

SĀM̄KHYAN CAUSALITY THEORY AND THE CRITERION OF BEING (SAT)

It may not be surprising to students of Indian Hindu metaphysics to note that many modern evaluations of Sāmkhya dualism serve to reveal the characteristic weaknesses of this philosophy, especially as these weaknesses are exposed and enunciated by Śaṅkara, the Vedāntin. Such metaphysical incongruities as the *vivekavāda*, *puruṣārthavāda*, and *saṁyogavāda*, all of which are integral aspects of Sāmkhya thought, are emphasized by modern writers and are used to illustrate the fundamental inadequacy of Sāmkhya as a philosophy in general.¹ These emphases have led some thinkers to claim that :²

The Sāmkhya is an outmoded thought now. The *Brahma Sūtras* and the commentaries thereon have practically thrown overboard what was once a major philosophy of ancient India ... It has only a historical value and its influence as a philosophy has practically disappeared.

Of a slightly more sympathetic view is S. Radhakrishnan who states³ :

The Sāmkhya does not rise to the truth of monistic idealism, but is content to remain at the level of mere understanding, which insists upon the distinction between being and non-being, and regards the opposition between the two as real and their identity as unreal. It was not able to realise all that is involved in the questions it raised—questions the difficulty and importance of which have been brought to light by ages of conflict and controversy—still less to reach a satisfactory solution to them ... the Sāmkhya analysis of experience prepared the ground for a more adequate philosophy.

Although it would be difficult to defend certain elements of Sāmkhya metaphysics against the charges of a Śaṅkara for example, I think that such conclusions as the ones cited above have missed the point of Sāmkhya discourse, more notably as it appears in the *Sāmkhya Kārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa. I do not think

that the Sāṃkhya *darśana* must be treated as a mere historical relic of some bygone era, nor can I conceive Sāṃkhya as having failed to recognize many of the singularly important issues implied in its dualistic and salvational ontology. To the contrary, many of its metaphysical claims, e.g., that suffering or *duḥkha* is an earmark of phenomenal existence (*S. K. I*), that suffering is due to the lack of discrimination or *aviveka* (*S. K. XIV*), that becoming or *samsāra* is the consequence of our misapprehension of our identity with the material cosmos (*prakṛti*) (*S. K. XX*), and that there does exist an alternative to our suffering in the specific form of *puruṣa* or immaterial spirit (*S. K. LXII*), are relevant questions for students of philosophy, especially insofar as these ideas strike to the very heart of provisional human existence viewed at interface with a far more substantial and enduring universe. This one feature, I believe, is the context of an abiding source of strength for Sāṃkhyan metaphysical thought. It is this pre-eminent recognition of the mortality of man seen over and against a seemingly more permanent cosmos that serves as the foundation and initial point of enquiry for Sāṃkhyan philosophy.

On the surface this recognition of the impuissance of individual man in opposition to the dominating mechanics of a physical universe may not appear to be all that revolutionary. Far from prompting us to explore further any implications that might arise out from such an understanding, we might just as well accept the minuteness of individual human existence (*bhāva*) as an inexorable datum of existence (*sat*) in general. This attitude is in fact what another philosophy of Indian Hinduism endeavours to convey.⁴ On the other hand it is this possibility, that man is merely one minute aspect along with countless others contained within the on-going genesis of the physical cosmos, which serves to stir the Sāṃkhyan philosophical conscience; it is a reaction to the real possibility that man is little more than what he apprehends to constitute his life as it appears to him. This is the *experiential* context that characterizes Sāṃkhyan discourse. For Sāṃkhya, our immediate experience of daily life results, in the final analysis, in the recognition that we ourselves are subject to a continual becoming (*samsāra*) which ends inevitably in death. The *Kārikā* equates this continual becoming and death with the ultimate category of suffering (*duḥkha*)⁵ ;

Because of the torment of the threefold suffering, (there arises) the desire to know the means of removing it. If (it is said that) this (desire - - i. e., enquiry) is useless because perceptible (means of removal are available), (we say) no, since (perceptible means) are not final or abiding.

Suffering occurs because of man's recognition that he is mortal. His recognition of his mortality originates out from his perception of the nature of the world (*saṁsāra*). His mortality is expressed in three ways: first, as personal or individual suffering (*ādhyātmika*), second, as externally conditioned suffering (*ādhibhautika*), and third, as universal or cosmic suffering (*ādhidaiivika*),⁶ suffering is individual because of the various components comprising the psycho-physical constitution of man (e.g., the *antaḥkaraṇa* — *buddhi*, *ahaṁkāra* and *manas*) (S. K. XXXIII); it is external because of the nature of the physical world (*vyakta-guṇaprakṛti*) (S. K. X—XIII); it is universal because everything of which man is comprised is likewise the very same as that which constitutes cosmic becoming itself (*sargaprakṛti*) (S. K. III & XII).

That the world is suffering is axiomatic for Sāṁkhya. Residing behind this axiom, however, is the far more significant fact that it is only with a *reflexive act of consciousness* that man then is capable of recognizing the nature of his world and his relationship with it. The *Sāṁkhya Kārikā* attributes this act of reflexive consciousness to the *antaḥkaraṇa* or internal organ, which is comprised of the *buddhi* (i. e., intelligence, intellect, consciousness, intelligence-stuff or *sattva-guṇa*, and / or will)⁷, *ahaṁkāra* (transcendental ego, principle of individuation, and self-sense)⁸, and *manas* (the thought-organ, or that which has the "function of synthesising sense-data into percepts, suggesting alternative courses of action and carrying out the decrees of the will . . . through the organs of action").⁹ The *buddhi* (*mahat*), *ahaṁkāra*, and *manas* are the first three evolutes or *tattvas* that emerge in the evolution (*sarga*) of primordial matter (*avyakta-guṇa* or *mūlaprakṛti*) into the manifest, physical cosmos (*vyakta-guṇaprakṛti*). Together they comprise all psychic or psychological functioning and the more specific function of the mind which is viewed as a synthesizing agent of raw sense (*indriya*) and the impulses arising out from the *ahaṁkāra* and *buddhi*. What is important to note

here is that the nature and function of the *antaḥkaraṇa* is pre-determined by the evolution of primordial matter (*Prakṛti*). For Sāṃkhya reflexive or self-consciousness is a consequence of *sargaprakṛti*. It is only with the generation of the cosmos, both in its collective and individual forms, that man or *jīva* is capable of recognizing the conditions of his own individual and particular being (*bhūta*) and more significantly as his particular being is illuminated by the characteristics of the world *per se* (*bhāva*).

To state categorically that man's existence, as it appears commensurately with the world is suffering is contingent upon the *immediacy* of his presence and the presence of the world itself; this, I believe, is the meaning of *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* II :¹⁰

The revealed (or scriptural, means of removing the torment [*duḥkha*]) are like the perceptible [i.e., *pramāṇas*—[*pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, *āptavacana*]] (—i.e., ultimately ineffective), for they are connected with impurity, destruction and excess; a different and superior method is the (discriminative [i.e., *viveka*]) knowledge of the manifest (*vyakta*), the unmanifest (*avyakta*) and the knowing one (or knower—i. e., *puruṣa*).

In this *kārikā* Īśvarakṛṣṇa has distinguished between the phenomenal world (*saṃsāra*), its appearance in the form of the context of human knowledge and the means of knowing (*pramā/pramāṇa*), and the conditions that determine the nature of human knowledge. In terms of man's knowledge, the act of reflexive consciousness apprehends two fundamental aspects of human experience: one, that human knowledge or consciousness (i.e., as understood within the idea of the *antaḥkaraṇa*) is inadequate knowledge or suffering, and two, that the world itself, which is the ultimate framework or fabric in which human consciousness occurs, is the *relational* locus of man's confrontation with and participation in suffering. This fundamental apprehension may be understood as the recognition on the part of man that he is *in* the world of becoming.¹¹

The appearance of man at interface with his universe is attributed to his consciousness of his individuality in opposition to the cosmos (*S. K. XXI*). This interface, however, is apprehended always in terms of man's individual self-identity, i.e. *ahṃkāra/abhimāna* (*S. K. XXIV*), in opposition to an otherwise imper-

sonal universe. Yet, although man cognizes the *de facto* reality of his existence (*bhūta*) in the world, he is driven nevertheless, says the *Kārikā*, to account for his own position as a knowing entity within the world as he himself perceives it — in other words, man is in the world, but is he *of* that world?¹²

For the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* this distinction between man as a self-reflecting entity in the world and the cosmos itself is the philosophical crux that permeates phenomenal existence from top to bottom. Īśvaraḥṣṇa expresses this problem in terms of the doctrine of causation. The two theories of causation found in the *Kārikā* are the *satkāryavāda* (lit., theory of the pre-existent effect) and the *satkāryaparināmavāda* (lit; theory of the real modification of the pre-existent effect).¹³ As we have seen previously man in the form of the *antaḥkaraṇa* is just one of many *tattvas* or evolutes emerging along with the genesis of the material cosmos (*vyaktapraḥṛti*). His genesis is an ontologically real one, as is the phenomenal world too. The essential characteristic of this genesis is expressed in *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* III: ¹⁴

Primordial nature (*mūlapraḥṛti*) is uncreated [*avikṛti*]. The seven—the great one (*mahat*), etc.—are both created [*vikṛti*] and creative [*prakṛti*]. The sixteen [i.e. *manas*, *buddhindriyaś*, *karmendriyaś*, and *mahābhūtas*] are created. *Puruṣa* is neither created nor creative.

The law that undergirds and sustains prakṛtic evolution is *satkāryaparināma*. Here two signal ideas appear: first, that man's world (*bhāva*) is an ontologically real existence, i.e. the world is substantial existence (*gūṇa*); second, that man's facility for conscious reflection is due entirely to causation which resides implicitly in the world. The significance of the latter point is that man's recognition of the world, of his existence in it, and his recognition of the apparent distinction between himself as a conscious entity in apposition to the world is determined by the universal appearance of cause and effect. Human consciousness, as it exists within the fabric of prakṛtic generation, is contingent upon the ontological verity of causation, of an irrevocable relation of cause (*prakṛti/vikṛti*) and effect (*vikṛti*), which is identical to the ontology of the universe. Human consciousness (and the knowledge that arises therein) is prescribed by the law of causation¹⁵:

The non-perception (of *prakṛti*) is because of its subtlety not because of its non-existence [*asat*]. Its apprehension is because of (or by means of) its effect. Its effect—the great one (*mahat*), etc.—is different from yet similar to *prakṛti*.

To conceive causation as a prescription of consciousness does not mean simply that we now know or are capable of knowing the essential nature of the world *per se* and that we can claim to know the origins of the cosmos. The Sāṃkhyan *satkāryapariṇāma*vāda is not a simple construction arising out from a conceptual analysis of the perceived appearance of an effect (*kārya*). Causation is both perceived (*pratyakṣa*) (S. K. V), and apprehended through inference (*anumāna*) (S. K. V-VI). There does not exist any separation of perception from inference; antecedent to both is the law of cause and effect. In as much as *satkāryapariṇāma* is the ontological structure of man and of the world of becoming (*saṃsāra*), causation is the *a priori* condition or foundation of existence in general (*sat*). We may say here that the real purport of Sāṃkhya's metaphysics is to reflect upon this *a priori* condition, acknowledging all along that it is precisely this condition that serves, in the final analysis, to reveal the alternative to phenomenal becoming in the form of *puruṣa*—the immaterial (*aguṇa*), inactive (*akartṛbhāva*), and eternally free reality (*kaivalya*) as consciousness (*cit/jñāna*).¹⁶

It is at this point in our discussion that I assert that the real, and perhaps sole, concern of Īśvarakṛṣṇa's Sāṃkhya *Kārikā* is consciousness (*cit/jñāna*), specifically as consciousness is viewed as the singular alternative and salvational mode of man's becoming. It is here also that I assert that it is precisely because of this salvational concern that we can appreciate the timeless relevance of Sāṃkhyan metaphysics, especially for those philosophers who render the field of philosophy an exercise in the exegesis of Being.

The *experiential* context of Sāṃkhya philosophy is causation. It is a foregone conclusion for Īśvarakṛṣṇa that (a) the phenomenal world (*prakṛti*) is real in the ontological sense of the term, (b) the cosmos is an ordered, i.e., causal, structure, (c) man participates wholly *in* the cosmos, (d) man is bound irreparably to the universe in the specific form of a chain of cause and

effect. The criterion under which the above conclusions are made is consciousness (S. K. XIV). To proclaim knowledge is to acknowledge the coincidence of consciousness with some thing; that is, self-reflection must needs be a consciousness of some content. Primordial matter or *prakṛti* is comprised of three qualities (*guṇa*) which together constitute the ontological substance of matter—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* (S. K. XII-XIII). As we have seen primordial matter is both creative (*prakṛti*) and uncreated (*avikṛti*); the various *tattvas* are comprised of the *guṇas* and are uncreated to the extent that they share the common characteristic of existence (*sat*). The *tattvas* are created in as much as causation serves to initiate a successive evolution of the psycho-physical components, e. g., *buddhi*, *ahaṃkāra*, *manas*, *buddhīndriyas*, and *karmendriyas*, etc., which results in the emergence of the gross, manifest universe. It is only the *buddhi* and *ahaṃkāra*, however, that are both created (*vikṛti*) and creative (*prakṛti*). Human consciousness (*cit/jñāna*) is created in as much as it is the first *tattva* that emerges out from the otherwise unmanifested state of primordial being (*avyaktaparakṛti*). In causal terminology, *buddhi* represents the first manifestation of an effect (*kārya*) out from its representative and respective cause—the *buddhi* reflects a transition from a balanced state of *guṇaparakṛti* called *sajātīyapariṇāma* or homogeneous change to the causally coercive state of *vijātīyapariṇāma* or heterogeneous change (*vyaktaparakṛti*). Human consciousness is creative insofar as *buddhi* reifies and continues the causal relation in the specific form of *ahaṃkāra*. Human consciousness is uncreated because of the eternal contiguity of the *guṇas* or qualities that preform and comprise the ontological status of primordial being (*prakṛti*). For Īśvarakṛṣṇa the claim that human consciousness is uncreated, creative, and created (S. K. XXXIII) reveals the essential thrust of his metaphysical theory. Sāṃkhya philosophy does not begin with an analysis of the natural world, neither does it begin with a pre-established ontology (for example, as is the case in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta). Īśvarakṛṣṇa's metaphysics is concerned with the appearance of an irrevocable confluence of thought as consciousness and the manifest, material cosmos. This confluence is viewed first as causation (*satkārya*), and second, is interpreted as a specific kind of causal relation (*Satkāryapariṇāma*) (S. K. IX, XV-XVI). Under all circumstances

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however, it is the paradox, given first in the form of an *experience* of human consciousness as it occurs along with a consciousness contained in the world that serves as the key to the discovery of the nature of human consciousness itself. Man is *in* the world of becoming. This fact is made clear because man alone can claim that he is conscious (*ahāṅkāra*) and intelligent (*buddhi*). Man is also *of* the world, because he participates in a world which is understood as the sole criterion as real existence (*sat*) for his self-consciousness. The specific nature of the world is revealed by the fact of reflexive consciousness as it appears as an inexorable datum of man's experience in general. For the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* consciousness (*cit/jñāna*) is an innate characteristic of phenomenal becoming (*sargapraṅkti*) (S. K. XXV). In as much as consciousness is characteristic of the world, it likewise follows that it is only with the acknowledged immediacy of the *de facto* world, i.e., the conscious recognition that the world exists as an immediately experienced datum of existence, that human consciousness only then can proceed to apprehend itself in terms of its confrontation with the world. It is in this way that Īśvarakṛṣṇa claims that human consciousness can pursue itself to its own origins, especially as these origins are seen as a recognition of the *resolution* of the *act* of human thought. This resolution is expressed as an intuitive realization (*viveka*) of the ground of reflexive consciousness in the special form of non-relational and impartite Consciousness (*puruṣa*).

The Relevance of Sāṃkhya Philosophy

In having outlined some of the central aspects of Īśvarakṛṣṇa's philosophy I believe that a move can be made towards a reification of the relevance of Sāṃkhyan thought for philosophical studies in Indian metaphysics. Although it is true that Sāṃkhyan philosophy does succumb to certain metaphysical difficulties, the real significance for its claims reside in their reflection upon the quality of human existence. It claims that existence (*sat*) is suffering (*duḥkha*); that all of the various and connected experiences that comprise human existence are fraught with pain. In saying this, Sāṃkhya philosophy has sought to explore the veritable depths of human experience as this experience appears as a combination of individual existence (*bhūta*) and existence (*bhāva*)

as a category of phenomenal Being (*sat*). Sāmkhya begins with the recognition that man is in the world, that man sees himself at interface with the cosmos. It then proceeds to raise the question of whether or not man is a willing participant within and of the world. At this point Sāmkhya poses the far more radical question as to the origins of man's own consciousness, and specifically, as his consciousness appears as an awareness of his distinction as a knowing entity from the universe itself. The answer that Īśvara-kṛṣṇa gives us is that the world and man are identical to one another — that what appears initially as an overarching *plenum* of cause and effect is but the larger context for, and determining characteristic of, man's otherwise individual existence. The singular criterion of this inexorable identity is Being (*sat*).

Īśvarakṛṣṇa's emphasis upon a dualistic ontology of material substance (*prakṛti*) in opposition to immaterial spirit is a problematical distinction. Yet, aside from the standpoint of a logic of metaphysics, the *Sāmkhya Kārikā* endeavours to illustrate several characteristics which because of an act of reflexive consciousness (*cit/jñāna*) drive to the heart of issues implicit in all salvational philosophies. It is because of these questions and their characteristic universality that the Sāmkhya philosophy continues to exercise considerable influence, especially as this influence is viewed as a responsible call on the part of the thinker to respond to the basic questions of life. For the *Kārikā* the most improtart and initial point of the enquiry into life hinges upon the *fact* of Being (*sat*). In its specific form the enquiry into Being is a reaction to a collision between man as a particular being (*bhūta*) and the being of the world (*bhāva*). The ontological connecting-link between the latter two is consciousness which, for Īśvarakṛṣṇa, is characterized always as an *act* of reflexive consciousness. Insofar as human consciousness is self-reflexive, and, which illuminates the fundamental rift between the individual man and the collective appearance of the cosmos, it is consciousness itself that not only prompts man to enquire into the nature of his phenomenal circumstances but also serves to illuminate the ground of his consciousness. This ground is framed within the doctrine of cause and effect (*satkāryapariṇāma*). Here, I believe, is the one signal contribution of Sāmkhya that stands as an irrepressible hall-mark of its metaphysics. Consciousness is the consequence of a causal relation.

It is determined by the appearance of the world and is also the creative agency of the ontological link between the act of consciousness and its appearance in the world. Man knows himself only insofar as he is willing to turn away from the world.¹⁷ What is implicit in this renunciation of the world is the acknowledgement on the part of man that the cosmos is never meaningful by itself, that the world is to be apprehended as the only reality of man's being. The universe is meaningful *only* in as much as man is cognizant of the fact of consciousness as the characteristic earmark of existence in general (*sat*). In this regard, Īśvarakṛṣṇa enlists causation as a methodological formula by which man can order his consciousness, and in so ordering then pursue the causal relation to its origins. In the pursuit of causation to its veritable origins, human consciousness then reveals to itself the terminus of the act of reflexive consciousness. This terminus is *puruṣa* the salvational mode of Being.

In summary I assert that Sāṃkhya philosophy is far from an outmoded and insufficient system of metaphysical thought. Its basic claim, which is of supreme significance for all salvational ontologies, is that the world (*vyaktaprakṛti*) is suffering (*duḥkha*). Implicit in this claim are (1) that man must needs face the fact of his mortality, (2) that his recognition of his mortality is contingent upon his self-consciousness, (3) that his self-consciousness, although causally prescriptive of his existence and the existence of the world, finds its origins in a non-causal sphere of self-effulgent and impartite consciousness, (4) that the appearance of man and the world exists for the salvation of man as a sufferable entity, (5) that under no circumstances is the world meaningful other than from within the context of salvation (as consciousness), and (6) that thought serves only one essential purpose—the self-revelation of the context of the phenomenal world of becoming which, according to the *Kārikā*, is seen ideally as an ultimate resolution of the dichotomy of man as a suffering agent within an otherwise unsufferable criterion of Being.

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NOTES

1. See Śāṅkara's *bhāṣya* on *Brahma-Sūtra* II, 2. 1-10.
2. K. B. Rao, *Theism of Pre-Classical Sāṅkhya* (Mysore : University of Mysore Press, 1966), p. 3.
3. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (London : George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1953), II, p. 334.
4. Cārvāka *darśana*. See, Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*.
5. G. J. Larson, *Classical Sāṅkhya* (Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, 1969) S. K. I, p. 257.
6. See Gauḍapāda's *bhāṣya* on *Sāṅkhya Kārikā* I in *The Sāṅkhya Kārikā ... by Īśvara Krishna*, trans. Henry Thomas Colebrooke, and, *The Sāṅkhya Kārikā .. with the Bhāṣya or Commentary of Gauḍapāda* [sic], ed. and trans. Horace Hayman Wilson (Oxford : A. J. Valpy, 1837).
7. See, various authors and texts : Edgerton, *Beginnings of Indian Philosophy*, pp. 343-344; Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, I, p. 249; Johnson, *Early Sāṅkhya*, p. 82; Larson, *Sāṅkhya*, p. 200., etc.
8. See, Edgerton, *Beginnings*, p. 356; Radhakrishnan, *Philosophy*, I, p. 268; Johnston, *Sāṅkhya* p. 83; Frauwallner, *History of Indian Philosophy*, I, p. 398., etc.
9. See, Edgerton *Beginnings*, p. 350; Radhakrishnan, *Philosophy*, I, pp. 269-270., etc.
10. Larson, *Sāṅkhya*, p. 256.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
12. S. K. IV-VI.
13. A synonym for the *satkāryaparīṇāmavāda* is the *vikāravāda*; see, Larson, *Sāṅkhya*, p. 179.
14. Larson, *Sāṅkhya*, p. 258.
15. *Ibid.*, S. K. VIII, p. 260.
16. S. K. XI and XIX.
17. See S. K. LXI-LXII.

