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GOD IN SĀṂKHYA*

(Published in: *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 27 (1983), pp. 149-164)

The present article is intended to show that Sāṁkhya — or at any rate the Sāṁkhya of the commentaries on the Sāṁkhyakārikā (SK) — accepted the existence of God (*īśvara*) until approximately the end of the first millenium A.D., even though He played a relatively minor role in its view of the world and was not a Creator God. The argumentation is based on the commentaries of the SK which (certainly or probably) belong to this period: primarily on the *Yuktidīpikā* (Ch./YD), but also on the *Gauḍapādabhāṣya* (GBh), *Mātharavṛtti* (MV), *Tattvakaumudī* (TK), *Sāṁkhyasaptatvṛtti* (V₁), *Sāṁkhyavṛtti* (V₂), and the commentary translated into Chinese by Paramārtha. Subsequently is shown how, and why, Sāṁkhya became really atheistic — or something close to that — in the ensuing period.

1.1. The YD discusses in a long section (68.20-74.15) the question what is the cause of the world. The candidates that are discussed and rejected are: the atoms (*paramāṇu*), the Self (*puruṣa*), God (*īśvara*),¹ work (*karman*), fate (*daiva*),² time (*kāla*), chance (*yadṛcchā*) and absence (*abhāva*). Regarding the Self, the YD (70.22-23) remarks that it cannot be the cause of the world, because it is non-active (*akartṛ*). Immediately following this, the YD (70.23-24) continues: “Since also God is not different from awareness, this same way [of arguing] must be understood to exclude that [God] is the cause [of the world]” (*caitanyāviśeṣād īśvarasyāpi sa eva vidhiḥ kāraṇatvapratīṣedhe boddhavyaḥ*). Clearly this passage does not deny the existence of God. On the contrary, it specifies that God, like the Selves, is pure awareness.

In another passage (YD 72.9-10) it is pointed out that the Scriptures describe the form of God, in such words as these: “covered with a skin”, “holding [the trident] Pināka in his hand”, “who has drawn [150] his bow”, “who has black tufts of hair”

* Prof. T. Vetter was kind enough to read an earlier draft of this article and to suggest some improvements.

¹ The discussions about the Self and God (YD 70.22-73.9) have been translated by George Chemparathy (1965: 134-146).

² We must probably read *daivaṁ* for *caivaṁ* at YD 73.27 (Ch. 88.25). The same was apparently done by Chemparathy (1965: 122, fn. 7).

(*śrutir api cāsya mūrtim ācaṣṭe kṛttivāsaḥ pinākahasto vitatadhanvā nilāsikhaṇḍīyādī*).³

The opponent, hearing this, replies that if the descriptions of God given in the Scriptures are accepted by the author of the YD, the latter abandons thereby his own position, and the existence of God is established; for a form cannot belong to something that does not exist (YD 72.10-12: *tadabhyupagamāt svapakṣahāṇir iti cet, syān matam yadi tarhi śrutivacanān mūrtimān īśvaraḥ parigrhyate/ tena siddham asyāstitvam/ kasmāt?/ na hy asato mūrtimattvam upapadyata iti kṛtvā*). The reaction of the author of the YD is this (YD 72.12.14): *etad... ayuktam/ abhiprāyānavabodhāt/ na hy ekāntena vyaṃ bhagavataḥ śaktiviśeṣaṃ pratyācakṣmahe, māhātmyaśarīrādiparigrahāt/ yathā tu bhavatocyate pradhānapuruṣavyatiriktaḥ tayoḥ prayoktā nāstīty ayam asmadabhiprāyaḥ*. “This is not proper. On account of the non-understanding of [our] intentions. Because we do not deny the special power of the exalted one completely, for [he acquires power by] adopting a body of dignity etc.⁴ But our intention is this, that there exists no [such being] as is mentioned by you, which is different from both the fundamental substrative cause (*pradhāna*) and the Selves (*puruṣa*), and instigates these.”

So, if we wish to understand the intentions of the author of the YD, we must realize that he accepts the existence of God.

The YD does not anywhere deny the existence of God. On a number of occasions it denies that God is the cause of the world, e.g. at YD 27.1-3; 29.15-17; 40.29-30; 142.2-4. All these passages refer to the section of the YD of which we have studied some parts above (YD 70.22-73.9). All of them are concerned with God’s activity, not with His existence.

However, the section of the YD (70.22-73.9) which deals in detail with all arguments that might be used to prove that God is the cause of the world, contains a few phrases which might create [151] the impression that indeed the existence of God is denied. This impression is not correct, as I shall show now.

YD 70.25 begins: *āha asty evam īśvara iti pāśupatavaiśeṣikāḥ* “[The opponent] raises the objection that the Pāśupatas and the Vaiśeṣikas [think] that God is such⁵ (viz., the cause of the world)”. The opponent then explains that an excellent effect is always caused by a superior instrument of understanding (*buddhi*), which, in the case of the

³ The first three epithets (with *avatata*° instead of *vitata*°) occur, in this same order, at Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā (KS) IX 7 (: 110,10) and Nirukta III 21 (cf. V 22); Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā (VS) III 61 reads *āvatatadhanvā pinākāvasaḥ kṛttivāsā*.

⁴ Chemparathy (1965: 142) translates: “for we admit (the existence of) glorious bodies (*māhātmyaśarīrāṇi*) etc.” This is not likely to be correct, for a few lines earlier the YD (72.8) speaks of *mūrtiparigraha*, which can only mean “adopting a bodily form”. We can, as a second choice, follow Chemparathy to some extent, and get: “for we admit [God as being] a *māhātmyaśarīra* etc.” We shall see that the YD sometimes uses the word *māhātmyaśarīra* (masc.!) in the sense “who possesses a body of dignity” (see p. 153, below).

excellent effect which is the world, belongs to God. He concludes (YD 70.28): *tasmād astīśvara iti*. This does not mean: “Therefore God exists”. Rather, it means: “Therefore God is [the cause of the world]”. This is further confirmed by the fact that the opponent concludes his second argument (that the connection between sentient and insentient things is caused by a sentient being; the connection between body and soul is therefore caused by God) with the words (YD 70.31): *tasmād astīśvaraḥ kāraṇam* “Therefore God is the cause”.

The reply to the first argument of the opponent reads (YD 70.31-32): *ucyate: yat tāvad uktaṃ kāryaviśeṣasyātīśayabuddhipūrvakatvād īśvarasadbhāvasiddhir iti atra brūmaḥ na, sādhyatvāt* “The defender argues: With respect to what has been said ‘Establishment of the existence of God because an excellent effect is caused by a superior instrument of understanding’, we say: ‘[This is] not [correct], because [this is still] to be established (i.e., is not valid)’.” We note that not the existence of God is rejected, but the establishment of the same on the grounds that “excellent effects are caused by superior instruments of understanding”.

1.2. What information does the YD provide regarding what God is like? We know already (see p. 149, above) that God, like the Selves, is pure awareness, and is not a cause of the world. About the Selves (*puruṣa*) it is known that, in order to interact with the world, they need an instrument of understanding (*buddhi*). The question is therefore, does God possess an instrument of understanding?

We saw above (1.1) that the opponent tried to establish the causal agency of God on the basis of his instrument of understanding, and also that this argument was rejected by the author of the YD. But why is it rejected? The answer is “This excellent effect (viz., the world) is not caused by [something] which possesses an instrument of understanding, because there can be no instrument of understanding before the coming into action of the fundamental substrative cause (*pradhāna*)” (YD 71.6-7): *...prāk pradhānapravṛtter buddhyasambhavān na buddhimat-[152]pūrvako 'yaṃ kāryaviśeṣaḥ*). According to the Sāṃkhya philosophy the world originates out of the fundamental substrative cause (*pradhāna*). When the fundamental substrative cause comes into action, effects (*kārya*) can become manifest. One kind of effect is the instrument of understanding (*buddhi*). A result is that no instrument of understanding can bring about the creation of the world, for it is itself part of what is created.

We learn from this passage that, according to the author of the YD, God has no permanent instrument of understanding, and consequently no permanent material accompaniment.

⁵ Not “There exists such an Īśvara”, as Chemparathy (1965: 134) has it.

The question is now: Does God ever have a material accompaniment? We saw on p. 150, above, that God “acquires power by adopting a body of dignity etc.”. This indicates that God, himself being pure awareness, sometimes adopts a material body and then possesses the power which belongs to that body.

What kinds of body does God adopt? Information regarding what is a “body of dignity” (*māhātmyaśarīra*) is obtained from YD 73.25, which says: “Among the [bodies which naturally come into being at the first creation] he is a supreme seer, whose instrument [to bring about] effects consists predominantly of *sattva*. He whose *sattva* contains much *rajas* is a possessor of a body of dignity.” (*tatra yasya sattvapradhānaṃ kāryakaraṇaṃ sa paramarṣiḥ/ yasya sattvaṃ rajobahulaṃ sa māhātmyaśarīraḥ*). The YD, incidentally, goes on to speak of other bodies “down to the bodies of plants”, thus indicating that bodies of supreme seers and bodies of dignity are the best ones available.

This explanation suggests that bodies of dignity are the bodies of divine warriors. The list of epithets given in YD 72.9-10 (see pp. 149 f., above) confirms this. All epithets seem to belong to Śiva, the god of destruction.

Does God ever take other bodies than bodies of dignity? The YD (72.13) says that God “adopts a body of dignity etc.” (*māhātmyaśarīrādīparigrahāt*). The question is now, what other bodies does God adopt?

The YD does not, to my knowledge, contain a clear and unambiguous answer to this last question. It does, however, contain a hint. We saw that the body of a supreme seer is as good as, perhaps even better than, a body of dignity.

The YD contains two passages, both on p. 45, which suggest that God accepts the body of a supreme seer. While dealing with the question who are authoritative persons (*āpta*), the following statement occurs (YD 45.10-11): *vyapagatarāgādidoṣāṇām asandigdhamatīnām atīndriyārthadṛṣvanām īśvaramaharṣīnām āptatvam ācakṣmahe* “We ascribe authoritativeness (*āptatva*) to the *īśvaramaharṣīs*, who are devoid of [153] blemishes such as passion, whose opinions are free from doubt, who see things that cannot be reached by the senses.”

The question is, what kind of compound is *īśvaramaharṣi*, a Dvandva or a Karmadhāraya? If it is a Dvandva, *īśvaramaharṣīnām* means “to Go and the great seers”. If it is a Karmadhāraya, it means “to the great seers, who are [incorporations of] God.”⁶ In the former case, the word *īśvara* cannot refer to the pure awareness that is God according to YD 70.23-24 (see p. 149, above), for pure awareness does not possess authoritativeness or opinions. We would then be forced to accept that this word refers to

⁶ Grammatically there is a third possibility: “to the seers, who are Gods”. The consistent use of singular endings after *īśvara* (see p. 149), above) and *bhagavat* (see p. 150, above) makes this possibility inapplicable here.

God when He has taken embodiment in a body of dignity (*māhātmyaśarīra*). In this sense the word *īśvara* has not been used anywhere else in the YD. On the contrary, YD 73.25 uses, to express this sense, the Taddhita formation *māhātmyaśarīra* (masc.!) “who possesses a body of dignity”.

The same compound *īśvaramaharṣi* occurs again at YD 45.22-23. Here the same arguments apply. Both times the compound must, so it seems, be interpreted as a Karmadhāraya: “the great seers who are [incorporations of] God.” We shall find a confirmation of this interpretation in the MV, where Kapila, the great seer *par excellence*, appears as a incarnation of God (see p. 156, below).

There is reason to believe that, according to the YD, God acquires an instrument of understanding (*buddhi*). It is found in the section of the YD (71.22-72.21) where the second proof that God is the cause of the world is rejected.

This second proof runs as follows: “Because the connection between a sentient and an insentient [thing] is brought about by a sentient [being]. In this world it is seen that the connection between a sentient and an insentient [thing] is brought about by a sentient [being], as for example [the connection] between an ox and a cart. There is such a connection between the insentient body and the sentient owner of the body (*śarīrin*). Therefore this connection also must have been brought about by a sentient [being. The being] by whom this [connection] has been brought about, that is God.” (YD 70.28-31: *cetanācetanayor abhisambandhasya cetanakṛtatvāt / iha cetanācetanayor abhisambandhaś cetanakṛto dṛṣṭaḥ, tad yathā gośakaṭayoḥ / asti cāyaṃ cetanācetanayoḥ śarīraśarīriṇor abhisambandhaḥ / tasmād anenāpi cetanakṛtena bhavitavyam / yatkrto ‘yaṃ sa īśvaraḥ*).

The author of the YD rejects this proof by pointing out, among other things, that it leads to an infinite regress (YD 71.26-27): *anava*[154]*sthāprasaṅgāt*). If the connection between a sentient and an insentient thing is always brought about by a sentient being, then the connection between God and His “cause to bring about effects” (*kāryakāraṇa*) likewise requires a sentient being as cause; and this argument can be repeated ad infinitum (YD 71.27-28: *cetanācetanayor abhisambandhasya cetanakṛtvaṃ bruvataḥ prāptam īśvarakāryakāraṇayor abhisambandhasya cetanakṛtatvam / tathā cānavasthāprasamgaḥ*). What is meant by “cause to bring about effects” (*kāryakāraṇa*) is learned from YD 71.29-72.2. Here the suggestion that both God and His cause to bring about effects are sentient, is discussed. The author of the YD does not accept this suggestion, for two reasons. The second reason is: “Because there would be the reverse [of what is desired]. For one who asserts the consciousness of both (i.e., of God and of His cause to bring about effects), just as the instrument-of-understanding (*buddhi*) etc. are the instrument (*kaṛaṇa*) of God, so God would also be the instrument of the

instrument-of-understanding etc.” (YD 72-1-2: *viparyayaprasaṅgāḥ*⁷ *ubhayacaitanyapratijñāsya atheśvarasya karaṇam buddhyādayaḥ, evam īśvaro ‘pi buddhyādīnāṃ karaṇam syāt*). God’s cause to bring about effects (*kāryakāraṇa*) is therefore an instrument-of-understanding (*buddhi*) etc.

The author of the YD accepts that God has a cause to bring about effects. This we learn from what immediately follows. The opponent there proposes for acceptance that God has no cause to bring about effects, in order to avoid the difficulties which had been pointed out by the author of YD (YD 72.3: *kāryakāraṇavattānabhyupagamād adōṣa iti cet ...*). This proposal is rejected on several grounds. Two of these are the following: 1. the proposal is incompatible with the view that God adopts bodily forms (YD 72.8: *mūrtiparigrahavyāghātāt*); 2. it is belied by the Scriptures (YD 72.9: *śruteḥ*). We know already (see pp. 150 and 152 f., above) that, according to the author of the YD, God does adopt bodily forms. This means that God has a cause to bring about effects, i.e., an instrument of understanding (*buddhi*) etc.

It is not clear from the YD whether God acquires His instrument of understanding together with the bodily forms which He sometimes adopts, or before them. It is therefore not clear if He needs the instrument of understanding in order to adopt a body, or perhaps the other way round, that He receives the instrument of understanding in the process of adopting a bodily form.

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1.3. We have arrived at a fairly complete picture of God as accepted in the YD. God is, first of all, pure awareness, like the Selves. As such He is not, and cannot be, a cause of the world. He has no permanent instrument of understanding (*buddhi*), but acquires one sometimes. He also adopts at times a bodily form, e.g. the body of a divine warrior, and perhaps that of a supreme seer.

2. The YD allowed us to obtain a fairly precise result, preciser than is possible in most other Sāṃkhya texts. Important is, however, that no Sāṃkhya texts of the first millennium deny God’s existence. Rather, more often than not they give us the impression that they accept God’s existence as a matter of course, but do not accept His causal agency with respect to the world. Let us look at some of them in more detail.

The SK never speaks a word about God, and in this sense does not deny His existence. The commentaries do discuss the question whether or not God is the cause of the world. Vācaspatimiśra’s TK does so on SK 56-57. Vācaspatimiśra argues that the creation is “not brought about by the original state of nature (*prakṛti*) supervised by God, since [God who is] without activity cannot be superintendent; for not does a

⁷ Both editions (YD 72.1; Ch. 86.20) read *aviparyayaprasaṅgāt*. This does not seem to make sense.

carpenter without activity superintend [his] chisel etc.” (TK 164.7-9: *neśvarādhiṣṭhitapraṅṅtikāḥ nirvyāpārasyādhiṣṭhātrtvāsambhavāt / na hi nirvyāpāras takṣā vāśyādy adhiṣṭhati*). Another reason why God cannot be considered the creator of the world, is that no purpose is served for Him by doing so, “for the exalted one (*bhagavat*) who has obtained all that is desired, has no wish whatever [even] while not creating the world” (TK 164.29-31: *na hy avāptasakalaprepsitasya bhagavato jadag asṛjataḥ⁸ kim apy abhilaṣitam bhavati*). So God is without activity, has obtained all that is desired, and has no wish whatever.

Gauḍapāda rejects the suggestion that God is the cause of the vicissitudes of living beings by invoking the teachers of Sāṁkhya: “With respect to this the teachers of Sāṁkhya said ‘Since God is free from genetic constituents (*guṇa*), how could creatures endowed with genetic constituents come into being?’” (GBh 153 [on SK 61]: *atra sāmṅhyācāryā āhuḥ, nirguṇatvād īśvarasya katham saguṇāḥ prajāḥ jāyeraṇ*). And again: “God is free from genetic constituents; the origin of the worlds which are endowed with genetic constituents out of Him is not suited” (GBh 153: *nirguṇa īśvaraḥ, saguṇānām lokānām tasmād utpattir ayukteti*). Gauḍapāda’s is a shortened version of Māṅhara’s [156] Vṛtti⁹ on the same verse, which recurs almost identically in V₁ 72.23-73.5. V₂ is close to Gauḍapāda, saying: “And God is free from genetic constituents; the origin of the worlds which are endowed with genetic constituents, out of God who is free from genetic constituents, is not suited. Therefore God is not [their] cause.” (V₂ 60.1-2: *nirguṇaś ceśvaraḥ¹⁰ nirguṇād īśvarāt saguṇānām lokānām utpattir ayuktā / tasmād akāraṇam īśvaraḥ*). The commentary translated into Chinese by Paramārtha, contains the following passage (also on SK 61): “You say that God is the cause. This is not correct. Why so? Since He is without genetic constituents. God does not possess the three genetic constituents, whereas the world does possess the three genetic constituents. The cause and the effect would not resemble each other; therefore God is not the cause” (T. 2137, p. 1260c l. 7-10; cf. Takakusu 1904: 1051 and Sastri 1944: 89). All these commentaries repeat that God is without genetic constituents (*guṇa*); they do not deny His existence.

⁸ This is the reading of 10 out of 26 Mss. and printed editions. All others have *-gat sṛj-*, so that we must translate, with Ganganath Jha (1965: 155): “... in the creating of the world, He can have no selfish motive”.

⁹ MV 75.18-23 [on SK 61]: *atra sāmṅhyā vadanti / īśvaraḥ kāraṇam na bhavati / kasmāt, nirguṇatvāt / imāḥ saguṇāḥ prajāḥ / sattvarajastamāṁsi trayo guṇāḥ te ca prajāsu santi / ... yadiśvaraḥ kāraṇam syāt tato nirguṇād īśvarān nirguṇā eva prajāḥ syuḥ / na caivam / tasmād īśvaraḥ kāraṇam na bhavati* /. Of course, I do not claim that Gauḍapāda’s Bhāṣya is later than Māṅhara’s Vṛtti. Esther A. Solomon (1974: 179-180 and *passim*) thinks the reverse is true.

¹⁰ Esther A. Solomon, the editor of this text, emends these words into *nirguṇaś ce[d ī]śvaraḥ* “if God is without genetic constituents”. The single Ms. does not support this change. The closely similar GBh shows that the emendation is not justified.

Two commentaries — GBh and MV (both on SK 23) — go to the extent of mentioning “devotion to God” as one of the virtues of the instrument of understanding (*buddhi*) when it betrays a preponderance of *sattva*. They quote here Yogasūtra (YS) II 32, which enumerates “devotion to God” as one of the observances (*niyama*).

The MV, finally, confirms our idea that the supreme seer Kapila is an incorporation of God. We read in MV 1.14-17: *iha hi bhagavān maharṣiḥ sāmśiddhikadharmajñānavairāgyaiśvaryasampanno bhagavataḥ purāṇapurūṣasyāvātāro jagadanujighrṣayā prajāpateḥ kardamasya putraḥ svāyambhuvasya manor duhitari devahūtyāṃ kapilo nāma babhūva* “For the exalted great seer, possessed of inborn virtue, knowledge, passionlessness and power, **an incarnation of the exalted old Self**, [and] named ‘Kapila’, came into this world (*iha*) as the son of Prajāpati Kardama, in Devahūti, the daughter of Svāyambhuva Manu, on account of his desire to show favour to the world.” The exalted old Self is, of course, God (*īśvara*).

God is again praised in an introductory verse (MV 1.3-4), which further elucidates the relationship between God and Kapila: *sarvavid-[157]yāvidhātāram ādityasthaṃ sanātanam / nato ‘smi parayā bhaktyā kāpilaṃ jyotir īśvaram //* “I am bowed down with the highest surrender for **God, the light of Kapila**, who grants all knowledge, resides in the sun [and] is eternal”.

God is the light of Kapila. What this means is clear: God is the Self which resides, shines, in Kapila. It is certainly no coincidence that the author of this verse deemed it necessary to speak of the light of Kapila and thus to deviate from the two prototypes of this verse found in the Mahābhārata (quoted in Wezler 1970: 257), which simply speak of Kapila. The simple identification of God (*nārāyaṇa / kṛṣṇa*) with Kapila found in these verses of the Mahābhārata had made place for a theoretically more satisfying relation Self - “be-Self-ed”.

3. But isn’t it true that an old distinction exists between theistic (*seśvara*) and atheistic (*nirīśvara*) Sāṃkhya? And isn’t atheistic Sāṃkhya the Sāṃkhya described in the SK and its commentaries?

The distinction is mentioned in verse 34 of Haribhadra’s Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya (8th century A.D.), the first verse in the section which deals with the Sāṃkhya system: “Some Sāṃkhyas are without God, some have God as their deity”¹¹ (§§ 96.21-22: *sāṃkhyā nirīśvarāḥ kecit kecid īśvaradevatāḥ*). Are the SK and its commentaries the work of the Sāṃkhyas with God, or of those without God? It is tempting to say that

¹¹ The formulation of this half-verse is somewhat queer. It suggests that some Sāṃkhyas have God (*īśvara*) as their deity (*devatā*), other Sāṃkhyas someone else. This is indeed how the commentator Guṇaratna understands the verse, for he says: “And those who are without God, their deity (*deva*) is Nārāyaṇa” (TRD 96.2-3: *ye ca nirīśvarās teṣāṃ nārāyaṇo devaḥ*).

they were written by the Sāṁkhyas with God, and that perhaps other Sāṁkhyas existed who denied the existence of God. There is, however, reason to think that this is not correct. It is likely that the word *īśvara* here is used in the sense “Creator God”. If this is true, the commentaries on the SK which we considered above become again squarely *nirīśvara*, now meaning “without Creator God”.

The reason to think that *īśvara* in the expressions *nirīśvara* and *seśvara* means “Creator God” is based on Śāntarakṣita’s Tattvasaṅgraha (TS) and its commentary Pañjikā by Kamalaśīla, both dating from the 8th century A.D. Śāntarakṣita discusses, and rejects, the opinion according to which all effects come forth out of the fundamental substrative cause (*pradhāna*). This view is given condensed expression in verse 7: “Out of the fundamental substrative cause alone, provided with all potencies (*śakti*), the several effects come forth; they are by their nature nothing but the fundamental substrative cause.” (TS 20.3-4: *aśeṣaśaktipracitāt pradhānād eva kevalāt / kāryabhedāḥ pravart-[158]tante tadrūpā eva bhāvataḥ*). Kamalaśīla comments: “The followers of Kapila [think] that ... these several effects, *mahad* etc., come forth out of the fundamental substrative cause. ... The word ‘alone’ is [used] to exclude God who is assumed [to take part in the creation] in addition to [the fundamental substrative cause] by the Sāṁkhyas with God.” (Pañjikā 21.2-4: ... *pradhānam, tata evaite mahadādayaḥ kāryabhedāḥ pravarttante iti kāpilāḥ / ... kevalād iti vacanaṃ seśvarasāṅkhyopakalpitesvaranirāsārtham*). We learn from this that those who think that the world came forth out of the fundamental substrative cause alone are not “Sāṁkhyas with God”, **irrespectively of their opinions regarding God’s existence.**

4. Why did the Sāṁkhyas believe in God? The role which He plays in their philosophy is minor indeed. He is the Self of Kapila, the seer who imparted the knowledge of Sāṁkhya to mankind.

There seem to be two additional reasons for the Sāṁkhyas’ acceptance of God: 1. it is written in the Scriptures; 2. devotion to God is an important aid to those who do yogic practices.

We have seen already (pp. 149 f., above) that the YD invoked the Scriptures (*śrutī*) in order to show that God adopts bodily forms. These same Scriptures were, of course, reason to think that God existed. Regarding the second reason it may be observed that the Sāṁkhyas always had close contact with circles in which religious teachings were handed down and practised (Frauwallner 1953: 283, 330-331). And even though the Sāṁkhya works do not emphasize it, some passages indicate that yogic practices were considered a part of the road to liberation. Most explicit on this point is Vācaspatiśra on SK 23, where he says: “Virtue, when produced by the performance

of sacrifices, charity, etc., is the cause of benefit, and when produced by the practice of the eight-limbed Yoga, is the cause of ultimate bliss” (TK 128.22-23: ...

yāgadānādyanuṣṭhānajanito dharmo ‘bhyudayahetuḥ / aṣṭāṅgayogānuṣṭhānajanitaś ca niḥśreyasahetuḥ). As is well known, the eight-limbed Yoga is described in the YS (II 28 ff.) and its commentaries. One of the eight limbs is constituted by the five observances (*niyama*), one of which is devotion to God (*īśvarapraṇidhāna*; see YS II 32). What Vācaspatimiśra is saying here, is that the practice of Yoga, including devotion to God, leads to release.

The YD gives as the means of obtaining liberation the abstentions (*yama*), observances (*niyama*), passionlessness (*vairāgya*) and knowledge (*jñāna*).¹² All these means are used in practical Yoga (see YS II [159] 29; I 12; II 28). Elsewhere the YD (95.21) describes the striver after liberation (*yatī*) as ‘single in intent’ (*ekāgra*), a yogic expression (see YS II 41; III 11; III 12). YD 143.3 speaks of someone “striving [after liberation], whose mind is single in intent owing to practice” (*abhyāsaikāgramanaso yateḥ*). We are reminded of YS I 13, according to which practice is “exertion towards stability” (*tatra sthitau yatno ‘bhyāsaḥ*). Clearly the author of the YD considered some kind of yogic training essential for the obtainment of the highest aim.¹³ He does not mention devotion to God as part of this training, but we may none the less think that the belief in God found at least part of its justification in the advantages it offered to the practical ‘striver’.

5. We have seen (pp. 152 and 156 f., above) that the God of Sāṁkhya had much to do with Kapila, the ancient seer. The former was the Self of the latter, the latter an incorporation of the former. It goes without saying that the distinction between these two could easily get blurred, and that God might simply fade away behind Kapila. This process was facilitated by the fact that the SK and its commentaries were already considered *nirīśvara* (see pp. 157 f., above). We know that this term initially merely implied that the existence of a Creator God was denied, but how easily could it come to mean that no God whatever was accepted!

The process here described took first place, so it seems, among adherents of other schools who wrote about, or against, Sāṁkhya. Its effect can be witnessed in Udayana’s *Nyāyakusumāñjali* (11th century) and Sāyaṇamādhava’s *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* (14th century). The *Nyāyakusumāñjali* (NK) deals with proofs of the existence of God. By way of introduction it raises, and answers, the question what need there is for such a

¹² YD 20.33-34: *yamaniyamavairāgyajñānābhyupāyaśuddher viśuddhaḥ [mokṣaḥ]*.

proof, since all worship Him in one form or another. Here (NK 3.9-20, § 1.3) Udayana enumerates no fewer than fourteen schools of thought, each of which worship God in their own way, among them the followers of Kapila, who worship God in the form of “the first knower, the perfected one” (*ādividvān siddhaḥ*). Wezler (1970: 256 f.) has correctly shown that this is Kapila. It is to be noted that Kapila is here represented as the highest being known to the followers of Kapila, but not as God! This can be seen as follows: In the same enumeration also others are mentioned who do not believe in God, most notably the Cārvākas. The Cārvākas are said by Udayana to worship God in the form of *lokavyavahārasiddha* “one established [as Lord [160] (*īśvara*)] by usage in the world”. What is meant by this last expression can be learned from a passage in the chapter on the Cārvākas in Sāyaṇamādhava’s Sarvadarśanasamgraha (SDS). Here the Cārvāka is presented as pointing out that the lofty things valued by others are really very ordinary and down to earth. ‘Hell’ is nothing but pain caused by thorns etc.; ‘liberation’ nothing but the destruction of the body; and the **Supreme Lord** (*parameśvara*) is the king established in the world (*lokasiddho rājā parameśvaraḥ* [SDS 6.52-53]). Udayana’s point is clearly this, that everyone has something, or someone, whom he considers highest and to be worshiped. For the Cārvāka this is the king, for the follower of Kapila it is Kapila; it is true that these Sāṁkhyas do not recognize the existence of God, but they do worship Kapila.

In the chapter on Sāṁkhya of the SDS we read: “But the great noise of those who advocate **the existence** of a Supreme God [saying] that the Supreme God sets the fundamental substrative cause (*pradhāna*) in motion out of compassion, has aborted” (SDS 328.124-125: *yas tu parameśvaraḥ karuṇayā pravartaka iti parameśvarāstitvavādinām dīṇḍimaḥ sa garbhasrāveṇa gataḥ*). In this sentence (as well as before and after it) the view that God is the cause of the world is refuted, and ascribed to **those who accept God’s existence**. In other words, the Sāṁkhyas here describe deny God’s existence according to Sāyaṇamādhava! And as to who are the Sāṁkhyas here described there can be no doubt: they are the followers of the SK and its commentaries, for the SK is quoted repeatedly. Sāyaṇamādhava calls their system *nirīśvara* in the concluding sentence of this chapter (SDS 330.152). This clearly means here “without God” in the literal sense of the words. God has completely disappeared from the scene.

The new belief that the Sāṁkhyas did not recognize God’s existence came to be accepted even by the Sāṁkhyas themselves. The Sāṁkhyasūtra (around 1400 A.D.)

¹³ More on yogic practices in the YD in Oberhammer 1997: 17-56. Oberhammer (1961: 142) has also expressed the supposition that Vṛṣagaṇa’s Śaṣṭitantra, the ancient Sāṁkhya work which is unfortunately now lost, made use of notions developed in certain yogic circles.

says repeatedly (SS I 92; V 10; VI 64) that the existence of an eternal God cannot be proved. It reserves the term *īśvara* for those who have become all-knowing and all-doing on account of their earlier dissolution in the original state of nature (SS III 54-57). When the Scriptures praise God, they really praise a liberated soul (SS I 95). The commentator Vijñānabhikṣu admits in the introduction of his *Sāṁkhyapravacanaabhāṣya* (SPBh) that *Sāṁkhya* is atheistic, even though he is not happy about this.¹⁴

6. We have come to the conclusion that the *Sāṁkhya* system of philosophy recognized the existence of God until about the end of the [161] first millennium A.D. It then became atheistic, first probably in the eyes of outsiders, then according to the *Sāṁkhyas* themselves.

Our study does not enable us to say since when *Sāṁkhya* recognized the existence of God. In this connection it is noteworthy that the epic forerunners of the *Sāṁkhya* philosophy show no sign of being atheistic; on the contrary, on some occasions they explicitly accept God's existence (Edgerton 1924: 7-14, 22-29).¹⁵ It is, however, unlikely that God, in this early period, was conceived in the same way as in the texts studied in the present article.

Among modern scholars, the idea that *Sāṁkhya* is atheistic was most forcefully urged by Richard Garbe. Garbe's (1917: 253-257) arguments were largely based on the SS, a work which he himself proved to be late (1917: 97). His opinion was none the less accepted by virtually all workers in the field. (A lonely exception is Abhay Kumar Majumdar [1930], who however goes too far by attempting to prove that even the SS is not atheistic.) The God-like nature of Kapila, however, did not go unnoticed. Wezler (1970) invoked it to explain some passages in *Sāṁkhya* works which mention God. Oberhammer (1964) argued that Kapila was the prototype of the God of the Yoga system of philosophy. Both these scholars came close to the truth, but failed to recognize the most important fact: that *Sāṁkhya* was not atheistic!

¹⁴ Vijñānabhikṣu tries to justify it by crooked means (SPBh 4.1-9).

¹⁵ According to Edgerton (1924) *sāṁkhya* in the epic refers to the method of salvation by knowledge, and not to a particular system of philosophy. This does not change the fact that the salutary knowledge is such as developed, among other things, into the later *Sāṁkhya* system (Edgerton 1924: 32-35).

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