

# Did the early Vaiesika admit the notion of "I" as a means to prove the existence of the soul?

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## DID THE EARLY VAIŚEŚIKA ADMIT THE NOTION OF 'I' AS A MEANS TO PROVE THE EXISTENCE OF THE SOUL?

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Two controversies on the proof of the existence of the soul are found in the Vaiśeṣikasūtra III,1.1-10 and III.2.4-14. The former deals with a universal recognition that the soul is something entirely distinct from the organs and their objects. This view is found in Sāṃkhya<sup>1</sup>, Yoga<sup>2</sup>, Vedānta<sup>3</sup> and Mīmāṃsā<sup>4</sup> too. The latter is a somewhat difficult passage on which commentators and scholars have diverse interpretations. Mine is as follows:

III.2.4 is certainly the siddhānta of Vaiśeṣika. The Buddhist canon, especially the Chinese version, refers solely to this sūtra as the Vaiśeṣika view, while no other proofs of the existence of the soul are regarded as the Vaiśeṣika opinion. Śabarāsvāmin in his Bhāṣya on Mīmāṃsāsūtra 1.1.5<sup>5</sup> says:

“We infer the existence of such an entity (the soul) through such acts as breathing and the like; so that the entity spoken of as equipped with the sacrificial implements is the one which carries on such activities in the body as breathing in, breathing down, breathing out, winking and so forth.”

This is clearly the view of Vaiśeṣika, which is confirmed by the commentaries on it: Śloka-vārttika of Kumāriḷa and Nyāyaraṭnākara of Pārṭhasāraṭhimiśra<sup>6</sup>. After that Kumāriḷa lets the Buddhists refute this Vaiśeṣika view, and next he refutes the Buddhist Vijñānavāda and then establishes his own doctrine on āṭman by proving it through the notion of 'I'. If Vaiśeṣika had demonstrated the notion of 'I' as a proof of the existence of the soul, Kumāriḷa would not have overlooked it. Incidentally Kumāriḷa mentions two notions of 'I': the one is in the case “I know” (*aḥam vedmi*), the other “I go” (*aḥam yāmi*). The former refers to the soul, while the latter to the body. His suggestion is very useful for us to understand Vaiśeṣikasūtra III.2.10-11.

1 Sāṃkhyakārikā 17

2 Yogasūtra IV.24

3 H. Nakamura: Śāṅkara no Shiso, Iwanami, Tokyo, 1989, p. 605

4 G. Jha: The Prabhākara School of Pūrvamīmāṃsā, Motilal, Delhi, 1978, p. 74

5 Jaimini: The Mīmāṃsā Darśana, BI vol. 45, 1, Reprint, Calcutta, 1863-67, p. 18

6 On Śloka-vārttika, āṭma-vāda, st. 92, Tara Publications, Varanasi, 1978, p. 504

III.2.6-8 seem to be Vedāntic, for Vedānta admits sacred scripture (*āgama*) as a source to prove the existence of the soul<sup>7</sup>. III.2.9-10, on the other hand, refer to Mīmāṃsā, which asserts that the soul is known by mental perception. The earliest reference to the perceptible soul is given by Upavarṣa as reported by Jayanta in his Nyāyamañjarī<sup>8</sup>:

“In that the followers of Upavarṣa admitted the perceptible soul, because it is known by the notion of ‘I’ (*aham-pratyaya-gamya*).”

This is followed by Kumārila in his Śloka-vārttika, ātma-vāda: *aham-pratyaya-vijñeya* (st. 107, 126), *aham-pratyaya-gamya* (st. 137). Praśastapāda seems to take over this Mīmāṃsaka view in his Padārthadharmasamgraha<sup>9</sup>. But he thinks this proof of the existence of the soul not to be made by perception but by inference, that is to say, he does not admit a perceptible soul. How does the Vaiśeṣikasūtra run on this point? *draṣṭuḥ pratyakṣa*<sup>10</sup> (perceiving the seer, viz. ātman) in III.2.10 is the view of the opponent, because this sūtra contains *yadi*.

III.2.11-13 are the proofs of Vaiśeṣika. *sarīra-pratyakṣa* (perceiving the body; we can perceive only the body, not the soul) is surely the Vaiśeṣika view. III.1.13 should mean

“The (cognition) which arises from the contact of soul, sense organ, mind and object is different (from the means of knowledge by which we can know the existence of the soul).”<sup>11</sup>

If *pratyakṣa* were admitted to be another means to prove the existence of the soul, we would expect *antara* instead of *anya*. Moreover the sūtra itself clearly says in VIII.2<sup>12</sup> that the soul is not sensually perceptible. That is to say Vaiśeṣika does not admit perception as a means of knowledge to prove the existence of the soul. Vaiśeṣika admits only inference as mentioned in III.2.4, *liṅga* being inferential mark.

*pratyag-ātman* in III.2.13 and III.1.14 is a somewhat controversial word. We do not see any trace of an all-pervading highest soul (*paramātman*) in

7 H. Nakamura: *ibid.*, pp. 160, 606

8 VizSS. X, p. 429

9 Praśastapādabhāṣya, VizSS. p. 70

10 *draṣṭuḥ pratyakṣo* (Anonymous), *drṣṭa-pratyakṣo* (Candrānanda), *drṣṭam anvakṣam* (Upaskāra)

11 Cf. *ātmendriyamanorthasannikarṣād yad utpadyate tad anyad anumānādibhyaḥ pratyakṣam* (Nyāyamañjarī, p. 100)

12 *tatrātmā manaś cāpratyakṣe* (Upaskāra)

the Vaiśeṣikasūtra. All the ātmans except those in IV.2.3 and V.1.6 are individual souls, which therefore the author need not expressly differentiate by the word *pratyag-ātman* in III.1.14 and III.2.13. For this reason *pratyag-ātman* in the Vaiśeṣikasūtra must not mean an individual soul. Candrānanda on III.1.14 says *pratyagātmēti śarīram*. How should we understand his comment? *pratyak-cetana* in Yogasūtra I.29 is explained by Vācaspatimiśra as adverse (*viparīta*) consciousness, because *pratyak* can mean reverse. Then in our case *pratyag-ātman* can mean what is adverse to the soul, that is the body. Candrānanda's gloss should mean "What is contrary to the soul means the body." And *arthāntara* in III.2.13 ought to be *śarīra* when comparing with *śarīra-pratyakṣa* in III.2.11.

A tentative translation of the sūtras from III.2.6 to 13 will be:

[Vedānta] There is no visible mark (to prove the existence of the soul), because (we have) no perception that (the soul is) Yajñadatta (even) in contact with (him). III.2.6

[Vedānta] And (the marks enumerated in III.2.4 are) not particular (to the soul), because (such marks are) seen commonly (in both soul and body). III.2.7

[Vedānta] Therefore (the soul is) proved by scripture. III.2.8

[To refute Vedānta the author presents the Mīmāṃsā point of view<sup>13</sup>] (The soul is) not proved by scripture, because (it is) excluded (from others) by the word 'I'. III.2.9

[Mīmāṃsā] And if (Mīmāṃsā asserts that we are) perceiving the seer (the soul) such as "I am Devadatta, I am Yajñadatta." III.2.10

[Vaiśeṣika] Because there are figurative uses (such as) "Devadatta goes" and "Viṣṇumitra goes", (hence in this case we are) perceiving their bodies. III.2.11

[Vaiśeṣika] And now the figurative use is dubious. III.2.12

[Vaiśeṣika] Because (the notion) 'I' exists in what is adverse to the soul (viz. the body) (and) does not exist elsewhere (viz. in the soul), therefore (that notion is) perceiving the object other than (the soul, viz. the body). III.2.13

The present writer would like to suggest the following conclusion: As a means to prove the existence of the soul the early Vaiśeṣika 1) accepted not sensual perception but inference only, and 2) did not admit the notion of 'I', which belonged to Mīmāṃsā.

13 To present another school in order to refute one school is a trite resource seen everywhere in Indian philosophical texts.

