

The Gārgya-Ajātaśatru Episode in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2.1*

By PAOLO VISIGALLI, Shanghai*

Summary: This paper offers a new interpretation of the Gārgya-Ajātaśatru episode. Complementing previous interpretations that emphasize the episode's derivative and incoherent nature, this paper argues that the episode forms a coherent whole and articulates a self-consistent teaching on *brahman*. This claim is supported by a close reading of the episode.

Introduction

The Gārgya-Ajātaśatru episode in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (BU)* 2.1 has often been characterized in scholarship as derivative and incoherent.¹

It is said to be derivative in two respects. First, the initial *brahmodya* or debate on *brahma*, which supposedly contains 'animistic'² or 'primitive'³ conceptions of the soul, is interpreted as an extension of the debate between Yājñavalkya and Vidagdha Śākalya (*BU* 3.9.10–17).⁴ Second, Ajātaśatru's teaching on sleep and dream, which is advanced in the latter part of the episode, is regarded as being indebted to Yājñavalkya's analogous teaching (*BU* 4.3).⁵

The episode is incoherent because Ajātaśatru's teaching is supposed not to fit in well with the *brahmodya*.⁶ To explain this presumed incoherency, it has been suggested that "[p]erhaps a lost, common source contained a more

* I would like to thank my home institution, Shanghai Normal University, World History Department, for providing an environment conducive to research. I would also like to express my gratitude to BRIAN BLACK, JÜRGEN HANNEDER, and DANIEL NEHRING for many valuable comments on different versions of this paper. Special thanks to JOEL BRERETON for his insightful and detailed feedback.

¹ Unless specified otherwise, references are to the Kāṇva recension of the *BU*. Another version of the episode occurs in *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* 4. Studies that compare both versions, to varying degrees of details, are FRAUWALLNER 1926, pp. 10–11; BODEWITZ 2002, p. 57f.; ACHARYA 2013, pp. 12–14; NORELIUS 2017, pp. 438–439; and SHEVCHENKO 2019, p. 508.

² RUBEN 1947, p. 265.

³ BODEWITZ 1991, pp. 36–42; 2002, p. 57.

⁴ RUBEN 1947, p. 265; Gotō 2005, p. 71.

⁵ DEUSSEN 1906, p. 288, pp. 306–307 / 1907, p. 260, pp. 275–276; RUBEN 1947, pp. 264–269.

⁶ DEUSSEN 1921 [1897], p. 51.

logical and convincing completion of the passage”,⁷ or that the Gārgya-Ajātaśatru episode in *BU* 2.1 is only the first part of a larger episode whose concluding section is *BU* 2.3.⁸

This paper argues that previous interpretations have overemphasized the composite nature of the Gārgya-Ajātaśatru episode. It is my contention that a close reading allows us to appreciate the episode’s hitherto underestimated internal coherency. It is argued that, although the episode may consist of multi-layered textual materials, it nonetheless constitutes a coherent and self-contained whole, which articulates a self-consistent, original and sophisticated teaching on *brahman*.

Summary of the Gārgya-Ajātaśatru episode

For the sake of clarity, I begin with a summary of the episode that reflects my interpretation. The evidence supporting this interpretation will be discussed in the following sections of the paper, which are referred to in brackets. I divide the episodes into two parts.

Part I

The arrogant brahmin (Dṛpta) Bālāki Gārgya boasts to Ajātaśatru king of Kāśī that he will tell him *brahman*. They engage in a *brahmodya* which follows a specific structure (§1.1). While Gārgya identifies (*upa √ās*) *brahman* as a series of twelve persons (*puruṣa*) residing in a series of loci (§1.2), Ajātaśatru counters each of Gārgya’s identifications by counter-identifying each such person with a proper name or epithet (§1.3). Each such proper name or epithet reflects a characteristic feature of the given locus (§1.4). For example, when Gārgya identifies *brahman* as that person over there in lightning (*asau vidyuti puruṣa*), Ajātaśatru counter-identifies this same person as ‘the Bright one’ (*tejasvī*). This is a proper name or epithet that refers only to the specific person relating to lightning; it does not refer to *brahman tout court*.

Part II

Gārgya recognizes his defeat. Ajātaśatru leads him to where a person (*puruṣa*) lies asleep, upon whom he performs two experiments (§2.1). First, Ajātaśatru addresses the sleeping person with the names or epithets (*nāmas*) he has given to the twelve persons in the previous *brahmodya*. Yet, the sleeping person does not wake up. Ajātaśatru thereby demonstrates experimentally

⁷ BODEWITZ 2002, pp. 58–59.

⁸ ACHARYA 2013, esp. p. 17; 2014, pp. 307–308.

that none of these names is the actual name of the person with which *brahman* should be identified; hence, none of these persons is in fact *brahman*. Second, Ajātaśatru prods (*ā* √*piṣ*) the sleeping person, whereby he wakes up. He thereby disproves experimentally a competing view on sleep, registered in *BU* 4.3, according to which the person exits the body during sleep and, therefore, it is dangerous to wake someone up, lest the exited person would find it hard to return to its body.

The stage is now ready for Ajātaśatru's teaching (§2.2). He first asks Gārgya about the locus in which the person consisting of perception (*viññānamaya puruṣa*) was when the actual person (*puruṣa*) was asleep. Since Gārgya does not know it, Ajātaśatru explains that after having gathered the (perceptions of the) vital functions, the person consisting of perception lies (√*śī*) in the space inside the heart (*ākāśa*). Next, he explains the states of dream and that of dreamless sleep. In dream, the person consisting of perception remains inside the body deprived of perception (*śarīra*), travelling around in the space inside the heart. In deep dreamless sleep, it slips from the heart into the pericardium through (one of) the Hitā vein(s). Ajātaśatru's teaching culminates in the (implicit) identification of *brahman* with the person consisting of perception (*viññānamaya puruṣa*) that lies in the pericardium (*purītati śete*) during deep dreamless sleep, unaware of everything.⁹

The following paper is divided into two parts, which match my division of the summary above. The first part analyzes the initial *brahmodya*. The second part discusses Ajātaśatru's experiments and his teaching.

⁹ The episode ends with a passage (*BU(K)* 2.1.20; *BU(M)* 2.1.23) that describes the *ātman* as the source of all beings, the truth that underlies the truth consisting of the vital functions. I will not discuss this passage in detail, but only limit myself to noticing the following. It has been proposed that this passage is an interpolation, on the basis that the word *ātman* is absent from the previous section of the episode (cf. ACHARYA 2013, pp. 16–17). If this is the case, however, one should wonder why the Upaniṣadic redactors did not smooth over this seemingly glaring terminological discrepancy. In this respect, it is worth noticing that several Upaniṣadic passages display a certain terminological latitude. This might be deliberate up to a certain extent, and it may reflect the Upaniṣadic redactors' syncretic attitude towards distinct textual and conceptual traditions. I give a few relevant examples. While the (*vaiśvānara*) *ātman* is the key term in the Aśvapati-brahmins *brahmodya* recorded in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (*CU*) 5.11.1–18, the episode begins with the question: *ko na ātmā kiṃ brahmeti* 'what is our *ātman*, what is *brahman*?' (*CU* 5.11.1). In *CU* 7, while Nārada tells Sanatkumāra that he wants to become a knower of *ātman* (*ātmanvīt*), Sanatkumāra uses only the word *brahman* in his teaching. In *BU* 4.4.5, Yājñavalkya identifies the self (*ātman*) consisting of perception with *brahman*: *sa vā ayam ātmā brahma viññānamayo* "Clearly, this self is *brahman* – this self that is made of perception" (trans. OLIVELLE 1998, p. 121). In *BU* 4.3.7, the same expression "consisting of perception" qualifies the word *puruṣa* (like in *BU* 2.1).

1 Part I

1.1 The structure of the *brahmodya*

The initial *brahmodya* comprises twelve sections each of which follows the same threefold pattern. I illustrate this pattern with *BU* 2.1.4. I use ‘x’ and ‘y’ to refer to the direct object and the object predicate taken by the verb *upa √ās* ‘to identify’.¹⁰

[1] Gārgya identifies (*upa √ās*) *brahman* (x¹) as a series of persons (*puruṣa*) (y¹) residing in a series of loci:

sa hovāca gārgyaḥ ya evāsau vidyuti puruṣa etam evāhaṃ brahmopāsa iti.

“Gārgya said: ‘as nothing else (*eva*) than this, the person over there in the lighting (y¹), I identify *brahman* (x¹).’”

[2] Ajātaśatru counters Gārgya’s identifications and identifies each such person (x² = y¹) as a proper name or epithet (y²):

sa hovācājātaśatruḥ...tejasvīti vā aham etam upāsa iti.

“Ajātaśatru said: ‘... as the Bright One (y²), clearly, I identify this one (*etam*) (x² = y¹).’”

[3] The Upaniṣadic narrator (rather than Ajātaśatru)¹¹ mentions the benefits (z) that Ajātaśatru’s identifications bring about:

sa ya etam evam upāste tejasvī ha bhavati | tejasvinī hāsya prajā bhavati.

[Upaniṣadic narrator:] “one who identifies this (x² = y¹) thus (*evam*) (i. e. as y²), he becomes bright (z); his offspring becomes bright (z).”

Table 1: The threefold pattern of the Gārgya-Ajātaśatru *brahmodya*

	agent	x direct object of <i>upa √ās</i>	y object predicate of <i>upa √ās</i>	z associated benefits
[1]	Gārgya	x ¹ <i>brahman</i>	y ¹ <i>puruṣas</i>	

¹⁰ The semantics of *upa √ās* is complex. Its semantic range comprises the meanings of ‘to meditate’ and ‘to venerate’. It also often means to take ‘x’ as ‘y’, whereby the two items are identified; see OLIVELLE 1998, p. 514 (on *BU* 4.1.2). This is the semantic nuance I picked upon in my translation. For a review of early works on the meaning of *upa √ās*, see FALK 1937, pp. 129–136. See also FALK 1986, pp. 80–81. For a recent perceptive discussion, see KILLINGLEY 2018a, pp. 134–136. On the syntax of *upa √ās*, see VISIGALLI 2020.

¹¹ Cf. OLIVELLE 1998, p. 498; ACHARYA 2013, p. 7 note 12.

	agent	x direct object of <i>upa</i> $\sqrt{ās}$	y object predicate of <i>upa</i> $\sqrt{ās}$	z associated benefits
[2]	Ajātaśatru	x^2 (= y^1)	y^2 <i>puruṣas</i> ' names or epithets	
[3]	Upaniṣadic narrator	x^2 (= y^1)	<i>evam</i> 'thus' (= y^2)	z

In what follows, I need to clarify three points in my analysis of the structure of the *brahmodya*. First (§1.2), I argue that the word *brahman* is the direct object (x^1) taken by *upa* $\sqrt{ās}$ in Gārgya's identifications. Second (§1.3), I contend that in his counter-identifications Ajātaśatru identifies the persons proposed by Gārgya with proper names or epithets (y^2). Third (§1.4), I examine the two links that connect the persons' names or epithets with their corresponding persons' (y^1) loci and with their associated benefits (z). The following discussion serves a twofold purpose: to provide the evidence in support of my interpretation of the structure of the *brahmodya* and to highlight its complexity and self-consistency.

Moreover (§1.5), comparison with another *brahmodya* between a king and brahmins, the Aśvapati-brahmins episode, will allow us to better understand the rationale that underlies the *brahmodya* between Gārgya and Ajātaśatru.

1.2 *brahman* is the direct object (x^1) in Gārgya's identifications

In my analysis of Gārgya's initial identifications, I take *brahman* as the direct object (x^1) and the persons (*puruṣa*) as the object predicate (y^1) governed by *upa* $\sqrt{ās}$. My analysis is supported by three arguments.

The first argument is contextual. Taking *brahman* as (x^1) fits with the outset of the episode. Acting in conformity with his appellative 'arrogant' (*dṛpta*), Gārgya boldly tells Ajātaśatru: 'I will tell/teach you *brahman*' (*brahma te bravāṇīti*).¹² In this opening sentence *brahman* is the direct object of 'to tell/teach' ($\sqrt{brū}$).¹³

My second argument is syntactic. It relies on a study of all the occurrence of *upa* $\sqrt{ās}$ in the *BU* (and *CU*).¹⁴ I analyze the syntax of Gārgya's

¹² As noted by BLACK (2015, p. 244 and note 5, with references), Gārgya's arrogance is reinforced by his readiness to share his teaching, which contrasts with most other Upaniṣadic teachers who are often reluctant to do so.

¹³ Cf. OLIVELLE 1998, p. 498, with reference to THIEME 1952, p. 119 note 3.

¹⁴ See VISIGALLI 2020.

identifications thus: “*etam (= puruṣam) (y¹) eva aham brahma (x¹) upāse*” (I resolve the sandhi), “as nothing else (*eva*) than this (=person) I identify *brahman*”. Note that the object predicate (*y*) precedes the direct object (*x*), schematically “*y eva x*”. I take this syntactic order to be marked. In the unmarked order, the object predicate follows the direct object it refers to, schematically “*x y*”.¹⁵ There are two other occurrences in the *BU* in which *eva* occurs after the first object taken by *upa √ās* (*BU* 1.4.8; 1.4.15). I analyze all these three occurrences as ‘*y eva x*’. The marked order is triggered by the particle *eva*, which indicates that the direct object (*x*) is emphatically identified as nothing else than the object predicate (*y*).¹⁶

The third argument draws on my overall interpretation of the Gārgya-Ajātaśatru episode. That the word *brahman* is the direct object in the initial *brahmodya* is consistent with Ajātaśatru’s teaching articulated in the episode’s second part.

In the initial *brahmodya*, Gārgya identifies *brahman* (*x*) as a series of matching person-counterparts (*y*) residing in different loci (the person in the sun, in the moon, in lightning, etc.). Ajātaśatru rejects such identifications as incomplete and provisional. For such persons are not *brahman tout court* but only its partial aspects or manifestations in specific loci (the sun, the moon, lightning etc.). In his teaching articulated in the second part of the episode, Ajātaśatru (implicitly) identifies *brahman* (*x*) with what he takes as the *right* person-counterpart (*y*). This is the ‘person consisting of perception’ (*viññānamaya puruṣa*) that lies in the pericardium during deep dreamless sleep. This interpretation will be clarified and elaborated below.

¹⁵ Cf. ICKLER 1973, pp. 127–128. In my translations of the relevant *upa √ās* occurrences, I imitate the Sanskrit marked order by foregrounding the object predicate: “I identify *x* as *y*” (unmarked order); “as *y* I identify *x*” (marked order).

¹⁶ I briefly comment on the two other occurrences of “*y eva x*”. *BU* 1.4.8: *ātmanam eva priyam upāsīta* “as nothing else (*eva*) than the *ātman* (*y*) one should identify what is dear (*x*)”; *BU* 1.4.15: *ātmanam eva lokam upāsīta* “as nothing else than the *ātman* (*y*) one should identify the world (*x*)”. The idea underlying both passages can be compared with *BU* 2.4.6 (4.5.7), where Yājñavalkya curses one who understands a series of items to reside elsewhere than the *ātman*. One of the items is the ‘worlds’ (*loka*): *lokās taṃ parādūr yo ’nyatrātmano lokān veda* “Let the worlds abandon him who understands the worlds elsewhere than the *ātman*”; trans. based on BRERETON 1996, pp. 54–55. I record a note of caution regarding my syntactic analysis of the syntax of Gārgya’s identifications. It should be noted that the target passage in *BU* 2.1 is “*ya- eva ... eta- eva*”. It may thus be possible that the second *eva* is functioning within the relative-correlative construction, rather than marking the object predicate. I thank JOEL BRERETON for pointing out this issue.

1.3 (y²)-s are proper names or epithets of the persons (y¹)

In countering Gārgya's identifications, Ajātaśatru identifies each person with its proper name or epithet. These persons are not *brahman* but only its partial aspects or manifestations relating to a specific locus. Each name or epithet reflects a characteristic feature of the locus with which each person/aspect of *brahman* is associated (see § 1.4 below). For example, while Gārgya identifies *brahman* (x¹) as the person in the lightning (y¹), Ajātaśatru counter-identifies such a person (x²) [= (y¹)] as “the Bright One” (*tejasvī*) (y²).

It is crucial to recognize that ‘Bright One’ and all the other (y²) are the proper names or epithets ascribed to the persons. This is supported by two kinds of evidence.

The first kind of evidence is, again, syntactic. Note that in the passages under scrutiny the object predicate taken by *upa √ās* is a nominative followed by *iti*: *tejasvī iti [y²] vai aham etam (= puruṣa) [x²] upāse* (I resolve the sandhi) “... as ‘the Bright One’, clearly, I identify this one (person in the lightning)”.

A systematic study of the syntax of *upa √ās* in the *BU* and *CU* shows that *upa √ās* occurrences that take a nominative plus *iti* as object predicate have a specific distribution. In such occurrences, the particle *iti* has its ordinary function of citation mark and the object predicate is the name or epithet given to the direct object. In this syntactic construction, the verb *upa √ās* resembles the verb *ā √cakṣ* “to call”.¹⁷

The specific distribution of *upa √ās* plus nominative-*iti* as object predicate is best seen by comparing two parallel passages, *CU* 4.6.4 and *BU* 1.5.13. Both passages likewise enjoin one to identify an item (x) as infinite (y) (*CU*: *anantavat*; *BU*: *ananta*). Yet, while the object predicate (y) is nominative-*iti* in *CU*, it is accusative in *BU*. This difference depends on the fact that the object predicate is the proper name or epithet of one of the quarters of *brahman* in *CU*; but it is merely an adjective in *BU*.

¹⁷ Cf. ICKLER 1973, p. 127. Compare the following passages, in which the object predicate occurring as nominative-*iti* conveys: (i) the esoteric name of *brahman* (*CU* 3.14.1) *taj jalān iti śānta upāsīta* “With inner tranquility, one should venerate it as *jalān*” (trans. OLIVELLE 1998, p. 209; see also note on p. 544); (ii) the names of the four quarters of *brahman* (*CU* 4.5.2–8.4); see, e.g. *CU* 4.6.4, which is cited in the main text below, and cf. *Jaminiya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa (JUB)* 1.27.4 cited in note 9 below. A bit less clear is *BU* 4.1, where the object predicate followed by *iti* refers to the four (partial) aspects of *brahman*: e.g. *BU* 4.1.2 *prajñā iti [y] enad [x] upāsīta* “one should identify it (= *brahman*) as ‘cognition’”. For a more thorough discussion of the evidence, I refer the reader to VISIGALLI 2020.

CU 4.6.4: sa ya etam evaṃ vidvāṃś catuṣkalam pādaṃ brahmaṇo 'nantavān ity upāste 'nantavān asmiml loke bhavati | anantavato ha lokān jayati ya etam evaṃ vidvāṃś catuṣkalam pādaṃ brahmaṇo 'nantavān ity upāste.

“He who, knowing thus, identifies this quarter of *brahman* consisting of four-sixteenths (x) as ‘the Infinite’ (y), he becomes infinite in this world. In infinite worlds he conquers, who, knowing thus, identifies this foot of *brahman* consisting of four-sixteenths (x) as ‘the Infinite’ (y).”

BU 1.5.13: ta ete sarva eva samāḥ sarve 'nantāḥ | sa yo haitān antavata upāste 'ntavantaṃ sa lokam jayati | atha yo haitān anantān upāste 'nantaṃ sa lokam jayati.

“These [*manas; vāc; prāṇa*]¹⁸ are all equal, are all endless. One who identifies them (x) as finite (y), he will win a finite world. But one who identifies them (x) as endless (y), he will win an endless world.”

The second kind of evidence for taking (y²) as referring to the proper names or epithets ascribed to the persons is found in the episode itself, in the context of Ajātaśatru’s first experiment on the sleeping person. In *BU 2.1.15 (etair nāmabhir)* the word ‘name’ (*nāma*) is used to refer collectively to all the object predicates (y²) mentioned in the preceding *brahmodya*. This provides internal evidence that (y²) are the persons’ names or epithets.¹⁹

¹⁸ Since the three referents (*manas, vāc, prāṇa*) have three different genders, one would expect the neuter pronoun *tāni*, which is used for the same referents in *BU 1.5.3: trīṇy ātmane 'kuruteti mano vācaṃ prāṇaṃ tāny ātmane 'kuruta* “‘he made three for himself’ mind, speech, breath – them he made for himself”. Perhaps the irregular masculine gender *ta ete* (*BU 1.5.13*) can be explained contextually. Note that *ta ete* is separated from its three actual referents, but is immediately preceded by a sentence containing *prāṇa* (m.), *āpas* (f.), and *candraḥ* (m.). When *ta-* pronoun refers collectively to both masculine and feminine referents, it can be either masculine or neuter. Cf. SPEIJER 1886, pp. 19–20 §28b; 1896, p. 31 §101.

¹⁹ See my discussion of the first experiment in §2.1 below. I am aware of two other Upaniṣadic passages (*CU 4.5.2–8.4; JBU 1.27*) in which the word *nāma* is likewise used to refer to the indirect objects followed by *iti* taken by *upa √ās*. In both passages, it is evident that the object predicates (y) are the proper names or epithets given to the direct objects (x). In *CU 4.5.2–4.8.4*, the names of the four quarters of *brahman* are revealed to Satyakāma (see *CU 4.6.4* in the main text). Each such revelation is introduced by a sentence containing *nāma*; e.g. *CU 4.6.3: eṣa vai somya catuṣkalah pādo brahmaṇo 'nantavān nāma* “[the fire says to Satyakāma] Dear, this quarter of *brahman* consisting of four-sixteenths is named ‘the Infinite’” (I am aware that *nāma* is here best taken as an adverb).

In *JBU 1.27*, three persons (*puruṣa*) are identified as residing in the eye, sun, and lightning, respectively. A name (*nāma*) is ascribed to each of them, and it is enjoined that one should identify (*upa √ās*) each such person (x) as their corresponding name (y); the object predicate is nominative plus *iti*. Take as example *JUB 1.27.4* (text in OERTEL 1896, p. 104): *sa yo' yaṃ cakṣuṣi eṣo 'nurūpo nāma. anvañ hy eṣa sarvāṇi rūpāṇi. tam anurūpa ity upāsita. anvañci hainaṃ sarvāṇi rūpāṇi bhavanti* “The name of the one [person] here in the eye is ‘Visible-wards’. For it is to-wards all visible (things). One should identify it (=person) as ‘Visible-wards’ [as a result] all visible (things) become turned to-wards him.”

1.4 Links connecting the persons' names (y^2) with the persons' loci (y^1) and with the benefits (z)

The twelve sections of the *brahmodya* follow a progression from what is farthest away (1: “the person in the sun over there [*asau*]”) to what lies closest at hand (12: “the person here [*ayam*] in the body”). Each section mentions a person (y^1) that is associated with a certain locus, the name or epithet of that person (y^2), and the benefits (z) one gains from identifying that person with its proper name or epithet.

For each section, the person's name exhibits two kinds of links: (i) with the given person's locus, (ii) and with the given benefits. I analyze both kinds of links below. In my analysis, I refer to Table 2, which helps us see these links clearly.

Table 2: Persons (y^1), their names (y^2), and the associated benefits (z) in the *brahmodya*. The phonetic-etymological links between (y^2) and (z) are highlighted in bold

	y^1 <i>puruṣas</i>	y^2 <i>puruṣas</i> ' names	z benefits
1	<i>asau āditye puruṣa</i> “the person in the sun over there”.	<i>atiṣṭhāḥ sarveṣāṃ bhūtānāṃ mūrdhā rājā</i> “the Pre-eminent, the head of all beings, [their] king”.	= y^2 <i>bhavati</i> .
2	<i>asau candre puruṣa</i> “the person in the moon over there”.	<i>bṛhan pāṇḍara-vāsāḥ somo rājā</i> “the lofty, whitish-dressed Soma, the king”.	<i>ahar-ahar sutaḥ prasuto bhavati nāsyānnaṃ kṣīyate</i> . “[he] will have Soma pressed for him every day, and his food will never decrease” (trans. OLIVELLE 1998, p. 61).
3	<i>asau vidyuti puruṣa</i> “the person in the lightning over there”.	<i>tejasvī</i> “the Bright one”.	= y^2 <i>bhavati</i> <i>tejasvinī hāsya prajā bhavati</i> . “his offspring will become bright”.
4	<i>ayam ākāśe puruṣa</i> “the person here in the space”.	<i>pūrṇam apravartī</i> “Fully-Non-Depleting”.	<i>pūryate prajāyā paśubhir nāsyāsmāl lokāt prajā-udvartate</i> . “he becomes filled with offspring, with cattle; his offspring will not turn away from this world”.

	y ¹ <i>puruṣas</i>	y ² <i>puruṣas</i> ' names	z benefits
5	<i>ayam vāyau puruṣa</i> “the person here in the wind”.	<i>indro vaikunṭho 'parājitā senā</i> “Indra Vaikuṅṭha (and his) invincible warrior band”.	<i>jiṣṇur hāparājiṣṇur bhavaty anyatastyajāyī.</i> “he becomes victorious, invincible, winner of adversaries”.
6	<i>ayam agnau puruṣa</i> “the person here in the fire”.	<i>viśāsabir</i> “Overpowering”.	= y ² <i>bhavati</i> <i>viśāsabir hāsya prajā.</i> “his offspring will become overpowering”.
7	<i>ayam apsu puruṣa</i> “the person here in the water”.	<i>pratirūpa</i> “the Counterpart”.	<i>pratirūpaṃ haivainam upagacchati nāpratirūpaṃ atho pratirūpo 'smāj jāyate.</i> “he approaches his counterpart, not what is not his counterpart; and counterpart (offspring) will be born from him”.
8	<i>ayam ādarśe puruṣa</i> “the person here in the mirror”.	<i>rociṣṇur</i> “Shining”.	= y ² <i>bhavati</i> <i>rociṣṇur hāsya prajā bhavati, atho yaīḥ samnigacchati sarvāṃs tān atirocate.</i> “shining will be his offspring; and he will out-shine all those with whom he deals with”
9	<i>ayam yantaṃ paścāc chabdo 'nūdeti</i> “the sound here that follows from behind one who walks”.	<i>asur</i> “Life”.	<i>sarvaṃ haivāsmiml loka āyur eti [=11z] nainam purā kālāt prāṇo jahāti</i> [similar to 11z]. “he lives out his life-span in this world; life-breath does not abandon him before his time”.
10	<i>ayam dikṣu puruṣa</i> “the person here in the directions”.	<i>dvitīyo 'napaga</i> “Comrade-Never-Leave”.	<i>dvitīyavān ha bhavati nāsmād gaṇas chidyate.</i> “he gets many comrades; he is not separated from this circle (of comrades)”.
11	<i>ayam chāyā-mayaḥ puruṣa</i> “the person here made of shade”.	<i>mṛtyur</i> “Death”.	<i>sarvaṃ haivāsmiml loka āyur eti [= 9z] nainam purā kālāt mṛtyur āgacchati.</i> “death does not arrive to him before his time”.

	y ¹ <i>puruṣas</i>	y ² <i>puruṣas</i> ' names	z benefits
12	<i>ayam ātmani puruṣa</i> “the person here in the body”.	<i>ātmanvī</i> “The Embodied”.	= y ² <i>ātmanvinī hāsya prajā bhavati</i> . “his offspring will be embodied”.

I first discuss the link between the persons’ names or epithets and the corresponding persons’ loci. The given person’s name reflects a characteristic feature of the corresponding locus.

This link is evident in (3; 7; 11; 12). “Bright One”, “Counterpart”, “Death”, and “Embodied” reflect distinctive features of their respective loci, i. e. lightning, water, shadow, and body.

Finding such a link in (4; 5; 6; 8; 10) requires a bit more interpretation. (4) “Fully-Non-Depleting” seems to refer to the feature of space (*ākāśa*) of being everywhere.²⁰ (5) “Indra Vaikuṇṭha (and his) invincible warrior band (*senā*)” may reflect Indra’s association with the power of (monsoon) winds’, which is symbolized by the *maruts*. (6) “Overpowering” probably refers to fire’s burning power.²¹ (8) “Shining” refers to the polished and shiny surface of a mirror (and not to its reflective power, probably because the latter is associated with water (7)). (10) “Comrade-Never-Leave” is likely to refer to the pervasive nature of spatial directions: they always accompany one, wherever one goes.²²

(1), (2), and (9) must be treated separately.

(9) is idiosyncratic. In contradistinction to all the other eleven sections of the *brahmodya*, there is no explicit mention of the key word “person” (*puruṣa*) in (y¹). Nor is there a clear link between the item mentioned in (y²) (*asu*) and the corresponding benefits (z).²³

²⁰ As the other proper names are all masculine, it may be better to solve the *sandhi* (*ap-ravartīti*) as *apravartī* (m.). *apravartī* would refer to *puruṣa* (m.) and *pūrṇam* would be an adverb qualifying the (verbal) noun. This proposal may be unduly complicated, however. Comparison with *CU* 3.12.9 – where *pūrṇam apravartī* (n.) “non-depleting fullness” qualifies *ākāśa*, the space within the heart – would rather support the parsing *apravartī* (n.). At any rate, note that *apravartin* does not need to be masculine to be the name or epithet of the associated *puruṣa*; cf. *ŚB* 10.6.1 (discussed in §1.5) where two feminine nouns (*ŚB* 10.6.1.4; 9: *pratiṣṭhā*; *atiṣṭhā*) are given as the names or epithets of the Vaiśvānara fire.

²¹ Cf. RENOÛ 1948, p. 65 note 1.

²² Cf. *BU* 4.1.5 *tasmād vai samrād api yāṃ kāñca diśaṃ gacchati naivāsyā antaṃ gacchati* “therefore, o king, to/through whatever direction one goes, one never reaches its end”.

²³ Note that the *Mādhyaṃdina* recension transposes (9) and (10). The *Mādhyaṃdina* order appears to better fit the progression of the *brahmodya* that we noted above, from

With respect to (1) and (2), it is unclear which words should be taken as the proper names or epithets (y^2) of the persons in the sun and in the moon, respectively.

I take “Pre-eminent” (*atiṣṭhāḥ* m.) to be the name in (1), on the basis of a parallel passage in *ŚB* 10.6.1.10, in which the similar word *atiṣṭhā́* (f.) “Pre-eminency” occurs as the proper name or epithet given to the aspect of the Vaiśvānara fire that is associated with the head (*mūrdhān*) (The passage is discussed in §1.5 below; note that *mūrdhan* occurs in (1), too).

I take *soma* as the name in (2). My reason for doing so is the phonetic-etymological link that connects the word *soma* with the associated benefits (*soma* [y^2]; *sutaḥ prasuto* [z]). As I detail below, such a link characterizes many of the other proper names or epithets and their corresponding benefits.²⁴

Where lies the connection between these two proper names and their respective loci?

“Pre-eminent” appears to refer to the physical and metaphorical pre-eminent position occupied by the sun in the sky. The association between Soma and the moon is often referred to in Vedic texts.²⁵

I now turn to the second kind of links, which connects the persons’ names with the associated benefits. This link takes two forms: (i) one (of the) word(s) forming the proper names or epithets are (is) repeated as part of the benefits; (ii) the benefits contain words that are linked phonetically or etymologically with their corresponding proper names (Both kinds of links are highlighted in bold in table 2.)

Thus, in (1; 3; 6; 7; 10 [*dvitīya* = *dvitīyavān*]; 11; 12) the same word occurs twice; once it forms (part of) the persons’ proper name or epithet (column y^2), once it occurs as part of the benefits (column z). There is a crucial difference, however. Take as example the word *tejasvī* (3). This is a proper name in (y^2), “the Bright One”; but it is merely an adjective in (z), “he will become *bright*; his offspring will become *bright*”.²⁶

In (2; 4; 5), the link between proper names and associated benefits is evidenced by phonetic-etymological affinity. In (8), both the repetition of the

what is farthest away to what lies closest at hand. Note also the similarity between (9 z) and (11 z). Both consist of two parts. The first part is identical in both. In the second part, whereas (11 z) has ‘death’ (*mṛtyu*), which is linked with “Death” (y^2), (9 z) has “breath” (*prāṇa*). Should we perhaps deduce from this that (9 y^2), too, must have been originally ‘Breath’?

²⁴ I take the other words in (y^2) of (1) and (2) as further qualifications or additions. It is likely that the text in (1) and (2) is interpolated; cf. note 19 below and ACHARYA 2013, pp. 12–14.

²⁵ See GONDA 1986, cited in SHEVCHENKO 2019, p. 514 note 16.

²⁶ Compare *CU* 4.6.4 and *BU* 1.5.13 cited and discussed in §1.3.

same word and phonetic similarities mark the link between items in columns (y²) and (z).

We have seen thus far that the initial *brahmodya* between Gārgya and Ajātaśatru follows a specific pattern, and we have tried to gain clarity on its structure. Now, to fully understand the rationale underlying this *brahmodya* and to better grasp the difference between Gārgya’s and Ajātaśatru’s views on *brahman*, it is helpful to briefly turn to a similar episode which features one other *brahmodya* between a king, Aśvapati, and six brahmins.

1.5 Comparison with the Aśvapati-brahmins episode

There are two versions of the Aśvapati-brahmins episode, *CU* 5.11.1–18 and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (*ŚB*) 10.6.1.²⁷ Both versions differ from each other in several respects, most noticeably regarding their respective objects of inquiry, the focus of the *brahmodya*. This is the *vaiśvānara* “fire” (*agni*) in the *ŚB* version; but it is the *vaiśvānara* “self” (*ātman*) in the *CU* version. Despite such differences, however, the *brahmodya* follows the same basic pattern in both versions. I use *ŚB* 10.6.1.9 to illustrate this pattern.

[1] Aśvapati asks the brahmin:

kām tvām vaiśvānarām vetthéti.

“As what (y) do you know the Vaiśvānara (x)?”

[2] The brahmin answers that he identifies Vaiśvānara with a cosmic element:

divám evá rājann íti.

“As nothing else (*eva*) than heaven (y), o king [I know the Vaiśvānara (x)].”

[3] Aśvapati counter-identifies such Vaiśvānara with a proper name or epithet. He then mentions the benefits that the brahmin’s identification brings about:

... eṣá vā’ atīṣṭhā vaiśvānarāb. etám hí vai tvám atīṣṭhām vaiśvānarām véttha tásmāt tvám samānān átīṣṭhasi.

“... This Vaiśvānara, clearly, is Pre-eminency. Since you know this Vaiśvānara as Pre-eminency, hence you will be pre-eminent over your peers.”

[4] The Upaniṣadic narrator (rather than Aśvapati) mentions other benefits that the brahmin’s identification brings about. It is worth noticing that while the benefits mentioned in [3] vary according to the different proper names

²⁷ While a few commentators (e.g. RENO 1948, p. 60 note 1; BODEWITZ 2002, p. 58) have pointed out that the two episodes are similar, I am not aware of any attempt to systematically explore their similarities.

or epithets Aśvapati ascribes to Vaiśvānara, the benefits mentioned in [4] remain the same throughout the episode:

yó vá etám atiṣṭhāṃ vaiśvānarāṃ védāpa punarmṛtyúṃ jayati sárvaṃ áyur eti.

“One who knows this Vaiśvānara as Pre-eminency, he wards off re-death, lives a whole lifespan.”

[5] Aśvapati identifies the cosmic elements mentioned in [2] with the bodily parts of Vaiśvānara. He then tells the brahmin that if he had not come to see him, the corresponding part of the brahmin’s body would have come to harm:

mūrdhā tvā’ eśá vaiśvānarásya. mūrdhā tvābhāsyad yádi ha nāgamiṣya iti mūrdhā té ’vidito ’bhaviṣyad yádi ha nāgamiṣya iti vā.

“This is the head of Vaiśvānara. Your head would have abandoned you, if you had not come, or the head (of Vaiśvānara? yours?) would have been unknown to you, if you had not come.”²⁸

With respect to its structure and rationale, the Aśvapati-brahmins *brahmodya* share several affinities with the Gārgya-Ajātaśatru *brahmodya*.

In their initial identifications, Gārgya identifies (*upa √ās*) *brahman* as a series of persons relating to a series of loci; the six brahmins identify (*upa √ās* in *CU* 5.11; *√vid* in *ŚB* 10.6.1) *vaiśvānara* as a series of cosmic elements (sky etc.).

In their counter-identifications, Ajātaśatru and Aśvapati likewise ascribe proper names or epithets to the items that their brahmin interlocutors wrongly identify as the fundamental principle. In both episodes, these names reflect a characteristic feature of the given item. In the Gārgya-Ajātaśatru episode, as discussed above (§1.4), the persons’ (*puruṣa*) names reflect a characteristic feature of the locus with which each person is associated. In the Aśvapati-brahmin episode, each cosmic element is given a name that reflects its key feature. So, for example, sky is called “Pre-eminency” (*atiṣṭhā*) (*ŚB* 10.6.1.10) and earth is called “Foundation” (*pratiṣṭhā*) (*ŚB* 10.6.1.4) etc.²⁹

²⁸ A few clarifications about my translation. In [1], I tentatively take *vaiśvānarāṃ* as (x) and *kaṃ* as (y). So does EGGELING (1897, p. 395), who translates it with ‘as whom knowest thou Vaisvānara?’ and adds in note ‘Or, perhaps, “what Vaisvānara knowest thou?”’. Taking *vaiśvānarā* as (x) would match with Gārgya’s identification in *BU* 2.1. In both *brahmodyas*, the fundamental principle that is the focus of inquiry (*brahman*; *vaiśvānarā*) would thus occur as the direct object (x) taken by the verb (*upās*; *vid*) (see §1.2). In [2], I take the cosmic element followed by *eva* as the object predicate (y); I take *vaiśvānarā* as the implied (x). In [3] and [4], I take *eta-* as an adjective qualifying *vaiśvānarā*.

²⁹ None of the translations of the *CU* version that I consulted explicitly renders the relevant words as proper names. Conversely, EGGELING (1897, p. 394 f.) capitalizes (some) such words in his translation of the *ŚB* version. Note that, unlike the proper names in the Ajātaśatru-Gārgya episode, the names in the Aśvapati-brahmins episode are not accompanied by the particle *iti*.

In both episodes the brahmins' identifications are said to produce real, if limited, benefits. In both episodes, too, there is a clear link between these benefits and the corresponding proper names or epithets. As we saw (§1.4), one of the ways in which this link is expressed in the Gārgya-Ajātaśatru episode consists in describing the associated benefits with words that are phonetically or etymologically linked with (one of) the word(s) that form(s) the proper name or epithet of the given person. The same happens also with the Aśvapati-brahmin episode. For example, the word *atiṣṭhā* is given as the proper name 'Pre-eminency' that is ascribed to sky. The etymologically related verb is used in the description of the corresponding benefits: 'you will be pre-eminent over your peers' (*tvam samānān ātitiṣṭhasi*).

At a deeper level of analysis, the two episodes likewise portray the contrast regarding the way in which the brahmins and the two kings go about investigating the fundamental principle. While Gārgya identifies *brahman* with such and such a person, Gārgya counters these identifications because these persons are not *brahman tout court* but only its partial aspects or manifestations relating to specific loci. Likewise, while each of the six brahmins identifies Vaiśvānara with one of the cosmic elements, Aśvapati counter-identifies each such element as only one of the limbs of Vaiśvānara.

The key difference between the kings' and the brahmins' stance on the fundamental principle is this: while the brahmins' knowledge is incomplete or provisional (*prthag* 'partial': ŚB 10.6.10; CU 5.18.1), the kings' knowledge is complete and comprehensive. Ajātaśatru and Aśvapati do not counter the brahmins' identifications because they are radically wrong, but because they are partial and provisional. Rather than to reject the brahmin's identifications outright, they incorporate them in their integrative vision.

In the Aśvapati-brahmins episode, the model of the human body is employed to represent how the brahmins' partial knowledge is integrated into Aśvapati's comprehensive teaching. The cosmic elements that the brahmins identify with Vaiśvānara are in fact only its bodily parts. To fully know Vaiśvānara in its entirety, one must take such elements together as relating to the underlying fundamental *vaiśvānara*. By contrast, in the Gārgya-Ajātaśatru episode, the model of the human body is only adumbrated in the first identification where the person in the sun is called 'the Pre-eminent, the head of all beings, [their] king' (*atiṣṭhāḥ sarveṣām bhūtānām mūrdhā rājā*).

To appreciate how the partial knowledge of *brahman* advanced by Gārgya is integrated in Ajātaśatru's comprehensive knowledge, we now need to turn to the second part of the episode, in which Ajātaśatru performs two experiments and then imparts his teaching.

2 Part II

2.1 Ajātaśatru's two experiments with the sleeping person

A neat narrative break divides the initial *brahmodya* from Ajātaśatru's teaching. Gārgya recognizes his defeat and asks Ajātaśatru to become his disciple. Even though he observes that it is the reversal of the norm (*pratiloma*) for a Brahmin to seek instruction from a Kṣatriya, Ajātaśatru accepts Gārgya's request. He then takes him by the hand, leads him to where a "person" (*puruṣa*) lies asleep, and performs on the latter two seemingly non-sequitur little experiments. He first addresses him with "names" (*nāmas*), but the person keeps on sleeping. Then he prods (*ā* √*piṣ*) him, upon which the person wakes up. Far from being non-sequitur, the two experiments make perfect sense once we see things from the viewpoint of Ajātaśatru and Gārgya.

With the first experiment Ajātaśatru proves Gārgya's identifications wrong: none of the persons which Gārgya had identified as *brahman* is in fact *brahman*.

To understand this experiment, we need to gain clarity on two points. First, when the text says that Ajātaśatru "addressed that (sleeping person) with these names ..." (*BU* 2.1.15: *tam etair nāmabhir āmantrayāṃ cakre* ...), the word "names" refers collectively to the proper names or epithets Ajātaśatru had given to the persons mentioned by Gārgya (see table 2, column y²).³⁰

Second, the logic of the experiment is this: Ajātaśatru assumes that if any one of the persons' "names" were indeed the *right* name of the person that is *brahman*, this would respond to his name and, as a result, the actual sleeping person would wake up. That this does not happen proves experimentally that none of these "names" is the name of *brahman* and, hence, none of these 'persons' (*puruṣa*) is *brahman*.

The idea that the person-*brahman* would respond if addressed with his right name is less naïve than it may seem at first. We should recall, first, that several Upaniṣadic passages record esoteric expressions or names relating to the ultimate principle.³¹ Such passages reflect the widely accepted belief in ancient India that a name has a substantive relationship with the entity it denotes.

³⁰ The relevant passage reads in full as following: *tam etair nāmabhir āmantrayāṃ cakre br̥han pāṇḍaravāsah soma rājann iti* "he (Ajātaśatru) addressed that one (the sleeping person) with these names: 'Oh lofty, whitish-dressed Soma, king.'" As ACHARYA points out (2013, p. 13), the *iti* has an enumerative function, i.e. it refers to all the proper names or epithets mentioned earlier in the *brahmodya*. It is unclear why "*br̥han pāṇḍaravāsah soma rājann*" is mentioned. This is the proper name or epithet of the second person, the one in the moon. One would rather expect the name of the first person in the sun. Cf. FRAUWALLNER 1926, p. 11 note 1.

³¹ See OLIVELLE 1998, p. 544 (on *CU* 3.14), with textual references.

Second, the idea that *brahman* is a kind of person constitutes the backbone of the Gārgya-Ajātaśatru episode. This idea is reinforced by the fact that the same word “person” (*puruṣa*) refers to both the actual sleeping man upon whom Ajātaśatru performs the two experiments and to the fundamental person-*brahman* – the person consisting of perception (*vijñānamaya puruṣa*). I will return below to the word ‘person’ (*puruṣa*) and its relevance to the entire episode.

With the second experiment, Ajātaśatru wakes up the sleeping person by prodding (*ā* √*piṣ*) him. Ajātaśatru thereby disproves experimentally a competing view, which is implicitly referred to, according to which the person (*puruṣa*) exits the sleeping person’s body during sleep.³²

This competing view is recorded in *BU* 4.3, in the context of Yājñavalkya’s teaching about sleep, dream, and dreamless sleep. Yājñavalkya first cites three *ślokas* (*BU* 4.3.11–13 (*K*), 12–14 (*M*)) that describe the “golden person” (*BU(K): hiraṇmaya puruṣa*) as exiting one’s body during sleep.³³ Next, he explains that the proponents of this view believe that it is dangerous to suddenly wake someone up, lest that exited person would find it hard to return to its body.

That Ajātaśatru’s experiment aims to disprove the view recorded in *BU* 4.3 is supported by the existence of several affinities between Ajātaśatru’s and Yājñavalkya’s teaching, including likely lexical borrowings.³⁴ Most noticeably, Ajātaśatru’s description of dream (see [3] in §2.2 below) borrows expressions (highlighted in bold) from the following *śloka* cited in *BU* 4.3.13:

*svapnānta uccāvacam īyamāno rūpāni devaḥ kurute bahūni | uteva strībhīḥ
saba modamāno jakṣad utevāpi bhayāni paśyan*

“In the state of sleep, hastening up and down, as a god he creates himself many forms: sometimes enjoying him-self with women, laughing, sometimes also seeing frightening things.”³⁵

Moreover, Ajātaśatru appears to borrow the key word ‘consisting of perception’ (*vijñānamaya*) from Yājñavalkya’s teaching.³⁶ This word has been

³² A similar interpretation of the second experiment is advanced in KILLINGLEY 2018b, p. 253; cf. also SHEVCHENKO 2019, p. 515. For a partly similar prescription against waking someone who is asleep, see *ŚB* 10.5.2.12.

³³ On these *ślokas*, see THIEME’s translation and notes (1966, pp. 29–30).

³⁴ Affinities have been noted by several scholars. See, most recently, NORELIUS 2017, p. 426.

³⁵ Trans. BRERETON 1982, p. 447.

³⁶ Compare *BU* 4.3.7 (*yo ’yaṃ vijñānamayaḥ prāṇeṣu hṛdy antarjyotiḥ puruṣaḥ*) and *BU* 4.4.22 (*yo ’yaṃ vijñānamayaḥ prāṇeṣu. ya eṣo ’ntar hṛdaya ākāśas tasmīñ chete*) with *BU* 2.1.17: *vijñānamayaḥ puruṣas ... ya eṣo ’ntar hṛdaya ākāśas tasmīñ chete*. A translation of this passage is given below.

described as Yājñavalkya's own lexical creation and as a distinctive feature of his personal language.³⁷

In short, the two experiments performed on the sleeping person allow Ajātaśatru to prove experimentally two distinct yet complementary points: none of the persons mentioned in the preceding *brahmodya* is *brahman*; the person does not exit the body during sleep. Both points prepare the ground for Ajātaśatru's teaching.

2.2 Ajātaśatru's teaching: sleep, dream, and dreamless sleep

I divide the relevant section of the text into four parts. Ajātaśatru asks Gārgya where the person consisting of perception was when the actual person was asleep [1]. Since Gārgya does not know it, Ajātaśatru answers his own question [2]. Next, he goes on explaining the states of dream [3] and that of deep dreamless sleep [4].

[1] *sa hovācājātaśatruḥ yatraiṣa etat supto 'bhūd ya eṣa vijñānamayaḥ puruṣaḥ kvaṣa tadābhūt kuta etad āgād iti | tad u ha na mene gārgyaḥ ||16 ||*

“Ajātaśatru said: ‘when this [person] was asleep here (*etat*), this person here consisting of perception where was he then (*tadā*)?’³⁸ From where has he come [back] here (*etat*)?’ Gārgya did not know that.”

[2] *sa hovācājātaśatruḥ yatraiṣa etat supto 'bhūd ya eṣa vijñānamayaḥ puruṣas tad eṣāṃ prāñānāṃ vijñānena vijñānam ādāya ya eṣo 'ntar hṛdaya ākāśas tasmīn chete.*

“Ajātaśatru said: ‘when (*yatra*) this [actual person] was asleep here, the person consisting of perception then (*tad*) – having taken [its own] perception with the perception of these vital functions – lies in the space that is within the heart.’”

[3] *tāni yadā gṛhṇāti | atha baitat puruṣaḥ svapiti nāma | tad gṛhīta eva prāno bhavati | gṛhītā vāg | gṛhītaṃ cakṣur | gṛhītaṃ śrotram | gṛhītaṃ manaḥ || 17 || sa yatraitat svapnyayā carati te hāsya lokāḥ | tad uteva mahārājo bhavaty uteva mahābrāhmaṇaḥ | utevoccāvacaṃ nigacchati | sa yathā mahārājo jāna-padān gṛhītvā sve janapade yathākāmaṃ parivartetaivam evaiṣa etat prāñān gṛhītvā sve śarīre yathākāmaṃ parivartate || 18 ||*

“When (*yadā*) [the person consisting of perception] controls ($\sqrt{gṛh}$) them [the vital faculties]³⁹ then (*atha*) the [actual] person here is said to be

³⁷ WITZEL 2003, p. 129.

³⁸ Though *kva* plus *bhū* are sometimes used in an idiomatic sense as “what has happened with x?” (see WHITNEY 1886, p. 8; HOFFMANN 1975, p. 99), I don't think that this is the case here (*pace* ACHARYA 2013, p. 14 note 19). Rather, Ajātaśatru asks about the specific locus the person occupied during sleep. I develop this observation below.

³⁹ HOCK (2007, p. 99) notes that neuter *tāni* “reflects the fact the following enumeration of these senses, ‘breath, speech, etc.’, contains words of mixed gender ...” Alternatively, *tāni* may refer to the ‘perceptions’ (**vijñānāni*) of the vital functions.

asleep;⁴⁰ then (*tad*) smell (*prāṇa*)⁴¹ is fully (*eva*) controlled, speech is controlled, sight is controlled, hearing is controlled, mind is controlled (17). Where that (*sa*) [the actual person] here moves in dream [i. e. he dreams], they [i. e. the vital functions] become his [of the person consisting of perception] worlds.⁴² Then (*tad*) [the person consisting of perception] sometimes becomes a great king, sometimes a great brahmin, sometimes he enters the high-and-low.⁴³ Like a great king, controlling (\sqrt{grh}) the people of his kingdom, would travel around his kingdom as he wishes, so this [person consisting of perception], controlling the vital functions here, travels around his own (insentient) body (*śarīra*)⁴⁴ as he wishes.”

[4] *atha yadā susupto bhavati | yadā na kasya cana veda | hitā nāma nādyo dvāsaptatiḥ sahasrāṇi hṛdayāt purītatam abhipratiṣṭhante | tābhiḥ prat-yavasrpya purītati śete | sa yathā kumāro vā mahārājo vā mahābrāhmaṇo vātighnīm ānandasya gatvā śayīta | evam evaiṣa etac chete || 19 ||*

“Then when [the person consisting of perception] becomes deep-asleep (*susupta*)⁴⁵, when he does not know of anything – seventy-two thousand veins called Hitā stretch from the heart to the pericardium – [then] slipping down by means of them, [the person consisting of perception] lies in the pericardium. Like a youth or a great king or a great brahmin would lie after having reached

⁴⁰ As JOEL BRERETON pointed out to me, there might be an indirect pun: *grhṇāti* “takes hold of”, i. e., “makes his own” and *svapiti* [as if related to *sva-* “own”]. Comparable etymological analyses regarding sleep are found in *ŚB* 10.5.2.14 and *CU* 6.8. On the latter, see VISIGALLI 2018, p. 998f.

⁴¹ I take *prāṇa* to refer to “smell”, and not to “breath”. This would fit well with the empirical observation that one keeps breathing during sleep, whereas smell (like the other vital faculties) ceases; see OLDENBERG 1919, p. 82 note 1, and RUBEN 1947, p. 267. Both refer to *ŚB* 10.5.2.15, a similar passage about sleep in which the word *prāṇa* means “smell”. Cf. also *BU* 1.3.2–7, where the vital functions are mentioned in the same order as in *BU* 2.1.17 (smell; speech; sight; hearing; mind) and the word *prāṇa* means “smell”. Further, the conception that breath is the only part of the sleeper that remains awake during sleep is well-attested in Vedic literature; see JAMISON 1982–1983, pp. 14–15.

⁴² It is also possible that *te* does not refer to the vital functions (*prāṇas*), but to the places the person goes. OLIVELLE 1998, p. 63: “Wherever he may travel in his dream, those regions become his worlds.”

⁴³ I follow BRERETON’s (1982, p. 447) interpretation that a double *iva* expresses the complementary of two actions and indicates that they take place in indefinite although different places.

⁴⁴ The word *śarīra* refers to the corporeal, physical body. It sometimes refers to a corpse, and it is sometimes contrasted with the living body (*ātman*); see OLIVELLE 1998, p. 507 (on *BU* 3.2.13). Specifically, in a few passages that describe death, *śarīra* refers to the body (corpse), from which the vital functions (*prāṇas*) have departed (*BU* 1.2.6; 3.9.4; cf. also *CU* 8.6.4, 5), or which has been made unconscious (*avidyām gamayitvā*) by the departing *ātman* (*BU* 4.4.3.–4). I think that the latter sense fits well with *BU* 2.1.18; accordingly, I take *śarīra* to refer to the *insentient* body, deprived of the vital faculties that are controlled (\sqrt{grh}) by the person consisting of perception.

⁴⁵ I take *susupta* as an adjective, being the nominal predicate of the implied subject, *vijñānamaya puruṣa*.

the climax of sexual bliss, so does this [person consisting of perception] lies here [in the pericardium].”

With respect to Ajātaśatru’s teaching, two points require clarification. First, while [3] and [4] describe dream and deep dreamless sleep, respectively, it is unclear what [2] refers to. Second, it is unclear how [2], [3] and [4] relate to each other. I begin with the latter point.

Note, first of all, that during each of the three sleep-related states the person consisting of perception is described as residing in a different physiological locus inside the sleeping person’s body.

Table 3: Sleep-related states and associated physiological loci as described by Ajātaśatru

Textual Parts	States	Physiological loci
[2]	(?)	<i>ākāśa</i> “space (in the heart)”
[3]	<i>svapnyā</i> “dream”	<i>śarīra</i> “(insentient) body”
[4]	<i>suṣupta</i> (adj.) “deep-dreamless sleep”	<i>purītat</i> “pericardium” ⁴⁶

In [2], the person consisting of perception lies ($\sqrt{śī}$) in the space in the heart. In dream [3], it travels around (*pari* $\sqrt{vṛt}$) the body. In deep dreamless sleep [4], it lies ($\sqrt{śī}$) in the pericardium. The wording in [4] strongly suggests that the person enters the pericardium *from* the heart, slipping through (one of) the Hitā vein(s) surrounding it. Granted that Ajātaśatru’s description is coherent,⁴⁷ then, how can we harmonize [3] with [4]?

⁴⁶ The word *purītat* is uncommon. The *Petersburger Wörterbuch*’s entry (“the pericardium or some other organ in the region of the heart”; followed by MONIER WILLIAMS) registers some uncertainty regarding its exact referent. The interpretation that *purītat* means pericardium (i. e. the fibrous sac that encloses the heart) seem to be supported by *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 8.5.4.6, the only Brāhmaṇa passage in which the word *purītat* occurs. Describing the symbolic meaning of the five layers of the fire altar, this passage equates the covering of the layer of brick with soil (*purīṣa*) with the covering of the heart with the pericardium (*purītat*).

⁴⁷ This has been doubted by DEUSSEN (1906, p. 303 / ²1907, p. 273). He opines that Ajātaśatru’s “extraordinary doctrine” that the person travels around the body during dream has ‘no basis on natural observations’, but is merely an attempt to reconcile the two different conceptions recorded in Yājñavalkya’s teaching (*BU* 4.3.11–13 (*K*), 12–14 (*M*)), according to which in dream the person remains in or exits the body (see §2.1). DEUSSEN’s interpretation is marred by the assumption that that these two conceptions “do not essentially differ”, but are – somewhat inexplicably – “derived only from poetical imagination”. A partly similar view is found in SLAJE 2009, p. 513. However, as far as I can see, these two conceptions are quite distinct.

I see two possibilities. One possibility would be assuming that Ajātaśatru's description implies that the person first travels around the body in dream, then re-enters the heart, and from there slips into the pericardium. The second possibility, which is the one adopted here, is taking "travels around his own (insentient) body (*śarīra*)" as meaning that the person travels *inside* the body as opposed to *exiting* it. Dream travelling takes place *within* the heart.

This interpretation gains strength once we consider the description of dream [3] together with the second experiment, whose (implicit) purpose was to disprove the view that the person exits the body during sleep. In this perspective, Ajātaśatru's description of dream reinforces the same point: the person does not exit the sleeping person's body, but remains inside it. Thus, [3] should not be taken literally to mean that the dreaming person travels around the sleeping person's body. Rather, it emphasizes that dream travelling takes place inside the body – i. e. in the heart – and not outside of it.⁴⁸ If this interpretation is accepted, the sequence dream [3] – deep dreamless sleep [4] becomes natural.

I now turn to the first question posed above: what does [2] refer to?

It has been suggested that [2] and [4] both refer to the state of deep dreamless sleep.⁴⁹ This interpretation does not, however, account for the fact that in these two sleep-related states the person consisting of perception is explicitly described as residing in two distinct physiological loci, the space in the heart [2] and the pericardium [4]. Though I am not fully sure, it seems better to take [2] as providing a general description of sleep, which is followed by the specific descriptions of dream [3] and dreamless sleep [4].

Additionally, I would like to draw attention to another aspect of Ajātaśatru's teaching on sleep which has thus far escaped scholarly attention, namely the association between the state of deep dreamless sleep [4] and the related physiological locus occupied by the person, the pericardium. I believe that this association represents a key feature of Ajātaśatru's teaching.

To appreciate the importance of this association, we first need to gain clarity on how the states of dream and dreamless sleep are described physiologically in the Upaniṣads. The relevant passages (*BU(K)* 4.4.2; *BU(M)* 4.4.3; *CU* 8.6.6; *KaU* 6.16) provide a fairly coherent picture. In dream, the principle or person experiencing dreams is said to reside in the space inside the heart. On the other hand, in deep dreamless sleep it is said to enter (one of) the Hitā vein(s).

The association between deep dreamless sleep and (one of) the Hitā vein(s) becomes clear once we recognize the close affinity between the state

⁴⁸ RUBEN 1947, p. 267, too, opines that 'Traumwanderung' happens in the heart, though he does not elaborate on this point.

⁴⁹ See HOCK 2007, p. 99, with reference to Śaṅkara's commentary.

of deep dreamless sleep and that of death. As described in the Upaniṣads (see, e.g. *BU* 4.4.1–2 and *CU* 8.6), death is a process whereby the living principle (which seems to be the same principle that experiences dream and deep dreamless sleep) first enters the heart, then slips into (one of) the vein(s) surrounding the heart through which it travels upwards, and eventually exits the body through one of the orifices in the head. Though such vein(s) are not explicitly called Hitā, the physiological conception is fundamentally the same (see, in particular, the *śloka* cited in *CU* 8.6.6). Physiologically, then, dream and dreamless sleep overlap with the initial stages of the death process. Deep dreamless sleep comes one step closer to death than dream.⁵⁰

Now, the question is: while elsewhere in Upaniṣadic descriptions of deep dreamless sleep (one of) the Hitā vein(s) are (is) ordinarily given as the relevant physiological locus, why, instead, is the pericardium (*purītat*) mentioned in the Gārgya-Ajātaśatru episode?

In my view, the Upaniṣatkāra intentionally employed the word *purītat*, for this allowed him to analyze etymologically the word ‘person’ (*puruṣa*) as ‘the one that lies in the pericardium’ (*purītati śete*). On the one hand, this etymology follows a long tradition of *nirvācana* analyses which analyze the word *puruṣa* as consisting of *pur* ‘fort/citadel’ and *√śī-* ‘to dwell/lie’.⁵¹ On the other, and more importantly, the etymology reinforces and coordinates with the central tenet of Ajātaśatru’s teaching, namely the identification of *brahman* with the person consisting of perception that is not aware of anything during deep dreamless sleep.

3 Conclusion

The above analysis counters the view that the Gārgya-Ajātaśatru episode is a loose combination of disjointed parts or an incomplete textual fragment. Instead, it tries to demonstrate that the episode (i) forms a cohesive and self-contained whole and (ii) it articulates a self-consistent and sophisticated teaching on *brahman*. These two interconnected points are foregrounded in the following concluding observations.

⁵⁰ The close affinity between death and deep dreamless sleep has been noted by OLIVELLE 2006, p. 59.

⁵¹ DEEG 1995, p. 167 (*Atharvaveda [AV]*); 253 (Brāhmaṇas); 376 (Upaniṣads) records the following examples: *AV(Saunakīya)* 10.2.28: *pūraṃ ... brāhmaṇo* ‘fort ... of *brahman*’; *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa*: 1.1.39; *ŚB* 13.6.2.1: *puri śete* ‘lies in the fort’; *BU* 2.5.18: *pūrṣu puriśayaḥ* ‘the fort-dweller in the forts’; *Praśna Upaniṣad* 5.5: *puriśayaṃ* ‘fort-dwelling’. It is also relevant to note that the word ‘fort’ (*pur*) is used to refer to the fort of *brahman*, which is located inside the space in the heart (*ākāśa*). See *CU* 8.1, 2, 4, 5: *brahmapur*; *CU* 8.5.3: *pūr brahmaṇaḥ*; cf. also *AV(Ś)* 10.2.28.

The episode's two parts – the initial *brahmodya* and Ajātaśatru's experiments and teaching – are consistent with each other. This consistency is undergirded by the two notions of “person” (*puruṣa*) and locus, which underlie the entire episode.

In the *brahmodya*, person and locus are the two coordinates that are required to know *brahman*. Ajātaśatru and Gārgya share the assumption that *brahman* can be identified with a person (*puruṣa*) residing in a certain locus. However, while Gārgya identifies *brahman* with a series of persons residing in different loci (the sun, the moon, the lightning, etc.), Ajātaśatru counter-identifies such persons as being merely the partial aspects or manifestations of *brahman* that are associated with these loci. He ascribes to each such person a proper name or epithet.

Person and locus underlie the second part of the episode, too. After having performed the two experiments on the sleeping person, Ajātaśatru questions Gārgya about the locus (*keva* “where?”; *kutas* “wherefrom?”) occupied by the ‘person consisting of perception’ (*vijñānamaya puruṣa*) when the actual person (*puruṣa*) was asleep.

Ajātaśatru's final teaching is articulated according to these same two coordinates. Ajātaśatru (implicitly) identifies *brahman* with a kind of person that resides in a certain locus, the person consisting of perception that lies in the pericardium. Unlike Gārgya's partial or provisional identifications, however, Ajātaśatru correctly identifies *brahman* with the *right* person. The validity of Ajātaśatru's identification is warranted by the etymological correspondence between “person” (*puruṣa*) and “[it] lies in the pericardium” (*purīṭati śete*).

In my analysis, the relation of Ajātaśatru's *brahman* to the *puruṣas* of Gārgya is the one that exists between the whole and its parts. Ajātaśatru tacitly incorporates Gārgya's partial or provisional knowledge of the individual aspects of *brahman* into his integrative vision: the various *puruṣas* that are associated with the various loci are the partial aspects or manifestations of the underlying fundamental *puruṣa-brahman*, the vital and cognitive principle that lies unaware of everything during deep dreamless sleep.

References

- ACHARYA, D. 2013: “*néti néti*. Meaning and function of an enigmatic phrase in the Gārgya-Ajātaśatru dialogue of *Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* II.1 and II.3.” In: *IJ* 56,3, pp. 3–39.
- 2014: “The Upaniṣadic Method of *Néti néti* and the Jaina Doctrine of *Anekānta*.” In: J. SONI/M. PAHLKE/C. CÜPPERS (eds.): *Buddhist and Jaina Studies. Proceeding of the Conference in Lumbini, February 2013*. Lumbini, pp. 299–317.

- BLACK, B. 2015: "Dialogue and Difference: Encountering the Other in Indian Religious and Philosophical Sources." In: B. BLACK / L. PATTON (eds.): *Dialogue in Early South Asian Religions: Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Traditions*. Farnham, pp. 243–257.
- BODEWITZ, H. 1991: *Light, Soul and Vision in the Veda*. Poona.
- 2002: *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad. Translation and Commentary with an Appendix Śāṅkhyāyana Āraṇyaka IX–XI*. Groningen (Groningen Oriental Studies 16).
- BRERETON, J. 1982: "The Particle *iva* in Vedic Prose." In: JAOS 102.3, pp. 443–450.
- 1996: "Yajnavalkya's Curse." In: StII 20, pp. 47–57.
- DEEG, M. 1995: *Die altindische Etymologie nach dem Verständnis Yāska's und seiner Vorgänger: eine Untersuchung über ihre Praktiken, ihre literarische Verbreitung und ihr Verhältnis zur dichterischen Gestaltung und Sprachmagie*. Dettelbach.
- DEUSSEN, P. 1906: *The philosophy of the Upanishads*. Authorised English Translation by Rev. A. S. GEDEN. Edinburgh.
- ²1907: *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie mit besonderen Berücksichtigung der Religionen. Erster Band, zweite Abteilung: die Philosophie der Upanishad's. Zweite Auflage*. Leipzig.
- (trans.) ³1921 [1897]: *Sechzig Upanishads des Veda, aus dem Sanskrit übersetzt und mit Einleitungen und Anmerkungen versehen von Dr. Paul Deussen*. Leipzig.
- EGGELING, J. (trans.) 1897: *Satapatha Brahmana Part IV*. Oxford (Sacred Books of the East 43).
- FALK, H. 1986: "Vedic *upaniṣād*." In: ZDMG 136, pp. 80–97.
- FALK, M. 1937: "*Upāsana* et *upaniṣad*." In: RO 13, pp. 129–158.
- FRAUWALLNER, E. 1926: "Untersuchungen zu den älteren Upaniṣaden." In: *Zeitschrift für Indologie und Iranistik* 4, pp. 1–45 (repr. in: G. OBERHAMMER / E. STEINKELLNER: *Kleine Schriften*. Wiesbaden 1982, pp. 95–139).
- GONDA, J. 1986: "Mind and moon." In: *Deyadharmā*, pp. 147–160 (non vidi).
- GOTŌ, T. 2005: "Yājñavalkya's Characterization of the Ātman and the Four Kinds of Suffering in early Buddhism." In: *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies* 12.2, pp. 71–85.
- HOCK, H. 2007: *An Early Upaniṣadic Reader*. Delhi.
- HOFFMANN, K. 1975: *Aufsätze zur Indoiranistik*. Vol. 1. Ed. by J. NARTEN. Wiesbaden.
- ICKLER, I. 1973: *Untersuchungen zur Wortstellung und Syntax der Chandogyopaniṣad*. Göttingen.
- JAMISON, S. 1982–1983: "'Sleep' in Vedic and Indo-European." In: *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 96.1, pp. 6–16.
- KILLINGLEY, D. 2018a: "Knowledge and Liberation in the Upaniṣads." In: S. COHEN (ed.): *The Upaniṣads. A complete guide*. London / New York, pp. 133–145.
- 2018b: "The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad." In: S. COHEN (ed.): *The Upaniṣads. A complete guide*. London / New York, pp. 247–258.
- NORELIUS, P.-J. 2017: "Mahān puruṣa: The macranthropic soul in Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads." In: JIP 45, pp. 403–472.

- OLDENBERG, H. 1919: *Vorwissenschaftliche Wissenschaft: Die Weltanschauung der Brāhmaṇa-Texte*. Göttingen.
- OLIVELLE, P. 1998: *The early Upaniṣads: Annotated text and translation*. Oxford.
- 2006: “Heart in the Upaniṣads.” In: *Rivista di Studi Sudasiatici* 1, pp. 51–67.
- OERTEL, H. (ed. and trans.) 1896: “The Jaiminiya or Talavakāra Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa: text, translation, and notes.” In: *JAOS* 16, pp. 79–260.
- RENOU, L. (ed. and trans.) 1948: *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad*. Paris.
- RUBEN, W. 1947: *Die Philosophen der Upaniṣaden*. Bern.
- SHĀSTRĪ PAṆŚĪKAR, W. L. (ed.). 1915: *Brahmasūtrabhāṣhya (Text with Tippanis.)*. Bombay.
- SHEVCHENKO, D. 2019: “Is Brahman a Person or a Self? Competing Theories in the Early Upaniṣads.” In: *JIP* 47, pp. 507–526.
- SLAJE, W. (trans.). 2009: *Upaniṣaden: Arkanum des Veda*. Leipzig.
- SPEIJER, J. S. 1886: *Sanskrit Syntax*. Leiden (repr. Delhi 1973).
- 1896: *Vedische und Sanskrit Syntax*. Strassburg (repr. Graz 1974).
- THIEME, P. 1952: “Brahman.” In: *ZDMG* 102, pp. 91–129 (repr. in *Kleine Schriften*, vol. 2, pp. 100–138].
- (trans.) 1966: *Upaniṣaden: Ausgewählte Stücke*. Stuttgart.
- VISIGALLI, P. 2018: “An Early Indian Interpretive Puzzle: Vedic Etymologies as a Tool for Thinking.” In: *JIP* 46, pp. 983–1007.
- 2020: “Quisquis deum intelligit, deus fit: The syntax of *upās* in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya* Upaniṣads.” In: *JIP* 48, pp. 191–228.
- WHITNEY, D. W. 1886: “The upanishads and their latest translation.” In: *The American Journal of Philology* 7.1, pp. 1–26.
- WITZEL, M.: 2003. “Yajnavalkya as ritualist and philosopher, and his personal language.” In: *Paitimāna. Essays in Indo-European, and Indian Studies in Honor of Hans-Peter Schmidt*. Costa Mesa, pp. 103–143.