THE EARLIEST EXTANT VAIŠEŠIKA THEORY OF GUÑAS

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Anyone who works with Turfan fragments knows how rarely something hitherto completely unknown can be discovered. Many of the fragments are too small to make sense on their own, many others have their parallels either in Chinese or Tibetan translations or in the Pāli canon, still others reveal information known already from other sources. Yet occasionally one comes across fragments that disclose something about which we had no inkling before.

In what follows I will try to show that the Spitzer manuscript (= SHT 810)¹ discusses a Vaiśeṣika theory of guñas, or at least of certain particular guñas, that is radically different from anything known to us on the subject. This theory represents an early stage in the development of Vaiśeṣika philosophy (3rd c. at the latest) when the Sāṃkhya influence was still considerable. In the classical period, when the differences between Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣika became more radical, this theory must have been abandoned as an alien body.

Elsewhere I have shown how some of the surviving fragments can be happily married with Moritz Spitzer’s transcriptions which represent some forty lost fragments of various size.² Drawing on these two sources has proved fruitful in the present case too and I will attempt to show how fragment 77³ and a fragment transcribed in Spitzer’s Nachlass, p. 13, can be related to each other.

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² Cf. my “Lost Fragments of the Spitzer Manuscript,” forthcoming in Minoru Hara Felicitation Volume, ed. A. Wetzler et al. (Reinbek 2001).

³ The number refers to the numbering of the glass frames containing SHT-810 preserved at the State Library, Berlin.
1. Read apratiṣṭi: the lengthening of the initial vowel seems to indicate an emphasis in the pronunciation, and throughout the discussion one has to read (a)pratiṣṭi instead of (a)prahīṣa. The confusion between hi and ti is perhaps due to the fact that they are mirror images of each other. In hi the vowel sign rests on the left arm of the akṣara and the right arm is curved to the right, in ti the vowel sign rests on the right arm and the left arm is curved to the left.

2. I suggest the conjecture aṣamsarga. The reading aṣamsarga is not impossible, but the sign for o is usually rotated more to the left (cf. for instance uṣo in lines 1 and 2 on the other side of this leaf). Further, even if we assume the nominative aṣamsarga we would still have to deal with irregular sandhi and an unusual construction with kiṅ kāraṇam.
pralīṇā is difficult to construe here; it cannot be an accusative plural because the sentence with the passive predicate upalabhyyate could not be construed, and it is probably not an ablative singular (masculine or neuter) because in this case one would expect pralīṇatvam. It seems preferable, therefore, to conjecture here, in analogy with the beginning of line 2, pralīṇa (neuter nominative singular). The adjective in the singular could refer to a samāhāraṇāvandva such as sukhadvīkham in line 3. It may be reminded that a and ā are often confused in this manuscript. Cf. also n. 13 below.
later times it was accepted by the Nyāya and the Mīmāṃsā as well, but not in the 3rd c. A.D. which is the latest possible date for the Spitzer manuscript. At this time Nyāya probably did not yet exist as a philosophical school, and sāmakṣāya was introduced into the Mīmāṃsā around the 6th c. A.D. Other expressions used here, such as ātmam-

\[\text{sādhanāsādhyate} (77b3), \] are also typical of the Vaiśeṣika. Further, the Vaiśeṣika considers mental states such as pleasure and pain as qualities that inhere in the soul (cf. 77a2 and 77b2: guṇāḥ ātmāsatva

tatā). So unless we encounter here a completely unknown philosophical school which also accepted the above mentioned tenets of the Vai-
šeṣika and vanished without leaving a trace, we must conclude that our text refers to the position of a Vaiśeṣika opponent.

The second contention is more difficult to prove. Let us have a look first at the surviving fragment. In 77a1 the (Buddhist)16 opponent seems to argue that a philosophical tenet is established by proofs or inferences (((sā)dhanāsādhyate) and that the proofs (of the Vaiśe-

\[\text{sādhanāsādhyate} (77b3) \] have been disproved or contradicted by ”us” (Buddhist) (sā-

\[\text{dhanānāy asādhyēr vyāhātā(ñjī). It is impossible to know whether this statement con-

cludes a previous discussion or begins a new section. In any case, in the next line (77a2) the Buddhist opponent poses two questions against the Vaiśeṣika: 1) How could the ātmā be a cause ((ka)ham ātmā kāranaṁ)? 17 2) Further, if absorbed qualities inhere the ātmā, what is the difference between such qualities and non-absorbed qualities (that also inhere it) (yadi ca pra[ñ]jātā/ñjī/anā/pa ātmā) ([guṇāḥ ātmāsatva

tatā] aprāśīn āpi ko v(ñjī/ñjī)ēs(ñjī)āh(ñjī) ...).

The reply of the Vaiśeṣika must have been that the absorbed qualities are not in contact (with the manas?) whereas those that are not absorbed are. Upon this the Buddhist asks: What is the reason/cause for the absorbed qualities not being in contact (atrocyeate pra[ñ]jānām asām(sa)/[rg(e) kīn kāraṇam itī]? The answer is incomplete; however, the Vaiśeṣika seems to reply that the contact is due to a special conjunction between the soul and the manas (ātmamakaṃvyāgij

\[\text{sādhyēr} \]. Such contact presumably does not occur in the case of the absorbed qualities.

On the other side of the same leaf (77b1) the Vaiśeṣika explains that (the guṇas that have disappeared, such as pleasure and pain) are not perceived precisely because they are absorbed in the ātmā; in the same way (one does not perceive speech) when one becomes silent after

16 My understanding of the discussion is that the Vaiśeṣika forms the pūrvaṇakṣaṇa and the Buddhist siddhāntin argues as the pūrvaṇakṣaṇa is the pūrvaṇakṣaṇa.

17 The beginning of the question has probably been lost. One can imagine that it was introduced with the mention of some presupposition, e.g., as something eternal cannot be a cause, how could the eternal ātmā be a cause?

having withdrawn speech (ātmā eva tu praśīn ātmā) nopalbhaya. tatā vā ca samāñyā trayaṁ ā ...

Speech seems to have been conceived here as a capacity which can be exercised or be kept dormant.

Unfortunately, no further information can be gathered from the second line. There is also a slight uncertainty about the interpretation of the text as I have to take recourse to two conjectures (cf. above) to construe it meaningfully: these qualities, as something inhering in the ātmā, are not perceived inasmuch as they are absorbed in it.

In the next line (77b3) the Buddhist charges the Vaiśeṣika with the fallacy of drṣṭāntavirodha, that is, the reason employed by the Vaiśeṣika is no reason at all (ahetu) because it is contradicted by the example. There is considerable uncertainty about the nature of the inference, for it is possible that some of the elements of the proof, such as the example, do not appear on what is preserved of this leaf. However, if we try to operate with the information that is available on the fragment, then the only item that could serve as an example is speech, or perhaps the capacity of speaking, which is withdrawn when one remains silent. Perhaps the proof was formulated as follows: Qualities such as pleasure and pain are not perceived because they are absorbed, just like speech. If this was the form of the proof, the Buddhist could argue that the example contradicts the reason, because speech as something which does not inhere in the ātmā, cannot be absorbed in it. From what seems to be the Vaiśeṣika’s reply to this objection nothing useful for our purpose remains. It begins with the familiar statement that pleasure and pain inhere in the soul ((it)/[y] (u)cyate sukhdhā-

\[\text{kham ātmānī samavetām nātma ...}. \]

At least one more objection must have been formulated after this reply because what remains of the next leaf (lost fragment a1) begins with the Vaiśeṣika answer that (the qualities of the ātmā such as pleasure and pain) have not perished (utrākha na khalu vināṣṭam ...). The next line explains further: Also something that has not perished, i.e., also something withdrawn into the state of an atom, is called absorbed (avixaṇam api sat anumānavāśāsamāḥ āpy praśīn ātmānity uc(yate). In other words, being “absorbed” does not mean for the qualities of the soul that they do not exist.

In the next line (a3) the Vaiśeṣika concludes that there are two modes of absorption (taṇ evam ubhayātā[ñjī]taj ...). The one presumably consists in complete destruction, the other consists perhaps in a contraction and penetration into another entity.18

On the other side of the leaf (b1) there is a reference to an omni-

\[\text{present entity probably by way of an adjective in the masculine noto...} \]

18 In this connection one has to consider fragment 471 which probably belongs to the same leaf as the lost fragment transcribed by Spitzer:
minative singular (sarcagata), which in this context must refer to the ātmān. This reference is of particular interest because it has been widely assumed that in early Vaiśeṣika the ātmān was only as large as the body. If this assumption is correct, our text provides the earliest reference to the new ātmān doctrine of the Vaiśeṣika and confirms that this change in the ātmān doctrine took place at a rather early stage in the history of the Vaiśeṣika, perhaps as early as the 2nd c. A.D. So far the earliest reference to this doctrine could be found in the work of Āryadeva whose date (3rd–4th c. B.C.) is still unsettled.

Further, I would suggest that the reference to an omnipresent or all-pervading ātmān indicates that the Vaiśeṣika opponent did not consider his doctrine about absorbed qualities in substances to apply to all qualities and all substances, but only to some, in any case to qualities of omnipresent substances. Indeed, it would be difficult to maintain that a quality in an atomic state - or in fact several such qualities inhering in an atom - could be absorbed, i.e., contained, in a substance that is also atomic, that is, not larger in size than the quality itself. On this point too the Vaiśeṣika qualities as presented in the Spitzer manuscript would differ from those accepted in classical Vaiśeṣika, as the latter are not spatial entities because in classical Vaiśeṣika size was conceived as a quality, and the school did not allow qualities of qualities: qualities cannot have size, neither small (atomic) nor medium nor large.

One may also consider whether medium-size composite substances could absorb qualities. Unfortunately, our fragment does not disclose anything on this point.

In the next line (b2) the ātmān is called camakāraṇa. The concept of camakāraṇa does not seem to make sense and, as far as I know, it does not occur in the relevant literature. I have no doubt that Spitzer's transcription is correct. He must have also had his difficulties with this concept and apparently rechecked his transcription, for above the transcription of the word cama- he added two small exclamation marks. Perhaps one should conjecture ca na kāraṇam. The whole sentence could then read: ... (in this manner) the ātmān is (not) a cause; and in the following manner the ātmān is also not a cause: pleasure etc., that contradict each other here (in this world / in the Vaiśeṣika system) are not inherent (in the ātmān) when/a/ / (kājera)naṃ ātmā āthām ca na kāraṇam ātmā sukhandinām iha viruddhāṇām asamavāyaḥ y.). This statement is probably due to the notion that a substance cannot possess contradictory qualities or properties. Unfortunately the precise nature of the possible contradiction is unexplained, at least in what remains of the leaf.

Finally, in the last line the Vaiśeṣika may have explained that those entities that proceed to absorption are as if they had perished (i.e., as good as destroyed or destroyed for all practical purposes, but not entirely inexistent) ((pralā)yaḥ khalu api vinaśiṣṭāṁ ātmā cārthaṁ).

One final remark in this connection. The adjective pratīna has almost completely disappeared from classical Vaiśeṣika texts. There is only one context where it is used regularly, namely, in the context of dreams. The dreaming person is called pratīnamanaskā when the manas withdraws to a region of the ātmān called “the inner heart” (antarārthāyā), which is devoid of senses, and stays there without movement.

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20 Cf. however, Vaiśeṣikasūtra (ed. Muni Jamprajjayah, Baroda 1961) X.2 and Candrāmānda's commentary thereon.