

Східні філософії

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YĀJÑAVALKYA'S CONCEPT OF ĀTMAN: A PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENT BETWEEN MAGIC AND RELIGION

This article seeks to interpret Yājñavalkya's teaching on the *ātman* in relation to the problem of historical types of knowledge. The proposed epistemological approach possesses both historical-philosophical and systematic significance: it not only enables a deeper understanding of the philosophical underlying the development of Indian philosophical thought, but also offers a new perspective on the nature and transformation of historical types of knowledge—specifically, from an “internal” standpoint, as perceived by the participants in this intellectual process.

Accordingly, the first section examines how historians of Indian philosophy have interpreted the relationship between magic, religion, and philosophy. The second section turns to those portions of the early *Upaniṣads* that, in our view, bear directly upon the problem of historical types of knowledge, and from these we derive the corresponding historical and systematic conclusions.

1. Indian Philosophy and the Problem of Historical Types of Knowledge

The English ethnologist and anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor exercised a decisive influence on the European understanding of the relationship between magic and religion. In his classic work, *Primitive Culture* (1871), Tylor laid the foundation for an evolutionary typology of human knowledge, in which each successive stage—Magic → Religion → Science—represented a progressively more rational approach to causality and explanation.

Tylor defined religion, in its simplest form, as “belief in spiritual beings” [Tylor 1871: 383].¹ Such belief, he argued, rests upon personal relations with spiritual entities, whereas magic is based on the supposed inherent power of words, gestures, and rituals [ibid.: 119].² He described magic as a pseudo-scientific and mechanistic attempt to control nature through formal acts performed independently of divine will.

James George Frazer broadly accepted Tylor's evolutionary framework. Like Tylor, he distinguished religion from magic by arguing that religion is characterized by the

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¹ “Religion, in its earliest and simplest form, consists in the belief in spiritual beings.”

² “Magic, as opposed to religion, does not rest upon personal relations with spiritual beings, but upon the assumed inherent virtue of words, gestures, and rites.”

worshipper's appeal to supernatural beings, whereas magic seeks to manipulate natural forces directly. In his theistically oriented interpretation, religion implies the intervention of higher powers in the natural order [Frazer 1890: 61]³ and expresses the human sense of dependence upon those powers [ibid.: 59].⁴ For Frazer, magical thought was universal and governed by an "associative logic." Since magic represented the earliest and most primitive form of rationality, he saw it as a first, though misguided, step toward science—a kind of *pseudoscience* that sought to explain and control nature through analogy and contagion.

Before the rise of professional German Indology, the conceptual distinction between "magic" and "religion" had already been developed within German idealist and Romantic philosophy and comparative religion. Both Schelling and Hegel regarded magic and religion as successive moments in the development of absolute consciousness. In Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion*, magic is treated as a form of *natural religion*, representing the primordial and immediate unity of spirit and nature. In contrast, religion proper presupposes a reflective and conscious relation to the divine.

The German Indologist Rudolf von Roth (1821–1895) also understood magic as a mechanical compulsion of nature through formula and rite, lacking any ethical or spiritual relation to a deity. Religion, by contrast, arises from inner moral consciousness and expresses itself as such. Max Müller (1823–1900) similarly derived his conception of religion from philological and comparative studies of the Vedic tradition. For Müller, the Vedic religion emerged through the deification of natural forces; the hymns of the *Rigveda*, which venerate these forces, thus exemplify the purest form of religion. The essential difference between magic and religion, according to Müller, is that magic seeks to mechanically influence natural forces through the automatic power of incantation and charm [Müller 1873: 21].⁵ While acknowledging the presence of magical elements in the Vedic corpus, Müller considered them degenerate forms of genuine religious experience. Magic, for him, was not an independent intellectual system—as Frazer had proposed—but a ritual automatism, marking the decline of authentic religious consciousness [Müller 1867: 53].⁶

Arthur Anthony Macdonell (1854–1930) held similar views. Like Frazer, he distinguished religion from magic by noting that the former venerates deities and employs prayer, whereas the latter depends on the automatic efficacy of ritual and verbal incantation. Both Macdonell and Frazer shared an Enlightenment conception of religion, defining it broadly as: "The conception by which men entertain the divine or supernatural powers, and that sense of the dependence of human welfare on those powers which finds its expression in various forms of worship." [Macdonell 1897: 1]

This broad definition reflects the prevailing assumptions of early European Indology: (1) religion originates, in a "pre-scientific age," from the human sense of dependence on natural forces; and (2) it consists in the worship of supernatural or divine powers. My-

³ "Religion assumes that the course of nature is directed by the will of personal beings; magic assumes that it is governed by laws which the magician can learn and employ."

⁴ "In magic, man relies on his own strength to compel the desired result; in religion, he relies on the will of higher powers to which he appeals."

⁵ "The charm and incantation belong to magic rather than to religion. Religion begins where the Infinite is felt behind the finite."

⁶ "In the Vedic hymns we see religion in its purest form, before it sank into the mechanical rites and charms of later days."

thology, in this view, represents the natural form of such belief and expresses the immature mind's attempts to explain natural phenomena. As Macdonell put it, "The basis of these myths is the primitive attitude of mind which regards all nature as an aggregate of animated entities. A myth actually arises when the imagination interprets a natural event as the action of a personified being resembling the human agent." [ibid.: 1]

In collaboration with Arthur Barriedale Keith (1879–1944), Macdonell further emphasized that religious activity in Vedic India was inseparable from the social and political life of its time [Macdonell, Keith 1912: I, vii]. According to them, religion is primarily a form of communication with personal deities through acts of worship, the center of which is sacrifice: "The center of the Vedic religion is sacrifice, in which the gods are invoked and propitiated by means of offerings placed in the fire." [ibid.: II, 468] By contrast, they defined magic narrowly as "spells and incantations directed against disease, demons, and enemies" [ibid.: I, 19], as found particularly in the *Atharvaveda*. In their estimation, "Witchcraft and sorcery represent the popular and superstitious side of Vedic belief, as opposed to the more elevated conceptions of the Rigvedic hymns." [ibid.: II, 512] Thus, in the evolutionary typology of knowledge, religion appears as the earliest form of rational understanding, while magic is its degeneration. Consequently, magic was deprived of the status of a legitimate historical type of knowledge.

Hermann Oldenberg (1854–1920) went further, viewing the Brahmana texts as symptomatic of a kind of intellectual pathology: "If I am not mistaken," he wrote, "it was Max Müller who once said that the Brahmana texts deserve to be studied, but only in the sense in which one studies the speech of madmen." [Oldenberg 1919: 2]. He denied the Brahmana authors any capacity for critical observation or reflection. Such a view makes it difficult to explain how the profound philosophical insights of the *Upaniṣads*, many of which were attributed to the same authors, could have arisen from this supposedly irrational milieu.

The Polish Indologist Stanisław Schayer (1899–1941) sought to explain this transition. Following Oldenberg, he characterized the Brahmana worldview as a reinterpretation of the magical worship of the gods found in the *Rigveda* [Schayer 1925: 6]. Schayer noted that both magic and religion presuppose a connection with supernatural powers and a corresponding desire to overcome dependence upon them—religion through personal emotional contact, magic through knowledge of impersonal law. For Schayer, the binding force in religion is a personal God, whereas in magic it is an abstract and impersonal law. Religion rests on an irrational feeling of dependence and on grace, whereas magic, governed by abstract principles, leaves no room for either grace or divine arbitrariness [ibid.: 6–7]. He thus described magical practice as grounded in the "binding efficacy" of normative relations rather than in personal supplication [ibid.: 7].

Although Schayer's account introduces a rational element into the analysis of ritual, it rests on questionable premises. The fundamental and pervasive error of these scholars lies in their interpretation of the *Rigveda* as a collection of purely religious hymns, devoid of magical meaning. Subsequent research into Indo-European ritual traditions has shown that many features earlier considered hallmarks of "religion" in the *Rigveda*, in fact, perform magical functions.

The Magical Foundations of Worship and Faith in the Rigveda

Take, for example, the worship of the gods. The Sanskrit word *namah*, derived from the verbal root *√nam* ("to bow, bend, submit"), literally means "veneration" or "wor-

ship.” In Vedic usage, however, *namaḥ* designates not merely a verbal expression of reverence but an act of offering—a *manasā yajña*, that is, a sacrifice of the mind or of speech. In many hymns, it replaces or complements a material oblation. Through this transformation, worship acquired all the magical properties inherent in sacrifice: like sacrifice, praise could nourish the gods and augment their strength.

Thus, in the hymn of praise to the *Ādityas*, the divine guardians of the cosmic order (*rta*), the formula of *namaḥ* becomes an act of adequate power:

nama idugraṃ nama ā vivāse namo dādhāra prthivīmuta dyām |
namo devebhyo nāma īśa eṣāṃ kṛtaṃ cideno namasāvivāse ||⁷ (RV 6.51.8).

Here, the act of veneration is endowed with a binding force: even the gods themselves cannot resist it, for to do so would mean to transgress *rta*, the cosmic law—something inconceivable for the gods. In this sense, the expression of respect, humility, submission, entreaty, and supplication proves a more effective means of achieving desired ends than command or coercion, especially in dealings with powers greater than the human. Another hymn speaks even more clearly of the compelling power of worship.

The early Indo-Aryan ritualists also applied the same verbal and sacrificial techniques to control the forces of nature and even to combat wild animals. The typical structure of a Rigvedic hymn (*sūkta*, literally “well-spoken”) reveals this practical orientation: the first part consists of praise of the deity. In contrast, the second contains a request—or even a demand—for a specific favor. Every verbal and metrical detail serves the primary purpose of compelling the deity to fulfill the supplicant’s wish, which is usually of a tangible, this-worldly nature. Even in the earliest magical strata, sacrifice functions as the most effective magical act for obtaining and augmenting material prosperity.

The same logic applies to the concept of faith (*śraddhā*) in the gods. In the *Śraddhā Sūkta* (RV 10.151), *Śraddhā*—faith, trust, and confidence—is personified as a goddess endowed with immense power:

śraddhām devā yajamānā vāyugopā upāsate |
śraddhām hṛdayaśyā kūtyā śraddhayā vindate vasu ||⁸ (RV 10.151.4).

Here, *śraddhā* represents not merely subjective belief but the psychological and spiritual condition for success in ritual and, indeed, in any form of action. Within the Rigvedic worldview, it operates as a cosmic and ritual principle linking gods, humans, and sacrifice.

Even the personification of impersonal magical forces—that is, their replacement by personal deities—was motivated by pragmatic considerations: it enhanced the efficacy of verbal magic. The underlying principle was the magical law of identity between name and object (*nāma-vastu-sambandha*). Similarly, the quest for first principles in the later Vedic and Upaniṣadic thought did not arise from abstract speculation but from practical magical interests: the conviction that he who knows the cause of all things attains omnipotence.

⁷ “Reverence is powerful. I seek to attract reverence here. Reverence upholds heaven and earth. Reverence to the gods; reverence is the master of them. With reverence, I seek to redeem even an offense committed.” (RV 6. 51.8; Cf. [Jamison-Brereton 2014: 846])

⁸ “Guarded by Vāyu, Gods and men who sacrifice draw near to Faith. Man winneth Faith by yearnings of the heart, and opulence by Faith.” [Griffith 1897: 592]

This pragmatic orientation is already evident in the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Upaniṣads*. When interpreting the hymns of the *Rigveda*, one must therefore proceed from the assumption that they were integral parts of ritual practice, governed by the laws of magic. For the ancient Indo-Aryans, magic functioned as science and technology do for us today: it was a form of empirical knowledge, tested and verified through repeated practice, which ensured the community's survival and prosperity. Such knowledge—sustaining entire civilizations for millennia—can hardly be dismissed as “pseudoscience.” Nor can it be reduced to mythological imagination. Magical knowledge possessed its own rationality and philosophical framework, through which it articulated a coherent worldview, defined norms of life, and directed cultural development.

Recognition of this underlying unity of magic, religion, and philosophy became a defining feature of the next generation of scholars of Indian religious thought. Louis Renou (1896–1966) already observed that religion and speculation go hand in hand from the very outset [Renou 1970: 8]. Although Renou described ritual magic as “mechanistic” and emphasized the personal appeal to the *devas* as the characteristic mark of religion, he nonetheless acknowledged the intimate connection between magical and religious elements in Vedic tradition. Moreover, he pointed to the symbolic structure of magical thinking. According to Renou, a relation of participation is established, however superficial may be the resemblance between two objects; and the magical act rests in a large measure on a transfer or a symbolic representation. [Renou 1957: 234] Renou's insight thus anticipated later interpretations of Vedic ritualism that view the early Indian conception of *yajña* as a philosophical system in action, in which the magical, the religious, and the speculative dimensions are inseparable.

Jan Gonda (1905–1991) likewise stressed that in the Vedic tradition, magic and religion are interwoven, though the criterion distinguishing them is relative: when the emphasis lies on “formula and correctness of execution,” it is magic; when on “personal relation with the deity,” it is religion. For Gonda, magic seeks to control hidden forces through knowledge of correspondences between phenomena, and the mantras chanted by priests “have magical, religious, or spiritual effectiveness” [Gonda 1963: 246, 251].

The recognition of this inseparability of magic and religion led Indologists to abandon the evolutionary model of knowledge that had long dominated Western historiography. This schema posited a linear transition from magic to religion to philosophy. This shift brought European scholarship closer to the self-understanding of Indian thought, which never conceived of such a developmental hierarchy.

Among Indian scholars, Surendranath Dasgupta (1885–1952) was among the first to challenge European misinterpretations of Indian philosophy as primitive or unsystematic. He wrote: “To study Indian thought as a product of primitive mentality or superstition is to ignore the rational structure by which the Indian mind sought to unify experience.” [Dasgupta 1922: 3] Dasgupta urged that Indian systems be reconstructed exegetically—“from within their own language and logic”—insisting that concepts such as *karma*, *dharma*, *apurva*, and *śraddhā* cannot be translated into the European categories of “magic” or “religion.”

M. A. Hiriyanā, in *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, similarly recommended approaching Indian thought through “sympathetic understanding rather than external classification,” warning that “to interpret ritual as magic is to miss its moral and metaphysical significance” [Hiriyanā 1932: 14]. He maintained that Vedic acts are grounded in *rta*, the order of truth, rather than in manipulation of impersonal forces.

Chandradhar Sharma also spoke about the need to take into account living religious traditions, especially Vedanta and Buddhism: “Ignorance of Indian philosophy, specially of Buddhism and Vedanta, is still profound and has given rise to uninformed or ill-informed accounts and misleading criticisms. It has been my aim to remove such misconceptions.” [Sharma 1962: ix]

Wilhelm Halbfass, proposing to revive the dialogue between India and the West “by clarifying its historical and hermeneutical conditions,” summarized the hermeneutical challenge as follows:

“Its tone may often be critical and analytical; but such analysis and critique is always motivated by an intense fascination and by the conviction that ancient and classical Indian thought is one of the most significant, still unexplored challenges to the modern Western and westernized world. We cannot expect quick and easy solutions of current problems from ancient India [...] Yet we can and must learn from it; the predicament of modernity leaves us no choice. Indians and Westerners will have to collaborate in this difficult process of learning. They have to speak and listen to each other, and respect one another in their otherness. Mutual respect .is not incompatible with mutual critique; indeed, it calls for such critique.” [Halbfass 1988: viii]

The requirement to study the Indian philosophical tradition *from within*—that is, according to its own conceptual criteria and internal logic rather than through externally imposed categories—should undoubtedly serve as a guiding principle for every historian of Indian religious and philosophical thought. Yet, this does not preclude the need to explore the internal logic of the development of Indian philosophy. Nor can the distinction between magic, religion, and philosophy lose its significance for adherents of Indian traditions themselves, who continue to pursue their highest religious goals. The error of both Western and Indian exegetes lies in treating magic and religion merely as historical and social phenomena—complex yet inseparable—rather than as specific forms of knowledge. It is not surprising that all attempts to distinguish between them have failed.

This study, therefore, proposes an epistemological approach to the problem of historical types of knowledge, aiming to identify the specific nature of magical, religious, and philosophical knowledge. The elucidation of religious knowledge is undertaken through the example of the Indian problem of *ātman*, focusing primarily on *Yājñavalkya*’s teachings in the *Chāndogya* and *Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣads*. The goal is to reconstruct *Yājñavalkya*’s conception of the nature of religious knowledge itself.

2. *Yājñavalkya*'s Concept of Ātman: the Problem of Distinguishing Magic from Religion

The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (8.7.1-15) recounts the myth of how Indra, representing the gods, and Virocana, representing the demons, approached Prajāpati to inquire about the nature of the Self (*ātman*). An ordinary person would rarely pose such a question, since the use of the pronoun “I” from early childhood creates the impression that the Self is self-evident. Yet the text does not concern the familiar sense of Self, but rather the “true self,” which must be discovered by those who wish to attain all worlds—that is, those who aspire to the fulfillment of all desires in both this life and the next.

“When someone discovers that self and perceives it, he obtains all the worlds, and all his desires are fulfilled.” (*ChU* 8.7.1, trans.: [Olivelle 1998: 246])

Thus, for Indra and Virocana, the issue is not merely speculative but profoundly practical, since its resolution would grant what human beings can only dream of and what, according to Brāhmanic ideology, constitutes the highest goal of life. The practical significance of the question is underscored by the fact that both Indra and Virocana consent to live as Prajāpati's students for thirty-two years. It is equally clear that the inquiry concerns not mere self-knowledge, but the discovery of a self that meets specific criteria:

“The self (*ātman*) that is free from evils, free from old age and death, free from sorrow, free from hunger and thirst; the self whose desires and intentions are real.”
[ibid.]

These criteria function as necessary conditions for attaining the ultimate goal. Although each seeker must discover this Self within himself, its existence is not assumed in advance; rather, it is a problem to be solved. After thirty-two years of service, Indra and Virocana return to Prajāpati to request an answer to their question.

Prajāpati's First Answer

Prajāpati invites them to look into a bowl of water and asks: “What do you see?” They reply that they see their own body (*ātman*), from hair to nails. This conception of the Self is grounded in sensory perception, for only the body and all that is corporeal are accessible to the senses. In this view, the external senses serve as the criterion of reality and truth. From this perspective, only the world of sensory objects truly exists. Even the existence of hidden forces of nature is regarded merely as a hypothesis, valid only insofar as it is confirmed by sensory experience, including the inner experience of the human being himself.

At the same time, the human being is understood as part of the natural whole. Yājñavalkya characterizes this view of the Self as “demonic” (*āsuric*). The demonic view of the Self encompasses not only the body but also clothing, ornaments, and everything connected with it. (*ChU* VIII.7-8).

Such a conception of the Self carries significant practical consequences. The most important of these is that it determines the principal meaning of human life: whoever identifies the Self with the body must dedicate himself to the care of the body. For the demonic consciousness, caring for the body becomes the main meaning of life and an object of worship.

The Opposition between the Devas and the Asuras: Historical Background

The term *asura* likely has Indo-Iranian roots. The Avestan *ahura* means “mighty, lordly.” In Vedic usage, however, the term is derived from *asu*—life, vital breath, or vital force. The suffix *-ra*, which appears in the names of several deities (for example, Indra, Rudra), indicates the possession of a particular quality and, at the same time, the ability to impart that quality to others. The most powerful and ancient gods are called Asuras or “children of Asura”: Varuṇa, Mitra, Agni, Soma, Indra, and even Vṛtra. In the *Rigveda* (RV 3.55: *mahad devānām asuratvam ekam*), “asurhood” (*asuratvam*) appears as the source and general characteristic of the most powerful and revered deities. The

gods are portrayed as manifestations of a single universal life force, which—in its functions—strongly resembles the *ātman* and *Brahman* of the *Upaniṣads*.

In the tenth and latest *maṇḍala* of the *Rigveda*, which presents a broad range of cosmogonic hypotheses, a similar function is attributed to *ātman*. This has led some scholars to speak of the “monotheistic pantheism” of the *Rigveda*. In this *maṇḍala* (RV 10.124), Asura is associated with darkness, which is understood as the primordial, original state of being. The hymn begins with Indra’s call to Agni to attend the sacrifice and become the charioteer of the offering. Agni calls Asura his kindly father, whom he abandons for the sake of immortality: he renounces the Father, who is not connected with sacrifice, for Indra, who is connected with it (RV 10.124.3: *ayajñīyād yajñīyam bhāgam emi*). Indra then appeals to Varuṇa and Soma to join him in slaying Vṛtra, for the magical power of the Asuras has weakened.

Cosmic creation is presented here as a sacrificial process, which presupposes the renunciation of one’s own life for another’s—the renunciation of the unrighteous in favor of the righteous—according to cosmic law. In this hymn we already encounter nearly all the oppositions later found in the *Atharvaveda*, the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Purāṇas*, and the epics: light versus darkness, those connected with sacrifice versus those unconnected with it, right versus wrong. Here, “wrong” is already associated with the power of witchcraft.

The identification of the gods with the vital forces of the cosmos is a distinctive feature of the Vedic religion and of magical religions more broadly [Macdonell 1897: 63–65]. In the *Rigveda*, the cosmos is presented as a living whole, with the gods as guardians and personifications of the cosmic order (*rta*).

By the time of the *Yajurveda*, however, we already encounter the opposition between the Asuras and the Suras. Here, the gods are associated with light (*sura*), while the Asuras are linked with the absence of light [Keith 1914: 53]. The Asuras symbolize forces hostile to the Aryans, who constantly attack them. Since the Asuras possess sacred power (Brahman) and perform sacrifices in imitation of the gods, the struggle is intermittent. [ibid: 290] However, this struggle is waged for the possession of material goods and involves the use of magic. But the Aryans, having chosen Brihaspati (sacred prayer) as their Purohita and sacrificing themselves to Indra [ibid.], generally defeat the Asuras.

In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (Mādhyandina recension), the Asuras now openly ally with the Rakshasas and oppose sacrifice. If the Devas symbolize the vital forces of the cosmos, then the Asuras represent that which is deprived of, or obstructs, life. The gods and the Asuras here have a common parent – Prajapati. They fight among themselves for the inheritance, that is, for the cosmos, understood as a living whole. The cosmogonic function of sacrifice is emphasized here with even greater force. Humans, who are also descended from Prajapati (ŚB I.2.4.8 [Eggeling 1882: 54]), unite with the gods, and sacrifice becomes the main instrument of their cooperation in the struggle for the cosmos. The role of prayer also increases. The verse *gayatri*, or the earth, also takes the side of the gods, and they defeat the Asuras (ŚB I.4.1.36 [Eggeling 1882: 111]).

Nevertheless, their opposition cannot be understood in purely naturalistic terms. Elsewhere in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the contrast is explained on another principle: *devā vai yajñena, asurā ayajñena* — “The gods are with sacrifice, the Asuras without sacrifice.” In alliance with the Rakshasas, they oppose sacrifices using magical powers (ŚB I.1.2.16 [Eggeling 1882: 8–9]). This interpretation reveals the socio-ethical dimension of their conflict. For the Indo-Aryans, whether or not a people offered sacrifices was

of fundamental importance. People who did not sacrifice were regarded as hostile. This is explained by the fact that sacrifice to the gods—understood as the life forces of the cosmos—was seen as the main means of sustaining the cosmic cycle of life, which in turn was regarded as the necessary condition for obtaining material goods. This was the “ethical dimension” of the law of *Ṛta*, understood as the law of retribution: one could not receive the benefits of life without making sacrifices.

The Worldview Basis of the Opposition in the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads

Thus, the opposition between the Devas, as bearers of truth and justice, and the Asuras, as bearers of falsehood and injustice, already possessed a distinct worldview foundation in the *Brāhmaṇas*. In the *Upaniṣads*, this worldview dimension receives explicit confirmation. In the passage from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* under discussion, the Asuras are depicted as representatives of a particular form of self-awareness, which the *Upaniṣad* authors dismiss as epistemologically false.⁹

The *Upaniṣads* repeatedly emphasize that it is not the eye that truly sees, but the mind; not the ear that hears, but the mind. They affirm that the senses themselves are powerless without the mind as their integrating center. that the senses themselves are powerless without the mind as their integrating center. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (BrU III.4.2) also emphasizes that: “You can't see the seer who does the seeing; you can't hear the hearer who does the hearing...” [Olivelle 1998: 83]¹⁰ This epistemological principle, employed to support the doctrine of the *ātman* as the genuine subject of knowledge, undermines the naive realist confidence in the senses. Indra's recognition of the negative consequences of such erroneous self-awareness leads to the breakdown of traditional notions concerning the meaning of life.

What is at stake here, therefore, is not merely a contradiction between the naturalistic (“demonic”) conception of the Self and some abstract ideal of the *ātman*. Instead, it is the realization of the futility of all traditional “worldly” values. This realization becomes progressively clearer in the later *Upaniṣads*. It is ultimately acknowledged as a necessary condition for the knowledge of *Brahman* and the attainment of a new, transformative religious consciousness. The trajectory of this thought is already apparent in Prajāpati's second response.

The Immortality of the Soul in the Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas, and Upaniṣads

Belief in the immortality of the soul was already present in the *Saṃhitās* and *Brāhmaṇas*.¹¹ The *Upaniṣads*, however, seek to provide an empirical justification for this immortality. One notable illustration is a fable, found in several *Upaniṣads*. In this fable the human life forces approach Prajāpati to determine which of them is supreme. This narrative functions as a kind of experiment: it demonstrates that breath (*prāṇa*) is independent of the other life forces, whereas their existence depends directly upon breath.¹² The lesson is that *ātman*, identified with the principle of breath, is the trustworthy source of life. Since the source of life cannot perish, the *ātman* must be immortal.

⁹ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* VIII.7-8, where the Asuras are portrayed as holding a false view of the Self.

¹⁰ Cf. also Radhakrishnan (953: 220).

¹¹ Cf. *Rigveda* X.16.4-5

¹² *Praśna Upaniṣad* II.1-13; *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* VI.1.7-13. See [Olivelle 1998: 252-254].

This experimental reasoning, strikingly reminiscent of Francis Bacon's inductive method, exemplifies the Upaniṣadic attempt to ground metaphysical claims in experience. The analogy is not accidental: just as Bacon advocates *experimentum crucis* to establish causal relations, the Upaniṣadic fable offers a phenomenological "experiment" that proves the primacy of breath.

In another passage, however, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* presents an entirely different proof of the soul's immortality. What is remarkable here is that Prajāpati does not resort to abstract metaphysical reasoning—as, for example, Plato does in the *Phaedo*—but appeals instead to the universally accessible phenomenon of dreams.¹³

Dream experience is *sui generis*. It is not an external experience, since in dreams the external senses are wholly inactive. Yet it is also not reducible to the internal experience of a reflective, empirical subject, for in sleep the empirical subject is inactive, while the dream subject remains active. Thus, while the eyes and mouth of the sleeping person are closed and the ears unhearing, the dream subject nevertheless sees, speaks, and hears. Moreover, the dream self persists in the dream world even after death. The fact that the dream self does not perish even when "killed" indicates its independence from the empirical subject.

For Yājñavalkya and other Upaniṣadic thinkers, this is not a hypothesis but an experiential fact: the dream self (*svapna-puruṣa*) is distinct from the waking Self and demonstrates its independence and immortality.¹⁴ Nor can dreams be reduced to the product of the empirical mind: while the waking mind may later interpret them, their origin lies in the mind of the dream subject itself. In existential terms, the mortal Self depends on the immortal Self, not the reverse. The *Upaniṣads* describe this higher principle as the "inner ruler" (*antar-yāmin*),¹⁵ upon whom the body and empirical consciousness ultimately depend.

Indra's Objection and the Revaluation of Immortality

Having heard Prajāpati's teaching, Indra at first rejoices and departs to bring the knowledge back to the gods. Yet before reaching them, he returns to Prajāpati with further doubts:

"It is true, sir, that this Self does not become blind when the body becomes blind, or lame when the body becomes lame. This Self is clearly unaffected by the faults of this body—it is not killed when this body is slain. Nevertheless, people do in a way kill it and chase after it; it does in a way experience unpleasant things; and in a way it even cries. I see nothing worthwhile in this." (*ChU* VIII.10.1-2)

Indra's objection directly challenges the traditional Brahmanical conception of immortality. Eternal life, he argues, is not in itself a desirable goal if it is accompanied by suffering. Indeed, eternal suffering would be the most fearful condition imaginable. The ultimate meaning of life can no longer be expressed in terms of the "attainment of both worlds"—this world and the world of the ancestors. The ultimate goal must instead be liberation from suffering. Immortality, if it entails unending pain, is meaningless.

¹³ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* VIII.10.1-2 [Olivelle 1998: 232-233].

¹⁴ Cf. (BrU IV.3.9-14).

¹⁵ (BrU III.7.3-23), the famous *antar-yāmin brāhmaṇa*.

This objection represents a decisive revaluation of religious consciousness. The highest good is no longer endless survival but the attainment of a state free from suffering. Such a state is not naturally given, for both waking and dream life are filled with sorrow; instead, it must be sought and known. Hence, the *Upaniṣads* reformulate the central question of the *ātman*:

“The Self that is free from evil, free from old age and death, free from sorrow, free from hunger and thirst, the Self whose desires and intentions are real—that is the Self that one ought to seek to know.” (*ChU* VIII.7.1)

Evil, hunger, thirst, sorrow, old age, and death are all understood as forms of suffering. To know the *ātman* is thus to discover the Self that transcends these conditions. Although Yājñavalkya and others still describe the knower's reward in traditional terms—the attainment of all worlds and the fulfillment of all desires—these notions are now transfigured. The fruits are no longer understood as magical gains mediated by ritual, but as the outcome of inner knowledge. In this way, the *Upaniṣads* initiate a profound shift: from the ritualistic conception of immortality characteristic of the *Brāhmaṇas* to a philosophical understanding of immortality as freedom from suffering.

If we compare this fable with the story of the contest among the vital forces for primacy, it becomes evident that they address different problem contexts. The tale of the critical forces concerns the search for the ultimate source of vitality and life as such, which is characteristic of a magical mode of consciousness. The magical nature of this inquiry lies in its orientation toward a concrete practical result: the mastery of the vital forces of the human being (the microcosm) and of the cosmos at large, subordinating them to human will. This is not the purely speculative question of *archē* as Aristotle conceived it, but rather a practical problem whose resolution is sought primarily through specific ritual and ascetic practices. The ultimate goal of such practices is omnipotence, with immortality functioning as both a necessary component and a criterion of such omnipotence. Reflection on the nature of things is, of course, indispensable for the formulation of the problem and its resolution, and this reflective element may properly be regarded as philosophical. Yet speculation alone is clearly insufficient to achieve the ultimate aim, which is inherently practical. The natural-philosophical reflections of the *Samhitās*, *Brāhmaṇas*, and even the *Upaniṣads* often proceed from the assumption that the human being is a part of nature and therefore identify the *ātman* with the body, whether with the physical body itself or with the “subtle body” conceived as soul.

By contrast, the story of Indra and Virocana concerns states of consciousness, which Indologists have frequently described as “psychological.” This designation is understandable, insofar as the terms *ātman* and *psyche* are both used to denote the soul. Nevertheless, it seems inadequate to classify the issue at stake as merely psychological. Psychology is operative in both magical and religious practices, and both *ātman* and *Brahman* may be understood in natural-philosophical, magical, or religious senses. Their interpretation depends not on the terms themselves but on the goals and character of the cognition involved. If the aim of knowing *ātman* or *Brahman* is the attainment of omnipotence, then this understanding must be considered magical. Even ascetic practices undertaken to acquire supernatural powers (*siddhis*) remain within the sphere of magic, since they do not culminate in the genuinely religious goal of liberation from suffering.

This distinction between magical and religious orientations is explicitly reflected in the Upanishadic doctrine of the “two ways of knowing Brahman.” In the fable of Indra

and Virocana, the object of inquiry is the *ātman* free from suffering. Here, the evaluation of states of consciousness is carried out not from the standpoint of power, but from a religious perspective—that is, from the standpoint of the ultimate goal of religious practice: the attainment of a state of consciousness liberated from suffering. Such a formulation of the problem becomes possible only for those, like Indra, who have recognized the futility of all actions directed toward the satisfaction of bodily desires. This recognition constitutes a necessary condition for the transition from magical self-consciousness, which identifies with the body and regards itself as part of nature, to religious consciousness, which no longer identifies with the empirical soul (*prāṇa* understood as the Self) but seeks to know the Self free from suffering.

Although the term *yoga* does not occur in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, the knowledge of the true Self is already conceived not as a speculative enterprise but as a practical process of inward immersion, culminating in identification with a state of consciousness free from suffering. This process represents a fundamentally new type of practice, distinct from the traditional ritual sacrifices. The decisive criterion distinguishing religion from magic is thus the goal and method of knowing *Brahman*: “Whoever perceives Brahman as the source of eternal peace attains eternal peace (*śānti*).” Since this peace is not given but must be sought, the question naturally arises whether such a state of consciousness is in fact possible. Prajāpati’s third response is explicitly directed to this question of the possibility of liberation from suffering.

Prajāpati’s Third Answer

After listening to Indra, Prajāpati declared:

“When a man sleeps soundly, completely collected and serene, and does not dream, that is his self; that is immortality; that one is free from fear; that is Brahman.” (*ChU* VIII.7.11)

Dreamless sleep suggests that a state of consciousness free from suffering is possible. Nevertheless, this answer did not satisfy Indra either. Before reaching the other gods, he again perceived a difficulty:

“But this self, as just explained, is not fully aware of itself as ‘I am this’; it does not even know any of these beings. It is completely annihilated. I see no value in this.”

Although in dreamless sleep the empirical Self ceases to operate, it is not aware of itself. It is not conscious either of its identity with the immortal Brahman or of the existence of other beings; indeed, it is conscious of nothing at all. Such a condition cannot serve as a desirable goal or meaning of life.

Prajāpati’s subsequent explanations aim to demonstrate that the true Self is not identical with any empirical state of consciousness and, in itself, does not suffer. It is immortal and free from suffering precisely because it is incorporeal. His argument rests on a sharp opposition between the corporeal and the incorporeal, which he endows with contrasting qualities: the corporeal, however subtle, is mortal and subject to suffering, whereas the incorporeal is immortal and free from suffering. Only the incorporeal Self possesses the qualities of true being (*sat*): it is eternal, primordial, independent, unchanging, and therefore unaffected by suffering. Such a self is identical with Brahman.

Despite the incompatibility between the true Self and the states of consciousness of the empirical subject, the mortal body is described as the abode of the immortal and incorporeal Self. In other words, the incorporeal Self inhabits a body, and as long as it does so, it is subject to suffering:

“This body, Magavan, is mortal; it is subject to death. Therefore, it is the abode of this immortal and incorporeal Self. He who has a body is subject to joy and sorrow, and there is no freedom from joy and sorrow for him who has a body. Joy and sorrow, however, do not touch him who has no body.” (*ChU* VIII.7.1)

At first glance, this description of the relationship between the disembodied Self and the body may appear contradictory. And this is true if, as is commonly done, it is interpreted as a speculative natural-philosophical hypothesis. Such hypotheses are indeed found in the *Upaniṣads*, for instance, in attempts to explain what happens to the vital forces (such as sight, hearing, and so on) during dreamless sleep. However, these accounts should be classified as hypotheses of magical knowledge, understood in the broad sense of the term, since they are irrelevant to the attainment of the religious goal—complete liberation from suffering. This type of explanation neglects the new conception of religious knowledge already present in the early *Upaniṣads*. They emphasize the fundamental inaccessibility of Brahman to conceptual thought and, consequently, the futility of speculative hypotheses.

Therefore, such statements should be understood as practical prescriptions with a normative function. In particular, the statement “*everything corporeal is mortal, only the incorporeal is immortal*” should be interpreted as an instruction to the practitioner to clearly distinguish between the corporeal and the incorporeal, without conflating them. This distinction is crucial, since religious practice concerns the experience of consciousness rather than the properties of existence external to consciousness. What is at issue here is not so much the body as “corporeal consciousness.” Such prescriptions serve to prevent both a mistaken understanding of the *ātman* and misguided approaches to its attainment.

Karma and Karmic Consciousness

These prescriptions, of course, arise from particular philosophical reflections motivated by the ultimate aim of religious practice. If their purpose is to assist an individual in freeing themselves from suffering, then their application necessarily presupposes some knowledge of the causes of suffering. The search for such causes is impossible without recourse to hypotheses. Yet these are not speculative hypotheses whose truth is unverifiable; instead, they are hypotheses grounded primarily in observation and capable of confirmation or refutation through personal experience. Indeed, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* contains explicit attempts to identify these causes. A key insight was the recognition that a person's actions shape his or her character, and that the nature of one's actions depends upon the nature of one's desires:

“What a man turns out to be depends on how he acts and on how he conducts himself. If his actions are good, he will turn into something good. If his actions are bad, he will turn into something bad. A man turns into something good by good action and into something bad by bad action. And so people say: ‘A person here consists simply of desire.’ A man resolves in accordance with his desire, acts in

accordance with his resolve, and turns out to be in accordance with his action” (BrU 4.4.5).¹⁶

Attachment to desire leads to rebirth in this world. This teaching not only contains the rudiments of the doctrine of karmic bondage as the cause of rebirth (BrU 4.4.6), but also indicates the path to liberation from sorrow: freedom from desire leads to the world of Brahman, which means peace in this life and immortality (BrU 4.4.7-8).

The *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* also emphasizes the inseparable connection between philosophical insight and religious practice. Without a correct understanding of Brahman, no practical goal can be achieved. Only a mind freed from desires, directed solely toward the *ātman*, can attain true knowledge. The text provides direct instructions for comprehending the Self:

“As just singular, one must behold it—immeasurable and immovable. The self is spotless and beyond space, unborn, immense, immovable” (BrU 4.4.20).

Yet it is immediately stressed that understanding alone is insufficient: liberation from karmic bondage is achieved not through words, but through wise action:

“Let the steadfast Brahmin, having known it, perform [the works of] wisdom. Let him not think about many words, for this is the weariness of speech.” (BrU 4.4.21)

Further, the text specifies the kinds of practices that lead to knowledge of the *ātman*:

“Brahmins strive to know it through study of the Vedas, sacrifice, giving, asceticism, fasting. He who has known it becomes an ascetic. Desiring only it as their world, wandering monks wander. Truly, knowing this, the ancients did not desire offspring.” (BrU 4.4.22)

Thus, the pursuit of true knowledge is not limited to Vedic study and sacrificial ritual, but also includes ascetic discipline and the complete renunciation of worldly desires.

Despite its revolutionary ideas, which undermine traditional values, the philosophy of the early *Upaniṣads* does not advocate a complete rejection of worldly values, traditions, or beliefs. Instead, it calls for their reinterpretation, thereby preserving continuity. In this respect, it differs from the philosophy of the Śramaṇas. Duties, family happiness, the desire for offspring, and the pursuit of wealth are not to be renounced; instead, according to the prescriptions of the *Upaniṣads*, they are to be desired for the sake of the *ātman*. The *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* calls for perceiving the manifestation of the *ātman* in everything, and it considers this perspective a necessary condition for the realization of traditional values and beliefs:

“The worlds abandon him who considers the worlds distinct from the Ātman. The gods abandon him who considers the gods distinct from the Ātman. The Vedas abandon him who considers the Vedas distinct from the Ātman.” (BrU IV 5.7)

The religious philosophy of the *Upaniṣads* permits belief in various deities and the performance of sacrifices to them. Still, it warns that the fruits of such sacrifices are far inferior to those derived from worship of *Brahman*. In this way, the *Upaniṣads* achieve not only remarkable tolerance but also a degree of freedom and social harmony, for indi-

¹⁶ See [Olivelle 1998: 121].

viduals may choose their faith, profession, and life path in accordance with their abilities and inclinations. In this respect, the Upanishadic worldview diverges from that of Brahmanism. It also departs from Brahmanism by establishing a unique hierarchy of activities, goals, and values, at the apex of which stands knowledge of the *ātman*. But at any level of the hierarchy, reason plays only an auxiliary role, since only actions advance religious consciousness. Knowledge obtained through the senses or the intellect necessarily presupposes a subject and an object, and thus involves duality. Overcoming dualistic vision is possible only through the realization of one's unity with the *ātman* as the actual subject of all knowledge. The essential feature of the *ātman* is that it can never become the object of (self-)knowledge; hence, it is indefinable and inexpressible. One can only describe it apophatically, that is, by stating what it is not. Addressing Maitreyī, Yājñavalkya formulates the problem in a rhetorical question:

“How can he know the one through whom he knows all this? He, this Ātman, [is defined thus:] ‘Not this, not this.’ He is incomprehensible, because not comprehended, indestructible, because not destroyed, unattached, because not attached, not bound, not wavering, not suffering evil.” (BrU IV 5.15)

This *apophatic* definition of the *ātman* not only characterizes the true self as a non-objectifiable subject but also contains a very specific practical requirement: one must not identify oneself with anything that can become an object of reflection. This is a necessary condition for liberation from suffering. This is made clear in Yājñavalkya's dialogue with Uśasta Cākṛāyāṇa:

“You cannot see the seer of seeing, you cannot hear the hearer of hearing, you cannot think the thinker of thinking, you cannot know the knower of knowledge. This is your ātman within everything. Everything else is subject to suffering” (BrU 3.4.2).

The method of progressive negation and the enumeration of what the Self is not—Yājñavalkya's so-called *neti neti* method—closely anticipates the later Sāṃkhya notion of discriminative insight (*viveka-khyāti*). This is not an expression of agnosticism with its attendant negative implications, but rather a precise attempt to define the limits of philosophical knowledge as extending only to what can become the object of reflection. At the highest religious level of knowledge, there is neither consciousness (*cit*) nor, still less, bliss (*ānanda*). And this, according to Yājñavalkya, is a necessary condition for attaining the supreme religious goal, here understood as liberation from karmic bondage—or more precisely, from karmic consciousness. This consciousness can be called “corporeal,” insofar as it represents the internal fruit of actions directed toward the satisfaction of bodily desires.

Thus, Yājñavalkya characterizes the highest form of religious knowledge by a single attribute: *sat* (being). There is no *chit* (consciousness) in him, and no bliss in the usual sense: “He becomes the one ocean, he becomes the sole seer... This is his highest attainment! This is his highest world! This is his highest bliss! On just a fraction of this bliss do other creatures live.” (BrU 4.3.32) Yājñavalkya's position is closer to that of Sāṃkhya and Yoga. His conception of the *ātman* strongly resembles the Sāṃkhya *puruṣa*, understood there as the incorporeal, non-objectifiable subject—the *sākṣin*, the passive witness. The difference from classical Sāṃkhya is that for Yājñavalkya, *viveka* (discrimination) functions merely as a means, though a necessary one, to overcome the

duality of consciousness. Patañjali's definition of Yoga as the cessation of the activities of consciousness (*citta-vṛtti-nirodha*) also corresponds to Yājñavalkya's position.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣads* does not yet use the terms *sāṃkhya* and *yoga*, but it already clearly distinguishes between reflection and concentration as successive paths to knowledge of the *ātman*. Yājñavalkya tells his wife Maitreya:

“You see, Maitreyi—it is one's self [*ātman*] which one should see and hear, and on which one should reflect and concentrate. For by seeing and hearing one's self, and by reflecting and concentrating on one's self, one gains the knowledge of this whole world.” (BṛU 2.5)

Yājñavalkya also points to *non-conceptual modes of knowing the ātman*, such as breathing exercises that cultivate sustained attention (BṛU 1.5.23)—highly reminiscent of *prāṇāyāma*—as well as meditative practices aimed at “stilling all desires” (*kāma-tyāga*) and attaining states of consciousness that we may call “yogic”: peace of mind, humility, patience, equanimity, composure, forbearance, and similar qualities. These yogic, method-derived states of consciousness are often referred to—by their ultimate aim—as “the state of *brahman*” in the *Upaniṣads*. *Brahman* here denotes a state of consciousness, and the one who realizes it becomes a *brāhmaṇa*. To know *brahman* is to become a *brāhmaṇa*. Such knowledge is non-conceptual—and therefore non-dualistic—because it is achieved not through discursive thought but through a practical, experiential path. This is precisely what we may call “religious knowledge,” for it alone leads to the highest religious goal of the *Upaniṣads*: liberation from karmic bondage and, consequently, from suffering:

“A man who knows this, therefore, becomes calm, composed, cool, patient, and collected. He sees the self [*ātman*] in just himself [*ātman*] and all things as the self. Evil does not pass across him, and he passes across all evil. He is not burnt by evil; he burns up all evil. He becomes a Brahmin—free from evil, free from stain, free from doubt.” (BṛU 4.4.23)

These qualities, in turn, serve as a *practical criterion* for determining whether a person has truly attained the state of *brahman*.

Distinctive Features of the Upaniṣadic Style of Philosophizing

The fundamental difference between the philosophical style of the *Upaniṣads* and that of the *Saṃhitās* and *Brāhmaṇas* should thus be sought not in a movement from the “folk poetry” of the *Rigveda* or the ritualism of the *Brāhmaṇas* to philosophical speculation, but rather in a transition from natural-philosophical hypotheses and the sacred speculations of magic to a new type of philosophizing grounded in the experience of self-reflective consciousness. This is most clearly exemplified in the evolution of the concept of *ātman*. Initially, the word *ātman* meant “air.” This meaning is preserved in ancient Greek in the word *atmosphere*, where ἀτμός (*atmós*) denotes “air.” In the early so-called “family *maṇḍalas*” of the *Rigveda*, *ātman* is most often understood as “breath,” the “vital force” inherent in all living beings and defining their inner essence. Although the existence of such hidden forces was hypothetical, it was confirmed in practice, especially in folk medicine. The intensity of interest in the nature of life and living beings

justifies defining Vedic philosophy as a philosophy of life. This concern with life was not merely speculative but profoundly practical.

In the later *maṇḍalas*—especially the tenth—there is heightened interest in the interconnectedness of all living beings, their unity, and the ultimate source of vital energy. *Ātman*, as the vital principle of all existence, becomes the ground of this unity and is identified with *Brahman*. More precisely, *Brahman* (*Hiraṇyagarbha*) is identified with the *ātman* of the world, the world soul (RV X.121). Here, the decisive factor is not speculative but practical. According to the law of participation between cause and effect, one who knows the cause of the vital forces of the cosmos attains omnipotence. The absence of such statements in the hymns themselves cannot be regarded as a refutation of their magical functions, since they appear only in the commentarial tradition. Given the specific ritual function of the *Rgvedic* hymns, such statements could not have been explicitly included. What is more important, however, is that all these discussions of *ātman* were hypotheses arising from lived experience and aimed at meeting vital needs of people.

The early *Upaniṣads* mark a radical shift. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (BrU 3.4.1-2), in the so-called “Yājñavalkya section,” Uśasta Cākṛāyaṇa asks Yājñavalkya to explain what *Brahman* is—perceptible, unhidden, and identical with the *ātman* within all things. Yājñavalkya replies: “It is your *ātman*, [which is] within all.” (BrU 3.4.1) The formulation of the question reveals dissatisfaction not only with the diversity of existing hypotheses about the *ātman* but also with the hypothetical character of any such doctrine. The question demands direct confirmation of the existence of the omnipresent *ātman*. Yājñavalkya's reply is equally significant: he directs Uśasta to his own *ātman*. Here, philosophy shifts from the sphere of external experience to that of inner experience. The subjective experience of consciousness is presented as more reliable: inner experience is immediate, while external experience is mediated.

Of course, inner experience may be interpreted through the lens of external observation, generating hypotheses of the sort familiar in the European psychological tradition, including phenomenology. Yet precisely this is what the *Upaniṣadic* thinkers reject, insisting on the fundamental unknowability of the *ātman*, which is identical with *Brahman* (BrU 3.4.2). Already in the early *Upaniṣads*, the knowable realm is limited strictly to name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*), that is, to spatio-temporal objects. Hence, human self-knowledge cannot be reduced to introspection capable of conceptual description, much less to speculative hypotheses about the general nature of the human “I.” Rather, it is practical, non-conceptual, subjective, and deeply individual. This is precisely what Yājñavalkya emphasizes in declaring: “This is your *ātman*” (BrU 3.4.1). We may describe religious knowledge in words, analyze it conceptually, and even formulate prescriptions for how it ought to be attained, but we cannot *acquire* it—or *transmit* it—through conceptual means alone. Consequently, all religious texts, including sacred ones, should be understood as forms of religious philosophy. They do not in themselves secure the religious goal, but they assist adherents in rightly interpreting religious precepts.

Ātman that is “*Brahman*, perceived and unconcealed,” is not an abstract principle but a concrete *ātman*, the existence of which each person can experience in breathing. Again, Yājñavalkya appeals to experience accessible to the interlocutor. The problem of the existence of *Brahman* is addressed by reference to the *ātman*, which is empirically accessible. This is not speculative abstraction but, on the contrary, an attempt to avoid such abstraction by appealing to the personal experience of the interlocutor. Yājñavalkya

does not appeal to his own experience but invites the interlocutor to appeal to theirs. Knowledge of *Brahman* is possible only through self-knowledge, and this is always an individual process, in which the conceptual component serves an auxiliary function. The process of cognition itself, which yields knowledge, is non-conceptual in nature. It is not limited to meditation, but includes any activity that has liberation as its ultimate goal and is motivated accordingly.

A significant portion of what is conventionally called *religion* or *religious knowledge* may be better understood as a synthesis of philosophical and magical knowledge. These types of knowledge are a necessary component of any religion, for the primary aim of religion is the transformation of magical—one might also say demonic, corporeal, or karmic—consciousness into a genuinely religious one. In this sense, religion presupposes the magical, not as its negation but as its material condition. As Yājñavalkya's dialogues in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* suggest, true knowledge (*vidyā*) must move beyond ritual correctness and verbal formulae toward the direct realization of the Self as the *ātman* that transcends empirical individuality (BrU 4.3.6-7).

Yet such knowledge is never sufficient by itself to attain the religious goal—liberation from suffering (*mokṣa*), which, according to both the *Upaniṣads* and the Buddhist canon, is realized through disciplined practice rather than through intellectual comprehension alone. This *praxis* can consist of the simple control of breath (*prāṇāyāma*), the regulation of thought (*citta-vṛtti-nirodha*), or the cultivation of mindful awareness (*smṛti*). Accordingly, both Buddhism and other yoga-based traditions place great emphasis on *non-conceptual contemplation* (*nirvikalpaka-jñāna*), which transcends discursive thought and restores the unity of subject and object [see Dasgupta 1922: 36-38; Hiriyanna 1932: 14-15].

Religious knowledge, however, is not exhausted by such contemplative states. It also encompasses what are commonly called “religious feelings”—love, compassion, humility, and similar affective dispositions—provided that these are accompanied by pure motivation, free from egoistic intent. In this sense, *bhakti* and *jñāna* represent two complementary forms of religious knowing: affective and cognitive, emotional and contemplative. When Yājñavalkya distinguishes between those who “know by the heart” and those who “know by hearing” (BrU 4.4.21), he is describing precisely this double aspect of knowledge.

If religious knowledge is understood as strictly as Yājñavalkya proposes, then magical knowledge, by contrast, must be taken in a much broader sense. It encompasses any form of knowledge that enables humans to subjugate nature and satisfy bodily desires. This type of knowledge has not disappeared; on the contrary, it has been transformed into scientific and technical knowledge, which allows humans to control natural and social processes even more effectively than traditional magical practices.

Everyday consciousness, too, retains this magical structure. It remains primarily imagistic, associative, and governed by the imagination. What has changed is only the symbolic order: the ancient religious myths that once organized collective consciousness have been replaced by political and ideological myths. These modern myths function analogously to ancient magical systems, shaping collective emotion and behavior. The predominance of such mythic structures within secular culture reveals, in fact, the continuing *demonic* nature of our civilization, which, to satisfy the desires of our transitory body, destroys the environment and everything that was previously considered sacred.

Philosophical knowledge, by contrast, represents a form of reflective knowledge oriented toward understanding and is therefore not governed by any specific practical goals, methods, or principles. Because of this, it is capable of subjecting any goal, method, or principle to critical examination—something that even scientific knowledge cannot accomplish without its assistance. Philosophical knowledge thus performs essential critical and heuristic functions. Without it, progress in both understanding and practical action becomes impossible.

However, as the experience of the Śramaṇic period in India demonstrates, when philosophical inquiry becomes detached from practical activity, it quickly degenerates into skepticism and sophistry. For this reason, the Buddhists restricted the scope of philosophical problems to those directly related to the attainment of the religious goal, and all major Indian philosophical systems acted wisely in observing similar limits. When Buddhist and Indian teachers prefer to describe their teachings as a “science” rather than a religion, this should not be regarded as an exaggeration. Within the practical philosophy they advocate, even myths, parables, and legends have an essential function: they help practitioners better understand the meaning of the teaching and refine their spiritual practice.

The capacity to derive practical benefit from philosophical doctrine is something that Western culture can—and should—learn from Indian philosophy.

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Serhii Secundant

Yājñavalkya's Concept of Ātman: A Philosophical Argument Between Magic and Religion

This article seeks to interpret Yājñavalkya's teaching on ātman within the problem context of the historical types of knowledge. The focus falls not on external phenomena but on the nature of magical, religious, and philosophical knowledge, approached through the very criteria employed by Yājñavalkya himself. Within this framework, the category of religious knowledge is significantly narrowed. Such an *epistemological* approach enables a clearer differentiation between religious and magical knowledge within any given religious tradition.

Сергій Секундант

Поняття атмана у Яджнавалк'ї: філософський аргумент між магією та релігією

Автор тлумачить учення Яджнавалк'ї про ātman у контексті проблеми еволюції історичних типів знання. Стаття зосереджується на дослідженні не феноменів, а природи магійного, релігійного та філософського знання «зсередини», застосовуючи ті критерії, які використовував сам Яджнавалк'я. У межах такого «епістемологічного» підходу поняття релігійного знання істотно звужується. Такий «епістемологічний» підхід дозволяє чітко розмежувати релігійне й магійне знання в рамках будь-якої релігійної традиції.

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