

## CHAPTER 1

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### Veda and Creation

The *ṛcs* are limited (*parimita*), the *sāmans* are limited, and the *yajuses* are limited, but of the Word (*brahman*) there is no end.

—Taittirīya Saṃhitā VII.3.1.4

In the cosmogonic and cosmological speculations of Vedic and post-Vedic mythology the corpus of Vedic *mantras* that has been preserved by the brahmanical lineages is represented as only a limited manifestation of the unlimited, eternal reality of Veda. Among the network of symbols associated with Veda, four complexes persist through the various strata of literature: (1) the Veda is described as the Word (*brahman*), which is the essence of Brahman, the ultimate reality, and is at times designated more specifically as Śabda-brahman (literally, “word-Brahman”), Brahman embodied in the Word; (2) the Veda as the totality of knowledge is also at times identified with the creator principle as the immediate source of creation; (3) the Vedas (plural) are represented as the archetypal plan or blueprint containing the primordial expressions of the divine speech that the creator utters in order to manifest the phenomenal creation; (4) the Vedas in their mundane, transmitted form are the *mantra* collections, or Saṃhitās, of the Ṛg-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sāma-Veda, and Atharva-Veda that are recited by human beings on earth as part of the Vedic sacrificial rites. The following analysis will be primarily concerned with the first three conceptions, since it is these conceptions that point to the cosmological status of the Veda.

Some attention will be given at the end of this chapter to the various philosophical positions adopted by the six Darśanas with respect to the origin, ontology, and authority of the Vedas. While the cosmogonic and cosmological speculations of Vedic and post-Vedic mythology tend to limit their discussion of the textual manifestation of the Veda to the *mantras* or Saṃhitās, the philosophical discussions of the Darśanas focus on the Veda in the broader sense of the term, as encompassing not only the Saṃhitās but also the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads.

The seminal speculations concerning the Veda found in the oldest texts of Vedic literature, the *Samhitās* (ca. 1500–800 B.C.E.), are reinterpreted and elaborated in later Vedic and post-Vedic texts, each genre of texts recasting the inherited paradigm from its own distinctive epistemological perspective and assimilating Veda to those aspects of reality that are of central importance to that perspective. Thus, while the various modes of representing Veda—as constitutive of Brahman, an aspect of the creator principle, or the blueprint of creation—may be found in each layer of texts, certain modes are at times given priority in accordance with the programmatic concerns of the texts. For example, the *Brāhmaṇas* (ca. 900–650 B.C.E.), which form part of the *karma-kāṇḍa*, the section of the Vedas pertaining to action (*karman*), focus on the sacrificial rituals that are to be performed in order to regenerate and maintain the relative creation. In accordance with this sacrificial perspective, the *Brāhmaṇas* elevate the creator Prajāpati, who is celebrated as the source of the sacrifice, the sacrificer, and the sacrifice itself, to the status of the supreme god, and in their discussions of the Veda they are above all concerned to establish the relationship of the Veda to Prajāpati and his consort Vāc, speech. On the other hand, the metaphysical speculations of the *Upaniṣads* (ca. 800–200 B.C.E.), which form part of the *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, the portion of the Vedas pertaining to knowledge (*jñāna*), reflect the sectional interests of certain forest-dwelling sages and ascetic groups that began to define themselves over against the priestly sacrificial tradition from the eighth century B.C.E. onward. Upaniṣadic speculations focus primarily on the ultimate reality—generally termed Brahman or Ātman (Self)—that is the source not only of creation but of the creator principle himself, and thus the relationship of the Veda to Brahman-Ātman becomes a paramount concern in the *Upaniṣads*. In post-Vedic texts that reflect the influence of sectarian devotionism (*bhakti*), such as the *Mahābhārata* (ca. 400 B.C.E.–400 C.E.) and certain *Purāṇas* (ca. 300–1000 C.E. and after), Brahman generally assumes a personalized aspect through becoming identified with either Viṣṇu or Śiva, and the Veda is correspondingly represented as an aspect of Viṣṇu or Śiva.

#### VEDA AND CREATION IN VEDIC TEXTS

The dual mechanisms by means of which the Veda is identified with the limitless Word or knowledge and at the same time is delimited to a bounded corpus of texts—the Vedic *mantras*—are

already evident in the Vedic texts themselves. In the Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads the terms “Veda,” “Vedas,” and their equivalents are used both in an abstract sense to refer to “knowledge” or “Word,” and in a concrete sense to refer to a circumscribed body of texts.

In the Ṛg-Veda Saṃhitā we find numerous reflections by the ṛṣis themselves on the nature and origin of the Vedic hymns.<sup>1</sup> However, the term “Veda” used in a substantive sense occurs rarely, where it generally refers to “knowledge.” Although we find isolated references throughout the Ṛg-Veda to the ṛcs (verses), *yajuses* (sacrificial formulae), and *sāmans* (chants), the most important reference for our purposes is Ṛg-Veda X.90.9, in which the three terms appear together as a triad, implying an emerging conception of the “threefold Veda” that was to become central in later Vedic texts.<sup>2</sup>

The triad *ṛcs*, *yajuses*, and *sāmans* commonly occurs in Vedic texts from the Atharva-Veda Saṃhitā onward, where it is sometimes juxtaposed with the term “Veda” or “Vedas.”<sup>3</sup> The terms “Ṛg-Veda,” “Yajur-Veda,” and “Sāma-Veda” first appear in the Brāhmaṇas and thereafter are frequently used in the Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads.<sup>4</sup> One of the most common designations for the Vedas in these texts is *trayī vidyā*, “threefold knowledge.”<sup>5</sup> The expression *traya veda*, “threefold Veda,” appears less frequently.<sup>6</sup> This prevalent emphasis in the Vedic texts on the “threefold knowledge” of the Ṛg-Veda, Yajur-Veda, and Sāma-Veda suggests that it took some time before the Atharva-Veda was accorded an equivalent status as the fourth Veda. The oldest name of the Atharva-Veda is *atharvāṅgirases*,<sup>7</sup> which occurs in the Atharva-Veda itself.<sup>8</sup> In another early reference from the Taittirīya Saṃhitā the term *āṅgirases* is used by itself to refer to the fourth of the Vedas mentioned after the *ṛcs*, *yajuses*, and *sāmans*.<sup>9</sup> In their discussions of the Veda the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads tend to focus almost exclusively on the threefold Veda, *ṛcs*, *yajuses*, and *sāmans*, with the *atharvāṅgirases* or *atharvans* rarely mentioned along with the other three *mantra* collections.<sup>10</sup> Even when the formal designations Ṛg-Veda, Yajur-Veda, and Sāma-Veda are used for the other three Vedas, the expressions *atharvāṅgirases* or *atharvans* are used to refer to “the fourth” of the Vedas.<sup>11</sup> The term “Atharva-Veda” does not occur until the Sūtra period.<sup>12</sup>

We thus find that the Vedic texts themselves quite frequently refer to the textual status of the Veda as the *mantras* of the Ṛg-Veda, Yajur-Veda, and Sāma-Veda, with only occasional references to the *mantras* of the Atharva-Veda. However, when we examine

the texts more closely we find that this textual definition of Veda as a concrete, finite corpus of *mantras* constitutes only one dimension of the term's meaning. Certain passages in the Vedic texts point to a conception of different levels of the Veda. Thus, while at times the Veda is explicitly identified with the *mantra* collections—"The ṛcs are the Veda. . . . The *yajuses* are the Veda. . . . The *atharvans* are the Veda. . . . The *sāmans* are the Veda."<sup>13</sup>—at other times the "Veda" (singular) is distinguished from the "Vedas" (plural). For example, the Aitareya and Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyakas speak of the "person of the Veda" (*veda-puruṣa*) as distinct from the "Vedas": "That which we have called the person of the Veda is that by which one knows the Vedas, Ṛg-Veda, Yajur-Veda, and Sāma-Veda."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, in a passage in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad the *ṛcs*, *yajuses*, and *sāmans* are clearly distinguished from the Ṛg-Veda, Yajur-Veda, and Sāma-Veda, respectively. The passage, in its discussion of the sun as the honey extracted from the four Vedas, describes the *ṛcs*, *yajuses*, and *sāmans* as the bees that brood upon the flowers of the Ṛg-Veda, Yajur-Veda, and Sāma-Veda, respectively, in order to extract their essences.<sup>15</sup> Although the passage does not elaborate on what is meant by this distinction, it nevertheless appears that a clear differentiation is intended, particularly since the flower that the *atharvāṅgirases* brood upon as bees is the Itihāsa-Purāṇa, an entirely different set of texts.<sup>16</sup>

Passages such as those cited above remind us of the need to avoid the tendency to collapse the distinctions between various terms—for example, Veda, Vedas, *ṛcs*, Ṛg-Veda—into a single monolithic definition of Veda as a circumscribed body of texts. As we shall see in the following analysis, the textual dimension of Veda is represented in the Vedic texts themselves as only one aspect of the reality of Veda. The Vedic texts also emphasize the Veda's primordial status as that eternal, infinite Word or knowledge which is inherent in the fabric of reality and which is expressed as the impulses of divine speech from which the phenomenal creation is manifested.

### *Samhitās*

During the Samhitā period (ca. 1500–800 B.C.E.) Aryan religious life became increasingly dominated by the fire sacrifice (*yajña*). In the period of the Ṛg-Veda Samhitā (ca. 1500–1200 B.C.E.), the oldest and most important text of Vedic literature, the sacrificial tradition had already attained a fairly high level of development. A simpli-

fied form of the fire sacrifice and a hereditary priesthood, with an incipient division of functions among various types of priests, are evident even in this early period.<sup>17</sup> The Ṛg-Veda itself contains a large number of hymns that were clearly intended to serve as sacrificial litanies. Even those hymns that arose independently of the sacrificial ritual later came to be used in liturgical contexts. However, it is not until the period of the liturgical Saṃhitās, the Sāma-Veda and Yajur-Veda Saṃhitās (ca. 900 B.C.E.), that we find the developed system of *śrauta* sacrifices that utilizes three fires—*gārhapatya*, *āhavanīya*, and *dakṣiṇa*—and four principal categories of priests—*hotṛ*, *udgāṭṛ*, *adhvaryu*, and *brahman*.

Along with the division of ritual functions among the four classes of priest came a demarcation of the respective roles of the different types of *mantras* in the sacrificial ritual: the *hotṛ* priest was assigned the responsibility of reciting the *ṛcs* of the Ṛg-Veda Saṃhitā, which consist primarily of praises of and invocations to the gods; the *udgāṭṛ* priest was responsible for chanting the *sāmans* of the Sāma-Veda Saṃhitā, which consist almost entirely of verses from the Ṛg-Veda set to fixed melodies; the *adhvaryu* priest was allotted the role of performing the sacrificial actions while muttering the *yajuses* of the Yajur-Veda Saṃhitās, which comprise sacrificial formulae that accompany the ritual manipulations; and the *brahman* priest was entrusted with the supervision of the entire sacrificial ritual in order to counteract by means of expiatory formulas (*prāyaścittas*) any mistakes made by the other priests. The *brahman* priest was originally associated not with any particular Veda but rather with the totality of the threefold Veda, *trayī vidyā*.<sup>18</sup> When the Atharva-Veda Saṃhitā (ca. 1100–800 B.C.E.), which contains popular religious elements in the form of incantations and imprecations as well as a number of speculative hymns, was eventually granted the status of the fourth Veda alongside the *trayī vidyā*, it also assumed a role in the sacrificial rituals as the Veda of the *brahman* priest.

The preeminent position granted to the sacrifice in the Vedic conception of reality is already evident in the Ṛg-Veda Saṃhitā, which represents the sacrifice as an inherent part of the cosmic order. *Ṛta*, the cosmic ordering principle, is described as governing not only the course of nature and the moral conduct of human beings but also the correct performance of the sacrifice (*yajña*). Moreover, the sacrifice is represented in several Ṛg-Vedic hymns as the means through which the creation is brought forth in the beginning. By the end of the Saṃhitā period the sacrifice had been ele-

vated to the status of a separate order of reality (*adhiyajña*), which was correlated with the other orders of reality—the human order (*adhyātma*), natural order (*adhibhūta*), and divine order (*adhidaiva*)—and which was viewed as essential to the harmonious functioning of all levels of the cosmos.

The Vedic *mantras*, as the sound offerings of the sacrifice, are granted a special status in the Saṃhitās as a constitutive part of the cosmic order that emerges from the body of the creator principle in the beginning of creation. The *mantras* are celebrated as manifestations of the power of *brahman*, the Word, which is elevated in the Atharva-Veda Saṃhitā to the status of a cosmic principle. As expressions of the Word the *mantras* are also linked to Vāc, speech, which is hypostatized in the Ṛg-Veda as a feminine principle that finds its most potent expression on the human plane in the speech of the *ṛṣis*, whose hymns are recited in the sacrificial rituals.

The conception of Veda that is found in the Ṛg-Veda Saṃhitā is dynamic and reflexive, for the hymns are still in the process of emerging as the *ṛṣis*, the “seers” of the hymns, speak. The Ṛg-Vedic hymns do not refer to the Saṃhitās, in the sense of fixed collections, but rather to the *mantras* themselves, and in particular the *ṛcs*. The hymns are self-referential in that they are concerned with describing the mechanisms through which the *ṛṣis* received their divinely inspired cognitions and gave them vocalized expression in recited hymns.<sup>19</sup> Although the hymns make occasional reference to the *yajuses* (sacrificial formulae) and *sāmans* (chants), the triad *ṛcs*, *yajuses*, and *sāmans* only appears once in the Ṛg-Veda.<sup>20</sup> The notion of the threefold Veda as an objectified body of *mantra* collections occurs more frequently from the Atharva-Veda Saṃhitā onward, with occasional references to the *atharvāṅgirases*.

*Veda, the Creator, and Creation* Brahmanical conceptions of the status and role of the Veda in creation, as reflected in the formulations of both Vedic and post-Vedic texts, have their foundation in the cosmogonic and cosmological speculations of the Ṛg-Veda. One of the preoccupations of the *ṛṣis*, as represented in the hymns, is to discern with their “mind’s eye” the subtle realms of the gods and to fathom the mysteries of creation.<sup>21</sup> The speculations of the *ṛṣis* are not presented in the form of a single continuous creation narrative but rather appear in a number of discrete hymns, attributed to different *ṛṣis*, that each treat a certain piece of the cosmogonic puzzle without attempting to explain how the different pieces fit together.<sup>22</sup> In order to understand the Ṛg-Vedic conception of the role



of the Veda in creation we first need to examine briefly the range of cosmogonic speculations found in the hymns, and in particular in the creation hymns of the tenth Maṇḍala (book), which is generally held to be the latest portion of the Ṛg-Veda.

The creation hymns of the Ṛg-Veda present in seminal form certain symbolic structures and patterns that are further developed in the cosmogonies of the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads from different perspectives, becoming interwoven into a single creation narrative in the Manu-Smṛti and finally gaining their most detailed elaboration in epic and Purāṇic accounts. Among these symbolic structures we can distinguish a number of creative principles or agents and a variety of means through which the universe is brought forth.

### *Creative Principles*

- the unmanifest Absolute, which is the ultimate source of creation (That One [Tad Ekam]—RV X.129; the Unborn [Aja]—RV X.82)
- the personal creator god, who is the fashioner of the three worlds—earth, midregions, and heaven (Prajāpati—RV X.121; Viśvakarman—RV X.81 and X.82)
- the waters (*ap, ambhas, salila*), which represent the feminine principle that serves as the primordial matrix of creation (RV X.129; X.121; X.82) and which are at times associated with Vāc, the goddess of speech (RV X.125; X.71)
- the cosmic embryo or egg (*garbha*), which contains the totality of creation in yet undifferentiated form (RV X.121; X.82)
- Puruṣa, the cosmic Man out of whose body the different parts of the universe are formed (RV X.90; X.130)

### *Creative Means*

- desire (RV X.129; X.81)
- *tapas*<sup>23</sup> (RV X.129; X.190)
- procreation
- sacrifice (*yajña*) (RV X.90; X.81; X.82; X.130)
- speech (*vāc*) (RV X.125; X.71), which is at times linked to the Vedic *mantras*

In order to understand the structure of relations among these various constituent elements of creation, we must distinguish first of all between different stages in the process of creation. F. B. J. Kuiper, in his attempt to reconstruct the Vedic cosmogonic myth,

has suggested that this myth comprises two different stages. (1) In the first stage the primordial world was “an undivided unity, a *rudis indigestaque moles*,” which consisted of the primordial waters and the undifferentiated totality of the cosmos—frequently represented by the image of the cosmic egg—floating on the surface of the waters. (2) In the second stage heaven and earth were separated out of the originally undifferentiated unity, either through an autonomous process of division or through the demiurgic act of a god.<sup>24</sup> Although the details of Kuiper’s thesis need not concern us here, my own research confirms that this basic two-stage pattern of creation is fundamental to both Vedic and post-Vedic cosmogonies. These two stages are most clearly evident in the Brāhmaṇas and later texts, but the seeds of this two-phase paradigm can already be discerned as early as the Ṛg-Veda.

The account in Ṛg-Veda X.129, the Nāsadiya hymn, corresponds to the first stage, in that it describes the mechanisms of emergence from a state of unmanifest, undifferentiated unity in which Tad Ekam, “That One,” alone exists, and along with it the primordial waters, stretching endlessly in the darkness. The hymn describes the very beginnings of the process through which That One, that single, primordial unity, begins to reverberate within itself and gives rise to duality. However, the hymn does not elaborate on how heaven and earth manifest from the unmanifest.

The creation of heaven and earth represents a later stage in the cosmogonic process, the second in our two-stage pattern. This second stage, in which the primordial unity differentiates in order to give rise to the three worlds—earth (*pṛthivī*, *bhūmi*), midregions (*antarikṣa*), and heaven (*div*)—and all beings, is described in other hymns of the Ṛg-Veda as the demiurgic act of a personal creator god. In Ṛg-Veda X.121 the creator and supporter of heaven and earth and the vivifier and lord of all beings is called Prajāpati (“lord of created beings”) and Hiraṇyagarbha (“golden embryo or egg”), while in Ṛg-Veda X.81 and X.82 he is called Viśvakarman (“maker of all”). Ṛg-Veda X.81 is of particular significance in that it portrays the creator Viśvakarman as the lord of speech (*vācas-pati*) and the primordial ṛṣi and *hotṛ* priest who takes his place upon the seat of sacrifice and offers up (root *yaj*) heaven and earth in sacrifice.<sup>25</sup> Ṛg-Veda X.82 similarly alludes to the primeval sacrifice and points to the role of the ṛṣis, the seers of the Vedic *mantras*, in the cosmogonic process.<sup>26</sup>

Ṛg-Veda X.90, the famous Puruṣa-Sūkta, in contrast to such conceptions of a personal creator god, presents a more monistic per-



spective, in which the one, all-pervading principle that is the source and basis of the cosmos is Puruṣa, the cosmic Man, the unified ground of all existence. Like Ṛg-Veda X.81 and X.82, the Puruṣa-Sūkta describes the primordial sacrifice (*yajña*) as the means through which creation is brought forth, although in this hymn Puruṣa assumes the role not of the sacrificer but of the sacrificial victim. In verses 1–5 Puruṣa is described as both immanent and transcendent. Possessing a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand feet, Puruṣa pervades (root *vr*) the earth on every side, and yet he extends beyond (root *sthā + ati*) it a measure of ten fingers. One quarter of him is manifested here on earth as all beings, while the other three quarters are the immortal (*amṛta*) in heaven. The differentiation of the totality of Puruṣa is described in verses 6–16 as occurring through a sacrifice in which the different parts of his cosmic body are offered up to form the different aspects of the universe. Although the Vedic *mantras* are depicted as one of the original products of the primeval sacrifice, they are not explicitly allotted a role in the process of creation. However, as in Ṛg-Veda X.82, the *ṛṣis* are portrayed as assuming a cosmogonic role as those who, along with the gods and Sādhyas, perform the archetypal sacrifice through which the universe is brought forth.<sup>27</sup>

Verses 6–10 of the Puruṣa-Sūkta establish a reciprocal relationship between the sacrificial and natural orders. On the one hand, certain elements of the natural order—in particular, the seasons—are used as ritual materials in the primeval sacrifice. On the other hand, the sacrifice gives rise to different aspects of the natural order—in particular, various types of animals, including horses, cattle, goats, and sheep, which are the primary offerings used in animal sacrifices. This reciprocity is also reflected within the elements of the sacrifice itself. The *ṛcs*, *sāmans*, and *yajuses*, as well as the meters (*chandases*) in which the Vedic *mantras* are composed, are described as emerging from the primordial sacrifice of Puruṣa, and they in turn provide the sound offerings that are essential to the sacrificial ritual.

From that sacrifice (*yajña*), in which all was offered, the *ṛcs* and *sāmans* were born; the meters (*chandases*) were born from it; from it the *yajus* was born.<sup>28</sup>

Verses 11–14 go on to establish a series of correlations between the different parts of the cosmic body of Puruṣa and the different aspects of the human, natural, and divine orders.

When they divided Puruṣa, into how many parts did they apportion him? What was his mouth? What were his arms? What were his thighs and feet declared to be?

His mouth became the brahmin; [from] his arms the *kṣatriya* was made; his thighs became the *vaiśya*; from his feet the *śūdra* was born.

The moon was born from his mind; from his eye Sūrya, the sun, was born; from his mouth came Indra and Agni, fire; from his breath Vāyu, wind, was born.

From his navel arose the midregions; from his head the heaven originated; from his feet came the earth; from his ear the cardinal directions. Thus they fashioned the worlds.

The hymn thus establishes connections among the various orders of reality, in which the sacrificial order, by means of which the cosmic body of Puruṣa is divided, is represented as giving rise to different components of the human, natural, and divine orders. The human order in this schema includes not only the different parts of the human body, which is a microcosmic replica of the cosmic body of Puruṣa, but also the social order with its division into four classes (*varṇas*)—brahmins (priests), *kṣatriyas* (royalty and warriors), *vaiśyas* (merchants, agriculturalists, and artisans), and *śūdras* (servants and manual laborers). The natural order as described in the hymn encompasses the three worlds, elements such as fire, wind, and sun, and various types of animals. The divine order includes the presiding deities of these elements, Agni, Vāyu, and Sūrya, along with other gods such as Indra. In later Vedic texts, as we shall see, these various components are brought together in a more systematic tripartite classificatory schema, in which the homologies in verse 13 between the faculties of speech (mouth), breath, and eye and the elements fire, wind, and sun, together with their presiding deities, are extended to include direct correlations with the three Vedas, Ṛg, Yajur, and Sāma; the three worlds, earth, midregions, and heaven; and the three higher *varṇas*, brahmins, *kṣatriyas*, and *vaiśyas*.<sup>29</sup>

Ṛg-Veda X.130 provides an alternative image of the primeval sacrifice, in which Puruṣa is portrayed not as the sacrificial victim but rather as one of the primary performers who “weaves” the sacrifice along with the gods. The hymn also grants the Vedic *mantras* a significant role in the creative process. The gods, as the weavers,

are each associated with a particular Vedic meter. Moreover, the gods are said to use the *sāmans* as shuttles that weave back and forth in order to produce the concrete fabric of creation from the original outstretched threads.<sup>30</sup>

The cosmogonic speculations of the Atharva-Veda and later Saṃhitās build and elaborate upon R̥g-Vedic conceptions of the cosmic origin and status of the Veda. Prajāpati is singled out as the paramount creator god in the Atharva-Veda Saṃhitā, Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā (White Yajur-Veda), and Taittirīya Saṃhitā (Black Yajur-Veda), and thus the primordial Veda becomes associated in particular with Prajāpati. In the Taittirīya Saṃhitā, Prajāpati—who assumes a role tantamount to that of Puruṣa in the Puruṣa-Sūkta—is identified with the sacrifice<sup>31</sup> and is celebrated as its creator.<sup>32</sup> He is depicted as the primordial ṛṣi who “sees” (root *drś*) certain ṛcs, ritual formulae, meters, and sacrificial rites<sup>33</sup> and then, assuming the role of the first priest, performs the various sacrifices in order to bring forth beings.<sup>34</sup>

Taittirīya Saṃhitā VII.1.1.4–6 describes Prajāpati as bringing forth from different parts of his body certain aspects of the Vedas that are used in the sacrificial ritual: lauds (*stomas*), chants (*sāmans*), and Vedic meters. The *stomas*, *sāmans*, and meters are further correlated with specific gods, social classes, and animals that emerge from the corresponding parts of Prajāpati’s body.

Prajāpati desired, “May I reproduce.” From his mouth he measured out the *trivṛt* (nine-versed) *stoma*. Subsequently the deity Agni was brought forth, the *gāyatrī* meter, the *rathantara sāman*, among human beings the brahmin, among animals the goat. Therefore they are foremost, for they were brought forth from the mouth. From his chest and arms he measured out the *pañcadaśa* (fifteen-versed) *stoma*. Subsequently the deity Indra was brought forth, the *triṣṭubh* meter, the *brhat sāman*, among human beings the *kṣatriya*, among animals the sheep. Therefore they are strong, for they were brought forth from strength. From his middle he measured out the *saptadaśa* (seventeen-versed) *stoma*. Subsequently the deities the Viśvadevas were brought forth, the *jagatī* meter, the *vairūpa sāman*, among human beings the *vaiśya*, among animals the cows. Therefore they are to be eaten, for they were brought forth from the receptacle of food. Therefore they are more abundant than the others, for they were brought forth after the

most abundant of the deities. From his feet he measured out the *ekaviṃśa* (twenty-one-versed) *stoma*. Subsequently the *anuṣṭubh* meter was brought forth, the *vairāja sāman*, among human beings the *śūdra*, among animals the horse. Therefore these two, the horse and the *śūdra*, are dependent on others. Therefore the *śūdra* is not fit for the sacrifice, for he was not brought forth after any deities. Therefore they support themselves by their feet, for they were brought forth from the feet.<sup>35</sup>

In this passage a number of the components that are depicted in the *Puruṣa-Sūkta* as emerging from the sacrifice of *Puruṣa-sāmans*, Vedic meters, gods, *varṇas*, and animals—are incorporated in a fourfold taxonomy that directly correlates these various components and ranks them hierarchically. Two aspects of these correspondences are of particular significance. First, the connections established in this passage between certain *stomas*, meters, and *sāmans* are fairly consistently replicated in later Vedic and post-Vedic texts, becoming further correlated in the *Purāṇas* with the four Vedas—*ṛcs*, *yajuses*, *sāmans*, and *atharvans*—that emerge from the four mouths of the creator *Brahmā*.<sup>36</sup> Second, this fourfold set of correspondences is at times incorporated in later Vedic texts in a threefold taxonomy that eliminates the bottom stratum in the hierarchy and focuses on the correlations between certain triads: the meters *gāyatrī*, *triṣṭubh*, and *jagatī*; the *varṇas* brahmin, *kṣatriya*, and *vaiśya*; and the gods *Agni*, *Indra*, and *Viśvadevas*. This taxonomy, which homologizes the Vedic meters and *varṇas*, together with the alternative classificatory schema mentioned earlier, which connects the three Vedas and the *varṇas*, provides a transcendent source of legitimation for the social hierarchy through assimilating it to the primordial *Veda*.<sup>37</sup>

*Veda and Brahman* In the *Atharva-Veda Saṃhitā* the *Veda* is linked not only to the creator *Prajāpati* but also to that ultimate reality which is the source and foundation of the creator principle: *Brahman*. The conception of *Brahman* as a cosmic principle is not developed in the *Ṛg-Veda*. However, as we have seen, we do find antecedents of the notion of *Brahman* in the conception of a unitary ground of existence that is the ultimate source of the cosmos: *Tad Ekam* in *Ṛg-Veda* X.129 and *Puruṣa* in *Ṛg-Veda* X.90.

In the *Ṛg-Veda* and later *Saṃhitās* the term *brahman* itself is

used, depending on the context, at times to refer to Veda, in the general sense of "Word," and at other times to refer more specifically to the Vedic *mantras*. The following passage from the Taittirīya Saṃhitā, for example, uses the term *brahman* to refer to that limitless totality of the Word, Veda, of which the Vedic *mantras*—*ṛcs*, *sāmans*, and *yajuses*—are but a limited manifestation.

The *ṛcs* are limited (*parimita*), the *sāmans* are limited, and the *yajuses* are limited, but of the Word (*brahman*) there is no end.<sup>38</sup>

The term *brahman* is also used in the Saṃhitās to signify the power inherent in the Word or in the Vedic *mantras*. In the Atharva-Veda the meaning of the term is extended to encompass that cosmic power or principle which underlies and gives rise to the universe.<sup>39</sup>

It is in the Atharva-Veda that we first find the notion that the Vedic *mantras* form different parts of the cosmic body of Brahman. The antecedent of this conception is found in the Puruṣa-Sūkta's description of the *mantras* emerging from the sacrifice of the body of Puruṣa, but Puruṣa is not identified with Brahman in this hymn. Atharva-Veda X.7 celebrates Skambha (literally, "support") as Brahman, the all-pervading reality that is the foundation of the entire cosmos. Skambha is depicted as embracing the infinity of space, encompassing within his body all the worlds, natural phenomena, and gods, and also as embracing the infinity of time, incorporating within himself all divisions of time, past, present, and future. Skambha is described as distinct from and superior to the creator Prajāpati, serving as the foundation on which Prajāpati establishes the worlds.<sup>40</sup>

The term *brahman* is used a number of times in the hymn in at least two different senses: first, to refer to the highest Brahman, which is a cosmic principle identified with Skambha, of whom the earth is the basis, the midregions his belly, and the heavens his head;<sup>41</sup> and, second, to refer to the Vedic *mantras*, which as a limited manifestation of the totality of Veda are depicted in one verse as forming only a portion of the cosmic body of Skambha—his mouth.<sup>42</sup> In verse 14 the *ṛcs*, *yajuses*, and *sāmans* are explicitly described as residing within Skambha, while in verse 20 they are depicted, along with the *atharvāṅgirases*, as forming various parts of Skambha's body.

Declare who, pray, is that Skambha from whom they cut off the ṛcs, from whom they scraped off the yajus, of whom the sāmans are the hairs, the atharvāṅgirases the mouth?

In Atharva-Veda IX.6.1–2 the Vedic *mantras* are similarly described as constituting different parts of the body of Brahman, with the ṛcs forming the spine, the sāmans the hairs, and the yajuses the heart.

*Veda and Vāc* In their identification with *brahman* the Vedic *mantras* are understood as expressions of the Word and therefore as manifestations of Vāc, speech. The conception of Vāc in the Ṛg-Veda Saṃhitā is already quite complex and multidimensional, encompassing both a divine dimension, in its hypostatization as the goddess Vāc, and an earthly dimension, in its diversified expressions in human language.<sup>43</sup> Ṛg-Veda I.164.45 emphasizes that this mundane dimension constitutes only one quarter of the total reality of Vāc.

Vāc is measured in four quarters. Those *brāhmaṇas* whose thoughts are inspired know them. Three [quarters], hidden in secret, do not issue forth. The fourth [quarter] of Vāc is what human beings speak.<sup>44</sup>

In both her hidden and revealed, divine and earthly, dimensions Vāc is ascribed special creative powers. Ṛg-Veda X.125, a hymn of self-praise by and to the goddess Vāc, celebrates the “Queen” whose abode (*yoni*, literally “womb”) is in the waters (*ap*), from which she spreads forth to pervade heaven and earth and all beings.<sup>45</sup> Vāc is described as both immanent, abiding in many places and entering into many forms,<sup>46</sup> and transcendent, extending beyond heaven and earth in her greatness.<sup>47</sup> Although the Vedic *mantras* are not explicitly mentioned, the goddess Vāc is ascribed the role of investing the ṛṣis with the power of *brahman*: “Him whom I love I make powerful, a possessor of the power of *brahman*, a ṛṣi, a sage.”<sup>48</sup>

Ṛg-Veda X.71, the other hymn in the Ṛg-Veda that is devoted entirely to Vāc, links Vāc directly to the speech of the ṛṣis that gives vocalized expression to the Vedic *mantras*. Those who follow the “track of Vāc” will find her “entered into the ṛṣis,” for it is the ṛṣis who have located the hidden source of speech. Having “distributed her in many places,” the ṛṣis celebrate Vāc by giving her manifest



expression in their own speech.<sup>49</sup> Vāc reveals her hidden nature to those who love her,<sup>50</sup> and it is the seers of the Vedic *mantras* who are celebrated throughout the R̥g-Veda as especially beloved of Vāc, upon whom she bestows her creative powers. For it is the *ṛṣis* alone who are said to have directly apprehended the impulses of knowledge emanating forth from the Transcendent as the subtle expressions of speech. The *ṛṣis* then spoke forth on the gross level that which they cognized on the subtle level, and in this way they preserved the Vedic *mantras* through their own speech, initiating an unbroken line of oral transmission through which the Vedas would be passed down to subsequent generations.<sup>51</sup>

### *Brāhmaṇas*

The speculations of the Saṃhitās concerning the origin and cosmological status of the Veda are reinterpreted in the Brāhmaṇas (ca. 900–650 B.C.E.), sacrificial manuals attached to the Saṃhitās, in light of an elaborate discourse of sacrifice. In their discussions of the textual manifestation of the Veda the Brāhmaṇas tend to focus almost exclusively on the three *mantra* collections, *ṛcs*, *yajuses*, and *sāmans*, that are essential to the performance of Vedic sacrifices. Although the Brāhmaṇas were accorded canonical status retroactively as part of the *karma-kāṇḍa*, the section of the Vedas concerned with action (*karman*), the Brāhmaṇas do not deem themselves to be part of the Veda. Nevertheless, they do establish the mechanisms whereby the purview of Veda could be subsequently expanded by emphasizing that, while on one level the Veda is delimited to a bounded corpus of texts—the Vedic *mantras*—on another level its domain is unlimited, for it constitutes the unbounded, primordial Word.

The Brāhmaṇas contain detailed prescriptions for the *śrauta* sacrifices, providing the rules (*vidhis*) for the performance of each ceremony as well as expositions (*arthavāda*) of the purpose and meaning of the sacrificial acts and *mantras*.<sup>52</sup> These sacrificial manuals are concerned with the correct performance of Vedic rituals in order to accomplish a twofold purpose: on an individual level, to attain for the patron of the sacrifice (*yajamāna*) certain worldly ends in this life and to construct for him a divine self (*daiivātman*) in order to convey him to the world of heaven (*svarga loka*); and on a cosmic level, to regenerate and maintain the cosmic order. While the sacrificial perspective and cosmological orientation of the Brāhmaṇas are fairly consistently articulated throughout the vari-

ous texts, certain differences are also evident in that each Brāhmaṇa emphasizes those aspects of the sacrificial ritual that are associated with the corresponding Saṃhitā and its priest. Thus, the Brāhmaṇas of the Ṛg-Veda, the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa and the Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa, focus primarily on the duties of the *hotṛ* priest; the Brāhmaṇas of the Yajur-Veda, the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa of the Black Yajur-Veda and the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa of the White Yajur-Veda, are concerned with the duties of the *adhvaryu* priest; and the Brāhmaṇas of the Sāma-Veda, the Pañcaviṃśa or Tāṇḍya Brāhmaṇa, its supplement the Ṣaḍviṃśa Brāhmaṇa, and the Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa, focus on the duties of the *udgātṛ* priest.<sup>53</sup>

The generative epistemological framework for the cosmogonic and cosmological speculations of the Brāhmaṇas is thus the discourse of sacrifice. The sacrificial discourse of the Brāhmaṇas is founded upon the speculations of the Puruṣa-Sūkta and in this context evidences three principal concerns: to establish the identity of Puruṣa with Prajāpati, who, as in the later Saṃhitās, is celebrated as the supreme god and creator in the Brāhmaṇas; to establish the cosmic import of the sacrifice as the counterpart of the Puruṣa Prajāpati; and to delineate the role of the sacrificial order in regenerating the cosmic order through enlivening the connections (*bandhus*) between the human, natural, and divine orders. The Veda, both as a cosmological principle embedded in the cosmic order and as the recited texts that form an integral part of the sacrificial order, is granted a pivotal role in this sacrificial discourse.

In the Brāhmaṇas Prajāpati is explicitly identified with Puruṣa<sup>54</sup> and is celebrated as the primary participant in the primeval sacrifice from which the different parts of the universe are formed. Like Puruṣa in the Puruṣa-Sūkta, Prajāpati is described in the Brāhmaṇas as both immanent and transcendent, pervading the entire universe<sup>55</sup> and yet at the same time extending beyond it.<sup>56</sup> He encompasses both the human and the divine realms<sup>57</sup> and is both mortal (*martya*) and immortal (*amṛta*),<sup>58</sup> expressed (*nirukta*) and unexpressed (*anirukta*),<sup>59</sup> limited (*parimita*) and unlimited (*aparimita*).<sup>60</sup> In his role as the unitary source and foundation of creation Prajāpati is at times identified in the Brāhmaṇas with Brahman.<sup>61</sup>

Prajāpati is primarily portrayed in the Brāhmaṇas in his role as creator, and as such he is identified not only with Puruṣa but also with the other creative principles celebrated in the creation hymns of the Ṛg-Veda, such as Viśvakarman<sup>62</sup> and Hiraṇyagarbha.<sup>63</sup> In the Brāhmaṇas the various characteristics and func-

tions ascribed to these creative principles are assumed by Prajāpati, who provides the integrating frame for the creation narrative into which are incorporated the various elements found in disjunctive form in R̥g-Vedic hymns. Nearly all of the accounts of creation in the Brāhmaṇas begin with the statement, "In the beginning Prajāpati alone was here."<sup>64</sup> In the Brāhmaṇas it is Prajāpati who is the creator, ruler, and preserver of heaven and earth; the father of the gods, demons, and human beings; and the lord of all creatures. It is Prajāpati who desires to bring forth creation and who performs *tapas* in order to accomplish his desire. It is Prajāpati who implants his seed in the waters and who both generates and is born from the cosmic egg. It is Prajāpati who harnesses the power of Vāc and unites with her as his consort.<sup>65</sup>

Prajāpati is above all celebrated in the Brāhmaṇas, as in the Taittirīya Saṃhitā, as the creator of the sacrifice,<sup>66</sup> the first performer of the sacrifice,<sup>67</sup> and the sacrifice itself.<sup>68</sup> The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa declares:

Having given his self (*ātman*) to the gods, he [Prajāpati] then brought forth that counterpart (*pratimā*) of himself which is the sacrifice (*yajña*). Therefore they say, "The sacrifice is Prajāpati," for he brought it forth as a counterpart of himself.<sup>69</sup>

As Brian K. Smith has emphasized, the initial generative act of Prajāpati, as described in the creation accounts of the Brāhmaṇas, generally results in a chaotic creation rather than an ordered cosmos. It is only by creating the counterpart of himself, the sacrifice, that Prajāpati obtained the "instrument of cosmic healing and construction" that was necessary in order to structure an ordered cosmos as well as to revitalize his own disintegrated being.<sup>70</sup> The sacrifice is at times described not only as the instrument of reparation but also as the instrument of creation by means of which Prajāpati sets in motion the entire universe<sup>71</sup> and brings forth all beings.<sup>72</sup> Thus, every time human beings—and the brahmin priests in particular—reenact the primeval sacrifice on earth, they participate in the creative process of constructing an orderly cosmos.

Prajāpati indeed is that sacrifice (*yajña*) which is being performed here and from which these beings were produced, and in the same manner are they produced thereafter even to the present day.<sup>73</sup>

The creative and renovative power of the sacrificial order (*adhiyajña*) is to a large extent attributed to its ability to activate the connections (*bandhus*) among the other orders of reality: the human order (*adhyātma*), the natural order (*adhibhūta*), and the divine order (*adhidaiva*). Smith notes that this principle of “hierarchical resemblance” among the various orders and levels of reality, which he considers to be “the central principle of Vedism,”<sup>74</sup> encompasses two types of connections.

Vedic connections are of two sorts: what we might call vertical and horizontal correspondences. The former connects an immanent form and its transcendent correlative. . . . This type of connection operates between the elements of the same species located on different and hierarchically ranked cosmological levels. Horizontal connections link resembling components of two different species located within the same cosmological plane which share a similar hierarchical position within their respective classes.<sup>75</sup>

Smith goes on to discuss how the notion of the sacrifice as a counterpart of Prajāpati exemplifies the vertical type of connection.

The construction of a sacrifice, an ideally continuous and complete entity made out of the joining of discrete parts (rites, performers, implements, offerings, etc.), is a reconstruction of the universe itself in the sense that one supposedly reproduces—in a different form—the other. They are not identical but resembling forms of unity, sharing the same essence but manifesting themselves differently. The sacrifice is composed of the counterparts to the cosmic prototypes (each element of the ritual being vertically connected to transcendent correlatives), and the sacrifice as a whole is the counterpart to the prototype that is Prajāpati, the universe. The sacrifice operates with “images,” whereas Prajāpati’s body or self is comprised of the “originals,” but both participate in the same ontological essence.<sup>76</sup>

The Veda is represented in the Brāhmaṇas as participating in the “ontological essence” of both the prototype, Prajāpati, and the counterpart, the sacrifice. The Vedic *mantras* form an integral part of the sacrificial rituals performed by human beings, and their recitation is considered essential to the world-ordering and main-

taining function of these rituals.<sup>77</sup> However, the mundane texts recited and studied by human beings on earth are viewed as constituting only a limited manifestation of that infinite (*ananta*) knowledge which is Veda.<sup>78</sup> Just as the sacrifice is held to be the gross counterpart of the cosmic prototype, Prajāpati, so the sound offerings of the sacrifice, the Vedic *mantras*, are represented as the gross manifestations of the cosmic reality of Veda, which is itself constitutive of Prajāpati. The Veda as a cosmic reality is correlated with the creator Prajāpati as well as with his consort Vāc, speech, and is represented as having both unlimited and limited, unexpressed and expressed dimensions even on the cosmic plane. The unlimited Veda is described as becoming delimited through the speech-acts of the creator. As the circumscribed expressions of Prajāpati's speech the Vedic *mantras* are allotted a cosmogonic role as the primordial utterances through which the creator brings forth the phenomenal creation and are represented as the subtle blueprint containing the sound correlatives of the concrete realm of forms.

*Veda, Prajāpati, and Vāc* The Veda as *brahman*, the Word,<sup>79</sup> is described in the Brāhmaṇas as participating in the essence of both Prajāpati and his consort Vāc. The Veda is at times identified with Prajāpati: "In the beginning Prajāpati was the Veda."<sup>80</sup> The Veda is represented as constitutive of Prajāpati's being, with the Vedic *mantras*, meters, and various components of the sacrifice forming different parts of his body or self (*ātman*).<sup>81</sup> At the same time the Veda is said to be derived from Prajāpati (*Prājāpatyo vedah*),<sup>82</sup> for it is Prajāpati who brings forth the Veda in the beginning of creation.<sup>83</sup> These two notions—the Veda as constitutive of Prajāpati and the Veda as derived from Prajāpati—are brought together in the Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa, which, in a variant of Taittiriya Saṃhitā VII.1.1.4–6, cited earlier, describes Prajāpati as bringing forth certain *stomas*, *sāmans*, and meters from various parts of his body.<sup>84</sup> The Veda is more specifically represented as the expression of Prajāpati's speech.<sup>85</sup>

In its role as divine speech the Veda becomes associated with Prajāpati's consort Vāc. Vāc as *brahman*<sup>86</sup> is correlated both with the unexpressed, undifferentiated Word, Veda, and with its expressed, differentiated manifestations as the Vedic *mantras*. The *ṛcs*, *yajuses*, and *sāmans* are said to be the threefold form of Vāc.<sup>87</sup> From Vāc, who is designated as the "Mother of the Vedas,"<sup>88</sup> the Vedic *mantras* flow out in the beginning of creation as her "thousandfold progeny."<sup>89</sup> The Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa proclaims:

Vāc is the imperishable one (*akṣara*), the first-born of the cosmic order (*ṛta*), the Mother of the Vedas (*vedānām mātā*), the navel of immortality (*amṛta*).<sup>90</sup>

As the progeny of Vāc the Vedas partake of their Mother's infinite, immortal nature and are themselves said to be infinite (*ananta*),<sup>91</sup> immortal (*amṛta*),<sup>92</sup> and imperishable (*akṣita*).<sup>93</sup>

Through correlating the Veda with Prajāpati and Vāc, the Brāhmaṇas are concerned to establish the Veda's primordial status as an inherent part of the two creative principles that are responsible for generating and structuring the cosmic order: the principle of knowledge or mind, and the principle of speech. Prajāpati, as the cosmic intelligence underlying the universe, is the abode of knowledge and is associated in particular with the principle of mind (*manas*),<sup>94</sup> while his consort Vāc represents the principle of speech. Prajāpati is at times identified with the mind,<sup>95</sup> and it is by virtue of his identity with the mind that he is said to know everything.<sup>96</sup> Prajāpati is described as entering into union with Vāc by means of his mind.<sup>97</sup> *Manas* and *vāc* are consistently paired throughout the Brāhmaṇas as male and female consorts, the human faculties of mind and speech constituting "yoke-fellows" (*yujs*)<sup>98</sup> that represent the microcosmic counterparts of Prajāpati and Vāc, who in their identification with mind and speech are also at times designated as Sarasvat and Sarasvatī.<sup>99</sup> Mind and speech are depicted in the Brāhmaṇas as mutually dependent upon one another. On the one hand, the mind upholds speech, for it is the mind that provides the cognitive content that speech expresses.<sup>100</sup> On the other hand, speech upholds the mind, for it is speech that gives vocalized expression to the cognitive content of the mind.<sup>101</sup> In the Brāhmaṇas the mind is given precedence over speech on both the human and cosmic planes, for while the mind is unexpressed (*anirukta*) and more unlimited (*aparimita*), speech is expressed (*nirukta*) and more limited (*parimita*).<sup>102</sup> On the human plane the mind precedes speech,<sup>103</sup> and on the cosmic plane Prajāpati precedes Vāc. Prajāpati, as the lord of thought (*cit-pati*) and the lord of speech (*vāk-pati* or *vācas-pati*),<sup>104</sup> brings forth Vāc and then unites with her in order to generate the gods and manifest creation.<sup>105</sup>

The Veda is described as emerging in this cosmogonic process as the manifestation of both Prajāpati and Vāc, both mind and speech. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VII.5.2.52 describes speech as the instrument by means of which the Veda, the threefold knowledge