

DANAM CONFERENCE 2004

SESSION 5:

Theme: Interpretation and Means of Knowledge in Dharma Traditions

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SUMMARY AND ABSTRACTS

Summary of Session 5

Contemporary works of scholarship in epistemology or hermeneutics rarely, if ever, mention even a reference to the multivalent epistemological methodologies and categories of interpretation available in the Dharma traditions. It seems reasonable, in light of two centuries of Western studies of Indic traditions to hope that contemporary philosophical inquiry would reference as normative, at least some of the diverse modes of indigenous Indic epistemological or hermeneutical structures. However, such a hope remains just that. As a response to such a lacuna, this session seeks to examine some of the diversity of resources such as the epistemologies of self knowledge in the *darsanas*; the Tibetan Buddhist theories of Valid Cognition; the Jaina argument for the 'seven philosophical standpoints' which include the conventional, generic, practical, linear, literal, etymological and actuality viewpoints; or the ethical and hermeneutical implications of the Sikh Dharam Khand; and the hermeneutical strategies of Swami Dayananda, founder of the Arya Samaj, in harvesting the authority of the Vedas towards the goals of individual development and social service.

Abstracts of Session 5

Trichur S. Rukmani, Ph.D., Concordia University, Montreal, Canada

The Epistemology of Knowing Oneself in the Six Astika Darsanas

This paper addresses the question of how the six systems (darsanas) of Hindu thought approach the problematic of knowing knowledge particularly when the knower is defined in these schools as something beyond what is commonly known as the 'person' or the 'ego'. Every knowledge event has the three components of "knower, known and process of knowing" and thus in order to understand the phenomenon of 'knowledge' there has to be an awareness of these three factors. The attempt will be to see how every one of these schools honestly tries to understand the issue from its own ontological perspective. That these schools were deeply concerned with such philosophical issues and made a sincere effort to address them speaks volumes for the intellectual and philosophical tradition of ancient Indian thought. The original sutra text of each school along with some commentaries will be used for this purpose.

Brian Nichols, Rice University

Pratyaksha in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Tradition

Does Buddhism accept the possibility of direct access to reality in a way denied by Kantian models of epistemology which dominate contemporary thinking? Tibetan monasticism provides monks and nuns with a detailed investigation of epistemology through study of the Collected Topics of Valid Cognition (*tshad ma'i bsdu grva*). Based on the work of Dignaga and Dharmakirti, the epistemological system laid out in Gelukba monastic education prepares one to achieve liberating knowledge through a special type of valid cognition (*pramana, tshad ma*) known as yogic direct perception (*yogi-pratyaksha, rnyal 'byor mngon sum*). Yogic direct perception arises only with the meditative union of calm abiding (*œamatha, zhi*

gnas) and special insight (*vipaṣyana*, *lhag mthong*) and provides a type a knowledge unaccounted for in regnant cognitive and epistemological models. What is the nature of this knowledge, how is it justified by the Buddhist tradition and can it be justified within the framework of contemporary epistemology and cognitive science?

Vimal P. Jain, Ph.D., Director, Ghogilal Leherchand Institute of Indology, Delhi, India

Means of Knowledge and Interpretation in Jaina Dharma Tradition

The Jain Dharma Tradition is very rich and elaborate in prescribing the means of knowledge and interpretation. In this paper, only a very sketchy introduction of the main features is presented. The first basic premise of the Jain scriptures is that knowledge is gained through the approved means of knowledge and philosophical standpoints (*Pramaannayairadhigamah*). The scriptures do accept the fourfold traditional Means of Knowledge i.e., perception, inference or logical deduction, analogy, and articulation (language or scripture). These four *pramaanas* are supplicated by seven philosophical standpoints. These 7 standpoints give us a limited view of what is presented in its unlimited (whole) character by the approved Means of Knowledge, i.e., by the *pramaanas*. The seven philosophical standpoints are—the common persons' view, the generic view, the practical view, the linear view, the literal view, the etymological view, and the actuality view. Besides the 4 approved means of knowledge and the 7 philosophical standpoints, knowledge itself has been categorized into five varieties. They are—Empirical Knowledge, Articulate knowledge, Clairvoyance, Mind Reading and Omniscience. The above description of the means of knowledge, the philosophical standpoints and varieties of knowledge does not provide us an insight into the Jain attitude of looking at things, the people, the world around, and any justification or logic for the multiplicity of views, opinions, attitudes and faiths of humanity. This is where the Jain philosophy of Non-absolutism steps in. The philosophy of Non-absolutism is one of the three main tenets, bases or pillars of Jain Dharma.

Nikky G. Kaur Singh, Ph.D., Colby College, Maine

Dharam Khand: The Heart of Sikh Tradition

Dharam Khand is the starting point of the spiritual journey enunciated by Guru Nanak in his Jap, the first hymn recorded in Sikh scripture and recited by devout Sikhs every morning. Guru Nanak describes Dharam Khand as a region of nights and seasons and dates and days within which Dharti, our planet earth, is firmly situated. My paper analyzes Nanak's poetically charged verse and its significance for Sikh philosophy and ethics. How does this region integrate *dharam* and *dharti*? What implications does it have for the construction of Sikh individual identity? For Sikh collective identity? And what meaning might Nanak's verse have for our global society today?

Dorothy Figueira, Ph.D., University of Georgia, Athens

Swami Dayananda's Hermeneutic Strategy for Reconstruction of the Arya Self

The Aryan presence in India is associated with the compilation of the Rg Veda. The notion of the Aryan developed through a continued re-articulation of the authority vested in Vedic texts. Dayananda's discourse concerning the Arya Self can, therefore, be seen as a reification of these ancient textual sources in service of social practice. However, Dayananda's attempt to reconnect with the Aryan past through the Veda proved problematic. As texts whose nature was seen as weakened, shifting, and infinitely interpretable, the Veda provided a unique practical guide. In this paper, I will examine how Dayananda constructed a Vedic canon that was simultaneously open to emendation, while absolutely fixed and unquestionable, I will show how Dayananda devised strategies for reading that enabled this Vedic canon to meet one challenge after another and become the yardstick by which all questions of religious and

social behavior were judged. In Dayananda's hands, the Veda provided an ideal tool for reform, since the movement back to the earliest text, predating any and all practices, provided an impregnable position from which to launch the Arya reform movement.

S.S. Rama Rao Pappu, Ph.D., Miami University, Oxford, Ohio

Dharma, Li and Natural Law: Foundations of Society

An important problem that a social philosopher encounters in the rational reconstruction of a society is the problem of foundations. Historically, "Dharma" for the Indians, "Li for the Chinese and "Natural Law" for the Western thinkers have provided such a foundation for society. In this paper, I shall explore, from a comparative perspective, the points of intersection and separation between these three perspectives. I shall argue that the Western Natural Law is founded on a theo-centric and rationalistic perspective, the Indian dharma is grounded in the metaphysical and psychological perspectives, and the Li is manifested in a secular and ceremonial perspective. Despite these differences, the underlying unity among these perspectives is more evident than their differences.