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Sruti and Apauruseya : an Approach to Religious Scriptures and Revelation

This article¹ is part of a larger project on the problem of how *word* can be a means of knowing, which is popularly known as the thesis of *śabda-pramāṇa* in Indian philosophy, and which has not hitherto received the systematic treatment that I have attempted in my work. The question, while being put philosophically, is not without its bearing in the context of religion and religious studies, especially as regards the status and sanction given to religious scriptures and to revelation in almost any tradition.

1. Revelation

Now revelation has meant different things in different traditions and theologies. Here we can get involved in comparative analysis, but I wish to steer clear of that in a short space at my disposal wherein I wish to concentrate on one aspect of the problem as seen through the notions of *śruti* and *apauruṣeya* in Hindu thought.

With this prefatory remark let me say this: my first thesis is that, the starting point of all revelation is 'word' (or 'the word' to be grammatically precise, as the verbal ideogram). Though I say 'a starting

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1. An earlier version of this article was read at the VI Annual Conference of the Australian Association for the Study of Religions, in Adelaide, August, 1981 (in Eastern Religions section). But I am indebted to the inspiration I have received through the writing and in person of Professor Raimundo Panikkar, University of California, Santa Barbara, with whom I had the good fortune to discuss some of my ideas. And I am also grateful to Professor Ninian Smart, with whom I also discussed my views on *śruti*, during my recent visit to Santa Barbara, after presenting a paper on *śruti* in the annual conference of the American Academy of Religion, in San Francisco.

point', as I go on to show, 'the word' is not the *central* point to revelation, for the word is a presentation of a sign, say a linguistic sign, pointing to or standing for a concept, idea, object or some referent beyond its sign form. What a word signifies is usually other than itself, unless it is used selfreferentially. There are instances though where the *Word* is used metaphorically denoting a dimension of being, an abstraction, a power which embodies a deeper significance, and which itself serves as a vehicle of transmission of the sense or significance represented. Likewise, the signs and markings used in conveying the 'Dreamtime' myths and legends in the Australian Aboriginal religion, could be said to be *words* in this sense, even though the linguistic counterparts are absent as the Aboriginals did not evolve a verbal script for their "revelations".

In other words, the *word* is the *logos*, the principle, as it were, behind the manifestation capable of self-disclosure, as speech is to reason. Speech [*vāc*] here is a metaphor that tells of the ease and power of expression, the intention of transmission, and the content as being of higher significance. But the word *qua* its power, or principle of manifestation inherent to it, transcends itself: and in the process of transcendence it reveals something else. It could, for instance, point to its origin or source, to its signification, or to some 'object', 'being', 'state' or 'experience' it refers to. Thus the words of the Gospels point to the purpose fulfilled in the life and teachings of Jesus. Other words could be about the occurrence of an event in history which evokes 'numinous astonishment', in the words of Paul Tillich. This is due to the *power* of the word, the *śakti*: it is the existential impact created by an inner participation on the part of the listener in the living power of the word. And this 'revelatory power' is a function of the word as a symbolic form disclosing that which it encapsules, which is expressed as its *meaning-content* or signification. There is a special relation between the word and its meaning: *autpattika*.²

2. I return to this later in section 5 below, but I can hardly do justice to this complex subject in this short space. I have dealt with this issue and devoted over a 100 pages to its analysis in my dissertation and in papers published elsewhere [*vide Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Dordrecht, Volume 8, No. 4, pp. 393-400 and Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 85-100]. See R. Panikkar, "Words and Terms", *Instituto di studi filosofici*, Rome, 1980.

It is in this sense then that I speak of the word as being the starting point of revelation, while its central point is that which the word discloses or, literally, REVEALS. The word may have an end point too, namely, that to which it leads, the goal it directs the hearer towards. Thus as a means to a higher *end*, the word assumes a soteriological purpose, which the Mīmāṃsā schools call *dharma*, rendered best as the *significance*. The word usually has a middle point too, and this is *culture*: the concretization of the abstract in terms of the practical living worked out in everyday life, in all walks of life. It is the process whereby the transcendental captured, as it were, in the kernel of the word, gets translated into the immanent, the all-pervasive reality, in terms of the context and social circumstances prevailing at the particular time and place of the revelation. The process may involve development of practices such as prayer, liturgy, rituals, rites and so forth, details of which usually call for recording in and re-citing from scriptures. But we must acknowledge that the communication effected, and the transmission of not just the word but also of its signification is in virtue of the inherent power of the word to possess such signification: *śabdaśakti* or word-power.

2. The word as revelation in scripture

Now the point of contact with revelation is mostly through the word, whether spoken or written, or through some other sign-vehicle representing the verbal ideogram. Thus the adherent of one religion may point to the religious scripture embodying the revelation according to his tradition; he may point to the testament(s), the tabloids of commandments, the Torah, the Qur'an, or to the Vedas, the *Bhagavadgītā* and so forth. Revelation is expressed in sacred markings or in scriptures and transmitted through these. The words in scriptures therefore become ordained with a sanctity and authority which secular language may not come to attain. But why are scriptural words more than any other words granted this sanctity?

Is the authenticity and the validity derived by virtue of the source attributed to some personal power, or an ancestral tradition, a lineage perhaps that goes back to the ancient times? We must also bear in mind that these 'revealers' could merely be correlative phenomena that trigger off with the revelation - they could, as it were, be catalysts for the revelation. Surely, words that have been passed on from the ancients become invaluable foundations for know-

ledge and understanding for a later progressive period—even if there has been a discontinuity in the tradition. And what is embedded in the tradition is indeed valuable and backed by years of experience and at least some continuity in existential conditions. But is tradition and the heritage bequeathed by the ancients always the source of revelation? Would it make sense to push the question of *source* and the actual *process* of revelation even further than what the history or the persons involved in the revelation could tell us? Would it also not make sense to lay aside the question of the “source” and the process? If we lay aside the question of the source, then religious scriptures and traditions become merely the carriers and preservers of revelation in which it is manifested and actualized. Likewise, with the prophets, messengers, messianic figures, the ancient beings, gods and may be even God, could be put “in brackets”, to use a phenomenological cliché as the question of the source is laid aside and we look at revelation *itself* for what deeper dimensions it may evince. Our entry into revelation, we must remind ourselves, is possible through the persistence of the word (*śabda*). We are concerned then fundamentally with the *word* as the only *available* “source” of revelation.

The fundamental point we can raise therefore about revelation is not about its source, not primarily at least, but basically about “what is heard” because this puts us squarely in the framework we have been moving towards, namely, that the word is the starting point of revelation, it is the point of contact; and that the word has a power peculiar to itself. We may argue that in a sense, but in a very restricted one, the word *is* the source of the revelation. Putting the problem in this way shifts the discussion to the subjective aspect of the event: namely, to the listener—for what becomes important here is *what is heard*—not, who spoke it? when? where? and so on. (These issues may arise too, but not as the central concern, only of historical interest). Even if speech itself could speak, then too such issues would not be so important. But one need not assume a speaker in the case of every speech; for methodological reasons the role of the speaker may be regarded as a *functional* process which achieves its end as soon as the speech is made, that is, the word is manifested. Who remembers the names of those on the jury once the court hears the verdict? What becomes important is the *hearing* of it, and a *precise* hearing of it. The hearing, though, need not be taken in a literal sense here as requiring the absolute utterance of words: but in the sense of the wider impact hearing leads to: namely, to the

assimilation of meaning, inference of its implications, intuition of deeper significance, and its application in existential terms. Hearing then, involves one in more than a grammatical or linguistic comprehension, as it requires a deeper understanding of the hidden meaning, the *kabbalah*, the *Veda*, the sense behind the song, the intentionality underlying the cognitive processes. It is as much a *perceptual* process, which requires concentration, attentiveness, one-pointedness, perhaps even an empathetic commitment to the felt-mood of the "original" imagined utterer, whoever that might have been. One might say, it is the hearing by the "inner ear" that leads to an inner version.

3. Śruti

It is in this context that I find the discussion on *śruti* relevant and of particular interest, in drawing comparisons with other views on revelation. The most striking feature associated with *śruti* is *apauruṣeya*, the non-personal nature of the "source" or origin, subordinated to which is the feature of *anubhava*, or lived experience in a particular context.

Before going on with this it may be useful to make a few remarks about how *Śruti* can or has been viewed in different circles, from different perspectives.

i. *Śruti* can and has been identified with the Vedas, a corpus of scriptural writings, bequeathed from ancient, perhaps Indo-Iranian, civilization, classified into *saṃhitās*, *brāhmaṇas*, *āraṇyakas* and the *upaniṣads*.

ii. *Śruti* can be taken to signify the eternally revealed word or *philosophia perennis*, which finds one, but not the *only* expression in the Vedas.³ *Śruti* is in this sense the 'heard word', in the symbolic sense of being the embodiment of wisdom, of truths that are timeless, and as such refer not to the corpus of scriptures called the Vedas, but to the knowledge, the *Veda*, therein. It is *Veda* in the true sense of the term—namely, from 'vid', close to the English analogues 'wit', 'wise', 'wisdom', and so on.

3. Cf. the R̥gvedic dictum: *ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti* (R̥gveda 1.164.46): *That is One, the wise call (It) in many ways.*

iii. *Śruti* may be seen as a corpus of teachings independent of personhood. It is an embodiment of teachings in a hierarchical and progressive gradation, though the complete revelation only occurs gradually through a series of gradual or progressive revelations – which could be in the life of an individual, a race, a species, a community and so on.

iv. *Śruti* is or may be regarded as a body of ‘potential truths’ [*logos*] which become revelation as soon as it becomes significant to one to whom the truth embedded in a *śruti* statement is disclosed. For example, a particular statement from *śruti* could appear to be utterly useless to one attempting to understand it, when suddenly its profound significance reveals itself accompanied with a vivid experience of some sort as intended through the statement—such as of ecstatic reason, numinous astonishment, or some sort of mystical cognitive state. The seers of old are said to have given expression to a number of *śruti* utterances in moments of such inspirations. *Śruti* is therefore looked upon as a set of *propositions*, expressed through sentences intelligible to a particular individual or group at a particular time—through a process of introduction, and initiation. But appropriate training may be required for the full impact to occur: the revelation only *then* takes root. This awareness or knowledge may not be attainable in any other way but through understandingly listening to these propositions.

The fifth way is to view *śruti* as ‘that which, if anything does, continues an understanding or realness, *per se*: for *śruti* is defined as the corpus of writings which embody wisdom of *ṛṣis* (seers) who do have this understanding having apprehended realness immediately.’⁴ In other words, *śruti* is ‘“that which is heard” in the sense of being disclosed with immediacy.’ The codification of the intuitive experience may have resulted in the Vedas which report these, and branched out into *darśanas* or schools, rather viewpoints, and continued in the form of oral memory of *smṛti*, with which a corpus of secondary literature that grew around the primary is identified.

4. Cf. Ian Kesarcodi-Watson “Hindu Metaphysics and Its philosophies: Śruti and Darśana”, in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, Dec. 1978, pp. 413-432; p. 416 Obviously though, the slant in this writer’s scant treatment of śruti is towards a wholesale identification of *śruti* with the common ‘metaphysic’ he claims to be underneath the *śad-darśanas* or orthodox schools of Indian philosophy.

Out of these perspectives arise two major points of focus to which we shall now return, namely, *apauruṣeya* and *anubhava*.

4. Apauruṣeya

Apauruṣeya relates to the question of the origin or source of the revelatory word. The second relates to the impact of revelation in terms of the *anubhava* or experience evoked: experience here is the measure [*pramāṇa*], as it were, of the power to create new revelatory situations: it marks the disclosure in existential reason of the mystery of being or of whatever knowledge the revelation is about. We might say *anubhava* or experience is the ultimate measure, the logical vindication of the *tour de force* of *śruti*.

Two minor implications follow from these two theses :

a) the possibility of creating new revelatory situations, namely, that revelation could somehow be continuous, that is, it is not a one-time occurrence, as the correlative event can recur or can be made to recur;

b) the meaningfulness of the revelation is on the subjective side of the person who participates in the experience.

As regards *apauruṣeya*, if we now accept that *śruti* proceeds through understandingly hearing of *śabda*, the word, in the form of well-constructed expressions, say sentences, then we might also ask if it makes sense to ask as to who is the author or the source of the word? And whether human or divine? For purposes of authentication of the testimony we may want to ask about the credentials of the author: who is the author? when were these words uttered? at what place? and so on. But one wonders whether it is always necessary to return to the source of the uttered word for its authentication, or whether there are other ways of authenticating statement of testimony, for example, through asking and testing to see if it works, whether it has real application, what goal it pretends and leads to, what long-term problems it raises—these are indeed *pragmatic* considerations, which can in part be also used as the criteria of validation here. Of course more would be necessary—but we have a starting point here. Such an attempt looks to gauge not only the dead amidst the living in the word but also looks for the existential ramifications of the process of revelation. It is a forward-looking approach rather than a backward looking one.

Such considerations, it appears, led the early thinkers in the Indian tradition to suggest that chief characteristic of *śruti* is that it is *aparurṣeya*, that is, it transcends the question of a source, personal or otherwise. It is essentially a non-issue and that the source, if anything or anywhere, is *transpersonal* in the sense that *śruti* transcends all possible personal origin. It's origin, as it were, is the word itself: the medium as its own maker! *Śruti* itself denies knowledge of its source—as is reflected in this famous verse from the Ṛgveda.

What thing I am I do not know
I wander secluded, burdened by my mind.

When the first born of Truth has come to me
I receive a share in that selfsame Word.⁵

The Word has just come, it is given birth to by Truth itself, and therefore it came to man through hearing the word. This is why *śruti* is 'that which is heard'—they are timeless words heard and passed on age after age. Advaita, following Mīmāṃsā, regards *śruti* in this light to be timeless words, statements of wisdom, of truths and insights, religious and ethical, which are true for all time and which are uniquely revealed for the good of all mankind. And the words of *śruti*, because of the natural relation between word and its meaning, and the power inherent in the word [*śabdaśakti*], become a means of knowing (the significance). As Pārthasārati Miśra puts it, "the validity of the Vedas is in the results the *śruti* leads to, because the words of *śruti* have an inherent power which manifests their significance."⁶ *Śruti* is therefore an authority in its own right.

As one of the verses in the Vedas explains,⁷

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5. *Vāco bhāgam*, Ṛgveda 1.164, 37. Unless otherwise indicated all translations of Vedic texts are taken from Raimundo Panikkar, see note 8 below.
 6. Pārthasārati Miśra argues that even if the veracity or otherwise of the Vedic word is resolved by inferring about the trustworthiness of the source, even then "the knowledge of the import of a proposition... which does not require the determination that the source of its origin is trustworthy, in no way implies (the operation of) inference." Under 64, p.98, D. Venkatramiah, trs. Gaekward's Oriental Series, Baroda, 1940 (No. LXXXIX), *Śāstradīpika* cf. 63. p. 96.
 7. *Taittīriya Brāhmaṇa* II. 8.8.4. ii (Panikkar p. 107).

He who knows not the eternal syllable of the Veda,
the highest point upon which all the Gods repose,
what business has he with the Veda . . .

The Word is infinite, immense, beyond all this
All the Gods, the celestial spirits, men and animals
live in the Word. In the Word all the worlds find
their support.

An astute perspective on śṛuti in this regard, that follows the Mīmāṃsā perspective in spirit, and which I find of tremendous inspiration, is provided by Professor Raimundo Panikkar, presented in his voluminous: *The Vedic Experience: Mantramañjarī, An Anthology of the Vedas*. Discussing the question of the source of the Vedas, Panikkar remarks, the “Veda is neither ‘inspired’ (having God as its author) nor ‘the word of God’ (containing or expressing the message of God); it is simply the primordial Word of whom no human being is the author: *apauruṣeya*, according to the doctrine elaborated by the Mīmāṃsā with such scholarly details and mental acuteness.”⁸

5. The Vedas as apauruṣeya

Panikkar next refers to the famous Ṛgvedic hymn that declares the word as *nityā vāc*, the ‘eternal Word’ (Ṛgveda VIII, 75, 6). Panikkar points out, rightly I believe, what is so peculiar and unique in the traditional notion of *apauruṣeya*, and defends the theory of the ‘non-authorship’, either human or divine, of the Vedas, against the charges that this theory is a contradiction of common sense and a denial of causality or ‘causal thinking’. He points to the complexity of the conception, whose one aim is to ‘purify our relationship with the text and to avoid any kind of idolatry.’ For, he goes on to argue, “any one of us is the author of the Vedas when we read, pray, and understand

8. Raimundo Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience-Mantramañjarī, An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebrations* (University of California Press, Berkeley, L.A. 1977), p. 92. Panikkar’s sentiments highlight a plea for such an approach to the Vedas that takes the philosophic-hermeneutical and phenomenological methodologies as seriously if not more so than the existing philological, historical, excessive exegetical and formcritical approaches. The title of Panikkar’s work itself suggests that he is looking at a fount of Experience “expressed and condensed in these amazing documents of the śṛuti.” (*Ibid.* p. 9).

them. Nobody is the author of living words except the one who utters them.”⁹

Panikkar therefore identifies the Vedas as the *living words*; the word however, is not something a human uses as his instrument, but is his supreme form of expression, of which again he is not the real author. “What has no author”, Panikkar goes on to explain, “according to the *apauruṣeya* insight, is the relation between the word and its meaning or object. The relationship is not an artificial or extrinsic relation caused by somebody. There is no author to posit the type of relationship which exists between the word and its meaning.” Thus this relationship in Mīmāṃsā is called *autpattika*. If this were not so, then the relationship would need another and so on *ad infinitum*; but being *autpattika* it does not require another. But this relationship, the *autpattika*, is only active while the word is a living word, when it is meaningful and ‘living’ for someone; when it ceases being a living word, it is not Veda any more—“it does not convey real or saving knowledge.”¹⁰

Panikkar then brings to our attention a truism this conception leads to, namely, that it “rescues the Vedas from the grip not only of a certain God functioning as a primal scribe, but also of the Hindu tradition, which cannot be said to be the author of the Vedas.”¹¹ Then Panikkar makes what may appear to be a rather strange statement when he suggests that the Vedas “without an author cease to be an authoritative book”.¹² *Prima facie*, we cannot understand, however,

9. *Ibid.* p. 12.

10. *Ibid.* p. 13. Panikkar also makes some astute observations about other possible approaches, open to him at least, for the study of the Vedas, such as that of the “trained mechanic, in Sanskrit and English”, or that of the “trusty pilot in Vedic and other personal flights”, that of the profanizer, the exploiter under the guise of scholarship and scientific knowledge, that of the proselytizer; and he calls for the freeing of the Vedas from the hands of the sectarian interpreter on the one hand, and the scholar-apologist on the other. He suggests an open attitude and an existential confrontation with the “revelation” of *śruti*. *Ibid.*, Introduction, (esp. pp. 10-11); *śruti* must be rescued from the monopoly of a single group, whether be a scholarly group of pandits and indologists or an active religio-political faction. . . . There is here also an attempt to break down the sharp schism of ‘karma vs. jñāna’ khāṇḍa.

11. *Ibid.* p. 13. 12. *Ibid.* p. 13.

why any text has to have an author to be authoritative [*prāmānya*]; it may need someone to express it or even 'emanate' it, but this need not necessarily be the basis also of its authoritativeness. If the Mīmāṃsā theses of *autpattika* and *apauruṣeya* are justifiable then also it follows that the 'texts' can be authoritative on these very grounds. However, what Panikkar seems to be saying is that it is only when one, the reader or hearer of the Vedas becomes *as it were* the "author", when it becomes possible for him to "utter" the Vedas himself, when he is the proper origin, "the *auctor*" of the text, do the Vedas disclose their authentic "authority".¹³ The attempt here is to make the "revelation" a real one for the votary who listens to the Vedas, and as such the Vedic Revelation is not any more the voice of an anthropomorphic Revealer, but Revelation *per se* to one who *hears* it—this is why *śruti* is "that which is heard", "which leads one to realize, to see the veil, the *māyā*, that covers or conceals *reality*". This is part of the discovery in the process of "hearing" the Vedas; it is the Revelation in which the seeker participates. Thus, Panikkar concludes this part of the discussion by remarking aptly, "the *śruti* is *śruti* when that which is actually heard is not merely the sound but all that there is to be heard, perceived, understood, realized. Our own discovery, our process of discovery, is part of the revelation itself. Only in the spirit are the Vedas, Vedas. And now we can understand why for centuries they were neither written down nor expounded to outsiders.¹⁴ And thus too, the Vedas do not reveal themselves to just anyone who hears them as the R̥gveda itself warns :¹⁵

Yet certain ones, though seeing, may not see her,
and other ones, though hearing, may not hear her.
But to some the Word reveals herself quite freely,
like fair-robed bride surrendering to her husband.

[R̥gveda X, 71].

But what is more interesting is another verse in one of the Brāhmaṇas, a part of the Vedas, which addresses itself to the goddess known as *Vāc* or Word :¹⁶

13. *Ibid.* p. 13. 14. *Ibid.* p. 13.

15. R̥gveda X. 71 [*Ibid.* p. 94].

16. *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* II.8 8.5. (tr. Panikkar p. 88). Commenting on this *mantra*, Panikkar says, "*Vāc* is really the total living Word, that is to say, the Word in her entirety, including her material aspects, her cosmic reverberations, her visible form, her sound, her meaning, her message. *Vāc* is more."

The Word, imperishable, is the Firstborn
of Truth, mother of the Veda and the hub of
immortality. May she come to us in
happiness in the sacrifice! May she, our
protecting Goddess, be easy of entreaty! [TB II, 8, 8, 5].

This hymn, we might just mention in passing, brings to mind the first
verse of the Gospel of St John in the New Testament—namely,

In the beginning was the Word (*logos*),
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God [Jn 1:1].

6. The Veda and the Vedas

It is sufficient then that the words *qua* speech are regarded to be self-manifested, not as the literal terms or the verbal sounds we usually though mistakenly identify to be the words, but in the sense of the manifestation of wisdom, in symbolic propositional form—it is this that is the *Veda*, which when written down becomes the *Vedas* (plural); but prior to the Veda being written it can only be “heard”. And the viewpoint of the “hearer” overrides or takes precedence over the speaker’s - because, in a manner of speaking, there is no speaker as such. Further, the nexus between the “revealer” or the revelatory power - in this case the “heard word” - and the audience, the hearer, is the lived experience of the hearer, individually or communally. And this too in the context of the historical continuity of the culture that enshrines the revelation in terms of the practical demands and concrete realities of everyday living; in other words, the perception is translated into concrete and fluid cultural praxis and not preserved merely in scriptures which tend to resemble dead parchment. The emphasis, precisely, is on *śruti* then, so that the hearer keeps his ears, so to speak, to the ground of experience. And each hearer or listener who is initiated in the process continues the revelation and contributes to the continuity of the revelation - and it is as much a revelation to him who immerses fully into the significance of what is heard by him, as it was for the seers of old, who apparently first “heard” these words.

It must be clearly understood that linguistic comprehension is not all that is meant here; much more is required by way of an earnest and existential participation in the symbolic, almost poetic exuberance

of the words, whose intentionality extends beyond the phenomenological *epoche* with regard to the "source", to a hermeneutical dimension. It is the felt-meaning therefore in the relevant context that is to be tapped from the roots of *śruti*. The power or *śakti* to effect this is in the word itself, as we argued earlier. The *word* then is revelation.

7. Methodology and role of Īśvara (God) in śruti

To pursue the question of methodology a step further, let me say something on this and relate the whole question to the role of *Īśvara* or God *vis-ś-vis apauruṣeya* from a methodological standpoint.

The following methodological structures are outlined for the successful deployment of *śruti* :

- i) *śruti* should reveal truths which are novel and meta-empirical (*alaukika*), that is, *śruti* should be able to show competence in the realm where the more ordinary *pramāṇas* are not capable—this principle is expressed succinctly in the *Mīmāṃsā* maxim '*arthe anupalabdhe*':¹⁷ in respect of object (otherwise) not known or knowable;
- ii) what *śruti* reveals should not be contradicted by or be inconsistent with what is known through other *pramāṇas* about the same matter—this is known as *abādhita*: for example,

17. Jamini in *Mīmāṃsā sūtra* 1.1.5. the so-called *autpattika sūtra* : The criterion of 'novelty' *qua apūrvatva*. Śaṅkara in his *bhāṣya* on the *Brahma-sūtra* also makes this point but with respect to the knowledge of Brahman as distinct from, or just merely, the set of injunctions and prescriptions as *Mīmāṃsā* insists upon, unavailable from any source but that of the *Śāstras* or scriptures under B.S.B.1.1.4, (p. 99), *iti brahmātmabhāvasya Śāstramantareṅānavagamyanāntvāt* and *ātmavijñānasya phalaparyantatvāna tadviśayasya śāstrasya prāmāṇyaṁ śakyaṁ pratyākhyātum*. It is in the scriptures that Śaṅkara finds the absolute authority for Brahman, though he insists on the need of *direct* realization of Brahman as *atman*, the innermost "essence" or *being* of the individual. Śaṅkara, also under 1.1.4, makes the point about the need of a *pramāṇa* to be authoritative in its own right, which it does if it can generate knowledge which is not revealed by any other means, but is yet in harmony with other *pramāṇas*—i.e., not contradicted by other *pramāṇas*. See *Bhāmati* for comm. on Śaṅkara on this, pp. 155-6.

śruti should not proclaim fire to be cold when perception *pratyaksha* informs us that fire is hot;¹⁸

- iii) reason should be able to portend what *śruti* attempts to enlighten us about—that is, the ‘truths’ of *śruti* should at least be shown to be probable on purely rational grounds;¹⁹
- iv) knowledge derived from *śruti* should lead to fruitful results of successful activity (*phalānukūla* or *samarthapravṛtti*), even if the *phala* (result) takes some time to manifest, which could be due to delayed causality or *apūrva*.

These stipulations are set firmly by *Mīmāṃsā*, and collectively this is a consequence of the *Mīmāṃsā* view of *śruti* which rules out the place of God [*Īśvara*] in the process, of both revelation and its operation. It is really only with the Nyāya school that *Īśvara* is introduced with great zeal into the picture, so to say. As regards the role of *Īśvara*, Nyāya maintains that *Īśvara* is actively involved in handing down the Vedas to man, and that because the Vedas are assertions of a special person, namely *Īśvara*, that Vedas are regarded as reliable and authoritative.²⁰ Thus reliability and the special character of *Īśvara* is what gives the Vedas their authenticity as a corpus of revelation. They deny the *Mīmāṃsā* view that the authenticity of the Vedas rests with the eternality of the words; however, because they are words of a special being their signficatory power is unique and they have specific “efficacy” especially with respect to non-perceivable objects or consequences [*adr̥ṣṭā*].

18. Śaṅkara in his commentary on *The Bhagavad Gita*, ch. XVIII, in conclusion, p. 515, tr. by Alladi Mahadeva Sastry, *The Bhagavad Gita with the Commentary of Śrī Śaṅkarāchārya*, (Samata Books, Madras, 1977), says that *Śruti* lies beyond the range of human, ordinary knowledge, and that “we should in no way attach to *Śruti* a meaning which is opposed to other authorities or to its own declaration. See also n. 54 *infra*, and n. 72 (Ch 9, *ante*.)

19. Cf. Hiriyanā, *Outline of Indian Philosophy*, [Bombay: Allen Unwin, 1973, p. 181 ff.] Hiriyanā quotes Anandajñāna’s gloss on Śaṅkara’s commentary on Brh. Up. (p. 8): *Sam̐bhāvānā-mātreṇa liṅgopanyāsaḥ. Na hi niścaya-katvena tadupanyasyate*: not as absolute determinants but as being measures of possibility.

20. Vātsyāyana says the same in commenting on *Nyāya-sūtras* 1.1.8 See also N.S. II. 1.69 and *bhāṣyas*. See also discussions in G. Chemparathy *An Indian Rational Theology*, Introduction to *Udayana’s Nyāyakusumāñjali* (Vienna: 1972).

The Advaita school²¹ comes in at this point and agrees with Nyāya that, (a) the words of *śruti* are special words with a unique efficacious power, and (b) that *Īśvara* is involved actively in the handing down of the Vedas. However, Advaita argues that *Īśvara* plays the role very much like that of the demiurge in Plato's creative cosmology. That is to say, *Īśvara* is merely the agency that preserves the Vedas after the dissolution of the world [*pralaya*] and returns the Veda to man by uttering it into the ears of the *ṛṣis*. The fact of the uttering on the part of *Īśvara* however does not make God any more the author of the Vedas than the seers who utter them to another generation. True, God does utter the Vedas in the beginning of creation, if there be a creation at all, but He utters what He Himself "heard" in another era, and so on *ad infinitum*.²²

Īśvara is not as such the originator of the Vedas; his utterance is dependent on a similar and previous utterance from another era prior to world-dissolution. *Īśvara* refurbishes the Vedas and hands over the words in a more refined structure and form from the decay the words had undergone in the previous era: his uttering does not amount to an absolute creation; rather his uttering the Vedas is tantamount to a priest or even a parrot repeating what has been heard previously. Thus, *śruti* remains *śruti per se*. Thus also, in speaking of the utterance of the Vedas by *Īśvara* we are merely acknowledging the vehicle, the medium, through which the Vedas came to man in any one era—but

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21. *Vedānta Paribhāsa* by Dharmarājadhvarindra, (Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1942. ed. S. S. Suryanarayan Śastri), Ch. IV or *Āgama*, verses 49ff.
22. In supporting 'origination' Dharmaraja quotes a verse from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* to the effect that the scriptures including the Vedas were "breathed" out by the Great Being (*Bṛh.* II. 4. 10.). V.P. IV. 40-49; also cf. V.P. IV. 54. . . *kintu sajjātiyoccāraṇapek ṣoccāraṇaviṣayatvaṃ*. "The origin of personhood involves the content of such utterance which is not dependent upon (or is indifferent to) another utterance of the same (or similar) kind (and not necessarily in someone speaking it)." In other words, personhoodness is the characteristic of an originated utterance; but since the Vedas, *Īśvara* 'spoke-forth' at the beginning of creation, comprise of dependent-utterances—for *Īśvara* recollects them from a previous era—they cannot be said to be 'originated'; they, therefore, must be 'unique utterances', if utterances at all, and independent of personhood or 'personality', being basically 'transpersonal' (to borrow a term from Sri Sathya Sai Baba, in this context).

we are not attributing the origin of the message to this process itself, which is prior.

One way of looking at this metaphor is to say that here Advaita is talking about the possibility of certain truths, propositionally structured, but prior to their sentential or linguistic expression, existing forever. Such propositions then are the "firstborn of truth", indeed truths themselves, which, however, need to be uttered in expressible forms comprehensible to one hearing. Thus, while *Īśvara* or some personal agency addresses, as it were, these propositions in some expressive guise, this does not make the essential *śruti* any more *personal*: *śruti* remains *apauruṣeya* or *transpersonal*. And when the Vedas are destroyed, the outer sound and letters are destroyed but not what is encapsulated by them and expressed through them, namely the *varṇas*, or inner syllabic pattern that constitute the truths: These together make up *śruti*, and are the real wisdom, *veda*, the insight.²³

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23. Śaṅkara in his *bhāṣya* on the *Brahma-Sūtra* (I. iii. 28) argues that *śruti* is analogous to 'perception' and is a means of knowledge independent of other means. He traces the authoritativeness of *śruti* to the timelessness of the words *qua varṇa*-aggregates that constitute the Vedas. He even goes on to state that the scriptures themselves of the 'creation' of the world from the words of the Vedas (e.g., in *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* II, 2, 4, 2 'uttering *bhur* he created the earth'; and *Manu* I, 21: 'The several names, actions and conditions of all things he shaped from the words of the Veda'). And, he further argues, if there is said to be a divine voice that 'utters' the Vedas at the time of creation of the world, what that indicates is the beginning of the oral tradition of the Vedas, for while the voice that 'utters' has a beginning, the syllables of the Vedas have no beginning or end. That is to say, there is no other sense in which we can talk about 'a voice without beginning and end uttering.' Though Śaṅkara does not identify the timeless words *materially* i.e., ontologically, with Brahman, as Bhartṛhari could be said to do, he identifies the *essence* of the word to be the power of signification in respect of the universal (*ākṛti*) signified, and through which reference to the individual is achieved in specific acts, such as in 'creation'. However, that Vedic words are there from time beginningless is not something Śaṅkara would want us to doubt for once. Śaṅkara in *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya* I. iii. 28 (Thibaut trs., p. 203 ff). cf. "The Word is infinite, immense, beyond all this. . . . All the Gods, the celestial spirits, men and animals, live in the Word. In the Word all the worlds find their support", *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* I, 4.4.1 (Panikkar *op. cit.*, p. 107).

Here then we have a perspective that regards a class of scriptures, the Vedas *qua śruti*, to be propositions which are *sui generis*, unique, undetermined, free from defects of personhood, and which are collectively "revelation" *par excellence*. The metaphysical underpinning of this view is that truth can reveal itself by itself, in the form of a word, and through its revelation lead one back to itself, and for this it is not absolutely dependent on the utterance or the agency of a personhood-being: its firstborn is from within its own centre, as it were, and which is alive in the *words* of the Vedas. But if the Vedas are alive and replete with the original *significance, value and truth*, then their constant hearing should be capable of enkindling the same *significance* and revealing the *understanding* (or 'wisdom') underlying the words, and thereby returning the listener to the source of the firstborn again namely, to *truth* itself. The cycle is then complete. There is in this unique process an awakening from ignorance, just as light negates darkness and illumines the surrounding space. This then highlights one approach to religious scriptures through a particular understanding of revelation *qua śruti* and *apauruṣeya* that places a far greater emphasis on the *word* as the door way which provides an insight into the truths embodied in revelation.