

THE SAMKHYA SCHOOL REVISITED

Dualism: *prakriti* and *purusas*

- *Prakriti* as unconscious matter (the three gunas), underlying material reality.
- *Purusas* as pure consciousness, passive, unchanging, outside of causation.

The regress argument given for the existence of *prakriti*. Note that here we have something like an analytical argument aimed at establishing a philosophical conclusion. The philosophy is justified not by appeals to experience or authority but by logical and rational argument.

Samkhya Epistemology:

Sense experience

Testimony

Inference: Originally in the sense of inferring one thing from its 'sign,' (natural sign?) inferring fire from smoke. But it comes to mean inferring something *indirectly* from premises, observations, or assumptions, other than the thing inferred.

Now at this point several questions arise. Firstly, the material world is a world of change. One thing changes its form. Small things recombine to form bigger things. And so on. But what makes this happen? Why is there any change at all?

The Samkhya school holds that change comes about in the *prakriti* only because of the presence of the *purusas*. So the structure and character of the material world we experience depends upon its being experienced by conscious thought. It is not that conscious thought imposes a structure on the world. Samkhya is not Idealism. It is rather that somehow the material world needs conscious thought to reveal its pre-existing implicit structure. (compare: secondary qualities, response dependent properties)

Secondly, the Samkhya school holds that the *purusas* end up being caught up in the material *prakriti*. How does this happen? Well, the *purusas* mistake the various levels of the material self for themselves. A *purusa* is 'reflected' in a *buddi*, *ahamkara*, and so on. It mistakes this reflection for itself. In a crude analogy, if your brain was wired up to a robot on a distant planet which fed you information about that planet and if you knew no better you would probably mistake that robot for you. In a better analogy, in a *matrix* we might mistake our virtual bodies for ourselves. The same sort of thought is operative here.

But can we *really* get our mind around this thought? No intellect, no ego, no senses. What is left?

Liberation comes from realizing that *prakriti* and *purusas* are distinct., that the material self is not the real self. We think we are suffering but we are not. And we cannot. Our

real self, our *purusa*, is separate and outside the real of *prakriti*. And *prakriti* itself has no consciousness. Suffering is an illusion.

The Samkhya school preaches is liberation through knowledge. Epistemology as the way to salvation. As such, perhaps a difficult path for ordinary folk to follow. Which brings us to yoga....