

King Vena--the Villainous

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THE SPLENDOUR OF TRUTH

Seeing Reality

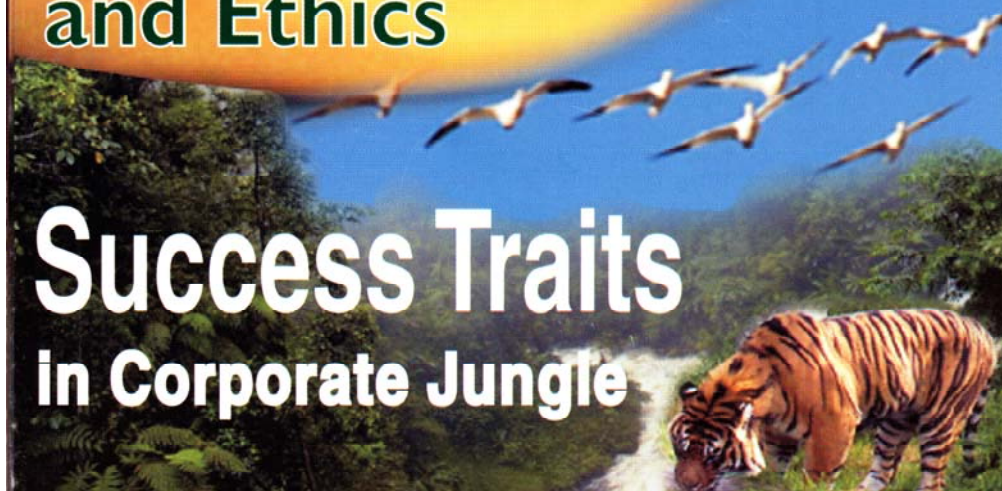
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Seeing Reality: The Darshanas*

by
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“There must be no barriers for freedom of inquiry. There is no place for dogma in science. The scientist is free, and must be free to ask any question, to doubt any assertion, to seek for any evidence, to correct any errors”

J. Robert Oppenheimer

Darshana simply means seeing. In fact Hindus often say they are on their way for a darshan (or Darshana) when they are visiting a temple. The implication is to “see” god in the deity they are about to worship. This word is also commonly used when they go see a holy person, or a village elder – meaning respectful visit. But Darshana as a philosophy is also “seeing” -- at a deeper level. This is seeing with a capital S. Seeing what? Seeing reality. Six different approaches to “see” have been recognized in the context of “Indian Thought” as ancient schools of philosophy.

The six schools of Darshana and the associated sages are:

- Nyaya Sutras of Gautama
- Vaisheshika Sutras of Kanada
- Samkhya Sutras of Kapila
- Yoga Sutras of Patanjali
- Mimasa Sutras of Jaimini
- Vedanta Sutras of Badarayana

These sages were not scientists and yet their studies fulfilled the rigor stipulated above by Oppenheimer centuries later and have survived in their earliest form expressed as crisp and concise aphorisms called sutras.

Sutras means strings. They represent, in context, pearls of wisdom on a string. Ancient Hindus defined two levels of reality. One reality is what you can sense, for example, see or touch. The book you are reading is real in the sense it is a physical reality. But a higher level of this is absolute reality which is defined as that which is not subject to change. Thus the book is not real in that context. Also in that context Hindus declare that this world is not real. Then what IS real? TRUTH is real. Truth does not change, decay or die. It was there before, it is there now and it will always be there. Thus seeing reality is the equivalent of seeing truth.

So the aim of the six schools of Hindu philosophy is to define the search for reality as the goal of life and to determine ways to reach that goal. They seek to know fundamental truths, truths of a metaphysical nature, and insist that these truths be realized by direct experience. The result is not just theory but a no-holds-barred approach to realization

based on understanding the external world and our relationship with it, distinguishing between appearance and reality. The goal is freedom or moksha: freedom from the burden of births and rebirths so that the individual soul can merge with the supreme soul once and for all.

Is there a rational basis?

The inquiry begins with doubting apparently evident beliefs. The Darshana philosophers refused to accept rituals, sacrifices and worship as prescribed in the Vedas unless such rituals were supported by a theoretical foundation which answered fundamental questions of life.

Clearly those who were bent upon exploring a rational basis for the philosophy of Hindus wanted debate and discussion. They were playing and playing hard at the boundary between faith and theology on the one hand and critical thinking and metaphysics on the other. And the Vedas were not exempt!

The cryptic early Sūtrās in the Darshana texts took additional commentaries to unravel and expand them to more intelligible messages. Nevertheless the Darshanas remain beyond the grasp of many and are inherently complex, requiring guidance from scholars.

By posing questions about the source of unhappiness, pain and misery of man in this world, and doubting “obvious” answers, the Darshana sages focused on defining the root cause/s. They found the answer. According their findings, the root cause of all human suffering is ignorance or false notions. Ignorance is, in their view, at the very source of our miseries. They insisted that acquisition of knowledge is the only weapon and powerful antidote against suffering.

The Darshanas developed in the post-Vedic and post-Upanishadic period. In attempting to provide as broad a base as possible, every conceivable variable relevant to Hindu thought was included to provide a firm rational basis for Hinduism: dharma, moksha, karma, prakriti, purusha, logic, truth, mind, matter, body, soul, self, death, atomic based material world and its composition, Vedic dictums, ...

The approaches seem to demand the impossible to attain the ultimate! If the ultimate goal is to attain salvation and freedom from cycles of births and deaths, then the vigor and the rigor of the efforts needed to match the anticipated result. And they seem to.

The inquiry indicates a high level of intellectual curiosity and debate regarding life’s persistent questions. The message appears to be: Don’t accept anything at its face value. Question it, doubt it, debate it, argue about it, and challenge it. And find the answer entirely by yourself. Do not depend upon anyone else. Use logic, develop an understanding of the most basic elements of the material world and distinguish between matter and spirit. Gain knowledge and be free.

A brief description of each school follows.

Nyāya

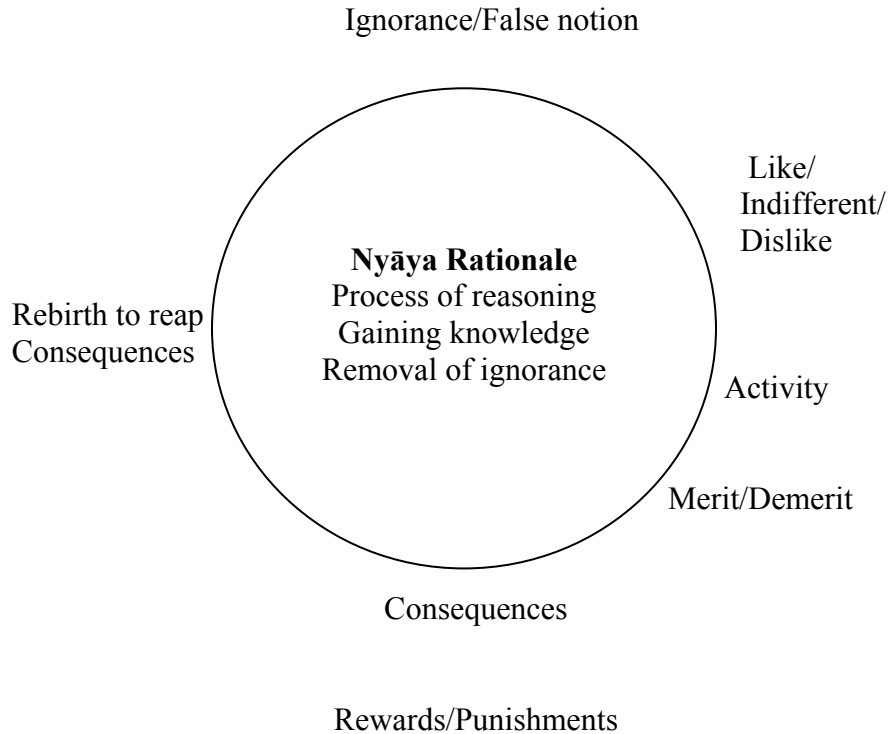
Nyaya is the science of logic and reasoning. Its goal is to obtain valid knowledge of the external world and its relationship with the mind and the self. Nyāya claims that one may rid oneself of all suffering by understanding and applying its technique to validate any proposition. It offers a set of tools to validate knowledge.

Nyaya provides a rational basis for the analysis of fundamental questions leading to attainment of moksha. The principal aphorism states

दुःख जन्म प्रवृत्ति दोष मिथ्याज्ञानानाम् उत्तरोत्तरापाये तदनंतरापायादपवर्गः

duhkha janma pravritti doṣa mithyājñānām uttarottarāpāyē tadanantarāpāyādapavarga:

Pain, birth, activity, faults and misapprehension – on the successive annihilation of these in the reverse order, there follows release. (Madan Mohan Agrawal, Six Systems of Indian Philosophy, Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratishthan, Delhi; 2001, p.3 Chapter 1). Short of this annihilation, man's sufferings in this world continue. This unending cycle may be illustrated as follows beginning with a false notion (about anything) arising out of ignorance and proceeding clockwise through the developments.



The very first topic in the very first Nyāya sutra addresses the methodology or the means (pramāṇa) for obtaining what it calls the right measure (pramā) of knowledge about a subject. How does one determine knowledge to be true and accurate? Nyāya recommends

four steps for this assessment. They are (a) perception by the senses (what do you see or hear etc.), (b) inference (what do you make of it?), (c) comparison (is there anything comparable in your experience?), and (d) verbal authority (are you aware of any testimony or trustworthy reference to support the perception?)

Among the above four, inference is further divided into five systematic logical steps and they are (a) hypothetical statement or proposition, (b) reason for the statement, (c) example that supports the observation, (d) application of the reason and (e) conclusion.

A simple example may be stated to illustrate the approach to inference.

- (1) A house on the street is on fire
- (2) Because smoke is visible in different parts at the roof level
- (3) Where there is smoke there is fire as during barbequing
- (4) This house is smoking
- (5) And therefore this house must be on fire.

Upon inferring thus, the analysis proceeds to compare with any earlier experience and any verbal authority to lead to a final conclusion. The core message is that one trains the mind to think logically to resolve an issue and draw rational conclusions; a rigorous alternative to mere believing – a scientific approach.

Other “topics” deal with a series of stages proposed by Nyaya for establishing or denying a proposition or dealing with a controversial issue and are listed below.

- संशय (*samshaya*) Express doubt about a proposition
- प्रयोजन (*prayojana*) Define the purpose or motive for discussing it
- दृष्टान्त - सिद्धान्त (*drishtānta leading to siddhānta*) Present an illustrative example leading to established conclusion
- Consider objectors' argument
- तर्क - निर्णय (*tarka - nirṇaya*) Consider a hypothetical argument or refutation of objection and ascertainment of the case
- वाद (*vāda*) Discussion
- जल्प (*jalpa*) Mere wrangling or disputation
- वितंड (*vitanda*) Caviling or refutation
- हेत्व आभास (*hetva-ābhāsa*) Fallacy in the cause or fallacious reasoning
- छाल (*Cchala*) Quibbling or guile
- जाति (*jāti*) Futile replies
- निग्रह स्थान (*nigraha-sthāna*) Putting an end to all discussion by demonstrating the objector's incompetence and noting the vulnerable point in the opponent's argument.

If some of these steps sound harsh and too overbearing, it appears they were meant to be.

The subjects of study recommended by the all encompassing Nyāya are the following:

- आत्मन् (*ātman*) Soul
- शरीर (*sharīra*) Body
- इंद्रिय (*indriya*) Senses
- अर्थ (*artha*) Objects of sense
- बुद्धि (*buddhi*) Intelligence
- मनः (*manas*) Mind
- प्रवृत्ति (*pravritti*) Activity
- दोष (*dośa*) Faults
- प्रेत्य - भाव (*pretya-bhāva*) Transmigration
- फल (*phala*) Consequences or fruits of action
- दुःख (*duhkha*) Pain

The development of this system is attributed to Sage Gautama (not Gautama Siddhartha, also known as the Buddha). The basis of this approach is to recognize that human minds are vulnerable to illusion and therefore to insist on logic to help distinguish truth from its opposite. So it teaches how to think logically and such training, if successful, should lead one to examine fundamental propositions and determine their validity. Conclusions in regard to any proposition, according to this school, are to be reached only through doubting, questioning, reasoning and arguments. With doubt as the driving force, it appears to suggest that one begins to sort out the illusions and reject them - logically.

Vaisheshika

While Nyāya provided tools to establish the validity of any proposition pertaining to reality, Vaisheshika focused on the reality of the physical world itself. According to this school, the most basic element in all material objects is the atom परमाणु (*paramānu*) which was considered to be indivisible, eternal (neither created nor destroyed) and extremely tiny (and therefore not visible to the naked eye and totally imperceptible to the senses). It is the combination of atoms that lead to substances which in turn lead to the physical world as we know it. The formation of the world through a series of integration of atoms, and the subsequent disintegration of the world through an equally vast disintegration of the atoms are believed to take place by the power of an unseen but extraordinary force known as अदृष्ट (*adrishta*). Monier (HINDUISM by Professor Monier Williams, London, 1906, p 192) posits that “this force becomes in Hindu philosophy a kind of god, if not the only god.” The essentially scientific reasoning used by Vaisheshika scholars to describe the physical world ties neatly to the presence of an unseen force that is critical to initiate the process of formation of that physical world.

The proponent of this school is known as sage Kaṇāda. According to Kaṇāda, atoms always existed, have no particular cause and are therefore eternal. Note the similarity

between this and the concept of soul in Hindu thought. Another similarity worthy of note is that each atom has a uniqueness of its own and it is this uniqueness known as Vishēsha that lends the school its name.

The more recent knowledge that the atom is indeed divisible and is itself made of even tinier components consisting of (1) a dense central nucleus of protons and neutrons which is around 20,000 times smaller than the invisible size of the atom itself and (2) surrounded by a cloud of electrons does not negate the main thesis of the school. What holds the “indivisible” atom together is now known to be an extraordinary electromagnetic force which is released when the atom is split leading to the current nightmare of nuclear bombs which plagues the world.

Samkhya

Unlike Nyāya and Vaisheshika which attempt to provide an analytical basis for what is, the school known as Samkhya, developed by sage Kapila, focuses on understanding the basics of how it all came about. The Sanskrit word संख्या (*samkhya*) derives from सम्यग् अख्यते (*samyag akhyate*) meaning an attempt to explain the whole. The aim is to consider the entire universe and our connections with it. An understanding of the Samkhya approach to reality begins with Prakriti, defined as the great producer. Sometimes the word nature is used to describe Prakriti but it is only one of the many meanings of the Sanskrit word. Another word commonly associated with Prakriti is matter. Nature and matter are useful in developing an understanding of the concepts inherent in Samkhya as long as one is aware that Prakriti is much more than that. The root word is प्रकरोति (*prakaroti*) meaning something that evolves or produces. It can be seen as a primal essence.

Prakriti is non-conscious, not intelligent, and is constituted of three materials known as Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. We may define the qualities of the material Sattva to comprise a host of highly desirable properties (qualities): awareness, happiness, gentleness, illumination, a certain lightness, etc. The qualities that govern a Tamas material are the opposite, comprising sloth, sorrow, roughness, obstruction, darkness, heaviness etc. And Rajas material possesses qualities that make it vibrant, full of activity, anxiety and pain. If you think that these qualities *in total* define life, you are on to Samkhya’s view of life. When these materials are in balance nothing happens and nothing is produced. But any unbalance is enough to motivate Prakriti to produce. Different entities (a clod of clay, a worm or a monk) are produced based on the magnitude and proportions of the three materials much the same way an alloy is produced depending upon the quality and quantity of each contributing base metal.

What is the source of any imbalance that sets a course for Prakriti to begin to produce? It is Purusha!

Purusha is pure spirit, pure consciousness, passive with no qualities attributed to it. Purusha is an absolutely neutral but extraordinarily powerful presence. It is simply there

with no feelings, no attachment, totally immune to pleasure and pain, and is inactive. Its mere presence causes excitation in Prakriti leading to an imbalance in the three materials which in turn leads to production of a great variety of entities. The level of induced imbalance depends on any experience present in the particular Purusha. Prakriti produces without any apparent *direct* aid from Purusha. The radiance of Purusha is all that is required. But the results are extraordinary leading to production of intelligence (buddhi), the “I” ness (ahamkara), faculties of action, thought, sense, subtle atoms and the gross elements (ether, air, fire, water, earth). There is an infinite number of individual purushās unlike the one prakriti. This is also unlike the concept of a single Supreme Soul and leads to the well-known concept called Dualism or Dwaita. If we look upon purusha as soul which has a subtle connection with a living body, *the living* comes about because of that connection. Devoid of the soul I and you are no different from a clod of clay!

Prakriti evolves and Purusha manifests. Science tells us that such evolution took thousands of centuries beginning probably with a single cell and reaching an age where humans as we know evolved.

The soul is everywhere like air. It is not bound by space and time. The soul in you is the same as the soul in me except for the different experiences of the two souls during our lifetime. Notice the word God never appears in the Samkhya thesis!

To the Hindu there is no death to the soul. It is the body that dies. The soul never dies.

नैनं छिंदन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः

नचैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः

nainam chindanti shastrāṇṇ nainam dahati pāvakaha
nachainam klēdayntyāpo na shoshayati mārutaha

The Bhavavad Gita II-23

Him the sword cannot pierce, Him the fire cannot burn
Him the water cannot melt. Him the air cannot dry.

Many a sage has declared that in its very essence the soul is free, unbounded, holy, pure, and perfect.

Yoga

Yoga Darshana, attributed to sage Patanjali, is based on the acknowledgement of a supreme being, a supreme soul as the only reality. The goal is to train body and mind to reach a level of perfection that helps the merging (union; true meaning of Yoga) of the individual soul with the supreme soul.

The first step is to train a healthy body to support and contain a healthy mind. A series of body postures (*āsana*s) have been developed to keep the body supple yet strong. This

system known as Hatha Yoga, is now very popular in the west. In the United States it is not uncommon to find, even in small towns, a yoga teacher with a few adherents. Many have trained directly under Indian gurus and are certified to offer yoga classes. Even mainstream health clubs now offer classes in yoga on a regular basis. The general trend is to be gentle in assuming the body postures and not strain the body unduly even though examples of extreme contortions of the body as practiced by a few easily get the attention of the press and the public.

Clearly Hatha Yoga can be practiced as beneficial physical exercise without any direct connection to a religious component. The only common connection with Hinduism, if any, comes about when the students may, at the end of the class, chant the familiar monosyllable Om!

Where Hinduism may come into play is in training the mind through meditation if Hindu prayers are offered silently or a focus is maintained on a chosen deity. Otherwise millions of non-Hindus who practice meditation choose to do so with a different focus. When Hindus meditate their goal is to train the mind to develop what is known as वैराग्य (*vairagya*) i.e. suppression of all passions. The method proposed is concentration on a chosen image or sound or on nothing. The goal is to empty the mind of all thought and attain a state of being at peace but still alert. This concentration is to be accomplished through restraint (Yama), rituals (Niyama), body postures (Asana), breathing techniques (Prāṇāyāma), control of senses (Pratyādhara), control of mind (Dharaṇa), contemplation (Dhyāna), reaching a state of trance (Samādhi). The message is that what we seek outside is already within us. So the focus is inward to both our body and our mind.

Mimamsa

Sage Jaimini insisted that the path to seeing reality was already clearly laid out in the Vedas. Rationalism and theism had no appeal for him. He claimed that neither reason nor a god was needed to see reality and therefore, in essence, the Vedas served that role entirely. A supreme being, according to Jaimini, may exist but is not needed for the purpose! Some have defined Hindus as those who accept the authority of the Vedas and this belief is rooted in Jaimini's assertion that the Vedas contain all that is necessary to

know and practice Dharma through the rituals prescribed there. Dharma is the focus in this system and the very first aphorism in his sutras clearly states: अथतो धर्म जिग्नासा (*athato dharma jignāsā*; "Next therefore is the inquiry into dharma"). He emphasizes the power of the mantras (words and their sounds combined in chanting) and lends credence to a Chinese proverb: "The echoes of a word once uttered vibrate in space to all eternity" (Monier, *ibid*, p 203). How true and how critical it is for us to think before we utter!

Notwithstanding its somewhat less than philosophical and I may add apparent unscientific character Mimamsa's aim is to raise and address doubts in regard to rituals and sacrifices. It delves into indentifying what it considers are apparent discrepancies in the Vedic texts and attempts to remove the same. "... every subject of is investigation is

explained according to a methodology which represents a high degree of logical skill in arrangement.” (See R. Garbe in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. VIII, p. 648, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1915). The methodology has parallels in Nyāya beginning with a statement of a proposition, raising a doubt about its correctness, discussing the erroneous approach to treating the question, refutation of the erroneous approach by what Mimamsa claims as a true argument and finally stating the result of the investigation. Thus it appears there is indeed a balance between its insistence that “the Veda needs no authority, but it is eternal ...” (Garbe, *ibid*), and its attempt to provide a logical basis in its quest.

Vedanta

Attributed to sage Badarayana, Vedanta Darshana appears to bring it all together. It means the end (culmination) of knowledge. It is based on the pantheistic creed so eloquently stated in the Chandogya Upanishad: एकमेव अद्वितीयं (*ēkamēva advitīyam*; one and only essence without a second). This fundamental belief is at play always and without this knowledge westerners may misinterpret the true spirit and meaning implied in the Hindu worship of many gods (polytheism).

Vedanta’s allegiance is to the One i.e. Brahman. The great sayings (mahavakyas) serve as the foundation of Vedanta: ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन् मिथ्य (*brahma satyam jagan mithya*) (Brahman is the reality, the world is false), सर्वं खलविदं ब्रह्म (*sarvam khalavidam brahma* i.e. All this is Brahman). That is why Swami Vivekananda declared “The living god is within you.” In this school there is no distinction between the individual soul and the universal soul. They are one and the same, leading to another great saying तत्त्वमसि (*tattvamasi*; Thou art That). This then is the basis for the philosophy of non-dualism (Advaita). The “That” represents at once सत् चित् आनन्द (*sat-chit-ananda*) or *sacchidaananda* (Existence, Knowledge and Joy) “but at the same time, without parts, unbound by qualities, without action, without emotion, having no consciousness such as is denoted by “I” and “Thou”, apprehending no person or thing, nor apprehended by any, having neither beginning nor end, immutable, the only real entity.” (See HINDUISM by Professor Monier Williams, London, 1906, p. 204). Monier quotes a Mr. Robson who noted a correspondence with the Christian belief observing “This is the Vedantist’s trinity, corresponding very remarkably with the Author of Existence (the Father), the Source of Wisdom (Christ, the word), and the Source of Joy (the Holy Spirit); ...”

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