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Origins Shrouded in Myth

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A Dialogue Exploring the Philosophical Roles of Myths

"If Vishnu exists, I am his avatar." – Kedar Joshi

"Science, religion, history, philosophy all spring from myths just as mere facts arise from universal truths." – Raam Gokhale

"It is a myth, not a mandate, a fable not a logic, and symbol rather than a reason by which men are moved." – Irwin Edman

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Scene & Players: Ram, Kedar, Sushama are at Sushama's spare house enjoying tea.

Sushama: Myths, legends, fables, fairy tales share many common elements. I can guess why you've chosen to focus on myths but I'd like to hear it from you just the same.

Ram: OK. Legends, like King Arthur, can have origins in actual historical events. Fables, like Aesop's, have a moralizing component. Fairy tales, like Cinderella, strive to entertain children. Though all at their best utilize explanatory elements, only myths have as their raison d'etre the goal of explaining some pre-existing reality. For example, the only word among them ambitious enough to go after 'Creation' is 'Myth'. Nearly every culture has a creation myth, a cosmogony.

Kedar: Well, besides explaining a pre-existent reality, myths can also serve as propaganda, a story to bring about a *new* social order. I'm reading a book called Asura that argues that the Hindu myth *Ramayana* is a bit of propaganda intended to justify the oppression of India's native Dravidians by the invading Aryans.

Sushama: Yes, the lure to propagandize is compelling even for philosophers. For example, let's not forget Plato's propaganda myth in *The Republic* about how philosopher-kings, guardians and everyone else have respectively gold, silver and iron in their souls.

Ram: Maybe we can generalize by saying myths are in the business of supplying meaning to facts, whether the meaning is elicited from the facts themselves or imposed from without as in the case of propaganda. But even propaganda myths strive to explain given facts…they just might not be the best explanations. And

being in the business of explanations, it's not surprising myths are the origins of all of mankind's explanatory endeavors, namely science, religion, history and philosophy. Their origins are not only shrouded in myths, they're also enshrined in them.

Sushama: Isn't that putting the cart before the horse, Ram? People surely have the idea/concept/theory before they dress it up in a story.

Ram: Good point. Let me rephrase: the origins of explanations lie in myths largely in the sense that that was the preferred mode of setting down explanations in ancient times.

Sushama: Then I agree. Thales, the first philosopher recognized as such in the Western tradition, probably owed his famous, 'All is water', fragment to the Babylonian myth of creation. All Thales did was to leave their god Marduk out of the picture. This might suggest that the myth came before the idea. But the Babylonians probably viewed water as constitutive of everything before they set it down in myth. The idea came before the myth, and maybe before Thales.

Still myths clearly have played a role in philosophy (*a little lost in her own thoughts*): in Empedocles' reign of love for instance the connection with myths and mythologizing seems to resurface. And certainly Parmenides' proem with its invocation to the goddess is styled after Homer. And of course, we've mentioned Plato who's chockfull of myths from the Charioteer to the Cave. And even in the modern period, myths play a role from Hobbes state of nature to Marx' dialectical materialism. And more recently philosophers like Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam and Daniel Dennett have freely used modern day 'myths' to illustrate philosophical points…

Ram: Uh…thank you Sushama for that summary of the role myths have played in the Western tradition but perhaps we should turn to a tradition where the connection with myth is alive and kicking, namely the Hindu tradition that our friend Kedar wants to address.

Kedar?

Kedar: Oh, where to begin? I suppose at the beginning…If I may quote the *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad*,

"In the beginning was the self, the Purusha (*the male principle*), alone, afraid, wondering what made him lonely and fearful. If there was loneliness and fear, there could also be company and pleasure. Restless, he split himself."

I should mention that there is also the *Advaita Vedanta* school of Hinduism that maintains that the undifferentiated *Brahman* is the only reality, that all differentiation is *Maya* or illusion.

Sushama: This differentiation cuts pretty deep. For example, the *Rigveda* has a passage translated as, 'in the beginning, there was neither what is nor what is not'. This addresses the fundamental divide Parmenides would later discuss in his proem, though it doesn't take the latter's counterintuitive plenum position.

Perhaps because the differentiation is so fundamental, the so-called illusion, is an independent 'reality' in itself, identified with the always-existing feminine force in nature, namely Maya, just as Brahman is the masculine.

 Ram: Interesting. The beginning is the very beginning. A creation myth has to explain everything, even how any differentiation at all arose. Thus the Bible's Genesis describes how the world was first without form and void until God separated/differentiated the heaven and the earth, light and dark, water and land.

And curiously, in Christianity, like in Hinduism, there is an alternate creation myth where the differentiating element is also a separate and distinct god: the New Testament's, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." If I may be so bold, the Word, being in essence language, is the differentiating element, here distinguished like Maya in Hinduism, as a deity in itself.

Sushama: Well, the Christian holy trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—are all masculine. One is left wondering how something as significantly distinct as the feminine arose. Surely not just out of Adam's rib?

Kedar: Like the creation of the world aren't there two myths in Christianity about the creation of man? A Garden of Eden in which Eve was created from Adam's rib and an Eden where Adam and Eve were created at the same time, both from dust?

Ram: True. Still even if 'Eve' was 'coeval' with Adam (pardon the pun), a female deity is not coeval with God as in some forms of Hinduism.

Sushama: Hinduism seems grander for that in some ways…though having male and female deities couple to produce creation is also part of the cosmogonies of many primitive people.

Kedar: In anthropomophing the forces of nature, Hinduism may've been trying to placate the common run of religious-minded people. The doctrines at their

core however are profoundly philosophical: regardless of the attribution of male and female, everything is one and many at the same time. Different forces or deities are posited to explain the two aspects. And since the tendency towards the 'many' is a fecundity, it seems reasonable to describe it as female and the tendency to be one with the male.

Ram: Hmm…I remember reading how creationists in the US drew support from the fact that the big bang theory became *the* accepted theory in cosmology. They thought a beginning view of creation supported the Genesis account better than the preceding steady-state theory. But I think modern day physics with all forces identified with their field particles and nothing, no God, not even time, outside the primordial atom supports the Hindu creation myth better than a Biblical creation with a God and time outside creation.

Kedar: The time-scales used in Hindu cosmology —on the order of several billions of years—also come surprisingly close to modern physics as noted by the likes of Fritjof Capra and Carl Sagan. For example, Capra wrote as follows (*borrowing Ram's laptop, looks up a quote*):

"This idea of a periodically expanding and contracting universe, which involves a scale of time and space of vast proportions, has arisen not only in modern cosmology, but also in ancient Indian mythology. Experiencing the universe as an organic and rhythmically moving cosmos, the Hindus were able to develop evolutionary cosmologies which come very close to our modern scientific models."

Ram(*taking back the laptop*): Yes, I remember reading that in The Tao of Physics. Though science does weigh against making the primordial elements in any way 'sexy': sex differentiation didn't originate till life and certainly 'creation' had been around a long time, contrary to the Hindu athropomorphing tendency.

Sushama: Perhaps the most charitable interpretation of Hinduism is as Kedar was suggesting: male-like and female-like forces are only used to characterize the one and the many aspects of creation in retrospect; the primordial entity in itself is described as *nirgun*, that is devoid of any characteristics.

Ram: OK. Hindu myths make a pretty good stab at philosophy. How about historical accuracy? Do the Ramayana and Mahabharata myths/legends have their basis in historical fact?

Kedar: Hold on. You're jumping from philosophy to history. Hinduism is not done with science. Having explained the origin of the universe, Hinduism also draws support from evolution's origin of species. The ten avatars of Vishnu

range in order from fish, to tortoise, to boar, to *Narasimha*, a beast-man, to *Vaman* a pygmy form of man—this curiously parallels human evolution. Only later do you get into the quasi-historical avatars of Parashuram of the iron ax, Ram of the bow and arrow and Krishna of the *sudarshan chakra*, the Frisbee-like weapon of power. Only then do you have the historical ninth avatar, the Buddha, who showed humanity the path to enlightenment, to be liberated from the world of suffering.

Ram: Interesting.

Kedar: Well some say co-opting the Buddha as the ninth avatar was another instance of Hindu propaganda. If Christianity had been popular in ancient India, Jesus might've been regarded as the tenth avatar, just as Islam co-opted Moses and Jesus as prophets in their own right, though Mohammed is their last and greatest prophet.

Sushama: So much for 'history'. Getting back to 'science', Hindu mythology's view of evolution is very much in the zeitgeist here in India but we must anticipate a facile objection to it: modern homo-sapiens appear in the story of the lion-man Narasimha and also the pygmy Vaman which wouldn't have been the case if these avatars were supposed to be evolutionary stages.

Of course, this is too facile because the myths are stories first not scientific theories. But to lay some claim to have insight into the latter, it is sufficient they contain allegories to modern theories—and this they surprisingly do.

Ram: That leaves a big question: HOW? We've formulated our theories of the origin of the cosmos and of species in the light of observation and experimentation. What did the ancients do?

Kedar: Well one theory is aliens or ancient astronauts; our ancestors were visited by aliens who they viewed as gods and these 'gods' gave them insight into the nature of things not to mention how to build the pyramids, a feat we'd find hard to duplicate today. Didn't Von Daniken's Chariots of the Gods first propose this idea in the 70's?

Sushama: Impressive Kedar. I would've thought you too young to know this reference which was all the rage once. Still if you're going to be knowledgeable about old books I think you can pick better ones.

Kedar: Well myths, even myths about the origins of myths arise in a historical context. We started dreaming up Roswells and Chariots of the Gods at the dawn of our own space-age. That's when we must look up original sources.

Sushama: I prefer to think the origin myths were original to the original myth writers, lost though they may be in antiquity. Only human writers, not aliens, could do justice to the interplay of characters, motives and emotions that are woven through the twin tapestries, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

We *are* capable of great insights—philosophical and scientific as well as artistic—when we do not have distractions like the sights, sounds and smells of the cities we live in, the laptops, smart-phones and other gadgets we're more often slaves to than masters of, the social networks that blanket us but provide little warmth. We—Indians, Greeks, Babylonians, Egyptians, etc.—were great once not because some futuristic aliens helped us but because we have always had the capacity for greatness as long as this so-called future doesn't stand in our way.

Ram: Very eloquent Sushama. Our capacity for greatness may not have only been manifested in insightful story-telling. My grandmother used to tell me that Hinduism's 330 million gods, far from being a farcical contradiction to the Vedas' monotheism or at most dualism, was an allusion to the fact that there were once that many 'god-like' men and women. She also used to say—many Indians today believe—that things like the *brahmastra* of the Mahabharata was an atom bomb, the secret of which was known to the ancients. That knowledge led to their destruction just as it will lead to ours. Then we would start over, an endless cycle of creation and destruction, day and night of Brahma.

Kedar: That's not quite right. The current cycle of Brahma didn't end with the great war depicted in the Mahabharata. It has continued to today's *kaliyug* at the end of which the last avatar of Vishnu, *Kalki*, will arrive destroying all immoral people marking the end of the cycle.

Sushama: From your quote at the beginning of the dialogue I gather you see yourself as Kalki?

Kedar: Not necessarily. Vishnu can have many minor avatars besides the ten main ones of the Vedas—for example, the girl Mohini who served immortal-life-giving nectar only to the gods but kept it away from their enemies, the *asuras*.

For me, I believe my purpose is to do philosophy and possibly through political means, contribute to the destruction of evildoers like any avatar of Vishnu. Remember Kalki has to survive to the end of kaliyug which may be a long way away; besides there are some who believe kaliyug hasn't even started yet; anyway all this may be beyond my lifetime which I expect to be short in any case.

Ram: OK philosopher-king avatar, what exactly is an avatar of Vishnu? I mean if we're not restricted to ten and for all we know there could be 330 million, or whatever is the current number of 'god-like' individuals to borrow my grandmother's idea…what exactly is an avatar? Could I be an avatar? Could Sushama be an avatar, now that you've reminded us there can be female avatars of a male god? Can that guy from the movie *Avatar* be an avatar?

Sushama: Good point, amusingly put! Remember *Advaita Vedanta*'s famous equation, 'Atman is Brahman'? God is in all of us, the world is ensouled with Him or rather It. This is consistent with a difference between Christianity and Hinduism: God in the latter doesn't exactly create the world; he splits and becomes the world. In fact the etymology of 'Brahman' is the root *brh* which means to grow or swell. This 'becoming' is why evolution is consistent with Hinduism in a way it isn't with Christianity.

So the one has become many…but, through meditation or yoga, any of us can become 'self-realized' and return to the One. This gets back to our potential for greatness that I waxed poetically about earlier.

Kedar: Well an avatar of Vishnu clearly has to be different than the common run of men. While ordinary men through self-realization may live the Hindu version of the good life with the *Gita*'s different stages, only an avatar of Vishnu directs traffic as it were on the road of history; everyone else is merely another car pivoting around the cones or ignoring them at their peril. In this way, Hindu mythology, as does the Christian one, does the job of history and eschatology as well as philosophy and science.

Still the difference between an avatar and a human may only be a matter of degree. Lord Ram as elaborated in his birth-myth was only half-Vishnu since Kausalya his mother-to-be ate only half of the *payasadan* given to the childless King Dasharatha; the other queens ate smaller portions and hence their sons, Ram's half-brothers, were lesser percentages of Vishnu.

Ram: So you seem to be saying that the difference between an avatar and an ordinary human may be quantitative, of the amount of 'God-stuff' in each but the amount of 'God-stuff' can't be increased through meditation or yoga; it can only become self-aware which admittedly is a good thing in itself; still the gulf between an avatar and an ordinary human can't be bridged, that a Krishna can impart self-knowledge to an Arjuna but an Arjuna can't thereby be a Krishna.

Kedar: Yes it is a matter of degree. But quantitative differences have a way of becoming qualitative after crossing some threshold level. Lord Ram and me for

that matter, have a portion of Vishnu but moreover that portion is sufficient to give the avatar the *paramatma* of Vishnu which ordinary humans lack.

Ram: Interesting…and certainly consistent.

Sushama: Oh c'mon! In trying to understand the consistencies in Kedar's positions, Ram always seems like he's justifying them. I'm sure that's not his intention in this case—it's just the typical pitfall of philosophers.

For my part, I still have to ask, what makes you think you are an avatar of Vishnu?

Kedar: The reasons are astrological…

Sushama (cutting off Kedar): Hence open to interpretation…

Ram (cutting off Sushama): Or entirely dubious…

Kedar: I expected as much. Anyway, I'm quite ambivalent about my quote, "If Vishnu exists, I am his avatar." On the one hand, I phrase it conditionally, like a *reductio*, because I often doubt Vishnu exists. On the other hand, certain astrological and other reasons lead me to think I might be an avatar of Vishnu, albeit minor. Yet again, since humanity and the kaliyuga, in some ways, appear to be on the brink of apocalypse, I, who, on certain rational assumptions, thinks of himself to be a serious avatar of Vishnu, might just be none other than Kalki, Vishnu's tenth and final Maha-avatar.

My ambivalence regarding my quote is connected with my uncertainty about myths. You remember the title I suggested for the dialogue: 'Myth—Reality, Illusion or Fiction?' I'm not sure where the truth lies.

Sushama: Reality, Illusion or Fiction…sounds like Goodman's <u>Fact, Fiction and Forecast</u>.

Ram: One of the reasons I rejected it, the main being it sounds too much like a textbook…not at all the urbane, witty tone I always strive for…which by the way you're killing Kedar!

Sushama: Ha, Ha! But Goodman's <u>Fact, Fiction and Forecast</u> *is* witty and urbane Ram. Similarly Kedar's title sounds intriguing: even an illusion as a genuine appearance is more real than fiction; the three indeed are the three possibilities for myths.

As for restoring your desired tone may I suggest this would be a good point to introduce the 'Great Man' theory of history you wanted me to research. The way to step down from Kedar's too lofty plane of gods to mere mortals would be by a detour through heroes.

Ram: Yes, young men can be ambitious even heroic, but delusional that's a form of insanity.

Sushama: Now you're killing the urbane tone, Ram. All three of us are crazy in our own way. Anyway, the great man theory.

The great man theory was first formulated by Thomas Carlyle. The idea is simple: history is driven, shaped by great men and women; history is nothing more than the biography of great persons. And indeed, after the theory, there were many 19th century encyclopedias of history that read like a collection of biographies.

The definitive counterargument to this theory was formulated by Spencer who said that such great persons are the products of their societies, and that their actions would be impossible without the social conditions built before their lifetimes.

Ram: I didn't know about Carlyle vs. Spencer but both their ideas are developed in Tolstoy's War and Peace. Napoleon is first seen as a great man who shapes history only to turn out to be at best a diminutive embodiment of the collective will of the French people who, abstracted as infinitesimals, can be summed up in a sort of historical calculus. The historical calculus is envisioned capable of even predicting history's future course.

I also remember coming across this idea in Asimov's science fiction novel, Foundation, with its science of psychohistory.

Kedar: Uh, getting back to Hindu myths, the avatars of Vishnu definitely fit into the great man theory. Vishnu says he will return periodically to free Mother Earth from her burden of evil which like dust on furniture has a tendency to accumulate. So an avatar acts contrary to the masses rather than merely reflect them. Still there is a concession to the Spencerian sort of counterargument as well. As humanity degrades further and further throughout the different epochs or yugs, the avatars become less and less pure good. Lord Ram operated within the means, adhering to principles despite tragic consequences to his father and later wife. Krishna believed the ends justify the means as exemplified by his devious methods of killing the enemies of his cousins the Pandavas. Kalki

influenced as he would be by the current kaliyug would presumably be even worse. An avatar, or a 'great man' shapes history but is also shaped by it.

Ram: Hmm…reminds me of Einstein's explanation of his theory: "Space tells matter how to move and matter tells space how to curve."

Sushama: Interesting analogy. If history is space and human beings flimsy or weightier matter depending on how great they are, maybe God is light, having a dual nature: God having a tendency to be one and many at the same time just as light is a single wave and many particles at the same time…

Sorry. I got carried away. Anyway like space, matter and light, an avatar's work is never done. Thus even after Kalki, the whole thing starts again and more Vishnu avatars would be needed to rid the world of the never-ending accumulation of evil. Sometimes I wonder: is the whole system rigged to provide Vishnu job-security?

Kedar: Very funny Sushama, but now you're being too witty and urbane.

Vishnu doesn't need job-security. Vishnu's job is a dream job—literally! In fact, I was torn between my Vishnu-avatar quote and the following: 'I am God; I am asleep; and Kedar Joshi is my dream'.

In Hinduism, Vishnu sleeps on the ten-headed snake Shesh in the eternal ocean and from his navel, Brahma appears and creates the world. Vishnu has ten major avatars in the world created by Brahma at the end of which the cycle either begins again or, if it has cycled through enough times, Shiva destroys the world.

My personal interpretation of Hinduism is that the world is just a dream of God— call him Vishnu if you like. This is the view of many yogis like Paramhansa Yogananda who said "God consciously dreams His cosmic play and is unaffected by its dualities."

Sushama: Well that's one view. But in the Gita, we find a competing dualist picture of the world, where matter is real as the body of God and is not an illusion though the forms it takes are. And in Hinduism you can find adherents of every other interpretation, even the 330 million gods.

Still, I too find the dream interpretation compelling. It unifies and makes sense of a lot of separate strands in Hinduism. The idea that the sensory world is Maya makes sense if the illusion is someone's dream. The triumvirate of Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh (Shiva)—which by the way you reference and reverence when you say the three-letter AUM—makes sense because an initiator, dreamer, and awakener is needed if the world is a dream. And why Brahma the creator should

be demoted, unlike the Christian Yahweh, to just growing out of Vishnu's navel makes sense because what causes a dream is secondary to deities like Vishnu and Shiva who show humans how to deal with life though it may be only a dream.

But isolating one strand as essential to Hinduism may be contrary to the spirit of the religion which, like the Gita's three ways to God-- of devotion, knowledge and good deeds—intentionally resists unification. I even have a problem with there being a single word, 'Hinduism'.

 Ram: Still the dream interpretation is the most interesting from a philosophical viewpoint. Let's focus on that.

But tell me, does Brahma grow out of Vishnu's navel like lint? Or does the swelling/growing root *brh* mean the *birth* of *Brahma* is more of a *burp* than a big bang? I'm just trying to assess how far to take the etymology and the demotion of the creator…

Sushama: Really Ram—neither lint nor burp, more like a lotus. But there is the myth of how Brahma, is cursed for his vanity in creating the world by not even having a single temple dedicated to him.

Ram: Interesting. Brahma is demoted but Brahman is exalted. Both are creators; are they the same or different?

Kedar: Brahma is the creator of the universe which, having both good and evil components, does not redound to the glory of the creator. The Brahman of the Vedas on the other hand is nothing less than the ensouled undifferentiated reality of the universe. It doesn't create the universe so much as *is* the universe in its true form. It is so worthy of praise that the adherents of both Shiva and Vishnu try to appropriate Its job for their own deity. Shiva-ites claim that the underlying undifferentiated reality is Shiva and Maya the illusion maker is Shakti, Shiva's consort. Similarly Vishnu-ites cite the Bhagvad Gita's cosmic form of Krishna having both godlike heads which issue life and demonic ones which devour life as proof that Vishnu is the ultimate, undifferentiated reality.

Ram: I'm sorry. I'm not sure why Brahma is needed if either Vishnu or Shiva fulfill his role or why Vishnu or Shiva are needed if Brahma can be identified with Brahman and fulfill his role.

Sushama: Well we've already mentioned how the logic of dreams requires three entities.

For a deeper reason, perhaps we can look to the Rigveda passage I alluded to earlier. It says the reason the world was created may be known to the creator or

maybe even he knows it not. This by the way is also like a dream whose why's and wherefore's we often do not know. And even in Kedar's passage, the Purusha splits itself because undifferentiated it is lonely and fearful, not out of any moral reason.

Either way, a moral purpose is lacking. There is no prescription for humans for how to deal with the world of illusion. Shiva and Vishnu represent two different responses to how to deal with Maya. Shiva advocates escaping illusion through meditation into a state of awakening or opening the third eye. Vishnu through Krishna advocates a disinterested devotion to duty, that is, living the dream, playing the hand you're dealt to the best of your ability.

Ram: OK so Vishnu and Shiva are two answers to a problem posed by Brahma, the purpose of creation or, translated to the human scale, the problem of how to live the good life if the world is an illusion. Brahma is demoted because he has no satisfactory answer to the riddle posed by his own creation. Is that it?

Kedar: Partly. Brahma is also demoted because he isn't purely good. Each positive brings with it, its negative, a what-is-not comes with what-is.

Ram: I guess every religion has a problem of evil. Why is there evil in the world if God is omniscient, omnibenevolent and omnipotent? Christianity also deals with this problem by on the one hand demoting God—by giving him an equal and opposite number, Satan as he's depicted in the story of Job—, or on the other hand, making some evil necessary for giving man a choice, a choice for which he may be rewarded or punished. It's all part of God's overall plan which is for the greater good of humanity.

Kedar: If God has a plan, I don't see how man has a choice. So much for free will in Christianity. Also in the dream interpretation of Hinduism, characters in a dream don't have free will. They only seem to the dreamer to have it.

Ram: This is getting close to the contingency vs. determinism dialogue I want us to have at some point so let's skirt that for now.

Sushama: I think Christianity's second answer is not tenable. Not all evil is necessary for giving humans a chance to exercise free will. Natural disasters kill untold innocents. Does that fit into God's overall plan for the greater good of humanity?

Ram: Yeah Christianity does try to salvage the free-will apology for evil by its doctrine of original sin so that nobody is really innocent. But for me the only true answer that Christianity can give is a less than omnipotent God. God himself

admits as much when he says to Job, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" This question greatly diminishes man's power in relation to God but it also hints at God's limitations: God is kind of saying, 'Do you know what I had to deal with?'

Sushama: In Hinduism one answer to the problem of evil is all differentiation—including that between good and evil—is illusory; the other answer is God, at least the worship-worthy God whether Vishnu or Shiva, didn't create the world. I wonder, does that make him less than omnipotent?

Ram: As my college philosophy professor was fond of saying, "a little omnipotence goes a long way." But seriously, I would like to discuss the first answer. If evil is an illusion must good be also?

Kedar: Good exists outside the dream in the character of the dreamer that finds the dream repugnant enough to require intervention. Evil on the other hand doesn't exist in the character of the dreamer but only in the dream. Still, I'm not sure: if God had a different character, what is good and evil in the dream would be different.

As philosophers, we want to say the Good is good independent of whether God wills it. But Hindu cosmology is so cosmic that there is no place left for the philosophers' Good to reside.

Sushama: I disagree. Vishnu could have dreams of eating sweet *moduks* and be drawn into 'intervening' in them. That wouldn't make gluttony good. Gluttony would remain gluttony and good good.

Kedar: But these are only concepts that characters in the dream have. Outside the dream, Vishnu only has likes and dislikes.

Ram: But Kedar, haven't you had the experience of going to sleep with a problem—it can be as simple as trying to recall a tune—and waking up with the answer? There can be a rightness to dreams. And if a dreamed character, or the dreamer for that matter, can be right in an epistemological sense, why not an ethical one?

Kedar: So a dream can be used to judge the mind of the dreamer?

Ram: Why not? Freudians do it all the time.

(*They laugh as they realize this is a convenient place to stop*)