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SANSKRIT AND REALITY:
THE BUDDHIST CONTRIBUTION[*]

I

Sanskrit plays a very special role in the traditional world view of Brahmanism. It is, to begin with, the language of the Veda. Since for many Brahmanical thinkers the Veda is uncreated and eternal, Sanskrit, too, is without beginning. Other languages are often looked upon as corruptions of Sanskrit which, being the source from which other languages have derived, better perhaps: degenerated, is the original language.[1]

But Sanskrit is more than just the original language. It is also the language which is closest to reality. The words and sentences of the Sanskrit language are believed to have some kind of inherent connection with the world we live in. This belief is no doubt linked to the belief in the efficacy of mantras, which, when correctly pronounced at appropriate occasions, are supposed to have various effects, from securing the success of a particular ritual act to curing a disease.[2] It also finds expression in the numerous etymological and related speculations which fill the Brāhmaṇas. The theme that seers have given names to things is no doubt connected with this same belief, because it provides something like a justification for it. We find it already in the Ṛgveda (e.g. 10.71.1).[3] We find it also in Yāska's Nirukta, as it seems.[4] Elsewhere the [110] Nirukta refers to seers with direct insight into the nature of things.[5] It is no doubt this insight which allows the seers of the Brāhmaṇas to "see" their hymns and "find" rites.[6]

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[1] See Bronkhorst, 1993a.

[2] For mantras in general, see Alper, 1989. This book contains, besides a number of valuable articles, an extremely useful Working Bibliography (pp. 327-443) and Bibliographical List (pp. 444-530).

[3] RV 10.71.1 reads, in the translation of Louis Renou (1956: 71): "O Bṛhaspati, ce fut là le premier commencement de la Parole, quand ils (i.e. the first poet-seers, referred to by the word *dhīra* in the next stanza; J.B.) se mirent en branle, donnant une dénomination (*nāmadhéyaṃ dádhānāḥ*) (aux choses)." See further Renou, 1955.

[4] See Bronkhorst, 1996.

[5] Nirukta 1.20: *sākṣātkṛtadharmāṇa ṛṣayo babhūvuḥ*; Falk (1993: 241 = 1990: 108) translates "Persons who had direct insight into *dharma* turned into poets ('seers')."

[6] Oldenberg, 1919: 223.

Perhaps the belief in the close connection between language and reality is not all that surprising. Psychologists from Jean Piaget onward have drawn attention to what they call the nominal realism in young children.[7] If young children in the modern West need time to separate words from things, perhaps certain other cultures, like that of Vedic India, allowed their members to hold on to the essential identity, or inseparability, of words and things right into adulthood.

Be this as it may. The truly amazing thing in India is that these etymological speculations of the Brāhmaṇas, and the presuppositions which underlie them, came to be rationalised in respectable branches of knowledge. The first one that comes to mind is, of course, the "science of etymology" (*nirukta*), one of the six so-called "limbs of the Veda" (*vedāṅga*). This "science of etymology" claims to offer a method to find the meanings of unknown words. This method consists, essentially, in drawing other, similar, words into the picture whose meanings *are* known. The principle underlying all this can be stated briefly as follows: similar words must have similar meanings. Traditional "grammar" (*vyākaraṇa*), which is another "limb of the Veda", appears to be based on the same principle. Its own contribution consists in the attempt to identify the — or rather: a certain number of — constituent parts of words that have meaning, and to show how these constituent parts join up so as to produce the words and sentences of the Sanskrit language.[8]

The fundamental texts of the disciplines just mentioned do not refer to other languages than Sanskrit. They seem to have been composed in surroundings where the pre-eminent position of Sanskrit was taken for [111] granted. In an important sense, the Vedic tradition hung on to that position. Yet it became ever more difficult to ignore the existence of other languages. Another confrontation that it could not avoid, was the one with Buddhism, which presented India with an impressive number of ideas that did not fail to exert a profound influence on Brahmanism. This influence also concerned the relationship between language and reality. In the present paper I will try to draw attention to these ideas within Buddhism, and to the way they came to affect Brahmanism. Put in a nutshell, Buddhism appears to have led the way, from what we might call a belief in some kind of magical connection between language and reality, to a philosophically sophisticated theory about that same connection.

Let it be clear from the outset that Buddhism never had any special link with the Sanskrit language. Its original teachings were expressed in a language, or languages, different from Sanskrit, and certain Buddhist schools — prominent among them the Theravādins — have never used Sanskrit throughout their long history. Other schools

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[7] See Piaget, 1925. For more recent confirmations, see, e.g., Brook, 1970; Scarlett and Press, 1975; Williams, 1977; Ball and Simpson, 1977.
[8] Cf. Bronkhorst, 1981, esp. p. 12.

did turn to Sanskrit at some point of their development, without however attributing to Sanskrit the special position which it occupied within Brahmanism.[9] Buddhist ideas about the relationship between language and reality, when they made their appearance, were therefore just that, ideas about the relationship between language and reality, and not ideas about the relationship between Sanskrit and reality in particular. For these ideas to become ideas about Sanskrit in particular, they had to undergo a special adaptation, to which I will turn later on in this lecture.

Before that, we have to consider the question how and why ideas about language and reality found their way into Buddhism at all. Buddhism is, first of all, a religion which teaches a path leading to the cessation of suffering and rebirth. Nothing in the early texts suggests that reflection on the relationship between language and reality was part of that path. For the origins of these ideas, we have to look at the special way the Buddhist message came to be handed down, and modified in the process. In their efforts to preserve the teaching of the Buddha, the early Buddhists were not content to memorise his own words. They also [112] enumerated the elements contained in his teaching, and this led to the creation of lists of so-called dharmas, elaborately discussed in the canonical Abhidharma-Piṭakas and subsequent literature. This activity, whose only intention may have been to preserve the teaching of the Buddha, yet resulted in theoretical developments, which one could globally refer to as the dharma-theory. For reasons that cannot be discussed here at present, the dharma-theory came to assume an ontological dimension. The dharmas came to be looked upon as the only really existing "elements of existence", which is, incidentally, the expression that is not infrequently used to translate the Buddhist term dharma. At this point Buddhism had become a philosophy — or at least it now included a philosophy — which possessed detailed lists of what there is. Things that do not figure in the lists of dharmas do not really exist, and this forced the Buddhist thinkers to deny the reality of all composite objects, which includes most objects of ordinary experience. This, in its turn, evoked the question why everyone seems to be subject to the same delusion: everybody believes that there are houses and chariots and the like in a world, which, in reality, does not contain any of these. The answer that the Buddhist thinkers proposed to this question is of particular interest to us in the present context. All these composite objects, which do not really exist, exist in name only; they are *prajñaptisat*.[10]

Probably the most charming passage in early Buddhist literature dealing with the problem here presented, occurs in the Pāli version of the "Questions of King Milinda", the Milindapañha. The meeting of the Buddhist monk Nāgasena with the

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[9] A certain distaste for non-aryan languages and for the speakers thereof is sometimes noticeable; see Lamotte, 1970: XI, 1583 f., 1585-86 n. 3.

[10] In the following remarks on the role of language in Buddhist thought, I follow to a large extent two articles by Paul M. Williams (1980, 1981). See further Harris, 1991: 93 ff.; Lindtner, 1992: 264 ff.

Indo-Greek king Menander as described in this text contains the following passages, in the slightly modified translation of T. W. Rhys Davids:[11]

"Now Milinda the king went up to where the venerable Nāgasena was, and addressed him with the greetings and compliments of friendship [113] and courtesy, and took his seat respectfully apart. And Nāgasena reciprocated his courtesy, so that the heart of the king was propitiated.

And Milinda began by asking: 'How is your Reverence known, and what, Sir, is your name?'

'I am known as Nāgasena, O king, and it is by that name that my brethren in the faith address me. But although parents, O king, give such a name as Nāgasena, or Sūrasena, or Vīrasena, or Sīhasena, yet this, Sire,—Nāgasena and so on—is only a generally understood term, a designation in common use. For no person is observed here.'

[At this point king Milinda utters his scepticism with regard to the opinion expressed by Nāgasena, and questions the latter as to his relationship with the constituent parts. Nāgasena then answers as follows:]

'You, Sire, have been brought up in great luxury, as beseems your noble birth. If you were to walk this dry weather on the hot and sandy ground, trampling under foot the gritty, gravelly grains of the hard sand, your feet would hurt you. And as your body would be in pain, your mind would be disturbed, and you would experience a sense of bodily suffering. How then did you come, on foot, or in a chariot?'

'I did not come, Sir, on foot. I came in a carriage.'

'Then if you came, Sire, in a carriage, explain to me what that is. Is it the pole that is the chariot?'

'I did not say that.'

'Is it the axle that is the chariot?'

'Certainly not.'

'Is it the wheels, or the framework, or the ropes, or the yoke, or the spokes of the wheels, or the goad, that are the chariot?'

And to all these he still answered no.

'Then is it all these parts of it that are the chariot?'

'No, Sir.'

'But is there anything outside them that is the chariot?'

And still he answered no.

'Then thus, ask as I may, I can discover no chariot. Chariot is a mere empty sound. What then is the chariot you say you came in? It is a falsehood that your Majesty has spoken, an untruth! You are king over all India, a mighty monarch. Of whom then are you afraid that you speak untruth?' ...

And Milinda the king replied to Nāgasena, and said: 'I have spoken no untruth, reverend Sir. It is on account of its having all these things—the pole, and the axle, the wheels, and the framework, the ropes, the yoke, the spokes, and the goad—that it comes under the generally understood term, the designation in common use, of 'chariot'.'

'Very good! Your Majesty has rightly grasped the meaning of 'chariot'. And just even so it is on account of having hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, nerves, bones, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, abdomen, [114] spleen, lungs, larger intestines, lower intestines, stomach, faeces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, serum, saliva, mucus, oil that lubricates the joints, urine, brain, outward form, sensations, ideas, confections, and consciousness that I come under the generally understood term, the designation in common use, of 'Nāgasena'.'"

Many other Buddhist texts repeat, be it usually in a less attractive garb, the message which we learn from the Milindapañha: composite objects exist in name only. Already a passage in the Saṃyutta Nikāya states that "just as the word 'chariot' is used when the parts are put together, so there is the use of the conventional expression 'being' when the constituents of a person are present".[12] A hut, we read in the Śāriputrābhidharma, is

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[11] *Milindapañha* (p. 25 f.); tr. Rhys Davids, 1890: 40 f. The Chinese version is to be found TI 1670, vol. 32, p. 696a l. 5 f.; p. 706a l. 9 f.; French translation by Demiéville (1924: 97 f.). Oetke (1988: 185 f.) has however shown, "dass an keiner Stelle der chinesischen Version ... eine These ausgesprochen oder angedeutet wird, die mit der, dass ein Pudgala nicht existiert, äquivalent ist".

[12] SN I.135: *yathā hi aṅgasambhārā hoti saddo ratho iti evaṃ khandesu santesu hoti satto ti sammuti.*

nothing but a designation.[13] The Mahāvibhāṣā illustrates the category of nominal existence (*prajñaptisat*) by enumerating the objects "vase, cloth, chariot, army, forest, hut etc.".[14] The Abhidharmakośabhāṣya explains that a composite object is *prajñaptisat*, not *dravyasat*.[15]

For most Buddhists belonging to the mainstream,[16] the only things that really exist, not only in name, are the dharmas. The following extract from a passage of the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya expresses this clearly:[17] [115] "Where the idea of an object is no longer present when the object is broken into pieces, that object exists only relatively (*saṃvṛtisat*); an example is a vase. ... Where the idea of an object is no longer present when one removes the other dharmas mentally, that object, too, is to be looked upon as existing only relatively; an example is water. ... To these objects a conventional name has been given. ... In cases different from these there is absolute truth. Where the idea of an object is present even when the object is broken, or when one removes the other dharmas mentally, that object exists absolutely; an example is colour." The older Saṃyuktābhidharmahṛdaya, from which the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya has borrowed extensively, has a similar passage, which, however, speaks of names rather than ideas: in case the name of an object is no longer present when it is analysed, that object exists relatively only.[18]

Here it is important to emphasise that reflections on the relationship between composite wholes and their parts are not marginal to Buddhist thought. Quite on the contrary, they are central to it, from an early date onward. The oldest parts of the Milindapañha may go back as far as the second century before our era. If the passage which I just read out to you belongs to the oldest kernel, which seems likely, it constitutes evidence that the concern with parts and wholes was already well established at that early date.

This date finds confirmation elsewhere. The school of thought which works out the dharma-theory in most rigorous detail is the one called Sarvāstivāda. From among

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[13] TI 1548, vol. 28, p. 626c l. 11-12.

[14] TI 1545, vol. 27, p. 42b l. 1-2. Cp. the following statements from the same text, translated by La Vallée Poussin (1937: 166-67): "Le Bhadanta Vasumitra dit: 'Le nom qui désigne est *saṃvṛti* ...'"; "Bhadanta dit: 'Parler d'être vivant (*sattva*), de cruche, de vêtement et autres choses, expressions (*vyavahāra*) produites par une pensée non-fausse, c'est *saṃvṛtisatya*; ...'"; "Le Bhadanta Dharadatta dit: 'Le nom, de sa nature (*nāmasvabhāva*), est saṃvṛti; ...'"Also the Vibhāṣā refers to the principle "Toutes choses sont vides et sans-soi"; see La Vallée Poussin, 1937: 164.

[15] Abhidh-k-bh(P) p. 13 l. 24-25, on verse 1.20: *yadi rāśyarthaḥ skandhārthaḥ prajñaptisantaḥ skandhāḥ prāpnuvanti/ anekadravyasamūhatvāt rāśipudgalavat/*

[16] Following Harrison (1990: xviii n. 8; 1992: 77-78 n. 8) I use this term here to refer to what is often called Śrāvakayāna or Hīnayāna.

[17] Abhidh-k-bh(P) p. 334 l. 3-9, on verse 6.4: *yasminn avayavaśo bhinne na tadbuddhir bhavati tat saṃvṛtisat/ tad yathā ghaṭaḥ/ .../ tatra cānyān apohya dharmān buddhyā tadbuddhir na bhavati tac cāpi saṃvṛtisad veditavyam/ tad yathāmbuḥ/ .../ teṣv eva tu saṃvṛtisaṃjñā kṛt[ā] .../ ato 'nyathā paramārthasatyam/ tatra bhinne 'pi tadbuddhir bhavaty eva/ anyadharmāpohe 'pi buddhyā tat paramārthasat/.*

[18] TI 1552, vol. 28, p. 958b l. 8 f.; cf. Dessein, 1994: I, 2, p. 802.

the texts just mentioned the Mahāvibhāṣā, and to some extent also the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, belong to this school. There is independent evidence to believe that the essential features of this school, too, were already in place in the middle of the second century before our era.[19] These essential features show that this school, too, had consciously rejected the existence of composite wholes at that time. Note here that followers of the Sarvāstivāda school of Buddhist thought continued to write detailed, and voluminous, treatises until beyond the middle of the first millennium of our era. The school led therefore a vigorous life for seven or eight centuries, and had plenty of opportunity to influence other thinkers, both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. We will come back to this in a while.

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But the preoccupation with the relationship between parts and composite whole went on to characterise other developments within Buddhism as well. A particularly momentous development was the arising of what came to be known as Mahāyāna, to be distinguished from the mainstream (Śrāvakayāna or Hīnayāna), to which schools like the Sarvāstivāda belonged. Several theoretical developments came to be associated with the Mahāyāna. Recall that the non-existence of composite objects in Buddhism was assimilated to the rejection of the existence of the person. This is clear from the Milindapañha passage which I read to you, but also from other Buddhist texts. Other Buddhists, primarily those belonging to the Mahāyāna, went further. They, too, rejected the full existence of the person and of composite objects (*pudgalanairātmya*). But in addition to this, they claimed the essencelessness of the dharmas (*dharmanairātmya*). For them, the challenge to account for reality as we experience it became even greater than it had been, and continued to be, for the mainstream Buddhists. Not even the ultimate constituents of all there is, the dharmas, could now be accepted as really existing any more.

The non-existence of the dharmas is often mentioned in the early Prajñāpāramitā-Sūtras.[20] The dharmas are described as 'empty',[21] 'without own reality' (*asvabhāva*),[22] 'empty of own reality' (*svabhāvaśūnya*),[23] 'without self' (*nirātmaka*),[24] etc. We learn from at least one passage that 'self' (*ātman/pudgala*) and 'aggregate' (*piṇḍa*) — i.e., 'whole', 'composite entity' — are identical.[25] The 'self' is the 'aggregate'; the text considers both of them ultimately unreal.

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[19] Bronkhorst, 1987: 71.

[20] E.g. *Suvikrāntavikrāmipariprcchā* ch. 1, p. 9 l. 26, l. 30 f.; p. 10 l. 22.

[21] E.g. *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* ch. 18, p. 172 l. 15-20, p. 173 l. 3 f .

[22] E.g. *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* ch. 18, p. 173 l. 3; *Suvikrāntavikrāmipariprcchā* ch. 1, p. 10 l. 22.

[23] E.g. *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya Sūtra* (long version), p. 98 l. 13.

[24] *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā* 17, p. 85 l. 2 and 7; 28, p. 88 l. 9.

[25] *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā* 30-31, p. 89 l. 2-6: *bhagavān āha: piṇḍagrāhaś caiva subhūte avyavahāro 'nabhilāpyaḥ/ na sa dharmo nādharmaḥ/ sa ca bālapṛthagjanair udgṛhītaḥ/ tat kasya hetoḥ? yo hi kaścit*

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In this vision of the world, then, neither composite objects nor constituents really exist. This includes the dharmas, the ultimate constituents for most of the main stream Buddhists. The texts identify the dharmas with empty space (*ākāśa*) which, for them, is non-existence (*abhāva*).[26] According to the Aṣṭasāhasrikā (ch. 13, p. 139 l. 10 f.) all dharmas are identical with empty space (*ākāśasama*); this is why one cannot count them, and why they have no measure (*pramāṇa*).

How does the Mahāyāna explain the phenomenal world? Here, too, it is language which plays an essential role. The "Maitreya-chapter" of the Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā states that all things up to the Buddhadharmas are nothing but names.[27] Designations, moreover, depend upon the analytic imagination (*vikalpa*).[28] According to the commentary by Devaśarman on the Madhyamakakārikā, cited in the Prajñāpradīpa of Bhāvaviveka (Bhavya), the aim of the text commented upon is to destroy adherence to language and to the referents of language.[29] The Madhyamakāvatāra of Candrakīrti cites, under 6.68, a Sūtra in which the Buddha declares that absolutely everything is nothing but name (*prajñapti*); things do not really exist and it is the linguistic referent which logicians (*tārkika*) misconceive as being the real thing.[30] Elsewhere in the same chapter, Candrakīrti observes: "Its own being is inaccessible to words. Since the name (*abhidhāna*) aims at grasping the form of the 'objects of naming' (*prajñaptisat*), as long as there is naming, one does not speak of reality."[31] According to the Prasannapadā of the same author, "emptiness itself is defined as metaphorical naming. The wheel and the other parts of a chariot are the substrate of naming. This naming of the chariot on the substrate of its parts [signifies] its non-production as being in itself; and the non-production as being in itself is emptiness".[32] Saṃsāra, too, is nothing but a name [118] (*saṃjñāmātrakam*), according to the Prasannapadā under verse 11.2. According to a text cited in the Śikṣāsamuccaya

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subhūte evaṃ vadet: ātmadṛṣṭis tathāgatena bhāṣitā, sattvadṛṣṭir jīvadṛṣṭiḥ pudgaladṛṣṭis tathāgatena bhāṣitā, api nu sa subhūte samyag vadamāno vadet? subhūtir āha: no hīdaṃ bhagavan, no hīdaṃ sugata, na samyag vadamāno vadet/"... One should neither speak of nor discuss the acceptance of aggregates (*piṇḍa*). The aggregate is neither a *dharma* nor a non-*dharma*. It is accepted by fools and stupid people. Why? He who says that the Tathāgata teaches the belief in the self (*ātman*), in a being (*sattva*), in the soul (*jīva*), in the person (*pudgala*), ... he would not speak the truth."

[26] See, e.g., *Suvikrāntavikrāmiparipṛcchā* ch. 4, p. 28 l. 1.

[27] Conze and Iida, 1968: 234 (section II.6), 238 (section IV.39).

[28] Id. p. 238 (section IV.40): *vikalpa(m?) pratītya abhilapanatā.*

[29] Cited by Williams (1980: 36 fn. 1): *de la dgag par bya ba ni gyis te/ brjod pa la mngon par zhen pa dang/ brjod par bya ba la mngon par zhen pa'o/*

[30] *Madhyamakāvatāra* p. 160 l. 9-12; tr. La Vallée Poussin, 1910: 344-45. Williams (1980: 37 fn. 29) explains that *btags* represents *prajñapti.*

[31] *Madhyamakāvatāra* p. 139 l. 15-18; tr. La Vallée Poussin, 1910: 328.

[32] *Prasannapadā* under verse 24.18, ed. Vaidya p. 246 (ed. La Vallée Poussin p. 504): *saiva śūnyatā upādāya prajñaptir iti vyavasthāpyate/ cakrādīny upādāya rathāṅgāni rathaḥ prajñapyate/ tasya yā svāṅgāny upādāya prajñaptiḥ sā svabhāvenānutpattiḥ yā ca svabhāvenānutpattiḥ sā śūnyatā/* Cf. May, 1959: 239.

of Śāntideva, everything is *vyavahāramātra, nāmadheyamātra, saṃketamātra, saṃvṛtimātra, prajñaptimātra*; that is to say, nothing but words.[33]

The *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra attributed to Nāgārjuna contains a whole series of remarks about the relation between language and the world. The following one gives its position in a nutshell:[34] "The ignorant pursue names while what they seek is reality."

The above citations are from works belonging to the Madhyamaka school of Buddhist thought. Passages could also be cited from Vijñānavāda works, but this would take us too far afield.[35] Be it here noted that the Vijñānavāda frequently speaks of *vijñapti* "phenomenon, percept"[36] rather than *prajñapti*.[37] The world is then described as *vijñaptimātra* "nothing but percepts". The connection between the two can be seen as follows. If things exist in name only, it is us who give those names. In other words, we create things, which are really nothing but our percepts.[38] D.T. Suzuki has indeed been able to show that *vijñaptimātra* and *prajñaptimātra* are often synonyms, at least in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra.[39]

I conclude this survey with a verse from the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgārjuna, which appears to state that the false reality evoked by language is yet necessary in order to reach the highest aim. The verse reads: "Without relying on linguistic usage (*vyavahāra*), the [119] highest truth (*paramārtha*) cannot be taught. Without obtaining the highest truth, nirvāṇa cannot be reached."[40]

All these passages are meant to show that the relationship between words and things in Buddhism, from at least the second century before our era onward, was intimately linked to another major concern of the Buddhist thinkers: the relationship between composite wholes and their parts. Composite wholes were not accepted to have real existence — this was the result of a particular interpretation of the doctrine of non-self, which we find already in the earliest Buddhist texts — and words were invoked to explain the universal belief in the existence of such non-existing entities. I wish to emphasise again that this complex of ideas was not marginal to Buddhist thought; it was not a set of ideas that someone may have had at some time, and which has left some traces in the texts. Quite on the contrary, these ideas pervade the Buddhist

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[33] *Śikṣāsamuccaya* (ed. Vaidya) p. 137 l. 12-13.

[34] Ramanan, 1966: 73. The whole of chapter II of this book, "Concepts and conventional entities (Nāma and Lakṣaṇa)" (p. 70-88), is of interest in the present context.

[35] See, e.g., La Vallée Poussin, 1910: 328; 1928-29: 554; 1933: 94; Lamotte, 1935: 188, 190. On the continuity between the two schools, see Harris, 1991.

[36] This is the interpretation proposed by B.C. Hall (1986), followed by R.P. Hayes (1988: 99-100).

[37] On the historical relation between *prajñaptimātra* and *vijñaptimātra*, see Schmithausen, 1973: 171.

[38] Cp. Frauwallner, 1956: 268-69.

[39] Suzuki, 1930: 181.

[40] MadhK(deJ) 24.10: *vyavahāram anāśritya paramārtho na deśyate/ paramārtham anāgamya nirvāṇaṃ nādhigamyate//* Candrakīrti's Prasannapadā explains *vyavahāra* as *abhidhānābhidheyajñānajñeyādilakṣaṇa*.

texts from a certain date onward, and belong apparently to the very essence of that which occupied Buddhist thinkers for a very long time.

II

I will now turn to a completely different system of thought, to the Brahmanical school known by the name of Vaiśeṣika. In a recent article I have argued that this system of philosophy may have been created under the influence of Sarvāstivāda.[41] The reason I offered is that Vaiśeṣika is to a large extent based on four axioms, which can be looked upon as either straight borrowings of, or reactions against, axioms of the Sarvāstivādins. Two of these axioms are of special interest in the present context. Recall first that the Sarvāstivādins — like most other Buddhists — rejected the existence of composite wholes besides their ultimate constituents, the dharmas. Composite objects exist in name only. In Vaiśeṣika, on the other hand, composite objects are as real as their constituents, and exist alongside them. The vase is different from the two halves that it is composed of; together they constitute three entities. It goes without saying that the world as conceived by the [120] Vaiśeṣikas contains far more objects than the world of the Sarvāstivādins. The latter could make an inventory of all there is, by basing themselves on their lists of dharmas. These dharmas, they believed, had been made known by the omniscient Buddha. The Vaiśeṣikas, too, presented a list of categories which constituted, in their opinion, a list of all there is. The question is: how could the Vaiśeṣikas find out what filled their far more crowded world?

      Their answer is directly relevant to the theme of this symposium. It is: the Sanskrit language. The Sanskrit language allowed them to find out what exists. I shall give some examples in a minute. Let me first, however, emphasise the parallelism and difference of this position as compared to that of the Sarvāstivādins. The Vaiśeṣikas accept the link between composite objects and words postulated by the Sarvāstivādins. But whereas the latter reject the real existence of composite objects, and assign no other role to words than that of explaining our common error, for the former composite objects are part of reality, and words are the key that gives access to that reality. This they explain by pointing out that names were given by seers who could perceive everything.[42] This in [121] its turn explains why the Vaiśeṣika texts frequently

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[41] Bronkhorst, 1992b.

[42] *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* (ed. Jambuvijaya) 2.1.18-19: *saṃjñākarma tv asmadviśiṣṭānāṃ liṅgam/ pratyakṣapūrvakatvāt saṃjñākarmaṇaḥ/.* See also Wezler, 1985. The theme of seers who have given names to things is already present in the *Ṛgveda* and other early texts, as we have seen. Other texts take over the same theme. The *Yuktidīpikā* (ed. Pandeya, p. 5 l. 9 f.) ascribes the original function of naming

emphasise that this or that ontological situation justifies this or that current expression. The quality *pṛthaktva* (separateness), for example, explains that people speak of distinction. Sometimes the reasoning works in the opposite direction: the fact that the personal pronoun "I" cannot be used in apposition with some such term as "earth", proves that the soul is different from the body. Many further examples could be adduced to illustrate the parallelism between words and things from the Vaiśeṣika point of view, but they tend to be rather technical; I will not, therefore, harass you with more of them.[43] But I would like to add one more observation: even though the texts are not explicit about this, the conscious belief in the intimate connection between words and things may explain why the three most important (and perhaps oldest) categories of Vaiśeṣika — substance (*dravya*), quality (*guṇa*) and movement (*karman*) — correspond to the three main types of words: nouns, adjectives and verbs.

The Vaiśeṣikas do not, not at least in their early surviving texts, contrast Sanskrit with other languages. And indeed, one may wonder whether Sanskrit in particular is a vital ingredient of their belief in the correspondence between language and reality. This correspondence is usually conceived of as the relationship between names and what is named by them: nouns, adjectives and verbs, for example, name the different kinds of things that constitute objective reality. Different languages use different 'names'; this much is clear. But do these different 'names' correspond to different 'objects'? Jan Houben has recently drawn attention to the fact that early Indian thinkers — he speaks of Bhartṛhari in particular, but the grammarian Patañjali, too, can be included — did not show much appreciation for the variations of structure of different languages.[44] Different languages are often presented as collections of

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things to the supreme seer (*paramarṣi*), who is, of course, Kapila. The *Mahābhārata* (12.262.8), probably inspired by the *Nirukta* passage cited earlier, states that the seer Kapila had an an insight into the nature of things (*pratyakṣadharma*); the *Mahābhāṣya* (ed. Kielhorn vol. I p. 11 l. 11 f.) uses the same expression (here *pratyakṣadharman*) in connection with seers known as *yarvāṇas tarvāṇas* (so Cardona, 1990: 7 and 16 n. 24). The *Nyāya Bhāṣya* use the same expression as the *Nirukta* (*sākṣātkṛtadharman*) with reference to "reliable persons" (*āpta*); see Franco, 1994: 241. See further Ruegg, 1994, 1994a; also Bhartṛhari's *Vākyapadīya* 1.37-38; 3.1.46; Houben, 1997. Isaacson, 1993, has drawn attention to the fact that yogic perception has played a role in Vaiśeṣika from an early date onward. The idea that poets have a special insight into the nature of things was to have a long life in India. Rājaśekhara, the author of the treatise on poetry called *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* (9th or 10th century C.E.), observes in chapter 12 (p. 62, l. 17 - p. 63, l. 1; tr. Granoff, 1995: 364): "The true poetic eye, gained from propitiation of the goddess Sarasvatī, without need of external aids reveals things that have been directly experienced by the poet and things that the poet has never even experienced before, in a process that is beyond the range of human conception and cannot be described in words. For it is said that the goddess Sarasvatī reveals even to the sleeping poet both the theme of his poem and the language in which to express it. But others though awake are as if blind. For this reason it is said that really great poets are blind to things that have already been seen by others, but possess a kind of divine sight that enables them to perceive that which no one before them has ever seen. Even the Three-eyed God Śiva or Indra with his thousand eyes cannot see that which mortal poets see with their ordinary eyes. In the mirror that is the mind of poets the whole universe is reflected. Words and what they express vie with each other in their rush to be present to great minded poets. Poets explore with their words that which yogins see through the power of their religious accomplishments. And so the words of great poets are potentially infinite."

[43] See Bronkhorst, 1992b: 99 f., for these and other examples.

[44] Houben, 1993: 149 f.

deviations of individual words. Seen in this way, reality [122] corresponds to other languages as much as it corresponds to Sanskrit, precisely because they do not differ from it in a manner which would affect this correspondence. Having said this, it is of course important to add that for the Vaiśeṣikas there could be no doubt as to which language the original seers used while naming objects: this was of course Sanskrit.

One more question must here be addressed. How certain is it that Vaiśeṣika was indeed created under the influence of Sarvāstivāda Buddhism, and not, for example, under the influence of other schools, such as Sāṃkhya or the Jainas? This question has actually been raised in a recent publication, and at first sight it seems reasonable enough.[45] I would therefore like to use the present opportunity to add some reflections to the ones which I have presented in my earlier publication referred to above. These reflections do not, of course, exhaust the question. I will concentrate on the issue that has occupied us all along in this lecture, the question of the relationship between composite wholes and their parts. For reasons special to the history of Buddhism in India, this issue became of the greatest interest to the Buddhists. We find it back, in a different form, in Vaiśeṣika, but it is virtually absent in Sāṃkhya.[46] This as much as rules out Sāṃkhya. Jainism seems to side with Vaiśeṣika in some of its texts, but there is no indication that I know of suggesting that this issue was of any particular importance to them, as it was to the Buddhists and to the Vaiśeṣikas. To this I should add, that there is no evidence that Sāṃkhya and Jainism had developed any form of systematisation at the early date mentioned above for Sarvāstivāda (2nd cent. B.C.E.!). Not even in later Jainism is there, to my knowledge, a tendency to exhaustively enumerate all elements of existence. This development is, in Buddhism, linked to the dharma-theory and to the particular interpretation of the doctrine of non-self, neither of which have a parallel in Jainism. Moreover, hypotheses about the early development of Jainism are extremely precarious. Even their canonical texts — according to the Śvetāmbaras who, contrary to the Digambaras, believed that they had been preserved at all — were not written down until the fifth century of our era.[47] Having said that, I fully [123] agree that the historical relationship between Vaiśeṣika and Jainism needs further exploration, and may yet throw new light on unresolved issues. I do not, however, expect that such research will produce reasons to think that Vaiśeṣika was more than marginally indebted to Jainism. And even if the Jaina tradition to the extent that the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra was (wholly or partly) composed by the Jaina schismatic Rohagupta

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[45] Houben 1995: 733 n. 29.
[46] According to SK 10, the manifest (*vyakta*) has parts (*sāvayava*), whereas the non-manifest (*avyakta*) has not. SK 17 adds that aggregates exist for the sake of something else (*saṃghātaparārthatvāt*), and concludes from this that the *puruṣa* exists.
[47] On the late date of at least some Jaina canonical texts, see Bronkhorst, 1995: 1039-40.

were to be true,[48] this would only shift the problem, and one might still hold on to the view that the system was created under the influence of the Sarvāstivāda, this time by a schismatic Jaina. Of course, one cannot completely exclude the possibility that another Buddhist school, different from Sarvāstivāda, constituted the main influence on Vaiśeṣika.

There is one further argument, one that has a direct bearing on the theme of this paper. Vaiśeṣika postulates, or presupposes, a direct correspondence between words and things. So do Sarvāstivāda and other Buddhist schools, be it that for them the things in the world do not really exist. Neither Sāṃkhya nor Jainism entertained the idea of such a correspondence, so far as I am aware. They certainly did not emphasise the existence and importance of such a correspondence, as did the Buddhists. This is not surprising, for they had no need for such an assumption. The Buddhists of this time, on the other hand, needed this assumption very much, and indeed, their world view depended on it in a crucial manner. The same assumption resurfaces in Vaiśeṣika. Is it not reasonable to conclude that Vaiśeṣika stood under Buddhist influence?

<div style="text-align:center">III</div>

At this point we have to return for a minute to the Buddhist thinkers. We have seen that, from an early date onward, all of them agreed on the relationship between the phenomenal world and the words of language. I say on purpose "the words of language", and not just "language", for the interest of many of them appears to have been limited to words only. We believe in the existence of chariots, because there is a word for it. Combinations of words, primarily sentences, do not play a role in these reflections.

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This changes with Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Madhyamaka school of Buddhist thought. Nāgārjuna no doubt believed, like his fellow-Buddhists, that the phenomenal world corresponds to the words of language, and is not ultimately real. But he went further. By analysing certain sentences, he could *prove* the unreality of the phenomenal world. No need to add that, while analysing these sentences, he started from the presupposition which he shared with his fellow-Buddhists, and perhaps with others as well, the presupposition namely that language and the phenomenal world somehow correspond to each other. Analysing sentences became in that way a form of analysing the phenomenal world.

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[48] See Leumann, 1885: 116-123, and Mehta and Chandra, 1972: 646 (s.v. Rohagutta), 664 (s.v. Vaisesiya). Cp. Schubring, 1935: 13.

Nāgārjuna's thought can be illustrated with the help of the statement: "A sound is produced". For Nāgārjuna, there must be a sound for it to be produced. But if the sound is already there, it does not have to come into existence. This is presented as an unresolvable contradiction.[49] Elsewhere Nāgārjuna analyses the (perhaps somewhat artificial) statement: "He travels the road that is being travelled". This is only possible, Nāgārjuna maintains, if there are two acts of travelling going on: this because the verb 'travel' occurs twice in the statement.[50] He concludes from this that neither travelling, nor traveller, nor indeed the road to be travelled exist.[51] These two simple examples allow us to see that Nāgārjuna takes the close correspondence between statements and phenomenal reality for granted. A more detailed study of Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā brings indeed to light, that something like the following presupposition underlies a number of its arguments: the words of a true sentence must correspond to objects in the phenomenal world while, and as long as, the sentence is true.[52] This is in itself not at all surprising, I repeat, for many of his contemporaries, among them prac[125]tically all Buddhists, would agree that phenomenal reality corresponds to language. Nāgārjuna merely extends this belief, by including whole statements. Subsequently he shows that the belief in the precise correspondence between statements and phenomenal reality leads to unacceptable contradictions. He does not conclude from this that there may not, after all, be such precise correspondence between statements and phenomenal reality, as we perhaps would. Quite on the contrary, he sees this as a confirmation of his conviction that the phenomenal world does not really exist. But whereas for his predecessors phenomenal reality corresponds to the <u>words</u> of language, for Nāgārjuna and his followers phenomenal reality corresponds both to its <u>words</u> and its <u>sentences</u>.

IV

With this in mind we turn to another Brahmanical thinker who, as it seems to me, has been profoundly influenced by Buddhist ideas.[53] This is Bhartṛhari, the linguistic

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[49] See e.g. MadhK(deJ) 7.17: *yadi kaścid anutpanno bhāvaḥ saṃvidyate kvacit/ utpadyeta sa kiṃ tasmin bhāva utpadyate 'sati//* "If something that has not come into existence exists somewhere, it may come into existence. Since no such thing exists, what is it that comes into existence?"

[50] MadhK(deJ) 2.5: *gamyamānasya gamane prasaktaṃ gamanadvayam/ yena tad gamyamānaṃ ca yac cātra gamanaṃ punaḥ//* "If one can travel the road that is being travelled, there would be two acts of traveling: the one by which the road is being travelled, and the traveling on it."

[51] MadhK(deJ) 2.25cd: *tasmād gatiś ca gantā ca gantavyaṃ ca na vidyate.*

[52] See Bronkhorst, 1997.

[53] For the argument here presented it is not important to know whether Bhartṛhari was directly acquainted with Nāgārjuna's works. Nāgārjuna's style of reasoning left a profound impression on Buddhist thought after him, so that Bhartṛhari may have undergone his influence indirectly. Some features of Bhartṛhari's thought suggest that he may have been acquainted with one or more Yogācāra thinkers; see below.

thinker *par excellence* of classical India. Bhartṛhari stood, in fact, under the influence of both Vaiśeṣika and Buddhism, not to speak of several other currents of thought. The extent to which he is indebted to Vaiśeṣika is evident on almost every page of his Vākyapadīya. The Buddhist influence is less immediately obvious, but not any the less important, as it appears to me. I have drawn attention to Bhartṛhari's indebtedness to Buddhist thought in an earlier publication.[54] In the present lecture I will try to show how Bhartṛhari, at least where ideas concerning the relationship between language and phenomenal reality are concerned, remains closer to the Buddhists than to the Vaiśeṣikas. I will also point out how he adapts these essentially Buddhist ideas to his own vision of the world. We will see that Bhartṛhari accepts the close correspondence between language and phenomenal reality, that, like the Buddhists, he looks upon phenomenal reality as ultimately unreal, and that, like Nāgārjuna, he includes sen[126]tences in the parts of language that correspond to the phenomenal world.

For Bhartṛhari the world, and each object in it, has two aspects: the one real, the other unreal. VP 3.1.32, for example, speaks of "the real and the unreal parts which are present in each thing".[55] The phenomenal world is unreal. It is the result of an (unreal) division of the undivided absolute:[56] "The Vedāntins base themselves on the truth of that object, in which seer, seen and seeing are not differentiated (*avikalpita*)." It seems likely that Bhartṛhari counted himself among these Vedāntins, or rather, Trayyantavedins, as he calls them. The essential reality of things, we read elsewhere in the Vākyapadīya, is beyond differentiation:[57] "With regard to things (*bhāva*), whose reality is beyond differentiation (*vikalpātīta*), the world is followed in linguistic expressions (*vyavahāra*) which are based on conventions (*saṃketa*)." Here it is stated that linguistic expressions correspond to the unreal divisions of reality. Another verse tells us more about the division here at stake:[58] "Heaven, earth, wind, sun, oceans, rivers, the directions, these are divisions of the reality belonging to the inner organ, [even though] they are situated outside it." Note that this verse does not prove that Bhartṛhari was an idealist, that he denied the existence of the outside world. It rather states that the divisions of the outside world are produced by the inner organ, and therefore by words, as we will see.

These few citations show already that, besides important differences, Bhartṛhari shared one idea with the Buddhists. Both they and he believed that the phenomenal world is not real, and owes its form to the influence of words. This idea had of course

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[54] Bronkhorst, 1992a.

[55] VP 3.1.32ab: *satyāsatyau tu yau bhāgau pratibhāvaṃ vyavasthitau.* Cf. Bronkhorst 1991: 12 f.

[56] VP 3.3.72: *yatra draṣṭā ca dṛśyaṃ ca darśanaṃ cāvikalpitam/ tasyaivārthasya satyatvaṃ śritās trayyantavedinaḥ//*

[57] VP 3.6.25: *vikalpātītatattveṣu saṃketopanibandhanāḥ/ bhāveṣu vyavahārā ye lokas tatrānugamyate//*

[58] VP 3.7.41: *dyauḥ kṣamā vāyur ādityaḥ sāgarāḥ sarito diśaḥ/ antaḥkaraṇatattvasya bhāgā bahir avasthitāḥ//*

been an essential part of Buddhist thought since long before Bhartṛhari, as we have seen. It is, on the other hand, quite the opposite of the Vaiśeṣika position in the matter. We have already discussed the Vaiśeṣika conviction that words do not correspond to an unreal, but rather to the real world. Bhartṛhari ac[127]cepted the position of the Buddhists, but adapted it to his own requirements.

Those own requirements are those of a Brahmin, who has the highest regard for the Veda and for the language in which it is handed down. Sanskrit, Bhartṛhari informs us, is the divine language which, unfortunately, has been corrupted by incompetent speakers.[59] He even mentions an opinion according to which incorrect words are not expressive. Referring to some incorrect words, he states:[60] "Since they are not followed by the educated like correct synonyms, they are not directly expressive according to the traditional treatise." It is possible that Bhartṛhari did not share this point of view. His Vākyapadīya also contains the following verse:[61] "Some consider the incorrect word expressive by way of inference. Alternatively, there is no difference [between correct and incorrect words] as far as expressiveness is concerned, but there is a restriction with regard to merit and demerit."

Words separate things from each other:[62] "By force of the [fact that understanding has the form of words], every produced thing is distinguished [from other things]." "Words are the only basis of the true nature of things and of their use."[63] It follows that "those who know the nature of things see the power of words".[64] The fact that understanding has the form of words, referred to above, "is the external and internal *saṃjñā* of living beings. The consciousness in all kinds [of living beings] does not go beyond this measure."[65] Here it is to be noted that *saṃjñā* means both "verbal conscience, ideation" and "name". The ex[128]pression "the external and internal *saṃjñā* of living beings" may refer to them both. Bhartṛhari elaborates on the power of words in the following verses:[66] "The power residing in words is the basis of this whole universe. ... Since the difference between *ṣaḍja* and other [musical notes] is perceived

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[59] VP 1.182ab: *daivī vāg vyatikīrṇeyam aśaktair abhidhātṛbhiḥ* "This divine speech has been muddled by incompetent speakers." The *Mahābhāṣyadīpikā* (Manuscript p. 7a l. 4; 'Critical edition' I p. 16 l. 29 - p. 17 l. 1; ed. Abhyankar/Limaye p. 20 l. 1; ed. Swaminathan p. 24 l. 19-20) states the same in different words: *anye manyante/ iyaṃ daivī vāk/ sā tu puruṣāśakter ālasyād vā prakīrṇā/*.
[60] VP 1.178: *na śiṣṭair anugamyante paryāyā iva sādhavaḥ/ te yataḥ smṛtiśāstreṇa tasmāt sākṣād avācakāḥ//*
[61] VP 3.3.30: *asādhur anumānena vācakaḥ kaiścid iṣyate/ vācakatvāviśeṣe vā niyamaḥ puṇyapāpayoḥ//*. See the discussion by Houben (1992: 345 sq.), and VP 1.27 cited below.
[62] VP 1.133cd: *tadvaśād abhiniṣpannaṃ sarvaṃ vastu vibhajyate. tad-* refers back to *vāgrūpatā avabodhasya* in verse 132.
[63] VP 1.13ab: *arthapravṛttitattvānāṃ śabdā eva nibandhanam.*
[64] VP 1.171cd: *svabhāvajñais tu bhāvānāṃ dṛśyante śabdaśaktayaḥ.*
[65] VP 1.134: *saiṣā saṃsāriṇāṃ saṃjñā bahir antaś ca vartate/ tanmātrām avyatikrāntaṃ caitanyaṃ sarvajātiṣu//*
[66] VP 1.122-23: *śabdeṣv evāśritā śaktir viśvasyāsya nibandhanī/ ... ṣaḍjādibhedaḥ śabdena vyākhyāto rūpyate yataḥ/ tasmād arthavidhāḥ sarvāḥ śabdamātrāsu niśritāḥ//*. On the exact reading of this verse, see Bronkhorst, 1988: 124.

[only] when explained by words, all categories of objects are based on the measures of words." The creative power of language is exemplified by the illusion of a circle created by a firebrand turned round:[67] "It is observed in the case of a torch-wheel etc., that the form of an object is perceived on account of words (*śruti*), even though the basis [of the perception] is entirely different." "There is no cognition in the world that does not follow words. All knowledge appears as if permeated by words."[68] "It is from words that things proceed; [words] create the distinctions [in the phenomenal world]."[69] One might be tempted to think that this last line speaks about meanings rather than things; both are called *artha* in Sanskrit. Bhartṛhari speaks however about things in the objective world. This is particularly clear from a passage of his commentary on the Mahābhāṣya, often called Mahābhāṣyadīpikā, where the perception of words such as 'heaven', *apūrva*, and 'divinity' are presented as means to infer (*anumāna*) the existence of the corresponding objects:[70] "Just as the words 'heaven', *apūrva* and 'divinity', when perceived, are the means to infer the existence of objects never observed, ..." The same three objects — 'heaven', *apūrva* and 'divinity' — are mentioned in the following, slightly obscure, verse of the Vākyapadīya:[71] "The sign of the thing denoted is, that [129] there is an object corresponding to all words. In the case of words like 'cow', they say, it is similar to 'heaven', *apūrva* and 'divinity'."

It will be clear from these quotations, that the connection between language and phenomenal reality is close. And the language concerned is Sanskrit. But Bhartṛhari goes further. The fundamental unit of language is the sentence; this is equally true of the Vedic sentence.[72] This is important. It shows that Bhartṛhari does not merely postulate a correspondence between individual words and elements of the phenomenal world. The link between statements, in particular Vedic statements, and the phenomenal world is as important, or even more important. We'll return to this point in a minute. First we consider some of Bhartṛhari's observations with regard to the role of the Veda in the unfolding of phenomenal reality:[73] "Different sciences unfold, based on the primary and secondary limbs of that [Veda] which is the organising principle (*vidhātṛ*)

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[67] VP 1.142: *atyantam atathābhūte nimitte śrutyapāśrayāt/ dṛśyate 'lātacakrādau vastvākāranirūpaṇā//.* Tr. Houben.

[68] VP 1.131: *na so 'sti pratyayo loke yaḥ śabdānugamād ṛte/ anuviddham iva jñānaṃ sarvaṃ śabdena bhāsate//*

[69] VP 3.14.198ab: *śabdād arthāḥ pratāyante sa bhedānāṃ vidhāyakaḥ.*

[70] *Mahābhāṣyadīpikā*, Manuscript p. 11a l. 11; 'Critical edition' Āhnika I p. 28 l. 8-9; ed. Abhyankar-Limaye p. 33 l. 24 - p. 34 l. 1; ed. Swaminathan p. 40 l. 11: *tatra yathaiva svargāpūrvadevatāśabdā upalabhyamānā atyantāparidṛṣṭānām arthānām astitvānumānam ...* Bhavya's *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā* 9.5 ascribes to a 'Mīmāṃsaka' the position according to which the existence of such objects is known from the Veda; see Kawasaki, 1976: 6-7.

[71] VP 2.119: *asty arthaḥ sarvaśabdānām iti pratyāyyalakṣaṇam/ apūrvadevatāsvargaiḥ samam āhur gavādiṣu//*

[72] See Houben, 1995a.

[73] VP 1.10: *vidhātus tasya lokānām aṅgopāṅganibandhanāḥ/ vidyābhedāḥ pratāyante jñānasaṃskārahetavaḥ//* Halbfass translates *vidhātṛ* "organizing principle" (1991: 5) or "Organisationsprinzip" (1991a: 126).

of the worlds, [sciences] which are the causes of the mental traces (*saṃskāra*) of knowledge." The context of this verse leaves no doubt that it actually concerns the Veda, and that therefore the Veda is the organising principle, or perhaps one is entitled to translate: creator, of the worlds. A comparison with VP 3.14.198ab, cited above ("It is from words that things proceed; [words] create the distinctions [in the phenomenal world]"), and which, too, uses the verb *vi-dhā*, shows that the creation of the world is essentially a division, a differentiation, of the undivided absolute. Another verse explains the relationship between the Veda and the world in the following terms:[74] "Those who know the sacred tradition know that this [universe] is a transformation of the word. In the beginning this universe proceeds exclusively from Vedic verses."

The world having been created, or organised, by the Veda, tradition (*āgama / smṛti*) bases itself on the Veda:[75] "The texts of tradition (*smṛti*), which are multiform and have visible as well as invisible aims, have [130] been arranged by knowers of the Veda on the basis of the [Veda] with the help of indicators." This implies, for Bhartṛhari, that the link between tradition and the world is close, too. The world follows the rules of the word:[76] "Even if [all] philosophies had disappeared, and there would not be other authors, the world would not deviate from the rules expressed by the Veda (*śruti*) and by the tradition (*smṛti*)." This implies, among other things, that the rules of behaviour are in a way inherent in the world:[77] "All duties (*itikartavyatā*) in the world are based on words; even a child knows them because of the mental impressions (*saṃskāra*) acquired earlier." The intuition (*pratibhā*) which is called "meaning of the sentence", and which makes us know our duties, can either be the result of verbal instruction, or it can be inborn:[78] "Whether the [intuition] is directly produced by the word or by the result of impulsions (*bhāvanā*), no one deviates from it where duties (*itikartavyatā*) are concerned." Even animals are guided by this intuition:[79] "Under the influence of that [intuition] even the animals act. ... Who changes the sound of the male cuckoo in spring? How have animals learnt to build nests and the like? Who induces wild animals and birds to eat, love, hate, swim, and so on, activities well known among the descendants of each species?"

These verses have been interpreted to mean that the hereditary knowledge one finds among animals and in children is the result of the use of language in an earlier

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[74] VP 1.124: *śabdasya pariṇāmo 'yam ity āmnāyavido viduḥ/ chandobhya eva prathamam etad viśvaṃ pravartate//*

[75] VP 1.7: *smṛtayo bahurūpāś ca dṛṣṭādṛṣṭaprayojanāḥ/ tam evāśritya liṅgebhyo vedavidbhiḥ prakalpitāḥ//.*

[76] VP 1.149: *astaṃ yāteṣu vādeṣu kartṛṣv anyeṣv asatsv api/ śrutismṛtyuditaṃ dharmaṃ loko na vyativartate//*

[77] VP 1.129: *itikartavyatā loke sarvā śabdavyapāśrayā/ yāṃ pūrvāhitasaṃskāro bālo 'pi pratipadyate//*

[78] VP 2.146: *sākṣāc chabdena janitāṃ bhāvanānugamena vā/ itikartavyatāyāṃ tāṃ na kaścid ativartate//*

[79] VP 2.147cd & 149-150: *samārambhāḥ pratāyante tiraścām api tadvaśāt// ... svaravṛttiṃ vikurute madhau puṃskokilasya kaḥ/ jantvādayaḥ kulāyādikaraṇe śikṣitāḥ katham// āhāraprītyapadveṣaplavanādikriyāsu kaḥ/ jātyanvayaprasiddhāsu prayoktā mṛgapakṣiṇām//*

existence.[80] Nothing in the text supports this point of view. It is true that living beings are born with impulsions (*bhāvanā*) or mental traces (*saṃskāra*) which are linguistic by nature, but it would appear that these linguistic impulsions are not, or not al[131]ways, the results of instructions in an earlier life.[81] One could here repeat Bhartṛhari's question: What verbal impulsions would change the sound of the male cuckoo in spring? Bhartṛhari himself answers this question, and the others that accompany it, in the following verses:[82] "It comes from tradition (*āgama*) only, which follows the impulsions (*bhavanā*). As for the tradition, it is different [for each individual] depending on the proximity or distance.[83] Six forms of intuition (*pratibhā*) are known, depending on whether they are produced by the own nature, the Vedic school, practice, Yoga, by the invisible (*adṛṣṭa*), or by a special [cause]." It follows that there is natural knowledge:[84] "Since knowledge is natural, the traditional religious and scientific treatises (*śāstra*) serve no purpose whatsoever." This also applies to morality:[85] "With regard to the two positions 'this is virtuous' or 'this is sinful', there is little use for religious and scientific treatises (*śāstra*) right down to the untouchables."

Bhartṛhari uses the word *bhāvanā* "impulsion" at several other occasions in the Vākyapadīya. The "impulsion of the word" (*śabdabhāvanā*) is required to set the speech organs in motion, to emit an upward breath, and to make the points of articulation strike each other.[86] The impulsions, moreover, cause the imaginary divisions of the sentence which has, in reality, no parts:[87] "Although the meaning of the sentence is without divisions, the imagined divisions are based on *bhāvanā*."
[132]

The direct link between words and things explains the effects words can have on things:[88] "Just as it is observed that colours etc. have well-defined capacities with regard to certain things, in the same way one observes that words [have well-defined capacities] to remove snake poison etc. Just as they have a capacity to do this (to

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[80] Biardeau, 1964a: 317-18; Iyer, 1977: 62.

[81] One is of course reminded of the *abhilāpavāsanā* of the Yogācāras, which is responsible for a number of percepts (*vijñapti*) besides the one of linguistic usage (*vyavahāravijñapti*). Cf. Lamotte, 1973: 88-89, 108 (= Mahāyānasaṃgraha II, 2; II, 16).

[82] VP 2.151-52: *bhāvanānugatād etad āgamād eva jāyate/ āsattiviprakarṣābhyām āgamas tu viśiṣyate// svabhāvacaraṇābhyāsayogādṛṣṭopapāditām/ viśiṣṭopahitām ceti pratibhām ṣaḍvidhām viduḥ//.* The reading *caraṇa* instead of *varaṇa* is here accepted, with Rau's hyparchetype **n** and the *Vṛtti.*

[83] The commentator Puṇyarāja explains: the tradition is sometimes acquired in this life, sometimes in another life.

[84] VP 1.150ab: *jñāne svābhāvike nārthaḥ śāstraiḥ kaścana vidyate.*

[85] VP 1.40: *idam puṇyam idam pāpam ity etasmin padadvaye/ ācaṇḍālamanuṣyāṇām alpaṃ śāstraprayojanam//.* This verse belongs to the *Vṛtti* according to Aklujkar, 1971: 512.

[86] VP 1.130: *ādyaḥ karaṇavinyāsaḥ prāṇasyordhvam samīraṇam/ sthānānām abhighātaś ca na vinā śabdabhāvanām//*

[87] VP 2.116: *avikalpitavākyārthe vikalpā bhāvanāśrayāḥ.*

[88] VP 1.155-156: *rūpādayo yathā dṛṣṭāḥ pratyarthaṃ yataśaktayaḥ/ śabdās tathaiva dṛśyante viṣāpaharaṇādiṣu // yathaiṣām tatra sāmarthyaṃ dharme 'py evaṃ pratīyatām/ sādhūnām sādhubhis tasmād vācyam abhyudayārthinām//* tr. Houben.

remove snake poison etc.) it should be understood that they also [have a capacity] to [produce] merit. Therefore, good people desiring elevation (*abhyudaya*), should use correct words." The capacity to produce merit belongs to correct words only:[89] "On the basis of traditional knowledge [received] from the well-educated, correct words are established as a means towards merit. While there is no difference in expressing the meaning, incorrect words are the opposite (i.e., not a means towards merit)."

V

The link between words and things having been established, the study of language, and of Sanskrit in particular, enables one to reach conclusions about the world. Bhartṛhari uses the words of Patañjali, who says in his Mahābhāṣya:[90] "We accept the word as authority. What the word says is authoritative for us." Exactly the same phrase can be found in the Śābara Bhāṣya,[91] but Bhartṛhari clearly gives it a wider interpretation. His Vākyapadīya observes:[92] "People accept the word as authority; they are followed [in this] by the religious and scientific treatises (*śāstra*)."

We return to Bhartṛhari's acceptance as the sentence as primary linguistic unit. This implies that the phenomenal world corresponds to statements, first of all Vedic statements. This explains that, according to Bhartṛhari, injunctions and other rules are somehow built into the phenomenal world. Individual words do not constitute injunctions, or [133] śāstras, or rules of behaviour for animals and men. And it is through its sentences that the Veda becomes what it is. If the world is created, or organised, in accordance with the Veda, Vedic sentences must be meant, not just individual Vedic words. Bhartṛhari follows therefore Nāgārjuna in extending the correspondence between language and phenomenal reality beyond mere words, so as to include sentences.

But here a new difficulty comes up. Nāgārjuna had brought to light the contradictions connected with such a procedure. How does Bhartṛhari deal with these difficulties? Some passages of the Vākyapadīya show that its author was very much aware of them, and that he offered solutions to them. According to one of these solutions, objects of words have metaphorical existence, which shows their form in past, present, and future. It is therefore a metaphorically existing sound which is

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[89] VP 1.27: *śiṣṭebhya āgamāt siddhāḥ sādhavo dharmasādhanam/ arthapratyāyanābhede viparītās tv asādhavaḥ//* tr. Houben.
[90] Mbh I p. 11 l. 1-2; p. 366 l. 12-13: *śabdapramāṇakā vayam/ yac chabda āha tad asmākaṃ pramāṇam/.*
[91] ŚābBh 3.1.36 (p. 184); cp. 6.1.3 (p. 183), 6.2.6 (p. 228), 10.5.73 (p. 431).
[92] VP 3.7.38cd: *śabdapramāṇako lokaḥ sa śāstreṇānugamyate.*

produced.[93] The problem of the road to be travelled can be solved in a similar manner. Another solution can be found in the Jātisamuddeśa of the Vākyapadīya. Words, according to this section, always refer to universals (*jāti*). Universals, in their turn, play an active role in bringing about the manifestation of the objects to which they belong:[94] "Nothing comes into existence which has no universal; the universal urges the causes to manifest itself." Seen in this way, the word 'sound' in "The sound is produced" refers to the universal, and there is no contradiction, even on the assumption that words must necessarily refer to something existing. Bhartṛhari may have thought of a transitive phrase such as "He produces a sound", for one of his verses refers explicitly to the grammatical object (*karman*). The verse reads:[95] "The universal is also effective with regard to a grammatical object that is being produced; it urges the action to bring about the object in which it resides." In the Sādhanasamuddeśa again another solution is offered, on the assumption this time that words refer to individuals:[96] "On the assumption that the meaning of the word is the individual, it is established [134] that the grammatical object which is being produced, for example sound, is the means (*sādhana*); this is done on the basis of mental form." It is clear that here, once again, Bhartṛhari addresses the problem raised by Nāgārjuna.[97]

<p style="text-align:center">VI</p>

We have to address one final, but very important, question. What reason is there to believe that Bhartṛhari borrowed his ideas on the role of language primarily from the Buddhists? There can be no doubt that several elements of his views have parallels in Brahmanical literature, too. Consider, for example, the idea of the Veda as creator, or organising principle, of the world. Halbfass (1991: 5) draws in this connection attention to the fact that the Manusmṛti, too, characterises the Veda as an organising and sustaining principle, and even as the real basis of the social and natural world.[98] He then adds: "It would be wrong to view such statements as merely metaphorical. The Veda is

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[93] VP 3.3.39 ff. Cp. Bronkhorst, 1992a: 67 f.

[94] VP 3.1.25: *na tad utpadyate kiṃcid yasya jātir na vidyate/ ātmābhivyaktaye jātiḥ kāraṇānāṃ prayojikā//.*

[95] VP 3.1.27: *nirvartyamānaṃ yat karma jātis tatrāpi sādhanam/ svāśrayasyābhiniṣpattyai sā kriyāyāḥ prayojikā//.* The translation of this verse in Bronkhorst, 1991: 14 has to be corrected.

[96] VP 3.7.7: *vyaktau padārthe śabdāder janyamānasya karmaṇaḥ/ sādhanatvaṃ tathā siddhaṃ buddhirūpaprakalpitam//.*

[97] According to Helārāja ad VP 3.1.27, the solution proposed in VP 3.7.7 is that of metaphorical existence, the same solution therefore as that of VP 3.3.39 f.

[98] See, e.g., Manu 1.21: *sarveṣāṃ tu sa nāmāni karmāṇi ca pṛthak pṛthak/ vedaśabdebhya evādau pṛthak saṃsthāś ca nirmame//;* also Manu 4.256ab: *vācy arthā niyatāḥ sarve vāṅmūlā vāgviniḥsṛtāḥ/* "All things (have their nature) determined by speech; speech is their root, and from speech they proceed" (tr. Bühler, 1886: 168). See also *Nāṭyaśāstra* 15.3 (ed. tr. M. Ghosh): *vāṅmayānīha śāstrāṇi vāṅniṣṭhāni tathaiva ca/ tasmād vācaḥ paraṃ nāsti vāg ghi sarvasya kāraṇam//.*

the foundation of language, of the fundamental distinctions and classifications in the world, and of those rituals which are meant to sustain the social and natural order." Certain Upaniṣadic passages, too, emphasise the role of language in the construction of the phenomenal world.[99] And already the Śata[135]patha Brāhmaṇa states: "Everything here is speech, for by speech everything here is obtained."[100]

Here it is important to remember that Bhartṛhari's thought does not belong to one single tradition. It is clear from his work that he was acquainted with, and made extensive use of, various schools of thought, be they Brahmanical, Buddhist, or even Jaina.[101] He used a variety of ideas in order to construe his own system of thought, which therefore contains traces of all of them, but all of them adjusted so as to fit into the resulting scheme. Any parallelism between Buddhist thought and more or less similar statements in the Brahmanical tradition, we may be sure, confirmed Bhartṛhari in the idea that he presented an essentially Brahmanical system of thought. In one important way, therefore, it is nonsense to look for Bhartṛhari's "true" source of an idea which is present in several of his known sources. Yet we should not forget that the belief in the close relationship between language and the phenomenal world is particularly prominent in, and essential to, Buddhist thought. As I said earlier, these ideas are not marginal here, but they belong to the very essence of that which occupied Buddhist thinkers for a very long time. Moreover, only the Buddhists had gone beyond some vague and general statements, and had incorporated these ideas into systems of thought, which Bhartṛhari could and did draw upon. It is in this sense that I conclude that Bhartṛhari is here, as in certain other respects, primarily indebted to the Buddhists of his time.

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[99] See, e.g., MaiU 6.6: *athāvyāhṛtaṃ vā idam āsīt/ sa satyaṃ prajāpatis tapas taptvānuvyāharad bhūr bhuvaḥ svar iti/ eṣaivāsya prajāpateḥ sthaviṣṭhā tanūḥ/,* and MaiU 6.22-23: *dve vāva brahmaṇī abhidhyeye śabdaś cāśabdaś ca/ atha śabdenaivāśabdam āviṣkriyate/ atha tatrom iti śabdaḥ/ ... evaṃ hy āha: dve brahmaṇī veditavye śabdabrahma paraṃ ca yat/ śabdabrahmaṇi niṣṇātaḥ paraṃ brahmādhigacchati// ... yaḥ śabdas tad om ity etad akṣaram/ yad asyāgraṃ tacchāntam aśabdam abhayam aśokam ānandaṃ tṛptaṃ sthiram acalam amṛtam acyutaṃ dhruvam ...*

[100] ŚB 10.5.1.3: *vāg ghy evaitat sarvam/ vācā hy evaitat sarvam āptam.* Tr. Eggeling, 1885: 365. Cf. ŚB 14.3.2.20.

[101] See Houben, 1994; Bronkhorst, 1990; 1992a; 1993.

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Abbreviations:

Abhidh-k-bh(P)	Vasubandhu, Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, ed. P. Pradhan, rev. 2nd ed. Aruna Haldar, Patna 1975 (Tibetan Sanskrit Works Series, 8)
MadhK(deJ)	Nāgārjuna, Mūlamadhyamakakārikāḥ, ed. J.W. de Jong, The Adyar Library and Research Centre, Madras 1977
MaiU	Maitrāyaṇī Upaniṣad, ed. V.P. Limaye and R.D. Vadekar
Mbh	Mahābhāṣya, ed. F. Kielhorn
RV	Ṛgveda
ŚābBh	Śābara Bhāṣya. In: Mīmāṃsadarśanam. Kāśīnātha Vāsudeva-Śāstrī Abhyaṃkara tathā Paṃ. Gaṇeśa-Śāstrī Jośī ... ity etaiḥ ... saṃśodhitam. 7 vols. Poona: Ānandāśrama. Published between 1974 and 1984. (Ānandāśramasaṃskṛtagranthāvali no. 97.)
ŚB	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
SK	Sāṃkhya Kārikā. Edition included in Pandeya, 1967

SN	Saṃyutta-Nikāya, ed. L. Feer, 5 vols., London 1884-1898 (Pali Text Society), vol. 6 (Indexes by C.A.F. Rhys Davids), London 1905 (Pali Text Society)
TI	Taishô Shinshū Daizôkyô or Taishô Issaikyô, 100 vols., Tôkyô 1924 ff.
VP	Vākyapadīya of Bhartṛhari, ed. W. Rau