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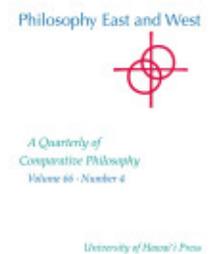
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*The Philosophy of Lokāyata: A Review and Reconsideration*  
by Bijayananda Kar (review)

Ethan Mills

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(Review)

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This book is the most comprehensive account of Vasubandhu's philosophy to date, and it is likely to become an indispensable resource for future scholarship. Although some of Gold's interpretive positions are bound to remain points of contention among scholars, his careful textual analysis challenges our preconceptions about Vasubandhu, forcing us all to rethink our understanding of this pivotal Buddhist thinker. Gold brings Vasubandhu to life, not only by painting a compelling portrait of the philosopher and his views, but also by showing how these views remain relevant to the continuing discussion of living philosophical questions and pressing practical problems.

*The Philosophy of Lokāyata: A Review and Reconsideration.* By Bijayananda Kar. Delhi: Motilal Banarstdass, 2013. Pp. 136. Rs. 295.



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The paucity of classical sources concerning the Cārvāka/Lokāyata school is mirrored by a scarcity of contemporary scholarship. On that note, this book is a welcome contribution. The subtitle of this book promises “a review and reconstruction.” There is some review of classical and contemporary sources (although perhaps not quite enough); however, the bulk of the book is Kar's reconstruction of what he thinks the Cārvākas might have or should have said. I will follow Kar in using “Cārvāka” and “Lokāyata” interchangeably to refer to the classical Indian school usually taken to endorse materialism, atheism, hedonism, and/or skepticism.

Kar's book consists of an introduction and conclusion with six chapters on a variety of issues (knowledge, materialism, atheism, morality, the self, and socio-individual relationship). In the introduction, Kar explains the points where he thinks the Cārvākas ought to be reevaluated. After a brief review of classical sources including the Upaniṣads, Early Buddhist texts, and Cārvāka philosophers such as Bṛhaspati, Purandara, and Jayarāṣi, Kar sets out to challenge many of the received views. His first controversial (if somewhat puzzling) point is that the Cārvākas engage in “no wholesale condemnation of the Vedic source,” but only of those parts that refer to trans-empirical phenomena (pp. 3–4). He also claims that the Cārvākas can't endorse the type of dogmatic metaphysical materialism they are usually taken to endorse, a claim he supports in more detail in the chapter on materialism. This illustrates the main claim of the book that the Cārvāka school is not nearly as simplistic or dogmatic as it has been taken to be by both classical and contemporary scholars.

The key to this claim comes in Kar's chapter on epistemology. While many sources present the Cārvākas as accepting perception as the single means of knowledge, which is then meant to support materialist metaphysics, Kar argues that the

Cārvākas in fact had a more subtle view, such as the view of Purandara.<sup>1</sup> According to this view, inference (*anumāna*) is a trustworthy means of knowledge as long it is limited to the empirical realm; it is only when inference is used to support the existence of things not subject to empirical verification that it is not trustworthy.

Given this epistemological framework, Kar argues that the Cārvākas cannot be the type of materialists they are commonly taken to be: “The materialistic stand that matter alone is real ultimately is not derived from empirical knowledge. It is a metaphysical presupposition and, as such, it is not at all acceptable to the logical foundation of the Cārvāka stand” (p. 37). In other words, materialism as a metaphysical view goes beyond empirically available data, and thus cannot be accepted. Kar draws a comparison with several types of positivism, especially that of A. J. Ayer.

Kar applies similar analyses to the issues of theism and the self, arguing that the Cārvākas cannot be dogmatic atheists and that they would accept a common-sense, empirical self without accepting a simplistic physicalism that equates the body with the self. Interestingly, Kar suggests that Cārvākas may not be dismissive of personal religious feelings based on emotion rather than trans-empirical inferences (pp. 55–56).

Concerning ethics, Kar thinks the typical view that the Cārvākas are selfish hedonists is entirely unfounded, since Cārvākas may well accept social ethics as a purely worldly phenomenon. They might even work to end discrimination on the basis of gender, caste, and race. Again, the problem comes in trying to base ethics on trans-empirical entities such as a transcendent self that can be reborn or go to heaven.

While I deeply appreciate Kar’s efforts to rethink the typical, unsophisticated depiction of the Cārvākas, I have a few criticisms. First, Kar takes for granted that there is one Cārvāka view, but, as K. N. Jayatilleke<sup>2</sup> and others have argued, the textual evidence makes more sense if we accept at least three branches of Cārvāka divided along epistemological lines: those who accept only perception as a means of knowledge (as depicted in the *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*), those who accept a limited form of inference (such as Purandara), and those who deny all means of knowledge (such as Jayarāśi). Second, Kar discusses many contemporary Indian sources, but he misses a few key classical sources where Cārvākas are mentioned such as Śrī Harṣa’s *Khaṇḍanakaṇḍakhādyā*. Additionally, Strawson and Quine seem to be the most recent Western philosophers mentioned, which is a shame because comparisons with more recent work in philosophy of mind such as the naturalistic dualism of David Chalmers might illuminate Kar’s discussion of Cārvāka views of the self. Third, I’m not convinced that Ayer-style verificationism is necessary to make sense of the original sources; as far as I can tell these sources never claim that the very question of whether trans-empirical entities exist is meaningless (that they exist is thought to be false or unestablished, but not meaningless).

Lastly, in reading the book I never got a sense of what Kar thinks is at stake in this project. I almost get the feeling that Kar thinks the Cārvākas are something like secular Hindus who are not ready to completely dismiss Vedic worldviews and who might not be critical of emotionally based religious devotion, such as *bhakti*

movements. Perhaps this is a way to make Cārvāka palatable to polite Hindu society, perhaps Kar means to put forward Cārvāka as a commonsense system compatible with modern science and pluralistic democracy, or perhaps Kar simply means to correct centuries of misreading, but I remain unclear about his motivations.

Despite my criticisms and disagreements, I found this book tremendously provocative, and I recommend it to anyone learning about Cārvāka/Lokāyata for the first time or to anyone who suspects they may need to rethink their existing beliefs about this fascinating and underappreciated school of classical Indian philosophy.

#### Notes

- 1 – Reconstructions of the views of Purandara and other “more educated” Cārvākas can be found in Pradeep P. Gokhale, “The Cārvāka Theory of Pramāṇas: A Restatement,” *Philosophy East and West* 43, no. 4 (1993): 675–682.
- 2 – K. N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1963), pp. 71–72.

*Mestari Kongin Keskustelut: Kungfutselaisuuden ydinolemus* (The discourses of Master Kong: The essence of Confucianism). By Jyrki Kallio. Helsinki: Gaudeamus Helsinki University Press, 2014. Pp. 382. Hardcover €34, ISBN 978-952-495-337-5.



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*The Discourses of Master Kong: The Essence of Confucianism* (hereafter *Master Kong*), written in Finnish by Jyrki Kallio, is a laudable work on Confucianism not only for students of Chinese philosophy but for a broader audience as well. The book is the first comprehensive work on Confucianism in the Finnish language: it comprises an annotated and critical complete translation of the *Analects* as well as longer selected and annotated translations from the Guodian corpus and central early Confucian classics such as the *Mengzi* and *Xunzi*; it also revisits texts from later Confucian thinkers. This lucidly written work is more than a translation of the seminal Confucian *Analects*; it is a handbook of Confucian philosophy and a testimony to an outstanding knowledge of the history of Chinese philosophy.

The style of writing and scholarly background work of *Master Kong* represent, in my opinion, the pinnacle of Kallio’s work to date on traditional Chinese thinking and prose, even surpassing his translation of the *Guwen guan zhi* 古文觀止, a classical Chinese prose anthology dating from 1695. Kallio has translated into Finnish and annotated a comprehensive selection of essays from the *Guwen guan zhi*, published