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THE THEORY OF PRACTICE AND THE PRACTICE OF THEORY IN INDIAN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

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Śāstra is one of the fundamental features and problems of Indian civilization in general and of Indian intellectual history in particular. But the idea and nature of *śāstra* in its own right have never been the object of sustained Indological scrutiny. This preliminary sketch of the problem of *śāstra* focuses on three connected questions: How does the tradition view the relationship of a given *śāstra* to its object; what are the implications of this view for the concept of cultural change; is there some traditional presupposition, or justification, for the previous two notions. The understanding of the relationship of *śāstra* ("theory") to *prayoga* ("practical activity") in Sanskritic culture is shown to be diametrically opposed to that usually found in the West. Theory is held always and necessarily to precede and govern practice; there is no dialectical interaction between them. Two important implications of this fundamental postulate are that all knowledge is pre-existent, and that progress can only be achieved by a regressive re-appropriation of the past. The eternity of the *vedas*, the *śāstra* par excellence, is one presupposition or justification for this assessment of *śāstra*. Its principal ideological effects are to naturalize and de-historicize cultural practices, two components in a larger discourse of power.

INTRODUCTION¹

STUDENTS OF DANIEL INGALLS learned among other essential lessons how important it is to take account of traditional categories and concepts when attempting to understand the cultural achievements of ancient India.² It was thus that, in my early work on the poetics of the Sanskrit lyric, I had the occasion to read through many of the "scientific" or "theoretical" textbooks (*śāstras*) on metrics. Besides the extraordinary taxonomical interests and procedures of the metrical texts, what struck me most forcefully was the nomological character of the handbooks, the apparent homogeneity with which they treated the subject over some two thousand years, and the very keen attempt throughout this period on the part of the poets to approximate their work as closely as possible to the shastric stipulations. Considering Sanskritic Indian culture as a whole with these two facets of *śāstra* in mind, I slowly began

to perceive how widely shastric codification of behavior was represented across the entire cultural spectrum, and how vast were its claims to normative influence.

My first reaction to the existence and effect of such codes was disfavorable, not unlike that of V. S. Naipaul, who once complained about the art of India that it was "limited by the civilization, by an idea of the world in which men were born only to obey the rules."³ It was this attitude that prompted me to further study in the area of shastric regulation, conceived accordingly as an analysis of the components of cultural hegemony or at least authoritarianism. The question of domination remains in my view important for several areas of pre-modern India, the realms of social and political practices, for instance. But it is clearer to me now that everywhere civilization as a whole—and this is especially true of art-making—is constrained by rules of varying strictness, and indeed, may be accurately described by an accounting of such rules.⁴

¹ I would like to thank the following colleagues for their comments on earlier versions of this essay: Paul Greenough, Christopher Minkowski, Peter Granda, David Arkush.

² This of course has informed his own critical practice as well; see for example *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry* (Cambridge, 1965), Introduction (especially the remarks on p. 50).

³ *New York Review of Books*, March 22, 1979, p. 10.

⁴ See the important volume edited by Mary Douglas, *Rules and Meanings* (London, 1973). The essentiality of rules in artistic creation is strongly argued by Andrew Harrison in *Making and Thinking* (Indianapolis, 1978), especially pp. 60–86.

When students first encounter the pervasive regulation of behavior presented by, say, *dharmaśāstra*, it is for many an experience serving to confirm how alien Indian culture is. They are amazed to find even so apparently simple an act as meeting another person encumbered with a whole battery of rules:

After the salutation, a brahman who greets an elder must pronounce his own name, saying "I am so and so." . . . A brahman should be saluted in return as follows: "May you live long, sir"; the vowel /a/ must be added at the end of the name of the addressee, the preceding syllable being lengthened to three morae. . . . A brahman who does not know the proper form of returning a greeting should not be saluted by learned men. . . . To a female who is the wife of another man, and not a blood relation, he must say, "Lady," or "Dear sister." . . . To his maternal and paternal uncles, fathers-in-law, officiating priests, and other venerable people, he must say, "I am so and so," and rise before them, even if they are younger than he.⁵

But these students, given the interiorization of their own cultural practices, are not apt to consider that such prescriptions, with the same degree of comprehensive and oppressive detail, are propounded in contemporary culture:

When men are introduced to each other they shake hands standing, without, if possible, reaching in front of another person. They may smile or at least look pleasant and say nothing as they shake hands, or one may murmur some such usual, courteous phrase as "It is nice to meet (or know) you." . . . In shaking hands, men remove the right glove if the action isn't too awkward because of the suddenness of the encounter. If they shake hands with the glove on they say, "Please excuse (or forgive) my glove." Men who meet or are introduced to each other outdoors do not remove their hats unless a lady is present. When a man is introduced to a lady he does not offer his hand unless she makes the move first. When women are introduced to each other and one is sitting, the other standing, the one who is seated does not rise unless the standee is her hostess or a much older or very distinguished woman.⁶

⁵ *ManuSm.* 2.122, 125–6, 129, 130 (after Bühler). (The abbreviations of Sanskrit texts and the particular editions used, unless otherwise specified, are those of the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Sanskrit* [Poona, 1976–].)

⁶ Amy Vanderbilt, *Everyday Etiquette* (New York, 1952), pp. 25–6.

What both *Manusmṛti* and Amy Vanderbilt's *Everyday Etiquette* articulate for us is practical cultural knowledge, mastery of which makes one a competent member of the culture in question. Such cultural grammars exist in every society; they are the code defining a given culture as such. Classical Indian civilization, however, offers what may be the most exquisite expression of the centrality of rule-governance in human behavior. Under the influence perhaps of the paradigm deriving from the strict regulation of ritual action in vedic ceremonies, the procedures for which are set forth in those rule-books par excellence, the *Brāhmaṇas*, secular life as a whole was subject to a kind of ritualization, whereby all its performative gestures and signifying practices came to be encoded in texts. *Śāstra*, the Sanskrit word for these grammars, thus presents itself as one of the fundamental features and problems of Indian civilization in general and of Indian intellectual history in particular.

Śāstra is a significant phenomenon both intrinsically—taken as a whole it is a monumental, in some cases unparalleled, intellectual accomplishment in its own right—and extrinsically, with respect to the impact it has exercised, or sought to exercise, on the production and reproduction of culture in traditional India. It is not only the sheer number and broad scope of these cultural grammars that arrest our attention. Equally important is the concrete form they have taken. Until quite recently in the West, codes such as these have, with some exceptions (law would be an obvious one), largely remained "tacit" knowledge, as Polanyi calls it, existing on the level of practical and not discursive awareness. In India, by contrast, they were textualized, many of them at an early date, and had consequently to be learned rather than assimilated by a natural process of cultural osmosis. In addition to the significant factor of their textuality, these grammars were, by a process to be discussed, invested with massive authority, ensuring what in many cases seems to have been a nearly unchallengeable claim to normative control of cultural practices.

In light of the major role it appears to play in Indian civilization, it is surprising to discover that the idea and nature of *śāstra* in its own right, as a discrete problem of intellectual history, seem never to have been the object of sustained scrutiny. Individual *śāstras* have of course received intensive examination, as have certain major sub-genres, such as the *sūtra*.⁷ But a systematic and synthetic analysis of the phenomenon as a whole,

⁷ Louis Renou, "Sur le Genre du sūtra dans la Littérature sanskrite," *Journal asiatique*, 1963, pp. 165–216.

as presenting a specific and unique problematic of its own, has not to my knowledge been undertaken.

For a preliminary sketch of this terrain—excluding on the present occasion the internal methodological features of shastric discourse—I see three areas where inquiry into the nature and function of *śāstra* might be directed. The first is the tradition's representation to itself of the ontological relationship, as it were, of any given *śāstra* to its object. The question I am asking here is how the tradition conceives its own activities as functioning; how cultural practices are thought to be constituted. The second concerns the implications of this relationship for the *conceptual* possibilities of cultural change and development. While I believe the degree of actual influence of shastric models on cultural practices and beliefs in pre-modern India to be a far-reaching issue of the utmost importance, here I want, again, to examine only the ideational status of these possibilities, that is, to consider how far they were entertained by the cultural actors themselves. Conflict between the essentially "ideological" representation of *śāstra*'s normative influence and historical "truth" is in some areas minimal (*alaṅkāraśāstra* and the *mahākāvya*, for example), in some significant (*dharmaśāstra* and the legal practices perceptible in the epigraphical record). But this is a discrepancy that will not be investigated here, where I am interested primarily in exhuming a structure of signification. The final area of inquiry is the presupposition behind, or perhaps more correctly justification for, on the one hand this relationship between *śāstra* and its object, and on the other its broad cultural implications.

These are large questions no doubt, all three of them, to which it is hard to do justice within the limits of this paper. But since, as I believe, they form a coherent whole, I shall try to deal with them as an ensemble, the first one alone in detail, the second two more cursorily and speculatively.

1. THE RELATIONSHIP OF ŚĀSTRA TO ITS OBJECT

It will be useful first of all to learn how the tradition itself defines *śāstra*, and to examine what it holds to be *śāstra*'s proper domain.

Although the word *śāstra* is attested from the time of the earliest literary monuments,⁸ no comprehensive definition is offered until the medieval period. Among its more common significations earlier, in the quite representative grammatical tradition especially, is "authoritative rule" (as, for example, *śāstrārthasam-*

pratyaya, "the intention of a rule," or *samāsaśāstra*, "the rule[s] concerning compounding"),⁹ or a rationalized collection of rules (the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, for example). We are informed further by Patañjali that "*Śāstra* is that from which there derives regulation [definite constraints on usage]" (*śāstrato hi nāma vyavasthā*).¹⁰ Outside the grammatical tradition, the term embraced more broadly the notion of "system of ideas," "philosophical system" (as, for example, *Nyāya*).¹¹ But it is the aspect of its "regulating" or "codifying" that we find prominent in what seems to be the first formal definition of *śāstra*, articulating a primary meaning of the term in the classical period that is of principal concern to us here. "*Śāstra*," we are told by the great eighth-century Mīmāṃsaka Kumārila bhaṭṭa,

"is that which teaches people what they should and should not do. It does this by means of eternal [words] or those made [by men]. Descriptions of the nature [of things/states] can be embraced by the term *śāstra* insofar as they are elements subordinate [to injunctions to action]."¹²

Śāstra is thus, according to the standard definition,¹³ a verbal codification of rules, whether of divine or human provenance, for the positive and negative regulation of some given human practices.

There is another important signification of *śāstra* that to a large degree intersects with but does not, at least at first glance, encompass that intended by Patañjali or Kumārila, though it is in evidence in the latter's bipartition of *śāstra*'s provenance. This seems

⁹ *MahāBh.* 6.1.84 *vārt.* 4; *KāśīVr.* on 1.2.43. See also Louis Renou, *Terminologie grammaticale du Sanskrit* (Paris, 1942), Part 2, p. 115.

¹⁰ *MahāBh.* 6.1.135 *vārt.* 4. Cf. P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra* (Poona, 1960–75), Vol. 5, p. 1252 and n. 2036.

¹¹ *NyāyVār.* pp. 1–2.

¹² *ŚlokaVār.*, *Śabdapariśeḍha*, vss. 4–5 (ed. Varanasi, 1978, p. 288). According to Kane, the reading in *pāda* c is elsewhere found to be *śāsanāc chaṁsanāc caiva* (Kane, *History*, Vol. 5, p. 1182 and n. 1924). For the derivation of the term outside the Brahmanical tradition, cf. Candrakīrti ad *Mūlamadhya-makakārikā* 1.1 (ed. Darbhanga, 1960, p. 1): "Since it chastises all one's inimical impurities and saves from evil [re]birth—from this 'chastising' and 'saving' it is called *śāstra*" (*yac chāsti vaḥ kleśaripūn aśeṣān samtrāyate durgatito bhavāc ca/ tac chāsanāt trāṇaguṇāc ca śāstram. . .*)

¹³ It is cited frequently, as for example by *Bhām.* on *BrahmSūBh.* 1.1.4 (ed. Bombay, Nirṇaya Sagar Press, 1934, p. 66).

⁸ See for example *RV* 8.33.16.

to be an old meaning of the term, preserved in the classical period above all in the Pūrva- and Uttara-Mīmāṃsā tradition. Here *śāstra* refers more specifically to *veda*, as when, for example, in the *Brahmasūtras*, *brahma* is described as *śāstrayoni*-, “that, the source of our knowledge of which is *śāstra*” (that is, the *vedas* and in particular the Upaniṣads).¹⁴ Such a shared signifier for the two domains (“rule” or “book of rules” on the one hand and “revelation” on the other) bespeaks an important rapprochement or even convergence between them. The bivalency may have been more than symptomatic, having perhaps fostered a postulate of critical importance in Indian intellectual history (below, pp. 518–19), unless it is more properly viewed as an effect rather than the cause of that postulate.

What then are the given practices for which the rules provided by *śāstra* apply? A relatively systematic catalogue of shastric knowledge—one of the first such catalogues that is something more than the earlier unrationalized lists, such as that of Yājñavalkya¹⁵—is offered by Rājaśekhara, the late ninth-century poet and critic. *Śāstra*, he explains, is two-fold, being in origin either human (*pauruṣeya*) or transcendent (*apauruṣeya*). *Śāstra* of transcendent origin consists of: the four *vedas*; the four *upavedas*: history (*itihāsa* *veda* [elsewhere this slot is normally occupied by *arthaśāstra*, the science of statecraft]), the science of weapons or war generally (*dhanurveda*), music, and medicine (these are affiliated respectively with the *Atharvaveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Rgveda*); the six *vedāṅgas* (grammar, phonetics, lexicography, metrics, astronomy/astrology, and sacrificial procedures, to which Rājaśekhara for his part would add rhetoric).¹⁶ *Śāstra* of human origin consists of the (eighteen) collections of ancient legends (*purāṇas*, to which is often added elsewhere *itihāsa*), logic or philosophy in general (*ānvikṣikī*), (*karma* and *brahma*) *mīmāṃsā*, and the *smṛtitantra* (that is, the *dharmaśāstras*). All together (excluding the four *upavedas*) these constitute the fourteen *vidyāsthānas*, or “topics of knowledge.” Others, Rājaśekhara continues, add economics (*vārttā* = agriculture, animal husbandry, commerce), erotology, art/architecture, and civil and criminal law (*daṇḍanīti*), and so reckon eighteen *vidyāsthānas*.¹⁷

¹⁴ *BrahmSū.* 1.1.3.

¹⁵ See *YājñSm.* 1.3.

¹⁶ It is somewhat unclear how far Rājaśekhara intends the category “transcendent” to extend. The marked division created by *pauruṣeya* (p. 3, 1.12) naturally suggests that everything listed prior is *apauruṣeya*.

¹⁷ *KāvyaMī.* pp. 2–4. The *vidyāsthānas* (the word is attested at least from the time of the *Nirukta* [1.15]) as numbering

Whatever the number and specific composition of such topics of knowledge, it seems clear that the very notion of a finite set of “topics of knowledge” implies an attempt at an exhaustive classification of human cultural practices. Given this, and the comprehensive nature of Rājaśekhara’s list, we would naturally infer that virtually any organized activity known to a pre-modern society is amenable to treatment in *śāstra*. And in fact, as our extant *śāstras* show, virtually every activity has been so treated, from cooking, sexual intercourse, elephant-rearing, thievery, to mathematics, logic, ascetic renunciation, and spiritual liberation.¹⁸

What Rājaśekhara provides us in his catalogue raisonné are the domain and scope of *śāstra* and the interrelationships of its constituent elements, as these were generally understood in the classical period of Sanskrit culture. Several modifications and amplifications, some important, some less so, have been introduced elsewhere in the tradition, or could be. I shall discuss further below the dichotomy between human and transcendent, which, as in the case of Kumārila’s definition of the term *śāstra*, is thoroughly undermined by the self-valorizing claims of secular *śāstra*: The postulate of a single source of both sorts of knowledge was far more widespread, and is the dominant presupposition when not clearly enunciated (as it is in the most elaborate survey of the sciences,

fourteen (minus the *upavedas*) are known from as early as the *YājñSm.* 1.3 (cf. also Kane, *History*, Vol. 2, pp. 354ff.; Vol. 5, pp. 820, 926 and n. 1478). They number eighteen first it seems in *ViṣṇuP.* 3.6.28–9, where instead of *vārttā* etc. the four *upavedas* are added. Rājaśekhara (p. 4) records various other more restrictive views on the number of the sciences (cf. in particular *ArthŚā.* 1.2.1, which mentions four *vidyās* [concerning the education of a king]; also *ManuSm.* 7.43, and *RaghuVa.* 3.30; see further in V. S. Sukthankar, *Epic Studies VI* [Poona, 1936], pp. 73ff., addendum ad *MBh.* crit. ed. 3.149.31). Jayantabhaṭṭa tries to rationalize the lists, employing an unusually narrow acceptance of *śāstra* (as concerned with transcendent human needs, cf. below, p. 508) that ignores the existence of such texts as the *upavedas* and the mass of other *śāstras* discussed below (see *NyāyMan.* [ed. Ahmedabad, L. D. Series, 1975], p. 7).

¹⁸ Other *śāstras* not listed by Rājaśekhara (though in large part able to be incorporated in his scheme) for which we have textual evidence include: *kṛṣi-śāstra*, *gaja-*, *gaṇita-*, *gandha-*, [*catuḥṣaṣṭi*] *kalā-*, *caura-* [the existence of the *cauraśāstra*, inferable from *Mṛcch.* 3.12.3ff, is confirmed by the *Śānmu-khakalpa* [MS at University of Pennsylvania]; cf. also *Vācaspatiyam* s.v. *Karṇisuta*], *citra-*, *takṣa-* *pāka-* (*sūda-*, *sūpa-*), *matsya-*, *mūrti-*, *mokṣa-*, *yati-*, *ratna-*, *rasa-*, *lekha-*, *śakuna-*, *śyainika-*, *saṃgita-*, *haya-*.

Madhusūdhana Sarasvatī's 16th century *Prasthānabheda*, where the division between human and transcendent is altogether abandoned, see, also, below, p. 516.

We have seen, again, that one signification of *śāstra* is "philosophical system." The very concept entails a possibility of "false *śāstras*," *asacchāstra* (which cannot be accommodated in Rājasekhara's system, though it presented itself as early as the *Manusmṛiti*),¹⁹ and accordingly sectarian delimitations of "true *śāstras*," as later in Madhva (13th cen.), who validates the restrictive definition of *śāstra* found in the *Skandapurāṇa*: "The four *vedas*, the *Mahābhārata*, the Pāñcarātra corpus, the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, and texts consistent with these, constitute *śāstra*. All other texts are not *śāstra* but rather the evil way."²⁰ By contrast, the historically more influential assessment of the sciences as they are presented in the taxonomy of Rājasekhara is that offered by Mīmāṃsā. This, the most orthodox and in many respects most representative of Indian traditions, and the one that most effectively formulated many of the fundamental cultural orientations of Sanskrit culture, includes, according to some, all these "topics of knowledge" within the category of what it defines as *śāstra* (as in Kumārila cited above), and thus implicitly invests them with the unique qualities of scripture that I shall notice below, especially its inerrancy and paramount authority.²¹

This empowerment of *śāstra*, however, represents a development toward normative discourse that comes only over time. The nature and function of *śāstra* in the classical period are rather different from its late vedic antecedent. If we consider some of our earliest *śāstras*, namely the *vedāṅgas*, it becomes apparent that *śāstra* had initially a thoroughly *descriptive* character. The rules formulated for grammar, metrics, or phonetics were intended in the first instance to name, order, and describe the disparate and complex linguistic phenomena of the *vedas*, in order that these texts might be more exactly preserved and transmitted (thus the *Prasthānabheda* describes the purposes of the *vedāṅgas*, adding that any secular interests they might have are largely desultory [*prasaṅgāt*]).²² This I think

can be demonstrated textually, but it also is the conclusion that the cultural logic of the vedic tradition invites us to draw: Precisely because they are *vedāṅgas* or "ancillaries to the *vedas*," they must in essence be descriptive, having never been meant as guides to the practical activity of generating additional vedic materials.

Several examples of the fundamentally descriptive thrust of the *vedāṅgas* are readily provided. The *Nirukta* is not a lexicon designed with Dr. Johnson's purpose of providing a standard for correctness and propriety (a lexicon, as in the words of the *Plan*, that seeks to "fix the [English] language"),²³ which appears to be the purpose of Sanskrit dictionaries from the *Amarakoṣa* onward. Its one source is a list of obscure words (the *Nighaṇṭu*) found in the *vedas*, and for this list it functions as a commentary, or rather a kind of semantic analysis indicating the "real" meanings of those words. It is thus in a way similar to the "glossaries" of medieval England, the descriptive antecedents to the normative Johnsonian lexicon. Its purpose was simply to aid in interpreting the hieratic discourse of the *vedas*.²⁴ In the same way, the *chandaḥśāstra* was not designed to provide apprentice *ṛṣis* with the metrical rules for constructing ("seeing") new vedic *sūktas*. Piṅgala's work describes the metric of the *vedas* in order to reveal its orderly pattern and so render it more easily assimilable, thereby guarding against corruption of the sacred texts. The *vedāṅgas*, thus, are in their very nature taxonomical, not stipulative; descriptive, not prescriptive.

Śāstra did not for long preserve this non-legislative character. In fact, the mutation is apparent already in the *vedāṅgas* themselves. For they include a great deal of (by definition irrelevant) secular material, in comparison with which the vedic is in fact relatively sparse (*chandaḥśāstra* and *vyākaraṇa*²⁵ are conspicuous examples; no rationale for including *laukika* material in the *vedāṅgas* is offered by the tradition, so far as I can tell). Any such recording of cultural data may have the effect, perhaps a natural and inevitable effect, of establishing authoritative principles. In ancient India, however, there were special factors, which we shall

¹⁹ See *ManuSm.* 11.65.

²⁰ See *SarvaDaSam.* p. 157, and for further references, *Nyāyakośa* (ed. Bhimacarya Jhalakikar [Poona, 1978]), p. 878.

²¹ See *Nyāyaratnākara* on *ŚlokaVār.*, *Śabdaparicheda*, vs. 10 (ed. Varanasi, 1978, p. 289), and further below, p. 519 (and contrast n. 85).

²² *PrasthāBhe.* (ed. Poona, Ānandāśrama S.S., 1906), pp. 4–5.

²³ Such was the programme of most eighteenth century lexicographers: to prevent, retard, or direct language change (cf. J. H. Sledd et al., *Dr. Johnson's Dictionary* [Chicago, 1955], pp. 25–26).

²⁴ C. Vogel, *Indian Lexicography* (Wiesbaden, 1979), p. 304; J. Brankhorst, "Nirukta and Aṣṭādhyāyī: Their Shared Pre-suppositions," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 23 (1981), pp. 1–14.

²⁵ See P. Kiparsky, *Pāṇini as a Variationist* (Cambridge/Poona, 1979), p. 4.

examine, that contributed to transforming *śāstra* into a rigorously normative code, enabling it to speak in an injunctive mood, with the authority appropriate to vedic *vidhis*. *Śāstra* would seem thereby to lose irrecoverably its participation in the dynamic symbiosis with practice that we are accustomed to presuppose in any competent "theoretical" formulation. Or perhaps more accurately, the understanding of the interaction between the two now takes on a distinctive and in some ways anomalous character with important consequences for cultural history. For here, on a scale probably unparalleled in the pre-modern world, we find a thorough transformation—adopting now Geertz's well-known dichotomy—of "models of" human activity into "models for," whereby texts that initially had shaped themselves to reality so as to make it "graspable," end by asserting the authority to shape reality to themselves.²⁶

If *śāstra* is the systematic exposition of some knowledge, what does the Indian intellectual tradition conceive to be the relationship of this exposition to the actual enactment of the knowledge? How, that is, are theory (*śāstra*) and practice (*prayoga*) viewed as interrelated? What is the causal—or more grandly, ontological—relation that is thought to subsist between the two? How does the one affect, constrain, inform the other? While such questions may have a particularly modern ring to them, they are none the less ones that the shastric texts themselves came to pose when the transformation of *śāstra* from descriptive catalogue to prescriptive system set in.

Already in the early sacred literature we can glimpse a tendency to assimilate (or better, subordinate), in Ryle's terms, "knowing how" to "knowing that." One suggestive example is found in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*:

Both persons perform [the particular religious rite under discussion], both the one who knows thus [the mystical meaning of the sacred syllable *aum*] and the one who does not know [who knows only the procedures of the rite and not the true character of *aum*]. [But] knowledge and ignorance are different. What one performs with knowledge and faith and *upaniṣad* becomes far stronger (*vīryavattaram*) [sc., than what is performed by the ignorant man].²⁷

²⁶ C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), pp. 87–125, especially 92ff.

²⁷ *ChāndoUp.* 1.1.10. Śaṅkara in his commentary ad loc. is prepared to allow a certain efficacy on the part of the ignorant man who acts appropriately. See also his comment on *BrahmSū.* 4.1.18.

Although the ritual activity performed may in both cases be identical, the worshipper who acts after conceptualizing its meaning (on the basis of the text provided by the Upaniṣad), attains a greater efficacy than the worshipper who is unable to do so.

The first extended meditation on the relationship between theory and practice is found in the grammatical tradition. This is to be expected, perhaps, insofar as grammar and language usage present to the learned community virtually a daily exemplification of this problematic interaction. Much of the first *āhnika* of the *Mahābhāṣya* is occupied with the question, and while I cannot examine the entire argument here, I will consider two related discussions that adequately illustrate the dominant view of the *vyākaraṇa* tradition. The *vārttikakāra* admits provisionally that words are naturally employed with their senses being competently conveyed.²⁸ But since the purpose of grammar is to provide a *dharmaniyama* (a restriction for, or motivated by, *dharma*), he determines the *siddhānta* view to be as follows:

*śāstrapūrvake prayoge bhyudayas tat tulyaṃ veda-
śabdena*

Only when practice [linguistic usage] is dependent on theory [grammatical rules] can there be success; this is in conformity with the view of the *vedas*.²⁹

Yet however detailed a descriptive grammar may be, it can never be totally exhaustive of linguistic practice. There are indeed passages in Pāṇini where this is

²⁸ *MahāBh.* (ed. Bombay, Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1951), Vol. 1, p. 64. Kumāṛila vigorously rejects the notion that linguistic activity is in any way regulated by grammar. See *Tantra-Vār.* on *PūrMīmSū.* 1.3.24 (ed. Poona, Ānandāśrama S. S., 1970, Vol. 2, pp. 195–196). Contrast Prabhākara, who finds shastric regulation to be a direct response to incorrect usage (*Bṛha.* [ed. Banaras, Chowkhambha S. S., 1929], p. 123).

²⁹ Or: "in conformity with (the manner in which we study) the words of the *veda*" (*MahāBh.*, Vol. 1, p. 73). The "view of the *vedas*" would be similar to that expressed in the *ChāndoUp.* passage cited above (p. 503). The dichotomy *śāstra* <> *prayoga* (repeated below; see also *Mālavikā.* 1.12.13; occasionally *āgama* replaces *śāstra*, as in *DaśaK.* p. 120), appears to be post-epic, but already in the epic period we find its germ in the distinction between "he who knows *śāstra*" [*śāstrajña*] and "he who knows deeds, or action" [*kṛtajña*]. (For the reasons justifying the analysis of the latter term, see "Some Lexical Problems in the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa" [in *Dr. B. R. Saxena Felicitation Volume*, ed. J. P. Simha (Lucknow, 1983), pp. 279–80].)

evidently well understood, and where consequently it cannot be claimed that *śāstra* has made provision for all acceptable usage. How then can the *siddhānta* view hold?

One interesting and instructive answer is found in Patañjali's discussion of *P.* 6.3.109. The well-known *sūtra* runs, "*prṣodara*, etc., are as enunciated." That is to say, items of the type of formation exhibited by the word *prṣodaram* (from *prṣad udaram*; this is an *ākṛtigāṇa*), where the loss, accretion, or interchange of phonemes takes place without explicit shastric provision and yet are current—as Patañjali puts it, "which are heard," or found in use, but not "spoken," or promulgated in the grammar—such items are to be considered acceptable in accordance with their "enunciation" or usage. At this point we may proceed with Patañjali:

"'Enunciated' by whom? By the learned [*śiṣṭa*]. And who are the learned? The grammarians. On what grounds? Learning is a function of *śāstra* [*śāstrapūrvikā hi śiṣṭiḥ*], and grammarians know the *śāstra*. But if being learned is a function of *śāstra*, and *śāstra* [in the present case this signifies the grammatical rule governing items of the form *prṣodara*] is [here declared to be] a function of being learned, we have a vicious circle. . . . Well then, we may say that being learned derives from place of habitation and way of life. . . . The brahmins who live in Āryāvarta, who may be penurious but are not greedy . . . and who in a short time have mastered some field of knowledge—among them are the learned to be found. But, it will be asked, if these learned men are authoritative with respect to grammar, what is the purpose of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* itself? Its purpose is for identifying who the learned are. . . . A person who studies grammar observes another who does not but who none the less uses the words [the grammatical forms] that are prescribed in grammar. The person observes: Truly, this man has divine favor, or genius [*svabhāva*—] who, while not studying the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, uses the words that are prescribed in it; surely he must know others as well [that is, such words as are not prescribed in it but are none the less enunciated]. Thus the purpose of the *aṣṭādhyāyī* is to identify the learned.³⁰

Patañjali's argument is this: There are speech items that, while not provided for in theory, are found in actual use. Pāṇini himself allows these items to be considered acceptable if the "learned" employ them. But how is the category "learned" to be defined? In the

present case it must be the grammarians, who are learned insofar as they know the grammar. But if "learning" depends on theory, and the theory itself (with respect to unregulated speech items) is shown to depend on "learning," our reasoning becomes intolerably circular. This problem is avoided if we identify the learned as brahmins of Āryāvarta, of unimpeachable conduct, and geniuses (who are such either by nature or the grace of God). They would be authorities for items not accounted for by theory. The purpose of the grammar itself is that it enables us to identify such men. Without having studied theory they can be recognized as having mastered it by one who has studied, and who may therefore infer that they are authorities for matters not included in the theory.

Acceptability and grammaticality exist concurrently as separate entities in any speech community (indeed, within each individual speaker).³¹ This co-existence may be uneasy, with grammaticality finally assimilating or annihilating acceptability as a category, though the latter, in a continually recurring process, will resurface in another form. Where, however, a linguistic science posits as its primary axiom that for usage to be "successful" it must derive wholly from grammatical theory, the presence of "ungrammatical" but acceptable usage can only be accounted for by recourse to the existence of a new member of the speech community who in a way distinct from that of the other members—by transcendent yogic insight as of a *ṛṣi*, for example—has mastered the grammatical rules and so can lead us to infer that he has access to a more complete grammar than others possess. This, assert the later commentators on the *Mahābhāṣya*, is Patañjali's true position here.³²

³¹ See D. T. Langendoen, "The Problem of Linguistic Theory in Relation to Language Behavior," *Daedalus* (Summer 1973), pp. 197–98.

³² Kaiyaṭa appends two verses describing such authorities. They are "experts in all knowledge ["The gist of this is: those to whom, by power of their asceticism, all knowledge, word by word and idea by idea, has manifested itself," Nāgeśa] without any application ["that is, instruction from guru," Nāgeśa]. The knowledge of past and future, which they have to whom (all) objects of knowledge have manifested themselves, because their minds are lucid ["by reason of their pure conduct," Nāgeśa], is not inferior to knowledge derived from perception. They who, with the eye of a *ṛṣi* ["a divine eye assisted (?) by the practice of yoga," Nāgeśa], see entities that are supersensible and unimaginable—their testimony is unable to be negated by inferences [to the contrary]. Cf. Bālaṇanorāma in *SiddhKau*: "A *śiṣṭa* is a yogin who

³⁰ *MahāBh.* Vol. 5, pp. 260–61.

A second domain in which the relationship between theory and practice is a topic for serious analysis is in the area of social relations (*dharmaśāstra*). According to nearly all *dharmaśāstras*, *dharma* is derived from three sources: *śruti* (revealed texts, considered transcendent), *smṛti* (traditional texts), and *sadācāra* (the “practices of the good”). In problematic cases where *śāstra* (*śruti* + *smṛti*) does not provide any explicit solution, one must look to *sadācāra*. But who are the *santaḥ*, or, as they are more usually referred to, the *śiṣyas*, the “learned”?

For some relatively early texts, the *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*, for example, the learned are those who have studied the *śāstra* and can extrapolate from it to problems not covered by *śāstra*.³³ But the more widespread and historically more influential understanding of the character and validity of their learning is this: Just as the “traditional” *smṛtis* have authority insofar as they are held to be invariably based on the transcendent *vedas* whether or not such vedic texts are still extant or able to be located, so all the practices of those learned in the *śāstra* are acceptable by reason of their conformity, or non-contradiction, with existing shastric precept; such of their practices as are not provided for by the letter of the *śāstra* are held to be authoritative insofar as we can infer that they are based on portions of the *veda* that are no longer extant or are otherwise unavailable.³⁴ That is to say, the “learned” do not creatively reason from and extend *śāstra* to illuminate obscure areas of social or moral conduct; on the contrary, their behavior derives directly from and fully conforms with the texts as codified, but these texts are (like the complete grammar) ones to which we no longer have access. Indeed, the later *purāṇas*, in a spirit similar to that of the grammarians we have just examined (n. 32), effectively dismiss “the practices of the learned” as a source of *dharma* altogether, by their

possesses an unmediated realization [*sākṣātkāra*] of the essential nature of words; [that this is the definition of a *śiṣya*] is clear from the *Bhāṣya* and Kaiyaṭa” (*SiddhKau.* #1034 [ed. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1971, Vol. 2, p. 256]).

³³ See *BaudhDS.* 1.1.6.

³⁴ See Śābara on *PūrMīmSū.* 1.3.1–2 (pp. 69–80, especially p. 77). Āpastamba frames the argument this way: The *vidhis* or injunctions of *dharma* were enunciated by Brahma. But the *pāṭha* or transmission has been interrupted. These *vidhis* may be inferred to exist because of the practices [of good men/the learned] (*ĀpaDhS.* 1.12.8–13 [ed. Benares, Kashi S. S., 1932, pp. 69–70], cf. Kane, *History*, Vol. 3, pp. 826–27, and for further details, R. Lingat, *The Classical Law of India* (Berkeley, 1973), pp. 13ff., 176ff.

restricting the category of “learned” to “Manu, the seven sages, and other similar great *ṛṣis* in each aeon . . . who settle the rules of conduct for succeeding ages.”³⁵

Again we can observe a development in the concept of “learning” that tends to isolate it from the world of actual social practices where it had originally been located (as in the deliberative *pariśads* attested to in the *sūtra* texts),³⁶ and instead to derive it from a divine source via individuals who are increasingly apotheosized. And just as occurs in the area of linguistic behavior, we can observe a concomitant narrowing—on the theoretical, or better, ideological plane—of the horizon of possibility for change in the realm of social intercourse.

The culmination of these deliberations, and what we may justly regard as the classical *siddhānta*, is to be found in the *vidyāsamuddeśa* section of the *Kāmasūtra* of Vātsyāyana. Here the relation of theoretical knowledge to actual practice, in perhaps the unlikeliest of sciences, attains its fullest and most pointed expression. Human sexual conduct, like all other activity without exception, is invariably and necessarily based on a pre-existent and textualized theoretical formulation. A useful supplement to the primary argument is offered by Yaśodhara’s *upodghāta* to the text, with which I here preface the relevant discussion of Vātsyāyana’s:

[Y. on 1.1] . . . *Kāma* cannot be achieved without the application of a specific procedure, and it is with the intention of setting forth this procedure that the Teacher Mallanāga composed this *śāstra* in conformity with the received opinion of earlier teachers. . . . *Kāma* is a function of the union of man and woman, and this requires some procedure, the knowledge of which comes only from the *kāmaśāstra*. . . .

The procedure must therefore be enunciated, and the purpose of the *Kāmasūtra* is to do just this and so make it known. For how does one come to know anything except by means of a given *śāstra*? Those who have never studied the *śāstra* cannot on their own attain knowledge of the various procedures enunciated in *śāstra*: This can happen only through the instruction of others. If the instruction of others were itself not admitted to be founded on *śāstra*, then the efficacy of the instrumental knowledge supplied by such people would be as fortuitous a thing as a letter etched into wood by a termite. . . . As it is said, “A man who does not know a given *śāstra* may occasionally achieve his

³⁵ *MatsyaP.* 145.34–36 and *VāyuP.* 1.59.33–35, cited in Kane, *History*, Vol. 2, p. 972.

³⁶ See Lingat, *Classical Law*, p. 16.

end, but do not think too much of it: it is like a letter etched into wood by a termite.”

That some who know the *kāmasāstra* are not skilled in practice is entirely their own fault, not the fault of the *śāstra*. It is not peculiar to *kāmasāstra* but universally attested that *śāstra* is rendered useless by faulty comprehension. Note that those skilled in such *śāstras* as medicine do not invariably maintain a healthful dietary regimen. People, therefore, who pursue the precepts of a *śāstra* and do so with faith and devotion achieve its purposes.

[*Kāmasūtra* 1.3.2 ff.]

[Y.: For a man engaged in seeking to attain the three ends of human life, the primary means for the accomplishment of *kāma* is the acquisition of knowledge; one who has not grasped the knowledge cannot engage in the activity that is subsequent to it. . . .]

1.3.2 A woman [should study *kāmasāstra*] before adolescence, and after marriage with the permission of her husband.

1.3.3 The teachers of old maintained that instructing women in this *śāstra* is useless, because women cannot learn *śāstra*.

1.3.4 But according to Vātsyāyana, they learn the application, or practice, and practice is dependent on *śāstra* (*prayogasya ca śāstrapūrvakatvāt*). [Y.: . . . One might object: Those who know the practice, the substance, have no need to master the *śāstra*; the substance is sufficiently serviceable to women. But how then, we would answer, can the substance possibly be taught to these women by others, if it has not previously been communicated by *śāstra*? . . .]

1.3.5 This is so not only in this particular *śāstra*. For all over the world there are only a handful of people who know the *śāstra*, while the practice [of it, or, the application of its principles] is within the grasp of many people. [Y.: . . . There are only a few who are able to master the *śāstra*, and it is from these people that others both capable [of learning the *śāstra*] and incapable are able to master the practice. . . .]

1.3.6 The cause of practice is *śāstra*, however far removed it may [seem to] be. [Y.: It descends by way of a chain: One who knows the *śāstra* grasps the practice, from him another, from that one yet another, and so on.]

1.3.7 It is because of the existence of the *śāstra* of grammar that even priests who are not grammarians apply in their rites the process of analogical reasoning (*ūha*).³⁷

1.3.8 It is because of the existence of the *śāstra* of astronomy/astrology that people perform rites on the proper auspicious days.

1.3.9 Similarly, horsemen and elephant-drivers train horses or elephants without having studied *śāstra*. [Y.: They do this via *āmnāya*, “tradition”; the cause of this too is *śāstra*.]

1.3.10 In the same way, because they are aware of the existence of a king, citizens even in distant provinces do not transgress the proper limits. Our case is just like that.

1.3.11 There are, in any event, courtesans, princesses, and daughters of ministers whose minds are exceptionally well versed in this *śāstra*.

1.3.12 Therefore, a woman may learn, from a trustworthy person and in private, the practice [alone], the *śāstra* as a whole, or a section thereof [according to her intelligence].

All knowledge derives from *śāstra*; success in astrology or in the training of horses and elephants, no less than in language use and social intercourse, is achieved only because the rules governing these practices have percolated down to the practitioners—not because they were discovered independently through the creative power of practical consciousness—“however far removed” from the practitioners the *śāstra* may be. As for learning the *śāstra* itself, this is the necessary commencement of the tradition, and later serves to enhance the efficacy of the practice, as we saw the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* to have asserted and as Yaśodhara reiterates here: It makes the practice “stronger,” reliable, and consistent, unlike uninformed practice, whose effectivity is altogether fortuitous.

Our principal interest in the *Kāmasūtra* passage is the clearly formulated understanding that the practice of all human activity depends on some code of rules accessible to us in determinate, textualized form. But in addition it is intriguing for the way it highlights a fundamental problem posed by the very existence of the work, the need in the first place for a *śāstra* in a realm of action not generally responsive to the demands of theoretical injunctions or indeed of discursive thought. Here we encounter a fascinating dimension of a number of shastric texts that I previously noted, their interest in bringing to consciousness or making explicit behavior that is largely tacit or pre-conscious. But

another context; essentially a grammatical modification, often the substitution of one vocable for another, e.g., *agnaye* for *indrāya*: Though not a grammarian the priest will know, given the existence of *śāstra*, how to form the dative singular masculine of the i-stem.

³⁷The term refers to the modification of a word in a *mantra* in order to adapt it to the case, number, or gender required for

more than this, such texts at the same time *constitute* an activity as a “science,” and thus as a target of intervention by the dominant culture.

We may be right to view this enterprise as a classical development; earlier the tradition seems to have recognized that not all human behavior was amenable to the normative discourse of *śāstra*, which we are told cannot be held to extend to what people do simply on the grounds that they derive pleasure from doing it.³⁸ For the logicians, human needs are concerned either with “visible” or “invisible” things. When one wishes to fulfil one’s “visible” needs—which include such things as eating—one proceeds, without consulting *śāstra*, to the effective action established by immemorial custom: One does not require shastric rules such as “When dirty a man must bathe,” or, “When hungry a man must eat.” It is for the “invisible” or otherworldly things—spiritual emancipation, for instance—that one requires *śāstra*. Similarly, according to Mīmāṃsā, *śāstra* is applicable only in those domains for which no other “sources of knowledge” are available.³⁹ Vātsyāyana is in fact sensitive to the problem. Early in his text he seeks to offer a *raison d’être* for a *śāstra* on human sexuality (1.2.18–20: peculiar means are required in

view of the special biological and sociological properties distinguishing humans from animals; see also Yaśodhara cited above, pp. 506–7).⁴⁰ But there remains a serious tension about the value and effectivity of such a *śāstra* in the *Kāmasūtra* itself, in view, for example, of its explicit admission that irrational passion sets untranscendable limits to the functionality of the rational system (cf. 2.2.31; 2.7.31).

The antecedence of some pre-existent, codified theoretical paradigm for activity that we have found to be postulated in three different areas of human behavior—language, social relations, and sexuality—comes in the classical period to be a basic presupposition about action as a whole, and finds expression in a wide range of texts. Consider, for example, the following pronouncement in *Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra*: “From learning comes knowledge, from knowledge application, from application self-possession. Such is the efficacy of the sciences.”⁴¹ Going to the opposite end of the intellectual spectrum, we may return to Rājaśekhara’s textbook on poetry: “[The prospective poet] must apply himself in the first instance to *śāstra*, for it is that upon which [the composition of] poems depends [*śāstrapūrvakatvāt kāvyānām pūrvam śāstreṣu abhiniviṣeta*]. Without making use of a lamp one cannot survey in the dark the caravan of things as they really are.”⁴² And this is a sentiment encountered frequently enough in the fine arts, as in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata: “Creation on the part of heavenly beings is a purely mental act; their objects are produced without any effort. . . . All human objects, however, are achieved only by the effort of men, and such activity is

³⁸ See Haradatta Miśra on *ĀpDhS.* 1.4.10 (pp. 24–5; cf. also Kane, *History*, Vol. 3, p. 837). The *Śyainika Śāstra* of Rāja Rudradeva of Kumaon poses and seeks to answer the question: “Is not *kāma* within the competence of those who are altogether ignorant of *kāmaśāstra*? It is indeed, but the sages nonetheless composed the *śāstra* so that one might come to understand its principles” (*Śyainika Śāstra or Book on Hawking*, ed. Haraprasad Shastri [Calcutta, Asiatic Society, 1910], 1.2). An important refinement to the whole question of the applicability and authority of rules is the distinction introduced by Mīmāṃsā (at issue also in the Haradatta passage cited above) concerning the “perceptible” purposefulness of the rules encoded in *śāstra*: Some are meaningfully practical (*dryārtha*), whereas some have no obvious purpose whatever (*adryārtha*). It is the latter type to which superior authority is attributed, and which has absolutely binding force (cf. Lingat, *Classical Law*, pp. 155–7; Kane, *History*, Vol. 3, pp. 835–40, Vol. 5, pp. 1260–3; see also below, n. 85).

³⁹ *śāstram aprāptaprāṇam*, as Vācaspati puts it (with particular reference to the *veda*, *Nyāykan.* p. 431). The logician’s argument is set out by Jayantabhaṭṭa in *NyāyMañ.* p. 3 (though the distinction he draws is far too narrow in view of the varieties of actually existing *śāstras*, cf. above, n. 17). Of course, in composing a *śāstra* Vātsyāyana may mean to suggest that, contrary to such sentiments as that of the *Śyainikaśāstra* cited in the previous note, *kāma* as he understands it is indeed not *prāpta*-.

⁴⁰ One unarticulated though none the less central concern of the *Kāmasūtra* is to systematize the subject of human sexuality and so make an intelligible and useable catalogue or typology available to writers and artists. It constructs a kind of iconology of the subject, a code facilitating recognition of standard situations, heroine types, and the like (a very good example of the confluence of *kāmaśāstra* and poetry is provided by a text I am now editing and translating. Bhānudatta’s *Rasamañjarī*).

⁴¹ *ArthŚā.* 1.5.16: *śrutād dhi prajñopajayate prajñāyā yogo yogād ātmavatteti vidyānām sāmāthyam*. Cf. also *AgnīP.* 238.3: *nayasya vinayo mūlaṃ vinayaḥ śāstraniścayāt* (“The foundation of political wisdom is discipline, and discipline comes from the correct determination of *śāstra*”).

⁴² *Kāvymī.* p. 2, 11.16–18. Rājaśekhara actually requires poets to follow the various poetic conventions enjoined by *śāstra* even in cases where these conventions conflict with actual experience (see V. M. Kulkarni, *Studies in Sanskrit Sāhitya-Śāstra* [Patan, 1983], p. 23 and n. 1).

governed by rules," shastric rules, as Abhinavagupta explains.⁴³

Even the act of ascetic renunciation, which is in its very essence the withdrawal from the rule-boundedness of social existence, depends on the mastery and correct execution of shastric rules. As one medieval manual of asceticism puts it, "Renunciation undertaken even by a man who has found the truth must proceed according to shastric injunction. It is not an act like casting off a worn-out garment, for instance, to be done according to no fixed rule."⁴⁴ The argument raised here is elsewhere extended to virtually all spiritual striving. In the introductory chapters to its massive and eclectic presentation of medieval spiritual disciplines, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* argues out in detail the peculiar efficacy of action performed in accordance with *śāstra*, echoing views we have seen expressed frequently:

When human activity is fundamentally action governed by *śāstra*, it leads to the full measure of success of whatever is intended; otherwise it leads to misfortune.

Whenever a thing is desired and is achieved not by action performed in accordance with *śāstra*, that [the fact that such things happen] is the play of a madman, merely delusive and not effective.

Tradition tells us that there are two kinds of human activity: activity in accordance with *śāstra*, and activity at odds with [or, outside of] *śāstra*. The latter leads to evil, the former to absolute good.

⁴³ The last phrase is *lakṣaṇābhīhitā kriyā* (*NāṭyaŚā.* 2.5). Rule-following also becomes a canon of aesthetic judgment, as in the later literary-critical doctrine of *doṣas* or formal faults, and this is already intimated in Bharata, cf. 27.102: "That performance is ideal in which there is adherence to all acts prescribed by *śāstra*." Bharata's demands that shastric injunction be followed can be insistent (cf. e.g., 19.105–6 on the *sandhyāṅgas*), and this called forth the response of later *ālaṅkārikas* that the poet should not care for mere formal adherence but rather for the aesthetic intensification made possible by the rules (cf. *Dhvanyā.* vs. 312, cited in Kulkarni, *Studies* p. 106 n. 82).

⁴⁴ *Yatidharmaprakāśa* (ed. P. Olivelle [Vienna, 1976]), 4.97 (p. 37), referring to the argument in *JīvanVi.* (ed. Poona, Ānandāśrama S. S., 1978), pp. 104–105, as noted by the editor ad loc. For some interesting remarks of Max Weber's on what he viewed as "an ascetic method . . . rationalized into a theoretical technology," see his *The Religion of India* (Glencoe, 1962), pp. 148ff.

What the wise mean by the word "human effort" is a totally concentrated and single-minded striving for those essential means to effect one's purpose; it is a state of being constrained by *śāstra*, leading to success.⁴⁵

For the epistemologically more sophisticated Vedānta the same postulate appears to hold true. Admittedly the question here becomes particularly complex, and "*śāstra*" undoubtedly has the more restricted meaning of vedic revelation, but the fundamental orientation to the problem of knowledge and action at issue elsewhere in the scholarly tradition is not really altered. Rāmānuja, for example, subscribes to the priority of textual knowledge when framing his definition of *śāstra*: "*Śāstra* is so called because it instructs; instruction leads to action, and *śāstra* has this capacity to lead to action by reason of its producing knowledge." The actual program of spiritual liberation enacts this postulate, since for Rāmānuja *śāstra* forms the sole means for attaining *mokṣa*.⁴⁶

Although the formulation of the relation between theory and practice that we have reconstructed becomes the standard one in traditional Indian culture, there are some indications that a more dialectical, and perhaps thus more realistic, interplay between the two realms was felt to exist. Kauṭilya himself—and it may be significant that it is in the highly practical realm of government that the caveat is heard—implies more than the necessity of integrating these realms when he states, "One who knows *śāstra* but is inexperienced will come to grief in practical application."⁴⁷ For he declares that the sources from which the two components are derived (and by implication the sorts of knowledge thus derived) can be different, as in the case of *daṇḍanīti*, which is to be learned "from theorists on the one hand and men of affairs on the other" (*vaktṛpratyoktṛbhyām*).⁴⁸ This suggests a certain discontinuity between the two domains, since it implies the existence of efficacious actors ignorant of theory, or, what comes to much the same thing, effective practice beyond the reach of theoretical comprehension. The disjuncture is perceptible elsewhere. The science of economics

⁴⁵ *YogVā.* 2.4.19; 2.5.2, 4; 2.6.32. Some of this material is cited by Vidyāraṇya in discussing the "superior effectivity of shastric action" (*JīvanVi.* pp. 8–10).

⁴⁶ The definition runs: *śāsanāc ca śāstraṁ, śāsanam ca pravartanam, śāstrasya ca pravartakatvaṁ bodhajanādvāreṇa* (*ŚrīBh.* on *BrahmSū.* 3.3.33); Rāmānuja's assertion that *mokṣa* is *śāstraikasamadhiḡamya* is found at *ŚrīBh.* 1.3.39.

⁴⁷ *ArthŚā.* 1.8.25.

⁴⁸ *ArthŚā.* 1.5.8.

(*vārttā*), for instance, is to be learned from those actively engaged in the regulation of economic activities (the *adhyakṣas*), or as Manu puts, “from the common people themselves.”⁴⁹ When preparing his chapter on royal edicts, Kauṭilya says that he “ran through all the *śāstras* and observed actual practice,” as if to suggest that the two did not fully coincide.⁵⁰

Again, in the area of literary studies, Daṇḍin implies that there can be some asymmetry between the theoretical prescriptions of *śāstra* and the poetic productions themselves, and also of course, by extension, a dialectical relation between precept and practice in the writing of “literary criticism”: He offers his own definition of the nature of poetry after “having brought together [summarizing, or, consulting] the earlier *śāstras* on the subject, and observing actual practices.”⁵¹ This dialectical orientation is especially prevalent in the medical tradition. As is well known, the *Suśruta-saṃhitā* urges the student to examine cadavers carefully and subject them to anatomical scrutiny, “For it is only by combining both direct observation and the information of the *śāstra* that thorough knowledge is obtained.” The *Carakasamhitā* confirms this view, asserting that “Of all types of evidence, the most dependable is that directly observed,” and, in a memorable epigram, proclaiming that “The wise understand that their best teacher is the very world around them.”⁵²

Such voices, however, with the exception of Dandin, may with some justice be viewed as oppositional, and in any case are pretty much in the minority. The dominant ideology is that which ascribes clear priority and absolute competence to shastric codification. It

would, moreover, be wrong to suppose that such an episteme was a late development in Indian intellectual history, or remained confined to a narrow stratum of elite culture. It is intimated as early as the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which censures those “brahmins who are materialists,” charging that “although pre-eminent *śāstras* on righteous conduct [*dharmaśāstra*-] are ready to hand, those ignorant fellows derive their ideas from reasoning alone and so propound utter nonsense.” The *Padma-purāṇa* condemns those who seek to compose *śāstras* on the basis of their own ideas: “They do it to confuse the foolish, they block the path of spiritual welfare, and for that they finally go to hell.” Elsewhere in popular literature it is considered a sign of coming apocalypse that “Thoughts not enjoined by *śāstra* become prevalent, and there is no one to transmit the statements of *śāstra*.” The most succinct statement of the doctrine is probably that of the *Bhagavadgītā*:

Whoever abandons the injunctive rules of *śāstra* and proceeds according to his own will never achieve success, or happiness, or final beatitude.

Therefore let *śāstra* be your guide in deciding what to do and what not to do. Once you determine what shastric regulation pronounces, you may proceed to action.⁵³

As Abhinavagupta summarizes, one must never contemplate action according to one’s own lights, but must instead follow shastric injunction.⁵⁴

The manner in which conceptual systems and behavior actually interact—how thought and action really affect one another—is not a question for which there is a simple answer. In fact, it is a complex problem where the interests of a variety of disciplines intersect—psychology, sociology, epistemology, the philosophy of action. But most people today I think would readily accept the commonsense assessment of Ryle, that “efficient practice precedes the theory of it”:

⁴⁹ Ibid., and cf. *ManuSm.* 7.43 and *KāmaS.* 1.2.10.
⁵⁰ *ArthŚā.* 2.10.63: *sarvaśāstrāṇy anukramya prayogam upalabhya ca*.

⁵¹ *KāvyaDar.* 1.2: *pūrvaśāstrāṇi saṃhṛtya prayogān upalakṣya ca / . . . asmābhiḥ kriyate kāvyalakṣaṇam /*. The evolution of *śāstra* from description to prescription postulated earlier in this paper is not altogether straightforward in the case of *alaṃkāraśāstra*. While a relatively early rhetorician like Bhāmaha (c. 6th cen.) offers a text of primarily normative discourse (*Kāvyaḷaṇ.* ch. 6 in particular contains a number of striking examples), Ānandavardhana (fl. 850) is far more descriptive.

⁵² See *SuśruS.* 3.5.60 (ed. Benares, Kashi S. S., 1973), *CaraS.* 3.3.36 and 3.8.14, and cf. W. E. Clark, “Science” (in *The Legacy of India*, ed. G. T. Garratt [Oxford, 1937]), pp. 354–5, and D. Chattopadhyaya, *Science and Society in Ancient India* (Amsterdam, 1977), pp. 63, 81, 94. See also *Hitopa.* 1.171 and 3.119 for more gnostic celebrations of practical activity over shastric instruction.

⁵³ The four quotations are found respectively in *Rām.* 2.94.32–33; *Śabdakalpadruma* s.v. *śāstra*; *HariVam.* 116.30; *BhagGīt.* 16.23–24.
⁵⁴ *Samgrahaśloka ad loc.* (*Gītārthasaṃgraha*, ed. Pt. Lakshman Raina [Srinagar, 1933], p. 162). With respect to the significance of “*śāstra*” in the passage, we are justified, I think, in allowing the broadest possible scope to the term (so Rāmānuja: “‘*śāstra*’ means the *vedas* as amplified by the *dharmaśāstras*, *itiḥāsa*, *purāṇas*, and the like”).

"Methodologies presuppose the application of the methods, of the critical investigation of which they are the products. . . . It is therefore possible for people intelligently to perform some sorts of operations when they are not yet able to consider any propositions enjoining how they should be performed. Some intelligent performances are not controlled by any interior acknowledgements of the principles applied in them."⁵⁵

And this is the position that has been dominant in Western thinking from the time of Aristotle.⁵⁶ I do not,

⁵⁵ G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Reprint London, 1978), p. 31. So Piaget: "Theorization translates what is discovered by actions into concepts and doctrines. . . . In every field, action comes first, classification and conceptualization come later. Before science there were techniques, and, as Essertier has said 'The mechanic is a physicist unaware of physics and unaware of theory'" (J.-C. Bringuier, *Conversations with Jean Piaget* [Chicago, 1980], p. 96). And, to summon one more witness, Oakeshott: "No doubt . . . what is learned (or some of it) can be formulated by learning rules and precepts; but in neither case do we . . . learn by learning rules and precepts. . . . And not only may a command of language and behaviour be achieved without our becoming aware of the rules, but also, if we have acquired a knowledge of the rules, this sort of command of language and behaviour is impossible until we have forgotten them as rules and are no longer tempted to turn speech and action into the application of rules to a situation" (*Rationalism in Politics* [London, 1967], cited, with some reservations, by Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory* [Berkeley, 1979], p. 67). The common-sense position has not, however, gone unchallenged. Suggestive is Popper's epistemological conjecture that theories or expectations, logically speaking, must predetermine experience; that our dispositions and in fact senses are "theory-impregnated" (K. Popper, *Objective Knowledge* [revised ed., Oxford, 1979], pp. 23–4, 71–2, 145–6, and elsewhere; the idea appears to go back at least to Comte [*The Positive Philosophy of August Comte* (London, 1913), Vol. 1, p. 4]). Still others wonder whether the dichotomy between theory and practice may not itself be more theoretical than practical (see D. Hoy, *The Critical Circle* [Berkeley, 1978], pp. 55ff., though he can still ask, "Is it not more intuitive, however, to think that theory evolves out of practice and will itself evolve as practice refines and modifies itself?" p. 74).

⁵⁶ See *Metaphysics* A1 p. 981 a5 for Aristotle's view that *texne*—"conscious method"—is something that arises inductively as "a single universal judgment" from many experiences (cited in R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship* [Oxford, 1968], Vol. 1, p. 57, cf. also p. 6).

however, mean to argue here the question of the truthfulness of this assessment, but simply to adumbrate the usual Western opinion as a backdrop to what I take to be the development and final position of the ancient Indian attitude toward it. For what is presently at issue is not the veracity of this or that model of the origins and transmission of cultural knowledge, but rather how such things were understood in traditional India. This understanding, as should now be clear, is diametrically opposed to that commonly found in the West, and the formulation of it appears to have been an essential component in the mature *Weltanschauung* of traditional India.

Insofar as *śāstra* comprises a "systematic statement of rules or principals" of something to be done, it may with justice be translated as I have done throughout this essay by the English word "theory."⁵⁷ This word is additionally appropriate in that it allows us to appreciate another aspect of *śāstra* beyond that of sheer systematization. "Theory," as Raymond Williams remarks, can connote also "'a scheme of ideas,' what we now call doctrine or ideology [in the more neutral sense], the largely programmatic idea of how things should be."⁵⁸ *Śāstra* shares a comparable double aspect, as exposition of established principles and programmatic scheme, deriving in part from what I have suggested was a development from descriptive catalogue to prescriptive plan.

I shall later characterize what I take to be some of the principal ideological effects of *śāstra*. Here I would, very succinctly, indicate one of the devices whereby these effects are achieved. This depends in large part on the programmatic aspect of "theory," which in the Indian case begins to dominate relatively early in the tradition.

To simplify a complex argument, we may say that *dharma* in the largest sense connotes the correct way of doing anything. From the *Mīmāṃsā* perspective, the prevailing one from which the rest of shastric discourse is extrapolated, *dharma* is by definition "rule-boundedness" (*codanālakṣaṇa*), and the rules themselves are encoded in *śāstra* (*upadeśa*).⁵⁹ But rules, as we have known since Kant, are either constitutive or regulative (the rules of chess and those of dinnertable etiquette would be respective examples). Shastric discourse collapses the two, enunciating both in the same injunctive mood. Another way to put this is that, while

⁵⁷ See the *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "theory," definition 3.

⁵⁸ R. Williams, *Keywords* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 266–8.

⁵⁹ See *Pūr MīmSū*. 1.1.2, 1.1.5.

on the one hand technical *śāstras*—cooking for example, or building—are invested with a programmatic or regulative aspect (there is only one correct way to boil rice or to build a stable, and that is presented as a categorical imperative), on the other, the more strictly regulative *śāstras*—those pertaining to human relationships, for instance—acquire a technical, constitutive aspect, as if human social or sexual intercourse were amenable to codified legislative control, and indeed, impossible in its absence.

2. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PRIORITY OF THEORY

That the practice of any art or science, that all activity whatever succeeds to the degree it achieves conformity with shastric norms would imply that the improvement of any given practice lies, not in the future and the discovery of what has never been known before, but in the past and the more complete recovery of what was known in full in the past. Such consequences of the priority of *śāstra* are I think clearly expressed in the mythic crystallizations of the postulate of shastric priority, namely the accounts of their origins the different *śāstras* contrive for themselves. It would be possible to trace historically the growth of this self-representation. In *dharmaśāstra*, for example, such a mythic orientation appears to set in after the composition of the major *sūtras* (*Āpastamba* and *Gautama*).⁶⁰ But here I wish to look at the classical conception only synchronically. Given the postulate of its *a priori* status, *śāstra* must exist primordially. Extant *śāstras*, consequently, come to view themselves as either the end-point of a slow process of abridgement from earlier, more complete, and divinely inspired prototypes; or as exact reproductions of the divine prototypes obtained through uncontaminated, unexpurgated descent from the original, whether through faithful intermediaries or by sudden revelation.

The *Mahābhārata* offers one synthetic exposition of this process that, because it articulates an essential paradigm, is worth summarizing before going on to consider the accounts of the individual *śāstras*.⁶¹ This ostensibly concerns the genesis of *nītiśāstra*, but it is clearly *nīti* understood in the widest possible sense. Bhīṣma tells how kingship came about, in the *kṛtayuga* (12.59.13ff. crit. ed.). There was no king at the beginning of things, and people wearied of protecting one another; confusion befell them (vs. 15), and their *dharma* perished (vs. 21). The gods became afraid

when *dharma* perished in the world, and they sought refuge with Brahṁā. Promising to consider their welfare, Brahṁā then “composed a work of one hundred-thousand chapters, arising from his own mind, in which *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* were described (vs. 29); . . . the triple *veda*, philosophy [*ānvīkṣikī*], economy, political science, and many other sciences were set forth there” (vs. 33). Included in Brahṁā’s text were all matter of political practices (vss. 34–70), the *dharma*s of country, sub-caste, and family, *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*; witchcraft, magic, yoga, the application of poisons, history, the *upavedas*, and logic in its entirety were described (vss. 71–82). In fact, whatever was able to be formulated in language (*vācogatam*) was all contained in it (vs. 84). Now, Śiva took that vast *śāstra* of Brahṁā’s and, considering the brevity of human life he abridged it into ten thousand chapters, calling it *Vaiśālākṣa* (“of Viśālākṣa,” Śiva); Indra abridged it further to five thousand chapters (called, obscurely, the *Bāhudantaka*); Brhaspati to three thousand (called the *Bārhaspatya*); Kāvya [= Śukra] to one thousand (vss. 86–91). With the first legitimate king, Vainya, that *śāstra* then took refuge (vs. 106), and he was ever protected by it (vs. 131).⁶²

Numerous individual *śāstras* adopt this mythological self-understanding and represent themselves as the outcome of a similar process of abridgement. The legendary origins of *arthaśāstra* as recounted in the *Mahābhārata* are rehearsed by most of the later texts on the subject, as for example the *Nītiprakāśa* (1.21–23).⁶³ The prose introduction to the *Nāradaśmṛiti*, similarly, relates the story that Manu composed a *dharmaśāstra* in one hundred-thousand verses arranged in 1080 chapters; this was reduced by Nārada (in view of the limits of human intelligence) to twelve thousand verses, by Mārkaṇḍeya (in view of the brevity of human life) to eight thousand, and by Bhṛgu’s son

⁶² A more generalized account of the descent of knowledge is contained elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*: The ultimate unchanging one, eternal Keśava, releases the *vedas* and *śāstras* and the eternal *dharma*s of the world at the beginning of each aeon. “The *vedas* and histories that are hidden at the end of an aeon the great *ṛṣis* recover through ascetic power, once permitted by the Self-existent Brahṁā. The Blessed One [= Brahṁā] knows [= learns?] the *vedas*, Brhaspati the *vedāṅgas*; Bhargava announces the science of government for the good of the world. Nārada knows [learns] the science of music, Bharadvāja the science of weapons, Gargya the deeds of gods and *ṛṣis*, Kṛṣṇātreya medicine” (*MBh.* 12.210.14–21 vulg.).

⁶³ See Kane, *History*, Vol. 3, p. 4.

⁶⁰ Lingat, *Classical Law*, pp. 25, 74, 107.

⁶¹ *MBh.* 12.59 crit. ed.

Sumati to four thousand, Nārada's text with its 2700 or so verses being only the end point of a long process of reduction.⁶⁴

One of the fullest classical accounts, and most interesting for the intriguing historical patina it bears, is that offered by the *Kāmasūtra* of Vātsyāyana. We are told that Prajāpati enunciated the "means of achieving the three ends of life" (*trivargasādhana*) in one hundred-thousand chapters at the beginning of time, when he created them. Svāyambhuva Manu separated out the one section dealing with *dharma*, Brhaspati the one dealing with *artha*, while Nandī, the servant of Śiva, formulated a *kāmasūtra* in one thousand chapters. Śvetaketu, son of Uddālaka, abridged this into five hundred chapters, Bābhravya of Pañcāla into two hundred and fifty chapters with seven topics. Different people thereupon separately reworked the seven topics. But because these independent treatises were too specialized, and Bābhravya's encyclopedic work too vast to study, Vātsyāyana took up the task of summarizing the whole subject in a single small volume.⁶⁵

Rājaśekhara appropriates wholesale this history of Vātsyāyana's in his *Kāyamīmāṃsā*. There Śiva is credited with the first formulation of the science of rhetoric, which is handed down to Brahmā, Bhṛgu, and Sārasvateya, after whom the various subtopics were treated by different authors. Again, specialization soon threatened the field, which Rājaśekhara himself made secure by his comprehensive synthesis.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ See also Lingat, *Classical Law*, pp. 91 and 100–101. He is inclined to give some credence to the tale, supposing it to reflect the transformation into a *dharmaśāstra* of a large body of aphorisms (p. 92; cf. 89).

⁶⁵ *KāmSū.* 1.1.5–14.

⁶⁶ *Kāvyamīm.* p. 1. Analogous is the origin Kauṭilya ascribes to his work: He assembled all the *arthaśāstras* composed by earlier teachers, and made a single compendium (*ArthŚā.* 1.1.1). The "earlier teachers" who composed texts are no doubt the mythological authors Brhaspati and Śukra, to whom *arthaśāstra* works are pseudonymously ascribed both in actual fact and in the mythological accounts of the genesis of *śāstra*; Kauṭilya does salutation to them in the *maṅgalācaraṇa* of his book. That there is a contradiction in Kauṭilya's work between his own understanding of the synthetic nature of his enterprise and its actual innovative character is quite palpable. For example, the polemics throughout the early part of the text imply that Kauṭilya has reviewed, weighed, and rationalized earlier opinions, often asserting his own, and has not simply assembled texts. Note too that in the colophon (15.17.3) there is no mention of the earlier authorities from

Similar narratives are found concerning the origin and descent of the *purāṇas*. That of the *Matsyapurāṇa* is representative:

Of all *śāstras* the *purāṇa* was the first remembered by Brahmā; then the *vedas* issued from his mouth. There was only one *purāṇa* then, in the time between the *kalpas* [?], holy, the means of attaining the three ends of life, one billion verses in extent. It is in the *purāṇa* that the source of all *śāstras* is found. Seeing how much time it took to learn that *purāṇa*, I [Viṣṇu], assuming the form of Vyāsa, abridged it progressively in cosmic age after cosmic age, down to four hundred-thousand verses in each *Dvāpara* age. It was divided into eighteen parts and published in the terrestrial world. But even today, in the world of the gods, it is one billion verses long.⁶⁷

Our last examples of the individual *śāstra* as deriving from some primordial text are presented by the sciences of architecture, astronomy, and medicine. The earliest text on architecture and town-planning, the *Mānasāra*, describes Śiva as the first promulgator of the science, who passed it on then to Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Indra, Brhaspati, and Nārada, whereupon it was finally transmitted to Mānasāra himself.⁶⁸ The author of our first textbook on astronomy, the *Yavanajātaka*, "traces his knowledge through Sūrya and the Aśvins back to Prajāpati."⁶⁹ Finally, the most important of the medical texts, the *Carakasaṃhitā*, claims to be Agniveśa's transcription of the teachings of Ātreya, which were received, through Bharadvāja, Prajāpati and the Aśvins, ultimately from Brahmā, while the second major text, the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*, similarly begins with a mythological introduction concerning the origin of medicine, and claims that "Brahmā it was who enunciated this *vedāṅga*, this eight-fold *āyurveda*."⁷⁰

which Kauṭilya at the commencement of the work claims merely to have drawn his materials.

⁶⁷ *MatsyaP.* 53.3–11. See also Kane, *History*, Vol. 5, p. 829 and n. 1349.

⁶⁸ *Mānasāra* 1.3–4 (cf. *MatsyaP.* 252.2–4). I learned of this example first in G. S. Ghurye, *Vidyas* (Bombay, 1957), p. 48.

⁶⁹ D. Pingree, *The Yavanajātaka* (Cambridge, 1978), Vol. 1, p. 4; cf. Vol. 2, pp. 414–415.

⁷⁰ *Suśruta*. 1.40. The previous reference is to *CaraS.* 1.4–5 (and cf. *MBh.* 12.210.16 vulg.). Such parallels as I have cited to the account in the medical tradition raise questions about the explanation for its presence in ayurvedic texts given by Chattopadhyaya. Of course the account may be a "transparent fiction" in a literal-minded historical sense, but to call it such

Related to such accounts is a second model of the origination of knowledge in which there is an unabridged, complete transmission of the divine prototype, either through intermediate links—the “succession of teachers,” *guruparamparā*—or by sudden revelation. One rather extreme example of unbroken transmission through a succession of teachers reaching back to the primordial transcendent Teacher is provided by the opening of the *Agnipurāṇa*.

The *Agnipurāṇa* commences with the sages, Śaunaka and others, sacrificing to Viṣṇu in the Naimiṣa forest.⁷¹ They address the Bard, who is passing by on pilgrimage:

“Tell us the essence of the essence,” they ask, “by means of which knowledge omniscience comes about all by itself.” The Bard replies, “. . . I went to Vadarika ashram and paid homage to Vyāsa. He told me the essence.” Vyāsa says, “Hear what Vasiṣṭha told me, when I asked about the essence of *brahma*.” Vasiṣṭha says, “Hear what Agni told me once. . . .” Agni says, “The Blessed One is higher and lower knowledge. Lower knowledge consists of the four *vedas*, the six *vedāṅgas*, *Mīmāṃsā*, *dharmaśāstra*, *purāṇa*, *Nyāya*, the sciences of medicine, music, weapons, statecraft [that is, the eighteen *vidyāsthānas*]. The higher knowledge is that whereby one goes to *brahma*. I shall explain to you as it was explained to me by Viṣṇu, to the gods by Brahmā long ago.”⁷²

What Agni goes on to reveal is an encyclopedic synthesis of human knowledge, including what is in fact a vast array of discrete *śāstras* on topics as diverse as *dharma*, architecture and iconology, astronomy, divination, the lapidary’s art, the science of weapons, arboriculture, veterinary medicine, metrics, phonetics, grammar, and rhetoric.

All this knowledge, which forms the foundation of human economic, social, and cultural life, is figured in the *Agnipurāṇa* as descending via an unbroken chain of teachers from Viṣṇu himself. Like the abridgement model, this one, too, is common, though elsewhere it is

usually found in more modest form, as in the *Bhagavadgītā* on the origin of the *yogaśāstra*: The Blessed One reveals the science of yoga first to Vivasvān, who reveals it to Manu and he to Ikṣvāku, the first king (as Śaṅkara describes him), whereupon it was lost until the Blessed One again, now in the form of Kṛṣṇa, reveals it to Arjuna.⁷³ Or in the *Mīmāṃsā* tradition, which, according to one account, views its system as transmitted from Brahmā to Prajāpati and thence successively to Indra, Āditya, Vasiṣṭha, Parāśara, Vyāsa, and finally to the author of the *sūtra* text, Jaimini.⁷⁴

The complete transmission of a *śāstra* may take place, not through any intermediaries, but directly from God to the author—a variety of revelation. Several examples may suffice. Our earliest *śāstra* on drama, the *Bharatanāṭyaśāstra*, describes how the art of dramaturgy was transmitted to the author by Brahmā, to function as a fifth *veda*.⁷⁵ Again, in another

⁷³ *BhagGīt.* 4.1ff. The divine origin of the doctrine of yoga is found likewise in the *yogaśāstra* tradition itself. Vācaspati-miśra (so too Vijñānabhikṣu) on *YogSū.* 1.1 cites the *Yogiyājñavalkya-smṛti* to the effect that “Hiranyagarbha was the first to enunciate the doctrine of yoga, no one else, in the ancient days.” (And this, he goes on to claim, is the reason why Patañjali called his *śāstra* an *anusāsana* [“after-teaching”] rather than simply a *śāsana*.) Note that in a perhaps relevant passage in the *sūtras* themselves, *Īvara* is said to have been “the teacher of the primeval sages” (*YogSū.* 1.26). For its part, the idea of the *guruparamparā* in general deserves special study. It is old, at least as early as the *Bṛhadāraṇyakaopaniṣad* (4.6; cf. 6.5: Upaniṣadic knowledge is figured as descending ultimately from Prajāpati and Brahmā). The same validating impulses are apparent in more recent history. In the case of Śaṅkara, for example, the intellectual genealogy traditionally ascribed to him is meant to corroborate the veracity of his philosophical system (what is, in fact, a *mokṣaśāstra*): The genealogy reverts back, through Govinda, Gauḍapāda, Śuka, Vyāsa, Parāśara, Śakti, Vasiṣṭha, to Brahmā and finally Nārāyaṇa (see *Gauḍapādakārikā*, ed. R. D. Karmarkar [Poona, 1973], p. i).

⁷⁴ Pārthasārathi Miśra, *Nyāyaratnākara* on *SlokaVar.*, *Pratijñāsūtra*, vs. 23 (p. 8). The *Sāmavidhānabrāhmaṇa* has a similar genealogy, cf. P. V. Kane, “Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā-Sūtra, Brahma-Sūtra, Jaimini, Vyāsa and Bādarāyaṇa,” *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute* 20 (1960), p. 120. Contrast, however, Kumārila: “Mīmāṃsā derives from the world itself, via the activities of an unbroken tradition of learned men who used perception, inference, and the like” (*TantrVā.*, Vol. I, p. 80).

⁷⁵ *NāṭyaŚā.* 1.1–24: *Nāṭyaveda* originates with Brahmā (vs. 7; cf. Abhinava ad loc.); the gods ask him to release it as

and so dismiss it does not advance our understanding very far (Chattopadhyaya, *Science and Society*, pp. 24ff.). Some attempt to unpack the significance of the mythic representation is offered below, pp. 515–16. See also Vācaspati’s argument reproduced below in n. 88.

⁷¹ The parallels here with the narrative framework of the *Mahābhārata* and the implications of this for the epic’s own evaluation of its veracity are important questions though outside the scope of the present essay.

⁷² *AgniP.* 1.1–18.

curious mix of historical and mythical elements, one of the earliest and most complete works on astronomy, the *Sūryasiddhānta*, purports to have been revealed by the Sun God himself to the author in the city of Rome ("Romaka").⁷⁶ The oldest extant Sanskrit cookbook, the *Pākadarpaṇa*, is pseudonymously ascribed to Nala; seeking to authenticate his knowledge of cookery, the author claims it was made known to him by grace of "the offspring of the sun," that is, Yama.⁷⁷ One final illustration is provided by the author of the *dhanurveda* of the *Brhatsārṇigadharapaddhati*, who, while he composed his book with words "derived from the *dhanurveda* enunciated by God," acquired his knowledge of the science of archery through revelation by the grace of Śiva.⁷⁸

There are several conclusions to be drawn from such mythic representations of the origins of knowledge, which I think comprise considerably more than simple "literary transposition[s] of speculations on the Golden Age."⁷⁹ First, the "creation" of knowledge is presented as an exclusively divine activity, and occupies a structural cosmological position suggestive of the creation of the material universe as a whole. Knowledge, moreover—and again, this is knowledge of every variety, from the transcendent sort "whose purposes are uncognizable" [*adr̥ṣṭārtha*-] to that of social relations, music, medicine (and evidently even historical knowledge)—is by and large viewed as permanently

fixed in its dimensions; knowledge, along with the practices that depend on it, does not change or grow, but is frozen for all time in a given set of texts that are continually made available to human beings in whole or in part during the ever repeated cycles of cosmic creation.

A final consequence is one I suggested earlier. From the conception of an apriori *śāstra* it logically follows—and Indian intellectual history demonstrates that this conclusion was clearly drawn—that there can be no conception of progress, of the forward "movement from worse to better," on the basis of innovations in practice. Undoubtedly the idea of progress in the West germinated in a soil made fertile by a peculiar constellation of representations, about time, history, and eschatology. Whatever may be the possibility of the idea's growth in the absence of these concepts, it is clear that in traditional India there were at all events ideological hindrances in its way. If any sort of amelioration is to occur, this can only be in the form of a "regress," a backward movement aiming at a closer and more faithful approximation to the divine pattern (as when Vātsyāyana or Rājaśekhara claims to reverse the entropic decline of textualization in order to recreate the comprehensive *śāstra*). Logically excluded from epistemological meaningfulness are likewise experience, experiment, invention, discovery, innovation. According to his own self-representation, there can be for the thinker no originality of thought, no brand-new insights, notions, preceptions, but only the attempt better and more clearly to grasp and explain the antecedent, always already formulated truth. All Indian learning, accordingly, perceives itself and indeed presents itself largely as commentary on the primordial *śāstras*. As the great ninth-century Kashmiri logician Jayantabhaṭṭa explains, "How can we discover any new fact or truth? One should consider novelty only in rephrasing the older truths of the ancients in modern terminology."⁸⁰

I am not, of course, asserting that there were no such insights, notions, or perceptions. Quite the contrary, if in certain areas the shastric paradigm did encourage—or enforce—a certain stasis (as in language and literature), elsewhere Indian cultural history in the classical and medieval period is crowded with exciting discovery and innovation (as in mathematics and architecture). These are not, however, perceived to be such; they are instead viewed, through the inverting lense of ideology, as renovation and recovery (the

the fifth *veda* (vs. 12); Brahmā appoints Bharata as *prayoktṛ* of this *veda* (and so by implication reveals it to him), who then teaches it to his sons.

⁷⁶ See *SūryaS.* 14.24ff., 1.1 ff., especially 6 ff. A striking contrast is provided by another astronomical text (recently brought to my attention by David Pingree), which vigorously (and uncharacteristically) reinterprets revelation so as to allow for observation. See *Jyotirmīmāṃsā* of Nīlakaṇṭha (ed. K. V. Sharma [Hoshiarpur, 1977]), pp. 2ff.

⁷⁷ *PākaD.* p. 2; for Yama's culinary boon to Nala, cf. *MBh.* 3.54.31.

⁷⁸ The Sanskrit text is found in G. N. Pant, *Indian Archery* (New Delhi, 1978), p. 331, vss. 1–2. Analogous is the case of a *śāstra* composed by an incarnation of the gods, as for example the *Vedantasūtra*, which is ascribed by Vācaspati to "an avatar of the intellectual energy of Viṣṇu" (*Bhām.*, introduction, vs. 5). I ignore here other well-known instances of revelation as not being tied specifically to texts viewed as derived from the primordial Text (e.g., the revelation of Pāṇini by Śiva, of Kālidāsa by Caṇḍī, of Vālmīki by Nārada).

⁷⁹ See L. Renou, "Politique et économie dans l'Inde ancienne," *Journal des Savants* 1966, p. 30 (= *L'Inde fondamentale* [Paris, 1978], p. 187).

⁸⁰ *NyāyMañ.*, Introduction, vs. 8 (cited in and translated by B. K. Matilal, *Nyāyavaiśeṣika* [Wiesbaden, 1977], p. 93).

creative work of Jayanta himself being a salient example).⁸¹

We may in fact characterize the ideological effects of the shastric paradigm more broadly as follows: First, all contradiction between the model of cultural knowledge and actual cultural change is thereby at once transmuted and denied; creation is really re-creation, as the future is, in a sense, the past. Second, the living, social, historical, contingent tradition is naturalized, becoming as much a part of the order of things as the laws of nature themselves: Just as the social, historical phenomenon of language is viewed by Mīmāṃsā as natural and eternal, so the social dimension and historicity of all cultural practices are eliminated in the shastric paradigm. And finally, through such denial of contradiction and reification of tradition, the sectional interests of pre-modern India are universalized and valorized.⁸² The theoretical discourse of *śāstra* becomes in essence a practical discourse of power.

In their essential form, the ideas we have been examining in this section are once again, like the conception of the apriori existence of *śāstra*, old and persistent. In the grand Upaniṣadic dialogue of Yājñavalkya and Maitreyī we are told how "From that great Being the *Rgveda* has been breathed forth, the *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Atharvaveda*; histories, ancient legends, sciences, Upaniṣads, heroic tales, *sūtras*, exegeses, and commentaries."⁸³ The *Mahābhārata* elsewhere succinctly asserts that "Yoga, the wisdom of Sāṃkhya, sciences, crafts, and actions, the *vedas*, *śāstras*, and knowledge—all this derives from the Grandfather, Brahman."⁸⁴ And the conception maintains itself until well into the medieval period. To quote

⁸¹ It is indicative of the depth of fissure between representation and reality that, as Matilal remarks, the *Nyāyamañjarī* (which is presented as a selective commentary on the *Nyāyaisūtras*) remains, Jayanta's claim notwithstanding, "one of the most original contributions" to Indian logic (ibid.).

⁸² For the theoretical and terminological framework used here, see Giddens, *Central Problems*, pp. 193–7.

⁸³ *BrāraU.* 2.4.10.

⁸⁴ *MBh.* 13.135.139, as cited by Vallabhadeva in his commentary on *KumāSam.* 2.3 (ed. Narayana Murti, Wiesbaden, 1980). The critical edition reads, in *pāda* d, *janārdanāt* (for *pitāmahāt*). See also *YājñSm.* 3.187–9 where "the *vedas*, *purāṇas*, sciences, Upaniṣads, verses [= histories, *Mitākṣara*], *sūtras*, commentaries, and all other types of discourse" (*vac ca kiṃcana vāṇmayam*) are transmitted via the 80,000 sages who inhabit a region of heaven between the Great Dipper and the "Road of the Elephant" (cf. n. 62 above).

the unambiguous words of Jayanta once more: "All sciences have existed, precisely like the *vedas*, from the first creation. People, however, ascribe them to one or another human author who has sought to abbreviate or expand them."⁸⁵

In the end, consequently, there really is no *śāstra* of human provenance, the assertions of Kumārila and Rājaśekhara (above, pp. 501 and 502) to the contrary notwithstanding. Their scholastic dichotomy seems designed mainly to provide an ad hoc differentiation underscoring the peculiar transcendence and infallibility of the *vedas*. The prevailing conviction is that all *śāstra* without exception ultimately shares those qualities.

3. THE CRITICAL PRESUPPOSITION: THE TRANSCENDENT ŚĀSTRA

In much narrower compass, finally, I will set out what I take to be a fundamental presupposition or axiom behind—or perhaps better, justification for—the various attributes of *śāstra* so far described, that is, the priority of *śāstra* to all and every practical application and activity; the conception—a logical consequence of this priority—of the primordial existence of *śāstra*; and the direct or indirect, complete or abridged, revelation of it to human beings. Several ways to explain these representations and beliefs suggest themselves, from within the Indian tradition itself and from a more general philosophical perspective. I reserve for the end the cultural-historical presupposition that I believe supplies us with one especially persuasive explanation.

The medical tradition, which as we saw shares the paradigmatic mythic conception of the origins of knowledge, offers an epistemological analysis that may be extended to other *śāstras* in its discussion of the *pramāṇa āptavanacam*, "authoritative testimony." After defining and describing the various "sources of valid knowledge," the *Carakasamhitā* remarks, "Of these three ways of knowing, the starting point is the knowledge derived from authoritative instruction. At

⁸⁵ *NyāyMañ.* p. 8. Kumārila elsewhere opposes this general cultural conviction. For him, the *smṛtis* and *vedāṅgas* and the rest of the *vidyāsthānas* outside of the *vedas* strictly speaking, are in general *pauruṣeya* in origin, because they are authored by men, whose names we remember (*TantrVā.*, Vol. 1, p. 167 top). More specifically, he argues that those portions that are *dṛṣṭārtha* are of secular provenance and have, concomitantly, less authority, while those that are *adṛṣṭārtha* derive from vedic texts and share their absolutely binding force (*TantrVā.* Vol. 1, pp. 79.8–9 and 81.18–19).

the next step, it has to be critically examined by perception and inference. Without there being some knowledge obtained from authoritative instruction, what is there for one to examine critically by perception and inference?"⁸⁶

Here we are given what seems essentially an epistemological response to the paradox presented by one variety of the hermeneutical circle, such as, for example, is found in the Socratic restatement of Meno's paradox: "A man cannot inquire either about that which he knows, or about that which he does not know; for assuming he knows he has no need to inquire; nor can he inquire about that which he does not know, for he does not know about that which he has to inquire."⁸⁷ Since theoretically no one is exempt from the paralyzing effects of this paradox, it is impossible to imagine how a body of knowledge such as medicine could ever have developed and been transmitted without positing the existence of some prior, beginningless, and unbroken "authoritative instruction." This enables the student to escape the circle by having the scope and object of his discipline defined for him, and learning what in fact it is that he must bring his powers of perception and inference to bear on.^{87a}

A second, rather more analogical sort of argument is formulated likewise in the medical *śāstra*. This asserts that, as the "laws of nature" are eternal, so must the knowledge be that depends on and derives from those laws:

Ayurveda is called eternal, because it is without beginning, because it is nothing but the laws inherent in nature (*svabhāvasamsiddhalakṣaṇāt*) and because the natural properties of the real substances are unalterable (*bhāvasvabhāvanityatvāt*). There had never been any break in the continuous stream of life, nor in the continuous stream of knowledge. . . . Apart from the restricted sense of acquiring this knowledge and of spreading it, there is no meaning in saying that medical

science came into being having been non-existent before.⁸⁸

The last phrase of this passage from the *Carakasamhitā* would suggest an even larger philosophical context for the epistemological issue with which we are dealing, for it would seem to fit into the greater problem of causality in general. In traditional India, the causal doctrine associated especially with Sāṃkhya and early Vedānta would seem to have particular relevance here (though whether merely as a condition facilitating the emplacement of the epistemological model or as the source of it is probably not possible to determine). This is the notion of *satkāryavāda*: As a pot, for example, must pre-exist in the clay (since otherwise it could never be brought into existence or could be brought into existence from some other material, e.g., threads), so knowledge must pre-exist in something in order that we may derive it thence (thus in part the postulates of the apriori and finally transcendent *śāstra*); like the clay, which ex hypothesi must in some form exist eternally, that from which our knowledge comes must be eternal; and like the potter, we ourselves do not "create" knowledge, but merely bring it to manifestation from the (textual) materials in which it lies concealed from us.⁸⁹

The epistemological implications of *satkāryavāda*, as drawn out in the above paragraph, seem never to be clearly expressed in Indian philosophical literature, as

⁸⁶ *CaraS.* 3.4. vss. 3–8, cited in and translated by Chattopadhyaya, *Science and Society*, p. 89.

⁸⁷ *Meno* 80d, cited by Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1979), p. 196. The circle is appreciated also in the Indian tradition, see Śābara on *PūrMīmSū* 1.1.1 (pp. 11–12), and Śāṅkara on *BrahmSū.* 1.1 (pp. 41–42).

^{87a} This is one argument the Mīmāṃsā uses to prove the beginningless (and so uncreated) character of the *veda*: (vedic) learning always derives from previous learning (*śabdapūrvatam*; *PūrMīmSū.* 1.1.29).

⁸⁸ *CaraS.* 1.3.27, cited in and translated by Chattopadhyaya, *Science and Society*, pp. 181–2. (Something similar is found in *dharmaśāstra*, that is, that *dharma* comprises the eternal laws that maintain the world [cf. Lingat, *Classical Law*, p. 3].) Yet another explanation for the origin of *āyurveda* is offered by Vācaspati in his commentary on *YogSū.* 1.24: Works such as those on medicine and magical formulae [against poisons, demons, lightning, etc.; cf. Vātsyāyana on *NYāySū.* 2.1.69] were composed by God; their authority is proven by their unfailing efficacy. No human being, who necessarily operates with quotidian means of knowledge, could even in many lifetimes have hit upon the positive and negative combinations of the many different herbs in the one case and of the various syllables in the other. Nor is there any possibility that such knowledge might accumulate through the ages, because the periodic universal dissolutions interrupt the tradition. (Incidentally, the indubitable authority hereby invested in such texts remains axiomatic among contemporary ayurvedic doctors [See S. Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors* (New York, 1982), p. 221 and n. 4].)

⁸⁹ For a good synopsis of the doctrine of *satkāryavāda*, see Śāṅkara on *BrahmSū.* 2.1.18.

far as I can tell. But that need not stop us from supposing they could have operated subliminally in the mythic representation of the transcendent provenance and authority of *śāstra*. That such a causal doctrine may be effectively incorporated in an epistemological theory is shown by the Socratic merging of *mathesis* and *anamnesis*, though here the source of knowledge is not the external text but the *psyche* itself:

What we call learning is really just recollection. The soul, since it is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in the other world, has learned everything that is. So we need not be surprised if it can recall the knowledge of virtue or anything else which, as we see, it once possessed. . . . When a man has recalled a single piece of knowledge—learned it in ordinary language—there is no reason why he should not find out all the rest . . . for seeking and learning are in fact nothing but recollection.⁹⁰

Finally, the possibility that these ideas may have a logical status quite independent of Platonic or any other metaphysics is shown by their reappearance in the contemporary neopositivism of Popper: "All acquired knowledge, all learning, consists of the modification (possibly the rejection) of some form of knowledge, or disposition, which was there previously; and in the last instance, of inborn dispositions. . . . All growth of knowledge consists in the improvement of existing knowledge which is changed in the hope of approaching nearer to the truth."⁹¹

Whatever the cogency of these more philosophical explanations for the special character attributed to *śāstra*, a historical-cultural consideration seems to me somewhat more persuasive. On the one hand, the peculiar traits *śāstra* is invested with in the classical period are easily related to, and in large part may be explained by the ancient, tenacious, and widespread belief in the transcendent character of the *śāstra* par excellence—namely, the *vedas* (literally, "knowledge"). On the other, the relationship of *śāstra* to practical activity may be patterned after the function of the *vedas* in, so to speak, cosmic "practice," the creation of the material universe.

It is not possible here to go into the arguments adduced to support it, but the thesis is widely accepted

that the *veda* is eternal, infinite, self-existent (that is to say, not created by any agency human or divine), and infallible.⁹² As Renou has pointed out, while this may be viewed as the "thesis of the learned" (being most rigorously argued out in *Mīmāṃsā*), it is still "also that which corresponds to the most general sentiment in India, the one enunciated in the epics and *purāṇas*."⁹³ Moreover, for centuries of cosmogonic speculation the *veda* has been conceived of as the blueprint or template according to which cosmic creation proceeds. And it is this, it would appear, that may furnish the paradigm for everyday practice in general. Examples of this cosmogonic doctrine may be adduced for some fifteen hundred years of Indian intellectual history:

By means of the *veda* Prajāpati separated out name and form, being and non-being (*TaiBr.* 2.6.2.3).⁹⁴

The several names, actions, and conditions of all things [Prajāpati] shaped in the beginning directly from the words of the *veda* (*ManuSm.* 1.21).

In the beginning a divine voice, eternal, without beginning or end, formed of the *vedas*, was uttered by Svayambhū—and from this all activities proceed (*MBh.* 12.224.55 + 671*.1).

All things derive from the [vedic] word, as is shown by perception and inference (*BrahmSū.* 1.3.28).⁹⁵

The name and form of living things, the procedure of all actions for gods and all the rest [Brahmā] brought about in the beginning directly from the words of the *veda* (*ViṣṇuP.* 1.5.62).

This all is a transformation of the Word—so say those who know the tradition. It was in the first instance from the vedic hymns that all the universe derived (*Bhārṭṛhari, VākyaP.* 1.120).

⁹² See for example *PūrMīmSū.* 1.1.27–32; Śabara on 1.1.5 (pp. 62ff.); *ŚlokaVār.*, *Vākṛyādīkaraṇa*, vss. 366–368; Kane, *History*, Vol. 5, pp. 1202ff. (and on the infinitude of the *vedas* cf., for one example out of many, *TaiBr.* 3.10.11).

⁹³ L. Renou, *Études védiques et pāṇinéennes Vol. VI: Le Destin du Veda dans l'Inde* [Paris, 1960], p. 1 n. 3).

⁹⁴ Cf. also 2.2.4, where the common idea appears that "He uttered the word 'earth,' and so created the earth; he uttered the word 'sky,' and so created the atmosphere."

⁹⁵ [*śabda iti cen nā*] *īṣṭa prabhāvāt pratyakṣānumānābhyām* (*pratyakṣa* referring to *śruti*, *anumāna* to *smṛti*, though Śaṅkara goes on to provide an additional argument from perception and inference in the passage cited below, p. 519).

⁹⁰ *Phaedo* 72c; *Meno* 81c–86c (in *Plato: Collected Dialogues*, ed. E. Hamilton et al. [Princeton, 1961]).

⁹¹ Popper, *Objective Knowledge*, p. 71. See above, n. 55, for the references to the "theory-ladenness" of experience that undergirds these theorems.

In his commentary on the *Brahmasūtras*, where several of the passages cited above are marshaled, Śaṅkara rather clearly makes the connections that relate such speculation on the cosmogonic Logos to the problems of *śāstra* raised in this paper:

We have all observed that, when undertaking something one desires to accomplish, one first remembers the word that expresses the thing in question, and afterward undertakes the thing. In the same way [we infer that] before creation the vedic words must have manifested themselves in the mind of Prajāpati the creator, after which he created the things corresponding to those words.⁹⁶

Human action in general may thus be viewed as following the paradigm offered on the plane of cosmogonic speculation. One proceeds to an activity only in dependence on a verbalized, and in fact objectivized, textualized plan.

The *veda*, the transcendent *śāstra*, subsumes all knowledge. It is itself eternal, infallible, the source of the *caturvarga* and thus the basis of all activity. Secular *śāstra* in general, consequently, as a portion of this corpus (and were it not, it would be “worthless and

false,” as Manu says, “being of modern date”), comes to share the *veda*’s transcendent attributes.⁹⁷ Just like the *veda*, too, it thereby establishes itself as an essential apriori of every dimension of practical activity. Such may have been one confluence of representations that facilitated the process by which *śāstra* attained its incomparable legitimacy and claim to practical authority,⁹⁸ and so helped determine many of the salient characteristics of traditional Sanskrit culture.

⁹⁷ On the omniscience of the *vedas*, see for instance *ManuSm.* 12.97; the *vedas* are the source of the *caturvarga* in *PrsthāBhe.* p. 3; *ManuSm.* 12.96 condemns modern *śāstras*. It is very common that secular *śāstras*, in the widest sense of the term, seek to make explicit this consanguinity with the *vedas* by arrogating to themselves the status of “fifth *veda*,” and thereby explicitly to claim a comparable authority. Typical examples are offered by *NāṭyaŚā.* 1.15ff., *MBh.* 1.1.205ff., 55.14ff.

⁹⁸ Like the *vedas*, *śāstra* in general becomes a source of knowledge as valid as perception or inference (in the Mīmāṃsā tradition the word *śāstra* replaces the older term *śabda* in referring to “verbal testimony,” as in Śabara’s commentary on *PūrMīmSū.* 1.1.5 [p. 44; see also *ManuSm.* 12.105]; as I observe above [p. 503 and n. 21], *śāstra* in this context is interpreted as embracing all the *vidyāsthānas*). “*Śāstra* is altogether indubitable,” says Śabara, “and more authoritative than the word of one’s mother or father. By means of *śāstra* one cognizes; it is like another sense power” (*Bhāṣya* on *PūrMīmSū.* 4.1.3; elsewhere Śabara can, nevertheless, insist that even the words of a *śāstrakāra* are unable to warrant a thing that is not otherwise proven by a *pramāṇa* [on *PūrMīmSū.* 1.1.5 (p. 56)]).

⁹⁶ Śaṅkara on *BrahmSū.* 1.3.28, p. 253. The notion that things “originate” from words seems to derive from the linguistic-philosophical view that entities individuate through their connection with words as expressing universals under which they can be subsumed (the universals being eternal). Śaṅkara discusses the idea at length *ibid.*, pp. 251–2.