

Arjuna and the Second Function: a Dumézilian Crux

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Arjuna is in many ways the central character of the Mahābhārata, the great Sanskrit epic. By order of birth he is the third among the Pāṇḍavas, the five sons of Pāṇḍu, who represent the forces of cosmic order. When, after humiliation and exile, the Pāṇḍavas finally triumph, primogeniture prevails, and it is the eldest brother, Yudhiṣṭhira who takes the throne; but in other respects, Arjuna is usually a more salient figure than his dutiful eldest brother. Thus it is to Arjuna that Krishna addresses his teaching in the Bhagavad Gītā (part of Book 6 of the Epic). Moreover although Pāṇḍu is *pater* to the five brothers, each has his own divine *genitor*, and the *genitor* of Arjuna is Indra, king of the gods in the classical pantheon. A paper about Arjuna is a paper about a major figure in Hindu tradition.

As for Dumézil, the great Indo-European comparatist gave much weight to Indian data (too much, according to some), and drew on a range of sources, including the Vedas and the Code of Manu.¹ However, if one asks what is his best-known and most sustained analysis of Sanskrit material, the answer is no doubt *Mythe et épopée I* (part 1), a 200-page comparatist examination of the Great Epic. Naturally Arjuna and his divine father are prominent in the analysis and, one might say, close to its core.

Dumézil's comparativism cannot be reduced to trifunctionalism: a good deal of the cultural material that he examined goes back to the common origins of the Indo-European speakers but does not relate to the well-known triadic pattern that he saw as dominating their ideology.² Nevertheless, in his analysis of the epic in general and of

the Pāṇḍavas in particular, the three functions are crucial. The argument, first propounded briefly by the Swedish scholar Wikander, is that the eldest brother represents the first function, Bhīma and Arjuna the second, and the youngest pair, the twins, the third. Apart from those who are unaware of or agnostic about Dumézil's work, there are of course many outside France, and some within it, who emphatically reject the notion of functions. But I suppose that for most of those who accept the notion the interpretation of Arjuna and his divine father as second-functional would count among the most solidly established of Dumézil's analyses. At least from Vedic times onwards, Indra is the warrior god par excellence, and within the epic Arjuna is fairly clearly the supreme warrior. He contrasts equally clearly with his pious and unwarlike eldest brother on the one hand, and with the humble twins on the other. Surely there can be no doubt that Arjuna belongs with Bhīma in the function that is defined, in contrast to the others, as pertaining to physical force, particularly that of the warrior?

My aim in this paper is not to reject this interpretation but to show that it is too simple. Once one looks at the details the anomalies begin to pile up, and to such an extent that the classical picture of the functions, and of Arjuna's relation to them, ceases to satisfy. Arjuna and his divine father do represent the second function, but they represent something else too. However, this extra element is not something that needs to be invented ad hoc. The present paper is one of a series in which I have been arguing that we need to fill out the Dumézilian picture of the three functions and recognise a bifurcated fourth function, one half valued, one half devalued. The 'something else' that Arjuna and Indra represent, in addition to the second function, is the valued half of the fourth function.

To interpret a single entity as manifesting simultaneously two separate functions may seem to run counter to all sane rules of method. In Dumézilian analyses two or more entities are often allotted to a single function, for instance two twins to the third function; but to allot a single entity, in this case Arjuna, to more than one function may seem to lay open the way to all sorts of analytical abuses. Does it not enable one to propose facile and pointless 'analyses' by postulating a mix of functions adjusted ad hoc to fit the needs of the case? This is a real danger, and if work in the Dumézilian tradition is to gain the place it merits (but does not yet possess) on the international intellectual map, methodological rigour is crucial. However, my proposal is less wild

than it may seem, and is not entirely unprecedented. Dumézil himself sometimes presents individual entities as ‘transfunctional’, that is, as manifesting a synthesis of all the functions. Since this applies particularly to kings,³ and Indra is a king, this may be relevant. However, to represent all the functions—in other words to transcend them, is very different from representing one and a half functions out of four, and I would prefer to emphasise that the interpretation proposed here applies to just one particular combination of functions in one particular area of the Indo-European speaking world. If similar interpretations are advanced for other contexts, this will need separate justification. More generally, of course, rules and precedents are not set in stone. Dumézil himself emphasised the provisionality of his own current views and frequently revised them;⁴ and I like to think that, in building on and somewhat modifying his work, I am only treating it in the way that he himself did.

Trifunctional interpretations

Dumézilian functional analysis always concerns structures rather than individual entities, and Arjuna cannot be analysed without reference to his brothers. So let us start by listing the Pāṇḍava brothers in order of birth, together with their divine fathers and the function to which Dumézil allots them.

1. Yudhiṣṭhira, son of Dharma: F1
2. Bhīma, son of Vāyu: F2
3. Arjuna, son of Indra: also F2
- 4,5 Nakula & Sahadeva, twin sons of the twin Aśvins: F3

The first three brothers are born from Pāṇḍu's first wife Kuntī, the twins from his second wife Mādri. Although certain contrasts exist between the twins, they are of too little weight to be relevant here. It is worth noting, however, that the gap between Kuntī's sons and Mādri's is seen by Dumézil as one among many expressions of the ideological gap that tends to separate the first two functions from the third.⁵

Straightaway we glimpse the problem regarding the second function. Whereas the first function is represented by a single brother, son of a single god, and the third by twin offspring of twin gods, the second is represented by two rather different heroes and two rather different gods. This duality within the second function is the central problem of the paper, and one which will constantly recur in one form or another.

In presenting his trifunctional analysis of the brothers, Dumézil initially (p. 53ff.) uses four main types of evidence:

I. The divine fathers

II. The details of each birth

III. The characteristic behaviour of each brother

IV. The contrasting disguises they choose for the thirteenth year of their exile, when they are obliged to remain incognito.

Later (p. 111ff.) he also uses variant birth stories which are told in connection with the Pāṇḍavas' polyandrous marriage to Draupadī. We need to examine all these arguments in turn.

I. **Divine fathers.** Dumézil begins with this topic because of the history of Mahābhārata studies. During the Second World War his comparative work on the theology of the Indo-Europeans had called attention to a particular grouping of Vedic gods. First attested in a Hittite inscription from the 14th Century BC, and present also in a certain number of Vedic passages, the list consisted of Mitra-Varuṇa, Indra and the Nāsatyas or Aśvins (the last two names being synonymous); these were to be analysed respectively as first-, second- and third-functional. In 1947 Wikander had compared the list with that of the divine genitors in the Great Epic, and although the similarity did not amount to identity, it was sufficiently clear to open up the Mahābhārata to Indo-European comparativism. Mitra and Varuṇa are commonly paired as guardians of the sacred cosmic order, and could readily be seen as precursors of the classical Hindu

deity Dharma. Vāyu was derived from an old Indo-Iranian war god closely associated with Indra (ibid. 47f.), and both lists ended with the humble twins.

Provided it is right, the functional analysis of the gods suggests a similar interpretation of the heroes. However, since the interpretation of the king of the gods is part of our problem (as will become clear), the argument risks being circular, and we must pass to the next.

II. **Birth Stories.** Because of a curse, Pāṇḍu cannot personally impregnate his wives, but fortunately Kuntī can draw on a boon once granted her by a certain sage, whereby at her own choice she can summon gods to be her lovers

Pāṇḍu wants his first son to be righteous, and accordingly has Kuntī summon Dharma. At the birth a disembodied voice announces that the infant will become greatest of all upholders of *dharma*. Pāṇḍu wants his second son to be strong, and the voice duly proclaims Bhīma strongest of the strong.

On the third occasion what Pāṇḍu wants is a superior son who will be supreme in the world (*loka-śreṣṭha* 1.114.15).⁶ With this in mind Pāṇḍu reflects that Indra is the king of the gods and best among them. This time special preparation is required: Kuntī fasts for one whole year and Pāṇḍu devotes himself to austerities (*tapas*), standing on one foot. Indra in due course responds, and at the birth the voice prophesies at length about Arjuna's future greatness and military success. The event is celebrated by a gathering of the celestial hosts.

Kuntī refuses to prolong her own series of sons, but is persuaded, just once, to let Mādrī use the boon, and it is she who chooses the Aśvins. Her twins are of matchless beauty.

This evidence brings us straight to the nub of the matter. The differential attributes of Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and the Twins—righteousness, strength and beauty—conform neatly to the definition of the functions, and raise no problems at all for trifunctional interpretation. So what about Arjuna? If he belonged unproblematically to the second function, he would resemble Bhīma and be characterised by the physical strength of the warrior, but he is not. In fact what Pāṇḍu wants is not another warrior

but a sort of superman, a human equivalent of the king of the gods. It is true that the disembodied voice foresees Arjuna's military glories, but that was not what Pāṇḍu requested, nor does the prophesy suggest any particular similarity between Bhīma and Arjuna. Quite the opposite. Whereas the accounts of the births of Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīma hardly differ from each other except as regards the attributes of the infants, when we come to Arjuna the story is altogether different. Quite apart from the lack of clear focus for his excellence, it is Arjuna's birth alone that is prepared for by ritual and celebrated by the celestials, and the account is two or three times longer than any of the others. So although the three brothers share the same mother, Arjuna stands apart. This is our first good evidence of the awkwardness involved in viewing him simply as second-functional.

III. General behaviour. As we noted, Yudhiṣṭhira eventually becomes king, owing to his seniority. It is certainly not owing to any obvious leadership qualities or to his own ambition—if he could choose, he would rather retire to the forest (Bailey 1983). His most obvious quality is his devotion to duty, and he is only an indifferent warrior.

Bhīma is quite different. Large in build, with a correspondingly gargantuan appetite, he loves fighting and wields a massive club—one might think of him as 'the tough guy'. The behaviour of the two eldest brothers thus contrasts straightforwardly as first-functional to second. As for the twins, the plot barely utilises their good looks, and their most obvious feature is their subordination to their elders. Their position in the sequence is suggestive of the third function, and probably their very duality adds weight to the case, but the construal rests essentially on arguments other than III.⁷

But what can be said of Arjuna's general behaviour? It does not have the one-dimensional specificity of his elder brothers, but perhaps the most salient quality is his supremacy on the battlefield. This of course fits with the second-function interpretation but, as I argue later, it contributes to it less weight than one might think.

IV. Disguises. At the start of Book 4 the brothers choose their disguises as follows.

Yudhiṣṭhira presents himself as a brahman—the representative par excellence of the first function.

Bhīma chooses three roles. As wrestler and elephant tamer he is evidently making use of his physical strength, but he is also a cook. This last role perhaps relates to the appetite that goes with his impressive physique.

The twins present themselves as specialists in livestock, respectively horses and cattle. From Vedic times onwards these are traditionally the pre-eminent form of wealth, and Sahadeva explicitly disguises himself as a vaiśya, a member of the third-function estate. They both emphasise their veterinary skills, a trait that echoes the medical knowledge of the Aśvins.

For all these four brothers the trifunctional interpretation is unproblematic, but again the picture changes as we turn to Arjuna. Arjuna presents himself as a eunuch, a teacher of song and dance and a story-teller. It is not obvious what to make of this combination, but one thing is clear: it cannot be directly linked with the second function. The most Dumézil can find to say (1968: 72f.) is that in the Ṛg Veda Indra too occasionally appears as a dancer. Although this is interesting, as a link between Arjuna and the second function it is like argument I: it is not only indirect, it is also wholly dependent on the interpretation of Indra.

V. **Additional birth story.** Epic tradition offers several justifications for the Pāṇḍavas' polyandry—a marital arrangement that is out of the question for Hindu orthodoxy. Among them is the following.

Indra's three sins. This story appears only very briefly in the epic itself (Scheuer 1982: 120), and it is excluded from the main text of the Critical Edition. The fuller version used by Dumézil (1968: 113-6, 1985: 86ff.) comes from the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa 5.1-24, and is presented by Dumézil in three parts.

Part i. Indra commits three sins, and each time he sins, one of his qualities or components leaves him to enter another god. Thus when he kills the Brahman Triśiras, his spiritual force or majesty (*tejas*), or at least much of it, departs and enters the god Dharma. The bereaved father of Triśiras then decides to revenge his son and generates the powerful demon Vṛtra. Indra, frightened, arranges a pact of friendship with Vṛtra, but then treacherously kills him. His physical strength (*bala*) leaves him and enters

Vāyu. Thirdly, Indra disguises himself as a sage and seduces the latter's wife. His physical beauty (*rūpa*) leaves him and enters the Nāsatyas (=Aśvins).

Part ii. The god has now lost his righteousness (*dharmā*) and majesty, his strength and his good looks, and the demons decide to take advantage. They incarnate as princes in such large numbers that the Earth feels oppressed and complains to the gods.

Part iii. In response to Earth's complaint the gods too take human form. Using the majesty acquired from Indra, Dharma begets Yudhiṣṭhira, and using Indra's strength Vāyu begets Bhīma. Half of Indra's remaining vigour (*vīrya*) is used for Arjuna. The twins are born to Mādri endowed with Indra's beauty. Thus Indra descends to earth in five parts, and (in marrying the Pāṇḍavas) Draupadī really becomes the wife of Indra alone.

Part i exemplifies 'the three sins of the warrior', a theme well known in Dumézilian studies and fundamental (for instance) to Dubuisson 1986 (cf. 137ff.). Clearly, each sin relates to a different function. To kill a brahman is an impious attack on the human representative of the sacred; to kill by treachery an enemy of whom one is afraid violates the ethic of the warrior; seduction is an offence within the domain of sexuality and hence falls under the third function. If the sins are linked to the three functions, so are the corresponding losses. This is obvious for losses two and three, and if any doubts arise about *tejas*, they are set at rest by śloka 14 in part i, which couples *tejas* with *dharmā*. In any case, *tejas* fills the first-function slot in the Aśvamedha ritual (Dumézil 1968: 118f.), and a lot of further supporting evidence is assembled by Hildebeitel (1976: 215-7). But for our purposes what matters is the contrasting treatment of Vāyu and Indra, the fathers of Bhīma and Arjuna. Vāyu, like Dharma and the Aśvins, is linked with a single sin, a single loss and a single function. Indra is not. He commits all three sins, suffers all the losses and is linked with all the functions.

In Part iii attention first shifts from the gods to their incarnations, and the contrast is less stark. All five brothers are treated, in the standard order starting with the eldest; and we now learn the component of himself that Indra used to create Arjuna. However, the contrast has not disappeared: Bhīma's *bala* reached him from Indra indirectly, via Vāyu, while Arjuna's *vīrya* came direct from his father.

The conclusion of part iii is also important. Contrary to appearances, Draupadī's marriage is not really to a plurality of males, since her husbands are all ultimately incarnations of the unitary sinful Indra. Indra is thus situated on a different conceptual level from Vāyu: he represents the whole while Vāyu and the others represent parts.

A very similar point is made by another birth story which, even though it adds nothing new to the trifunctional analysis of the brothers is worth inserting here in summary form (Dumézil 1968:111-3).

The five Indras (1.189.1 ff.). Indra follows the course of the Ganges up to the Himalayas. He is there imprisoned by øiva in a cave with four other Indras from previous ages. To escape they must all be incarnated as human beings. The previous Indras demand to be begotten by Dharma, Vāyu, Indra and the Aśvins, but the Indra of our age undertakes to perform the impregnation himself, i.e. to beget Arjuna directly.

Here too Arjuna stands apart from the other brothers, just as Indra stands apart from the other gods.

Let us sum up. At first sight the second-function interpretation of Indra and Arjuna seems satisfactory. The mighty Indra, 'the incomparable celestial warrior' (Dumézil 1968: 52) is famous for his victories and is often coupled with the old war-god Vāyu (Dumézil 1977: 228). In the canonical list of gods he precedes the unambiguously third-function Nāsatyas, and follows the apparently unambiguously first-function Mitra-Varuṇa.⁸ As is foretold at his birth, Indra's son becomes the greatest of heroes (*vīryavatām śreṣṭha* 1.114.34), and in the birth order he is juxtaposed to the unambiguously second-function Bhīma, immediately preceding the unambiguously third-function twins. He is made from Indra's *vīrya*. Both for the hero and for his divine father the second-function label is well justified.

However, there is more to it. Let us first limit attention to the heroes. We have already found several times that whereas Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and twins form a straightforward trifunctional set, Arjuna tends to stand apart. His birth story is strikingly different from theirs, his generalised excellence contrasts with their more

specific qualities, and his disguise is not clearly related to any of the three functions, just as in argument V his birth is not directly linked with any of Indra's sins.

More specifically, Arjuna's links with his fellow representative of the second function are not particularly close. Arjuna and Bhīma occasionally act together, for instance in the conflict following the winning of Draupadī (1.180), but such pairing is not particularly typical. They do not hang together as do the two twins, who were not only born together as Mādri's only children but tend to be treated in parallel thereafter. The contrast between the two second-function representatives and the two third-function ones becomes even more striking if one recalls the definitions of the two functions. The very notion of a third function has sometimes been criticised for the range of concepts that it embraces, while the second function is usually given the clearest and shortest definition of the three. Though the notion of the third function as a *fourre-tout* is wrong, the contrast between the two definitions is valid, and might suggest that paired third-function figures would differ from each other more than would paired second-function figures. But this is certainly not the case here.

Of course Dumézil did not ignore the contrast between Bhīma and Arjuna. Already Wikander had proposed that Vāyu's protégés were more 'more wild, more brutal, more solitary' than those of Indra—the orientations roughly illustrated in Greece by Hercules and Achilles (Dumézil 1968: 48). Elsewhere Dumézil talks of Bhīma and Arjuna as representing the brutal and chivalrous aspects of warrior force that the Ṛg Veda unites in Indra alone (1985: 17, 71), or contrasts the two as the brutal club-wielder versus the chivalrous archer (1987: 142). These formulations, which have been taken up by others, notably Vielle 1997, capture part of the reality, but suggest too great a symmetry between the heroes. They are not simply two equistatutory variants of the second-functional warrior.

This is clear enough from the fact, already noted, that Arjuna contrasts in various ways, not only with Bhīma, but with *all* the other brothers including Bhīma. But it becomes clearer still when we recall that all the brothers are born as kṣatriyas and therefore by definition as warriors. Arjuna's supremacy on the battlefield is therefore not just one quality a hero might have, comparable to others. It represents rather in the highest degree the essence of all warriors, and in particular that of all the Pāṇḍava brothers. Within their estate the others specialise in piety, muscles and good

looks; Arjuna, lacking a specialisation, epitomises the estate as such, and in that sense his excellence lies on a hierarchically higher level than Bhīma's.

On the divine level a comparable asymmetry exists between Vāyu and Indra, being most clearly seen in argument V and the related story of the five Indras. Vāyu contributes only to the birth of his own son, while Indra, alone or with his homonymous predecessors, contributes to the birth of all five. In his progenitive act Vāyu uses the *bala* derived from Indra, while Indra uses only his own resources. The point can be expressed in the form Indra : Vāyu :: whole : part.

The four-functional perspective

Dumézilian method looks above all for the inherited triadic schema, but since it postulates that the first function may be split into two aspects (labelled by Varuṇa and Mitra), it sometimes also recognises inherited tetradic ones. Other tetradic phenomena, not to mention pentadic ones, present the trifunctionalist with problems that are usually solved by postulating ad hoc elaborations. However, pentadic structures are common in the Indo-European world, and in particular cases several comparativists have wanted to derive them from proto-Indo-European schemata. For instance, it was Alwyn and Brinley Rees who first talked of the addition of a fourth function which however 'does not complete the picture' (1961: 113); and Sterckx (1975, 1992) is equally concerned with pentadic phenomena. However, the tendency has been to situate additional elements at the bottom of the hierarchy, whereas my proposal is to situate the valued half of the fourth function above the Dumézilian triad and the devalued one below. Where the fourth function is represented (which is not the case in all contexts), its valued half will cover sovereignty, which must accordingly be removed from the definition of the first function.

Such experiments with models are only interesting if they relate to the real world, or at least to the texts. A number of my previous papers have tried to show the advantages of a bifid fourth function for analysis of material from Nuristan, Greece, India and Rome (e.g. Allen 1996c and in press a), and to minimise repetition I shall simply present here selected results from these analyses, together with a few comments.

context	F4+	F1	F2	F3	F4-
1 Roman priests	rex sacrorum	fl. dial.	fl. mart.	fl. quir.	pontifex
2 linked deities	Jupiter	Fides	Mars	Quirinus	manes
3 varṇa origins	Puruṣa	his mouth	arms	thighs	feet
4 Hindu society	king	brahmans	kṣatriyas	vaiśyas	śūdras

Rows 1 and 4 relate to the paper by Dumézil that first launched trifunctional theory in 1938. In both cases the focus was on the three central entities in the row, on the three flamines maiores and the three twice-born varṇas, and the comparison rested on the fact that both triads appear in the texts with their members in order of descending rank, and that the occupants of a given position in the two lists have something in common. The first flamen matches the first varṇa, the second the second, the third the third. Later, as Dumézil's work advanced, the common factor in each position came to be called a 'function' and was given an explicit definition.

So far, so good; but the comparison has stopped short. The three flamens are included in the *fivefold* ordo sacerdotum, and the myth of origin of the varṇas (Ṛg Veda 10.90.11f.) can also be interpreted as fivefold. First there was the primal man Puruṣa; then, as he was dismembered, the twice-born and the ritually excluded śūdra arose respectively from descending parts of his body. Thus both the triads on which Dumézil concentrated were substructures set within pentadic wholes.

Like the other functions, the fourth needs a definition, and I have proposed that it pertains to what is other, outside or beyond, relative to the domain of the classical functions. Transcendence, as of a whole relative to its parts, is one form of such otherness. The definition was arrived at not a priori, but by reflection on the outer ends of these and a number of other rows.

But why posit a divided fourth function rather than a fifth function? In practice outsiders often are subject to contradictory evaluations—admired or despised, greeted as gods or enslaved—and a similar ambiguity hangs over the Durkheimian concept of the sacred: what is set apart from the profane may be either the good sacred or the bad. But such points are merely suggestive, and a better reason is that valued and devalued representatives of the fourth function do quite often seem to stand closer to each other than to representatives of the other functions. This will seem less odd if one replaces a linear model of the pentadic structure with a circular one, consisting either of five

sectors or of a centre and four peripheral elements. An example of the closeness of the two half-functions will be given below (in connection with Karṇa).

For the moment our main concern is with the valued aspect of the fourth function. In the tabulation above, this is shown by the column which (for Rome) contains both Jupiter, king of the gods, and the rex sacrorum, usually understood as the priestly continuator of the pre-Republican king. Puruṣa, though not particularly a *royal* figure, represents the totality of Hindu society in a creational and mythic sense, while the king does so in a synchronic and practical sense, as is indicated in row 4.

This brings us to a paradox. On the one hand, it is obvious that (whatever the cultural specificities of any particular case) the king represents society as a whole, and stands on a different conceptual level from his subjects. This transcendence qualifies him for interpretation as fourth-functional (valued). On the other hand, Hindu ideology regularly classifies him as a kṣatriya, which puts him in the second function. The only solution (Allen in press b) is to see the king as combining or participating in both, and the question for the rest of the paper is whether the same solution can help us make sense of Arjuna and his divine father.

Arjuna and the fourth function

When we examined the trifunctional interpretation of the brothers, we found repeatedly that Arjuna was the odd man out. His birth was different from the others, the nature of his excellence was difficult to pin down, his disguise was unrelated to the classical functions, his begetting had no link with Indra's sins. On the one hand he is emphatically a member of the pentad, on the other he stands apart from the rest of the structured set. This relative heterogeneity or separateness immediately qualifies him for interpretation as fourth-functional.

In so far as these manifestations of his separateness have a common theme, it is their relation to totality. If his excellence is generalised it is because it relates to the warrior essence which is shared by *all* his brothers, whatever their special orientation. The divine father who begat him directly begat the others indirectly, so that it is Arjuna who is most immediately related to the source of the Pāṇḍavas as a group.

Alternatively (in the story of the Five Indras) it is the multiforms of *his* father who constitute that source. One can look at the matter from many points of view, as indeed the epic does, but the conclusion is clear: Arjuna's relation to the other brothers is as that of whole to part. He is not simply one member of a pentadic sequence.

This link with concepts of totality situates Arjuna squarely under the valued aspect of the fourth function, and thereby, as we have seen, aligns him with the notion of kingship. Even without the idea of a fourth function, Arjuna is of course directly associated with kingship via his divine father. In the Hindu tradition titles such as king (lord, chief, leader...) of the gods are far from being the monopoly of a single god, and are allocated in different ways in texts from different periods. In the Ṛg Veda Indra's kingship is only one among his many attributes (Macdonell 1898: 58), and the label is attached quite commonly to a number of other deities, notably Agni, Soma, Varuṇa and other ādityas (see Schlerath 1960). However, overall, Indra is certainly closer than any other god to being *the* king of the gods, the Indian equivalent of Zeus or Jupiter. O'Flaherty (1975: 56) opens her chapter on him thus: 'The mythology of the god Indra, king of the gods, warrior of the gods, god of rain, begins in the Rig Veda.' More to the point, it is precisely as king and leader of the gods (*rājā devānām pradhāna, devarāja*-1.114.17, 24), that Pāṇḍu thinks of Indra when he plans for his third son. As incarnation of Indra, Arjuna right from his birth participates in royalty.⁹

On the human level, though Arjuna is not a king, the feeling that in some sense he ought to be is not new. Dumézil himself notes the various forms of eminence that characterise Arjuna as distinct from his brothers, linking them with the high profile of Indra in Vedic and pre-Vedic religion (1968: 121). Earlier in the same work (56f.) he talks of Pāṇḍu as 'confused' by the superposition of two mythologies, the Vedic, in which Indra is strong, and the classical Hindu, in which he is king. Reverting to the same point (ibid: 151f.), he describes the poet's handling of it as awkward (*une gaucherie*); it is a passage in which the poets stumble (*broncher*), and where confusion arises. In other words, in spite of one's possible reservations about his formulations, Dumézil quite correctly senses that there are two facets both to the god and to his son, and that the relationship between the two facets is problematic. However, working without the notion of a fourth function, he lacks the analytical vocabulary to identify

the two facets with clarity, and is content with viewing Arjuna simply as second-functional (chivalric).

Approaching the matter from the purely Indological and non-comparativist point of view, Madeleine Biardeau, the leading French specialist in the Great Epic, usually avoids the Dumézilian language of functions altogether, but she too emphatically links Arjuna with royalty. In spite of the fact that Yudhiṣṭhira appears as king in the story, 'the epic makes Arjuna the figure of the ideal king' (Biardeau 1982: 88). Everything indicates that he is the king 'symbolically' (Biardeau 1985: 100), including his name Kirīṭin, 'le Couronné'.¹⁰ Biardeau's pupil Scheuer similarly proposes viewing Arjuna as the king par excellence (1982: 59 n.28). It is Arjuna who, 'in conformity with his royal character' (ibid.: 96) wins the hand of Draupadī, who becomes the wife of all the Pāṇḍavas.

The conclusion is that in spite of his position in the birth order and the other features favouring a second-function interpretation, Arjuna is *also* fourth-functional. In the tabulation above his name could have been entered in the left-most column along with the Roman *rex sacrorum*.

The Mahābhārata evidence drawn on so far in this paper has essentially come from passages used by Dumézil (1968) in support of his trifunctional analysis of the Pāṇḍavas. But surely there will be other evidence bearing on the interpretation of Arjuna? I look first at a topic discussed by Dumézil (1968: 125ff.), then at a few other passages from the epic.

The unrecognised eldest brother

If the fourth function is typically represented by two quite separate halves and Arjuna represents the valued half, one might expect to find a representative of the devalued half. Clearly the slot cannot be filled by anyone from among the five Pāṇḍava brothers mentioned so far, for the twins are convincingly third-functional as a pair, and the minor differences between them in no way suffice to make one of them into any sort of devalued outsider. But a sixth figure exists, a half-brother who is not usually counted as a Pāṇḍava.

Karṇa is the son who was born to Kuntī before her marriage to Pāṇḍu, when she first tried out her boon by summoning Sūrya, the Sun god. Having arrived, the god insisted on impregnating her, and Karṇa is therefore Arjuna's maternal half-brother, just as the twins are his paternal ones. Pāṇḍu and his wives have no further children, so the six-member set of siblings is a totality that cannot be further enlarged without changing the criteria for inclusion.

That Karṇa is both an outsider and devalued is abundantly clear. Since his birth was illegitimate and shameful, Kuntī keeps it secret by casting him adrift in a river in a basket. He is rescued and brought up away from court by foster-parents of low caste (they are SÚtas, charioteers or bards, an occupation 'despised by the twice-born'—Manu 10.46f.); and Kuntī does not publicly acknowledge him until after his death. Although he is privately informed of his identity, he insists on fighting for the Kauravas, the villains of the epic. Expelled by his own mother, insulted for the lowly standing of his adoptive father (1.127.5-7), an ally of the forces of cosmic disorder, he is an excellent occupant of the slot that seemed to need filling.

Karṇa is in fact an instructive representative of his half-function for at least two reasons. Firstly, he is not devalued in all contexts: he has certain good qualities such as loyalty to those who have helped him and generosity to Brahmans. No doubt if the interest of the audience is to be fully engaged, the villains in an epic cannot be entirely without sympathetic qualities. But more to the point, his case illustrates that the labels 'valued' and 'devalued' as applied to the two halves of the fourth function are relative to each other and not absolute—indeed they may eventually prove unsatisfactory.

Secondly, Karṇa exemplifies the tendency mentioned earlier for the two halves of the fourth function to cohere: in other words, Arjuna and Karṇa relate to each other in ways that neither relates to anyone else. In various senses the two actually cohere as a pair more convincingly than Arjuna and Bhīma, whom a trifunctionalist might expect to cohere particularly closely, as fellow members of one function.

It is worth alluding briefly to nomenclature. One of the many names applied to Arjuna is Nara (literally 'Man'—note the generalising or totalising aspect of the name), while Karṇa is said to incarnate the soul of the dead demon Naraka or 'Hell' (3.240.19,

32).¹¹ However, this matter (like many others) is complicated by the pairing of Arjuna as Nara with Krishna, who in this context is called Nārāyaṇa, and the various etymologies seem uncertain. In view of these complications I do no more than note the Nara-Naraka similarity.

More striking is the fact that both Arjuna and Karṇa appear in the central position in important five-element lists that show a certain symmetry. The Pāṇḍava faction has only a single general (Dhṛṣṭadyumna) but it centres on the five brothers. The Kaurava faction centres on the single person of Duryodhana, but it has five generals in succession. Arjuna is the third Pāṇḍava brother, Karṇa is the third Kaurava general.¹² When the two factions are compared to two trees (1.1.65f.), Karṇa and Arjuna are each related individually to the *skandha*, the trunk or crotch.

Both heroes also have a curious link with kingship. As will be recalled, Arjuna, son of the king of the gods, is a virtual or symbolic king. But Karṇa, as Kuntī's first-born, potentially outranks Yudhiṣṭhira, and in the course of his efforts to avert the war, Krishna not only offers him a one-sixth share in Draupadī, but also promises in person, that very day, to consecrate him as king, if he changes sides (5.138.14ff.). Karṇa declines, but what matters here is the offer, which makes him a virtual or conditional king.¹³ Contrast Bhīma, that 'pure' representative of the second function, who is never presented, either implicitly or explicitly, as kingly.

Finally, but most obviously, Arjuna and Karṇa are linked as arch-enemies. Their mutual hostility begins when Karṇa challenges Arjuna at the tournament marking the end of their generation's period of military training (1.124.1ff.), and only ends when Arjuna finally kills Karṇa in Book 8. As Dumézil shows (1968: 129-144), the heroes' enmity reflects that of their divine fathers in the Ṛg Veda, and the special relationship between the two heroes is frequently alluded to. Karṇa even promises Kuntī that it is Arjuna alone among the Pāṇḍavas whom he will try to kill (5.144.20-22), pointing out that whether he himself dies in the attempt or succeeds and takes Arjuna's place, Kuntī will still have five surviving sons.

One might wonder whether the two facets of Arjuna, reflecting the second and fourth function respectively, find any parallel in his arch-enemy. Probably they do.

Karṇa's position in the centre of the five-member list of generals (like Arjuna's in the list of five brothers) reflects the second function (Allen in press b), while his potential royalty reflects the fourth. However his divine father Sūrya is not obviously regal, and could well belong in the devalued half-function.

Three other passages

We can now look briefly at three passages that give further support to the fourth-function interpretation of Arjuna.

I. Hiding the Weapons. Before they can enter the city where they will spend their year in disguise, the Pāṇḍavas have to hide their weapons. Arjuna suggests they choose as hiding place a certain śamī tree in a secluded spot, and thereupon all the brothers unstring their bows. They do so, not according to the birth order, but in the sequence Arjuna, Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Nakula, Sahadeva (4.5.15-23). So in this context the ordering (F4+,1,2,3,3) conforms with the interpretation of Arjuna as 'quasi-king'.

II. Weapons presented by gods. In the course of the twelve-year exile, Arjuna leaves his brothers and sets off via the Himalayas on a journey to heaven. In the course of this he encounters five gods, all of whom give him weapons. The first is Śiva, who visits the self-mortifying hero on a mountain peak. Then come a group of gods who guard the cardinal points: Yama, Kubera, Varuṇa and Indra. Only the first three give him weapons at this point, though Indra promises to do so later (3.42.38). Arjuna then travels by chariot to heaven, where his father fulfils the promise.

There are many questions to be asked of this passage (Allen 1996b, 1998), and I cite it here to make only two points. Firstly, it is difficult not to feel that the pentadic sequence Śiva-triad-Indra is a meaningful one, and that we are dealing with an ascending hierarchy. If so, it follows that Varuṇa, situated within the triad, is outranked by Indra. This of course runs counter to the trifunctionalist view of second-function Indra as outranked by first-function Varuṇa, but it conforms with the view of Indra as fourth-functional.

Secondly, the passage supports the view that Indra, like Arjuna, has two facets. On the one hand he appears on earth as one among the gods of the cardinal points (potentially second-functional); on the other he appears as king of the gods in heaven. It is in his second capacity that he gives Arjuna the arms that will ensure Pāṇḍava victory.

III. Krishna's prophecy. When Karṇa turns down Krishna's offer of the dynastic throne, the latter smilingly assures him that Arjuna's victory is certain. He then makes a prophecy consisting of five parallel pairs of śloka (5.140.6-15). The general format is: 'When you see X on the battlefield, doing Y, then there will be no more Kṛta, no more Tretā, no more Dvāpara.' The last phrase, repeated each time, refers to the first three of the cyclical eras (*yugas*) that constantly recur in the course of cosmic history, and the implication is that the battle marks the start of the fourth, last and worst of the *yugas*, the one in which the audience of the epic lives. But the main point here is the sequence that fills position X: Arjuna, Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, the twins (not distinguished), and finally a set of Kaurava names. In other words, this is the full pentadic sequence with valued and devalued half-functions represented in their 'canonical' position.

Though it is of less significance here, it is worth noting the first three fillers of position Y. In the prophecy, Arjuna, with Krishna as his charioteer, is using various of his god-given weapons and his bow Gāṇḍīva, which sounds like (Indra's) thunderbolt; Yudhiṣṭhira is protecting his army with spells and oblations (japa-homa-); Bhīma, having drunk the blood of a leading Kaurava, is dancing like a rutting elephant. So Arjuna is assimilated to the king of the gods, Yudhiṣṭhira is using the techniques of the first function, and Bhīma is exhibiting savagery and brute strength.¹⁴ The passage thus emphasises, once again, the contrast between second-function Bhīma and the fourth-function facet of Arjuna.

These three passages are not the only ones that could be cited to support the interpretation of Arjuna as fourth-functional, but they illustrate the sort of evidence that can be brought to bear from the Indian epic. In view of the arguments for a common origin lying behind parts of the Indian and Greek epic traditions (e.g. Allen 1995), one can envisage the possibility of further evidence being brought to bear from Greece, and perhaps from elsewhere in the Indo-European world. Moreover the search for further evidence needs to go beyond the hero to consider his divine father's various

homologues in other regions. It can hardly be accidental that, just as Indra himself has two distinct facets, so he can be compared with two separate figures in Roman pseudo-history. On the one hand, Indra can be compared with the warlike third king of Rome, Tullus Hostilius, who is certainly second-functional (Dumézil 1985 part I). On the other, his dealings with the Aśvins, resulting in their incorporation among the gods allowed to drink soma, parallels the dealings of Romulus with the Sabines, resulting in their incorporation in the Roman state (Dumézil 1968: 285ff.); and Romulus represents the valued fourth function (Allen 1996c).

Concluding remarks

The argument has been that Arjuna, and no doubt his divine father (though the latter has not been our main focus) has not only a second-function facet but also a valued fourth-function one. But this is a synchronic formulation, and the question arises how the duality arose. Although the historical details are obviously inaccessible, and much further comparative work is needed, it may be worth offering a preliminary abstract model.

I assume that the Indo-European ideology once formed a framework with five compartments or slots, and that the original figure who became Arjuna belonged unambiguously to the highest valued compartment. However, in the course of the developments that lie behind the Indian epic, the conceptual divide between this compartment and the second-function one became, at least in some contexts, permeable or blurred, so that entities such as Arjuna or his predecessors could come to straddle it. Perhaps one can envisage the process as one of centripetal shrinkage. But whatever model is chosen to conceptualise the process, the reason why Arjuna comes after second-function Bhīma in the birth order is no doubt that this puts him in the central position within the pentad.¹⁵

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NOTES

1. His various discussions have now been synthesised and, to some extent, filled out in the valuable work by Sergent 1997.
2. The three domains making up the pattern are, in descending order of value: sovereignty with its magical and juridical aspects and a sort of maximal expression of the sacred; physical force and valour whose most salient manifestation is victorious warfare; fecundity and prosperity with all sorts of conditions and consequences... (Dumézil 1974: 173).
3. 'The king is the agent of synthesis of the three fundamental functions, which the flamines maiores in contrast isolate and administer analytically' (Dumézil 1974: 576, my translation).
4. 'I live -- and it is not so disagreeable -- with the feeling of provisionality and ephemerality' (1981: 40).
5. It is manifested for instance in the gap that separates the two elite varṇas or social estates, the brahmans and kṛatriya warriors, from the third, the vaiśya or commoners.
6. References are to the Critical Edition. The English translation of that edition by van Buitenen (1973-8) may be found convenient. For scholarship on the Mahābhārata in general see now Brockington 1998.
7. Among them is the *āsura* mode of marriage of their mother, which involves the payment of bride-price and is linked with the third function (Dumézil 1968: 74-6, Allen 1996a: 14ff.).
8. The ultimate nature and origins of Varuṇa seem to me problematic.
9. In contrast, Bhīma's father Vāyu is treated by Schlerath (1960: 22 ff.) under the heading of gods whose links with sovereignty are rare (and no doubt insignificant).

10. He received his *kirīṭā*, his crown or diadem, from Indra in person when he visited him in heaven (cf. Katz 1989:284).

11. The suffix *-ka* is often pejorative (Renou 1961: 245 f.).

12. For similar play with the number five, compare the two fourth-functional modes of marriage of Arjuna (Allen 1996a: 15f.). Both are plural, involving five partners of one sex and one of the other, but the valued marriage with Draupadī involves five males, the devalued relationship with the crocodile Vargā and friends involves five females. The latter is so devalued that it requires an effort to envisage it as a 'marriage' at all.

13. Karṇa had in fact already been consecrated King of Aṅga (1.126.36), but only by Duryodhana; and Aṅga is an outlying domain in the East, and not the central throne for which the great war is fought.

14. The remaining fillers of Y pertain to fighting and do not clearly link with the relevant functions.

15. This paper has benefited from discussion of earlier drafts that were presented in Brussels in 1993 (Institut des Hautes Etudes, conference on Traditional Kingship) and in London in 1995 (Annual Conference of the South Asian Anthropologists Group).