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Satkāryavāda and asatkāryavāda

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Point of departure of this lecture will be the correspondence principle, i.e. the principle that the words of a sentence correspond, one by one, to the elements that constitute the situation described by that sentence. A full discussion of the historical background of this principle is not possible at this moment. For our present purposes it must suffice to state that the correspondence principle appears to have occupied the minds of all the best Indian thinkers for a number of centuries during the first millennium of the common era.

What is the problem with the correspondence principle? A simple example may explain this. In the case of a sentence like "John reads a book" it makes sense to assume that the situation described by this sentence contains someone called 'John', a book, and the activity of reading. The words of the sentence correspond, therefore, one by one to the elements that constitute the situation described. Put differently, the correspondence principle is valid here. It is not, and cannot be, valid in the sentence "John writes a book". The situation described by this last sentence, too, contains John and the activity of writing, but it does not contain the book. For the book is not yet finished. The same is true of sentences like "he makes a jar", or even "the jar comes into being". The situations described by these last two sentences do not contain the jar that is being made, or that comes into being. If it did, there would be no need to make the jar, or the jar would not have to come into being.

The correspondence principle clearly raises questions which it is not easy to answer as long as one holds on to it. Yet most [44] thinkers of the period under consideration appear to have accepted the principle. And many of them tried to deal with the problem of origination, which is the most obvious problem it evokes. Famous among them is the Buddhist thinker Nāgārjuna, who did not hesitate to conclude from the dilemma that nothing can come into being. Some followed him in this respect, even from among those who were not Buddhists. The *ajātivāda* of Gauḍapāda is a famous example. Gauḍapāda is considered— at least by the later tradition; many questions surround the historical person or persons who composed the works attributed to him — an early Vedānta author, the teacher of the teacher of Śaṅkara.

Yet most thinkers were not all that keen to deny the possibility that things can come into being. They had to find other solutions. They all had to find something in the situation described by the sentence "the jar comes into being" / "he makes a jar", to which the word 'jar' could refer. Many chose the universal, sometimes along with other things, such as the individual. The universal 'jar-ness' being eternal, it is already there when the jar comes into being, or is made. Others maintained that the jar is present in its causes, and therefore already there in a way while it is being made. This second position is known by the term *satkāryavāda* "the position according to which the effect exists [in its causes]". I do not think that the *satkāryavāda* was created, or invented, in order to solve the difficulties connected with the correspondence principle, but its appeal grew inevitably once these difficulties attracted general attention.

But not everyone accepted the *satkāryavāda*. Some emphatically resisted it, preferring the *asatkāryavāda* "the position according to which the effect does not exist [in its causes]". The Vaiśeṣika school of philosophy accepts this position.

How did Vaiśeṣika deal with the difficulties connected with the correspondence principle? After what I have said so far, its reaction is almost predictable. Vaiśeṣika does not accept that the jar is already there before it comes into being; that solution to the problem is consequently not open to it. Its ontology, on the other hand, does allow for universals. One would therefore expect a solution of the kind that the word 'jar' denotes — perhaps along [45] with other things — the universal. The word 'jar' in "he makes a jar" will have something to refer to, and the problem would be solved.

It is true that from a certain date onward Vaiśeṣika authors opt for this solution. The Padārthadharmasaṅgraha, or Praśastapādabhāṣya, does not however touch this problem, and nor does the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra. Since we have practically no other texts for the early period, one might be tempted to conclude that Vaiśeṣika authors have chosen this solution right from the time they became aware of the problem of origination. This position will however have to be modified in the light of some of the Vaiśeṣika points of view that have been preserved for us in the works of non-Vaiśeṣika authors, which inform us about the period before the Padārthadharmasaṅgraha.

Consider to begin with a passage from the Vibhāṣāprabhāvṛtti, a commentary on the Abhidharmadīpa, a text of the Buddhist Sarvāstivāda school. It attributes the following position to the Vaiśeṣikas:¹

¹ Abhidh-d ad kārikā 310, p. 274 l. 5-7: *vaiśeṣiko manyate: kapāleṣv avidyamānaṃ ghaṭadravyaṃ tantuṣu cāvidyamānaṃ paṭadravyaṃ kapālatantusaṃyogād utpadyate/ gaunīyā ca kalpanayā viprakṛtāvasthāviṣayā janikartṛsattā vyapadiśyata iti*. Le mot *viprakṛta* est obscur. The editor, Padmanabh S. Jaini, suggests an emendation into *viprakṛṣṭa* 'distant', but this does not improve much. Apte's dictionary gives *viprakṛta*, among other meanings, the sens 'opposed' which seems to fit more or less both here and two lines further down where the word is used a second time.

The Vaiśeṣika thinks [as follows]: The substance 'jar', which is not present in the potsherds [out of which it will be constituted], and the substance 'cloth', which is not present in the threads [out of which it will be constituted], come into being as a result of the contact between the potsherds and that of the threads [respectively]. And through secondary thought (*gauṇyā kalpanayā*) one speaks of the existence of the agent of coming into being, [existence] which has as object a state [of the jar] which is opposite [to the present].

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Mysterious as this passage is, it states quite clearly that the jar exists prior to its coming into being, thanks to a secondary thought. No further details are provided.

If this passage has whetted our appetite, a discussion in the *Dvādaśāranayacakra* of Mallavādin, and in its commentary the *Nyāyāgamānusāriṇī* of Siṃhasūri will give us further material to think about. We learn here that in Vaiśeṣika things that have come into being are called 'existing' because of a connection with the universal 'existence' (*sattāsambandha*). This connection with the universal 'existence' takes place at the moment of, or immediately after, their coming into being; it is the reason of the denomination and of the idea of the things concerned.²

Here the following question arises: Are objects completely non-existent before this connection with existence take place? According to Mallavādin, the Vaiśeṣikas give a negative answer to this question. Things do exist in a certain way before they come into being. True, they have no connection with existence at that moment, but they have some kind of essence (*astitva, svabhāva, svabhāvasattā*), which allows them to come into being. This means that even without connection with existence, a substance (or, for that matter, a quality or a movement) has an identity. The Vaiśeṣika, according to Mallavādin, goes to the extent of reinterpreting the expression *asat*, which normally means 'non-existent'. The Vaiśeṣika takes it as a *bahuvrīhi* compound, and interprets it to mean "that which does not have existence". The expression *asatkāryavāda*, seen this way, does not say that the effect is not there before it comes into being; it only says that it has no connection with the universal 'existence' as yet.³

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The main discussion takes place in the seventh chapter (lit. spoke, *ara*) of the *Dvādaśāranayacakra*. The *asatkāryavāda* of Vaiśeṣika is attacked right from the very first line:⁴ "If the effect is not present [in its causes], it would not come into being, for there would be no agent of the operation [of coming into being] at hand, just as [in the case of] a sky-flower. Or [alternatively,] also a sky-flower would come into being,

² DNC vol. 2, p. 459 l. 8-9: ... *sattāsambandho 'bhidhānapratyayahetuḥ*.

³ DNC vol. 2, p. 462 l. 3-5: *nanu asat ity atra nañā uttarapadābhidheyānivāraṇārthatvāt satpratiśedhārthatvāt katham asya sātmatvam? na, anekāntāt, aputrabrāhmaṇavad agunāgunavat/ yathā nāsya putro 'stīty apuro brāhmaṇaḥ nāsya guṇo 'stīty aguno guṇaḥ tathēhāpi nāsya sad ity asat/; cp. Siṃhasūri, DNC p. 460 l. 10-11.*

⁴ DNC vol. 2, p. 455 l. 1-2: *yady asat kāryam notpadyeta asannihitabhavitṛkatvāt khapuṣpavat/ khapuṣpam api votpadyeta asannihitabhavitṛkatvāt kāryavat/*

because there would be no agent of the operation [of coming into being] at hand, just as [in the case of] an effect."

This is, of course, the familiar problem, which is based on the correspondence principle. The Vaiśeṣika recognizes the problem, and maintains that the effect does not exist before it comes into being. However, there are two kinds of existence. The effect has no connection with the universal 'existence' (*sattā*) before it comes into being; but it is there, in a certain way — it has *astitva*. This is why the Vaiśeṣika answers:⁵ "Unlike the sky-flower, the effect, having come into being through its own *astitva*, becomes, even without the relationship of inherence with [the universal 'existence'], a support [for that universal]."

The opponent of the Vaiśeṣika then raises the question whether existence (*sattā*) makes existent that which exists, or that which does not exist, or that which exists and does not exist.⁶ It is here that the Vaiśeṣika observes that one can deny that substances etc. have a connection with existence, but not their existence [48] through their own form; the universal 'existence' does not, therefore make inexistent things existent.⁷

I will not bother you with all the passage in this long discussion that concern the state of a thing before it is connected with existence. I must however cite the following sentence, which Mallavādin ascribes to the Vaiśeṣika:⁸ "And the [object which is *asaṭ*] is not[, for that matter,] without identity, like a hare's horn. Even without connection with *sattā*, it is in our system like in another one, where *pradhāna* etc. have an identity." Elsewhere in the discussion the Vaiśeṣika recalls that *sāmānya*, *viśeṣa* and *samavāya* — all Vaiśeṣika categories — exist without having connection with *sattā*. But the comparison with the *pradhāna* of Sāṃkhya — for there can be no doubt that a comparison with the Sāṃkhya system of philosophy is made here — is stunning. For Sāṃkhya adheres to the *satkāryavāda*, and is therefore in many ways the exact opposite of Vaiśeṣika with its *asatkāryavāda*. The comparison shows that the Vaiśeṣikas to whose writings Mallavādin had access came dangerously close to the position of the Sāṃkhyas where they tried to solve the problem of origination.

A very important question remains to be discussed. If the Vaiśeṣikas maintained that things exist in a certain way before they come into being, can one determine the beginning of this half-existence? Are they there from beginningless time, as the

⁵ DNC vol. 2, p. 456 l. 1-2: ... *āśrayisamavāyād ṛte 'pi kāryaṃ svenaivāstītvenotpannam āśrayo bhavati khapuspavāidharmyeṇa ...*

⁶ DNC vol. 2, p. 459 l. 1-2: *iha prakṛtīṣu sattāsambandhāt satām vā asatām vā sadasatām vā dravyādīnām satkarī sattā?* Similar criticism in the *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā* and *Tarkajvālā* of Bhāvaviveka; see Tachikawa, 1994: 898.

⁷ DNC vol. 2, p. 460 l. 1-2: ... *dravyādīnām sattāsambandhaḥ pratiśidhyate na tu svarūpasadbhāva iti sattā naivāsatām satkarī.*

⁸ DNC vol. 2, p. 462 l. 6-7: *na ca tad api nirātmakam śaśaviṣṇavat, sattāsambandhād ṛte 'pi yathā parapakṣe pradhānādīnām sātmatvatvaṃ tathehāpi syāt.*

Sāṃkhyas believed? To my knowledge Mallavādin and Siṃhasūri's discussions offer no answer to this question. We may find the answer in another early text, the Yuktidīpikā, which comments upon the Sāṃkhyakārikā. Around kārikā 9 this text contains a discussion with a Vaiśeṣika on the *satkāryavāda*. Where it presents the argument that one cannot make something [49] that is not there — an argument which we are familiar with — it puts the following words in the mouth of the Vaiśeṣika:⁹ "But the effect is made by the agent etc. in the intermediate time. Which is this intermediate time? The answer is (follows a verse): They call 'intermediate time' the time during which the causes have started to do the work, until the production of the effect."

I conclude, be it with much caution, that the preexistence of something that is going to come into being is not without beginning. This passage from the Yuktidīpikā suggests rather that this preexistence starts when the different factors that contribute to produce the effect, i.e., to make the jar, start fulfilling their various functions. The intermediate time is neither without beginning, nor momentary.

Two questions remain to be asked in connection with the preceding observations. First of all, what is in general the relationship between words and things in Vaiśeṣika? Since the correspondence principle presupposes a close link between the words of a sentence and the elements that constitute the situation it describes, this question is of some importance. The second question to be asked concerns the literature of Vaiśeṣika in which the positions just described were originally expressed.

First the relationship between words and things. In a recent article I have argued that Vaiśeṣika is to a large extent based on four axioms.¹⁰ Two of these axioms are of special interest in the present context. In Vaiśeṣika composite objects are looked upon as real, as real as their constituents, and as existing alongside them. The vase is different from the two halves that it is composed [50] of; together they constitute three entities. The Vaiśeṣikas, moreover, present a list of categories which constitutes, in their opinion, a list of all there is. The question is: how could the Vaiśeṣikas find out what filled their world?

Their answer is directly relevant to the theme of this lecture. It is: the Sanskrit language. The Sanskrit language allowed them to find out what exists. Words are for them the key that gives access to reality. This they explain by pointing out that names

⁹ YD p. 52 l. 16-21: *āha, nanu ca madhyame kāle kartrādibhiḥ kāryaṃ kriyate/ kaḥ punar asau madhyamaḥ kāla iti? āha:*

*ārambhāya prasr̥tā yasmin kāle bhavanti kartāraḥ/
kāryasyāniṣpādāt taṃ madhyamaṃ kālam icchanti// iti*

yadā hetavaḥ pravṛttārambhā bhavanty uddīśya kāryaṃ na ca tāvan naimittikasyātmalābhaḥ samvartate sa madhyamaḥ kālaḥ/ tasmīn kriyate kārakaiḥ kāryam iti/ Cp. Motegi, 1994: 815 sq.; Motegi draws attention to the fact that the reading *kāryasyāniṣpādāt* in the verse is an emendation which deviates from the manuscripts.

¹⁰ Bronkhorst, 1992.

were given by seers who could perceive everything.¹¹ This in its turn [51] explains why the Vaiśeṣika texts frequently emphasise that this or that ontological situation justifies this or that current expression. The quality *pr̥thaktva* (separateness), for example, explains that people speak of distinction. Sometimes the reasoning works in the opposite direction: the fact that the personal pronoun "I" cannot be used in apposition with some such term as "earth", proves that the soul is different from the body. Many further examples could be adduced to illustrate the parallelism between words and things from the Vaiśeṣika point of view, but they tend to be rather technical; I will not, therefore, harass you with more of them.¹² But I would like to add one more observation: even though the texts are not explicit about this, the conscious belief in the intimate connection between words and things may explain why the three most important (and perhaps oldest) categories of Vaiśeṣika — substance (*dravya*), quality (*guṇa*) and movement (*karman*) — correspond to the three main types of words: nouns, adjectives and verbs.

These considerations show that Vaiśeṣika takes a close connection between words and things for granted. This makes it all the more understandable that the principle of correspondence exerted a strong attraction on them.

We now turn to the other remaining question. Which were the Vaiśeṣika texts in which the positions outlined above found expression?

The oldest clearly understandable and unitary Vaiśeṣika text which we possess is the Padārthadharmasaṅgraha of Praśastapāda, which I mentioned earlier. I am tempted to believe that this text belongs to the sixth century of the common era, and I have the

¹¹ *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* (ed. Jambuvijaya) 2.1.18-19: *saṃjñākarma tv asmadvīṣṭānām liṅgam/ pratyakṣapūrvakatvāt saṃjñākarmaṇah/*. See also Wezler, 1985. The theme of seers who have given names to things is already present in the *Rgveda* and other early texts, as we have seen. Other texts take over the same theme. The *Yuktidīpikā* (ed. Pandeya, p. 5 l. 9 f.) ascribes the original function of naming things to the supreme seer (*paramarṣi*), who is, of course, Kapila. The *Mahābhārata* (12.262.8), probably inspired by the *Nirukta* passage cited earlier, states that the seer Kapila had an insight into the nature of things (*pratyakṣadharma*); the *Mahābhāṣya* (ed. Kielhorn vol. I p. 11 l. 11 f.) uses the same expression (here *pratyakṣadharman*) in connection with seers known as *yarvānas tarvānas* (so Cardona, 1990: 7 and 16 n. 24). The *Nyāya Bhāṣya* use the same expression as the *Nirukta* (*sākṣātkṛtadharman*) with reference to "reliable persons" (*āpta*); see Franco, 1994: 241. See further Ruegg, 1994, 1994a; also Bhartrhari's *Vākyapadīya* 1.37-38; 3.1.46; Houben, forthcoming b. Isaacson, 1993, has drawn attention to the fact that yogic perception has played a role in Vaiśeṣika from an early date onward. The idea that poets have a special insight into the nature of things was to have a long life in India. Rājaśekhara, the author of the treatise on poetry called *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* (9th or 10th century C.E.), observes in chapter 12 (p. 62, l. 17 - p. 63, l. 1; tr. Granoff, 1995: 364): "The true poetic eye, gained from propitiation of the goddess Sarasvatī, without need of external aids reveals things that have been directly experienced by the poet and things that the poet has never even experienced before, in a process that is beyond the range of human conception and cannot be described in words. For it is said that the goddess Sarasvatī reveals even to the sleeping poet both the theme of his poem and the language in which to express it. But others though awake are as if blind. For this reason it is said that really great poets are blind to things that have already been seen by others, but possess a kind of divine sight that enables them to perceive that which no one before them has ever seen. Even the Three-eyed God Śiva or Indra with his thousand eyes cannot see that which mortal poets see with their ordinary eyes. In the mirror that is the mind of poets the whole universe is reflected. Words and what they express vie with each other in their rush to be present to great minded poets. Poets explore with their words that which yogins see through the power of their religious accomplishments. And so the words of great poets are potentially infinite."

¹² See Bronkhorst, 1992: 99 f., for these and other examples.

impression that most researchers would more or less agree with this date. Besides the Padārthadharmasaṅgraha we have a short text, that has only survived in Chinese translation, and which may have been called Daśapadārthī; it is unfortunately too short to derive much information from it. And then there is, of course, the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra. The Vaiśeṣika Sūtra is the oldest [52] Vaiśeṣika text we possess, and I am tempted to think that it is the earliest Vaiśeṣika text that ever existed. It, or rather its earliest version, must date back to the early centuries of the common era, for Vaiśeṣika is already referred to in the Buddhist Vibhāṣā.¹³ Unfortunately the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra which is known to us is not identical with its earliest version. Five versions have been preserved,¹⁴ all of which share features that belong to a time well after the beginning of the system. Sūtras have been added and removed, and even the order of the sūtras appears to have occasionally been changed so as to allow of a different interpretation.¹⁵

It is not clear until what date modifications were still introduced into the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra. Certain is that a long time separates the earliest version of this text from the Padārthadharmasaṅgraha. And it is also becoming more and more clear that during this period much happened to the system. The sūtra that enumerates qualities, for example, has just seventeen of them. The Padārthadharmasaṅgraha, on the other hand, enumerates twenty-four qualities. Among the added qualities we find sound, and there is indeed evidence that early Vaiśeṣika looked upon sound, not as a quality, but as a substance, a form of wind.¹⁶ Another example concerns the creator god: the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra contains no trace of a creator god, in the Padārthasaṅgraha he has assumed his position. We even have the evidence from the Yuktidīpikā and from the Vedāntin philosopher Śaṅkara to the extent that early Vaiśeṣika did not accept a creator god, whereas later thinkers of the school did.

Most of these changes were not introduced into the system by Praśastapāda. The idea of a creator god may be an exception; here there is some reason to assume that Praśastapāda himself [53] may have played a crucial role.¹⁷ Most of the other developments must have found their earliest expression in a number of texts that have existed during the long time that separates the original Vaiśeṣika Sūtra from the Padārthadharmasaṅgraha. Of most of these texts even the names will probably forever remain unknown to us. About a few of them, however, we have some little information. One is a commentary written by Praśastapāda, the author of the Padārthadharmasaṅgraha. The other is the one on which he wrote a commentary, and

¹³ Uī, 1917: 38 f.

¹⁴ Three versions were known, accompanied by the commentaries of Candrānanda, Bhaṭṭa Vadindra and Śaṅkara Miśra respectively; two more have been brought to light in Harunaga Isaacson's recent doctoral dissertation (1995).

¹⁵ See Bronkhorst, 1995.

¹⁶ Bronkhorst, 1993a.

¹⁷ Bronkhorst, 1996.

which appeared to have been well-known in its time. By collecting the various testimonies in the texts of other schools, I have come to think that this text was called Kaṭandī, and that its author was known by the name Rāvaṇa. The Kaṭandī was itself a commentary, on the Vaiśeṣika Sūtra, and it was written in the so-called vārttika-style, which explains that we sometimes find references to *vākyas* and *bhāṣyas*; the vārttika-style is characterised by the presence of short nominal *vākyas* followed by somewhat more elaborate explanations called *bhāṣyas*.¹⁸

This Kaṭandī (or whatever may have been its name) appears to have been an authoritative text for quite some time. It is indeed the text to which Mallavādin constantly refers while describing and criticizing the Vaiśeṣika position. It seems likely that also the other texts we have referred to — the Buddhist Vibhāṣāprabhāvṛtti and the Sāṃkhya Yuktidīpikā — based their information concerning Vaiśeṣika on this text. However this may be, it seems probable that the problem of origination did not play much of a role, if any, during the time of composition of the original Vaiśeṣika Sūtra, and that it came up at a later time, perhaps for the first time in the Kaṭandī, or already before this text.

I have already pointed out to you that later Vaiśeṣika came to adopt a solution to the problem of origination that was quite different from the one offered (if I am right) in the Kaṭandī. Later Vaiśeṣikas joined the Naiyāyikas in thinking that the fact that words refer to universals solved that problem. Once this solution accepted, the complicated distinction between two forms of [54] existence, and the attempt to use it to answer the question of how something can come into being, became superfluous, and the weaknesses of the earlier solution, such as its vagueness (when exactly does the pre-existence of a jar begin?), could not but contribute to its decline. The earlier solution was not just refuted, worse, it was forgotten, and no one talked about it any more. I do not exclude that this change of position of the Vaiśeṣika thinkers is responsible for the fact that the Kaṭandī and its commentary by Praśastapāda, once the main works of the school, soon stopped to be handed down. Praśastapāda's Padārthadharmasaṅgraha, on the other hand, does not touch the question of origination; is this the reason that it continued to be handed down in a fairly large number of manuscript copies until today? It is hard to prove these suspicions, but I would like to suggest, in conclusion, that the loss of philosophical texts may in certain cases have been occasioned by the fact that points of view changed.

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¹⁸ Bronkhorst, 1993.

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Abbreviations:

Abhidh-d	Abhidharmadīpa with Vibhāṣāprabhāvṛtti, ed. P. S. Jaini, Patna 1959 (TSWS 4)
DNC	Dvādaśāraṃ Nayacakram of Mallavādin, with the commentary Nyāyāgamānusāriṇī of Simhasūri, 3 parts, ed. Muni Jambuvijaya, Bhavnagar: Sri Jain Atmanand Sabha (Śrī Ātmānanda Jaina Granthamālā no. 92, 94, 95), 1966, 1976, 1988.