

# Some Anti-Metaphysical Tendencies in Indian Philosophy

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Indian philosophy is generally studied as a collection of schools or systems. Each system is said to contain a position about ultimate reality, which can be called its metaphysics, a theory of *pramāṇas* which can be called its epistemology, and an approach to the goals of life (*puruṣārthas*) which can be called its axiology. There were philosophers in India who were opposed to construction of any metaphysics or any system of *pramāṇas*. They did it either in the framework of a philosophical system or independently of any system. Such positions which present either metaphysical skepticism or epistemological skepticism are generally neglected or even condemned in Indian philosophical discussions.

This paper deals with such a comparatively neglected area of Indian philosophy. It tries to make a critical but selective survey of anti-metaphysical tendencies in Indian philosophy. I have called them 'tendencies' because they are not always found in the form of full-fledged and systematic approaches.

Here a question can be raised about the very term metaphysics. It can be asked as to which approach can be called metaphysical and in what sense of the term 'metaphysics' can it be so called. In the first section therefore, I have dealt with the variety of ways in which one can come across metaphysics and also the

corresponding anti-metaphysics. In the second section I have dealt with a few skeptical approaches which are opposed to common sense. In the third section I have discussed the approaches of Cārvāka and the Buddha which are allegedly opposed to transcendent metaphysics.

## 1. Varieties of Metaphysics

Metaphysics is not one concept but there are different concepts of metaphysics. A very broad and general concept of metaphysics would be that metaphysics is a study of the transcendent, a study of something which goes beyond what is given. But the question is: What is given? The answer to this question can differ from philosopher to philosopher and accordingly the nature of metaphysics for a philosopher can also differ. If “the given” is too minimalistic, for example, only the sense datum of the present moment, then even a common-sense world view or even a scientific world view will be regarded as metaphysical.

However, the upholders of common-sense view may not agree that their view is metaphysical. For example, phenomenologists may claim that realism of material objects is a metaphysical view. But the realists may not accept the charge that they are metaphysicians. They may believe that material objects are directly given in our experience. Materialists too may not accept that they are metaphysicians. They may believe that their view being obviously true or indubitable is scientific.

If on the other hand common sense view or scientific world view is regarded as ‘given’, then the view such as theism or idealism would be regarded as metaphysical. In fact, such views may be called metaphysical by all.

It may be interesting to see how ‘metaphysical thinking’ is possible in a variety of ways. Let us start with the idea of what is immediately given. Suppose we say that some sensible object or a feeling is given to me here and now. Immediately there are three ways of going beyond what is immediately given.

(1) One may either deny the existence of it and say that this is just a false appearance and reality is different. This is how a form of metaphysical idealism becomes available to us.

(2) One may say instead, this immediate phenomenon is real, no doubt, but maybe other things are also real. A leap is involved in this kind of claim and for justifying such a claim, different types of rational exercises may be conducted.

(3) But there is also a third possibility. Someone may claim that the

immediately given phenomenon is the only reality and nothing else exists. This is also a metaphysical position insofar as here one is making a negative ontological claim regarding what is beyond the immediately given.

The three kinds of metaphysics emerging from the three modes of thinking can be called eliminative, additive and restrictive metaphysics respectively. In all these varieties one is making assertive or negative existential claims. Hence, they are different from cognitive skepticism in which we suspend such claims.

Now let us consider in more detail the second variety, i.e., the additive metaphysics which accepts 'something more' in addition to what is immediately given. Here we can get a series of metaphysical approaches in increasing degree of heaviness (*gaurava*) or crowdedness. How can one go on constructing a more and more crowded metaphysics? One normal way is: by accepting additional sources of knowledge than direct experience. For instance –

- I. Over and above direct experience one may accept memory as a source of knowledge so that one accepts not only immediately given phenomena, but also other phenomena which have been previously experienced.
- II. We may claim to know continuity or identity between past and present phenomena on the basis of 'recognition' (*pratyabhijñā*) as a source of knowledge.
- III. One may think that the phenomena that appear are just the apparent features of something substantial which has many other features. One may do this on the basis of a certain kind of inference (*anumāna*).
- IV. One may think that the phenomenon given to me or the 'thing' apprehended in it by me is just an instance of a class of similar phenomena or things. In fact we can know the whole class through an instance. Here generalization is used as a method. *Sāmānyalakṣaṇā pratyāsatti* of Nyāya can be a variety of this.
- V. One may further think that these phenomena cause other phenomena and are themselves caused by others. This involves a causal reasoning, which is a variety of the knowledge of universal laws – a form of the knowledge of *vyāpti*.

There are certain abstract notions like space, time, number and relation, which are accepted because it is in terms of them that we can explain our sensory

and linguistic experience. The mode of reasoning through which such abstract notions are postulated may be construed in different ways. It could be construed as transcendental reasoning or speculative reasoning. In Indian epistemological terms it may be construed as *kevalavyatireki anumāna* (according to Nyaya) or *arthāpatti* (according to Pūrvamīmāṃsā) or *sāmānyatodrṣṭa anumāna*. (according to Nyāya or Sāṅkhya)

All the above additions to ‘what is immediately given’, form a part of our common sense view of the world and in their sophisticated, examined and revised form they constitute the scientific view of the world. Nevertheless, they do contain metaphysical elements insofar as they cross the boundaries of what is immediately given ‘here and now’. However, I am not suggesting here that whosoever possesses or develops such common sense or scientific metaphysical beliefs necessarily arrives at them by using various forms of reasoning I have suggested. Though the beliefs of the common-sense metaphysics are not given to us in immediate experience, they are culturally given to us through communicative and social practices. We simply imbibe them. The question of *pramāṇas* or ratiocinative grounds arises in the case of their justification.

Now, on the background of such a mundane (commonsensical or scientific) metaphysics, metaphysical thinking can lead us to still ‘higher’ levels. Just as the immediate experience of phenomenon can be a point of departure for metaphysical constructions, a mundane metaphysics can be a point of departure for further metaphysical constructions. For instance, one can take an eliminative approach by saying that the world view given by common sense or even by science is ultimately not real, the true nature of the reality is different. Or, one can say that our world view need not be limited to the sphere of common sense or even to the scientific world view, certain additions can be made which make our word view more complex and expansive. Or someone may develop a restrictive approach by saying that common sense view or scientific view of the world is all that we should have and to transcend the limits of it amounts to stepping into nonsense. In this way the same three ways: eliminative, additive and restrictive could be open at this stage as well. The first two ways out of them amount to developing a kind of transcendent metaphysics whereas the third, i.e. the restrictive approach is opposed to a transcendent metaphysics.

One thing may be noted here. We have seen how different forms of reasoning – *pramāṇas* – are used for arriving at and justifying common sense view

of the world. All these *pramāṇas* may not be needed for developing transcendent metaphysics. However, the most important *pramāṇas* which are generally used at this level seem to be the following:

1. Analogical reasoning or *sāmānyatodrṣṭa anumāna*.
2. Verbal testimony or *āgama pramāṇa* / *śabda pramāṇa*.
3. Transcendental reasoning which in Indian context assumes the form of *Kevalavyatireki anumāna* or *arthāpatti*.

In this way two broad groups of metaphysical approaches become available to us. One: the mundane metaphysics, i.e. the metaphysics of common sense and science and two: the transcendent metaphysics – i.e., what is popularly so called.

Now, if metaphysics can be conceived broadly at two levels, anti-metaphysical tendencies too can be conceived at two levels. The philosophers who are opposed even to common sense metaphysics are skeptics. In Indian context we can consider three major philosophers in this context: Jayarāśibhaṭṭa, Nāgārjuna and Śrīharṣa. They seem to be opposed to common sense metaphysics. But are they also opposed to transcendent metaphysics? They have to be opposed to additive type of transcendent metaphysics, but they need not necessarily be opposed to eliminative metaphysics. We will consider this issue in the next section of this paper.

At the second level of anti-metaphysical tendencies, we can consider Cārvākas and early Buddhists, who are allegedly opposed to transcendent metaphysics. Two questions seem to be interesting at this level.

- a. Does Cārvāka epistemology consistently negate transcendent metaphysics?
- b. Can the Buddha's silence on the unanswerable questions (*avyākṛta-praśna*) be interpreted as his theoretical opposition to metaphysics?

We will deal with these questions in the third section of this paper.

## 2. Anti-metaphysical Implications of Indian Skepticism

In India there were cognitive sceptics who doubted the authenticity of all *pramāṇas* including *pratyakṣa* and also the existence of all *prameyas*. Three well-known philosophers have done this exercise. They are Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśibhaṭṭa and Śrīharṣa. In normal course cognitive skepticism of the above sort can be expected to be radically opposed to any kind of metaphysics. But the facts are otherwise. Though Nāgārjuna and Śrīharṣa object to the authenticity of all *pramāṇas* and

existence of all *prameyas*, they also seem to develop metaphysical approaches.

The case of Śrīharṣa is clear. He denies *pramāṇas* as well as *prameyas*, but also asserts that the reality of *Atman/Brahman* beyond the duality of *pramāṇa* and *prameya* remains undeniable. Nāgārjuna's case is complex. Nāgārjuna in *Vigrahavyāvartanī* criticizes the concepts of *pramāṇa* as well as *prameya*. In *Madhyamakāśāstra* and elsewhere he vehemently criticizes the metaphysics of essentialism (*svabhāvavāda*) and propagates non-essentiality (*niḥsvabhāvatā*) or emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of all things. Now, is the assertion of *śūnyatā* an expression of his anti-metaphysical tendency or that of the metaphysics of *śūnyata*? What does expressing a metaphysical position amount to? One can say that it amounts to accepting or committing oneself to the being of something which is beyond what is immediately given. *Śūnyata* of all things is certainly not something that is immediately given and still Nāgārjuna is committing himself to it as the true nature of reality. On the other hand one can quote Nāgārjuna's well-known claim that he is not making any claim, i.e. *pratijna* and hence one cannot find fault with him ('*Nāsti ca mama pratijñā tasmān naivāsti me doṣaḥ*', VV 29). Similarly, one can refer to Nāgārjuna's statement in *Madhyamakāśāstra* that the Buddha states that *śūnyatā* is the elimination of all views; but those who hold *śūnyata* itself as a view are incorrigible. ('*Yeṣāṃ tu śūnyatā dr̥ṣṭis tān asādhyān babhāṣire*', MS 13.8). This argument of Nāgārjuna is like the one from Liar's paradox. One possible answer is that, that all views are *śūnyata* is not itself a view but a meta-view. Nāgārjuna would not be satisfied by this answer because he would regard both, 'view' as well as 'meta-view', essentialist in nature and therefore *śūnyata*. But now the question is: What about *prajñā* - insight or wisdom regarding *śūnyata*? Nāgārjuna's approach seems to be that it is not a view (*dr̥ṣṭi*), because a view by its very nature assumes the form of a statement which asserts something to be the essence (*svabhāva*) of something. *Prajñā* on the other hand is not expressible in language. The so-called expression of *prajñā* which is aimed at generating a similar insight in the listener (Nāgārjuna says: "*prajñāptiyartham tu kathyate*" MS 22.11) may 'point at' the ineffable reality, i.e., *śūnyatā*, but it cannot adequately describe it. (The position may be compared to early Wittgenstein's position that metaphysical statements show something without saying it.) The most interesting part of Nāgārjuna's argument (unlike Wittgenstein) is to show how language fails to describe the true nature of things. This position, however, does not amount to the denial of metaphysics. It only implies that though one can have an insight into metaphysical reality, one cannot express it in language.

What about Jayarāṣi, whose philosophical affiliation is essentially different from that of Nāgārjuna and Śrīharṣa? Can we say that he being a Lokāyata sceptic was free from metaphysical commitment? I think, it is possible to accept this as a broad claim insofar as Jayarāṣi in his *Tattvopaplavasīmha* interprets even Bṛhaspati's aphorisms as questioning the existence of the four gross elements as *tattvas*. Jayarāṣi consistently refutes all *pramanas* and *prameyas* and regards this position as the true Lokayata position<sup>1</sup>. Unlike Nāgārjuna and Śrīharṣa he does not accept any transcendent ultimate reality also. Still, he can be accused of allowing the common-sense world view by back door. For at the end of his treatise he says:

“Hence having all essential principles (*tattvas*) been refuted, all the common practices (*vyavahārāḥ*), which are worth entertaining without reflecting upon (*avicāritaramaṇīyāḥ*), are acceptable.”<sup>2</sup> Here the adjective *avicāritaramaṇīya* is important. Jayarāṣi's idea seems to be this. There are common practices involving a common world view which the ignorant and the learned have to accept alike (*‘Lokavyavahāram prati sadṛśau bālapaṇḍitau’*, TUS p. 1, Line 7) If we investigate into them, try to explain and justify them or refute them theoretically, then we will be frustrated, because after all no *pramāṇas* and no *prameyas* can be established. In this sense philosophy is a self-defeating exercise. But practically such practices and such a world view are inevitable. Here the expression *‘sarve vyavahārāḥ ghaṭante’*<sup>3</sup> only means that they are acceptable practically and *‘avicāritaramaṇīyāḥ’* means ‘to be entertained superficially, without going deeper’.

Here Jayarāṣi's acceptance of common sense can be compared with G.E. Moore's defense of common sense. Jayarāṣi is recommending practical acceptance of common sense but he is not giving any theoretical justification of it, because his cognitive skepticism prevents him from doing that. G.E. Moore, on the other hand, while emphasizing acceptability of common sense is pointing out that non-acceptance of common sense beliefs would lead to pragmatic contradictions. He is making pragmatic necessity a ground for their theoretical acceptability. He is claiming that it is not only the case that common sense beliefs are acceptable

1 TUS P.1, lines 10-14. For translation and interpretation see Franco (1994: 5, 69) Also see my paper Gokhale (1999)

2 “tad evam upapluteṣu eva sarvatattveṣu avicāritaramaṇīyāḥ sarve vyavahārā ghaṭante”, TUS p. 125, Lines 11-12

3 Ibid

but we know them to be true, though we may or may not be able to give correct analysis of them (Moore 1959: 53).

Hence though Jayarāsi allowed common sense metaphysical beliefs to enter into one's life as a practical inevitability, he disallowed any knowledge-claims in their favour. By and large this can be appreciated as a form of consistent anti-metaphysical tendency.

### 3. Cārvāka and the Buddha vis-à-vis transcendent metaphysics

Now we come to those anti-metaphysical tendencies which accept the metaphysics of common sense or that of science but are critical about transcendent metaphysical beliefs. Two such tendencies are identifiable in Indian context. One is that of Cārvāka-darśana and the other is that of early Buddhism.

#### 3a. Cārvāka

Cārvākas (- here I am excluding the sceptic Cārvākas such as Jayarasibhatta-) represent an admixture of anti-metaphysical epistemology and materialistic metaphysics. Cārvākas developed their epistemology mainly in order to combat otherworldly metaphysics of Brahmanical and Śramaṇa schools. Side by side they also presented their materialistic metaphysics. This has led to a paradoxical situation in their epistemology. Let me explain.

Cārvāka epistemology is available to us at least in two forms. One form is extreme empiricism and the other is what can be called mitigated empiricism. According to the former, *pratyakṣa* alone is *pramāṇa* and according to the latter *pratyakṣa* along with *anumāna* of a certain kind is *pramāṇa*. But what kind of *anumāna* is *pramāṇa*? One answer is: *utpanna-pratīti anumāna*<sup>4</sup>, which is the inference, the object of which has been experienced before. Here Cārvākas are opposed to the other kind of *anumāna*, viz. *utpādyapratīti anumāna*, which is the inference, the object of which has not been experienced by *pratyakṣa* (literally, the object of which is to be experienced). It is the kind of inference specially used in the case of transcendent objects such as God. *Utpādyapratīti anumāna* which is rejected by Cārvākas is nothing but analogical inference, i.e. *samanyatodrsta anumana*

4 Jayantabhaṭṭa in Nyāyamañjarī introduces this classification while explaining the position of more educated (Suśikṣitatara) Cārvākas. For my explanation of the classification see Gokhale (1993)

which Naiyayikas-Vaisesikas and Samkhyas use for establishing transcendent entities. Hence these Cārvākas through *pratyakṣa* and *utpanna-pratiti anumana* as the only two *pramanas* develop, like A.J. Ayer, a positivistic epistemology, which results into refutation of transcendent metaphysics. But unlike A.J. Ayer, these Cārvākas present metaphysics of common sense with materialistic explanation of consciousness and also a theory of values. They argue that consciousness arises from the four gross elements viz. earth, water, fire and air, when they get organized in a particular way, like the power of intoxication generated in the molasses and other things combined and processed in a certain way. This is a kind of inference. But what kind of inference is this? Here the object of inference, viz. the rise of consciousness from material elements, is not a matter of our prior experience like fire generating smoke is, or intoxicating power arising from molasses and other things is. In this inference *drṣṭānta* operates as an analogy and not as an instantiation of the object of inference. When, on the other hand, we prove fire on the mountain, fire in the kitchen serves as an instance of fire in general. Hence the Cārvākas' materialist explanation of consciousness takes recourse to analogical reasoning, which they themselves reject while refuting the arguments for God.

If such a move of Cārvākas is justified, then their approach will be on par with the approach of other advocates of transcendent metaphysics – such as idealists and dualists. This is a paradoxical situation.

Here Purandara's classification of *anumana* seems to suggest a way out. Purandara, a Cārvāka thinker referred to in *Tattvasaṅgrahapañjikā* of Kamalaśīla, comes out with another classification of *anumana*, the one between *lokaprasiddha anumāna* and *lokātīta anumāna*.<sup>5</sup> According to Purandara, Cārvākas accept the former and deny the latter. Here '*lokaprasiddha anumāna*' can be taken to mean an inference, the object of which is acceptable (*prasiddha*) as belonging to this empirical world (*loka*) whereas *lokātīta anumāna* is the one, the object of which is supposed to be beyond the empirical world. The rise of consciousness from physical elements is the phenomenon acceptable within the limits of this world, the soul or God transcending the empirical existence is not so acceptable.

Cārvākas are suggesting here that even an analogical reasoning can be accepted if it is of *lokaprasiddha* type and not if it is of *lokātīta* type. Hence Cārvākas

5 See Gokhale (1993). Purandara in the statement quoted in *Tattvasaṅgrahapañjikā* describes the second type of inference as 'the one which is stated by transgressing the worldly way'. I have called it *lokātīta* for the sake of brevity.

seem to believe that by using this technique we can not only prove materialism but also many objects of common-sense view of the world in general.

This proposal of Cārvākas, however, may not be satisfactory as a purely epistemological proposal, because Cārvākas here, one could say, are prejudging the issue as to what should count and what should not count as a part of this world and accordingly designing the nature of the methodological tool with which they try to establish it. Of course, it is quite possible that such a prejudgment of the issue is not the peculiarity of the Cārvākas. It is quite likely that many systems of Indian philosophy first determine their ontology or axiology and then erect the structure of *pramāṇas* appropriate for its justification. However, the paradoxical situation continues.

I suggest that two-fold response is possible from the side of Cārvākas to this paradox supposed to be committed by them. The metaphysics which transcends common sense, as we have seen, could be of two kinds: (1) eliminative metaphysics which condemns common sense as *mithyā* or illusory and (2) additive metaphysics which adds the doctrines such as those of soul, God and other worlds to the commonsense view of the world. In the former case Cārvākas may point out that eliminative metaphysics involves pragmatic contradictions. In the latter case they would point out, by using the principle of parsimony, which is again a pragmatic principle, that such extra-commonsensical beliefs are not necessary for understanding and living the life in this world successfully. Hence justification of common sense metaphysics and denial of theistic, idealistic or dualistic kind of transcendent metaphysics may be done on the basis of certain pragmatic considerations and not merely on the basis of the mitigated empiricism.

### 3b. Early Buddhism

Now let us turn to another school which is many times described as anti-metaphysical. It is early Buddhism or what is more radically termed as original Buddhism or the original teaching of the Buddha.

A few observations can be made at the very outset. Unlike the metaphysics of Cārvākas who advocated materialism in the frame of common-sense world view, the Buddha's metaphysical inclinations are more towards phenomenalism which denies material as well as spiritual substances and more towards giving primacy to change than to permanence or continuity. Similarly, since the Buddha was concerned with finding out the laws of human and physical nature (though

only those laws which were most relevant to the problem of human suffering) his metaphysics leans more towards scientific world view than towards the common-sense world view.

On this background it is sometimes pointed out that the Buddha was primarily and solely concerned with the empirical–practical problem of suffering and not with the trans-empirical metaphysical issues, since they are irrelevant to this problem. Here the reference is generally made to the so-called unanswerable questions (*avyākṛta-praśnas*) on which the Buddha observed silence. The questions included the following:

1. Is the world ( *loka*) eternal or non-eternal?
2. Is the world infinite or finite?
3. Does the *Tathāgata* exist after death?
4. Is the self (*jīva*) same as body or different from body?

The list of these questions is further augmented by conjunctively affirming and denying some of the internal options and is made into the list of 12 or 14 questions. The questions (1) and (2) above which look similar are distinguished by suggesting that question-1 refers to beginning-less-ness or otherwise of the world whereas question-2 refers to endlessness or otherwise i.e. questions (1) and (2) refer to *pūrvānta* and *aparānta* respectively. Here it is to be noted that questions (1) and (2) do not pertain to this or that phenomenon in the world but to the world as a whole. This is important because the Buddha did make statements about phenomena in the world by saying that they arise from causes and whatever so arises also comes to an end. The world as a whole can be conceived as the totality of the series of causally connected phenomena and now the question is whether this totality has a beginning and an end. Similarly, it is generally agreed that the Buddha accepted the doctrine of rebirth and the wheel of becoming caused by misconception (*avidyā*) and craving (*trṣṇā*) but the question was whether the person free from these causes of suffering will also have rebirth. Similarly, it was clear that the Buddha did not accept noumenal self, i.e., *ātman*, but the question was whether the phenomenal self, which he accepted was inseparable or separate from body. The Buddha's silence on these questions has been interpreted in various ways. Here I am considering only one interpretation according to which the Buddha's attitude is likened with that of a logical positivist, who regards metaphysical statements to be cognitively meaningless or nonsensical.

Here, I want to suggest that though the Buddha's approach *prima facie* resembles such a positivistic approach, it is different from that in many respects. Logical positivists were philosophers of science, not philosophers of life. They treated not only metaphysical but also ethical statements to be cognitively meaningless. The Buddha was primarily and essentially a philosopher of life who treats ethical statements to be cognitively meaningful. The Buddha was very much in favour of scientific temperament which he employed mainly in the field of moral psychology unlike logical positivists for whom physical sciences were the sciences in the primary (and ultimate) sense of the term.

Now what about their attitude to transcendent metaphysics? When one concentrates on the unanswerable questions (*avyākṛta-praśnas*) and the way the Buddha explained his silence over them, we come across two kinds of explanations the Buddha himself gives. One in terms of the relevance of the questions to the basic problem of life and the other in terms of the question whether the question itself is true or false.

In the *suttas* like *Cūlamalunkyasutta*<sup>6</sup> and *Potthapadasutta*<sup>7</sup> the Buddha says that these questions and the possible affirmative or negative answers to them are irrelevant to the fundamental problem of life. They are like the questions regarding the physical details of a poisoned arrow and the social details of the person who threw it, when someone is actually wounded with it. In other words this explanation questions the pragmatic propriety of the question. The second explanation is found in *Aggivacchagottasutta*<sup>8</sup> which particularly refers to the question regarding the existence of *Tathāgata* after death. The Buddha claims there that the question is a false question, i.e. the question based on a false presupposition. It is like the question regarding an extinguished fire whether it went in eastern direction or western direction etc. Here one can ask, is the question really a false question? The question regarding extinct fire (whether it went in the eastern direction or western direction etc.) is a wrong question based on a false presupposition that fire, when it becomes extinct, 'goes somewhere'. No such false presupposition is logically involved in the question about *Tathāgata*. (The *Mādhyamika* interpretation apart, because *Nāgārjuna* in the chapter 'Nirvānapariṅśā' of *Madhyamakāśāstra* said that it is incorrect even to presuppose that *Tathāgata* existed during his life. (MS 25.18)) The Buddha also said that if he would say that *Tathāgata* exists after death then it would lead to eternalism (i.e. belief that *Tathāgata* is the eternal

6 See Warren (1953): "Questions which tend not to edification", pp. 117-22.

7 Humphreys (1987) pp.53-54.

8 Warren, (1953) pp. 123-128.

ātman) and if he would say that *Tathāgata* does not exist after death, it would lead to annihilationism.<sup>9</sup> In fact annihilationism in the early Buddhist tradition refers to the materialist view (say, that of Ajitakesakambalī) that there is no fruit of action and hence no rebirth. Since *Tathagata* is free from the bondage of action, the question of annihilationism does not arise in his case. Perhaps the Buddha was reading the question about the posterior existence of *Tathāgata* as the question regarding the existence of the soul of *Tathāgata* after death. If, the question is read as this, then it can be considered as a false question, the false presupposition there being ‘*Tathāgata*’s soul existed when he was alive.’ But suppose, one is not having this presupposition and asking the same question, will the question be false? I think, not. Perhaps the Buddha is reading the question the way he does to avoid the disrespect people would have shown to the doctrine of *nirvāṇa* if the Buddha would have plainly accepted that a liberated person does not exist after death any more. Again, this was a pragmatic consideration of another kind on the part of the Buddha. The point I am trying to make is that though the Buddha’s methodological approach was influenced by scientific rationality, his opposition to transcendent metaphysical beliefs was not solely based on that, it was also based on pragmatic considerations.

On the other hand, it cannot be said that the Buddha was always averse to any kind of transcendent metaphysics. Two limitations may be cited here. (1) As a part of his total world view the Buddha also developed the theory of karma which had its implications to the transcendent metaphysics of past and future birth. (2) One can also attribute to him the metaphysical doctrine of *nibbāṇa* (i.e., *nirvāṇa* in Sanskrit). The Buddha’s *nibbāṇa* cannot be identified with Ātman-Brahman identity because according to the Buddha’s doctrine of triple character (*trilakṣaṇa*), the characteristic of *anattā* (non-substantiality) was applied not only to conditioned objects, but to the unconditioned ones such as *nibbāṇa* as well. *Nibbāṇa*, however, remains a mystery because it was also described by the Buddha as *amataṃ padam* (immortal state) and *paramaṃ sukhaṃ* (ultimate bliss).

Let me summarize this section. (1) The Buddha was developing a metaphysics close to a scientific world view with the focus on phenomenalism and flux and the laws governing human nature. (2) His so-called scientific metaphysics was subservient to his moral psychology and (3) His opposition to transcendent metaphysics was mitigated and was governed largely by pragmatic considerations regarding the problem of suffering.

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9 Humphreys (1987) pp. 54-55.

## Some observations at the end:

An interesting observation common to different anti-metaphysical views which emerges from the above discussion is that anti-metaphysicians in India had to take recourse to pragmatic considerations in some way or the other. A sceptic like Jayarāsi denies all rational metaphysics, but he is ready to accept common sense beliefs at pragmatic level – because that was inevitable in some way. The materialist Cārvāka can deny so-called transcendent metaphysics either on the ground that the latter (- if it is eliminative -) involves pragmatic contradictions or because (- if it is additive -) it is pragmatically superfluous. The Buddha refuses to answer some metaphysical issues for the reason that the issues are pragmatically irrelevant, i.e., irrelevant to the universal practical problem of suffering. One may conclude that pragmatic considerations are inevitable in this way or the other for any kind of anti-metaphysical approach. But why should this conclusion be restricted to anti-metaphysics? Pragmatic considerations are probably inevitable for anti-metaphysicians as well as metaphysicians. No one can escape from them. To quote Jayarāsi: “*Lokavyavahāram prati sadṛśau bālapaṇḍitau*” (The ignorant as well as the learned are alike with respect to the worldly practices.).

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- MS: *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna*, edited by Vaidya P.L. The Mithila Institute, Darbhanga (1960)
- TUS: *Tattvopaplavasimha of Sri Jayarasi bhatta*, edited by Sanghavi, P.S. and Parikh R.C. Bauddha Bharati, Varanasi (1987)
- VV: *Vigrahavyāvartani*, ( Included as Appendix 5 in Vaidya P.L. (Ed.), *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna*, The Mithila Institute, Darbhanga (1960) )
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