

Christopher Bartley

An Introduction to Indian Philosophy.

London: Continuum International Publishing Group 2011.

256 pages

US\$110.00 (hardcover ISBN 978-1-8470-6448-6);

US\$32.95 (paper ISBN 978-1-8470-6449-3)

The thrust of the book is to counter-pose, on the one hand, the Vedāntic tradition which accepts the authority of the Vedas and encompasses the six orthodox schools of Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta; against, on the other hand, the Buddhist schools. The cosmology, ontology and epistemology of both these philosophies is rigorously developed in the form of multiple debates throughout the book, but I bracket all these discussions and concentrate mainly on the notions of *dharma* (duties) and liberation, which according to Bartley are the central core of Indian philosophies.

There is a unifying structural theme that all Indian schools, except for the Cārvākas, share, which is that some system oriented toward moral practice needs to be in place in order to attain salvation. This is centered around the notion of *dharma* in the performance of rituals or meditation or yoga or some other more sophisticated practices. This creates a primacy of practical ethics concerned with the very living of day-to-day life.

The Vedāntic perspective is introduced in Chapter 1. The Vedas provide the complete anatomy of the performance and meaning of rituals. Either there was a Being at the beginning who was the cause of everything, or the universe emerged from nothing. Since nothing can emerge from nothing there must be an original cause. In the Vedas this is taken to be the self-sufficient and all encompassing *Brahman*, which ends the cycle of causes. Given that it is the whole cosmos, it is also in every soul. Rituals are the medium linking individual souls to the *Brahman*. The Buddhist perspective is introduced in Chapter 2. Buddhists believe in constant flux and do not accept the existence of individual souls nor of *Brahman*. They replace the ontology of substances and essences with the ontology of events and processes in which the self becomes insignificant or disappears. They propose the four-fold ethical life: first, experience of suffering; second, suffering is caused by desires such as greed; third, suffering can be ended by attaining *nirvāna*, a state that ends the cycle of rebirths; and fourth, an eight-fold moral path is to be followed to eliminate suffering. This moral life replaces trying to attain salvation through rituals.

Varieties of Buddhist schools are discussed in Chapters 3 through 6. *Abhidharma* Buddhism claims that each *dharma* as a series of experiences is self-sufficient but impermanent hence antithetical to *Brahman*. *Nirvāna* is seen as a positive state to be achieved through *dharma*. *Sautrāntika* Buddhism adopts radical momentariness. *Nirvāna* is seen as an absence of suffering. Ethical consequentialism and responsibility are espoused, because the self acts for the benefit of the future series of experiences that are

the constituents of a self even if it is not the same self. *Madhyamaka* Buddhism rejects the essences of *dharma*. Nāgārjuna argues that if there are essences then there cannot be change, for in order for there to be change, every entity must be devoid of any intrinsic nature. If the world has essences then there is no *nirvāna*, because sufferings are essences of the world and cannot be transcended.

Varieties of Vedāntic schools are presented in Chapters 7 through 14. Sāṃkhya emphasizes the importance of consciousness as an ideal observer that moves the self out of the immediate world of perception and knowledge. Yoga extends the Sāṃkhya method of achieving liberation by providing a rigorous system with features ranging from self-restraint and non-violence to physical postures and breath control to meditation leading to a stage of detachment that is a necessary condition for liberation. Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika argue for a sustained self that is the agent of thoughts, desires, actions. Mimāṃsa concentrates on the performance of Vedic rituals as *dharma*, as social and religious duty. They see the function of language as a guide to human activity in accordance with *dharma*. The Vedas are simply prescriptive tools for rightful action. For Kumārila, the ‘I’ remains constant and performs duty for duty’s sake.

The Prabhākaras agree that the main function of words—especially of the words found in the scriptures—is to propel us into action. Later Mimāṃsakas think of *dharmas* as eternal reality manifested in the rituals and their consequences. For *Advaita* Vedānta pure consciousness goes beyond all dualism including the rationalistic means-ends dualism. It goes beyond the self and is simply consciousness without objects. Śaṅkara believes that in order to attain pure consciousness one must denounce the world. By contrast, Maṇḍana Mīśra takes the more practical approach of realizing pure consciousness through meditation while staying within practical life. Śaṅkara’s soteriological goal is the freedom of the soul from rebirth. All Vedāntins believe that the scriptures are the only means of knowing the *Brahman*, and this knowledge is the necessary and sufficient condition for liberation. Some Vedāntins argue that liberation is to be achieved through the performing of the *dharmas* and rituals. Śaṅkara, however, insists that liberation cannot be attained through action because it is always there with the *Brahman*. Maṇḍana Mīśra, on the other hand, sees positive value in religious practices. The *Viśiṣṭādvaita* Vedānta of Vaishnava tradition turns fully to *bhakti* as a form of personal worship.

The most remarkable achievement of this book is the demonstration of how each tradition of Indian philosophy is unified under some theme, such as the ‘no self’ theory and momentariness of the Buddhists. Yet, within each tradition and each school there is a wide range of difference, so that among the Buddhists we have a range from direct realism to absolute idealism. Not only are there debates across competing schools, there are also intense debates about the nature of the cosmos, epistemology, ethics, religion and the role of rituals among different philosophers or schools within one tradition. Whether we are looking at the thematic heterogeneity of Indian philosophies or the heterogeneity of philosophical positions and theories within each one of the schools, Indian philosophy from its very origins has to be identified with schools of thought rather than with names of philosophers.

This volume contains an abundance of long passages cited from various primary source thinkers within each school. The long quotations highlight the general theme. These extensive passages demonstrate how the thinkers developed their theories in response to those of their opponents. Through the long passages Bartley paints a broad landscape of Indian philosophy. Alternative viewpoints, worldviews and theories are presented as dynamically evolving systems.

The dimensions within each school can be studied in a vertical manner in order to reveal the sophistication and depth of the development of each sub-discipline within Indian philosophy; or they can be studied horizontally by comparing the competing schools at any given point in history. Bartley suggests an integrated approach involving study both of all dimensions within each school vertically and horizontally, i.e. between or across schools.

Bartley successfully displays the diagonal relations between the horizontal and the vertical; that is, he shows how a philosopher within a particular school borrows and develops a notion from a preceding philosopher of an opposing school. For example, Śamkara (8th Century), the *Advaitin*, borrows the refined notion of ‘no self’ theory of the Buddhist Nāgārjuna (2nd Century), in order to come up with a minimalist notion of the self as the seat of a unified experiencing of the empirical world. However, as the central tenet of Vedāntic philosophy is the realization of the unconditioned reality of the *Brahman*, this self becomes relatively insignificant once the *Brahman* is realized and the self as the soul merges with it. This concept of the merging of the *Brahman* and the soul is rejected by Nāgārjuna. On the other hand, Rāmānuja (12th Century), a *Viśiṣṭādvaitin*, thinks of the self as embodied reality as the manifestation of the *Brahman* in an individual, and it has a concrete identity like the enduring self of the Naiyāyikas. The concrete self is also the subject that involves itself in devotion that is the means of attaining *Brahman*.

In Chapter 12 Bartley provides a paradigm of the diversity of Indian schools of philosophy even within the same perspective—in this case, the Vedānta perspective:

Chāndogya Upanisad 6.8.7 says: ‘That which is the subtle essence, that is the identity of the cosmos, that (*tat*) is the reality, that is the *ātman*, and that (*tat*) is what you are’ (*Sa ya eṣo ’ṅimaitadātmyam idam sarvam. Tat satyam. Sa ātmā. Tat tvam asi*).

Advaita Vedāntins read ‘That thou art’ as an identity statement. Rāmānjua understood it as expressing the relation of inseparable dependence between body and soul, and between the soul and God. Madhva reads it as ‘You are not that’. He contrives this by ignoring the natural break between ‘*ātmā*’ and ‘*Tat tvam asi*’ so that it becomes ‘*ātmātat tvam asi*’ which is analysable as ‘*ātmā atat tvam asi*’.

According to the rules of Sanskrit morphology, the long \bar{a} may indicate the coalition of an initial letter a with the letter \bar{a} at the end of the preceding word. The form '*atat*' means 'not that'. (190)

It is remarkable that three schools of Vedānta with close affinity to each other interpret the same sentence in radically different ways, and that Śamkara and Mādhva have exactly contradictory translations of the same sentence.

Bartley surveys almost every school of Indian philosophy. However, some of the discussions on ontology and philosophy of language are too sophisticated for an introductory book, but the sophistication makes it a good read for experts in Indian philosophy.

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