



AN ASPECT OF THE CONCEPT OF BELIEF AS REFLECTED IN PLATONIC THOUGHT AND UPANIṢADIC PHILOSOPHY

S. G. M. WEERASINGHE

§1. That Plato (c. 427-347 B. C.) has put forward a philosophy of "forms" (Gk. *eidos*; *idea*), the only reality underlying this world of phenomena is too well known to be dwelt upon here. His activity has spread over a period of about 40 years.¹ Plato's basic philosophical standpoint remained the same throughout his career although he has continuously been in search of new and better methods of establishing it. The historical development of similes and analogies adduced in this connection can clearly be discerned in his dialogues which are some 29 in number.² The authors of the *Upaniṣads* have, on the other hand, presented a philosophy of *Brahman*,³ the only reality giving rise to the illusory appearance of *nāma-rūpa*, the names and forms, consisting of this world. This idea is implicit in all the important *Upaniṣads* of which about thirteen in general belong to the early period. While adhering to their central theme the *Upaniṣads* have, in course of time, put forward new and different similes and analogies to support their doctrine.⁴ All these are clearly seen in the *Upaniṣadic* literature.

§2. According to the Platonic thought *forms* alone are real. While "matter" is illusory (geometrical) "forms" of things are enduring. He postulates an eternal *world of forms* or archetypes (Gk. *archai*) giving rise to this world of perishable things. Therefore the *world of forms* is the reality. The world we live in is but a shadow of the world of *forms*. In spite of his similes and analogies, the relationship between the world of forms and the world we live in has always remained a problem for Plato. The *Upaniṣads* maintain that

1. See Copleston, F. *History of Philosophy (H.P.)*, vol. 1, part 1 (*Image Book*) pp. 153-65, New York (1962).

2. *Ibid.*

3. (a) "prāṇo evā brahman, kaṁ brahman, khaṁ brahma-iti," Life is Brahman, Joy is Brahman Ether is Brahman (*Chānd. Up.* IV, II, 4) (b) "brahma satyam jagan mithyā, the reality is Brahman and the world is (only) an illusion (*Saṁkara*).

4. *Yathā sudīptāt pāvakaṁ viśpuliṅgāḥ / sahasraśah prabhavante sarūpāḥ / tathāḥ śarād vīśidhāḥ, saumya, bhāṣāḥ / praśāpante tatra caivāpi yanti.* As from a blazing fire, sparks of similar form issue forth by thousands, even so, O dear one, many kinds of beings issue forth from the immutable and they return thither too (*Mundaka Up.* II, 1, 1).