



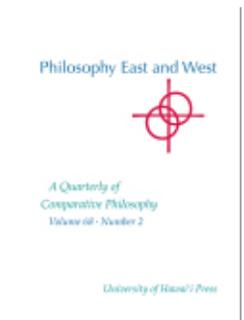
PROJECT MUSE®

Lokāyata/Cārvāka: A Philosophical Inquiry by Pradeep P.
Gokhale (review)

Ethan Mills

Philosophy East and West, Volume 68, Number 2, April 2018, pp. 645-648
(Review)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/pew.2018.0056>



➔ *For additional information about this article*
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/690310>

Olberding, Amy. 2012. *Moral Exemplars in the Analects: The Good Person is That*. New York and London: Routledge.

Riggs, Wayne. 2010. "Open-mindedness." *Metaphilosophy* 41, nos. 1/2: 172–188.

Tan, Sor-hoon, ed. 2016. *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Chinese Philosophy Methodologies*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Zagzebski, Linda [Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski]. 1996. *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2010. "Exemplarist Virtue Theory." *Metaphilosophy* 41, nos. 1/2: 41–57.

Lokāyata/Cārvāka: A Philosophical Inquiry. By Pradeep P. Gokhale. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. 222. Rs. 750; £21.99, ISBN 978-0-19-946063-2.



Reviewed by **Ethan Mills**
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
Ethan-Mills@utc.edu

The greatest strength of Pradeep P. Gokhale's *Lokāyata/Cārvāka: A Philosophical Inquiry* is its much-needed enrichment of the vocabulary for the study of the Indian Lokāyata/Cārvāka school. For too long this school has been studied in the rather limited terms of its opponents in texts such as Mādhava's *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, which identify a single Cārvāka position advocating extreme empiricism in epistemology, materialism in metaphysics, and hedonism and irreligiousness in ethics. Gokhale establishes frameworks for understanding the diversity of epistemological, metaphysical, and axiological positions of Cārvāka philosophers that ought to be considered by anyone writing on the school in the future.

Chapter 1 introduces Gokhale's pluralist approach to understanding Cārvāka. Concerning the various names for this school—Lokāyata, Cārvāka, and Bārhaspatya—Gokhale suggests that while these names have separate histories, they all designate "a family of systems or a family of philosophical trends" (p. 19). While recognizing this diversity, Gokhale follows the practice of most scholars in tending to use "Cārvāka" inclusively to refer to this family, which will also be my practice in this review. Gokhale criticizes what he calls a singularist approach to Cārvāka in the works of scholars such as Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya and Ramkrishna Bhattacharya, who conceive of Cārvāka as a single school with a more-or-less unified set of positions. In opposition, Gokhale supports a pluralist approach according to which "Cārvāka" is to be understood as a family-resemblance term that refers to Indian philosophers with irreligious intentions. Other scholars such as D. R. Shastri and Eli Franco have supported pluralist approaches, but Gokhale's book offers a more fine-tuned and sophisticated version of pluralism. Part of the reason for this is that, while Gokhale

is well versed in the available historical evidence, he considers his inquiry to be more philosophical than historical (pp. 21–22), which allows him to set out philosophically plausible positions that may not always be directly apparent in the primary texts.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 cover Cārvāka epistemology, highlighting skepticism, extreme empiricism, and mitigated empiricism, respectively. Chapter 2 focuses on Jayarāśi (ca. 770–830 c.e.). While singularists tend to claim that Jayarāśi cannot be a member of the Cārvāka school on account of his rejection of materialist principles and perception as a means of knowledge, Gokhale's pluralist model includes Jayarāśi as the primary example of a skeptical branch of the Cārvākas. Jayarāśi can be called a Cārvāka, argues Gokhale, due to his negative doctrines (i.e., critiques of religious philosophy) and acceptance of worldly practices in everyday matters. Gokhale reads Jayarāśi as an epistemological skeptic who denies all means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*), and offers an interesting treatment of Jayarāśi's response to the "paradox of skepticism" (i.e., the charge that skepticism is inconsistent or self-refuting) by comparing Jayarāśi's response with those of other skeptics like Nāgārjuna and Śrī Harṣa (pp. 37–45).

Chapter 3 concerns extreme empiricism, which is the view that "perception is the only means of knowledge and inference is not a means to knowledge at all" (p. 49). This is the view typically assigned to the Cārvākas. Gokhale counters what he sees as misunderstandings of this view. Extreme empiricist Cārvākas do not mean to deny reasoning in general or even that inference (*anumāna*) can *sometimes* yield knowledge; their argument is that inference cannot be considered to be a proper means of knowledge because it does not *necessarily* yield knowledge. They support this view with a dilemma of inference (where it is argued that the object of inference cannot be a particular, a universal, or a particular characterized by a universal) and with critiques of the possibility of knowing a universal concomitance (*vyāpti*). On the latter, Gokhale presents some interesting material on the problem of induction in Indian philosophy (pp. 60–66). He ends the chapter by cashing in his promissory note to provide a philosophical, rather than merely historical, treatment of these issues with an argument that extreme empiricism does not cohere with Cārvāka metaphysical or ethical views and is thus philosophically inadequate (pp. 83–85).

Gokhale finds mitigated empiricism to be more promising, and this is the subject of chapter 4. Unlike extreme empiricism, mitigated empiricism is "the position that though perception is the major instrument of knowledge, a certain kind of inference can be accepted as a means to knowledge" (p. 86). According to this view inference can be accepted as a means of knowledge in a weaker, secondary sense according to which inference sometimes does yield knowledge in particular domains even though it cannot necessarily be guaranteed to yield knowledge in all domains. Gokhale describes two versions of mitigated empiricism: a positivist approach, which rules out all non-empirical inferences as meaningless, and a commonsense approach, which accepts inferences that are compatible with what is commonly accepted in the world (*lokaprasiddha*). According to Gokhale, the first view was that of

the more learned (*suśikṣita*) Cārvākas mentioned in Jayanta's *Nyāyamañjarī* while the second view was that of Purandara. Gokhale argues that the positivist proposal would force Cārvākas to give up their own materialist beliefs while the commonsense view allows for materialism based on a criterion of pragmatic necessity.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on Cārvāka metaphysical materialism and conceptions of value, respectively. Gokhale presents a pluralist understanding of Cārvāka views in both areas. In metaphysics there are two Cārvāka views: Jayarāśi's ontological skepticism and traditional materialism, the latter having axiological, cosmological, and anthropological dimensions. Gokhale argues that the Cārvāka theory of consciousness is a type of non-eliminative materialism in that consciousness is said to arise from matter but not be reducible to it; the self is a body qualified by consciousness. One of the most interesting sections of this chapter is Gokhale's thorough defense of Cārvāka materialism from several interesting objections, for instance the objection that mind and matter are too heterogeneous to be so intimately related (pp. 135–143). In his discussion of personal identity, Gokhale suggests that a modern Cārvāka might accept a view he calls "the doctrine of brain-as-the-self" (*brain-ātma-vāda*) (p. 140). Chapter 6, which is on values, begins by noting that Cārvāka was typically presented as a moral critique of Brahmanical orthodoxy from a secular point of view. There is, of course, a diversity of Cārvāka views, but non-skeptical Cārvākas have typically been hedonists in a more enlightened sense like Epicureans or Jeremy Bentham (Gokhale presents a detailed comparison with Bentham's hedonism). Gokhale considers the possibility of Cārvāka versions of the human goals (*puruṣārthas*), even offering secularized versions of moral duty (*dharma*) and liberation (*mokṣa*).

Chapter 7 presents Gokhale's attempt to provide a Cārvāka-centered picture of Indian philosophy, something all the more interesting considering the peripheral place of the school in most histories of Indian philosophy. He presents a Cārvāka metaphilosophical approach that, like the approaches of Advaita Vedānta, Jainism, and Buddhism, offers a critical yet accommodative view of the landscape of the Indian philosophical tradition, learning from other schools while ultimately rejecting them. Gokhale ends by identifying pro-Cārvāka views in contemporary Indian figures such as Rajendra Prasad, Debiprad Chattopadhyaya, S. S. Barlingay, and B. R. Ambedkar.

While Gokhale's book has considerable merits, it is not without a few flaws. Occasionally Gokhale's desire to provide philosophical articulation means that historical detail is lacking. For instance, his comparisons with Western skepticism rely almost exclusively on the work of Richard Popkin rather than primary sources (pp. 45–48). Furthermore, Gokhale sometimes presents specific interpretations without mentioning contemporary scholarly disagreements; for example, his assertion that "Nāgārjuna questions the laws of logic" in favor of a kind of mystical apprehension of ultimate truth is extremely controversial within contemporary Nāgārjuna scholarship (p. 40).

These problems, however, are relatively minor. None of them should be taken to discount Gokhale's considerable accomplishment in expanding the frameworks in

which Cārvāka/Lokāyata can be understood. Gokhale claims, “if we want to study Indian philosophy today as a relevant and meaningful subject, then we should highlight its secular and rational aspects, rather than its other-worldly and religious aspects” (p. 198). Many readers will disagree with Gokhale’s claim. Nonetheless, I suspect many will agree that the secular aspects of classical Indian philosophy, represented most thoroughly by the Cārvākas, are well worth understanding. Gokhale provides fruitful resources for doing so.

Hindu Theology and Biology: The Bhāgavata Purāṇa and Contemporary Theory. By Jonathan B. Edlmann. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. 251. ISBN 78-0-19-964154-3.



Reviewed by **Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad**

Lancaster University

c.ram-prasad@lancaster.ac.uk

Hindu Theology and Biology: The Bhāgavata Purāṇa and Contemporary Theory is a conceptually ambitious book, because it seeks to articulate a program and a position so novel that there is scarcely any extant literature to draw on. The reader with a background in the study of Hinduism and Indian philosophy is likely to be puzzled by the juxtaposition of topics indicated by the title of the book. But what Jonathan Edlmann is setting out to do is to create an area of work in the study of Hindu thought that is almost entirely missing in comparison to the work that has been done on Christianity (and to a lesser extent on other religious traditions): how should a person or community committed to a particular sacred narrative and transcendental reality engage with the methods, epistemic processes, findings, and truth claims of contemporary science?

Part of the puzzlement is over the choice of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as the locus of the Hindu worldview in this dialogue. It would be understandable if one were to think that the systematic philosophical writings of Vedāntins of various schools—a Vedānta Deśika or a Madhusūdana Sarasvatī—were more appropriate because of their self-evident objective of developing a single coherent position on devotion, epistemology, metaphysics, and action. But Edlmann suggests (although he does not explicitly argue for his choice of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*) that this text offers a “world-view” that can be compared to “contemporary Darwinism,” being a comprehensive existential position. For him, this text “is a devotional crystallization” of “Vedic, Upaniṣadic, Vedāntic, Tantric, and Indian philosophical thought, such as Sāṃkhya and yoga” (p. 1), a sort of maximal textual realization of how to think and exist in a God-given world. Although the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is in fact important to all the many Vaiṣṇava traditions, Edlmann’s remarks throughout the book point to an approach to it through the Gauḍiyya stream of Vaiṣṇavism. When he talks of a *Bhāgavata* Theory