

Preface

In the Indian social-religious space, the Vedic period roughly dates from the second half of the second millennium BCE up to the year zero, while the classical period might be considered to span from the beginning of the common era until the 12th c., give or take one or several hundred years. In both periods, a special elite class of people existed that were called Brahmins. Ideally, they neither tilled the fields nor worked as cattle herders, artisans, or the like. In a rough manner, one might say that their material wellbeing depended on *dakṣiṇā* in the Vedic period and on *dāna* in the classical one.

Broadening the perspective beyond *dakṣiṇā* and *dāna*, this book is on all sorts of giving in the context of premodern India, using Vedic, Sanskrit, Buddhist and, to a much lesser extent, Roman and Christian sources. The Brahmanical theory of the gift (i.e., the theory of dutiful gifting, *dharmadāna*) is a major focus of—and has provided a major motivation for—this study. I hope that it proves to be a highlight of this book. While writing this book, the author has observed the ways in which the seemingly diverse givings and takings covered therein are interrelated, and the readers will hopefully be convinced of this as well. Such a project cannot take the form of articles, treating this or that aspect in isolation. The form of a book instead seems best suited to this endeavour as Trautmann (1981, p. 278) has already observed:

The analysis of exchange [...] holds out the promise of synthesizing large and seemingly disparate sectors of the social order by means of a small number of formal principles that run through the economy, the polity, religion, social organization, and the system of kingship. To expound properly the ancient Indian theory of exchange in the full range of its manifestations would require a book in itself [...].

In attacking the quite diverse topics of Indian givings and takings, I am inspired by this challenge thrown down by Trautmann. Unsurprisingly, structuring the vast field of giving and taking is very demanding. Even with respect to the smaller field of dharmic giving, I am sceptical towards the often-found approach of carving up gifting along the headings of “donor”, “recipient”, “ritual”, and “gift”. All too often, it is simply unclear in which of these categories a particular discussion should be placed. For example, the merit to be earned by the donor depends on the properties of the recipient. Furthermore, I do not think that premodern Indian giving can be fruitfully subsumed under the Maussian concept of gifts. Finally, while the taxonomy proposed by Trautmann is certainly very helpful, it is far from a catch-all in the Indian field of giving and taking.

The book is meant to be a “dialogue” in a twofold direction. Firstly, the book is written with the conviction that non-contextual generalisations can make sense, over and above the particulars that deserve mention. Here I am in in general agreement with the

“Defense of the Comparative Method” by Segal (2001). Part Two of the book presents important “emic” perspectives on givings in Vedic, classical Indian, Buddhist, Christian, and Roman literatures. Thus, I discuss non-contextual and imaginary dialogues between these diverse cultures.

Secondly, I aim at dialogues between these emic perspectives on the one hand and “etic” ones on the other hand. Here, I have applications of modern economic, sociological, ethnological, and marketing theories in mind. In particular, rational-choice approaches are sometimes used. While I am aware that many social scientists may not particularly like these approaches, I find them to be insightful and hope to convince readers that they can contribute valuable insights over and above those following from non-rational-choice perspectives. Dialogues between the emic and etic points of view need not be one-directional, i.e., monologues where the modern perspectives may shed light on premodern viewpoints.

Of course, a book of this size (or even a book ten times as large) could not do justice to the different reasons for or circumstances of the various manners of giving and taking. Any reader looking for a broad description of any particular instance of giving might well be disappointed by what he finds in my book. Indeed, where Kane’s “History of Dharmaśāstra” has dozens of pages on any given subtopic, I may have reduced my coverage to only a few pages. The reason for doing so does not relate to the “importance” of a topic. Instead, I try to explain what I find interesting on the basis of the above-mentioned methodological decisions. Thus, this book suffers from a highly subjective selection process. Inversely, the reader may be surprised to find topics that he would not expect to see in a book with this title. Let me mention judicial wagers, the Varuṇa rule, or female hypergamy. While indologists may be surprised about some of the topics covered in the current book, they will notice the often-missing philological depth. Indeed, my current effort does not match the philologically fine-grained analyses of Pali and Vedic sources undertaken by Candotti & Pontillo (2019) and Candotti et al. (2020, 2021).

I have the pleasure to thank many colleagues. I am indebted to David Brick for indepth discussions of translational difficulties. While being skeptical of the rational-choice perspective, Thomas Trautmann gave some very useful hints. Alexander Singer checked the mathematical formulae. Johannes Bronkhorst and Walter Slaje provided clarifying remarks and helpful literature. Tim Lubin offered helpful suggestions. Many thanks go to Valerie Tschiersich from the Bibliothek Orientwissenschaften of Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig. Jan Warzok checked most of my sources and pointed out many mistakes. Several mistakes were discovered by Maximilian Föhl. Big thanks go to David Onofrei, who improved the English wording tremendously. Finally, le-tex publishing services provided the professional typesetting.