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Karl H. Potter

University of Washington

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INDIAN PHILOSOPHY'S ALLEGED RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION*

by

Karl H. Potter

Generalizations about the genius of Indian philosophizing as contrasted with Western ways of thinking have been not infrequently set forth in the past few decades. These contrasts have, to the best of my knowledge, until very recently been based on the assumption that there is a peculiarly close relation between what goes on in Indian philosophy and the religious motivations of the Hindus and Buddhists who produced that philosophy. Such an interpretation was apparently accepted without question by the earliest Western expounders of Indian philosophy, and has been endorsed by generations of influential Indian scholars such as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who writes: “Philosophy in India is essentially spiritual.”1 (I refrain from adding other citations; they are so numerous it seems unnecessary to do so.) Many contemporary writers accept this interpretation of Indian philosophy, though they may differ in their attitude toward it. For example, Ninian Smart’s main argument in a recent book is that “the main determinants of the metaphysical systems (of India) have been religious . . . .”2 Smart’s book seems predicated on the need for that thesis to be demonstrated. Agehananda Bharati, however writes “That there is no de theologized philosophy in India is a fact hardly anyone would dispute . . . .”3

Despite Agehananda’s confidence, however, something of the sort has been questioned in a number of recent publications. Some of these come from the pens of Marxist writers. For example, Professor N. P. Anikeev, of the Institute of Philosophy in the Academy of Science, USSR, points to three “false notions in bourgeois literature” on Indian philosophy. These notions are (1) that “for India . . . the worldly life . . . is only a . . . step forward towards ‘spiritual enlightenment’ ”; (2) that “for India the ultimate reality can be realized only through mystic intuition”; and (3) that “Indian philosophy . . . is totally indifferent to scientific methods of objectivity studying the external world . . . .”4 Anikeev proceeds to argue that Western scholars of Indian philosophy have taken two distinct attitudes toward what they have mistakenly supposed to be the nature of Indian thought. Some, such as the German philosopher-scholars Arthur Schopenhauer, Max Muller and Paul Deussen, “try to ennoble (its) idealistic philosophy as the highest attainment of the spiritual culture of India.”5 Then there have been those like Hegel who, “on the contrary, consider that Indian philosophy, because of its religious and mystic aspiration, does not deserve any serious attention.”6 Anikeev recognizes a group of more insightful Indologists, including “most of the Russian Indologists of the older generation,” who see through the fallaciousness of the spiritualistic reading of Indian philosophy and who “endeavor to concentrate attention on its rational teachings.”7 Sometimes, he complains, this sort of scholar goes to the other extreme, fancifully claiming scientific breakthroughs for Indian thought. Marxist scholars, he suggests,

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because of their willingness to recognize the materialistic elements in Indian philosophy and assess them appropriately, are in a unique position with regard to this field of study. Anikeev hints that the inability of many European scholars to recognize materialism in Indian philosophy is connected with their imperialistic leanings. One might expect him to say, though he doesn’t, that in the case of Indian scholars their manner of reading Indian philosophy is related to the privileged caste and class status of these scholars, who are generally members of castes high in the hierarchy.

Support for the Marxist line of interpretation is provided in a recent work by an Indian Marxist Indologist, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya. In his book *Indian Atheism: A Marxist Analysis* Chattopadhyaya shows in great detail that outside of the Vedānta systems of the last millennium or so the Indian philosophical systems have without exception been at least initially either agnostic or frankly atheistic. Indeed, he argues, the common position on the part of traditional Indian philosophers was that God is a myth and not a salutary one at that. As Chattopadhyaya reads it, those philosophers did not fully carry out their mission, “which could have been nothing but the full eradication of the idea of God from the Indian mind,” so that “the idea of God survived—and survived in a big way—all the philosophical considerations urging for its rejection.” What the classical philosophers lacked, Chattopadhyaya suggests, was a method of showing how to outgrow the need for the notion of God. Since Marx provides that method, Chattopadhyaya concludes, “the real inheritors of (the Indian philosophical) tradition can stop nowhere short of the acceptance of Marxism.”

Marxists are not the only writers who have recently called the traditional interpretation of Indian philosophy into question. Dale Riepe, for example, in his book *The Naturalistic Tradition in Indian Philosophy* rehearses a story about the history of Indian thought which resembles Chattopadhyaya’s. He seeks to show the presence of what he calls “naturalism” in the non-Vedāntic systems, arguing that it can be discerned in all of those systems but “was nearly totally replaced by various forms of idealism which tried to make pleasant an imaginary life when the natural one was frequently intolerable.” Riepe believes that there is nowadays a “naturalistic revival in India” the history of which “is still to be written although its green shoots are visible everywhere.” Elsewhere Riepe has attacked what he takes to be a more traditional approach, in this case that of the present writer, for underestimating the importance of materialistic philosophy. He writes that “He (Potter) presupposes that Indian philosophy may be interpreted without actual recourse to its cultural moorings,” and that “instead of giving us the cultural clues that might explain Indian philosophy, Potter defends the old ethical-individualistic interpretation.” In contrast to the approach to Indian philosophy as the source of *philosophiae perennes*, an approach whose probability of success he rates as slight, he counsels a socio-historical approach, e.g., by asking “why is the classical tradition being neglected (in India)?” a question whose answer requires “the rudiments of a philosophy of history and considerable information in the area of the sociology of knowledge. Otherwise one is reduced to the impotence of psychical determination and the mystification of the idealistic and spiritual-
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Historical history of ideas." 17

Similar reflections are found in the writings of the contemporary Indian philosopher Daya Krishna, once again commenting on the present writer's book among others he considers mistaken in their approach. In two articles 18 he indicates a number of "myths" about Indian philosophy. The fundamental one, he argues, is the notion that Indian philosophy has primarily to do with spiritual liberation or moksha. This notion, he declares, "is treated as axiomatic by almost all who write on the subject. It seems to require no proof for its establishment." 19 Yet Daya believes that it does require proof, and that such proof cannot be successfully provided. He concludes:

\[ \text{Moksha, then, is not the exclusive concern of Indian philosophy. Nor is it its predominant concern, either. Many of the thinkers and many of the schools are not concerned with it even marginally. Many others are concerned with it only in a peripheral manner. There are very few with whom it is a major concern and even they are concerned with it only in a philosophical manner. The propagandistic statements by classical writers in the course of their works, along with the failure to note that moksha may give rise to genuinely philosophical problems as much as anything else, have created the myth that Indian philosophy is intrinsically and inalienably concerned with spiritual liberation and not with what may be called philosophical problems proper. It is time that the myth be dispelled and Indian philosophy be treated seriously as philosophy proper.} \]

If my recapitulation of the arguments and positions of the several writers reviewed does not itself show it, more extensive consultation of their writings indicates that a number of distinct issues are involved here. The confluence in thought of, among those I have mentioned, a non-Indian Marxist, an Indian Marxist, a non-Indian non-Marxist and an Indian non-Marxist might give the impression that a widespread revolution is occurring among scholars of Indian philosophy. At the least, we might say, there is some tendency on the part of Marxists to attempt a take-over of the subject, a tendency which is supported in various ways by contemporary philosophers writing about Indian philosophy who are not, at least avowedly, themselves Marxists. I think the impression of a consolidated position on the part of these writers is a misleading one, that several distinct issues need to be untangled, and that the right approach is more complicated than the simplistic "revolution in scholarship" interpretation would allow. It may be worthwhile to make the effort here to untangle some of these matters and to explore a bit more deeply some of the most interesting of the issues raised.

The general thesis of all four of the writers whose views I have characterized might be summarized as involving the denial of Radhakrishnan's remark about Indian philosophy being "essentially spiritual." The tangle begins to be evident when one considers the several senses or aspects of the meaning of "spiritual" against which our four writers are reacting—senses or aspects which may be related but which are quite distinct on the face of them. I want now to separate
some of these meanings and to consider the question afresh in connection with some of the strands. Some of the issues thus elicited turn out to be both easily stated and relatively easily settled; others are easily stated, but not so easily settled; and still others not even easily stated.

The terms "spiritual" and "religious" are used in this sort of discussion without any very specific distinction in their respective scopes of application. One of the easily stated and relatively easily settled issues has to do with a standard Western meaning of "religious", namely "theistic". The kind of scholarship on Indian philosophy which Chattopadhyaya controverts attempts to read into Indian philosophies a general tendency towards theism, so that questions about the nature and existence of a supreme being bulk large in the alleged concerns of Indian philosophers. Chattopadhyaya convincingly shows that if one counts noses among the classical philosophical systems, using plausible principles of differentiation, one comes up with the finding that the vast majority of those systems were at least initially agnostic or atheistic. Thus, providing one slices into the history of Indian philosophy at a suitable moment, say, the second century A.D., one finds that the major systems extant at that time—Sāṃkhya, Mīmāṃsā, Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika, Jainism, the several schools of Buddhism, and Čārvaka—are none of them theistic. It is of course important that one slices at the right point in time, as well as that the thesis is put in terms of the number, rather than the importance or popularity, of the systems being compared. For if one slices instead at, say, the fourteenth century A.D., one finds that Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika has become pronouncedly theistic, that Buddhism and Čārvaka have disappeared, and that several varieties of theistic Vedānta have come to prominence. Furthermore, judging from the output of literature representing the various schools during the last millennium, the theistic schools now not only outnumber but far outweigh the non-theistic ones in importance and extent of influence. Thus one can accept Chattopadhyaya's claims, properly dated, without having to deny Agehananda's previously-cited remark about the absence of any "theologized" philosophy in India today.

Chattopadhyaya does not deny this limitation on his thesis, but he places his own peculiar evaluation upon it. Indian philosophy started atheistically and ended up theistic. This need not contradict Chattopadhyaya's summary of his conclusion, "that the overwhelming majority of significant Indian philosophers were in fact committed atheists." For he retains the right to decide whom he wishes to consider significant Indian philosophers. And in addition he has, of course, a point to make about the supposed Marxist implications of Indian philosophy's history, as we have already seen. The link to Marxism is this: that since Indian philosophy is by nature atheistic, and since "the idea of God survived—and survived in a big way—all the philosophical considerations urging for its rejection," the theism of later times must have "had its root somewhere outside the sphere of mere philosophising." Chattopadhyaya traces that root in now familiar terms: religion, "an effective palliative for the people and therefore also an effective tool for policing the state," came in India to serve to maintain the class-structure of society. Philosophical arguments were insufficient to break theism's hold, given these causes for its adoption. The only proper critique which
will have practical effect is the Marxist one. Marxist philosophy thus becomes the logical culmination of classical Indian philosophy.

A good many of the historical claims involved in this account, it seems to me, are at present unsubstantiated and likely to remain so. It does seem to me that Chattopadhyaya is in certain important respects right as against the majority of Indian and Western scholars. In the second century A.D., say, the vast majority of philosophers of whom we have any knowledge showed no signs in their philosophy of leanings toward theism. Chattopadhyaya cleverly brings out the fact that Pūrva-māṁśā, usually considered the bastion of orthodox Hindu religion, in fact explicitly argues that God is a myth. Chattopadhyaya infers from this that the Vedās, whose exegesis is the main purpose of Māṁśā, were likewise atheistic tracts. One need not accept this inference. Nevertheless, his reading of the Māṁśā passages himselfs is convincing. However, what we don't know is what the status of the Upanishadic philosophy was at that time. It happens that outside of Bādarāyana’s Vedānta- or Brahma-sūtras we do not have the works of any Vedāntist until the sixth or seventh century A.D. There is evidence that nevertheless there were a number of philosophers who espoused the philosophy of the Upanishads, and it is reasonable to conjecture that the form taken in this esposal may well have been theistic, given the forms in which the later Vedāntists expounded the Upanishads. I suspect that Chattopadhyaya would resist that conjecture, since on his principles the later theologizing of Vedānta would be a part of the general theologizing of all Indian philosophy. But it seems to me the evidence is not there on either side.

A similar lack of evidence obtains in connection with another important part of Chattopadhyaya’s claim, the part having to do with the supposed introduction of theism to police the state and maintain the class-structure. Marx’s theories on this point are intriguing, but one should not be seduced into accepting their application to a given historical case without some evidence. With respect to its application to classical Indian society we have little or nothing to go on. Indeed, what little there is suggests that, far from theism being something introduced by the rulers to rationalize and maintain their superiority, it was an indigenous belief of the masses to which the Brahminical philosophers, seeing through theistic claims, still had to try to accommodate themselves. Generally, the Marxist approach here runs the risk of defeating itself: backing the slaves in revolting against their masters, the Marxist may for dialectical reasons attribute to the masters the beliefs and aspirations of the slaves, thus undermining the cogency of the proposed revolution.

These same considerations seem to me to pertain to Riepe’s arguments cited earlier. Riepe calls upon me and scholars of Indian philosophy to “explain Indian philosophy”; instead of doing that, he complains, I give “the old ethical-individualistic interpretation.” I should counter that we just don’t know enough to explain Indian philosophy. It is hard enough to explain someone’s philosophy even when he is present in the flesh; given the lack of knowledge about Indian history, and in particular about the state of the ordinary farmer, say, in classical Indian times, it seems to me to be hopeless to essay any explanation. In saying this, however, I must insist that an “explanation,” as I understand it, involves
not only a theoretical reconstruction but also data to back that reconstruction against its rivals. Riepe, I suspect, is asking not for an explanation in this sense but for a certain kind of reconstruction in default of data, a reconstruction which he thinks is justified by appeal to an appropriate “philosophy of history and considerable information in the area of the sociology of knowledge.” What he is really unhappy about, I suppose, is that in reporting Indian philosophy as it is found in the texts one is likely to “reconstruct” it in terms of the ideology of the elite whose texts they were. Yet if the texts really do reflect that ideology it is not bad history to say so, whatever doubts one may have about the extent to which that ideology properly characterized the entire populace.

Chattopadhyaya thinks this demonstration of atheism permeating classical Indian philosophy shows that the “spirituality” Radhakrishnan credits to it is a “fiction.” While it seems to me that it doesn’t follow from his argument in any evident way, the view that Indian philosophy’s spirituality is a fiction seems to be endorsed by all four of the writers under discussion. Of them, Daya is possibly the most forthright in his arguments.

Daya declares, with Aniket, that it is a mistake to view Indian philosophy as particularly concerned with spiritual liberation. His reasons are more difficult to evaluate than in the case of the Marxist attack on theism, primarily because whereas in the case of Chattopadhyaya’s arguments it is reasonably clear where he is theorizing and where he is reporting textual data, it is not clear to what extent Daya is offering persuasive definitions in the language of factual claims.

The crux of the problem Daya raises is: should we use the word “philosophy” in some appropriate way drawn from contemporary Western practices, or should we redefine it to fit a concept employed within Indian philosophy itself? Daya prefers the former procedure. Adopting a standard Western understanding of “philosophy”, Daya notes, one may have a philosophy of anything, and by that token, one may have a philosophy of liberation among other things. And that is the way Daya proposes to view Indian philosophy, pointing out that Indian philosophers have not confined themselves to philosophy of liberation but have treated in a recognizably philosophical manner a large number of matters apparently unconnected with liberation. In arguing his case, he presents reasons for thinking both that lots of Indian philosophy has nothing to do with liberation, and also that lots of Indian writings which are not philosophy do have to do with liberation. He notes, correctly, that it was fashionable in writing on “sex, economics, medicine, grammar, and politics” to claim that study of the tract in progress would lead the reader toward liberation, and he contends that it was perfectly natural for treatises which had no other particular connection with liberation to be introduced with the same claim. Although he admits that “probably… mokṣa was accepted as the highest value and the ultimate goal of life by the whole of Indian culture,” Daya seems to suggest that the fashion of associating treatises of all kinds with liberation was merely a social gambit intended to gain respectability. That gambit was frequently window-dressing, he thinks, particularly in the case of logical systems such as Nyāya and Vijnānavāda Buddhism. He finds it “difficult to believe that anyone could seriously believe that he or anyone else could achieve mokṣa through a knowledge of the types of
objects or experience to be found in the world or through a knowledge of the means of knowledge or the logical fallacies which are relevant in the field of reasoning and argumentation. It is not as if we alone are questioning the relevance of these things to mokṣa. Rather, it is the tradition itself which decisively rejected these claims almost at the very time when they were being put forward.”27 Daya doesn’t indicate which texts he has in mind as a basis for the last remark.

The word “philosophy” is not a Sanskrit word, and there is no particular reason to suppose a priori that there is any standardly accepted term which translates our word “philosophy”. Thus one cannot quarrel with Daya if he is suggesting that it is possible to understand “philosophy” as we in the West do, and thus to treat liberation as one of the things one can philosophize about. Nevertheless, though it is a possible way, I think it is not likely to produce as many insights as the alternative method, which is to devise an account of “Indian philosophy” which will retain the features of inquiry, etc., that characterize Western philosophy while specifying liberation as the central concept within the subject-matter of Indian philosophy, which is what the authors of the texts actually specify, whatever Daya may think of their motives. I have two main kinds of reasons for saying this, beyond whatever demonstration I may hope to have provided among the pages of my book Presuppositions of India’s Philosophies.

One kind of reason is this: that there is in India a traditional distinction among fields of knowledge, according to which treatises devoted to such fields may be divided according as they fall into arthaśāstra, kāmaśāstra dharmaśāstra or mokṣaśāstra. This classification overlaps the distinction of fields which Daya mentions—sex, economics, medicine, etc.—and reflects a celebrated notion about various aims or “orientations” toward life within which interest in the subject-matter of a treatise might be expected. The fourfold classification I mention has a different logic, however, from the classification Daya has in mind. Daya would count philosophy, if I understand him, as one more in the list, in much the manner of a review of the academic disciplines of a university, each of which has its appropriate subject-matter or methodology or something and is in that respect autonomous and different from all the others. The logic of the four puruṣarthaśāstras is rather different, and it explains otherwise what Daya is forced to explain as a kind of social gambit which was actually window-dressing. For the logic of the four aims of life is such that one who transcends the first two by coming to view life in terms of dharma does not thereby leave behind the points of view (subject-matter, methodology) of the first two but rather combines them into a new and more adequate overview of life. The same thing, in turn, is said to happen when one advances toward mokṣa or liberation. Since in this way the point of view of liberation not only constitutes the highest value and the ultimate goal, but also represents the most adequate understanding of anything worth understanding, it is evident why treatises on all sorts of subjects were introduced in such a fashion to suggest that the work would present its subject under the aspect of liberation.

The second kind of reason I have for preferring my way of construing “Indian
philosophy" has nothing primarily to do with peculiarities of India but rather has to do with a conviction. I have about philosophical inquiry, one which seems to me ought to lead one to favor my approach to Indian thought. My conviction is that philosophy is a moment in every inquiry, rather than a distinct kind of inquiry. This view is sometimes described as the view that philosophy is "the queen of the sciences," that is, that the differences between the various sciences derive from a division of labor with regard to subject-matter, but that the canons of sound investigations are constant despite this division of labor, and that the interrelated totality of the various sciences should ultimately issue in a systematic account reflecting the various discoveries of specific sciences conditioned and synthesized through philosophical criticism. If this view is correct, and I grant that it is only my conviction, then instead of viewing each "science" as an autonomous discipline with respect to which one may or may not philosophize, one will view the various sciences as specialized facets of the general pursuit of philosophy. Thus there is no special method of philosophy distinct from the method or methods utilized in the several kinds of inquiry; rather, there are moments in any investigation where one will make observations, formulate hypotheses and test them, and there are likewise moments in any investigation where one will reflect critically on the assumptions underlying the hypotheses, the procedures involved in the testing, and the terms and concepts used in formulating the results of the inquiry. But the same critical processes which are used in the latter moments must be present during the former moments as well, and conversely critical reflection on method is empty and will go astray unless it is carried on in full knowledge of the substance of the subject-matter to which the method is to be applied.

The advantage of taking philosophy this way is that it involves no a priori assumptions about distinctions which may subsequently obstruct the progress of inquiry. If one supposes one knows in advance the limits of philosophy, because it is taken to have a nature of its own apart from its function within what are taken to other branches of knowledge, one can easily cut off philosophy from the self-corrective processes which characterize scientific inquiry. By viewing knowledge as an integrated process one minimizes the temptation to suppose there are shortcuts to truth which one shields from criticism by stipulating that these shortcuts constitute "true philosophical method."

If it is constructive to interpret philosophy in the way I have described, then it is worth noting that it fits the interpretation of Indian philosophy that I propose. For the search for liberation is a search for an ultimate understanding of the truth, and that is the same aim that characterizes scientific inquiry when such inquiry is viewed in its widest and most interrelated sense. Thus the quest for liberation involves an intellectual component, though doubtless it is not exhausted in intellectual inquiry. I have argued previously that this intellectual component can in the case of Indian philosophy be best understood as the effort to remove the doubts and fears which, deriving from skeptical and fatalistic views, threaten to render a person incapable of undertaking the quest.

Daya misunderstands me at this point, thinking that I hold the quest for liberation to involve only procedures which are not intellectual. He expresses
doubt that “intellectual difficulties of a purely rational and cognitive kind can stand in the way of the practical pursuit of ends which are non-cognitive, non-intellectual, and non-rational in nature.”28 The assumption that the quest is non-cognitive, etc., is, however, his, not mine. And it is this assumption that lies at the root of his argument. For if the quest for liberation involves intellectual as well as non-intellectual moments, and if liberation represents among other things an ideal state of cognitive attainment toward which all branches of inquiry ultimately aim, then the contrast between what he thinks of as philosophy and what he takes to be the non-rational pursuit of liberation collapses.

Daya, in trying to divorce philosophy from any essential concern with liberation, has seemed to attack the view of Indian philosophy as “spiritual” by persuasively redefining the quest for liberation as non-rational so that philosophy plays no part in either science or religion but stands as some third thing unconnected in any essential way with either. The quest for liberation is too spiritual, and rational inquiry not spiritual enough, to identify with philosophy—that seems to be Daya’s conclusion.

That the proper place for philosophy is somewhere between faith and reason is an interesting thought, and one whose relevance to our discussion is more direct than may at first appear. We are witnessing today another round in the ceaseless battle between romantics and classicists, Nietzsche’s Dionysians and Apollonians; only nowadays, since the conflict has become so time-worn, both sides have taken on the aspect of losers. The defenders of traditional faiths, unable to demonstrate their beliefs through reasoned argument, make a virtue of the irrationality of religious belief. To believe because it is absurd is argued to be justifiable because it leads to psychological health, providing the needed antidote to the emptiness of antiseptic scientism. Traditional defenses of the intellect as the sole guide to the good life have tended to accept a good many of the assumptions that make their opponents’ anti-intellectualisms superficially attractive. Apologists for the life of reason too often agree that science is limited in its applications, antiseptic in its values, a champion of attitudes which everyone knows to be unhealthy. Both sides are caught in practical inconsistencies: the irrationalist feels the need of showing by reason the rationality of being irrational, the rationalist admits that reason itself cuts at the heart of his defense of rationalism.

Under these circumstances there is an understandable attraction to be found in a philosophy which denies the common assumptions which appear to damn both rationalism and irrationalism. Indeed, one is inclined to enshrine the need for such a philosophy by deciding to talk in such a way that a method will not be called truly “philosophical” unless it avoids both extremes, extremes which can then be characterized as “religion” on the one hand and “science” on the other. Arriving at this point through what is for the moment a verbal maneuver, one searches for something that is “true philosophy”. The exciting candidates for this role in contemporary affairs are those would-be world-views which claim to avoid the assumptions, reviewed above, common to the defenders of both reason and unreason.

Antipathy toward both the life guided by theology and that guided by tech-
nology is a fashion of the day, and it is tempting for philosophers who wish to make their thought relevant to contemporary trends to argue that their philosophy is the true philosophy in that it escapes the shortcomings of religious and scientific philosophy. I wonder whether the current burgeoning of interest in Oriental philosophy is not closely connected with this concern for a philosophy which is neither theological nor technological? This hypothesis is strengthened when one notes that the types of Eastern thought which grab the young person today are those types—notably Zen Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta—which are anti-rational (anti-science) without being theistic.

Throughout the history of Indian thought there has regularly occurred philosophical confrontation between three kinds of philosophers. On the one hand, there have been the philosophies which featured rational methods of investigation, treating man and nature alike as amenable to metaphysical and psychological analysis based upon sense-experience, and this without residue, there being nothing about man and nature which is intrinsically beyond experimental investigation. Such philosophies in India have been those of the Čārvākins, the Jains, perhaps some Buddhists of the Sarvāstivāda sort, and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. A second kind of philosophy has been that born from sectarian theological concerns: here devotion is paramount, and philosophy is viewed as the apologetic needed to place God in an appropriate setting conducive to appropriate modes of worship. One must suppose that such philosophies have always existed in regional or local forms, although our evidence about them in early times is scanty. The later bhakti movements, which celebrate love for and reflecting the divine, move the masses today and have clearly done so for several centuries to an extent that philosophies more extensively treated in histories have not.

But the type of philosophy which most intellectuals both in and outside of Asia have found most challenging has been neither of the above, but a third sort, one whose exposition in India came in the schools of Madhyamika Buddhism, especially through the writings of and about Nāgārjuna, and in Advaita Vedānta, especially through the writings of and about Śāṅkara. Elsewhere I have suggested one might term these “leap” philosophies, since they eschew explanations in terms of causality with respect to ultimate matters. Strictly, however, my classification included devotional philosophies (of the second sort mentioned) as well as Madhyamika and Advaita, and so I went on to distinguish “do-it-yourself” leap philosophies from the rest, the do-it-yourself ones being those of Madhyamika and Advaita.

In my account, then, the fundamental opposition is between the first sort of philosophical stance and the other two, between philosophies which investigate man and the world through rational (i.e., scientific) methods and those which do not do so or at any rate do not allow that everything relevant can be investigated in that manner. The division between the second and third kinds of Indian philosophy appears then, as a division subordinate to the major distinction between the first kind and the other two. But I suspect that this way of viewing the matter may not fit current fashion. And that, if true, is of considerable interest in our discussion today.
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Why should writers such as Anikeev, Chattopadhyaya and Riepe, apparently committed to one or another sort of materialistic view, find Indian thought threatening enough to warrant the amount and kind of attention they pay to it? I am not sure of the answer, but one might hypothesize that the amount of attention will be determined by the extent to which contemporary interest in Oriental philosophies increases, and that the kind of attention given it will stem from the kind of threat it appears to pose to the materialist. And whether they realize it or not, so it may further be suggested, the threat posed comes from the claim that philosophy, or at least a certain kind of philosophy, can find a way between the horns of the contemporary dilemma between theology and technology, faith and reason.

Let me explore for a bit this line of thought, admitting all the while that it may be completely wide of the mark as prophecy. A well-known feature of Marxist philosophy is its claim to provide a viewpoint from which the historical developments leading from religion to science, not to speak of those leading from slavery to freedom of the masses, can best be understood. In keeping with that conception of Marxist philosophy, the defender of Marxism characteristically glorifies scientific method and denigrates irrationalism as exhibited in pre-scientific modes of thought which he will characterize as passé remnants of religious dominance. In an age in which the achievements of science dazzle us into respect, whatever our assessment of its applications, associating one’s philosophy with the pure spirit of scientific method seems sound strategy, whatever one might wish to say about the consistency of Marxist dogma with the spirit of scientific inquiry. But suppose that revulsion with the successes of science so overcome a generation that “science”, “reason” and associated words become terms of abuse, and that people come to look to philosophy not as support for science or religion but rather as a source of a new sort of synthesis transcending an alleged antithesis between those two?

An alert philosopher acquainted with Indian thought might, under such circumstances, be able to stir up a good deal of interest by a timely exposition of Nagarjuna’s or Śaṅkara’s philosophy, no doubt, modified somewhat to fit the time and situation. Madhyamika and Advaita provide attractive candidates for the role of true philosophy under such circumstances. Though neither one is theistic they each allow for stages along life’s way in which worship is an appropriate guiding feature in a lifetime. Likewise their attitude is not to deny the worth of scientific investigations but rather to limit the scope of science in what will seem under the hypothesized circumstances to be a fully justified manner. The upshot is the mapping out of the history of an individual personality (which might perhaps be generalized by a clever expositor into a map of collective human history) indicating stages through which the seeker must pass on his way to freedom (which again the clever expositor will be able to describe in terms attractive to the coming generations).

Suppose, now, you are a Marxist, or at least a materialist, philosopher faced with the growing popularity of such a view? What will your strategy be? Your view is that the only defensible attitude to contemporary vicissitudes is a faith in rational methods of science which you hold will issue in a vindication of cet-
tained metaphysical theses, but the new philosophy holds that the attitude you celebrate is merely a stage along life's way, due to be transcended about now! As a Marxist with a philosophy of history you may well feel you have been upstaged by the very same procedures you have found useful in setting aside your previous opponents—the procedure of writing the opposition off as a remnant of a bygone era. You now face the problem of how to react when threatened in this fashion.

The difficulty of the position stems in good part from the problem posed by the supposed popularity of Mādhyamika or Advaita. The materialist is apparently in a position of either beating them at their own game or joining them. Either line of work is fraught with danger, however.

Suppose one tries to beat them at their own game. One might, e.g., argue that the evidence shows that the dialectical advance of human history favors the Marxist reconstruction against the Indian one. If challenged one cites in defense appeals to the method of science as justifying one’s faith in this regard. But, leaving aside the question whether the evidence does in fact support Marxism against Indian reconstructions of history, it should be evident that any defense of the materialist position based on an appeal to the supremacy of scientific methods begs the question. It is precisely the strength of the “Indian” position that it can dismiss the adducing of scientific evidence as the child’s play of those who have not yet arrived at the transition point leading to the new stage in human history.

If one despairs of this method of defending materialism, one might then try to beat the “Indians” by joining them. Clearly this looks like admission of defeat, unless one can assimilate the assumptions of the “Indian” position in such a way as to preserve the fundamental features of materialism. One might try to do that by accepting the position now arrived at, one in which men feel the need of a stage corresponding to one envisaged in Mādhyamika or Vedānta, as a stage on the way, superior to previous stages which featured science or religion, but somehow to convince people that this stage is penultimate and that the ultimate stage will conform to materialist or Marxist specifications. The question is—how will one convince the people of that? If one proposes to do it by argument one is left open to the rebuttal as before, that one’s position depends upon one’s listeners’ accepting the superiority of rational procedures in arriving at convictions. So, one should probably avoid argumentation in defending this line of response to the putative situation: the counsel should rather be to proceed appropriately through actions premised upon the superiority of rational methods, actions which might include the use of persuasive language to move men to further action but which should not feature any extensive attempt to justify the appropriateness of one’s choice of how to act.

This rehearsal of options that might occur to a materialist or Marxist under a certain kind of circumstance seems to me, despite the circumstance not actually holding at the present time, to help in explaining why the writers we have been considering speak the way they do. Anikeev, if I read him rightly, prefers to speak from a position of strength. His view is that Indian philosophy has always featured materialistic doctrines, and he is concerned to glorify those scholars,
notably Russian ones, who have discerned this fact. Movements within Indian philosophy which run counter to materialism are assumed to be of less importance; perhaps the very allegation of their occurrence is frequently an aberration created by the mistaken readings of bad scholars biased toward religious concerns. But there is little attempt by Anikeev to argue the point, which is just as well, since it is not at all plausible that Madhyamika and Advaita didn’t occur at all, nor is it plausible to say that they have been misconstrued as anti-materialist. Under the circumstances a Marxist or materialist taking this line does best to avoid exploring the evidence too closely.

Chattopadhyaya, however, wades right in. By cleverly equating anti-materialism with theism, and then arguing that it follows that atheism (perhaps better “non-theism”) supports materialism, he manages to make a try at beating the do-it-yourself leap philosophers at their own game. But, as we have seen, the historical case depends on allowing Chattopadhyaya the privilege of choosing the rules of the game; if one doesn’t accept this estimate of who are important philosophers and which the important ages in the history of Indian philosophy, his case does not amount to much. But more fundamentally the case depends on our being willing to classify Madhyamika as atheistic and so anti-spiritualist (materialist), and then finally just to ignore Advaita Vedanta altogether (Chattopadhyaya has little to say about it). A case that requires us to misinterpret or ignore the evidence against it, particularly when the evidence involves the most renowned systems within Buddhism and Hinduism, is hardly a convincing one.

Riepe, I think, feels the difficulty rather acutely. In a recent piece entitled “Critique of idealistic naturalism: methodological pollution in the main stream of American philosophy” he complains about the “methodological monomania” of American naturalists, deploring their penchant for discussing method interminably without getting on to specify ways in which their philosophical position can be put to work in human affairs. Perhaps the Marxist should likewise counsel us to forget about methodology and advise us merely to act upon it. In this way perhaps Marxism can provide for the naturalistic revival in India, whose green shoots Riepe finds visible everywhere, the necessary nourishment which will enable it to outgrow the attitudes characteristic of classical Indian thought.

I confess, however, that I find irresponsible the notion that in order to stay abreast in popularity polls a philosopher should avoid arguing in his own defense. And in any case he is just as likely to lose the particular contest in question. For the opposition—Madhyamika and Advaita—are at no loss for words when it comes to defending their position by attacking that of others. Nor do they feel any difficulty in using the very rational methods which, according to their assumptions, stem from a stage of thought now withering away. So the materialist who refuses to argue because whatever he says will be held against him and made the basis for a loss in the popularity of his position puts himself at a hopeless disadvantage to no purpose.

Scientism, I suspect, will never be a really popular philosophy, although it may despite that come to be much more widely accepted than it is now. It won’t
be popular in that it appeals not to the heart but to the head, so to speak. I think the materialist, Marxist or not, is probably going to have to accept that and live with it. But it will be enough if materialism gains and holds the respect of thoughtful human beings capable of appreciating the full nature of the human predicament. It should aim to do that by refusing to seek shortcuts in philosophy. Its position should be that there is no "true philosophy" which solves the dilemma of faith versus reason. Mādhyamika and Advaita, insofar as they refuse to use rational methods to the full in defending their doctrines, are necessarily on the side of faith and against the side of reason. In a paper entitled "The ethics of belief," prepared for and delivered to this Center a year ago, Brand Blanshard shows how insidious are the temptations to treat important matters, such as religious ones, as if the results of believing might outweigh the rationality of what is believed. Professor Blanshard eloquently argues that the philosophers must resist such temptations, no matter how "dreary and negative all this must sound to those whose belief is unquestioning, exuberant, and joyful." Adherence to strict canons of inference and evidence is, to repeat, not likely to win popularity polls. Yet it seems to me to be the indispensable commitment which the materialist must make.

The honesty required, however, makes it incumbent upon the materialist—Marxist or otherwise—to keep an open mind about the truth of materialism itself. Spiritualism, or idealism, or monism, or whatever is conceived to be contrary to materialism, must be given a completely fair hearing—that is what honesty in philosophy involves. When Anikeev complains that Indian philosophy has been wrongly accused of being "indifferent to scientific methods" he is attempting to indicate that Indian philosophy, of whatever persuasion, has generally been honest in its methods of inquiry. Such is the mark of what truly deserves the name of "philosophy", he is suggesting, and those who propose to interpret Indian philosophy as shot through with spiritualism are doing it an injustice, since that interpretation seems to imply that Indian philosophers have, along with religious apologists within other religious traditions, treated reason as subservient to other methods.

Is Indian philosophy guilty of treating reason as subservient to other methods—does it counsel shortcuts to truth? It may seem, from what has already been said, that some styles in Indian philosophy have been guilty of this, and not surprisingly they have been the styles which have gained the most popular appeal. But even this estimate may be hasty. Suppose the Mādhyamika Buddhist, such as Nagarjuna, is right, and that the absolutely honest pressing of rational methods will lead to nothing but endless antinomies—which will not be the honest conclusion in this situation to draw no conclusion except that reason is untrustworthy? It is not necessarily dishonest to appeal to reason in order to show its emptiness. Professor Blanshard, it may be worth recalling, who sounds the clarion call for complete honesty in philosophical methods, is known as the chief contemporary champion of idealism in this country. He apparently does not find materialism to be the necessary outcome of adherence to strict canons of reasoning.

The fact is that in neither India nor the Western world has it been possible to
achieve consensus among philosophers as to just which beliefs are dictated by adhering honesty to strict canons of reasoning. Anikeev is certainly correct in denying that Indian philosophy is indifferent to scientific methods: if a different impression has been given to the world at large it has been because of an unfortunate desire on the part of too many expositors of Indian philosophy to cater to the popularity of religious modes of thought. Anikeev sees all this. What he perhaps fails to see is that it remains possible that the application of just those scientific methods may yield the opposite results from those that Marxism expects. Similarly, Chattopadhyaya rightly calls attention to overlooked applications of honest reasoning put to use to debunk theism in India; what doesn’t follow, though he seems to think it does, is that theism is false and his own alternative true. Chattopadhyaya and Riepe seem to think that appreciation of a sound “socio-historical approach” constitutes sufficient reason to accept materialism. The claim, however, smells suspiciously of dogma, pseudo-scientific methods offered in place of honest consideration of evidence and recognition of the limits of our present knowledge. It is not that they may not be right; it is rather that, even if they are, it is important that we not hasten uncritically to their conclusion, but consider it impartially, objectively, and extendedly, however much it may pain us to do so.
FOOTNOTES

5 Ibid., p. 14.
7 Ibid., p. 29.
9 Ibid., p. 303.
10 Ibid., p. 303.
12 Ibid., p. 248.
13 Ibid., p. 248.
15 Ibid., p. 445.
17 Ibid., p. 263.
20 Ibid., p. 50.
22 Ibid., p. 310.
23 There are of course passages in the epics, such as the Bhagavad-gita and the Mokṣadharmā section of the Sāntiparvan of the Mahābhārata, which may be interpreted as Vedantic, though it seems to me they may equally well be taken as Śāmkya in their orientation.
26 Ibid., p. 49.
27 Ibid., p. 49.
28 Ibid., p. 49.
31 Ibid., p. 6.
33 Ibid., p. 93.