

## Is Sāṃkhya Really Dualistic? A Comparative Perspective Gathered from Other Gnostic Yogas

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A form or another of dualism within the Sāṃkhya philosophical system has long been noticed and denounced. Early opponents of Sāṃkhya were quick to point out the inherent and problematic dualism they perceived in the system's distinction between 1. *puruṣa*, the only metaphysical category representative of consciousness in the Sāṃkhyan list of twenty-five core realities (*tattva*-s), and 2. *prakṛti*, the category which encompasses everything non-conscious and out of which Sāṃkhya theorizes and organizes the entire manifestation of the cosmos.

More recent academic commentators of Sāṃkhya have generally continued in the early footsteps of dualism-shaming. For example, Gerald James Larson, leading scholar of the tradition, believes Sāṃkhya to be promoting an “eccentric form of dualism,” in the sense that it does not fit the usual or conventional notions of dualism articulated in Western schemes of thought. This talk suggests that there is another possible way of reading the function of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* in Sāṃkhya that makes it much less eccentric in the general context of South Asian Gnosticism.

I propose that the *Kārikā* be read from two synchronic perspectives illustrative of a diachronic pedagogical and psychagogical progression. 1. From the perspective of the ‘path’ to be undertaken by the student of Sāṃkhya, there is indeed such a thing as *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. They are to be contemplated in a precise dialectical manner detailed within the text. 2. From the perspective of its result, ‘fruit,’ or goal, however, the *Kārikā* is clear that the purpose of its ritual therapy is to isolate consciousness from everything that it is not, leaving it alone, pure and simple. Whatever *prakṛti* there was in the course of the Sāṃkhyan ritual visualisation, it vanishes once the eye of consciousness opens. As with every South Asian form of gnostic yogas, that ritual sacrifice, or spiritual exercise, is established through a specific internalization of taxonomy and its determinate negation.

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