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Autor(en): **Bronkhorst, Johannes**

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INDOLOGY AND RATIONALITY*

Johannes Bronkhorst, University of Lausanne

1.

The first announcement of the present “International Seminar on Indology: Past, Present and Future” contains some challenging questions, which I would like to cite in context. We read there:

Indology is, of recent, being looked at as an East-West encounter; philosophers of this century express their view that the time has come to reach beyond ‘occident’ and ‘orient’. In his study, *India and Europe*, W. Halbfass observes:

“In the modern planetary situation Eastern and Western ‘cultures’ can no longer meet one another as equal partners. They meet in a westernized world, under conditions shaped by Western ways of thinking. [...]”

If this is true, is ‘European’ or ‘Western’ discourse the destiny of Indology? Will the Neo-Hindu attempts to ‘actualize’ ancient Indian teachings for the present succeed in establishing a stronger alternative? Will there ever be an ‘Indian discourse’ in Indology? Could such a discourse serve as the best solution for the present predicament?

There is of course no way of denying that Indology was initially a European enterprise, carried out by European scholars, either in India or in Europe, either with the help of Indian pandits or without them. In this sense, Indology originally was characterized by ‘European’ or ‘Western’ discourse. Many of its themes and preconceptions were determined by the European context. I have dealt with a few of them in an earlier publication.¹ One is the conviction that the oldest literature of India, i.e. the Veda, must be extremely old. This conviction seems to find favour with some modern Indian scholars, but for its origin we

* This is the text of a lecture pronounced the 13th January 1997, which opened the “International Seminar on Indology: Past, Present and Future” held at the University of Pune and organised by Professor Saroja Bhate. The text is here reproduced without change, except for some references to publications that have meanwhile come out. Experience has since taught me that my use of the terms “rationality”, “tradition of rational inquiry”, etc. are often misunderstood: certain readers take them to denote some mysterious virtue rather than the social constraint/obligation which they are here meant to indicate.

1 “L’indianisme et les préjugés occidentaux.” *Études de Lettres*, avril juin 1989, pp. 119-136.

may have to look at the European romantic period. The idea that India is, and has always been, a place of spiritual wisdom, too, is very old in Europe. It dates back to the Greeks, and has persisted for some two thousand years.

However, even though Indology was originally characterized by European concerns and preconceptions, and even though it may have a hard time to rid itself of these, I am reluctant to call Indology in general ‘European’ or ‘Western discourse’. We all know that, for reasons that are very difficult to determine with precision, some extremely important historical changes took place in Europe, or in North America, before they spread elsewhere. The ‘scientific’ and ‘industrial revolutions’ took first place in Europe, but obviously transcend any regional culture. The first cars were produced in the United States, but the most efficient car makers at this moment may well be the Japanese. Computers, too, were invented in the West, but the most competent programmers at present may well be Indians.² What I mean to say is that the developments just mentioned are global developments, which for reasons that are far from evident started in particular regions. Other contributions to global culture have begun in other parts of the world: gun powder perhaps in China, the decimal place value notation perhaps in India. All these developments and discoveries are not just expressions of some regional culture. They transcend it, and may indeed occasionally prove to be more fruitful in cultures different from the one that invented it.

Scholarly discourse, as I see it, is one such thing. It is global rather than confined to one culture. It may have begun in Europe, but it is essentially no more European than any of the other things I have just mentioned.³ It is not my intention to try to define what it consists in. This I willingly leave to others. One element of scholarly discourse—and of scientific discourse in general—I would

2 Similarly Gellner, 1995:4: “This inequality of cognitive styles does *not* engender a hierarchy of peoples and cultures. It is not the by-product of the genetic equipment of any particular population pool. The population or culture where this style was born would have been wholly incapable of producing it a few generations earlier than it actually occurred; and since it has happened, other populations have acquired this style with ease, and some of them have conspicuously surpassed the originators of science, when it comes to the business of technological application of the New Science. The new knowledge is not the reward or mark of some general excellence. Nevertheless, the asymmetry of cognitive and productive performance is the most important single fact about our world.”

3 Albrecht Wezler and Michael Witzel, in their Foreword to the Series *Indian Philology and South Asian Studies* (1995: vii) speak of “Western norms and approaches” as distinguished from the “Indian *śāstric* sciences”. It would seem to be more appropriate to speak in this context of “modern norms and approaches” or the like, the more so since the two authors find fault, on the very same page, with Western methods in the 19th century.

however like to emphasize: its readiness to accept criticism, and its attempts to deal with it, and this in all domains, including those normally covered by tradition, religion, revelation, or insight. This is what I call ‘rationality’.⁴ This use of the term may seem to be somewhat unusual, but is not without precedents; the philosopher of science Karl Popper used it in much the same manner.⁵ Rationality in this sense is, I believe, a vital ingredient of all scientific and scholarly discourse. I realize that rationality alone may not be sufficient to obtain the results of science and scholarship. The European Middle Ages had a tradition of rationality, i.e. of critical debate (be it that its scope was rather limited),⁶ but this by itself was apparently not enough to set off the scientific revolution in the European Renaissance. Other factors were required, and much historical research may still be needed before we will know exactly which ones they are.⁷ In fact, one of the exciting tasks of historical research, as I see it, is to throw light on the developments—among them the scientific revolution—that within a few centuries changed the surface of the earth virtually beyond recognition (whether for better or for worse).

2.

Let me briefly touch here upon one other aspect of at least some scholarly discourse, but one which should interest us Indologists in particular: the interest in the history, and beyond that in the origin, of the ideas and institutions we study. Is this a feature which merely betrays the Western beginnings of our field of study? Is the quest for origins nothing but a heritage from the European romantic period, that should be discarded as soon as possible?

Recently Paul Harrison, a Buddhist scholar who teaches in New Zealand, published—in connection with his research into the origins of Mahāyāna—some reflections on the usefulness of this kind of investigations. Let me cite some parts:⁸

4 This idea of rationality has little to do with the presence or otherwise of logical rules like the law of the excluded middle, and even less with the economic rationality emphasized by Max Weber and others.

5 See Popper, 1959:149 f. See further “Why is there philosophy in India?” (Bronkhorst, 1999).

6 See Eamon, 1994:15-90.

7 For a useful survey of the literature, see Cohen, 1994.

8 Harrison, 1995:49.

Why indeed are we so interested in the origins of the Mahāyāna? Well, the fascination with origins, beginnings or sources does appear to be a kind of scholarly universal. Part of this—and this much is clear enough—is the idea that if we can understand the beginnings of something, we are better placed to understand the whole thing, as if its essential character were somehow fixed and readable in the genetic encoding of its conception. There is no doubt that such a view is problematic, i.e., it may *not* be the case that understanding the beginnings of the Mahāyāna (or even the beginnings of Buddhism as a whole) will give us privileged access to the mysteries of the later tradition, but I think the idea is still sufficiently compelling to result in a kind of methodological cliché.

Harrison next emphasizes the personal and private need for knowing origins. He may be right in all this, but I have the impression that he overlooks one crucial point.⁹ Scholarship is not only concerned with collecting data, but also with understanding them. Beside the question “what?” there are the equally important questions “why?” and “how?”. Scholarship can for example establish that there were Christians in India before the arrival of the Europeans; this is a fact. To explain this fact only one type of answer can satisfy us: information as to how they got there. No other kind of answer would work, and this has nothing to do with European influence on scholarship. More generally, human institutions of all kinds are characterized by the fact that many of their features (or at least some) are there simply because they were there earlier and no one bothered, or dared, to change them. Some of these features may have played a different role in earlier situations, and they may have been introduced at first for again different reasons. This does not mean that only history allows us to understand human institutions, but it does mean that, in order to reach as good an understanding as possible, at least some questions have to be addressed that involve the history of the institution concerned.¹⁰

9 Harrison sums up his ideas on this matter in the following words (1995:50): “As I see it, then, our fascination with the origins and early development of the Mahāyāna can be explained in terms of all these factors. That is to say, understanding this topic successfully will indeed help us to understand Buddhism better; it will help us grasp the lineage of East Asian Buddhism, and our own personal religious ancestry, if we happen to follow an East Asian Buddhist tradition; it will no doubt be productive of academic ‘merit’; and it will yield considerable intellectual satisfaction. Yet these factors do not exhaust the question; there is always something left, some seductive magic that the subject holds for us as individuals.”

10 For a critical discussion of this issue with special reference to early Vaiśeṣika, see Houben, 1995.

3.

Let us now return to rationality. Rationality in the sense described above is not only found in Europe in the centuries preceding the present globalisation of science and scholarship. More in particular, it is not a foreign product that was introduced into India with modern scholarship. India has had a long rational tradition which has not, in my opinion, received the attention which it deserves.¹¹ I am aware that the history of Indian thought is a rich field of research, with many specialists, some of them focusing on the history of logic, others on other aspects of critical thought. But how many researchers have ever expressed surprise about the fact that India has a rational tradition at all? Yet this may be far from self-evident. Do all cultures have rational traditions? Is it self-evident that people enter into debate rather than ignoring, or aggressing, each other? I have the impression that rational traditions may be the exception rather than the rule. Even major cultures can survive for centuries, nay millennia, without them. The most striking example may be China. Sinologists such as A.C. Graham and François Jullien have commented upon the absence, or disappearance, of a rational tradition in China.¹² We know of course, thanks to the researches of Joseph Needham and others, that China has made many important discoveries in the field of technology, but evidently this was possible without the presence of a strong tradition of rationality.

The fact that scholars have not expressed surprise at the discovery of a strong rational tradition in India may be due, ironically, to the Western background of modern scholarship. The European rational tradition, as is widely known, goes back to ancient Greece, and has continued—with more or less serious interruptions—until today. European scholars, and those influenced by them, may have found it self-evident to find something similar in India. If this is indeed the case, we may have here an example of how scholarship can be limited, and indeed prejudiced, by its historical background. It also suggests that

11 An exception is an article by Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (1989), which emphasizes the presence of rational traditions in India. The authors conclude (p. 321): “Our general conclusion regarding the often-voiced conservationist worries about the ‘undermining’ of Indian culture due to the spread of modern science and technology is that they may well be, to a great extent, seriously misleading. It is arguable that these worries are based on drawing alarmist inferences from an overly narrow and biased view of the nature of Indian culture, and also on ignoring the legitimacy, power, and reach of possible internal criticism of parts of the old tradition in the light of new information and understanding.”

12 Cp. Graham, 1989:142; Jullien, 1995; and my publication mentioned in note 5 above. For a recent discussion of the issue of rationality, see Goody, 1996:26f.

new perspectives *may* show up if scholars from altogether different cultural backgrounds, and preferably with not too much Western cultural baggage, join in. What may we expect for Indology once there will be many Chinese trained Indologists (or for that matter for Sinology when many Indians will turn to this field of study)? I do not know the answer, but I do believe that a variety of approaches, questions and points of departure cannot but enrich the fields concerned. Note that this would be an enlargement of Indology in a rational direction, for rationality means: looking for suggestions and criticism from all directions. This is, incidentally, also my answer to the question raised at the beginning: do we need Western or Hindu Indology? My answer is: we need both, and much more, on condition that mutual criticism is seriously considered, not rhetorically, but by trying to understand the other's position and the arguments and evidence that support it.

How do we explain the presence of a tradition of rationality in India? Note that we are, once again, confronted with a question that appears to demand an answer in terms of origins. When did this tradition of rationality begin? We have relatively little difficulty in understanding that a rational tradition, once established, can maintain itself for a certain length of time. But how did it start? Rationality is conspicuous by its absence in Vedic literature, including the Upaniṣads. It is true that the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads record a number of famous debates. But they cannot in any way be called rational in our sense of the term. No one, in these debates, is ever convinced by the arguments of his opponent, nor is the attempt made to bring this about. The winner of a debate is not the one who knows better, but the one who knows more.¹³ Logical argumentation is completely absent. Apodictic statements are accepted without resistance. Indeed, the teacher need not present arguments in support of his teaching, because the very idea that he might by mistake teach something that is incorrect, does not seem to have occurred to the thinkers of the Upaniṣads. Every thought is correct, but it may be insufficient, and may therefore have to be subordinated to the knowledge of the winner. Asking too many questions, on the other hand, can have dire results. One's head may be shattered, or one may lose one's head in a physically less violent manner.¹⁴ What is more, the Vedic examples all deal with knowledge which is "secret" in one way or another, known only to a few.

Rationality in the sense described above does not, therefore, seem to be present in Vedic literature, not even in the early Upaniṣads. When and why did

13 See Ruben, 1928.

14 See Witzel, 1987, and Insler, 1990.

it begin? This question has, to my knowledge, never been seriously addressed. Yet it seems to me a question of the greatest interest and importance. Unlike their Upaniṣadic predecessors, the classical philosophers of India assiduously studied the works and arguments of their opponents, so much so that it is often hardly possible to understand texts belonging to one current of thought without knowing something about practically all the other ones. The ongoing debate between Buddhists and Naiyāyikas is a well-known example,¹⁵ but by far not the only one. And even though the thinkers concerned may not be keen to admit this, it seems more than likely that they very often borrowed ideas from each other, modifying them so as to make them fit into their new surroundings.¹⁶ Why did these thinkers go through all this trouble? Could they not just ignore each other? To my knowledge no such intense intellectual interaction ever came about between Hindus and Moslems in later centuries. And indeed, Christians and Jews lived together for many centuries in Europe, yet their intellectuals hardly seem to have taken much notice of each other's views (with some few notable exceptions);¹⁷ unless, of course, we take the kind of interest into consideration which was expressed by king Louis IX (canonized as St. Louis) by saying, after a theological debate between Christians and Jews at Cluny, that the best way for a Christian to defend his faith against those people was "to thrust his sword into their entrails, as far as it would go".¹⁸ The Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina thinkers of classical India, on the other hand, were apparently greatly interested (i.e., intellectually interested) in each other. Why?

In this connection I would like to draw attention to a passage in Uddyotakara's Nyāyavārttika.¹⁹ Here Uddyotakara criticizes the Buddhist doctrine of No-Self (*anātman*). One of the arguments he presents is that the Buddhists, by believing this, go against their own sacred texts. At this point Uddyotakara cites a text which it is not possible to locate in the surviving versions of Buddhist Sūtras. But apparently the cited passage was not well-known to the Buddhists in Uddyotakara's time either, for he says: "Don't say that this is not Buddha word;

15 Documented in Shastri, 1964.

16 It will not be necessary to emphasize that this picture of the development of Indian thought goes against the traditional Brahmanical view of things. See in this connection Pollock, 1985, and the passage from Jayanta Bhaṭṭa's Nyāyamañjarī which it cites on p. 516: "All sciences have existed, precisely like the Vedas, from the first creation. People, however, ascribe them to one or another human author who has sought to abbreviate or expand them."

17 For some exceptions, see, e.g., Eco, 1995:119f.

18 Olschki, 1960:181 as cited in Batchelor, 1994:83-84.

19 Bronkhorst, 1997.

it occurs in the Sarvābhisamaya Sūtra.” The point I wish to make is that Uddyotakara took his opponents’ position so seriously, that he was concerned to prove that it could not be in accordance with their own sacred tradition. And in order to prove this, he made what seem to be extensive searches in their sacred literature. Why did he do so? He could have saved himself much time and trouble by just ignoring the position of the Buddhists. What could he gain by this? The only answer that seems appropriate is that Uddyotakara, and his intended readership, weighed up the different arguments against each other. We do not know whether many people actually changed allegiance in the light of such arguments, but the very fact that they were studied shows that theoretically the possibility of a change of mind was not discarded.

4.

Note that the conviction that Indian philosophy is based on a rational tradition, i.e., a tradition of critical argumentation, rather than on mere revelation or inspiration, has methodological consequences for modern scholarship, too. A rational system of philosophy—or at least one which tries to be rational, to answer objections not by just quoting authority, but by taking the objections seriously—may be expected to be more or less coherent. When one is nonetheless confronted with some elements that do not fit in, one is then tempted to think that this is a leftover from an earlier stage of the system, which was coherent. This is the method applied by Erich Frauwallner, with impressive results as a whole.²⁰

However, this method is based on the presupposition of rationality, which is no doubt valid for much of Indian philosophy during its classical period, but which is less certain for Indian philosophy in its early period and for schools of thought which had not joined the rational tradition. We have seen that Vedic literature appears to antedate the period of Indian rationality. And we do not know when exactly this changed. Indeed, it is unlikely that there is such a generally valid date at all. The Italian scholar Raffaele Torella has pointed out in a recent publication²¹ how an initially obscure school of Śaivism managed, from the 10th century C.E. onward, to emerge into the open and escape from a merely restricted circle of adepts owing to the efforts of a series of remarkable

20 Houben, 1995:722, 740, 742 f, 744 n. 43.

21 Torella, 1994: Introduction.

thinkers—among them Somānanda and Utpaladeva. These thinkers carried out various tasks; Torella mentions exegesis of the scriptures, the reformulation of their teaching and the organizing and hierarchizing of their contents, extracting a homogeneous though varied teaching from the diverse texts; purging it, without changing its essential nature, of all that it was felt could not be proposed to a wider circle—in other words, of all that was bound to create an instinctive and insurmountable resistance—by attenuating the sharper points or removing every actually concrete aspect, and finally translating it into a discourse whose categories were shared by its addressees and engaging in a dialogue that would not be afraid to confront rival doctrines. In other words, this school of Kashmir Śaivism joined the rational tradition of India as late as the 10th century, even though it is known to have existed as a religious movement well before this time. Other schools may have joined this tradition at other times, before or after the 10th century, or they may have chosen to remain aloof throughout their history.

5.

With this in mind we may look at the Sāṃkhya system of philosophy. Several scholars have pointed out a peculiar feature of the classical system. Eli Franco, like Paul Harrison a scholar who used to work in the southern hemisphere, describes it as follows: “One of the reasons why many of us feel uneasy with the Sāṃkhya philosophy is that we are never quite sure where we stand and whether the ancient teachers were talking psychology or cosmology. Typical psychological and individual terms like cognition, ego, mind, sense organs, and even hands, feet, tongue, anus and penis, become trans-individual and obtain cosmological dimensions.”²² Franco, following the methodological principle just

22 Franco, 1991:123f. Hulin (1978:73) speaks of “le paradoxe d'un Ego «cosmique», producteur des sens et des éléments matériels subtils, et non plus, semble-t-il, forme de la conscience de soi chez un individu concret”. He then continues: “Cependant, aussi objectivé et dépersonnalisé soit-il, l'*ahaṃkāra* n'en conserve pas moins, à l'intérieur du système Sāṃkhya, une face individuelle, subjective, puisqu'on lui associe constamment l'*abhimāna*, cette fonction de sur-estimation (de soi) qui lui sera désormais automatiquement attribuée. Comme on ne saurait évidemment pas se contenter de juxtaposer les deux aspects, cosmique et individuel, le problème se pose immédiatement de concevoir leur mode d'articulation.” Parrott (1986) makes a brave, but unconvincing, attempt to solve the difficulty.

described, looks for an explanation of this strange situation in the historical background of the classical system:

This somewhat confusing state of affairs is certainly the result of a long historical development. Sāṃkhya has probably started as a cosmology of two players, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, as male and female, passive and active, principles. This is quite clear from the very terms used for soul and matter—man and the procreating (woman)—as well as from the old metaphors which compare matter to an actress or a dancer and soul to a passive spectator, or to the chaste woman who is surprised naked by a stranger, etc. However, at a certain stage, probably under Vaiśeṣika influence as pointed out already by H. Jacobi, the plurality of the souls was introduced into the system. And this created the imbalance which is so peculiar to and characteristic of Sāṃkhya. Indeed, shouldn't every soul have its own mind, its own senses, etc.? What does it mean that two hands, two feet, one tongue, one penis and one anus are common to all of us? The next logical step was, of course, to introduce a plurality of *prakṛtis* and to allow as many *prakṛtis* as there are *puruṣas*. And as is well-known, the Sāṃkhya teacher Paurika has taken this step [...]. But Paurika's opinion did not prevail; it was rejected once and for all by the extremely influential Vārṣaganya, perhaps because he felt that admitting the plurality of *prakṛti* would be detrimental to its logical proofs, which were based on an opposition between the plurality of the products and the uniqueness of their manifested cause.

There can be little doubt that classical Sāṃkhya is the result of a long historical development. But I fail to see why the earlier forms of Sāṃkhya must necessarily have been coherent. Supporting evidence for this can certainly *not* be derived from the fact that its descendant, i.e. classical Sāṃkhya, is *not* coherent. Indeed, if we assume that a rational tradition came to be established in India some time during the development of pre-classical Sāṃkhya, we would expect more coherence the more we move forward in time. Given that even classical Sāṃkhya harbours a major inconsistency, what reason is there to expect that the earlier forms of Sāṃkhya fared any better?

Let me emphasize at this point that the historical study of thought does not have to presuppose rationality. In situations where this assumption seems justified, it can be of the greatest help in historical reconstructions. But also non-rational traditions of thought can be studied historically. This is not the occasion for an in-depth discussion, but I have to make the point to avoid misunderstanding.

Let us return to Sāṃkhya. Franco and others think that this school of thought was originally a cosmology, including a player who presumably was

something like a world-soul.²³ Certain thinkers then made the revolutionary step of introducing the notion of a multiplicity of souls in the place of the one world-soul, but did not dare to replace the single *prakṛti* with a plurality of *prakṛtis*.

I do not know what evidence is supposed to support the claim that Sāṃkhya was originally *only* a cosmology. All attempts to determine the earliest form of Sāṃkhya that I am aware of have been highly speculative, with far from certain results. Less uncertain is that the term Sāṃkhya in the Mahābhārata refers to a method to reach liberation through knowledge. What kind of knowledge could have this effect? Edgerton offers the following specification in the Introduction to his book *The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy*:

The epic is like [the Upaniṣads] in regarding the soul as the essential part of man. But in emphasizing its distinction from what is body or non-soul, it often undertakes to analyse matter. The soul is unitary, undifferentiated, without qualities, and generally regarded as really inactive. It is immortal; when the body dies, the soul merely passes into another body; and it cannot be affected by anything physical [...]. All acts are commonly said to be done by material nature, which appears in manifold forms and is constantly subject to change.²⁴

Edgerton then distinguishes, and briefly describes, two different ways in which matter is analysed. One is by describing the three ‘strands’ (*guṇa*) which compose it. The second is ‘vertical’ and ‘quasi-evolutionary’: it approaches the classical enumeration of twenty-three or twenty-four ‘essences’ (*tattva*), the soul being number twenty-five.

What is most interesting in this observation is its beginning. Epic Sāṃkhya is a method leading to liberation through knowledge, and it can be so because it teaches that the soul, i.e. the essential part of man, is inactive, and different from all that acts. This, of course, makes perfect sense against the background of the doctrine of *karma*. Actions lead to rebirth; the realization that one really does not act frees one from their effects. It seems to me more than likely that these epic conceptions are among the forerunners of classical Sāṃkhya. But these epic forerunners are not, or not only or even primarily, cosmologies. Quite on the contrary, they concern not the universe, but the individual. If, therefore,

23 van Buitenen, 1988:60 (originally published in 1957) observes: “There will be no one at present who seriously doubts that Sāṃkhya began by being theistic, in other words, by positing a cosmic person whose self-creation took place in series of evolutions [...].” But E.H. Johnston had still maintained (1937:17): “Early Sāṃkhya was in fact little concerned with the cosmos [...].” The question to be raised below is: do we have to make a choice?

24 Edgerton, 1965:41.

we stick to our rationalistic presupposition, we might have to assume that Sāṃkhya originally had a plurality of *puruṣas* and an equal number of *prakṛtis*.

Such a conclusion might have to be drawn if we believe that already the forerunners of classical Sāṃkhya were rational in the sense described above and looked for coherence. But what reason is there to do so? Is it not equally conceivable that in those early days Sāṃkhya discourse concerned two different levels of reality at the same time? Examples of parallelisms between, and of identifications of, macrocosm and microcosm are numerous, both in Indian and in non-Indian religions. A well-known example comes from Buddhist cosmology. Here the universe is thought of as consisting of three layers, the *kāmadhātu*, the *rūpadhātu*, and the *ārūpyadhātu*. These layers are thought of in spatial terms, yet the *rūpadhātu* and the *ārūpyadhātu* correspond to attainments in meditation. Here too homology, or rather identification, between the profoundly personal and the cosmological is to be seen.²⁵ Examples from Vedic literature, and even from classical Indian medicine (Āyurveda) are not lacking.²⁶ The importance of homologization of the body with the macrocosm in Yoga and Tantrism has been emphasized by Mircea Eliade and others.²⁷ Epic Sāṃkhya is inseparable from Yoga. Equally close to the historical predecessors of classical Sāṃkhya, the Bhagavadgītā describes how Kṛṣṇa reveals to Arjuna the whole universe inside himself.²⁸ Such identifications of different realms—usually the

25 See the discussion in Gombrich, 1996:83ff.

26 See, e.g., Carakasamhitā, Sūtrasthāna, chapter 12, and Filliozat, 1933.

27 See Teun Goudriaan in Gupta, Hoens and Goudriaan, 1979:57f.: “The doctrine that the human body corresponds to, is even identical with, the universe is seldom systematically expounded but nearly always self-understood.” “Microcosmic symbolism is especially prominent in the passages which deal with *kuṇḍalinīyoga* [...]” “[...] very common [...] is the outright equation of the body [...] with the world or universe. We also find many statements to the purport that gods, heavens, hells etc. are all present in the body [...]” “A consequence of the ‘cosmization’ of the individual is that the body is made to encompass the world of the gods in particular ways.” etc. Padoux (1990:78 n.122) observes, similarly: “Śaiva cosmogony often appears as a ‘cosmization’ of psychological experiences and vice-versa.” Heilijgers-Seelen (1994: 20 f.) draws attention to the fact that the five *cakras*, which are situated in the body, are given dimensions inspired by cosmological theories. A later commentator, she points out on p. 25 (with n.20), distinguishes the macrocosm and the microcosm, where the text commented upon makes no such distinction. *Man as Microcosm in Tantric Hinduism* by Grace E. Cairns (New Delhi, 1992) was not available to me.

28 Mhbh 6.33 (= Bhag 11). Surprisingly, the Bhagavadgītā may be without the contradiction that mars classical Sāṃkhya. It appears to distinguish between the individual and the “godly” level, both of which interact in parallel but different ways with *prakṛti*. See e.g. Bhag 3.27-28, 30 (tr. Edgerton): “Performed by material nature’s strands (*guṇa*) are actions, altogether; he whose soul is deluded by the I-faculty (*ahaṃkāra*) imagines ‘I am the agent’.

personal and the cosmological, microcosm and macrocosm—are not “rational” in our sense, because they can evoke tricky, or even unanswerable, questions, like the ones raised by Franco with regard to Sāṃkhya. Yet many religions, especially the ones in which rationality as here defined plays a less important role, have proved able to ignore or bypass such annoying questions. Why should we not accept that this is precisely what the pre-classical Sāṃkhyas did?

It will be interesting to point out that the second flourishing of Sāṃkhya in the second millennium of the common era made an effort to rectify the lack of coherence that they apparently thought characterized the classical school. Clearest in this respect is Vijñānabhikṣu’s commentary on Sāṃkhya Sūtra 3.10. It has been known for long that the Sāṃkhya Sūtra was composed (or compiled) late, long after the Sāṃkhya Kārikā and most of its commentaries; its present form may date from the fourteenth or fifteenth century. Vijñānabhikṣu himself wrote in the sixteenth century. He speaks in this passage of the single (*eka*) subtle body (*liṅga*) which is formed at creation and is an adjunct (*upādhi*) of Hiraṇyagarbha. This single subtle body subsequently divides into many (*nānā*) individuals, just as the single subtle body of a father becomes multiple in the form of the subtle bodies of his sons and daughters. This division of the subtle body of Hiraṇyagarbha is caused by the difference of karma of the individuals.²⁹ It is true that Vijñānabhikṣu has a tendency to impose his own views on the Sāṃkhya philosophy, in particular the idea of a creator god. But his interpre-

But he who knows the truth, great-armed one, about the separation [of the soul] from both the strands and action, ‘the strands act upon the strands’—knowing this, is not attached [to actions]. [...] On Me all actions casting, with mind on the over-soul, being free from longing and from selfishness, fight, casting off thy fever.” (*prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ / ahaṃkāravimūdhātmā kartāham iti manyate // tattvavit tu mahābāho guṇakarmavibhāgayoḥ / guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta iti matvā na sajjate // [...] // mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi samnyasyādhyātmacetasā / nirāsīr nirmamo bhūtvā yudhyasva vigatajvaraḥ //*); and contrast this with Bhag 9.9-10 (tr. Edgerton): “And Me these actions do not bind, Dhanamjaya,—participating as one indifferent, unattached to these actions. With Me as overseer, material nature brings forth [the world of] moving and unmoving [beings]; by this motive-force, son of Kuntī, the world goes around.” (*na ca māṃ tāni karmāṇi nibadhnanti dhanamjaya / udāsīnavad āsīnam asaktaṃ teṣu karmasu // mayādhyakṣeṇa prakṛtiḥ sūyate sacarācaram / hetunānena kaunteya jagad viparivartate //*).

29 Vijñānabhikṣu on Sāṃkhya Sūtra 3.10 (p. 190): *nanu liṅgaṃ ced ekaṃ tarhi kathaṃ puruṣabhedena vilakṣaṇā bhogāḥ syus tatrāha: vyaktibheda° / yady api sargādau hiraṇyagarbhopādhirūpam ekaṃ eva liṅgam, tathāpi tasya paścād vyaktibhedo vyaktirūpeṇāṃśato nānātvam api bhavati / yathedānīm ekasya pitṛliṅgadehasya nānātvam aṃśato bhavati putrakanyādiliṅgadeharūpeṇa / tatra kāraṇam āha: karmaviśeṣād iti / jīvāntarāṇāṃ bhogahetukarmāder ity arthaḥ /*. Cp. Garbe, 1889:211.

tation of Sāṃkhya Sūtra 3.10 to the extent that one subtle body is subsequently divided into many individuals seems correct.³⁰ A.B. Keith comments:

The Sūtra evidently regards the whole process [of primary creation] as being a cosmic one, the principle of individuation producing cosmic organs, and elements, and the corresponding individual principles being derived from the cosmic. It is characteristic of the difficulty of the doctrine, and of its absurdity, that the explanation of the derivation is nowhere given: the Sūtra (iii, 10) merely says that from the one psychic apparatus many were produced by reason of the difference of the works, an explanation which is subject to the disadvantage that it begs the question, since the distinction of works presupposes individuals, and individuals presuppose separate psychic apparatuses with which to perform works.³¹

This criticism may be justified. But here at least one knows at every step exactly what is being talked about, psychology or cosmology. So whatever further difficulties this position may entail, Franco's criticism, which I cited earlier, is no longer applicable here. We now know what is being talked about, but we are left with difficulties of understanding concerning the mechanism of the process described.

6.

In order to drive home the point that the assumption of irrational elements in classical Indian philosophies is far from unreasonable, I will now draw attention to a similar contradiction as the one found in classical Sāṃkhya in the thought of an altogether different thinker of classical India. Bharṭṛhari is often said to be a, or the, philosopher of grammar, but this does not do him full justice. Apart from the many schools of thought whose ideas he used to create his own system of thought, it should here be emphasized that he has been claimed by non-grammarians, too. At least one Buddhist is reported to have composed a commentary on his Vākyapadīya, and another one (I-ching) thought that Bharṭṛhari

30 SS 3.9-10: *saptadaśaikaṃ liṅgam / vyaktibhedaḥ karmaviśeṣāt /*. Aniruddha, though explaining SS 3.9 in a somewhat peculiar manner, agrees with this interpretation.

31 Keith, 1924:108. The "probable explanation of the effort to fill up the system", as Keith (1924:108) sees it, is "the fact that the *Kārikā* itself evidently allows organic nature to be in some way directly connected with nature, and not merely, as it should consistently be, derived for each individual from the fine elements which form part of his psychic apparatus". Īśvarakṛṣṇa could have avoided so many difficulties, if only he had asked Keith to write the Sāṃkhya *Kārikā*!

was a Buddhist himself. And the influence of Bhartrhari on Kashmir Śaivism is not to be ignored either. However that may be, Bhartrhari's Vākyapadīya confronts us with the same problem which also characterizes classical Sāṃkhya: It is not always clear whether the universe or an individual person is the subject of discussion.

In Bhartrhari's view of the world only the absolute, sometimes called Brahma, is real; the phenomenal world is not real. The multiplicity of the phenomenal world is primarily explained with the help of two factors: *śakti* (energy, power) and language. The very first verse of the Vākyapadīya describes the relation between the absolute and its *śaktis*:³² "It seems to be separate from its *śaktis*, even though it is not separate [from them]." No complete enumeration of these *śaktis* is given in the Vākyapadīya, but one gets the impression that they include the categories of Vaiśeṣika (or something corresponding to them).³³ Prominent among them are, in any case, 'direction' (*diś*) or 'ether' (*ākāśa*), 'time' (*kāla*), 'inherence' (*samavāya*), and 'substance etc.' (*dravyādi*). The role of language in the creation of Bhartrhari's world is well-known. He goes to the extent of saying that the Veda is the creator (or organizer; *vidhātṛ*) of the (phenomenal) world. This close link between words and things explains the "supernatural" effects of certain words or combination of words: they can destroy poison, or produce merit which leads to heaven.³⁴ In all this the individual plays no role.

The picture changes when we consider what the Vākyapadīya has to say about *vikalpa*. This word is used in various meanings, among them 'division', 'imagined division', or 'analytical imagination'. The things (*bhāva*) of this world are produced by *vikalpa* (*vikalpotthāpita*; VP 3.3.82), even though their essence (*tattva*) is beyond *vikalpa* (*vikalpātītattva*; VP 3.6.25). Reality (*tattva*) is *avikalpita* 'without *vikalpa*', but it attains the form of *vikalpa* (*vikalparūpaṃ bhajate tattvam evāvikalpitam*; VP 3.2.8). Real knowledge (*vidyā*) is free from the *vikalpas* of the traditions (*anāgamavikalpā [...] vidyā*; VP 2.233). For this reason, "he who knows that should not mentally analyze (*viklp-*), like the explanation in usual practice by common people of things the essence of which is inexplicable".³⁵ This last remark suggests that there is a link between *vikalpa* and language. At the same time it assigns the activity of mentally analyzing

32 Vkp 1.2cd: *aprthaktve 'pi śaktibhyaḥ prthaktveneiva vartate*.

33 This is suggested by Vkp 3.1.23 ([...] *dravyādayaḥ sarvāḥ śaktay[ah]* [...]) and explicitly confirmed by Helārāja's commentary.

34 On language in Bhartrhari, see Bronkhorst, 1996.

35 Vkp 2.142: *asamākhyeyatattvānām arthānām laukikair yathā / vyavahāre samākhyānaṃ tatprajñō na vikalpayet //*

clearly to the individual: the individual “who knows that” should stop mentally analyzing. This means of course that the individual “who knows that” can indeed stop dividing the world into objects. Note in this connection that verse 3.7.41 attributes the division of the world into objects to the inner organ (*antaḥkaraṇa*):³⁶ “Heaven, earth, wind, sun, oceans, rivers, directions; these are divisions of the reality belonging to the inner organ which [nonetheless] are situated outside.” The fact that the individual can have control over his analytical imagination (*vikalpa*) allows him to put an end to this division of the world and reach liberation.³⁷

The confusion is obvious. Either each individual divides the world into objects and whatever else fills the phenomenal world, or this division concerns all individuals at the same time, and is then transpersonal. If the powers of Brahma, or the Veda, create the world, it is hard to see how each, or any, individual can undo this. Rather than finding some more or less far-fetched explanation for this difficulty, it seems likely that Bhartṛhari speaks in his *Vākyapadīya* about different levels of reality—the individual and the universal—at the same time. In doing so, he makes himself vulnerable to the same kind of criticism as classical Sāṃkhya. But by doing so, he strengthens our impression that the contradiction in Sāṃkhya is not the outcome of some historical development in which rationality somehow lost out. No, this contradiction was, if anything, a survival of pre-classical Sāṃkhya, which was not yet rational, in the sense that it did not yet, or not yet as much as later, try to immunize itself against criticism from outsiders.

The case of Bhartṛhari is particularly interesting for the following reason. I pointed out earlier that certain thinkers of Kashmir Śaivism joined the rational fold rather late, in about the 10th century of the common era. I mentioned the names of two of these thinkers, Somānanda and Utpaladeva. The former of these two, Somānanda, was rather critical of Bhartṛhari, but Utpaladeva appropriated his thought and incorporated many aspects of it in his own. However, Utpaladeva manages to avoid the contradiction which mars Bhartṛhari’s ideas. He does so by claiming that God’s creation is essentially free from language, whereas the individuals’ *vikalpas* impose upon their experience of the world the categories of language. Liberation of the individual takes place through the suppression of his or her *vikalpas*. Since the underlying world, created by God, is in itself not determined by these *vikalpas*, and by language in

36 Vkp 3.7.41: *dyauḥ kṣamā vāyur ādityaḥ sāgarāḥ sarito diśaḥ / antaḥkaraṇatattvasya bhāgā bahir avasthitāḥ //*

37 On liberation in Bhartṛhari, see Bronkhorst, 1996a.

general, the liberation of one individual does not imply the destruction of the universe. Here then we see how Bhartr̥hari's thought came to be "rationalized" even further by a later thinker who makes use of it.³⁸

7.

Here I wish to draw attention to one further current of Indian thought, the Yogācāra school of Buddhism. It is well known that this school turned to idealism at some point of its history, but it is less generally realized that this idealism poses a serious difficulty of interpretation. It is Thomas E. Wood who has drawn attention to this difficulty in a recent publication. He formulates the problem, and its solution as he sees it, in the beginning of his book in the following words:

First of all, the Vijñānavādins [...] were not solipsists. Secondly, the Vijñānavādins did not believe that the world was in God's mind, nor did they believe it was in the mind of an Absolute. [...] Consequently, the Vijñānavāda doctrine that the world is "nothing but mind" does *not* mean that the world is the manifestation or creation of some infinite or absolute mind.

If the world is mind only, and if the Vijñānavādins were neither solipsists, theists, nor absolutists, whose mind did they think the world was in? The answer [...] is as follows: The world exists (at least at the level of relative truth) in a multiplicity of independent minds. [...] the experiences of these minds—or at least the experiences they have in the normal waking state—are coordinated with each other because these minds are in immediate, mind-to-mind contact. [...] The world we seem to see in our waking state is in fact just as unreal as the things we dream about at night. The only difference is that objects seen in the normal, waking state are *collectively* hallucinated, whereas the things seen in dreams are not.³⁹

The solution which Wood ascribes to the Yogācāras he documents with references to texts such as Vasubandhu's Viṃśatikā and its auto-commentary. "[Vasubandhu's] view is that the representations (*vijñapti*) of the various mind streams mutually influence each other. Thus, he says, the characteristics or differentiations (*viśeṣa*) of one mind stream arise because of the *viśeṣas* of the representation of another mind stream (*saṃtānāntara*), and not because of the

38 See, for details, my review article of Raffaele Torella's *The Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā of Utpaladeva with the Author's Vṛtti* (Bronkhorst, 1996b).

39 Wood, 1991:ix-x.

characteristics of an external object.”⁴⁰ However, Yogācāra turned to its idealist position well before Vasubandhu, and there is no reason to think that Vasubandhu expressed the views of those preceding him. It seems far more likely that he “rationalized” the views of his predecessors. Earlier Vijñānavāda, it would seem, somehow did not yet face the difficulties inherent in an idealism without God or Absolute. If this is correct, it provides us with a further case where two different levels of reality, the individual and the universe, are confused. Further research may throw additional light on this issue.⁴¹

8.

Back to Sāṃkhya. I realize that classical Sāṃkhya can no longer be called “non-rational”. During its classical period it had become a school of thought which fully participated in the rational developments that were taking place. Indeed, the contributions of Sāṃkhya to Indian logic have been studied, especially by Erich Frauwallner.⁴² And there can be no doubt that the classical Sāṃkhyas had become aware of the somewhat contradictory nature of their doctrine. Some, like Paurika, tried to solve it by postulating as many *prakṛtis* as there are *puruṣas*.

Why, then, were the contradictory elements maintained? Why was Paurika’s point of view not accepted? Franco suggests that it may have been rejected because admitting a plurality of *prakṛtis* might be detrimental to its logical proofs, which were based on an opposition between the plurality of the products and the uniqueness of their unmanifested cause. I do not know whether this is the, or a, correct explanation of the situation, but I do think that an explanation, or explanations, must be looked for along such lines. Beside tradition, there must have been internal reasons to the system—rational reasons, if you like—which induced the Sāṃkhyas to hold on to such contradictory

40 Wood, 1991:167. A note (n.7 on p. 257) cites the auto-commentary on Viṃśatikā 18: *sarveṣāṃ hi sattvānām anyonyavijñāptyādhipatyena mitho vijñapter niyamo bhavati yathā-yogam / mitha iti parasparataḥ / ataḥ saṃtānāntaravijñaptiviśeṣāt saṃtānāntare vijñaptiviśeṣa utpadyate nārthaviśeṣāt /*.

41 Perhaps the earliest testimony of Mahāyāna Buddhist idealism occurs in the Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi Sūtra or Bhadrupāla Sūtra (Schmithausen, 1973:176 = 1976:247). Harrison (1990:xx) however points out that this formulation of idealism “is not representative of the general tenor of the text. Rather, the attitude to phenomena propounded throughout the sūtra is one that we might characterise as essentially Śūnyavādin.”

42 Frauwallner, 1958.

elements. The logical proof of *prakṛti* may have been one of them. Another one, I would like to suggest, is that the presence of one material and many spiritual principles can be used as an argument against idealism. This is what is done in Yoga Sūtra 4.15-16 and in the Bhāṣya thereon. The Yoga Bhāṣya observes that one material reality (*vastu*) is shared by many minds (*citta*). This material reality has not been imagined (*parikalpita*) by one single mind, nor by many minds; stated differently: it is not imagined at all, it is real. It is therefore independent (*svapraṭiṣṭha*). The text goes on to explain that different minds derive from this single material reality pleasure, sorrow, confusion, or indifference, depending upon the presence in each mind of virtue (*dharma*), vice (*adharmā*), ignorance (*avidyā*) or correct insight (*samyagdarśana*). Material reality and the minds go in this way their separate paths. This is precisely what sūtra 4.15 states: *vastusāmye cittabhedāt tayor vibhaktāḥ panthāḥ*. The Bhāṣya on 4.16 adds that objective reality is common to all *puruṣas* and independent, whereas the minds, which too are independent, belong each to one *puruṣa*.⁴³

9.

By way of conclusion, let me repeat that India has a long rational tradition. The study of this tradition is likely to be rewarding, as I have tried to show with the help of some examples. At least as important is that this shared tradition of rationality, both in India and in the West, should enable researchers to work together rather than against each other. The main characteristic of a rational tradition is that no one can claim to have privileged access to the object of study, that everyone is ready to listen to criticism and to consider it seriously. In the end there is no point of view to be defended, for every point of view should be abandoned in the face of sufficient contrary evidence. Mutual criticism is to be encouraged, for it is the only way to make progress, to move closer towards the aim of our scholarly endeavours, in whatever way we define them.

43 It appears that the thinkers of classical Sāṃkhya became aware of the weakness of their system and tried to rectify the situation in various ad hoc ways. An investigation of these “solutions” has now been published under the title “The contradiction of Sāṃkhya: on the number and the size of the different *tattvas*” (Bronkhorst, 1999a).

Abbreviations

- ABORI Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona
 AS Asiatische Studien, Études Asiatiques, Bern
 BEI Bulletin d'Études Indiennes, Paris
 Bhag Bhagavadgītā
 EB The Eastern Buddhist, Kyōto
 HdO Handbuch der Orientalistik, Leiden 1952 ff.
 HOS Harvard Oriental Series, Cambridge Mass.
 IsMEO Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, Roma
 KISchr Kleine Schriften [in der Serie der Glasenapp-Stiftung], Wiesbaden, Stuttgart
 Mhbh Mahābhārata, crit. ed. V.S. Sukthankar u.a., Poona 1933-41 (BORI)
 N.S. Neue Serie, New Series
 PICI Publications de l'Institut de Civilisation Indienne, Paris
 SOR Serie Orientale Roma, Roma
 SS Sāṃkhya Sūtra (for the edition, see Vijñānabhikṣu)
 StII Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik
 StPhB Studia Philologica Buddhica, Tokyo
 Vkp Bhartṛhari, Vākyapadīya, ed. W. Rau, Wiesbaden 1977
 ZDMG Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Leipzig, then Wiesbaden
 ZMR Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft, Münster

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