

Abstract (3.20) Title: Slaying the Dragon of “Sāṃkhya” in the *Mahābhārata*

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In 1999 Hans Bakker and Peter Bisschop reviewed Frauwallner’s and van Buitenen’s treatment of the famous trio of “Sāṃkhya texts” 12.187, 12.239-41, and 12.286[5] of the Bombay text.¹ Discussed at length first by Hopkins,² Erich Frauwallner—enjoying the benefit of the Deussen-Strauss translation of the vulgate text³—accepted Hopkins’s argument that these three separate texts were “three different versions of an older Sāṃkhya tract”—Frauwallner styled the putative, single, underlying text as the “*episch Grundtext*” of Sāṃkhya and argued that it presented the “*epische Urform*”⁴ of Sāṃkhya—but he rejected in scathing terms Hopkins’s judgment that the tracts had been “worked over into Brahmaism.”⁵ The review of Bisschop and Bakker offered a number of important advances in the study of the complex doctrines and texts found in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*. But their most important contribution was to undo the textual simplifications put forward by Hopkins and Frauwallner and furthered by van Buitenen with regard to that trio of texts. Their review demonstrated that a study of the doctrinal and textual heterogeneity of the three texts revealed important

¹ This chapter, the third of three *adhyāyas* not found in the southern manuscript tradition of the *MBh*, was, quite correctly, not included in Belvalkar’s constituted text of the *Śāntiparvan* of the *MBh*. The two *adhyāyas* preceding it in this exclusively northern tercet are an account of Śiva’s destruction of Dakṣa’s sacrifice and a *sahsranāmastotra* of Śiva recited by Dakṣa. In the northern tradition these three *adhyāyas* were 12.284[3]-286[5], occurring between 12.274 (“The Origin of Fever”) and 12.275 (“The Dialogue between the Seers Nārada and Samaṅga”) in Belvalkar’s constituted text.

² Edward Washburn Hopkins, *The Great Epic of India: Its Character and Origin* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1901), 157-162.

³ Paul Deussen and Otto Strauss, *Vier Philosophische Texte des Mahābhāratam* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1906).

⁴ Erich Frauwallner, *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, 1953: v. 1, p. 288 and J. A. B van Buitenen, “Studies in Sāṃkhya (I): An Old Text Reconstituted,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 76 (1956): 153-157.

⁵ Erich Frauwallner, *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, 1953: v. 1, p. 288, n. 158.

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differences of thinking that must be preserved, rather than washed away in misguided textual reconstruction. My paper in April is based on this recommendation of theirs, and will in fact, take up their final specific suggestion:

What justification, if any, is there to annex the two⁶ dialogues at issue to the Sāṃkhya tradition and not, for instance, to the dialogue between Manu and Bṛhaspati? If the hallmark of the Sāṃkhya is a rift between the material and ideal world, all three dialogues⁷ might be said to belong to the same multifarious stream from which classical Sāṃkhya emerged.⁸

I have recently completed an annotated translation of the *Manubrhaspatisaṃvāda* (12.194-99, henceforth *MBsmvd*). My conference paper will comment on various features of its construction and argumentation in comparison to a number of similar presentations of ontology and ‘soteriology’ in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* (*MDh*), including the famous 12.187 and its parallels in the *Śukānupraśna* (12.239-241) and other parts of that long cycle of instruction— itself an anthology within the *MDh* anthology—, 12.289-90, and other epic texts. Particularly, my paper will attend to:

1. The thoroughgoing antinomy between Action, on the one hand, and Pure Consciousness (*jñāna*, sometimes ‘congealed’ as Knowledge of Consciousness, and sometimes ‘even more thickly congealed’ as intellectual knowledge, and, again, even more thickly congealed, as knowing in general). While hardly unknown elsewhere in the epic, this antinomy is presented in the

⁶ “Two dialogues,” that is the two of the three texts of that formed part of the constituted Pune text.

⁷ That is, 12.187, 12.239-41, and the *Manubrhaspatisaṃvāda*, 12.194-99.

⁸ Hans Bakker and Peter Bisschop, “Mokṣadharmā 187 and 239-241 Reconsidered,” *Asiatische Studien* 53, no. 3 (1999): 469.

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MBsmvd in such a sustained theoretical and practical way that it reminds us of that antinomy later in the Advaita Vedānta tradition.

2. The position of the material world in this text’s cosmogony, which is quite different from that of later Sāṃkhya, but which, again, seems to resemble that of Advaita Vedānta. Here the five elements derive from the absolute reality in a generation distinct from that giving rise to the mental, that is the “conscious,” faculties.
3. The question of the status of *traiguṇya* in this text.
4. The text has a number of interesting arguments regarding our knowledge of the embodied soul (*bhūtātman*). The arguments here are more complex than being simply an invocation of *anumāna*. Additionally, there is a problematic passage (196.4, supplemented perhaps, by 198.11) that would seem to suggest that Vedic revelation, *śravaṇa*, does exist as a way of knowing of the existence of the transcendent reality. BEAR IN MIND: this text is presented to “Bṛhaspati,” whose name at some point in history became synonymous with the epistemologically skeptical, materialistic Lokāyata doctrine.
5. The psychological teachings of this text concerning *buddhi* and *manas*. The text makes a number of important points regarding the function of *buddhi*, some of which Frauwallner missed in his summary of this text in his monumental and splendid *Geschichte*, pages 103-113.

I shall make these observations and comparisons under the aegis of Bakker’s and Bisschop’s dispensation from the tyranny of the idea that all of these texts are either Sāṃkhya or proto-Sāṃkhya. Additional reinforcement for this campaign against the Sāṃkhya-Vṛtra comes from Peter Schreiner, who more or less simultaneously suggested that we not postulate the existence of “Sāṃkhya” unless

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it be so named in a given text or doctrine.⁹ My paper will add further arguments to those adduced by these three scholars: not only does viewing these texts as early Sāṃkhya or Sāṃkhya *manqué* obscure the specificity and the legitimacy of particular teachings, it also prevents us from understanding what “Sāṃkhya” itself signifies when it bursts upon the scene about the turn of the era and causes a real stir.

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⁹ Peter Schreiner, “What Comes First (in the Mahābhārata): Sāṃkhya or Yoga?,” *Asiatische Studien: Études Asiatiques* LIII, no. 3 (1999): 775-776.