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REFLECTIONS ON RG-VEDA X.129: STIMULATED BY WALTER MAURER'S PAPER

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Maurer's interpretation of RV X.129, the "Hymn of Creation", is very stimulating and, I believe, right in many points. These notes will attempt to show, however, that he misses the pivotal function of *human* thought in the structure of creation in the hymn, and so loses the connection between the 'primary' creation described in stanzas 1-3 and what Renou (1956, p.254) has called the 'secondary creation' (*viśṛṣṭi*) of the two last stanzas.

Stanza 1 As Maurer says, *sāt* and *ásat* are not abstract nouns — 'being' and 'non-being' as often translated. He suggests that they are predicate adjectives to an unexpressed *sārvam idám*, 'all this' (i.e., the cosmos) which appears in stanza 3. I suggest that they refer rather to *tád* (stanza 2), the neuter 'that', meaning the precosmic Being which evolves into the cosmos, and which is referred to under the image of water in pada d. Furthermore, I do not feel that *sāt* and *ásat* are adjectives. In stanza 4 of this hymn, and in RV X.72.2-3 and X.5.7, we have a substantive use of these words, and I suggest that this is the case here also. *sāt* and *asāt* may be translated as collectives: 'what is and what is not a thing' — i.e., what is manifest in this world and what is not (remaining unmanifest or indeterminate).

¹ As such, *sāt* and *asāt* would be similar to *mṛtyú* and *amṛta* in verse 2, which although apparently abstract nouns ('death' and 'immortality'), actually signify collectivities: mortals and gods. They are, I suggest, predicate *nominatives* to *tád*, "that" of stanza 2. In the beginning, the Being which would become this cosmos was neither a thing (collection of things) nor not a thing. But how could it be neither? Why was is not rather sim-

1. Cf. van Buitenen (1957b) esp. pp. 104-105.

ply *ásat*, an indeterminate quantity, as implied by RV X.72.2? Maurer avoids this difficulty by interpreting *sát* and *ásat* as existent/non-existent, and holds the pre-cosmic state to have been indeterminate because neither existent nor non-existent. But when the words appear again in stanza 4, Maurer interprets *ásat* as the "unformed, unmanifested world". Like all other translators of whom I am aware, he does not face the difficulty: if *ásat* is the unmanifest, unformed state from which a formed, manifest world (*sát*) arises, why is the unmanifest state called neither *sát* nor *ásat* in stanza 1? A solution is, however possible: perhaps the pre-cosmic Being is neither unmanifest nor manifest because it is *coming to be* manifest (cf. *ābhū* in stanza 3). The cosmos (*sát*) is *in statu nascendi* from the unmanifest, named by the profound waters of pada d.

This situation is suggested by the rest of the stanza, most significantly by the verb *ā varīvaḥ*, which I take with Maurer to be from *vṛt*, 'turn', rather than *vṛ*, 'cover'. *ā vṛt*, as Oldenberg (1912, p. 346), Geldner (1951, pp. 359-360), and Renou (1967, p. 168) demonstrate, refers to the primordial self-movedness of the original Being;² the verb elsewhere names the movement of breathing, or of blowing wind³, which fits very well the "windless breathing" of stanza 2.⁴ Maurer's "exists" is too vague and colorless. In addition, the absence of *rājas* ("space, atmosphere") and *vyòman* (lit. "separate realm";⁵ "heaven") suggests a common Vedic cosmogony in which Indra or Varuṇa opens the originally constricted universe to create space in the middle and heaven/earth on either side. I take the absence of *rājas* and *vyòman* to signify that the primal Being is not yet a cosmos, but will become one. The words *kásya sárman*, "in whose keeping", seem to refer to the power of constriction against which the divine act of opening must push.⁶ This en-

2. *ā vṛt* is close in meaning to *sam vṛt*, "evolve" in stanza 4.

3. Cf. Geldner and Renou, *op. cit.*

4. The birth of *sát* from *ásat* in X.72.2-3 likewise results from breath: Brahmanaspati "blowing like a bellows".

5. Cf. Renou (1967) p. 92.

6. *sárman* is usually a positively valenced concept: "protection" rather than "bondage". Nevertheless, these concepts are interchangeable, depending on who does the protecting, and from whom. Thus at I.174.2, Indra breaks open the *sárman*-s of the (cosmic) enemy to release the waters. For the enemy, *sárman* is a protection; for the singer (and Indra) an obstacle to be broken apart. Likewise, the word *gopā*,

closing power will later be described as "darkness" and "vacuity" (stanza 3).

But the cosmogony described in this hymn does not depend on a divine dragon-slayer (Indra) or proper-apart of heaven and earth (Varuṇa) to release the constriction. Creation is the autonomous self-manifestation of the primal Being, at least on the "objective" level. As we shall see, the part of dragon-slayer/ proper-apart is played by the minds of the human poets (stanza 5).

The relatively autonomous cosmogony of this hymn is met with in earlier parts of the RV associated with the fatherless birth of the fire god (principle) Agni.⁷ Thus in II.35 Agni as the Son of the Waters (Apām Napāt) seems to be spontaneously generated by the feminine waters, and only then becomes their husband, with them generating other creatures. A distinction between this hymn and the Agni-waters mythology is that here the primordial waters seem to be neuter in conception as well as grammatical gender (*āmbhas*), although they do take on a feminine character later in the hymn.

Stanza 2. *Amṛta/mṛtyú*, as Maurer rightly interprets, mean "mortals" and "immortals". Together with "day and night" in pada b, they represent the duality of the created world (*sát*), and in contrast with *tád ékam*, "That One" or "that alone", again suggest a state of cosmic nascence. The "windless breath" of the primal Being refers back to the atmospheric space (*rājas*) and "breathing"-like movement of stanza 1. Breathing is normally a function of the atmosphere, but here seems to *create* it. The pre-cosmic waters may be imagined to swell outward like a self-inflated balloon, thus opening an atmospheric space in their midst, which will later make possible the heaven/earth (male/female) opposition of stanza 5.

Stanza 3. Again the self-swelling of the primordial waters: *Salilám*, although grammatically neuter, perhaps represents a more feminine, fructifying stage than the *āmbhaḥ* of stanza 1.⁸ The "darkness hidden by darkness" is explained as a "coming to

"guardian" becomes negative when it refers to the serpent "guarding" the cosmic waters (I.32.11: *āhigopā*).

7. E.g., VI.8.4, VI. 16.35; cf. also X.121.7, X.82.6, X.45.3.5.

8. Cf. Renou (1956) p. 254; also Gonda (1966) p. 682: see Maurer's Note 21.

be" (*ābhū*) "covered by emptiness (vacuity)" (*tuchyá*). Perhaps the sense is that the primordial Being which was coming into manifestation was restrained in this movement by the absence of an entity outside itself. The difficulties inherent in a self-evolved or "autochthonous" creation may be implicit.⁹ Another possibility is that the evolution was initially hidden from the eyes of the *kaví*-s (inspired poets) of stanza 4. At any event, the primal Being gives birth to itself (i.e., emanates a part of itself) after gestating or brooding over itself in *tápas*, or "inward brooding" to modify Maurer's evocative rendering of the word. The self to which it gives birth will be seen to be both masculine and intelligent in the next stanza.

Stanza 4. As Maurer says, this stanza is the high-point of the poem; I also agree that the connection of the two hemistiches is of crucial importance. However, I cannot accept his interpretation of the stanza. Specifically, I do not agree that *rétas* is the evolved product ("offshoot") of *mánas*, "thought", although it clearly is the product of the "inward brooding" (*tápas*) of the previous stanza. *rétas* ordinarily denotes the masculine creative potency (concretely, "semen": cf. X.61.7), and is here identified with the "desire" (*kāma*) which evolved through the "inward brooding" of the primal Being. Maurer interprets this as the desire to create a manifest, differentiated world, and considers that it is just this desire which the sages discover to be the link between the unmanifest and manifest world in the second half of the stanza. Although this explanation agrees well with some later cosmogonies, I am not convinced that it is appropriate here. On the contrary, I feel that it obscures the significance of the human thought which appears in this stanza and takes up a crucial role in the further development of the cosmos. This role is clear in stanza 5 where the male energies (*retodhā*, *práyati*) of the later creation (*visṣṭi*) were distinguished from the feminine energies (*svadhā*, *mahimán*) by the "line" (*raśmī*) of the *kaví*-s' thought: it is this act of setting apart which makes possible a dualistic, bisexual creation.

But an analogue to the seers' "line" appears already in stanza

9. For the source of my use of the word "autochthonous", cf. C. Levi-Strauss' discussion of the Oedipus myth in *Structural Anthropology*: "The Structural Study of Myth", esp. p. 216 of the Harper Torchbooks edition. Of course, the "earth" in *autochthonous* is represented in my use by the primal Being.

4 as a "family tie", a bond of kinship or descent (*bándhu*).¹⁰ This genealogical tie, which they find by eager search in their heart, connects manifest being with the unmanifest.¹¹ In effect, the *kaví*-s discover that this world arises, is born, autochthonously from the unmanifest Being: this birth is precisely the subject of the first three stanzas.

It is clear that this discovery results from a *desire* to uncover the origin (*bándhu*) of the manifest world (*sát*). This is indeed the motive for the entire hymn: beginning with the given, everyday world, the *kaví*-s try to find out its origin. Now, I take the "search" (*pratīṣyā*) of the *kaví*-s for the origin of the *sát* to result from the *kāma*, "desire", which arises in the primal Being as the "seed" (in the sense of producer) of thought. This 'thought' (*mánas*) is closely related to the *manīṣā* ("poetic activity"?) by which the *kaví*-s' search is carried on. But I have said that *kāma* evolved from the primal Being's "inward brooding", while the *kaví*-s' search apparently originates in the subjective sphere of the human mind. How to reconcile these differing origins of what I take to be the same impulse?

The answer can only be that the "desire" of the primal Being was expressed *through* the *kaví*-s in the form of thought seeking the origins of the world.¹² But we have seen that the "desire" was the self-emanation of the primal Being when it was "born" through *tápas* in stanza 3: it is thus an entity with the quality of *sát*, a thing in the manifest world. Since thought (*mánas*) is the immediate result of desire, it too is a constituent of the *sát*, and the *kaví*-s' thinking is a case of *sát* reflecting on its own origins.¹³

10. Cf. Renou (1953) pp. 171-175.

11. *ibid.*, p. 173.

12. The role of human thought in completing creation in the RV is widely recognized, albeit in different ways: cf., e.g., Thieme (1952) pp. 110-112; Renou (1968) pp. 17-18; Schmidt (1968) pp. 42-52.

13. It may be appropriate to discuss briefly here two patterns of late Vedic cosmogony. The one present in SB X.5.3, cited by Maurer as the earliest commentary on our hymn, begins, in a sacrificial context, with primordial "mind" (*mánas*), and proceeds through *tápas* to increased definition (*niruktatva*) and solidity (*mūrtatva*). This is an autochthonous process, involving no second member. The other pattern of creation I wish to point to, and which I feel continues the thought of X.129, occurs when "a primordial being becomes conscious of himself" (van Buitenen (1957a) p. 19). In this case, thought *arises* as the second member of a progenitive pair. A transparent instance is BAU I.4.10: *brahma va idam āsit/tad ātmānam evāvet – aham brah-*

Stanza 5. The evolved desire of the primal Being which resulted in men seeking and finding the origin of the world in stanza 4 here shows its masculine creativity as *retodhā*, "placer of the seed". (*práyati*, the other "male" element, is obscure.) This masculine desire is paired in bisexual complementarity with the primal Being which has now become feminine (both *svadhā* and *mahimán*, which seem to represent the female creative powers, appeared earlier (stanzas 2 and 3) as qualifications of the pre-sexual, self-generative stage of the Being). As a result of the pairing of the male and female energies, the manifest world of *sát* (now called *visṣṣṭi*) is present in stanzas 6 and 7.

The question can now be raised, what is the relationship between the creativity of *kāma* (*rétas*, *retodhā*) and its motivation of the *kavi-s'* search? First, it seems clear that a search for the origins of the *sát* presupposes that *sát* already exists: yet the masculine, impregnating activity of the *kāma* (*retodhā*) seems to generate the world. But *this* generation is secondary: bisexual creation depends on the search for origins. The sexual opposition of *kāma* (*retodhā*) and the primal Being arises in the first place as a discrimination between them in thought, but this distinction rests on realization of the autochthonous origin of *kāma* in the primal Being (stanza 4). We may say that the search

māsmi/ tasmāt tat sarvam abhavat, "This (cosmos) was (only) *brahman* in the beginning. He knew himself: 'I am *brahman*'. From this the whole world came to be." In this story *desire* to know itself plays no part in the primal Being's self-awareness, but desire is present in a similar story, *BAU* I.2.1. (SB 10.6.5.1). There, the primal Being is death, or nothingness. This nothingness, however, is the same as *hunger* (i.e., a *privation*), which leads to the *desire*: "May I be myself" (*tan mano 'kuruta - ātmanvī syām iti*). The phrase *mano 'kuruta* is especially interesting. If we follow Maurer's reading of *manas* at SB X.5.3 as "mind" or "thinking", we would translate this as "he (hunger) made himself a mind"; he then uses the mind to express his desire to become himself (a self). Primordial hunger, then, expresses its desire to be a self *through* thought (mind). But since hunger is by nature a desire, it is clear that desire comes before thought, which merely expresses it. An alternative translation of *mano 'kuruta* is proposed by van Buitenen (1957a, p. 18, Note 17), who points to parallels with *akāmayata* and *aikṣata*, "desired, willed". On this interpretation, the connection between the primordial desire (hunger) and its expressive thought becomes closer: thought is essentially "will". In either case, thought (will) comes into existence at a certain point in the cosmogony: the point at which the primordial being reflects on itself, sees itself, or tries to gain itself: hence thought is *not* primordial. These reflections apply to X.129 with the difference that the primal Being's self-awareness is there mediated by *human* thought.

for origins develops into the act of setting apart the masculine and feminine energies which produce the secondary creation (this is the connection of stanzas 4 and 5). Furthermore, this act is simultaneously the act of impregnation which defines bisexual creation. The intellectual desire which evolved in the Being directs itself reflectively against that Being, thus discovering its own rootedness in that. This reflexivity of thought thinking on its roots is expressed in stanza 4, where the *kavi-s'* searching thought enters their own heart (*hṛd*), which is elsewhere (e.g., II.35.2) precisely the *source* of thought.¹⁴ By so reflecting, thought comes into its own as an autonomous entity: but this autonomy exists only in opposition to thought's continuing basis in the primal Being.¹⁵ Thinking on its own origins, it becomes, so to speak, its own "father", while the primal Being becomes its "mother". The situation is closely similar to RV II.35 where the "Child of the Waters" is autochthonously generated by the maternal waters (stanzas 7, 8, 10)¹⁶ but also engenders himself upon them (stanzas 13 and probably 9). RV X.129 differs from this hymn in representing thought, rather than a god, as the male principle which is generated by the primal Being (here a plurality of females) as the latter's impregnator.¹⁷

14. Cf. Renou (1955) p. 24. The assimilation of the roots of thought to the roots of the cosmos is found in the hymn to Speech (Vāc), X.125, stanza 7: Speech, who is the source of thought (stanzas 4 and 5) has her "womb" in the waters, and like them engenders a male principle (the "father") as a sexual complement. Evidently she stimulates thought and speech among men for the same reason (stanza 5). "The heart as source of poetry (inspiration) is called an *occan* (=The precosmic waters) at IV.58.II.5."

15. The peculiar place of man as a being who attains a relative independence of the maternal principle is expressed rather clearly in X.72.8.9. If, following Hoffman (1957), p. 101, we take *mārtāṇḍa*, "born of a dead egg", as signifying "man", we have a case where the first 7 sons born from the body of Aditi (i.e., the Adityas) become gods and return to the primal condition (*pūrvyām yugām*), i.e., back to her body, while the 8th son, Mārtāṇḍa, is set apart (*pārā āsyat*) to generate progeny and die. Rather than thought, the source of man's independence seems to be here his mortality.

16. Cf. also VI.16.35; X.121.7; X.82.6.

17. RV X.121 presents a similar but not identical situation. The Unknown God having been earlier credited with the cosmogonic acts of Indra and Varuna (propping apart the worlds, fixing the earth, ruling as a king over all creatures) is in stanzas 7 and 8 compared with two male gods who are first generated by the primordial waters: Agni (7) and Dakṣa (8). As in X.129 the male god becomes the sexual complement of the waters, but instead of impregnating them, he is said flatly to "generate"

But if thinking initiates bisexuality, and the latter creates the evolved world of *sát/visṛṣṭi*, what are we to say of the place of *sát* in the original, autochthonous evolution of the primal Being? In stanza 3 we have that the Being "was born", i.e., evolved or emanated a part of itself, and the *kaví-s'* discovery of *sát*'s evolution out of *asát* in stanza 4 seems to show clearly that *sát* did evolve before it was thought about. The question is whether the "world" was autochthonously generated along with *kāma*, or whether *kāma* (and thought) developed alone, with the "world" a later, solely bisexual production.

The answer seems to be that *kāma* and the world of *sát* did arise together, and the latter merely changed its mode of being following the self-discovery of thought's origins. When thought discovers its autochthonous birth it *thereby* comes to be born bisexually as its own "father". Perhaps because *sát* and thought are not identical (thought is only part of *sát*), the generativity of thought with respect to *sát* is not assigned exclusively to

them as well as the cosmos. But this is somewhat illusory: the situations are in fact consonant. The root *jan*, "generate", is used in two senses, one appropriate to the female sexual function, the other to the male. Feminine engenderment is "evolutionary", involving inner transformation and self-manifestation, while masculine engenderment operates from *outside*, by opening up or impregnating. This can be seen by comparing stanza 9 with stanza 7. In 7, Agni is "generated" by the waters as the embryo of the universe, while in 9 the Agni/Dakṣa-like god "generates" heaven and earth. The latter "engenderment" seems comparable to the propping-apart of heaven and earth recalled in stanzas 1 and 5; that is, the originally closed world is made open and thereby fertile. Thus, when in 9, pada c, the god is said to generate the waters, (by whom he has himself been "generated" in 7) we may infer that this merely specifies the act of propping apart heaven and earth suggested in the first half of the stanza: the matrix in which the heavenly/earthly substance subsisted, which was split in two by their "engenderment", was the waters. The waters would then be engendered only in the figurative sense that they are the material out of which the worlds are "engendered". Alternatively, we may think that the waters are released (as in I.32, etc.) from their primordial bondage when the worlds are propped apart. In any event, the waters are not produced by the masculine principle in the *same way* as he is produced by them. (This observation should also apply to the cases of "reversible parenthood" at X.72.4,5 and X.90.9.) As in X.129.5 the masculine principle in X.121 is intelligent: this is conveyed by the phrase *āpo . . . paryāpaśyad* "watched the waters all around" (stanza 8). Likewise, in X.82.5 the gods, newly born from the embryo borne by the waters, "see" (*samāpaśyanta*).

18. My interpretation of *kāma* as intellectual desire finds a partial parallel at X.71.1-2 where *preṇā*, "love, friendship", motivates the origin of language and thought, which as in X.129 appear out of obscurity. The result of thinking and speaking is that the poets *know* their friendship for each other: a social bond rather than the cosmic tie of X.129. Nevertheless, the desire to communicate with each other

human thinkers but also to a god: the *ādhyakṣa*, "overseer", of the last stanza, who repeats the cosmic role of thought on the cosmic plane.¹⁹ Thus, the bisexual generation described in stanza 5 is not to be construed as contradicting the autochthonous generation described in stanza 3: it is a transformation of the latter in thought. When the world is understood to arise autochthonously, it is thereby also understood to arise bisexually — because thought cannot conceive of its own origin as autochthonous without the *desire* to understand which makes its origin bisexual. This can be expressed in the form of a proportion: autochthonous thought: bisexual thought = autochthonous cosmos (*sát*): bisexual cosmos (*sát*), because the cosmos (*sát*) includes thought.

Stanzas 6 - 7. The question of the source of autochthonous creation is raised, and simultaneously the question of who knows this origin. The difference from stanza 4 is that here the context is purely cosmological rather than human, so the "knower" must be cosmic also. Stanza 6 asks who this knower may be, and stanza 7 tentatively answers, "one who oversees the world from heaven". This overseer is evidently not only a knower, but like human thought, a masculine engenderer of beings: this is conveyed when the poet asks whether the world was "put in place" (*dadhé*), presumably by the overseer, in stanza 7. The root of which *dadhé* is the 3rd person singular, perfect middle, is *dhā*, which forms the second half of *retodhā*, "placer of the seed" which, as we have seen, characterises the masculine principle produced by human self-reflection (stanza 5). But because the world whose origin is sought is not referred to human thought as "engenderer", the connection I have tried to show between autochthonous and bisexual creation becomes

leads them to discover their (implicit, "unconscious") relatedness, which that desire already expressed (albeit in a nascent form). Thus, desire to be related reveals, through the mediation of thought and language, a preexistent relatedness. Likewise, at X.129, *sát*'s desire to be related to its origin reveals, through thought, that it was already so related. In both cases thought *changes* nothing, but merely brings something out into the light — and yet this act of illumination is precisely the advent of bisexual creation, in X.129, and in X.71, of the ritual apportionment of language. (Cf. stanzas 3 and 11, where the unitary treasure of language is divided into the various priestly roles at the sacrifice.) Common to both is an increasing differentiation by thought: of the cosmos in X.129; of society in X.71.

19. Cf. X.121.8; X.82.5.

obscured. Instead, they are presented as mutually exclusive possibilities: *either* the cosmos evolved autochthonously from the primal Being (as implied by the word for "world", *visṛṣṭi*, literally "emanation", and the verb form *ā bhū*, which refers back to the nominal *ābhū* of stanza 3, denoting "becoming"), *or* it was "put" in place by the masculine overseer functioning as *retodhā*, "impregnator". What is missing is the autochthonous provenance of the overseer himself who, precisely *because* his roots are in the primal Being, could know his origin and that of the cosmos of which he would be, in this act, "father". Evidently these last two stanzas represent a degeneration in the *kavi*-s' thought, which falls into a dualism losing itself in obscurity at both ends. Even bisexuality is nearly lost at this point: the creative principles are wrapped in their respective (temporal and spatial) remotenesses and connect only as complementary mysteries.

Perhaps the significance of these two verses is to show by a negative example that autochthony and bisexuality are mutually complementary: when they are severed, as here, neither makes sense, and the world loses its moorings in the primal Being and, simultaneously, in the thought which realizes that it is moored there.

Nevertheless, we are left with a desire to understand the origin of this world, and are the wiser for understanding that this desire is not merely personal but is rooted in the nature of the cosmos.

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