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# LIBERATION AND NATURAL PHILOSOPHY IN EARLY VAIŚEṢIKA: SOME METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS\*

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*In memory of my teacher Dr. L. van Daalen*

0.0 In this paper I will discuss a trend in the modern understanding of the early Vaiśeṣika system, show its highly speculative basis (which was to some extent already criticized by others), and, by investigating possible alternative interpretations of problematic points, try to stimulate new reflections on some generally accepted presuppositions. It is not a study of new material or a defence of completely new interpretations, but it is intended as a small contribution to the historiography of modern Vaiśeṣika-studies, and, as the sub-title indicates, to a reflection on their methodological basis.

As is well known, the early sources on which we can build our interpretations of the system are very incomplete and problematic. It seems therefore desirable that scholars direct their attention first of all at recovering and reconstructing as far as possible the ancient sources, before attempting encompassing and global interpretations of the system.<sup>1</sup> However, reconstructions on the basis of the limited available material always presuppose some preliminary views about the nature and development of the system as a whole. From this point of view, initial interpretations and expectations necessarily precede and give direction to our reconstructions. Obviously, there is always the danger that inappropriate initial views misdirect the reconstructions, and 'create' seeming textual evidence for themselves. This is especially true if the subject matter of the texts is very abstruse and if the

\* In this paper I elaborate some observations on the Vaiśeṣika system and its interpretation, made during my research into Bhartṛhari's philosophy of Language (cf. Houben, 1992b, Part 1, section 3.2). Thanks are due to the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research for financial assistance on several occasions. I am grateful to the International Institute for Asian Studies (Leiden) which enabled me to finalize this paper. My sincere thanks are also due to Professor J. Bronkhorst and Professor T. Vetter for their comments on an earlier version of this paper. The stimulating discussions with other participants at the Vaiśeṣika panel during and after the conference, especially, Dr. E. Franco, Prof. Dr. M. Hattori, H. Isaacson, and Prof. M. Nozawa, inspired me to modify and rephrase a few passages and to be more explicit in others. I am very grateful for their comments and suggestions.

1 That important improvements can still be made to the presently available editions of primary sources is clear from H. Isaacson's contribution to the present conference.

researchers feel justified to relegate large parts of a transmitted text to later periods as non-original or non-essential, on no other grounds than that these parts do not fit the supposed original philosophy of the system. The proposal of historical layers mainly on the basis of sense, context, and creative thinking, without strong objective basis, may lead to new and useful insights. However, careful and critical consideration of the preliminary views and presuppositions at the basis of the proposal will always remain necessary.

1.0 After these introductory remarks, let us now proceed to consider a modern trend in the interpretation of early Vaiśeṣika, which has influenced recent interpretations and reconstructions of the system.

1.1 Several modern students of Vaiśeṣika have perceived a sharp contrast between the Vaiśeṣika philosopher's theoretical attitude towards reality and his orientation towards liberation. In his pioneering work on early Vaiśeṣika, Barend Faddegon has the following to say about early Vaiśeṣika:

If we consider the discovering of the six – or originally three – categories as the birth of the Vaiśeṣika system, then it follows that this philosophy owes its origin to a purely theoretical attitude of mind and not to that craze for liberation which dominates nearly all forms of Indian thought. Therefore it is not the wish to discriminate soul from that which is not soul, ego from non-ego, as conceived by later scholiasts, but it is the theoretical desire for a correct classification and system of definition which has been the starting-point of the Vaiśeṣika system. (Faddegon, 1918:12; cf. idem:344)

1.2 In his Introduction and Notes to the Daśapadārthī, a later Vaiśeṣika text available only in a Chinese translation, Hakuju Ui goes deeply into the tenets of the main transmitted Vaiśeṣika texts in relation to other early schools and systems, and speculates about the origins and early development of Vaiśeṣika. According to Ui, the Sūtra-text does not clearly mention liberation, while in later times Praśastapāda's PDhS gives a full description (Ui, 1917:73-74). According to him, although Vaiśeṣika acknowledges other independent factors besides the four material atoms, "a materialistic tendency dominates the whole system" (idem:18-19). Therefore, it did not originate in the Upaniṣadic literature, but rather in the 'heterodox' speculation of mainly materialistic thinkers. Starting from the observation that in the Daśapadārthī all other categories would be meaningless without the category of Substance, he concludes "that the Vaiśeṣika system intends principally to explain things and phenomena in nature as they are;" and

with an explicit extrapolation to the entire early Vaiśeṣika tradition: "The whole system was a kind of natural philosophy in ancient India." (Ui, 1917:224).

1.3.1 A much more elaborate and sophisticated version of the idea that somehow the theoretical desire for explanation and classification is more central and original in the Vaiśeṣika system than the desire for liberation, we find in the works of the Austrian scholar and savant Erich Frauwallner. In his *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie* or *History of Indian Philosophy*, the author describes Vaiśeṣika as a system which was originally only interested in the theoretical explanation of natural phenomena, not in methods of liberation. In his view,

... Indian natural philosophy did not confine itself to giving a natural explanation in particular cases and to developing and expanding these particular lines of thought. In Vaiśeṣika it proceeded instead to design a grand, unitary world view by applying one great thought consistently. ... [T]his world view ... seeks to explain the entire phenomenal world on an atomistic-mechanistic basis ... With this ... world view, Vaiśeṣika had reached a high point in its development. But it did not stay at this point. The change of times brought up new thoughts, pushing aside the old world view, which was from then on only dimly reflected in tradition and should be inferred through investigation.... The religious inclination and the prevailing tendency towards liberation penetrated gradually also into Vaiśeṣika circles and drew it into the stream of the general development. And this development finally led to the incorporation into the system of a doctrine of liberation and a belief in a highest God. (Frauwallner, 1956: 90; transl. II:60)<sup>2</sup>

In Frauwallners vision, Vaiśeṣika is an important representative of one of the two main streams of Indian thought. One of these streams originated in early Upaniṣadic circles and is characterized by the doctrine of a 'world-soul', Brahma. This stream is at the basis not only of early Upaniṣadic philosophy, but also of Sāṃkhya and Buddhism (the latter formulating a negative version, as it were, of the doctrine of a 'world-soul') (Frauwallner, 1953:192f, 268; transl. I:152f, 211). The other stream is characterized by the acceptance of a multitude of individual souls, and by a strong natural philosophical orientation (Frauwallner, 1953:268; transl. I:211). The natural philosophy at the basis of later, classical Vaiśeṣika already had its own distinctive character (Frauwallner, 1956:315; transl. II:231). The first con-

2 The translations from the German original are my own; for ease of reference I give the corresponding pagenumbers of Bedekar's translation (Delhi, 1973), which is neither elegant nor precise, and sometimes even misleading.



crete result of the influence from a religious-moralistic sphere on the original atomistic-mechanistic world view was the adoption of the idea of *adr̥ṣṭa*, 'the inobservable' (Frauwallner, 1956:95; transl. II:64). This spoiled the original scientific spirit, because difficult natural phenomena could now be 'explained' through this unobservable factor and the need to find a 'real' natural explanation disappeared (*idem*). In the course of its development, Vaiśeṣika adopted *dis*, 'space' and *kāla*, 'time' as established notions in the system. Next, a great change came about which gave a completely new form to the system, namely the introduction of categories (Frauwallner, 1956:114-115; transl. II:78-79). Praśastapāda, finally, transformed Vaiśeṣika into the classical system in which these categories form a consistent framework (Frauwallner, 1956:186-197; transl. II:133-141).

1.3.2 Already in his *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, in one of the last notes in the second volume, Frauwallner says that the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra originally started with a sentence which is quite different from the traditionally accepted first sūtra of the system (1956:339, note 387; transl. II:258, note 387).<sup>3</sup> Frauwallner's arguments for this thesis, which in a less developed form appeared already in Faddegon's study of the Vaiśeṣika-system,<sup>4</sup> are found in the paper "Der ursprüngliche Anfang der Vaiśeṣika-Sūtren" published posthumously in Frauwallner's *Nachgelassene Werke I* (Frauwallner, 1984:35-41).

3 In fact, Frauwallner's conviction that the first sūtras are not original, dates back to a much earlier period in his scholarly career. In 1939 his paper 'Der arische Anteil an der indischen Philosophie' was published in WZKM 46 (a shorter version appeared in 1938 in the ZDMG). Here he distinguishes two distinct periods in Indian philosophy, the first starting with the earlier Upaniṣads and ending towards the end of the first millennium C.E.; the second starting towards the end of the first millennium C.E. and continuing till modern times. Frauwallner characterized the first period as 'purely philosophical, atheistic and scientifically presuppositionless'; and the second period as mainly 'religious, theistic and dogmatically committed' (1939:283-284). In accordance with the ideological and political trends of his time, he introduced the inner nature of Aryan and non-Aryan races as a guiding explanatory principle (cf. Ruegg, 1986; Frauwallner's first, purely philosophical period, was dominated by the Aryan invaders, whereas in the second, theistic and dogmatic period, the original non-Aryans became more powerful). Since Frauwallner discontinued this line of thought and does not base his later ideas directly on these earlier theories (cf. Oberhammer, 1976:9-10), our focus will here mainly be on the theories and arguments as given in Frauwallner's important and momentous postwar publications.

4 In his paper in the WZKM, Frauwallner (1939:273) refers to Faddegon, 1918:344; see also Faddegon:107.

In this paper, which, according to the editors, originated in the early fifties of this century, Frauwallner argues as follows. Religious movements, which became important in the middle of the first millennium of the common era, also influenced the philosophical schools. In Vaiśeṣika it is possible to demonstrate how the doctrine of a highest God was introduced into the system towards the beginning of the classical period. Not only the doctrine of a highest God was introduced at a later stage, but also another religious element, namely the doctrine of liberation. The beginning sūtras speak of *dharma* and characterize Vaiśeṣika as a system leading towards liberation. This, however, contradicts the spirit of the system. Early Indian authors have criticized Vaiśeṣika for announcing a doctrine of liberation but teaching something else. Originally Vaiśeṣika must have been a “pure” theory of nature (*Naturlehre*). Now, two commentaries on Praśastapāda’s PDhS<sup>5</sup> ascribe (in slightly different wordings) a sentence to Kaṇāda, the reputed author of the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra, in which he announces to explain all of reality (*yad (iha) bhāvarūpam, tat sarvam abhidhāsyāmi/abhidhāsyāmaḥ mayopasaṁkhyātavyam*), without explicit claim with regard to liberation. This, according to Frauwallner, must have been the original beginning of the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra. The initial sūtras which speak of *dharma* and in which claims concerning liberation are made must have been added and accepted in the tradition in the centuries after Praśastapāda, who introduced not only the doctrine of a highest God into the system but also the doctrine of liberation.

1.4 Echos of Frauwallner’s influential ideas we find in the works of several scholars, notably Wilhelm Halbfass and Albrecht Wezler. Although they do not adopt all of Frauwallner’s ideas uncritically, both scholars seem to accept, at least initially, that the theoretical attitude towards reality evinced in the Vaiśeṣika system contrasts with its claims concerning liberation.

1.4.1 While Halbfass at first followed Frauwallner’s suggestions to a considerable extent, he later on severely criticized the form in which Frauwallner supported his ideas in the posthumously published article on the beginning of the Vaiśeṣika-sūtra. In one of his earlier articles, Halbfass refers to Frau-

5 Vyomaśiva’s Vyomavati p. 47, line 13f., and p. 492, line 24f (Praśastapādabhāṣyam, with the Commentary Vyomavati, edited by Gopinath Kaviraj and Dhundhiraj Shastri, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series no 61, Benares, 1930)); and Udayana’s Kiraṇāvalī on PDhS §176 (Praśastapādabhāṣyam with the commentary Kiraṇāvalī, ed. J.S. Jetly, Gaekwad Oriental Series no. 154, Baroda, 1971, p. 148, line 13).

wallner and his suggestion “that in its origins the Vaiśeṣika was a ‘pure’ philosophy of nature, theoretical in its orientation, interested in the explanation of natural phenomena, not in soteriological schemes and methods of liberation from *samsāra*” (Halbfass, 1980:288). He admits that Frauwallner’s thesis is “stimulating, yet inevitably speculative,” but thinks that “it remains undeniable that the soteriological orientation is not genuinely at home in Vaiśeṣika” (idem). In his words, the development from early to classical Vaiśeṣika and the process of final systematization are characterized as “an attempted merger of soteriology and ‘physics’” (idem:285).

Six years later, however, in a review of Frauwallner’s *Nachgelassene Werke I*, Halbfass is rather critical about the postulation of an early stage in which Vaiśeṣika has no interest whatsoever in liberation. He suggests that Frauwallner’s idea of an early ‘pure’ philosophy of nature at the basis of classical Vaiśeṣika “reflects his background as a classicist, his fascination with the Greek ideal of ‘pure’ philosophy and ‘disinterested’ theory and research, and his readiness or even desire to find traces of this ‘theoretical’ attitude also in ancient Indian thought” (Halbfass, 1986:857). Halbfass also points out that the opening sūtra of the existing versions of the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra is not likely to be a late interpolation after Praśastapāda, because already Bhartṛhari refers to this sūtra in his *Mahābhāṣya-Dīpikā*.

Yet, even in his more recent works Halbfass maintains the contrast between ‘physics and soteriology’ in the Vaiśeṣika system, and the suggestion that the former precedes the latter (in time and importance). All the above citations from the 1980 article (about Frauwallner, about “the soteriological orientation” being “not genuinely at home in Vaiśeṣika,” and about Vaiśeṣika as “an attempted merger of soteriology and ‘physics’”) are also found in the revised version in Halbfass’ *Tradition and Reflection* (Halbfass, 1991, chapter 9, pp. 314, 314-315, 311 respectively).

1.4.2 In an article on the definition of ‘yoga’ in Vaiśeṣika, Wezler follows Frauwallner’s suggestion about a different beginning of the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra (Wezler, 1982:647). Admitting that the definition of *yoga* in the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra is “in perfect harmony with other relevant passages of the VS” (idem:664), he nevertheless follows Frauwallner in his conviction that the soteriological doctrine of Yoga was ‘at home’ in Buddhism, but not in Vaiśeṣika. Vaiśeṣika would mainly aim at “naming, enumerating whatever has the character of being” (idem, with reference to Frauwallner’s lecture which was later published in Frauwallner’s *Nachgelassene Werke I*).

In another important article, Wezler studies the problems of the concept of *adrṣṭa* in the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra. Wezler is critical about the way Frauwallner

reconstructs the history of the role of *adr̥ṣṭa* in Vaiśeṣika, and rightly observes that “The history of ideas in India is by no means lacking of examples for the coexistence, continuing for a long time, of two or more rival, even incompatible ideas” (Wezler, 1983:36-37). Yet he remains within the framework of Frauwallner’s hypothetical chronology, if he speaks of the “older use [of the concept *adr̥ṣṭa*] in physical and cosmological contexts,” and the “soteriological re-orientation” of Vaiśeṣika (idem:57). He also refers approvingly to Frauwallner’s *Geschichte* and his (at that time still unpublished) article about the beginning of the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra for the different historical layers in this text which “have in part already been” distinguished (Wezler, 1983:40, note 17).

2.0 Since Frauwallner has presented us the most detailed and daring elaboration of the hypothesis that the theoretical attitude is original in Vaiśeṣika, the orientation towards liberation secondary and introduced at a later stage, we may here focus on his ideas and his proposed reconstruction of the original beginning of the Sūtra-text.

3.0 If we leave aside for a moment the question whether Frauwallner’s hypothesis is fully convincing or whether there are possible alternatives, we may first consider the chronology of the textual changes which took place according to this thesis. Until Praśastapāda, the first sūtra of the Vaiśeṣikas would have been *yad iha bhāvarūpam, tat sarvam abhidhāsyāmi / abhidhāsyāmaḥ*. Only in the centuries after him this sūtra would have been replaced by *athāto dharmān vyākhyāsyāmaḥ*.

3.1 As pointed out earlier by Halbfass (1986:857), there is textual evidence (in the MBhD, which was not accessible to Frauwallner when he was most engaged in Vaiśeṣika studies) against the postulation of a change of initial sūtras after Praśastapāda (cf. section 1.4 and 3.3). The relevant passage deserves to be quoted in full, because the immediate context gives some additional hints concerning Bhartṛhari’s way of reading the introductory sūtra of the Vaiśeṣikas.<sup>6</sup> In the Mahābhāṣya-dīpikā, Bhartṛhari discusses the phrase *gaur ity atra kaḥ śabdaḥ* which starts an important discussion in the

6 On the relation between Bhartṛhari and early Vaiśeṣika see Bronkhorst, 1993a; and cf. Houben, 1992a and in Houben, 1992b Part 1 section 3.2 and Part 3, comments on VP 3.3.18.

introductory chapter of Patañjali's MBh. Bhartṛhari considers different possible reasons why Patañjali pays so much attention to the word *śabda*, which is also the subject of the entire exposition (*atha śabdānuśāsanam*). At a certain stage in his discussion Bhartṛhari says:

*atha vā dvau bhāgau śabdasya svarūpabhāgo 'rthabhāgaś ca / rūpabhāge 'nvākhyānavaiyarthīyāt dvitīyo bhāga āśrīyate tadanvākhyānāt śabdeneti / yathā "dharmaṁ vyākhyāsyāma" iti prastūtya dravyādyupadeśas tatpratipatter eva / athāpi cātra gaur iti śabdena dravyādayaḥ sāhacaryād ucyante /* (MBhD part 1, p. 2 line 6-8)

Or else, the word has two parts, the part which is its own form, and the part of its meaning. Because an explanation concerning the part which is its own form is useless, he resorts to the second part, because that is explained by the word. Just as, commencing (with the words) "we shall explain *dharma*", one teaches substance etc., because these are understood. And also here, by the word 'cow' the substance etc. are denoted because they go together.

3.2 From this passage we can infer a few important points with regard to Vaiśeṣika. First, with *dharmaṁ vyākhyāsyāma iti* Bhartṛhari apparently refers to the sūtra which is at the beginning of all known versions of the Sūtra-text of the Vaiśeṣikas, namely *athāto dharmaṁ vyākhyāsyāmaḥ* (Vaiśeṣikasūtra 1.1.1). Next, this statement is referred to as a well-known initial statement. Third, the subject announced by this initial statement is contrasted with the teaching in the text. Fourth, the difference between announced subject and the subject of the teaching is bridged by some relationship between the two: Bhartṛhari indicates that the latter is understood from and associated with the former.

Finally, it should be noted that the reference to the first sūtra of the Vaiśeṣikas is only an incidental reference to illustrate a point which does not directly concern the Vaiśeṣika system, but rather 'the way to start a treatise'. There is no trace of a polemic attitude against Vaiśeṣika which might distort the cited statement and its intention.

3.3 Praśastapāda as well as Bhartṛhari and Dinnāga are all three generally thought to have lived in about the fifth or sixth century C.E. Bhartṛhari preceded the Buddhist logician Dinnāga (the latter cites from Bhartṛhari's Vākyapadīya<sup>7</sup>) while Dinnāga probably preceded Praśastapāda.<sup>8</sup> The MBhD,

7 Jambuvijaya, 1954:230.

8 Cf. e.g. Hattori, 1972; Frauwallner has proposed as the date of Bhartṛhari 450-510 C.E., of Dinnāga 480-540 C.E. and of Praśastapāda around 550 C.E. (Frauwallner, 1959:83ff; 1961:125; 1955:80).



usually accepted as a work of the same Bhartṛhari who wrote the Vākyapadīya, may have been Bhartṛhari's earlier work (Houben, 1993). In the MBhD, as we have seen, the sūtra at the beginning of all presently known versions of the VS is referred to, apparently as the initial statement of an exposition. That it was considered to be a statement at the beginning of some exposition can be inferred not only from *prastutya* 'commencing, introducing', but also from the larger context of the passage in the MBhD. In order to find the intended meaning of *atha gaur ity atra kaḥ śabdaḥ*, Bhartṛhari went back to the introductory line of the MBh, *atha śabdānuśāsanam*. Moreover, to illustrate one of his points, he gave a fictitious introductory statement of a fictitious exposition: *athāto niśvāsapraśvāsān vyākhyāsyāmaḥ*. In this context and without any polemical intention against Vaiśeṣika, Bhartṛhari refers to *dharmam vyākhyāsyāmaḥ*.

If we follow the usually accepted chronology, Bhartṛhari preceded Praśastapāda, and if the former refers to *athāto dharmam vyākhyāsyāmaḥ* as the introductory statement of an exposition explaining 'substance etc.' (observations one and two in the previous section), it is not possible that this statement came to be accepted as the beginning of the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra only after Praśastapāda (cf. Halbfass, 1986:857). Even if Praśastapāda was earlier than Bhartṛhari or if he was his close contemporary, it is not very likely that Frauwallner's suggestion that the initial sūtra in the versions known to us originated in the centuries after Praśastapāda is correct: Bhartṛhari's quotation presupposes that the sūtra was well-known (even among grammarians who are not necessarily specialists of Vaiśeṣika), and this means that it can hardly have been a recent innovation in the time when the MBhD was written.

4.0 If we arrive at the conclusion that the chronology suggested by Frauwallner is untenable, and that it is highly improbable that Praśastapāda played the role attributed to him in Frauwallner's reconstruction, the possibility that remains is that the supposed changes in the sūtra-text and the developments of which they are a reflection somehow took place in earlier periods. Perhaps, Frauwallner's hypotheses (as described in sections 1.3.1-2) have to be stripped of the proposed connections with recognizable events in the history of Indian philosophy, but can otherwise be maintained.

4.1 Since specific sources about the early stages of Vaiśeṣika are very incomplete, our judgment about the possible form of early and pre-classical Vaiśeṣika has to take into account the larger context of early Indian thought



and the parallel developments of contemporaneous systems and schools. This is precisely what Frauwallner tried to do in his *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*. He presented the Vaiśeṣika system as one of the systems originating from an early philosophy of nature, which was also at the basis of Jaina philosophy and the materialistic systems. Originally, this philosophy of nature was interested only in a scientific explanation of the universe, not in liberation (Frauwallner, 1956:7; transl. II:vii). Others, however, on the basis of the same limited amount of material, arrived at quite different hypotheses with regard to the earliest stages of Vaiśeṣika and its relation to other systems.

4.2 An almost diametrically opposed view about early Vaiśeṣika and ancient Indian philosophy of nature was adopted by Madeleine Biardeau in her *Théorie de la connaissance et Philosophie de la Parole dans le brahmanisme classique*. She vehemently criticizes the idea of an original, purely theoretical philosophy of nature, without interest in the soul and liberation (Biardeau, 1964: 243, note). Although the second volume of Frauwallner's *Geschichte* appeared about eight years before the date of publication of her own work, she does not refer to it and ignores Frauwallner's detailed hypothetical reconstruction of the history of early Vaiśeṣika.<sup>9</sup> Her criticism is explicitly directed only against Faddegon (cf. the passage cited above, section 1.1). According to Biardeau, "it would seem normal to our minds habituated at seeing how philosophical thought absorbs 'scientific' theories, to dissociate in Vaiśeṣika a scientific framework – atomism – from a philosophical and religious superstructure" (Biardeau, 1964:243, my translation from French). However, if we postulate such purely theoretical atomism, we have to do it without any support in the history of Indian thought (idem). "An atomistic theory reappeared in Jainism, and no-one would consider to deny that it is indeed a religious doctrine; never in the succeeding centuries an atomistic theory would detach itself from its religious context" (idem).<sup>10</sup> In this con-

9 While Biardeau ignored Frauwallner's ideas about early Vaiśeṣika as elaborated in volume two of his *Geschichte*, the scholars following Frauwallner's suggestions seem to have neglected Biardeau's criticism on certain presuppositions which were also adopted by Frauwallner.

10 In the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first half of this century, the discussion about the scientific achievements in ancient Indian thought were very much centered around the theme of 'atomism'. It was often implicitly accepted that the Western atomic theories were extensively validated and that they were the superior culminations of a long tradition of scientific efforts which started in early Greek thinking. The question was whether or not early Indian thought had arrived independently at similar

text she cites approvingly Masson-Oursel, who wrote in an article devoted to 'Indian atomism': "Their physical explications have always conserved a very archaic character, and they are an integral part of the notion of salvation. The reason for this is simple: bondage and liberation are in their eyes material processes" (Masson-Oursel, 1925: 344). In Masson-Oursel's article this remark concerns Jaina atomism, but Biardeau's citation suggests that she thought it applicable to early Vaiśeṣika as well.

4.3 Biardeau's ideas amount to the following: Vaiśeṣika and early natural philosophy in general (including e.g. Jainism) did not arise from a purely theoretical search for the explanation of natural phenomena, but were always embedded in a religious context in which the doctrine of the soul and liberation were of considerable importance. In other words, there is no basis for the postulation of a period of purely theoretical natural philosophy as an early stage or predecessor of Vaiśeṣika.

Biardeau's position presents the outlines of an alternative to Frauwallner's reconstruction, but she perhaps overemphasized the importance of the doctrines of the soul and of liberation for Indian thought: one may point to Mīmāṃsā and materialistic schools as important exceptions (cf. below, section 5.1.3).

5.0 We may now return to Frauwallner's arguments underlying his historical reconstruction of early Vaiśeṣika, and especially his separation of a period of theoretical natural philosophy from a succeeding period in which religious-moralistic influences penetrated into the system. In the first volume of the *Geschichte*, where Vaiśeṣika is only incidentally referred to, it is said that in this system "especially in the older period, the philosophy of nature holds a prominent place" (Frauwallner, 1953:16; cf. 267f; transl. I:7, cf. 210f). Frauwallner also says that Yoga as a way to liberation is 'not at home' in Vaiśeṣika (idem:409; transl. I:321), but not yet that Vaiśeṣika has originally nothing at all to do with the search for liberation. This more radical version is presented in the second volume, devoted to schools of natural philosophy

speculations as the Greek. Cf. Handt (1900); Faddegon (1918:13, 191-194); Keith (1921); Masson-Oursel (1925). The interest in this whole question decreases when the atomic theories in physics lose ground with the advent of new quantum-mechanic theories. Biardeau uses the term 'atomism' because she objects to speaking of 'materialism' in ancient Indian thought: "this term makes sense to us only in opposition to 'spiritualism'" (Biardeau, 1964:243, note).

in general and to Vaiśeṣika in particular. From the beginning, Frauwallner posits here boldly that early Indian philosophy knew schools of thought which were not motivated by a desire for liberation, but which sought to explain the universe in a scientific sense in a philosophical pursuit of knowledge, and that Vaiśeṣika was foremost among them (Frauwallner, 1956:7f, 26f, etc.; transl. II:viif, 11f). It is said that, although classical Vaiśeṣika knows a doctrine of liberation, this is only an addition which has no inner connection with the remaining system (idem:28; transl. II:13).

Frauwallner also discusses some methodological aspects of the study of ancient Indian philosophy in general and of early Vaiśeṣika in particular. From the outset, Frauwallner's approach to the Indian schools and systems of philosophy is more diachronic than synchronic. In the first volume of his *Geschichte*, he states that he wants to give "a description of the *becoming* of the different doctrines and systems and their *development*" (Frauwallner, 1953:1; transl. I:xlviif, my emphasis). With regard to Vaiśeṣika he is well aware that there is a great lack of sources for the early period. In order to arrive at a picture of the development of Vaiśeṣika, he therefore wants to derive the earlier stages from the system as it is transmitted. The only sources of some additional indications are early Jainism and Buddhism, Nyāya, and, to a lesser degree, Mīmāṃsā. But here too, the early stages are often to be inferred from texts established in later periods (Frauwallner, 1956:17-20; transl. II:5-7). Elsewhere he states his conviction that the genetic approach of Vaiśeṣika, i.e. the postulation of different developmental stages, greatly improves our understanding of the transmitted material (Frauwallner, 1956:315-316; transl. II:231-232).

5.1.1 Frauwallner's first argument or reason to postulate an early period in the development of Vaiśeṣika, in which this school of thought was purely a scientifically oriented philosophy of nature without interest in liberation, is therefore simply this: In classical Vaiśeṣika as we know it mainly through the eyes of Praśastapāda and his commentators, there is a contrast between the doctrine of liberation and the rest of the system. The doctrine of liberation aside, the remaining part can be understood as a categorizing reformulation on the basis of an early philosophy of nature.

The contrast can be most easily solved by postulating an earlier period in which the doctrine of liberation was entirely absent. In Frauwallner's reconstruction, this is the first period. Vaiśeṣika is here still a philosophy of nature in which the idea of categories of existent things is not yet applied. In short, the contrast perceived in classical Vaiśeṣika between the doctrine of liberation and other aspects which from a modern point of view appear

more 'scientific' in character, is solved by attributing them to historically distinct periods.

5.1.2 One may, however, wonder to what extent the postulation of an early 'pure philosophy of nature' without any interest in liberation can be justified in the larger context of early Indian thought and culture.<sup>11</sup> A few important factors in early India may be mentioned in this context. First, Vedism is of interest not only because of its general importance in early Indian thought, but also because Vaiśeṣika as we know it posits itself on the side of Vedism. While liberation from an unhappy state of life and the attainment of a better state play a role in the earliest Vedic texts, the first clear pronouncements of the idea of final liberation appear only in the Upaniṣads. The doctrine of liberation is here intimately connected with theories about certain processes in nature, especially with the so-called five-fire doctrine (cf. Frauwallner, 1953:55f, 75f [transl. I:40f, 57f]; idem, 1992:32, 44; Halbfass, 1991:323-325).

Next, Jainism should be mentioned as a movement of considerable importance for early Vaiśeṣika.<sup>12</sup> As pointed out before (section 1.3.1), one of the two main streams in Indian thought recognized by Frauwallner is the stream with strong interest in natural philosophy. Apart from Vaiśeṣika,

11 The argument of the 'larger context' was used by Frauwallner in 1938 and 1939, by Frauwallner in 1956, and by Biardeau in 1969. The results in these three cases were quite different. The 'larger context' apparently constitutes a very flexible argument which leaves considerable room for the personal convictions of the one who uses it. Moreover, even if the 'general context' points in one direction, it can never be excluded that an individual case proves to be an exception. Arguments of 'context', therefore, become only important where other, more direct evidence is absent or inconclusive.

On the other hand, the factor of the larger context, whatever the methodological difficulties in interpreting it, should not be underestimated. Just as the Indian subcontinent was a 'linguistic area' from very early times, i.e. an area in which processes such as linguistic convergence took place (cf. Kuiper, 1967; 1991), it was no doubt also a 'cultural area' (though of course by no means a very homogeneous one) from the same very early times.

12 On the relation between Jainism and early Vaiśeṣika cf. Keith, 1921:14; Leumann in *Indische Studien* 17:116-123; Jacobi in *Jaina Sūtras, part II, Sacred Books of the East* 45: xxxvff; Ui, 1917: 35ff; 66ff; Matilal, 1977:60; Halbfass, 1992:52. Because the Jaina Āvaśyaka-text cites only seventeen 'qualities' instead of the twenty-four of the classical system (Leumann in *Indische Studien* 17:116-123), it has been inferred that it was familiar with an older form of Vaiśeṣika, in which only these seventeen qualities were accepted. For an alternative interpretation of the Jaina evidence, see below, end of section 6.3.4.



Jainism is an important representative of this stream (Frauwallner, 1953:247f, 268f; transl. 194f, 211). With regard to Jainism, however, there can be little doubt that it was from the beginning characterized by a strong and sincere motivation to present a way to liberation. Unfortunately, the state of the transmitted texts does not permit precise inferences regarding the exact nature of the earliest teachings in the Jaina tradition (Frauwallner 1953:249 [transl. I:196]; Dixit, 1978:1-4; Halbfass, 1992:52). Yet, it is probably safe to say that, whatever the precise historical relation with early Vaiśeṣika, the Jaina understanding of the soul in bondage and liberation was at an early date intimately connected with theories about certain processes in nature. In the *Tattvārthasūtra*, which certainly does not represent the earliest stage of Jainism but is nevertheless most probably earlier than the classical systematization of Vaiśeṣika by Praśastapāda,<sup>13</sup> bondage through the accumulation of karma and the upward movement of the soul at the moment liberation is reached, are presented as quasi-physical processes (*Tattvārthasūtra* 10.1-5).

A school of thought that has recently been mentioned in connection with Vaiśeṣika is the Buddhist Abhidharma school called Sarvāstivāda (Bronkhorst, 1992:107-109). One of the characteristics of the Sarvāstivādins is their endeavour to enumerate everything that exists. This gives them a strong desire to understand and classify physical as well as mental and other phenomena. Still, their interest in the external world takes place within the context of the fundamental Buddhist doctrine of liberation.

5.1.3 None of the streams and movements mentioned so far provides any support for the postulation of an original Vaiśeṣika with only a physical and theoretical orientation, to which later on a doctrine of liberation was superimposed. Either the physical and soteriological orientation are intimately related from the beginning, or it is the soteriological orientation which precedes. As for Mīmāṃsā, with which Vaiśeṣika was in a dialectical relation from early times, it was mainly interested in the practice of Vedic ritual and the interpretation of ritual texts, and neither liberation nor the understanding of natural phenomena seem to have played an important original role in it.<sup>14</sup>

13 According to Zydenbos the commentary by Umāsvāti was probably written in the fifth century (Frauwallner places Praśastapāda in the sixth, see note 4 above), while the *Sūtra*-text must have originated still earlier (Zydenbos, 1983:12).

14 The Mīmāṃsā-Sūtras mention *dharma* as the main object of investigation, and define it only in terms of Vedic prescription (*codanālakṣaṇo 'rtho dharmah*). It is Śābara who explains it in terms of *niḥśreyasa* (cf. D'Sa, 1980:42-54).

One stream of thought remains in which an interest in natural phenomena may have been original, namely Indian materialism. As mentioned before, Ui has suggested that Vaiśeṣika originated in the circles of these materialistic schools (Ui, 1917:18-33). If this were the case it would remain unclear how, when and why a school opposing Vedic ritualism and the doctrine of liberation turned into a school defending the Veda and accepting a doctrine of liberation. As far as there really are similarities between Vaiśeṣika and materialistic thought,<sup>15</sup> if it is assumed that elements of materialism are adopted by Vaiśeṣika in a polemic relation (the first denying the validity of the Vedas and the latter defending the Vedas but adopting other points of his opponent), there is no need to postulate such a radical and fundamental change as the one from an anti-Vedic school to a school supporting the Veda and a Veda-oriented society.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, one may doubt

15 The 'ethical' similarity between Vaiśeṣika and materialist (or 'heterodox') schools mentioned by Ui (1917:30-31) is not convincing. His interpretation of sūtra 5.1.12 follows the Upaskāra; Candrānanda's commentary (not available to Ui) has quite a different interpretation. Ui considers the permission which Vaiśeṣika in some circumstances gives for killing others and taking what is not given as un-Brahmanical. However, although I am not aware of exact parallels, the Brahmanical lawbooks do give similar permissions (taking the property of a Vaiśya and Śūdra: Manu-smṛti 11.12-13; class or caste and killing in fight: a king should not be killed by someone who is not a king or a noble, a soldier should not kill a Brāhmaṇa: P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra* (Poona, 1946), vol. 3, p. 210). Also the Mahābhārata permits the taking of possessions of other persons under certain circumstances (Mahābhārata 12.141.39-40, cited by Thakur in Jambuvijaya, 1961, Introduction, p. 4).

16 Reference may be made to an observation by Bronkhorst with regard to certain aspects in the Buddhist tradition: "Moreover, it is known that religious traditions tend to be conservative. They may inadvertently borrow elements from outside; they may also develop and undergo modifications. They will not as a rule introduce complete novelties. This privilege is reserved for the founder of such a tradition" (Bronkhorst, 1993c: xviii [XII]). Of course, the moot question that remains is: which points in a tradition are to be considered "elements from outside" and which belong to the original core of the system? Cf. Matilal, 1977:56: "There is another interpretation of the occurrence of the term *dharma*, and reference to the Veda according to which a 'profane', scientific *sūtra* is superficially characterized as 'an orthodox' manual."

According to Halbfass (1991:24), "Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika ... were not originally and genuinely affiliated with the Veda." It is not entirely clear whether the author here means to say that Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika were originally non-Vedic or even anti-Vedic, or merely that they were not interested in the Vedic texts as such although they did arise in orthodox Brahmanical circles (possibly in response to anti-Vedic polemics). At any rate, the same author affirms that "As far as the contents of *dharma* are concerned, Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika adopt the views of the orthodox Dharmaśāstra tradition" (Halbfass, 1991:25). In my view, even though Vaiśeṣika does not even accept the Veda as a valid means of gaining knowledge (as does Nyāya), there is no strong reason to consider the



whether there really was a strong orientation towards the *theoretical* understanding of natural phenomena in Indian materialism which seems to have been much more preoccupied with the (often negative) moral and ethical implications of their theories.

5.1.4 Thus, the streams of thought which must have been important in the environment of early Vaiśeṣika-thinkers do not provide a strong basis for postulating an original state of pure philosophy of nature in early Vaiśeṣika. What led Frauwallner to nevertheless postulating such state? According to Halbfass in his critical discussion of Frauwallner's *Nachgelassene Werke I*, it was Frauwallner's "fascination with the Greek ideal of 'pure' philosophy and 'disinterested' theory and research" (Halbfass, 1986:857; 1988:157-158<sup>17</sup>), which made him formulate the thesis that Vaiśeṣika was originally a pure philosophy of nature and that the doctrine of liberation was a later addition. Halbfass' judgement of the situation, which draws the attention to an important factor<sup>18</sup> which is easily neglected, calls for some comments.

First, even apart from the factor of Frauwallner's background as a student of Greek and Latin and his preoccupation with 'pure philosophy', there were more immediate sources for his thesis of Vaiśeṣika as originating as a pure philosophy of nature, in the form of his predecessors Uṣ and Faddegō (cf. the reference to them in Frauwallner, 1956:315, note 1; and

Vaiśeṣika's motivation to defend Brahmanism and Vedic ritual as not original and historically later. The Vaiśeṣika seems comparatively close to the 'heterodox' schools only if we compare it with 'more extreme' defenders of the Veda, such as Mīmāṃsā. The Vaiśeṣika's defence of Brahmanism and Vedism may be moderate but need not be less resolute or less sincere than that of other defenders. If we do not relegate large portions of the Sūtra-text as known to us to later historical periods, the Vaiśeṣika's connections with Vedism and Brahmanism seem quite strong (references to the Veda, Vedic rituals, Brahmins), although they are of a quite different order than for instance the connections of Mīmāṃsā, which by its very nature as a tradition of exegesis presupposes the Vedic texts throughout.

17 Oberhammer mentioned the strong influence of Greek philosophy and classical studies as a factor in Frauwallner's earlier theory (Frauwallner, 1938, 1939) of early Indian philosophy containing an important 'Aryan' component (Oberhammer, 1976:9).

18 That the background and presuppositions of the interpreter may greatly influence his interpretation (although an interpretation, of course, cannot and need not be fully 'explained' this way) has been nicely demonstrated in Andrew P. Tuck's study of different Western interpretations of Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (*Comparative Philosophy and the Philosophy of Scholarship; On the Western Interpretation of Nāgārjuna*; New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). Cf., however, Bronkhorst's critical review in *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 47.3 (1993): 501-511.

to Faddegon in Frauwallner, 1939:273).<sup>19</sup> For some reason, Frauwallner did not seek for alternative reconstructions, and neglected Masson-Oursel's views about early Vaiśeṣika and Jainism. Masson-Oursel might have placed him on a different track.

Second, Halbfass applies his argument to Frauwallner's thesis but does not recognize that it applies as well to his own discussion of physical and retributive causality in early Vaiśeṣika (Halbfass, 1980:284-290; 1991:311-316). Halbfass is critical about Frauwallner's assumption that early Vaiśeṣika "was entirely unsoteriological in its orientation" (Halbfass, 1986:857; cf. 1988:157-158 and 1992:76), but he rejects it only in its extreme form. He emphasizes that the thesis of the different beginning of the Vaiśeṣika with which Frauwallner sought to support this assumption is untenable (Halbfass, 1992:76), but maintains the contrast between 'physics and soteriology' in the Vaiśeṣika system, and the suggestion that the former precedes the latter (in time and importance).

As for Frauwallner's thesis of an original pure philosophy of nature without interest in liberation, we may conclude that the only argument which can be used here, viz. the 'larger context' of early Indian thought,<sup>20</sup> does not seem to provide much support; however, in Frauwallner's time there clearly was an intellectual climate which was very favourable for such a thesis. Though the possibility that Vaiśeṣika arose in materialistic circles cannot be excluded, it seems preferable to assume that there was a polemic relation between the two from the beginning. Generally speaking, there is no evidence that any stream of early Indian thought accepted a hard and fast boundary between (what we would separate into the categories of) 'physics' and 'soteriology'. Instead, the two were usually inextricably interwoven.

5.2 After the discussion of this first argument, deeply rooted in the approach of Frauwallner (and other Western scholars) to early Vaiśeṣika, the other arguments can be dealt with more briefly. Frauwallner's second argument is more straightforward than his first, intuitive or impressionistic argument. As it was formulated in his posthumously published article: the con-

19 Apart from Faddegon and Ui, also Bulcke (1947, p. 1), referring to Jacobi (Jacobi, 1911), speaks of a 'more purely scientific' orientation of Vaiśeṣika. A firm grounding in Greek and Latin was probably common to all these scholars, except perhaps the Japanese scholar Ui.

20 Because our primary sources do not show a purely theoretically oriented system and because they may reflect later stages of development, we have to take recourse to arguments of the 'larger context', which, however, can only lead to very tentative conclusions (cf. note 10 above).

trast in Vaiśeṣika between the doctrine of liberation and the pure spirit of natural philosophy, “was not just a European feeling”: also the Indians themselves felt the same (Frauwallner, 1984:37).

Specifically, Frauwallner refers to Durveka Miśra, according to whom Vaiśeṣika promises one thing and explains quite something else. Similarly, Pakṣilasvāmin, author of the Nyāya-Bhāṣya, mentioned the categories of the Vaiśeṣikas, but added that knowledge of these does not lead to liberation, unlike the knowledge of the objects (*prameya*) of Nyāya. These polemical remarks, however, may be understood from the need to demarcate and defend the own systems. Moreover, Pakṣilasvāmin’s commentary on the Nyāya-sūtras was probably considerably later than the earliest versions of Vaiśeṣika; and Durveka Miśra, author of a sub-commentary on Dharmakīrti’s Hetubindu, clearly belongs to a much later time, a different era with an entirely different intellectual climate. It is therefore very well possible that an earlier natural connection between announcement and exposition was no more recognized as such. Bhartṛhari, who lived a few generations before Durveka Miśra and was perhaps close in time to Pakṣilasvāmin, distinguishes, just as Durveka Miśra, between the announcement and the exposition (see passage cited in 3.1). Unlike Durveka Miśra, however, Bhartṛhari accepts at the same time that there is some relation between the two (observations three and four in section 3.2 above).

This second argument was also used by Halbfass in his 1980 article (1980:288-289 and note 70) and maintained in his later work (1991:315 and note 95 on p. 339). Halbfass moreover feels that critique is implied in Bhartṛhari’s reference to Vaiśeṣika Sūtra 1.1.1, for which, however, there is no basis (cf. sections 3.1 and 3.2 above).

5.3 What may be considered a third argument in support of Frauwallner’s reconstruction is an implicit argument of analogy: there are good indications that the doctrine of a highest God was introduced into the system at a comparatively late date, therefore it is likely that also the doctrine of liberation was introduced later.<sup>21</sup> Both doctrines belong to a moralistic-religious sphere, and are not at home in an original, pure philosophy of nature. That the doctrine of a highest God was introduced later has indeed been demonstrated convincingly (Chemparathy, 1967; 1983:25-28; cf. Jacobi, 1923 and

21 In Frauwallner’s earlier postulation of a first period in Indian philosophy, dominated by ‘Aryan’ influence and ‘purely philosophical, atheistic and scientifically presuppositionless’ in character (Frauwallner, 1938, 1939), there was neither place for an early doctrine of God, nor for an early doctrine of liberation.

Bulcke, 1947). In systems which accept both God and the possibility of liberation, liberation is usually strived after by emphasizing and cultivating devotional emotions. This type of liberation is indeed difficult to find in Vaiśeṣika, even in its classical version. To this extent, Faddegon may have been right that Vaiśeṣika did not owe its origin "to that craze for liberation which dominates nearly all forms of Indian thought" (Faddegon, 1918:12), including, to a gradually increasing degree, the later Vaiśeṣika-tradition. However, if such 'devotional' 'craze for liberation' seems absent in early Vaiśeṣika, this need not imply that the doctrine of liberation had no place whatsoever in this system.

6.0 It is now time to approach the problem from a different angle. The argument of the 'larger context' does not provide convincing support for an important presupposition in Frauwallner's reconstruction. The reconstruction is therefore open to serious doubts. Yet, because our knowledge of the earliest texts is still very incomplete and problematic, it is too early for an alternative account, in extensiveness and details comparable to the one offered by Frauwallner in his *Geschichte* (Frauwallner, 1956). Instead, we should be happy if we can at least formulate some crucial questions which arise with the new situation.

As we have seen, Frauwallner's main argument, which was a deep-rooted intuitive or impressionistic argument, loses its persuasive force if we place early Vaiśeṣika in its environment of early Indian thought and culture. In that context, it would seem unlikely that it originated as a purely theoretical philosophy of nature as assumed by Frauwallner. If we want to leave the domain of the rather flexible 'contextual' arguments and turn to the evidence in the transmitted texts, what is the relation between the latter and the earliest stages of Vaiśeṣika? If at all we would ever be able to reconstruct the earliest Sūtra-text, what is the relation between this text and a possible earlier tradition in which it arose? Perhaps, the results which we obtain by studying the textual evidence apply to quite a different period than the earliest periods about which Frauwallner developed his speculations?

6.1.1 Let us first return for a moment to the 'contextual' argument, but now not for the earliest pre-systematic basis of Vaiśeṣika which in some respects it might have shared, according to Frauwallner's hypothesis, with Jainism, but, more concretely, for the origins of the Sūtra-text. If it is assumed that the Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra text originated somewhere between 200 B.C.E. and 200



C.E. (cf. Jacobi, 1911; Ui, 1917:65; Matilal, 1977:54), it originated in a time in which Buddhism and Jainism were already strong and had become important factors in Indian society.<sup>22</sup> In such a context, the early creator(s) of the Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra had to give an account of the soul, its place in the universe, and the processes to which the objects of the universe and especially the soul are subjected. Apart from liberation as the ultimate goal, 'elevation' may have been important as an intermediate goal, something which would suit the connections which Vaiśeṣika as we know it has with Vedism (Vedic rituals usually aiming at a better state of life; only the Upaniṣads go beyond and postulate the possibility of liberation).

While Jainism produced an ideology which seriously challenged Vedic ritualism, because it offered a world view and a way to lasting happiness without reference to the Vedas and rituals, Vaiśeṣika may have originated in an emulative relation with Jainism, seeking to strengthen and immunize Brahmanism and Vedic ritualism against criticism from this side. Also Buddhism seriously challenged Vedic ritualism, and although its founder was probably rather averse from constructing an all-encompassing philosophical system, such systems did arise in the early centuries after his decease.<sup>23</sup> The relations with Jainism and Buddhism, probably mainly those with the first, would force the early (pre-) Vaiśeṣikas to give an account of liberation from the earliest times.

As regards the nature of bondage and liberation, it may be surmised that they were understood and taught as 'physical' processes in which soul, mind and body play the leading parts, and to a considerable degree parallel to so many other processes in which substances, attributes and actions are involved. Perhaps, a certain 'insight' was held to be necessary for the final and decisive step towards liberation. If bondage and liberation are under-

22 Note that here is not much evidence that the Vaiśeṣika-system or anything similar to it was of any importance before Nāgārjuna (first or second century C.E.) who referred to the 'system of Ulūka (Kaṇāda)' in his *Ratnāvalī* (cf. Ui, 1917:46ff; Halbfass, 1992:273). According to Jacobi the *Caraka-saṁhitā* contains the oldest reference to the Vaiśeṣika (Jacobi, 1911:732). The date of this text, however, is uncertain.

23 Bronkhorst, 1992, postulates an emulative relation between Vaiśeṣika and the Buddhist Abhidharma school of the Sarvāstivādins, because of the similarity (sometimes in a negative way) of their basic assumptions. This need not exclude the possibility of the relation with Jainism postulated here (Bronkhorst, 1992:109 note 51). Whatever the precise historical relations between Jainas, Vaiśeṣikas and Sarvāstivādins and whichever system was earlier, the relation of the Vaiśeṣikas with the Sarvāstivādins, like that with the Jainas, would suggest they concerned themselves with the doctrine of liberation from the beginning, because in both the Jaina and the Sarvāstivādin context liberation is of primary importance.

stood this way as being to an important degree 'physical' processes, it becomes possible to intervene in a 'mechanical' way through some of the factors involved. Unlike the Jainas, the Vaiśeṣika thinkers emphatically accepted factors from the Vedic ritualistic sphere as effective in the sphere of the soul and liberation.

Note, that such a physicalistic and mechanistic view of liberation would suit the early intellectual climate as reflected in Jainism, and in some Brahmanic and Upaniṣadic accounts of travels of the soul. In contrast with the understanding of liberation in later periods, devotion and divine grace are not emphasized as deciding factors.

6.1.2 The audience for which the Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra was intended would consist of Brahmins and followers of Brahmanical *dharma*, as well as Jaina and Buddhist converts and doubters in Brahmanical circles. They were not intended to make Vaiśeṣika 'converts' among those who never had a Brahmanical background and education. Because of the Jaina and Buddhist converts and doubters, however, they had to take the Jaina and Buddhist systems into account. In their discussions with these converts and doubters, the Brahmanical creators of the Vaiśeṣika-system could only use arguments based on those *pramāṇas* (means of reliable knowledge) which were also accepted by the other party, namely direct perception and inference. They used these two *pramāṇas* to arrive at conclusions to which they were committed from the beginning (no place here for Frauwallner's 'presuppositionless philosophy'), namely the authoritativeness of the Veda, the great importance of the *dharma* taught in (or projected into) the Veda, and the existence of an own doctrine of liberation. The Jainas and Buddhists, of course, were also committed to certain 'truths' when they developed *their* systems on the basis of the same two *pramāṇas*. (In a later period, this is very clear in the Buddhist logical school where e.g. Dharmakīrti develops logical techniques which he uses only in certain limited domains to arrive at the Buddhist truths to which he is beforehand committed.)

Brahmanical adherents of Vaiśeṣika had thus a sophisticated system from which coherent arguments could be derived to counter those of the Jaina and Buddhist critics of Brahmanism. In their own Brahmanical circles, however, they came from very early times into conflict with others, the Mīmāṃsakas, who never tried to prove the validity of Vedic texts on the basis of the *pramāṇas* accepted by Jainas and Buddhists, but defended these texts as a separate *pramāṇa*, with absolute validity in the field of *dharma*.



6.1.3 The Vaiśeṣika's concern with liberation was thus original in the system as it arose in a context in which Jainism and Buddhism were challenging the Brahmanic society.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, sūtras dealing with liberation were an integral part of the oldest form of the Sūtra-text. If the fascination with the possibilities of an original 'pure philosophy' is given up, there is neither any good reason left to consider the sūtras dealing with *dharma* as late and secondary.<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, the emulative relation with Jainism and Buddhism could have made it one of the first objectives of the first author<sup>26</sup> of the Sūtra-text to assert the Vedic and Brahmanical *dharma*. The introductory sūtras (1.1.1-3) as well as the concluding ones (10.20-21), would thus belong to the earliest versions of the text,<sup>27</sup> and the sixth chapter (dealing with Vedas, *dharma* and liberation) formed the very heart of the system.<sup>28</sup>

6.2 Continuing on this line, it would seem natural to assume that the Sūtra-text originated in order to express a system which, though at several points different from the system explained by Praśastapāda, was complete in its own way. Starting from the Sūtra-versions now available, and accepting that

24 It is perhaps not superfluous to emphasize again that the period of origination with which we are concerned here is much later than the pre-historic origins about which Frauwallner speculated in his *Geschichte* and before. As for the character of the Vaiśeṣika understanding of liberation, the influence of (non-monistic) interpretations of Brahmanic and Upaniṣadic philosophies on early Vaiśeṣika conceptions of liberation is not immediately obvious but can at this stage not be excluded.

25 The phrase *yad (iha) bhāvarūpaṁ tat sarvaṁ abhidhāsyāmi/abhidhāsyāmaḥ/mayopasamkhyātavyam*, which Frauwallner considered to be the original beginning of the Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra, is to be traced back to the early commentatorial literature accompanying the beginning sūtras of the Vaiśeṣika-system. Or, following Halbfass' suggestion, the statement may have been "a retrospective and explanatory statement, instead of an actual quote" (1992:70; cf. 1986:857). As for the contents of the statement, it is questionable if it could at all be taken as an indication that its author was only interested in a naturalistic exposition about the universe, and not in liberation. As pointed out earlier, the example of e.g. the Sarvāstivādins shows that the endeavour to explain the entire universe may very well arise in the context of a system or school which is sincerely interested in liberation.

26 For convenience's sake I will speak in the following sections often of the 'author' of the Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra, although we do not know whether we should credit an original author with the main structure of the Sūtra-texts available, or rather a final redactor or influential commentator.

27 According to Thakur, however, *dharma* in the initial sūtras does not refer to the Brahmanical socio-religious *dharma*, but to the *dharma* 'property' or 'attribute' of the different categories (Thakur in Jambuvijaya, 1961 (Introduction, p. 3).).

28 Frauwallner's presuppositions can only lead to the diametrically opposed conclusion that the sixth chapter is definitely later than other parts of the Sūtra-text. A study of this important chapter of the VS has been announced (Wezler, 1983:40, note 17; 58).

not all but at least a considerable part of the sūtras may belong to the earliest layer, it should be possible to make some observations on the system as a whole. In this respect the approach in the first part of a recent article by Bronkhorst (Bronkhorst, 1992), where the author tries to understand Praśastapāda's *system* in terms of a small number of axioms, and next proposes to investigate their validity for the sūtra-text, is of interest. The author argues that Praśastapāda accepted at least the following four axioms: (1) the Vaiśeṣika offers a complete enumeration of everything that exists; (2) composite wholes constitute new entities, which exist in their own right, apart from the parts out of which they are constituted; (3) there is a direct correspondence between words and things; (4) spatial and temporal atomism. The author's preliminary conclusion is that these axioms were also presupposed in the sūtra-text.<sup>29</sup>

6.3.0 The system which an author wants to propound is one thing, the exposition in which he does this is quite something else. This applies all the more if the system is expounded in the highly developed sūtra-style. In the Vaiśeṣika-sūtras as they are now available, two principles seem to determine the structure of the text. The first principle is brevity. The second principle is that the exposition does not simply give a systematic treatment of the philosophy (as later on Praśastapāda would do), but that it seems to have been intentionally structured according to a certain 'didactic' design: the author takes into account what his student (reader or listener) may find obvious and immediately acceptable and what not. (Alternatively, one may understand this as another axiom of the system: one should proceed from the obvious to what is less obvious.<sup>30</sup>)

The principle of brevity it shares with other sūtra-texts such as the different ritual Sūtras (Śrauta-sūtras) and Pāṇini's grammar. The second principle, however, for which some indications will be given below (6.3.2-4),

29 Bronkhorst, 1992:107: "The sūtras of the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra, in fact, already betray a knowledge of the four axioms. It cannot be the purpose of the present article to prove this ... Let it suffice to say that the axioms form to such an extent an integral part of the system – in a sense they are its basis – that it is difficult to imagine that they did not form part of it from the very beginning." In the second part of his article (Bronkhorst, 1992:107f), the author emphasizes that Vaiśeṣika shared the axiom that the system contains an exhaustive enumeration of all existents with the Sarvāstivādins. This finding should be evaluated in a broader context before far-reaching conclusions can legitimately be drawn from it: to what extent did other schools in this period such as Sāṃkhya or the Jainas believe the same about their own system?

30 Cf. VS 6.2.1, and Halbfass, 1991:339, note 93: "There is a rule in Vaiśeṣika that 'invisible' causes should not be invoked as long as 'visible' causes are available."

seems to be rather characteristic for the Vaiśeṣika-sūtras. While the Śrauta-sūtras mainly follow the course of the ritual that is being explained, Pāṇini's grammatical sūtras are mainly concerned with brevity; some careful 'planning' of the exposition can be demonstrated,<sup>31</sup> but this can hardly be interpreted as a 'didactic' concern with the student of grammar. This seems not to have been of much importance in either of these two types of sūtra-texts.

6.3.1. A consequence of the first principle is that a topic which is presented in a very modest way in the sūtra-text, may yet be of vital importance in the system which is being expounded. A device which is much used in the Vaiśeṣika-sūtra is that of paradigmatic arguments and explanations. In the fifth chapter of the Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra, for instance, much attention is paid to the movement of the hand (VS 5.1.1-6), while the movement of the mind is discussed in only a few words (VS 5.2.15), with a reference to the paradigmatic explanation of the movement of the hand. Yet, systematically the 'movement of the mind' is certainly not less important than the movement of the hand. Similar things will apply to the topic of liberation. In the extant versions only two sūtras use the word *mokṣa*, and one the word *niḥśreyasa*. Yet, the concept of liberation seems to have much deeper roots in the system than this small number of sūtras would suggest. Systematically, the topic of liberation is probably most at its place in the sixth chapter, devoted to the Vedas, to *dharma* and *adharma*, and to death and rebirth. At that place, however, it suffices for the author to refer to an earlier passage where liberation had already been explained. The earlier passage is in the fifth chapter, devoted to action, and there, because the principles of action and non-action are being explained at length, only a few sūtras suffice to explain the special case of bondage and liberation.<sup>32</sup>

6.3.2 The second principle, the 'didactic design' can, of course, only be appreciated if the Sūtra-text is studied in detail as a structured whole. Such study, however, must be postponed to a future occasion. For now, it may suffice to make a few general observations, and give some illustrations. The Vaiśeṣika-sūtras discuss the different topics in a specific order. This order is not dictated purely by the abstract system, as in Praśastapāda's Saṃgraha. Instead, the author or redactor of the Sūtras seems to have proceeded as much as possible from what is obvious, perceptible, generally accepted and

31 E.g. Buiskool, 1939:1-3.

32 Cf. Bronkhorst, 1993c:61-62 [55-56], who argues that already the way the soul is postulated as a substance in which certain qualities inhere has certain implications for the Vaiśeṣika-doctrine of final liberation.

directly verifiable by anyone, to what is less obvious, imperceptible, not generally accepted but nevertheless inferable from the obvious. In the course of his exposition, he develops the logic he needs to arrive at a next point. Here the methodological problems pointed out in section 6.0 become very important: What is the relation between our versions of the Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra and possible earlier traditions? To what period in the development of Vaiśeṣika do the results which we obtain in a structural approach apply? Do they reveal to us the design of the author of the Sūtras, or of the final organizer or redactor, or of the last commentary from which all our versions would have been culled?

6.3.3 Whatever our answer to these questions, the backbone of the body of the exposition as presently available seems to be the discussion of substances, qualities and actions. While it can be argued that *samavāya* 'inherence', *sāmānya* 'universals', *viśeṣa* 'particulars' and *sāmānya-viśeṣa* 'universal-particulars' are systematically of vital importance in the entire exposition, these are dealt with more or less incidentally; *samavāya* is defined in the second part of the seventh chapter, the other notions are introduced in the second part of the first chapter. The means of gaining knowledge (*pramāṇas*) are of great importance systematically, but the abstract and technical problems of their validity and mutual relations are discussed only towards the end.

After the introduction of the categories of substance, quality and action in the first chapter, specific substances, actions and qualities are discussed in the succeeding chapters. The 'obvious' substances, earth, water and fire, are first discussed in a few sūtras in the beginning of the second chapter. The other substances, wind, ether, direction and time, require more explanation. In the course of the discussion of these substances, the logic needed to infer their existence is developed.

The most elaborate discussion, however, is devoted to the substances mind and self. The entire third chapter, dealing with mind and self, has attracted the attention of several scholars. A radical reinterpretation, emendation or reordering of the main sūtras (as available and commented upon in the commentaries), however, would probably be unnecessary if it is assumed that the first part, consisting of sūtras 3.1.1-12, only *prepare* the real proof of mind and self which is finally given in the next part,<sup>33</sup> 3.1.13-3.2.17. The first part begins with the assertion that 'there must be something else' apart from the substances perceived by the sense-faculties, and next the logic is

33 According to Candrānanda, the Sūtra-author starts to prepare the discussion of the self already in the last part of 2.2 (Candrānanda, introducing 2.2.19).



developed which should support this assertion. After the need for postulating 'something else' is thus established, the self is introduced in the next part. Because of the close cooperation between self and mind in the system (they form a pair at least until liberation), the mind is defined in this part. The main argument in this second part may be understood as an initial argument (the self to be inferred from breathing out, etc.) which is next criticized by someone who wants to infer the existence of the self from scriptural authority. Later on, the argument is nevertheless accepted in a refined form, by the additional argument of the use of the word 'I'.<sup>34</sup> The difficult third chapter would thus illustrate the 'didactic design' in the Sūtra-text.

6.3.4 A point which again can be discussed only summarily in the present paper is the enumeration and discussion of qualities. Sūtra 1.1.5 enumerates seventeen qualities. In other parts of the Sūtra-text, however, several additional qualities are discussed or presupposed. In the PDhS Praśastapāda enumerates seventeen qualities, says they are explicitly mentioned (in the sūtra), and adds seven more (among them *śabda*) which he says are included on account of the word *ca*. Indeed, in all our Sūtra-versions the sūtra enumerating the qualities concludes the enumeration of items with *ca*, whereas the preceding and succeeding sūtra, enumerating the substances and actions respectively, conclude the enumerations with *iti*. Also the other commentators (Candrānanda, etc.) on sūtra 1.1.5 interpret *ca* as indicative of the inclusion of seven more qualities.

The usual interpretation of this situation is that Praśastapāda and the commentators read a later development into an old sūtra, attributing to *ca* a meaning which cannot have been original.<sup>35</sup> The enumeration in different

34 Here the explanation of this passage by Adachi (1992:33-35) can be largely followed. Whether the oponent in the discussion is a Mīmāṃsaka (as supposed by Adachi) or someone else is a problem which need not be discussed at this place.

35 Bühler's article about "A disputed meaning of the particles *iti* and *ca*" (WZKM 1 (1887): 13-20) gave rise to a series of critical reactions; for references, see Oertel, 1926:11; most important are the reaction of Böhlingk (ZDMG 41 (1887):516-519) and that of Knauer (*Festgruss an Böhlingk*:(1888): 62-67). According to Bühler, *iti* and *ca* both in modern and ancient texts, could mean 'and so forth', in accordance with the explanations of Indian commentators. His critics refused to accept this meaning in early texts such as Pāṇini's grammar. More recently on the enumerative *iti* and *ca* (without adding new points in the discussion): Verpoorten, *L'ordre des Mots dans l'Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa* (Paris, 1977), §635; Verpoorten, "Iti dans le Jaimintya-Brāhmaṇa et le Śābara-Bhāṣya" in *Panels of the VIIth World Sanskrit Conference, Leiden, 1987, vol. IV: Sense and Syntax in Vedic* (general editor: J. Bronkhorst; Leiden, 1991):88, §6: "*Iti* peut aussi clore une énumération."

Jaina sources of only seventeen instead of twenty-four qualities (precisely the seventeen mentioned in sūtra 1.1.5) is presented as supporting evidence for the original acceptance of only seventeen qualities in Vaiśeṣika.

This interpretation, however, leaves us with some problems. In the Sūtra-text as we have it (apparently also in the one which was available to Praśastapāda), there is a conspicuous variation in choice of words (*ca* vs. *iti*) which happens to correspond to a conspicuous semantic difference: illustrative enumeration vs. complete enumeration. At this place it is impossible to study all occurrences and possible occurrences in the Sūtra-text and all recorded variants, but it may be noted that there seem to be a few other clear cases of incomplete or illustrative enumeration with *ca*.<sup>36</sup> In the earlier discussion about *iti* and *ca* (see note 32), the problem was discussed in a way which could never give an answer to the specific problem of VS 1.1.5. For, what we want to know is not whether under certain circumstances both *ca* and *iti* could perhaps mean 'etcetera'. (For the earliest literature the answer must be negative.) What is of interest in our case is what the precise stylistic and semantic differences may have been between the two in the time when the VS was written. The question to be asked is not whether *ca* can have the meaning 'etcetera' or not, but rather whether an enumeration with *iti* may have been felt to be more 'marked' or more emphatic than an enumeration with *ca*. From the discussions of Böhrtlingk and Knauer (see references in note 32), it is moreover clear that *iti* in early texts most probably *never* concludes illustrative enumerations. Apparently, in a certain stage of the Vaiśeṣika-tradition the difference in 'markedness' between the comprehensive *iti* after a complete enumeration, and the simple enumerative particle *ca* came to be used and interpreted as indicative, in certain contexts, of the difference between a complete enumeration and an illustrative enumeration. Is it possible that this stage coincides with the origin of the Sūtra-text? Is it possible that the Sūtra-author wanted to begin with an enumeration of only those qualities which were immediately acceptable or which corresponded with the qualities accepted in contemporaneous systems? Is it possible that the same author (group of authors, redactor) who gave an important place to the discussion of the status of *śabda* (whether substance or quality), intentionally left out at least this item from the list of qualities in the beginning?

36 Here I would like to mention VS 3.2.4: enumeration of *ātmaliṅgāni* in Candrānanda's and Śaṅkaramiśra's version with *ceti* and *ca* respectively; (*pratyakṣa*)*jñāna* is not mentioned although the discussion in 3.1 seems to imply that this is a *liṅga* of the *ātman*; and VS 6.2.2: *brahmacarya ... vānaprasthya ... ca*; followed by 6.2.3 *cāturāśramyam ...*



As for the evidence of the Jaina sources, how strong is their reliability in this case? The enumeration of seventeen qualities in the Āvaśyaka was attributed to a schismatical Jaina teacher, not to a foreign system.<sup>37</sup> The Jaina-tradition considered *śabda* a substance, so it could never be accepted in a list of qualities. The doxographic reliability of Jinabhadra, author of the Viśeṣāvaśyakabhāṣya, is not without problems either.<sup>38</sup>

In short, the situation is as follows. In the available Sūtra-text there is a contrast between the enumeration of only seventeen qualities at the beginning and the discussion and acceptance of more than seventeen qualities in the rest of the text.<sup>39</sup> Is this contrast part of the design, or did it arise in the course of the development of the system? Should this contrast be understood as an indication of the commitment of later exponents of the system to an earlier stage in the development of Vaiśeṣika, or as an indication of the commitment of the creator(s) of the system to other traditions and discourses which were important in his/their time?

6.4.1 A few words may now be said about *adrṣṭa*. Did this notion, as proposed by Frauwallner (1956:93-95; transl. II:62-64), originally belong to a religious context, and was it added to the Vaiśeṣika-system in a later stage, spoiling its scientific orientation? Was it, as proposed by Thakur (1957:18f; 1969), a notion originally belonging to the system and showing the scientific attitude of the author ('we have not yet determined the precise nature of this but may be able to do so in the future')? Was it, as proposed

37 Keith, 1921:14; Leumann in *Indische Studien* 17:116-123; Jacobi in *Jaina Sūtras, part II, Sacred Books of the East* 45: xxxvff; Ui, 1917: 35ff; 66ff.

38 Having pointed out that Jinabhadra, in the context of the discussion of the eighth heresy (*nihnava*) in the Jaina tradition, mentions 36 items (9 substances; 17 qualities; 5 actions; *sattā*, *sāmānya* and *sāmānya-viśeṣa*; *viśeṣa*; *samavāya*), Dixit observes: "These are certainly Vaiśeṣika categories but it is difficult to make out what the *nihnava* in question has to do with the Vaiśeṣika school. It seems that historical references made in connection with the seven (or eight) *nihnava*s are not literally true .... It seems that a pre-occupation with the problem of partial truth led to the formulation of the doctrine of seven *nayas* as well as the doctrine of seven (or eight) *nihnava*s while the historical references made in connection with both are somehow of the nature of an after-thought" (Dixit, 1971:131). References to the Viśeṣāvaśyakabhāṣya were made by several authors, e.g. Thakur in his Introduction to Jambuvijaya's edition of the Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra (Jambuvijaya, 1961:6); Halbfass, 1980:285, note 55 (1991:338, note 80); Wezler, 1983: 36 note 5.

39 From the point of view of the system, at least one quality, viz. *śabda*, should have the same status as primary quality as the qualities which are explicitly enumerated (*rūpa*, *rasa*, etc.). With regard to the other qualities there may be some doubt whether some of them were originally perhaps thought of as secondary qualities, subsumed under some main quality.

by Halbfass (1980:289) and accepted by Wezler (1983:38-39), originally a 'gap-filler' in the causal explanation of the universe which offered itself subsequently for a more soteriological interpretation?

With our alternative presuppositions, the (especially in the eyes of modern scholars) 'dual' role played by *adr̥ṣṭa* may go back to the earliest time, because the contrast between the supposed 'original, purely scientific spirit' of the system and its soteriology has evaporated. Whether it will ever be possible to reconstruct on the basis of the available evidence the precise meaning of *adr̥ṣṭa* in all places where it occurs, and to determine its relation to related notions such as *abhyudaya*, *dharma* and *adharma*, is of course very uncertain. At this moment, I would only like to suggest that it seems very well possible that in the context of early Indian thought (cf. above, sections 5.1.2-3) the author of the Sūtra-text could without any problems postulate certain factors or qualities, such as *adr̥ṣṭa*, *dharma* and *adharma*, but also *saṃskāra*, which belong as much to selves and minds as to material objects. At places such as VS 5.2.19 and 6.2.15, *adr̥ṣṭa* may already refer to *dharma* and *adharma* inhering in the self,<sup>40</sup> but this need not imply that *adr̥ṣṭa* in the VS was coextensive with these two notions.

If this suggestion is accepted, someone may still observe that, although the 'physical' and 'soteriological' function of *adr̥ṣṭa* cannot be clearly distinguished in the sūtras, a contrast between these two is felt at least in Praśastapāda's PDhS. Then, if one does not start from the presupposition that there must have been an original 'purely theoretical natural philoso-

40 In the VP, a pre-Praśastapāda-text, *adr̥ṣṭa* may already refer to some factor residing in the self, although this is by no means certain. Cf. my comments on VP 3.3.18 (Houben, 1992b, Part 3): "With regard to the standard of comparison (namely the self and its connection with 'own' entities), the PDhS interpretation is only natural: The *adr̥ṣṭa* which determines the connection of the self with a specific body, mind, etc. may without any problem be equated with *dharma* and *adharma*, two qualities of the self." Bronkhorst (1993a:89) completely rejects the possibility that *adr̥ṣṭa* in VP 3.3.18 refers to the qualities *dharma* and *adharma* residing in the self, because this would imply that the relation between word and thing-meant was also made dependent on *dharma* and *adharma*. However, with regard to the relation between word and thing-meant which is the object of the comparison in VP 3.3.18, it is not clear whether Bhartṛhari suggested to attribute this relation to the same *adr̥ṣṭa*, or rather to something which is in certain respects similar to it, e.g. *saṃketa* (because, after all, he was only making a comparison). And even if he would have suggested that this relation be attributed to *adr̥ṣṭa*, he would remain within the framework of Vaiśeṣika-tenets as reflected in both the VS and the PDhS (where *adr̥ṣṭa* is also invoked to explain phenomena outside the obvious sphere of selves and retributive causality). Bronkhorst's complete rejection may have been based on an idealized form of Vaiśeṣika (on what modern scholars think Vaiśeṣika-philosophy should be like, or on the PDhS minus inconsistencies).

phy', he would have to speak, not of a 'merger of physics and soteriology', but rather of a 'differentiation and polarization of physics and soteriology'.

6.4.2 A general consideration to support the preceding suggestion is the following. In the case of Praśastapāda's Padārthadharmasamgraha one may feel that he admits certain inconsistencies in the system he explains, because the tradition (the Sūtra-text) forces him to do so. Wouldn't it be very well possible, or even likely, that the author of the Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra could likewise live with certain inconsistencies (or did not feel they were there) because of the tradition(s) to which *he* was committed, and because of the discourses in which *he* was involved? The author of the Sūtra-text must have lived and worked in a certain context which provided the necessary background and objectives for his exposition. It is not reasonable to assume that he could detach himself from this context in all details, even though he proclaimed to accept only direct perception and inference as valid means of gaining knowledge. The presupposition underlying reconstructions such as that of Frauwallner seems to be that the system started off as an ideal, systematic, scientifically oriented philosophy; but, as we have seen above, the validity of this presupposition is very questionable.

6.5 It is at this place of course impossible to discuss all problematic aspects of early Vaiśeṣika in the light of the new perspectives which open up if the presupposition of its 'purely scientific origin' is abandoned. One point of interest, however, deserves to be mentioned here.

The name Vaiśeṣika for the system under discussion poses several problems. It was used already by the pre-Praśastapāda author Bhartṛhari, but we know neither what the original meaning of the name was, nor by whom it was given. The earliest Indian explanations of the name stem from later times. Guṇaratna, author of a commentary on the Śaḍdarśanasamuccaya of Haribhadra (eighth century), derived it from *viśeṣa*, the name of the fifth category in the Vaiśeṣika-system. A similar explanation was adopted by several modern scholars (Nandalal Sinha, K.H. Potter). However, as Halbfass observed in his discussion of the problem, "Kaṇāda's system was probably known as Vaiśeṣika before the definition of the fifth category was finalized" (Halbfass, 1992:269-275).

Among the various other explanations which have been suggested, Halbfass makes special mention of the one which derives the name from *viśeṣa* in its more general sense of particularity, characterization and differentiation. Thus, Faddegon, for instance, suggested that the name Vaiśeṣika referred to the system "as a doctrine of characterization" (Faddegon, 1918:18).

Halbfass' own conclusion is that

whatever the actual derivation and the original meaning of the name Vaiśeṣika may have been, we may say that *viśeṣa* in its role as 'ultimate particularity' is a central and symptomatic concept. It illustrates the basic ontological orientation of the classical Vaiśeṣika system, its commitment to identifiability, distinctness, and comprehensive enumeration. Without ultimate particularity, the whole edifice of distinct, enumerable entities would not have a secure basis. Reality itself, as conceived in the Vaiśeṣika system, would collapse or evaporate without individual identity and distinctness. (Halbfass, 1992:273)

The name Vaiśeṣika would therefore characterize the general, ontological orientation of the system.

However, the name becomes much more meaningful if the main structure of the Sūtra-texts presently available is accepted as original, and if ontology is not dissociated from other aspects of the system. As we have seen, the importance of the Brahmanical *dharma* and the Veda in the sūtras as we have them shows that those accepting them belonged to Brahmanical circles. It therefore need not surprise us to see that the Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra upholds not only ontological distinctions (by distinguishing and defining the different categories and their elements with great precision), but also, as is especially clear from the sixth chapter, social distinctions. In this chapter the results in the field of *dharma* of 'giving and taking' and 'killing and being killed' are made dependent upon the socio-religious status of the other person (with reference to oneself as the actor) involved in the act (VS 6.1.4-18; the other person may be equal, lower, or *viśiṣṭa* 'distinguished' or 'superior'). A distinction is also maintained between the four *āśramas*, 'stages of life' (6.2.2-3).<sup>41</sup> Not only socio-religious distinctions are upheld but also spiritual distinctions. The Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra accepts persons 'distinguished from us' (*asmadvīṣiṣṭa*) with special faculties (2.1.18; 6.1.1-2; 9.28). This upholding of distinctions in life perhaps also explains one aspect of the Vaiśeṣikas' attitude towards yoga and liberation. Both are accepted and explained as facts, but it is nowhere insisted that each and every person should immediately focus his entire life on the attainment of liberation and yogic stages. Unlike the doctrines of Buddhism and especially Jainism, Vaiśeṣika does not urge all its followers to live the life of an ascetic, nor is the status of a householder very much looked down upon.

41 The period in which the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra-text took concrete shape (roughly 200 B.C.E. to 200 C.E., cf. above section 6.1.1) may have been largely parallel with the development of the Brahmanical integrated system of four stages of life or *āśramas* out of an earlier juxtaposition of different ways of life (cf. Olivelle, 1974; Bronkhorst, 1993b:11).



The name Vaiśeṣika would thus be meaningful as a characteristic not only of the ontological doctrine expounded in the system, but also of the socio-religious commitments of its exponents.

6.6 In the foregoing I hope to have showed that the search for synchronic explanations based on the context of the author of the Vaiśeṣika-Sūtra, the traditions to which he was committed, and the discourses in which he was involved is potentially fruitful. At many points, however, diachronic or 'genetic' explanations are still called for. In Praśastapāda's exposition we find that the doctrine of a highest God has received for the first time a definitive place in the system. Further, the categories play a different role in the Sūtra-text than in the system as expounded by Praśastapāda. The latter (or one of his predecessors) seems to have reformulated the system within a comprehensive framework of six categories; in the sūtras, however, the notions of 'particular' and 'universal' were not yet fully developed and neither these two nor the notion of 'inherence' was presented as a category (cf. Halbfass, 1992:273 and Professor Tachikawa on "The Concept of Universal in Bhāvaviveka's Writings" in his contribution to this conference).

7.0 Conclusion and discussion. Among those considering the Vaiśeṣika-philosopher's theoretical attitude towards reality as more fundamental to the system than his orientation towards liberation, Frauwallner has presented the most detailed elaboration of this hypothesis and has even proposed a reconstruction of the beginning of the sūtra-text in its light. In sections 3.1-3, the chronology of Frauwallner's reconstruction, according to which the beginning sūtras of the currently available versions of the Sūtra-text were added in the centuries after Praśastapāda, is confronted with a citation in Bhartṛhari's MBhD. The chronology turns out to be untenable (as pointed out earlier by Halbfass).

In the succeeding sections, it has been shown that, in spite of the persuasive force with which Frauwallner has depicted his reconstruction of historical periods in early Vaiśeṣika and connected it with historical data, the presuppositions and arguments at their basis remain highly speculative. A genetic approach is of considerable importance in Frauwallner's studies of Indian philosophy. This approach is in sharp contrast with the well-known neglect of the historical dimension in the Indian commentarial tradition.<sup>42</sup> Its

42 Cf. Keith, 1921:9; Halbfass, 1988:349-350. Frauwallner's attempts to place philosophical ideas in a chronological order, and to consider them understood if they can be



consistent application proved very useful for the explanation of numerous points in many systems and schools of thought including early Vaiśeṣika, which remained unclear in the Indian commentarial tradition. At times, however, it assumes the character of an easy explanatory device: that of imposing a reasoned linear and chronological order on an amorphous mass of data.

More specifically, the approach may have been rather unfortunate in the case of the perceived contrast between the Vaiśeṣika's theoretical attitude and his concern with liberation. Considered in the larger context of early Indian thought, the contrast evaporates, and confronts us with modern pre-suppositions regarding science and philosophy (a point emphasized earlier by Biarreau). With the evaporation of this contrast, the basis for the postulation of several developmental stages (a purely theoretically oriented first period, followed by stages in which *adṛṣṭa* is introduced and the doctrine of liberation adopted) disappears.

As for Frauwallner's thesis, it is only fair to repeat at this place that Frauwallner was very well aware of the methodological difficulties of his endeavours to reconstruct the development of early Vaiśeṣika. The detailed criticism of his reconstruction was only possible because of the systematic and scholarly way in which he applied his principles to an extensive, seemingly amorphous mass of statements, references, indications, incomplete and distorted expositions, and later reinterpretations of the Vaiśeṣika system.

Finally, the possibilities to develop an alternative interpretation of early Vaiśeṣika have been investigated, in which liberation occupies an important place from the beginning. Several contrasts in the system may be understood and explained in a global and synchronic way, without resorting to diachronic explanations of puzzling elements.

As a concluding observation, it may be said that both Frauwallner's approach and the suggested alternative have their strong and weak points. The danger in Frauwallner's approach is that the philosophy reconstructed by explaining all (alleged) inconsistencies as the result of an historical

placed in such an order, are characteristic for the Western approach to history and historiography, in contrast to the Indian ahistorical 'doxographic' approach. Indian philosophy offers an exciting field for applying the chronological method, because so much material is available which has not yet been ordered chronologically by the Indians themselves. However, even within the limits of the European context, the basis and universal validity of the chronological method are open to criticism; cf. Löwith, 1949 and Cesana, 1988. If insufficient attention is paid to synchronic connections, diachronic explanations lose their force.

development, is more ideal and systematic than the original ever was (and perhaps even substantially different on account of the difference in background and presuppositions of modern scholars). Moreover, this approach may lead to an 'inflation' of postulated historical layers. The danger of the alternative approach is that too many inconsistencies are accepted as original by adopting a great number of ad hoc explanations (somewhat like the much criticized Indian commentators).<sup>43</sup>

To steer a middle course between the Scylla of the one approach and the Charybdis of the other, one could propose that an ideal system may be postulated, but that contemporaneous discourses and competing systems may introduce asymmetries in the exposition. (Somewhat as in astronomy: the asymmetries in the courses of the visible heavenly bodies point to the presence of hitherto unperceived ones.) Thus, in the case of the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra, the special attention paid, for instance, to the status of *śabda*, which is disproportionate from the point of view of the system, is easily explained as the result of a contemporaneous debate (e.g. between Jainas and

43 In recent years, the method of Frauwallner and his school has been evaluated, defended and criticized on several occasions. Cf. e.g. E. Franco's review of H.S. Sakuma's *Die Āśrayaparivṛtti-Theorie in der Yogācārabhūmi* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1990) in IJ (forthcoming). In this review, Franco refers to the "Discussions on the respective merits of the traditional philological history of ideas approach versus the structuralist or holistic approach." In the course of his review, he contrasts Hacker's approach to Epic and Purāṇic texts with that of Biarreau, and L. Schmithausen's approach to the *Yogācārabhūmi* with that of P. Griffith (Hacker and Schmithausen representing the 'traditional philological history of ideas approach' and Biarreau and Griffith the 'structuralist or holistic approach'). Franco's conclusion is that "there is no real opposition between a structural or holistic approach and reconstructions of historical developments. The two (or more) methods of analysis can and need to be used in tandem towards a better understanding of Buddhist (and Hindu) texts."

Of interest in this context is also the anecdotal information about Frauwallner's methodology provided by E. Steinkellner in his review (WZKS 36 (1992):237-239) of T. Vetter's *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 1988). According to Steinkellner (WZKS 36 (1992):239), Frauwallner once said one should first try to grasp the system underlying a certain exposition and next interpret remaining inconsistencies as changes in the course of time. On the basis of the problems pointed out in the present article one would like to ask: can only historical changes explain the perceived inconsistencies in a system, or should one be equally willing to search for synchronic, structural or contextual explanations? The complement of this question is: did the system start off as an ideal, systematic philosophy, or rather as a complex whole which already contained certain (seeming) contradictions on account of the different discourses in which the founder(s) was/were involved? Both questions, of course, would apply as much to the reconstruction of the early Vaiśeṣika-system, as to the reconstruction of early Buddhism.

Brahmanical opponents), which may very well have been current when the Sūtra-text came into being. That is to say, on this point there is no good basis to postulate an even earlier historical layer, in which the system and its exposition would have been more symmetric and more 'ideal' (or more 'scientific').

### Abbreviations

- MBhD = Bhartṛhari's Mahābhāṣya-Dīpikā, edited by a team of scholars in Poona (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute), in seven parts (1985-1991).  
 PDhS = Prāśastapāda's Padārthadharma-Saṁgraha.  
 VP = Bhartṛhari's Vākyapadīya. Critical edition of the *mūla-kārikās* by W. Rau, Wiesbaden, 1977.  
 VS = Vaiśeṣika Sūtra. References to Jambuvijaya's edition (Jambuvijaya, 1961).

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