

Common Premises of Non-Materialist Schools

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The search for eternal happiness

The starting point of philosophical schools is that our life is full of suffering. The urge to obtain release from suffering or obtain happiness, being inborn in all creatures, needs no justification. The fault the philosopher finds with normal means to this object is that they give us only temporary relief from suffering; and this very fact lands the discreet in unhappiness. The aim of the philosopher is to find out whether there could be eternal happiness, and, if so, what could be its means.

Indian philosophical schools are unanimous on the point that eternal happiness is possible, and that the sole means to it is the knowledge of the reality. This concept of eternal happiness has been expressed in various terms and has found a place in the scheme of the goals of human existence: dharma (piety), artha (economics, politics, agriculture etc.), kaama (worldly pleasures) and moksha (liberation). The first three of these, though recognised on a practical level, are set aside by the philosopher as leading to temporary results, as he aims at eternal release from suffering. He places moksha at the top of the goals for the reason that it is permanent or eternal in nature.

Though unanimous on the point of the goal, philosophical schools differ considerably in their view of the reality as their attitude towards the means of knowledge of the reality and their relative precedence in the event of mutual conflict is not the same. The most important means of knowledge are perception, inference and scripture. Although the limitations of perception is admitted by all, there are fundamental differences about the precedence of inference and scripture over each other. It can be noted, however, that even those schools which place scripture at the top cannot and have not divorced themselves totally from inference or rationalism; and it is a fact that even the scriptures – I mean the Upanishads – have followed the path of rationalism in presenting their findings.
The transmigratory soul and the theory of action

Another common premise of Indian philosophical schools is its view of life as a continuum punctuated by births and deaths which are considered passing phases of the transmigratory existence of the soul which is eternal. This transmigratory existence of the soul is the result of actions the soul does not in reality do, but assigns to itself, owing to its mistaken identification with the machinery of actions: the body, the organs and the mind. So long as the soul does not realise its distinction from these associates, it cannot escape the consequences of its actions. Actions are momentary in their physical aspect; but the unseen power created by them lasts until their results are experienced by the

performer. Actions after actions are thus piled up life after life and await their turn determined by their chronological order or intensity. Whatever the size of the accumulated actions, they are said to be annihilated at one stroke, once the soul gains knowledge of the reality. However, the particular action causing the current life of the soul does continue to yield its results even after enlightenment. It must be remembered that knowledge in this context is not mere information but direct experience. Mere academic knowledge, although the starting point of the spiritual journey, is not enough to lead one to liberation.

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