

KARMA AND ITS ROLE IN NON-BUDDHIST INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

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Introduction

In this article I will attempt to summarize the views on *karma* of the main doctrines of Indian philosophy as presented by various outstanding modern Indologists. However, as we have translated Étienne Lamotte's classic *Introduction to the "Treatise on the Demonstration of Action"* (*Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa*) of Vasubandhu, the *Treatise on the Demonstration of Action* (*Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa*) by Vasubandhu and the section on *karma* from Asaṅga's Compendium of the Abhidharma (*Abhidharmasamuccaya*) which present the main aspects of the general Buddhist view on *karma* as well as the views of the different Buddhist schools, for the appendix of the translation of the Karma chapter of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, there is no need to try to sum up what has already been summarized by the masters themselves. But as these texts as well as the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* itself do not present the historical development of the doctrine of *karma* and also do not spend much time on presenting the different views of the non-Buddhist doctrines, it may still be helpful to fill in the gaps so that the Buddhist view on *karma* and the details as presented in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, considered to be the first systematic and at the same time classical formulation of *karma*, will be more comprehensible.

This article will therefore first attempt to present the beginnings and early development of the non-Buddhist doctrines of *karma* and then move on to a summary of the six orthodox systems of classical Hindu philosophy. Following this, we will step back historically and present the views of the six prominent non-Buddhist and non-Hindu teachers as formulated in the important *Samaññaphala Sutta* in the *Digha Nikāya*.

Although references to *karma* are now quite frequent in the West, its import in general and for Indian philosophy in particular may still be, or because of it, underestimated. To emphasize the importance given to *karma* in Indian philosophy, we will therefore start out with three quotations from outstanding modern scholars and then, without commenting on them, move on with the material as outlined in the table of contents.

Jitendra N. Mohanty in his Encyclopedia Britannica article 'Indian Philosophy' states:

Three basic concepts form the cornerstone of Indian philosophical thought:

(1) the self, or soul (*ātman*), (2) works (*karma*, or *karman*), and (3) salvation (*mokṣa*).

Wilhelm Halbfass (1998) states:

The combined beliefs in *karma* and rebirth, that is, the retributive power of actions and decisions and a beginningless, though not necessarily endless, succession of births and deaths for living beings, constitute a fundamental premise of the great majority of India's religious and philosophical traditions.

Finally, Étienne Lamotte starts out his *Introduction to the "Treatise on the Demonstration of Action" of Vasubandhu*¹ with the following words:

The doctrine of action, of *karman*, forms the keystone of the entire Buddhist edifice: action is the fundamental explanation of sentient beings and of the receptacle world, and it is in accordance with action or *karman* that the Buddhist scholars have built their philosophy.

A. BEGINNINGS AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF KARMA

AA. TERMINOLOGY

Before discussing the beginnings and early development of *karma*, issues of terminology as related to *karma* should be clarified by quoting Wilhelm Halbfass (1998):

In Sanskrit, the realm of rebirth and karmic retribution is known as '*saṃsāra*'. [...]

The word '*karma*', one of the most familiar Indian loan words in colloquial English and other Western languages, is the nominative of the Sanskrit noun *karman*, which is a derivative of the verbal root *kṛ*, 'to do', 'to make'. The literal and primary meanings of *karman* are 'deed', 'work', 'action', 'act' (often with ritual connotations), but also 'object' in a grammatical sense.² The semantic linkage with an inherent retributive power of acts and decisions, or with an accumulation and preservation of their effects, occurs in some *Upaniṣads* and, much more clearly and explicitly, in early Buddhism (Pāli: *kamma*).

A familiar alternative for *karman* in this sense, especially in Hindu literature, is *adṛṣṭa*, 'unseen', that is, the 'invisible' results of our actions. In closer association with ritual acts, we also find the term *apūrvā*. Good *karma* is often referred to as *dharma* or *puṇya* ('merit'), bad *karma* as *adharma* or *pāpa* ('demerit', 'evil', 'guilt'). The term *karmavipāka* refers, primarily in Buddhism, to the 'ripening' or 'fruition' of the karmic potential, while *karmāśaya* refers to the 'karmic residue' or the 'accumulation of *karma*'. [...] The common phrase 'law of *karma*' has no terminological equivalent in traditional Indian thought, where there is no use for the modern concept of 'natural laws', nor any commitment to their systematic empirical verification. 'Law of *karma*' is not only a terminological innovation, but, in many of its usages, also a conceptual reinterpretation.

¹ See our translation in the Appendix.

² Halbfass (2000) specifies: In contrast to the noun *kriyā*, which also has as its root *kṛ*, *karman* does not refer primarily to action as such and its actual execution but above all to the executed action as the result of action as well as the executed and to be executed work.

AB.

DECENTRALIZATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF KARMA AND REBIRTH

In general, the popular notion that India was the origin and locus of ideas of rebirth does not seem to be correct. Obeyesekere (2002) in his recent book 'Imagining Karma' explores the beliefs of small-scale societies of West Africa, Melanesia, traditional Siberia, Canada, and the northwest coast of North America and compares their ideas with those of the ancient and modern Indic civilizations and with the Greek rebirth theories of Pythagoras, Empedocles, Pindar, and Plato. He thus decenters the popular notion that India was the origin and locus of ideas of rebirth.

Also, although the doctrine of *karma*, as we will discuss later in more detail, is closely connected with the doctrine of rebirth, we should not make the mistake that every doctrine of rebirth presupposes the doctrine of *karma*, because there are doctrines of rebirth which do without it, both outside and inside India.

AC.

CANDIDATES FOR HISTORICAL PRIMACY OF THE DOCTRINE OF KARMA IN INDIA

More specifically, with regard to the historical origins in India of the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth, Wilhelm Halbfass (1998) cautions that they cannot be determined with certainty and precision, and that it is essential not to presuppose and impose the standards of a unified theory of *saṃsāra* or of any other kind of systematic theory. In her introduction to 'Karma and Rebirth' Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (ed.) discusses different candidates for historical primacy, namely, Vedic thinkers, heterodox thinkers (Jaina, Buddhist, and Ājīvika), Dravidians and tribal religions:

Gananath Obeyesekere's essay suggests that we look for the origins of the idea of *karma* in ancient Indian tribal religions in the Gangetic region where Buddhism and Jainism, as well as the religion of the Ājīvakas, flourished. He argues that it is reasonable to suppose that a simple theory of rebirth, not unlike those which occur in other parts of the world, underwent certain changes in order to develop into the specifically Indian theory of *karma*; that ethicization³ transformed rebirth into the Buddhist and Jaina theories of *karma*. [...]

It is clear from Obeyesekere's presentation that the *karma* theory of rebirth is not a linear development from Vedic and Upaniṣadic religion, but a composite structure. At this point one might ask if it would be possible to separate these strands and to determine the chronological order in which they developed. It seems implicit in Obeyesekere's argument that the 'tribal' substratum came first, and indeed many scholars have long supported a

³ According to G.W. Muller (www.iias.nl/iiasn/iiasn7/south/gonda.html), ethicization is a process whereby a morally right or wrong action becomes a religiously right or wrong action that in turn affects a person's destiny after death.

theory that all three of the great ancient religions of India originated with non-Aryan tribal teachers in the Ganges valley. But since we know virtually nothing about these hypothetical sages other than our own defining assumption that they were *not* Vedic, it might be argued that 'tribal' is merely a scholarly way of saying 'we do not know who they were'.

She concludes that "rather than looking for one central 'source' which was then embroidered by 'secondary influences' like a river fed by tributary streams, it would be better to picture the intellectual fountainhead of ancient India as a watershed consisting of many streams".

These comments will have to suffice here in regard to the issue of historical primacy.

AD.

THE VEDAS AND KARMAN

The Veda, meaning 'knowledge', is a collective term of the sacred scriptures of the Hindus which were composed in archaic Sanskrit. There are four collections (*saṃhitā*) of the Veda or Vedas:

- 1) *R̥g Veda*, comprised of hymns,
- 2) *Yajur Veda*, dealing with sacrificial formulas or mantras,
- 3) *Sāma Veda*, referring to melodic recitations,
- 4) *Atharva Veda*, containing a large number of magic formulas.

Each of the Vedas contains four sections:

- i) *Samhitā*, i.e., the four Vedas (c. 1500-1200 B.C.E.);
- ii) *Brāhmaṇas*, a body of prose writing discussing the origin and significance of sacrificial rites and ceremonies (c. 800-600 B.C.E.);
- iii) *Āraṇyakas* (forest-texts), being partly included in the *Brāhmaṇas* and partly reckoned as independent, expounding the symbolism of the more difficult rites (c. 600 B.C.E.);
- iv) *Upaniṣads*, discussing the nature of the universe and man's relation to it (c. 700-500 B.C.E.).

The *Samhitās* and the *Brāhmaṇas* form the *Karma Kāṇḍa* ('action part') of the Vedas, the *Āraṇyakas* and *Upaniṣads* form the *Jñāna Kāṇḍa* ('knowledge part') of the Vedas. The entire corpus of Vedic literature became the most sacred literature of Hinduism, known as '*śrūti*', divinely revealed texts not composed by any person (*apuruṣeya*), embodying the results of intuitive experiences of seers, in contrast to the later religious literature known as '*smṛti*', traditional texts based on human memory, like the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhagavadgītā*.⁴

⁴ Cf. Radhakrishnan (1957; p. 3) and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* entries: 'Veda', 'Vedic texts', 'Hinduistic philosophy' (Mohanty).

In regards to the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth, Halbfass⁵ (1998, 2000) makes the general comment that the Vedas and *Brāhmaṇas* provide significant antecedents or traces for the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth, because

- i) death,
- ii) the possibility of the continuity after death,
- iii) the power of ritual actions and
- iv) the idea of cosmic balance and justice (*ṛta*),

are addressed in them. However, as they do not show any clear recognition of the doctrine as such, he states that it is beyond doubt that the ‘standard version’ or Potter’s common core *karma* theory or ‘classical *karma* theory of India’ (CKTI)⁶ cannot be found in explicit form in them.

Vishwanath Prasad Varma gives further details about *ṛta* and its relation to ritual actions:

The Vedic poets and singers adhered to the belief in *ṛta*—the cosmic law of harmony and order. This order was recognized, not merely as a mechanical uniformity, but as proceeding from a superior moral and beneficent force symbolized by the god Varuṇa. In the Vedas we also find reference to the *vrata* of *ṛta* followed by the gods. *Vrata* is the law of effective austere living, and, according to the Yajur Veda, through the cultivation of the vows in one’s life alone can a man testify to his sincere belief in cosmic moral harmony. Thus the idea of perceptible universal order and rhythm at the physical level was supplemented by the belief in a law of moral order.

The ritualistic cult of the sacrifices was an exemplification, at the religious and practical level, of the belief in a universal moral order of *ṛta* and *satya* (truth).

Mahony (1987) elaborates on the power of ritual action in relation to the continuity after death:

This sacerdotal performance was known as *karman*, the ‘action’ of the ritual undertaken to gain a particular end. The rites were often quite expensive and the rewards not always immediately realized, so the patrons were reassured that their support of the ceremony would benefit them sometime in the future.

⁵ As you will notice, the writings of the late Wilhelm Halbfass (1998, 2000) provide the continuous thread for my presentation. As Halbfass’ book (2000) is available in German, I will paraphrase/translate/summarize certain sections throughout this article.

⁶ Karl Potter, in: O’Flaherty, 1980, pp. 109: “The CKTI holds that certain fundamental features of one’s present life—viz., the genus, species, and class into which one has been born, the length of life one is (likely) to live, and the type of affective experiences one is having—are conditioned by one’s actions in a previous existence. I call the CKTI, thus understood, the ‘common core’ because this much seems to be accepted by all classical Indian philosophers and scientists, be they Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain.”

Arguments in defense of this notion that the reward for one's present ritual action is reaped in the future laid part of the foundation for later doctrines of rebirth and transmigration.

In regard to the continuity after death and the development of the notion of transmigration Mohanty (EBO 2003) explains:

The hymns may, in general, be said to express a positive attitude toward human life and to show interest in the full enjoyment of life here and hereafter rather than an anxiety to escape from it. The idea of transmigration and the conception of the different paths and worlds traversed by good men and those who are not good—i.e., the world of Viṣṇu and the realm of Yama—are found in the Vedas. The chain of rebirth as a product of ignorance and the conception of release from this chain as the greatest good of the spiritual life are markedly absent in the hymns.

ADA.

THE UPANIṢADS AND KARMAN

In regards to death and the continuity after death as addressed in the Upaniṣads, Halbfass (1998; 2000, pp. 37ff.) goes on to state that, although in the older *Upaniṣads*⁷ (prior to 500 B.C.E.) the formulations of the doctrines of *karma* and rebirth are still tentative, partial and more or less isolated, some of the oldest *Upaniṣads* (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya*) provide us with more specific approximations and anticipations of the later concept of *saṃsāra*, the most significant example being the cyclical explanation of life and death found in the combined doctrines of the 'five fires' (*pañcāgnividyā*) and the 'two paths', i.e., the cyclic 'way of the fathers' (*pitṛyāna*) and the 'way of the gods' (*devayāna*) that transcends all cycles.

Mahony (EBO 2003) elaborates on the 'two paths':

The composers of the major *Upaniṣads* (eighth to fifth century B.C.E.) generally saw two paths open to the deceased at the time of death. The lower path, one on which the person eventually returns to earth in a subsequent birth, is described as the 'way of the fathers' (*pitṛyāna*) and is traveled by those who perform the rituals in hopes of material gain. The higher path, the way of the gods (*devayāna*), is one that does not lead to rebirth on earth and is taken by those who have renounced worldly ends and practice austerities in the forest.

Now specifically about *karma*, Mahony and Halbfass go on to say that the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* proclaims *karma* to be the decisive factor for the continuation of existence after death:

⁷ *Upaniṣad*, Skt., lit. *upa*: 'near', *ni*: 'down', *sad*: 'sit', 'to sit down near to', that is, at the feet of the guru, in order to receive the confidential, secret teaching. The *Upaniṣads* form the final portion of the *śruti* (the revealed part of the Veda) and the principal basis of Vedānta, the philosophical conclusion derived from the Vedas. EEPR (1989).

The early or oldest *Upaniṣads* which are associated with the *Brāhmaṇas* are the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, *Chāndogya*, *Aitareya*, *Taittiriya*, and *Kaṣītaki Upaniṣads*.

Seeking to understand the Brahmanic notion of the ritual in anthropological rather than sacerdotal terms, the Upaniṣadic sages taught that all physical and mental activity was an internal reflection of cosmic processes. Accordingly, they held that every action, not only those performed in the public ritual, leads to an end. One's behavior in the past has determined one's situation in the present, and the totality of one's actions in the present construct the conditions of one's future. Thus the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*'s assertion that "truly, one becomes good through good action, bad by bad" (III.2.13) represents the encompassing Upaniṣadic scope of *karman*. From this notion arises the idea that one's worldly situation and personality are determined by one's desire: that is, one's desire affects one's will; one's will leads one to act in certain ways; and, finally, one's actions bring proportionate and appropriate results. [...]

The only way to break this turning wheel of life and death (*saṃsāra*) was to free oneself of the structures and processes of *karman*. The composers of the *Upaniṣads* understood this liberation to take place (i) through the practice of yoga or (ii) through the intervention of a personal supreme deity who lived beyond the karmic realm.⁸

AE.

THE MAHĀBHĀRATA AND KARMAN

As we have mentioned above, Hinduism distinguishes between two types of holy scripture: *śruti* (revealed scriptures) and *smṛti* ('tradition'). The later scriptures are regarded as of human origin and as valid only when they are assumed to derive from a *śruti*. *Smṛti* includes among others the *Mahābhārata* (c. 4th century B.C.E., Halbfass) which recounts the conflict between two claimants to the throne, the two Bhārata families, the evil Kauravas and the virtuous Pāndavas, and symbolizes the struggle between the forces of good and evil. Its most important philosophical section is the *Bhagavadgītā*.

In regards to our discussion on *karma*, Halbfass (1998) states that clearer formulations of what may be called a 'standard version' of *karma* and rebirth emerge in the *Mahābhārata* and other texts of the period beginning around 400 B.C.E. as, for example, the 'law texts' (*Dharmaśāstras*), with their elaborate catalogues of different acts and their karmic compensation. The *Mahābhārata* itself is familiar with the two basic postulates which define the 'classical' *karma* theory, namely, that:

- (1) no morally relevant action may disappear without its appropriate karmic retribution as its effect (*kṛtavipraṇāśa*);
- (2) no positive or negative experiences and modes of being can arrive or be enjoyed without a karmic cause (*akṛtābhyāgama*).

⁸ Mahony (1987).

This is also expressed by Louis de La Vallée Poussin (1914) who states that the doctrine of *karma* was formulated in definite terms at an early stage and confirms the famous quotation from the *Mahābhārata*:

As a man himself sows, so he himself reaps; no man inherits the good or evil act of another man. The fruit is of the same quality with the action, and, good or bad, there is no destruction of the action.

He goes on to say that this doctrine might be called the essential element, not only of all moral theories in India, but also of popular belief.

AEA.

THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ AND KARMAN

To turn now more specifically to the *Bhagavadgītā* and its relation to *karma*, Mahony (1987) comments that the authors of the *Bhagavadgītā* developed the doctrine that it is the desire for certain results, and not the action itself, that gives rise to the mechanism of karmic processes, and that therefore freedom from the bonds of *karman* is not achieved through cessation of action but when one acts without desire, when one renounces the attachment one has for the fruits of one's actions. Further, this renunciation of desire can only be obtained through *bhakti-yoga*, the loving surrender to God's will, because ritual action, although meritorious when properly performed, requires wealth. and ascetic meditation, although leading to release, is difficult to perfect.

But beyond its particular role as document for the development of the doctrine of *karma* in India, Halbfass (2000) and Radhakrishnan (1957, p. 101) explain that the *Mahābhārata* and *Bhagavadgītā*, a religious classic rather than a philosophical treatise, reflect the transition from the presystematic way of thinking and way of presentation of the Vedic-Upaniṣadic texts to the literature of the classic philosophical systems of Hinduism by integrating into a comprehensive synthesis the different elements of the Vedic cult of sacrifice, the Upaniṣadic teaching of the Absolute *Brahman*, the Bhāgavata theism, the Sāṃkhya dualism, and the Yoga meditation. And this leads to our next main topic.

B.

THE SIX ORTHODOX SYSTEMS OF HINDU PHILOSOPHY AND KARMAN

During the centuries preceding the beginning of the Common Era, the concepts of *karma* and *saṃsāra* became, according to Halbfass (1998), almost universally accepted premises of Indian thought and literature, with the exception of the materialist Carvākas and a few other groups. In addition, older texts and doctrines and ideas, such as the conceptions of fate (*daiva*) or time (*kāla*) as cosmic powers, were interpreted and reinterpreted in the light of the *karma* theory.

The six 'orthodox philosophical systems' of Hinduism are the (1) Vaiśeṣika, (2) Nyāya, (3) Sāṃkhya, (4) Yoga, (5) Mīmāṃsā, (6) Vedānta.

In regards to the term 'orthodox' (*āstika*), it refers to a system which accepts

- i) the authority of the Vedas;
- ii) the superiority of the *Brahmans* (the class of priests), who are the expositors of the law (*dharma*);
- iii) a society made up of the four traditional classes (*varṇa*).⁹

In regards to the term 'philosophical', one could simply say that philosophy refers to the love of or searching for (*philos*) wisdom (*sophia*). Greek philosophy starts with amazement, wonderment, curiosity and is looking for the primary cause (*arche*). In this way philosophy replaces mythological thinking.

In regards to the term 'system', Karl Potter (EIP, II, 1) explains it as the following:

A full-scale philosophical system is generally expected to speak to problems in the following areas: (1) metaphysics, (2) epistemology, (3) ethics and theory of value, (4) logic, (5) philosophical method.

It might be helpful to clarify some of these terms since we will be using them frequently from now on.

Metaphysics comes from the Greek *meta ta physica* ('after or beyond physics') and refers in a narrow sense to the book written after Aristotle's *Physics* (Nature), and in a wider sense refers to that which goes beyond physics or any other discipline. In his *Die Grundbegriffe der Antiken Philosophie* (The Fundamental Terms of Ancient [Greek] Philosophy), Martin Heidegger comments that metaphysics deals with entities as entities in their totality and that therefore every metaphysical question includes the questioner. The 'fundamental question' of Metaphysics is formulated as: "What is?", or, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Metaphysics thus looks for the primary cause (*arche*) which, as a formal term, refers to 'the first out of which..., the last to which things can be referred to'.

⁹ Cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* entry: 'āstika'.

The two main laws of metaphysics are described as (i) the law of contradiction: for a reasoning to be true, it must exclude all contradictory statements, and (ii) the law of sufficient reason: we must establish sufficient ground in order to demonstrate that a thing is necessarily this thing and not another thing, or nothing else.

Metaphysics has an onto-theological character:

- i) ontology (study [*logos*] of entities or beings or being [*onta*]) addresses the totality of entities in general, in the sense of its most general characteristics; or addresses entities as such;
- ii) theology (study of god [*theos*]) addresses the totality of entities as entities in the sense of the highest and therefore divine entity; or addresses entities as a whole; the wholeness of this whole is the unity of beings, the ground that brings them forth and unifies them. From a philosophical point of view god or *theos* is not necessarily a personalized god.

So much for metaphysics to which from now on I will refer as 'ontology', as do some scholars.

Epistemology comes from the Greek *episteme* ('knowledge') and *logos* ('study' or 'theory'). It asks about the conditions of the possibility of knowledge, and does not necessarily ask about ultimately or primary causes or principles (*arche*) as ontology does.

Ethics comes from the Greek *thikos* (from *ethos* meaning 'custom' or 'usage'; Latin, *moralis*) (W.L. Reese). It refers to acting in terms of the good and the right or the bad and the wrong; it refers to injunctions constituting the moral precepts, to discipline.

Theory of value, according to Potter, refers to the nature of liberation, *karma*, transmigration, the abilities of yogis and sages, the question of human versus divine freedom, and the relative worth of the various paths to liberation. Instead of the term 'theory of value', I will be using 'soteriology'.

Soteriology comes from the Greek *soteria*, salvation (Latin: *salvatio*). It refers to the doctrine of salvation from some dire situation and includes ethics, the path of deliverance, cessation, enlightenment.

Now, specifically about Indian systems, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, Halbfass (2000) comments that the beginnings and style of the 'systematic' philosophy received important impulses from the old-Indian traditions of debate and their standards of coherence, particularly from the discussions and rivalries between the schools and their world views. All classical systems subjected themselves to these standards, but they developed their own particular versions of the doctrine of the 'means of valid cognition' (*pramāṇa*), necessary and permissible for the establishment of tenets of the particular school. In contrast to the Vedic-Upaniṣadic texts, the doctrine of *karma* with its two basic postulates, as presented above, is now generally presupposed and the role which *karma* and rebirth plays within these systems is now more or less pronounced and more or less explicit:

- In some cases, the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth appears from its early period as an organic part of the system, as, for example, in Buddhism and Jainism.
- In other cases, one can observe that the doctrine is appropriated with increasing clarity and assimilated into the context of the particular system, as, for example, in the Vaiśeṣika system.
- In some other systems, central terms subsequently become coordinated to the postulates of the doctrine of *karma* and adjusted to it, for example, in the Sāṃkhya with its conception of the primal nature or materiality (*prakṛti*) and its fundamental forces (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*).

Moreover, in regard to the fundamental texts which form the basis of the six classical orthodox Hindu systems, although they are not considered to be *śrūti* (revealed text), it is good to keep in mind Mohanty's comment (EBO 2003) in the following, since in relation to Western thought there is a striking difference in the manner in which Indian philosophical thinking is presented as well as in the mode in which it historically develops:

There is, apparently, an underlying assumption in the Indian tradition that no individual can claim to have seen the truth for the first time and, therefore, that an individual can only explicate, state and defend in a new form a truth that had been seen, stated and defended by countless others before him: hence the tradition of expounding one's thoughts by affiliating oneself to one of the systems (*darśanas*). If one is to be counted as a great master (*ācārya*), one has to write a commentary (*bhāṣya*) on the *sūtras* of the *darśana* concerned, or one must comment on one of the *bhāṣyas* and write a *ṭīkā* (subcommentary). The usual order is *sūtra* (aphoristic summaries of the main points of a system), *bhāṣya* (commentary), *vārttikā* (collection of critical notes), *ṭīkā* (subcommentary). At any stage, a person may introduce a new and original point of view, but at no stage can he claim originality for himself.

Since we will now discuss *karma* in the context of philosophical "systems" where the set of the basic elements are intended to reflect internal coherence and unity provided by rules governing their permissible combination and transformation (W.L. Reese), it will be necessary to begin the presentation of each system with a short description of its ontology and other topics important in our context, such as the main representatives, its basic texts, the explanation of the name of the system, etc. Then we will move on to discuss *karma* as presented in the particular system.

In the following, the six systems will be discussed in pairs which are traditionally considered to be related to each other. Brief summaries will be provided which, of course, carry the danger of oversimplification and which may be a little dense in some places. The reader is therefore advised to pursue the topics in more detail in the books and articles found in the footnotes and in the list of resources at the end of this article.

BA.

THE NYĀYA-VAIŚEṢIKA SYSTEM

The first pair are the Vaiśeṣika and the Nyāya. Historically the Vaiśeṣika system had separate origins and interests different from Nyāya.

The Vaiśeṣika belonged to an old tradition of pluralistic and realistic thinking and was—particularly in its early period—“a philosophy of nature most concerned with the comprehensive enumeration and identification of all distinct and irreducible world constituents, aiming to provide a real basis for all cognitive and linguistic acts” (Eli Franco). Its name may well account for this endeavor for distinction (*viśeṣa*).

The Nyāya, on the other hand, concerned itself primarily with questions about dialectic, logic and epistemology. Its name means ‘that by which the mind is led to a conclusion’ (Radhakrishnan), often translated as ‘logic’, also as ‘method (of proof)’.

Later, these two systems formed an alliance which became so close that they amalgamated into a single syncretistic school, mutually complementing each other. In terms of the presentation of the ontology of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, it will therefore suffice to focus just on the Vaiśeṣika.

The *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* is the basic Vaiśeṣika text ascribed to a probably fictitious person named Kaṇāda, the legendary founder of the school. The great systematizer and scholiast of the school is Praśastapāda (c. 500 C.E.).

The *Nyāyasūtra* is the basic Nyāya text ascribed to Gautama who is also known as Akṣapāda. Great commentators are Vātsyāyana (c. 400 C.E.), Uddyotakara, Vācaspati, Udayana.

BAA.

THE VAIŚEṢIKA SYSTEM AND THEIR DOCTRINE OF CATEGORIES

In regards to its ontology, the *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* classifies all of reality into six basic categories (*padārtha*):

- i) substance (*dravya*),
- ii) quality (*guṇa*),
- iii) motion (*karma*),
- iv) universal (*sāmānya*),
- v) particularity (*viśeṣa*),
- vi) inherence (*samavāya*).

These six categories are ontologically distinct entities and have three abstract attributes of ‘is-ness’ (*astitva*), that is, (1) objectivity or factual identifiability, (2) knowability, and (3) nameability (Franco).

Another way of looking at this, as S. R. Bhatt (1997) explains,¹⁰ is that according to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, reality is a totality of (i) substratum (*dharmīn*), (ii) properties (*dharma*) and (iii) relations (*sambandha*). Thus in the Nyāya Vaiśeṣika pluralistic metaphysics there cannot be a simple entity, for example, the *puruṣa* in the Sāṃkhya system (see below) which is completely distinct from *prakṛti*, but the real, by the very force of its nature, has to be a complex entity.

Substance (*dravya*) is a substratum of qualities, action, etc. The *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* lists nine substances (*dravya*):

- (1) earth (*prthivī*), (2) water (*jala*), (3) fire (*tejas*), (4) air (*vāyu*), (5) ether or space (*ākāśa*),
- (6) direction (*dik*), (7) time (*kāla*), (8) internal organ (*manas*) and (9) self (*ātman*).

To provide a framework for our discussion of *karma*, we will provide some details on the first three of the six categories (*padārtha*): i) substance, ii) quality and iii) motion.

(i) *Substance*: In regard to the self (*ātman*), an innumerable number exist of them, but each of them is ubiquitous, i.e., they pervade each other, and each of them is eternal.

In regard to the internal organ (*manas*), it is eternal and infinitesimal in size; an innumerable number of them exists, but each soul has only one internal organ. Being atomic in size, the internal organ is incapable of apprehending many objects simultaneously but, on the other hand, it moves around quite swiftly and in this way it appears as if the mind were apprehending many objects simultaneously.

The selves, even though ubiquitous, are restricted to individual bodies as the place of their experiences and activities because their internal organ is connected with the body (Franco). However, on the other hand, yogis are able to move the internal organs in and out of their bodies at will.

In regard to earth, water, fire and wind, each of them has two modes of existence: as atoms they are eternal and infinitesimal in size; as products they are non-eternal.

(ii) *Quality*: In regard to quality (*guṇa*), it is a property of substance and as such depends on substance as its substratum, but qualities are ontologically distinct entities. The *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* of Kaṇāda lists 17 qualities, color, taste, etc., in contrast to the classical system of Pāśastapāda which extends the number of qualities to 24 (c. 500 C.E.). The special qualities of the self in the *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* are cognition (*buddhi*), pleasure (*sukha*), pain (*duḥkha*), desire (*icchā*), hatred (*dveṣa*), effort (*prayatna*), all of which are impermanent. It is by 'effort' that the omnipresent self, incapable of movement itself, initiates mechanistically conceived psychological and physical processes (Franco).

(iii) *Motion*: As in the case of quality, motion (*karma*) is a property of substance. There are 5 varieties of motion: (i) going up; (2) going down; (3) contraction; (4) expansion; (5) going.

¹⁰ 'Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika', p. 134 in: *Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy* (Indira Mahalingam and Brian Carr), London, Routledge 1997.

S. R. Bhatt explains that while quality (*guṇa*) is passive and does not take us beyond the things it belongs to, motion is a transitive process by which one substance reaches another. *Karman* as a category should not be confused with retributive *karma*, which, as we will see, the Vaiśeṣika refers to as *adr̥ṣṭa* or *dharma/adharma*.

In the context of our discussion on *karma* these few remarks about the Vaiśeṣika ontology may suffice. With the help of these explanations we can now turn to the discussion of *karma* itself. Here we will treat the two systems separately.

BAB.

THE VAIŚEṢIKA SYSTEM AND KARMAN

In this section we will discuss the following topics:

- a general account of *karma* through the notions of *dharma*, *adharma* and *adr̥ṣṭa*
- the explanation of Praśastapāda of the general mechanism of how *adr̥ṣṭa* works in regards to the processes of life and death, rebirth and cosmic processes
- a specific account of the cosmic role of *adr̥ṣṭa* at the beginning of a new world period
- questions, problems and theistic solutions.

Halbfass (2000) notes that the doctrine of *karma* and the mechanism of karmic retribution was not very important and not fully integrated in the oldest Vaiśeṣika, as can be seen from the list of 17 qualities, but in the classical system of Praśastapāda they were appropriated with increasing clarity and assimilated, as can be seen from its list of 24 qualities of which, particularly noteworthy in our context, are two qualities of the self, namely:

- i) merit (*dharma*),
- ii) demerit (*adharma*).

But before discussing these two qualities, we should note that, apart from these two qualities which are related to *karma*, another quality called dispositional tendencies (*saṃskāra*) is listed which has three types, one of which, ‘mental traces’, is also classified as a quality of the self. Mental traces are produced by vivid knowledge, habit, or a special effort of attention, i.e., they are not necessarily or not exclusively produced by karmic action, and they are particularly efficacious in the production of memory.

In regard to merit and demerit (*dharma* and *adharma*), good or bad *karma*, both are seen as qualities of the self (*ātman*) that stick to the self until retribution takes place. Praśastapāda refers to them jointly not as *karman* but as *adr̥ṣṭa*, the ‘unseen’ result of our actions, the empirically not graspable retributive causality of our actions. In order to distinguish *dharma* and *adharma*, Vaiśeṣika refers to the orthodox ‘law books’ (*Dharmaśāstra*), where ‘good’ refers to what is in accord with the directives of these texts, and ‘bad’ to what is in discord with them.

Adr̥ṣṭa, as Halbfass (2000) states, seems to be used mainly in two different ways, but not as part of the 17 qualities, in the *Vaiśeṣikasūtra*:

- 1) in a physical-cosmological way and
- 2) in a religious-ritualistic way.

In its physical-cosmological use, *adr̥ṣṭa* seems above all to have the function of explaining extraordinary or irregular phenomena for which no other explanation can be found (as, for example, magnetism, and the upward-movement of flames). In such cases the Sūtra text does not seem to intend to refer to and to presuppose any implication of reward and punishment, of retribution of action. *Adr̥ṣṭa* appears here as a causal factor, as a possible, though not more clearly determined, physical explanatory factor among others, e.g., 'heaviness' (*gurutva*) or 'fluidity' (*dravatva*), which also are classified as qualities (*guṇa*).

In its religious-ritualistic use, *adr̥ṣṭa* is used in reference to the 'unseen' results of religiously or ritually correct or incorrect performed actions.

But *adr̥ṣṭa* is also used as causal factor in the formation of dreams, in the arising of extraordinary ways of cognition (*ār̥ṣajñāna*), etc.

How does Praśastapāda explain the mechanism of how *karma* works?

Halbfass (2000) answers that for Praśastapāda the self, as we have explained above, is omnipresent or ubiquitous, i.e., it is at least potentially present in the whole cosmos. However, actual presence is, of course, in need of the actualization through the 'inner organ' (*manas*) and a body, both of which are bound to a particular spatial position. This doctrine allows then the assumption that *dharma* and *adharma* stick to a self and can unfold their efficacy everywhere in the world on things that do not necessarily have to be at the same place "as the body" of the particular self.

Whereas in the *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* the 'unseen force' is above all used to explain special or exceptional phenomena, for Praśastapāda and his followers it is a factor which (i) pervades all processes of life and consciousness and (ii) determines the cosmos.

In regard to a single embodied living being and its processes of life and death and rebirth, this doctrine implies that *adr̥ṣṭa* is the determining structural and organizational principle of that body assigned to that self or soul as a specific vehicle for its reward and punishment. *Adr̥ṣṭa* is always part of the efficient causal complex, secondary cause, collaborating factor for life in general but in particular for breathing which is constitutive for life, as well as for all processes of thought, sensation and cognition. Death occurs if a certain contingent or quota of good or bad *karma* is exhausted and is not available anymore for the support of the processes of life.

As for rebirth, this doctrine excludes the possibility that the self itself wanders from body to body. Instead it maintains that the atomic or infinitesimal inner organ accompanied by an invisible subtle body leaves the dying body and enters into a new, developing body and actualizes in the new body the karmic potential of the soul. In *Vaiśeṣika*, therefore, we do not have a transmigration of the soul, but a transmigration of the inner organ, and this transmigration is caused by *adr̥ṣṭa*.

What impact does this radicalization and universalization of *adṛṣṭa* have on our cosmos?

In regards to the purely material spheres of the physical elements (*mahābhūta*) which are not directly in connection with the processes of life and consciousness, Praśastapāda explains that *adṛṣṭa* can be a cause for two kinds of such phenomena: (a) those which have otherwise no ascertainable causes, and (b) those which may benefit us or harm us. Thus, the cosmos is interpreted more and more in the sense of *saṃsāra*, i.e., the vehicle of retribution of action. All natural causality becomes potentially subordinated to the causality of retribution, of *karma*. The world appears now essentially as a completing institution for reward and punishment of past deeds.

The most particular function, however, which is ascribed to *adṛṣṭa* in the classical system of Praśastapāda, is connected with the doctrine of the cyclic creation and destruction of the universe. This doctrine includes the notion that, at the end of the complete destruction of the universe, the infinite multitude of atomic, i.e., singular, world constituents (*paramāṇu*) remain in complete rest. If this is the case, according to the system the question necessarily arises how a new world system can arise out of complete rest. Praśastapāda answers that it is the 'unseen force' that, at the beginning of a new world period bestows the impulses on the completely resting atomic world constituents (*paramāṇu*), that cause them to join themselves. First, two *paramāṇus* make a dyad (*dvyaṇuka*), then three *dvyaṇukas* join to make a *tryaṇuka*, etc.,¹¹ and so gradually organisms re-arise, new bodies, which serve as vehicle for karmic retribution inherited from the previous world age, and due to which the sleeping selves become entangled again into processes of experiences, suffering and actions. The necessity of retribution itself is raised here as the principle of the cosmological 'explanation'.

A question arises. Does the explanation of karmic retribution by means of *dharma* and *adharma* fully explain how *dharma* and *adharma* bring about pleasant and unpleasant experiences? Can the world be explained without recourse to God?

Bronkhorst (2000, p. 35) comments:

The answer would be simple if they *only* brought about pleasant and unpleasant experiences, i.e., the qualities happiness and pain belonging to the same soul to which also *dharma* and *adharma* belong. Such an effect would be relatively easy to visualize. However, Vaiśeṣika claims more than this. *Dharma* and *adharma* bring about not only certain qualities different from themselves in the same soul, they also have an effect on the material world: they bring about situations in the material world that lead to pleasant and unpleasant experiences for the living beings that inhabit it, in such a way that good deeds are rewarded, bad deeds punished. *Dharma* and *adharma*, therefore, bring about goal-oriented activity in the material world. How can Vaiśeṣika explain the mechanism of karmic retribution without resorting to teleology? [...] It appears that the Vaiśeṣikas themselves

¹¹ See note and drawing in AKB. iii. p. 219f.

were not satisfied with the mechanism of karmic retribution through mere *dharma* and *adharma*.¹² This is shown by the fact that they soon abandoned their atheistic position (atheistic in the sense that they did not accept the existence of a creator), and assigned a central role in the retribution of *karma* to their newly introduced creator God. Assigning karmic effects is one of the principal functions attributed to God [who acted as a kind of book-keeper of the karmic accounts of all living beings].

In this context, Uddyotakara¹³ maintains that *karma*, due to being unconscious (*acetana*), must be guided by a conscious cause in order to come into action, just like an ax. He denies that the soul could give guidance to *dharma* and *adharma* and also that *dharma* and *adharma* themselves could directly affect the atoms.

Bronkhorst states that one reason why the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas accepted the notion of a creator God was systemic as otherwise their system could not account for the effects of *karma*.

Another systemic reason for God, but probably not for the introduction of God, lay in the serious shortcomings of their atomic theory. Bronkhorst cites Chattopadhyaya who states that the main weakness of the atomic theory was the want of a satisfactory explanation of the process of atomic combination in general, i.e., an explanation for how atoms, by definition partless, could combine with each other, a theory which was heavily attacked by idealist philosophers.¹⁴ But more specifically it also referred to the first combination of two inherently partless atoms which marked the beginning of the shaping of the physical world.

Chattopadhyaya (1969, p. 256) writes:

The only thing possible for them was to attempt some solution of the problem inevitably *in terms of the technology known to them*. But this was essentially the technique of manual operation – of the potter producing the pot, the weaver producing the cloth and the mason building the house. ... Essentially in the image of the craftsman, therefore, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika conceived of an intelligent agent to effect the first atomic combination. This agent, however, had to be super-human, because the act of combining two intrinsically partless atoms could be nothing short of a miracle. Therefore, argued the later Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas,

¹² Similarly Chemparathy, George (1972: 116-117: “In course of time, however, this explanation was felt to be unsatisfactory, most probably on account of the objections of the opponents, who pointed out that the *adr̥ṣṭam*, under whose directing power the government of the entire universe was placed by the Vaiśeṣikas, could not give a satisfactory explanation of the universe; for being unconscious (*acetana*), how could this *adr̥ṣṭam* guide the processes of this universe, which, in spite of the existence of pain and evils, presupposed the guidance of an intelligent director (*adhiṣṭhātā*)? The Vaiśeṣikas were thus compelled to seek a more satisfactory explanation by accepting an intelligent cause, namely *Īśvara* ...”

¹³ Nyāya Vārttika p. 945 l. 12-13 (on *sūtra* 4.1.21).

¹⁴ As for example in Vasubandhu’s *Viṃśatikā*.

just as the potter produced the pot by combining two *kapāla*-s (pre-fabricated parts of the pot), so did God produce the first *dyad* (*dvyāṇuka*: binary product) by combining two atoms.

In this context, Bronkhorst raises the question of whether God plays an equally important role in the creation of each new body at birth as God does at the creation of the world. He answers that a passage in the *Nyāya Bhāṣya* suggests otherwise and that instead, the individual soul to whom this body is going to belong plays that role on the basis of its karmic residues.

BAC.

THE NYĀYA SYSTEM AND KARMAN

In contrast to the Vaiśeṣika, in the old Nyāya *karma* is not referred to as *adrṣṭa* but as *karman*.

Halbfass (2000) explains that *karma* and rebirth is a central theme for Nyāya and that this system claims that it contributes through its epistemology and logic to final liberation. The soteriological orientation is thus more clearly emphasized than in Vaiśeṣika which is primarily a philosophy of nature. In the following we present a series of questions and answers as discussed by Halbfass (2000).

How is activity (*pravṛtti*) defined?

Activity is the operation of speech, of the inner organ and of body.

What is the cause of activity?

The afflictions (*doṣa*) are the root of all activity and thus the foundation of *karma*. From within the triad of attachment (*rāga*), hatred (*dveṣa*) and ignorance (*avidyā*) or delusion (*moha*), it is delusion which plays the most important role. Delusion is the basis on which the other afflictions and their fateful effects unfold and they lead us to selfish and fateful action and make us stay in *saṃsāra*.

How is liberation obtained?

At the beginning of the *Nyāyasūtra* we find the following fivefold causal chain which can be considered to be an appropriation and simplification of the Buddhist formula of 'dependent origination' (*pratityasamutpāda*): suffering (*duḥkha*), birth (*janman*), activity (*pravṛtti*), afflictions (*doṣa*; literally, 'fault'), and false cognition or judgment (*mithyājñāna*). Liberation (*apavarga*) is thus obtained by the elimination of the fundamental false cognition or judgment through which one eliminates in turn affliction, activity, birth and suffering and in this way obtains liberation (*apavarga*).

How does an organic body, i.e., the body of a sentient being, come about?

The arising of a body occurs due to the connection with the results of former deeds. These results, i.e., reward and punishment, are dispositions or also qualities (*guṇa*) of the soul or self for which the body is a useful instrument. The parents and their sexual union alone do not bring about offspring without the karmic dispositions of the soul.

What else does *karma* determine?

Karma determines the biological rank of the new sentient being, i.e., the species in which it is born, its growth and flourishing and its individual peculiarities. The body is here a house or instrument for reward and punishment, for ways of experiencing and for states which are befitting to the accomplished deeds of past lives.

Can the *karma* of the parents influence the children?

Uddyotakara thinks that even though *karma* is and remains personally bound, its causal efficacy is not a strictly personal affair but involved in the context of causal efficacies and in the net of interpersonal relations. But the course of *karma*, the manifestation of karmic consequences are difficult to understand and cannot be determined in advance, at least by ordinary humans.

Why do we need *karma* as an explanation for sentient beings and the world?

According to Nyāya, as *karma* explains the individual peculiarities of sentient beings, it also makes the great variety and the injustice or at least the seeming injustice which rules the world understandable. If *karma*, which assigns to the souls the body which is appropriate to them, did not exist, how could one explain that persons are so different? How could one explain that one person has a good parental home and another a bad one, that one person has a magnificent body and another a pitiful one, that one person is healthy and another unhealthy, that one person enjoys life and another suffers. In the nature of the souls as well as in the nature of the material body, there is nothing for Nyāya which could explain such differences. *Karma* is also here the principle for explaining that which otherwise remains unexplained, the rule for the apparent irregular. As *karma* itself appears in limitless varieties, therefore that which is caused by *karma* also appears in limitless varieties. This is not only an explanation but also a justification for the variety of sentient beings and their states which as such appear to be unjust. We see here the motive of theodicy, or to be more exact, of cosmodicy.

How do we know that there is rebirth?

This is so since otherwise it would be difficult to explain the capabilities, behaviors or instincts of newborn living beings. The new-born baby already knows the feelings of fear and of pleasure. It knows the importance of nourishment and knows what to do in order to receive nourishment from the breast of the mother. To do this knowledge and habit are necessary which the baby can have achieved only in a previous existence.

BB.

THE SĀṂKHYA AND YOGA SYSTEM

The second pair are Sāṁkhya and Yoga. In regards to the general orientation of the Sāṁkhya and Yoga systems, Indira Mahalingam states:

Sāṁkhya concentrates its efforts primarily on providing an account of reality, and Yoga, which accepts the Sāṁkhya account of the nature of reality, provides a detailed description of the practical steps to be taken by the individual in attaining liberation from the world of suffering. Because of the closeness of the intellectual positions of these two schools they are

traditionally viewed as one. The close alliance of the schools does not mean that there are no divergencies in their views. One important difference is that Yoga is theistic whereas Sāṃkhya is atheistic. [...] The earliest available work of the school is Īśvara Kṛṣṇa's *Sāṃkhya Kārikā*. Composed probably during the fifth century C.E., it provides a terse account of the system. There are a number of commentaries on the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā*, the best known of which are Gauḍapāda's *Bhāṣya* (C.E. 500-600), *Yuktidīpikā* (C.E. 600-700) by an unknown author and Vācaspati Miśra's *Sāṃkhyatattvakaumudī* (C.E. 850-975?). [...] Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* is the oldest text of the Yoga school.¹⁵

Gerald James Larson (1969, p. 3f.) explains that the term '*sāṃkhya*' refers primarily to the idea of 'number' or 'enumeration', but that it also signifies those who reason or analyze by means of the enumeration of categories. The term 'classical Sāṃkhya' refers to the formulation of Sāṃkhya found in Īśvarakṛṣṇa's *Sāṃkhyakārikā*.

In regard to ontology and basic doctrines we will now address the following topics:

- the fundamental dualism: *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*
- the 25 principles (*tattva*)
- the fundamental, metaphysical confusion
- the three strands (*guṇa*)
- the theory of *satkārayavāda*, i.e., that the effect pre-exists in its cause
- the teleological structure of *prakṛti*

Sāṃkhyā and Yoga are marked by a fundamental dualism, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, which divides the world into two fundamentally different spheres composed of 25 principles (*tattva*).

On the one hand, there is *puruṣa*, a pure subject or soul or self that is in its essence objectless. *Puruṣa* is characterized (i) as simply being a contentless witness (*sākṣitva*); (ii) as being isolated (*kaivalya*) from *prakṛti*, (iii) as neutrality or totally detached (*madhyasthya*), (iv) as subjectivity or seer (*draṣṭṛtva*), and (v) as totally inactive (*akartṛbhāva*), its only function being that of passive presence.

On the other hand, there is *prakṛti*, the primal nature or primal matter in its unmanifest (*avyakta*) and manifest (*vyakta*) condition; as unmanifest, it is the ultimate material cause (*kāraṇa*) of the manifest *prakṛti*, i.e., the principles (*tattva*) no. 3-25 (see chart): intellect (*buddhi*), ego (*ahaṃkāra*), mind (*manas*), the five sense-capacities (*buddhindriyas*), the five action-capacities (*karmendriyas*), the five subtle elements (*tanmātras*) and the five gross elements (*mahābhūtas*). The dynamic-

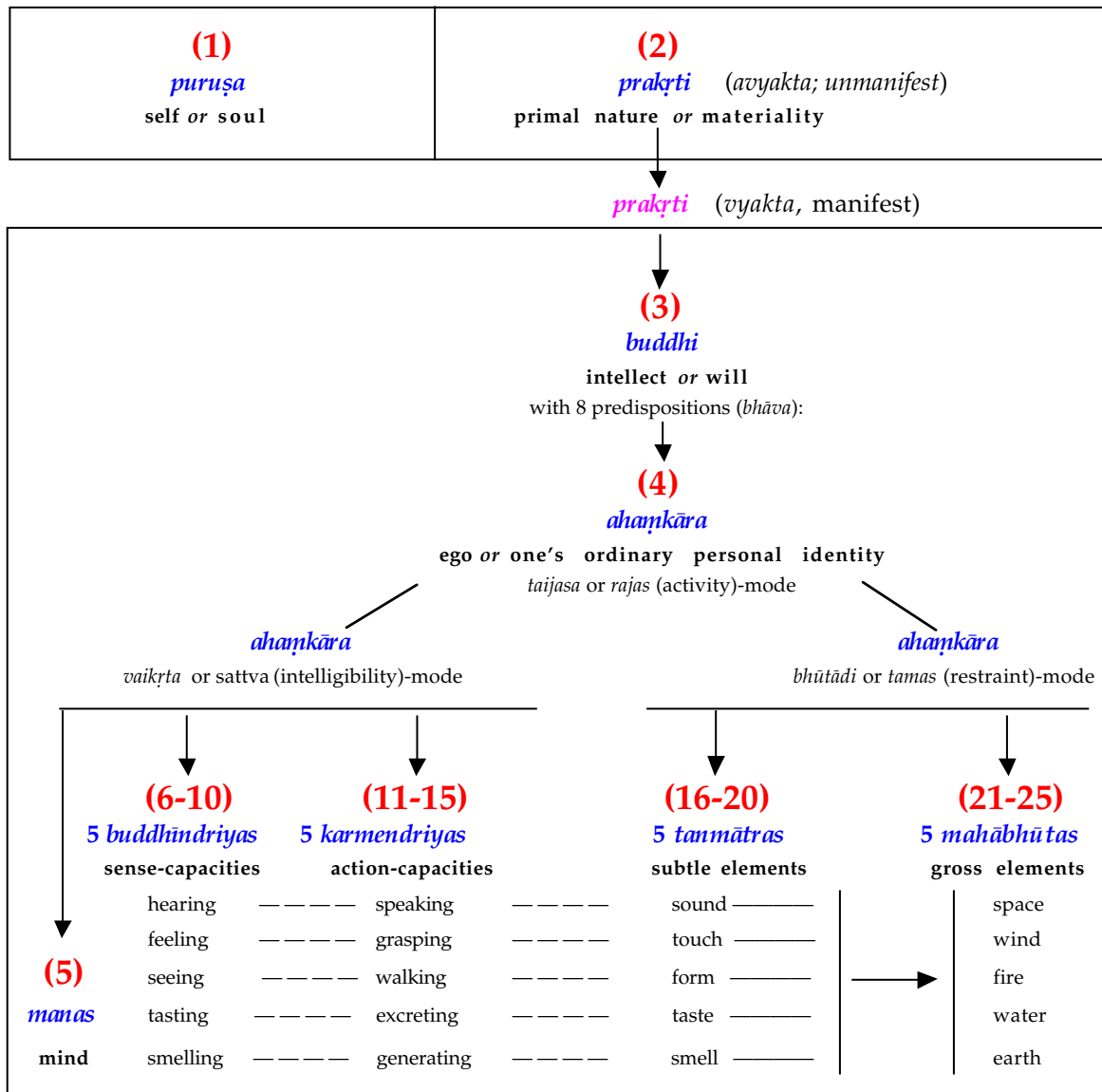
¹⁵ 'Sāṃkhya-Yoga', in: *Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy* (Indira Mahalingam and Brian Carr), London, Routledge, 1997.

productive *prakṛti* produces again and again out of itself the actual empirical world, the world of objective processes (to which the sphere of objectifiable mental phenomena also belongs).

It should be noted here that a plurality of *puruṣas* exists but that only one unmanifest *prakṛti* exists.

The 25 Principles (*tattva*) of Classical Sāṃkhya

(based on Gerald James Larson)



When comparing *puruṣa* and unmanifest *prakṛti*, both have the following characteristics:

they are (i) uncaused (*ahetumat*), (ii) permanent (*nitya*), (iii) pervasive (*vyāpin*), (iv) immobile (*akriya*), (v) single (*eka*), (vi) unsupported (*anāśrita*), (vii) non-mergent (*alīṅga*), (viii) not made up of parts (*anavayava*), (ix) independent (*aparatantra*).

But they differ, because *puruṣa* has the following characteristics:

(1) not constituted by the three *guṇas* (*atriguṇa*), (2) can be clearly distinguished from *prakṛti* (*vivekin*), (3) is not an object-field (*aviṣaya*), (4) is not general (*asāmānya*, i.e., not capable of objective apprehension either by perception or inference), (5) is conscious (*cetana*), and (6) is not productive (*aprasavadharmin*),¹⁶

whereas *prakṛti* has the opposite characteristics.

When comparing unmanifest action and manifest action, they both have the following same characteristics:

(i) they are both constituted by the three *guṇas*, (ii) they cannot be clearly distinguished from each other in a final sense, etc., (as just mentioned),

but they differ from each other because unmanifest action has the following characteristics:

it is (i) caused, (ii) permanent, etc., (as just mentioned),

whereas manifest action has the opposite characteristics.

In regard to the fundamental, metaphysical confusion, although *puruṣa* is fundamentally distinct from the emanation and projections of the *prakṛti* and in truth cannot at all be affected by it, the *puruṣa* finds itself entangled in the world of *prakṛti* and of objects due to this confusion. The *Sāṃkhya-kārikā* says:

- (20) Because of the association or proximity of primal matter and pure consciousness, that which is manifest appears as if it is characterized by consciousness, and, similarly, even though all agency or activity occurs only in the constituents (*guṇa*), consciousness appears as if characterized by agency or activity.
- (21) Moreover, this association or proximity is like the association of the lame man and the blind man. Primal matter ‘performs its task’, as it were, so that consciousness may have content, and consciousness ‘performs its task’, by revealing itself as radically distinct or isolated from all subjective and objective transformations. Because of this association, the manifest and experiential world has come into being.¹⁷

Sāṃkhya deals with the fundamental, metaphysical confusion in a rather theoretical and metaphysical way, whereas Yoga above all tries to demonstrate soteriological methods and practices of self-discipline, in particular meditation, through which the fundamental, metaphysical confusion actually can be overcome. According to both systems, action and its retribution occur within the sphere of *prakṛti* and its emanations. Besides this, the treatment of *karma* and rebirth shows clear differences between Sāṃkhya and Yoga.

¹⁶ See EIP.IV.78.

¹⁷ EIP.IV.156f.

Moreover, *prakṛti* has a teleological structure: the Sāṃkhya believe that the primal nature is goal-oriented (*arthavattva*) and serves the aims of something else (*pārārthya*), namely, *puruṣa*. *Prakṛti* functions for the sake of the *puruṣa* (*puruṣārtha*) by providing 'enjoyment' or 'experience' (*upabhoga*) and 'freedom' (*apavarga*).

Before turning to the discussion of *karma*, it is necessary here to give a little more detail about the above mentioned doctrine, viz. that the unmanifest and manifest action are constituted by three strands (*guṇa*),¹⁸ I will do this in the context of the Sāṃkhya doctrine of transformation (*pariṇāma*) and the theory that the effect pre-exists in its cause (*satkāryavāda*). To clarify the strands first:

- i) *sattva* accounts for thought and intelligibility, experienced psychologically as pleasure, thinking, clarity, understanding and thoughtful detachment;
- ii) *rajas* accounts for motion, energy and activity, experienced psychologically as suffering, craving and attachment.
- iii) *tamas* accounts for inertia and restraint, experienced psychologically as delusion, depression and dullness.

If the three strands are in a balanced state, then *prakṛti* is in its unmanifest or primordial condition (*avyakta*). However, when *puruṣa* is present, *prakṛti* enters into its manifest condition (*vyakta*) and shows itself as the principles (*tattva*) no. 3-25. The strands have therefore physical and psychological, objective as well as subjective, implications. The variety of the empirical world occurs through the transformation of the strands (*guṇapariṇāma*), i.e., a mutual interaction between the strands that occurs as each of the strands becomes successively dominant. Transformation here means that an object obtains new qualities without deviating from its essence. This is so because Sāṃkhya maintains the theory that the effect pre-exists in its cause (*satkāryavāda*) in an unmanifest condition or potential state prior to the manifest operation of the cause, because (a) something cannot arise from nothing; (b) any effect requires a material basis; (c) anything cannot arise from just everything, (d) something can only produce what it is capable of producing, and (e) the very nature or essence of the cause is non-different from the effect (*Sāṃkhyakārikā* 9). The process of causation, therefore, does not generate anything new; it simply brings into manifestation what is already present in the cause. It is further inferred that all manifest entities must have a single ultimate cause and that this ultimate cause is *prakṛti*.

¹⁸ Gerald James Larson in EIP.IV.66 states: Although three *guṇas* are mentioned, namely, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, the basic Sāṃkhya conceptualization is that of one continuous and unique process with three discernible 'moments' or 'constituents'. There is one continuous process of transformation (*pariṇāma*), which is the inherent generativity of primordial materiality, but this one continuous process manifests itself in three inextricably related 'constituents' that intentionally define the unique, continuous process itself. Rather than referring to three *guṇas*, therefore, it is perhaps more accurate to refer to a 'tripartite process'.

THE SĀṂKHYA SYSTEM AND KARMAN

In this section we will discuss the following topics:

- the systemic difficulties of the adoption and appropriation of the doctrine of *karma*
- the agent that transmigrates
- *dharma*, *adharma* and the eight predispositions (*bhāva*) of intellect (*buddhi*)
- the precarious role of *karma* at the beginning and end of a cosmic age
- obligation (*adhikāraḥ*) as the cause of the universe
- the ethical and soteriological role of *karma*.

As for Sāṁkhya, Halbfass (2000) states:

The adoption and appropriation of the doctrine of *karma* was particularly problematic. The basic structure of the oldest of the six systems was not suitable for that, and even later on no organic and harmonious integration took place. Along with Erich Frauwallner (*Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, 1953, 404), we therefore assume that the periodic manifestation and unfolding of *prakṛti* into the empirical world was not originally connected with *karma*, i.e., with the merit and demerit (*dharma*, *adharma*) of the acting sentient being, but rather it was something that existed in the intrinsic nature of *prakṛti* itself. However subsequently, under the influence of the Vaiśeṣika and similar doctrines, *karma* was attributed an important cosmic role.

In other words, for Sāṁkhya it is primarily *prakṛti* with its transformations that determines the structure of sentient beings and of the world and not *karma*, at least not primarily.

But the difficulties lay deeper, for, as Halbfass points out, it was action itself, along with the acting subject who was responsible for his or her actions, for which there did not seem to be a place within the Sāṁkhya system:

[On the one hand,] pure consciousness [i.e., *puruṣa*] cannot act. It also cannot be rewarded and punished, and as *Sāṁkhyakārikā* 62 [see below] emphasizes, it also cannot wander in *saṁsāra*.

On the other hand, the non-conscious primal nature is not an acting subject that is responsible for its actions, but the originator of objective processes. What appears to us as action and decision is in truth part of these objective processes and a distant offshoot of the cosmic and psychophysical efficacy of the primal nature. Nature performs, so to speak, a play or a cosmic dance whose non-participating spectator is the *puruṣa*. *Karma* and rebirth are part of this show. Certainly, the classical and later Sāṁkhya exerted itself greatly to find a terminological basis for the ideas of actions, the acting subject and retribution within the frame of the system. However, the role of *karma* remains precarious and ambivalent.

In other words, even in the case where Sāṃkhya tries to adopt and appropriate the doctrine of *karma*, the question of the ‘identity’ or at least ‘continuity’ of the one who performs the action and the one who receives or experiences the retribution of the action, is problematic systemically, since neither *puruṣa* nor *prakṛti* can really satisfactorily do the job. Moreover, what appears to us in daily life as subject, as our self, is, according to Sāṃkhya, in truth just the evolutes and products of primal matter (*prakṛti*) and not a permanent and identically remaining soul, i.e., not the *puruṣa*. This “apparent” self is in no way eternal and unchanging, a fact which many traditions assumed to be a prerequisite for explaining the functioning of *karma*.

The difficulties of *puruṣa* as possible subject of action is not only that it is by nature totally inactive (*akartṛbhāva*) but also that it has the characteristic of being pervasive (*vyāpin*) and immobile (*akriyā*), i.e., it cannot wander in *saṃsāra*, as *Sāṃkhyakārika* (Sk.) 62 says:

Not any (pure consciousness), therefore, is really bound, is liberated or transmigrates. Only materiality in her various manifestations is bound, is liberated or transmigrates.

If one asks what specifically transmigrates from one birth to the other, what wanders in *saṃsāra*, classical Sāṃkhya claims that it is the subtle body¹⁹ (*liṅgaśarīra*, *sūkṣmaśarīra*), permeated or ‘perfumed’ (*adhivāsita*) with its basic predispositions (*bhāva*), that transmigrates (Sk. 40), and it is not the soul²⁰ (Sk. 62), as just discussed. This subtle body is saturated or perfumed by eight predispositions or modes of existence (*bhāva*) (Sk. 23):

(i) virtue or meritorious behavior (*dharma*), (ii) non-virtue or demeritorious behavior (*adharma*), (iii) knowledge (*jñāna*), (iv) ignorance (*ajñāna*), (v) passionlessness or detachment (*virāga*), (vi) passion or attachment (*rāga*), (vii) power (*aśvarya*), (viii) lack of power (*anaiśvarya*),²¹

that are modifications of the intellect (*buddhi*) and not of the soul (*puruṣa*).

In general, the eight predispositions assist in determining the process of rebirth as well as the quality of one’s present life; for example, through meritorious behavior one transmigrates into

¹⁹ The subtle body is the characteristic ‘mark’ of the transmigrating entity made up of the principles (*tattva*) no. 3-20 as it ‘marks’ the different *puruṣas* which otherwise, as merely knowing subjects would be completely identical and indistinguishable.

²⁰ Bronkhorst (2000, p. 17) comments that even though both in Sāṃkhya and in Vaiśeṣika the soul is conceived of as being by its very nature motionless, in Sāṃkhya there is an absolute distinction between the soul and the rest of the world, while in Vaiśeṣika there is not, because the soul is looked upon as a substance among other substances which, like those other substances, can have qualities.

²¹ Bronkhorst (2000, p. 23): “Note that happiness (*sukha*) and pain (*duḥkha*) are not part of this list of states of the *buddhi*. The reason is that these two are identified with the constituents (*guṇa*) called *sattva* and *rajas* respectively, while the third constituent (*tamas*) corresponds to confusion (*moha*). These three constituents are not considered to be mere attributes of the mind, or states of the *buddhi*, but do belong to the objective world as well.”

higher forms of life and through knowledge one achieves liberation. But in particular, it should be noted that the first two predispositions relate to *karma*, although in an ambivalent light, because as manifestations of primal matter the predispositions are molded by the three fundamental forces or strands (*guṇa*) and in spite of the systemic problems Sāṃkhya has in regard to action and its subject.

The precarious role of *karma* becomes clear when Halbfass goes on to discuss whether the subtle body has a beginning and an end for classical Sāṃkhya? The predominant version of the doctrine is that as the subtle body with its predispositions is an evolute of the *prakṛti*, it arises with the beginning of this cosmic age and ceases when the empirical world temporarily dissolves into the primal nature. It appears that the karmic continuity is canceled out at the end of a cosmic age and that the cosmic new beginning is also a karmic new beginning. However, this poses a problem with the two basic postulates of the classical *karma* theory:

- (1) that *karma* may not disappear without its appropriate retribution as its effect (*kṛtavipraṇāśa*), and
- (2) that retributive experiences cannot exist without a karmic cause (*akṛtābhyāgama*).

One may ask if the cosmic universe and rebirth of the subtle body at the beginning of the cosmic age do not arise from *karma*, then what is their cause? Is it due to a God?

Sāṃkhya did not introduce the notion of a creator God to solve this problem. Instead, as Frauwallner (HIP, p. 319) states: "For the solution of the difficulty, the Sāṃkhya put up a new idea—the idea of the obligation or commitment (*adhikāraḥ*). So long as the soul is not liberated, the Ur-matter has an obligation towards it, to work for it and to bring about its Deliverance; it is this obligation (*adhikāraḥ*) which causes world-creation." So it is not *karma* but obligation that plays the important role in the creation of the world, at least for classical Sāṃkhya.

Bronkhorst (2000, p. 60) comments:

It is interesting to observe that by denying the carrying over of *karma* from one creation to the next, Sāṃkhya did away with one central reason that induced others, most notably the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika thinkers, to postulate the participation of a creator God in each new creation. It may well be that this idea of *karma* restricted to one single creation was a relative novelty, introduced in order to avoid the theoretical difficulties linked to the opposite opinion. This position allowed Sāṃkhya to maintain that no God played a role in the creation of the universe. It does, however, evoke other difficulties. It implies that the deeds of living beings at the end of a world period remain without retribution. An even more serious consequence would be that souls that had reached liberation in one world period might find themselves subject to rebirth all over again in a next world period.

Halbfass (1998) can thus conclude that there is little evidence that *karma* played any significant role in the cosmology of ancient Sāṃkhya.

He then goes on to state that *karma* also remains insignificant insofar as its ethical and soteriological role is concerned. This must be so because it is not *karma* but ‘knowledge’ (*jñāna*) of the 25 principles and of the fundamental difference between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* that plays the crucial role for liberation (*mokṣa*) and isolation (*kaivalya*) of the pure consciousness. The *Saṃkhyakārikās* state:

- (63) Materiality binds herself by herself by means of the seven predispositions [i.e., excluding *jñāna*]. She releases herself by means of one form or one predisposition (namely, the predisposition towards knowledge) for the sake of consciousness (*puruṣārtha*).
- (64) As a result of the meditative analysis on the principles (*tattva*) (of the Sāṃkhya), the discriminating knowledge (*jñāna*) arises [to the Buddhi]: “I am not (conscious), (consciousness) does not belong to me, the ‘I’ is not (conscious).” This discriminating knowledge is complete, pure, because it is free from error, and not mixed with any other thing.
- (65) Then, consciousness, like a spectator sees materiality, for at that moment materiality has turned away from the other seven predispositions.
- (66) The indifferent one (namely, pure consciousness) thinks, “I have seen her.” The other (namely, materiality) thinks, “I have been seen,” and ceases. Though the two continue to be in proximity with one another, no new transformations take place.
- (68) When distinction from the body (and its attendant processes) has been attained (that is to say, when materiality has ceased to function after having accomplished her purpose), there is the realization of isolation (*kaivalya*) that is both complete and permanent.

BBB.

THE YOGA SYSTEM AND KARMAN

In this section we will discuss the following topics:

- Yoga’s different treatment of *karma* and rebirth
- the production of *karma* and its dependence on afflictions
- the overcoming of karmic residues (*karmāśaya*) through meditation
- the effect of *karma* on the next rebirth
- the issue whether all we experience is due to *karma*
- the explanation of species-specific behavior patterns of the newborn.

Halbfass (2000) states that although there is no doubt that Sāṃkhya and Yoga are in accord in regard to their fundamental metaphysical position, their treatment of *karma* and rebirth is quite different, probably due to Yoga’s exposure to a variety of other influences, particularly

Buddhism (i.e., Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika). Action and activities plays not only a greater role, which is hardly understandable from a Sāṃkhya point of view, but these actions are not traced back from the outset to the universal efficacy of primal matter and their three strands (*guṇa*).

Yoga as a praxis-oriented system is engaged in methods and practices of self-discipline, in particular meditation, in order to systematically weaken and overcome confusion and achieve liberation. Therefore it is not surprising that *karma* and rebirth are discussed within the context of achieving *samādhi*, the highest stage of yogic concentration.

The production and operation of *karma* depends on the presence of the five afflictions (*kleśa*): ignorance (*avidyā*), egoity (*asmitā*), attachment (*rāga*), hatred (*dveṣa*) and clinging to life (*abhiniveśa*). The afflictions subjugate us to the power of the three strands (*guṇa*) of *prakṛti* by instigating their innate dynamic which then entangles us in action and in rebirth. Among the group of afflictions, it is ignorance, a radical misconception of oneself and the world, that plays a fundamental role. It is the 'field' (*kṣetra*) on which the other fateful predispositions and tendencies develop, the soil on which the seeds (*bija*) of *saṃsāra* sprout and give forth fruits. As such ignorance is the "condition of the possibility of all processes of *karma* and rebirth" and as long as this ignorance has not been eliminated, the other afflictions will remain in place, and new *karma* will be produced. This is illustrated by a quotation from Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* II, 12-14:

The karmic residue (*karmāśaya*) which is conditioned by the afflictions (*kleśa*) has to be experienced (in its consequences) either in this or a future life.

As long as there exists this foundation (*mūla*, 'root'), the retribution (of *karma*, *tadvipāka*) will take place in the form of (1) birth (a particular species), (2) life-span and (3) quality of enjoyment (*bhoga*, agreeable or disagreeable experiences).

These (three forms of retribution) result as satisfaction or frustration, insofar as they are caused through merit (*puṇya*) and demerit (*apuṇya*).

It is thus the goal of Yoga-meditation to systematically weaken and eliminate these afflictions and in this way achieve liberation. This is, according to Mahony (1987), achieved in the following way:

Classical Yoga, as represented by Patañjali, therefore presents the yogin with a set of practices by which that person can be free of the karmic process. In these exercises the meditator reduces the power of the *kleśas* by performing actions that are opposed to their fulfillment. Traditionally this meant the practice of ascetic renunciation of physical pleasures. Thorough renunciation makes it impossible for new *kleśas* to arise, and through more and more subtle meditations the *kleśas* that remain from the past are diluted so much that they no longer produce any *karmāśayas*. At this point the person (*puruṣa*) within the yogin no longer needs a body because it no longer has any unripened *karmāśaya*, and at the

death of the present body the person no longer migrates to another life. The *puruṣa* is liberated from the entrapping demands of habitual afflictions and experiences *kaivalya*, 'autonomy'.

Halbfass now raises three more specific questions related to karma and rebirth.

First, Vyāsa in his commentary to Patañjali's *Yogasūtras* asks whether many actions committed in one life cause many rebirths or whether these actions unite in order to bring about just one rebirth.

Vyāsa explains that as a general rule—with certain exceptions—the totality of the committed actions of one life form the conditions of only one rebirth, namely, the next immediately succeeding life, as otherwise there would not be a fixed and reliable correlation between action and the effect of action. However, it should be noted that this theory of classical Yoga does not represent the predominant conception of Hinduism.

Second, it may be asked whether whatever we experience is due to karmic traces.

Halbfass answers that, according to Yoga, *karma* is distinguished from (i) instincts, (ii) afflictions (*kleśa*) and (iii) the contents of memory, which as traces, though not as the ones involving retribution, are inherent within us. These come from many previous lifetimes, are without determinable beginning and can be effective over many lifetimes. The karmic residues (*karmāśaya*) as well as the mere traces (*vāsanā*) are dispositions (*saṃskāra*) in our mental organism (*citta*, i.e., *buddhi*, *ahaṃkāra*, and *manas*). As a rule, the karmic traces accompany our psyche only into the next life where we experience them as reward or punishment; but the non-karmic traces accompany our psyche over many existences and, from case to case, they become manifest and activated through the *karma* befitting to them. But naturally, the non-karmic traces are not merely static phenomena since they have their own particular dynamic and potency. Although they produce no karmic potential, no retribution and no rebirth, they do contribute in a fundamental way to the continued entanglement in the activities of the world. Thus, according to classical Yoga, it is neither the actions alone nor the afflictions alone that bind us to this painful world. It is the dynamic interplay of meritorious and demeritorious behavior, of satisfaction and frustration, of attachment and hatred, which does not allow the wheel of *saṃsāra* to come to rest.

Third, how does Yoga explain the capability of sentient beings to follow certain species-specific behavior patterns immediately after the beginning of a new existence?

Yoga explains this by means of the dispositions and instincts that are latently stored-up in our psychic organism for a very long time. We already have been everything once and we can become everything once again.

BC.

THE PŪRVA MĪMĀṂSA AND VEDĀNTA SYSTEM

The third pair are Pūrva Mimāṃsā and Vedānta.

Pandeya and Manju²² write that traditionally the Mimāṃsā system has been divided into prior (Pūrva) and later (Uttara) Mimāṃsās:²³ the first is commonly known as Pūrva Mimāṃsā and the second as Vedānta. Pūrva Mimāṃsā and Vedānta together form a systematic exegetical account of the contents of the Veda, including the hymns, the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Upaniṣads*. The Pūrva Mimāṃsā focuses mainly on the *Brāhmaṇas* which are primarily concerned with the sacrifices (*karman*) and is thus also called Karma Mimāṃsā. The Vedānta focuses mainly on the religious and philosophical speculations of the *Upaniṣads* which are primarily concerned with cognition (*jñāna*) and is thus also called Jñāna Mimāṃsā.

The older tradition also uses the terms Dharma Mimāṃsā and Brahma Mimāṃsā for Pūrva Mimāṃsā and Vedānta, as they are chiefly dealing respectively with:

- i) *dharma* which is characterized by John A. Taber²⁴ as what one ought to do and avoid doing, the proper way to conduct oneself in this world and to attain salvation in the next, including not just the carrying out of certain rituals but also the observance of the minute details of everyday custom and etiquette, and
- ii) *Brahman*, meaning the ultimate cause of all that exists, characterized by Mohanty (EBO 2003) as infinite (*ananta*), truth (*satya*), and knowledge (*jñāna*), and as existence (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*).

The term *mīmāṃsā* literally means ‘deep thought, consideration, reflection, exposition’ and refers here to the investigation of the proper interpretation of the import of the entire Vedic texts.

The term *vedānta* literally means ‘end of the Veda’ and, according to Eliot Deutsch (1969), refers (i) to the teachings of the *Upaniṣads*, the *Brahmasūtras* and the *Bhagavadgītā*, which are recognized by all schools of Vedānta as ‘foundations’ (*prasthāna*) of systematic Vedānta, and (ii) to the various philosophical systematizations of them.

BCA.

THE PŪRVA MĪMĀṂSA SYSTEM

The root text of the Pūrva Mimāṃsā is the *Mimāṃsā Sūtra* of Jaimini, composed between 300 and 100 B.C.E., which takes into account and clarifies both the nature of sacrifices and their elaborate procedures and the roles of different categories of persons and things employed in the rituals (Pandeya/Manu). As it was found that the Vedic texts contained seeming contradictions and

²² ‘Pūrva Mimāṃsā and Vedānta’, in: *Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy* (Indira Mahalingam and Brian Carr), London, Routledge, 1997.

²³ The terms prior (*pūrva*) and later (*uttara*) are not used in the chronological sense but are linked solely with *dharma* and *Brahman* (see below), because the Vedas as revealed texts (*śruti*) are not created by any person or God and are without reference to temporal events.

²⁴ ‘Mimāṃsā’, in: *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London, 1998

obscurities, it was mandatory to develop cogent rules of textual interpretation to establish the uniformity of the Vedic procedures and texts in order to defend the Vedic foundations against criticisms, changes and reinterpretations. Halbfass (2000) notes that although exegesis of rituals is the primary purpose of the system, at the time of the middle of the first millennium C.E. Pūrva Mīmāṃsā had established itself as a full philosophical system particularly contributing to the philosophy of language and epistemology.

The first surviving commentary on the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* of Jaimini, the *Śābarabhāṣya*, is by Śabara (c. fifth century C.E).

The Mīmāṃsā school later divided into two subschools, (i) the Bhaṭṭa school and (ii) the Prabhākara school, based on subcommentaries on the *Śābarabhāṣya* by Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (7th century) and Prabhākara (7th century).²⁵

In regards to ontology, Pandeya/Manju write that the [Pūrva] Mīmāṃsā school has nothing significant to contribute. Kumārila holds that there are five categories, namely substance, quality, motion, universal and absence. Prabhākara does not recognize absence as a separate category; instead he adds four more to the list proposed by Kumārila, namely, power, similarity, number and inherence.

The central doctrine of the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā was, according to John A. Taber,²⁶ that the Veda is the sole means of knowledge of *dharma* or righteousness, because it is eternal.

He goes on to state:

[Pūrva Mīmāṃsā] held that all cognition is valid unless its cause is defective. [...] [Pūrva] Mīmāṃsā thinkers also defended various metaphysical ideas implied by the Veda – in particular, the reality of the physical world and the immortality of the soul. However, they denied the existence of God as creator of the world and author of scripture.

The eternality of the Veda implies the eternality of language in general. Words and the letters that constitute them are eternal and ubiquitous; it is only their particular manifestations, caused by articulations of the vocal organs, that are restricted to certain times and places. The meanings of words, being universals, are eternal as well. Finally, the relation between word and meaning is also eternal. [...] The basic orientation of Mīmāṃsā was pragmatic and anti-mystical. It believed that happiness and salvation result just from carrying out the prescriptions of the Veda, not from the practice of yoga or insight into the One.

²⁵ For a brief summary of the differences between the two schools see J. N. Mohanty's *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* article 'Indian philosophy'.

²⁶ 'Mīmāṃsā', in: *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London, 1998.

THE PŪRVA MĪMĀMSĀ SYSTEM AND KARMAN

In this section we will discuss the following topics:

- the negligible role of *mokṣa*, *karma* and *saṃsāra* and the specific Mimāṃsā use of and focus on *dharma*
- the mechanism of the sacrificial act and the notion of *apūrva*
- the difference between *apūrva* and *adrṣṭa* in regard to the generating agency
- the difference between *apūrva* and *adrṣṭa* in regard to the difference in scope
- the difference between *apūrva* and *adrṣṭa* in regard to the cosmic cycle and God.

Halbfass (in O’Flaherty, 1980) states that Pūrva Mimāṃsā disregards or rejects ideas or doctrines which have become basic premises for the other systems. This includes final liberation²⁷ (*mokṣa*), the cyclic destruction of the world (*mahāpralaya*), God (*īśvara*), etc. In the *Mimāṃsāsūtra* and its oldest commentary, Śabara’s *Bhāṣya*, the general concepts of *karma* and *saṃsāra* remain negligible, but instead the focus is on *dharma*, the core of which is the efficacy of the Vedic rituals; but the term *dharma* is used differently here than in other Indian systems of thought and refers to that entity which is characterized by imperative Vedic statements which, when followed properly are bound to achieve the ultimate good of human life, i.e., heaven, either in this life or the next. Pūrva Mimāṃsā thus deals only with the specific efficacy of the Vedic sacrificial works and not, or at least not explicitly, with ‘works’ or ‘deeds’ in general.

In regards to the mechanism of the sacrificial act, if it is performed today it may achieve its result at some later date, and in the meantime the result is in the form of an unseen force or *apūrva* which may be regarded either as the imperceptible antecedent of the fruit or the after-state of the act itself (Radhakrishnan). In this way the *dharma* of Pūrva Mimāṃsa becomes related to *karma* and rebirth, and the deferred fruition of acts is possible only through the force of *apūrva* which literally means ‘not having existed before’. Halbfass (in O’Flaherty, 1980, p. 275f.) discusses *apūrva* in the following way:

Apūrva is a potency produced by the sacrifice which makes it possible that its fruits be reaped at a later time; it is a bridge between the actions and their promised results. In this context, *apūrva* appears as a specific device to account for a specific exegetic problem. Yet Kumārila himself leaves no doubt that it has wider and more general implications and ramifications: basically, the same problem for which the concept of *apūrva* is supposed to provide a solution exists also in the case of ordinary, ‘secular’ activities such as farming, eating, studying: the results cannot be expected right after the completion of the acts, but

²⁷ Liberation for the Mimāṃsā is life in heaven, and not the state of ultimate release found in most other systems of Indian thought.

only some time in the future. A certain storable ‘power’ (*śakti*) is necessary as a connecting and mediating principle between act and result.

Apūrva is thus quite similar to the Vaiśeṣika concept of *adrṣṭa* as discussed above; however, there are also differences.

For example, if one asks where *apūrva* is stored as traces and dispositions (*saṃskāra*), Kumārila on the one hand resorts ultimately to the soul of the sacrificer, but on the other hand, for him *apūrva* remains a potency generated by, and in a sense belonging to, not the sacrificing person, but the principal sacrifice itself.

Furthermore, there is a difference in scope. Kumārila, although emphasizing the parallels between *apūrva* and other ‘stored effects’ of actions, does not integrate his notion of *apūrva* into the general context of the theory of *karma*, nor does he discuss problems of interaction, overlapping, or conflict between these two types and contexts of causality (Halbfass, in: O’Flaherty 1980, p. 280).

Moreover, in regard to the creation of the world at the beginning of a new world period, Kumārila rejects the Vaiśeṣika school’s attempt to explain it through *adrṣṭa*, the retributive power of past deeds, together with the controlling agency of the ‘Lord’, as their efficient cause. Pūrva Mimāṃsā itself does not accept the periodic destruction and recreation of the world. Bronkhorst (2000, p. 114) states that Kumārila criticizes the notion of a creator God in the *Sambandhākṣepaparihāra* of his *Śloka Vārttika*, a passage in which he also rejects the notion of a universal destruction followed by a new creation:

68. For we have no proof for a dissolution in the form of universal destruction. And that activity (*karman*) on the part of Prajāpati would serve no purpose.
69. Moreover, it is not possible that beings that have engaged in activity (*karmavat*) would stop without experiencing [the results of] those [activities]; for the fruit deriving from one action cannot be stopped by another activity (*karman*).
70. The coming to a stop of all [beings] without [experiencing] the fruits [of their activities] is not possible, nor is that absence of experience itself the fruit of any activity (*karman*).
71. Alternatively, in case all activities (*karman*) have been destroyed, no new creation is possible. Or if [you maintain that] activities manifest themselves [anew at the occasion of a new creation], what would cause this?
72. If you propose God’s desire, then let that be the cause of the world, for it would be pointless to imagine [the efficacy of] actions (*karman*) if [the creation of the world] is controlled by God’s desire.
73. Moreover, God’s desire cannot come into existence without having itself a cause; or rather, the cause of that [desire] will be the cause [of the creation of] living beings.

THE VEDĀNTA SYSTEM

In this section we will discuss the following topics:

- the general and particular purpose of Vedānta
- historical development according to two lines and the three main schools
- definitions of *Brahman* (*saccidānanda*, etc.)
- the *via negativa* and the two aspects of *Brahman*: *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa*
- three levels of being: Reality, Appearance, Unreality and the notion of subration
- the central problem of classical Vedānta: relation between *Brahman* and the world
- *Brahman*—*māya*, *Brahman*—*satkāryavāda* and *vivartavāda*; *Brahman*—*līlā*
- identity of self (*ātman*) and *Brahman*
- the relation between the self (*ātman*) and the individual (*jīva*)

Vedānta is not only the most widespread but is also generally considered to be the highest of the six orthodox systems of Hinduism.

As mentioned before, the term ‘Vedānta’ refers (i) to the teachings of the *Upaniṣads*, the *Brahma-sūtras* and the *Bhagavadgītā*, which are recognized by all the schools of Vedānta as ‘foundations’ (*prasthāna*) of systematic Vedānta, and (ii) to the various philosophical systematizations of them.

In regards to the *Upaniṣads* as revealed texts (*śruti*), Vedānta found itself in an analogous situation as did the *Mīmāṃsā* towards the revealed sacrificial texts of the Vedas. In the *Upaniṣads* many statements from different standpoints are found which require clarification, interpretation and systematization in order to avoid apparent contradictions and to be able to defend them against criticism, changes and reinterpretations. This was the general purpose of the *Vedāntasūtra* which inquires into the nature of *Brahman*, God, the world and soul and which is attributed to Bādarāyaṇa (between 500 B.C.E. and 200 C.E.). But the particular purpose of the *Vedāntasūtra* was to differentiate itself from *Mīmāṃsā* for whom *dharma* was primary, in contrast to Vedānta for whom it was *Brahman* and the knowledge of *Brahman*. Thus the *Vedāntasūtra* is also called *Brahmasūtra*. Besides this, the *Brahmasūtra* was also intended to integrate seeming Sāṃkhya views in the *Upaniṣads* within a *Brahman*-centered philosophy and in this way differentiate itself from Sāṃkhya.

In terms of the further historical development of Vedānta, Stephen H. Philips²⁸ states that by the end of the Upanisadic period (c. 200 B.C.E.), Vedānta had begun to develop along two lines:

²⁸ ‘Vedānta’, in: *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London, 1998.

- (i) *Brahman* is seen as an impersonal Ground of Being in the (idealist) sense of the entire phenomenal display of this universe viewed as a dream or illusory projection of a single Self; or, alternatively,
- (ii) *Brahman* – the Supreme Being by all counts – is conceived as a personal God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, manifesting as the several gods and goddesses and incarnate in *avatāras*.

As the *Brahmasūtra* itself needed further clarification, a long list of commentaries developed based on these two lines of thought. Various schools developed among which we will focus on the three main schools of Vedānta:²⁹

- 1) Advaita ('nondualism'), the oldest school expounded by Śaṅkara (788-820 C.E.), the most outstanding exponent of Vedānta, according to which (i) *Brahman*, the All-Soul or Absolute Reality, (ii) *ātman*, self or soul, and (iii) the world are identical. For Śaṅkara unqualified *Brahman* is ultimate reality, whereas the phenomenal world is illusion (*māyā*) even though not wholly unreal. Knowledge (*vidyā*), in the form of meditative insight (*jñāna*), is essential to gain liberation.
- 2) Viśiṣṭādvaita ('qualified nondualism') was advocated by Rāmānuja (1017-1137 C.E.) who was the first of the Vedānta thinkers to make the identification of a personal God with *Brahman* the cornerstone of his system. For Rāmānuja, God or *Brahman* is the source and substratum of all that exists that can be qualified by the soul (*cit*) and the phenomenal world (*acit*, matter) both of which depend on God for their existence and constitute the body of God. For Rāmānuja, qualified *Brahman* is ultimate reality and *māyā* is real as it is the plurality of attributes manifested by *Brahman*. Devotion (*bhakti*) is essential to gain liberation.
- 3) Dvaita ('dualism') was founded by Madhva (1238-1317 C.E.) who also identified *Brahman* with a personal God. Reality is of two types, (1) infinite independent reality (God), and (2) finite reality (i.e., matter and souls) which depends on God. (i) God, (ii) the souls and (iii) matter constitute three distinct realities and the distinction between them is not illusory but real. Madhva gives a scheme of 'fivefold distinction' (*pañcabheda*): distinction (i) between God (*īśvara*) and the soul (*jīva*), (ii) between God and matter (*jada*, *prakṛti*), (iii) between the souls, (iv) between the soul and matter, and (v) between matters. Devotion (*bhakti*) is essential to gain liberation.

In the following, I will restrict myself to present some of the doctrines of Advaita Vedānta as presented by Eliot Deutsch (1969) before proceeding to discuss the implications on the doctrine of *karma* as he sees it.

²⁹ Cf. <http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/hindu/ascetic/Vedānta.html>. 'Vedānta' entry by Richard Shaw (Lancaster University).

In Advaita Vedānta's ontology, as already mentioned, (i) *Brahman*, (ii) *ātman* and (iii) the world are identical. Now in regard to *Brahman*, the One, Deutsch states that it is a state of being that is neither a 'He', a personal being, nor an 'It', an impersonal concept, but a state where all subject/object distinctions are obliterated. This state is designated as *saccidānanda*:

- i) 'being' (*sat*) pointing to the ontological principle of unity, to the oneness not constituted of parts, to the existential substratum of all subjects and objects,
- ii) 'consciousness' (*cit*) pointing to the principle of awareness which informs being and which is an unchanging witness of our being,
- iii) 'bliss' (*ānanda*) pointing to the principle of value.

Brahman is thus ultimately a name for the experience of the timeless plenitude of being. *Brahman* is also defined as truth (*satya*), knowledge (*jñāna*), infinite (*ananta*).

But even though *Brahman* is characterized in these ways, these characterizations are intended merely as aids for those who are searching for *Brahman* but have not yet realized *Brahman*. *Brahman* itself defies all description or characterization and can only be hinted at through *via negativa* as expressed by the Upaniṣadic sage Yājñavalkya: "There is no other or better description [of *Brahman*] than this; that it is not-this, not-this (*neti neti*)."³⁰ Thus Deutsch says that Advaita Vedānta distinguishes two aspects or modes of *Brahman*, *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa*:

- i) *Nirguṇa Brahman*—*Brahman* without qualities—which is that transcendent indeterminate state of being about which ultimately nothing can be affirmed;
- ii) *Saguṇa Brahman*—*Brahman* with qualities—which is *Brahman* as interpreted and affirmed by the mind from its necessarily limited standpoint; it is that about which something can be said. And it is also a kind of spiritual experience.

From an ontological standpoint, Advaita Vedānta delineates different levels of being, which Deutsch clarifies by using the Advaita notion of 'subration' (*bādha*) which he defines as the mental process whereby one disvalues some previously appraised object or content of consciousness because of its being contradicted by a new experience. He then goes on to distinguish 3 levels of being:

- 1) *Reality*, i.e., that which cannot be *subrated* by any other experience;
- 2) *Appearance*, i.e., that which can be *subrated* by other experience;
- 3) *Unreality*, i.e., that which neither can nor cannot be *subrated* by other experience

1) 'Reality' is defined as that which is when the subject/object situation is transcended. It is the timeless, unconditioned, undifferentiated oneness of being which can be spiritually experienced in non-conceptual concentration (*nirvikalpa samādhi*) and which is *nirguṇa Brahman*.

³⁰ *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, II, 3, 6.

2) 'Appearance' is made up of three types of 'existents':

- i) 'real existent', which comprises those contents of experience that can be sublated only by Reality; as, for example, the highest kind of experiences or objects or the law of contradiction;
- ii) 'existent', which comprises those contents of experience that can be sublated by Reality or by the 'real existent'; as, for example, experiences or objects that are not the highest kind and relations that lack necessity;
- iii) 'illusory existent', which comprises those contents of experience that can be sublated by all other types of experience. Hallucinations, pure fancies and dreams, erroneous sense-perceptions, and the like are 'illusory': they may be vivid experiences, but they fail to satisfy certain basic practical or intellectual needs: they lack empirical truth.

Deutsch summarizes Appearance as that about which doubts can arise. It is that which is, or in principle can be, a datum of experience within the subject/object situation. The Apparent is that which is the content of sense-mental experience. It is the differentiated multiplicity of being.

3) Unreality is that which can never be a content of experience. By the criterion of sublation, the Unreal is non-being. For example, a square circle.

Since, from the standpoint of Reality, *Brahman* itself cannot be characterized, this hierarchical ontology holds only from the standpoint of Appearance and as such these distinctions may be necessary and valid as mental organizations of experience.³¹

Now let us turn to what Deutsch says is perhaps the central problem of classical, systematic Vedānta.³² The question is asked:

What is the relation that obtains between *Brahman* and the world? Or in what sense is *Brahman*, the Absolute, the creator of the world?

Deutsch answers that for Advaita Vedānta from the standpoint of *Brahman*-experience (*nirvikalpa samādhi*), i.e., the immediate, intuitive experience of non-duality, *Brahman* presents itself as the fullness of being, as self-luminous consciousness, and as infinite bliss (*saccidānanda*) where the complex world of our ordinary experience disappears in the pure white light of a spiritual simplicity where all distinctions, contradictions, and multiplicities are transcended and are obliterated, including the distinction between creator and created: creation is a question and

³¹ Deutsch notes that Śaṅkara explicitly acknowledges three levels: *pāramārthika* (which corresponds precisely to the level of Reality), *vyāvahārika* (which includes all the sublevels of Appearance except the 'illusory existent'), and *prātibhāsika* (which is the 'illusory existent').

³² The *Upaniṣads* mainly propound and explore views about a true Self (*ātman*) in relation to *Brahman*, the supreme reality, the Absolute or God (Phillips).

problem only from the standpoint of rational-empirical consciousness, from the standpoint of Appearance within which philosophizing takes place.

“In sum, for Advaita Vedānta, the creation or evolution of the world, as indeed the status of the world itself, is only an apparent truth. Creation may be considered a positive activity of *Brahman* only from the *vyāvahārika*³³ or empirical point of view; only to the extent that we are subject to *māya* (‘illusion’), *avidyā* (‘ignorance’),³⁴ and are engaged in the activities of *adhyāsa* (‘superimposition’).³⁵ When in this condition one attempts to understand the relation between *Brahman* and the world, one is compelled rationally to uphold creation in terms of *satkāryavāda*—theory that the effect pre-exists in its cause [and ontologically is non-different from it]—that *Brahman* is the material and efficient cause of the world. Further, when seen from this standpoint and in terms of the requirements of spiritual experience, *Brahman* becomes *Īśvara*, the creative Lord who calls forth worlds, maintains them, and re-absorbs them as *līlā*, as sport or play. *Īśvara*’s distinctive activity is thus an outpouring of energy for its own sake. There is no purpose to creation, as *Īśvara* has no need that is to be fulfilled in creation. He is a free, unlimited power.

But having arrived at all of this within *māyā*, one cannot ascribe ultimacy to it. Creation is only apparent change, it is not a modification of *Brahman* in reality, and hence *vivartavāda*.³⁶

³³ *Vyāvahārika* is the apparent or practical reality of the world that is distinguished from true reality (*sat*) and from complete non-reality (*asat*).

³⁴ Śaṅkara uses the terms ‘*māyā*’ and ‘*avidyā*’ interchangeably.

Deutsch (1969) states that metaphysically, ‘illusion’ (*māya*) is that mysterious power (*śakti*) of *Brahman* by which the world of multiplicity comes into existence, that deludes us into taking the empirical world as reality, and that only ceases when one realizes the truth of *Brahman* through knowledge (*jñāna*). Epistemologically, *māyā* is ignorance (*avidyā*) that has the power of concealing reality (*āvaraṇa-śakti*) and also of misrepresenting or distorting reality (*vikṣepa-śakti*). For Advaita Vedānta, the phenomenal world is thus not just a figment of one’s imagination; it is not subjective idealism. So far as a separate subject exists, so does the object that is experienced by it. Even though the world is not ultimate Reality, it is not wholly unreal because Unreality is that which never appears as an objective datum of experience.

³⁵ Deutsch (1969, 33f.): “Superimposition takes place when the qualities of one thing not immediately present to consciousness are, through memory, given to or projected upon another thing that is present to consciousness and are identified with it. In the stock example of the rope and the snake, the rope (the thing immediately present to consciousness) is taken as a snake through the erroneous attribution of qualities remembered from previous perceptions (of snakes). [...] Those who do not see clearly attribute causation to *Brahman*, and assign the characteristics of *Brahman*, such as existence, to *Iśvara*, the creator of the universe.”

³⁶ I.e., the special theory that the effect is nothing but an ‘apparent’ manifestation of its cause. For Sāṃkhya, as for Advaita, the effect pre-exists in the cause but is an ‘actual’ transformation of it (*parināma-vāda*).

We then have the following chart (Deutsch 1969, p. 35):

From the standpoint of *Brahman*-experience, from the standpoint of *Brahman* itself, there is no creation: Reality is non-dual.

The whole import of *vivartavāda* then is to bring the mind away from its involvement in *māyā*, away from the need to ask the question about the relation between *Brahman* and the world, the asking of which implies the recognition of the world as a separate entity, to its experiencing directly the Reality that is *Brahman*. The world is first affirmed as an empirical reality, an affirmation which, apart from its inherent philosophical justification, avoids a subjective idealism that would overcome duality without self-transcendence; and secondly as an ‘effect’ of *Brahman* which again, apart from its logical justification, has the practical value of bringing the mind that is attached to the world into an awareness of *Brahman* as its cause. *Vivartavāda* then affirms the appearance-only status of the effect and thus points the way to the sublation of the world in *Brahman* through ‘de-superimposition’ (*apavāda*), through the reducing of effects back into their causes. This leads the mind to *Brahman*, to Reality, where all questions of the relation between it and something else are silenced.”³⁷

Before turning to the discussion of *karma* we will briefly look at the main topic of most of the early *Upaniṣads*, namely, the identity of the individual self (*ātman*) with the Cosmic Absolute (*Brahman*). Deutsch (1969) states that the central concern of Advaita Vedānta is to establish the oneness of Reality and to lead the human being to a knowledge and realization of it so that all pain, misery, ignorance, and bondage is overcome.

He then raises the question as to how the self, the knowledge of which yields freedom and wisdom, relates to what we ordinarily take to be our self—our physical organization, our mental activities and capacities, our emotional and volitional life.

Deutsch answers:

“Ātman (or *paramātman*, the highest Self), for Advaita Vedānta, is that pure, undifferentiated self-shining consciousness, timeless, spaceless, and unthinkable, that is not-different from *Brahman* and that underlies and supports the individual human person.”³⁸

“The individual human person, the *jīva*, on the other hand, is a combination of reality and appearance. It is ‘reality’ so far as Ātman is its ground; it is ‘appearance’ so far as it is identified as finite, conditioned, relative. The individual self then is empirically real, for it is

<i>satkāryavāda</i>		<i>asatkāryavāda</i>	
Effect pre-exists in cause (Advaita and Sāṃkhya)		Effect exists independent of cause (Buddhism, Mīmāṃsā, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika)	
<i>vivarta-vāda</i> (Advaita)	<i>pariṇāma-vāda</i> (Sāṃkhya)		
Effect is mere ‘appearance’	Effect is actual ‘transformation’		

³⁷ Deutsch (1969, p. 40f.).

³⁸ Deutsch (1969, p. 48).

a datum of objective and subjective experience; but it is transcendently unreal, for the self, in essence, is identical with the Absolute.”³⁹

To further clarify the status of *jīva*, Śaṅkara proffers two theories:

- i) the theory of reflection (*pratibimba-vāda*), according to which *jīva* is a reflection of Ātman on the mirror of *avidyā*, and as such it is not-different from Ātman in essence.
- ii) the theory of limitation (*avaccheda-vāda*), according to which the individual is a limitation of consciousness that is constituted by the ‘limiting condition’ (*upādhi*) of ignorance, so that the individual does not see him- or herself as he or she really is, but as a being separated from other individuals, conditioned and finite.

BCB.1.

THE VEDĀNTA SYSTEM AND KARMAN

In this section we will discuss the following topics:

- the non-validity of *karma* on the level of ultimate reality
- *karma* and morality on the level of conventional reality
- the self-realized person and morality
- *karma* as a convenient fiction to solve practical problems
- first problem: the clarification of the definition of *mokṣa*
- second problem: moral preparation
- third problem: discouragement and retreat
- fourth problem: inequality and evil
- theistic Vedānta schools and *karma*.

As we have seen, from an ontological framework of Advaita with its insistence on distinctionless Oneness, it follows that *karma* with its distinctions of cause and effect, of creator and created, good or bad action, etc., does not ultimately exist since it can be sublated into *Brahman*, which transcends all moral distinctions, principles and duties and is in essence ‘beyond good and evil’.

Also from an epistemological framework, for Advaita Vedānta, as Deutsch (pp. 69-76) attempts to show, the law of *karma* cannot be established through any of the means of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) recognized by the system, i.e., neither by perception (*pratyakṣa*), comparison (*upamāna*), non-cognition (*anupalabdhi*), inference (*anumāna*), postulation (*arthāpatti*) or testimony (*śabda*).

³⁹ Deutsch (1969, p. 51).

Thus Advaita maintains that to attain the highest goal or value, namely, self-realization, knowledge (*jñāna*) alone is sufficient.

On the other hand, even though *karma* does not exist on the level of ultimate Reality, *karma* is not an illusory existent, a pure illusion, and so Advaita maintains that the individual (*jīva*) who has not yet attained self-realization is bound up by the moral consequences of his or her actions, whether mental, verbal or physical, and that the practice and cultivation of morality is an aid to the attainment of the highest goal, self-realization. Therefore, apart from the traditional code of conduct generally adhered to, whatever action is conducive to the attainment of self-realization is considered to be morally good, whereas all other activities—however noble and altruistic they may appear to be—suffer from being rooted in egoistic desire and thus are considered to be not good.

Deutsch now raises the question of whether the person who has realized the true Self is bound by morality or whether he or she is justified committing any kind of action whatsoever. He answers that for Advaita, logically speaking, nothing that the realized person (*jīvanmukta*) does is subject to moral judgment, whereas, from a psychological point of view, this person would not perform immoral actions as these presuppose egoism which has been overcome.

Moreover, *karma* was used as a 'convenient fiction' by the Upaniṣadic teachers and taken over by later Advaitins, with the expectation that it would help to solve certain specific problems. Deutsch mentions four of these, that arise for the practitioner attempting to realize self-knowledge and freedom. Thus, Deutsch states, *karma* is central to the manner in which the supreme value of *mokṣa* or freedom is conceived and thus has, for the Advaitin, the logical status of a 'convenient fiction'.

The first problem is related to the formulation of the definition of freedom (*mokṣa*) which is defined in terms of liberation from bondage (*bandha*). As most people need to be inspired in order to pursue self-realization, it is necessary for the practitioners to develop a keen and straightforward awareness of being in bondage, and *karma*, as a central factor of bondage, provides ready means for instilling this awareness, being fairly easy to communicate to all varieties of people.

The second problem is related to the moral preparation for the pursuit of self-liberation. *Karma* is very helpful in persuading people to live a moral life as it emphasizes the importance of every moral action and decision and the inevitable results which come from it.

The third problem is related to discouragement and possible retreat of the practitioner. As the spiritual path is no doubt a long and winding road before self-realization is achieved, it is easy to become discouraged and want to give up. The doctrine of *karma* and rebirth helps to solve this spiritual problem as it maintains that no effort goes to waste and that there is not just one life in which to attain self-realization.

The fourth problem is related to the problem of the presence of inequality among people and of evil. The doctrine of *karma* provides at least one of the answers to these problems as it links present experiences as an effect to past actions as their cause.

Halbfass (1998) summarizes:

But although *karma* is a basic premise in Advaita Vedānta, it is ultimately (*paramārtha*) irrelevant. It is confined to the level of conventional, provisional truth (*vyavahāra*). In the end, *karma* and rebirth have only one meaning and function: to expose the ontological and soteriological deficiency of our world of time and space. Good *karma* is as vacuous as bad *karma*. The entire domain of *karma* and causality is a realm of ignorance and illusion (*avidyā*, *māyā*) and needs to be transcended.

On the other hand, Halbfass (2000) points out that one should not underestimate the role that *karma* and rebirth played in the thinking of Śaṅkara; in no other Hinduistic system is *karma* so clearly and rigorously conceived as the starting point and counterpart of liberation (*mokṣa*) as in Śaṅkara.

Halbfass (1998) concludes with a brief comment on the theistic Vedānta schools and their relation to *karma*:

The radical monism and illusionism of Advaita Vedānta was criticized by numerous schools of theistic Vedānta, especially those that flourished among the devotees of Viṣṇu (for instance, Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita and Madhva's Dvaita Vedānta). According to these groups, *karma* was real; but it could be neutralized and superseded through loving devotion to God (*bhakti*) and divine grace, and was thus relegated to a lower level of relevance.

C. **THE PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS OF THE SIX NON-ORTHODOX TEACHERS AND KARMAN**

What remains to be discussed in our survey of the non-Buddhist systems and their relation to *karma* are the major systems that are ‘unorthodox’ both from the Buddhist and Hindu point of view. We will do this in relation to the six prominent teachers who lived at the time of the Buddha and who were discussed in the *Samaññaphala Sutta* in the *Dīgha Nikāya*. Historically speaking, we thus take a step back from the classical Hindu orthodox systems which flourished at a later time.

We will start out with Jainism whose literary contribution to the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth, according to Halbfass (1998), surpasses those of both Hinduism and Buddhism, and then we will move on to the Ājivikas who were strict fatalists and determinists denying free, independent action and *karma* that is created by humans themselves. We will end with the materialists who deny *karma* and the skeptics who avoid either affirming or negating *karma*.

CA. **JAINISM**

Halbfass (2000) states that Mahāvira (‘Great Hero’; 599-527 BCE), the 24th and last Tirthaṅkara (‘Ford-maker’⁴⁰) who is also known as Vardhamāna or Jina (‘Conqueror’), or as Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta in the *Samaññaphala Sutta*, was probably not really the founder of Jainism but was a reformer and innovator within an already existing tradition of asceticism and of an ethical way of life, an older contemporary of the Buddha. Like the Buddha, the Jina did not leave behind any written teachings. Supposedly in 79 C.E., the tradition split into two sects, the Śvetāmbaras (‘white-robed’), monks and nuns who wear white robes, and the Digambaras (‘sky-clad’; i.e., naked), monks who go naked.

The name ‘Jainism’ (derived from *ji*, ‘to conquer’) refers to the ascetic battle against the afflictions and bodily senses in order to gain omniscience and complete purity of the soul.

Jainism’s ontology is dualistic, where ultimate reality is divided into the fundamental categories of:

- i) *jīva*, living entities or souls,
- ii) *ajīva*, lifeless entities.

Jayandra Soni⁴¹ states that, in their intrinsic natures, they are exclusive categories in the sense that, despite their coexistence (as, for example, in human beings), the one cannot take on the nature of the other. Both are ontological substances (*dravya*) in that reality or existence as such can ultimately be reduced to these two eternal, uncreated and indestructible categories.

⁴⁰ One who has found the way to cross over into spiritual perfection.

⁴¹ ‘Jaina philosophy’, in: *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London, 1998.

In regards to souls (*jīva*), their essential characteristics are consciousness (*cetana*), bliss (*sukha*) and energy (*vīrya*) which, in the fully liberated soul, are unlimited. Souls are also infinite in number, indestructible, immortal, unitary. In regards to the size of the soul, the basic Jaina doctrine maintains that a soul can be of variable size in accordance to the body it inhabits, whereas a fully liberated soul is said to retain the shape and size of the body that it occupied at the time *mokṣa* was attained.⁴² Jainism has an extremely wide-ranging notion of life and souls. In their embodied state souls can be classified into two groups, as either being (a) stationary (*sthāvara*) or (b) moving (*trasa*).

The first group of souls, being single-sense beings (*ekendriya*) which possess only the sense of touch, can inhabit plants and the four elements or 'molecules' of earth, water, fire and air and thus form five distinct types whereby the 'plant life' (*vanaspati*) can be further divided into *pratyekas* which have an entire plant-body to themselves and *nigodas* which exist as part of a cluster of microscopic organisms distributed over the whole cosmos; but this does not imply that matter itself is animated and alive.

The second group inhabits bodies having between two and five sense organs and includes gods, men, hell-beings, and animals. An absolute God or creator god does not exist for the Jains.

In regards to lifeless entities (*ajīva*), they are classified as (a) non-sentient and material and (b) non-sentient and nonmaterial.

The first group refers to 'matter' (*pudgala*) the essential characteristic of which is non-consciousness (*acetana*). The smallest unit of matter is the atom (*paramāṇu*) which is indestructible and eternal. The raw material of the universe is composed by combination and aggregation of atoms. The world (*loka*) is considered to be eternal and uncreated but not limitless, as it is surrounded by the non-world (*aloka*) which is empty. As we will see shortly, matter is crucial for Jainism since, according to Jayandra Soni, it directly affects the nature of the soul in the sense that, by becoming converted into *karma*, it restricts the intrinsic functions of the soul, inhibiting right faith, right knowledge and right conduct.

The second group refers to (i) 'space' (*ākāśa*), (ii) the medium and condition of motion (*dharma*) and (iii) the medium of rest (*adharma*), to which sometimes (iv) 'time' is added.

Thus, including the souls and matter, we have either five or six ontological categories (*astikāya*) or substances (*dravya*) which are eternal and indestructible while their conditions change constantly. The whole universe is composed out of these substances.

⁴² P. S. Jaini: 'Karma and the problem of rebirth in Jainism', in: O'Flaherty (1980), pp. 217-238.

Jaini states that this is in contradiction with virtually all the Vedic *darśanas* who assert that the soul is omnipresent (*vibhu*); however, exception has to be made for Rāmānuja's theory of an atomic, dimensionless soul.

JAINISM AND KARMA

For the presentation of this section we will follow the basic framework of the doctrine of *karma* provided by the seven fundamental principles (*tattva*).⁴³

- 1) the principle of the living entity or soul (*jīva*);
- 2) the principle of the lifeless entity (*ajīva*);
- 3) the principle of influx (*āsrava*): through the interaction (*yoga*) between *jīva* and *ajīva* matter flows into (*āsrava*) the soul, clings to it and becomes converted into *karma*;
- 4) the principle of bondage (*bandha*) of *karma* that restricts the manifestation of the consciousness;
- 5) the principle of stoppage (*saṃvara*) of new *karma* through asceticism;
- 6) the principle of the burning up and expulsion (*nirjarā*) of old *karma* through the intensification of asceticism;
- 7) the principle of final liberation (*mokṣa*) when the soul is freed from the influence of *karma*.

Having already discussed the two ontological categories of the *jīva* and *ajīva*, Halbfass (2000) starts by describing the third and fourth principle:

It is of fundamental and symptomatic importance that the Jains describe *karma*⁴⁴ as something material. It is neither an inner mental disposition nor a subtle cosmic power, but something that the soul literally attracts from the external world. It is a subtle material substance consisting of atoms like all other matter, that can attach itself to the soul, that actually enters into it, i.e., into the space occupied by the body belonging to the soul.

The material particles that are suitable to take on karmic functions and to attach themselves to the soul are distributed over the whole world. As long as they exist by themselves and are not related to a particular soul as its own *karma*, their moral value is neutral. They are not in themselves good or bad. This differentiation comes about only under the influence of the soul which makes decisions and initiates actions by activating the inner organ, speech and the body. Later authors describe this activation (*yoga*) as a 'vibration' (*parispanda*) of the soul which extends over the body. As a result, the nonmaterial soul (*jīva*) in alliance with the karmic subtle body belonging to it is able to affect matter, and in this way it draws karmic matter into itself and gives it the characteristic of good or bad.

⁴³ Cf. Jayandra Soni (1998): 'Jaina Philosophy', in: *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London, 1998.

⁴⁴ For Jainism *karma* refers in general to the result of action and not to the actually executed action itself which Jains prefer to term *kriyā/kriyā* or *yoga/joga*.

However, the attraction of *karma*, the influx (*āsrava*) [of karmic matter into the soul] and the subsequent bondage (*bandha*) is, however, not the result of the vibrations of the soul alone. The bondage occurs when the soul is formed by certain afflictions or stains (*kaṣāya*, *doṣa*, *kleśa*), namely, anger (*krodha*), pride (*māna*), confusion (*māyā*) and greed (*lobha*) which themselves can arise in different degrees of intensity. These afflictions are complemented by a number of moods or affliction-like emotions (*nokaṣāya*), for example, fear, abhorrence, and sex-specific tendencies. Through this the soul is, so to speak, 'moistened' so that *karma* can attach or stick to it.⁴⁵

Besides this fundamental determination of *karma* as a material and atomic substance, Halbfass presents four classifications of *karma*:

- 1) the classification oriented to the different types and spheres of the results that are brought about through *karma*;
- 2) the classification referring to the 'duration' (*sthiti*) of *karma*,
- 3) the classification relating to the 'intensity' of karmic effects;
- 4) the classification dealing with the 'quantity' or 'number' of the particles of *karma* (*pradeśa*) which are involved.

I will restrict myself here to presenting the eight basic types (*mūlaprakṛti*) of the first classification of *karma*:⁴⁶

- 1) *karma* that obstructs or covers the inherent knowledge of the soul, i.e., its normal functioning of the intellect and senses as well as its omniscience (*jñānāvaraṇakarman*);
- 2) *karma* that obstructs the perception of the senses, of the inner organ, etc. (*darśanāvaraṇakarman*);
- 3) *karma* that arouses sensation (of satisfaction and frustration) (*vedanīyakarman*);

⁴⁵ T. G. Kalghati (<http://www.ibiblio.org/jainism/database/BOOK/book.html>) in his 'Jaina View of Life' states: Nowhere has the physical nature of *karma* been asserted with such stress as in Jainism. [...] The Jaina tradition distinguishes two aspects: i) the physical aspect (*dravya-karman*) and ii) the psychic aspect (*bhava-karman*). The physical aspect comprises the particles of *karma* (*karma pudgala*) accruing into the soul and polluting it. The psychic aspect is primarily the mental states and events arising out of the activity of mind, body and speech. They are like the mental traces of the actions, as we experience the mnemonic traces long after the conscious states experienced vanish. The physical and the psychic *karma* are mutually related to each other as cause and effect. The distinction between the physical and the psychic aspects of *karma* is psychologically significant, as it presents the interaction of the bodily and the mental due to the incessant activity of the soul. [...] *Bhava-karman* is immediate to the *jivas*, while *dravya-karman* belongs to the body. [...] Mental states, like passion, attachment and aversion, which prepare the ground for the binding of the soul by *karma* are called psychic bondage (*bhava-bandha*); and the actual binding by the particles of *karma* is called *dravya-bandha*.

⁴⁶ Cf. Bronkhorst (2000) and the more detailed discussion in Halbfass (2000).

- 4) *karma* that leads to delusion (in regard to religious and ethical behavior as related to the different kind of afflictions) (*mohaniyakarman*);
- 5) *karma* that determines the lifespan (*āyuhkarman*);⁴⁷
- 6) *karma* that determines what kind of rebirth (human, animal, etc.) is attained as well as the bodily disposition (number of sense-organs, etc.) (*nāmakarman*);
- 7) *karma* that determines the social as well as soteriological status of an individual within a species (*gotrakarman*);
- 8) *karma* that limits and obstructs the energy (*vīrya*) and other capabilities of the soul (*antarāyakarman*).

These eight basic types of *karma* are later classified into two types: (i) ruinous or harming (*ghātin*) and (ii) non-ruinous or non-harming (*aghātin*).

‘Harming *karma*’ which impedes or obscures the internal cognitive and soteriological potential of the soul and so keeps the soul in bondage, includes (1) *jñānāvaraṇakarman*, (2) *darśanāvaraṇakarman*, (4) *mohaniyakarman* and (8) *antarāyakarman*.

‘Non-harming *karma*’ which is responsible for the mechanism of rebirth and embodiment in regard to species, status, circumstances, etc., includes (3) *vedaniyakarman*, (5) *āyuhkarman*, (6) *nāmakarman* and (7) *gotrakarman*.

Turning now to the fifth and sixth principle (*tattva*), the principle of stoppage (*saṃvara*) of new *karma* through asceticism and the principle of burning up and expulsion (*nirjarā*) of old *karma* through the intensification of asceticism, Halbfass (2000) explains that every attempt at the stoppage (*saṃvara*) of new *karma* or expulsion (*nirjarā*) of the already influxed *karma*, must take the function of the afflictions into account and must aim at neutralizing and overcoming them, Bronkhorst (2000) further specifies that the destruction of the fourth basic type of *karma*, namely, the *karma* that leads to delusion (*mohaniyakarman*), the principal ‘harming *karma*’, leads to the elimination of the other varieties of *karma*.

Now, Halbfass (2000) goes on to explain, if at the end of a lifetime the *karma* and afflictions are not eliminated, then an immediate and direct passage to a new organism occurs, i.e., without an intermediate being (*antārabhava*), and since *karma* is material, it forms a karmic subtle body (*kārmaṇaśarīra*) which accompanies the soul from one existence into the next. In fact, the soul, as long as it is entangled in *saṃsāra*, never exists without a karmic subtle body which is the foundation of its worldliness.

Coming now to the last principle, final liberation, Bronkhorst (2000) states that it is the declared goal of Jainism to free the souls from *karma* and in this way from the bondage to matter in order

⁴⁷ Whereas general *karma* can enter and accumulate in the soul at any time, *āyuhkarman* can only be bound to the soul at a specific time, i.e., at the time of death.

to bring forth fully and unconcealed their perfections, such as omniscience, unlimited energy, eternal life, freedom from satisfaction and frustration, which are potentially inherent in them.

Halbfass describes the soteriological aspect (2000) of the final liberation in the following way:

The classification and analysis of the karmic factors, their effects and ways of functioning, are, for the Jains, the prerequisites for overcoming them. The goal is in the end practical and soteriological, namely, the self-purification and self-perfection of the soul, i.e., the liberation from the entanglement in the material world and from the cycle of rebirths. For this, first it is necessary to prevent and stop (*saṃvara*) new *karma* thus making sure that the bondage of the soul is not continuously renewed or strengthened. But in the end, the *karma* that already has entered into the soul has also to be systematically deleted, i.e., it has to be separated and sent back or expelled into the world (*nirjarā*).⁴⁸ At the same time, the afflictions which enable the attaching and sticking of *karma* to the soul, must be combated against and eliminated. Through this the path to final liberation (*mokṣa*) is paved and the ascent of the soul into the highest regions of the universe reserved for the liberated and perfected souls (*siddha*) is facilitated. In order to make this goal attainable, the Jains develop a rigorous and complex system of ethical rules of behavior, which is enlarged and deepened by the practice of meditation and radical asceticism and self-chastisement.

The path of liberation is practiced through the cultivation of the three jewels (*ratnatraya*): right knowledge, right faith and right conduct. Right conduct, the framework of the ascetic practices, is made up of the 'five great vows' (*mahāvratas*) ascribed to Mahāvira, which seem to be a summary of Indian asceticism as a whole from ancient times and according to which the ascetics vow to live: (1) nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) towards all forms of life, (2) abstinence from lying, (3) not taking what is not given, (4) celibacy, and (5) renunciation of property. Nonviolence is strongly emphasized and foremost since violence produces the greatest amount of *karma*.

CB.

THE ĀJIVIKAS AND KARMAN

Coming now to the Ājivikas, in Buddhist literature the term 'Ājivika' in a broad sense seems to refer to all naked religious wanderers and not just to one religious movement.⁴⁹ However, in the strict sense, it referred to the Ājivikas, the followers of Makkhali Gosāla—one of the six non-orthodox teachers discussed in the *Samaññaphala Sutta*—an atheistic ascetic rival sect of the Jains and Buddhists that started at the time of the Buddha and lasted until the 14th century C.E.

⁴⁸ U. P. Shaw notes that *nirjarā* consists of fasting, not eating certain kinds of food, control over taste, resorting to lonely places, mortifications of the body, atonement and expiation for sins, modesty, service, study, meditation, and renunciation of the ego. *Nirjara* is, thus, the calculated cessation of passionate action.

⁴⁹ Cf. 'The Riddle of the Jainas and Ājivikas in early Buddhist literature', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 28, pp. 511-529, 2000.

Makkhali Gosāla⁵⁰ was a former disciple and companion of Mahāvira who remained with him for six years before it came to a breach, after which Gosāla directed himself towards the sect of the Ājivika of which he later became the head.⁵¹

According to Hirakawa (1990), the Indian term ‘*ājivika*’ probably meant ‘those who follow a strict mode of life’, referring to the severe austerities performed by the Ājivika followers, but there are different opinions on this.⁵²

As the Ājivikas’ own texts have not survived, their doctrine is usually reconstructed via the texts of their Jain and Buddhist opponents.⁵³

In the following, we will discuss the following topics

- the ontology of the Ājivikas
- the general doctrine of the Ājivikas
- determinism or fatalism (*niyati-vāda*) as the most essential feature of their doctrine
- the ethics and soteriology of the Ājivikas
- the Ājivikas particular use and understanding of *karma*
- the symptomatic value of asceticism in the deterministic doctrine of the Ājivikas

In regards to their ontology, Richard Shaw states that the soul was considered to be atomic and thus could not be divided. In its natural state outside the body, it is immense in size, five hundred leagues (*yojana*) in extent. They accept an atomic theory with seven substances: earth, water, fire, air, joy, sorrow and life, that are uncreated and unchanging.

⁵⁰ Dasgupta in his *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. III. p. 522, says that according to Buddhaghosa he was born in a cow-shed (*go-sāla*). As he grew up he was employed as a servant; while walking in the mud to bring oil he was cautioned by his master to take care not to let his feet slip (*mākhali*) in the mud; but in spite of the caution, he slipped and ran away from his master who, following him in a rage, pulled the ends of his *dhoti*, which was left in his hands, and Makkhali ran away naked. Thus left naked, he afterwards became an ascetic like Pūraṇa Kassapa.

⁵¹ Cf. Frauwallner, *History of Indian Philosophy*, p. 213.

⁵² For example, Heinrich Zimmer states in his *Philosophies of India*, p. 263f.: The followers of this much-abused and freely slandered teacher [i.e., Makkhali Gosāla] were the so-called *Ājivaka*—those professing the doctrine termed *ā-jīva*. *Jīva* is the life-monad. The prefix *ā-* here signifies ‘as long as’. The reference seems to be to Gosāla’s striking doctrine that ‘as long as the life-monad’ (*ā-jīva*) has not completed the normal course of its evolution (running through a fixed number of inevitable births), there can be no realization.

⁵³ A. L. Basham’s *History and Doctrine of the Ājivikas: A Vanished Indian Religion* is considered to be the definitive work on the Ājivikas. Unfortunately, I have been unable to consult this. The following is therefore based on the writings of other modern scholars and a few citations from Buddhist scriptures.

In general, what can be said about their doctrine is that the Ājivikas as an unorthodox system rejected the sacrificial polytheism of the *Brāhmaṇas* and the monistic mysticism of the *Upaniṣads*.

More specifically, we hear Makkhali Gosāla in the *Samaññaphala Sutta* explaining his doctrine to King Ajatasattu in the following way:

Great king, there is no cause, no requisite condition, for the defilement of beings. Beings are defiled without cause, without requisite condition.

There is no cause, no requisite condition, for the purification of beings. Beings are purified without cause, without requisite condition.

There is nothing self-caused, nothing other-caused, nothing human-caused.

There is no strength, no effort, no human energy, no human endeavor.

All living beings, all life, all beings, all souls are powerless, devoid of strength, devoid of effort.⁵⁴

Subject to the changes of fate, serendipity, and nature, they are sensitive to pleasure and pain in the six great classes of birth.⁵⁵

There are 1,406,600 principle modes of origin. There are 500 kinds of *kamma*, five kinds, and three kinds; full *kamma* and half *kamma*. There are 62 pathways, 62 sub-eons, six great classes of birth, eight classes of men, 4,900 modes of livelihood, 4,900 kinds of wanderers, 4,900 *naga*-abodes, 2,000 faculties, 3,000 hells, 36 dust-realms, seven spheres of percipient beings, seven spheres of non-percipient beings, seven kinds of jointed plants, seven kinds of deities, seven kinds of human beings, seven kinds of demons, seven great lakes, seven major knots, seven minor knots, 700 major precipices, 700 minor precipices, 700 major dreams, 700 minor dreams, 84,000 great aeons. Having transmigrated and wandered on through these, the wise and the foolish alike will put an end to pain.

⁵⁴ Dasgupta: All vertebrates (*sabbe sattā*), all animals with one or more senses (*sabbe pāṇā*), all lives emanating from eggs or ovaries (*sabbe bhūtā*), all vegetable lives, are without any power or efficiency.

⁵⁵ Frauwallner: fate, chance and nature; Mohanty: destiny, environment and their own nature; Bhikkhu Bodhi: destiny, circumstance, and nature. Dasgupta translates: They become transformed in various forms by their inherent destiny, by their manifestation in various life-forms, and by their different natures (*niyati-saṅgati-bhava-pariṇati*), and it is in accordance with their six kinds of life-states that they suffer pains and enjoy pleasures. T.W. Rhys Davids translates: They are bent this way and that by their fate, by the necessary conditions of the class to which they belong, by their individual nature: and it is according to their position in one or other of the six classes that they experience ease or pain.

The Pali Text Society Dictionary has *sangati* = accidental occurrence D I.53.

This passage might explain why Mohanty says that, although Makkhali Gosāli is usually considered to be a strict determinist or fatalist, scholars have held the view that he might leave room for chance, if not for freedom of will.

Though one might think, “Through this morality, this practice, this austerity, or this holy life I will ripen unripened *kamma* and eliminate ripened *kamma* whenever touched by it” – that is impossible. Pleasure and pain are measured out, the wandering-on is fixed in its limits. There is no shortening or lengthening, no accelerating or decelerating. Just as a ball of string, when thrown, comes to its end simply by unwinding, in the same way, having transmigrated and wandered on, the wise and the foolish alike will put an end to pain.

Thus, when asked about a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here and now, Makkhali Gosāla answered with purification through wandering-on.⁵⁶

Frauwallner notes that the most essential feature of the doctrine of the Ājivika was a strong determinism (*niyati-vāda*).

Niyati-vāda is usually translated as ‘determinism’ or ‘fatalism’.⁵⁷ *Niyati* can be translated as ‘fate, destiny, necessity’. *Niyati* is the cosmic force through which everything is not only carried out according to rigorous legality impossible to break through, but every being, during an immense time-space, has to go through a definite number of births to exhaust the different possibilities of existence until finally it attains deliverance. *Niyati* thus determines an

⁵⁶ <http://www.accesstinsight.org/canon/digha/dn02.html>. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

⁵⁷ As to the different connotations of determinism and fatalism in a Western context, Manfredi of Southern Illinois University (<http://www.siu.edu/~philos/faculty/Manfredi/intro/freedom/freedom.html>) says the following:

Determinism: The thesis that the past together with the laws of nature determine a unique future. More specifically, it is the thesis that every event which occurs, including human actions and choices, is physically necessary given the laws of nature and the events which preceded it.

Fatalism: The claim that what happens to us cannot be avoided no matter what we do. Saying that an event is fated to occur means that it will occur regardless of what choices I make. For example, if I jump out of a ten story window, I am fated to fall towards the ground. After I jump, my choices make no difference to whether or not I fall. The fatalist believes that if I was fated to perform some action, then even if I had made completely different choices than I in fact did, circumstances would have resulted in my performing that action anyway.

The fatalist and determinist agree that we cannot avoid doing what we do, but they think this for different reasons. The fatalist believes that our choices make no difference—different choices will lead to the same action; the determinist believes that our choices do make a difference—different choices will lead to different actions, but we cannot avoid the choices we make.

Bronkhorst in his *The Riddle of the Jainas and Ājivikas*, points out that the strict determinism of the Ājivikas had an important role to play in the days when Mahāvira was still alive and in the following period during which the human behavior, including errors, of the omniscient leaders of Jainism were still part of collective memory, as it was eminently useful to explain the human shortcomings of their “omniscient” leaders.

individual's fate to the last detail and therefore bars personal efforts to change or accelerate improvement toward one's spiritual destiny.

Thus in regards to ethics and soteriology, Halbfass (2000) states that as Makkhali Gosāla proclaimed a radical fatalism and determinism, he also radically denied the purpose and possibility of religious and ethical endeavors, the free decision and moral initiative of humans (*puruṣakāra*); and B. K. Matilal⁵⁸ states that though the *saṃsāra* hypothesis was accepted by Ājīvika, human actions were thought to be meaningless (*a-kriyā-vāda* or *ahetu-vāda*), because they would not affect in the least the inexorable world-process, whereas the Jainas and the Buddhist maintained the efficacy of human action (*kriyā-vāda*) and that an individual can better his or her lot in the course of transmigration.

However, in contrast to the materialists, Makkhali Gosāla does not deny the doctrine of rebirth or the term *karma* as can be seen from the quote of the *Dīgha Nikāya*. But his version of the doctrine of *karma* does not allow any room for human initiative and for free, responsible action; his conception of *karma* is fatalistic.

Jains and Buddhists object that it would follow that religion and ethics would have no meaning at all. Heinrich Zimmer (p. 265f.) clarifies the role of asceticism of the Ājīvikas and its role for liberation in the following way:

The Ājīvika doctrine that no amount of moral or ascetic exertion would shorten the series of rebirths offered no hope for a speedy release from the fields of ignorance through saintly exercises. On the contrary, a vast and comprehensive review of all the kingdoms and departments of nature lets it appear that each life-monad was to pass, in a series of precisely eighty-four thousand births, through the whole gamut of the varieties of being, starting among the elemental atoms of ether, air, fire, water, and earth, progressing through the graduated spheres of the various geological, botanical, and zoological forms of existence, and coming finally into the kingdom of man, each birth being linked to the others in conformity to a precise and minutely graduated order of evolution. All the life-monads in the universe were passing laboriously along this one inevitable way. [...] When the time at last arrives, and the final term of the series of eighty-four thousand existences has been attained, release simply happens, just as everything else has happened—of itself. [...]

And yet, according to this 'hempen shirt' doctrine of Gosāla, man's moral conduct is not without significance; for every living being, through its characteristic pattern of reactions to the environment, betrays its entire multibiographical history, together with all that it has yet to learn. Its acts are not the cause of the influx (*āsrava*) of fresh karmic substance, as in the Jaina view, but only reveal its position or classification in the general hierarchy, showing how deeply entangled or close to release it happens to be. Our words and deeds,

⁵⁸ *Logic, Language & Reality*, p. 365.

that is to say, announce to ourselves—and to the world—every minute, just what milestone we have come to. Thus perfect asceticism, though it has no causative, has yet a symptomatic value: it is the characteristic mode of life of a being who is on the point of reaching the goal of isolation (*kaivalya*); and conversely, those who are not readily drawn to it are comparatively low in the human scale. [...] Pious acts, then, are not the causes, but the effects; they do not bring, but they foretell release. The perfect ascetic shows through the detached austerity of his conduct that he is the being nearest to the exit. He shows that he has all but completed the long course and is now absolutely unwavering in his exalted unconcern both for himself and for the world—indifferent alike to what the world thinks of him, to what he is, and to what he is about to be.

CC. THE MATERIALISTS AND KARMAN

We will now discuss the materialistic school of classical Indian philosophy, the most common designation of which is Lokāyata, i.e., the doctrine which concerns only this world as there is no beyond, but is also referred to as Cārvāka when traced back to one of its great teachers. Early references to materialism go as far back as the *Ṛg Veda*. Of the basic text of the Lokāyata, the *Bṛhaspatīsūtra* (600 B.C.E.), only a few fragments remain. The only surviving original work is Jayarāśi's *Tattvopaplavaśiṃha* (7th century C.E.). The doctrine is therefore reconstructed through the works of other traditions.

In the following we will discuss the following topics:

- the connection of Materialism with political theory
- various representatives of Materialism and their doctrines
- the essential component of Materialism according to Frauwallner
- ontology of Materialism: in general, acceptance of only 4 elements
- epistemology of Materialism: in general, acceptance of only direct perception
- ethics, soteriology: denial of the doctrine of *karma*

The development of the Lokāyata shows a close connection with a Macchiavalli-like political theory. Eli Franco⁵⁹ says that it is noteworthy that both the legendary founder of Lokāyata and the founder of a school of political science (*arthaśāstra*) bear the name Bṛhaspati and he finds it possible that Indian materialism developed as an alternative worldview counterbalancing that of the priestly class. In regards to the first materialist, whom tradition has handed down to us, he says:

⁵⁹ 'Indian School of Materialism', in: *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London, 1998.

Both the Jaina and Buddhist canons report the views and gruesome experiments of King Paesi (Pāyāsi), who argued that:

- i) if the soul were different from the body and if a person's fate after death depended on deeds in this life, deceased relatives could be expected to come back from the other world to warn and admonish those left behind.
- ii) He once had a thief condemned to death put into a hermetically sealed and guarded jar. The prisoner was found dead after a while and the escape of a soul was not observed.
- iii) On another occasion, Paesi had an executed thief placed in a sealed jar. The jar was later found full of worms, although their souls could not have entered it.
- iv) Weighing immediately before and after death and dissection of bodies did not yield evidence for the existence of a soul.

According to Frauwallner, three of the six non-Buddhist *samana* teachers that are mentioned in the *Samaññaphala Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 2) are materialists: Pūraṇa Kassapa, Ajita Kesakambali and Pakudha Kaccāyana.⁶⁰ In this Sūtra we hear Pūraṇa Kassapa, when asked about the fruit of the contemplative life, give the following answer to King Ajātasattu:

“Great king, in acting or getting others to act, in mutilating or getting others to mutilate, in torturing or getting others to torture, in inflicting sorrow or in getting others to inflict sorrow, in tormenting or getting others to torment, in intimidating or getting others to intimidate, in taking life, taking what is not given, breaking into houses, plundering wealth, committing burglary, ambushing highways, committing adultery, speaking falsehood – one does no evil.

If with a razor-edged disk one were to turn all the living beings on this earth to a single heap of flesh, a single pile of flesh, there would be no evil from that cause, no coming of evil.

Even if one were to go along the right bank of the Ganges, killing and getting others to kill, mutilating and getting others to mutilate, torturing and getting others to torture, there would be no evil from that cause, no coming of evil.

⁶⁰ However, notice that there are different views on classifying these three teachers. For example, Obeyesekere mentions that Basham considers not only Makkhali Gosāla to be an Ājīvika but also Pūraṇa Kassapa and Ajita Kesakambali. Obeyesekere (2002) himself, however, considers Ajita Kesakambali to be an uncompromising materialist and ‘annihilationist’ and, in regards to Pūraṇa Kassapa, states that he believed in rebirth though obviously not accepting karmic causality.

Not having yet access to Basham's book, I follow Frauwallner's classification here, partly as it gives more details than the other sources available to me, but also as my focus is more on the systems themselves than on the 6 non-orthodox teachers.

Even if one were to go along the left bank of the Ganges, giving and getting others to give, making sacrifices and getting others to make sacrifices, there would be no merit from that cause, no coming of merit. Through generosity, self-control, restraint, and truthful speech there is no merit from that cause, no coming of merit.”

Thus, when asked about a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here and now, Pūraṇa Kassapa answered with non-action (*akiriya*).⁶¹

To the same question, Ajita Kesakambali answers the following:

“Great king, there is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed. There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions. There is no this world, no next world, no mother, no father, no spontaneously reborn beings; no priests or contemplatives who, faring rightly and practicing rightly, proclaim this world and the next after having directly known and realized it for themselves.

A person is a composite of four primary elements. At death, the earth (in the body) returns to and merges with the (external) earth-substance. The fire returns to and merges with the external fire-substance. The liquid returns to and merges with the external liquid-substance. The wind returns to and merges with the external wind-substance. The sense-faculties scatter into space.

Four men, with the bier as the fifth, carry the corpse. Its eulogies are sounded only as far as the charnel ground. The bones turn pigeon-colored. The offerings end in ashes. Generosity is taught by idiots. The words of those who speak of existence after death are false, empty chatter. With the break-up of the body, the wise and the foolish alike are annihilated, destroyed. They do not exist after death.”

Thus, when asked about a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here and now, Ajita Kesakambalin answered with annihilation (*natthika*).

And Pakudha Kaccāyana answers:

“Great king, there are these seven substances -- unmade, irreducible, uncreated, without a creator, barren, stable as a mountain-peak, standing firm like a pillar -- that do not alter, do not change, do not interfere with one another, are incapable of causing one another pleasure, pain, or both pleasure and pain.

Which seven? The earth-substance, the liquid-substance, the fire-substance, the wind-substance, pleasure, pain, and the soul (*jīvāḥ*) as the seventh.

⁶¹ Translation Thanissaro Bhikkhu; <http://www.accesstinsight.org/canon/digha/dn02.html>.

akriyāvādin: disbeliever in the efficacy of actions.

These are the seven substances -- unmade, irreducible, uncreated, without a creator, barren, stable as a mountain-peak, standing firm like a pillar – that do not alter, do not change, do not interfere with one another, and are incapable of causing one another pleasure, pain, or both pleasure and pain.

And among them there is no killer nor one who causes killing, no hearer nor one who causes hearing, no cognizer nor one who causes cognition. When one cuts off [another person's] head, there is no one taking anyone's life. It is simply between the seven substances that the sword passes."

Thus, when asked about a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here and now, Pakudha Kaccāyana answered with non-relatedness (*ahetuka*).

Erich Frauwallner (1973) summarizes that Pūraṇa Kassapa exhausts himself in mere denial of all moral obligations, Ajita Kesakambali seeks to prove it with a gross materialism, and Pakudha Kaccāyana finally represents an ancient Nature-philosophy which explains all occurrences through the interplay of a number of permanent factors. He explains further that even though in the case of Pakudha Kaccāyana the souls are mentioned as one of the seven factors, this doctrine also denies everything transcendent:⁶²

"For the Indian Materialism, the essential thing is not the denial of the soul and the exclusive restriction to matter as the cause for the explanation of the world. The decisive thing, on the contrary, is its purely negative interest. Its aim is:

- 1) to dispute and deny the continuance of life after death,
- 2) the retribution of good and bad work and
- 3) the moral claims derived out of them."⁶³

If we want to summarize the doctrine of the classical Lokāyata in more detail, it would give the following picture as expressed by Franco in regard to its ontology:

According to the *Bṛhaspatīsūtra*, there are four 'great' elements, earth, water, fire and wind, although some Lokāyatikas accepted space/'ether' as a fifth element. Certain Lokāyatikas

⁶² How this is possible with the substances including the soul being described as: unmade, irreducible, uncreated, without a creator, barren, stable as a mountain-peak, standing firm like a pillar – that do not alter, do not change, do not interfere with one another, are incapable of causing one another pleasure, pain, or both pleasure and pain, Frauwallner does not explain.

However, see below under the topic 'ontology' the brief discussion of the relation between matter and mind. On the other hand, the explanation given there does not seem to match up with the doctrine of Pakudha Kaccāyana.

⁶³ Erich Frauwallner, *History of Indian Philosophy*, p. 215

may have admitted the existence of atoms; the majority, however, denied both atoms and space because they are not perceptible.

The world in all its diversity is only the result of various combinations of the material elements. There is no determinative principle, such as God or *karma*, which is responsible for the properties of things. They are due to their own nature; no agent makes fire hot or water cool. Lokāyata causality operates with material causes only, and efficient causes are not recognized.

The theory of elements formed the basis for various Lokāyata doctrines of the arising of consciousness. As stated by the *Bṛhaspatisūtra*, consciousness arises from the elements just as the power of intoxication arises from molasses and other substances when a fermenting agent is added. In other words, when certain material substances are mixed something new emerges, be it consciousness or the power of intoxication, that was not there before and could not be produced by these substances severally. The mixture conducive to the production of consciousness is obtained when the elements are transformed into the form of a body.

The Lokāyata thus represents a complete reductive materialism, and mind has thus a physical nature and must be regarded as either (i) being *produced out* from the fundamental substances, as an effect of the body just as light is an effect of a lamp, or as (ii) being *manifested by* the fundamental substances, as a quality of the body just as a mural is a quality of a wall.⁶⁴

According to Radhakrishnan (1957), there are four varieties of materialism according to whether the soul is identified with the body, the senses, the breath, or the organ of thought.

In regards to epistemology, sense perception (*pratyakṣa*) is held to be the only means of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*), i.e., classical Lokāyata denies the validity of inference, the authority of scriptures, etc. To exist is to be perceivable. As Frauwallner (1973) points out, one could [appeal only to sense perception] as long as the inferences which were arrived at by the antagonistic schools were simply inference by analogy, as it was enough to show the faultiness of every conclusion, in order to decline every inference as unreliable. Also Mohanty states that the validity of inferential knowledge was challenged on the ground that all inference requires a universal major premise ("All that possesses smoke possesses fire") whereas there is no means of arriving at a certainty about such a proposition. No amount of finite observations could possibly yield the required universal premise. However, later on, Frauwallner continues, when the opponents developed the firmly grounded scientific doctrines forming conclusions, the Lokāyata was compelled to adjust its doctrine and they then accepted the limited use of inference.

⁶⁴ Cf. Kamalaśīla, *Tattvasaṃgrahapañjikā*, 1858f.

In regards to the doctrine of *karma*, ethics and soteriology, this then has the following consequences.

Since in their ontology a person consists of only four elements, there is no separate independently existing soul continuous after death and experiencing the retribution of actions of the previous lives; consciousness is just a product of the body; it perishes at the point of death, dissolving into the respective elementary mass.

Since their epistemology accepts only sense perception and not inference, all such supersensible objects as *karma* or karmic retribution, fate, soul and life after death, rebirth, etc., are not valid, there being no means of knowing them.

However, one might object, if *karma* is denied how could one explain the unequal distribution and alteration of joy and sorrow?

Lokāyata answers that the accidentality of joy and sorrow is explained as being due to the different capacities of things caused by different combinations of the elements, just as the incalculable accidental rise of bubbles in water in their diversity of size, hue and duration.

Moreover, one might object that if previous births would not exist, then how could the expression of desires and instinctive behaviors of small children be explained?

Here Lokāyata presents the counter-argument that if there were previous births, then one should be able to remember earlier births in general and not only in isolated cases; but this is not the case.

Now, if there is no soul, no afterlife and no *karma* due to epistemological and ontological reasons, then, as Franco states, the cornerstone of all Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina socio-religious and ethical and soteriological ideals that presuppose karmic retribution over many lives is destroyed. This has what one might call (i) 'negative' and (ii) 'positive' specific consequences for their doctrine:

In regard to the 'negative' side, Lokāyatana denies the retribution of sacrificial works and good and bad action and the moral and restricting claims derived from them. Heaven and hell are denied as the inventions of stupid people since there is no continuation of life after death. Many of statements are particularly directed against the efficacy of sacrifices. For instance: If the sacrificed animal goes to heaven, why does the sacrificer not put his own father in its place? The entire Vedic ritual is but a scheme of the Brahmins to provide a good and easy living for the priests. Omniscience, omnipotence and enlightenment is pie in the sky. The highest god is an almighty king.

In regard to the 'positive' side, Lokāyatana, not feeling bound by the socio-religious and ethical ideals of the other traditions, propagates a hedonistic life-style according to which one ought to pursue only two goals:

- i) enjoyment of the maximum amount of sensual pleasure here in this life: one should eat meat, drink alcohol, indulge in sexual pleasures.
- ii) avoidance of pain, as this is likely to accompany such enjoyment.

CD.

SCEPTICISM AND KARMA

After having presented many systems which assert *karma* and some which deny *karma*, there naturally must be representatives of scepticism.⁶⁵ The doctrine of one of them, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta, who is mentioned as one of the six non-Buddhist teachers of the *Samaññaphala Sutta*, will be presented here briefly. Traditionally it is said that the two most famous disciples of the Buddha, Śāriputta and Moggallāna, were originally followers of Sañjaya.

Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta as a sceptic refused to give a direct answer to any question or to make a definite statement about anything. He was thus described as an eel-wiggler or one who is as slippery as an eel. In order to preserve peace of mind, he refused to make a commitment to any particular point of view, as knowledge was, in principle, impossible.

When asked about the fruit of the contemplative life, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta gave the following answer to King Ajātasattu:

“If you ask me if there exists another world [after death], if I thought that there exists another world, would I declare that to you? I don’t think so. I don’t think in that way. I don’t think otherwise. I don’t think not. I don’t think not not. If you asked me if there isn’t another world... If you asked me if there both is and isn’t another world... If you asked me if neither is nor isn’t another world...

[If you asked me if there is any fruit, any result, of good and bad actions... If you asked me if there isn’t... If you asked me if there both are and aren’t... If you asked me if there neither are nor aren’t...]⁶⁶

If you asked me if there are beings who transmigrate... If you asked me if there aren’t... If you asked me if there both are and aren’t... If you asked me if there neither are nor aren’t...

If you asked me if the Tathāgata exists after death... If you asked me if the Tathāgata doesn’t... If you asked me if the Tathāgata both... If you asked me if the Tathāgata neither exists nor exists after death, would I declare that to you? I don’t think so. I don’t think in that way. I don’t think otherwise. I don’t think not. I don’t think not not.”

⁶⁵ Stewart Cohen in his ‘Scepticism’ entry in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1998), states: Simply put, scepticism is the view that we fail to know anything. More generally, the term ‘scepticism’ refers to a family of views, each of which denies that some term of positive epistemic appraisal applies to our beliefs.

⁶⁶ This section is missing in Thanissaro Bhikkhu’s translation.

Thus, when asked about a fruit of the contemplative life, visible here and now, Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta answered with evasion.⁶⁷

Hellmuth Hecker comments.⁶⁸

Whenever such questions were raised by ancient Indian thinkers, four alternative types of answers were thought to be possible: affirmation; negation; partial affirmation and partial negation; neither affirmation nor negation. Sañjaya, however, taught that, with regard to the questions mentioned, none of those four positions was acceptable as a solution; they all contained unresolvable contradictions (antinomies), and therefore one should refrain from any judgment about these problems. [...]

While other ascetic teachers as a solution of their problems always advocated one of the four logical alternatives – yes, no, yes and no, neither-nor – Sañjaya did not commit himself to any of them. In particular he did not commit himself dogmatically to the unprovable assertion [of any of the above mentioned problems]. [...] In that attitude, he clearly differed from the materialists of his time. He rather taught that, in view of the unresolvable nature of these problems, one should keep to a stance of detachment and impartiality, not tolerating the slightest bias towards approval or disapproval of any of these theories and their consequences. From that we can see that he was a confirmed agnostic and skeptic of a peculiar brand who tried to convert the purely negative “Ignorabimus” (“We cannot know”) into a definite philosophical attitude.

⁶⁷ Translation Thanissaro Bhikkhu; <http://www.accesstinsight.org/canon/digha/dn02.html>.

⁶⁸ <http://www.tipitaka.net/moments/mmnts002/page02.htm>. ‘Mahā-Moggallāna’ by Hellmuth Hecker; The Wheel Publication No. 263/264.

D.

CONCLUSION

With this we come to the end of our brief summarizing discussion of *karma* and its role in non-Buddhist Indian philosophy. We discussed the beginnings and early developments of the doctrine of *karma* and the six orthodox systems of Hindu philosophy as well as the philosophical systems of the non-orthodox teachers in relation to *karma*.

We found that:

- the doctrine of rebirth does not presuppose the doctrine of *karma* and that India was probably not the origin and locus of ideas of rebirth
- the historical primacy is uncertain and the karmic theory is a composite structure
- in some systems *karma* appears as an organic part of the system from the beginning
- in other cases, the doctrine of *karma* later became appropriated with increasing clarity and assimilated into the context of the particular system
- in still other cases, central terms later became coordinated to the postulates of the doctrine of *karma* and adjusted to it in spite of systemic problems
- some accept *karma* as ultimately real
- some accept *karma* only as relatively real
- some accept *karma* only on a nominal level
- some deny *karma* altogether
- some neither assert nor deny *karma*.

E.

ABBREVIATIONS

AKB	<i>Abhidharmakośabhāṣya</i> by Vasubandhu
EBO	<i>Encyclopaedia Britannica Online</i>
EEPR	<i>Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion</i> . Shambhala Publications, Boston, 1989.
EIP	<i>Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies</i> . Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi.

F.

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