



On Being and What There Is

Classical Vaiśeṣika and the History of Indian Ontology

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Genesis, Enumeration, and the Question of Being

1. In the history of Indian thought, the Vedic fascination with the "beginning," that is, the initial cosmogonic event or primeval state of the world, was replaced by, or transformed into, a preoccupation with schemes of recurrent evolution and involution and with the permanent foundations of such regular and cyclical processes. The generally unchallenged assumption of cosmic cycles leaves little room for the question of a first beginning. This is true for the philosophical systems as well as for religious and mythological speculation. In the Purāṇas, the cosmogonic question in the strict sense has disappeared. What is called *original creation* (*prākṛtasarga*) and distinguished from the "re-creation," or "secondary creation" (*pratisarga*), is not a first and absolute beginning, but only a more fundamental event in a wider, but still cyclical framework of time.¹

Moreover, the increasingly soteriological orientation of classical Indian thought favors the orientation toward a future goal and solution; that is, a final, irreversible liberation from all cyclical existence. The

question of the first beginning appears as the very prototype of a useless, unanswerable question.² The familiar statement that the world and its cycles are without beginning (*anādi*) is not only, and perhaps not even primarily, a cosmological and metaphysical thesis, but also a dismissal of the cosmogonic question itself. In accordance with this attitude, there is not much explicit interest in the manner in which the cycles succeed each other in time. Is it a recurrence of identical worlds or world structures? Does the sequence of cycles constitute a linear development which implies that the successive worlds or world phases are somehow different from each other? Reflection on these questions, though certainly not entirely absent, remains somewhat marginal.³

The "origin" becomes a recurrent event. The question now is: What is the origin *and* decay of this world? In other words, what is the regular course of events, the underlying scheme and structure in the dissolution and reappearance of this visible and organized world, and what is the firm ground from which it emerges and to which it returns again and again? The old mythical question: What *was* all this in the beginning? is translated into the question: What *is* it, in the ultimate analysis? In other words, what are the ultimate ingredients of the cycles, those constituents or elements of the world that are not affected by the recurrent cosmic processes?

2. In the preceding chapter, we noted that cosmological speculation has produced at least two basically different perspectives on the question of being. On the one hand, an explicit ontological interest evolves through questions concerning the meaning of genesis, origination and change; on the other hand, it manifests itself through an interest in comprehensive enumeration and classification and reflection on the question *What is there?* In the context of the cyclical world-view, enumeration itself may have different implications. It may be an enumerative description of cosmic schemes, that is, a "vertical" enumeration of stages of evolution, or a "horizontal" classification of ultimate entities and classes of entities. In the history of classical Indian philosophy, Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣika exemplify these different types of cosmological enumeration.

Both of these systems present elaborate lists of world constituents. However, the Sāṃkhya does so in a "vertical" manner; that is, in an enumeration of successive stages (i.e., the primeval "nature," *prakṛti*, and its twenty-three evolutes).⁴

The Vaiśeṣika, on the other hand, is the most representative case of a "horizontal" enumeration and classification of world constituents. It lists its cosmic factors and "categories" of reality not as successive stages in a scheme of evolution, but in a horizontal, synchronic arrangement, which includes, however, certain structures of dependence and subordination. The ultimate constituents of the world never merge with one another nor do they emerge from one common ground; they are irreducibly distinct. The emphasis on what is ultimately separate is, indeed, one of the associations of the name *Vaiśeṣika*.⁵

The Vaiśeṣika system, just like other traditions, lists the ultimate substances (*dravya*) of the world, including four types of atoms (*paramāṇu*). But it incorporates this list in a more comprehensive enumeration of types or classes of entities; that is, the so-called categories (*padārtha*) "substance," "quality," "motion," "universal," and so forth. From the cosmological interest in the ingredients of evolution and the irreducible elements of the world, it proceeds to the more comprehensive as well as more elusive question *What is there?* According to Quine's familiar and provocative statement, this deceptively simple question articulates "the ontological problem." In the words of G. Bergmann, "an ontology is an inventory of what exists (is there)."⁶

3. Both Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣika exemplify the ancient Indian predilection for elaborate enumerations, classifications, and numerical schemes. E. Frauwallner called it "das indische Streben nach Systematik und zahlenmässiger Erfassung der Dinge."⁷ Since Vedic times, we find long lists of phenomena of the most diverse kind, such as physical entities, deities, events, natural regularities, ritual phenomena, and abstract notions. Cosmological enumerations are just one exemplary type of such lists; we find them in Hinduism as well as Buddhism and Jainism.

The older cosmological enumerations are usually of the vertical type or at least affiliated with schemes of evolution or emanation. This includes the oldest lists of "elements" in the Upaniṣads, most conspicuously in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* VI; here, "fire," "water," and "earth" appear as successive emanations from the ultimate substance, *sat* or pure "being."⁸

E. Frauwallner has suggested that the most ancient Sāṃkhya did not have a theory of evolution and that it had a list of elements *not* included in a scheme of evolution or emanation nor derived from a more

basic source. He saw this as the "simple and natural" way of cosmological thinking.⁹ The texts do not provide much evidence for Frauwallner's thesis, which implies that the Sāṃkhya theory of evolution is a secondary phenomenon, nor do they support his more general assumption that the nonevolutionary approach would have been "simple and natural" in Vedic-Upaniṣadic and early Epic thought.

In the earlier Vedic-Upaniṣadic texts, which are committed to cosmogony instead of cosmology, it seems quite difficult to find unambiguous cases of "horizontal," static, nonevolutionary enumeration of equally irreducible, nonderivative world constituents. Texts that suggest a division of one fundamental entity, such as *Rgveda* X, 90, are neither unambiguous cases of "horizontal" classification, nor are they typical of Vedic-Upaniṣadic thought. The "doctrine of Yājñavalkya" ("Yājñavalkyalehre") that Frauwallner cites from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* does not provide conclusive evidence. The same may be said about the *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, which gives us the oldest extant list of five elements; although it does not present the elements as successive emanations, it includes them in, and derives them from, *brahman*.¹⁰ The traditional term for "element," *bhūta/mahābhūta*, which emerges in the Upaniṣads, seems to have an evolutionary connotation insofar as it suggests something that "has become." We may recall here the etymological connection of its root *bhū* with Greek *phýō/phýsis*. The individual elements are, of course, not necessarily presented as successive stages. From an early time on, they may be coordinated "horizontally" within "vertical" schemes of evolution. This is an example of "horizontal evolution" or "ramification" at one level of cosmic development. Even in the *Mahābhārata*, our most important source for the early history of the Sāṃkhya tradition, the basic tendency is still evolution-oriented, if not fully "vertical." For the parallel texts *Mahābhārata* XII, 187 and XII, 239f., which Frauwallner claimed as main evidence for a "nonevolutionary" early Sāṃkhya, that is, a coordination of equally irreducible elements, J. A. B. van Buitenen has convincingly argued that they do, indeed, presuppose an "evolutionary" perspective, although of the type he called "horizontal" evolution.¹¹ For the majority of the other cosmological schemes and enumerations in the *Mahābhārata*, we may say that they are unambiguously "vertical."¹²

4. The vertical cosmological perspective that tends to view different kinds of entities as successive stages in a process of evolution or

emanation has, to a certain extent, also determined the interpretation of what later on came to be known as categorial distinctions, in particular the distinction between "substances" and their "qualities." Among the characteristic features of classical Sāṃkhya, we find its enumeration of five "subtle elements" (*tanmātra*) in addition to the five "gross elements" (*mahābhūta*). As a matter of fact, these so-called subtle elements are the hypostatized characteristics and, in accordance with the literal meaning of *tanmātra*, "pure essences" of the elements. Following the precedent of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* and other ancient texts, they are seen as cosmologically prior to the elements themselves, which are merely less refined and more concrete versions or mixtures of the original essences.

However, once qualities in general were considered as subordinate to and dependent on their substance-substrates (and finally classified as a different "category"), these essential and elemental qualities, too, had to be subordinated to their substance-elements and repositioned in the scheme of evolution. Accordingly, various texts preserve the scheme that gives priority to the "pure essences" (*tanmātra*), but then also add a corresponding series of derivative "qualities" (*guṇa*), presenting them as products or emanations of their "gross" elemental substrates.¹³ Elsewhere, for instance in some of those texts which Frauwallner cites as evidence for a "preevolutionary" Sāṃkhya, the *tanmātra* do not appear at all; instead, "qualities" such as color, taste, and smell are presented as emanations of their elemental substances and genetically subordinate phases in the evolutionary scheme. Most conspicuously, we find this in the dialogue between Bhṛgu and Bharadvāja in the *Mahābhārata*, and in its elaborate list of quality emanations.¹⁴ With reference to such texts, we may say that the "horizontal" and "categorial" distinction between "substance" (*dravya*) and "quality" (*guṇa*) that culminates in the Vaiśeṣika system was either preceded or echoed by a genetic, "vertical" distinction and correlation between the elemental substances and their characteristic essences.

5. To be sure, other texts in the *Mahābhārata* come much closer to the kind of horizontal, nonevolutionary enumeration that Frauwallner seems to postulate as the natural or ideal type of cosmological enumeration. The instruction of Asita Devala in the *Mahābhārata* provides a good example. Asita presents the five "great elements" (*mahābhūta*) as the material out of which the Lord produces this whole world and all beings in it. These elements are called *eternal* and *unchanging*. Time

(*kāla*), “being” or “becoming” (*bhāva*) and “nonbeing” or “destruction” (*abhāva*) are added in a horizontal fashion to the list of five elements. Together, they are said to be the external constituents of all beings.¹⁵ Yet even in this text, we find traces of the “vertical,” evolutionary perspective.¹⁶

Another type of “horizontal,” nonevolutionary enumeration of elements may be characterized as materialistic. The references found in the *Mahābhārata* are supplemented by old Buddhist and Jaina sources. We hear about a teacher, Ajita Keśakambala, allegedly a contemporary of the Buddha, who proclaimed that only the four material elements—that is, earth, water, fire, and air—exist. Subsequently, we find the same list of four elements in the well-known tradition of systematic materialism (*Cārṇvāka*, *Lokāyata*) associated with such names as *Bṛhaspati*, *Uśanas*, and *Purandara*.¹⁷ Another contemporary of the Buddha Gautama and the Jina Mahāvīra, Kakuda Kātyāyana (*Pakudha Kaccāyana*), added “pleasure, pain, and souls” to Ajita’s list of elemental entities (*kāya*).¹⁸

Other cosmological enumerations of a more or less horizontal type have been produced by the Buddhists and Jainas. In particular, Jainism has been linked with *Vaiśeṣika* pluralism—not only by modern scholars, but also by the Jaina tradition itself.¹⁹ However, the nature of the relationship between Jainism and early *Vaiśeṣika* has not yet been established. The age, origin, and background of cosmological enumeration in Jainism, in particular of its fundamental list of “basic entities” (*astikāya*), continue to be problematic. K. K. Dixit states “that the tradition of discussing the nature of *loka* and *aloka*, matter and soul was comparatively old, that of discussing the nature of five *astikāyas* comparatively recent. It seems that the tradition of discussing the nature of reality in general is still more recent.”²⁰ Whereas the debate about “reality in general” (*sat-sāmānya*), that is, the phenomena of origination (*utpāda*) and so forth and the distinction between the substance (*dravya*) and its modes (*pariyāya*) seems to have no real precedent in the *Āgamas* and apparently gained prominence only with Umāsvāti’s *Tattvārthasūtra*, the notion of *astikāya* does occur in the canonical *Viyāhapañnatti* (often referred to as *Bhagavatīsūtra*).

Mahāvīra’s chief disciple Gautama, when asked to justify his belief in the existence of the five *astikāyas*, naively pleads that only that which exists is called by his camp an existing entity, only that which does not a non-existing entity (*savvaṃ atthibhāvaṃ atthi-iti vadāmo, savvaṃ natthibhāvaṃ natthi-iti vadāmo*).²¹

Whatever the original meaning of *astikāya* may be, it does not become a central and programmatic term in Jainism, but remains one item of enumeration among many others. It appears among the twenty-three *anuyogadvāra*, topics of debate and investigation, which include *prthivī*, *dvīpa*, *śarīra*, *dr̥ṣṭi*, and *jñāna*.²² Evidently, it does not indicate any special or exclusive interest in the "ontological" question *What is there?*

6. Extensive schemes of enumeration and classification are found in the Buddhist Abhidharma traditions. The five "groups" (*skandha*) of physical and mental factors, the six "elements" (*dhātu*), and the twelve "realms" (*āyatana*) are the most conspicuous and familiar categories of enumeration in Buddhism, not to mention the causal links (*nidāna*) in the twelvefold chain of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Not only the existence of different schemes of enumeration, but also the role and relevance of enumeration *per se* have been a matter of concern and debate in Buddhism. The coexistence of the three competing lists of *skandha*, *dhātu*, and *āyatana* is explained as an accommodation to different types of disciples.²³ However, this cannot vindicate enumeration, classification, and conceptualization in general.

The fundamental motivation of the Buddhists is practical and soteriological. Enumeration and classification should serve a soteriological purpose. They should focus on soteriologically relevant causal relations and on the conceptual mastery of the conditions of worldly existence, and thus contribute to the goal of liberation from this condition. But such interest in comprehensive enumeration and conceptual mastery may again produce attachment to the world and one's own deceptive identity. The enumerative, objectifying approach itself calls for transcendence and detachment.

The word *dharma* indicates the ultimate units of enumeration, classification, analysis, and identification. It is at the same time one of the most central and most elusive terms of Buddhism in general. The debates about the meaning of *dharma* have been intense and far-reaching, and they reflect basic differences in the interpretation of Buddhism. Numerous translations and explanations have been suggested, for instance, "element," "object," "phenomenon," "datum," and "element of existence."²⁴

We do not have to determine the full semantic range of the term *dharma* or its various functions in different contexts. Our question is: What is the role of *dharma* as a category of enumeration and classifica-

tion? What is it that is being enumerated, classified, and identified in the *dharma* lists? But can we determine the meaning of *dharma* as such, regardless of the fact that it is the ultimate unit of enumeration and identification? In a sense, enumeration and identification, or rather enumerability and identifiability, constitute the meaning of *dharma*. Dharmas are essentially "identifiables," basic, irreducible units of identification. They are supposed to emerge at the end of a process of analysis and division that reduces all false units and apparent identities to their true and ultimate constituents.

The Abhidharma tradition itself supports this interpretation. It refers to the etymological affiliation of *dharma* with the root *dhṛ*, "to uphold," and derives its meaning from the fact that it upholds its own identity and distinctness (*svalakṣaṇadhāraṇād dharmah*).²⁵ An analogous explanation is proposed for *dhātu*, "element."²⁶ However, the idea of ultimate identifiables remains elusive and controversial. According to the Mahāyāna, one should not enumerate and classify dharmas. One should not be attached to the "identity" (*svabhāva*) of any particular entities, not even to the identifiability and objectifiability of these ultimate identifiables.²⁷

7. What is there? How can it be classified and enumerated? What does it mean to deal with the totality of what there is? What is the relationship between the enumeration and classification of different types of entities and the semantic analysis of being? What deserves to be listed as a separate item of ontological enumeration? Should being itself, insofar as it can be distinguished from, and predicated of, what there is, somehow be added to it? Is the assertion of being or existence, and its distinction from nonbeing, an act of enumeration and classification? Does the distinction between being and nonbeing presuppose a definition of being? Does the definition of being require a previous understanding of nonbeing? Can being be defined as the common denominator of what there is? But to what extent is an understanding of "being itself" the condition of the possibility of referring to what there is? In what sense does it determine the extent of enumeration and the enumerability of enumerables?

According to W. V. Quine, the ontological problem *What is there?* can be answered in one word: "everything," although this answer may leave "room for disagreement over cases."²⁸ The Vaiśeṣika system of

"categories" (*padārtha*), with its inherent claim of comprehensive enumeration, is obviously committed to this answer; but it also illustrates its ambiguity and questionability, and the scope of what Quine called "room for disagreement." This becomes more obvious if we compare the Vaiśeṣika project of enumeration with other approaches to "everything" (*sarvam*), or the totality of what there is, for instance in the Buddhist Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika school.

Apart from other significant differences concerning the systematic premises and the psychological as well as soteriological orientations of Vaiśeṣika and Sarvāstivāda, their notions of "everything" are characteristically different. Above all, this has to do with the role of time in these two traditions. In Vaiśeṣika, time itself is thoroughly integrated into the system of horizontal enumeration: It is one of nine substances (*dravya*), an enumerable item on a par with other world constituents. Time is an entity, not the horizon in which entities exist nor the abyss in which they disappear. There is not much room for reflections concerning "being and time," or "being-in-time," nor for speculations on past, present, and future as modes of existence or on potentiality and actuality.

In the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika list of seventy-five basic enumerables (*dharma*), time as such does not appear at all.²⁹ Yet temporality is a far more prominent and pervasive theme than in the Vaiśeṣika. The four Sarvāstivāda masters Dharmatrāta, Ghoṣaka, Vasumitra, and Buddhadeva are associated with basically different positions concerning the relationship and distinction between past, present, and future.³⁰ The Sarvāstivāda is not a system of evolution comparable to the Sāṃkhya. Yet there are significant affinities. Actuality and potentiality, manifestation and latency are pervasive themes in both traditions.

This brings us back to the distinction between evolutionary and nonevolutionary, vertical and horizontal schemes of cosmology, and more specifically, to the systematic relationship and confrontation between Vaiśeṣika and Sāṃkhya-Yoga that constitutes the main topic of this chapter.

8. In traditional Indian doxography as well as in the modern histories of Indian philosophy, the systems of Vaiśeṣika and Sāṃkhya are often presented as characteristic examples of two different theories of causality, that is, of *asatkāryavāda* and *satkāryavāda*. These doxographic

titles are very familiar. But is their meaning as clear, and their opposition as unambiguous, as it appears to be?

Satkāryavāda is commonly defined as the theory that the effect (*kārya*), or rather the product, already exists in its material cause; and hence nothing new is brought into existence or produced in the process of causation. *Asatkāryavāda*, on the other hand, is defined as the theory that the product does not preexist in its material cause, and hence is produced; that is, brought into existence in the process of causation.

In the extant Sāṃkhya literature, the locus classicus for the *satkāryavāda* is verse 9 of Īśvarakṛṣṇa's *Sāṃkhyakārikā*:

*asadakaraṇād upādānagrahaṇāt sarvasambhavābhāvāt/
śaktasya śakyakaraṇāt kāraṇabhāvāc ca satkāryam//*

The verse gives us five reasons why the effect has to preexist in its material cause: what is not cannot be produced; the effect requires a material cause; not everything arises from everything; the cause produces only what corresponds to its potential; and the effect has the nature of the cause. The first reason states that it is impossible to produce something out of nothing; the following reasons postulate a more specific correspondence between the nature of the product and its cause. Although these two types of reasons seem easily compatible and, in fact, complementary, their coordination is not without problems.³¹

The Sāṃkhya "theory of the preexistent effect" has to be seen in connection with the concept of *prakṛti*, the inherently dynamic primeval nature (and ultimate material cause, *pradhāna*) that contains the entire spatiotemporal universe in a "nonmanifest" (*avyakta*) state. The undifferentiated *prakṛti* evolves periodically into the manifest world through a process of internal modification (*pariṇāma*) and by producing out of and yet within itself a series of "differentiations" (*vikāra*, *vikṛti*). This process is at the same time a process of manifestation and presentation for the "spirit" (*puruṣa*); that is, pure, passive, yet actualizing awareness. The basic premise of this explanation is that nothing can come out of nothing and that the undifferentiated totality of *prakṛti* anticipates the existence of all particular entities. This is the universal cosmological and metaphysical application of the first reason for the *satkāryavāda*. The following reasons are more specific, but also more problematic if applied to the concept of *prakṛti*. They presuppose not just an undifferentiated preexistence of differentiated entities nor the preexistence of differenti-

ated effects in a nondifferentiated cause; instead, they postulate special causes for special effects. Particularity and differentiation themselves cannot be "new"; that is, originating out of nonparticularity and non-differentiation. A special product, such as sesame oil, requires a special material cause: sesame seeds. But this process of specified derivation cannot be traced back to the ultimate material cause, *prakṛti* itself, which is by definition nonspecific, nonmanifest, and undifferentiated.³²

9. For the Vaiśeṣika *asatkāryavāda*, there is no analogous locus classicus. In the Vaiśeṣikasūtras, the issue is repeatedly referred to, specifically in several Sūtras of *Adhyāya IX*, as well as in *Sūtra I, 1, 8*.³³ In Praśastapāda's authoritative systematization of the Vaiśeṣika, the *asatkāryavāda* receives very little explicit attention. On the one hand, this may suggest that it is basically taken for granted, or, as B. Faddegon notes, "considered a settled tenet of the Vaiśeṣika system."³⁴ On the other hand, one gets the impression that Praśastapāda avoids the issue or considers it somewhat obsolete.³⁵

According to its standard interpretation, the *asatkāryavāda* teaches the production of new entities out of their constituents; that is, the origination of wholes (*avayavin*) that are genuinely new units with an identity of their own and something over and above the sum total of their parts. The Vaiśeṣika does not recognize a nonmanifest, potential state of the world. In general, it tends to avoid the ideas of potentiality and latency, as well as the assumption of different "modes of being."³⁶ Instead, it tries to understand the world in terms of a combination, aggregation, and separation, but also substitution and replacement of definite, actual, distinct entities. In the terminology of the *Mahābhāṣya*, it emphasizes *ādeśa* instead of *vikāra*.³⁷

The historical process of debate has led to an increasingly confrontational articulation of the two positions, but also to interaction and mutual accommodation. The idea of aggregation gains some significance in Sāṃkhya. Some Sāṃkhya thinkers even try to explain the transition from potentiality to actuality, or latency to manifestness, in terms of *asatkāryavāda* premises, although few go as far as Mādhava, who interprets "manifestation" (*abhivivakti*) itself as a new, additional factor. Mādhava and others also adopt a form of atomism for the Sāṃkhya.³⁸ On the other hand, the Vaiśeṣika has made concessions to the idea of potentiality; the concept of *śakti* itself has its own peculiar history in

Vaiśeṣika. In their rejection of the Buddhist theory of momentariness (*kṣaṇikatva*, *kṣaṇabhāṅga*), which implies a far more radical notion of universal actuality, the Naiyāyikas and Vaiśeṣikas (including Śrīdhara and Udayana) have invoked various ideas of latent causality, potentiality, and manifestation.³⁹

Yet, in spite of much dialectical interaction and various tacit accommodations, what characterizes the debate most is a certain refusal to address each other's basic premises concerning the nature of being and the different meanings in which the words *sat* and *asat* are used. The transition from "nonbeing" to "being" that the Vaiśeṣika accepts is not identical with the one that the Sāṃkhya rejects. With the appropriate semantic adjustment and clarification, the Vaiśeṣika theory itself could easily be called *satkāryavāda*. The disagreement is as much about the meaning and usage of words, as it is about the nature of reality and causality. Nonetheless, the debate between *satkāryavāda* and *asatkāryavāda* is a genuinely ontological debate.⁴⁰ The familiar doxographic labels, which present this as a debate concerning different theories of causality, hide rather than reveal this underlying ontological significance.

10. The Sāṃkhya concept of *prakṛti*, or of the unevolved, nonmanifest (*avyakta*) cause and substance of our manifest, actual universe, is among the most familiar notions of Indian philosophy. But do we understand its ontological implications? Do we know what the Sāṃkhya means when it speaks of a latent, unevolved, nonmanifest preexistence of the product in its cause, and of the world in *prakṛti*? Do we know what we mean when we speak about "being" in a latent, nonmanifest, potential state?

Various ancient and popular metaphors illustrate such withdrawal into latency (and reemergence from it): The world disappears in, and emanates from, *prakṛti* in a manner that may be compared to the way in which a tortoise protrudes, retracts, and hides its limbs.⁴¹ But what is the ontological and cosmological meaning of such hiding? In their own way, modern Sāṃkhya scholars have tried to paraphrase and explain the latent preexistence of all products, including the manifest universe itself, in their causes. We hear, for instance, that the cosmic products preexist in the sense "that they are specifications of the inherent generativity of primordial materiality" and, furthermore, "that the emergence

of the various effects together with the causal matrix from which they derive is characterized in terms of continuing dynamic transformation."⁴² Whatever this may mean, it does not address the fundamental ontological issue.

Regardless of all specific causal processes and all specific functions ascribed to the three *guṇa*, we have to proceed from and return to the basic ontological premise, as it is found in the Sāṃkhya teachings and in related texts: "There is no existence for that which is not; nor is there nonexistence for that which is" (*na-asato vidyate bhāvo, na-abhāvo vidyate sataḥ*).⁴³ "That which is cannot arise in what is not; nor can that which is loose its reality" (*na-asati sataḥ sambhavaḥ, na sata ātmahānam*).⁴⁴ "That which is, is once and for all; that which is not, is not (i.e., nonexistent) once and for all. There is no origination for what is not, nor destruction for what is" (*yad asty asty eva tad, yan na-asti na-asty eva tad. asato na-asti sambhavaḥ, sato na-asti vināśaḥ*).⁴⁵

The last of these three statements is attributed to the Sāṃkhya teacher Vārṣaganya. According to another fragment ascribed to this teacher, the entire threefold world may withdraw from manifestness, but not from reality; even in the state of withdrawal, it continues to exist, because destruction is unacceptable. Because of its merger (*saṃsarga*) with *prakṛti*, the world is "subtle"; and because of such subtleness, it cannot be perceived. Therefore, destruction is nothing but withdrawal from manifestness (*tad etat trailokyam vyakter apaiti na sattvād, apetaṃ apy asti vināśapratishedhāt. saṃsargāc ca-asya saukṣmyam, saukṣmyāc ca-anupalabdhis. tasmād vyaktyapagamo vināśaḥ*).⁴⁶ This is the state of the world when it is entirely without "transformation" or "differentiation" (*vikāra*, *vikṛti*).

11. Classical Sāṃkhya shares its basic term *vikāra* with the "science of being" which Uddālaka Āruṇi presents in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad and which forms the background of the *satkāryavāda*. According to Uddālaka's teaching, all entities are differentiations, transformations (*vikāra*) of pure being (*sat*), the universal substrate. They are identifiable particulars and have a reality and identity of their own, insofar as they can be named. "Name and form" (*nāmarūpa*) are the vehicle, if not the principle, of differentiation (*vyākṛ*) and particularization. The manifestation of the world coincides with the differentiation of the absolute.⁴⁷

To what extent does this describe the position of Sāṃkhya? Is

manifestation nothing else than differentiation of one underlying substrate?⁴⁸ Here, we have to remember that, unlike Uddālaka's "science of being" (*sadvidyā*), classical Sāṃkhya is a dualistic system, which recognizes the "spirit" (*puruṣa*), that is, pure, objectless, awareness, as the second irreducible principle. Evolution and differentiation, so we are told, are "for the sake of the spirit" (*puruṣārtha*). What then is the role of awareness in the process of manifestation and actualization? What is its cosmological role and its ontological meaning? To what extent does it contribute to, or perhaps even constitute, actuality and manifestness (*āvirbhāva*, *prādurbhāva*)?⁴⁹

The statements of the Sāṃkhya texts tend to be metaphorical and somewhat elusive; but the basic position seems to be clear: The presence of the *puruṣa*, pure awareness, does indeed "solicit" the process of differentiation and actualization; yet, it does not in any way contribute to the process as such. Neither does it supply any of the specific features or structures of the world of experience, nor does it generate the character of manifestness or actuality. "Manifestness" (*vyakti*) as well as differentiation are produced *for* the *puruṣa*. The process is entirely objective: *prakṛti* generates its own visibility, transforms itself into a content of experience. It does so through the mediating presence of the three *guṇa*, which are psychological as well as physical and cosmological principles, "threads" that extend from the state of potentiality into the actual, manifest, differentiated universe.⁵⁰ Without this, there would be nothing to be experienced.

In its "subtle," nonmanifest state, the world is inherently imperceptible; its imperceptibility is not due to any incapacity of the perceiving subjects. Even Kapila, the greatest sage and seer, could not see and identify entities in their latent, potential state; he could not see the world in *prakṛti*, because it is objectively nonmanifest.⁵¹ On the other hand, classical Sāṃkhya does not admit any movement between different states of being, any fluctuation between actuality and potentiality, in awareness itself. The spirit is unchanging, contentless, absolute awareness and presence per se, unaffected by what is presented to or withdrawn from it.

12. The allied Yoga system also recognizes the immutability of the pure "spirit" (*puruṣa*), but leaves much room for "actuality" and "potentiality" within the "mind" (*citta*). Transition from potentiality (*śak-*

ti) to actuality (*abhivyakti*) in the mental sphere means change from an unconscious, "unnoticed" (*aparidrṣṭa*) state to a conscious, "noticed" (*paridrṣṭa*) one.⁵² Furthermore, the Yoga associates the conceptions of actuality and potentiality, manifest (*vyakta*) and subtle (*sūkṣma*) with time and temporality: Present phenomena are manifest, that is, actual; past and future phenomena are subtle, that is, potential (*vartamānā vyaktāt-māno, atītānāgatāḥ sūkṣmātmānaḥ*).⁵³ The concepts of actuality and potentiality are thus used in an attempt to clarify the nature of time and its three "routes" (*adhvan*); that is, past, present, and future.

The connection of these reflections with Sarvāstivāda ideas about "being" and "time" is as obvious as the affinity that the Yoga teachings concerning actuality and potentiality in the mental sphere have with the Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda tradition.⁵⁴ This tradition distinguishes the sub-conscious, latent traces stored in the "base consciousness" (*ālayavijñāna*) from the actuality of present experience; that is, the actual functioning (*pravṛtti*) of awareness. The mind itself is the substrate and "seed" of all phenomena (*sarvabīja*); through a process of internal transformation (*vi-jñānapariṇāma*), it evolves into the manifoldness of actual experiences and objects of awareness.⁵⁵ The great Vedānta (and Mīmāṃsā) philosopher Maṇḍanamiśra applies this idea in his own way; he speaks of an apparent unfolding (*vipariṇāma, vivartana*) of the pure subject (*draṣṭṛ*) or self (*ātman*).⁵⁶ In general, the tradition of Advaita Vedānta has adopted important suggestions from Buddhism as well as Sāṃkhya and Yoga, and it has transformed them into its own complex theories of "apparent transformation" (*vivarta*) and "objective illusion" (*māyā*).

Unlike Yogācāra, classical Yoga does not attempt to reduce *esse* to *percipi*, or "being" to "being experienced." Yet, it tends to ascribe a more constitutive role to awareness or experience than the Sāṃkhya and to interpret it as an efficient factor of manifestation and actualization.

The correspondences between the *satkāryavāda*, especially in its Yogic version, and certain ideas of Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra are undeniable. On the other hand, there are significant Buddhist parallels of the *asatkāryavāda*. In general, the Buddhists have asked challenging questions concerning the relationship between wholes and their parts, and the ontological status of aggregates (such as the famous chariot discussed in the *Milindapañha*).⁵⁷ Implicitly or explicitly, the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika have responded to this challenge.

In their own way, the Buddhists have articulated the idea of the "prior nonexistence" (*prāgabhāva*) of the product in its cause. The for-

mula that epitomizes the precarious fact that something exists that did not exist before—*abhūtvā bhavati*, *abhūtvā bhāvah*—is typically Buddhist and most familiar in the Sarvāstivāda debates.⁵⁸ As a matter of fact, some Sāṃkhya texts refer explicitly to the *asatkāryavāda* of the Buddhists.⁵⁹

The debate between the two theories that the product does, or does not, preexist in its material cause, that is, *satkāryavāda* and *asatkāryavāda*, fades away without a clear victor and without a generally recognized solution of basic ontological problems. It remains, of course, a familiar doxographic issue and is referred to as such by numerous later authorities, including Udayana.⁶⁰ Up to the end of the living debate, its protagonists fail to address each other's divergent concepts of being. Yet, this debate has exemplary significance in the history of Indian ontology. Although it has not produced definitive solutions, its results are by no means negligible. What it has left behind is a rich legacy of problematic concepts, questions, and suggestions concerning actuality and potentiality and the enigmatic relationship between being and time.⁶¹

Chapter 3: Notes

1. Cf. M. Biarreau, *Études de mythologie hindoue*, vol. 1. *Cosmogonies purāṇiques* (Paris, 1981), p. 8, n. 1: "un recommencement plus radical." See, on the other hand, *Rgveda* VI, 48, 22: *sakṛd ha dyaur ajāyata*, *sakṛd bhūmir ajāyata*.

2. In particular, this is the case in Buddhist thought, but also in Advaita Vedānta and other Hindu systems.

3. Cf., for instance, Bhartṛhari, *VP* III/9, 51ff. with Helārāja's commentary; this text rejects a strictly cyclical view of time and the possibility of returning to an identical past; see later, Chapter 9, n. 10.

4. On the other hand, *puruṣa* is coordinated with *prakṛti* in a "horizontal" fashion.

5. This would apply most specifically to *viśeṣa*, "ultimate particularity," the fifth category of the system.

6. G. Bergmann, *Logic and Reality* (Madison, 1964), p. 127; on Quine, see earlier, Chapter 1, n. 28f.

7. E. Frauwallner, *Gesch. d. ind. Phil.*, vol. 2, p. 27; cf. vol. 1, p. 313.

8. See *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* VI, 2; *Aitareya Upaniṣad* III, 3, has a list of five elements (adding air and ether).

9. See E. Frauwallner, *Kl. Schr.*, p. 64 (originally in *Wiener Zeitschrift für die des Morgenlandes* 32, 1925): "In einem Dualismus . . . ist zu der Annahme einer Entstehung der Elemente gar keine Nötigung vorhanden, sondern sie erscheint vielmehr recht gekünstelt. Einfach und natürlich ist es, dass Welt und Einzelwesen aus den ewigen Elementen hervorgehen und wieder in sie zurückkehren."

10. *Kl. Schr.*, pp. 96ff. (originally in *Zeitschrift für Indologie und Iranistik* 4, 1926); see also *Aitareya Upaniṣad* III, 3.

11. See J. A. B. van Buitenen, "Studies in Sāṃkhya (I)" *Studies in Indian Literature and Philosophy*, ed. L. Rocher (Delhi, 1988), pp. 43–51 (originally in *JAOS* 76, 1956, 153–157); on "horizontal evolution" or "ramification," cf. van Buitenen's "Studies in Sāṃkhya (II)" *ibid.*, pp. 53–73; especially p. 55 (originally in *JAOS* 77, 1957, 15–25).

12. Cf. *Mahābhārata* XII, 175ff. (Bhṛgu and Bharadvāja): XII, 239ff. (Suka and Vyāsa); XIV, 42 (*Anugītā*; Brahmā presents an evolutionary scheme of the elements and the emergence of our empirical world).

13. Cf. M. Biardeau, *Cosmogonies purāniques* (cited in n. 1), p. 20f. (on *tanmātra* and *bhūta*, with reference to *Kūrmapurāṇa* I, 4, 24f.); see also P. Chakravarti, *Origin and Development of the Sāṃkhya System of Thought* (Calcutta, 1951; reprint Delhi, 1975), p. 242 (on cumulative and noncumulative concepts of *tanmātra*).

14. See *Mahābhārata* XII, 175ff. (Bhṛgu and Bharadvāja).

15. *Mahābhārata* XII, 267, 4ff. (Asita Devala).

16. See XII, 267, 7ff.

17. Cf. E. Frauwallner, *Gesch. d. ind. Phil.*, vol. 2, pp. 27f.; 301ff.; see also F. O. Schrader, *Über den Stand der indischen Philosophie zur Zeit Mahāvīras und Buddhas* (Leipzig, 1902; Diss. Strassburg), pp. 52ff. Materials concerning the philosophy of the materialists (Bārhaspatya, Cārvāka) have been collected by M. Namai in two articles in Japanese; see *Indological Review* 2 (1976): 33–74; 3 (1981): 59–78; and by D. P. Chattopadhyaya and M. K. Gangopadhyaya in the anthology *Cārvāka/Lokāyata* (New Delhi, 1990).

18. Cf. E. Frauwallner, *ibid.*, and F. O. Schrader, *ibid.*; see also C. Vogel, *The Teachings of the Six Heretics* (Wiesbaden, 1970).

19. Cf. H. Ui, *The Vaiśeṣika Philosophy*, pp. 36ff., 65ff.; A. Thakur, Introduction to VS, ed. Jambuvijaya, pp. 6ff. (on the tradition of Śaṅkara Rohagupta, a schismatic Jaina teacher who apparently adopted Vaiśeṣika teachings).

20. See K. K. Dixit, *Jaina Ontology*, p. 28; for an example of a comprehensive classification in Jainism, see also *Uttarādhyayanāsūtra*, ch. 36.

21. *Jaina Ontology*, p. 27.

22. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 18ff.

23. Cf. Vasubandhu, *AKBh* I, p. 20 (ed. P. Pradhan, 2d ed., Patna, 1975, p. 14): *mohendriyarucitraidhāt tisrah skandhādideśanāh*). Other broad categories of classification include the juxtaposition of *samskrta* ("conditional") and *asamskrta* ("unconditional") elements; cf. O. Rosenberg, *Die Probleme der buddhistischen Philosophie* (Heidelberg, 1924; reprint San Francisco, 1976), pp. 120–140 (Russian edition, Petrograd, 1918); Nyanatiloka, *Guide Through the Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, 3d ed. by Nyanaponika (Colombo, 1957); J. Takasaki, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, trans. R. W. Giebel (Tokyo, 1987), pp. 107–127.

24. Cf. O. Rosenberg, *Die Probleme*, p. 83; J. R. Carter, *Dhamma: Western Academic and Sinhalese Buddhist Interpretations* (Tokyo, 1978); T. Stcherbatsky, *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word Dharma* (London, 1923; reprint Delhi, 1974).

25. Cf. Vasubandhu, *AKBh* I, 2 (ed. P. Pradhan, p. 2); Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā* on MK XVII, 1 (ed. L. de La Vallée Poussin, p. 304); XXIII, 7 (457); see also Buddhaghosa, *Atthasālinī*, (commentary on *Dhammasaṅgani*), §94: *sabhāvaṃ dhārenti*.

26. Cf. Vasubandhu, *AKBh* III, p. 3 (ed. P. Pradhan, p. 112): *svalakṣaṇadhāraṇād dhātuh*.

27. Cf. E. Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India* (London, 1962), pp. 204ff., 220ff. (dharma as *svabhavaśūnya*); see also *The Large Sūtra on Perfect Wisdom*, part 1, trans. E. Conze (London, 1961), p. 98 (I, 4, 13): "A Bodhisattva should therefore be trained in non-attachment to all dharmas, and in their unreality—in the sense that he does not construct or discriminate them."

28. See earlier, Chapter 1, no. 28. See also P. M. Williams, "On the Abhidharma Ontology," *JIPh* 9 (1981): 227–257; Williams cites Quine's ontological question and discusses its implications and problems with reference to the Sarvāstivāda views on being, time, and intentionality.

29. See earlier, n. 24; see also S. Schayer, *Contributions to the Problem of Time in Indian Philosophy* (Cracow, 1938), pp. 19f.

30. See S. Schayer, *Contributions*, pp. 28ff.; L. de La Vallée Poussin, "Documents d'Abhidharma," *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 5 (1936–37): 75–158; P. M. Williams, "Buddhadeva and Temporality," *JIPh* 4 (1976–77): 279–294.

31. On the ambiguities of "production" and "manifestation," see later, Chapter 8; on the interpretation of SK, v. 9, see also Y. Wadhvani-Shah, "A New Plausible Explanation of Sāṅkhya-Kārikā 9," *JIPh* 17 (1989): 211–224.

32. However, one might say that the theory of the three *guṇa* addresses the problem in its own, mythical fashion.

33. Cf. VS I, 1, 8: *dravyāṇi dravyāntaram ārabhante*; see also Candrānanda's commentary on this Sūtra.

34. See B. Faddegon, *The Vaiṣeṣika System*, p. 29; cf. also Vyomaśiva, *Vy.*, p. 602 (*vaiṣeṣikaśāstre hy asat utpadyata iti prasiddham*); and Mallavādin, *DNC*, vol. 2, pp. 502f. (*asatkāryatvasiddhi* and the lost *Kaṭandī* on VS).

35. Likewise, *Praśastapāda* has very little to say about nonbeing (*asat*, *abhāva*) in general. This is, of course, very different with his successors. *Praśastapāda* himself notes that for a *Vaiṣeṣika* to accept the preexistence of the product would be contrary to the premises of his school (*svaśāstravirodhin*); see PBh, p. 234. Cf. also Śrīdhara's paraphrase, *NK*, p. 237; and Vyomaśiva, *Vy.*, p. 602.

36. Vācaspati explains that according to the *Vaiṣeṣika* the manifest (actual) arises from the manifest and that the atoms are manifest (actual); see *Tat-tvakaumudī* on SK 15 (Introduction): *vyaktāt vyaktam utpadyate . . . paramāṇava hi vyaktāḥ*).

37. For *ādeśa* in the sense of "substitution," "substitute," see *Mahābhāṣya* I, 1, 56 (on *Vārttika* 11f.; vol. 1, pp. 136f.). Patañjali further paraphrases: *yo 'bhūtvā bhavati*.

38. Cf. Bhāsarvajña, *NBhūṣ*, p. 569; see also Uddyotakara, *NV* IV, 1, 48 (Calc. S.S., p. 998; on the production of *abhiṣyakti*, "manifestation," but without explicit reference to Mādhava). On Mādhava in general, see E. A. Solomon, *The Commentaries of the Sāṃkhya Kārikā—A Study* (Ahmedabad, 1974), pp. 153–169.

39. The *Vaiṣeṣika* commentators use terms such as *sāmarthya* and *yogyatā* (capability, capacity) which have obvious connotations of potentiality; cf. Śrīdhara, *NK*, p. 144 (*kāraṇasāmarthya*); Udayana, *Kir.*, GOS, pp. 93–97 (*sāmarthya* and the Buddhist doctrine of momentariness and pure actuality). For implications of "potentiality" in the *Vaiṣeṣika* "universals," including *sattā*, see later, Chapter 8, sections 6, 12.

40. Cf. W. Liebethal, *Satkārya in der Darstellung seiner buddhistischen Gegner* (Stuttgart, 1934), p. 50: "Der satkārya-vāda ist die letzte theoretische Spitze einer Diskussion ontologischen Inhalts."

41. Cf. P. Chakravarti, *Origin and Development* (cited in n. 13), p. 220.

42. G. J. Larson in *Sāṃkhya. A Dualist Tradition in Indian Philosophy*, ed. G. J. Larson and R. S. Bhattacharya (Princeton, 1987; *EIPh*), p. 68.

43. *Bhagavadgītā* II, 16.

44. YBh IV, 12; cf. NBh I, 1, 29: *na-asata ātmalābhah, na sata ātmahānam*. For

all this, we have to recall the instruction of Śvetaketu, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* VI, 1ff.

45. Cf. Vasubandhu, *AKBh* V, p. 27 (ed. P. Pradhan, p. 301); see also A. Wezler, "Remarks on the Sarvasarvātmakatvavāda," *Philosophical Essays*, A. Thakur Felicitation Vol., (Calcutta, 1987), pp. 166–181 (especially pp. 178f.).

46. See *YD*, ed. R. C. Pandeya, p. 57. Pandeya reads *asaṃsargāc* instead of *saṃsargāc*, but this seems hardly tenable; on this term and the meaning of the statement, cf. A. Wezler, "Remarks" (n. 45), pp. 176ff. A very similar statement appears in *YBh* III, 13; but unlike *YD*, this text does not mention the name of Vārsagana/Vārsaganya. See also Helārāja on *VP* III/9, p. 55.

47. Cf. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* VI, 1–4; especially the recurrent formula *vā-cārambhanam vikāro nāmadheyam*, and VI, 3, 2: *nāmarūpe vyākaraṇāni*.

48. Cf. the presentation by Śaṅkara, *BSBh* II, 1, 4.

49. Whether only one *puruṣa* is assumed or (as in certain Sāṃkhya schools) many is not relevant in this particular context.

50. The *guṇas*, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* constitute and differentiate the realm of feelings and other mental phenomena (*pleasure, pain, passion, dullness*, etc.) as much as the physical, material realm. Even cognition and detachment are ultimately administered by the *guṇas* for the pure, unaffected *puruṣa*.

51. Cf. *YD*, p. 70: *śrīkapilabrāhmaṇair api pradhānapuruṣāv apratyakṣāv iti naḥ śāstram*. The text contrasts this with the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theory that atoms are accessible to "yogic perception" (*yogipratyakṣa*).

52. See *YBh* III, 15: *cittasya dvaye dharmāḥ*; Vyāsa uses the terms *śakti* vs. *abhiṣyakti*, *aviśeṣa* vs. *viśeṣa*, etc.; cf. also *YBh* II, 19; IV, 13.

53. See *YBh* IV, 13; cf. also III, 13; IV, 12. Accomplished yogins know past and future objects; accordingly, these have to be ontologically validated.

54. For a comparative study, see B. M. Sinha, *Time and Temporality in Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Abhidharma Buddhism* (New Delhi, 1983).

55. Cf. Vasubandhu, *Triṃśikā*, v. 1 (with commentary by Sthiramati); see also v. 18.

56. See Maṇḍana, *Brahmasiddhi*, ed. S. Kuppuswami Sastri (Madras, 1937; reprint Delhi, 1984), p. 7; cf. also P. Hacker, *Vivarta*, (Wiesbaden, 1953; Ak. Wiss. Lit. Mainz), especially pp. 34ff., on the relation between *vivarta* and *pariṇāma*.

57. See *Milindapañha*, ed. V. Trenckner, (London, 1880; Pali Text Society; reprint 1962), pp. 26ff.

58. Cf. Nāgārjuna, *MK* XXVII, 12: *na-apy abhūtā samudbhūto*; see also *MK*, ed. L. de La Vallée Poussin, p. 263, n. 2: "La formule *abhūtā bhavati* . . . est

caractéristique du Bouddhisme; elle joue un grand rôle dans la controverse du *sarvāstivāda*."

59. Cf. Gaudapāda's commentary on *SK*, 9; see also *NBh* IV, 1, 14.

60. See, for instance, Udayana, *Kir.*, *GOS*, p. 227.

61. See later, Chapters 8 and 9.