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Autor: Houben, Jan E.M.

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WHY DID RATIONALITY THRIVE, BUT HARDLY SURVIVE IN
KAPILA'S "SYSTEM"? ON THE *PRAMĀNAS*, RATIONALITY AND
IRRATIONALITY IN SĀṂKHYA (PART I)

Jan E. M. Houben, Leiden

*A study of the genealogy of objects reveals the fact
that perceptual meanings can become stabilized
but are never absolutely secure ...
If concepts could in turn be shown to grow
out of perception and therefore to reflect its
irreducible contingency, reason and order
would be neither prior to experience
nor guaranteed.¹*

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1 H.L. and P.A. DREYFUS in the introduction to their translation of MERLEAU-PONTY'S *Sens et Non-sens* (Paris 1948), Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964.

1. Introduction: three interrelated problems pertaining to rationality in Sāṃkhya

1.1. This paper deals with three interrelated problems, and I start with a warning: I am not suggesting or claiming that I can provide anything like definite solutions; rather, I will reflect on possibly fruitful ways of formulating and dealing with them.

The first problem is the one explicitly mentioned in the title: Why did rationality – distinguished by “the presence of reasoned argument for preferring one alternative to others”² – thrive, but hardly survive in Sāṃkhya? Two other problems are implicit in this title. The verb ‘to thrive’ presupposes degrees of realization, hence we arrive at the question: *to what extent* did rationality thrive, and at a later stage stop to thrive, in the Sāṃkhya-system? But then, if rationality is present only to a certain extent, the presence of irrationality is implied, and we are entitled to ask: to what extent and in what sense is *irrationality* important in the Sāṃkhya-system, in different stages of its development?³

1.2. Sāṃkhya, especially in its classical and post-classical forms but also pre-classical Sāṃkhya,⁴ has appeared to several Western observers as a system in which ‘rationality’ plays a remarkable role.

2 FURLEY 1973: 46. See further section 1.3 on ‘rationality’ and ways to characterize it.

3 In fact, three important notions in the title are highly problematic with regard to what we presently know about Sāṃkhya: first of all ‘rationality’ and ‘irrationality’ (as major terms in Western and modern philosophy where they are already problematic and controversial, applied to the philosophy of ancient South Asia) and next ‘system’ (i.e. Sāṃkhya as a philosophical system). In the course of our discussion each of these notions will be reflected upon and an attempt will be made to contribute to a ‘useful’ understanding of these notions with regard to Sāṃkhya.

4 I will here regard the Sāṃkhyakārikā (SK) and the commentaries up to the Yuktidīpikā (YD) as belonging to Sāṃkhya’s ‘classical period’; although the earlier but now lost Śaṣṭitantra seems to have functioned as an even more important classical Sāṃkhya-text till several centuries after the composition of the Kārikā, I will consider it here as a pre-classical text in the light of the further developments in Sāṃkhya at the end of the first and in the second millennium C.E (when only the Kārikā functioned as a widely accessible classical text).

Richard GARBE, author of the first major handbook on Sāṃkhya-philosophy (1894, cf. JACOBI 1895; 2nd ed. 1917), gave his work the undertitle: “eine Darstellung des indischen Rationalismus”. In GARBE’s book we find no proper justification for the employment of the term ‘Rationalismus’, which HALBFASS finds “somewhat misleading” (HALBFASS 1988: 282). But in an earlier article by GARBE, “Die Theorie der indischen Rationalisten von den Erkenntnismitteln” (1888), several considerations are given which are apparently to be regarded as reasons for calling the Sāṃkhya-thinkers ‘rationalists’: their system, according to GARBE, is one of “logical consideration and validation”, and it attempts to remain in accord with the empirical⁵; further, the system deals with what GARBE considers to be one of the most interesting questions, viz. the question of the relation between body and mind. In this latter regard GARBE presents Sāṃkhya as a kind of pre-scientific form of ‘psychophysics’ (reference is made to FECHNER and his work⁶).

According to Franklin EDGERTON (1924; 1965: 36) the term *sāṃkhya*, as used in the Mokṣadharmā and elsewhere in the Mahābhārata, does not primarily mean ‘calculating’ or ‘numerical method’ but rather ‘reasoning’; Sāṃkhya, then, is “the rationalizing, reflective, speculative, philosophical method” of gaining salvation.

Although FRAUWALLNER does not explicitly characterize Sāṃkhya as a rational or rationalistic system, he gives it, together with Vaiśeṣika, an important place in his first major period of Indian philosophy, which starts in Vedic times and ends when the old systems have practically died out at about the end of the 1st millennium Common Era (FRAUWALLNER 1953: 25 [1973: 15]). These systems, in which a highest God or a divine revelation have no significant role to play, are said to develop their theories in a scientific, presuppositionless way (FRAUWALLNER 1953: 26: “Ihre Lehren werden ... wissenschaftlich voraussetzungslos entwickelt.”). In

5 “ ... dieses System, [ist] nicht ein System tiefsinniger Spekulation, sondern ein *mananaśāstra* ‘ein System logischer Erwägung und Begründung’ im ausgezeichneten Sinne des Wortes ... welches besonderes Gewicht darauf legt mit der Empirie sich im Einklang zu halten” (GARBE 1888: 2).

6 Gustav Theodor FECHNER (1801-1887), a pioneer in experimental psychology, was the author of *Elemente der Psychophysik* (publ. 1860), which for many decades remained a standard work in the study of the human perception of physical stimuli. It was one of FECHNER’s ulterior aims to demonstrate the continuity or even unity of mind and matter.

FRAUWALLNER's second major period, systems become strong which are theistic and have a strong religious orientation. These are philosophically less significant. (FRAUWALLNER, *ibid.*).

In LARSON & BHATTACHARYA's *Sāṃkhya* (1987), the most recent handbook on the system, one of the main headings under which it is discussed is "Sāṃkhya as rational reflection" (1987: 83 ff.).

Rationality appears, finally, as a theme in the fourth problem area of this workshop, namely when it is asked whether the ambiguity between psychology and cosmology in classical Sāṃkhya is to be seen as "a leftover in a 'rational' system of less 'rational' concepts." It is also a theme in a paper entitled "Indology and Rationality," presented by Johannes BRONKHORST at a seminar last year in Pune (BRONKHORST 1997a, ms. p. 8-12⁷). Here too it is the ambiguity between psychology and cosmology in classical Sāṃkhya which is discussed. BRONKHORST questions the presupposition of some scholars that earlier, pre-classical forms of Sāṃkhya should be expected to be more coherent on points where the classical form appears to show inconsistencies,⁸ and observes: "Indeed, if we assume that a rational tradition came to be established in India some time during the development of pre-classical Sāṃkhya, we would expect more coherence the more we move forward in time" (BRONKHORST 1997a, ms. p. 9).

1.3. 'Rationality' is a difficult concept, even if one does not try to apply it to the Sanskrit philosophical tradition of ancient South Asia where a precise equivalent of the term was absent. This absence is in itself not a sufficient ground to refrain from reflecting on 'rationality' in the South Asian tradition. After all, also the ancient Greek philosophers, who "are generally taken to be the discoverers of rationality, or at least to have made the first giant steps on the path of rational inquiry into the nature of the universe"

7 Cf. BRONKHORST 1997b for some related points regarding the theme of rationality.

8 The immediate occasion for BRONKHORST's reaction is FRANCO's observation regarding the ambiguity between psychology and cosmology in classical Sāṃkhya, in the words of FRANCO a "somewhat confusing state of affairs" which is "certainly the result of a long historical development" (FRANCO 1991: 124). In FRANCO's argument one may recognize the method and presuppositions of FRAUWALLNER (attempting to understand contradictions within a system as arising from a historical development from an earlier and less contradictory stage). FRAUWALLNER's method has led to numerous convincing results, although there are cases where one may doubt its applicability (cf. HOUBEN 1995).

(FURLEY 1973: 46), lacked a proper equivalent to the term ‘rationality’ which is first attested (as *rationalitas*) in the Latin writings of Tertullian (2nd century C.E.).⁹ Moreover, if the notion of ‘rationality’ is associated with claims of being a general human faculty and of having universal validity – aspects which can be traced back to the Aristotelian concept of man as *animal rationale* – a confrontation with the South Asian philosophical tradition is unavoidable. If, conversely, ‘rationality’ is regarded as a culture-specific notion – if human ‘rationalities’ (in plural), including Western ones (also in plural), are thought to have only relative validity¹⁰ – there is all the more reason to confront and compare dominant notions of ‘rationality’ in Western philosophy with those in South Asian philosophy.

Because serious claims of ‘rationality’ with regard to South Asian thought, made esp. in the 19th century and afterwards, have remained quite controversial (cf. HALBFASS 1988, esp. pp. 263-309), it may be wise to begin with a generalizing approach rather than a culture-specific one, and start off with a relatively loose and general characterisation of ‘rationality’ as an attitude which accords a high value to the *ratio* – that is, to reason and reasoning¹¹ – in arriving at reliable knowledge.¹² In the course of our

9 Since Cicero *ratio* became the fixed translation of *lógos* (HOFFMANN 1992: 53), but the latter term covers a much wider range of meanings (cf. FURLEY 1973: 46) and has ‘linguistic’ connotations (*lógos* as ‘word’) where *ratio* has ‘calculatory’ ones (*ratio* as ‘calculation’) – just as, incidentally, the term *sāṃkhya* has ‘calculatory’ or ‘enumerative’ connotations (cf. *samkhyā* ‘number’).

10 In the work of one of the first to use ethnographic data to shock the self-confidence of Western rationality, Lucien LEVY-BRUHL – especially in his *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, which became highly controversial in the decades after its publication in 1910 (Eng. tr. 1926) – there appears a “deep-seated dichotomy between two alternative reality-constructs, thought-modes, ‘logics’, or whatever, one predicated on participation and the other on the rule of non-contradiction, which can be detected in varying proportions everywhere [including in Western culture]” (LITTLETON 1985: xliii). Cf. in this regard also GELLNER 1992: 30 on Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912, Eng. tr. 1915): “This is the book in which the ethnographic investigation of diverse human rationalities, in the plural, comes up against the philosophical inquiry into the generic human reason, in the singular.”

11 For now, we will neglect the various ways in which ‘reasoning’ was classified and standardized in *Sāṃkhya* – from the early and unrecoverable beginnings to the times when it was strongly influenced by developments in other South Asian philosophical traditions – and in the Western tradition.

discussion, our understanding of ‘rationality’ is then to be made somewhat more concrete with regard to the attested philosophical developments in South Asia. A philosophical system or school or movement may be regarded as ‘rationalistic’ or as ‘a rationalism’ if it makes it a matter of principle to accord a high value to reason and ‘rationality’ or reasoning.¹³ If this is genuinely the case, one may say that “rationality is thriving.” If reason and reasoning are severely restricted on account of other sources of knowledge such as tradition and perception (including divine, inspired perception), ‘rationality’ cannot be said to be ‘thriving’ any more.

This ‘rationality’ – and the same applies to ‘rationalism’ – is a coin with two sides. One may say: “be rational, don’t believe the earth is flat just because you see it flat.” And one may say: “be rational, don’t believe that the world was created in seven days just because the Bible says so.” In other words, one may be ‘rational’ vis-à-vis tradition, and ‘rational’ vis-à-vis direct perception. For the sake of my discussion I will accordingly distinguish these two sides of the coin as Rationality-A (vis-à-vis direct

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- 12 This knowledge may concern facts, situations or states of affairs: in that case there is theoretical rationality; or the knowledge may concern lines of action and the results expected: in that case there is practical rationality. These two aspects (cf. GERT 1995 on theoretical and practical rationality, and GOSEPATH 1992 on “Rationalität der Wünsche (und der Werten und Normen)” and “Rationalität der Meinungen”) may be distinguished but cannot be entirely separated, in the South Asian tradition with its frequent emphasis on liberation as the ultimate goal of knowledge perhaps even less than in the Western one.
- 13 This characterization of rationalism – unlike ‘rationality’ a relatively late term; its correlate ‘rationalist’ is attested not earlier than the 16th century, when it is contrasted with ‘empirical’ (GAWLICK 1992: 44) – is in harmony with the ‘moderate’ form of rationalism as a “position that reason has precedence over other ways of acquiring knowledge” (GARBER 1995: 673). The strong position “that [reason] is the unique path to knowledge” (GARBER, *ibid.*) was never seriously defended in the major South Asian philosophical systems; and even major rationalists in the Western tradition like Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz gave a definite place to sense experience and empirical enquiry. They were also, willingly or not, influenced by traditional knowledge (esp. the Christianity of State and Church). Cf. also BLACKBURN’s characterization of rationalism as “Any philosophy magnifying the role played by unaided reason, in the acquisition and justification of knowledge” (1994: 318), where the expression “magnifying” allows a restricted involvement of other sources of knowledge.

perception and empiricism) and Rationality-B (vis-à-vis tradition and traditionalism).¹⁴

In order to be able to apply our questions to the specific cultural and philosophical material of our enquiry, we will adopt an operational definition of 'rationality'. Making use of conceptual distinctions developed in the Sanskrit philosophical tradition, more specifically of the concept of the *pramāṇas* and their subdivision into *pratyakṣa* 'direct perception', *anumāna* 'inference', and *āgama* 'traditional knowledge' (*āptāgama*, *āptavacana*, or *āptaśruti*) also found in Sāṃkhya (SK 4-6), we can reformulate our characterization of rationality (from now on without quotes) as the attitude which accords a high value to *anumāna* in arriving at reliable knowledge.¹⁵

2. When and how did rationality thrive in Sāṃkhya?

2.1. Why did rationality thrive in Sāṃkhya? A complete and definitive answer to this question which asks for historical causes and motivations cannot be hoped for, but perhaps the phenomenon can be understood in more detail and we may be able to associate it with other developments and with facilitating or obstructing factors. So let us try to localize the phenomenon: when and how did rationality thrive in Sāṃkhya?

2.2. According to BRONKHORST in the paper quoted above, once a rational tradition gets established, one "would expect more coherence the more we move forward in time" (BRONKHORST 1997a, ms. p. 9). Indeed, BRONKHORST can cite an example showing that with regard to the problem

14 In the historiography of Western philosophy, rationality vis-à-vis empiricism and rationality vis-à-vis traditionalism are generally not only sharply distinguished but also separated. The South Asian tradition, in my view, allows and favors their association (like the two sides of a coin), even when they are to be clearly distinguished.

15 The mentioned *pramāṇas* seem to be primarily directed to providing knowledge of facts, situations or states of affairs. Yet, they have, perhaps secondarily, also a bearing upon knowledge concerning lines of action and the results expected, especially in Mimāṃsā, the system of 'Vedic exegetics', where 'traditional knowledge', under the name *śabda* which in this context primarily refers to the Vedic texts, is the most important *pramāṇa* (and where a few additional *pramāṇas* are accepted besides *śabda*, *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*).

of the ambiguity between psychology and cosmology in classical Sāṃkhya the 16th century author Vijñānabhikṣu clearly distinguished these two spheres (BRONKHORST 1997a, ms. p. 11).

On the basis of FRAUWALLNER's model, however, one would rather expect an early Golden Age of rationality followed by a period in which rationality steadily decreased. Although Vijñānabhikṣu's clear distinction between psychology and cosmology is more in conformity with a modern perspective, this cannot be a sufficient ground to maintain that the Sāṃkhya-system as presented by him was on the whole more rational than classical Sāṃkhya. As is well-known, Vijñānabhikṣu was first of all an adherent to a specific form of theistic Vedānta, and interpreted the Sāṃkhyasūtra on which he comments throughout in accordance with his religious conviction, even if he had to deviate considerably from direct statements in the Sāṃkhya-texts.¹⁶ In some respects, Vijñānabhikṣu's Sāṃkhya may be more rational and more coherent as a system, but the working of rationality is restricted and 'domesticated' as it is secondary and subservient to 'truths' (such as the existence of God, which is not even accepted by his immediate predecessors the Sūtrakāra and Aniruddha) imported from outside the system. Even if these externally based positions are regarded as independently rationally defensible, and even if Vijñānabhikṣu's 'scholastic' rationality in Sāṃkhya is valuable in its own right, this situation can hardly be characterized as a 'thriving of rationality' within Sāṃkhya.

2.3. Can we then say that rationality was thriving in classical Sāṃkhya? The main text we have at our disposal, the Sāṃkhyakārikā, gives, to speak with FRAUWALLNER, "nothing more than compact dogmatics."¹⁷ On the important subject of the *pramāṇas*, the SK gives only very brief characterizations. It mentions that *anumāna* is regarded as threefold, but only one kind (*sāmānyato dr̥ṣṭāt*) is briefly mentioned (in SK 6). Still, this kind of *anumāna* appears as a crucial one in the system, and the importance of *anumāna* and especially *sāmānyato dr̥ṣṭāt anumāna* is emphasized in the SK-commentaries and, much later, in the Sāṃkhyasūtra (SS 1.60, 103).¹⁸

16 Cf. on Vijñānabhikṣu's philosophy generally GARBE 1917: 101-105, DASGUPTA 1940: 445-495, LARSON & BHATTACHARYA 1987: 375 ff.

17 1958: 84[223]: "sie gibt nichts als eine knappe Dogmatik."

18 Cf. GARBE 1917: 214 ff.

This way the SK appears as an ‘in-house’ overview and didactic arrangement of the main Sāṃkhya doctrines¹⁹ which testifies primarily to a *preceding* period of philosophical activity in which an important place was accorded to rationality.²⁰ It is true that the *Yuktidīpikā* shows that this philosophical activity continued to some extent beyond the composition and spread of the SK.²¹ Other early commentaries on the SK, however, testify to a basically scholastic tradition lacking philosophical depth.²² A period in which Sāṃkhya rationality was thriving can therefore be located first of all before the composition of the *Kārikā*.

Roughly in the time when the SK and the earliest commentaries were composed, however, Sāṃkhya witnessed some other developments which are now only very dimly discernible. Vindhyavāsin, who may have been an older contemporary of the author of the SK, tried to answer several criticisms on Sāṃkhya uttered by thinkers from emerging Buddhist and Brahminical schools. In doing so, he was ready to adopt several important changes in the standard Sāṃkhya doctrines. Some time after the composition of the SK (which neglected several of Vindhyavāsins innovations), the Sāṃkhya teacher Mādhava introduced even more fundamental changes in traditional Sāṃkhya doctrines. Because these changes appeared too radical to his successors he acquired the name ‘destroyer of Sāṃkhya’. As far as the discussions and deliberations of these two Sāṃkhya teachers are (very indirectly) accessible, they seem to point not just to increasingly desperate attempts to rescue an outdated system,²³ but also to a period in which rationality is still genuinely the dominant *pramāṇa*, occupying a higher place even than the traditionally accepted doctrines of one’s own school and hence unavoidably leading to a considerable diversity in doctrine. The picture of diversity suits other

19 Cf. LARSON & BHATTACHARYA 1987: 149.

20 Cf. FRAUWALLNER 1958: 84[223]: “Wir ahnen noch das reiche philosophische Schaffen, das in der *Kārikā* seinen letzten Niederschlag gefunden hat.”

21 Still, from a passage such as that on the ‘impurity’ of Vedic rituals and the problem of killing animals (YD on SK 2b; cf. HOUBEN 1999), one gets the impression that the YD-author gave in considerably to Mīmāṃsā and traditionalists’ objections to the Sāṃkhya-position represented in the *Kārikā*.

22 Cf. FRAUWALLNER’s evaluations, e.g. 1958: 84[223].

23 This is mainly FRAUWALLNER’s way of representing this episode (FRAUWALLNER 1953). Cf. also LARSON & BHATTACHARYA 1987, where other relevant literature is mentioned.

indications on Sāṃkhya-teachers in the classical and pre-classical period. The Sāṃkhya doctrines underlying the Yogabhāṣya, for instance, are in some important points different from those summarized in the (probably somewhat earlier) SK. The ‘Sāṃkhya’ teacher Arāḍa who plays a role in the Buddhacarita or “life of the Buddha” of the 2nd century Aśvaghoṣa, professes again a somewhat different set of doctrines. Much doctrinal diversity also speaks from references to Sāṃkhya in the Mahābhārata. According to Hsüen-Tsang’s pupil Kuei-chi there were eighteen schools of Sāṃkhya: this may not have been too much off the mark even when the number eighteen is no doubt to be regarded as a literary convention.

As for the period before the composition of the Kārikā where a definite ‘thriving’ of Sāṃkhya rationality can be located, we are fortunate that FRAUWALLNER succeeded forty years ago in uncovering important fragments on epistemology of pre-Kārikā Sāṃkhya. These show that in a treatise of the pre-classical period, possibly the Śaṣṭitantra of (probably) Vārṣaganya which the SK claims to summarize, much space was devoted to *anumāna*, and that it was placed first in the sequence of the exposition (FRAUWALLNER 1958: 100 [1982: 239]). Direct perception and traditional knowledge²⁴ are also recognized as *pramāṇas*, but are discussed very briefly. This in itself can be taken as an indication, based merely on the external form of the exposition, that in the period to which the text belongs a very high value was attributed to *anumāna* in arriving at reliable knowledge.

Further, fragments which give diverging explanations of details in the Śaṣṭitantra seem to belong to commentaries on the Śaṣṭitantra, and one of the commentators is provisionally identified by FRAUWALLNER as Vindhyavāsin (FRAUWALLNER 1958: 102-115 [241-254]). Even if we probably have quotations from only two commentaries, their disagreement and detailed reasoning can be taken as an indication of ‘rationality at work’ and dealing also with central issues (this also appears from other information on Vindhyavāsin). As such these commentaries contrast with the early commentaries on the SK.

There is thus a strong suggestion of an earlier phase of Sāṃkhya in which rationality, at least in its aspect of *anumāna*, genuinely played a primary role. The dominance of rationality seems to have continued till some time after the composition of the SK. Within the system, *anumāna*

24 FRAUWALLNER 1958: 99-100 [238-239] and 122 [261].

was used to proceed from directly perceptible data to facts and situations which are beyond the reach of the senses. In this respect, one may speak of Rationality-A. As we have seen, also established doctrines within the system itself were subjected to critical consideration, and they were revised when this was thought necessary. To this extent also the presence of Rationality-B is felt in Sāṃkhya.

This gives a first picture of a thriving rationality starting in pre-Kārikā Sāṃkhya and continuing in the classical period. But the picture is still one-sided.

2.4. A quite different perspective on pre-Kārikā Sāṃkhya is provided by elaborate philosophical discussions in the twelfth book of the Mahābhārata, in a large section called Mokṣadharmā, to which already a brief reference was made. In addition, the value of Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita (esp. canto 12) as evidence for early Sāṃkhya should not be underestimated (as FRAUWALLNER tended to do²⁵). Since the date of Aśvaghoṣa is relatively well-established at the 2nd century C.E., we know when this author projected his image of the Sāṃkhya-hermitage in the life-time of the Buddha. This gives no argument regarding the existence of Sāṃkhya in the Buddha's time, but it does show how Sāṃkhya was depicted by an educated author for an educated public: as we may assume, it was depicted realistically according to the standards of Aśvaghoṣa's contemporaries with regard to details not directly concerning the wonderful capabilities of the young Siddhārtha searching for enlightenment.²⁶

The material in the Mokṣadharmā is both extensive and confused, with numerous similar and repetitious passages as well as inconsistencies and illogical elements. It abounds in doctrinal expositions and didactic stories, which are all directed towards the attainment of *mokṣa* or liberation, which is also the central aim of the exposition in the SK. There are numerous references to Sāṃkhya and to Yoga, Sāṃkhya-doctrines are explained, and several Sāṃkhya-philosophers are mentioned by name, the most important

25 Cf. FRAUWALLNER 1953: 473f [1973: 379f].

26 Because of the problems in dating relevant parts in the Caraka-Saṃhitā, this text will be left out of consideration.

of them being Kapila, Āsuri and Pañcaśikha.²⁷ The names Āsuri and Pañcaśikha also occur in the concluding Kārikās of the SK, which deal with the history of the system and where Kapila is referred to by means of his most frequent epithet, ‘the supreme seer’ (*paramarṣi*) in SK 69. In one of the stories in the Mokṣadharmā (211-212), Pañcaśikha is presented as overwhelming the 100 teachers of king Janadeva Janaka of Mithila by means of his logical reasoning.²⁸ Some amount of reasoning is obviously present and comes to the surface in this and other stories in the Mokṣadharmā, even though the context of the Mahābhārata as an epic for a larger public does not favor detailed representations of the relevant arguments. Thus the stories, in spite of narrative distortions, point to pre-Kārikā Sāṃkhya rationality in the establishment of realities which are not directly perceived, in other words a rationality-A.

But also another aspect of Sāṃkhya rationality is manifest in these stories. In a section in the Mokṣadharmā (248-267) we find discussions dealing with ethical problems (problems regarding lines of action rather than states of affairs), among them the problem of killing a sacrificial animal. These have been studied by Professor SCHREINER in 1979, and I myself am dealing with some aspects in another paper (HOUBEN 1999). The rejection of killing a sacrificial animal is defended in one story (MBh 12.260-262) by a certain Kapila, apparently associated with some form of Sāṃkhya, while an opponent defends the killing with reference to the Vedic prescriptions. Kapila takes a critical distance from Vedic knowledge, especially from Vedic precepts to kill animals (even if he denies to reject or denounce the Veda), and argues his case against a ‘traditionalist’, Syūmaraśmi.

In the Mokṣadharmā but also in the Sāṃkhyakārikā and its commentaries Sāṃkhya is generally associated with the recluse way of life,²⁹ even if the attitude towards the householder’s way of life is relatively

27 The name Kapila occurs quite frequently; Āsuri appears a few times as teacher of Pañcaśikha (e.g. in 12.306); Pañcaśikha plays a major role in some sections (12.211f, 306 ff; cf. S. MOTEGI’s contribution to this conference).

28 MBh 211.17 ... *jñātvā dharmajñānam anuttamam / upetya śatam ācāryān mohayām āsa hetubhiḥ* // In the ensuing exposition, Pañcaśikha explains and refutes the arguments of others and gives an account of his own views regarding the nature of life and liberation. Cf. S. MOTEGI’s contribution.

29 In the mentioned story of Kapila and Syūmaraśmi, Kapila is associated with “eine Philosophie, die einen Weg der Erkenntnis der individuellen Heilssuche anbot und –

positive³⁰ (apparently more than e.g. in early Jainism and Buddhism). The value of *ahimsā* ‘non-harming’ is very much emphasized. Aśvaghoṣa’s Arāḍa, teaching Sāṃkhya-like doctrines, is presented as a recluse who welcomes the acts of renunciation of Siddhārtha.

3. Circumstances and earlier phases of Sāṃkhya rationalism

3.1. With this we have localized a period in which rationality was strong in pre-Kārikā Sāṃkhya. If we want to understand why it was strong, we have to try to get information about circumstances and about earlier phases.

The doctrines found in the Mokṣadharmā differ on some important points from those propounded in the SK, and it seems likely that the former generally represent an earlier stage of development. In their attempts to disclose still earlier, pre-Mokṣadharmā forms of Sāṃkhya, scholars such as FRAUWALLNER and VAN BUITENEN have tried to reconstruct preceding stages from the different enumerations of basic elements in the Mokṣadharmā. It may be doubted, however, whether the variations which became synchronically associated in single recensions of the Mahābhārata can be used to reconstruct a diachronically earlier phase.³¹ Since, as we have seen, the diversity is to be attributed, at least to a considerable extent, to a dominance of rationality in Sāṃkhya – a dominance which gave no safety to traditional doctrines including those of Sāṃkhya itself – a historical reconstruction according to a strictly genetic model must be deemed to be out of place. The mentioned attempts at reconstruction show a one-sided focus on established doctrines in Sāṃkhya, while these cannot

wie es der Text andeutet – an eine asketische Lebensform gebunden war” (SCHREINER 1979: 302). The Yuktidīpikā on SK 2b shifts to a long discussion of the virtues and Vedic legitimacy of the recluse way of life (*saṃnyāsa*) (YD 35.9-42.7) after an explanation of the Kārikā statement that Vedic texts are connected with impurity.

30 Illustrative of this positive attitude is a verse attributed to Pañcaśikha: *pañca-vimśatitattvajño yatra tatrāśrame vaset / jaṭī muṇḍī śikhī vāpi mucyate nātra saṃśayaḥ* // (Māṭharavṛtti on SK 22 and elsewhere; cited and transl. in S. MOTEGI’s contribution). Pañcaśikha is himself presented as a wandering ascetic.

31 Here I generally agree with LARSON & BHATTACHARYA 1987: 116-117, although one cannot say that FRAUWALLNER 1953 and VAN BUITENEN 1957 directly “impose a linear development” on “a variety of parallel traditions developing.”

have formed the core of Sāṃkhya if rationality occupied the important place it apparently did.³²

It is further to be noted that the Mahābhārata is rooted in an oral tradition.³³ Pre-Kārikā Sāṃkhya did know important written texts: the Śaṣṭitantra of which FRAUWALLNER reconstructed a section was certainly committed to writing. But the stories and discussions in the Mokṣadharmā present themselves as belonging to a still primarily oral tradition. Even supposing one could penetrate to this oral basis through the insertions, omissions and distortions of several generations of transmitters of the text, it would be wrong to expect here the same word-by-word similarity in doctrine which one could expect to find in later periods in Sāṃkhya when e.g. the Śaṣṭitantra became a generally accepted authoritative text, and in the classical phases of other philosophical systems – a word-by-word similarity in doctrine on which elsewhere ‘religions of the book’ insist when judging for instance new publications, and on which they *can* insist only because of the rigid fixation of the religious doctrines in script.

For investigations of the relation between “features of ... religions [that have written texts on myth, doctrine and ritual] ... and the literary mode itself, the means by which religious beliefs and behaviour are formulated, communicated and transmitted” (GOODY 1986: 3), reference may be made to GOODY & WATT 1968, to the Introduction in GOODY 1968 and to GOODY 1986.³⁴ The comparison between Eurasian, literate religions and societies, and West African, mainly oral ones is continued in GOODY 1987 – where, however, the earlier published (1985) chapter on

32 A lack of interest in fixed doctrine is implied in EDGERTON’s understanding of *sāṃkhya* (in the MBh) as “a natural term to describe the method of gaining salvation by ‘knowledge’” (EDGERTON 1965: 36). The importance of reflection by oneself comes to the fore in a statement such as MBh 12.187.50: *evam eke vyavasyanti nivr̥ttir iti cāpare / ubhayam sampradhāryaitad adhyavasyed yathāmati* “Thus some are convinced [regarding a certain cosmological topic]. Others think there is *nivr̥tti*. Having considered both alternatives, one must decide as one thinks best.”

33 FALK 1993: 268-269; passages pointing to the use of script belong to parts which are generally considered to be rather young.

34 Cf. also BELL 1992: 166f note 270: “Goody has strongly argued for the role of writing and standardization in promoting universal values over particular and local values ... It has been argued that literacy causes unarticulated *doxa* of a community to give way to the formulation and authority of orthodoxy.” This may apply *mutatis mutandis* to a mainly oral, doctrinally diverse early Sāṃkhya vs. a later Sāṃkhya in which written texts have become more important.

the oral composition and oral transmission of the Vedas is inadequate, cf. the criticism of STAAL 1986, the critical presentations of GOODY's view in FALK 1993: 324 ff., and FALK's own well-considered position: FALK 1993: 284.

In the context of our discussion of the Sāṃkhya-tradition, it is to be noted that when the Buddhist canon was first committed to writing in about the 1st century B.C.E. (FALK 1993: 287), this appears to have been a novelty in the social and religious context of Buddhist and South Asian history. Within the ancient South Asian socio-cultural context the resistance to committing sacred texts to writing was greatest with regard to the central Vedic texts, as appears from remarks in Dharma-texts, and from testimonies of foreign visitors, esp. Yi jing (I-Tsing), 670 C.E., and Al-Bīrūnī, 11th cent. (FALK 1993: 288f). Even if in the course of time occasional efforts were made to write down the Vedas,³⁵ they were at the time of these visitors still primarily orally transmitted (FALK *ibid.*). Sāṃkhya's association or attempts to maintain good relations with (the "Schriftfeindliche") Vedic orthodoxy and the Vedic householder's orthopraxy, the oral features of early accounts of Sāṃkhya as found e.g. in the Mahābhārata – with an important role for stories and for numerically ordered doctrines and topics – all point to an important phase of mainly oral orientation in early Sāṃkhya. This must have had consequences for the modes in which rationality could manifest itself.

3.2. If a fixation on detailed similarities in doctrine is avoided, traces of a different continuity between Mokṣadharmā- & Kārikā-Sāṃkhya and earlier South Asian cultural forms can be observed. It concerns what we have called Rationality-B, rationality vis-à-vis tradition and traditionalism.

It may first be pointed out that a negative attitude towards killing in violence and a corresponding critical attitude towards the Vedas unites all relatively well-known forms of Sāṃkhya – Mokṣadharmā- and Kārikā-Sāṃkhya, the variety of Sāṃkhya reflected in the Yoga-Bhāṣya, most Kārikā-commentaries, later the Sāṃkhyasūtra with Aniruddha's and Vijñānabhikṣu's commentaries – and sets these apart from the other major

35 A date for the first time this may have happened is difficult to give: cf. STAAL 1986, BRONKHORST 1989; the inadequacy of the early Brāhmī-script for Sanskrit (FALK 1993: 284, 339) prevents in any case a pre-C.E. date.

systems of Brahminical philosophy, including Vedānta according to its main three commentaries (cf. HOUBEN 1999).

In a different textual context, several Dharmasūtras give rules for ascetics, and mention the virtues to be brought into practice. The Dharmasūtra of Baudhāyana mentions *ahiṃsā* and other items as virtues to be practiced.³⁶ In another passage (BDhS 2.6.11.9-29) the author gives a division into four orders or ways of life: the student, the householder, the hermit, and the ascetic (*brahmacārin*, *grhastha*, *vānaprastha*, *parivrājaka*). The passage is introduced and concluded with statements which show the disagreement of the author of BDhS with this division. Much attention is paid to the hermit (who should follow the Vaikhānasa rules), and even more to the ascetic to whom is accorded a very high status. One of the rules for the ascetic is that he should abstain from injuring living beings in word, thought and deed (2.6.11.23). The doctrine of the division into four orders is attributed to a Kapila, son of Prahlāda, who is further said to be Asura or Āsura (2.6.11.28).³⁷ Kapila's epithet Asura/Āsura may have something to do with the rejection of the division into four orders by the author, although the name Kapila is also strongly associated with the notion of a special, spiritual being (cf. Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad 5.2). While in the Baudhāyana-DhS and Gautama-DhS the division into four orders is, as rightly pointed out by OLIVELLE (1993: 83-94), not yet integrated into the exposition of Dharma, it is so in later Dharmasūtras such as Āpastamba and Vasiṣṭha.³⁸

36 BaudhDhS 2.10.18.2 gives *ahiṃsā*, *satya*, *astainya*, *maithunasya varjana* and *tyāga* as the five first *vratas*, and *akrodha*, *guruśuśrūṣā*, *apramāda*, *śauca* and *āhāraśuddhi* as five secondary *vratas*.

37 The name Kapila recurs in the Baudhāyana-Gṛhya-Śeṣa-Sūtra (cf. GONDA 1977: 589). Here, a section is found called *kapila-samnyāsa-vidhi* 'Kapila's rules for renunciation' (4.16). One of the mantras to be pronounced by the candidate is: "Fearlessness to all living beings from my side, svāhā!" (*abhayaṃ sarvabhūtebhyo mattas svāhā*, BGŚS 4.16.4).

38 It is unlikely that Gautama gave the long discussion of the division into four orders in chapter 3 only as something to be rejected in the last line, as OLIVELLE suggested (1993: 86). A much briefer reference would have sufficed for this simple rejection. The relatively detailed exposition is apparently adopted for the sake of completeness, even though the author definitely opposes some aspects such as the relatively high status accorded to the ascetic, and the possibility of an open choice between the orders when the student ends his period of study.

3.3. Apart from the name of Kapila, these brief passages show a continuity with the Mokṣadharmā- & Kārikā-Sāṃkhya in their emphasis on the importance of non-harming and in their association with renunciation, or, put differently, their distance from established Vedic ritualism which takes the householder as starting point.³⁹ If we can follow the suggestions in the texts and attribute the social-religious renewal of a fourfold division of orders with high status for the ascetic to an early Kapila, we may suspect here the result of tradition-independent considerations and decisions on the side of this Kapila. It can be seen as a reflection of an emerging rationality-B which in a more developed form persists in the well-known later manifestations of Sāṃkhya.

4. Why did rationality thrive, why did it stop to thrive in Sāṃkhya?

4.1. Having seen that rationality with its two sides A and B was strong in pre-Kārikā Sāṃkhya and having considered some possible earlier antecedents reflected in Dharma-texts, we may return to our first question: why did rationality thrive in Sāṃkhya?

The observation that rationality was relatively strong in early Sāṃkhya has been made, in varying formulations, by earlier scholars (as briefly indicated in 1.1). In pre-second world-war Europe, explanations for such large cultural phenomena commonly involved the notion of races and their inborn propensities and capacities. In Erich FRAUWALLNER's *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie* - part I (1953) – still unequalled as an introduction to Indian philosophy in historical perspective – the ethnic part was amputated from an earlier explanatory model,⁴⁰ but nothing theoretically convincing came in its place. Still in 1953 FRAUWALLNER suggested that the earlier phase of South Asian philosophy is more strongly influenced by the Aryan invaders, and hence tends more to developing theories in a scientific, presuppositionless way (1953: 26). In later times,

39 Cf. also OLIVELLE 1993: 90, 96-98. Another continuity may be perceived in the purpose associated with the ascetic life-style (cessation of births, BDhS 2.10.17.8), the rejection of (Vedic) rituals as rather futile and the praise of knowledge (BDhS 2.10.17.7). Cf. on the two major directions of early South Asian asceticism, each with distinct methods and purposes, BRONKHORST 1993.

40 Cf. FRAUWALLNER 1938 and 1939.

the indogenous South Asian element would have a stronger influence and make the philosophy much more religious in character. While FRAUWALLNER's division into two major periods seems acceptable, his suggestion for an explanation remains unsatisfactory: The number of Aryan immigrants was probably much lower than scholars have assumed earlier⁴¹; and intensive contacts, cultural and linguistic exchanges, as well as ethnic mixing, seem to have taken place already before the R̥gveda was composed, as has now been argued by several scholars, e.g. KUIPER 1991. These processes must have continued for centuries. In this light, it seems more likely that we have to search an explanation for the two distinct periods in philosophy and philosophizing in terms of social, political and cultural processes taking place mainly within South Asia.

One explanatory factor for an increasing importance of rational reflection which can question traditional customs and prescriptions applies also to the emergence of the very forms of asceticism with which it was apparently to some extent associated: developments in agriculture allow larger food crops (rice), which supports a growing population and leads to an increasing urbanization, esp. in the Gangetic plain (cf. ALLCHIN 1995: 329 ff., 339 ff.). This facilitates the emergence of monastic orders whose members can survive without an active contribution to food-production, and are free to follow the ascetic life-style of their choice, and to take distance from and reconsider established beliefs and social structures. This explanatory factor applies, of course, as much to the still quite hypothetical beginnings of Sāṃkhya-asceticism as it does to the better-known beginnings of Buddhism and Jainism, as well as to the on the long run less successful groups of Makkali Gosala, Ajita Kesakambali and others.

We see that the beginnings, if we can really locate them in Kapila's asceticism and his renewal of the social-religious system, were very modest indeed in terms of clearly discernible traces of rational reflection. Through the Mokṣadharmā we see a rising line which finds its climax in the lost Śaṣṭitantra. In the SK a more doctrinal Sāṃkhya has already started, though rationality remained dominant at least until the time of the 'destroyer of Sāṃkhya,' Mādhava. For some part of the early development, we see the rising line which BRONKHORST expected for the later period. This rising line and its start close to zero within an ascetic development associated with Brahmanism is a further argument against FRAUWALLNER's hypothesis of

41 Cf. ERDOSY in ERDOSY 1995: 3 ff.

a major influence of the Aryan invaders in philosophical thinking, since the latter hypothesis should make us expect very consistent and rational beginnings of early philosophical systems which later on deteriorate (this was indeed presupposed by FRAUWALLNER, also in the case of Vaiśeṣika, on which see HOUBEN 1995).

[end of Part I]

ABBREVIATIONS

BDhS = Baudhāyana-Dharmasūtra.

BGŚS = Baudhāyana-Gṛhya-Śeṣa-Sūtra.

MBh = Mahābhārata.

SK = Sāṃkhyakārikā. Ed. H.P. Malledevaru, Mysore 1982. Cf. also Wezler & Motegi 1998 (YD), App. II-III. Tr. Frauwallner 1992: 104-117.

YD = Yuktidīpikā. Ed. Wezler & Motegi 1998.

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