

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Canadian Journal of Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_canadian-journal.php

Language and Phenomena

What I have to say is simply a reflection of the comparative religious situation. This situation can be a source of spiritual anguish. If one belongs truly to the eastern and western spheres of the spirit – and I dare say these are spheres of the spirit – anguish is inescapable, for one cannot then find happiness by leaving the one and cleaving to the other. Comparative religious study, if taken with real seriousness, must deepen one's anxiety, for twofoldness of all perspectives will engender dilemmas all the way. The temptation to accept a western or an eastern solvent will, however, be very great. But the lone thinker as the single one will see that that kind of solution is an ultimate betrayal of the spirit. We must step back from where others like Hegel or the Christian apologist or the contemporary Vedantist have advanced. Such a retreat will be the only genuine preparation for real advance.

The prefatory remark will set the tone, I believe, for my discussion of language and phenomena, as I shall strive to maintain the twofoldness of perspectives. Whatever modest contribution I make to the subject will be strictly in terms of that. Other than that, I shall not pretend to enter into any original discussion of language and phenomena as such. I take Wilhelm von Humboldt's idea of the 'inward form of language' very seriously. Accordingly, my concern is not with physical languages but with their inward forms, with different world concepts. I shall maintain also that these world concepts are self-enclosing systems. For this too, I shall invoke von Humboldt, who says, 'Man lives with his objects chiefly – in fact, since his feeling and acting depend on his perceptions, one may say exclusively – as language presents them to him. By the same process whereby he spins language out of his own being, he ensnares himself in it; and each language draws a magic circle round the people to which it belongs, a circle from which there is no escape save by stepping out of it into another.'¹ I shall concern myself not with the primitive magic circles but with the two major philosophical languages of the world, the Hindu and the western, which too are magic circles, although enormous ones. For the present, I shall be satisfied with mostly juxtaposing these two gigantic circles, and shall only briefly consider *how* one may step out of the one into the other. But correct knowledge of their essential forms will implicitly suggest some passage ways between them. But I shall attempt also to suggest some principles in a direct way at the end.

Both these great philosophical traditions have inquired deeply into the nature of language as such, that is, not as Sanskrit or Greek or Hebrew but

1. E. Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, translated by S. K. Langer (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), p. 9.

as speech, and have developed theories of language, and have thus transformed and transcended the primitive mythic perceptions, first by producing mythology, the logos of myth, or as Usener puts it (*Götternamen*), 'the science of the forms of religious conception,' and later by ushering in metaphysics. But as I adopt metaphysics as my starting point (insofar as I am primarily challenged by the encounter with two stupendous philosophical circles rather than by any primitive phenomena) I shall attempt to recapitulate language from there rather than from the position of 'divine names' (Usener) or from that of 'linguistic concepts' (von Humboldt). In other words, I shall stay clear of any fundamental phenomenology of language or religion as far as this comparative enquiry is concerned: this, not because I am dubious of phenomenology, but because I consider what I have set forth here as a discrete and independent project in itself. Furthermore, although I am fully cognizant of the value of tracing the passage from primitive mythic notions to high metaphysical concepts (individually, that is), I shall not address myself to that task either.

Nevertheless, one observation may be added: the root theory of language of each of these two great philosophical traditions cannot properly be considered without asking how it is implied in, and exemplified by, the respective fundamental terms. Again, it is a truism nowadays, but worth repeating, that the study of the theory of language involved in a philosophy is the study of its theory of reality, both phenomenal as well as noumenal, if there is one. At the risk of sounding elementary one has to say that the Hindu theory of how language expresses reality gives language a cyclic character, while the western theory gives it a linear character. The distribution of the primary terms under the respective captions of 'cyclic' and 'linear' will make sense. Terms like *Brahman*, *Ātman*, *Māyā*, *puruṣa*, *dharma*, *vidyā*, *nirvāṇa*, *satyam*, etc., will come under the cyclic; while terms like God, being, world, person (man), order, thought, salvation, *aletheia*, etc., will come under the linear. Likewise, in respect of meaning there is a distinction between the cyclic and the linear.

In brief, and by way of anticipation of the results of the ensuing inquiry, I may say that, in the case of the one, language indicates, and is employed for, disengagement from phenomena and retreat into the single centre of Reality, while, in the case of the other, what language indicates and is employed for is engagement with phenomena. In the case of the one, phenomena are absorbed into that centre of Reality revealed in gnosis through the use of language. This means that every time it happens it is not a speaker who speaks but the self-same centre; hence speech is attached to no person; speech speaks by itself. Speech is *apauruṣeya* (non-personal). (However, we should not worry here about Hindu theories which say that language is *pauruṣeya* or personal for, in the light of western theories and in terms of my analysis, they too are ultimately non-personal, being cyclically oriented.) In the case of the other, phenomena are not absorbed *into* a centre but proceed *from* a centre. Thus, phenomena are put forth or brought into being. Every new point that emerges (in terms of linear procession) equally becomes an authentic centre from which language and phenomena can again proceed.

In keeping with the above analysis, there is a vital distinction of unicentricity from multi-centricity between the use of the word 'I' in Hindu and western philosophy. Multi-centricity is possible only in a linear expression of language. As a model, take a statement like 'the Word became flesh.' Now the point at which the Word *became* flesh is a new, divine or, rather, theandric centre. From that centre, which is linearly produced, Christ could declare 'I and my Father are one.' There is an absolute difference between this linear linguistic statement concerning one expressible centre related to another expressible centre and the well-known cyclic statement of the *Upaniṣad* which says 'I am Brahman' (*Aham Brahma' smi*). In the *Upaniṣadic* statement the centre referred to by 'I' is not another one but the self-same Brahman. In the *Upaniṣads* 'I' is used for absorption, retreat, retraction; in the Fourth Gospel 'I' is used for asserting this new centre from which speech is made. When we retreat from or assert a centre of speech we retreat from or assert phenomena that attend on that speech. Let me also be clear that, contrary to common assumptions, the 'I' statements in the *Upaniṣads* do not *deny* phenomena.

The Hindu View of Language

The Hindu tradition of inquiry into the various aspects of language is too well known to need reiteration. It began with the concept of *Vāk* or personified speech in the *R̥gveda*. Speech is the creation of the gods which they have put everywhere (*Tam mā devā vyadhuh purutrā, bhūriṣṭātrām bhūryaveśyantīm* R.V. 10.10.125.3.). The loom of speech, the Vedic seers say, is writ large over the whole creation: (*yāvad brahma viṣṭhutam tavatī vak.* R.V. 10.10.114.8). Speech is symbolized by cows in one of the *R̥gvedic* hymns where the demon Pāṇi is reported to have stolen Indra's cows. (Indra's connection with speech is very old, for the later *Taittirīya Saṃhītā* must be echoing that connection when it says [6.4.7] that it was he who first arranged and analysed language [*Vyākṛta*] at the request of the gods. Now Pāṇi the demon kept the cows bound in the cave of untruth or chaos (*guha tiṣṭhantīr anṛtasya setau*). The god Bṛhaspati was sent out to detect and rescue the cows, which he did. In other words, by freeing speech he restored order, and order is always imperiled by the threat to speech. This is an ancient theme as we well know. It is interesting to see the same theme in a recent work, *Speaking (La Parole)* by Georges Gusdorf, where we read: 'Anxiety about language always accompanies the alienation of man, rupture with the world, and it demands a return to order or the establishment of a new order' (p. 39). Bṛhaspati is only a paradigmatic figure; the searching and finding of the cows is a continual task for all time to come. The cows are still hidden in the cave and the *R̥gveda* has a prayer addressed to Bṛhaspati (10.6.71.1) which expresses the belief that knowledge of the hidden essence of language is possible through piety, love (*prenā*).

Much thought is also given to the subject of language in the *Brāhmaṇas*. But the typical Hindu metaphysical inquiry begins in the *Upaniṣads*. The Real is one only without a second: it is pure being, pure consciousness and

pure bliss. And since all phenomena are a construction from it, and language itself is one such construction, how can language express it? It is therefore that from which mind and speech return without attaining it (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.4.1). In the *Māndūkya Upaniṣad* a distinct step is taken to link the unspeakable with the speakable through speech itself. It creates the deeply meaningful symbol of AUM, which traversing the three phenomenal levels of consciousness, waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, reaches out beyond to the transcendent where the sound itself comes to an end. Symbolically again, it is called the Fourth and it is described in the following words: 'It is not that which cognizes the internal, not that which cognizes the external, not what cognizes both of them, not a mass of cognition, not cognitive, not non-cognitive. It is unseen, incapable of being spoken of, ungraspable, without any distinctive marks, unthinkable, unnameable, the essence of the knowledge of the one Self, that with which the world is resolved, the peaceful, the benign, the non-dual, (*Māndūkya Upaniṣad* 7). The *Māndūkya Upaniṣad* attempts to give a proper account of language and defines it on the one hand as the very algebra of the phenomenal world and on the other as unreal, being phenomenal, expression of the Real. AUM is the Word of Words. 'As all leaves are held together by a stalk, so is all speech held together by AUM. Verily, the syllable AUM is all this, yea, the syllable AUM is all this' (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 2.23.3). It is the *Akṣara*, the letter, literally the imperishable. It stands for Brahman in the latter's cosmic and acosmic dispositions, for Brahman is said to be AUM (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 1.8.1). Elsewhere Brahman is said to be the same as speech (*Vagvai Brahmeti, Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.1.2). Now surely there is contradiction between saying that speech cannot attain Brahman and saying that speech *is* Brahman. This contradiction cannot be resolved by suggesting that speech in the first instance is *human speech*. The fact, on the contrary, is that what we have in the word Brahman (speech) and the concept Brahman (mind) is precisely what returns without attaining it. Hence the word and the concept are phenomenal and subject to the destiny of phenomenal things. But once we receive the word we can turn it into an arrow which can be discharged from the bow of the lowest phenomenal (physical) level so that, piercing through the higher phenomenal levels (life and light) with the mind as the arrowhead, it reaches the target of Brahman (*Maitrī Upaniṣad* 6.24). The flight beyond the third level is above the realm of word and imagination. The word Brahman itself is phenomenal, and as one expression of the universal language of AUM it too is designed to boomerang back to the Real after traversing all the levels of the cosmos.

Those cows stolen by Pāṇi the demon are still kept bound in a dark cave: language is very much an obscure thing; prayer to Bṛhaspati is a good start as he was the scout who went out originally to deliver the cows and he might lead the way. Bṛhaspati gives place to AUM, eventually, as the scout who liberates words; gives place to Brahman itself. At the point of the identification of speech with Brahman a great transformation takes place. The latent powers of the word, to create and to liberate, not only others but itself, are

expressed. Here speech is symbolized by the epic cow Kāmadhenu of the sage Vasistha who upon attack by an enemy was able to protect herself and her master by producing armies from her udder. In Brahman, speech is secure because speech *is* Brahman. This also shows that the word resists, and repulses those who simply covet it and attempt to take it away by force. Further, from this point on there is no dualism between the truth and untruth or cosmos and chaos in respect of the word. Brahman-knowledge by its very nature is hidden in a cave or *guha*; hence it is called 'hidden in a cave' (*guhya*). However we conceive of it, it is still darkness, blinding darkness (*Īśa Upaniṣad* 9.10). Therefore no linear movement whatsoever will suffice to reach it; we must find out the origin of the word and return thither by the way it came, that is to say, cyclically; and as we return, deposit each level of the phenomena by the correct knowledge of their formation by the law of name and form (*nāma-rūpa*).

Speech and Mind in Hindu Thought

The direction in which Hindu thought moved is very significant and must be noted as the issue was for ever settled by the eventual victory of speech over mind. This was not achieved in any decisive battle but by a war of attrition which succeeded in demoting mind (*manas*) to the position of a sense, to a *kośa* or sheath of the microcosm, leaving speech free to reorganize the entire phenomena including mind as *nāma-rūpa* (name and form) and as the only instrument of Reality's self-revelation. The *Brāhmaṇas* are full of reference to an extended debate as to which was the higher. One would have thought that Prajāpati's decision (*Taittirīya Saṁhitā* 5.11.4), where he says to speech, 'You are the messenger of the mind, for what one thinks with the mind that one speaks with speech,' has clearly favoured mind, but in fact the subsequent development of Hindu thought from the *Upaniṣads* shows something different. In the subsequent metaphysics, mind clearly became subservient, and speech as *Śabda* was elevated to the highest status among *pramāṇas* (sources of knowledge), and proclaimed as the very principle whereby the world originates (*Vedānta Sūtras* 1.3.28). I am not going to enter into the controversy whether it was the *Mīmāṃsas* (including the Vedānta) that changed the direction or whether they were only making manifest a direction already implicit in the earlier Vedic literature, nor am I going to propose any audacious solution, although I am partial to the *Mīmāṃsas*. Let that be as it may.

What I am indicating is that the Vedānta and the Vedas knew the speech and mind problem of language and opted for an impersonal solution to the problem of language and phenomena. The word for mind is *manas* which originally included the elements of what we call person, like will (*kratu*), desire (*icchā*), *Kāma* (love), as *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* (X. 5.3.1ff.), make clear. With the lateral derivation *matī*, personal intelligence, judgment, this connotation is very much more apparent. In fact *manas* itself is said to be the Brahman (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.4.1). Often in the *Upaniṣads* the various

aspects of *Manas*, such as will and desire, are ascribed to Brahman or Atman. This is what motivated creation.

But eventually the ascendancy of speech over mind became complete even in the *Upaniṣads*. Transcendent speech, on which all true speech is modelled, is impersonal, for it simply employs the mind as an instrument (an organ). Mind ceases to be an agent of decision, a centre of individuation. It is language that directly expresses thought; mind simply arranges. It does not discover through criticism. It is there only to be conditioned as in Yoga. It reflects in the sense of reproducing an image (*bimba-pratibimba*).

All this has much to do with meaning and truth in respect of language; according to the *Vedānta*, because *manas* has been disfranchised, meaning and truth are neither the discovery of objective states of affairs nor personal achievements, but simply what remains after all phenomena have been cancelled. Language goes the way it comes. It is the self-reflection of Reality upon nothing and, since there is nothing for Reality to reflect upon, nothing becomes *something*, the phenomenal *something* of name and form. The Buddhist *sūnyavāda* (void theory) makes it a reflection of nothing upon nothing thus producing a dialectical *something* purely dependently originated.) This is not just *creatio ex nihilo*, for creation itself continues to be *nihil* under certain provisos; but by the same token, under certain other provisos it *is* something. Gnosis (*jnāna*) is the dividing line. Furthermore, there is strict one-to-one correspondence at every level between the macrocosm and the microcosm. Since the development is not linear, there is no point of culmination. Brahman by definition is inexpressible but this definition too has to be given verbal expression. This is not a mere paradox but a logical mystery. It is given expression in the *māyā* theory. This logical mystery is worked out by Śaṅkara, but in a different way by Bhartṛhari in his *Vākya-padīya*. Bhartṛhari spelt out the theory that the word is the source of the cosmos. But he erred in making the word (*śabda*) ontologically identical with Brahman. This is a position he inherited from the grammatical philosophers. This in substance is what underlies the epistemological doctrine of *sphoṭa* (the doctrine that the word-essence explodes itself into view or manifests itself through the utterance of words and sentences). The more orthodox Vedantists have severely criticized this doctrine. I am inclined to think that the orthodox Vedantists are right in rejecting *sphoṭa*, for the supposition of the word-essence as ontological makes the verbal expression of Brahman necessary and thus it destroys the mystery of that expression and along with it *māyā*: at any rate they have been more faithful to Vedic epistemology (see Śaṅkara's criticism in his commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtras*, 1.3.28). There is no necessity for the phenomenal world to be: yet it is. The need to speak about Brahman exists only in the phenomenal world. The phenomenal world if seen rightly will be seen as Brahman. That way Brahman is *all this* (*sarvam idam*), *the whole phenomena plus* (as in AUM). Brahman as the inexpressible, as the signless, is (all this plus) minus (all this), which means the logical remainder, but this formula can never be escaped except in *mukti* (liberation). And as long as *mukti* is not attained the pheno-

menal world exists, through the sheer necessity of logic. The transformation of *vāk* into *śabda* pervades all the key words of the *Vedānta* (and in a larger sense the Hindu) thought, such as *puruṣa* (loosely translated: person), *dharma* (loosely translated: social order or ethics), *mukti*, *nirvāna*, etc. All these are words of speech without presupposing a speaker.

The Fundamental Western View of Language in Comparison with the Hindu

As we have dimly perceived the bare outline in the Hindu view we may proceed to examine the western view of language in its light. In sharp contrast to the cyclic view stands out the relief map of the western assumptions of what language is and does. The cyclic view aims at being direct, essentially intuitive, with respect to knowledge. It tolerates no obstacles or obstructions except those that can be readily conditioned and rendered transparent and thus overcome. Hence language by definition is both unicentric and transcendently originated. It is by definition also self-luminous and its purpose is revelation through *vidyā* (*jnāna*, gnosis). But western theories accept the deferment of gnosis implicit in thought and this deferment may take the form of *noesis* or *pistis* or *scepsis* or a combination of these or something else. The line of language is never drawn as a circle, returning to the place of origin. The origin must give way to the end and there will be a gap between where one stands in thought and the end itself. The route by which the end is projected from thought and the route by which thought seeks to reach it are not the same. According to the width and the depth of the gulf separating the two routes one grasps either *noesis* or *pistis* or *scepsis*, as a bridge over the gulf. Language, according to this scheme, must be subordinated to thought and thought to a person or persons. I maintain that whatever impersonal approach there is in the theme of language in the west is only a critical variation of the personal, just as – I assert boldly – whatever personal approach there is in Hindu thought, for instance that of the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika*, is simply a critical variation in the impersonal, which is the standard. Science is possible because of this, and western religion must also be deeply associated with science.

In Hindu thought, language has to be impersonal as in the western it has to be ultimately personal. Brahman cannot speak and there is no one else to speak the ultimate word; so speech is attached tenuously to Brahman and the whole of the phenomenal world as pervaded by name and form is hung from speech. Brahman is being, consciousness, and bliss, which are its *svarūpalakṣaṇas*, own-signs, It is possible to argue that if we take any of these as designating the primary ontological Reality the other two could be regarded as its own-signs; and it is logical that in ontology being must get the primacy. In this way Brahman can be spoken of as being (*sat*) characterized by the own-signs of consciousness (*cit*) and bliss (*ananda*). These are called signs because they are not logical implications or entailments, and because they *are* the essence, not attributes. Without distinction between essence and attributes and logical distance between the two, teleology cannot be conceived of. Hence,

being in Hindu thought has no teleology. The world is in no way attributive of Brahman.

I am not sure if there is any connection between teleology and conscience or attributes and conscience. Whatever be the connections between classical metaphysics and existentialist metaphysics, on this point as well as on some other points, I do not know much about them and I am not in a position to hazard an opinion. But it seems to me that it may be because of something in teleology that the idea of conscience suddenly surfaces as a concrete characteristic of Being. But in religious thought in the west it has always been associated with being because it has been associated with God. The most striking effort so far to absorb conscience into being, is, I suppose, to be found in Heidegger who says many original things about the problem, one of which I quote: 'conscience manifests itself as an attestation which belongs to Dasein's Being – an attestation in which conscience calls Dasein itself face to face with its own inmost potentiality-for-Being.'² Heidegger makes it very clear that conscience has much to do with 'being-guilty' and 'being-responsible-for.' Now it may not be possible or necessary to reconstruct God's existence or God's personality from Heidegger; but it is both possible and necessary, nay imperative, to reconstruct Being's existence (as Dasein) and its conscience-constitution from him. Knowing something about western thought, I will say that Heidegger here expresses something very fundamental in all western thought. Now I may be right in guessing that the idea of conscience here may be – I don't know for sure – a remote but tendentious development from teleology conditioned by Christianity. But it is revealing. Even in incipient teleology, some sort of potentiality for a conscience-metaphysics may have been latent, particularly in the distinction between essence and attributes and the logical (and eventually existential) distance between the one and the other. A difference between essential (ideal) attributes and accidental (actual) attributes is itself an inescapable outcome of this. Man was made in the image of God, but he fell; that is, he fell short of the teleological intentions with which he was created; the ideal attributes and actual ones were sundered. Why? Because of the distinction and distance between his essence (the image of God) and his attributes, which were futuristic, time- and freedom-oriented. Because of this the essence must move to the accidental attributes too, thus corrupting the image (essence) itself by the act. How could this tremendous linear expression of being have been possible unless it was teleologically grounded in God?

The analysis of conscience is integral to the analysis of Being in western, particularly western religious, thought. In Indian religion this is by no means so; there analysis of Being (or non-being in dialectical Buddhism) is dependent on analysis of consciousness. In the Vedanta, Being characterized by consciousness and bliss and conditioned by *Māyā* is the 'personal' God (*Īśvara*); the same conditioned by *avidyā* (ignorance) is the 'individual' (*jīva*). Phenomenal reality is the result; in the light of Brahman the phenomenal world

2. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 334.

can be called neither real nor unreal but indefinable (*nasadasadbhyām anirvacanīyam*). All significant language in the Vedānta is designed to express the 'relation' of phenomena, as neither real nor unreal but indefinable, to Brahman, and the awareness thereof. In western metaphysical (particularly religious) thought, the significant words express being characterized by conscience or at least teleology and are also directly intended expressions of phenomenal reality. Therefore, each time any of them is uttered it is identified with an existential point in time, at least with a logical point in the time-phenomenon. Thus the utterance of words pertaining to Being is not meant to be negation of phenomena; on the contrary, whenever Being is asserted, phenomena are asserted with it.

This, I think, makes phenomenology both possible and necessary in western thought. On the basis of this fact there can be no linear phenomenology of Indian religion, as it cannot be achieved without recasting the whole of Indian philosophy, and if we do so recast it it becomes something different. On account of this all efforts so far towards a phenomenological interpretation of Indian religion, beginning with Max Müller's comparative philosophical method, have missed the mark. There can be a phenomenology of Indian religion only if we take the whole character of Indian philosophical language from the beginning through all its forms up to the very termini, so far available, and not by any particular method, not even by philological analysis designed to uncover the nature of certain mythical beings or the examination of the point of identity or departure between particular linguistic expressions and particular myths. All Indian myths stand together as embodiments of the cosmic myth (*mīthyā*) of *Māyā*. This will reveal the cyclic character of myth and of language. Here we do not assume a relation between names and essences, for there is only one essence and this is always transcendent. Myths are, according to Indian thought, made of symbols where each devours the lower rather than imparting to it existence. To quote Gusdorf, 'Naming establishes a right to existence. It is words that make things and beings, that define relation according to which the order of the world is constituted: To situate oneself in the world, for each of us, is to be at peace with the network of words that put everything in its place in the environment' (p. 39). To disavow language, as Gusdorf would say, is to disavow reality, and renunciation of discourse is the renunciation of being (p. 41).

In the western tradition investigation of words is an outcome of awareness of worldly reality. Philology begins from the awareness of worldly reality which includes self-awareness, and vice versa, and moves towards self-knowledge. Through words one moves from the illusion of commonsense and opinion to the rightness of good sense and knowledge. This is the case in Socrates. Socrates knew that words originate in the mutual engagement of man and the world (or society) but words tend to become detached and go off on their own. But the original situation of that engagement must be, and can be, recalled by the pursuit of words to their origin. This is real philology. Socrates knew this and Heidegger knows this. Words are therefore a device not for

transcending phenomena but for being in them thinkingly, as against Indian thought. Academic philologists like Bopp and Max Müller also hoped that they could recall a situation of mutual encounter between man and nature (or man and society) as it obtained in the beginning of Vedic religion or elsewhere, historically. I am not questioning the derivation of any of the particular words and names that Max Müller and others following him have attempted,³ or the theories of language associated with them such as Müller's, but I am questioning the feasibility of grafting philology on to a self-interpretation of Indian religion. In contrast to all these, what do ancient Indian religious works themselves do? They adopt a scheme of etymology based on the philosophical myth of language, for example (among hundreds), the word *puruṣa*, ordinarily translated person, is analysed as *purvamevāham ihāsam iti* (*Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* 23.1.2), meaning 'I was existing here before.'

Language in the western tradition is basically human; it is also more than human, but it is unquestionably personal. The gods are personal and they call upon human beings to be persons. Even during the 40 (or shall I say 50?) years of wandering in the wilderness of linguistic analysis, philosophers have not entirely forgotten this. Some one like P. F. Strawson could still write a book (*Individuals*) reissuing a linguistic call to men to be human, just as the ancient Greek gods did – and in so doing established their own character as personal. Language in this context is ultimately a personal reality. Heidegger opens his treatise on language, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* with the words 'Der Mensch Spricht,' and says later, 'Als der Sprechende ist der Mensch: Mensch' (p. 11). GUSDORF expresses the idea well when he says that it is the personal initiative which brings language into being. The emphasis is on the personal speaker, not on speech. It is typical of a linear approach that language be regarded as personal, intentional, and even existential. It expresses anxiety (as Heidegger makes very clear) which calls not for gnosis (*jnāna*) but for *noesis*, *pistis*, or *scepsis*, directed not towards *satyam* (loosely translated: truth – from the root *Sat*, Being) but towards *aletheia*, the act of being, whereby it is no longer possible for Being to escape notice in beings that belong to the world of man, of events, be they natural or historical or human spiritual events.

Whether, according to Indian philosophy, the world of phenomena exists, is not the problem. Contrary to common misunderstandings Indian philosophy does not deny its existence – nor does it assert it (at least in the Vedānta). The problem is *how* the world exists. Language is designed not to assert or deny it but to assert Brahman, and in so doing the world acquires a contingent existence which will vanish with gnosis. The question is, what metaphysics is possible here? Will science be possible? Will action other than gnosis-seeking action be possible or relevant? Is politics possible, or is religion itself other than in the given form possible?

3. F. Max Müller, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion, as Illustrated by the Religions of India* (London: Longmans, Green, 1878).

Between the Two Circles:

What I have so far tried is (1) to establish the fundamental character of the difference between the eastern (Hindu) and western approaches to language, in other words their philosophical theories of language; (2) to show that this fundamental difference is reflected in the key terms used in each case; (3) to show that phenomena will have to be located by the instrumentality of the respective theories of language and in terms of them. As conceived of here my primary task has not been to locate phenomena in language *per se*, or vice versa, but to describe the already existing mutual location in case of both the eastern and western philosophical spheres and thus to examine the inter-relation of these two in respect of such mutual location between language and phenomena, necessarily correlated to the mutuality of language and Reality in each case. Having done this and having borne some meagre testimony to the uniqueness, self-consistency, and essential self-enclosedness of the two, I shall now essay to inquire if a passage between them is possible at all. The answer is 'yes,' but some provisos (to be elaborated below) have to be observed – these will be set forth only as provisos not as steps in a method. The question of method, in view of its gravity, can scarcely be entered upon as anything less than one's life work. But provisos can be declared without regard to methodological or even logical considerations and in a random sort of way, which is what I shall do here. One beneficial result hoped for is that the application of them will conduce somewhat to that retreat about which I spoke at the beginning.

1 The first proviso is to recognize the separateness and distinctiveness of the two circles. The following ones will indicate no logical order that I can admit to.

2 It is necessary to avoid the method available in each and suitable to each in approaching the other. Indian philosophical language is so constructed as to help reduce all things to some fundamental unities, the ultimate unity being purely non-dimensional. Underlying that is the assumption that nothing whatsoever, wheresoever it is, can resist reduction to unity; for all selves are one self. The western interest in order does not mean interest in unity. What underlies western logic is not unity but order, which, incidentally, can be one-dimensional or multi-dimensional but not non-dimensional. In either case each is free and privileged to read all phenomena in its own language and reduce all things to unity or order as the case may be. But neither of them should reduce the other's reading of phenomena in terms of its own language. In other words, they should not read each other's reading wrongly. But they have done this often. Now, how to hold this proposal within philosophy, without moving over to strategy or policy, how to construct a logic for it, is something to which much thought will have to be given. Having thought about it in some measure, I have had the experience of chasing a will o' the wisp. This I confess.

3 Each must take the other's self-understanding and self-interpretation very seriously. Even a child is apt to be offended if the mother says, 'I know you better than you know yourself.' Hinduism has shaped its language and other tools of inquiry to reveal its non-historical character. Indian religion does not want to be studied as history because it is by definition non-historical (*sanātana*). Now there is more than sheer perversity or obscurantism or benightedness in its insistence on this; it is part and parcel of its essential self-understanding which it cannot exchange for another without jettisoning its entire language. Now I am far from suggesting that the methods of philology, periodisation and strata-separation are all wrong, but I am suggesting that they belong to another circle. By the same token, whenever Hindus as Hindus have attempted interpretation of western spirituality or religion the results have been scarcely significant. All this points to another proviso, in fact an antithetical one.

4 An outside view of a circle does not seem wrong of itself. In fact it may complement the inside view, but it must be recognized as an outside view, not calculated to oust the inside view, which however strange or alien is still the authentic one.

As the centre of gravity in this discussion has been, throughout, the relation between language and phenomena and/or language and reality in the two spheres, with religion serving as the spinal cord in each case, it has been obvious, as was announced in the preface itself, that the problem has been envisioned and erected as one of comparative religion. As I believe that comparative religion is an essentially philosophical task, it is always necessary to go to the root, for it is there and not at the level of the fruit that we can compare at all.

5 We have to recognize that there is no third party here; there are only two parties, and one of the two parties is dynamic and eager to explore, while the other is quiescent. The language we use today, pertaining to everything, is the language of one party. For it, itself and others are phenomena to be studied, discovered, and perhaps even advanced. But it must recognize the limits beyond which it cannot push its language. Eastern language is not as relevant for contemporary discourse on many things as western, but it can be employed for setting limits to the western, and it is a good thing to be shown one's limit.

Take as an example the distinction between sacred and profane universally prevalent in contemporary language. Brahman is beyond the sacred and secular distinction, as he is totally beyond phenomena and beyond history. Since what can be said about Brahman can be applied to nothing other than Brahman (by the sheer logic that there can be nothing apart from Brahman and therefore whatever is, is Brahman) it can be applied to everything. To incarnate a sacred-secular distinction in Hinduism except in the devalued modes of popular piety or superstition meets with the same difficulty as in the effort to graft historical or phenomenological language onto it. But the sacred-profane (or sacred-secular) distinction is not a fallacious one. It springs from the very

depth of western experience and contemplation of phenomena. And Brahman language must force itself to recognize that the language of sacred-profane distinction provides it with a point of contact with the world. This, in my judgment, cannot be obtained by attempted phenomenological explanations (in terms of the sacred-profane) of Indian religious history but simply by a new philosophical resolution.

This brings me to my last point, which pertains to the question how easterners and westerners do actually use each other's language today. Clearly, western language of science and philosophy is incomparably more widespread than eastern. Eastern language is confined, in the west, to conscious study of comparative religion or philosophy, but this is not in great vogue. By contrast, we cannot live in any part of the world today without using western language applied to everything. I shall confine myself to India: Indians today use both the traditional language of religion and the new language of western science, politics, and even philosophy. But there has been no real meeting of the two languages and whenever people like Aurobindo have attempted an integration they have come out with pseudo-syntheses. Why? Like the average Indian user of western scientific language, they have not understood the deep spiritual sources of western scientific or political terms and ways of thinking. Who can doubt that these are deeply embedded in such things as the sacred-profane distinction, which I dare say had never been, at least as seen in the light of Brahman interpretation, a striking aspect of Indian religion? Western philosophy grew under the pressure of this, and science itself, it seems to me, has had some interest in moving towards a universal sacredness, at least the sacredness of phenomenal truth. We must, however, refrain from idealizing such possibilities of science, as it is not free from the shortcomings of things human. The sacred-profane distinction is only one of the many influences that forged western language. My fear is that, as easterners appropriate western science (on account of its obvious attractiveness) and its language, they do not think of its source. In the west, technology and the language of dehumanization still meet with some authentic counter-language, because criticism is inherent in that language, from Socrates down. But I am afraid there is no authentic counter-language to these things in the east; such language as there is (the genuinely eastern), does not touch them. So, there is a quiescent traditional language and a partially appropriated western language. If this process is indicative of the future, the east will wholly adopt technology uncritically and when the east is fully technologized, materialization of technology will be complete. To avoid that fate alone, it is urgent that traditional eastern language enter into real dialogue with what it can have dialogue with, namely the language of the west in its entirety, with due awareness of its spiritual roots.