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SEEING, TOUCHING. COUNTING, ACCOUNTING. SĀMKHYA AS FORMAL THOUGHT AND INTUITION.

Luis O. Gómez, Michigan

Sāṃkhya and Yoga as Types or Styles

Louis DE LA VALLEE POUSSIN suggested in 1929 that early Buddhism was divided by two tendencies, which he assumed corresponded to monks that he characterized as “philosophers” and those he called “mystics.” He also spoke of these two groups as “schools,” and made other unsubstantiated remarks that were at best questionable. In developing these ideas he gathered textual evidence suggesting a distinction in early Indian Buddhism that could be compared to the *sāṃkhya-yoga* opposition of epic literature. This suggestion he developed further in two essays published in 1937. By then he was aware of a paper Franklin EDGERTON published in 1924. This paper supported DE LA VALLEE POUSSIN’s notion that *sāṃkhya* and *yoga* were modalities of thought reappearing in the Buddhist categories of *prajñā* and *dhyāna* (or *saṃādhi*). Both authors believed that these modalities of thought and practice were generalized styles that were manifested in the schools of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, and in a set of less specific Buddhist groups.

Comparisons between *sāṃkhya* and various aspects of Buddhist *prajñā* were also proposed by FRAUWALLNER (1953, 1971) and Richard ROBINSON (1970), who, in separate contexts, noted the peculiar symmetry between early Buddhist ways of classifying *dharmas* and the taxonomy of the cosmos in Sāṃkhya. ROBINSON also noted similarities between certain Yogācāra notions and Sāṃkhya categories and assumptions.¹

If there is in fact some underlying historical connection, it is not clear whether it is one between actual and discrete schools or one between cognitive modalities characteristic of a cultural milieu. In other words in the present state of our knowledge we cannot know whether the alleged similarities are due to “lower case *sāṃkhya*” or “upper case Sāṃkhya.”

Although one should exert caution in making any sort of facile comparison, and although one must also ask the extent to which such

¹ See also MUDGALA, 1975, and SINHA, 1983.

parallels can be extended to other Indian systems of thought, one is nevertheless compelled to wonder what sort of relationships obtained between Buddhism and *sāṃkhya* as a generalized modality of thought. Regardless of the way in which one may decide the issues of historical priority or influence, or those of doctrinal and social integrity of systems and modes of thought, one can recognize in *Sāṃkhya* and in certain Buddhist styles of thought a peculiar conception of truth as taxonomy, or at the very least of taxonomy as foundational of ontology. In this style of thought to count is to account for or, what may be more, to accept a canon of truths or real entities is to achieve control over or liberation from these realities.

The conception of truth as an ordering of categories, as an exhaustive labeling of all that is, is not foreign to Western philosophical analysis, where it is also a mode or a form of philosophical organization reflecting a human cognitive style, a clerical cognitive style: the need to count, classify and record, “to account for” by bringing order and taking stock in the manner of an accountant. This is a style, rather than a specific philosophical or scientific doctrine; but it may lead to specific forms of philosophical accounts of the world.

In India as well the characteristic contents of *Sāṃkhya* or *Abhidharma* as doctrinal systems were associated with *formal* peculiarities. The peculiar ways of onto-cosmological analysis and world construction are not only alternative systems of doctrine, but also alternative methods of thought. Some of the early western Indologists, armed with the youthful confidence of a new discipline conceived of an ancient, pre-Buddhistic *Sāṃkhya-Yoga*, a matrix for Indian philosophy generally (GARBE, *Sāṃkhya und Yoga*, 1896, etc.). But it is no accident and no *lapsus calami* that Richard GARBE called *Sāṃkhya* “*indischer Rationalismus*” (1894), or that his book *The philosophy of ancient India* was published in the United States in a series titled, “The Religion of Science Library.” For these earlier researchers assumed *Sāṃkhya* contained the germ or the model of rationalistic thought in India – serving to a certain extent as a case study in the transition from myth to proto-scientific thought.

What we today call *Sāṃkhya* and *Yoga* may not be the monolithic unbroken line of philosophical teachings conceived by GARBE, but under these terms both Western and Indian thinkers have correctly recognized modes of thought that may in fact be at the root of rationalism and human confidence in scientific reasoning. They may also represent an ancient

Indian dichotomy present also in Buddhism. So that, even if we reject the notion of a pre-Buddhistic Sāṃkhya school (THOMAS, 1933), we can still speak of *sāṃkhya* elements in Buddhism.

GUDMUNSEN (1977) observed the close parallels between *abhidharma* and the rationalist philosophy of Bertrand RUSSELL, suggesting a typology of ontologies in which the RUSSELL-*abhidharma* modality would be distinguished from the WITTGENSTEIN-*mādhyamika* style in ontology. Similar views had been expressed earlier by POTTER (1963) in his reclassification of the Indian systems of Philosophy. In light of his work one can add Sāṃkhya/*sāṃkhya* to the “rationalist” category. The arguments of POTTER and GUDMUNSEN are strictly limited to differences in ontology and epistemology, but their observations are reminiscent of the distinction proposed by Louis DE LA VALLEE POUSSIN.

One is tempted to think of *abhidharma* or *sāṃkhya* rationalist-realist ontologies in terms of “primitive classification.” I am reluctant to adopt such a category because of the obvious problems built into the word “primitive.” One encounters not-so-primitive notions in “primitive systems.” And one encounters rather “primitive” (if by that one means “fanciful”) notions in modern systems of classification. I would rather argue in a modified version of a Foucauldian argument, that primitive systems of classification are in a continuum with rationalist ontologies that attempt to account for the world with exhaustive categorizations of entities.²

A Close Reading of the Mahācunda Sutta

Without venturing too far into the uncharted waters of the origins of human classificatory instincts, I would now like to revisit the texts considered in DE LA VALLEE POUSSIN’s essays of 1929 and 1937 as a way to evaluate critically the notion that such texts can teach us something about the role of a prototypical *sāṃkhya-yoga* distinction, and the possibility that the polarity

² The perils of the concept “primitive” are well represented in the classical monograph *Primitive classification*, by DURKHEIM and MAUSS (1903). For a critique of the monograph, see the preface by NEEDHAM in the edition referenced in the Bibliography.

may represent a division in styles of thought characteristic of Indian culture.

The first text to capture the attention of DE LA VALLEE POUSSIN was the *Mahācunda Sutta* of the *Ānguttara Nikāya* (AN, 3, 355-356). The text distinguishes two types of monks (*bhikkhu*): namely, those devoted to doctrine (*dhammayoga*) and those who engage in meditation practice (*jhāyin*).³

Reverend sir, those monks among us who devote themselves to doctrine (*dhamma*) disparage the monks who [engage] in meditation practice, saying, “These people say: ‘We are meditators, we are meditators (*jhāyino ’mha jhāyino ’mha*).’ They meditate and then they meditate again (*jhāyanti pajjhāyanti*). But what do they meditate on? To what end do they meditate, how do they meditate?”

Thus, the monks who devote themselves to doctrine are not pleased with this situation, and the monks who [engage] in meditation are not pleased either. Nor are these [two groups] following a practice for the benefit of the many, for the happiness of the many, for the benefit and happiness of the gods and humans.

As one can easily predict, the text proceeds to make a similar statement regarding the meditators view of those who specialize in the doctrine:

Those monks among us who devote themselves to meditation practice disparage those that devote themselves to doctrine, saying, “These people say ‘We are dedicated to doctrine, we are dedicated to doctrine.’ They are proud, arrogant, restless, talkative, long-winded, lacking mindfulness, inattentive, lacking concentration, their thoughts wandering about, their sense faculties untamed. What is this dedication to doctrine? How are they dedicated to doctrine?”

Thus, the monks who devote themselves to doctrine are not pleased with this situation, and the monks who [engage] in meditation are not pleased either. Nor are these [two groups] following a practice for the benefit of the many, for the happiness of the many, ...

3 HARE, in *Gradual sayings*, 3, pp. 252-253, translates respectively: “dhamma-zealots” and “musers.” The first rendering is particularly problematic, especially since it biases the reader’s judgement, suggesting that these are zealots, and the “musers” are not. I take the term *yoga* in *dhamma-yoga* as meaning more “focused on doctrine,” and not “emotionally or irrationally attached to doctrine.” The reader may judge their behavior emotional and irrational, but the notion is not conveyed by the term itself. Notice that my rendering “doctrine” for Dhamma, has to be contextual and certainly provisional, or a solution of convenience.

In what appears to be an ironic or tongue in cheek “summary” of their respective positions, the text concludes the first part of the sutta with the statement:

And, reverend sir, those monks among us who devote themselves to doctrine only praise those monks who devote themselves to doctrine, not those that devote themselves to meditation, ...

And reverend sir, those monks among us who devote themselves to meditation practice praise only those monks who devote themselves to meditation, not those that devote themselves to doctrine, ...

The wording of this last quotation is particularly interesting because it is built around a common stock phrase that finds an echo in a *Mahābhārata* passage quoted by EDGERTON in his 1924 article, and later translated *in extenso* in his *Beginnings of Indian philosophy*. This epic echo states (MBh. XII.289.2):⁴

The twice born who follow *sāṃkhyā* praise *sāṃkhyā*, those who follow *yoga* praise *yoga*. In order to exalt their own position they proclaim their superiority by means of proofs (or arguments) (*kārana*).⁵

The similarity, however, is deceptive; for soon the plot thickens. The Pāli text does not validate the conflict between the two tendencies.

Therefore, reverent sirs, train yourselves (*sikkhitabbam*) so that you will think: “Though we continue to be devoted to doctrine, we will praise those monks who are devoted to meditation.” ... Why should you do this? Because these are indeed extraordinary (*acchariya*) persons, hard to find in the world, these persons who live touching the deathless with their bodies (*ye amatam dhātum kāyena phusitvā viharanti*).

But conciliation does not mean resolution. Note the different ending to the paragraph that follows.

Therefore, reverent sirs, train yourselves so that you will think: “Though we continue to be devoted to meditation, we will praise those monks who are devoted to doctrine.” ... Why should you do this? Because these are indeed extraordinary

⁴ Not all relevant passages could be discussed in this paper. Cf. also the following chapters in the *Śāntiparvan*: MBh. XII.293, 295, 304.

⁵ On the use of this term see MBh. XIII.163.2-9, where *kārana* is the opposite of *āgama*. Cp. also MBh. XIII.14.198, and HOPKINS, who translates “convincing proof” (*Great epic of India*).

persons, hard to find in the world, these persons who with discernment penetrate and see the profound meaning (*ye gambhīram atthapadam paññāya ativijha passanti*).⁶

The *Mahābhārata* passage likewise attempts a conciliation of sorts, yet maintains a sharper distinction between the two groups. On the one hand it declares that both styles of thought lead to the same goal (289.8-9):

Both of these ways of thought [lead to] knowledge (*jñāna*) approved by the learned, [because] both when followed... may lead to the supreme goal.

Purity and compassion to all creatures are the same in both; the keeping of vows is equal, but their perspectives (*darśana*) are not the same.⁷

But, on the other hand, their difference in view has been carefully established: (289.7)

The followers of *yoga* rely on direct perception (*pratyakṣa-hetavo yogāḥ*), the followers of *sāṃkhya* on the elucidation of accepted teaching (*śāstra-viniścayāḥ*).⁸ Yet I consider both of these ways of thought (*mata*) as true (*tattva*)...

The apparent parallelism is therefore undermined once one goes beyond the vague characterizations of EDGERTON and, especially, those of DE LA VALLEE POUSSIN. If one appeals to the facile, and ultimately vacuous, contrast between “mysticism” or “ecstasy” and “rationalism” or “speculation,” or even those of practice and theory, one sees that the distinctions are only superficially similar. A detailed critique of these analytic categories would take us too far afield. But a tabular comparison of the two sources discussed above should demonstrate the degree to which we stand before two distinct models.

⁶ HARE’s “deep way of the goal” for *gambhīram atthapadam*, is perhaps etymological but it is not transparent. Given the context, I assume that *attha-pada* refers to the one meaning of the teaching, but alludes indirectly to the more common sense of “meaningful word” (PTSD, *sub voce*).

⁷ In this passage *darśana* cannot refer to intuition or mystic vision, which is *pratyakṣa* in a preceding stanza (289.7 translate next in the main body of this paper). Here *darśana* is the theoretical style or stance that leads to understanding or realization, not the perception of ultimate reality itself.

⁸ Or, less likely, “the distinctions established in the treatises.” EDGERTON, 1965, p. 291, translates as follows: “The followers of Yoga rely on immediate (mystic) perception; the followers of Sāṃkhya rest on accepted teaching (i.e. ‘knowledge’).” I find his parenthetical explanations obscure.

Comparative Table:

	AN, Mahācunda Sutta	MBh, Mokṣadharma
object/goal		
	(dh) <i>gambhīra atthapada</i> (jh) <i>amata dhātu</i>	(s & y) <i>jñāna > paramā gati?</i>
means		
	(dh) <i>paññā</i> (jh) <i>kāya</i>	(s) <i>śāstra-viniścaya</i> (y) <i>pratyakṣa</i>
process and outcome		
	(dh) <i>ativijha passanti</i> (jh) <i>phusitvā viharanti</i>	(s) <i>śāstra-viniścaya > jñāna?</i> (y) <i>pratyakṣa > jñāna</i>

This Comparative Table shows the basic schema of path and goal attributed to the Buddhist monks devoted to doctrine [*dhamma-yoga*, abbreviated (dh)] and those devoted to meditation [*jhayin*, abbreviated (jh)], as compared to the contrasts among the followers of the method of *sāṃkhya* [abbreviated (s)], and the followers of *yoga* [abbreviated (y)].

The *Mahācunda* suggests the difference is between two types of perception (seeing and touching). The *Mahābhārata* passage suggests a difference between rational determination and perception. It is crucial to understand that whichever way these differences are understood they are all differences within communities of practicing religious specialists. To paraphrase the *Mahābhārata*, “purity and compassion to all creatures are the same in both; the keeping of vows is equal,” their differences are only in point of view or style.

But, the crux of the matter is that this difference in style raises important issues on the nature of religious conviction and self-representation – that is, on the nature of what is more commonly referred to as “religious experience.”

Two Traditions: A Close Reading of the *Kosambī Sutta*

In his later essay, Louis DE LA VALLEE POUSSIN noted the importance of several Buddhist canonical passages for our understanding of these contrasts. He again argued for a broad, generalized, distinction which he saw at the root of many doctrinal conflicts in Buddhism.

Of the passages considered by DE LA VALLEE POUSSIN, one stands out, by his own choice, as the most significant. This is the *Kosambī Sutta* of *Samyutta Nikāya*, 2, 115-118, an encounter between Nārada, Mūsila and Vasiṣṭha.⁹ The dialogue takes place at the Ghosita Park in Kosambī between two groups of monks. On one side is *Muṣila (Pāli, Musīla or Mūsila) accompanied by Vasiṣṭha (Vasiṣṭha), on the other are Nārada and Ānanda.¹⁰ In the *Samyukta Āgama* version, the passage reads as follows:¹¹

(98c3) The venerable Nāra[da] addressed the venerable Muṣila, saying, “Apart from belief, apart from personal preference, apart from hearsay,¹² apart from inference, apart from the conviction born of mental consideration,¹³ have you

⁹ Since the Pāli version of the text has been translated several times and was analyzed masterfully by the great Belgian scholar, I will limit myself to quotations from the version in the Chinese translation of the *Samyukta Āgama* – *Taishō*, ii, #99(351), 98c1 -99a5 – with only occasional references to the Pāli text.

¹⁰ De LA VALLEE POUSSIN chose as the title to his essay “Musīla et Nārada,” implying that these two characters represent two opposing styles or schools. However, it is not at all obvious that the contrast is between these two figures. In my view, Nārada is simply a literary conceit, a pre-text. Vasiṣṭha is the only authoritative voice (speaking presumably for the author of the sutta), and in fact the only voice expressing a position. Musīla is also more of a pretext than anything else. In the Chinese text, Vasiṣṭha is called Shu-sheng 殊勝 – an acceptable rendering of Sanskrit Vasiṣṭha. However, the *Taishō* editors render the Chinese as Saviṣṭha. In the absence of no sure way to know what some of these names may have been in the original Indic source, I have opted for using my best guess of what the Indic (Sanskritized) equivalents would have been. Nārada and Ānanda are certain, Vasiṣṭha likely, and Muṣila somehow speculative.

¹¹ The first of the two stock phrases in the quotation that follows is similar, but by no means identical with one found in AN, 1, 189 (the famous *Kālāma Sutta*, pp. 188-193), and 2, 191 (*Bhaddiya Sutta*, pp. 190-193).

¹² The Chinese, 聞, is ambiguous, and could mean either “listening,” “learning,” “memorizing.” But Pāli *anussava* suggests “rumor, hearsay.”

¹³ The interpretation of this phrase is problematic. The Chinese 見番諦忍, is probably a mechanical rendering of a Sanskritic **drṣṭi-vi-/pari-/ni-dhyāna-ksānti*, but perhaps **pratyavekṣana-ksānti*. On the basis of Pāli, *dīṭṭhi-nijjhāna-khanti*, however, it seems

actually known birth, have you actually seen birth, with your own realization and as it truly is, [and have you seen] that old age and death rise because of birth, and that without birth there is no old age and death?"

The venerable Muṣila replied: "Apart from belief, apart from personal preference, apart from hearsay, apart from inference, apart from the conviction born of mental consideration, I have actually known birth, I have actually seen birth, with my own realization and as it truly is, [and I have seen] that old age and death arise because of birth, and that without birth there is no old age and death."

In the Pāli version, Nārada asks the same questions over and over again, each time substituting one of the twelve *nidānas* in the chain of causation. In the Chinese, on the other hand, the only other member of the 12 *nidānas* is the paired term "old age and death." The questions end with a third permutation, this time on the cessation of the chain. To this Muṣila gives the expected answer:

Apart from belief, apart from personal preference, apart from hearsay, apart from inference, apart from the conviction born of mental consideration, I have actually known birth, I have actually seen birth, with my own realization and as it truly is, [and I have seen] that birth has been stopped, and that its cessation is nirvana.¹⁴

But then Nārada surprises us by demanding to know if Muṣila's realization means that he is an arhant:

(98c13) "Now, when you say 'that birth has been stopped, and that its cessation is nirvana' – does that mean that you are already at present an arhant, [one for whom]

reasonable to assume an underlying **dr̥ṣṭinidhyānakṣānti*, which, etymologically may mean "entertaining and accepting views." Still, this would not solve the problem. PTSD offers two contradictory renderings: under *ditthi*, PTSD suggests "forbearance with wrong views," but under *nijjhāna*, "delight in speculation." This is based in part on the PTSD's interpretation of the idiom *nijjhānam khamati*; but this was correctly challenged by EdgD, under *nidhyāna* (see also his discussion of *nidhyāna-ksānti*, under *ksānti*). The meaning seems to be: accepting or adopting (*ksānti*) a certain notion of truth (*dr̥ṣṭi*) based on an intellectual consideration. A *nijjhāna* is as much mental consideration and choice as it is a mental retention or the outcome of adopting an opinion, and hence, I prefer to see the compound in the present context as involving some sort of intellectual effort, including speculation and logical consideration of opposing views. PTSD also refers to SN, 4, 139, and to the *Kālāma* and *Bhaddiya Suttas* referenced above.

¹⁴ Or, "and I have seen that the cessation of birth is peace, nirvana." This alternative reading would agree with Pāli: *bhavanirodho nibbānan 'ti*.

the flow of karma has stopped completely?" The venerable Muṣila remained silent, he did not answer.

He was asked a second and a third time, but Muṣila remained silent.

This dramatic twist is of special interest because in the Pāli version Muṣila's silence is at best ambiguous, possibly a denial, whereas in the Chinese there is no question that Muṣila is as much dumbfounded as he is embarrassed. For, Vasiṣṭha declares, "You have been silenced. So I will now reply to Venerable Nārada in your stead." And Muṣila agrees, "I have been silenced. You reply for me."

But Vasiṣṭha repeats exactly what Muṣila had said before to the first two questions. Nārada then asks his last question: "[Are] you already at present an arhant, [one for whom] the flow of karma has stopped completely?" And Vasiṣṭha replies: "I declare that birth has been stopped, and that its cessation is nirvana. But I am not an arhant with outflows extinguished."

Nārada is not satisfied, he sees a contradiction in Vasiṣṭha's statements. Vasiṣṭha explains with a parable:

Imagine there is a water-well on a jungle path; but it has no rope and no bucket to draw water. Then, one day, a traveller approaches, consumed by heat and thirst. He comes to the well in desperation; but there is no rope and no bucket. He can see correctly that there is water in the well, he sees it as it really is, but he cannot touch with his body (不觸身).¹⁵

In the same way, I can declare that birth has been stopped, and that its cessation is nirvana, but that I am not an arhant with outflows extinguished.¹⁶

Again, the distinction is between seeing and touching, not between reasoning and mystical vision.

Exploring other canonical passages, DE LA VALLEE POUSSIN connects *jñāna* with seeing (or perceiving with discernment) and *dhyāna* with the actual experience of touching *nirvāṇa*. He also concludes that this distinction is synonymous with the distinction between *sāṃkhya* and *yoga*. But the conclusion is premature. In the above passages the "seeing" in

¹⁵ The Pāli uses an expression similar to the one we saw in the *Mahācunda Sutta*: *Tassa udakanti hi kho ṇāṇam assa, na ca kāyena phusitvā vihareyya*: "He would know the well has water, but he would not be in a position to touch it."

¹⁶ Pāli: *Evam eva kho āvuso, bhavanirodho nibbāṇan 'ti yathābhūtam sammappaññāya sudiṭṭham, na 'vam hi araham khīṇāsavo 'ti*.

question ranges from reflection and understanding to distant apprehension. In the *Kosambī Sutta*, it is a matter of seeing a particular structuring of the universe. The simile suggests an intuitive seeing, but it is still an incomplete experience. The contrast is not between the intellectual apprehension and the intuitive apprehension, but between all mental apprehensions and an experience in the body or the whole person: in short, a realization.

Proto-Abhidharma and the *Nikāya-Āgama* tradition

We should ask ourselves what is this *jñāna* that is being contrasted with *dhyāna*? Are we only discussing here the distinction between *darśana* and *bhāvanā*? Perhaps, but I do not believe this accounts for the whole discussion in the *Nikāya-Āgama* passages.

The issue is also one of a contrast between vision understood broadly, and *dhyāna*, which is clearly here not a vision. Under vision broadly, is the path as a way of structuring the world under the classificatory power of *abhidharma*, constructing reality into orthodoxy, as it were. But vision includes also attempts at apprehending reality under the claims of direct perception. In other words, within this category we may discover the conflict between *sāṃkhya* and *yoga* styles of cognition. It is true that *yoga* seeks realization and *sāṃkhya* engages in speculation. But *yoga* is also a bodily realization, and hence something more than *darśana*, something more than both intellectual apprehension and mystical vision.

We may speak of a structured path leading from orthodox dogmatic classification to the apprehension of those classifications as apprehension of truth (as the abhidharmic *prajñā* is based on the *mātrikās*). In the *Muśila* dialogue the issue is not the list, but what is to be done with the list. The fundamental proto-scientific insight continues to be fundamental and foundational. Limitations of space do not allow me to give detailed exemplification, but the *Nikāya-Āgama* literature abounds with passages in which a simple mapping out or enumeration of the components of reality and liberation is presented as tantamount to understanding and realization.¹⁷ In some cases, as in the *Udāna* account of awakening (*Udāna*, pp. 1 ff.), a

¹⁷ BRONKHORST (1985) has shown the extent to which the analytical truths of the *Nikāyas* correspond to *mātrikā dharma* lists in the abhidharma literature.

simple run-down of the Buddhist schema of evolution and involution, bondage and release, is considered to be an accurate description of the *content* of awakening. In these cases counting and recounting are accounting and making sense. In fact they are forms of describing realization.

At times, however, it seems like the texts recoil and balk. The *Samyukta Āgama* version of the Channa Sutta, for instance, distinguishes knowing from realization by suggesting that it is possible to know a dogmatic formula (*uddāna*) without understanding or realizing its meaning:¹⁸

And to every monk [he encountered] he pleaded and asked: “Please instruct me. Please teach me the Dharma. Please let me know and see the Dharma, that I may know according to the Dharma, that I may perceive according to the Dharma.”

Then every monk told Channa: “The body is impermanent. Sensations, thoughts and conceptions, habitual tendencies, and consciousness are impermanent. All compounded things are impermanent. All dharmas are without a self. Nirvana is peace.”

This is, of course, a dogmatic formula – presumably one known and recited by all the monks in Channa’s community. Channa balks, replying:

I already know this, that the body is impermanent, etc. ... Still I find no joy in hearing this, that all compounded things are empty, and at peace. I am unable to attain the extinction of craving, the abandonment of desire, nirvana. In this state, how will I know or see so that I can say “In this way I know, in this way I see”?

Channa’s reply suggests a difference between process and outcome. But the context of the exchange would also imply a distinction between the true understanding of meaning and the simple intellectual repetition of an account of reality. Yet the full understanding or realization can just as well take an intellectual form.

¹⁸ *Samyukta Āgama* [雜阿含經, *Taishō*, ii, #99(262), 66b-c]. This represents a different version or transmission of the *Channa-sutta* of *Samyutta Nikāya*, 3, 132-135. The Chinese sutra has no title, the protagonist is called 阿陀, which presumably represents *Channa or *Chanda.

Then Ānanda spoke thus to Channa: “This I heard directly from the Buddha, as he explained it to Mahā-Katyāyana:¹⁹ People of the world are confused and upset because they rely on two extremes – being and non-being. People of the world grasp at all the sense fields, and their minds hanker after them, become attached to them. Katyāyana, if one does not hold on to an ‘I,’ does not grasp at an ‘I,’ does not dwell in it, and does not hanker after it, then [one knows] it is [only] sorrow that arises when [sorrow] arises, and ceases when it ceases. Katyāyana, [one who knows this] has no doubt or hesitation about this; relying on no one else, this person is able to know by himself. This is called seeing correctly what Tathāgata has taught.

Why is this so? Katyāyana, if one sees correctly, as things truly are, the coming to be of the world, then one does not give rise to the view of the non-existence of the world. If one sees correctly, as things truly are, the coming to be of the world, then one does not give rise to the view of the existence of the world. Katyāyana, the Tathāgata, abandoning both extremes, teaches a Middle Way, namely, “When that cause exists, this arises; when this is born, this is born. That is to say, by depending on [the arising of] ignorance karmic conditioning arises, and so forth, down to the arising of birth, old age, illness and death and of the whole mass of grasping, affliction and sorrow. And also, that when that cause does not exist, this does not arise; when that ceases, this ceases.”

This is, in a nutshell, the “ontological Middle Way”: neither being nor non-being, but causal connection. Are we to assume then that this particular twist to the argument transforms a dogmatic formula into a revelation or into words of inspiration? At the very least, this new elaboration or reformulation is powerful enough to produce the desired effect:

When the venerable Ānanda had explained the Dharma in this manner, Channa the monk left behind the impurity of the world and abandoned the dust of the world, and he was able to purify the eye of Dharma. [He] saw the Dharma, attained the Dharma, knew the Dharma, gave rise to the Dharma. He surpassed all doubts. Without relying on another, he gained the fearlessness of a great teacher who teaches the Dharma.

Somehow, Channa has seen and he has attained. Naturally, this is not simply an internal event, a philosophical understanding, but a personal transformation that prompts both a deeper gratitude towards the teacher, and a sense of personal joy, in which both teacher and disciple share. But it is all the same described as an intellectual grasp or intuition.

¹⁹ The redactors are alluding to an encounter found earlier in the collection (*Samyutta Nikāya*, 2, 15-17 = xii.2.15). The pericope following the note reference above is almost a verbatim quotation from that earlier passage.

In this case we have a dichotomy between knowing and true understanding, but it does not presuppose any structural or formal distinction, or even a difference in style and method – on the contrary the difference seems to be one of doctrinal content.

Approaching a conclusion, I would argue that there is a Buddhist dichotomy that could suggest a generalized distinction, a common cultural opposition under which some forms of the *sāṃkhya-yoga* distinction fit. Nevertheless, this typology, like all cultural topologies should not be read stereotypically. In fact a nuanced reading of only a few passages has already shown how complex are oppositions between styles (and ideals) of knowing and realizing.

One is left with the impression that DE LA VALLEE POUSSIN was trying to escape the problems raised by the nuanced reading. By positing the modern Western contrast “extase et spéculation,” he is left with an opposition that is sharp enough to establish a clear dichotomy. But is the meaning of this dichotomy as clear as it seems? Are its two components accurate terms with a heuristic value? And, most importantly, are the two terms as well as the contrast valid for all the variations within the Indian context? I am very skeptical that any of these questions can be answered positively.

“Meaning and Making Sense”

The small sampling of texts considered here suggests a recognition of the difference between knowledge as a conceptually accurate account of reality and knowledge as grasping the meaning of, and making sense of reality. The latter transforms, but is not necessarily different in conceptual contents or rhetorical form from the latter. Intellectual intuition of Dharma can result in a transformative apprehension.

Knowledge is practice. It is as much a technology of self-cultivation as “ecstasy.” But it is, admittedly, of a different order. That India was willing to understand that the mere counting is something more than just listing, is something deserving our most careful reflection. For, it is precisely in the claim that analytical understanding is transformative that *sāṃkhya* and Buddhist abhidharmic thought contradict many modern expectations about religious experience.

This does not mean India made no distinction between certain forms of intellectual apprehension and the “practices of the body” – the latter are technologies of self that appear to transform by means that are not fully intellectual – the “ecstasy” or “mysticism” of DE LA VALLEE POUSSIN. But it does confirm what the most recent reflections on religious experience suggest: that “direct experience” and discourse are not necessarily mutually exclusive.²⁰ The complexity of the Buddhist position vis à vis “direct experience” also raises some questions regarding theories of the “origin” of Buddhism that assume the terms “mysticism” and “yoga” suffice to show an original, foundational experience (VETTER, 1986 & 1988).

The Buddhist suttas examined here do not make the distinctions as sharp, stable, and clear as DE LA VALLEE POUSSIN’s formulation would suggest. Even with a softer and more general reformulation of the distinction, I would think it inappropriate, and certainly of no heuristic value to speak of *sāṃkhya* in Buddhist canonical writings or in the *abhidharma*. Nevertheless, it may be of some help to our understanding of Buddhist doctrine and its development to continue to explore the connection between Buddhist ontology and the proto-scientific formalism that came to be known as Sāṃkhya. That is to say, we do not need to assume like the earliest researchers did, that a particular movement, or school, or lineage called Sāṃkhya influenced or begat Buddhism, or vice-versa. Nor do we have to assume a generalized cultural presupposition in the form of a dichotomy of this sort.

But we can learn much about Buddhism, and we can begin to rethink early Buddhism if we accept the fact that, for all its sophisticated theories of mind, early Buddhism, and early *abhidharma* are best understood as the High Tradition scholastic reworking of “folk systems” and prescientific systems of classification. That these systems are not amendable to a simple decoding such as the one suggested by MAUSS and DURKHEIM needs no further discussion. But as prescientific systems, one must continue to seek their sources in something more than a reasoned process of hypothesis formulation following a close empirical observation.

20 For a more radical formulation of this thesis, see SHARF, 1995 & 1998. Much more nuanced is the work of SCHMITHAUSEN (e.g., 1969 & 1982). Limitations of space do not allow me to do justice to these contributions.

It is a tendency to construct classificatory systems, categorization of reality, that account for reality and is believed to do so exhaustively. But it is also a categorization that can bestow power either through those technologies of self vaguely called “*yoga*,” or by a liberating insight born from understanding.

It is hard to imagine the development of *abhidharma* without this classificatory instinct. It is therefore reasonable to argue that the foundational, and I would argue instinctive desire to reckon, account, and depict, the desire to construct a model of the world and the self – in short the aspiration we may call lower case *sāṃkhya*, is indeed fundamental to Buddhist thinking and practice.

The style of thinking I have described as “counting” can be associated with personality traits and moments of cognitive adaptation that may, in their extremes, seem rigid. And they may very well be (SHAPIRO, 1965 & 1981). But we may be culturally predisposed to prejudge such styles. The passages considered cursorily in this paper advise more caution, and suggest that counting and accounting cannot be separated sharply from intuition, seeing or touching. *Sāṃkhya* and *abhidharma* are after all techniques of liberation (FORT & MUMME, 1996). A full psychological understanding of the connection between ordered accounting and intuitive understanding still escapes us.

The construction of ordered systems of classification and evolution is not science. However, it is fair to say that the style of thought represented by *mātrikā*, or by *abhidharma* and *sāṃkhya* (*in lower case*) is not merely an unexamined habit of thought limited to traditional, pre-scientific culture. It is at the heart of scientific aspiration for order. One could easily say of early Buddhist and non-Buddhist attempts at ordering the known world what is said by Stuart KAUFFMAN regarding the quest for the organizing principles of biological evolution (KAUFFMAN, p. 645):

... for all the known organisms on this branching river we call life, biology should aim ultimately to account for those essential features which we would expect to find in any recurrence of such a river. To suppose, as I do, that such an intellectual task may one day be achieved is ... to suspect with a quiet passion that below the particular teeming molecular traffic in each cell lie fundamental principles of order any life would reexpress.

ABBREVIATIONS

AN	<i>Āṅguttara Nikāya</i> , see MORRIS, et al.
EdgD	EDGERTON, Dictionary, 1953.
MBh	<i>Mahābhārata</i> , see Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
PTSD	<i>Pāli Text Society Dictionary</i> , see RHYS DAVIDS & STEDE.
SN	<i>Samyuttanikāya</i> , see FEER.
Taishō	see TAKAKUSU & WATANABE.

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