

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# The hard problem of ‘pure’ consciousness: Sāṃkhya dualist ontology

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## Abstract

This article addresses the theme of ‘death and immortality’ from the perspective of consciousness, and takes as its starting point a root text of Hindu philosophy, the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* by Īśvarakṛṣṇa (c. fourth century CE). The text posits a dualist ontology in which consciousness is separate and autonomous from a material reality that includes body and mind. The goal is to be ontologically situated in a ‘pure’ consciousness (non-objective), which signifies existential liberation. There are mundane ways to understand this claim, such as referring to cognitive states that produce affective dissociation, or more radical interpretations, such as a post-death state. This article explores the question of what Sāṃkhya’s consciousness is like: it is said to be immortal, plural, individuated, and contentless. What is the motivation for and implication of engagement with a system that describes an existential freedom that may only be known in a dualist reality or after death? And how can Sāṃkhya’s concepts be brought into conversation with contemporary investigations into mind–body questions? Sāṃkhya rationality counters the argument of eternal oblivion or of consciousness as an illusion confined to the brain. Yet there are resonances with Chalmers’s notion of consciousness as fundamental. This article concludes that contemporary Anglo-American philosophy of religion can be enhanced by adding Sāṃkhya thought to its purview.

**Keywords:** ontology; dualism; consciousness; death; immortality; Sāṃkhya; Indian philosophy; post-death

## Introduction

This article investigates the Hindu philosophical tradition of Sāṃkhya, focusing upon its dualist ontology and its arguments concerning the relationship between death and consciousness, its claim that consciousness is immortal, and its rational method geared towards existential liberation. By highlighting the unique approach of this dualist ontology – in which consciousness and materiality are separate – and bringing it into contact with strands of the ‘hard problem’ in Chalmers’s work, I seek to make a contribution to globalizing philosophy of religion and to theoretical discussions within that field concerning mind–body questions, post-death states, and the nature of consciousness.

My aim is to explicate the themes of consciousness, immortality, and death while continuing to work within the dualist frame of Īśvarakṛṣṇa’s *Sāṃkhyakārikā* and to engage contemporary and intercultural philosophical perspectives without collapsing the text’s

fundamental dualism. This article follows Burley (2007) and Ashton (2020) in narrowly discussing the dualism as focused on subjectivity and experience rather than objective reality as a whole. The c. fourth-century *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, unlike other systematic treatises of its time, does not concern itself with broader ontological analyses of trees, hoofprints, and clay pots, nor with the origins of the world, but rather with the principles of reality<sup>1</sup> and an analysis of subjectivity as dual. I will argue that it asks how a material being mediates experience of the material world, including death and what remains after death. Burley's work in particular has been instrumental in reframing the understanding of Īśvarakṛṣṇa's *Sāṃkhya* ontology, in part through a Kantian notion of the self. However, the innovative intercultural approaches of Burley and others using European lenses such as Kant, Goethe, Merleau-Ponty, or Irigaray<sup>2</sup> sometimes seek to move towards a resolution of the strict ontological dualism of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* into a non-dualism – a move I will seek to avoid. The scholar who most consistently and prolifically brought *Sāṃkhya* into a frame with western thought, Larson, always maintained the strict dualism of the text in his interpretations (e.g. Larson (1969a), (1969b), (2012)). Similarly, Schweizer (1993) conducted an effective critique of Cartesian dualism using *Sāṃkhya*<sup>3</sup> and the syntax/semantics approach of Searle, all the while arguing for a strong dualism.

This article progresses in three stages. The first offers a concise summary of *Sāṃkhya* ontology, designed to make this discussion accessible to non-specialists in Indian philosophy and supported by a close reading of selected verses related to consciousness and death. The second stage considers some limits of *Sāṃkhya* philosophy in its applied reasoning on consciousness, death and immortality. The third stage brings *Sāṃkhya* ontology into a contemporary dialogic frame with Chalmers's work on the 'hard problem' of consciousness. It also considers how an application of Ellis's expansive naturalism might lead us to discuss the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* as 'expansive naturalist dualism'. By analysing the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* and its relevance for contemporary philosophy, including Euro-American frames, *Sāṃkhya* is positioned not as a relic of ancient thought or the preserve of those engaged in Indian philosophy, but as a living and breathing philosophical current today that has broader disciplinary resonance.

### Verses on *Sāṃkhya*: worldview and ontology

The goal of this first section is to provide an accessible introduction for those unfamiliar with early Hindu traditions. Our starting point is one of the root texts of Hindu philosophy, the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* (*Verses on Sāṃkhya*) by Īśvarakṛṣṇa (c. fourth century CE), a non-theist text. The *Sāṃkhyakārikā* is the earliest surviving work from the *Sāṃkhya* philosophical tradition in South Asia and is known as a text that posits a dualist ontology in which consciousness is separate and autonomous from a material reality that includes body and mind.<sup>4</sup> Like all of the root texts of the Hindu *āstika* tradition (those that adhere to the authority of the Vedas), Īśvarakṛṣṇa's treatise opens with an announcement of its topic and scope. In this case, its aim is to remove the threefold suffering (*duḥkhatraya*, SK 1) of beings.<sup>5</sup>

This short text (containing only seventy-two verses or *kārikās*) summarizes the doctrines of a school preoccupied with 'enumeration' or 'counting' (*sāṃkhya*). This refers to the central method of rational reflection on an ontological taxonomy, or a classificatory account of the constituents of reality (which, for the purposes of this article, we will mostly confine to 'subjective reality'). Although twenty-five constituents (*tattvas*) can be enumerated,<sup>6</sup> it is really only two that count: materiality (*prakṛti*) and consciousness (*puruṣa*). The verses explain the nature of consciousness and materiality as two separate domains of reality, which do not interact. This produces a dualist ontology in which consciousness is not associated with the body and in which the mind and body form a single material complex. Subjectivity as inhabited only by material being (mind and body) is

real, but has no knowledge of the conscious self.<sup>7</sup> Here, the goal of inhabiting a 'conscious self' is not only about residing in a peaceful state (free of suffering), but it is also about accessing true perception of reality as dual. The material person is prey to erroneous perception that cognizes its own being (mind and body) as the fact of self. This perception is false because materiality only perceives that there is one domain (itself) and does not 'know' that consciousness also exists. Mental awareness (*buddhi*), which is a property of materiality, cognizes itself as the whole truth, but it is only one part of the ultimate truth of a dual reality. Consciousness, on the other hand, always knows that there are two domains of reality, and it knows itself (accurately) for what it is, while also knowing materiality as the other domain. So, it is not the case that materiality is false and consciousness is true – they are both true as real existents. However, perception from a material standpoint alone can only be an erroneous perception, while perception from the conscious standpoint can accurately discern ontological difference at a fundamental level. The capacity to discern between consciousness and materiality is, in itself, the liberated state, by which is meant that one is existentially freed from the affect of suffering. This de-emphasis on materiality in the scheme of liberation is a result of the introspective and renunciatory nature of Sāṃkhya practice, which flourished in the context of Indian asceticism and, accordingly, proposed abstract contemplation and withdrawal from the world in order to acquire true knowledge about self and world.

In this ontology, and in accordance with the *karma* theory of reincarnation, consciousness does not die with the physical body, but endures beyond the perishing of the mind-body complex, simply becoming associated with another material subject in the future (rebirth). While the association of conscious and material subjectivities is real, the fact of their interaction is not real and is therefore a cognitive error that takes place in the mind. Nonetheless, the process of association continues until correct knowledge of self occurs. The liberation process does not end with perception, however. Realization entails not only seeing the difference between materiality and consciousness, but also fundamentally residing in pure consciousness – to be in one's own state of consciousness is to be free of materiality and hence disembodied, isolated, separate and disengaged from the world. To be ontologically situated in consciousness means that the body and mind dissolve back into a material state of potentiality. The question is whether this 'pure' consciousness should be interpreted as a radical imaginative mode, affective dissociation, cognitive disruption, or alternatively as a special type of post-death state.

To use Burley's (2007) descriptors, the principles of materiality and consciousness are both 'co-ultimate' and 'co-fundamental', but whereas the internal expressions of a unitary materiality are finite and can be enumerated, consciousnesses are infinite in number (SK 18). Each consciousness is unique and is associated with a particular string of embodied incarnations until the point at which liberation is achieved (SK 18).<sup>8</sup> The plurality of individuated consciousnesses is an important point in establishing that consciousness cannot be designated as transcendent, as in the case of *brahman*.<sup>9</sup> And yet, if not transcendent, liberated consciousness is 'pure', and this is how the term *puruṣa* is often translated,<sup>10</sup> indicating its non-mundane and non-objective status. What actually is the basic nature of self as 'pure consciousness'? Its isolation indicates a supremely self-sufficient or perfected state, in which nothing else is required. It is not mediated and it has no content. Therefore, it is 'pure' in the sense of being a principle or representing potential capacity: pure consciousness is a state of potentiality, a capacity to witness, correlating to the pure potentiality of materiality in its primordial form.<sup>11</sup>

This brings us to the first apparent paradox in this dualism. While material being is subject to death, consciousness does not change, decay or die and is therefore immortal. The unique perspective associated with each individual *puruṣa* remains unchanged before and after the death of the material body-mind (the subject).<sup>12</sup> In context, this is, in itself,

not difficult to understand, since Hindu metaphysics are largely eternalist. Immortal consciousness, then, is not a radical or exceptional notion in early Hindu philosophy of religion, but what is difficult is how to describe it (if it is not transcendent, as might be expected) and how to access it (given the dualist ontology). A second apparent paradox is that Sāṃkhya's dualism suggests that existential liberation is achievable only through physical death (or deathlike states) in which a pure consciousness can be inhabited. The immortal quality of consciousness yields a third paradox in that through its non-engagement with the world, consciousness is never truly bound in the first place, and so there is, in reality, no state of bondage from which to be liberated (SK 62) – this in itself is the knowledge required for self-realization. According to this argument, liberation would be strictly epistemological and not produce any ontological change, which renders the whole question of death somewhat superfluous. However, we should not be stalled by these apparent paradoxes, since, as Timalina has argued, paradox is an essential tool in South Asian philosophy, a 'particular class of language [. . .] to describe reality when the everyday language fails to accomplish the task' (Timalina (2018), 7). To address these paradoxical questions thrown up by the dualist ontology, let us now approach Īśvarakṛṣṇa's text in more detail.

### Causality, death and naturalism in the Verses on Sāṃkhya

In support of the above summary, I now offer a reading of a few key verses (*kārikās*) in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* that explain specifically how the immortal nature of consciousness is established and endures after death.

In order to discuss consciousness and its relation to death in Sāṃkhya, we should understand something of causality. In this dualist ontology and eternalist worldview, the physical domain is closed off from the domain of consciousness apart from the capacity (and function) of consciousness to witness the physical world: 'puruṣa [consciousness] is neither creative nor created' (SK 3; trans. Burley (2007), 165).<sup>13</sup> As such, consciousness (*puruṣa*) is outside all laws of causality. The topic of causality in Sāṃkhya is a profound one and, properly treated, would require another article. But to illuminate some key points here: (1) the relation between consciousness and materiality is not causal (i.e. consciousness does not cause materiality, and neither does materiality cause consciousness); (2) consciousness itself has no causation internally, being a changeless state; (3) materiality does, of course, have some kind of cause and effect in the processes of emanation (unmanifest to manifest) and dissolution (manifest to unmanifest),<sup>14</sup> but this is a limited principle, referred to as 'the effect pre-exists in the cause';<sup>15</sup> and (4) the notion that consciousness has to be liberated is itself an error due to the paradox that, as pure consciousness, *puruṣa* is always-already free and was never entangled in the first place, and so even liberation itself is uncaused.

In the subjective material realm of mortality, life is manifestation and death is non-manifestation (or dissolution). This is spelled out in SK 10:

The manifest is caused, temporal, spatially limited, active, non-singular,  
dependent, a cipher, composite, conditioned; the unmanifest is the opposite.  
(SK 10; trans. Burley (2007), 166)<sup>16</sup>

Here, the 'manifest' is life, described as conditioned forms that are spatially and temporally bound (such as bodies), and death is the opposite in material terms: uncaused, not bound by time and space, static, singular, independent, without an identifying mark, non-composite (therefore in a unitary or undifferentiated state), and unconditioned. When we think of a cremated or decomposed body, these adjectives would appear to fit the

conception of a body returned to 'nature'. Yet these adjectives also (almost all) apply to consciousness (apart from singularity). In fact, as Ashton (2020) points out, even in this dualist ontology, unmanifest materiality (the 'cosmic soup') bears resemblance to pure consciousness in its apparent emptiness.<sup>17</sup> The next verse underscores this by widening the focus from these internal polarities within materiality (manifest and unmanifest) to the ways in which consciousness is a polar opposite to materiality (SK 11).<sup>18</sup>

The manifest as well as *pradhāna* (i.e. the unmanifest) are tripartite, undiscriminated, objectual, universal, non-conscious, productive; and *pumān* (i.e. *puruṣa*) is the opposite of these. (SK 11; trans. Burley (2007), 166)

Hence the descriptors of death (or the unmanifest) in SK 10 are also largely the descriptors of consciousness in SK 11 and have a vague and even apophatic quality,<sup>19</sup> not just as an ineffable state but particularly in that consciousness can only be understood through what it is not (materiality). What is most striking here is the broad qualitative equivalence between the states of death found in materiality (latent, non-manifest material existence) and the state of pure consciousness labelled *puruṣa*.

Death of the physical body is an apparent change, but only in state.<sup>20</sup> What happens in the death of a person? The gross material body, constituted of the five gross elements, perishes, but a subtle material mark (*liṅga* or *sukṣma*) transmigrates, retaining an association to an individuated consciousness. (This process, of course, troubles a strict dualism.) The subtle body comprises the other eighteen material categories (i.e. the threefold mental complex, the five senses, five action capacities and five subtle elements) – practically everything apart from the gross elements. In this picture of personhood<sup>21</sup> only five of the 25 constituents fit the category of gross materiality; everything else is capacity, potentiality, mentality, or consciousness. Therefore, the event of death is mostly informed by subtle transformations (not gross), and subjective death is not an end, just another transformation (*pariṇāma*) in ongoing processes of worldly transformation. And for an individuated consciousness that is enduring over many lifetimes, death is just another blip on the long road to freedom.<sup>22</sup> Even in the material world, then, death is not given undue prominence ontologically, being underpinned by a vast and eternal realm of primordial energy and potential to which everything returns. In this eternalist ontology, death can be a gateway to both continued suffering (reincarnation) but also to liberation (no future incarnation).

The question is: does liberation *depend* on death? Such a causal understanding is never explicit, since liberation (*apavarga*)<sup>23</sup> is stated as a result of knowledge (*jñāna*, SK 44) and may surely be acquired independently of death. This was, in fact, an emerging pan-Indian idea in the first millennium CE: that one can be 'liberated' and yet carry on living embodied (*jīvanmukta*) (Fort (1988)). And even though this doctrinal innovation was only consolidated in the period after the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, the question does arise in our text. SK 67 suggests that knowledge while alive may be possible in that 'the endowed body' (*dhr̥taśarīrah*) (Burley (2007), 178) exists due to the mental karmic impressions (*saṃskāra*). This relays the notion that even for a liberated subject, residual karmic impressions may need to play out, and so the body continues living and exhausting karmic store until a final death event takes place. Yet, separation from the body (*śarīrabhede*) is inevitable for the liberated consciousness and, as SK 68 tells us, brings about the isolation (*kaivalya*) that is both absolute (*aikāntika*) and infinite (*ātyantika*). Embodiment will not recur, and what is left is immortal consciousness. SK 55 suggests that the existential misunderstanding in which consciousness (*puruṣa*) appears to get mixed up in the suffering of life only ends when there is deliverance from form (*liṅga*), or being part of the material

and manifest reality of forms (i.e. having a body) (SK 55).<sup>24</sup> Hence, according to these lines of reasoning, liberating knowledge is dependent on death.

What of the relation of the plural nature of consciousness to the fact of individual physical death? Each consciousness (*puruṣa*) is liberated singly (*pratipurūṣavimokṣārthaṃ*) (SK 56) rather than there being a mass liberation of consciousnesses all at once. This underlines the individuated nature of the journey as one of personal moral responsibility. There is no grace or accident in this naturalist and non-theist Sāṃkhya account; rather, each person must be held responsible for their own existential bondage or liberation. Ethical causality, or *karma*, is the agential factor that makes the world as it is – with the past shaping the present and the present shaping the future.<sup>25</sup> This karmic fact determines what happens after death – without any need for a creator God weighing up justices and injustices. So while the laws of ethical causality (*karma*) shape the material mark or imprint of being (*liṅga*) in a fervent realm of intention-activity-repercussion-transmigration, consciousness is disengaged and passive. ‘Pure’ consciousness is always-already free, and especially so if we regard it as a principle rather than a state. By this yardstick, liberation is epistemological and not ontological and can therefore occur independently of death.

What we have seen in this analysis is that although consciousness and death (as a material event) are strictly separated in the dualist ontology, consciousness, like death, is somewhat apophatic, that is, it is difficult to describe from a materially subjective standpoint. Moreover, materiality, like consciousness, has an immortal quality in that it facilitates perpetual rebirth (even though it is the ‘wrong’ kind of immortality). Third, both consciousness and material death are characterized by potentiality. These similarities in kind create the ground for existential confusion. To sum up, Sāṃkhya offers an ontological model that includes the following key points:

- It is dualist (between mind–body and consciousness).
- Consciousness is unitary in form, but plural in number and associates with various mind–body complexes in succession (rebirth).
- The goal is to bring about the cessation of reincarnation because embodied existence entails suffering.
- Consciousness is liberated and immortal in a post-death state, in a relation to death that is both dependent and non-dependent.
- There is no supernaturalism in this non-theist system which presents itself as rationally based. Given that the contemplative method is focused on enumerating observable ontological constituents, Sāṃkhya can be considered to present its approach as naturalistic in a broad sense.

### The limits of philosophical understanding in contemporary Sāṃkhya

So, how has this historical Sāṃkhya ontology and its underpinning arguments survived across time? And how does such a worldview relate to contemporary understandings and rational explanations of consciousness and post-death states? There are some limits to the above-described model from outsider, contemporary, and naturalistic perspectives.

#### Limits of naturalistic frames

The first limit is how to verify what is meant by the nature of consciousness in Sāṃkhya and to relate this to contemporary lives and experiences. What is it like to dwell eternally in a state of immortal, witnessing consciousness? Going beyond this mere statement of fact to describe the nature of consciousness qualitatively is challenging. Larson describes ‘pure consciousness’ using phrases such as ‘contentless consciousness’, ‘contentless

non-intentional consciousness' or 'sheer contentless presence' (Larson (1969a); (2012)): 'It is transparent, translucent; it is a witness' (Larson (1969b), 46). The best descriptors we can arrive at, drawing directly on the SK verses, are that consciousness is unchanging, plural, non-objective, eternal, and free. However, altogether, this package gives rise to further complex questions. If there is a plurality of consciousnesses, are they a resonant collective, and can they know each other in some way? What, exactly, is a unit of consciousness? And where do such units exist when not associated with material being? These profound ontological questions are beyond the scope of this article, which is focused more narrowly on death and immortality. Yet the fundamental issue of whether liberated consciousness entails a post-death state remains relevant here: does separation from one's material identity (which includes the mind, body and a kind of reincarnated 'mark', called a *liṅga*) logically entail corporeal death, or can disengagement from the material world be temporary (or graduated) in the sense of deep dissociation from the body complex?

These questions must remain open because a liberated consciousness cannot be described through phenomenology. We cannot relay how consciousness endures nor where. Its immortality is not possible to prove empirically from the standpoint of material, embodied existence, which, according to Sāṃkhya, can never see consciousness for what it is. In this sense, there is an absolute basis (*a priori*, necessary) in how Sāṃkhya posits the existence of consciousness, in the way that some theisms posit the existence of God, and this weakens the naturalistic basis of the system. Nonetheless, despite this shade of absolutism, we should be wary of appealing to pure consciousness as a divine state, theistic principle, deified consciousness, or transcendent mind.<sup>26</sup> Neither can we posit an easy equivalence with other contemporary terms for a 'true' or 'essential' self in Indian thought, such as the Hindu *ātman* (self in correlation to *brahman*), the Jain *jīva* (self) or *jīvātman* (instantiated self) or the ambivalent Buddhist *āśraya* (substratum/basis of mind). The question then remains: on what valid bases of knowledge can we make any claims about a liberated and immortal state of consciousness? Sāṃkhya proposes that valid knowledge can only be based on direct perception, inference and reliable testimony (SK 4). However, these bases are always associated with the mind-body complex, an imperfect tool for true or ultimate knowledge (according to the system).<sup>27</sup>

### *Limits of epistemic frames*

At this stage, it may be helpful to step back and draw attention to the epistemological basis on which we are asking such questions. One immediate observation is that the culturally situated ontology of Sāṃkhya cannot be processed adequately through a western epistemic lens (e.g. Cartesian dualism, empiricism, or naturalism). Rather, in keeping with Gadamer's hermeneutic 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer (1960)), we are better informed if we travel epistemically to meet this tradition and to engage with it intellectually on its own terms. In Indian dualist metaphysics, there are many variations of dualism, often influenced by Sāṃkhya, from radical systems (such as Śaiva Siddhānta and Madhva Vedānta) to weakly formulated positions of qualified non-dualism (such as Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta). In this landscape, Sāṃkhya offers its own brand of dualism that is unique in its strict definition. And so, to appreciate the epistemology of Sāṃkhya, we should recognize its importance in the wider context of Indian philosophy and its continued applications today. For living adherents of Sāṃkhya (who either follow a strict/adapted, theoretical/practical form of Sāṃkhya, who may be Hindu or non-Hindu), how do they understand the relation of death and consciousness, and the reality or goal of the immortal liberated state, which is to exist as consciousness alone forever?

### *Limits of contemporary 'livability'*

In India, Sāṃkhya philosophy continues to thrive in higher education programmes, and has remained a cornerstone of academic philosophical discourse and training. In part, it has been kept alive by the publications of a twentieth-century scholastic commentator, Hariharānanda Āraṇya, a monk and the chief revivalist of Sāṃkhya as a religio-philosophical way of life. Sāṃkhya has not been a popular philosophical or religious tradition in lived communities in India since the early common era – in stark contrast to the dominant non-dual Hindu traditions of Vedānta. However, Sāṃkhya's textual lineages survived unbroken, and popular engagements have continued, particularly in relation to traditional ascetic practices of yogic meditation. In India today, there is only one main community dedicated to the practices of traditional Sāṃkhya, the Kāpil Maṭh, based in Madhupur in Jharkhand. This Bengali Hindu reform movement was conceived by Āraṇya in the 1890s when, as a new monk, he encountered the textual tradition of Sāṃkhya (Jacobsen (2018)). He formally re-established a Sāṃkhya community in 1924. Yet this rare expression of Sāṃkhya as a lived philosophy today reflects the practical problems of continuing a tradition that adheres strictly to the dualist ontology outlined above (Jacobsen (2018); Jakubczak (2020)). Āraṇya, in his revived philosophy, stressed Sāṃkhya's strict expression as monastic renunciation. Ultimately, this meant withdrawal into an artificial 'cave' (a secluded building) in a world-denying mode of embodied existence focused almost entirely on consciousness through continuous meditation or rational reflection (Jacobsen (2018)). Āraṇya spent twenty years from 1926 to 1947 in this isolated environment, until his death. The most pressing problem with such an ontology is that, as Jakubczak states, and as Āraṇya himself recognized, a 'spiritual tradition focused on renunciation cannot continue unbroken for a long time' (Jakubczak (2020), 113). Not only do monastic renunciation and celibacy preclude the growth of communities numerically, but a philosophy whose ultimate mode of practice is to withdraw to a cave in an attempt to access pure consciousness for the duration of one's life seems at odds with the deeply materialistic vein of global consumerism. Hence, Īśvarakṛṣṇa's Sāṃkhya as a lived system seems unlikely to result in transnational popularity or be open to commercial exploitation in the way that other Indian philosophies have been.

### *Beyond limits?*

Where the Sāṃkhya tradition can be brought to life for wider audiences and kept alive is perhaps not in a mode of embodied practice that paradoxically seeks to transcend the body and mind, but rather in the less radical context of secular education. Simply put, Sāṃkhya is a fascinating philosophy from the ancient world that has much to offer today's growing field of global philosophy. In recent decades, much has been done to bring Buddhist philosophy into mainstream western contexts and research partnerships with science, but more highly visible research is needed to accomplish the same for Hindu philosophy. Sāṃkhya plugs into contemporary questions about the relationship of consciousness to mind and body, and of what happens to consciousness after death. Moreover, some of the broader approaches in western philosophy today may be employed to illuminate the puzzles of Sāṃkhya and to help us address some of the limitations in our own understanding or worldviews.

However, the deep methodological problems of trying to engage in intercultural philosophy include the potential opaqueness produced by linguistic and conceptual translation and the capacity for epistemic violence. It is a challenge to bring the concepts of *puruṣa* and *buddhi* into conversation with terms such as 'qualia', 'subjective feel', and 'what-it-is-likeness' of contemporary western philosophy of mind (Carruthers (2001))

without enacting an epistemic violence that is based on the historical hegemony of western colonialism. Larson was already well aware of this danger in his 1969 comparative article 'Classical Sāṃkhya and the Phenomenological Ontology of Jean-Paul Sartre'.<sup>28</sup> Yet the goal in this present article is to better integrate Sāṃkhya into academic discussions on ontology, in order to decentre dominant western epistemes in the academy and to highlight the value of 'doing philosophy' with Indian tools and concepts. In short, a reciprocal exchange between Sāṃkhya and western systems can breathe new life into old questions and old life into new questions.

### Dualism, a bi-directional conversation

For philosophers working in the western canon, dualism often refers to one conception, a Cartesian dualism of mind and body. However, in the South Asian context, not only are there several dualist traditions, but the mainstream ontology tends to be non-dualist (meaning there is often a 'not-two' ontology rather than a singular or monist frame).<sup>29</sup> When we use the lens of Sāṃkhya, we access an alternative episteme through which to scrutinize questions about dualism in contemporary western philosophy of mind.

Separating out the existence of consciousness from the mind is practically necessary when determining the Sāṃkhya nature of consciousness. However, the non-substantiality of *puruṣa* blocks all kinds of imaginative solutions for understanding it (is it floating in its detachment? cocooned? dispersed?).<sup>30</sup> Given the ineffable quality of *puruṣa*, how might metaphors in contemporary ontology help us to find new modes of understanding a 'contentless' consciousness? Discussions on idealism and ontology in relation to virtual worlds might give us a new language through which to comprehend the concept of consciousness as *puruṣa*. If virtual means 'non-material' rather than 'non-real', as in virtually but not materially existent, then this might offer one metaphor to understand *puruṣa* – watching action on the screen of life but not engaging with it. Another explanation might be to watch the experience of pain without feeling it (affective dissociation from one's own or another's pain). Yet 'contentless', while indicating some kind of non-objective state, is unlikely to indicate a void for pure consciousness, given the sustained reality of materiality; in the liberation of a consciousness, material reality endures, unassociated with that particular liberated consciousness, but surely still witnessed. What would be the purpose of pure consciousness, if not to witness? Nonetheless if a liberated consciousness witnesses material reality as a whole, we are back to a claim of transcendence (entailing omniscience), which we have dismissed. The perspective of consciousness then, even when liberated, is partial, particular, and unique.<sup>31</sup> Yet the claim that consciousnesses are 'infinite in number' indicates that consciousness has a stretchy quality, outside space and time. It seems then that pure consciousness is to be understood as capacity only, or as a principle, and hence suited for the rational enquiry of philosophy. Can such an abstract goal be attractive for the sustained rational labour required by the Sāṃkhya system? As abstract rationality, Sāṃkhya works, conveying a fragile internal logic. If kept apart from soteriology, the method is perspicuous. It is only when we try to translate this method into embodied practice (like the contemporary monks at Kāpil Maṭh) that the method becomes hard because of its dualist ontology.

### The hard problem of 'pure' consciousness

The embedded paradoxes of a dualist ontology for living subjects consigns Sāṃkhya solutions to the realms of Chalmers's (1996) 'hard problem' of consciousness:<sup>32</sup> 'Consciousness poses the most baffling problems in the science of the mind. There is nothing that we

know more intimately than conscious experience, but there is nothing that is harder to explain' (Chalmers (2010), 3). For Chalmers, the easy problems of consciousness are phenomena such as: the focus of attention, the deliberate control of behaviour, the integration of information by a cognitive system, or the ability to discriminate external stimuli (*ibid.*, 4). Yet the hard problem of consciousness is linked to experience (*ibid.*) and materialism (Chalmers (2020), 235),<sup>33</sup> and hence to questions of dualism. Chalmers describes himself as a property dualist, although we can claim that Sāṃkhya is closer in kind to substance dualism.<sup>34</sup> And, here, we must clarify the term 'experience' in both contexts, that of Chalmers and that of Īśvarakṛṣṇa. What Chalmers describes as 'conscious experience' is subjective, such as visual sensations or felt qualities of colours, and so consciousness and experience are vitally interwoven.<sup>35</sup> Yet in Sāṃkhya philosophy, as we have seen, the realm of experience is not that of the conscious self, but of the mind-body subject. In Sāṃkhya, when studying experience, we are studying materiality, and the Chalmers experience-materialism dualism does not exist. Sāṃkhya 'pure' consciousness, then, is always at a remove from experience. Yet when Chalmers discusses the role of introspection in his account of consciousness, we encounter ideas that are familiar in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*: 'Introspection of conscious states largely delivers us with truths such as "I am having such-and-such conscious state" or perhaps "This experience has this property"' (*ibid.*, 246).<sup>36</sup> When Chalmers uses the phrase 'conscious experience' he is often referring to introspective states, and to proceed further with an intercultural philosophical discussion, we must assume some kind of uneasy equivalence between Chalmers's hard problem of consciousness (how does 'conscious experience' arise?) and the Sāṃkhya hard problem of a 'pure' consciousness which is only introspection without experience. In each case, what is hard is the dualism.

As for Chalmers's key question of *why* there should be (conscious) experience, Sāṃkhya addresses this point. The *why* of the experiential subject in Sāṃkhya is a fundamental and immutable aspect of material reality. A more idealist interpretation suggests that the presence of consciousness 'activates' materiality into being (becoming manifest), engendering a kind of consciousness-dependent material reality (e.g. Larson (1969b), 46). Yet a moderated realist reading of the SK is that a conscious self can detachedly 'enjoy'<sup>37</sup> the acting subject in the role of an 'overseer'.<sup>38</sup> There is an undeniable hint of relationality to this dualism, even though consciousness as a perfected state is isolation from material subjectivity. Can the Sāṃkhya 'pure consciousness' principle be capacious enough categorically to contain some notion of 'experience'?

A Sāṃkhya perspective shifts the hard problem from 'subjectivity as conscious experience' (Chalmers) to 'subjectivity as the capacity to consciously recognize experience'. *Puruṣa* is pure (non-objective) perception, meaning that objects do not show up *in* consciousness, but can be witnessed *by* it from a detached standpoint. As Larson puts it: 'Consciousness is always conscious of something' (Larson (1969b), 48). Pure consciousness, then, does not contain sensation, feeling, or experience. This might seem counterintuitive, given that experience seems to be at the core of what it is 'to be'. But, although Sāṃkhya reasoning requires some effort to engage with, its theory of contentless consciousness as a pure capacity produces some interesting points of contact in conversation with the work of Chalmers, examining the same problems in a different context. Chalmers discusses phenomenal consciousness as Nagel's (1974) description of mental states in which it is 'like something' to undergo certain mental states. Phenomenal consciousness is therefore linked to first-person introspection. For Chalmers, as noted above, experience is a unified notion of phenomenal consciousness and, in some contexts, awareness is tied to phenomenal consciousness: 'if one is aware of something, one is phenomenally conscious of it and vice versa' (Chalmers (2020), 237). Chalmers also opens up a distinction between mind and consciousness, wondering if the 'ordinary English word "mind"' is a fit for phenomenal

consciousness and conceding: 'One issue is that "mind" may cover a lot which is not conscious, such as unconscious desires, background beliefs, and so on' (*ibid.*).

In the way that Chalmers identifies the adequacy of cognitive science to explain the functions of the mind (such as reportability of internal states) (*ibid.*, 8), Sāṃkhya proposes a naturalistic explanation of the material dimensions of subjectivity and world (according to the system's contemporaneous understanding of empirical investigation and explanation). But this does not exhaust the goal of Sāṃkhya and, in fact, naturalism does not adequately encompass its rational method. The Sāṃkhya system describes the material subject in functional terms, which can be broken down into twenty-three components,<sup>39</sup> but the conscious self is largely ineffable and entirely irreducible. Chalmers's question 'why is the performance of functions accompanied by experience?' (i.e. conscious experience) (Chalmers (2010), 8, original emphasis) might be reframed in Sāṃkhya as 'why is the performance of functions accompanied by consciousness?' (i.e. why is the mind-body complex associated with a detached consciousness at all)? For Chalmers there is an 'explanatory gap'<sup>40</sup> between function and experience, and he seeks a bridge (*ibid.*).<sup>41</sup> But in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* there is an explanatory gap between mind-body and consciousness that cannot be bridged – hence the dualist ontology. The goal here is not to reduce Sāṃkhya's dualism, but to offer fresh ways to articulate this system's meaning for embodied existence (since the text was, after all, produced for readers and listeners).<sup>42</sup>

Next, I will explore two points of potential contact between Sāṃkhya dualism and Chalmers's theories that may hint at an 'explanatory bridge' on: (a) the dependent non-dependence of consciousness and materiality and (b) the fundamentality and irreducibility of consciousness.

### Consciousness and awareness: 'intimate coherence'

In terms of what consciousness points to, Chalmers reserves the term 'consciousness' for the hard problem and 'awareness' for the more straightforward mental functions listed above, such as reportability or emotional regulation (*ibid.*, 6). Sāṃkhya proposes a not dissimilar distinction between consciousness (*puruṣa*) and awareness (*buddhi*), the latter associated with the mind as a property of the body. We can argue that functional<sup>43</sup> concepts such as 'discrimination, integration, reaction and report' (*ibid.*, 33) are all found in *buddhi*, but not in *puruṣa* since this is a pure entity with no operative functions.

When, in determining a fundamental theory of consciousness, Chalmers asserts a 'principle of coherence between the structure of consciousness and the structure of awareness' (*ibid.*, 20), we can assert a similar principle of coherence in Sāṃkhya between the structure of consciousness (*puruṣa*) and the structure of awareness (*buddhi*). Indeed, the structural similarity gives rise to the key problem of Sāṃkhya, namely that *buddhi* is ordinarily misrecognized as *puruṣa* (inducing cognitive error and the basis of suffering). It is, perhaps, through Chalmers's principle of one-to-one coherence (or isomorphism) that we can understand a basic feature of Sāṃkhya dualist ontology: 'even though cognitive processes do not conceptually entail facts about conscious experience, consciousness and cognition<sup>44</sup> do not float free of one another but cohere in an intimate way' (*ibid.*, 22). In Sāṃkhya, something like this 'intimate coherence' takes place in a structural mirroring that exists between cognitive awareness and consciousness. But the more accurate standpoint here is consciousness, which is merely reflected in the mirror frame of *buddhi*. *Buddhi* mistakes this reflected image as its own conscious nature,<sup>45</sup> thinking there is only one 'I am', whereas there are fundamentally two iterations of 'I am' (the conscious and the material). Chalmers's model, in which 'structural properties constrain experience without exhausting it' (*ibid.*), may also be found in Sāṃkhya, in that consciousness can only witness what exists in materiality. Even pure consciousness (thought to exist beyond

time and space), then, is constrained by the conditions of possibility in materiality. It is this very condition of constraint that structures the ‘intimate coherence’ of this dualism and promotes understanding of the dependent non-dependence of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. By shifting the strict dualism from an absolute basis to a relative basis (of relational coherence, i.e. Chalmers’s isomorphism), the hard problem of Sāṃkhya dualism becomes somewhat easier to rationalize without the epistemic violence of reducing that dualism to non-dualism.

### Consciousness as fundamental

For Chalmers, a theory of consciousness (i.e. conscious experience) can only be developed if consciousness itself is accepted as a fundamental property, which leads to a nonreductive explanation (*ibid.*, 16).

Conscious experience is not ‘postulated’ to explain other phenomena in turn; rather, it is a phenomenon to be explained in its own right. And if it turns out that it cannot be explained in terms of more basic entities, then it must be taken as irreducible, just as happens with categories such as space and time. (*ibid.*, 33)

Again, if we consider this proposal in the terms of Sāṃkhya ontology, we find a useful overlap. In Sāṃkhya, both consciousness and materiality are fundamental (materiality in its primordial state is also singular and hence irreducible). And while contemporary physics does not permit materiality to be fundamental in this sense, there is a way in which consciousness-as-fundamental makes sense in a contemporary scientific worldview: ‘I suggest that a theory of consciousness should take experience as fundamental. We know that a theory of consciousness requires the addition of something fundamental to our ontology, as everything in physical theory is compatible with the absence of consciousness’ (*ibid.*, 17). In the Sāṃkhya dualist worldview, everything that is physical, namely manifested materiality, is compatible with the absence of consciousness and, indeed, can never be imbued with consciousness. And yet even in this dualist ontology, there is a need for materiality in the *raison d’être* of consciousness, a qualified non-dependence in that even detachment requires an object from which to detach. For Chalmers, the way in which (conscious) experience depends on the physical is determined by ‘psychophysical principles’ that ‘will not interfere with physical laws, as it seems that physical laws already form a closed system’ (*ibid.*). Moreover, he posits that this acceptance of a fundamental theory promotes a kind of dualism that is nonetheless naturalistic, a ‘*naturalistic dualism*’: ‘There is nothing particularly spiritual or mystical about this theory’ (*ibid.*, 18). As a non-theist system, Sāṃkhya is unique among the six *āstika* systems of Hindu philosophy in that it aims to be naturalistic.<sup>46</sup> But the problems of this endeavour have been long since outlined by scholars: ‘representational content, even for a cognitive phenomenon as basic as visual perception, is not susceptible to naturalistic explanation, if this content is held to reside in a non-material medium’ (Schweizer (1993), 853). And yet in our attempt to make some use of Chalmers’s ‘explanatory bridge’ (of isomorphism), there is something further required beyond a ‘naturalistic dualism’.

### Expansive naturalistic dualism

Chalmers is still working with a dualism that is vaguely in the ‘mind-body’ category of dualism,<sup>47</sup> but that does not transfer well to the context of Sāṃkhya, in which consciousness is apart from the mind-body complex. This ‘apartness’ is what requires an explanatory bridge, since if consciousness is not material, then what is it? At this point, it may be

beneficial to refocus on philosophy of religion with a turn to the 'expansive naturalism' of Ellis (2014). For Ellis, an 'expansive' approach questions whether naturalism, if understood primarily or solely as the scientific method, 'can really do justice to the variety of phenomena we seek to comprehend' (Ellis (2014), 11). Expansive naturalism is not a framework that lends itself to a dualist ontology, since Ellis rejects a dualism 'that places God and nature in permanent and mutually exclusive opposition' (*ibid.*, 6). Yet neither does the position assert that 'the expansive naturalist has to concede in a theistic direction' (*ibid.*, 7), situating the relevance of this framework for analysing the non-theist dualist naturalism of Sāṃkhya. In exploring the question of 'what it means for a dimension of reality to be appropriately other-worldly' (Ellis (2021), 237),<sup>48</sup> Ellis's framework seeks to navigate some kind of middle way between the 'disenchanted objects of scientific investigation' and a 're-enchantment' of nature that moves beyond narrow scientism (Ellis (2014), 79). Hence there are properties that exist 'apart and alone' or 'remotely' because 'they are irreducible to properties that fall within the narrow scope of science' (Ellis (2021), 246).<sup>49</sup> It is this leaning that makes expansive naturalism practical for understanding or engaging Sāṃkhya. Indeed, this categorical step of rendering Sāṃkhya dualism both naturalistic and ontologically expansive is necessary. This is because, although Sāṃkhya presents its own method in naturalistic terms (as recorded observation with rational dissection), consciousness does not die and is immortal, and the positing of such an immortality cannot be accounted for within a naturalistic framework alone. As Schweizer puts it: 'Here we are trying to equate something objective, quantitative and scientifically normal on the one side (brains), with something subjective, qualitative and empirically quite abnormal on the other (first-person conscious experience)' (Schweizer (2019), 240). Neither can Sāṃkhya's core mechanisms of transmigration be bracketed out as points of exclusion from a naturalistic frame. If we can combine Chalmers's 'naturalistic dualism' with Ellis's 'expansive naturalism', we can arrive at a new way of discussing Sāṃkhya, as an *expansive naturalistic dualism* that has broader resonance for the human condition in the contemporary world. This framework permits the Sāṃkhya dualism to be relevant for an embodied sensibility and not just a post-death state, while also preserving the fundamentality and irreducibility of consciousness as one of the aspects of our reality 'which elude scientific investigation and which demand for their discernment and understanding a rather different approach' (Ellis (2014), 87).

## Conclusion

As Schweizer (1993, 858) puts it, in philosophy and science, 'dualism of any flavour tends to be theoretically distasteful'. Nonetheless, my aim has been to represent faithfully the strict dualism of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* and to ask how it may be useful in thinking through contemporary discussions on the mind-body problem. Because it is a contemplative tradition based on classificatory observation and rational analysis, Sāṃkhya can be brought to sit meaningfully with the naturalist frame of Chalmers's thought. In Īśvarakṛṣṇa's Sāṃkhya, there are no quasi-religious promises of bliss, transcendent union, or ecstasy, but rather a straightforward goal of existential liberation which arises from true knowledge of personhood – as both fundamentally material and fundamentally conscious, but in different and disconnected ways. The hard problem is: how can these two domains be both connected *and* disconnected? Put another way, in a dualist ontology there is no unified self or subject that 'experiences' life, if experience is the preserve of materially instantiated being. Yet Chalmers's argument for an 'explanatory bridge' through 'intimate coherence' and 'naturalistic dualism' offers fresh and constructive models through which we can re-approach and re-view the 'hard' problems of Sāṃkhya dualism and 'pure' consciousness. Moreover, Ellis's approach of expansive naturalism has the potential to

address the immortal dimension of consciousness in Sāṃkhya ontology, a claim that cannot be explained by scientific accounts alone. In intercultural dialogue, the reframing of Sāṃkhya as an *expansive naturalistic dualism* opens up new possibilities for amplifying the ongoing relevance of this systematized worldview for prevailing questions and currents in the philosophy of religion. But even to approach the possibility of dialogue, we also have to invest in the hard task of engaging with the complex cultural situatedness of a philosophical text like the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*.

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## Notes

1. Schweizer refers to *prakṛti* (materiality), one of the two principles of reality in this system, as a ‘metaphysical principle’ (Schweizer (1993), 847). This notably indicates that we are dealing with a system concerned with abstract fundamentals of rationality rather than with ‘things’.
2. For an analysis of Sāṃkhya through a Goethean lens, see Ashton (2020). Funes Maderey (2019) draws on Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray.
3. For Schweizer, the problem with Cartesian dualism is: ‘Thought becomes separated, by an ontological chasm, from the external objects of thought, and the inner world of subjective experience threatens to become a solipsistic bubble’ (*ibid.*, 852).
4. Sāṃkhya is a tradition that emerges in the late first millennium BCE in the *Upaniṣads*. At least one other prior authoritative treatise existed in this tradition: we have glimpses of the lost *Ṣaṣṭitantra* (c. second century CE), through references in surviving texts, and we know that it proposed an ontological taxonomy of some sixty constituents. The *Sāṃkhyakārikā* purports to summarize the *Ṣaṣṭitantra*.
5. Threefold suffering is glossed in various commentaries as *ādhyātmika*, *ādhibhautika* and *ādhidaiivika*, or suffering produced by the self, material world, and supernatural agency. See, for example, Kauṇḍinya’s *Pañcārthabhāṣya* (c. fifth century), a commentary on the *Pāśupatasūtra*, which incorporates Sāṃkhya metaphysics, or Vācaspatimiśra’s *Sāṃkhyatattvakaumudī* (c. tenth century), a commentary on the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*.
6. Consciousness is indivisible and materiality in its manifest expression is divided into twenty-three categories: awareness, egoity, and mundane mind; seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching; speaking, clasping, walking, excreting, reproducing; sound, tactile feeling, visible form, flavour, odour; earth, water, fire, air, space (SK 22).
7. In this article, I shall use the term ‘self’ to indicate a principle of being or personhood, with ‘subjectivity’ as the instantiation of that principle.
8. ‘Due to various patterns of birth, death and capacities, and to the disjunction from activities, *puruṣa*’s multiplicity is established; and also due to contrariety of the three *guṇas*’ (SK 18; trans. Burley (2007), 168). (Burley has ‘of’ but I have emended this to ‘from’ to make clear that consciousness is disjoining from materiality.) *jananamaraṇākaraṇānāṃ pratīnyamād ayuḡapat pravṛtteṣu ca | puruṣabahutvaṃ siddhaṃ traigunyaḡaviparyayāc caiva* (SK 18). *Guṇa* here refers to the basic qualities of material existence (balance, kinesis, and inertia). All Sanskrit verses and English translations of the SK are taken from Burley (2007).
9. In Hindu nondual philosophy, *brahman* is posited as a unitary and transcendent principle of reality.
10. In addition to the primary term *puruṣa*, other terms are used to label consciousness: *pumān* (person or living entity) (SK 11, 60), *cetanāḡ* (consciousness) (SK 55), *sākṣitvaṃ* (witnessing) (SK 19), *draṣṭṛtvaṃ* (pure seeing) (SK 19).
11. For an interesting analysis of the potential of materiality as a gendered creatrix, see Ashton (2020), who brings a lens of Goethean ‘organics’ to bear on Sāṃkhya’s theory of nature, in order to critique modern science and Kantian idealism.
12. Thank you to my anonymous reviewer for helping to clarify this point.
13. *na prakṛtir na vikṛtiḡ puruṣaḡ* (SK 3).
14. This unmanifested materiality is referred to as *pradhāna* (primordial), *avyakta* (unmanifest), and *mūlaprakṛti* (root materiality).
15. ‘The [formally] existent [is] an effect due to: the non-causation of non-being; the apprehension of a material cause; the non-production of everything [from everything]; the possibility of causation [only] from that which is capable; and the nature of the cause’. *asad akaraṇād upādānagrahaṇāt sarvasaṃbhavābhāvāt / śaktasya śakyakaraṇāt kāraṇabhāvāc ca sat kāryam* (SK 9; trans. Burley (2007), 166). This verse describes the Sāṃkhya doctrine of ‘the

effect pre-exists in the cause' (*satkāryavāda*). The *Sāṃkhyakārikā* is the *locus classicus* of this well-known principle, in which all change is explained as merely a transformation of an underlying and permanent substratum of material reality – hence nothing new ever truly comes into effect.

16. *hetumad anityam avyāpi sakriyam anekam āśritaṃ liṅgam | sāvayavaṃ paratantraṃ vyaktaṃ viparītam avyaktam* (SK 10).

17. For Ashton (2020), this primordial and metaphysical ground is the very site of the mix-up between consciousness and materiality and not any ordinary or mundane states of subjective embodiment. However, compelling though this argument is, it does not sufficiently account for the purpose of the SK as an existentially oriented treatise on rational reflection to escape the condition of affective suffering, clearly an embodied and ordinary state.

18. *triṅgaṇam aviveki viśayaḥ sāmānyam acetanam prasavadharmi | vyaktaṃ tathā pradhānam tad viparītas tathā ca pumān* (SK 11).

19. From the qualities of materiality, we can deduce the opposite qualities of consciousness (*puruṣa*), namely non-partite (unitary), discriminated (being comprised of the capacity of discrimination, and knowable only upon discrimination), subjective (Burley translates this as 'subjectual'), particular (not universal), conscious, and non-productive.

20. Potentiality, in relation to materiality, is the capacity of forms to exist and transform through time. In Indian philosophy, the clay-pot example is ubiquitous and is used to demonstrate that there is a permanent substratum to material reality that never changes in essence, just in form. Those formal changes are transitory, while the underlying substance that manifests as 'clay' (whether in atoms, dust, a vase, fragments, dust again, etc.) remains constant. In this account, nothing can be added to or subtracted from the material world.

21. Let us bear in mind that personhood in early Indian ontology may refer to humans but also to non-human animals or natural entities, such as plants.

22. Rusza argues that consciousness in Sāṃkhya is not particularly useful: 'What could its function be? It is not needed even for such popular purposes as immortality, since the transmigrating entity is immortal' (Rusza (2019), 9). However, association with the transmigrating entity (*liṅga*) is not necessarily immortal, but can be ceased at any time if one eradicates one's karmic traces to become liberated from rebirth. We should not forget that the ongoing generation of new mind–body complexes is described as 'suffering' – in contrast, residing in pure consciousness is framed as an enjoyable state (SK 17) and as pure freedom.

23. Different terms for liberation are used, such as *apavarga* or *vimokṣa*.

24. 'Puruṣa, consciousness, acquires there the suffering created by decay and death until its deliverance from the *liṅga*; hence one's own nature is associated with distress' (SK 55; trans. Burley (2007), 175). *tatra jarāmaraṇakṛtam duḥkham prāpnoti cetanaḥ puruṣaḥ | liṅgasyāvinivṛttes tasmād duḥkham svabhāvena* (SK 55).

25. Historically, this was even understood to produce the social order in divisions such as gender or caste, which are in some sense understood to be determined by the individual's actions in a previous life. This claim is problematic from the standpoint of social history and ethics.

26. For the contrary argument that *puruṣa* is a deified consciousness, see Harimoto (2014). Although the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* is generally accepted as non-theist, some earlier proto-formulations and later expressions are theistic.

27. Moreover, at best, consciousness can only be demonstrated through inference (given that direct perception is ruled out by both embodiment and death, and the SK's appeal to the reliable testimony of the Vedas is weak or absent).

28. In his comparative reading of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* and Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, Larson identifies a structural similarity between the 'fundamental dualism' of *puruṣa-prakṛti* and Sartre's formulation of consciousness as an undifferentiated nature or being, divided into the 'for-itself' (individual consciousness) and the 'in-itself' (the unconscious world) (Larson (1969b), 53). Further parallels for Larson included the instrumental nature of the world for consciousness and the basis of human existence in the world as suffering (*ibid.*, 55). Yet he disagrees that *puruṣa* can be equated to the nothingness of Sartre's ontology (*ibid.*, 54) or that the two visions of existential freedom coincide, since for Sartre 'man is condemned to be free within his suffering' (*ibid.*, 57). The Sāṃkhya worldview offers a more optimistic view of the human condition. For a critique of Larson's article, see Gelblum (1970).

29. That may be 'self and other' or 'self and world', modelled through many theist and non-theist variations such as *brahman-ātman* or *śiva-śakti*.

30. In this sense, the Sāṃkhya model is not 'substance dualism', and Rusza (2019) argues further that it is 'dualism without substances'.

31. Schweizer (1993, 858) argues further that consciousness can only ever illuminate part of the contents of the mind and never has full access to the mind's contents.

32. More recently Chalmers defined the 'hard problem' as 'the problem of explaining how and why physical processes give rise to consciousness' (Chalmers (2020), 227). In this restricted sense, Sāṃkhya is somewhat outside

the definition, since in Sāṃkhya's dualist system, physical processes do not give rise to consciousness (i.e. is not an epiphenomenalism in which consciousness/mind arises from the brain). In fact, this present article might be more accurately stated to address 'the meta-problem of consciousness' which is 'the problem of explaining why there seems to be a hard problem of consciousness' (*ibid.*).

33. The dualism of Chalmers's 'hard problem' presupposes a materialist frame: 'why and how do physical processes in the brain give rise to conscious experience?' (*ibid.*, 253). But it can also be formulated without these materialist presuppositions: 'why and how does conscious experience arise?' (*ibid.*). Or it can include the more fundamental question of why consciousness exists at all or why specific experiences have a specific character (*ibid.*).

34. Property dualism is the view that reality comprises one kind of substance which has separate kinds of physical and mental properties (and in which consciousness is qualitatively distinct and emergent). Substance dualism is the view that there are two kinds of substances, one physical and one mental/conscious (or material and immaterial, of which Cartesian dualism is one variety). Sāṃkhya is closer to substance dualism, apart from the key point that *puruṣa* or consciousness is not substantial, which is a property of materiality alone. Sāṃkhya's *puruṣa* concept is so rarefied that as a pure capacity it does not inhere in substance.

35. Chalmers (2020, 237) argues that experience (in his dialect of English) 'expresses a unified notion of phenomenal consciousness' that includes both seeing and feeling, but he also explores other arguments that experience can have non-phenomenal readings.

36. Another alternative correlate to *puruṣa* in this explanatory scheme might be a phenomenal intuition (*ibid.*, 248).

37. SK 37 tells us that the location of enjoyment occurs in *buddhi*, since such affect or emotion could not be directly experienced by *puruṣa*. Consciousness experiences no thing, since it is only a witnessing presence.

38. This, perhaps, hints at the Upaniṣadic notion of the inner controller of personhood as *brahman*. The reasons why consciousness (*puruṣa*) exists are laid out: '*Puruṣa* exists due to: composites [being] for another's sake, the opposite of the three *guṇas* etc., [the need for] a controller, [the need for] an enjoyer, and the process [being] for the purpose of aloneness' (SK 17; trans. Burley (2007), 167). *saṃghātaparāthavāt triguṇādiviparyayād adīṣṭhānāt | puruṣo 'sti bhokṛtṛbhāvāt kaivalyārthaṃ pravṛtteś ca* (SK 17). *Guṇas* are ontological qualities of materiality.

39. See note 7 above.

40. Chalmers is drawing on Levine (1983).

41. Chalmers (2020, 241) explores the explanatory gap between seeing and feeling, which also has resonance for the Sāṃkhya system in terms of the seeing capacity of *puruṣa* and the feeling capacity of *prakṛti*.

42. Texts in this period have both written and oral traditions.

43. Schweizer (1993, 854) describes the functions of mind as 'computational'.

44. Cognition here is used to indicate awareness.

45. Larson describes this paradoxical relation somewhat cryptically:

[Consciousness] functions by witnessing or seeing the world, and by so doing it appears as what it is not. It appears as if it were the world, and the world appears as if it were possessed of consciousness. In other words, a kind of double negation takes place. The *puruṣa* appears as what it is not, and the world appears as what it is not. This negation occurs, however, because of the very negation of *puruṣa*, that is, its function as witness is to reflect or to appear as what it is not. Only by appearing as what it is not can it appear as what it is. (Larson (1969b), 46)

46. Even in a related treatise, the *Yogasūtra*, there is an ambivalent recourse to a creator-like figure, *īśvara*, in places.

47. He acknowledges that this 'dualism' is not metaphysical and that 'experience might in a certain sense still be physical' (Chalmers (2010), 18).

48. She is exploring the objections of empiricist philosophers to 'the "other-worldly" dimension of Plato's position' from a scientific standpoint (Ellis (2021), 234).

49. Although Ellis is arguing in relation to Plato's concept of divine beauty or to the concept of the good, we might extend her reasoning to our discussion of consciousness.

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