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SOME USES OF DHARMA  
IN CLASSICAL INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

The word *dharma* is used in a variety of meanings. In philosophical parlance it is mainly used in two totally different ways, which one might call the Buddhist and the Brahmanical way. This article will briefly present the way in which the Buddhists came to use the term (usually in the plural), then sketch the development which the Brahmanical concept of *dharma* (singular) underwent in the hands of the adherents of the Vaiśeṣika philosophy.

With regard to Buddhism we can be brief.<sup>1</sup> The word *dharma* here came to be used for the items collected in lists in what is known by the name Abhidharma. These lists may originally have contained no more than items considered important to be memorized, often mental states. For our present purposes all that counts is that when at last one of the Buddhist schools decided to put order into the inherited teachings, it promoted the items thus collected, the dharmas, to the status of being the ultimate, and only, constituents of all that exists.

This revision, which amounted to a philosophical revolution, apparently took place in the north-west of the Indian subcontinent, at some time during the centuries preceding the common era, and the outcome was primarily preserved in the texts of the Sarvāstivāda school of Abhidharma. This intellectual revolution did more than just turn dharmas into elements of existence. It imposed a thoroughly atomistic vision on common sense reality, thus reducing the latter to non-existence. All complex entities – which includes virtually everything that we are familiar with from experience – were stated to be non-existent, precisely because they were nothing beyond their constituent elements. The impetus to this radical rejection of common sense reality must have come from the Buddhist doctrine according to which no person exists. What we believe is a person is made up of numerous mental and physical states, precisely the things known as dharmas.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, the person does not exist, but the elements that constitute it do. Or more explicitly: the person does not exist because it is complex; its ultimate constituent elements on the other

hand do exist. The same reasoning was applied to other things that have constituent elements.

It will be clear that this kind of logic inevitably leads to the conclusion that only dharmas exist, and that these dharmas cannot themselves harbour constitutive elements. That is to say, the dharmas are irreducible and are for that reason the ultimate constituents of the things that make up phenomenal reality. Strictly speaking the dharmas are the only things that exist, for the objects of phenomenal reality, being made up of more elementary constituents, do not.

Seen in this way, the ontological position of the Buddhist dharmas can easily be defined: they are the only things that really exist. The Sarvāstivādins had more to say about their dharmas, to be sure. Their thoroughly atomistic approach led them to another postulate: the dharmas are momentary. They also made an effort to enumerate all dharmas in an exhaustive list and to categorize them. They went to the extent of deviating from traditional forms of categorization and introducing a new system, called Pañcavastuka, which far more comprehensively summarized all the dharmas in five categories.<sup>3</sup> Nor did they hesitate to introduce newly invented dharmas which they felt were required to arrive at a coherent vision of the world. All this led them into sometimes frighteningly complex arguments, which have the unfortunate tendency of obscuring from view the overall vision that is hidden behind it.

This particular understanding of the dharmas as elements of existence, the only things that really exist, characterizes later developments in Buddhist thought, even in philosophical developments (such as the Madhyamaka philosophy) that came to reject the existence of the dharmas. The position of these latter, called *dharmānairātmya* “non-reality of the dharmas”, amounts to a radical denial of all that exists, a position in which even the last remaining anchors in reality, i.e. the dharmas, are removed. In an important way the denial of the dharmas was a continuation of the original denial of empirical reality that characterized the postulation of dharmas as the only existing entities. The denial of composite objects and personalities justified, all by itself, statements of the kind that no Buddha exists or has ever existed, which we find, for example, in the Buddhist Prajñāpāramitā literature. Denying the existence of the dharmas hardly sounds radical in a Buddhism that has already denied the existence of its founder.

Within the Brahmanical philosophies the word dharma is not used as in Buddhism. Fundamentally dharma is here something like ‘merit’.

As such there is nothing noteworthy in the concept of dharma in the Brahmanical philosophical systems. Some of these – first of all the Vaiśeṣika – tried to specify the concept. This led to the developments which will be outlined here.

Dharma occupies a prominent position in the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra*. This text begins with the announcement that dharma will be explained (*athāto dharmam vyākhyāsyāmaḥ*). This suggests that dharma plays a fundamental role in this school of thought. However, when we consider this philosophy in its classical form, we find that dharma is not so fundamental after all.

The classical doctrine of Vaiśeṣika finds expression in Praśasta's *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha*, also known by the name *Praśastatāpādabhāṣya*. This text divides all that exists into six categories, called 'substance' (*dravya*), 'quality' (*guṇa*), 'activity' (*karman*), 'universal' (*sāmānya*), 'specificity' (*viśeṣa*) and 'inherence' (*samavāya*) respectively. It states that knowledge of the essence of these categories, through the similarities and differences between them, is the cause of the highest good.<sup>4</sup> Dharma and its opposite and companion adharma are classified among the qualities; they are qualities that can only reside in a single substance, 'soul' (*ātman*), not in other substances.

Dharma and adharma are not the only qualities that can reside only in the soul. The text provides a complete list of such qualities: knowledge (*buddhi*), pleasure (*sukha*), pain (*duḥkha*), desire (*icchā*), repulsion (*dveṣa*), effort (*prayatna*), dharma and adharma;<sup>5</sup> subliminal impressions (*saṃskāra*) might be included in this list, even though other aspects of saṃskāra allow it to reside in other substances as well. Together, these qualities of the soul account for the psychological functioning of a person. Knowledge, which is experience, causes pleasure or pain; these give rise to desire and repulsion, respectively. Desire and repulsion bring about effort (*prayatna*), which in its turn brings about bodily activities aiming to reestablish or avoid the sources of pleasure and pain, respectively. This leads to new experiences, etc. etc. A further effect of these activities is the production of dharma and adharma, which determine one's future state. Correct knowledge, which is primarily knowledge of the Vaiśeṣika philosophy, will free a person from passion, as a result of which in the end no more dharma and adharma will be produced and liberation from rebirth will be obtained.<sup>6</sup> Dharma and adharma obviously play some kind of intermediary role in all this. Dharma in particular can help a person some way in the direction of final

liberation, but not all the way, for all the remaining dharma has to be consumed before liberation can take place. That is to say: the soul quality called dharma is an important causal factor with respect to liberation,<sup>7</sup> but it would not be justified to say that dharma, or knowledge of dharma, brings it about. Yet this is what the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* appears to say, as we will see below. For the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha*, as we have seen, the cause of the highest good, i.e. of liberation, is knowledge of the Vaiśeṣika categories. It is true that this knowledge has to follow a number of preparatory conditions, which are described in some detail in the text; this does not change the fact that the clinching element is knowledge.

There is one passage in the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* which appears to use the word *dharma* in a way that differs from its classical usage. This passage reads:<sup>8</sup>

- (1) *dravyaguṇakarmasāmānyaviśeṣasamavāyānām śaṅṇām padārthānām  
sādharmyavaidharmyābhyām tattvajñānaṁ niḥśreyasahetuḥ / tac  
ceśvaracodanābhivyaktād dharmād eva /* (WI p. 1 Section 2)

Knowledge of the essence of the six categories – viz.

substance (*dravya*), quality (*guṇa*), activity (*karman*), universal (*sāmānya*), specificity (*viśeṣa*) and inherence (*samavāya*) – , by way of the similarity and dissimilarity [between them], is the cause of the highest good. That [knowledge comes about] as a result of dharma that is manifested through the injunctions of the Lord.”

The last part of this passage is not free from difficulties. If we assume that here, too, *dharma* designates the quality of the soul described above, how then are we supposed to understand that liberating knowledge can only result from dharma which is manifested through the injunctions of the Lord? What could it mean that this specific quality of the soul is manifested through the injunctions of the Lord? Does God utter injunctions to the effect that dharma that is already present in a soul must manifest itself? The *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* contains no hint suggesting that any such manifestations of dharma ever take place. And the early commentators do not provide help either.

There is however an obvious answer to these questions, if only we are willing to look outside the Vaiśeṣika system. *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* 1.1.2 defines dharma as follows: *codanālakṣaṇo 'rtho dharmah*. Frauwallner (1968: 17) translates this: “Der Dharmah ist etwas Nützliches, dessen Kennzeichen die (vedischen) Weisungen sind.” In

other words: dharma is *characterized* by *codanā* in the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra*, just as it is *manifested* by *codanā* in the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha*. This strongly suggests that Praśasta here uses the term *dharma* as it was used in *Mīmāṃsā*, and not as he uses it everywhere else in his *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha*. That is to say, *dharma* in this passage of the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* does not refer to the classical Vaiśeṣika idea of dharma, a quality of the soul, but to the *Mīmāṃsā* idea of dharma. It is true that Praśasta adds one word to mark his difference from the *Mīmāṃsā* position. He prefixes the word *īśvara* 'God' to *codanā*, thus indicating that he, unlike the *Mīmāṃsakas*, looks upon Vedic injunctions as coming from God. This by itself is not surprising, because Praśasta appears to have been one of the first, if not the first, to introduce the notion of a creator God into the Vaiśeṣika system.<sup>9</sup>

This different use of the term *dharma* in one single passage of the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* suggests that the new Vaiśeṣika understanding of dharma as a quality of the soul replaced an earlier one, within the Vaiśeṣika school itself, that was close to, or identical with, the *Mīmāṃsā* idea of dharma. The present passage would then preserve a trace of this earlier usage.

Various considerations confirm the view that the classical Vaiśeṣika understanding of dharma as a quality of the soul represents a change of doctrine within the school that had taken place at some time before Praśasta but after its earliest beginnings. Consider the following:

(a) The way in which the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* presents the qualities, and dharma in particular, allows us to conclude that much had changed between the time of the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* (since the surviving text has undergone various modifications, the expression "time of the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra*" is imprecise) and that of Praśasta. The *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* initially cites *Vaiśeṣika-sūtra* 1.1.5, which enumerates seventeen qualities.<sup>10</sup> Dharma and adharma do not figure among these. The *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* then adds seven more qualities (which cover dharma and adharma, see below), which it claims are covered in the *sūtra* by the particle *ca*. It seems safe to conclude that the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* known to Praśasta did not yet include dharma among the qualities. The same is true of all its surviving versions.

(b) The *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* says that it enumerates seven additional qualities, but in fact it enumerates only six items: heaviness (*gurutva*), fluidity (*dravatva*), viscosity (*sneha*), *saṃskāra* (no single

translation is possible; see Kapani (1992–1993: I: 277) ff.), ‘the unseen’ (*adr̥ṣṭa*) and sound (*śabda*).<sup>11</sup> The solution to this riddle lies in the fact that the single item *adr̥ṣṭa* stands for the two qualities dharma and adharma, as is clear from other passages in the same book: the enumeration of qualities of the soul, for example, does include *dharma* and *adharma* rather than *adr̥ṣṭa*<sup>12</sup> and *dharma* and *adharma* are sometimes used to refer back to *adr̥ṣṭa*<sup>13</sup>. *Adr̥ṣṭa* is a term that occurs a number of times in the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra*, primarily in the fifth chapter, most often to explain physical processes: “*adr̥ṣṭa* moves objects in ordeals and magnetic processes; it causes extraordinary movements of earth and water, the circulation of water in trees, the upward flaming of fire, the horizontal blowing of wind or air, the initial movements of atoms and ‘minds’ (*manas*, in the process of forming new organisms)” (Halbfass, 1991: 311). Halbfass (1991: 312 f.) further points out that the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* nowhere states that *adr̥ṣṭa* and dharma/adharma are identical, nor that they are different. He draws attention to the fact that the *Nyāya Bhāṣya* of Vātsyāyana knows dharma and adharma as being inherent in the soul, but does not use the term *adr̥ṣṭa* as a synonym for these two. This term is here rather used with reference to a theory that is rejected and that maintains that there is *adr̥ṣṭa* in the material atoms (*aṇu*), as well as in the ‘mind’ (*manas*),<sup>14</sup> and that gives them the kinetic impulse needed for the formation of bodies and so on. Also the commentator Vyomaśiva on the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* is acquainted with, and rejects, the theory that *adr̥ṣṭa* resides in atoms and not in the soul. Halbfass (1991: 315) assumes that *adr̥ṣṭa* “may primarily have been a gapfiller in the causal explication of the universe”.<sup>15</sup> We may conclude that the classical notions of dharma and adharma as qualities of the soul absorbed the notion of *adr̥ṣṭa* which was initially different from these two.

It is clear from the above that the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* as known to Praśasta, just like the versions known to us today, did not count dharma and adharma among the qualities. And yet dharma plays a central role in the first three sūtras of this text,<sup>16</sup> which read as follows (for an interpretation, see below):

- (i) *athāto dharmam vyākhyāsyāmaḥ*
- (ii) *yato ‘bhyudayaniḥśreyasasiddhiḥ sa dharmam*
- (iii) *tadvacanād āmnāyasya prāmāṇyam*<sup>17</sup>

Sūtra (i) announces that dharma will be explained, presumably in the remainder of the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra*; sūtra (ii) adds that on the basis of

dharma one reaches *abhyudaya* and *niḥśreyasa* (to be understood as residence in Brahmaloka and liberation respectively, according to the commentator Candrānanda); while sūtra (iii) appears to state that the Veda is authoritative because it teaches dharma.<sup>18</sup> The dharma taught by the Veda is not, of course, the quality of the soul accepted by later Vaiśeṣikas. It must be something very similar to the dharma which the Mīmāṃsakas believed was taught in the Veda. And indeed, if we assume that Praśasta's characterization of dharma as *īśvaracodanābhivṛtyakṛta* 'manifested by the injunctions of the Lord' continues an earlier Vaiśeṣika tradition, we can conclude that early Vaiśeṣika shared in most essential respects its notion of dharma with ritual Mīmāṃsā.<sup>19</sup>

This does not necessarily entail that all occurrences of the word *dharma* in the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* have to be interpreted as in Mīmāṃsā. One should never forget that the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* is not the unitary composition of one single individual. Already before the time of Praśasta, this text had undergone numerous modifications. There is, for example, reason to think that sūtras had been added and that their original order had been changed.<sup>20</sup> It is not therefore impossible that the new meaning of *dharma* manifests itself already in some parts of the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* as we know it. At some places (VS(C) 4.2.5: *dharmaviśeṣāt*; 6.2.18: *icchādveṣapūrvikā dharmā-dharmayoḥ pravṛttiḥ*) one has indeed the impression that *dharma*, already in the surviving *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra*, is used in its classical sense, referring to a quality of the soul. This merely suggests that the new meaning of *dharma*, its understanding as a quality of the soul, had been introduced into Vaiśeṣika already before Praśasta. Unfortunately no evidence is known to me that would allow us to determine with more precision exactly when this change may have taken place.

How is the term *dharma* used in Mīmāṃsā? We have already seen that dharma is "characterized by injunctions (*codanā*)" (*Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* 1.1.2). Beyond this, the *Mīmāṃsā Bhāṣya* of Śabara, the classical text for this school of Vedic interpretation, says remarkably little about it. Indeed, while introducing sūtra 1.1.2 Śabara states that experts have varying opinions as to what is dharma.<sup>21</sup> Sūtra 1.1.2 (*codanālakṣaṇo 'rtho dharmah*; see above) is meant to resolve this issue. Dharma is what one gets to know through Vedic revelation, which consists in injunctions. What do we learn through these injunctions? Primarily what activities – sacrificial activities – lead to heaven. The intermediary between a sacrifice and heaven (which is

reached long after the termination of the sacrifice) is represented by the mysterious *apūrva*, which guarantees the connection between the two. *Dharma*, *apūrva* and *codanā* are closely connected, and in one passage Śābara states in so many words that one speaks about *codanā* to indicate *apūrva*.<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere he identifies *dharma* with ‘the Agnihotra etc.’, i.e., with ritual activity.<sup>23</sup> A passage in Jayanta Bhaṭṭa’s *Nyāyamañjarī* observes that the old Mīmāṃsakas identify *dharma* with *apūrva* which is without substratum (*nirādhāra*) and is produced by ritual activity, whereas the followers of Śābara identify it with ritual activity itself.<sup>24</sup> Yoshimizu (2000: 163 n. 27) – drawing attention to a passage in the Śābara Bhāṣya on sūtra 2.1.1 where *dharma* and *apūrva* are identified – points out that Śābara, measured by Jayanta’s criteria, is an ‘old Mīmāṃsaka’ rather than a ‘follower of Śābara’. An analysis of Śābara’s observations, on the other hand, seems to suggest that he may think of *apūrva* as having a special connection with or even as inhering in the human soul.<sup>25</sup>

Halbfass (1991: 302, 334 n. 46), who draws attention to the above-mentioned passage of the *Nyāyamañjarī*, also refers to some passages in other works where *apūrva* is supposedly a synonym of *dharma*. Not all these passages do however provide evidence for the presumed identification of *dharma* and *apūrva* in early Mīmāṃsā. Neither of the two passages from Bhartṛhari’s *Vākyapadīya* which he refers to makes this identification. The first one (Vkp 3.7.34) does use the word *apūrva*, but does not mention *dharma*; the second (Vkp 3.8.37) uses neither of these two terms. The commentator Phullarāja on the first of these two verses<sup>26</sup> explains that, according to some, *apūrva* is identical with *dharma* / *adharma* and with *adṛṣṭa*.<sup>27</sup> The identification of *dharma* / *adharma* with *adṛṣṭa* suggests that Phullarāja does not here introduce us to “an old Mīmāṃsā theory of *apūrva*”, but to the classical Vaiśeṣika doctrine of *dharma* / *adharma*, with as added peculiarity that now *apūrva* is said to be the same as the Vaiśeṣika qualities of the soul known by those names.

Uddyotakara’s *Nyāya Vārttika* on *Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.7, too, uses the term *apūrva* as a synonym of *dharma* and *adharma*.<sup>28</sup> As in the case of Phullarāja, this suggests that we are here confronted with a new interpretation of *apūrva*, which identifies it with the new Vaiśeṣika qualities of the soul called *dharma* and *adharma*. However, Uddyotakara is acquainted with a position which looks upon *apūrva*, and *dharma* and *adharma*, as being eternal. This eternal *apūrva* is supposedly manifested by people:<sup>29</sup> “Although *apūrva* is [one and] eternal, [only] the person who makes [it] manifest has [its] fruit. And



ritual act is [done] for the sake of manifestation. And because it is [done] for manifestation, ritual act is not left unperformed. [For] it is seen that whatever is manifested gives its fruit only to the one who manifests it.” Kei Kataoka (2000) has recently argued that the notion of dharma as an eternal entity that is made manifest as a result of sacrificial activity was current among certain Mīmāṃsakas, and was at least sometimes identified with apūrva. Such a notion appears to be attributed to the Mīmāṃsakas by authors as diverse as Bhartṛhari (commentary on the *Mahābhāṣya*),<sup>30</sup> the author of the *Vṛtti* on Bhartṛhari’s *Vākyapadīya*,<sup>31</sup> Siṃhasūri the commentator of Mallavādin’s *Dvādaśāra-Nayacakra*<sup>32</sup> and of course Uddyotakara. Also the chapter on Mīmāṃsā in Bhavya’s *Madhyamakahrdaya* mentions apūrva and describes it as “to be manifested by [ritual] action”.<sup>33</sup> His auto-commentary *Tarkajvālā*, moreover, identifies apūrva with dharma.<sup>34</sup> Kataoka concludes from all this evidence that the theory which he calls *dharma-abhivivakti-vāda* must go back to the latter half of the 6th century.

It seems, then, that early Mīmāṃsā had rather hazy ideas about the precise nature of dharma. Later on, at least in part under the influence of classical Vaiśeṣika, it tried in various ways to give a more precise meaning to this originally imprecise term.

We have seen that the ontological concerns of the Vaiśeṣika school of thought made them specify what exactly dharma is. In doing so, they ended up with a notion of dharma as a quality of the soul, a notion which, as a result of this transformation, had moved a long way from the Mīmāṃsā understanding of this term which they started from. Mīmāṃsakas after Śabara were not uninterested in the new qualities dharma and adharma. It appears, indeed, that Brahmanical thinkers of the time felt pressed to specify what kind of thing dharma really is. Where earlier thinkers of the Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsā schools used the term *dharma* in a rather general sense – expressing something perhaps not too dissimilar to English ‘virtue, merit, appropriateness’ – later thinkers of these two schools felt obliged to specify its precise ontological status. In the case of Vaiśeṣika this is not surprising, for ontology has been a central concern of this school, perhaps from the beginning; the presence of an important element in its philosophy (*dharma* is mentioned in its first sūtra) whose ontological status was less than clear posed a challenge which the school had to come to grips with. Mīmāṃsā was perhaps under less pressure; yet it did not escape from the ontological concerns of its fellow philosophers.

By way of conclusion some few words can be said about the other classical schools of Brahmanical philosophy. Sāṃkhya – which here includes the so-called Yoga philosophy – underwent a strong influence of Vaiśeṣika in matters psychological, but its efforts to precisely define what kind of thing dharma was did not lead to noteworthy results. Dharma and adharma are explained as parts of buddhi, one of the evolutes of primary matter (*pradhāna*); the constraints of the system hardly allowed for another possibility. The *Yuktidīpikā*, for example, describes dharma as follows:<sup>35</sup> “The disposition which is part of [the constituent called] sattva, and which resides in the buddhi as a result of carrying out acts that have been prescribed in the Veda and in the sacred tradition, is called *dharma*.” The so-called Vedānta philosophy presents itself as a better form of Mīmāṃsā, but one which, unlike ritual Mīmāṃsā, does not study dharma but Brahma. *Brahma-sūtra* 1.1.1 reads *athāto brahmajijñāsā*, which is an adaptation of *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* 1.1.1 *athāto dharmajijñāsā*. The Śārīraka Mīmāṃsā – later also called Uttara-Mīmāṃsā – builds in an essential way on ritual Mīmāṃsā, to which it has left the study of dharma; it can now concentrate on Brahma. Dharma does not therefore play as crucial a role in it.

#### APPENDIX

The following passage occurs, as we have seen, in the Padārthadharmaśāstra:

- (1) *dravyaguṇakarmasāmānyaviśeṣasamavāyānāṃ śaṅṅāṃ padārthānāṃ  
sādharmyavaidharmyābhyāṃ tattvajñānāṃ niḥśreyasahetuḥ / tac  
ceśvaracodanābhiviyaktād dharmād eva /* (WI p. 1 Section 2)

It is not possible to seriously discuss this passage without taking into consideration passage (2), which is a sūtra in one of the surviving versions of the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra*:

- (2) *dharmaviśeṣaprasūtād dravyaguṇakarmasāmānyaviśeṣasamavāyānāṃ  
padārthānāṃ sādharmyavaidharmyābhyāṃ tattvajñānāṃ  
niḥśreyasam* (VS(Ś) 1.1.4)

This is sūtra 1.1.4 in the version of the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* commented upon by Śaṅkara Miśra. It does not occur in the other surviving versions of this text.<sup>36</sup> We will refer to it as “the fourth sūtra”.

The similarity between (1) and (2) is undeniable, and we have to accept that the two did not come into existence independently of each other. The question is: Which one influenced, and therefore preceded, the other?

Erich Frauwallner (1984: 39) argued that ‘the fourth sūtra’ (2) was composed under the influence of *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* passage (1). He further argued that ‘the fourth sūtra’ (2) is indispensable after the three sūtras that precede it, and must therefore be accepted as belonging in their company, in spite of the fact that it has only been preserved in the version commented upon by Śaṅkara Miśra. These four initial sūtras, Frauwallner argued, must have been composed after the original character of Vaiśeṣika had been modified around the time of Praśasta. The original beginning of the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* was different, and Frauwallner makes an attempt to reconstruct it.

Frauwallner’s arguments that original Vaiśeṣika was not interested in concepts like liberation and that such ideas, along with the idea of a creator God, did not enter the system until around the time of Praśasta, have found little favour among more recent scholars. Halbfass (1986, 1992: 69 f.) has described Frauwallner’s thesis about the “original beginning” of the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* as “challenging, but not convincing”. Houben (1994) criticizes Frauwallner’s position according to which originally Vaiśeṣika was a pure philosophy of nature without interest in liberation. This implies that the beginning of the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* may have been as it is today, already before the time of Praśasta.

This raises the question whether ‘the fourth sūtra’ may be older than Praśasta. This question is to be distinguished from the other one as to whether “the fourth sūtra” is inseparable from the three initial sūtras of the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra*. If it is inseparable from those three, the ‘fourth sūtra’ must be as old as the other ones, and therefore older than Praśasta. But it may conceivably be older than Praśasta without being inseparable from the three initial sūtras. It may conceivably have existed as part of a commentary, or as a sūtra that was added long after the first three but still before Praśasta. The question as to how old the ‘fourth sūtra’ is must therefore be considered on its own, independently of speculations about its connection with other sūtras.

Isaacson (1995a: 234) is of the opinion that “... there is no good reason to regard the sūtra as old”. In another publication (1995b: 757 n. 22) he criticizes Frauwallner: “Frauwallner’s keen philological instinct may perhaps have erred ... It is precisely the absence of the expected enumeration of categories which is likely to be original here.

Indeed an enumeration of six categories would be suspect, for I think it very likely that in the *earliest* period of composition of sūtras the classical list of padārthas had not yet been settled on.” This last argument may be valid, and would show that the “fourth sūtra” cannot have belonged to the earliest period of composition of sūtras. This does not however help us all that much, for passages that existed before Praśasta do not for that reason necessarily belong to the earliest period of Vaiśeṣika. There is indeed some reason to think that Praśasta, if he knew passage (2) at all, did not recognize it as a sūtra, this because Praśasta normally clearly indicates that he considers something a sūtra.<sup>37</sup> He might then have cited it to justify (1). This does not exclude the possibility that (2) had once been a sūtra that, because of its length, came to be looked upon as part of a commentary.<sup>38</sup> We here find ourselves in the midst of speculations from among which the available evidence does not allow us to make a sensible choice.

Let us look somewhat more closely at passages (1) and (2). Both agree that knowledge of the essence of the Vaiśeṣika categories is the cause of the highest good. Both agree that this knowledge results from dharma. According to the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* this dharma is “manifested by the injunctions of the Lord” (Jha, 1915/1982: 16). The “fourth sūtra” (2) merely states that this dharma is special (*dharmaviśeṣa*).

An important difference between the two passages is that the former recognizes a creator God where the latter does not. It is known that the notion of a creator God entered Vaiśeṣika rather late (Bronkhorst, 1996). However, if one accepts the obvious, viz., that passages (1) and (2) are not independent of each other, it will be difficult to conclude from this that the ‘fourth sūtra’ (2) was composed under the influence of passage (1). As far as our knowledge of the development of Vaiśeṣika goes, the idea of a creator God was accepted by all subsequent texts of the school, certainly by all those that based themselves on the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha*. It is hard to believe that the author of the ‘fourth sūtra’ – assuming that he composed this sūtra under the influence of the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* – could leave out God and simply speak of a special dharma (*dharmaviśeṣa*). Influence in the opposite direction – the passage in the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* was composed under the influence of the ‘fourth sūtra’ (2) – avoids this difficulty.

This position is confronted with one difficulty. We had occasion to observe that the word *dharma* in passage (1) is closer to Mīmāṃsā

and early Vaiśeṣika usage than to the classical Vaiśeṣika use of this term. The “fourth sūtra” (2), on the other hand, would seem to use the term in a way which agrees with classical Vaiśeṣika. The compound *dharmaviśeṣa* occurs several times in the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha*,<sup>39</sup> but does not appear to be used in *Mīmāṃsā*.<sup>40</sup> Is this proof that the ‘fourth sūtra’ must be more recent than passage (1)?

It is not. We saw that passage (1) uses the word *dharma* archaically and is therefore something of an anachronism in the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha*. We concluded from it that the classical meaning of *dharma* may have been introduced into Vaiśeṣika before Praśasta. The classical use of *dharma* in the ‘fourth sūtra’ does not therefore prove anything regarding its age.

If, then, we are forced to choose between these two possibilities: either the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* passage (1) influenced the “fourth sūtra” (2), or vice-versa, we may have to consider the second possibility as the more likely. The ‘fourth sūtra’ may be older than the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha*, and Praśasta may have known it, even if not as a sūtra. It is true that we may not be forced to make such a choice. The similarity between these two passages might be due to the fact that both were influenced by an earlier common source. Either way, it seems unlikely that the “fourth sūtra” was composed under the influence of passage (1).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The section on Buddhist dharmas heavily draws upon Bronkhorst (2000a).

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Gethin’s understanding of *dharma* as “an instance of one of the fundamental physical or mental events that interact to produce the world as we experience it” (Wijeratne & Gethin, 2002: xix).

<sup>3</sup> See Frauwallner (1963/1995).

<sup>4</sup> The passage (WI p. 1 Section 2) is cited below.

<sup>5</sup> WI p. 16 Section 80: *tasya (= ātmanaḥ) guṇāḥ buddhisukhaduḥkhecchādveṣaprayatnadharmādharmasaṃskārasaṃkhyāparimāṇaprthaktvasaṃyogavibhāgāḥ*. The remaining qualities of this list can also occur in other substances.

<sup>6</sup> Bronkhorst (2000b: Section 4, Section 6)

<sup>7</sup> Cp. WI p. 63 Section 308: *kartuḥ priyahitamokṣahetuḥ [dharmāḥ]*.

<sup>8</sup> Some editions omit *ṣaṇṇāṃ* others read *sādharmyavaidharmyatattvajñānaṃ*; some again have °*nodanā*° for °*codanā*°.

<sup>9</sup> Bronkhorst (1996).

<sup>10</sup> WI p. 1 Section 5: *guṇāś ca rūparasagandhasparśasaṃkhyāparimāṇaprthaktvasaṃyogavibhāgaparatvāparatvabuddhisukhaduḥkhecchādveṣaprayatnās ceti kaṇṭhoktāḥ saptadaśa*. (Some editions omit the first *ca*, one omits °*saṃkhyā*°, another one *iti*.) Compare this with VS(C) 1.1.5: *rūparasagandhasparśāḥ saṃkhyāḥ parimāṇāni prthaktvaṃ saṃyogavibhāgau paratvāparatve buddhayaḥ sukhaduḥkhe icchādveṣau prayatnāś ca guṇāḥ*.

<sup>11</sup> WI p. 1–2 Section 5: *caśabdasamuccitās ca gurutvadratvasnehasaṃskārādṛṣṭās-abdāḥ saptaivety caturviṃśatir guṇāḥ*. (Variants: one edition reads *tu* for *ca*, one omits *saptaiva* and reads *eva* for *evam*, some read *caturviṃśatiguṇāḥ*.)

<sup>12</sup> See note 3, above.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. WI p. 43 Section 228: ... *adrṣṭāc ca*; Section 231: ... *tat sarvaṃ saṃskāradharmābhyāṃ bhavati* / ... *tat sarvaṃ adharmasaṃskārābhyāṃ bhavati* /

<sup>14</sup> The *Mīmāṃsākośa* (IV p. 2241) cites a passage from Prabhākara's *Bṛhātī* according to which some consider dharma a quality of the buddhi, others a quality of the self (p. 26: *dharmam kecit buddhiguṇam manyante kecit ātmaguṇam*). On p. 2249 it cites a line from Pārthasārathi Miśra's *Śāstradīpikā* according to which dharma and adharmas are fluctuations (*vṛtti*) of the internal organ (1.1.5.5, p. 114 l. 3: *dharmādharmayoḥ antaḥkaraṇavṛttivāt*).

<sup>15</sup> For at least some Buddhist thinkers *acintya* appears to have played a similar role; see Kritzer (2002).

<sup>16</sup> VS 1.1.1–3. These sūtras figure in all surviving versions of the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra*, i.e., the ones commented upon by Candrānanda, Bhaṭṭa Vāḍindra and Śaṅkara Miśra respectively, as well as the two further recensions discovered and edited by Isaacson (1995a: 216, 270). About the question whether originally a fourth sūtra, now only preserved in the version commented upon by Śaṅkara Miśra, concluded this set, see the appendix.

<sup>17</sup> VS(C) 1.1.3 has *āmnāyaprāmāṇyam*.

<sup>18</sup> The expression *tadvacanāt* has been interpreted to mean:

- (i) because Hiraṇyagarbha has uttered it (Candrānanda)
- (ii) because it teaches *svarga* and *apavarga* (Bhaṭṭa Vāḍindra)
- (iii) because God has uttered it (Bhaṭṭa Vāḍindra, Śaṅkara Miśra)
- (iv) because it teaches *dharma* (Bhaṭṭa Vāḍindra, Śaṅkara Miśra)
- (v) because it teaches the self (Bhaṭṭa Vāḍindra)

There can hardly be any doubt that (iv) is by far the most natural understanding of this expression in its context. It leads to the following interpretation of the sūtra: "The Veda is authoritative because it teaches dharma."

<sup>19</sup> Thakur (1961: 3) suggests that *dharma* at the beginning of the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* means *padārthadharmas*, "'property' or 'attribute' of the different categories" (Houben, 1994: 732 n. 27). This seems unlikely.

<sup>20</sup> See Bronkhorst (1993a, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Frauwallner (1968: 16): *dharmam prati hi vipratipannā bahuvidāḥ / kecid anyam dharmam āhuḥ, kecid anyam* /

<sup>22</sup> Śabara's *Bhāṣya* on *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* 2.1.5 (Ānandāśrama edition p. 358): *codanety apūrvam brūmaḥ*. Cited in Biarreau (1964: 92 n. 1). See further Yoshimizu (2000: 161 n. 16), on the interpretation of this sentence.

<sup>23</sup> Śabara on *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* 1.1.5; Frauwallner (1968: 24): *autpattikāḥ śabdasyārthena sambandhas tasya agnihotrādīlakṣaṇasya dharmasya nimittam pratyakṣādibhir anavagatasya*.

<sup>24</sup> Jayanta Bhaṭṭa, *Nyāyamañjarī* (ed. Śukla I p. 255 l. 3–4; ed. Varadacharya I p. 664 l. 6–7): *vṛddhamīmāṃsakāḥ yāgādīkarmānirvartyam apūrvam nāma dharmam abhivadanti, yāgādīkarmaiva śābarā bruvate*. Further p. 255 l. 8–9 / p. 664 l. 15–16: *svargayāgāntarālavartinaś ca sthiraśya nirādhārasya pūrvasya niḥpramāṇakatvāt jarajjaiminīyaprovādo 'py apeśalaḥ*. The first of these two positions finds expression in Mādhava's *Jaiminīyanyāyamālāvistara* (2.1.1: *apūrvasyaiva dharmatvāt*). Cp. Yoshimizu, 2000: 163 n. 27.

<sup>25</sup> Bronkhorst (2000b: Section 13). I am not sure that the passage from Śabara's *Bhāṣya* (on sūtra 7.1.7) referred to by Yoshimizu (2000: 151) is in contradiction with this idea.

<sup>26</sup>Helārāja's commentary on this and the following stanzas is not available, as indicated by the editor Subramania Iyer (1963: 261 n. 31).

<sup>27</sup>Subramania Iyer (1963: 261 l. 12) (on Vkp 3.7.34): *apūrvaṃ dharmādharmākhyam adṛṣṭasaṃjñākaṃ kecid evaṃrūpaṃ taṃ sāmāthyalakṣaṇaṃ bhāvaṃ āhuḥ*.

<sup>28</sup>NV on 1.1.7, p. 175 l. 2–3: *asiddham apūrvasyānityatvam / na prāyaṇānupapatteḥ / yadi dharmādharmau nityau bhavataḥ kasya prakṣayāt prāyaṇam iti / etc.*

<sup>29</sup>NV on 1.1.7, p. 175 l. 9–10: *nityam apy apūrvaṃ yo 'bhivyanakti tasya phalam, abhivyaktyarthā kriyeti, ato na kriyālopa iti / yena yad abhivyaṇyate tasyaiva tat phaladātṛ bhavātīti dṛṣṭam /*. Tr. Kataoka (2000: 170).

<sup>30</sup>Bronkhorst, 1987: 25 l. 24–27: *dharmaprayojano vā iti mīmāṃsakadarśanam / avasthita eva dharmah / sa tv agnihotrādibhir abhivyaṇyate / tatpreritas tu phalado bhavati / yathā svāmī bhrtyaiḥ sevāyām preryate phalaṃ praty evaṃ ayaṃ niyamo dharmasya phalanirvṛttiṃ prati prayojaka iti /*. Cf. Bronkhorst, 1989: 112 [383] ff.; Kataoka, 2000: 168.

<sup>31</sup>Iyer, 1966: 224 l. 5–6 (on verse 1.136 = Vkp 1.172): *tatra kecid ācārya manyante: ... / śāstrānuṣṭhānāt tu kevalād dharmābhivyaṇyatiḥ / ...* Kataoka (2000: 167–168).

<sup>32</sup>DNC I p. 140 l. 25: *... parasparaviśiṣṭābhir yajñasaṃsthābhir agniṣṭomādibhir iṣṭibhiḥ cābhivyaṇyavyā apūrvā api ...*; as emended in Kataoka (2000: 174). DNC I p. 141 l. 8: *... dharmah kriyābhivyaṇyā[ḥ] ...* Kataoka (2000: 176).

<sup>33</sup>Bhavya, *Madhyamakahrdaya* 9.10: *apūrvo 'pi kriyāvyāṅgyah kriyā mokṣe 'pi sādhanam / somapānādikā vidvān nirjayed antakaṃ yayā //* “Moreover, apūrva is to be manifested by [ritual] action, and ritual action such as drinking soma etc. are the means to [attain] liberation (*mokṣa*). By means of such [ritual action] a knowing person may overcome death.” Cp. Kawasaki (1977: 10–11); Lindtner (1997: 96–97, 1999: 254–255, 2001: 93).

<sup>34</sup>See Kawasaki (1977: 10 n. 9).

<sup>35</sup>YD p. 191 l. 33–35: *tatra śrutismṛtivilānāṃ karmaṇām anuṣṭhānād buddhyavasthaḥ sattvāvayava āśayabhūto dharmā ity ucyate*. Cp. Bronkhorst (2000b: 56).

<sup>36</sup>The Trivandrum manuscript edited by Isaacson (1995a: 270, 1995b: 757) has *sādhanaṇy asya dravyaguṇakarmāṇi*.

<sup>37</sup>Bronkhorst (1993a: 83 f).

<sup>38</sup>Cp. Bronkhorst (1993b: 164 f).

<sup>39</sup>WI p. 131, s.v. *dharmā-viśeṣāt, dharmā-viśeṣa-sahitebhyah*.

<sup>40</sup>Cp. *Mīmāṃsakośa* IV pp. 2241 s.v. *dharmā* etc.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- DNC Dvādaśāra Nayacakra of Mallavādin. Edited, with the commentary Nyāyāgamānusārṇi of Siṃhasūri Gaṇi Vādi Kṣamāśramaṇa, by Muni Jambūvijayajī, 3 parts, Bhavnagar: Sri Jain Atmanand Sabha, 1966, 1976, 1988.
- GOS Gaekwad's Oriental Series, Baroda
- NV Nyāya Vārttika de Uddyotakara, in the following edition: Nyāyadarśanam with Vātsyāyana's Bhāṣya, Uddyotakara's Vārttika, Vācaspati Miśra's Tātparyaṭikā & Viśvanātha's Vṛtti. Chapter I, section I critically edited with notes by Taranatha Nyaya-Tarkatirtha and chapters I-ii – V by Amarendramohan Tarkatirtha, with an introduction by Narendra Chandra Vedantatirtha. Calcutta: Metropolitan Printing & Publishing House, 1936.
- ÖAW Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien
- Vkp Bhartṛhari, Vākyapadīya, ed. W. Rau, Wiesbaden 1977
- VS Vaiśeṣika Sūtra
- VS(C) Vaiśeṣikasūtra of Kaṇāda, with the Commentary of Candrānanda, critically edited by Muni Śrī Jambuvijayajī, second edition, Baroda: Oriental Research Institute, 1982 (GOS 136)
- VS(Ś) Vaiśeṣika Sūtra in the version commented upon by Śaṅkara Miśra; for an edition see Sinha, 1911/1986.
- WI Word Index to the Praśastapādabhāṣya: A complete word index to the printed editions of the Praśastapādabhāṣya, by Johannes Bronkhorst & Yves Ramseier, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994
- YD Yuktidpīkā, ed. in Albrecht Wezler and Shujun Motegi, Yuktidpīkā: The most significant commentary on the Sāṃkhyakārikā, Vol. I, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1998 (Alt- und Neu-Indische Studien, 44)

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