Thomas McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002). Pp. xxxvi+732.

Here we have a book that is clearly written with love and devotion. The author has collected an astonishing amount of literature and from the Acknowledgments we learn that the book is the result of about thirty years' devoted labour. It would be nice to be able to say that it was also worth of the effort. Unfortunately, a work of love is not necessarily a work of critical scholarship. After all his wide reading McEvilley remains an amateur. His list of references is no less than 24 densely printed pages, but still one easily notes that writings of central importance have escaped his notice. Moreover, the extensive literature written on the subject in French, German, Italian and Russian is completely ignored.

The dilettantism is also seen in his methods of working. Vague ideas of secondary literature are accepted as solid evidence without any effort to back them up with textual evidence. He was looking for contact and exchange and wherever it was possible he happily thinks that it actually did happen. To take just one example, I cannot see how it was necessary that traders discussed philosophy with their foreign partners.

Even before McEvilley's book, there has been an unending flow of attempts to show an Indian influence in classical Greece (and a few suggesting an influence other way round). Quite often the arguments stray outside scholarship. We are told that it is eurocentric, sort of Orientalism in the Saidian sense, to deny such an influence, it only remains to show, where in particular it was felt. And for this, just a vague similarity of ideas seems often to be enough.

The idea of Greek philosophy arising out of nowhere, without any antecedents or outside impulses just on the force of a supposed mental superiority of Greeks belongs, I hope, to a distant past, at least in scholarship. A considerable debt owed to Egypt and Mesopotamia, even to Thrace and Scythia was acknowledged by the Greeks themselves and in addition, research has succeeded in pointing out other, important but forgotten, ties to ancient Anatolian and Near Eastern cultures. Even an Iranian impact was apparently felt. But India was just too far away.

My original intention was to give this bulky volume a detailed examination, but as my reading went on I soon became aware of two facts.

On the one hand, almost every single one of the over 700 pages asked for some kind of comment. On the other hand, as the text went on the hypotheses of the author became wilder and wilder, and a full examination clearly seemed to be waste of time. He is not content with finding possible similarities of doctrines (and even here he accepts very vague parallels and happily proves an Indian "origin" for an early Greek idea referring to an Indian work written perhaps 1500 years later). A classical scholar is bound to raise his eyebrows, when the author, unhappy with the meagre parallels found in the works of Plato, starts to reconstruct the unwritten, esoteric oral teachings of Plato which – surprise! – are completely based on Indian ideas. The Indological eyebrows go still higher up when he explains Jainism as a sort of left-hand Tantrism. After this, one is no longer surprised, when the author, completely convinced of the (possible, but unproven) Harappan origins of Yoga goes on to draft its palaeolithic origin in Africa. Earlier, he had proposed a new history for the reincarnation doctrine. All Greek philosophers confessed it, of course, and had it from India, but originally it came to India from Egypt where it was – *teste* Herodotus – an ancient doctrine. The Egyptologists are just prejudiced and silly and don't understand the real nature of ancient Egypt. I could accumulate examples like this – and give an almost unending list of smaller lapses, mistakes and obscurities – but I regret so much the many hours I have wasted in reading this pseudo-scholarship that I shall stop here.

Klaus Karttunen
University of Helsinki