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Stephen A. Kent Valentinian Gnosticism and classical *Sāṃkhya*: A thematic and structural comparison

INTRODUCTION

Several scholars have noted striking similarities between Gnosticism and various Indian and Buddhist religious traditions. The Tibetan Buddhist scholar Giuseppe Tucci has acknowledged the “surprising simultaneity” between “the inwardly experienced psychological drama” of both Tantra and Gnosticism.¹ The noted Buddhist scholar Edward Conze has identified the “eight basic similarities between Gnosticism and Mahāyāna Buddhism” and further noted an additional twenty-three possible similarities.² Jean Doresse, a Coptic scholar who was instrumental in securing and examining the Chenoboskion Gnostic works, speaks of possible “discoveries” one might find in a selective comparison between the doctrines of Gnosticism and “certain texts of Indian literature also composed about the commencement of our era.”³

In locating these similarities, though, one encounters persistent difficulty in explaining why they occur. Conze, for instance, has offered four hypotheses which might explain the Gnostic-Buddhist similarities (that is, mutual borrowing; a joint, rhythmical development; a parallel development between Asia and Europe; or a prehistoric *philosophia perennis* which has become dispersed), and, while these categories might be used to explain similarities between several other Western and Eastern traditions, he ultimately finds none of them to be an adequate solution to this particular problem.⁴

Another possible explanation would be one offered by such Jungians as Erich Neumann. The argument would premise that consciousness evolves as and through a developmental sequence, and these sequences or stages are variously represented in mythology, philosophy, literature, and so on. Similarities found in various diverse systems of thought would be explained as being formulations of the psycho-historical evolutionary process of consciousness as told within a particular cultural framework. This approach, which has much in common with some of Conze’s suggestions, is the one put forth by Neumann in his *The Origins and History of Consciousness*,⁵ but its particular application to the question of Gnostic-Indian (or more particularly, Gnostic-*Sāṃkhya*) similarities would require a specialized study. One suspects, however, that such a study would be more efficacious in examining thematic content rather than particular, more minute, points of linguistics or doctrine.

This article will not attempt to explain the occurrence of similarities between Gnosticism and various Eastern traditions. If anything, it will add further to the perplexing problem, since it explores the various parallels between Valentinian Gnosticism and Indian classical *Sāṃkhya*. These two systems are distinc-

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tive because of their impact on later cosmological and mythological speculations within their larger traditions. Consequently, the identification of similarities between them helps place in thematic and structural perspective parallels found between certain later systems among the Gnostic and Indian traditions.

In the case of the Valentinian and Sāṃkhya systems, one immediately attempts to explain parallels as being the result of cultural contact. That is, one speculates that during the extensive exchange of commerce between Alexandria and India in the last centuries before the Common Era and the first centuries of it, there must also have been an exchange of religious doctrines. Evidence does indicate that some Greeks certainly knew parts of the *Mahābhārata*, and also possibly knew the *Bhagavadgītā*,⁶ but no evidence can be found that shows any direct exchange between the (Valentinian) Gnostics and the Sāṃkhyas. While it is true that each of the two traditions in question borrowed from the wider intellectual currents of their day, one does not know whether these wider currents had exchanged concepts;⁷ consequently it seems wisest, given the evidence, to consider both Valentinian Gnosticism and classical Sāṃkhya as indigenous developments.⁸

Using as primary sources translations of the Indian *Sāṃkhyakārikā* (hereafter cited as *S.K.*) of *Īśvarakṛṣṇa* (before c. 560 C.E.)⁹, the description given of the Valentinian doctrines by Irenaeus in *Adversus Haereses* (hereafter cited as *Adv. Haer.*, c. 180),¹⁰ and occasional references to the Gnostic *Hypostasis of the Archons* (hereafter cited as *H.A.*, circa 339), a text which in part borrowed Valentinian soteriological ideas,¹¹ similarities in the following themes will be discussed: (1) the problem of immanence versus transcendence; (2) the apparent admixture of “spirit” and matter; (3) ignorance and creation; (4) threefold structure of manifestation; and, (5) knowledge and the quaternary element.

THE PROBLEM OF IMMANENCE VERSUS TRANSCENDENCE

Introduction

Both Valentinianism and Sāṃkhya claimed the existence within the individual of a (spiritual) consciousness whose origin was not of the material realm. This essence was of an eternal nature, untarnished by the vicissitudes of the world. The Valentinian image of this purity juxtaposed against the world’s vagaries and decays was one of “gold in mud” (*Adv. Haer.* I.6.2), and it serves as a striking portrayal of this (spiritual) essence from the perspective of either tradition. And while both traditions hold a thematically similar conception of a (spiritual) consciousness, the doctrines behind each cause the specific notions to be quite different, one from the other.

Valentinianism

The Valentinians began their speculation with the assumption that an omnipresent and perfect God could not be directly connected with an obviously

imperfect world. Therefore, this creation must have come into being through a power (or powers) either antithetical to the Godhead and/or far less perfect than He. Despite this, some people had within them the certainty of the knowledge of God while still having a physical existence in the material world. The solution to this enigma was that there had fallen from the heights of the Perfect God (that is, the *Pleroma*) some of His wisdom, and that this fall was what led to the creation of the world. Contained within the inmost core of the person was a seed of this wisdom, a seed which could grow to receive a full knowledge of the bliss of God's love. However, for reasons probably involving accommodation to basic Christian doctrine, this seed was not thought to be in all people, and many could not know God's love but could at least reap some benefits by studying about His greatness. Those remaining persons who could not even benefit by such studies were doomed to perish with the destruction of *hyle* (matter) at the end of the world.

Sāṃkhya

The initial philosophical problems of the Sāṃkhyas were quite different from the Valentinian concerns of explaining creation without compromising God's transcendence. Instead, the Sāṃkhyas believed in a state of isolated and refined consciousness (known as *puruṣa*) but did not believe in the existence of a supreme God. Coupling the belief (or perhaps the experience) of this consciousness with the perception of the wide range of human diversity (S.K. XVIII), the resulting doctrines stated that this transcendent consciousness was quantitatively individualized while being qualitatively equal. That is, each person had an internal essence which would achieve a liberation-consciousness, but the content or insight of each of the liberated states would be the same as all others.

Over and against these isolated and individualized liberated *puruṣas* was placed the mother of all creation, *prakṛti*. Eternal as are her male counterparts, she could never come in contact with these *puruṣas*. They were ontologically separate. She was the actualizer of creation, transforming the creative potency of her restful condition into the creative manifestations of her active state. Creation began when unconscious matter became activated by the proximity of an individual consciousness, in much the same way that a dancer performs when she has an audience (see S.K. LIX). For a time this individual consciousness (*puruṣa*) appeared to be active while at the same time the active *prakṛti* appeared "as if characterized by consciousness" (S.K. XX).

This separateness is again realized when *prakṛti* (as *buddhi*) discriminates between herself and *puruṣa*. For the individual *puruṣa* the original state is now restored, with but one difference. In the original condition, prior to creation, *puruṣa* had not yet witnessed material manifestation. Now, after having seen *prakṛti*, *puruṣa* is freed from ever having to witness her again, at the same time that the *buddhi* of *prakṛti* discriminates the ontological difference between

herself and him. What has been gained is discrimination, and by it the ontological separation between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* has been reaffirmed. The achievement of discrimination by *buddhi* serves as the reason for creation (along with producing enjoyment for the *puruṣa* [S.K. XXXVII]), and with this achievement *prakṛti* has fulfilled her purpose (S.K. LVI–LVIII; LX). This discrimination allows the *puruṣa* to say, “‘I have seen (her)’” and *prakṛti* (as *buddhi*) to say to herself “‘I have been seen’, and never again [come] into sight of *puruṣa*” (S.K. LXI). Ignorance of the isolation of *puruṣa* has been eliminated.

The Apparent Admixture of Spirit and Matter

One detects a subtle difference in the descriptions offered by the two systems about the apparent admixture of the (spiritual) consciousness and matter. The Valentinian *Bythos* initiates creation by the emanation of *Nous* and *Truth*, but after this action He takes no other intervention in the process He began. Apparently, though, creation continues “in accordance with the Father’s prudent design” (*Adv. Haer.* I.2.5). So it appears that the process of creation, particularly the process of redemption, is built into the very emanation process itself. If this is so, then *Bythos* need only initiate the emanations, and His prudent design will become manifest. He therefore remains aloof from the particulars of creation, and His transcendence is built into the cosmological structure itself.

There is also an internal design within the Sāṃkhya process of emanations named *satkāryavāda*—the doctrine that the effects of manifestation are pre-existent in the unmanifest. Once creation begins, the heretofore latent emanations become active as *prakṛti*’s manifesting form.

Conclusions

The differences, then, between the Valentinian and the Sāṃkhya systems are threefold. The first is that while *puruṣa* must remain in apparent relationship (as witness) with *prakṛti* in order that the *satkāryavāda* design operate, *Bythos* can initiate the emanation process but then effectively allow it to run its course. The second difference is that the Sāṃkhya design of *satkāryavāda* is an eternal characteristic within *prakṛti*, but the prudent design of Valentinianism is apparently one inserted by *Bythos* in his only-begotten *Nous*. Finally, the Sāṃkhya emanation process can occur an infinite number of times since there are an infinite number of *puruṣas*, but the Valentinian process was thought to occur but once.

The most significant similarity between the two systems is that both *puruṣa* and *Bythos* provide the means themselves which lead to liberation as defined within its particular system. *Bythos* does this by His prudent design; *puruṣa* does this by serving as the catalyst for the activation of *prakṛti*, since of course *prakṛti* necessarily works for the discrimination of his isolation (which is to say “for the sake of the release of each *puruṣa*” [S.K. LVI]).

In summary, both Sāṃkhya and Valentinianism speak of a (spiritual) consciousness becoming (apparently) encumbered in matter. A knowledge of the (spiritual) consciousness can be attained by an individual, and through such an attainment one finds one's true self-definition. The systems differ, however, about how this (apparent) entanglement came about. The Valentinians speak of the passionate fall of *Sophia*, a feminine emanation whose (indirect) origin was God and who was known as divine Wisdom. The Sāṃkhyas, believing in neither a God nor in a consciousness that could generate emanations (*S.K.* XIX), instead held that all emanations were generated within *prakṛti*. *Prakṛti* herself was eternal and ungenerated; *Sophia* was forever in the loving knowledge of God.

IGNORANCE AND CREATION

At first glance, one is tempted to claim that both classical Sāṃkhya and Valentinianism postulate ignorance of the true nature of Spirit as the cause of creation. The classical Sāṃkhya rendition would be interpreted, according to this view, as *puruṣa* becoming ignorant of his separation from matter and thereby appearing as an active force (*S.K.* XX). This is the interpretive position more or less taken by Eliade in various of his writings.¹² The Valentinian position, more accurate in this interpretation than its applicability to Sāṃkhya, would be that creation was caused by the ignorance of *Sophia*. Specifically, she was ignorant of her inability to intellectually know the Father. Her act of ignorance served as the paradigm for *Achamoth's* passionate longings in the heavenly realm, and also for the ill-fated attempts by those in the world (like the Greeks) who tried to know God by rationality and intellect.

The basic flaw with this thematic interpretation is that it can be maintained only by fusing the Sāṃkhya and Yoga positions into one that misrepresents the former. (In contrast, the Valentinian interpretation is essentially correct.) Ignorance as the cause of creation is the essential doctrine of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* (*Y.S.* ii,5),¹³ as well as early Sāṃkhya,¹⁴ but it is not that of classical Sāṃkhya. Instead, classical Sāṃkhya offers that the appearance of the manifest world is "for the sake of *puruṣa* (*puruṣārtha*)."¹⁵ Manifest creation occurs so that *puruṣa* can appear to become that which it can never be (that is, active) as part of the process by which *buddhi* gains discriminative knowledge of his isolation. Therefore, to say that classical Sāṃkhya sees creation occurring as a result of ignorance is to neglect the important proposition that the primary purpose of *prakṛti* is to bring about knowledge of the true, isolated condition of *puruṣa*. So it is that *S.K.* LVI says:

This creation, brought about by *prakṛti*—from the great one (*mahat*) down to the specific gross elements—functions for the sake of release of each *puruṣa*: (this is done) for the sake of another, as if it were for her own (benefit).

Unlike Valentinianism, then, ignorance cannot be posited as the cause of

creation. Similar to Valentinianism, however, ignorance can be said to be the cause of the perpetuation and continuation of creation. In both systems, ignorance is really the lack of salvation-knowledge, that is, failure to know the absolute otherness of the spiritual principle and its complete separation from matter. In classical Sāṃkhya ignorance or lack of knowledge (*ajñāna*) is the *tāmasa bhāva* counterpart of the *sāttvika bhāva*, knowledge (*jñāna*), the latter being the *bhāva* which actualizes *puruṣa*'s discrimination of his inherent separateness. Ignorance, then, is considered to be lack of discrimination of the absolute separation of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, which is, by extension, the regular, normal, intellectual knowledge with which one functions in the world (S.K. XLVI).

The Sāṃkhya perspective that the limited potential of intellectual knowledge is akin to ignorance is virtually the same as that of Valentinianism. This is quite clear in various examples: *Sophia*'s initial fall was a parody of the Greek passion to know the Absolute through the passion of the intellect; *Achamoth*'s passion was described as ignorance (*Adv. Haer.* I.4.1); the Demiurge created the heavens modelled after the *Pleroma*, but "was ignorant of the ideas of the things he made," since he was unknowingly under *Achamoth*'s directions (*Adv. Haer.* I.5.3); and one of the roles of the Savior, as demonstrated through his effect on the Demiurge (*Adv. Haer.* I.7.4) was to train those who were in ignorance of the Father. Furthermore, the fire that consumes all matter at the end of time is probably the fire of ignorance burning itself into oblivion.¹⁶ With the perfection of the seed of God, then, the ignorance of the world is destroyed—the ignorance that perpetuates the world. Both Valentinianism and classical Sāṃkhya define ignorance as anything short of salvation-knowledge, and this ignorance is what, by definition, perpetuates the existence of the world.

THREEFOLD STRUCTURE OF MANIFESTATION

The Three Constituents of the Feminine

The constituents of creation in both classical Sāṃkhya and Valentinianism are threefold. In Valentinianism these three are named *pneuma*, *psyche*, and *hyle*, and it is said that "[t]hese three substances underlie all else" (*Adv. Haer.* I.5.1). In classical Sāṃkhya these three substances—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—are called the *guṇas*, and together they compose *prakṛti* in both her manifest and unmanifest form. These three *guṇas* are, as the constituents of *prakṛti*, eternal, and in this respect they differ from the Valentinian formulation. There the three substances are emanations: *psyche* and *hyle* being formed from *Achamoth*'s passions (*Adv. Haer.* I.5.1); while the *pneuma* being generated by her joy at seeing the savior's accompanying angels (*Adv. Haer.* I.4.5; I.5.1; I.5.6).

Furthermore, not only are the Valentinian substances emanations of the

feminine (and thereby differ from the Sāṃkhya notion), but they also are not eternal. At the end of time, at the judgment, there is what might be called a polarization of principles. That which is either *hyleic* or *psychic*¹⁷ inclined toward the *hyle* incinerates into oblivion; that which is pneumatic ascends into the *Pleroma*, the Fullness; and that which is psychic and inclined toward the *pneuma* ascends into the place formerly held by the pneumatic *Achamoth*. The three substances do not return to an initial condition of complementary balance as do the *guṇas* in *prakṛti*'s unmanifest state of *mulaprakṛti* or *avyakta*.

These are not the only differences between the three substances and the three *guṇas*. In classical Sāṃkhya, the *guṇas* are the very constituents of *prakṛti*, no other elements being in her makeup (*S.K.* XII, XIV, XV, XVI). In Valentinianism, however, only the pneumatic emanation finally can be considered as a constituent of its mother, even though the other two substances are formed out of the same mother's passions. This is so because, once having emitted passions which are to become a lower creation, the mother repents in some way and becomes a pneumatic being. *Sophia*, for example, generates a passion (which soon becomes *Achamoth*), but as a result of doing so she and the other aeons receive knowledge of the Father, which means, consequently, that she no longer contains such passions. Following the same pattern, *Achamoth* first generates the substance which is to become both *psyche* and *hyle*, but then is given "formation that is in accordance with knowledge" (*Adv. Haer.* I.4.5) which makes here a pneumatic being herself (*Adv. Haer.* I.5.6). The conclusion to be reached, then, is that the only constituents which are of the same nature as both *Sophia* and *Achamoth* is *pneuma*, even though before their transformation both feminine figures seem to have been constituted of *psyche* and *hyle*. Unlike the three *guṇas* of *prakṛti*, only one of the three substances of Valentinianism is to be considered a constituent of either *Sophia* or *Achamoth*, although all three substances do originate from the feminine.

The Nature of the Feminine

Inevitably the two systems would have a differing opinion about the temporal nature of the three substances, since the issue leads rather directly to questions concerning *prakṛti* and *Sophia* themselves. One such question involves whether Valentinianism should be regarded as a dualistic system; and if so, precisely what kind of dualism it is. Certainly it is true that several of the Gnostic systems are more dualistic than Valentinianism, since in the latter system the dualism is compromised by *Sophia* and her daughter not having existed as eternal entities. They are, albeit indirectly, emanations whose roots trace back to *Bythos*, meaning also that they were created at a point in time. Although once they are created they seem to live for all of time. What must be said, then, is that the Valentinian system puts the feminine creative figures in active relation to the Father, and this is a design far different from the absolute dualism found in

Sāṃkhya which posits the feminine principle to be ungenerated, eternal, and absolutely separate from the male (a separateness which Sāṃkhya insists is not compromised by *puruṣa* witnessing *prakṛti*).

Another fundamental difference between the feminine conceptions in Valentinianism and Sāṃkhya lies in the very process which causes manifestation to occur. *Sophia* experiences a “fall,” and she and her passions must be redeemed. She is out of her proper place in the cosmos and must be righted to her true home, and creation occurs as part of this grand redemptive plan. Sāṃkhya has no such notion of the feminine principle in need of redemption. If anything, it is the male principle which needs redemption (S.K. LV), and the feminine activates simply to this end (S.K. LX). In Sāṃkhya, creation comes about for the male principle’s redemption, not for the female’s sake as in Valentinianism.

In these two doctrines—that *Sophia* is a generated entity and that manifestation comes about as a result of her fall and subsequent redemption—we see differences between Valentinianism and Sāṃkhya which go to the heart of both traditions. While Sāṃkhya uses the feminine as the means through which the true isolation of consciousness from all matter is affirmed, Valentinianism uses the feminine *Sophia* as the means by which one realizes one’s own true identity to be the same as her identity (that is, spiritual). Furthermore, just as *Sophia* fell and was redeemed, so too can an individual who has fallen into matter also be redeemed. At redemption one becomes feminine like *Sophia* and her daughter, *Achamoth*, and this new feminine spirit begins the loving relation to the Father, just as *Achamoth* enters into a loving marriage with the Savior. In short, Valentinianism uses its feminine emanations as redemptive models whereas Sāṃkhya uses its feminine figure as a redemptive means.

Trinity into a Quaternity

While having demonstrated that the internal dynamics of the three principles in relation to the feminine differ between the classical Sāṃkhya and the Valentinian system, and while further suggesting that these differences indicate fundamental differences in the conceptions of the feminine, it is nonetheless true that the trinitarian groupings in each aspire to fulfill themselves in some fundamental way through a fourth, separate element. Sāṃkhya is explicit on this point: “[the three *guṇas*] function for the sake of *puruṣa* like a lamp” (S.K. XIII), that is, in accordance with the doctrine of *puruṣārtha* (for the sake of *puruṣa*), the *guṇas* operate together to facilitate *buddhi*’s acquiring of discrimination as do the oil, the wick, and the flame of a lamp to produce light.

The comparable Valentinian process is spoken of by Irenaeus and concerns the inclinations of the *Plerom*-ic aeons toward *Bythos*: “. . . the rest of the aeons [other than Nous] quietly wished to see the one who had produced their seed and to acquire knowledge of the root which had no beginning” (*Adv. Haer.* I.2.1).

This “knowledge of the root which has no beginning” is obtained only after

the fall of *Sophia* has occurred. Keeping in mind that: (1) Since the structure and function of the Valentinian aeons are models for the lower cosmological and psychological levels; and, (2) the three substances are the constituents of the psychological structure of the pneumatic person; we can then conclude that the psychological structure of a pneumatic person only fulfills itself when it transcends itself—that is, when it gains knowledge of God. Knowledge of God can only be acquired after the fall has occurred, an act which allows one to discover what one really is by first experiencing what one is not.

A similar thematic conclusion can be reached about the three *gunas* in classical Sāṃkhya. Because the purpose of *prakṛti* (which is composed of the three *gunas*) is for the sake of *puruṣa*, it seems that the active *prakṛti* fulfills herself by providing the medium through which *buddhi* discovers discrimination through knowledge. The active *gunas* fulfill themselves by providing the experiences through which this discovery takes place. They fulfill themselves through a principle that is wholly other than they, in a way thematically similar to Valentinianism. The analogies of the trinitarian transformative processes of both systems become even clearer when we examine the activities of each of the six substances. It is to this analysis that we now turn.

Hyle/Tamas—Psychology, Cosmology, and Morality

One of the three substances of each system is associated with psychological dullness, gross matter, and counterproductive morality. The Valentinians refer to this substance as *hyle*; the Sāṃkhyans refer to this substance as the *tamas* *guṇa*. Its conception in both systems is reasonably similar. The Sāṃkhyas claim that, cosmologically, *tamas* is said to predominate in the subhuman order (*S.K.* LIV), but more commonly is remembered as the dominating *guṇa* in the generation of the gross elements. Valentinians claim that *hyle* is the substance which composes both this world of ours and the essence of the devil, the world ruler (*Adv. Haer.* I.5.4). The obvious similarity between the two beliefs is that the world, the product of the gross elements, is formed from *hyle/tamas*. In addition, if the Sāṃkhya reference to the subhuman order is to the *narakas*, the hells, then a second possible correlation exists between *tamas* predominating in the *narakas* and *hyle* predominating in Tartaros in the *H.A.* (143.10–13).

The moral notions concerning *tamas/hyle* are in harmony with the cosmological ones, although a precise correlation between the notions of the two systems is a bit obscure. In Valentinianism, that which is *hyle*—the world, the *choic* man, and the world ruler—cannot be saved. They are all burned out of existence in the final judgment. A bit less harsh but certainly in the same vein is the Sāṃkhya notion of *tamas* as “passive and dull, function[ing] as the quality of matter and delusion.”¹⁸

Finally, the psychological interpretations of these two principles are perhaps the most similar if not the most intriguing. It is on this psychological level that

we first begin to realize that the trinitarian division of each system has implicit in it a hierarchical ordering, one of the substances being highest, one being in the middle, and one being lowest. According to this scheme, *tamas* and *hyle* are the lowest ones in their respective systems. Each of these lowest substances can be seen as a fetter or weight, inhibiting the more refined and necessary insights. This explains why the four *tāmasa bhāvas* are those which are the most inhibitive for the acquisition of discriminative vision.¹⁹ Similarly in the Valentinian system, *hyle* is the substance which will lead to the destruction of those psychics who turn toward it and not toward the pneuma. These two examples clearly document the inhibitory roles of *tamas* and *hyle* to the process of gaining liberation-knowledge.

The most positive function of the lowest substance seems to be that of providing a body into which the soul can be housed, such as the Sāṃkhya notion of the subtle body for the *liṅga*. In Valentinianism, there is a comparable belief that the pneuma, located inside the psyche (*Adv. Haer.* I.5.6), transmigrated from body to body until the liberating knowledge was gained.²⁰ In addition, it is said at one point that the pneuma benefits from “the perceptible means of instruction” that the *hyle* of the world provides (*Adv. Haer.* I.6.1).²¹

Psyche/Rajas—Psychology, Cosmology, and Morality

Developing further the labeling of the three divisions as either highest, middle, or lowest, psyche and *rajas* are the middle principles of each of their systems. Their decisive roles are to orient the psychological, moral, and cosmological structures toward conditions leading to liberating insight. In Sāṃkhya, this intermediate principle predominates in the middle of its three cosmological levels, that of the human order (*S.K.* LIV). The Valentinian cosmology has psyche dominating in the heavenly realm, but from this realm the psychic souls were made and inserted into various beings of the human race. The Valentinian concern for the salvation of psychics from within the human order brings the Valentinians rather close to the Sāṃkhya statement that the middle principle dominates that realm.

The predominating psychological and moral quality of the intermediate principles is that of activity. *S.K.* XIII speaks of *rajas* as being “stimulating and moving,” while Larson describes it as “active and aggressive, and functions both as the quality of energy and passion.”²² The energy and passion of this intermediary substance shows itself demonstrably in one particular statement by Irenaeus, which says, “the psychic . . . stands midway between the spiritual and the material, and consequently passes to whichever side it is inclined” (*Adv. Haer.* I.6.1).

In Irenaeus’ statement lies the key to understanding the potentiality of the intermediate principle in both systems. Its active and passionate potential can either turn toward the denser and limiting realm of the lowest principle, or it can orient itself toward the highest realm. The implication in *S.K.* XXV, for

instance, is that *rajas* is the activating *guṇa* in *ahaṃkāra* which causes the production of both the *sāttvika* and *tāmasa ahaṃkāra* productions. The *sāttvika ahaṃkāra* emanations complete the generation of the cognitive faculties so important to *buddhi*'s efforts at discrimination. The *tāmasa* emanations, on the other hand, distract the *sāttvika* emanations into the exterior world of matter. *Rajas* is the instigator of both kinds of emanations from *ahaṃkāra*, the ego, and therefore one can postulate that *rajas* determines whether the ego focuses on its internal cognitive processes or on the external, gross, world. One important key to the process of gaining liberation-knowledge in both systems is to orient the intermediary principle to focus on the highest principle instead of on the lowest one. The energy of the middle substance can be used by the highest substance (*Adv. Haer.* I.6.1), or its passion can be an overpowering burden oriented to the gross manifestations and away from efforts at cognitive refinement.

Pneuma/Sattva—Psychology, Cosmology, and Morality

The highest of the trinitarian substances is called the *sattva guṇa* by the Sāṃkhya and the pneuma or the spiritual by the Valentinians. Its function in both systems is to prepare and orient one for the perception of the liberating knowledge. The significant difference between the two is in the particular dynamics of gaining this liberating knowledge.

Both systems place this highest substance in the cosmological realm uppermost in the universe but still *within* the universe. Thus, *sattva* predominates in the world of the gods (*S.K.* LIV), and pneuma is the constituent quality in the *Pleroma*. Furthermore, both systems assign to their respective highest substance the moral function of positioning one's life and adjusting one's perceptibility so as to receive the liberating knowledge. In Sāṃkhya it is a *sāttvika bhāva*, *dharma*, which is said to move one upward in the scale of beings (*S.K.* XLIV). It is also this *bhāva* along with the three other *sāttvika bhāvas* which propel the *buddhi* towards discrimination.

The comparable role of the Valentinian pneuma as a determinant of one's life is less clear than in Sāṃkhya but is still discernable. The pneuma, since it is a seed which needs to grow to perfection (*Adv. Haer.* I 7.1), links "with the psychic, [that] it might be shaped and trained with it in conduct" (*Adv. Haer.* I.6.1). Since psychic training was to be one of works, faith, and good conduct (*Adv. Haer.* I.6.2), we must suppose that these moral behaviors were also to be part of the pneumatic education. Once the seed was perfected, however, and knowledge had been gained, then actions were no longer important (*Adv. Haer.* I.6.4).

These similarities in function make it no surprise that the two substances were referred to in somewhat analogous terms related to light: *S.K.* XIII describes *sattva* as being "shining" or "illuminating" (*prakāśa*); and *Adv. Haer.* I.6.1 speaks of the pneuma as being "the salt and the light of the world"

(Mt. 5.13–15). It is clear that both *sattva* and *pneuma* must mature and refine themselves as they approach the acquisition of the liberating knowledge.

It is on the acquisition of this liberating knowledge that the two systems differ. In *Sāṃkhya* this knowledge is, as the *bhāva jñāna*, a fundamental part of one's inner nature. In Valentinianism, this knowledge is *received*; that is, the perfect Logos (that is, Jesus, the Lord [Jn. 1.14]) is sent from above (*Adv. Haer.* I.2.6). Knowledge must come from above, from the *Pleroma*, since this world is by its very nature fallen and depraved, and therefore not capable of generating this knowledge from within itself. The seed (*pneuma*) is perfected so that it can receive the message of eternal salvation through God's infinite love, but the actual message is sent down from above.²³ In this description of Valentinianism, I would argue that after one has received the message it becomes the essential part of one's inner nature, but until that reception the message has a wholly other character about it. The message itself is not innate, only its potential to be actualized is. It is a knowledge that speaks to one's inner nature but does not originate in it, and in this way Valentinian Gnosticism differs importantly from classical *Sāṃkhya*.

The Obstacles of the Intermediate Substances

The training or refinement process which one must undergo in order to intuit the salvation-knowledge involves, on the conceptual level, the orientation of the middle substance away from the lower substance and toward the highest substance. On a practical level, this involves training toward a contemplation of one's higher, more discriminating inner faculties and away from distractions of the material world.

This orientation must occur within the very nature of the person, and so it does in the classical *Sāṃkhya* system. At the important psychological juncture called *ahaṃkāra* (ego), both emanations of cognizance and emanations of matter are generated. The ego can either continue its ordinary and natural orientation to sense-objects or it can initiate a process by which the emanations cease their orientation toward the external objects. This self-reflexive process is an important step along the path of gaining the eventual salvational insight, and is no doubt related to the fifth and sixth disciplines of Yoga, *pratyāhāra* and *dhāraṇā*.

Looking for a moment at the *H.A.*, the first indication of human individuality—the sense of ego—appears in the division of the bisexual primal Adam. According to his story in the *H.A.*, this bisexual being was divided by the archons into male and female (the sexual Adam and Eve) in an effort to “bring a forgetfulness over him” (*H.A.* 137.5) about his true and original spiritual nature. This is a division of the primal Adam's fundamental nature, and one which forces all of Adam and Eve's offspring to spend their lives looking for their complementary and completing “soul partner” instead of developing the

spiritual seed within themselves. There is even the sense in the myth that the partner must be found before this development can take place.

The Gnostic fragmentation of the individual sense of self may be the counterpart of the Sāṃkhya *sāttvika* and *tāmasa* emanations from *ahaṃkāra*. In both, the unified ego (in *H.A.*, of the bisexual self) becomes divided so that its attention is focused into the external world (in *H.A.*, as it searches for its partner). Only after the inner reunion of the self is achieved, perhaps comparable to the Sāṃkhya notion of *ahaṃkāra* no longer oriented toward its emanations, can the refinement of one's truer nature proceed. Probably the Sāṃkhya *ahaṃkāra* is speaking to a somewhat analogous psycho-cosmological state as does the *H.A.*'s primal Adam, and if so the question begs more study.

KNOWLEDGE AND THE QUATERNAL ELEMENT

The Basic Pattern

Even though the trinitarian groupings in Valentinianism and Sāṃkhya complete and fulfill themselves by striving for a fourth principle, it should not be supposed that the achievement is the same for both systems. The achievement, of course, is nothing short of the liberating knowledge (*gnosis*, *jñāna*), but critical differences exist between the meanings necessarily given to this liberating knowledge by each; one which believes in a God and the other which believes in an isolated consciousness.

The purpose of the trinitarian structure of the classical Sāṃkhya is to facilitate *buddhi*'s discovery of *puruṣa*'s separation from *prakṛti*. *Puruṣa*'s true and original nature is described in *S.K.* XIX as "witness, possessed of isolation or freedom, indifferent, a spectator, and inactive" and the achievement of the *guṇas* is to create the psychological and cosmological setting in which consciousness of these conditions (or, more properly, this condition) is rediscovered. The goal, the achievement, is the (re)discovery of *puruṣa*'s absolute isolation (*S.K.* XIII, LVI) via discrimination.

In contrast to the Sāṃkhya notion of a consciousness in isolation, the Valentinian knowledge is that of a consciousness in absolute relationship. The threefold psychological and cosmological structure facilitates the perfection of the spiritual seed (*Adv. Haer.* I.6.4) which alone experiences knowledge of God's love. It appears that this knowledge is individualized; that is, there is not a loss of self through, nor mergence into, the Godhead, but instead the individualized beings, now "of" or "with" spiritual bodies (1 Cor. 15.44–49) are in the blissful wedding between the savior and wisdom (as *Achamoth*). Again, in classical Valentinian style, this marriage is probably metaphorical, and means that when the individual realizes the full consequences of the union of divine wisdom and eternal salvation, one will then experience God's divine love. It is this knowledge that liberates. If this marriage is a metaphor, then

the acquisition of such knowledge can occur before the final cosmological judgment, since it is probably the description of what happens when one's own spiritual pneumatic seed is perfected.

In summary, while the trinitarian structures of both systems fulfill themselves through a fourth quaternary principle, the knowledge obtained in such fulfillment is fundamentally different. The Sāṃkhya achievement is one of knowing one's individualized isolation; the Valentinian achievement is one of knowing the personalized love of God.

Salvation and the Psychic

A brief analysis needs to be made concerning the kind of knowledge a Valentinian psychic can hope to achieve. The determining factor of a psychic's comparatively limited potential is that the pneuma, the spiritual seed, is missing from the internal psychological arrangement. For the psychic, salvation cannot culminate in the *Pleroma* since one needs the pneuma to enter it. Instead, salvation will occur above the realm of fate (that is, above the seven planets) in the place previously occupied by *Achamoth* named the Middle.

The explanation for this formulation perhaps should be sought by remembering the religious environment of the day. Christianity was vying for supremacy against the various other religions of the area, including of course Judaism, and yet Christians were keenly aware of their indebtedness to this particular faith. It is tension with Judaism that I propose is behind the limited salvation granted to both the psychics and the Demiurge (the latter of course personifying the Jewish God). Since Valentinianism was at core a Christian apologetic work, it reflects this particular dilemma of projecting the supremacy of Christianity while still respecting aspects of Judaism. In what may have been a streak of theological genius, the Valentinians (and one suspects the gifted Valentinus himself) equated the psychics and the Demiurge with the Jews and their god, and granted them a salvation which was noticeably less than the (Christian) Gnostic achievement of realizing God's love.

This theory is reinforced when one realizes that the various descriptions of psychics could easily have been applied to a Christian interpretation of the Jews, such as the statement that psychics "are strengthened by works and mere faith" (*Adv. Haer.* I.6.2). Finally, this theory would explain why the Valentinians were not as critical of the Demiurge as were several Gnostic sects—he was portrayed as ignorant, but not evil. The fact that the Valentinians also depicted as psychics those of the Church (*Adv. Haer.* I.6.2) could simply have been in response to Valentinus having been rejected a bishop's position.²⁴ If this hypothesis is true, then when studying Valentinianism one should consider his description of the salvation of the psychic as a theological commentary which makes a clear statement about the power of faith in comparison to the power of love.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

One way to compare the differences between classical Sāṃkhya and Valentinianism is through the perspective of the individual in relation to the universe. As the cosmological structure in both systems was reflected in the psychological structure of an individual, the position of the individual in relation to that cosmological structure directly indicated the form of salvation a person would achieve. Furthermore, the form of salvation was intimately related to the conception each system had of time. Just as a person was apparently within the cosmos but would achieve a salvation outside of its forces, one also was under the influence of cosmological time. At the same moment that one correctly adjusted one's place in relation to the cosmos, so also would one eliminate the burden of time's necessities. It is through these two themes—achievement of one's proper place in the cosmos, and the escape from the burden of time—that we will summarize and compare Valentinianism and classical Sāṃkhya.

Salvation in Valentinianism is preordained by the existence of the aeon Man within the *Ogdoad* of the *Pleroma*. It is to the *Pleroma* that one will return after the cause of one's present human existence—the fall of one's Wisdom into intellectualism and passion—is corrected. The cosmos has one's salvation built into its very structure, and its very existence, through God's prudent design, facilitates individual redemption. In this way, an individual identifies with the feminine *Sophia*, an aeon whose fall from the fullness at the same moment initiates her eventual return. As *Sophia* gains the knowledge of God through the consequence of her fall, so will any individual who contains the spiritual seed or has a soul which orients itself toward the higher realms.

Unlike Valentinianism, the individual in classical Sāṃkhya cannot receive an assurance of one's salvation through any principle within the cosmology. To the contrary, the model for salvation is found in one's reaffirmed isolation from the cosmology. The cosmology has an absolute otherness about it, and the proper relation of the individual to the cosmological structure is through actualizing the awareness of its otherness. When the awareness of this otherness occurs, one finds oneself in complete and inactive isolation. Probably there is no awareness of this isolation, since such an awareness might imply a cognizance with which one was in contact at some past time. Instead, this kind of isolation is one of self-absorbed consciousness, of consciousness being conscious only of itself.

One has reaffirmed the self-absorbed state one had prior to the manifestation of creation, but yet with a significant new addition. After having witnessed the process and substance of creation (*prakṛti*) over a period spanning numerous rebirths and redeaths, the need for manifestation ends forever when knowledge of the isolation of spirit is gained. Creation can no longer become manifest since the isolated individual *puruṣa* never again witnesses *prakṛti*, which also

is to say that *prakṛti* never again actualizes her creative potency in response to the proximity of *puruṣa*. Isolated and alone, engulfed in self-absorption, the individual *puruṣa* continues to reside in himself for all eternity, while infinite numbers of other *puruṣas* reenact the same process of witnessing (a) creative *prakṛti*.

What we can conclude about the idea of salvation in both systems is that there exists a similar theme of one returning to the original cosmological condition after having gained a liberating and permanent knowledge as a result of the relationship (be it real or apparent) with matter. Structurally this original cosmological condition is quite different, since one system defines salvation within the cosmological framework while the other defines salvation as being absolutely other than anything created or generated. But in both cases the apparent purpose for this cosmos is to provide the means through which one can gain the liberating knowledge as defined by each belief. In one, knowledge of God's love is gained, in the other, discrimination and self-absorption is gained.

While the notions of salvation provide only a thematic similarity, the related psychological construction and function provides both thematic and structural affinities. It may be that the cosmology is largely a function of theological and philosophical doctrines while the psychology explicates a more universal human truth. Whatever the case may be, the psychological structure of each is three-fold, and both structures define and fulfill their purpose through a fourth and separate principle. One threefold structure does so through knowledge of God and His love and the other structure through knowledge of *puruṣa* and his isolation.

In Sāṃkhya, the three substances called *guṇas* are the sole constituents of *prakṛti*. They are the sum and substance of all cosmological and psychological occurrences. Similarly in Valentinianism the three substances are inherent in the cosmology and the psychology, but, all three are not found in every manifestation as in Sāṃkhya. Rather, each constitutes separate entities and the entities enter into relation with one another. Despite this important difference, the three substances of each system work, more or less together, in an effort to prepare one of its members for the perception of the liberating knowledge.

In these preparatory efforts the internal harmony is actually hierarchically arranged. The lowest substance in the arrangement provides a material encasement—a foundation or base in which the higher two substances are housed. The middle substance has the difficult task of orienting one's cognitive efforts away from the material base and toward the necessary refinement of the highest element. This middle element is a pivotal point in the liberation efforts, since it has propensities toward both the highest and the lowest substances. Finally the highest substance is the one which facilitates the discriminating perception. It appears to undergo a period of refinement before it is capable of such a pure and discriminating knowledge.

It is on the relation between this knowledge and the highest substance that Valentinianism and Sāṃkhya differ, and differ markedly. At the heart of this difference lies the belief or nonbelief in (a) God. The atheistic Sāṃkhya system had to maintain that there was an innate faculty of discrimination within the psychological structure itself. Otherwise, the individual would have no means of severing the apparent contact between the psycho-cosmology and the isolated consciousness. The means for escaping the psycho-cosmology had to be within its very structure. The Valentinians did not have to escape their cosmology, but they did have to gain knowledge of that which was beyond it, that is, God. The Valentinian goal was not to establish a separation between the cosmology and God, but instead was to establish a connection between the two. It was felt that, in and of itself, nothing inherent within the psycho-cosmology could initiate such a link. The highest substance could receive the knowledge from a divine messenger, but it did not inherently contain such knowledge. So it is in Valentinianism that liberating knowledge is received from a messenger and consequently places the individual (pneumatic) in a loving relation with God, while the liberating knowledge in classical Sāṃkhya generates from within the psycho-cosmology and puts the individual (*puruṣa*) in self-absorbed consciousness of himself.

The actual achievement of this liberating knowledge predetermines the very existence of the cosmology. That is, the cosmology's essential purpose (and in Sāṃkhya, its only purpose) is to facilitate the gaining of the liberating knowledge as defined in both systems. Consequently, Valentinian psycho-cosmology unfolds according to God's prudent design, and the appearance of all manifestations in *prakṛti*'s active state is *puruṣārtha* (for the sake of *puruṣa*). While the psycho-cosmological systems work for the achievement of the liberating knowledge through their respective trinitarian structures, the very existence of this creation is perpetuated by ignorance which the psycho-cosmology is designated to eliminate.

As the ignorance which perpetuates the cosmos is eliminated, one also experiences an alteration of the time framework. Salvation, even the limited psychic salvation, frees one from the constraints and demands of time, so the process of gaining this knowledge involves transcending a temporal and linear consciousness. The process in Sāṃkhya seems to be one of withdrawing through the cosmological emanations to the absolute stillness which prevailed before *prakṛti*'s stimulation into activity, *prakṛti* (as *buddhi*) now having gained the discrimination needed to prevent a recurrence of such generation again (S.K. LXVI). The Valentinian time orientation also is intermeshed with the process of the cosmological structure, but involves not so much a retracing through the time of cosmological generation as a making imminent the destruction of the world.

In an important way, though, the two processes—the destruction of the world and retracing through creation—are similar, since they both involve

purifying the highest of three substances so that one can gain the liberating knowledge. The Sāṃkhya technique of purification involves a step-by-step withdrawal from each successive lower emanation until one has refined a discriminatory awareness (in *buddhi*). The Valentinian technique of purification, symbolically taking place at the end of the world, involves leaving the shackles of *hyle*, returning to each of the seven archons, or heavenly planets, that part of the soul which they contributed, and then as a mature seed of *pneuma*, entering into the fullness of God's love.

In conclusion, the doctrines of Valentinianism and classical Sāṃkhya can easily be explained according to their respective intellectual and religious traditions. Moreover, some of these differences, such as the question of the existence of (a) God, or of absolute or qualified dualism, speak to the very heart of both traditions and must be given ample consideration within any comparative work. But similarities still remain, and attempts to explain them in an inclusive and convincing manner have so far been only marginally successful. This is unfortunate, since an adequate explanation would be a significant advance in the interpretive techniques of the history of religions.

NOTES

1. Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (Rome: La Libreria Dello Strato, 1949), pp. 210–213.
2. Edward Conze, "Buddhism and Gnosis" in Ugo Bianchi, ed., *The Origins of Gnosticism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), pp. 651–667.
3. Jean Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), pp. 284–285.
4. Conze, *op. cit.*, pp. 665–667.
5. See: Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1970).
6. William Woodthorpe Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. 380–381.
7. Francis Legge does cite evidence, though, that the Ophites may have spread into India. If this is so, one wonders with whom they were in contact. See: *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity* (New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1964 reprint), II, p. 76.
8. A problem very similar to ours, that of possible Advaita influence on Neoplatonism, has been explored by J. F. Staal, and the conclusion reached was similar to ours, that no influence could be either proven or inferred. See: J. F. Staal, *Advaita and Neoplatonism* (Madras: University of Madras, 1961), pp. 235–249.
9. Eliade dates the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* as being not later than the 5th century C.E. Dasgupta, however, dates it to about 200 C.E. Larson says that the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* was translated into Chinese between 557–569 C.E., so we can presume that the original had to have existed before then. See: Mircea Eliade, *Patanjali and Yoga*, trans. Charles Lam Markham (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), p. 16; S. N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1922, 1955), p. 212; and Gerald J. Larson, *Classical Sāṃkhya* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969), p. 4. All quotes from the *S.K.* will be taken from Larson's translation.
10. All of the quotes from *Adversus Haereses* are taken from the translation found in Werner Foerster, *Gnosis* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), I, pp. 127–145.
11. This is the earliest date of the manuscript on which the *H.A.* was founded at Nag Hammadi.

Very probably the story itself is older. The date to Codex II was obtained from: Henry A. Green, "Gnosis and Gnosticism: A Study in Methodology," *Numen*, 24, no. 2, (August, 1977):130. All textual references to the *H.A.* are taken from: Roger Aubrey Bullard, *The Hypostasis of the Archons* (Berlin: Walter DeGruyter and Co., 1970), pp. 19–41. Bullard acknowledges the Valentinian borrowing on p. 115.

12. "For Sāṃkhya and Yoga, the world is real. . . . Nevertheless, if the world *exists* and *endures*, it is because of 'ignorance' of spirit. . . ." Eliade, *Yoga Immortality and Freedom*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series LXXVI (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), p. 9. See also: Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), pp. 118 and 133.

13. See the various commentaries on the *Y.S.* in: James Haughton Woods, *The Yoga System of Patanjali*, Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. 17 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1914), pp. 160–172.

14. E. H. Johnson, *Early Sāṃkhya*, Prize Publication Fund, vol. 15 (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1937), p. 34.

15. See: Larson, p. 191.

16. See: Foerester, I, p. 126.

17. "Psychic" is a term used by Irenaeus to designate whatever possesses the quality of psyche. As such, "psychic" can refer to any of three things: the entire cosmological substance generated from *Achamoth's* conversion (the substance being psyche); and, (nonmaterial) creations formed from this cosmological substance (psyche); or, any person who contains this inner psycho-cosmological substance (psyche) (*Adv. Haer.* I.5.1). In this article, "psychic" almost always is used in the latter, psychocosmological and personal sense. It does not carry any of the modern occult or ESP connotations. I have chosen not to treat either "psychic" or "psyche" as Greek words because their English definitions relating them to "soul" roughly equate their Valentinian meaning.

18. Larson, p. 216.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

20. It is unclear whether or not the Valentinians believed in transmigration or reincarnation, but there are indications that they did. See: Legge, 2:115, n. 3.

21. See; Foerester 1:125, for an analysis of the relationship between psyche and pneuma. See also how this relationship was mythologized in the story of Norea crying for help against the archons in *H.A.* 140.26–141.13.

22. Larson, p. 216.

23. For a discussion of this theme, see: Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1973), pp. 74–91.

24. See, Foerester, I, p. 126.