

Article

“Become This Whole World”: The Phenomenology of Metaphysical Religion in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6–8

Jessica Frazier 

Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford, Oxford OX1 2JD, UK; jessica.frazier@theology.ox.ac.uk

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Abstract: Implicit in Heidegger’s 1920–1921 *Phenomenology of Religious Life* is an account of religion as a radical transformation of the very structures of experience. This article seeks to apply that account to a classical Indian discourse on reality and the self, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* chapter six. This classical source-text for two thousand years of Hindu theology advocates a new ‘religious life’ achieved through phenomenologically reorienting the very structures of cognition toward the *broadest* truths of reality, rather than the finite features of the world. The goal is to create a new form of primordial subjectivity with an altered relationship to phenomena, finitude, and the divine. The article proceeds in two parts: The first section brings out Heidegger’s theory of religion through a reading of Heidegger’s 1920 *Phenomenology of Religious Life* with the help of his lectures, *On the Definition of Philosophy*, from the previous year. The second section tries to demonstrate the value of integrating traditional textual/historical scholarship in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* with Heidegger’s method. The juxtaposition aims to both (1) foreground the phenomenologically transformative goals of this influential Indian text, and (2) challenge Heidegger’s scepticism about the religious value of metaphysical reflection.

Keywords: Indian philosophy; Heidegger; phenomenology; *Upaniṣads*; Vedānta; religious experience; comparative philosophy; subjectivity; mysticism

This article looks at what it means to enter a new ‘religious life’ by phenomenologically reorienting the very structures of experience toward the *broadest* truths of reality—that is, by shifting one’s perspective so fundamentally that the world is experienced in terms of its universal features, rather than its finite, transient details. Heidegger’s 1919–1921 lectures on ‘The Phenomenology of Religious Life’ described his vision of what the Christian experience can and should be. But they also contained a broader theory of religion, taking it to be a cultural form that alters the most basic patterns of our experience of the world in such a way that it reorients our sense of identity, values, and behaviour. Complimenting this, they also demonstrated a ground-breaking method of reading that seeks ‘to penetrate therewith into the grounding phenomena of primordial [religious] life.’ Here, we apply this to a classical Hindu text that aimed to create a new form of experience which alters one’s relationship to phenomena, finitude, and the divine.¹

In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, a 6th century text that shaped Hindu understandings of divinity for two millennia, a father asks his ‘swollen-headed’ son whether his teachers have passed on a special kind of truth that does not just *fill* the mind, but also *transforms* it:

¹ The Upaniṣads are generally taken as introducing proto-philosophical ideas about metaphysics, identity, causality, and selfhood, that would later be refined in India’s scholastic traditions. Texts, like the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, a c.7th century reflection on language and meaning, universalisation and essence, and finitude and immortality, highlights the uses of philosophical thinking as a spiritual exercise—using inference as a tool for changing the focus of our thought and thereby reshaping the self (Frazier 2017, pp. 87, 113–16, 135–38).

... you must have surely asked about that teaching by which one hears what has not been heard of before, thinks of what has not been thought of before, and perceives what has not been perceived before?²

This passage reflects the beginnings of a culture in which philosophical theories about divinity often went hand in hand with a yogic tradition in which knowledge was meant to transform the self. In the story, the father trains his son in the attitude by which one sees the world in its deeper truths, experiences himself as part of the universal 'levels' of reality, and ultimately *becomes* truth—he '*becomes*' the world.

This teaching in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* has a phenomenological dimension in the sense that it aims at a new focus for all of our cognitions (on the broad, continuous features of the world rather than the particular details), and brings out its implication for how we understand not only what we perceive, but also ourselves. In this sense, it attempts a phenomenological transformation of the kind Heidegger intends when he speaks of changing the 'fundamental religious experience' in terms of how "'I"-ness' has the world through its own perceptions (PRL 51, 64).³

His application of this definition of religion to Paul's letters has the potential to shed light on the experiential fabric of 'religious life' across cultures. It reminds us that it is not merely particular practices or beliefs, nor a particular perception that many religions seek to create, but a whole disposition toward the world, rooted in a particular structure, mood, or interpretive orientation in the way we experience things. In many ways, Heidegger's definition of religion continues the mystical tradition that so fascinated him as a young man, insofar as it takes religious life to be a matter of transformed experience.⁴ Here, religious texts, understood in their true religiosity, primarily *transform* rather than *inform*—a view with roots in the theological hermeneutics of Rudolf Bultmann and the Kierkegaardian literature that so impressed him. On this reading, what is really at stake in both Paul's letters (and in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, as we will see) is a restructuring of subjectivity that creates a new 'mood.' This mood changes our perspective on self, action, futurity, and death, and turns our attention to other realities than our own finite selves. In both cases, the new 'religious life' markedly contrasts with the quotidian concerns of those Paul calls 'unbelievers,' and the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* deems ignorant.

Yet a deep and salient difference distinguishes these Hindu and Christian texts. Here, in these early lectures, we find Heidegger facing that 'hotly debated issue' of whether there can be a religiosity that avoids reducing the divine to a metaphysical theory, and instead unveils 'a genuine God ... who cannot be named in the language of metaphysics' (McGrath and Wiercinski 2010, p. xii). In Heidegger's idea of authentic Christianity, the divine is always a limit of thought, never a content of it. As Zaborowski puts it, death and finitude can be contrasted to "'an eternal trace," but not "an eternal order"' (Zaborowski 2010, p. 7). By contrast, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* set the tone for a strain of early Indian religious culture that was centred on a divinity that is continuous with the finite world. In this Indian text, induction from empirical particulars to general truths, applied to all experience and to the self, was the epitome of a new vision of religious life, superseding the previous primacy of Vedic religious ritual. Heidegger would have seen its ancient brahmin authors as subject to the same mistakes as Christianity's scholastic and mystical thinkers: 'The medieval individual loses himself in 'the matter at issue', the material', and 'the universal"' (Pattison and Kirkpatrick 2019, p. 52). But those same Indian authors would have accused Heidegger of a narrow and unambitious understanding of the untapped capacities that are latent in *Dasein*. Thus, the juxtaposition of the two texts invites us to

² uta tam ādeśam aprākṣyo yenāśrutam śrutam bhavaty amataṃ matam avijñātam vijñātam iti| katham nu bhagavaḥ sa ādeśo bhavati| (CU6.1.3). Translations of the Upaniṣads are based on Olivelle 1998. The text draws on the rich classical Sanskrit range of vocabulary for mental reflection of different kinds, arguably 'deepening' cognitively from perception (*śruta*) to thought (*mata*) to understanding or discernment (*vijñāta*). It also suggests an almost paradoxical magical power in making the 'unheard heard', the 'unseen seen.'

³ All references to the *Phenomenology of Religious Life* use the translation found in (Heidegger 2004).

⁴ See, e.g., Wolfe (2014); Pattison and Kirkpatrick (2019); and Caputo (1978) on Heidegger's continuity with mystical thinkers, such as Zaborowski (2010, p. 6), on his early personal theology of grace as 'immediate relation to a transcendent being.'

ask: Can there be a 'Phenomenology of Religio-Philosophical Life' that moves from worldly metaphysics to the divine?

This article tries to do two things: In the first section, it gives a short interpretation of Heidegger's 1920 *Phenomenology of Religious Life*, that tries to bring out its message for a hidden hermeneutics of religious *mood*, and to probe its complex relationship with 'philosophy'—which Heidegger seems to see as antithetical to religious attitudes. This reading is done through the lens of his lectures, *On the Definition of Philosophy*, from the previous year of 1919. We will see how his phenomenological method challenges all scholars of past religious texts to reveal the form of experience they refer us to.

In the second section, this article gives a reading of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* chapters 6 and 8, trying to show what can be gained by integrating traditional textual/historical/philosophical analysis with Heidegger's phenomenological method. It brings out the theme of mental transformation in that text, and also to show how specifically *philosophical* thinking plays what Heidegger would define as a 'religious' role in the early Vedāntic tradition of Hinduism.

Both of these sections, clearly marked, can be read separately—but they are meant to be equally weighted and mutually illuminating. For that reason, much of the secondary, contextual, and critical notation of the essay has been placed in the footnotes. The two sections function as a *method* and an *application* that critically illuminates the method itself. The second section shows some limits and possibilities of Heidegger's phenomenological approach to religion, and it also explores characteristics of Hindu philosophical religion that are often ignored. As Hadot (1995) noted of Ancient Greece, so too in Ancient India did philosophy function as a way of life, and more—as a kind of spiritual exercise by which the self is re-aligned. So too, India has used philosophy as a way to shape the mind through a cognitive and affective attention to universals rather than particulars, enabling subjectivity to 'know the whole, and become the whole world' through transformative reasoning (Frazier 2017, p. 104).

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1. Heidegger's Theory of Religion: The Structural Reorientation of Experience

The themes in the *Phenomenology of Religious Life* (PRL) are too many to mention here, but the thread in Heidegger's method that is most interesting for the religiosity of our Hindu text is the idea that it seeks a radical transformation—a subjective restructuring—of one's fundamental life-disposition. This transformation is such that the value of living is also thereby altered. For Heidegger, the essence of authentic Christian religiosity is acceptance of 'a living connection with God' that 'consists in entering oneself into the anguish of life'; it is for this reason that he emphasises the imagery of becoming, and turning (pp. 66–67).

The opposition to 'security' (p. 73) that he finds in Paul is connected to this basic conception of religion as a transformational practice. Those who 'spend themselves on what life brings them, occupy themselves with whatever tasks of life' are 'caught up in what life offers; they are in the dark' (p. 74). This too is the root of his opposition to taking the second coming of Christ as a real future event; the goal is not to 'hold out until the decisive day' (p. 75), but to achieve a new orientation in the present. This is why phenomenology is needed for the future of theology and religious understanding, to bring us back from the 'idol' of objective knowledge to the true 'enactment' of religious transformation (p. 84). Heidegger's definition of religion as transformation, then, means that phenomenological hermeneutics reveals that aspect of a text that seeks to fundamentally alter the basic orientation of all our experience, rather than reinforcing its usual worldly structures.

As a method for understanding 'religious' texts, Heidegger's reading of the letters of Paul in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* draws our attention to two things. Firstly, the way that the text *historically* reflects a structure or orientation of experience experienced, observed, or advocated by its authors. Secondly, the way that *religiously* it recommends this basic orientation of subjectivity to its audience, and even seeks to inspire it. Heidegger alludes briefly and approvingly to the approach of the earlier phenomenologist, Max Scheler, who took Christian thought to be a restructuring of the subject's relation to aspects of its own functioning in such a way that it is deeply changed; this might be its own memories

(in repentance), its own dispositions (in rebirth), its consideration of others (in love), or its integration of values into its basic framework of assessment (in ethics). So too, Heidegger's phenomenology explores religion as a distinctive process of restructuring experience, and in this it is transferable across cultures. Applied specifically to India it connects richly with classical Hinduism's interest in self-reflexive awareness, and the mutability of subjectivity's basic structures (e.g., of subjective focus and attention, scope, speed, cohesion (or fragmentation), and inter-subjective outreach).⁵

2. The Problem of Philosophy as Religious Life

Yet there seems to be a limit to the applicability of Heidegger's method, for he conceives of religion as an orientation to a radically transcendent divinity *beyond Being*. Judith Wolfe notes that Heidegger's conception of religious life seems deeply—almost unduly—committed to its distress-filled and anxious attitude of obstinate, unfulfillable waiting. It is essentially concerned with faith in a *parousia* that we can never experience, rather than with hope, which '(alone among the three theological virtues) is entirely absent' (Wolfe 2014, p. 50). This attitude, which he brings out in his reading of Thessalonians, is intrinsically connected to his idea of Christian authenticity, and his judgement that it is finitude that essentially defines humanity. From this flows his rejection of metaphysical religion. Yet while this may fit well with Abrahamic religions which hold the divine nature to be ontologically different in substance from the world, it occludes religions committed to a divinity that is *continuous with or present within* worldly Being.⁶ This presents a kind of puzzle for those interested in carrying Heidegger's philosophical and methodological insights into other cultures. We will see below whether Hindu examples can help to interrogate and realign these theological commitments within Heidegger's religious phenomenological method.

In his section on the *phenomenological* form of understanding, Heidegger contrasts it to the 'usual philosophy of religion,' which presumes that religion can be understood in terms only of that 'which has the character of consciousness' (PRL 53). This can be clarified by reference to prior comment in *On the Definition of Philosophy*. Attitudinally speaking, the value of *philosophical* ideas, he says, lies in their provision of clarity, calm, and rest:

In other words, the efforts of the great philosophers are directed towards what is in every sense ultimate, universal, and of universal validity. The inner struggle with the puzzles of life and the world seeks to come to rest by establishing the ultimate nature of these. (TDP 7)⁷

But rest is not the goal of life. This echoes in his implicit critique of 'those who find rest and security in this world' by clinging to a kind of fulfilment that is impossible after Kant (p. 72):

... in the after effect or renewal of Kant, then the hope for a metaphysics in the old sense will be essentially diminished: an experientially transcendent knowledge of super-sensible realities, forces, causes, is regarded as impossible. (TDP 7)

After Kant's critique of reason, we can know only the forms and content of what we know. The balm of metaphysical knowledge is thus a false solution to the human predicament; the philosopher attends not to a change in the self, but rather to some objective, external saving thing. But 'they do not

⁵ A number of scholars detail the way certain Indian texts focus on the structures of subjectivity in a manner that could be called 'phenomenological'; e.g., Jonardon Ganeri's work on Indian insights into the nature and limits of consciousness (Ganeri 2007), its deconstruction of 'the first person stance' (Ganeri 2012), and Hindu-Buddhist debates' focus on the potential of the fragmented self to be dissolved or unified by the mental capacity of attention (Ganeri 2017). So too, Gavin Flood has given a Heideggerian reading of the Kaśmīrī Śaiva tradition's methods for re-engineering subjectivity (Flood 2013); and Frazier (2017) has looked at the forms and methods of mutability that characterise the Upaniṣadic conception of the self.

⁶ While there are clear cases of monism in the West, and dualism of God and world in India, nevertheless, a metaphysics of divine grounding and emanation predominates in Vedāntic traditions, while creation *ex nihilo* or from a separate substance is virtually unknown (see Frazier 2014 on Vedāntic ontological monisms).

⁷ All references to *On the Definition of Philosophy* use the translation found in (Heidegger 2008).

have themselves, because they have forgotten their own self, because they do not have themselves in the clarity of their own knowledge.' (p. 72). For Heidegger, that approach inspires a 'Spenglerian' problem of 'decline,' incurred by trying too hard to build concrete knowledge. Thus, he is sceptical of philosophy's ability to deliver the peace it promises, and one must undertake a phenomenological 'Destruktion' to reveal the 'often overlooked' 'guiding foreconception' that shapes our experience prior to any particular beliefs (p. 54).

However, ultimately, Heidegger's rejection of philosophical approaches to religious life is grounded on two pillars: An existential notion of spirituality as the total dedication of subjectivity (a Lutheran and Kierkegaardian theme), and Christian commitment to the idea of God as something transcendent that lies beyond the 'lawful' and 'conscious' fabrics of human life (PRL 52). A paradox flows from this: For a Christian existentialist of this kind, subjectivity must be utterly committed to something that transcends its capacity of experience or understanding. His reading of Christian theology rejects the philosophical mode of conceiving the divine, preferring an attitude of faith 'inherently directed toward that which exceeds the 'naturally' human.' (Wolfe 2014, p. 50). In contrast to Jewish ethical law, and Greek rational philosophy, the Christian experience is 'not dealing with a logical mode of argumentation' (p. 51), and the idea of Christianity as a theological proposition is 'actually a contradiction' (p. 87). Rather, he sees faith as an 'unwavering running toward the aim' that never arrives (p. 50). Christian hope, then, 'is radically different from all expectation' and refers to the present knowledge that Christians acquire insofar as they are 'those who have become' (pp. 71–72). We will see how this affects his reading of religiosity as effecting a present change rather than informing us about a future 'saving' state.

Heidegger accordingly rejects anything that seems excessively focused on understanding the divine as a contemporaneous reality to be 'bad mysticism . . . mystical absorption and special exertion' (p. 70); one example is the 'Hellenistic mystery-religions' with their idea that pneuma or spirit is 'part of the human being' (pp. 88–89). Paul's description of the Antichrist as the God of the World is taken to indicate a rejection of any divinity that can be reduced to finite ideas. The Platonic-Aristotelian heritage, with its desire to speculate on and validate God, leaves one 'stuck in the worldly' and 'in the dark, with respect to knowledge of themselves' (p. 74). In this way, his 'phenomenology of religious life' is methodologically tied to the theological presupposition that religion concerns what is transcendent, and therefore exceeds human conceptualisation: Philosophy takes one away from what Heidegger in 1920 considered a truly 'religious life.'

But what of those religious outlooks that are premised on a philosophical understanding of the divine and its nature? Does Heidegger's prejudice against the Greek element in Christianity mean that his whole conception of phenomenology cannot be used for any religion that arrives at God through reason? To put it concisely:

- (i) Could there be a notion of the divine that is continuous with finite human experience of the world, whilst remaining significantly *divine*? That is, does divinity imply inaccessibility to human consciousness?
- (ii) What do we mean by human finitude? Are there any ways of being that can broaden the self, and any forms of infinity that the mind can encompass? Could there be a way of accessing the divine (or any other thing) that does not reduce it to an object within consciousness, but which instead accesses ideas without *reducing* them?

Together, these questions ask whether there could be a phenomenology of the religio-*philosophical* life. We will see that our Hindu case study calls for a certain kind of answer.

3. Heidegger's Phenomenological Hermeneutics: Five Levels of Understanding Religion

The methodological question that the PRL addresses is how to uncover the fundamentally restructured shape of subjectivity that a given text embodied and recommends. Heidegger is not fully explicit nor systematic in the reading he gave through his lectures, but one can extract one

schematisation (possibly of many) of his conception of understanding religion. His lectures on philosophy from the preceding year (collected in *Towards a Definition of Philosophy* (TDP) possess an unusually lucid and comparative tone, and they set out at least three different ways of looking at distinctive cultural perspectives.

Perhaps the first and most obvious hermeneutic level at which one can understand religion is in terms of its *worldview*, by which he seems to mean one's picture of the world, including cosmology and science, metaphysics and ethics, aesthetics, customs, and assumptions. He explicitly allows for a comparative approach to worldview, citing diverse backgrounds:

Today, worldview is a spiritual concern of everyone: the peasant in the Black Forest has his worldview, consisting in the doctrinal content of his confession; the factory worker has his worldview, whose essence, perhaps, consists in regarding all religion as a superseded affair; certainly the so-called educated person has his worldview; the political parties have their worldviews. One hears nowadays about the antagonism between the Anglo-American and German worldviews. (TDP, 6)

In contrasting the humble Black Forest Catholic, the (presumably Marxist secularist) worker, and others, Heidegger seems to be describing something similar to what is elsewhere called *ethos*, *habitus* (Bourdieu), and indeed *worldview* (Geertz).

A second more fundamental perspective is offered by understanding a religion at the level of its philosophy, the underlying principles and essential conceptualisations, that constitute 'higher autonomous worldviews' (p. 6). We should remember that Heidegger is aware of the Nietzschean critique of mummifying philosophy, when he writes that philosophers:

... experience and view the world with heightened inner vitality, penetrating to its final sense and origin. They recognise nature as a cosmos of the ultimate lawfulness of simple movements or energies. (p. 6)

On this early Heideggerian view, philosophy bestows both vitality and a lawful, restive finality. But a year later in the PRL he would depict it as fatal to authentic Christian religiosity insofar as it forgets that the divine stands, unknowable, against all human knowledge.

Above metaphysics, Heidegger posits a third way of understanding a given perspective in terms of the values that fundamentally inform it: he speaks of 'critical epistemologies' that look for other 'validities,' the meta-criteria of 'logical, ethical, and aesthetic values' that correspond to thinking, willing and feeling as determining factors of consciousness. This 'critical science of value' (p. 8) is the third possibility for philosophy, a 'primordial science' (p. 10) revealing the most basic value commitments that underpin both cosmology and metaphysics.⁸

This kind of threefold division from his lectures of the previous year can be mapped onto his phenomenological analysis of religious life in 1920–1921, adding two further levels. In his 'schema of phenomenological explication' in the PRL, all of these three levels may be attributed to the first step, which is 'to determine the complex of phenomena object-historically, pre-phenomenologically, as a historical situation, but already from out of phenomenological motives' (PRL 58). Thus, for the preliminary comprehension of a text, he follows the standard historical-critical hermeneutics that govern all area studies from classics to oriental studies.⁹

⁸ Heidegger alludes to the presence of a hermeneutic circle in this study of cosmology, philosophy, and values, which must of necessity import the observer's own cosmology, philosophy, and values: 'One must forthrightly deliver oneself over to the circle which lies within the very idea of primordial science. There is no escape from this ... the Munchausen problem of the spirit' (p. 15), but this is not a problem for the kind of non-objective reading that phenomenology seeks. It can be *overcome* not in the sense of getting rid of it, but 'in such a way that this circularity can immediately be seen as necessary and as belonging to the very essence of philosophy' (p. 15).

⁹ For this, he makes it clear that a good knowledge of the original language is required, a relatively unbiased translation (Heidegger rejects Luther's reading), and a full awareness of the historical context (including 'the struggle with the Jews and

But he also discusses what it means to go beyond these and presents a new *kind* of philosophical understanding of religion. One can see ‘phenomenological’ knowledge as a fourth level over the three described in TDP. The essence of religious life is to transform our experience, and a good understanding of religion aims to reveal the ‘originary’ experience behind each text, using it as a hermeneutic guide to the concepts:

One must free oneself from drawing out certain concepts . . . Equally mistaken is the thought of a theological system in Paul. Rather, the fundamental religious experience must be explicated, and, remaining in this fundamental experience, one must seek to understand the connection to it of all original religious phenomena.’ (PRL 51).

From these passages, we see that the fundamental experience is the ‘original’ religious phenomenon. The distinction is essential: It is not an experience of an object (e.g., God) that matters here, but rather an attitude toward life, a ‘guiding foreconception’ that shapes the way we experience things.

But even this alone is not enough; a further fifth element of the process of phenomenological interpretation requires that this understanding of the foreconception ‘is determined by the *enactment* of the observer’ much as someone ‘in other sciences’ verifies the results by empirically undergoing them in her own right (PRL 57). This kind of knowledge means that one is not ‘projecting’ information and gives no finalisable data—the goal is not merely to collect ‘material’ (p. 52). Rather, one proceeds ‘formally’ to note what ‘results for the phenomenon’ when one inhabits a certain understanding (PRL 57). He gives more detail on this process in his second step of ‘the enactment of the historical situation’ (PRL 58), understanding ideas in terms of their *fundamentum* (PRL 59)—the experience *in which* they happen and from which the objective conception is a distorting abstraction.

This phenomenological enactment is not the same as the ‘empathy’ of Husserl. True, there is a sense in which, in reading *Thessalonians*, ‘we write the letter along with Paul. We perform the letter writing, or its dictation, with him,’ and as a result we can answer questions, like ‘how is his communal world given to him in the situation of writing the letter.’ But Heidegger is clear that knowledge through direct empathy is a false ideal: ‘It is impossible—or possible only in a limited way—to transport oneself into Paul’s exact situation’ (p. 61).¹⁰

If not through empathy, then how can this form of understanding be achieved? Here, his approving allusion to Max Scheler’s Christian phenomenology suggests that what is needed is something more like a restructuring of subjective experience in respect of particular concerns. It is here that Heidegger’s notion of understanding religious life touches on the theological: One need not believe nor ‘become’ the original person empathetically—rather one would have to know these truths as a determining orientation of experience, in the ‘absolute-historical in its absolute unrepeatability’ (p. 62) of one’s own life. This shaping of the determining structures of experience (time, value, identity, emphasis, mood, agency, etc.), as foreconceptions according to the formal indications of the original text, enables us to perceive what it would be to experience the world this way for oneself. This borders on theological enactment, hovering on the boundary between credulous participation and observer understanding. Yet Heidegger here provides a unique insight into the way that a religious outlook affects one’s whole phenomenological orientation, reminding us that this is often precisely what a religious text is trying to create in its audience.

Jewish Christians,’ p. 48; ‘the first missionary trip in Corinth,’ p. 60; and the shift from the message of an imminent arrival of Christ to a Christian version of Ancient Near Eastern eschatology, p. 79).

¹⁰ Heidegger acknowledges some now well-known hermeneutic critiques of empathy as a means of knowing other individuals, arguing ‘that we cannot at all, with our ideas, put ourselves in Paul’s place . . . the problem of the *presentation, empathy, and explication* of “autonomized individuals” is badly posed’ (p. 62).

4. Reading Religion Phenomenologically: Hermeneutic Themes

Although no method is systematically given in the PRL, which was intended for an audience already familiar with standard theological hermeneutics, Heidegger uses a series of distinctive techniques to excavate the text's target 'originary experience' from beneath its words. He does tick the standard interpretive boxes: Outlining the historical context and textual style, giving a brief summary of the letters (particular the letter to the Galatians), and working through their key movements of thought; we will do the same below with *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* chapter six. But it is only after this walk through the context that we start to see hints of what he takes to be the practice of specifically phenomenological reading. The allusiveness and obscurity of terminology in the PRL is widely acknowledged but certain methodological themes can be discerned in its approach:

4.1. Soteriological Goals

The text should be read in light of its religious goals, which indicate 'the fundamental comportment of [a given religion's] consciousness' (PRL 48).¹¹ Using the relevant theology and the particular outlook of the text itself, the researcher must take seriously the intention of the text, otherwise she wills herself to be profoundly tone-deaf to its central concern with 'Religious Life.' Phenomenological analysis understands that religiosity in terms of its own 'genuine object' (53).¹² In the case of Paul, 'the aim is "salvation,"' and his letters are not information, but *proclamation* (PRL 55–56) and must be understood as such; their epistolary genre helps us to see this, recognising their call to recognise, repeat, and share the religious attitude they describe.

4.2. Change, Contrast, and Language

Descriptions, rhetorics, and techniques of change are important, and provide a marker of this kind of religiosity. In the Pauline worldview, a profound change is imminent in the world and concurrently in the self; indeed, it is the latter form of salvific change that matters rather than the future historical 'fact' of the *Parousia*.¹³ The state of mind that the text cultivates is also highlighted by *contrast* to the state of those who refuse its 'enactment': The 'unbeliever' sees two optional paths of faith or disbelief, one of which they will choose. But those very people appear strangely blind for they treat it as an optional item of belief enclosed *within* our thoughts, rather than an all-determining foreconception. A 'new' and distinctively Christian kind of subjectivity is not optional for the believer (PRL 49, comment on 2:19). This misunderstanding is the meaning that Heidegger gives to Paul's talk of the 'antichrist' (p. 78).¹⁴

From a linguistic perspective, hermeneutic attention to pairs (e.g., in Paul: Law and faith, night and day, the rejected and the called, the Antichrist and God, security and anguish) helps to highlight the attitudinal shift at which a religious text aims. So too, close reading of repeated verbs helps to highlight the kind of activity the text hopes to usher in. They indicate 'an ever-repeatedly surfacing tendency' (p. 65). Thus, for instance, Heidegger highlights the Greek verb, *genesthai*, to become, as indicative of Paul's interest in a new situation that he is still in the process of cultivating (p. 66). He also emphasises direct address, calls, and cases where strong language builds the tension and pulls one towards a powerful reaction.

¹¹ The aim of the text and its importance are flagged up at the outset where Heidegger tells us 'the aim of "salvation," finally "life." (PRL 48).

¹² We will see that Heidegger cautions his students against using the phenomenological method of reading religious texts merely as a way to line up different religious perspectives as 'a bare collection of material,' an approach that 'is entirely usual today, after all' (PRL 52).

¹³ Heidegger marks as 'significant' the 'complete break with the earlier past, with every non-Christian view of life' that he sees at 1:10 in Galatians (PRL 48).

¹⁴ Heidegger intriguingly likens the believer's rejection of any outside objectification of his belief, to the negative philosopher's refusal to legitimise any reductive account of the divine (pp. 77–78).

5. Primal Experience and Re-Structured Subjectivity

Above all, the phenomenological reading treats religiosity as the ushering in of a new 'posture of life to which [one is] turned.'¹⁵ Heidegger makes it clear that it is an intentional attitude, not theoretical knowledge, that matters in a religious text. This attitude is not merely an object or qualia of experience: It is a change at the level of restructured or radically reoriented subjectivity, and it is precisely this that makes a new form of human life possible. The PRL devotes considerable space to trying to explain how each religious life is a specific relationship between the subject and its experience, describing it (in terms that prefigure the language of *Being and Time*), as the 'having-relation of that which is "like an I"' (p. 64). For Heidegger, Paul's letters give a 'formal indication' for the way each case of 'I-ness' (*Ichliches*) 'has' the situation that is its world (p. 64). In this vision of phenomenology, we are not an 'I' having an experience of 'the world,' but rather we are a world with I and its aspects integrated into its structure. Thus, changing our focus of attention, the concern that direct our perception, and our interpretive lens really changes reality (including oneself) as it exists for us.

Focusing on these hermeneutic themes, one can attempt a 'phenomenology of the religious life' of a canonical classical Hindu text that established a way of understanding divinity, self, and reality, which has influenced India from the first millennium BCE until the present. Bearing in mind Heidegger's scepticism about the place of *metaphysics* in religious life, one can also see how this text suggests a way to reorient experience toward divinity through the specific means of *philosophical* processes of thought.

2

6. Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6–8: A Drama of Philosophically Transformed Life

In this section, we will apply methods extracted from Heidegger's reading of the letters of Paul, to see what they can tell us about the 'grounding phenomena of primordial life in classical India. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (CU)¹⁶ is one of the oldest distinctly philosophical texts of Hinduism, and the earliest roots of the Vedāntic tradition of scholastic theology. A prose work in eight chapters exploring the relation of the soul and the divine through short stories and speculations, the sixth chapter is famous for a metaphysical teaching that seems to identify the divine (*brahman*) with the origin, ground, and material of all things. Like water that flows into the rivers and back to the ocean again, the divine 'constitutes the self of this whole world:'

"The easterly [rivers] flow toward the east, and the westerly ones flow toward the west. From the ocean, they merge into the very ocean; they become just the ocean . . . The finest essence here—that constitutes the self of this whole world; that is the truth; that is the self (atman). And that's how you are . . ." ¹⁷

This analogy between the merging of rivers in the ocean and the union of the world's entities in the divine, is but one in a series of cosmological explanations and metaphysical metaphors in this chapter. But as we will see, this is not merely 'metaphysics' in the sense that Heidegger found so unreligious, for it is not primarily aimed at giving information. Instead, it uses its teaching about the underlying universal ground of reality to train us to see differently, and thereby shape a 'foreconceptual' structure of experience that alters our apprehension of all things, including ourselves.

¹⁵ The choice of Paul as a paradigmatic text seems linked to the importance of experience in the Damascene conversion narrative and the view that Paul's Christian experience might have been primal, standing independently of the historical advent of Jesus (PRL 49).

¹⁶ Useful scholarship on the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* as a whole includes (Renou 1955; Brereton 1990; Witzel 1997), and a good summary can be found in (Cohen 2018).

¹⁷ *imāḥ soṃya nadyaḥ purastāt prācyāḥ syandante paścāt pratīcyāḥ| tāḥ samudrāt samudram evāpi yanti| sa mudra eva bhavati| sa ya eṣo 'ṇimaitad ātmyam idaṃ sarvam| tat satyam| sa ātmā| tat tvam asi . . .* (CU 6.10.1–3). 'Truth' here (*satya*) is the same word used to refer to the pervasive material reality of 'clay' in the central metaphor.

Historical Context and Textual Content

In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*'s stories about language, universality, and realisation, we get a glimpse into the northern Indian intellectual cultures of approximately eighth century BC. The Upaniṣads are the late speculative portion of the Vedic genre of ritual texts largely composed by the 'brahmin' priestly intelligentsia of the period (with some help from society's emerging nobility and ascetic cultures). The priests and kings in the text are depicted as discovering that beyond the finite empirical truths we see in daily life, the world contains wider-reaching truths that can be realized through inference. Ritual culture had already contained some intimations of hidden forces, through which the symbolic actions of sacrifice possessed their power to influence the invisible world of deities and spirits. But extended speculation on language, cosmology, and both rational and meditative kinds of reflection seems to have pushed new generations of thinkers toward specifically philosophical theories about the world's hidden truths.

Thus, in the Upaniṣadic genre of texts, earlier cosmological ideas culminated in the beginnings of *philosophy*; the hidden realities now included not only natural forces, deities and spirits, and magical powers, but also universals, essential identities, inclusive properties, causal connections, and ontological foundations.¹⁸ The idea of a central defining essence was often (but not only exclusively) termed *ātman* and applied with particular force to humans. The notion of a single grounding and uniting principle was frequently called *brahman* (as well as reality (*satya*), or procreative material (*prakṛti*)); in some cases, *atman* and *brahman* were used interchangeably or explicitly identified—a connection that established one of the key themes of the subsequent Vedāntic theological tradition rooted in these texts. Accounts of *brahman* proliferated, and a kind of competitive market for 'theories of everything' developed (Frazier 2017). These often developed through a style of 'abductive plurilogue' (Frazier 2019) in which a text gathered together existing theories in a many-voiced dialectic between competing models, which, united through abductive reasoning, together generated an overarching theory.

Historically, the Upaniṣads are similar to the letters of Paul insofar as they call a minority community to a new order of experience based on fresh ideas in an increasingly cosmopolitan society. The growth of a series of relatively stable and expansive kingdoms in North India from the 8th century onward had generated new courts where intellectuals could trade ideas, and vedic culture gradually reached a turning point in its thinking about the world.¹⁹ The success of the new polities challenged the region's brahminical culture to justify its value in this wider cosmopolitan world. Previously, *śākhās* or familial clans had specialised in different schools of ritual expertise, but after challenges from changing cultural trends, and the *kṣatriya* nobility who added more innovative teachings to the old styles of knowledge, they suffered a crisis of identity in contexts where their rituals were no longer patronised.²⁰ Some began to market themselves as the purveyors of a new worth that was both more universal in application and more specific to their own outlook—metaphysical knowledge.²¹

¹⁸ The closest 'Western' cultural parallel is with the flourishing of ancient Greek ideas about the basic constituent of the cosmos, amongst which Heidegger included Platos' *Ideas*, Aristotle's *Energeia*, Heraclitus' *Logos*, Parmenides' *Moirā*, and Anaximander's *Chreon*, all of which serve a function as a unifying 'one' (see Backman 2015).

¹⁹ Bronkhorst (2007, 2017) compellingly (if sometimes controversially) describes the cultural development of India's northern kingdoms as they combined strands of Brahminical, Buddhist, Jain, and other traditions. To some extent, once brahminical culture was 'no longer primarily a sacrificial tradition, it became mainly a socio-political ideology that borrowed much (including the belief in rebirth and karmic retribution) from the eastern region in which Buddhism and Jainism had arisen.' (Bronkhorst 2017, p. 361). The process also involved an internal rethinking of the status, expertise, and proper work of the brahminical intelligentsia (see Black 2007). Philosophical material also emerged from continuous evolution of brahminical notions of creation, cosmos, power, and reasoning (Frazier forthcoming).

²⁰ The economy of patronage for the priests' ritual expertise and new cosmological ideas was also a factor in encouraging the development of *philosophical* styles of Hindu religiosity (see Black 2007). The Upaniṣads and epics contain episodes in which brahmins struggle for economic advantage using ritual and metaphysical knowledge as their medium (see, e.g., Lincoln 2006).

²¹ This was associated with a stock of tales about 'celebrities' of the northern intelligentsia—teachers who were the gospel writers of classical India, as it were. Such characters include the brahmins, Uddālaka Āruṇi, Yajñavalkya, and Satyakāma Jābala; and kings, Janaka and Pravāhana Jaivali.

But this was not merely knowledge as it is usually understood in the modern West. With the new ‘knowledge economy’, came new forms of ‘internalised’ religious practice associated with the attainment of immortality (a finer treasure than cattle, sons or warriors). For this purpose, it was not the natural world or one’s social position, but one’s very self that needed to be transformed. The power of language (in the form of *mantras*), and the power of focused mental intention (*saṅkalpa*), had played an important role in brahminical ritual culture, and these now complemented yogic practices that were developing. This led to a view of knowledge as something that has causal efficacy in shaping the practitioner’s own consciousness. In this sense, the phenomenological goal of altering the self through knowledge became central to many schools of thought, from Vedānta to Yoga, Sāṃkhya, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Buddhism, and Jainism.

The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* contains some of early classical Hinduism’s most sustained philosophical reflection on the means and effects of acquiring metaphysical knowledge about the most universal and unchanging levels of reality.²² Far from being an epistle direct from one mind to an immediate set of known interlocutors (as are the letters of Paul), it is the cunning work of artful redactors. In it, a multi-faceted cluster of associated theories is built out of the speculations of Udgatṛ ‘chanting’ priests—the clan with whom the text is associated. In contrast to the directness of the epistolary genre of Paul, this redaction cunningly weaves a whole out of complimentary parts (see Brereton 1990).

Its central metaphysical insight unity arises out of the two central rituals most familiar to its authors—chanting and soma-pressing. Chanting provided linguistic tropes and prompted the theorisation of properties, identifiers, and symbolic words. Ritual chanters saw how words could ‘substitute’ for realities, and the grammatical tradition (*vyākaraṇa*) also noted interchangeability and substitution within grammatical rules. Individual words thus seemed to possess a double life both as themselves, and as mysteriously ‘grasping’ wider concepts.²³ Gonda (1970, p. 16) has noted that a name or *nāman* was regarded as a special Daseinsmacht, ‘that is a potency, a ‘power-substance,’ but this idea of a ‘magical word’ also acquired *philosophical* power. Soma-pressing provided another philosophically fertile trope: Long chanting ceremonies were augmented with the drinking of pressed juices called ‘soma,’ a stimulant meant to keep the chanters awake. This produced a new metaphor that could be applied to language: As plants could be condensed into their potent essence, so too words could be ‘pressed’ intellectually into their conceptual essence—‘tiger’ and ‘deer’ into ‘animal,’ or ‘river’ and ‘ocean’ into ‘water.’²⁴ We can see the fieriness behind particular fires, and the qualities of effulgent, transformative heat behind mere fieriness. Thus, as the pressing of Soma releases the potent milky liquid from its flesh, so ‘speech will yield for him the milk which is the very milk of speech’ (CU 1.13.4; 2.8.3). The very first chapter of the CU takes the sacred syllable, *Om*, as the “quintessence of all essences. It is the highest, the ultimate, the eighth.”²⁵ But its real efficacy deserves critical enquiry:

²² The textual situation of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* is that it is part of the Vedic corpus of Sanskrit texts themed around a set of rituals performed by Brahmin priests in the first millennium BCE. It constitutes the last eight chapters in the *Chāndogya Brahmana*, ritual texts embedded in the *Sāma-Veda*’s metrically annotated hymns. The first two chapters focus specifically on the syllable, *Om*, and the High Chant (*udgītha*), identifying them as equivalent to the whole world, and exploring correlations with other pervasive realities, such as space. Chapters 6–8 are a more sustained development of a central ‘teaching’ (*ādeśa*) that appears to be about the ability to identify pervasive features of the perceived world. In adducing new material to support his emerging theories, the redactor is also a ‘philosopher-commentator . . . contributing something to it through it through his creative appropriation of its very life and being’ (Deutsch 1988, p. 170). In redaction ‘each available conceptual structure thus shows the limitations of the others and suggests an alternative possibility unexplored by them’ (Krishna in Larson and Deutsch 1988, p. 81).

²³ So too, the themes of unifying structures and identity in change were developed in different Upaniṣads according to the ritual expertise of their authors. The *Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, which focused on the dissection of animals in the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice, furnishes analogies of torso, core, and structure; the *Aitareya*, *Taittirīya*, and *Māṇḍūkya* concern the proper pronunciation of mantras in ritual recitation according to “phonetics—phoneme, accent, quantity, strength, articulation, and connection” (TU 1.2); the *Kauṣītaki* concerns the ritual transferring the father’s life-force to his son at the time of death, and uses this to reflect on the ‘essence’ of life.

²⁴ The offering of Soma was an important part of the Vedic *Agniṣṭoma* sacrifice (descriptions of which are given in (Caland and Henry 2010); Kane 1962–1975, II: 1133–1212), and as Olivelle notes, the whole Upaniṣad is illuminated by knowledge of its practical details.

²⁵ *rasānām rasatamaḥ paramaḥ parādhyo ‘ṣṭamo yad udgīthaḥ*, CU 1.1.2.

“What ultimately is the High Chant? These subjects have been the subject of critical inquiry (*vimṛṣṭam*).” (1.1.4) One who knows its ‘hidden correspondence’ (*upaniṣad*), and uses it with knowledge (*vidya*) and faith (*śraddha*), will reap its power (*vīrya*) (1.1.10). The remaining chapters then go on to look for more essences of language, reality, and the self. In chapter six, these ideas underpin the brahmin teacher, Uddālaka Āruṇi’s explanation that names and forms, like ‘pot’ and ‘ornament,’ are mere ‘word-handles’ for more general realities extending beyond them (like ‘clay’ and ‘gold’; 6.1.2–6).

This sixth chapter was probably the most influential section of the whole text, forming a key theological source for the whole Vedāntic tradition of Hindu theology that has continued to the present.²⁶ Through 16 sub-sections it recounts a conversation in which Uddālaka changes his student son’s self-perception, leading him to identify as part of a larger reality that transcends his finite body and mind; the recurring motif ‘tat tvam asi’—*that* or *thus thou art*—is one of the most globally celebrated lines in the whole 3000 year span of Hindu thought.²⁷ Heidegger’s emphasis on religion as a transformation of the structures of subjectivity is particularly relevant for this text; little has been written about experience in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* chapter six. Many Upaniṣads treat liberation as a kind of freedom from rebirth, but the *Chāndogya* says little about such things. Its epistemological emphasis suggests a distinctive notion of changed awareness, integrated in chapter eight with a philosophy of self-transformation, immortality, and freedom. The whole text is underpinned by a particular ‘theory of knowledge’ as a practice that not only affects the knower, entering into his or her cognition, but which actually restructures it (Frazier 2017, 2019).²⁸ This *philosophical* goal is also *religious*, and the religious goal is actually, in Heidegger’s sense, a *phenomenological* one.

7. Content: Transformation through Philosophical Analysis

In recounting Uddālaka Āruṇi’s teaching to his son Śvetaketu, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* combines two plots: The explicit plot is the story of a father leading his ‘swollen-headed’ son past arrogance to a desire to learn (‘teach me more’ Śvetaketu cries repeatedly). From there he comes to knowledge of what has not been seen or heard, a truth that vouchsafes freedom in all the worlds, and transcendence of death. But this narrative parallels an implicit philosophical plot about the effects of identifying the broader phenomena that underlie shorter-lived individuals. The reader is trained to see phenomena as the observable symptoms of those underlying realities, which also form a pervasive ‘root’ from which individuals perennially arise (like ‘buds’). Finally, we are given a series of metaphors and enacted experiments that cultivate the real-life application of this insight to one’s environment and oneself. Chapters seven and eight expand on this idea, showing how it implies a level of self that survives death. In order to see what phenomenological shift of religious life this sequence encourages, it is helpful to have a picture of the way the text proceeds through its content (much as Heidegger’s reading of Paul gives a brief summary of the key moves in the text):

- 6.1:** A priestly father says to his recently graduated son: ‘So you must have surely asked about that teaching by which one hears what has not been heard of before, thinks of what has not been thought of before, and perceives what has not been perceived before?’ ... “It is like this, son. By

²⁶ Scholarship seeking to explain the origins and implications of chapter six includes (Edgerton 1915, 1965; Morgenroth 1970; Hanefeld 1976; Brereton 1986, 1999; Acharya 2017; Visigalli 2018).

²⁷ The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*’s coherence is stressed by scholars, such as Bodewitz (2001, p. 153) and Slaje (2009, p. 565). Others (e.g., Hanefeld 1976; Acharya 2017) have noted the division between sources marked by textual ‘frames’ and reflecting quite different views. Acharya in particular notes the contrast between linguistic (broadly Vedic) teachings that reflect a focus on meaning and ontological foundations, with cosmogonic (noticeably proto-Sāṃkhya) teachings that emphasise transformation and evolution.

²⁸ Other sections within the CU depict Vedic knowledge as a beehive: The existing sciences of Rg verses, Yajus ritual-formulas, Sāman chants, as well as the Atharva and Angirasa spells, itihāsa histories, and purāṇa tales are part of this coherent body, like parts of a honeycomb. But the honey of knowledge is the secret ādeśa teachings, and brahman, the knowledge of the foundation and essence of all, is the flower. This knowledge makes up the essence (*rasa*) of the Vedas, from which flow the splendour (*yāśas*), ardour (*tejas*) strength (*indriya*), and energy (*anna*) of the world, qualities that one can see as a flickering brightness in the sun (3.1–5).

means of just one lump of clay one would perceive everything made of clay—the transformation is a verbal handle, a name—while the reality is just this: ‘It’s clay.’²⁹ This teaching (*ādeśa*) promises a further knowledge that will make Śvetaketu truly a brahmin, party to realities beyond his empirical experience. The point is that diverse instances of name-and-form (*nāma-rūpa*) can be understood in terms of their broader underlying materials or qualities, which are termed the real or true (*satya*). Initially, substances are used as an example of the truth underlying individual forms (e.g., clay), but this will later be broadened into a “‘principle’ of identity’ in a way that is reminiscent of Heidegger’s argument that the pre-Socratics used materials as metaphors for universal principles (Marx 1971, p. xxxi). Phenomenal particulars are designated as a transforming ‘word-handle’ (*vācārambhana vikara*), while the underlying feature is the truth, knowing which one knows, in advance as it were, the whole world.

- 6.2–6: *‘In the beginning, son, this world was simply what is existent—one only, without a second . . . And it thought to itself: ‘Let me become many. Let me propagate myself’ . . . Then that same deity thought to itself: ‘Come now, why don’t I establish the distinctions of name and appearance by entering these three deities here with this living self (atman)’*³⁰ The father then shifts to a cosmogonic narrative explaining the genesis of differentiated plural name-and-forms from a single original internally-self-differentiating source. The motif of seeing a verbal-handle in terms of its underlying reality is linked to the idea (found elsewhere in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*) that certain perceptible signs can be recognized as indicating those (ordinarily invisible) underlying features. We see here idea and language proleptic of syllogistic inference from the passing phenomena of experience to an underlying substrate. The text offers a warning that the realities can also go through quite radically different formations, as when milk becomes curd (6.6.1) and food channels its energies into new beings (6.5, 6.6.2–5).³¹ Thus the previous reasoning from shared properties is assimilated into a model of inference that shows us the wider reality.
- 6.7–8: *‘It is like this, son. Out of a huge fire that one has built, if there is left only a single ember the size of a firefly and if one were to cover it with straw and set it ablaze—by means of that, the fire thereafter would burn very much.*³² In the first enacted teaching, Śvetaketu is asked to consume nothing, but water for a time, so that his vital and mental faculties diminish, but when he eats again, the ‘fire’ of the mind is reignited. This is the first of a series of examples that stress that temporary forms can rise repeatedly from a single ground, as embers are the ‘root’ of blazing fires, and consciousness arises from the ‘root’ self in the highest deity, the self of the whole world, from which presumably he can arise again even after death.³³
- 6.9–13 *‘The finest essence here—that constitutes the self of this whole world; that is the truth; that is the self (atman). And that’s how you are, Svetaketu.*³⁴ A new set of examples is now given to build the idea that diverse instances often indicate a broader reality (different trees/same honey, different rivers/same water, different branches/same sap). This insight is applied to the self by

²⁹ uta tam ādeśam prakṣyo yenāśrutam śrutam bhavaty amataṁ matam avijñātam vijñātam iti| . . . yathā somyaikena mṛt-piṇḍena sarvaṁ mṛn-mayaṁ vijñātam syāt| vācārambhanaṁ vikāra nāmadheyaṁ mṛttikety eva satyam. 6.1.1–4. Olivelle translates *ādeśa* as ‘rule of substitution,’ but given the debates over this, here, we use merely ‘teaching’.

³⁰ sad eva somyedam agre āsīd ekam evādvitīyam| . . . tad aikṣata bahu syāṁ prajāyeyeti| . . . seyaṁ devataikṣata hantāham imās tisro devata anena jīvenātmanānupraviśya nāmarūpe vyākaraṇīti| CU 6.2.2–3

³¹ This idea seems to be an early version of the Sāṃkhya school’s *satkāryavāda* theory that all effects are contained *in potentio* in their source, retaining their identity in/as it.

³² tam hovāca yathā somya mahato ‘bhyāhitasyaiko ‘ṅgāraḥ khadyota-mātraḥ pariśiṣṭaḥ syāt| tena tato ‘pi na bahu dahet| CU 6.7.

³³ The whole series of examples is of embers as the ‘root’ source for fires, the mind as a ‘root’ of memory, consciousness as a ‘root’ present even in sleep, a bird resting on the ‘root’ of a tree before flying away again, a flock repeatedly ‘driven’ by its ‘root’ mover who is the shepherd, a literal root as the source from which plant buds arise repeatedly, and a dying man merging back into his ‘root’ in the highest deity, the self of the whole world, from which presumably he can arise again.

³⁴ sa ya eṣo ‘ṅimaitad ātmyam idaṁ sarvaṁ| tatsatyam| sa ātmā| tat tvam asi śvetaketu| CU 6.9.4. ‘Aṅiman’ here could evoke a particle or atomic essence, or subtle material (as opposed, for instance, the *rasa* used here which means a substantial, qualitative or elemental essence. It may be that *aṅiman* signifies a hidden, subtle metaphysical level of reality.

the repeated refrain ‘thus you are’ (*tat tvam asi*), despite variations in the precise relations described.³⁵ Ostensibly this mirrors the earlier ‘clay’ idea of a material substrate, but it now incorporates the ‘root’ model to build a notion that contingent forms are *evolutions* of the substrate, and their ceasing is *dissolution* back into it. Soteriologically, this is now less about ‘rebirth-from-a-root’, than about ‘merging-into-a-deeper-identity’ and it sets the stage for ideas of liberation (*mokṣa*) as a permanent shift to the pervasive level of being, in contrast to the repeated arising of contingent forms in reincarnation. In two further enacted teachings, Śvetaketu is invited to open a seed to find the source of the banyan tree (famed for its complex network of limbs, roots, and trunks), but he sees nothing, just a fine ‘essence’. He dissolves crystals of salt in water, and then tastes the invisible quality of salt throughout the fluid. We learn that the underlying ‘essence’ can be invisible, but we may realise it through inference to a shared cause.

6.14–16: *[when a man] is innocent of the crime, then he turns himself into the truth; uttering the truth and covering himself with the truth, he takes hold of the ax and is not burnt, upon which he is released. "What on that occasion prevents him from being burnt—that constitutes the self of this whole world; that is the truth; that is the self. And that's how you are, Svetaketu." And he did, indeed, learn it from him.*³⁶ The analogies of a lost, blindfolded man going home when his sight is restored, a dying man whose conscious faculties merge back into the ‘highest deity,’ and an accused man who proves his crime by passing the test of grasping a heated ‘truth-telling’ axe, suggest that humans can be united with broader properties. The last analogy crucially connects the foregoing metaphysical points to human agency: One can embody properties, like ‘true’ or ‘false,’ that transcend our finite individuality, and change our very fabric.

The chapter takes us on a conceptual journey on which the audience is guided through a series of theoretical moves thematically clustered around the initial teaching that sentient beings have the potential to cognitively shift the focus from particulars to universals, and thus from local to wider—potentially limitless—truths. Through each we can see the gradual structural alteration of awareness by learning to recognize the broader principles that weave through our changing phenomenal experience, realizing that they indicate an invisible reality. With the broadest principle—of being itself—this gives us cognitive access to *brahman* as the pervasive root of all things, and all of the possible entities to which it applies. It is important to see that this is not merely theoretical: Uddālaka seems to be training Śvetaketu to *see* that way, and to be transformed into a man who speaks truth, and thereby ‘becomes’ truth, able to touch a truth-testing axe without being harmed.

All of this provides a kind of further *ādeśa* teaching for chapters seven and eight. In seven, different features said to underlie the world can be venerated as the pervasive substrate so that one ‘wins’ (acquires) its associated qualities. In chapter eight, this is given a soteriological application in which the pervasive hidden essence of self is described. Transforming oneself through knowledge is emphasized, and the contrast between the ‘verbal-handle’ and ‘reality’ is labelled a secret that masks the real substrate with its unreal forms. This substrate-quality relationship is slightly modified in 8.14 to avoid undue *substantialism*, as *brahman* is depicted as a space in which name and form are located.

So far, we see the philosophical narrative unfolding itself, but more is required to understand what it is trying to achieve at an experiential level. Applying Heidegger’s methods of attending to the soteriological goals and the language of change, mood, and contrast to our Indian case, we can bring out the restructuring of ‘primal’ or originary’ experience that this text intends.

³⁵ Bodewitz (2001, p. 195) has brought out the conceptual differences between the examples used in the second section of chapter 6, with some focusing on merging into a prior and posterior base, and others focusing on subtle hidden essences of things; slightly different possible soteriologies are implied in each type.

³⁶ *atha yadi tasyākartā bhavati| tata eva satyam ātmānaṃ kurute| sa satyābhisandhaḥ satyenātmānam antardhāya paraśuṃ taptam pratigrhṇāti| san a dahyate| atha mucyate|| sa yathā tatra nādāhyeta| etad ātmayam idaṃ sarvam| tat satyam| sa ātmā| tat tvam asi śvetaketo iti| tad dhāsyā vijajñāv iti vijajñāv iti|| CU 6.16.2–3.*

8. Soteriological Aims: Inference as Phenomenological Liberation from Finitude

We have seen that the religious goal of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* chapter six is more ambiguous than one might expect: Just as one might take Paul's main goal to be belief in preparation for a future coming of Christ, and eventual admission to heaven, so standard narratives about the Upaniṣads take it to be aimed at *mokṣa*, liberation from rebirth into some kind of communion with *brahman*, the ground of both self and world. But analysis of chapter six shows at least two different goals: The first goal, which is the most thematically integrated into the text as a whole, is that of realising the truth expounded in the teaching and applying it in a self-transformative way. It is true the later sections hint at the *metaphysical* promise of a post-mortem return to our infinite and pervasive 'root' in a wider truth. But more central to Uddālaka's teaching is the *experiential* promise that unfolds out of the *ādeśa* teaching. Rather than a proclamation that invites the leap of faith, we have seen that this text transforms through pedagogical means. The *ādeśa* that had previously signified magical equivalence between a ritual item and its effect, now refers to the cognitive efficacy of ideas conveyed by the knowledge-elite of 'illustrious men' (CU 6.1.7, 6.5.4) who keep the secret.³⁷ This is dramatized in the narrative of Śvetaketu's education, as arrogant ignorance is left behind, succeeded by a tone of irony and frustration at realising there are present, but ignored things (the son complains "Surely, those illustrious men did not know this, for had they known, how could they have not told it to me?" 6.1.7).

Heidegger's attention to mood and contrast is important here: as Ganeri (2007, p. 37) notes, the Upaniṣadic rhetoric of secrecy and hiddenness cultivates a mood of anxiety. Rather like Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, CU chapter eight uses a 'hidden treasure of gold' (8.3.2) metaphor to contrast the new outlook with those who willingly remain ignorant and 'pass right over it time and again.' 'In exactly the same way', we are told, 'all these creatures, even though they go there every day, do not discover this world of brahman, for they are led astray by the unreal.' (8.3.1–3). By contrast, the self of the person who knows transcends the body (here partly signifying finite embodied limitations), and finds a new 'true' self:

This deeply serene one who, after he rises up from this body and reaches the highest light, emerges in his own true appearance—that is the self," he said, "that is the immortal; that is the one free from fear; that is brahman." Now, the name of this brahman is "Real" (satyam).³⁸

Chapters seven and eight revel in the new will and intention, power of agency, and fresh possibilities that flow from this transformation-by-philosophy. It bestows complete 'freedom of movement in every place reached by the mind' (7.3.2), in all the worlds (7.25.2); such a man 'wins worlds patterned after his intention' (7.4.3), obtaining all his desires (7.10.2), winning radiance, space, memory, and brahman (7.11–14), seeing no death, sickness or distress (7.26.2), and enabling one to cross beyond darkness (CU 7.26.2) going to the heavenly world every single day (CU 8.3.3). Knowledge appears as a veritable treasure-chest of spiritual and supernatural boons, and we are meant to feel the frustration of a wealth so narrowly lost if one fails to see what is hidden in plain sight. But the body of chapter six stays true to its predominantly epistemological-phenomenological approach to religiosity: Saying little of treasure,

³⁷ Since Paul Thieme, this has been interpreted in reference to the Pāṇinian notion of a grammatical 'substitution,' where one understands that one thing generally behaves like (and thus can be substituted for) another (see Kahrs 1998, chp. 5 for discussion of this). Olivelle (1998) carries over this translation, although Acharya (2015) has argued that it is synonymous with 'upaniṣad' in signifying a special teaching, and that *neti neti* apophysis in the *Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is another example. In CU 6, there is debate over whether the *ādeśa* refers to 6.1.1's teaching that all 'name-and-form' is only the temporary limitation of an underlying reality (later called an *upādhi* or 'limiting condition'), or to the cosmogonic teaching that the origin of reality lies in Being's (*sat*) evolution through into the many-faceted world. This may be the extension of earlier Vedic cosmogonies from a self-proliferating one, juxtaposed with an 'evolution' theory containing Sāṃkhya elements of *satkāryavāda*, *prakṛti* and *vyakta* concepts (Acharya 2015, p. 862). Either way, this 'theory of knowledge' echoes repeatedly through the chapter (Thieme 1968; Visigalli 2014).

³⁸ atha ya eṣa saṃprasādo 'smāc charirāt samutthāya paraṃ jyotir upasampadya svena rupenābhiniṣadyata eṣa ātmeti|| CU 8.3.4.

freedom, or immortality, it focuses on learning itself as the goal. The happy ending of this chapter is not attainment or ‘the highest light’—it simply states ‘And he did, indeed, learn it from him’ (6.16.3).

In this sense, this is a soteriology by self-transformation, rather than a soteriology by some future event. The philosophical plot of the text epistemically *teaches the reader to see* the omnipresent level of things that survives their contingent forms. The attitudinal journey moves as follows:

- A. We can see things in terms of the broader principles that they instantiate. These principles are both actual and potential (one can know what has not been seen through them, etc.) so that when one sees the world as ‘clay, iron and gold’ it is really the universals that one learns to perceive.
- B. An origin story lays the ground to envision (a) all beings, and (b) different qualities as forms of a single underlying reality.
- C. A new model explaining contingent phenomena as the evolved manifestation of more basic principles invites us to see particular forms (*rūpa*) as the sign of an underlying evolving substrate.
- D. We are invited to see becoming as an arising out of that substrate and ending as a return. All things become inferential signs of the divine. As we can understand that salt is unseen in water, so we can see *brahman* in the world; and as we see the signs of an underlying vital force in our selves, so we can experience ourselves as ‘buds’ of the ‘root’ reality.
- E. The examples are turned back upon the human person: We can reorient ourselves like the un-blindfolded man, merge our faculties back into the substrate, and knowing and embodying *brahman*, we can become it as an honest man becomes an instance of truth.

It is not some future change that matters in this chapter, but an alteration to our fundamental mode of receiving what is right here, right now. The text is filled with viscerally instructive examples (*dr̥ṣṭāntas*) that include 6.6’s image of curd hidden as an invisible, but omnipresent possibility in butter, 6.7–8’s example of how the vital faculties are latent in the living person even when they are weak, 6.11’s image of a single sap that courses through many limbs of a tree, 6.12’s image of an invisible vital energy in the banyan seed, or 6.13’s image of salt revealed to be present (though hidden) in saline water. None of these examples suggest that the contingent form is preserved by being merged back into the root. Rather, the point is to recognise an already-death-transcending feature of the self, and shift one’s being-in-the-world accordingly.

The final analogy of a truthful man successfully passing a truth-test bridges the gap between the initial image of materials and the later implications for a changed state of the self. It claims that by a disposition of mind and action one can ‘cover oneself’ with a state or quality like the man who ‘turns himself into the truth; uttering the truth and covering himself with the truth’ (6.16.2). In the immediately subsequent initial section of chapter seven (which gives a related teaching by the sage Nārada), the CU’s redactors urge us to apply the *ādeśa* of 6.1 to the self in its most immediate presence as the ‘I’:

Now, the teaching of the ‘‘I—‘I am, indeed, below; I am above; I am in the west; I am in the east; I am in the south; and I am in the north. Indeed, I extend over this whole world’³⁹

This is a strikingly phenomenological passage in its interpretation of the designation of the ‘I’ (literally the *ahaṃ-kāra* or ‘I-maker’—a word that later means simply the egoic function of consciousness) in terms of the shifting modes of experiencing ‘I’-ness—what Flood has called the indexical ‘I’ (Flood 2013, pp. 81–83). Olivelle translates *ādeśa* as substitution, and here this meaning *is* at the forefront of this passage, but with a phenomenological application: Trained conceptual substitution is used as a phenomenological tool for altering the way one experiences *oneself*. Yet there is a distinction from the previous uses of *ādeśa* as a kind of symbolic substitution in ritual or a syntactical one in grammar. Here,

³⁹ athato ‘haṅkāraśa eva| ahaṃ evādhāstād ahaṃ upariṣṭād ahaṃ paścād ahaṃ purastād ahaṃ dakṣinato ‘haṃ uttarato evedaṃ sarvaṃ iti|| CU 7.25.1.

the substitution is not meant to replace an item in experience, but to replace a structure of experience (our 'I'-ness or ego) so that the whole phenomenological framing of the world is substitutionally altered. Here, the varying modes for experiencing selfhood become a kind of training in for experiencing oneself as the universal reality—thus cultivating recognition of what is already present. If we can apply that wholesale to all our experience and to the self, then we will ourselves be redefined.

The rhetoric of change also helps bring to light the experiential remaking of experience that is intended here. Applying Heidegger's phenomenological attention to repeated phrases, we can note the prevalence of verbs of seeing and understanding that would remain important throughout later traditions of scholastic thought. The verbal roots *jñā-*, 'to know,' *viññā-*, 'to understand,' and *prajñā-*, 'to recognise,' *drś-*, 'to see,' *anveṣ-*, 'to investigate', are repeated in motifs and frames. The student's causative cry of *viññāpayitu*, literally 'cause to understand' in the famous '*tat tvam asi*' series (6.8–16), is thematically prevalent throughout the Upaniṣads with their many tales of characters asking to be enlightened; by seeing something (*drś*), one gains, enters, or undergoes it (*ap-*) (7.26.2).⁴⁰ But the ways the teaching turns this ontological realisation repeatedly onto the self, shows that its goal is to cultivate a phenomenological change-through-teaching, not only for Śvetaketu, but also for ourselves. It transmits the effects of Uddālaka Āruṇi's teachings directly out of the distant past into the present as a perennial pedagogical enactment of the new way of seeing. Hence, the preponderant examples of recognising what is already present strongly parallel Heidegger's interpretation of the future coming of Christ (*parousia*) as a present phenomenological state of expectation, not a future temporal event. Although they have radically different goals, both aim at holistic phenomenological transformation. It is not an end that awaits, but a learning that transforms us *now*. It is in this way that we see Heidegger's early conception of religiosity in action here. The text is giving not only a perspective on the world, but also a 'formal indication' for the way 'I-ness' (*Ichliches*) could newly have its worldly situation (PRL 64).

This is a different kind of experience from that more usually attributed to classical Hindu philosophies. It is true that, as Ganeri (2007, p. 36) puts it, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6 seems opposed to 'ordinary perceptual experience, in which the egocentric frame-of-reference places me in the centre of a network of spatial relationships with the objects perceived'. But the experience it advocates is also not the type of 'absolute subjectivity' (Flood 2013, p. 152) attributed to many Hindu texts.⁴¹ Some forms of Vedānta and Yoga suggest a dissolution of our usual self-understanding within 'a compact mass of perception' with 'no limit or boundary' (see Ganeri (2007, pp. 24–25, 33) on *Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.12 and CU 8.11.1). This implies 'a non-objectual mode or aspect of experience,' and Ganeri focuses on techniques of relishing the qualia (or 'what it feels like to be thinking') as the 'stuff' of the self (pp. 34, 36).

But this reading assumes that the goal is self-knowledge, and can elide the centrality of *brahman* for Vedāntic tradition, much as belief in God is central to the New Testament. By contrast, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6 is more concerned with a broadening of experience to attend to the underlying principles of experiential reality, rather than diving into qualitatively 'pure' consciousness. In this sense, it is as much outward as inward-facing. Ultimately, it is not the universals of clay-ness, iron-ness, gold-ness (6.1.4–6), heat, water, food (6.4–6), life, fire, nectar, water, sap, flavour, knowledge, and truthfulness (6.7–16), but real-ness, existence itself upon which we must stretch out our minds.

⁴⁰ This is not to argue that there is no conception of liberation as a future event in this chapter: Certain of the chapter's analogies depict individuals merging (*saṃpad-*) back into an underlying source. We see this in 6.9's image of different flowers united in a single nectar, 6.10's image of rivers united in a single ocean, or (perhaps) 6.14's man returning home, and 6.15's merging of consciousness back into its source. An explicit generalisation of this idea to all beings is made at 6.9.2–3, further amplified in hints at transcending death (6.14–16). That idea is further developed in chapter eight (see also Raveh 2008).

⁴¹ E.g., *Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.12 or *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 5. More directly introspective forms of phenomenological recognition are implied in Upaniṣads, such as the *Kena*, *Māṇḍūkya*, *Kāṭha*, and *Kauṣītakī*, and are central to the notions of sensory withdrawal (*pratyāhāra*) and meditative focus (*dhyāna*) in the *Yoga Sūtras*. By contrast the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (and also texts, such as the *Sāṃkhya Kārikās*) seem more concerned with the realisation that a single ontological substratum must underlie the diversity of changing forms.

This experience seems to be *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6's way of achieving that boon alluded to repeatedly in the early Upaniṣads: A 'knowledge on which the world is woven' (CU 2.21), by which one can 'become this whole world!' (CU 5.2). Through the learned foreconception that makes us attend primarily to underlying realities rather than their transient forms, we experience the world through our own identity as one manifestation of an infinite principle, full of potential to re-arise from that root. As such, we outspan death, and our relation to our own finitude is altered. Subjectivity—*Dasein*—in later language, fills itself with the single universal cognition of *being*, much as the flowers' pollen would now see itself as nectar, and the rivers ultimately identify as ocean. Seeing this, reorienting self to it, valuing it as divine, and acting from out of that 'worldview' in the full five senses described above, is what constitutes the 'religious life' of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* chapter 6.

9. Indian Philosophical 'Religiosity' on the Heideggerian Model

Is this really the kind of religiosity, bent on changing the shape of the self, to which Heidegger tried to draw attention? Or is it merely another metaphysical attempt to escape our finitude. One significant difference between Heidegger's Pauline phenomenology and the *Chandogya Upaniṣad*'s Hindu version might be that this form of phenomenological change tries to connect humanity to infinity, rather than helping it become at peace with our finitude. Heidegger disliked secure conceptual frameworks because he sees them as 'a way of trying to escape the very precariousness and uncertainty of our existence.' (Wolfe 2014, p. 83). We cannot escape our mortal limits for, as he would later write, 'finitude is not some property that is merely attached to us, but is *our fundamental way of being*. If we wish to become what we are, we cannot abandon this finitude or deceive ourselves about it.' (Heidegger 1995, p. 6). In contrast to the CU's metaphor of the blindfolded man who, released by right understanding, returns to Being, Heidegger holds that, like Novalis, we can be 'home-sick' for the world, but can never be at home in it.

But is finitude as inescapable as Heidegger takes it to be? From its earliest sources, Indian religious culture has been intensely sensitive to the constraints of human life, both physically and cognitively. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* was part of a tradition interested in ways of reorienting the self beyond finitude toward access, continuity, or identity with the divine. In a sense, what Wolfe says of Augustine is also true for Uddālaka Āruṇi's outlook:

Augustine's entire vision of man . . . is predicated on the belief that man was made for eternity . . . Firstly, that God dwells at the centre of each heart and continually recalls it to him . . . Secondly, that death is not the natural end point of human existence . . . (Wolfe 2014, p. 53)

This is true for CU's outlook, but with some modifications. Firstly, humanity is not *made for eternity*, but already possesses an eternal level. The essential continuity with the divine means that it can be accessed as a level of essence, ground, or deep structure throughout experience; the deeper/broader the eidetic structure, the closer it is to the divine. Given this, if one wants world-spanning, non-situation-specific, more stable, undecaying phenomena, one looks not to the pot, but to the clay. The Upaniṣadic confidence in the plasticity of the most basic structures of consciousness, means that eternity, infinity, and universality are achievable human goals for the person who reorients their perceptual habits and affective. For these chanter-priests of ancient India, this *really* changes the nature of the self.

Perhaps Heidegger's model from the year before his PRL helps to situate this kind of religiosity. In *Towards a Definition of Philosophy*, he describes value-relations as a primal part of the 'given' character of our experience of the world.

I experience value-relations without the slightest element of ought being given. In the morning I enter the study; the sun lies over the books, etc., and I delight in this. Such delight is in no way an ought . . . There is, therefore, a kind of lived experience in which I take delight, in which the valuable as such is given. (p. 37)

Heidegger is eager to distinguish this from our experience of ontic, objectified objects:

The value 'is' not, but rather it 'values' in an intransitive sense our language is not adequate to the new basic type of lived experience involved here. (p. 37)

Lived truths, as opposed to purely theoretical ones, are truths that we experience immediately as values that directly shape our experience:

In worth-taking the 'it values' does something to me, it pervades me . . . in value-taking there is nothing theoretical: it has its own 'light', spreads its own illumination: 'lumen gloriae'. (p. 39)

Heidegger chooses to liken this to the Thomist doctrine of the *Lumen Gloriam*, a capacity gifted to the intellect by God, by which one can overcome the limitations of (a) the bodily form of sight, and (b) the conceptual capacity of the finite human imagination. One then is able to 'see' the divine glory (see *Summa Theologiae* 1a, 18). The *lumen gloriae* is an analogy for what the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* is trying to achieve here—allowing the deeper structures of experience to become foregrounded as the pervasive 'is' of perception, in place of the transient names-and-forms. This is possible because instead of taking reason as intrinsically limited in its ability to comprehend reality, the *Upaniṣad* takes it to be a natural capacity of the self to transcend its finite temporal span and scope of perception, by abstracting repeatedly to ever wider truths.

There seems a fitting symmetry between Paul's sudden Damascene conversion, and Heidegger's vision of value as arriving in 'one fell swoop' of 'an orientation, an illumination, a background' (p. 57). By contrast, Śvetaketu's education is a gradual cognitive process, a deliberate work of subjectivity-reshaping. But this should not prevent the latter from exemplifying 'religiosity' in the Heideggerian sense of radical change at the primal level of experience. Perhaps this Indian case is better likened to the work of someone who was one of the most influential existing religious phenomenologists of his time, mentioned with approval in the *Phenomenology of Religious Life*: Max Scheler also took religiosity to be a process of restructuring the self through re-evaluation of phenomena, new narratives of identity, and reattributions of care. Scheler's model of repentance and rebirth as our cognitive self-reorientation in relation to our memories and intentions, respectively (Scheler 1973), is methodologically similar to the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad's* use of inference to reorient the mind toward eidetic structures that reach beyond the present, and Scheler's emphasis on religious affects reminds us that aesthetic and ethical changes can be prompted by epistemic ones. Beyond Heidegger, there is a strain of phenomenological thought that detected possibilities for reaching beyond finitude.

Heidegger's theory of religion brings out an important truth of many religious texts: That they aim beyond information to radical transformation of the deepest kind that human subjectivity can achieve. To become religious in this sense is to transform our perceptions, values, identity, and goals at their root. It also raises interesting questions about the scope of the mind to reach beyond present concerns and its own finite scope, to comprehend infinite truths; more could be done to explore the assumptions that lead reason to seem limiting or expanding in different philosophies. In this case, at least, classical India, assumes the latter: As Wolfe (2014, p. 52) says of Augustine, so too the redactors of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* chapter six felt that 'while within time, we strain towards eternity'.

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