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AIM AND SCOPE

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A RE-EXAMINATION OF ṚGVEDA X.129, THE NĀSADĪYA HYMN

WALTER H MAURER
University of Hawaii

'This article is dedicated to the revered memory of Dr. W. Norman Brown, under whose inspiring tutelage its author first became acquainted with the tantalizing problems of the Veda.'

This well-known hymn is here re-examined in the light of the extensive study that has been expended upon it by many scholars over the years. Each stanza is discussed and annotated in detail and a new, closely literal translation provided, which, it is hoped, reflects greater clarity and cohesiveness in the development of the ideas from one stanza to the other.

The Nāsadīya¹ Hymn, or Creation Hymn as it is often somewhat misleadingly called, belongs to a group of hymns, numbering under a dozen and almost entirely confined to the

*The writing of this paper has been a gradual process involving several separate stages, in the course of which I have made many small modifications in my original views as first presented to the XXIXth International Congress of Orientalists, Paris, 1973, partly as a result of exchanges with colleagues and students, and partly in consequence of further reflection and study of my own. To all those whose views have contributed to the evolution of this paper from āsat to sāt, so to speak, I here express my profoundest gratitude.

1. This term Nāsadīya is derived, by the addition of the suffix -īya, from the first two words of the hymn, *nā āsad* (contracted into *nāsad* by vowel coalescence). A longer name, Nāsadāsiya, made similarly from the first three words, *nāsad āsīn* (minus the final consonant!), is occasionally seen (e.g. it is used by Ludwig and Deussen).

tenth and last Maṇḍala of the Ṛgveda, that address themselves to the question of the origin of the world. These cosmogonic hymns are immensely important to the understanding of the gradual evolution of Indian philosophic thought from its earliest beginnings in the Ṛgveda to the Upaniṣads and the great systems or *darśanas*. It is not to be supposed, however, that the speculative matter contained in these hymns constitutes in any sense a single and coherent system of thought. The fact is quite the reverse: not only are many opinions ventured as to how the world began, but within the same hymn are found contradictions, so that it is quite impossible to present one homogeneous Vedic cosmogony. Furthermore, the different theories are in general presented in a fragmentary, incomplete form tantalizingly lacking in detail or elaboration. What one finds is a series of gropings, attempts to offer some acceptable explanation of how it all began. In one place it is asked: 'What, pray, was the wood, what was the tree from which they fashioned heaven and earth which are firm and unaging, while the days and former dawns have perished?'² The answer to this question is given not in the Ṛgveda but in the Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa, where we read: 'Brāhman was the wood, Brāhman was the tree from which they fashioned heaven and earth.'³ In yet another place the creation of the world is ascribed to Viśvākarman, the great artificer of the gods, who performed his work like a mighty smith with bellows and fan.⁴ Elsewhere to Tvāṣṭṛ, the divine artisan.⁵ In another passage the world is attributed to Hiraṇyagarbhā, the 'golden germ,' who arose in the beginning and became the one lord of all, upholder of heaven and earth, giver of life and breath.⁶ Another hymn asserts that the world originated from a great sacrifice in which the gods offered as victim the primeval giant Pūruṣa, parts of whose body became portions of the universe.⁷ But certainly the boldest and by far the most re-

2. RV. X.31.7: *kīm svīd vānaṃ kā u sā vṛkṣā āsa yāto dyāvāpṛthivī niṣṭatakṣūh | saṃtasthānē ajāre itāulī ahāni pūrvīr uśāso jaranta ||*

3. Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa II.8.9.6: *brāhma vānaṃ brāhma sā vṛkṣā asit | yāto dyāvāpṛthivī niṣṭatakṣūh* ¹

4. RV. X.81 and 82.

5. No entire hymn is addressed to Tvāṣṭṛ, but he is often mentioned (v. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, § 38B, p. 116ff.).

6. RV. X.121.

7. RV. X.90.

markable of all these attempts to explain the beginnings of things is to be found in the Nāsadiya Hymn, X.129.

In all probability no hymn in the entire Ṛgveda has been the object of more attention than this short hymn of but seven stanzas. Moreover, it has been translated more than any other hymn in the whole collection, and it can rightly be said that practically every Sanskritist of note has made a translation of it, whether in a separate article devoted to this hymn or in connection with a larger study involving Vedic exegesis.⁸ Some scholars have been lavish in their praise of it. For example, the German Sanskritist and philosopher, Paul Deussen, says in his *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie*: 'In its noble simplicity, in the loftiness and purity of its philosophical ideas this famous . . . hymn is perhaps the most remarkable bit of philosophy that has come down to us from ancient times.'⁹ The greatest of American Sanskritists, William Dwight Whitney, however, was somewhat less favorably disposed to this hymn: 'The unlimited praises which have been bestowed upon it, as philosophy and as poetry, are well-nigh nauseating.'¹⁰

But in spite of the attention that has been accorded this hymn, many difficulties continue to impede its interpretation. Unfortunately the translations, though numerous, tend to borrow from one another, especially in those parts where a fresh interpretation would be most welcome. In addition to failing to pierce the veil of darkness and provide anything essentially new, some of the more recent translations often compound the problems by an awkward obscurity of phraseology, occasionally enhanced by an insistence upon a metrical translation.

The chief example in the hymn of an old notion to which almost all translators have adhered occurs in stanza 4 where we are told that 'in the beginning desire arose upon That.' In the

8. Some of the most important studies of this hymn (which contain translations) are given in the bibliographical references at the end of the article. The frequency of its translation was noted as long ago as 1883 by Ludwig who remarked: 'Diese Sūktam gehört zu den am häufigsten übersetzten des Ṛgveda' (*Der Rigveda*, p. 433).

9. Deussen, pp. 119-120: 'Dieser berühmte ... Hymnus ist in seiner edlen Einfachheit, in der Hoheit und Reinheit seiner philosophischen Anschauungen vielleicht das bewunderungswürdigste Stück Philosophie, welches aus alter Zeit uns überkommen ist.'

10. Whitney, p. cxi.

latter half of this stanza, which in my opinion contains the key to the entire hymn and, at the least, represents the culmination of its ideas, it is stated that 'wise men found out the connection of the existent in the non-existent, after searching with the wisdom in their heart.' But when the two parts are thus translated, they lack interrelationship, as the notion of desire is not extended to the second half where nothing further is made of it. The two parts can be brought intimately and meaningfully together if 'desire' is understood as object of the verb 'found out' with the remaining words of the third verse serving as its explanatory adjunct. The discovery made by the seers, then, would be that 'desire is the connecting link between the existent (i.e. the world of reality) and the non-existent (i.e. the indeterminate condition of primordial time).' If this notion is correct, it serves not only to make a more homogeneous unity out of stanza 4 and more closely integrate it with the preceding and following stanzas, but to bring this hymn into more direct and intimate relationship to later Indian philosophic thought, where this notion of desire as the starting point of creation is common.

One of the problems presented by this hymn is to what extent later philosophic ideas are dependent on it.¹¹ The vagueness and condensation of its phraseology are such that it can be regarded as providing the basis of both the Sāṃkhya and Vedānta systems. In fact, the great Vedic commentator Śāyaṇa, who has two entirely separate commentaries on the hymn, in the one gives a Sāṃkhyan interpretation of it, but in the other a Vedāntic. Doubtless this problem cannot be solved, and the truth of the matter may with much probability be that the hymn simply sums up or reflects some of the cosmogonic ideas that were afloat at the time of its composition and out of which, rather than out of the hymn itself, subsequent philosophic thought evolved. Whatever may be the precise relationship, then, between this hymn and later ideas, its interest is very great, and one cannot but peruse it with much the same feeling as that voiced by Deussen.

In what follows an attempt is made at yet another translation of this hymn, based upon a close examination of most of the studies and translations that have appeared so far. The translation is as literal as English idiom permits, and words have

been supplied only in those few instances where they are needed to carry the sense. These have been inserted in parentheses. Each line of the translation corresponds to the same line of the Vedic text. On the whole, overly technical and amplificatory matter that is likely to be meaningful principally to the specialist has been omitted from the commentary subjoined to each stanza and relegated to the exegetical notes.

1. *nāsad āsīn nō sād āsīt tadānīm*
nāsīd rājo nō vīomā parō yāt |
kīm āvarīvaḥ kūha kāsya śārmann
āmbhaḥ kīm āsīd gāhanam gabhūrām ||

Not non-existent was it nor existent was it at that time:
 there was not atmosphere nor the heavens which are beyond.

What existed? Where? In whose care?

Water was it? An abyss unfathomable?

The first verse is generally rendered: 'There was neither non-being nor being at that time.' But this suggests a greater degree of abstraction than was probably meant. In this translation the two Sanskrit words *āsat* and *sāt*, which are thus generally made into the abstract nouns 'non-being' and 'being', are taken as predicate adjectives ('non-existent' and 'existent') to *sārvam idām* 'all this (world)' not actually expressed until the third stanza, but here assumed to be the implicit subject of *āsīt* 'was.' In the English 'it' serves as this implicit subject: 'Not non-existent (*āsat*) was it nor existent (*sāt*) was it.'¹²

11. Geldner, *Der Rigveda in Auswahl*, p. 207, is very explicit regarding the dependence of the 'later theory of creation' upon this hymn: 'Auf dieses alte Schöpfungslied ist vielfach die spätere Schöpfungstheorie gegründet. Was hier nur durch einen Spiegel in einem dunklen Worte geschaut ist, wird später im einzelnen ausgemalt.'

12. Almost no one takes the words *āsat* and *sāt* as predicates to an implicit *sārvam idām*. Oddly enough Geldner, who did so construe these words in several early treatments, e.g. in his *Kosmogonie*, p. 16 ('Als Subjekt ist aus Strophe 3 'dieses' sc. Weltall heraufzudenken ...'), and *Der Rigveda in Auswahl*, p. 208, seems later to have changed his mind, as his translation of this hymn in the *Harvard Oriental Series* reads: 'Weder Nichtsein noch Sein war damals.' But it may be worth pointing out that in Śatapathabrāhmaṇa X.5.3.1, which appears to be the oldest comment on the hymn, the pronoun *idām* 'this' is actually expressed in the paraphrase, thus: *neva vā idam agre 'sād āsīn neva sād āsīt* ('In the beginning this (world) was not, as it were, non-existent; not, as it were, was it existent'). Oldenberg, p. 346, however, considers this passage from the Śatapathabrāhmaṇa to be valueless in deciding the issue ('Die 'älteste Erklärung der Worte' ... besitzt in solcher Frage m.E. keine Autorität') and

'At that time' (*tadānīm*) means, of course, 'at that primordial time, in the beginning.'¹³ In the next stanza this idea is expressed by 'then' (*tārhi*), a similar adverb, but in the third and fourth occurs the more explicit 'in the beginning, at first' (*āgre*). We are told, then, that in the beginning of things this world was in an indeterminate, unformed state that does not admit of description in ordinary terms: though it did not exist in the sense of the existent world about us, yet it did not wholly not exist. In fact, as will become apparent in the second stanza, something did exist – an indescribable 'It' or 'That,' a spiritual principle in which adhered the potentiality of creation.

The words *kīm āvarivah*, here rendered "What existed?" have occasioned much discussion among commentators since the verb form *āvarivah* may with almost equal probability be regarded as an imperfect of either the verb 'cover' or the verb 'move about, exist.'¹⁴ If it is assumed to mean 'covered,' then the interrogative *kīm* might be the subject or object, thus: 'What covered (it)?' or 'What did (it) cover?' But in the second verse the poet clearly indicates the absence of any cover, whether atmosphere or heavens beyond, and we do not therefore expect him to ask what covered the world in the next verse. It seems more reasonable to suppose that, having posited a condition intermediate between non-existence and existence, where there was not the heaven to serve as cover, he would ask, in effect, 'What, then, was there?' In the fourth verse two answers (in the form of questions!) to the query as to what existed are offered, viz. water or a vast chasm. In the translation of this last verse it has been assumed that *kīm* is used simply as an interrogation marker, not as a neuter pronoun 'what.' Many, however, follow the latter course and render the verse: 'What was the water deep, unfathomable?' By this view, then, both *gāhanam* and *gabhirām* are taken to be adjectives modifying 'water' (*āmbhas*). The interpretation adopted here makes *gāhanam* a noun signifi-

opts for 'Nicht war das Nichtseiende noch war das Seiende damals.'

Curiously enough Hillebrandt, p. 133, reverses the sequence of these predications and translates 'Nicht war Sein, nicht Nichtsein damals' and so also Roth: 'Da gab es weder Sein noch gab es Nichtsein.'

13. Ambrosini, p. 95, remarks: 'con *tadānīm* vagamente alludendo ad una mitica età originaria.'

14. For a fairly full discussion of this issue on whether *āvarivah* is to be taken from *√ṛ* 'cover' or *√ṛt* 'exist' v. Oldenberg, pp. 346-347.

ing 'chasm' and *gabhirām* an adjective 'deep, unfathomable.' Several other permutations of the last verse are possible, but it seems purposeless to repeat them all here.¹⁵

2. *nā mṛtyūr āsīd amṛtam nā tārhi*
nā rātriā āhna āsīt praketaḥ |
ānīd avātām svadhāyā tād ekam
tāsmād dhānyān nā parāḥ kīm canāsa ||

Neither mortal was there nor immortal then;

not of night, of day was there distinction:

That alone breathed windless through inherent power.

Other than That indeed there was naught else.

The Ṛgveda often uses the abstract for the concrete so that the words 'There was not death nor what was immortal then'¹⁶ ought to be taken to mean quite simply 'Neither mortal was there nor immortal then.'¹⁷

In spite of the indeterminateness of things, there was, after all, something that enjoyed a kind of existence by reason of inherent power of its own (*svadhāyā*),¹⁸ yet its breathing was without breath, 'windless' (*avātām*), as the poet puts it. For want of any term by which to call this principle the poet uses the neuter pronoun *tād* 'That,' a remarkable usage, as it implies absolutely nothing about its nature. Almost all translators join *ekam* 'one' together with *tād* and render 'That One' or 'The One' as though *ekam* were part of the appellative. I prefer, however, to treat *ekam* as an adverb in the sense of 'alone.' Of course, that the two words constitute an almost indissoluble

15. The majority of them may be found in Scherman, p. 1. Gonda, p. 677, is of the opinion that the line means: 'Was there the water, the unfathomable, deep?' ('Was er het water, het grondeloze, diepe?'), with an implication of doubt on the poet's part as to whether water was, as widely accepted, the primordial substance. This interpretation is, of course, not precluded by the translation adopted here. With regard to the 'abyss' mentioned in Id v. Brown's article on the Ṛgvedic equivalent of hell.

16. According to Whitney, p. cx, 'a very unnecessary amplification; since if there was, as already declared, neither existence nor even non-existence, there evidently could occur no cessation of existence, nor could there be anything that prolonged an existence without cessation.'

17. Geldner, *Kosmogonie*, p. 17, translates 'Damals war nicht Tod, nicht Unsterblichkeit,' but adds 'Es gab weder Sterbliche noch Götter.' Deussen, p. 122, similarly subjoins 'die Menschenwelt und Götterwelt' and refers to RV. X.121.2c where *amṛtam* and *mṛtyuḥ* are again probably used as equivalents of concrete nouns.

18. Geldner, *Kosmogonie*, p. 18, compares *svadhā* here to the later *sakti*, the creative power that inheres in the world-cause. Coomaraswamy, p. 57, equates

unity in subsequent Indian thought is not to be questioned. But it is doubtful whether the union of these two words was so close in this earliest usage. It is perhaps noteworthy that *tád* occurs in the last line of this stanza without *ékam* and similarly in the first line of stanza 4.¹⁹ Only in the last verse of stanza 3 do both *tád* and *ékam* again occur, but there with words intervening.

3. *táma āsīt támasā gūḥám ágre*
apraketám salilám sárvam ā idám |
tuchyénābhú ápihitám yád āsīt
tápasas tán mahinájāyatáikam ||

Darkness it was, by darkness hidden in the beginning:
 an undistinguished sea was all this.

The germ (of all things) which was enveloped in void,
 That alone through the power of brooding thought was
 born.²⁰

A question may here arise as to whether the first two words *táma āsīt* 'Darkness it was' should constitute a sentence and so be separated from what follows, thus: 'Darkness it was; hidden by darkness in the beginning, all this was an undistinguished ocean.' But this is hardly substantially different from construing the first verse as a unified whole ('Darkness it was, by darkness hidden in the beginning') and taking the second also as forming a unit by itself, though with the implication that it is the consequence of the state of things described in the first verse ('an un-

ātmamāyā in Bhagavadgītā IV. 6 with *svadháyā*, an equation which may be supported by other parallels with *māyā* in the Ṛgveda.

19. Doubtless the strongest argument in support of not considering *ékam* part of the appellation of the first principle is its omission in these two instances. It is interesting to note that Sāyaṇa, in his comment on this hymn in the Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa II.8.9.3, basing his interpretation on the later Vedāntic notions, supplies the appropriate form of *éka* in the places where it is wanting. Thus, for example, in commenting on the last verse of stanza 2 he says: *tasmād ekasmād brahmaṇo 'nyat kiñca kimapi param utkṛṣtam nāsa naivāsīt*. On this also cf. Ludwig, *Der Nāśadaśīya-hymnus*, pp. 2-3.

20. Gonda, p. 683, finds difficulty in translating *ajāyata* by 'was born' here since the primal being has already been mentioned in stanza 2 and prefers to say 'it realized itself, acquired its own independent existence' ('... het zich realiseerde, eigen, zelfstandige existentie kreeg') or, in his English version on p. 695, 'assumed individual existence.' But while the primal being admittedly cannot be said to have been born in quite the ordinary sense (since he already existed), it seems an unnecessary elaboration to substitute a term fancied to be more in keeping with strict logic for what the poet has in fact said.

distinguished sea was all this'). The expression 'undistinguished sea' (*apraketám salilám*) need not be taken absolutely literally; that is, the sense may with some probability be that the world was in that time of indeterminateness as devoid of distinguishing features as a sea, and anyone who has travelled long distances by ship knows how monotonously and unvaryingly the same a calm sea can be.²¹

In the third line the first principle 'That' is amplified by the epithet *ābhú*, the most transparent derivation of which suggests the meaning 'coming into being' (as though a present participle) or, if a substantive, 'that which comes into being, that which becomes.'²² Here somewhat freely translated 'the germ (of all things),' this principle of becoming is now said to have been born or come to life 'through the power of brooding thought' (*tápasas . . . mahinā*), the implication of which appears to be that 'That' is nothing else than mind, a point to which we shall revert in commenting on the next stanza. It is difficult to find a suitable equivalent in English for Sanskrit *tápas*, a word that has permeated Indian thought from very early times, signifying literally 'heat' but applied in various ways to the internal heat of deep concentration through which immensely great powers could be attained.²³ Perhaps 'brooding thought' is the most

21. Sāyaṇa alternatively suggests that a particle of comparison may be omitted with *salilám* (*yadvā salilam iti luṭtopamam | salilam iva*). Gonda, p. 682, is insistent on taking *salilám* not in the sense of 'ocean' or 'water' but 'wave' or 'something waving' (so in his English translation, p. 695). But his justification for this, while extended, is not entirely convincing and seems to me in part contradictory, since he gives as reasons the doubt expressed in 1d concerning the existence of the waters and the fact that, according to 2d, there was nothing else than the primal being, but then proceeds to speak of the waves of the ocean (de golven van de oceaan) as being frequently mentioned in cosmogonic texts as the impregnating place of the primordial germ.

22. i.e. < ā- √bhū which occurs in the form *ābābhūva* in 6d and 7a; Macdonell, *Reader*, p. 209, translates 'coming into being,' with the value of a present participle, and Edgerton, p. 73, regarding *ābhú* as a noun to ā- √bhū, renders somewhat freely by 'generative principle'; close to this is Tola's 'principio de devenir' (p. 300). Geldner, H.O.S. III, p. 360, on a somewhat different tack, has 'das Lebenskräftige'. But in sharp disagreement with all these, Ambrosini, pp. 129-130, has proposed that *ābhú* means 'water' and belongs to the same word-family as *āmbhas* and *āmbu*, the initial vowel representing PIE. *ǵ or preferably *ǵ, if the reading *ābhú* be rejected in favor of *ābhū* (against the Padapāṭha!).

23. On *tápas* a great deal has been written, but v. especially the monograph by Blair. Regarding *tápas* in this passage the author says that it 'has become not only a completely abstract entity, but also a great creative, primeval power' (p. 67). Cf. also

suitable rendition, as it combines the notions of concentrated thought and heat.

4. *kāmas tād āgre*²⁴ *sām avartatādhi*
mānaso rétaḥ prathamām yád āsit |
sató bāndhum āsati nīr avindan
*hrdī pratīśya kavāyo manīṣā*²⁵ ||
 Upon That in the beginning²⁴ arose desire,
 which was the first offshoot of (that) thought.
 (This desire) sages found out (to be) the link
 between the existent and the non-existent,²⁵
 after searching with the wisdom in their heart.

This stanza, though it has generally been accorded less attention by scholars than the following, is really the highpoint of the entire poem, as was noted in the introductory remarks. As it is almost invariably translated, however, its two halves hang but loosely, almost incoherently, together, and as a whole it bears but an obscure relationship to what precedes and what follows. We are told that 'Upon That in the beginning arose desire' and we may infer, in agreement with subsequent Indian ideas, that it was a desire to create the objects of the world.²⁶ The second line, consisting of a relative clause which explains and amplifies this notion, is almost always rendered by 'which was the first seed (*rétas*) of the mind (*mānaso*).' But what do the words 'first seed of the mind' mean? Was the desire the first seed of the mind in the sense of the source or origin of the

Geldner, *Kosmogonie*, p. 20: '*tāpas* ist das Schwitzen oder Brüten über einer bestimmten Idee, die innere Erwärmung für oder der heisse Drang zu etwas.' In an extended note Muir, O.S.T. V, pp. 361-362, note 541, quotes several interesting and illuminating passages on *tāpas*.

24. Hillebrandt, p. 133, note 4, suggests that by *āgre* ('in the beginning') is here meant *tāpaso 'gre*, i.e. 'in the beginning of the brooding thought' which seems better than 'in the beginning' in the more general sense of cosmic antiquity.

25. Thieme, *Gedichte*, p. 67, translates *manīṣā* by 'durch Nachdenken,' but in his extended article 'Vedisch *manīṣā*' (sic!) renders it by 'in (ekstatischer) Erregtheit' (Kleine Schriften I, p. 245), congruent with which view is that of Gonda, pp. 688 and 696 where he translates 'with the inspired thoughts of their minds.'

26. Sāyaṇa specifically asserts this (*sisṛkṣā jātety arthah*). Muir, O.S.T. IV, p. 4, note 3, remarks that 'the creative acts of Prajāpati are constantly said to have been preceded by desire'; e.g. *Taittirīyasaṁhitā* III.1.1.1.: *prajāpatiḥ akāmayata prajāḥ sṛjeyēti sá tāpo 'tapyata sá sarpān asṛjata*. Cf. also Winternitz, p. 87, note 1: 'Nicht der Schopenhauersche 'Wille,' wie Deussen und andere annehmen. Wie die sinnliche Liebe zur Zeugung und Entstehung der Wesen führt, so dachten sich diese alten Denker die Sinnelust als den Urquell alles Seins.'

mind? And if so, what is meant by 'mind,' not a word more being said about it either in this stanza or the remainder of the hymn. These problems can be solved if it is assumed that by 'seed' is meant not 'source' or 'producer' but 'product' or 'offshoot'²⁷ and, further, that *mānas* is used in its more original sense of 'thinking, thought.'²⁸ The desire that arose upon That was, then, the resultant product — the very first product — of the brooding thought or *tāpas*, whereby it had come to life as the germ of all things. This line of reasoning, if correct, leads us inevitably to the assumption that the first principle or That and *mānas* are ultimately one and the same.²⁹

The second half of this stanza contains the solution which ancient sages found to the mystery of the world's origin, viz. that the link between the existent world of everyday life, the *sāt*, as it is called in the text, and the unformed, unmanifested world, loosely termed the non-existent or *āsat*, is the desire which arose upon That. Generally, however, these last two lines are translated 'Sages found out the bond of the existent in the non-existent' etc.,³⁰ without any reference at all to the desire

27. Winternitz, p. 87, also takes *rétas* as 'product' and translates 'als das erste Erzeugnis seines Geistes.' This same meaning is also hinted at by Gonda, p. 687: 'Of moet men met de oude autoriteit die in TĀ. 1,23,1 aan het woord is opvatten: het verlangen dat het eerste zaad, d.i. product van het *manas* is?' In this connection ought to be mentioned the fact, noticed by Gonda, p. 686, note 60, that in later times Kāma as the God of Love is called Manobhava (and other synonymous names), literally 'whose origin is the mind,' i.e. born from or arising from the mind. Etymologically, *rétas* first means 'flow, stream' then 'sperm, seed'; v. Mayrhofer, *Lieferung* 18, p. 73 s.v.

28. i.e. as a simple nomen actionis, 'act' or 'process of thinking.'

29. With regard to this identification of *mānas* ('mind' or 'thinking') with the first principle (*tād*) it is interesting to note that precisely the same view is expressed in *Satapathabrāhmaṇa* X.5.3.1ff. which, it was observed above under note 12, is the earliest comment on this hymn. It is worth quoting this passage in full: 'In the beginning this (world) was, as it were, neither non-existent nor existent. In the beginning this (world) was, as it were, and it was not, as it were: for it was only that mind (*mānas*). For this reason it is stated by the Ṛṣi with reference to this (condition of the world): 'It was neither non-existent nor existent at that time (i.e. X.129.1a). For the mind is neither existent, as it were, nor non-existent, as it were. This mind desired to become manifest (as something) created. It sought after a more defined (and) more concrete nature. It engaged in *tāpas*. It took shape,' etc. In his introductory comments to his translation of this hymn in the H.O.S. III, p. 359, Geldner remarks: 'Das *ēkam*, das Eine, ist zunächst reines *mānas*, bloss Denken, ganz geistig.' Gonda, p. 687, also feels that *mānas* and the primal being may be identical ('De oplossing is hoogstwaarschijnlijk deze, dat *manas* en het Ene hier identiek zijn') and refers to the teaching of this identity in this same passage in the *Satapathabrāhmaṇa*.

30. The bare notion that the existent derives from the non-existent is, to be sure,

to create which is the theme of the first half of the stanza. This interpretation has the effect of separating the second half from the first and destroying the unity of the stanza. Furthermore, the culmination of ideas which ought to reach its peak at this juncture falls considerably short of the mark, since finding out the bond or link of the existent in the non-existent is hardly any discovery at all. It is worth noting also that the idea that desire is the connection between *ásat* and *sát* is quite in accord with later speculative conceptions where it takes many different forms. It is a commonplace in Indian thought that desire is the root of all clinging to this world and the suffering that it entails. By the simple expedient of supplying, or more accurately carrying over, the word 'desire' (*kāmas*) from the first half of this stanza to the second, the two halves are closely linked together and the search by the sages for the truth of the world's origin has a meaningful conclusion.³¹

5. *tiraścīno vītato raśmír eṣāṃ*
adhāḥ svid āśīd upāri svid āsīt |
retodhā āsan mahimāna āsan
svadhā avāstāt prāyatiḥ parāstāt ||

Straight across was extended their line (of vision):
 was (That) below, was (That) above?
 Seedplacers there were, powers there were:
 potential energy below, impulse above.

This stanza has always been a focal point of discussion, but in spite of its disconcertingly condensed mode of expression

voiced elsewhere in the R̥gveda. But that is no reason to suppose that, just because the same two terms (*sát* and *ásat*) are also juxtaposed here in X.129.4c, the same philosophy must necessarily prevail. Though grammatically it is of course possible to translate 'Sages found out the link of the existent in the non-existent,' it is equally possible grammatically to supply *kāmam* from the preceding thought and render 'Sages found out (desire) as the link of the existent in the non-existent.' The fact, then, that R̥V. X.72.2 states that 'In a prior age of the gods the existent was born from the non-existent' (*devānām pūrvyé yugé sataḥ sād ajāyata*) does not mean that the same notion is being propounded in our hymn.

31. For the most part it is only the earlier translators of this hymn who supply *kāmam* as object of *nīr avindan* and so regard desire as the connecting link between *sát* and *ásat*. So Muir, O.S.T. V, p. 356, renders metrically: 'Within It first arose desire, the primal germ of mind, | Which nothing with existence links, as sages searching find' (footnote 530) and also literally: 'Desire first arose in It, which was the primal germ of mind; (and which) sages, searching with their intellect, have discovered in their heart to be the bond which connects entity with nonentity' (p. 357). Max Müller, p. 562, observes: Love was to him (i.e. the poet) the beginning of real reality,

and lack of explanatory detail, the general purport would seem to be fairly clear.³² The sages, having found out during the course of their speculative reasoning that the link between exist-

and he appeals to the wise of old, who discovered in love, "the bond between created things and uncreated" and similarly in the metrical translation quoted from an anonymous source: 'Then first came Love upon it, the new spring | Of mind – yea, poets in their hearts discerned, | Pondering, this bond between created things | And uncreated' (p. 564); cf. also Monier-Williams, p. 13, who thus translates: 'First in his mind was formed Desire ... which the Wise ... say | Is the first subtle bond, connecting Entity | And Nullity.' Gough, p. 319, renders: 'Desire arose in the beginning thereof; the first germ of the mind from which it came into being: sages having searched with the intellect in the heart have found this the tie which binds entity to nonentity'; and perhaps most recently (!) Winternitz, pp. 87-88, in similar vein: 'als das erste Erzeugnis seines Geistes . . . entstand Kāma ... und in diesem Kāma 'haben die Weisen, im Herzen forschend, durch Nachdenken den Zusammenhang des Seienden mit dem Nichtseienden gefunden'.'

In his comment on this hymn in the Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa, but not in his commentary on the R̥gveda, Śāyaṇa too explains that it was desire which the wise found to be the connecting link between this world and the unmanifested darkness out of which it arose, thus: 'Seers, learned men who had mastered the Upaniṣads, after searching with the wisdom in their heart, after reflecting with their intellect in the lotus of the heart, found desire to be the cause of the existent, i.e. the world-to-be, in the non-existent, i.e. unmanifest darkness' (II.8.9.1-3).

Gonda's interpretation of the second half of stanza 4 is quite different. He does not supply *kāmam* as object of *nīr avindan* in 4c and thus takes *bāndhum* as its direct object, that is to say, the sages' discovery is not that desire is the connecting link (*bāndhum*) between *sát* and *ásat*, but the 'bond of the existent in the non-existent,' which he explains as 'the mysterious connection or relation, on the one hand, between fact, event or phenomenon in this world and, on the other hand, the eternal, transcendental background of things, in which everything earthly has its origin and in which it finds its explanation and motivation' (de mysterieuze connectie of relatie tussen enerzijds feit, gebeuren of verschijnsel in deze wereld en anderzijds de eeuwige transcendente achtergrond der dingen, waarin al het aardse zijn oorsprong heeft en waarin het zijn verklaring en motivering vind[t]), p. 689. In viewing the meaning of *bāndhu* as connecting link in the literal sense of 'that which connects one thing with another,' I am, of course, taking it in its etymological value. I do not question the ritualistic use of this word in the Brāhmaṇas so admirably and exhaustively discussed by Gonda in his article 'Bandhu- in the Brahmanas-' in the Adyar Library Bulletin, vol. XXIX (1965), pp. 1-29. But that a word has a particular technical use does not mean that it cannot elsewhere be employed in another non-technical sense.

Passing allusion may here fittingly be made to the well-known passage in the Chāndogyaopaniṣad which questions the validity of the doctrine that the existent emanates from the non-existent and resolves the problem by postulating that the world was at first only secondless existence which became diversified by the desire to procreate (VI.2.1ff.).

32. Whitney's declaration that 'No one has ever succeeded in putting any sense into it, and it seems so unconnected with the rest of the hymn that its absence is heartily to be wished' (p. cxi) is too extreme to merit serious refutation. Macdonell, however, omits this stanza entirely in his translation of this hymn in his *History of Sanskrit Literature*, pp. 136-137. According to Geldner, *Siebenzig Hymnen*, p. 166, who along with Roth (Preface, p. viii) was of the opinion that this hymn was original-

tent and non-existent (*sát* and *ásat*) was the desire to create the world which had arisen upon That, are now said to have extended the 'line of their vision' (*raśmís*) directly across that primordial being as envisioned in their heart. They saw that it had evolved into a duality of forces, male and female, through the union of which the objective world of reality was produced.³³ In this dichotomy of sexually differentiated energies, the male are conceived to be arrayed above, the female below, doubtless after typical old dualities like heaven and earth, the former as impregnator with his fructifying rains, the latter as ground of all nature's abundance.

Much has been said about the probable meaning of *raśmís*, literally 'cord' or 'ray,' here translated as 'line of vision.' But when all is said, it is hard to see how anything other than the 'cord' or (figuratively) the 'ray' of the sages' intellect can be meant, an interpretation which flows without difficulty from the assertion in the previous stanza about the sages having searched in their heart for the answer to the riddle of the relationship between the *sát* and *ásat*. It matters little whether the line of vision be viewed as a carpenter's cord, as some would insist on the basis of similar wording elsewhere in the Ṛgveda.³⁴

The second verse, which consists of two contrasted questions, is a bare skeleton of the twice-recurring verb 'was' (*āsīt*

ly divided into four strophes, there has been lost between 4 and 5 a stanza mentioning the various beings and worlds that sprang into existence across which the wise men drew their line. But the idea of the loss of a stanza just because it is supposed that there is a gap in the sequence of thought ('... der erste Vers der dritten Strophe aber zwischen v. 4 und 5 ausgefallen, wie die Lücke in der Gedankenfolge zeigt') seems quite unjustifiable in a tradition such as that by which the Ṛgveda has come down to us. Presumably, however, Geldner subsequently abandoned this view, as he makes no mention of it in his translation in the H.O.S.

33. With regard to the differentiation of the primordial being into male and female principles Gonda, pp. 691-692, rightly draws attention to parallels elsewhere in the Veda. Thus in *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* I.4.3 the *Ātman*, no longer wishing to be alone, divides himself into a male and female half, and in ṚV. X.90.5 the female *Virāj* is born of the *Puruṣa* as a creative force. The later concept of *īśvara* and *śakti* seems to be a special extension of this male-female dichotomy of the primal being.

34. v. Geldner's discussion in *Der Rigveda in Auswahl*, p. 213, in which he mentions both views but prefers the figurative, and cf. also his remarks in H.O.S. III, p. 360. Oldenberg, p. 347, seems to insist on the literal interpretation, but it is hard to see what sense can be made of this. *Sāyana* on *Taittirīyabrahmaṇa* II.8.9.5 considers *raśmís* to be a self-luminous beam of consciousness emanating from the Supreme Self, which cannot be localized as below or above, but is all-pervasive, like the clay that constitutes the pot.

differently accented as belonging to the one and the other half of the question)³⁵ and the spatial words 'below' (*adhás*) and 'above' (*upári*). No subject is expressed, unless indeed it be assumed that the 'line of vision' of the first verse is the subject and the two verses form a single sentence, thus: 'Was their line of vision, which had been extended straight across, below? was it above?'³⁶ Some insist upon supplying an interrogative 'what' as subject of each verb, a usage that seems unnatural and probably difficult to parallel.³⁷ Yet others take 'below' and 'above' as nouns and make the poet ask: 'Was there a below, was there an above?'³⁸ In the interpretation here adopted, That, i.e. the primordial spiritual being, is assumed to be the subject and the first verse a complete assertion.

There can be no doubt that the meaning of *retodhás* is 'seedplacers' or 'impregnators,' i.e. male principles. By itself

35. The protraction of the vowel (*pluti*), indicated by the Devanāgarī numeral for '3' after the final vowel of *āsīt* in both occurrences, and the *udatta* accent on the final syllable of the first *āsīt* are prescribed under Pāṇini VIII.2.97: (*vicāryamaṇānam* '[The final vowel of sentences] which denote a balancing of alternatives [is protracted and *udatta*]'). The use of the *anudatta* in the second part of the disjunction, instead of the expected *udatta*, is covered under Pāṇini VIII.2.102 which actually quotes the words *upári svīd āsīt* as falling also under VIII.2.101 which requires a final *anudatta* when the particle *cit* is used in the sense of 'like.' Ordinarily disjunctive questions in the Ṛgveda neither show any difference in accentuation nor do they have a protracted vowel in any part, e.g. ṚV. VI.18.3: *āsti svīn nū vīryān tāt ta Indra ná svīd asti tād ṛthuthā vī vocaḥ* ('Is this your heroic deed, Indra, or is it not? Proclaim it in due season').

Since this peculiar usage is exemplified half a dozen times in the Atharvaveda and is fairly common in the Brāhmaṇas (according to Whitney, p. cxi), it may be assumed that it is a later phenomenon, so that here we have an outward mark of the relative lateness of the Nāsadiya hymn.

36. Scherman, p. 3, joins the two lines in this way ('Ihre querüber ausgespannte Schnur, war sie wohl unten oder war sie oben?'), but he is apparently alone in this.

37. e.g. Wallis, p. 59: 'What was above? what was below?' (a reversal of the order in the hymn); Griffith, p. 576: 'What was above it then, and what below it?'; Deussen p. 125: 'was war darunter, was war darüber?' (wörtlich: war es darunter, oder war es darüber?); Edgerton, p. 73: 'below (what) was there? above (what) was there?'

38. So Macdonell, *Vedic Reader*, p. 210; von Schröder, Thieme and many others. Ludwig, *Der Nāsadiya-hymnus*, p. 4, expands this notion by openly posing the question: 'Can one in this case speak of an above and a below?' ('Kann man dabei von einem oben oder unten sprechen?'). Both in his *Kosmogonie*, p. 22, and *Der Rigveda in Auswahl*, p. 213, Geldner makes *adhás* and *upári* nouns, but in the latter he adds: 'whoever finds this too artificial must supply the One as subject of *āsīt*' ('Wem das zu künstlich erscheint, muss zu *āsīt* das Eine als Subjekt supplieren').

mahimānas, literally merely 'powers, forces,' would be vague and might imply either male or female energies, but since it is quite clearly employed in opposition to *retodhās*, it must signify female powers. In the final verse are stated the relative positions of these female and male principles, both with respect to each other and to the sages' line of vision. While indistinctive in themselves as indicators of female or male powers, the terms *svadhā* and *práyatis* must here be referred respectively to the female and male principles by reason of their positions below and above which they are said to occupy. As in 2c, *svadhā* may be rendered 'inherent power,' or perhaps, as Edgerton suggests, 'innate power,'³⁹ in any case a passive force in contradistinction to *práyatis*, which, whatever may precisely be its derivation, seems to mean something like 'impulse' or 'effort.'⁴⁰

The chiasmic order of ideas in the last two verses is noteworthy: seedplacers — powers / potential energy below — impulse above, i.e. male — female / female — male. Probably this rhetorical device is not here accidental, but is intended to imply the interplay between the two forces of creation.

6. *kó addhā veda ká ihá prá vocat*
kuta ájātā kúta iyám vísr̥ṣṭih |
arvāg devā asyá visárjanena
áthā kó veda yáta ābabhūva ||
 Who, after all, knows? Who here will declare
 whence it arose, whence this world?
 Subsequent are the gods
 to the creation of this (world).⁴¹
 Who, then, knows whence it came into being?

39. Edgerton, p. 73, and note 3.

40. Sāyaṇa clearly enough derives *práyati* from *pra-* / *śyat*, not from *pra-* / *śyam*, and is followed in this by Geldner, *Der Rigveda in Auswahl*, p. 213, and H.O.S. III, p. 360. Oldenberg, p. 347, however, insists upon the derivation from *śyam*, largely because the derivatives made with the suffix *-i* have the accent usually on that suffix (but Whitney, *Sanskrit Grammar*, 2nd ed., § 1155.f gives examples with the accent on the prefix).

41. It matters little whether *arvāk* be taken as a preposition governing the instrumental *visárjanena* ('subsequent to the creation') as here, or as an adverb, as, for example, by Edgerton, p. 74: 'The gods (arose) on this side (later), by the creation of this (empiric world, to which the gods belong).' Both constructions are possible, and there is no difference in meaning; cf. Deussen's remarks on the matter, p. 125. Sāyaṇa too, construes *arvāk* as a preposition to judge from his summation: *bhūtasr̥ṣṭeḥ paścaj jāta ity arthah*.

Up to this point, with the exception of some doubts voiced in the first stanza, the author has proceeded with fair certainty about his cosmogonic reflections. But now that he has concluded his account, he seems suddenly overcome with doubt and he lays the whole matter open to question.

The second verse can alternatively be construed as yet another independent question parallel to those posited in the first verse. But this seems less desirable than taking it as an indirect question dependent upon 'Who here will declare' (*ká ihá prá vocat*), which, apart from being grammatically possible, is logically more satisfactory.

The repetition of the interrogative *kútas* in the second verse may be explained as an example of epanalepsis: 'whence, whence this world arose' or *kútas* may introduce two separate questions, the alternative adopted in the translation: 'whence it arose (*kúta ájātā*), whence this world (*kúta iyám vísr̥ṣṭih*)?'

7. *iyám vísr̥ṣṭir yáta ābabhūva*
yádi vā dadhé yádi vā ná |
yó asyādhyaḥṣaḥ paramé vioman
só aṅgá veda yádi vā ná véda ||
 This world — whence it came into being,
 whether it was made or whether not —
 He who is its overseer in the highest heavens
 surely knows — or perhaps He knows not!

The principal point of dispute here among translators has always been the Sanskrit word *dadhé* in the second verse, here rendered '(it) was made.' Here again it is the extremely laconic style, characteristic of the author, that is the source of the problem. No subject of *dadhé* is expressed and, depending upon whether we assume it to be 'this world' (*iyám vísr̥ṣṭis*) implied from the first verse or the 'overseer' (*ādhyakṣas*) referred to in the second half of the stanza, *dadhé* may be translated '(it) was made'⁴² or '(He) made (it).' The former translation, adopted

42. On the use of the perfect middle as a passive, v. Whitney, *Sanskrit Grammar*, §§ 531 and 998.c and d. The second line is two syllables short, and it may be that the object of *dadhé* (if taken as a middle without passive sense) has been deliberately suppressed — what Geldner, H.O.S. III, p. 361, calls 'intentional aposiopesis' (beabsichtigte Aposiopesis). But, on the other hand, would it not be better to suppose that it is not the *object* (which, in any case, can easily be supplied), but the *subject*, which has been omitted, since this omission would more conduce to heightening the sense of wonder. For another explanation of this hypometric verse, v. Oldenberg, p. 347.

here, by omitting all mention of the agency, might imply either the kind of evolution which has been the principal subject of the hymn or some cosmic agency, not necessarily the overseer, however.⁴³

At this point, in the interest of clarity, it may be well to repeat the English translation as a unit, unbroken by commentarial matter and without even the occasional parentheses to mark words that are supplied. For only in this way, when the poem is viewed as a whole, can the coherence and interrelationship, as they are developed from stanza to stanza, be appreciated.

1. Not existent was it nor non-existent was it at that time;
there was not atmosphere nor the heavens which are beyond.
What existed? Where? In whose care?
Water was it? An abyss unfathomable?
2. Neither mortal was there nor immortal then;
not of night, of day was there distinction:
That alone breathed windless through inherent power.
Other than That there was naught else.
3. Darkness it was, by darkness hidden in the beginning:
an undistinguished sea was all this.
The germ of all things which was enveloped in void,
That alone through the power of brooding thought was
born.
4. Upon That in the beginning arose desire,
which was the first offshoot of that thought.
This desire sages found out to be the link between
the existent and the non-existent,
after searching with the wisdom in their heart.
5. Straight across was extended their line of vision:
was That below, was That above?
Seedplacers there were, powers there were:
potential energy below, impulse above.
6. Who, after all, knows? Who here will declare
whence it arose, whence this world?
Subsequent are the gods to the creation of this world.
Who, then, knows whence it came into being?

43. Cf. Thieme, *Gedichte*, p. 67, who translates: '... ob sie getätigt worden ist (von einem Agens) oder ob nicht.'

7. This world — whence it came into being,
whether it was made or whether not —
He who is its overseer in the highest heavens
surely knows — or perhaps He knows not!

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COMPARATIVE STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THREE
ETHICAL QUESTIONS IN BEOWULF, THE NIBELUNGEN-
LIED, AND THE CHANSON DE ROLAND

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Three questions frequently asked by critics of *Beowulf*, the *Nibelungenlied*, and the *Chanson de Roland* are these: (1) Does Beowulf fail his responsibilities as king when he dies in the dragon fight? (2) Does Hagen commit the ethical crime of *untriuwe* when he deludes Kriemhild in order to eliminate Siegfried? (3) Is Roland guilty of *desmesure* when he refuses to summon help by sounding the horn? Most critical studies fail to answer such questions successfully because they employ critical perspectives which are too limited, which demand that one reduce the problems of interpretation of these poems to a determination of the ratio of pagan to Christian influence in the poems.¹ This reduction is an oversimplification. It seems obvious that all three of these poems were written by Christian poets for Christian audiences, audiences long since converted from active paganism. However, conversion certainly does not obliterate cultural continuity, not in this case at least. Regardless of the Christian presence in these poems, one should not forget that all three of them spring from Germanic peoples, the Anglo-Saxons, the Bavarians, and the Franks, all of whom seem to have preserved strong cultural affinities with one another and with their Indo-European forebears.

Once one recognizes the necessity of considering the cultural heritage of these poems, he immediately faces the unfortunately limited body of information regarding the ancient Germanic peoples. How can one cope with this paucity of concrete

1. A convenient survey of criticism of *Beowulf* regarding the problems relating to the Christian and pagan influences apparent in the poem is offered by E. G. Stanley, *The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism*, *Notes and Queries* CCIX: 204-209, 242-250, 282-287, 324-331, 455-463, 1964; and CCX: 9-17, 203-207, 285-293, 322-327.