

# An Introduction to Indian Philosophy

Perspectives on Reality,  
Knowledge, and Freedom

**Bina Gupta**



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## AN INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

*An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* offers a profound yet accessible survey of the development of India's philosophical tradition. Beginning with the formation of Brāhmaṇical, Jaina, Materialist and Buddhist traditions, Bina Gupta guides the reader through the classical schools of Indian thought, culminating in a look at how these traditions inform Indian philosophy and society in modern times. Offering translations from source texts and clear explanations of philosophical terms, this text provides a rigorous overview of Indian philosophical contributions to epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of language and ethics. This is a must-read for anyone seeking a reliable and illuminating introduction to Indian philosophy.

**Bina Gupta** is Curators' Distinguished Research Professor, Professor of Philosophy and Director of South Asian Studies Program at the University of Missouri.



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Perspectives on Reality, Knowledge,  
and Freedom

*Bina Gupta*

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To  
Claudio  
Who is the light of our daughter's life  
And  
Whom Madam and I cherish as our own son



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## PREFACE

This book has grown out of an upper division Indian philosophy course and a graduate seminar on Advaita Vedānta that I regularly teach at the University of Missouri-Columbia. So, one could say that the present work has been in the making for over three decades.

Indian philosophy represents one of the most ancient traditions of human culture, yet Western philosophers generally ignore it. This neglect may stem from a presumption common among them that philosophy, as a systematic inquiry, properly understood, is exclusively a Western phenomenon—and hence absent within non-Western cultures. Thus I was not surprised when over a decade or so ago, I found the philosophy faculty at my university arguing that a course titled “Introduction to Philosophy” should only include Western philosophy as its content, thereby implying by the omission of a qualifying adjective that there is, or can be, no philosophy other than its Western incarnation. This book is conceived with the thought that the true understanding of the other requires respect for the other, not appropriating the other into oneself. Its novelty consists in highlighting—contrary to the dominant Western view—the fact that Indian philosophy is also truly philosophy, not merely spiritual, religious, and esoteric, while at the same time having its own distinctively unique approaches to things. This book clearly demonstrates that there exists an amazing variety of epistemological, metaphysical, ethical, and religious conceptions in Indian philosophy. These conceptions developed within a period, roughly, of 1,500 years, and contain very sophisticated arguments and counter-arguments that were advanced by the defenders of each thesis and its opponents. One of the goals of this book is to dispel these myths and bring out the theoretical, discursive rigor of Indian philosophy.

“Indian Philosophy” refers to the philosophical concepts, theories, and schools that developed in the Indian sub-continent. In ancient days, most of the philosophical works were written in the Sanskrit language, while in modern times, philosophical works are written, not only in English, but also in many modern Indian languages. The Sanskrit words for “philosophy” are “*ānvikṣīkī*” (examination of things by the means of true cognition) and “*darśana*” (“standpoint” or “system”). The classical *darśanas* of Indian philosophy have been the

focus of my attention in this work. Given the space limitations, it was not possible to include Islamic or Sikh traditions, though these religious and philosophical traditions have thrived in Indian culture for many centuries and have made important intellectual contributions.

Those who are familiar with Indian philosophy know well that Indian philosophy is rich and variegated; it represents the accumulation of an enormous body of material reflecting the philosophical activity of 3,000 years. It is a multifaceted tapestry and cannot be identified by one of its strands. Thus, the task of providing an introduction to such a vast topic as Indian philosophy is daunting, both by virtue of its magnitude and the competence needed to carry it out. Any author venturing to write such a book needs to be conversant not only with the general philosophical issues, history of Indian philosophy, the Buddhist thought, but must also possess necessary linguistic skills, i.e., expertise in the Sanskrit language, a combination which is not easy to come by.

There are two standard approaches Indian philosophy: the topical and the historical. The topical approach expounds Indian philosophy under such headings as "Theory of Knowledge," "Metaphysics," "Ethics," "Social and Political Philosophy," and brings together the various views held by different philosophers and/or philosophical systems irrespective of the historical order in which these views appeared, took shape, and developed. J. N. Mohanty's *Classical Indian Philosophy* follows this approach. The historical approach, on the other hand, arranges the various systems in the order in which they appeared; thus, an account of the Vedic and the Upaniṣadic thought precedes the introduction of the Buddhist philosophy. Hiriyanna's *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* follows this approach. A historian, irrespective of how valuable his/her work may be, is likely to be bogged down with philosophical questions, and may not be sensitive to the ways the philosophical questions and issues outlive their introduction and may have a life of their own. In this book on Indian philosophy the issues, arguments counter-arguments, objections, responses to the objections, and so on, contribute the main driving force, though an historical order of exposition prevails.

No philosophy or philosophical system exists in a vacuum; a philosophy neither originates nor develops bereft of some under-girding context. It is a product of the contemporaneous and preceding cultures and exerts a decisive formative influence on the social and cultural achievements of ages that follow. A system of philosophy must be evaluated in light of its own aim and historical setting, by comparison with the systems immediately preceding and following it, by its antecedents as well as the results, and by the developments to which it leads. Keeping this in view, the systems are introduced in a historical order, but the exposition of each system focuses on certain key questions and issues. The approach therefore may be called historical-cum-philosophical. It demonstrates that there has been through the centuries a remarkable development, emergence of new interpretations of the ancient texts, new ways of arguing for the old theses, and sometimes a totally novel point of view.

The source material of Indian philosophy particularly demands such a combination. The basic Sanskrit texts are presented in argument-counter-arguments, objection-reply forms, and I would like the Western students to learn to appreciate the rhetoric that bears testimony to the vibrant Indian intellectual life. Such a mode of presentation is also needed to dispel, as stated earlier, from the minds of the Western readers certain persistent myths about Indian philosophy, and to bring home to them the truth of Indian philosophy, namely that it has been a genuinely philosophical and intellectual, highly sophisticated, rigorous discipline. The attempt is made to (1) understand a particular philosophical system in its integrity, to enter into its fundamental doctrines with an open mind in order to grasp its philosophy as a whole; (2) subject each philosophical school has been subject to philosophical criticisms, first of an internal sort, in order to reveal fundamental inconsistencies between the different assumptions of the philosophy, and secondly, an external sort which discloses the limitations of a given philosophy when judged by reference to phases of human experience and knowledge to which it fails to do justice.

The book will serve two additional basic purposes: it will (1) help students understand the different ways in which basic philosophic issues have been considered in India, and (2) introduce the students to an understanding of the Indian mind.

This book, while staying close to Sanskrit sources, (1) expounds various positions rather freely and in some details which are relevant for the contemporary students' interests, and (2) for each part, adds some selected texts in lucid English translation without jeopardizing the integrity of original Sanskrit texts. Wherever necessary, I have added comments in parentheses to make translations easier to understand. It is my hope that these translations will give the student some taste of the literary style and philosophical rhetoric of the source material, without being too bogged down with the philosophical questions.

Regarding the content of this book, after an introduction that sets the stage for what is to come in the subsequent chapters, I begin with the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, the foundational texts of the tradition, where one finds the first philosophical questions and some decisive answers. I discuss the three *nāstika* and the six *āstika* systems. The encounter with the Buddhist critique led to the rise and the strengthening of the Vedic *darśanas*, each with its epistemological bases, logical theory, metaphysics, and ethics. A systematic exposition of the *darśanas* gradually takes precedence over the historical and we have the six *āstika darśanas* expounded in a manner that skips over centuries of development. All this leads to the section in which four schools of Buddhism and Vedānta become the focus of my attention, because as we stand today in the twenty first century, it is these two that have earned a global interest. There have been numerous attempts to interpret and reinterpret them in novel ways. In my interpretations, I have tried to be as faithful to the Indian tradition as was possible for me, in order to enable my readers to have an accurate and authentic understanding of the various philosophical conceptions that are found on the Indian philosophical scene.

Regarding the audience, it is my hope that this book will introduce undergraduate students, possibly beginning graduate students, to classical Indian philosophy. Its primary audience will be philosophy students who have already been introduced to Western philosophy but not yet to Indian philosophy. Therefore, it is safe to assume that these students will have familiarity with such philosophical terminologies as “theory of knowledge,” “metaphysics,” “reality,” and “appearance.” They, however, will have no acquaintance with such Indian philosophical terms as “*ātman*,” “*brahman*,” “*pramāṇas*,” “*dharma*,” “*mokṣa*,” etc. Though I have explained these technical terms suitably, I have used these Sanskrit terms throughout the book in order to make students familiar with basic Indian philosophical vocabulary. I have tried to make use of them as much as was needed in my view to represent the schools in the manner they were expounded in Sanskrit works and I have tried my best to avoid making them difficult. How far I have been successful I will let my readers judge.

Writing this book has been a difficult enterprise. I recognize that some of the material discussed in this book is very complex. This complexity is confounded by the problems involved in translating complex philosophical concepts from Sanskrit to English. I apologize for any difficulty the students may encounter in following my exegesis and interpretation. If this work challenges the students to further investigate the issues raised herein, I will have succeeded in my effort.

It is both a duty and a pleasure to express my sincere thanks to those friends, scholars, and students who have contributed to this work in various ways. It is not possible to list them all individually. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to such scholars as Sibjiban Bhattacharyya, B. K. Matilal, J. N. Mohanty, and Karl Potter, whose books and papers have played a significant role in shaping my views on the issues under consideration. I want to thank Mr. Kim Sang, Director, Asian Affairs Center at the University of Missouri–Columbia, for providing me all sorts of assistance with my research projects. Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Madan, and daughter, Swati, for believing in me, supporting me, and being there for me when I needed them.

Bina Gupta  
Columbia, Missouri  
December 25, 2010

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AV	<i>Atharva Veda</i>
BG	<i>Bhagavad Gītā</i>
BGBh	<i>Bhagavad Gītābhāṣya</i>
BP	<i>Bhāṣā-Pariśeḍa with Siddhānta-Muktavālī, Advaita Ashrama edition</i>
BS	<i>Brahmasūtra</i>
BSBh	<i>Brahmasūtrabhāṣya</i>
BU	<i>Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad</i>
CU	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i>
KUBh	<i>Kena Upaniṣadbhāṣya</i>
MAU	<i>Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad</i>
MMK	<i>Mūlamadhyamakakārikā</i>
MU	<i>Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad</i>
NB	<i>Nyāya Bhāṣya</i>
NS	<i>Nyāya Sūtras</i>
RV	<i>R̥g Veda</i>
SB	<i>Śatpatha Brāhmaṇa</i>
SDS	<i>Sarvadarśanasamgraha, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series edition.</i>
SK	<i>Sāṃkhya-kārikā</i>
Śvetā	<i>Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad</i>
TPS	<i>Tattvopaplavasiṃha</i>
TSD	<i>Tarka-Samgraha of Annambhaṭṭa with Dīpika, Progressive Publishers edition</i>
TSDNB	<i>Tarka-Samgraha of Annambhaṭṭa with Dīpika, Bombay Sanskrit and Prakrit Series edition</i>
TU	<i>Taittirīya Upaniṣad</i>
TUBh	<i>Taittirīya Upaniṣadbhāṣya</i>
VP	<i>Vedānta Paribhāṣā</i>



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# Part I





# INTRODUCTION

## I Preliminary Considerations

In my classes on Indian philosophy in American universities, I am often asked: what is Indian philosophy? How is Indian philosophy different from Western philosophy? I find it difficult to answer these questions because I am being asked not only “what is philosophy” but also what makes Indian philosophy “Indian.” In dealing with such general questions, one must always bear in mind that the frequently used designation “Indian philosophy” is as much a construction concealing in its fold many internal distinctions as is the designation “Western philosophy.” One cannot but point out—which would be obvious to my readers—that the difference between Western analytic philosophy, as it took shape from Russell and Wittgenstein onwards, is substantially different from the Western post-Kantian philosophy which developed from Kant to Hegel. Thus, the designations “Indian” and “Western” do not bring together any common essence among systems of thinking coming under them, excepting features which may indeed be contingently related to philosophical thinking, namely, geographical points of origin.

It seems to me that history and geography are not of much help in this search for essential features of a philosophical tradition. It is indeed anachronistic to give a geographical adjective to a mode of thinking, unless one agrees with Nietzsche’s statement that Indian philosophy has something to do with the Indian food and climate, and German Idealism with the German love of beer. There must be some way of characterizing a philosophical tradition other than identifying such contingent features as the geographical and historical milieu in which it was born, some way of identifying it by its concepts and logic, the problems, the methods, and other issues that are internal to the tradition under consideration.

Prior to the Colonial period, philosophers of India did not concern themselves with the question of the differences between Indian and Western philosophy. Most of these philosophers wrote in Sanskrit, some in their local languages, and never sought to distinguish what they were doing from what was being done outside the pan-Indic culture. The task of distinguishing Indian

thought from the Western modes of thinking became gradually important to Indian philosophers in the Colonial period. Almost every Indian philosopher worth the name, writing in English (because that was the only Western language in which they wrote), expressed some opinion about it, although these opinions differed considerably. It is worth noting, however, that no Western philosopher—unless he/she was also an Indologist, e.g., Paul Deussen (1845–1919), Halbfass (1940–2000), or had acquired some acquaintance with Indian thought under the guidance of an Indologist, e.g., Schopenhauer (1788–1860), and Hegel (1770–1831)—thought it necessary to delimit what is called “Western philosophy” from non-Western philosophies. It is difficult to ascertain the reason for this asymmetry; perhaps, it is a political rather than a philosophical question. Likewise, the Indian philosophers of the classical period, e.g., Śaṅkara (788–820 CE), Vācaspati (900–980), or Raghunāth Śīromaṇi (1477–1557) did not deem it necessary to distinguish their domain of thinking from the Western or the Chinese thought. However, since the question has been raised, philosophers like me—trained both in Western thought and traditional Indian philosophy, writing on Indian philosophy, and hoping to contribute to the development of Indian thought while maintaining her continuity with the tradition—must provide a satisfactory answer. This predicament is not only mine, but also characterizes such thinkers as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), Bimal Matilal (1935–1991), and J. N. Mohanty (1928–present). It is incumbent on my part to concede that, though reared in the Western academia, I carry in my baggage the entire tradition of Indian thought.

There are two kinds of positions taken by my predecessors on the issue of how Indian philosophy is different from Western philosophy. One position, more prevalent in the generations of thinkers ending with Radhakrishnan as its high priest, may be articulated thus: in spite of superficial similarities, Indian and Western modes of thinking are fundamentally different, and this difference may be expressed in such binary oppositions as intellectual–intuition, discursive/logical–spiritual, and theoretical–practical. This way of looking at the contrast is rejected by such philosophers as Matilal and Mohanty, who tend to see affinities between the Indian and the Western modes of thinking, and argue that both traditions have developed their own logic, epistemology, and metaphysics, and so the binary oppositions listed above fail to capture the exact differences between the two traditions. These thinkers, especially Matilal, under the influence of modern Western philosophy overemphasize the analytic nature of Indian philosophy; Matilal selects and juxtaposes the Navya-Nyāya (the new Nyāya school) and the modern Western philosophy of language. Mohanty has also done a similar juxtaposition by selecting the theories of consciousness in Indian philosophy and modern Western phenomenological theories of intentionality from Brentano, Husserl, and Sartre. I stand in continuity with the second group of Indian thinkers and am greatly influenced by their writings. Matilal and Mohanty make a good case for bridging the distance between Indian and Western philosophies. My goal in this work however is not to bridge the

distance between the two, but rather to focus primarily on Indian thought in its own terms as it presents itself to the participants in its discourse from ancient times up until the beginning of the Colonial period. The question is: How was the Indian world of thinking circumscribed? If we can give an adequate representation of this world in the broadest outline, it would enable us to compare and contrast the pictures that emerge. I will attempt a total circumspection of the structure of Indian thought, in the hope that it would not only make differences between Indian and Western philosophies evident, but also recognize affinities brought out by the thinkers of the last generation.

## II Philosophy and Cultural Context

All human activity, philosophical or otherwise, takes its distinctive shape within a cultural setting and tends to bear the mark of that culture. In reviewing the concept and the scope of “philosophy” in the Western context, we see that it has changed considerably over the 2,500 years of its existence. As is well known, the word “philosophy” etymologically means “love of wisdom” (from the Greek “*philia*” meaning “love or desire,” and “*sophia*” meaning “wisdom”). Philosophy thus originally signified any general practical concern, encompassing in its scope what today are generally known as the natural and social sciences. As late as the eighteenth century, physics was still called “natural philosophy.” Eventually, science broke away from philosophy and became an independent discipline in its own right. The separation forced philosophers to redefine the nature, goals, method, and boundaries of their own inquiry.

One tradition within speculative philosophy has always focused its attention on metaphysics. Philosophy in this context is considered to be an inquiry into the nature of ultimate reality. The business of metaphysics, it is argued, is to answer the most fundamental questions possible about the universe: its composition, the “stuff” of which it is composed, and the role of individuals within the world. The Platonic theory that over and above the world of particulars there exists a realm of forms, the theory that God created the universe, and that the soul is immortal, all furnish examples of metaphysical speculations. Until fairly recently, a majority of philosophers believed that speculative theorizing was one of the most important tasks of a philosopher. Most Western philosophers today no longer believe that the role of philosophy is to “discover” the real nature of the world; it is rather, first and foremost, to provide a clarification of the basic concepts and propositions in and through which philosophic inquiry proceeds. These philosophers are only interested in the linguistic study of logical analysis of propositions, concepts, and terms. Their contention is that philosophy’s primary function is to analyze statements, to identify their precise meaning, and to study the nature of concepts *per se* to ensure that they are used correctly and consistently. This conception of philosophy as conceptual analysis is widespread among philosophers, especially in Great Britain and America, and such a linguistic analysis is considered to be the *sine qua non* of any proper philosophical

enterprise. The point that I am trying to make is as follows: the presuppositions behind Western philosophy, which give it its unique character and flavor, are the product of a particular history and a set of discrete cultural traditions. Both the content and forms of inquiry distinctive of Western philosophic inquiry have been shaped to some indeterminate extent by—for want of a better term—the “meta-philosophical” assumptions, presuppositions, and values which, historically, have given philosophy its own unique and distinctive character.

Likewise, the context of Indian philosophy is particular to a specific set of cultural conditions, and its lineage is likewise different from the complex set of social, cultural, intellectual, and sociopolitical forces that have formed Western philosophy. The Indian tradition represents the accumulation of an enormous body of material reflecting the philosophical activity of 2,500 years. It goes back to the rich and the large Vedic corpus, the earliest and the most basic texts of Hinduism.<sup>1</sup> The earliest extant texts of the Hindus are the Vedas, a title which does not refer to a particular book, but rather to a literary corpus extending over two thousand years. The Indian philosophical tradition, in its rudiments, began in the hymns of the *Rg Veda* (which we will study in the next chapter), the earliest of the four Vedas composed most probably around 2000 BCE.<sup>2</sup> This rootedness has given rise to the widespread belief—not only among educated Western intelligentsia but also among the Indian scholars—that Indian philosophy is indistinguishable from the Hindu religion. The reason for this belief is obvious: it is possible that whoever were the first translators/interpreters of the Vedic literature saw there what they found to be a religious point of view consisting of beliefs, rituals, and practices, having an eschatological concern, and came to the unavoidable conclusion that, given that all Indian philosophical thinking goes back to the Vedic roots, the entire Indian philosophy must be religious in its motive, inspiration, and conceptualization. But to draw this conclusion from the literary and the philosophical evidence available is uncalled for. There are several mistakes in this argument, which will be obvious to my readers as we proceed in this work; however, I will draw the attention of my students to two such mistakes: (1) It results from an unthinking application of the Western word “religion,” or its synonym, that covers up the distinctive character of Vedic religion. The very word “religion” being Western in origin, when applied to the Indian context, prejudices the issue. The entire attempt to impose the Western concept of “religion” over Vedic thought is a mistake. It completely distorts the significance of the Vedic hymns, the Vedic deities, and the entire worldview that articulates a certain relationship between human beings, nature, and the celestial beings in poetic forms. (2) The second mistake consists in not recognizing that if philosophy is borne out of pre-philosophical literature, then philosophy must also be of the same nature as that out of which it arises. Thus, the conceptual and logical sophistications of the Indian philosophical “schools” are totally overlooked out of either prejudice, or ignorance, or both.

Indian philosophy is rich and variegated. It is a multi-faceted tapestry and cannot be identified with one of its strands. Therefore, any simplification is an

oversimplification. The problem is further compounded when we realize that in the Indian tradition there is no term corresponding to the Western term “philosophy.” The term “*darśana*” used in the Indian tradition for “philosophy” is a rough approximation and lends itself to a variety of meanings not connoted by its Western counterpart. “*Darśana*,” derived from the Sanskrit root “*drś*,” means “to see” or a “way of seeing.” “Seeing” as the end result of *darśana* is “seeing within”—the Indian seer sees the truth and makes it a part of his understanding. “Seeing within” should not, of course, be understood in a subjectivist sense; it signifies “seeing” or “insight” using the intellectual means with, the help of which insight is gained. Indian philosophy is not merely a search for knowledge of the ultimate reality but also a critical analysis of the data provided by perception. Leaving aside *darśana*, another term used to describe Indian philosophy is “*ānvīkṣikī*,” which has been defined as “a critical examination of the data provided by perception and scripture.”<sup>3</sup> Inference is called *nyāya* because it consists in critically analyzing the data previously received by perception as well as by the authority derived from the foundational texts (Vedas). In case of a conflict between two, the testimony of the foundational texts was probed into, analyzed, in order to determine how far it could be reconciled with the canons of logical reasoning.

*Darśana* also means a “standpoint” or “perspective” (Cf. *dīthi*, the Pāli word for “a point of view”). And it is in this second sense that Indians allowed the possibility of more than one *darśana*. There are nine *darśanas* or “schools” or “view-points” of Indian philosophy: Cārvāka, Buddhist Philosophy, Jaina, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta. Traditionally these schools are grouped under two headings: *nāstika*, and *āstika*, which in common parlance, signify “atheist” and “theist” respectively. However, in the Sanskrit philosophical commentaries and schools of Indian philosophy these terms mean “the one that denies the authority of the Vedas” and “the one that accepts the authority of the Vedas” respectively. Accordingly, the first three schools are generally called “*nāstika*,” and the last six “*āstika*.” It is customary to couple the six *āstika darśanas* in pairs: Sāṃkhya-Yoga, Vaiśeṣika-Nyāya, and Vedānta-Mīmāṃsā; the former in each pair is viewed as providing a theoretical framework and the latter primarily a method of physical and spiritual training. However, in viewing the evolution of these schools such a coupling together does not make much sense: for example, it is misleading to characterize the Nyāya school as a method of physical and spiritual training. Neither the six *āstika darśanas* nor their basic framework is found in the Hindu foundational literature (Vedas). As a matter of fact, each *darśana* has grown and developed far beyond what was anticipated by the early scholars.

Philosophy in the Indian tradition was not simply an intellectual luxury, a merely conceptual hair splitting, a mere attempt to win an argument, or defeating an opponent, although all these excesses characterized many works of Indian philosophy. Underlying these excesses, there was an awareness of a thorough process of thinking towards a distant goal on the horizon for the individual

person or for humankind as a whole. These *darśanas* had a certain acceptance of the relations between the theoretical and the spiritual, and a certain conception of being from within the bounds of a tradition. In order to comprehend the philosophies of these *darśanas*, it is imperative that one understands the context in which these philosophies are embedded. To this end, I will focus on several presuppositions of Indian philosophies.

### III Presuppositions of Indian Philosophy

I will discuss three presuppositions, which are: (1) *karma* and rebirth, (2) *mokṣa*, and (3) *dharma*. In the language of R. G. Collingwood, we may call them “absolute presuppositions”<sup>4</sup> and the rest of the philosophy may be regarded as a rational and critical elaboration of these presuppositions. The resulting philosophies do not justify these presuppositions; they rather draw out what follows from them.

*Karma/Rebirth*: it is almost universally admitted that a common presupposition of pan-Indic thought is encapsulated in the words “*karma/rebirth*.” The word “*karma*” is derived from the verbal root “*kr*,” meaning “act,” “bring about,” “do,” etc. Originally, “*karman*” referred to correct performance of ritualistic activity with a view to receiving the desired results. It was believed that if a ritual is duly performed, nobody, not even divinities, could stop the desired results. On the other hand, any mistake in the performance of rituals, say, a word mispronounced, will give rise to undesired results. Thus, a correct action was a right action and no moral value was attached to such an action. Eventually *karma* acquired larger meaning and came to signify any correct action having ethical implications. Depending on the context, it could mean (a) any act, irrespective of its nature; (b) a moral act, especially in the accepted ritualistic sense; and (c) accumulated results, i.e., unfructified fruits of all actions. Underlying these senses is the idea that a person by doing, by acting, creates something and shapes his/her destiny.

*Karma* is based on the single principle that no cause goes without producing its effects, and there is no effect that does not have an appropriate cause. Freed from any theological understanding, that is, independently of postulating any God or supreme being as the creator and destroyer of the world including animals and humans, the idea is to posit a necessary relation between actions in this life, previous births, and rebirth in the next. Since many of our actions seem to go unrewarded in the present life, and many evil actions go unpunished, it seems reasonable to suppose that such consequences, if they do not arise in this life, must arise in the next. *Karma* carries the belief that differences in the fortunes and the misfortunes of individual lives, to the extent they are not adequately explicable by known circumstances in this life, must be due to unknown (*adṛṣṭa*) causes which can only be actions done in their former lives. These two concepts of *karma* and rebirth are interlinked and together form a complex structure. Belief in *karma* is also shared both by the Buddhist and the

Jaina thinkers despite the differences in their metaphysical and religious beliefs. It has entered the American vocabulary and is expressed as “what goes around comes around.”

The doctrine of *karma* forms the basis of a plethora of ethical, metaphysical, psychological, and religious Indian doctrines. A commonly stated account of *karma* in terms of “as you sow so shall you reap” or “as you act, so you enjoy or suffer” are attempts to connect the underlying thought to our ordinary ethical and soteriological thinking and, precisely for this reason, does not capture the underlying thought in its totality. A necessary sequence of lives, worlds (insofar as each experiencer has his/her own world), destinies, and redemptions is posited in order to eliminate all traces of contingency, arbitrariness, or good/bad luck from the underlying order. It is not a causal order in the ordinary sense, because the causal order obtains within a world and is not the result of the moral nature of God as the creator or attributing moral nature to the God (e.g., when one says “the God is good”), which presupposes that the God’s will, despite its omnipotence, conforms to this underlying order. As a consequence, though religious thinkers in India formulated their concepts of divinity to conform to this underlying order, the very fact that the atheistic thinking, e.g., Buddhism, and non-theistic thinking, e.g., Advaita Vedānta (non-dualistic Vedānta), recognized this absolute presupposition only shows that theology, like morality, is only a faint attempt to throw light on this presupposition and does not completely illuminate it.

Though we understand the ideas of “*karma*” and “rebirth” and in some way wish to accept it, nevertheless our understanding and acceptance never rise up to the level of clarity that we expect of our thoughts. In this context, Heidegger’s insight—Being as distinguished from beings can never be brought to pure presence or complete illumination, that all unconcealment goes with concealment, presence with absence, light with darkness—makes me wonder whether it is possible to achieve clarity in the case of an absolute presupposition. All our attempts to capture the idea of *karma*/rebirth by employing the categories of causality, moral goodness, reward/punishment, and the logical idea of God as the dispenser of justice, are faint attempts to illuminate *karma* and rebirth, because the chosen categories are from the areas of experiences in mundanity with which the thinker is familiar, areas *karma* and rebirth however cover past, present, and future experiences.

Most Indian thinkers seek to establish *karma* on logical grounds. The two familiar arguments are that in the absence of such an order, there would arise the twin fallacies of phenomena that are not caused and that which do not produce any effect. This idea of necessary causality requires, better yet, demands, that every event has a cause and that every event must produce its effects. It is worth noting in this context that the idea of causal necessity that is applied is modeled after empirical and natural order best exemplified in scientific laws and philosophically captured in Kant’s Second Analogy of Experience.<sup>5</sup> The resulting understanding of *karma*/rebirth then becomes a super science, a



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