
«Отрешенность» и «сакшин» (наблюдатель): мистицизм Майстера Экхарта и ведической школы санкхья

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В статье предлагается сравнение двух метафизических и сотериологических стратегий: «Отрешенность» христианского мистика Майстера Экхарта и «сакшин» (наблюдатель, созерцатель, свидетель) в индийских даршанах санкхья и аштанга-йога. Мы анализируем представления о сознании и психике в западных и индийских традициях, а также о «высшем сознании». Вполне очевидно, что христианская и индийские традиции имеют разные антропологии, разные когнитивные и сотериологические цели, разные онтологические основания. Представления о психике в западных (основанных на Христианстве) и индийских традициях также различны (они, в свою очередь, различны в пост-ведических даршанах). Тем не менее корреляция западной дихотомии «душа/психика – дух» и идея несопоставимости повседневного опыта и опыта высших (трансперсональных) состояний сознания в даршанах санкхья и йога, по нашему мнению, дают основания для сравнения стратегий отрешенного созерцания. Наряду с онтологическими различиями мы можем обнаружить сходство мистического опыта в обеих традициях: уход от мира образов и форм как высшее благо; не-связанность сознания с телесностью, чувствами и разумом; интериоризация интенциональности сознания и прекращение его репрезентативной функции. «Сакшин» ведических даршан санкхья и аштанга-йоги суть чистое знание, взятое вне пределов времени, пространства, формы, вне пределов всех объектов и процессов. Апофатическое учение христианской неоплатонической мистики о постижении Бога посредством отрыва от тварного мира и собственного эго дает возможность такого компаративного анализа.

Ключевые слова: сознание, Майстер Экхарт, мистицизм, отрешенность, ничто, интенциональность, апофатическая теология, санкхья, сакшин, высшее сознание, трансцендентальный субъект.

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Detachment and Sākṣī (the Observer): Meister Eckhart's Mysticism and Sāṃkhya Darśana

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This article offers a comparison of two metaphysical and soteriological strategies: the “Detachment” of Christian mystic Meister Eckhart and *sākṣī* (observer, contemplator, witness) in the Indian darśanas of Sāṃkhya and Ashtanga Yoga. We analyse the ideas of consciousness and psyche in Western and Indian traditions, as well as of higher consciousness. We understand that Christian and Indian traditions have different anthropologies, different cognitive and soteriological purposes, and different ontological foundations. Ideas about the psyche in Western (grounded in Christianity) and Indian traditions are also different (in turn, they are rather different in post-Vedic darśanas). Nevertheless, the correlation of the Western “soul/psyche – Spirit” dichotomy and the idea of incomparability of everyday psychic experience and the experience of higher (transpersonal) states of consciousness in Sāṃkhya and Yoga darśanas, in our opinion, provide grounds for a comparative study of the strategies of detached contemplation. Along with differences, similarities of mystical experience can be found in both traditions: detachment from the world of images and forms as the highest blessing; non-association of oneself with corporality, feelings, and reason; interiorizing the intentionality of consciousness, and termination of its representative function. *Sākṣī* of the Sāṃkhya and Yoga darśanas is a pure knowledge taken beyond time, space, shape, beyond all objects and processes. The apophatic doctrine of Christian neo-platonic mystics about comprehension of God by means of detachment from the created world and one's own ego offers the opportunity for such comparative analysis.

Keywords: consciousness, Meister Eckhart, mysticism, detachment, nothingness, intentionality, apophatic theology, Sāṃkhya, sākṣī, transcendental subject.

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Introduction

In this comparative study we address the problems of metaphysics; we are interested in similar ontological and epistemological strategies – so to speak, “dialogue in heaven”. So, what is metaphysics? Throughout the history of Western European philosophy, both the assessment of metaphysical knowledge and the position of metaphysics in the system of philosophical sciences and in the worldview landscape have changed significantly. How many times metaphysics (including Marxism) was “buried”! And a question about its “life after death” raised constantly. And was there a dead one?.. “Metaphysics” is a philosophical doctrine of the a priori, supersensory principles of being and thinking; so it exists and will exist as long as philosophy exists. And if new forms of metaphysics (“post-metaphysics”, “analytic metaphysics”) arise in the blossom of such seemingly irreconcilable its enemies and

“gravediggers” as post-structuralism and analytical philosophy – it says that metaphysical thinking as an aspiration to the supersensory is embedded in the very nature of philosophizing. The same aspiration we see in Eastern (Indian, in this case) metaphysics.

Meister Eckhart of Hochheim was the most striking personality on the path of mystical-apophatic theology, a marginal path against the background of Western philosophical thought. Eckhart remains inspiring and controversial precisely because he may have discovered philosophizing strategies atypical for his own time, or even atypical for the mainstream Western tradition. Those researchers who value integrity, consistency and comprehensive interpretability may be disappointed with Eckhart. The philosophy of Eckhart and his disciples was rooted on the one hand in Latin scholasticism (Eckhart was a Dominican theologian, follower of Albert the Great), and on the other, in the deeper tradition of neo-platonism, Corpus Areopagiticum and Christian monastery-ascetic literature. Eckhart’s doctrine at times is antinomial. We argue its antinomy in many cases provides the possibility for comparative studies.

Eckhart’s peculiarity against the background of his Christian counterparts has prompted numerous scholars to juxtapose his mysticism with Indian traditions. One of the first authors comparing Christian and Indian mysticism was Evelyn Underhill in her book “Mysticism: A study of the nature and development of man’s spiritual consciousness” (1911). There were also earlier investigations which were rather inspired by Blavatsky’s theosophical ideas about the unity of all mystical experiences – we cannot agree with them categorically. Perhaps one of the most important investigations was conducted by Rudolph Otto, who in his book (1926) “Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism” concluded that, despite “formal equalities”, “inner cores” of Eckhart’s and Śaṅkara’s teachings are fundamentally different. Suzuki in his “Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist” draws parallels between Eckhart’s detachment and *Śūnyatā* of Mahayana. However, no attempt has yet been made to analyse *sākṣī* in relation to certain concepts found in Eckhart. Janice Forde’s excellent thesis (1974) is the sole academic work we could find dedicated exclusively to the concept of *sākṣī*.

That the author is neither Christian or adherent of any Indian tradition. Still, it is virtually impossible to conduct a study in the humanities *sub specie aeternitatis*. There may always be unconscious presuppositions and hidden biases preventing one from looking at a foreign concept appropriately. However, the author will strive toward a neutral attempt at analysis.

The Psychological and the Spiritual in India and the West

Eckhart’s mysticism is not psychological, but rather intellectual¹. It almost lacks visionary experience – unlike, for example, the “female mysticism” of Mechthild von Magdeburg, Angela of Foligno, Marguerite Porete, and even Francesco of Assisi. Eckhart’s disciple, Johannes Tauler, tried to cautiously rehabilitate Eckhart after his teacher was officially condemned by a Papal bull in 1329: “Thus teaches and says to you about it the beloved Master, but you do not understand it. He spoke from the perspective of eternity, but you grasp it in temporal terms. The exalted teacher... spoke from the perspective of knowledge beyond all senses, outside any whats and hows” [Tauler 1961, 103].

We maintain that anti-psychological nature of Eckhart’s mysticism provides the basis for comparing his teachings with the spiritual traditions of India. Now we will consider the most important differences in how Western and Indian spiritual traditions generally perceive the consciousness [Lysenko 2016]. In Western philosophy, consciousness is usually considered in the dualistic psychophysical perspective. Western thought posits the ontological difference between the physical (natural, biological, physiological) on the one hand, and the mental (consciousness, mind, reason, soul, psyche) on the other. The classical dualism of the soul (mind, consciousness) and body started with Plato, and Descartes, of course, occupies a special place in this strategy. This dualistic strategy often persists to this day – even if modern philosophers do not share the foundations of Cartesian dualism. The key philosophical

question remains the same: how can the brain give rise to consciousness (“The Hard Problem of Consciousness”, as D. Chalmers calls it)?

Indian religious and philosophical thought (notwithstanding all its variety) reveals one common strategy, where both the physical and the mental aspects of the human being are interpreted as ontologically profane. The fundamental difference is to be found not between the physical and the mental, but between ordinary experience and the experience of altered (transpersonal) states of consciousness achieved through meditation and yoga practices. That is, the subject of philosophical reflection provides completely different pictures of the world as per these two types of experience. If the Western thinker has always strived for the ultimate “objectivity” of knowledge, then the Indian thinker, in contrast – certainly implies the need to verify knowledge in the soteriological perspective of the concrete experience of the thinker or adept. Despite many Indian darśanas treating personality as an illusion, it is precisely the “personal” (in the Western sense) experience of the thinker which is of paramount importance. Any spiritual knowledge is thus necessarily connected to the spirituality of both the author and the reader (“first-person perspective”, in Western terms) [Ibid.]. Husserl, for example, considered that twice two is four, whoever says or thinks it – angels or demons, humans or beasts. For the Indian thinkers on the highest level (*pāramārtha-satya*) there’s neither two, nor four, nor multiplication...

Hence, the psychophysical is interpreted, in contrast to Western tradition, *not* as the opposite of consciousness and body (the well-known mind – body problem), but as a continuum of certain states within the framework of one type of experience. That which is conceptualized as the “psyche” in the West, in Indian orthodox (Vedic) and Buddhist traditions is an integral part of nature. The opposition to this continuum is the higher consciousness, understood as the metaphysical basis of everything that exists – a principle or source that lies beyond the profane level of samsara and the law of karma. Moreover, such mental functions as thinking, reasoning, understanding, reflection – that is, everything associated with rational activity in the Western philosophical tradition – belong to the continuum of “ordinary” experience. Not only the psyche in all diversity of its manifestations (perceptions, emotions, ideas etc.), but the mind itself is distinct from the higher consciousness.

In comparison, from the West we can cite the Christian binary opposition of the created person, which postulates that a person has a single (physical) body with individual and unique characteristics; a person also has the one and only soul and the same unique connection of this body with this soul, on the one hand, – and with the Spirit, on the other. It is the Spirit, which is beyond the limits of the soul and not connected with the notions of space – time – images – forms in the teachings of Meister Eckhart that gives us the basis for comparative strategies. In Indian philosophy, there is another binary opposition: between phenomenal (non-authentic, profane, samsaric) existence and the higher existence outside of karma and samsara and *pratītya samutpāda* (causally dependent origin) – *mokṣa*, *mukti*, *nirvāṇa*. In the classical European philosophical tradition, this can be compared with the opposition “phenomenon – essence”². The world of “appearances” corresponds to ordinary human experience, while comprehending the “essence” corresponds to experiencing oneself as a transcendental principle (*Ātman*, *Brahman*, *Puruṣa*). From the point of view of the ultimate truth (*pāramārtha-satya*), phenomenal reality appears as an illusion (*maya*).

Detachment as spiritual unity with the Deity in Eckhart’s metaphysics

Meister Eckhart was profoundly influenced by the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (approx. 5th century C.E. – “*Mystical Theology*”, “*On Divine Names*”). The doctrine of Pseudo-Dionysius, synthesizing a number of the most important features of neo-platonism, especially Porphyry and Proclus (as well as Plato, of course), and early Christian patristics, turned out to be a certain focus in which the ancient and Christian elements intersected, and became the source of many theological and philosophical concepts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

However, the origins of “mystical theology” can be traced back to even more distant times – almost to the philosophy of Parmenides, who formulated a radical thesis that Being is uniform, despite the existence of many things and words with which to describe it. According to Parmenides, all the many words of our language are not able to adequately convey this unity of being, and therefore it remains inexpressible. The tradition goes all the way to Wittgenstein, who wrote in the *“Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus”*: “There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical (TLP 6.522). And also “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” [Wittgenstein 2001, 89].

Eckhart’s doctrine of God was considered a heresy by many of his contemporaries. Eckhart speaks of the Deity (Gottheit), which is immovable, inactive, indefinable and inexpressible. It begets not only the world and soul, but also the Holy Trinity (Gott)⁵ [Eckhart 2009, 569]. Unlike the Deity, Eckhart’s God is active. He serves as a *primum movens* and *conditor mundi*. He resides above and beyond the world but is not identical with the Deity. God is only an image of the Deity, one which can be comprehended by a layperson or someone lacking any mystical experience. Communion with this God is not the true purpose of spiritual effort. It is impossible to perceive the Deity either empirically or intellectually, nor even by means of faith. Only via Eckhartian *detachment* and removal of every imperfection of the soul may one realize that their “inner person” is co-substantial to the Deity. Eventually, this leads one to a “place” where “... in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their darkness, and surcharging our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories which exceed all beauty” [Dionysius the Areopagite 1997, 118].

In Eckhart’s German and Latin sermons and treatises the main condition for true knowledge is defined as aversion from created things, “emptiness” and “detachment”. Detachment is the most important ontological, anthropological and ethical category in the teachings of Eckhart. His most important work on the concept is a small treatise, *“On Detachment”*. The concept of detachment (*Abgescheidenheit*) comes from the verb *abgescheiden*, meaning to separate, cut off, go away, part (including “parting with life”, death), demarcate (one’s plot of land from the common pool). Eckhart uses the concept of “detachment” metaphorically – spirit is what must become detached – and this detachment can also be understood in practical terms, as it was apparently understood in Eckhart’s times. The “detached life” is, first of all, the life of a hermit, the result of moving away from the world. However, this kind of seclusion is exclusively a spiritual one. We are talking about “worldly” hermitry, which takes place among other people and worldly pursuits. Eckhart says that being detached from oneself makes one absolutely independent of any external forms of human existence. In other words, a truly detached person, no matter what they do, always remains detached. In *The Talks of Instruction*, Ch. 7, Eckhart says that “...for a man in a right state, who should thus possess God, God would shine forth as nakedly in the most worldly things as in the most godly” [Eckhart 2009, 493].

By way of detachment, persons purify themselves of concerns about the creature and its images and instead concentrate on the Deity, which has no image. The divine presence emerges within the person, who enters inexplicable darkness, ignorance and silence, where his spirit is eternally born within the Deity. Thus, the freer persons are from said images of the creature, the more susceptible they are to Deity. A person who has renounced selfhood and the created world becomes, according to Eckhart, the same as the Son of God and endowed with the same power. Rejecting images is tantamount to ignorance, but in this (quite literally) blissful ignorance there is infinitely more to be found than in the worldly knowledge of scholars. One who has rejected the soul’s mundane powers (i.e., comprehending the world via psychological faculties) and was born through divine birth is inseparable from Deity and cannot relapse into sin. As Dionysius the Areopagite writes: “And you abandoned your brilliant mind and the knowledge of things for the sake of the Divine night, which must not be named” [Dionysius the Areopagite 2002, 737].

Some branches of Christian apophatic theology treat God as Nothing, inexpressible and incomprehensible by means of reason (see: [Lifintseva, Tourko 2018]). Eckhart turns to

Pseudo-Dionysius: “[On this matter, Dionysius says, ‘Lord, lead me to where you are Nothing!’ ‘God is Nothing,’ said Dionysius... That means: there is nothing in him! And when Dionysius says, ‘God is Nothing’, then that means there are no ‘things’ which exist with him!” [Eckhart 1921, 205].

The inclusion of the human “I” within God as Nothing via an act of renunciation removes the barrier between physics and metaphysics. The question of Being is not solved here, but it is posed in its entirety and depth as a problem of actual divine being. And where the maximum, the total, the summit, *summum* is revealed – there, for Eckhart, lies the true beginning. It is no coincidence that the Anaximanderian maxim “the beginning of things is also their end” is one of Eckhart’s favorite theological topoi, one of his definitions of God. For Meister Eckhart, religious thinking is, therefore, a constant return to the original source, to the original statement of the problem, which is then determined and resolved through renunciation of the solution in the divine Nothing. Eckhart writes: “And this you must know for sure: when the free mind is quite detached, it constrains God to itself, and if it were able to stand formless and free of all accidentals, it would assume God’s proper nature... But the man who stands thus in utter detachment is rapt into eternity in such a way that nothing transient can move him, and that he is aware of nothing corporeal and is said to be dead to the world, for he has no taste for anything earthly... You should know that true detachment is nothing else but a mind that stands unmoved by all accidents of joy or sorrow, honor, shame, or disgrace, as a mountain of lead stands unmoved by a breath of wind” [Eckhart 2009, 568–569].

In this case, we are not talking about mysticism of visions and ecstasies nor of ritualistic ceremonial action, but, again, about intellectual mysticism, which consists in stopping discursive thinking, freeing the mind from metaphors and plunging into the Divine Darkness. An analogy with Wittgenstein’s “ladder” can be suggested:

“My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright” (TLP 6.54) [Wittgenstein 2001, 89].

The famous Aristotelian example of the eye in an act of vision, helps Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Eckhart to develop the theme of the constant immanent presence of the transcendent in the real everyday human world.

For a person, realizing complete detachment is the direct way to the fullness of divine reality. After attaining detachment, it makes no sense to talk about other stages or steps. Thus, the concept of “detachment” is not only the most important category, goal and method of ascetic practice, but it also represents Eckhart’s most important theological and metaphysical concept. Practically, it is described as complete equanimity and perfect imperturbability. “You should also know that God has stood in this unmoved detachment from all eternity, and still so stands; and you should know further that when God created heaven and earth and all creatures, this affected His unmoved detachment just as little as if no creature had ever been created” [Eckhart 2009, 569].

One can be externally and internally mobile, that is, experience various physical and mental movements (“psychological”, we would say now), and at the same time be in a state of complete detachment. Eckhart’s anthropology could be traced back to Jesus when he says “I and the Father are One” (John 10:30). The sphere of detachment is not the soul, but the Spirit. It is the Spirit which is similar to the “motionless prime mover” – the Deity.

Perfect detachment is not concerned about being above or below any creature; it does not wish to be below or above, it would stand on its own, loving none and hating none, and seeks neither equality nor inequality with any creature, nor this nor that: it wants merely to be. But to be either this or that it does not wish at all. For whoever would be this or that wants to be something, but detachment wants to be nothing. It is therefore no burden on anything [Ibid., 567].

Detachment brings a person closer to the Deity. It makes a person similar to the Deity – motionless and unperturbed. To Eckhart, the counterpart of detachment is emptiness (devastation of consciousness). He writes: “You must know, too, that to be empty of all creatures is

to be full of God, and to be full of all creatures is to be empty of God” [Eckhart 2009, 567]. “If a man might and knew how to make a cup completely empty and keep it empty of whatever might fill it, even air, assuredly that cup would lose and forget its own nature, and emptiness would bear it aloft” [Ibid., 535].

It should be said that the concept of metaphysical void and devastation in the history of Western thought (even in neo-platonism and Christian apophatic mysticism) did not have such an ontological status as in India, where it was called *śūnya* or *śūnyatā* (emptiness). For Indian mentality, whether it is the Buddhist darśana of *mādhyamaka-śūnyavāda* or in the orthodox (Vedic) tradition of *śamatha* (peace, equanimity) the contemplation of the emptiness of the world is the path to liberation. *Tejobindu Upanishada* says: “It is the highest space; it is neither supreme nor above the supreme. It is inconceivable, unknowable, non-truth, and not the highest. It is realised by the Munis, but the Devas do not know the supreme One” [Aiyar 1914, 79].

In Eckhart, as in other apophatic mystics, we see a description of the experience of ontological unity as an exaltation of the soul to its involvement in the divine primordial unity. Medieval mysticism stemmed (through Pseudo-Dionysius) from neo-platonists who described the immersion of the soul into the mind and the mind into the One and Nothing. Eckhart’s disciple Heinrich Suso wrote: “This arises from the entering of the spirit into God, when it has passed away out of itself as regards the sense and is lost in the stillness of the glorious dazzling obscurity and of the naked simple Unity” [Suso 1865, 310].

This experience of similar ontological unity was also profoundly described in Indian philosophical traditions. It is interpreted by the Advaita Vedanta darśana as experiencing the identity of individual “I” (*Ātman*) and universal “I” (*Brahman*); by Buddhism – as realizing the dharmic body of Buddha, in which all oppositions and all kinds of dichotomies disappear; and by Sāṃkhya and Patañjali’s Yoga as extricating spirit (*Puruṣa*) from matter (*Prakṛti*) and the spirit’s subsequent abiding in its own nature.

Sākṣī as the highest condition of any possible experience

Despite being indebted to Pseudo-Dionysius, Eckhart’s concept of detachment was a part of his original contribution to Christian mysticism and apophatic theology. However, semantically and conceptually analogous terms have been developed in Indian spiritual traditions at least since mid-first millennium BCE. Thus, Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra* features the notion of *vairāgya* (dispassion), which together with *abhyāsa* (repetitive practice) constitutes a critical part of his *citta-vṛtti-nirodha* scheme, whilst early Buddhist thought introduces the concept of *nekkhamma*, defined as “renunciation of the habitual structure of self”. *Dhyāna* is also a term of great importance understood similarly across many religious and philosophical schools of India (the Vedic tradition, Buddhism, Jainism) – calming the mind, mastering the processes of its deployment, leading to the cessation of all mental activity.

Now it is important to point out that detachment, dispassion, renunciation, etc. as psychological requirements for attempting monastic, ascetic and mystical practice in some form appear to be present in many religious traditions, both “Western” and Indian or Chinese. In this sense the idea of giving up on the world and severing one’s attachments to it seems a universal religious sentiment across cultures and eras. Unlike purely psychological detachment in this sense, Eckhart’s *Abgescheidenheit* is a state which carries profound ontological significance, so in order to find its proper counterpart in Indian religions, we must zoom in on a similarly metaphysically-laden term. We propose that this term is *sākṣī*, which is crucial for Sāṃkhya and Patañjali’s Yoga. *Sākṣī* is a detached witness to all empirical forms and states of mind, consciousness and the psyche which contemplates them while being itself absolutely passive, alien to change and multiplicity.

Before the analysis of the term, let us briefly outline its Vedic roots. In different darśanas of Vedic and post-Vedic Indian thought, the principle of higher consciousness is given different names: *Ātman* in Advaita Vedanta, *Jīva* in Jainism, *Puruṣa* in Sāṃkhya. Of all post-Vedic darśanas, the life of psyche is most thoroughly structured and described

in Sāṃkhya and Ashtanga Yoga of Patañjali (2nd century C.E.). The first serves as the philosophical basis of Patañjali Yoga. The Sāṃkhya system is ancient, and its ideas are already present in many middle and late “Upanishads”, most notably in Maitri and Śvetāśvatara. The term “Sāṃkhya” (“calculus”) first appears in Śvetāśvatara Upanishad together with yoga: “The changeless, among the changing, the intelligent, among intelligent beings, the One, who dispenses desires among the many – when a man knows that cause, which is to be comprehended through the application of Samkhya, as God, he is freed from all fetters” (Śvetāśvatara VI.13) [Olivelle 1998, 431, 433].

Sāṃkhya traces its history back to mid-first millennium B.C.E. Its prominent representatives are Ishvara Krishna (4th c. C.E.), Gaudapada (4th C.E.) and Vachaspati Mishra (9th C.E.). The philosophical basis of Sāṃkhya and Yoga is the dualism of *Puruṣa* (spiritual energy) and *Prakṛti* (psychosomatic or psychophysical energy), which constitute ontologically opposing realities.

Almost all classical darśanas postulate the opposition of the spiritual and the psychic. Sāṃkhya sees *manas* (mind) as the phenomenological centre of the whole psychic life. Manas, however, is only an aspect of the individual’s subtle body, different from *Puruṣa* (the spirit). The task of an adept yogi is to separate the aspects of the gross and subtle “body”, that is, the sensual and mental, from the spiritual.

Many commentators and scholars distinguish between epic and classic Sāṃkhya. Sāṃkhya is called “epic” insofar as its presentation is given in the philosophical sections of the great Indian epic “Mahābhārata” (“Bhagavad Gita”, “Anugita”, “Mokshadharma”, etc.). The main difference between epic and classical Sāṃkhya is the attitude to God. Epic Sāṃkhya considers God Ishvara as the only source of both spirit (*Puruṣa*) and matter (*Prakṛti*). The latter acts as the creative, constructive force (*yogamaya*) of the Ishvara. Classical Sāṃkhya is non-theistic (*nirīśvara*), denies the existence of God and considers higher consciousness and matter ontologically equivalent, primary and independent of each other substances. Liberation (*kaivalya*) is understood in classical Sāṃkhya not as unity with God, but as separation of spirit and matter, their disidentification (because as a result of ignorance, *Puruṣa* falsely identifies itself with various states of *Prakṛti*).

The Sāṃkhya dualism is different from other systems of Indian dualism (Jainism), as well as non-Indian (for example, Cartesian) systems. In Sāṃkhya, *Puruṣa*, the highest subject opposed to the world of objectivization, is significantly narrowed and “pulled together” to a speck of light. If we compare Sāṃkhya’s dualism with that of Descartes, we will find that in Sāṃkhya everything Descartes considered mental activity is relocated to the sphere of matter/*Prakṛti*. The spiritual principle (*Puruṣa*) is completely deprived of action and reduced to the role of a motionless pure contemplator of *Prakṛti*’s activities. The sphere of objectivization includes not only the external world and individual’s body, but also all mental functions and states of a person. As a result, the subject/*Puruṣa* can only be a “witness”, “observer” (*sākṣī*) of manifestations of *gunas*⁴. Such a witness, according to Gaudapada, is involved in the whole experience of the individual no more than ascetics who accidentally witness fieldwork of local peasants. In Sāṃkhya, this pure witness or observer is a pure, unchanging, timeless consciousness. It does nothing, and nothing happens to it because action arises from incompleteness or imperfection, and pure consciousness is absolute fullness and perfection. So, *sākṣī* is a pure contemplation, carried out beyond the boundaries of time, space, form, beyond all objects and processes. If the contents of everyday consciousness change depending on the object, then the *sākṣī* itself, contemplating a multitude of changing objects and worlds, remains unchanged. This consciousness (not involved in the world, witness-observer), unlike ordinary consciousness, is not determined by the object and sensory organs. It never arises, but is constantly present as a metaphysical premise of any experience – as light, invisible in itself, is a condition for the visibility of objects. The soteriological task of an adherent is to achieve, through meditation and yogic practice, a state of supreme detached contemplation that is not involved in the world of desires, suffering, images, objects and processes. According to Sāṃkhya, the original equilibrium of the *gunas* is disturbed when *Prakṛti* turns to *Puruṣa*. *Puruṣa* does not come into direct contact with *Prakṛti*,

but in a sense provokes its unfolding. In Sāṃkhya texts an example of iron filings and a magnet is given: near magnet, filings begin to change their position, “focusing” on the magnet. According to Gaudapada, the *sākṣī* experience can also be described, for example, as a dream without dreams, because it is a state devoid of qualities and forms (*rupa*), an inexpressible, non-subject – object state. It is this state of contemplation of true reality that is not mediated by the tools of the psyche that is the transcendental and, at the same time, immanent foundation of any ordinary experience. *Sākṣī* is a certain (albeit minimal) expression of subjectivity, which remains only within the limits of illusory empirical reality (*maya*), while the subject-object dichotomy is just in effect. But this minimal subjectivity completely disappears upon transition to the level of the Highest Truth (*pāramārtha-satya*).

The correlation of *Puruṣa* with the psycho-mental apparatus of an individual which is extraneous to him is described as their mirror reflection in each other, and not as a real connection. Liberation is conceived as deliverance not from real karmic consequences of actions performed in the present and the past (as in Jainism, Vaiśeṣika or Mīmāṃsā), but as awareness of complete non-involvement of *Puruṣa* with the temporary pleasures and constant suffering of a series of incarnations that are falsely related to it. The process of liberation itself and the distinctive knowledge that provides it (like any knowledge in general) are also “delivered” to the subject from the side of the active and unconscious primordial *Prakṛti*, which is alien to him.

Western philosophical tradition distinguishes different levels of opposition to the subject on account of the world of objects (for example, see H. Rickert “The Subject of Knowledge”, 1904). For Rickert, the epistemological subject is opposed not only to the outside world, but also to various mental states. There is a certain similarity here, but Sāṃkhya is different in that the “pure subject” (*Puruṣa*) opposes the realm of objectivization, not as an epistemological abstraction, but as the starting point of a dualistic ontology. As already mentioned, *Puruṣa* is not the cognitive principle proper, but only the condition for the functioning of transcendental cognitive mechanisms. The correlate of the European term “consciousness” can, in Indian philosophy, denote the phenomena on both sides of the opposition “phenomenal/illusory – genuine”, i.e., denote both ordinary experience and higher states of experience. In Sāṃkhya, consciousness is considered the true nature of a higher principle (*Puruṣa*).

The darshana Ashtanga Yoga, attributed to Patañjali (2nd century C.E.), is closely connected with Sāṃkhya in its philosophical foundations. In fact, Yoga is the implementation of classical Sāṃkhya’s soteriological ideal. Patañjali defines yoga as “the cessation of the activity of consciousness” (*citta-vṛtti-nirodha*), that is, the cessation of all forms of unfolding, or actual states of empirical consciousness, due to which the true subject – *Puruṣa* – ceases to identify itself with the states of matter and realizes perfect detachedness to abide in its own form.

Let us now scrutinize the concept of “witness” (*sākṣī*) or “observer” (*draṣṭṛ*). (*Draṣṭṛ* from *drś*, see; cf. *darśana* lit. “vision”, “philosophical school”). *Sākṣī* and *draṣṭṛ* are used metaphorically to describe the higher spiritual reality in Advaita-Vedanta and Sāṃkhya-Yoga, respectively. *Sākṣī* is favored by Śaṅkara, while *draṣṭṛ* is frequently referred to in Patañjali’s Yoga Sūtras. The two terms are rather synonymous and have been used interchangeably by at least one author (Citsukha) [Forde 1974, 71]. As such, neither term is a concept in its own right; rather, both are used to illustrate or synonymize the idea of an eternal, unmovable and blissful spiritual state. E. Bryant [Bryant 2009] points out the synonymy of *Ātman* (Upanishads, Vedanta), *Puruṣa* (Sāṃkhya Yoga, Bhagavad Gita), *jīva* (Bhagavad Gita) and *draṣṭṛ* (Yoga Sūtras).

The concept of *sākṣī*, implicitly or explicitly, is present as early as in the prior Upanishads. The oldest text in which this concept occurs is the Śvetāśvatara Upanishad: “The one God hidden in all beings, pervading the universe, the inner self of all beings, the overseer of the work, dwelling in all beings, the witness, the avenger, alone, devoid of qualities – *Sākṣī*” (Śvetāśvatara VI.11) [Olivelle 1998, 431].

The image of Vision is widely metaphorized in many languages as understanding. Etymologically, perhaps an image of absolute consciousness as an observer stems from

the metaphor seeing-perceiving. If *sākṣī* in Śvetāśvatara is an eye which itself remains undetected, then (translating a metaphor), it is a consciousness that is aware, itself remaining unknown⁵. The nature of consciousness is to realize, as the nature of the eye is to see. If there is empirical experience in the consciousness, sensory and mental phenomena, that is, the subject-object dichotomy is acting, then it remains to conclude that consciousness is not absolute – there is something in it that opposes it, not being it. From the point of view of Advaita Vedānta, this “other” is illusory, since there is only one thing – absolute divine consciousness (*Brahman*), identical to the individual consciousness (*Ātman*). From the point of view of Sāṃkhya, something else exists, but the task of a practitioner who embarks on the spiritual path is to separate the spiritual from this other, to make the observer reside “in his own nature”. Yoga is the realization of unlimited consciousness, which, making this move, simply eliminates contamination caused by *Prakṛti* and returns to itself.

Sākṣī's titular act of witnessing, of course, should not be taken literally. It refers to *sākṣī*'s all-pervasiveness in phenomenological experience, while still able to remain hidden. Essentially, *sākṣī* is a metaphor, or a synonym, for higher consciousness. The latter manifests itself as eternal, unmovable, boundless and self-illuminating. *Sākṣī*'s ‘presence’ in all phenomenological data means it serves as a ground for all possible knowledge. As such, *sākṣī* is equivalent to Ātman of Advaita Vedānta. In Brihadaranyaka III.4.2 we read: “You can't see the seer who does the seeing; you can't hear the hearer who does the hearing; you can't think of the thinker who does the thinking; and you can't perceive the perceiver who does the perceiving. The self within all is this self of yours. All else besides this is grief!” [Ibid., 83]. Thus, the overseer is ever present but never discovered. The only way to realize this state of luminosity, limitless being and all-encompassing consciousness is to engage in psychosomatic practices, i.e., yoga.

The soteriological formula of Yoga can be described as follows: liberation is the distinction between the observer and the observed, the detachment of the observer. Practically all systems of Indian philosophy were projects of liberation or personal transformation from subjugation and suffering into being free and blissful; the idea of spiritual release is also the cornerstone of Christian salvation. We hope we have succeeded in showing that both Eckhartian detachment and *sākṣī* are both described as fundamentally non-psychological states, and that some unobvious aspects of Eckhart's thought can be understood by dint of corresponding Indian concepts.

Conclusion

In this paper, we endeavored to compare the ideas of Meister Eckhart's apophatic theology and mysticism and those of Sāṃkhya and Ashtanga Yoga darśanas. We were primarily interested in the strategy of detached (higher) consciousness, or Spirit. This task is difficult, particularly because it is always easy to succumb to the temptation of some external similarity. We understand that Christian and Indian traditions have different anthropologies, different cognitive and soteriological purposes, and different ontological foundations. Ideas about the psyche in Western (grounded in Christianity) and Indian traditions are also different (in turn, they are rather different in post-Vedic darśanas). Nevertheless, the correlation of the Western soul/psyche – Spirit dichotomy and the idea of everyday psychic experience and the experience of higher (transpersonal) states of consciousness in Sāṃkhya and Yoga Patañjali darśanas, in our opinion, provide grounds for a comparative study of metaphysical strategies of detached contemplation.

Notes

¹ In his sermons and personal life Eckhart was a warm, charismatic person and even a humorist, who was popular among both female and male monastics and also common parishioners. He is also considered the creator of literary German.

² Not absolutely so, because essence is conceived by ratio.

³ After Eckhart's death, in his texts rewritten by his disciples, the word Gottheit (Deity) was replaced by God, and current researchers and readers can only guess where the substitution occurred.

⁴ According to Sāṃkhya, *gunas* are qualities of objects as well as actions. There are three *gunas*: *satva* (which represents light, peace and positivity), *rajas* (anger, activity and passion), and *tamas* (darkness, passivity and negativity). The interplay of *gunas* is what constitutes the objects of Prakṛti and prevents Puruṣa from realizing itself.

⁵ As in L. Wittgenstein, the eye is not seen in the perspective of vision.

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