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ON A HUNT FOR 'POSSIBLE' OBJECTIONS

1. For reasons which are his own Das has written a critical examination of *Aryans in the Rigveda*. *Habent sua fata libelli*: the original title, before the booklet lost the article on its way to the publisher, was *The Aryans in the Rigveda*. It presented itself as an attempt to gain a better and more realistic insight into the society in which the Rigvedic hymns were composed. The not uncommon picture of isolated Aryans, surrounded by inimical tribes, is at variance with the text. Why is it so difficult to believe an author on his word? According to Werba 1992, 13 n. 10, the booklet 'was written to disprove the 19th century theory' of Prakritisms in the RV (which is utterly unfounded, as in fact the theory was considered disproved). Das also confuses the object and the means (which inevitably are linguistic ones) and fails to understand the activity of an Indo-Europeanist who tries to distinguish between Rigvedic lexemes which are of Indo-Aryan origin and those which are not. Das mistakes it for a 'hunt for foreign words', which is definitely a misnomer. On the part of the Indo-Europeanist there was at best curiosity, but no 'eagerness' (p. 219), 'longing' (p. 223) or 'wish' to prove anything, nor was there a '— more or less reluctant — approval' (Werba). If there has been an eagerness over the past sixty years, this has been on the part of those who denied or systematically ignored certain facts. Das is still a vehement advocate of this general negative attitude towards the problem of languages in contact. Thomason and Kaufman 1988 have analysed this curious *parti pris* of Neogrammarians, structuralists and generative grammarians. Das' reason for opposing this kind of study, however, is that its results can be misused for political purposes. In a former draft of the peroration he had therefore put his veto on this study in the name of humility. Since in the final draft his position has become less clear, I would like to begin with the end.

Das now proposes a) to acknowledge ('perhaps') 'in all humility and humbleness (—) that there are ultimately mysteries which (—) will forever remain unsolved to all of us' — Of course, there are limits to what we can know, but how shall we know where they are, unless we proceed? His proposal boils down to a general advice to stop thinking.

b) Second possibility: 'we as individuals cannot hope to see the solution of them [viz. these mysteries], though others following us might' — The
curious distinction between 'individuals' and 'others' suggests the idea that what an 'individual' cannot achieve now, can later successfully be done by a collectivity. The only sense I can detect in these words is that Kuiper should desist from his individual efforts and leave it to others of a later generation to continue theirs. The booklet under discussion presented itself as 'a sketchy programme for future research.' Its author hoped to clear the way for a later generation of scholars who will improve upon, and if need be, reject his views. For this to be possible, however, he must offer his experience gained as a starting point.

c) 'Those of us bent on finding answers' [but which researcher is not?] may be impatient and offer 'arbitrarily' 'very rash' statements. Opposite to these bad guys is the category of 'those of us aspiring to search impartially for knowledge', that is: those who are ready to give up further research.

d) By giving up research we 'will not run the risk of forcing ourselves to create answers for everything' [italics mine, K.] — To which researcher this refers, cannot be doubtful.

e) Yet 'we should not despair and cease efforts' — This conclusion, somewhat unexpected after the foregoing, is an afterthought, added after a critic had observed that 'Desponding before beginning is not a token of humility'. It remains puzzling, however, which efforts need not be ceased.

f) We must 'always bear in mind' the misuse politicians may make of our results. — All right, but which effect is this 'bearing in mind' supposed to have? Must 'academic' results be withheld?

The gist of this peroration is apparently: Kuiper 'as an individual' should humbly stop his research but others (whoever they may be) get permission to continue their efforts, provided the results are not politically dangerous.

2. Das places himself in an awkward position by criticizing a study, with the facts and method of which he is not acquainted. Naturally, he confines himself to critically examining 'the premises on which the study is based and the methodology employed in it'(p. 207). However, is it possible to theorize in vacuo, without a knowledge of the facts?

Our discussion may start with what is clearly the central problem, viz. the criteria for stating a word to be foreign. Das can only think in terms of etymology. To him the whole matter boils down to 'a feeling based on etymological unease' (p. 217). His 'impression' (p. 208) is that words are deemed to be foreign because an 'Indo-European etymology does not seem to readily present itself' (pp. 208, 221). A confirmation of this idea he thinks can be found on p. 89, but there it is only emphatically repeated that the criteria are morphological and phonological ones.