

Chapter 7

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Culture in the Rg Veda: Creation, Poetry, and Thinking

The philosopher Martin Heidegger found in pre-Socratic Greek thinking a primordial "appropriation" or "event" (*ereignis*) of Being, a shining-forth in thought that became increasingly hidden in later Western reflection on the being of what is as a result of the growing dominance of paradigms of truth as representation and technological control. I will suggest that something similar happened in India. In both cultures (and here I may partially disagree with Heidegger) a tendency to fall away from the original revelation motivated a yearning for return that gave rise (in India) to moments such as tantra, yoga, Vedanta, Buddhism, and bhakti; and (in the West) to Neoplatonism, the Medieval Christian synthesis, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Modernism, the Sixties, Postmodernism—and Heidegger. In this chapter I will look at the oldest known Indian recording of breakthrough to a World Two of satisfaction and Being, preserved in the Rg Veda, and inquire how realization nurtured a World Three cultural synthesis expressed in poetry and sacrifice. To anticipate, I find that the fundamental insight we discovered in yoga—the paradoxical unity-in-separation of matter and consciousness—is paralleled in Vedic thought and poetry in the continuity-cum-distinction between gods and inspired poets (the latter treated, at least by the poets themselves, as men par excellence).

The Hymn of Creation

Our access to the world that produced the Rg Veda is almost entirely through the thousand twenty-eight poems of the text that have come down to us. We do not have independent knowledge of how Vedic people experienced their everyday World One, or unfiltered (non-poetic) records of their World Two ecstasies (the effects, for instance, of the drug soma). Even so, these matters are talked about enough in the poems to give us a general sense of how they were experienced. The daily suffering of World One is seen, above all, in the image of restraint, bondage and constriction by forces of enmity (human and cosmic), which are broken open in World Two moments of battle and poetic inspiration, and especially in the remembrance and reenactment of heroic deeds of the gods Indra and Varuna who thrust apart the fused (constricted, imprisoned) cosmic regions and opened an atmospheric realm of air between heaven and earth across which flow sun's rays, rain, wind, and communications between gods and men. The road of exchange between gods and mortals emerges in space opened in the midst of a prior closed world, imagined as a cosmic serpent (ahi, vrtra), a pen where cows are kept, a mountain, and in other images. The subtle and profound relationship between the mind (preeminently the mind of the poet, and to a lesser extent that of his patron) and cosmogony can best be approached by looking at one poem in some detail, then extrapolating from it to a few other high points in the Rg Vedic corpus. I have chosen to begin with one of the latest and most famous songs in the text, X.129, The Nasadiya sukta or "Hymn of Creation." I wrote about X.129 over thirty years ago (Collins, 1975), but do not claim originality for my interpretation, which draws on the philological and interpretative skill of my Vedic guru Louis Renou, and the thought of Martin Heidegger.

To understand the poem, and the Worlds One, Two, and Three that it embodies, we must move slowly.

Rig Veda X.129, "The Hymn of Creation"

Nāsad asin no sad asit tadanīm, nāsid rajo no vyoma paro yat |
Kim avarivah kuha kasya sarmann, ambhaḥ kim asid gahanam gabhiram || 1

There was no being then, nor was there nothing; there was no middle space or heaven beyond. What stirred? Where? Held in whose grip¹? Was it profound depth of water?

The first stanza draws a distinction between "sat" and "asat" (sat- is a present participle of the verb as-, "to be," with a-sat representing the privative of the same form). Often translated as "being" and "non-being," the terms may better represent, as van Buitenen () has suggested, what "is" and "is not" a thing. That is, asat may be understood as the unformed state of the primordial universe before the world of things (sat) has arisen out of its matrix. This is a valuable corrective, but we should not go too far in abandoning the sense of bare "is-ness" that others have found in sat (e.g., Renou, 1953, p. 125).² The problem is that asat also names a sort of is-ness, one that is seen as "higher" (parama-) than the "inferior" (avara-) sat at AV X.7.21. Already at RV X.72.2-3 sat is said to have been born from asat in the "former" (purvya-) and in the "first" (prathama-) "age of the gods." Evidently for the Vedic poets the primordial state when things were not things is opposed to a later stage in which things have become the things they are. This opposition, however, is not absolute; indeed, the point of this first verse is

¹ Sarman is usually a positively valenced term: "protection" rather than "bondage." Nevertheless, these concepts are interchangeable, depending on who does the protecting, and from whom. Thus at I.174.2 Indra breaks open the sarman-s of the (cosmic) enemy to release the waters. For the enemy, sarman is a protection; for the singer and Indra it is an obstacle to be broken apart. Likewise the word gopa, "guardian," becomes negative when it refers to the serpent "guarding" the cosmic waters (I.32.11, ahi-gopa).

² Elizarovna (1995), following Gonda (), has correctly stressed the tendency in the Rg Veda to personify or concretize abstractions.

to play the participial forms sat and asat against the finite form of the same verb as-

"Asat was not" (nasad asit), nor was sat (no sad asid) "at that time" (tadanim).³ But how could it be neither? This apparent violation of the Law of the Excluded Middle hints that there is a connection, some sharing of "substance" between sat and asat.

Further, a restrained developmental process is suggested in the stanza, as a chaotic, watery state of affairs is held imprisoned (sarmani) while pushing against its enclosure (the word varivart, which I take with most commentators to be from vrt- "stir, turn" also suggests enclosure, as if from the root vr- "cover, restrain").⁴ The sense is that "mid-space" (rajas) and "heaven" (vyoman, literally "separate realm," cf. Renou, 1967, p. 92) are pushing to be born from a state of constriction.

Na mṛtyur asid amṛtam na tarhi, na ratrya ahna asit praketaḥ
Anīd avātam svadhayā tad ekam, tasmād dhānyan na paraḥ kim canāsa || 2

Neither mortal nor god was then; there was no mark of night or day. That one breathed without wind by its own nature; there was nothing else beyond it.

In this verse the place of sat and asat are taken by mṛtyu- and amṛta-, "mortals" or "death" and "immortals" or "immortality." Again, the ambiguity between a more abstract and a more concrete reading seems to be intentional. Breathing without wind suggests as before a nascent state where the closed universe might open up from within, like a self-inflated balloon, and similarly the absence of a "mark" (praketa, recalling the more usual ketu) makes us think of the sun, not existent at this stage of the cosmos but still in the imagined future. The poem speaks of a precosmic state by naming features of the rsis' actual world, a cosmos that was not yet existent in the era upon which the poet meditates.

³ One is reminded of Nagarjuna's "fourfold negation." The state of the world of things being described cannot be said to be that it "is," "is not," "both is and is not," and "neither is nor is not."

⁴ Elizarenkova (1995) points out the frequent ambiguities due to "sound play" in the Rg Veda.

This gives us a clue as to the relationship between sat and asat: perhaps neither being (or beings) exists because things are caught at the moment of coming forth from a primordial state of indistinction. There is neither sat nor asat because sat is *in statu nascendi* from asat.

Tama asit tamasa gulham agre, 'praketam salilam sarvam a idam
Tuchyenabhv apihitam yad asit, tapasas tan mahinajayataikam || 3

Darkness was hidden by darkness in the beginning; this universe was an unmarked ocean. Coming-to-be was covered by void as that one was born by the power of its inward brooding.

Again, as in verse 1, we have the image of primordial waters, surely intended to convey an absence of distinctions in the cosmos. And as in verse 2, there appears the work praketa, "mark." There, it was day and night that were not marked (as different, by the rise of the sun). Here it is the ocean itself that is unmarked. As before, but more explicitly, the state is one of cosmic nascence, as "being" emerges (abhu is here clearly abstract, not a name for what either is or is not an essent but rather a state of coming-to-be). Again that coming-to-be (from another "to be" verb, bhu-) is associated with the finite form asit, "was." That very same abhu was "born by the power of its inward brooding."⁵ The poet is describing something very hard to talk about, a monistic state where there is only one (eka-) "thing" (if we are to call it a thing, which the poem does not) or one "non-thing." That non-thing reality broods within itself, swells with coming-to-be, and gives birth to itself through its own power.

Kāmas tad agre sam avartatādhi, manaso retah prathamam yad asit
Sato bandhum asati nir avindan, hrdi pratisya kavayo maniṣā || 4

⁵ The association between power (superiority, might, support, etc.) and roots for "being" (bhu-, as-) is very strong. See Elizarenkova, 1995, pp. 90-91.

In the beginning love stirred in that (one) which was the first seed of thought. Seeking in their heart with (that very) thought, the poets found the family tie of what is in no-thing.

This verse is the heart of the poem. The sat which is being born from asat is revealed to be (in part, or to include) the inspired poetic thought of the rsi-s. To this point there has been no "sign function" in the cosmos, no thinking that connects the two worlds of the precosmic and the cosmic, or in Vedic terms that bridges between the world of the gods and the world of men. This thought now appears, expressed in the words manas and manisa, which seem to have the same or very similar sense. The key to understanding this verse is to see that it is desire or love (kama) that develops into thought rather than the reverse. (Maurer, 1983, for instance, thinks that thought creates desire.) Kama develops within the primordial "one's" brooding, but as it turns into thought it is found to reside in the minds of the kavi-s. This shift to the human level is softened by the source of the poets' thought being located in their "heart" (hrdi). Clearly the heart is closely akin to the primordial waters or asat from which sat arises, just as thought arises in the poets.⁶ The kavis' thinking, therefore, is a case of sat reflecting on its own origins. This represents a rupture in the structure of the world which is coming to be. An emanational process, an inward pressure and unfolding rather like a one-celled organism putting forth a pseudopod, suddenly becomes a dualistic, or partially dualistic one. There are two, sat and asat, or thought and the origin of thought on which it thinks. Even so, however, what thought thinks about (as distinguished from its basis or origin) is precisely the "family

⁶ Thought also arises (or abides) in the waters. Cittir apam dame visayuh, sadeva dhirah sammaya cakruh (For Agni who is) thought dwelling its (his) whole lifetime in the waters the wise have measured out a seat." (RV I.67.10). As we will also find in II.35 and many other places, the divinity simultaneously remains in its "dwelling" (dama-) and manifests in the world of the poets (sada-). The situation is continued in X.90 where the cosmic Man externalizes himself as the world and at the same time remains "three fourths immortal life in heaven."

tie" (bandhu, cf Renou, 1953) that connects asat and sat, the precosmic world and the kavis' thought.

Tirascino vitato rasmir esam, adhah svid asid upari svid asit
Retodha asan mahimana asan, svadha avastat prayatih parastat || 5

Their (the poets') ray was extended across (horizontally). Was it below? Was it above? Seed-placers were (above), innate powers were (below). Self-power was below, impulse beyond.

The results of the rupture or transcendence recorded in the previous stanza are seen in this one. The poets' bandhu here becomes a line or ray (rasmi) that is drawn horizontally to bring about an above and a below. Above are masculine cosmogonic energies, below are feminine ones. Retas (seed, shoot) which was an inner, unisexual process in verse 4 now becomes the masculine half of a bisexual relationship, something "placed " (dha-) rather than something that unfolds.

Ko addha veda ha iha pra vocat, kuta ajāta kuta iyam visṛṣṭiḥ
Arvag deva asya visarjanena, 'tha ko veda yata ābhabhuva || 6

Who knows and will here say whence this (universe was) born, from where it emanated? The gods are later than this emanated universe; therefore, who knows whence it has come-to-be?

From the perspective of the divided, bisexual world it is impossible to say whence the world has come-to-be or emanated. That is, in a dualistic world where thought has become opposed to its unisexual origin, there can be no understanding of how the divided world of sat-, which includes thought, came to be. Thinking, like sat as a whole, is locked into its own side of the opposition. The possibility remained as recently as the verse before last of *thought thinking on its own origins*. This thought continues its origins and is part of them, not something split off. Verse 6 expresses the paradox that only at this

moment of origination, the instant of its nascence, can thought think what it is. Although momentary, the emergence of thought is a developmental process: water (apas) → becoming (abhu) → brooding (tapas) → love/desire (kama) → thought (manas, manias), or (more concisely) asat → sat. Arising from asat, sat knows itself as having its origin there, it knows its bandhu or "lineage" in that (cf. Renou, 1953, p. 254). Later, after sat and asat have become opposed as svadha and mahiman, thinking is isolated on one side of the divide and cannot understand what it knew just a moment ago, in stanza 4.

Iyam visrstir yata ababhuva, yadi va dadhe yadi va na
 Yo asyadyaksah parame vyoman, so anga veda yadi va na veda || 7

Whence this emanated universe has come-to-be, whether it was set-in-place or not, perhaps the overseer in highest heaven may know—or perhaps he does not know.

Paradox has been replaced by puzzlement, as the intimate tie between cosmic evolution and thought has turned into incomprehension. The reflective indwelling of thought in/on its origins (I think very close to what Heidegger calls ereignis ["appropriation"]) has given way to thought isolated from its source. Our hymn expresses something almost inexpressibly painful, for which Heidegger's word "uncanny" seems quite appropriate. In fact, it tells the source of World One—what will become the world of dukkha in Buddhism and Yoga—in opposition to World Two. Sat is World One, but asat is not World Two. World Two is the lost bandhu, the deep sense (more exactly the realization) of oneness with one's world because one's thinking—what one is most inwardly—comes to one from that World. As Heidegger said, "the question about man's nature is not a question about man." Questions about man *qua* man are expressed in stanzas 5, 6, and 7; man's nature is the topic of the first four stanzas.

Agni, the Son of the Waters, and Poetizing

Recall the nature of World Two as it was first glimpsed in the writings of D.W. Winnicott and Sri Gurudev. It is a state of complete satisfaction and fulfillment, an absence of any disharmony between the world and the self, because self-world boundaries do not exist in it. For Freud, this is primary narcissism, which we have seen to be intimately joined to the death instinct insofar as the latter aims at the breakdown of boundaries and differentiation. World Three, the cultural maintenance of ways to hold onto World Two in the face of disappointment, decay, and death (which constitute the First Noble Truth of the Buddha) is present in the Rg Veda through poetry and sacrifice. Indeed, the whole Vedic world that we know is just World Three. Yet as we have seen in X.129, World Three is constantly concerned with the other two Worlds as it struggles to rediscover World Two while caught in the oppression of World One. X.129 is very late in the Rg Vedic corpus, and marks an early stage in a transition to humanism via the image of the Cosmic Man which we will discuss shortly (I have written about this at greater length in my dissertation, Collins, 1976). For now, our aim is to go in the other direction, back into the "old" Rg Veda, using the same tools we have employed in analyzing the "Hymn of Creation." Again, we will look closely at one poem, then refer to a few others.

As in X.129 but in a more sustained way—indefinitely repeated at every sunrise and sacrifice—the older strata of the Rg Veda express a relationship between cosmogony and poetry. A previously obstructed or constricted universe is opened by the great deeds of the gods who themselves "come to be" in the act. These deeds and the opening they

bring about stimulate poetic thought, which responds to them in song and through sacrifice. A mid-space (antariksa) is opened between heaven and earth that were formerly fused into a single entity, and across that space flows sunlight, rain, wind, and in the other direction sacrificial offerings and poems. Two gods convey the flow of substance between heaven and earth, Soma (representing the intoxicating substance itself and also rainfall and plants in general) and Agni (fire in all its manifestations, from the sun to forest fire, to the cooking and sacrificial fires, to digestive and other vital processes in humans). Soma and Agni are two of the most significant deities in the Rg Veda. One form of Agni with qualities of Soma that reflects themes from X.129, particularly that of the primordial Waters, is Apam Napat, the "Son of the Waters," who is associated with lightning.

II.35 (excerpts)

Upem asrksi vajayur vacasyam, cano dadhita nadyo giro me
Apam napad asuhema kuvit sa, supesasas karati josisad dhi || 1

Seeking wealth I have let flow this eloquence; may the son of the streams enjoy my song. Let Apam Napat, impeller of horses, make (my poems) well adorned—for he would enjoy them.

Imam sv asmai hrda a sutastam, mantram vocema kuvid asya vedat
Apam Napad asuryasya mahna, visvani aryo bhuvana jajana || 2

We would speak this well-crafted thought from the heart to him: perhaps he would take note of it. The noble Son of the Waters with the greatness of his divine lordship has engendered all beings.

The first two stanzas show the reciprocity between Apam Napat and the poets (and patrons) who sing to him of his nature and creative acts. The Son of the Waters has given birth to all things but is also expected to enjoy this poem about him made by the rsi-s (themselves among the beings created by Apam Napat) which is just this moment

being sung to him. The subject of, and audience for the poem, Apam Napat, is asked to assist the poet in the adornment of his own song of praise.

Sam anya yanty upa yanty anyah, samanam urvan nadyah prinanti
Tam u sucim sucayo didivamsam, apam napatam pari tasthur apah || 3

Some combine, others enter (separately); the streams fill a common ocean. The Waters surround Apam Napat, the pure, shining one.

The streams enter a single ocean, and the Waters surround a unique Apam Napat. The singularity of the Son of the Waters, and his association with the precosmic ocean, recall the asat from X.129, and the "one" (eka-) from the same hymn.

Tam asmera yuvatayo yuvanam, marmrjyamanah pari yanty apah
Sa sukrebhah sikvabhi revad asme, didayanidhmo ghrtanirnih apsu || 4

The shy young maidens surround the young (Apam Napat), rubbing him. Without fuel he shines on us with his sharp (flames), ghee-cloaked in the Waters.

Asmai tisro avyathayaya narir, devaya devir didhisanty annam
Kṛta ivopa hi prsarsre apsu, sa piyusam dhayati purvasunam || 5

To him, unwavering, three women want to give food, goddesses to the god. Like one made, he flows among the Waters. He drinks the milk of them who have given birth for the first time.

The Son of the Waters is simultaneously the lover and offspring of the Waters who nourish him as he shines on us.

Sva a dame sudugha yasya dhenuh svadham papaya subhv annam atti
So apam napat urjayann apsv antar vasudeyaya vidhate vi bhati ||7

The Son of the Waters, in whose home is a cow giving good milk, eats good food. Swelling with force in the Waters, he shines widely in order to give goods to the worshipper.

Yo apsv a sucina daivyena rtavajasra urviya vibhati
Vaya id anya bhuvanany asya pra jayante virudhas ca prajabhah || 8

By him who shines far and wide with divine purity, according to Law and unaging, other beings and plants are engendered like offshoots, along with their progeny.

Tad asyānīkam uta cāru nāmāpīcyam vardhate naptur apam
Yam indhate yuvatayah sam ittha hiranyavarnam ghrtam annam asya || 11

That face of his and the dear name of the Son of the Waters grow in secret. The one whom the young maidens kindle: golden-colored ghee is his food.

Asmai bahunam avamaya sakhye yajnair vidhema namasa havirbhih
Sam sanu marjmi didhisami bilmair dadhamy annaih pari vanda rghbih ||12

To him who is the nearest friend of many we would pay worship with sacrifices, obeisance, and oblations. I rub his back; I want to unite him with shavings of wood; I unite him with food; I praise him with poems.

Sa im vrsajanayat tasu garbham sa im sisur dhayati tam rihanti
So apam napad anabhimlatavarno 'nyasyeveha tanva vivesa || 13

As a bull he has engendered an embryo in them; as a calf he sucks them and they lick him. This Son of the Waters with undiminished color has entered here as with the body of another.

Verses 7 and 8 show the Son of the Waters as before, swelling within his mothers and then shining widely across the universe. Verse 7 adds that he does this in part in order to benefit his worshippers, not just out of an inner dynamism (like abhu, tapas, kama in X.129). This intention adds an initiative from the god's side to the reflexive move toward origins found in X.129 arising within the seer-poets. Not only do the human recipients of divine evolution reflect back on their roots; in addition, the gods themselves act (create) in part in order to bring about communication with and from humans. We discern, in fact, a Kohutian self-selfobject bond between the two levels of being. The gods need human poets to reflect their greatness (i.e., to "mirror" their magnificent self sense) and the poets in turn need for the gods to share their greatness with men (i.e., to allow a "merger" of the human self with the divine).

The flow of substance from the god to the created world, including humans, is reciprocated in verse 12 with reverse prestations of sacrifices, obeisance, oblations, wood shavings, food, and poems of praise. Here we have the "normal" flow and counterflow between gods and mortals across the air or midspace (antariksa). But the Son of the Waters, and Agni in other forms, does not live just in one place or the other, or even only along the paths that flow between them. As verse 13 says, he "enters here (i.e., into this world) as if with the body of another." The situation is like that of a Puranic story where the hero enters a stream or pond enchanted by Visnu's maya and is transported into another body (Zimmer,). Once there, he comes to himself as the other, recognizing himself only in the identity of that one. This is the axial break I think we see in X.129 between verses 1-4 and 5-7. The "body of another" may refer to the embodied consciousness of the poet himself or to the fire on the sacrificial hearth which has been entered by Agni as Son of the Waters and is now, as it were, "the body of another" and not simply the transformed form of the celestial divinity. "Coming to" as oneself cuts across the continuous flow from heaven to earth (asat to sat, etc.) and back, and I think forms the basis for the opposition between consciousness (purusa) and world (prakrti) in Samkhya/Yoga, between the realm of samsara and nirvana in Buddhism, and for many similar oppositions in other Indian traditions. Still, despite the rupture in the two-way flow of substance there remains a way in which continuity remains. The "other" body of the self must be given. Otherwise, there would be no self to "come to" as.

"Possession" and God-Human Relationships

This forgetting of the (old) self and self-recognition as a new personality is a feature of the phenomenon of "possession" that is clearly seen by Frederick Smith in his excellent historical treatment of these transactions in India (2006). Although recognition of this type of relationship has been previously mostly confined to anthropological studies of modern India (Hiltebeitel, Obeyesekere), Smith has found that possession by divine or demonic forces that enter the human being and take over part or all of his/her agency is an ancient idea and experience, one with roots as far back as the Vedas (and leading even further, into shamanic roots of Vedic thought). The root *vis-*, which Smith finds ubiquitous in descriptions of possession, is present in verse II.35.13 (*vivesa* is the 3rd singular perfect active of the root). In fact Agni/Son of the Waters does possess the poet and the sacrificial fire, just as *asat* "possesses" *sat*, but there is always the moment of otherness, or as-it-were otherness ("as if—*iva*—with the body of another"). It is at this moment that the ego (*ahamkara* in later thinking) is born. This is also—and for the same reason—the key moment for Samkhya and Yoga (and other traditions influenced by them) when *vijnana* (discrimination) must see that the seemingly self-existent forms of this world (most particularly the first person singular) are in fact "outflows" (emanations, possessions) of the primordial Being. Discrimination in Samkhya-Yoga does not draw its line between *ahamkara* and world but between consciousness (*purusa*) and *ahamkara*. *Ahamkara* is seen to be part of *prakrti*, just as the poet is part of the *sat* he interprets and Agni in the sacrificial fire is part of Agni in the precosmic Waters.

What, then, is the meaning of the emergence of specifically human consciousness, that awareness that turns back on itself and examines its origins? Is this *ahamkara* the essential function of human being or is it the first fall out of that being? We will look

again at the early development of the word ahamkara as sketched by van Buitenen (1957) and also at the exalted, ambitious self frequently seen in the songs of the Vedic poets. In terms of the basic rubrics of this book, the question will be whether ahamkara, the ego or self, is the basic cause of World One or instead an essential constituent of culture's World Three, a power able to move the human in whom ahamkara lives from suffering towards fulfillment. To anticipate, we will find that the later Indian tradition disputes this point, with some (e.g., Samkhya and Sankaracarya, and in a somewhat different way some Buddhists) arguing for an essentially "demonic" ahamkara and others (e.g., King Bhoja and Ramanjua) for an ahamkara capable of breaking through from World One to World Two.

In a classic paper, van Buitenen (1957) shows that the word ahamkara, the principle of individual selfhood in the Samkhya Karika, originally meant the cry of self-assertion, "I!" and was thus analogous to expressions such as omkara, vasatkara (the utterance of "om," "vasat"), etc. At the time of the Brahmanas and Upanisads, roughly, cosmogenesis was imagined under the figure of a Cosmic Man (usually Prajapati) who emitted the world verbally, at times through the word "I." Vac, the Vedic name for sacred language (Elizarenkova, 1995, p.), was the initial form of the emitted word/world and Prajapati's first evolute. With her (evidently his daughter) Prajapati copulated and thereby gave birth to all creatures. A famous form of this myth, later referred to by Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents*, has it that this original male (here called Purusa rather than Prajapati) was "as big as a man and a woman embracing." (BAU,). The similar myth retold by Plato in the *Timaeus* is cited by Freud as a parallel. Van Buitenen summarizes his understanding of verbal self-creation thus:

We find the beginnings of the concept of ahamkara in the older upanisads, in this form: at the beginning of creation a primordial being becomes conscious of himself, formulates himself, creates himself; these three distinctions do not really exist: consciousness-formulation-creation is actually one single process. (1957, p. 60)

Compare this upanisadic state of affairs, several hundred years later, to Rg Veda X.129. In the latter poem, asat evolves into sat at least in part through the inward brooding (tapas, a yogic process) in the "heart" of the poets. Poetry is therefore essential to creation (or evolution from a formless no-thing into the things of the world) but it is also secondary, a human activity responding to a more primordial creative act of the gods. It is clear in X.129 (verses 1-4) that human thought, though emergent, is also created like the rest of sat through the inner development of the primordial principle. At the next moment, however, thought—which initially had been and/or had made a tie between asat and sat—stretched a line of discrimination between the primordial and the evolved worlds. As in the upanisadic texts cited by van Buitenen, the opposition in the Vedic hymn is sexual. Seed placers were above, feminine powers below. This is quite parallel to Prajapati emitting Vac and then copulating with her, except for one thing: the thinking/uttering function, which comes *later* in X.129, is *primary* in the upanisads. A quasi-human figure now stands at the beginning, inverting the old order in which the human followed and was dependent on the gods.

Self Assertion and Self Discovery in the Hymn to Sacred Speech

George Thompson (1995) has shown that self-assertion is not foreign to the Rg Veda, including its older portions. I will argue, however, that this self-claiming, even grandiosity as it sometimes becomes, is quite different from the humanism that develops

in the Brahmanas and Upanisads under the Cosmic Man image. Thompson's discussion of the Vac hymn, Rg Veda X.125, following the earlier analysis of Todorov and Elizarenkova (1995), shows what this Vedic I-assertion really is: grandiosity (mirroring) and merger (participation in a grander self) at all levels of the divine-human cosmos. To anticipate, we will find that the ahamkara, as it arises in the Cosmic Man context in the Brahmanas/Upanisads, represents narcissistic self pathology, a "vertical split" (Kohut,) claiming control or ownership over the other side in the self-selfobject relationship upon which it continues to depend. The relationship between speech (or rather, Speech) and what it speaks about is quite different in X.125. Again I will go slowly through the hymn.

Rg Veda X.125

Aham rudrebhir vasubhis caramy
 Aham adityair uta visvadevaih
 Aham mitravarunobha bibharmy
 Aham indragni aham asvinobha || 1

I proceed with the Rudras, with the Vasus, I with the Adityas and the All-Gods. I bear Mitra and Varuna, Indra and Agni, and the two Asvins.

Aham somam ahanasam bibharmy
 Aham tvastaram uta pusanam bhagam
 Aham dadhami dravinam havismate
 Supravye yajamanaya sunvate || 2

I bear the swelling Soma, Tvastr, Pusan, and Bhaga. I bestow wealth on the one who offers oblation, the soma-pressing and cheerful patron.

Aham ratri samgamani vasunam
 Cikitusi prathama yajniyanam
 Tam ma deva vy adadhuh purutra
 Bhunisthatram bhury avesyantim || 3

I am queen, a repository of good things, wise, the first of those worthy of sacrifice. As such, the gods have put me divided in many places, as I pervade many forms.

The first nine lines begin with the word "I" (aham). These lines assert the fundamental supportive role of the goddess Speech vis-à-vis the most important Vedic gods. She "travels with" the Rudras and Vasus, and "bears" the Adityas, Mitra, Varuna, Indra, Agni, the Asvins, Soma Tvastr, Pusan, and Bhaga. At the same time, she gives wealth to the "soma-pressing" patrons of the poet who (as Thompson puts it) "impersonates" her in these verses. As wise queen, treasury of goods, the most worthy of sacrifice she has been apportioned in many places by the gods. This seems to refer (as Dumézil pointed out,) to the fact that the multipotential being Vac is expressed (or expresses herself) through the specific personalities and powers of the various Vedic gods. Not only does Speech "deintegrate" (the term is from the Jungian analyst Michael Fordham) as she is expressed by the gods; she also "enters" (manifests herself in) the many forms of the world inhabited by humans. The verb form here, a vis-, is the one found by Smith (2006) most often to name possession, and it is clear that Vac does let herself flow into beings, as she lets her compound nature pour differentially into the specific qualities of the various gods.

Maya so annam atti yo vipasyati
 Yah praniti ya im srnoty uktam
 Amantavo mam ta upa ksiyanti
 Srudhi sruta sraddhivam te vadami || 4

By me he eats food who sees, who breathes, who hears what is said. Even fools live by me. Hear, you who are heard; I will tell you what you should hear.

Aham eva svayam idam vadami
 Justam devebhir uta manusebhih
 Yam kamaye tam-tam ugram krnomi
 Tam brahmanam tam rsim tam sumedham || 5

I say this myself, which is enjoyable to gods and men: whom I love I make formidable, a Brahman, a poet, wise.

In these two stanzas Vac tells what she does for the poet in particular, but even for those who lack understanding. All live on her resources, but those she loves she makes wise and potent. Only they understand the innate tie between the manifest world and the precosmic realm called brahman (Renou and Silburn, 1949). As such they become "formidable" brahmans, suggesting that they are equipped to defeat the forces of darkness and enmity always implicit in Vedic discourse with the gods.

Aham rudraya dhanur a tanomi
Brahmadvise sarave hantava u
Aham janaya samadam krnomy
Aham dyavprthivi a vivesa || 6

I stretch out the bow for Rudra so that his arrow will kill the hater of the brahman.
I make (thereby) joy for the people. I have pervaded heaven and earth.

Vac asserts that her power underlies the warrior function, which is regularly assigned the role of opening the closed worlds (and liberating territory on earth). Her act of "pervading" heaven and earth is likely cited here because it is the effect of this violent opening. Brahman implies a connection between divine and human, and as such rests upon a prior openness in the universe. Killing the brahman-haters is in effect to break the restraint on cosmic openness, and on brahman, which those enemies try to maintain.

Aham suve pitaram asya murdhan
Mama yonir apsv antah samudre
Tato vi tisthe bhuvanano visvo
'tamum dyam varsmanopa sprsami || 7

I give birth to the father at the head (of the sky), (while) my womb is in the Waters, in the ocean. From there (i.e., from the womb) I straddle all worlds. I touch that sky with the top (of my head).

The twofold nature of Vac that Todorov has found is in evidence here.⁷ As we have seen for *asat* and *Apam Napat*, at one time Vac remains in her origin and also spreads herself out to touch (and create) the far ends of the world.⁸

Aham eva vata iva pra vamy
Arabhamana bhuvanani visva
Paro diva para ena prthivyai
'tavati mahina sam babhuva || 8

It is I who blow like the wind, reaching all beings (creatures). Beyond heaven and beyond the earth I have come-to-be by this greatness.

Vac declares here the "autochthonous" process by which she supports the world. Growing within herself as do the Waters in X.129, she "blows" like the wind to the farthest parts of the world while remaining eternally "beyond" heaven and earth. Again we have the sense of a static, transcendent part or aspect of Vac being opposed to a creative or emanational part. Like the Cosmic Man who is about to take the scene in the late-Vedic world, Vac works with only part of herself, while a deeper or more essential aspect remains in her origin (womb).⁹ Unlike the Cosmic Man, however, the hidden portion of Vac is not a human blueprint for the world that she will create. Her coming-to-be is truly creative, and indeed we may say with Winnicott that in her "everything is creative." (Winnicott,).

Thompson sees in RV X.125 "the impersonation of a goddess by a poet-priest...." (1997, p. 151), and later (p. 153) speaks of the poet as "a veritable sign of the targeted god" (here Vac). While I find the word "impersonation" misleading and much prefer the second characterization of "sign," Thompson has pointed to something very important in

⁷ Elizarenkova (1995).

⁸ "In the womb of the mother I am the father of the father" (citation?) expresses something similar.

⁹ Vac's two aspects remind us of Saussure's "synchronic" and "diachronic" levels of language.

Vedic poetry, especially cases of the gods' directly praising their own great deeds.

Although the creative force comes from the gods, the words are in fact uttered by the poet who declaims them in the ritual assembly (sabha), and in doing so the poet does act very much like the god Agni in his role of ketu, "banner" (generally the sun). The poet is also like Agni in making the 180 degree turn back toward his own origins we have seen so beautifully expressed in RV II.35 and (without reference to Agni) X.129. The poet is the way in which the gods manifest in the world; in poetic thought heaven and earth are opened and the flow between them commences. At the same time, the poet inhabits the bondage, unconsciousness, and unmanifestness of the present world, the state of affairs that I have called World One where the poet's selfhood is overruled by oppressive Others who "hate" and deny it.

The Vedic Self and its Other

Theories like those of Kohut and George Thompson do not go far enough in penetrating to the essential experience of selfhood, which rests in a nexus between a World One of suffering and a World Two of satisfaction. As such, they fail to provide a basis for culture, the World Three in which the poems of the Rg Veda live and continue to have their being. Vedic poetry is a specific kind and instance of culture; it constitutes a World Three where the never-ending agon to hold open the possibility of full satisfaction is repeatedly practiced over time, across the seasons of the calendar and of the sacrifice. The essence of Vedic poetry is renewal in the midst of a world fraught with oppression and decay. Hence such apparently mundane concerns as a cure for baldness () or excitement over the yearly return of the frogs in springtime () are not trivial or

banal events for the Vedic poets. Winter and old age are threats to the reopening of the world, the receipt of fresh life from its storehouse in the heaven of the gods. Poetry is practice, and van Buitenen's comments on the hero's "presence of mind" (his translation of *buddhi*) in later texts also apply in the Rg Veda.

The quality which we paraphrase as presence of mind is not so much a function of worldly wit or cleverness, as its condition. It is the articulation of a constant cagy awareness of what is going on, the refusal to permit oneself to be distracted momentarily, the preparedness and collectedness of one's faculty of discrimination and decision. It is what the philosophic psychology calls *buddhi*, which comprises both this wide-awake vigilance and the capacity for immediately acting upon what comes within its purview. This faculty is the hero's principal weapon in the struggle for survival. (Van Buitenen, 1959, p. 100).

The Vedic poet, like the hero of classical tales, must sustain a constant awareness of threats (i.e., *buddhi*) and be ready to meet them by an act of reopening the self and the world. What the Vedic poet adds to Van Buitenen's description is awareness of the origin of that *buddhi*, and the poet's constantly practiced reflection upon the givenness of his mental powers by the gods out of their primordial creative potency. His/her task is not primarily to make poems ("worldly wit or cleverness") but to be open to the flow of cosmic forces into thought and to turn those forces back towards their origin. Poems come of themselves when this openness and reflection occur.

To understand the selfhood of the Vedic poet we will have to modify and expand Kohut's theory. Crucially, Kohut's psychoanalytic self psychology shares with psychoanalysis generally a conviction that the origins of the self lie in the parent-child relationship. Vedic thought, while certainly not ignoring the parent-child roots of selfhood, sees cosmic and divine origins as more important and grounds parent-child relationships in the latter. Mirroring and merger are not personal processes in the Veda

but rather ones with cosmic significance. As such, humans (again, this means the poets preeminently and to a lesser extent their patrons) are not just more or less worthy of praise or emulation, but in their act of poetizing are felt actually to perform a cosmogonic task that both glorifies the world's origin and enacts its coming-to-be (in both ways poetry is comparable to the rising of the sun) . Selfhood does not merely aim to achieve human ambitions within the world of men but to act comparably to the great world-opening deeds of the gods and to shine with similar splendor. Vedic thought is not humanism, though it is poised to become humanism in subsequent days (the Atharva Veda and Brahmanas) when the Cosmic Man and the father-son lineality of selfhood will take the place of the earlier vision. Vedic culture paradoxically requires the continual recreation of the fallen-apart world while to do so it relies on the traditional poems of the "fathers" of the poets now living. Drawing on the realization of the older poets allows those of the present (nutana-) to follow their predecessors' great acts of assisting the gods to destroy enemies of brahman and to reopen the world. Late in his career Kohut spoke of a kind of selfhood he termed "cosmic narcissism," by which he meant a sense of self encompassing much of the physical world. This seems better to describe what the Vedic rsi-s experienced and worked to experience again with each new day and poem.