

DRAFT. Published in: Jonardon Ganeri (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 2017: 403–419.

Jayarāsi Against the Philosophers*

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ABSTRACT

Jayarāsi Bhaṭṭa (c. 800–840), one of the most original Indian philosophers, a sceptic with strong affiliation to the materialists, launches a devastating project against all philosophical schools to demonstrate inherent flaws in any philosophical system one may construct. This involves, as he aptly demonstrates, inherent systemic inconsistencies which primarily involve the mutual dependence of our knowledge, on the one hand, and, on the other, cognitive means and categories, both epistemic and ontological, we adopt in order to establish its validity and certitude. This irresolvable vicious circle may be, metaphorically speaking, considered an Indian counterpart of Gödel's incompleteness theorems: no consistent philosophical system is possible in which one is capable of proving its fundamental premises through a valid, effective procedure.

KEYWORDS

Jayarāsi Bhaṭṭa, scepticism, epistemology, materialism, Cārvākas, Lokāyatas, *reductio ad absurdum*

Jayarāsi Bhaṭṭa is one of most curious and controversial figures in the whole history of Indian philosophical thought. Not only has the exact assignment of the historical times he flourished been considered problematic but also his philosophical affiliation and the exact nature of his views, even though he did exercise considerable impact on the philosophical method in the late classical and early mediaeval India.

Till 1926 when a singular copy of a (damaged) palm leaf manuscript of his *magnum opus* (TUS₁) was discovered in a Jaina manuscript library at Patan in the state of Gujarat and was subsequently published in 1940, Jayarāsi had remained a completely anonymous figure. The rediscovery of Jayarāsi Bhaṭṭa's work called *The Lion of the Dissolution of all Categories (Tattvôpaplava-simha)* amounts to a retrieval of a small, but extremely important chunk of philosophical tradition of India related the sceptics and materialist schools, of which we had had not even a single instantiation in extant texts, except for unreliable reports from most hostile sources, such as Buddhist, Jaina or Brahmanic works. After a few decades and a handful of studies we are in a position to provide some more concrete information on the author of one of most extraordinary philosophical works in India.

* Work on this chapter has been generously supported by the National Science Centre of Poland (Research Project: History of Classical Indian Philosophy: non-Brahmanic Schools, National Science Centre, 2011/01/B/HS1/04014).

It seems most likely that Jayarāṣi wrote his treatise some time between 800–840 somewhere in Southern India, i.e. after an important Jaina philosopher Akalaṅka Bhaṭṭa (c. 720–780), who was very well acquainted with philosophical traditions of India, including his contemporaries but who did not seem to know of Jayarāṣi, and before Vidyānanda Pātrakesarisvāmin (c. 850), a philosopher in the same Digambara Jaina tradition, who commented on Akalaṅka and who already referred to the tradition of Jayarāṣi and to ‘those who propound the dissolution of [all] categories’ (*tattvôpaplava-vādin*), a clear echo of the title of Jayarāṣi’s work.¹ Of note is that the critical analysis based on the argument *reductio ad absurdum*, which forms the groundwork of Jayarāṣi’s particular method, is generally absent in Akalaṅka’s works, whereas it is regularly used by Vidyānanda, Akalaṅka’s commentator, and all subsequent Jaina thinkers.

The Lion of the Dissolution of all Categories seems to have exercised certain impact on late classical and mediaeval philosophers of Southern and Northern India alike, especially in terms of a consistent application of his method of refutation, but he was hardly ever given proper attention and evaluation he deserved. Instead of entering into a serious discussion with him, other philosophers simply ignored him.

Further, even though we have some evidence that he probably managed to establish some kind of philosophical school of his own whose representatives were called the propounder the dissolution of all categories, it seems that no one ever commented on his treatise, or if he did the commentary has not been preserved. We do not even know whether *The Lion of the Dissolution of all Categories* was his only work. In it, we do find a reference to another treatise known as *The Quintessence of the Definition of Cognitive Criteria (Lakṣaṇa-sāra)*, to which he refers his reader to consult for more details as regards the problem of formulation of an adequate definition of the cognitive criterion (*pramāṇa*, or veridical instrument of knowledge). It is not improbable that it is another of his works, or perhaps of his own teacher or a representative of the materialist school.

Scanty circumstantial evidence may suggest that Jayarāṣi was most probably related to South India, primarily because those who mention him for the first time are exclusively South Indian Digambara Jainas: Vidyānanda, already mentioned, and Anantavīrya (the turn of 10th and 11th centuries). In addition, they as well as other South Indian Digambara Jainas adopt a peculiar critical method of argumentation consistently employed by Jayarāṣi as well as some of his arguments. It took perhaps a century or two till this method of critique penetrated also into the works Jaina authors in Gujarat, mostly Śvetāmbaras, to become the standard method of critique among them. Another reason which may speak in favour of his Southern provenance, albeit with a much weaker voice, is his appellation ‘Bhaṭṭa’ which is frequently appended to the names of Southern Brahmins,² but also used by as a designation of a high rank

¹ Balcerowicz (2011). Other scholars placed Jayarāṣi in 8th century (Saṅghavī and Rasiklāl C. Pārīkh in TUS, p. x), between 725–825 (Saṅghavī 1941, Franco 1987: 12-13), in the period of 770–830 (Franco 1994), ‘between 7th and 8th century’ (Mehta (2010: xvii).

² Mehta (2010: xviii) commits a common mistake in the disjunction that Jayarāṣi was either ‘a Jain or a Brāhmin’. There are numerous cases of Jaina or Buddhist monks who were Brahmins by birth, the latter being rather a designation of social status, not necessarily religious affiliation. In the same sense, it is possible that Jayarāṣi could be both a materialist or sceptic, rejecting the authority of Vedic or Hindu tradition, and a Brahmin, as was the case of the author of *The Treatise on Aims (Artha-śāstra)*, a Brahmin by birth and materialist by outlook.

cleric (not monk) among South Indian Digambaras. The same titular name, however, occurs in Northern India as well. What could speak in favour of Jayarāśi's Northern descent would be the fact that the single extant manuscript which survived was copied in 1291 CE (*sam* 1349) in the locality of Dhavalakkaka, or present-day Dholkā near Ahmedabad in Gujarat. This a weak argument, however, because what this fact only proves is that the text of Jayarāśi's treatise was simply in circulation *also* in Gujarat. Despite the fact that (the only?) one of Jayarāśi's works is available, his philosophical inclination, or his affiliation to an established philosophical school or lineage have been a matter of debate among scholars. Two alternative views are to be noted. Some scholars, including the publishers of the first³ complete edition of *The Lion of the Dissolution of all Categories* (TUS₁), Sukhlālji Saṁghavī and Rasiklāl C. Pārīkh (1940: xi-xii), assume that this is 'a work of the Lokāyata or Cārvāka school, or to be more precise—of a particular division of that school', and maintain that its authors 'is developing the doctrine of the orthodox Lokāyata', which does not have mean that they claim that it is a typical Cārvāka work. Such view is, however, voiced by Ruben (1958) and, with more caution, Franco (1987: 4–8). The matter of fact is that even if Jayarāśi were proven to belong to a materialist tradition, his views are far remote from what we know of the Cārvākas / Lokāyatas. Other scholars are of the opinion that Jayarāśi cannot be a materialist, i.e. a Cārvāka / Lokāyata, but represents the tradition of Indian sceptics. This line of argument, represented with various strength by Chattopadhyaya (1959), (1989) and Karel Werner (1995) with some reservations though, rests on the assumption that one cannot be a materialist, i.e. maintain a definite world view, and a sceptic, i.e. disavow all categorical views, at the same time. Further, rather vague views of Jayarāśi do not allow one to establish any clearly determinable link between his philosophical beliefs and a standard materialist framework. Mehta (2010: xvi) takes Jayarāśi's work to be 'a rare and unparallel[ed] work depicting the full-fledged form of Indian Skepticism.'

However, there are strong reasons, based on the internal evidence provided by the contents of his major work, to believe that Jayarāśi did consider himself a representative of the materialist school, even though nowhere does he mention his philosophical leaning or school affiliation. The standard manner to provide information about one's philosophical lineage was to encapsulate it in a more or less indirect manner either in the introductory section, usually versified, which opens a treatise, or in the colophon at its very end. They usually expressed homage to either one's spiritual teacher, to the founder of one's school, e.g. the Buddha or the Jina, to supreme god (e.g. Śiva under the name of Maheśvara), or to Gaṇeśa, who removes obstacles on the way to a successful completion of the work. Nothing of this sort is found in *The Lion of the Dissolution of all Categories*: neither the colophon, most of which is not penned by Jayarāśi but by one of his students, seems to contain any such hint, nor the introductory section, because the beginning portion of the preserved manuscript is damaged (and most probably it never contained such standardised introduction).

Significantly, the only name of a philosopher Jayarāśi ever mentions in his work, and that is not only once, is Bṛhaspati, a well known materialist philosopher, accredited with the composition of *Bṛhaspati Treatise* (*Bṛhaspati-sūtra*). One of such references,

³ Another complete edition by Shuchita Mehta (TUS₁) is not an independent work; it is practically a transcript of TUS₁, and in containing a large number of misprints and inaccuracies is certainly not an improvement.

‘Honourable Bṛhaspati,’⁴ patently indicates his respect to the materialist teacher. On several occasions he quotes from *Bṛhaspati Treatise* to point out that he generally agrees with its contents, even though he may interpret it in his own way. A good example is the very first quotation in Jayarāśi’s work (TUS₁, p. 1.10–14), which is quite telling in its own right, is precisely from that materialist work, now lost. Jayarāśi’s hypothetical opponent points out a contradiction between Jayarāśi’s goal to ‘dissolve all categories’, which is indicated in the title of the treatise, with what Bṛhaspati, apparently taken to be Jayarāśi’s authority, states at the very outset of *Bṛhaspati Treatise*, namely that he is going to explain the main categories, and these are the only ones adopted by the materialists, such as earth, water, fire and wind, of which the body, sense organs and objects of cognition are composed. Jayarāśi, in reply, does not criticise this view but simply provides an explanation why Bṛhaspati speaks of these categories at all. In other words, Jayarāśi formally subscribes to the materialist legacy, acknowledging that he had originally been trained within it, but tries to give it a new interpretation.

The method against all claims

Except for the materialist tradition, i.e. Cārvāka / Lokāyata school, in which he must have been trained, and the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara, which apparently was either unknown to him or considered completely unimportant, or was not yet established,⁵ Jayarāśi criticises basically all important philosophical schools of his times. And he does it quite successfully, availing himself of a particular kind of methodical approach. To see it at work, let me just refer, as an example, to the very first argument in his work, formulated against the idea of non-erroneousness (*avyabhicāritva*), or non-deviance of cognition vis-à-vis its object, which is assumed by the representatives of the logical-epistemological school of Nyāya to be one of defining characteristics of, for instance, perception, the basic cognitive criterion (*pramāṇa*), or veridical instrument of knowledge, i.e. true cognition and the means of its acquisition. A definition *D* of perception adopted by the Nyāya school says: ‘The cognition (1) which is produced by the immediate contact of an object with a corresponding sense organ, (2) which is non-verbal, (3) which is non-erroneous, (4) the nature of which is a determination of its object, is perception’ (NS 1.1.4). In order to demonstrate the inapplicability of this definition, Jayarāśi proceeds as follows (TUS₁, p. 2.2 ff.). In a very extensive discourse, he will show that none of the four constitutive elements of the definition holds, not only factually but also is logically inadmissible. How? For definition *D* to be true it should fulfil all the four criteria: $|D| = C_1 \wedge C_2 \wedge C_3 \wedge C_4$. Therefore, all the four criteria *C*s have to be analysed any by one. For instance, non-erroneousness, or Criterion 3 for the correctness of the definition, is logically possible either (3.1) as a result of a complex of errorless causal factors (sub-criterion *C*_{3.1}), or (3.2) due to its being free from sublation (sub-criterion *C*_{3.2}), or (3.3) in view of the efficacy of activity based on it (sub-criterion *C*_{3.3}), with apparently no other alternative left. In other words, it can be validated for its correctness through the test of its intrinsic verification (with its generation process being unvitiated), or through the test of the lack of extrinsic falsification (with no external factors at hand which would invalidate it), or through an epistemically independent, pragmatic test,

⁴ TUS₁, p. 45.10–11 = Franco (1987: 228.10). Another reference by name is TUS₁, p. 88.9.

⁵ This may be an indication that Śaṅkara was either contemporaneous or posterior to Jayarāśi.

respectively. In the next step, the correctness of each of these sub-criteria is scrutinised. With respect to the first criterion $C_{3.1}$, the question is how its being a result of a complex of errorless causal factors can be known: (3.1.1) through perception or (3.1.2) through inference? The possibility of $C_{3.1.1}$ has to be rejected, because to verify the intactness of sensory apparatus through which perception is acquired cannot be verified through the same kind of perception (the rejection of self-referential character of perception). Similarly $C_{3.1.2}$ has to be dismissed, because inference requires one to establish the relation of an invariable concomitance (*vyāpti*) between two properties, namely between the intactness of the sensory apparatus, which is the property to be proved, and some other reliable property, i.e. the inferential sign which serves as the logical reason, and this cannot be known with certainty, because this would either involve an error of vicious circle or permanent doubt. Hence, alternative $C_{3.1}$ has to be rejected. Let us analyse, in the next step, $C_{3.2}$. If non-erroneousness of perception can be established due to its being free from sublation, then one can legitimately doubt whether this non-occurrence of sublation is ($C_{3.2.1}$) because perception has already grasped its object correctly or ($C_{3.2.2}$) because potential factors which would sublimate this perception are deficient in some way or another (here a range of further options are discussed, e.g. the sublation has not *yet* occurred, or it has been prevented by some other factors etc.). Further, to know that there is no sublation at all (not only that it has not been recognised *yet*), one would have to be omniscient; and if everyone were omniscient then the concept of non-omniscience would become meaningless. Thus, both $C_{3.2.1}$ and $C_{3.2.2}$ yield further options which Jayarāṣi analyses, all of which lead to contradiction, and conclusively $C_{3.2}$ has to be rejected. The third step is a critical examination of the pragmatic criterion $C_{3.3}$, or the fact that activity based on such perception is efficacious, i.e. it leads to desired goal. First, Jayarāṣi enjoins that one should define the terms used, such as efficacy, which he says is, in a nutshell, relatedness of a physical action, undertaken through physical body, to a fruit and which concerns physical objects, albeit they are metaphorical fruits, the real ones being the actual goal or purpose. How can it be known that such physical action is characterised by efficacy, which in turn serves to establish non-erroneousness of perception? Is this efficacy $C_{3.3.1}$ apprehended or $C_{3.3.2}$ not? ($C_{3.3.2}$) If it is not apprehended, how can one determine that it exists at all? ($C_{3.3.1}$) If it is apprehended, how can one determine that the knowledge that efficacy exists is non-erroneous? Here, a series of further alternatives follow, such as for instance: does the efficacious activity based on perception of water₁ lead to the acquisition of the same substance of water₁ or to some other water₂, which is not identical with water₁, because some time has already elapsed between the perception of water, which happens to be water₁, from water which one obtains, which is water₂. Hence, relying on perception (deemed non-erroneous) of object₁, one obtains another object—object₂ through allegedly efficacious action: in other words, one sees x and obtains y , which defies the standards of efficacy. The alternatives which Jayarāṣi evokes here are extremely subtle and concern for instance also the nature of the objects perceived and obtained, whether universals or particulars etc. Each of these highly subtle and sophisticated alternatives he employs end up being illogical, absurd etc. The conclusion is that the criterion C_3 of definition D of perception has to be rejected. This method is illustrated by the tree in Fig. 1.

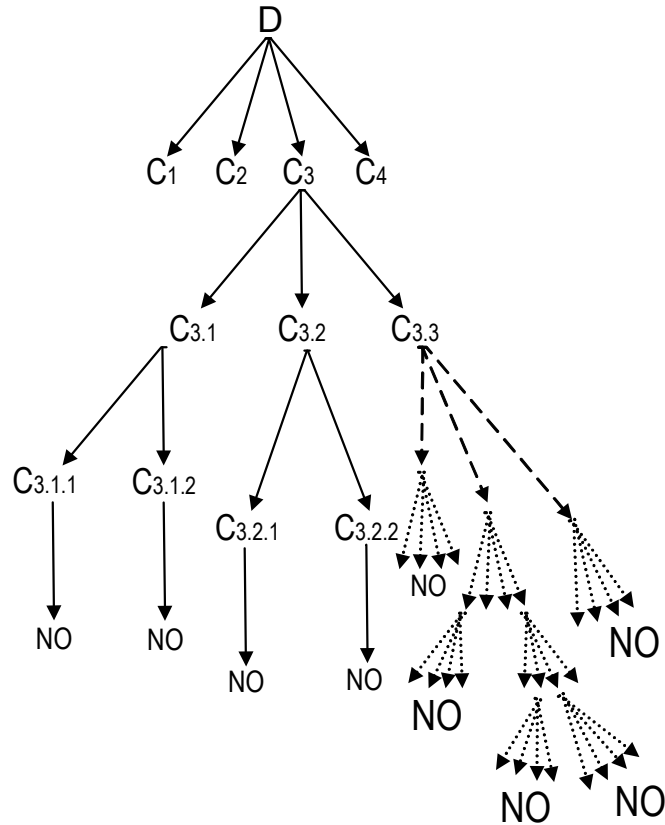


Fig. 1: How non-erroneousness is analysed.

The same method will subsequently be used to reject other terms of the definition: C_1 , C_2 , C_4 , which means that the initial definition of perception proposed by the proponents of the Nyāya school has to be rejected. In the same manner Jayarāśi will deal with definitions of perception proposed by all other philosophical schools of India, with the outcome that one cannot formulate a reasonable and proof-tight definition of perception at all. Would that mean that non-erroneous perception for Jayarāśi does not exist, or that this is something which cannot be rationally known? This is a question to which I will return later.

Such a detailed description, which is an encapsulated argument which runs over several pages, seems necessary to provide a mere glimpse of how sophisticated and highly elaborated Jayarāśi's method of criticism is. This in itself was not a novel contribution in India. In fact, Jayarāśi adopts here a strategy developed centuries earlier by Nagārjuna (c. 150 CE), a prominent representative of the Madhyamaka school of Buddhism, which is known as a *reductio* type of argument (*prasaṅga*). This forms the point of departure of Jayarāśi's elaborated and devastating methodology used against all philosophers. What are the peculiar features of his method?

As Fig. 1 demonstrates, reflecting the synopsis of Jayarāśi's approach towards the definition of perception developed by the Nyāya school, and this was his routine procedure applied by him consistently against all philosophers, his method was set to analyse a particular thesis T advanced by another philosopher in a few steps. First, Jayarāśi would enlist all its conceivable conclusions C_1 , C_2 , C_3 , ... C_n which follow from thesis T admitted by the opponent. These could be either logical implications or conclusions which are doctrinally possible within the opponent's system, which the

opponent is likely to concede. In the second step, Jayarāśi examines each of conclusions $C_1, C_2, C_3, \dots C_n$ separately, in order to analyse the truth value or admissibility of each of them, demonstrating that each and every one either leads to an undesired consequence or stands in contradiction with the initial thesis T . Undesired consequence may involve either that it is logically problematic, e.g. self-abortive, or incompatible with the opponent's system, or requires one to additionally adopt premises to which one is not ready to acquiesce (because it would, for instance, run counter basic assumptions of one's system), or is contradicted by everyone's basic experience. In this manner, each of the initial possible conclusions $C_1, C_2, C_3, \dots C_n$ implied by thesis T have to be rejected. In the third and last step, the obvious is asserted: since thesis T implies only conclusions which are false or inadmissible, it has to be false or inadmissible itself. The following illustrates the pattern of reasoning underlying the method:

$$\begin{array}{l}
 (1) \quad T \rightarrow C_1 \wedge C_2 \wedge C_3 \wedge \dots \wedge C_n \\
 (2) \quad |C_1| = 0 \\
 \quad \quad |C_2| = 0 \\
 \quad \quad |C_3| = 0 \\
 \quad \quad \dots \\
 \quad \quad |C_n| = 0 \\
 \hline
 (3) \quad |T| = 0
 \end{array}$$

where '0' stands both for 'false' (logically false) and for 'inadmissible within the opponent's specific set of beliefs', or 'incompatible with the opponent's specific set of beliefs'.

This general strategy of refutation was executed, as a careful reading and analysis of the contents of *The Lion of the Dissolution of all Categories* indicates, by way of the following four patterns:

$$\begin{array}{l}
 [(p \rightarrow q) \wedge \sim q] \rightarrow \sim p, \\
 [(p \rightarrow q) \wedge (p \rightarrow \sim q)] \rightarrow \sim p, \\
 [p \rightarrow (q \wedge \sim q)] \rightarrow \sim p, \text{ or} \\
 [p \rightarrow (q \equiv \sim q)] \rightarrow \sim p.
 \end{array}$$

Characteristically, in all arguments he practically deploys, Jayarāśi always asserts that p , viz. that the opponent's thesis is true. These four basic patterns are employed by Jayarāśi depending on the nature of the issue at hand and argumentative necessity. In case a thesis yields a complex tree of nested conclusions, sub-conclusions etc. to be analysed, exactly the same method is applied at each level.

Not infrequently, he ventures into a discourse on a related topic necessary for a thorough analysis of a particular sub-conclusion entailed by a thesis. For instance, while discussing the idea of efficacy as a test of the veracity of perception (in his refutation of the Nyāya definition), he ingeniously demonstrates that nothing like the universal can exist. For it to exist, one of the three conclusions would have to be valid: *If* ($T = C_{1.1.3.1.2}$) the universal exists, *then* ($C_{1.1.3.1.2.1}$) the universal is different from the individuals in which it is instantiated, or ($C_{1.1.3.1.2.2}$) it is not different from

the individuals, or ($C_{1.1.3.1.2.3}$) it is different from the individuals in some respect and it is not different from the individuals in some other respect. As we can see from the numbering, this is an argument deeply nested in the whole line of the reasoning to disprove Nyāya's definition of perception. Now, each of these three alternatives is broken down to its sub-alternatives, and all are eventually demonstrated to be impossible, absurd or false. Since all the three conclusions $C_{1.1.3.1.2.1}$, $C_{1.1.3.1.2.2}$ and $C_{1.1.3.1.2.3}$ entailed by the idea of the universal have to be rejected, the initial thesis T (= $C_{1.1.3.1.2}$), which is a sub-conclusion $C_{1.1.3.1.2}$ in a lengthy argument, and which asserts that the universal exists, has also to be rejected. Interestingly, having done away with the notion of the universal, Jayarāśi does not proceed to state *what* actually exists, if there are no universals. To assert that only particulars have to be admitted as the only existent things would consign him to nominalism, which he also seems to reject.

This method is applied by Jayarāśi in such a skilful and highly sophisticated manner that each and every proposition an opponent may put forward it will ultimately be demonstrated to be inadmissible and false. And the results are indeed quite devastating.

A notable feature of Jayarāśi's strategy, which has been responsible for classifying him as a full-fledged sceptic, perhaps even in the sense of Pyrrhonian scepticism, is that whenever he demonstrates that all corollaries $C_1, C_2, C_3, \dots C_n$ of a particular thesis T are all wrong, i.e. either false or doctrinally inadmissible, and for this reason the thesis must also be wrong, he never commits himself to the contrary thesis $\sim T$ with ontological entailment.

Jayarāśi's method and *reductio ad absurdum*

Can Jayarāśi's method be easily mapped onto a standard *reductio ad absurdum*, for instance? The standard pattern of *reductio ad absurdum* can be phrased as the following well-known logical law:

$$[(\sim p \rightarrow q) \wedge \sim q] \rightarrow p .$$

Alternatively, other laws of the proof by contradiction are sometimes interpreted as variants of *reductio* type of argument, namely:

$$\begin{aligned} & [(\sim p \rightarrow q) \wedge (\sim p \rightarrow \sim q)] \rightarrow p , \\ & [\sim p \rightarrow (q \wedge \sim q)] \rightarrow p , \text{ or} \\ & [\sim p \rightarrow (q \equiv \sim q)] \rightarrow p . \end{aligned}$$

A characteristic feature of this kind of argument which one immediately notices is its premise which turns out to be the negation, tentatively assumed for the sake of the argument, of what one seeks to demonstrate as true. In Jayarāśi's case, however, no kind of contraposition or (a hypothetical false) denial of the (true) thesis is ever considered. In his methodical system, it is never the case that in order to prove a thesis, its denial is first assumed and shown to lead to false, absurd or untenable consequences. What Jayarāśi consistently does is to take a positive thesis and demonstrate it undesired outcome. In this sense, Jayarāśi's argument would remain a variety of *reductio ad absurdum*. Most importantly, however, when p is demonstrated

to be false through the *reductio* argument, this does not commit Jayarāśi to admitting $\sim p$, viz. he is not committed, as in ordinary *reductio* type to accept a state of affairs which contrary to p . For instance, if Jayarāśi demonstrates (TUS₁, p. 100.16 ff.) that the cognition of colour can neither be of a nature of the apprehension of colour nor its non-apprehension, there being no third option, this does not commit him to recognise that no cognition of colour can exist. He is contended with a mere rejection of the opponent's thesis, neither accepting the opposite of it nor aspiring to postulate his own solution to the problem.

In his universally applied strategy, Jayarāśi does not list and analyse all logically conceivable conclusions which the thesis he wants to disprove entails. As a rule, he limits his choice to the alternatives and consequents which are contextually or doctrinally relevant, i.e. to those which the representative of a particular philosophical school would be ready to admit as logically valid or doctrinally conceivable within that school's epistemological, ontological or otherwise assumptions. Implications entailed by a thesis which are logically possible or thinkable are never taken account of in case one may justifiably believe that the opponent would never allow them as valid or admissible for whatever reason. Each and every sequence of arguments is tailor-made for a refutation of a particular philosophical school or a tenet upheld within a particular doctrinal scheme of assumptions, but it is hardly ever implemented in order to refute an idea as such.

Jayarāśi's critics and cracks in philosophical systems

As we have seen, Jayarāśi's is reductionist tactics which breaks down every thesis to its basic logical or doctrinal atomic components which are critically scrutinised and consequently rejected one after the other, without however postulating any positive state of affairs. This non-commitment method of critique, which he shared with the Mādhyamika Buddhists, such as Nagārjuna, and which he refined and elaborated to a complex argumentative machinery, was viewed in India as not entirely flawless, inasmuch as it indeed posed a formal problem. Since it was generally acknowledged in India, particularly among Brahmanical philosophers, such as the Nyāya school, that the requirement of a genuine debate was the quest for truth, and this had clearly to have entailed the demonstration of true claims and rejection of false ones, Jayarāśi did not fit into this formal typological scheme. His method, which seemed to contain no positive claims, came to be classified as an eristical dispute or refutation-only debate (*vitaṇḍā*), and regarded as a non-legitimate argument.

No doubt, such classificational stratagem was just an excuse not to deal with a range of serious problems embedded in all philosophical systems in India which Jayarāśi skilfully exposed, and for any philosophically committed observer this refusal to seriously engage with his philosophy and critical method should be dismissed as kind of a forerunner of modern-day Indian bureaucratic red-tape strategy *not* to engage with troublesome problems at all merely for formal arbitrary reasons.

Irrespective of his adversaries' reluctance to engage in a debate with 'the nihilist', were his critics justified in their claims that, first, Jayarāśi's sole goal was to refute any philosophical theory possible and that, secondly, he had no thesis of his own? The first of these claims seems to find its justification in the very title of Jayarāśi's treatise: the dissolution of all categories. At least taken at its face value, his approach may appear to purely negative, eristical and nihilistic. But this does not have to be the

case. His main objective seems to have been not to demonstrate the fallibility of our knowledge or incapability to acquire true knowledge, but rather what could be phrased, using Indian terminology, a mutual dependence (*anyonyâśraya*) our knowledge and cognitive means and categories, both epistemic and ontological, we adopt. Our knowledge is fundamentally dependent on the epistemic tools which adopt as valid and truth-conducive, and that decision ultimately turns out to arbitrary, for in order to adopt a set of criteria and epistemic tools that guarantee truth and validity of knowledge, we first have to have a piece of true knowledge which functions as a kind of touchstone against which we can verify the validity of the criteria and tools we have just adopted. Similarly, no reliable system of solid ontology is possible as long as our cognitive apparatus is not well tuned to be apperceptive to the reality and its analysis into ultimate building blocks and metaphysical layers, but to develop the cognitive apparatus one requires a benchmark against which our cognitive apparatus can be measured and verified as truth-conducive. The circularity in the construction of any system of philosophy is quite profound. Any coherent set of beliefs has to rest on presumptions and definitions which are considered true and valid for some reasons. To adopt these, we first have to adopt definitions and criteria of validity on which we agree that they are precisely such true and valid reasons. The selection process of such true and valid definitions and criteria has to be done vis-à-vis the external reality against which they have to be tested for their validity.⁶ But to accomplish this task of verification of true and valid definitions and criteria which serve to acquire and verify true knowledge of reality, one should first know that the reality, which serves as the benchmark, is precisely such as it appears to us or as it is rendered in our system. However, as long as we have no reliable instruments of knowledge (cognitive criteria) and criteria of validity at our disposal, we cannot know what reality is really like. And to have these, we should first have clearly defined criteria of validity and truth. There is no way-out of this vicious circle and what we are left with is not necessarily a rejection of all valid knowledge or agnosticism, but a pragmatic approach. We adopt *working* criteria and epistemic measures as long as they seem to work and prove efficient for our purposes. Once we discover they don't accomplish the epistemic (or otherwise) task we have adopted them for, we re-evaluate our epistemic strategies and metaphysical criteria according to our pragmatic needs imposed on us by everyday life. The result is not to discard philosophical enterprise as such—after all, Jayarāṣi himself is fully engaged in this enterprise, and such a step would be self-defeating in his position—but rather to take it as a fluid system which has to be cautiously adopted to our requirements and needs, whether epistemological or metaphysical, time and again. What Jayarāṣi terms 'the dissolution of all categories' means that no closed and final system of metaphysics or epistemology is possible, and that the process of knowing the world, including an attempt to analyse the structure of our epistemic faculties and knowledge to its fundamental components and cognitive strategies within a final system as well as to particularise world phenomena into elemental, further indivisible constituent units, is both, pragmatically speaking, doomed to fail and, logically speaking, impossible, unless we succumb to the *circulus vitiosus*. Further, all the epistemological and ontological criteria we adopt as a foundation to design the architecture of any philosophical system which would rest on them are themselves in need of further evidence and reinforced understructure.

⁶ Indian philosophers generally accepted the correspondence theory of truth.

What Jayarāṣi lays bare is not only that to devise a proof-tight, contradiction-free and complete system of philosophy is not only an open-end and forlorn enterprise but also that contradictions and inconsistencies have to be accepted as inherently systemic. Whatever set of propositions one is constrained to arbitrarily adopt at the outset as axiomatic in the system, they will ultimately yield contradictions and inconsistencies inasmuch as a contradiction-free and consistent method of selecting the axioms, whether on the epistemological or ontological level, is lacking by default. As a result, any knowledge we venture to acquire through such means will lack reliable and coherent foundations. In order to strengthen our system, we adopt new premises which again turn out to be vulnerable and the system collapses. In a way, this conclusion could be considered an intuitive and undeveloped forerunner of Gödel's incompleteness theorems. The aim of the method Jayarāṣi chooses indeed appears to discard all claims and theories that neither are consistent nor compelling evidence is available for them, but this is not an agnostic or sceptical approach to remain empty-handed, with no claim at all but rather a critical instigation to remain a perpetual investigator, an attitude that may to some extent resemble Pyrrhonism in the interpretation of Sextus Empiricus, although the actual method Jayarāṣi employs is purely negative, as compared with Sextus' approach to balance two sets of arguments (pros and cons) against one another to demonstrate their equipollence. And his goals are quite different, too.

It is most unlikely that the idea of truth did not represent any tangible value for Jayarāṣi. From his perspective, however, to engage in what Brahmanic philosophers would traditionally term a 'genuine debate' (*vāda*), focused on the process of uncovering the truth alone against a backdrop of arbitrarily adopted premises, was a flawed and miscalculated resolution, inasmuch as either one would be required to acknowledge at a certain point that the goal has been reached (in addition, within the time allotted for the debate), which given an open-end character of philosophical quest is by definition a myth, or such debate would have to be pursued indefinitely, and ultimately in its course, as long as it has not yet been successfully terminated, it would have to assume the form of an eristical dispute (*vitaṇḍā*), or refutation-only debate. In this light, a perpetual quest for truth and a process of infinite approximation to the goal, without ever reaching it, cannot be reduced to agnosticism.

The second claim, voiced by his critics, that Jayarāṣi had no thesis of his own, should be taken with most caution. Indeed, he was reluctant to assert anything definitely and nowhere does he use the standard expression 'thus it was established that...' (*iti sthitam*), or a similar one conventionally employed by Indian philosophers, to conclude a line of argument. Despite this, we can trace some positive claims he made. In the first place, he plainly rejects the idea of karmic retribution, afterlife and the supernatural, as indicated in the thesis that 'human actions do not bring otherworldly results, such as rebirth in heaven etc.'. He also consistently endorses the thesis that there is no ultimate reality which would be absolutely beyond our senses and mind: the ultimate reality is what we actually experience, and the world is not an illusion at any level of experience or analysis. Further, the reality around us, amenable to our direct experience, concerns both metaphysics and ethics, for there is no supernatural, extrasensory reality, metaphysically speaking, and on the level of ethics, the only criterion to distinguish the right from wrong and to determine the proper course of action is only what people agree to accept as such, as indicated in Jayarāṣi's contention that 'the worldly path should be followed'. The actual practice, reasoned custom and efficacy seem to be the ultimate ethical resorts. Jayarāṣi rejects the

extrasensory world, which is by definition beyond the reach of our mind and senses, in his usage of examples of such non-existent entities as atoms (*paramāṇu*), god (*mahêśvara*) or demons (*piśāca*), whose fictitious character is taken by him for granted. On numerous occasions, he dismisses the existence of universals ('universals do not exist'; TUS₁, p. 4.5 ff.), a claim which does not seem to have been made just for the sake of argument, but rather is a genuine reflection of his beliefs, inasmuch as it is repeated throughout his work and whenever he refers to this claim he takes it to be a genuine depiction of the state of affairs ('we have already shown that universals do not exist').

At the same time, he would opposed to be classified as a standard nominalist who assumes the sole existence of particular objects understood as non-repeatable sensory data, e.g. a particular patch of green, a particular sound pitch of 1200 Hz, etc., which jointly make up what we eventually perceive as individual things, a view represented by Buddhist nominalists. On one occasion (TUS₁, p. 24), Jayarāśi criticises the (Buddhist) view that composite macroscopic wholes cannot exist, and what exists are individual particular objects which can no longer be analysed (either spatially / physically or mentally) into further parts. His conclusion is that it is not possible to demonstrate that composite wholes do not exist. He does not plainly state that what ultimately exists are composite wholes as particulars, but he nowhere formulates any criticism against such a claim and discusses such an idea. Those in India who would object the existence of macroscopic composite wholes compounded of a spectrum of sensory data (the ultimate particulars) would immediately introduce the paradox of the whole and its parts⁷ against the idea of the wholes. However, Jayarāśi never takes recourse to this paradox or formulates an argument against the existent of composite wholes. Interestingly, universals were argumentatively treated in India as a kind of composite wholes, i.e. analysable into particulars in the same way as composite wholes are analysable into its constitutive parts. And the same paradox was usually applied against both universals and composite whole by those who accepted neither. Jayarāśi is cautious not to use this argument at all for, apparently, he knows that once that argument is applied against the universals it should also be used against the macroscopic composite wholes, i.e. particulars of our experience. In this, he seems to adopt the so-called commonsensical view of reality inhabited by macroscopic objects, but not by invisible and indivisible atoms (which he rejects) or universals, demons and god. In addition, there are indications (e.g. TUS₁, p. 57–88 = Franco (1987: 269–271)) that he also maintained that consciousness is a product of the four elements. The argument is embedded in a refutation of the Buddhist view that 'the first moment of consciousness [of the newly born], immediately after the exit from the mother's womb, is preceded by another moment of consciousness', which is concluded with the statement that 'the first moment of consciousness in the womb etc. [i.e. of the newly born], must come from the combination of the elements'. All these positive views upheld by Jayarāśi just referred to are characteristic of genuine materialists of the Cārvāka / Lokāyata tradition.

⁷ There are many versions of it, for instance the following one, in a nutshell: Is the whole different from its parts? If it is different, then how does it subsist in each of its parts: as a whole or as a part? If it subsists in one of its parts as a whole, then that part in which it subsists as a whole is identical to the whole, and all the other parts cannot be considered genuine parts of the whole. If it subsists in its part as a part, then it cannot be considered a whole at all, for what we end up with are only parts, with no whole. If the whole is not different from one of its parts, then again the whole is identical to that particular part, and other parts cannot be the genuine parts of the whole.

Jayarāśi's scepticism

That is a strong reason not to take Jayarāśi as a typical sceptic who would withhold his views with respect to all claims. It is quite difficult to classify Jayarāśi as a representative of the so-called ontological scepticism, also called negative dogmatism,⁸ in which the sceptic does not merely refuse to concede the existence of certain things, such as demons, or the truth of claims about them, but in addition denies their existence and the truth of such claims. Likewise, he does not easily fall into the compartment of the so-called epistemological scepticism,⁹ or the standard version of scepticism (genuine scepticism), in which one suspends the judgement as to whether particular things exist or not, taking these two claims as equipollent, and whether we can know anything about them with certitude, when one actually refuses both to accept the truth of some propositions and to deny it. Clearly, his scepticism is not all-embracing, rather a kind of *restricted* methodological scepticism which is a method to balance one view against another, equipollent view, with the aim not necessarily to demonstrate the inapplicability of all views and inadequacy of theories which would result in the rejection of the ideas of certitude and reliability of our knowledge in all circumstances, but rather to show its restricted applicability and reliability under *current* circumstances. Our system of knowledge of the world is at work, and it is an infinite process.

In this sense, Jayarāśi's sceptical methodology should not be confused with methodological scepticism of, e.g., Descartes which served to eliminate all fallible beliefs, liable to doubt, in order to uncover firm and unquestionable foundations on which one could establish one's system of knowledge. To the contrary, Jayarāśi seeks neither such ultimate, infallible foundations for his system, for he has none, nor firm basis for his epistemology, ontology or ethics, because he never, even vaguely, intimates he would have any, except for the 'commonsensical' ones. What he is concerned with is to demonstrate that all the philosophers have so far established cannot hold.

Philosophically speaking, his main claim, therefore, is that it is not possible to arrive at true knowledge, because one should first properly define basic criteria of validity for valid cognitive procedures, which is not possible without a prior true knowledge of reality against which we could test the procedures for validity etc. Clearly, our knowledge of reality and of objects depends on valid cognitive procedures. However, all valid cognitive procedures are either fundamentally flawed and ultimately unreliable or they require further valid cognitive procedures, and these stand in the same need etc. Therefore, we can neither formulate proper definitions of valid cognitive procedures nor define what reality is and what basic categories are. This is at least the case, he claims, with all the cognitive tools and epistemological categories which are now at our disposal.

It does not seem correct at all to assume that Jayarāśi's stratagem or task was the suspension of all judgements, akin to the suspension of judgement whether there is an elephant in the lecture room¹⁰ even though I do not see one, even under the desk. It is

⁸ See Hankinson (1995: 13 ff.).

⁹ See Hankinson (1995: 13 ff.).

¹⁰ A view (with a hippopotamus featuring in the story instead of an elephant) ascribed by Russell (1951: 297) to Ludwig Wittgenstein. See also Hankinson (1995: 12–13).

most unlikely that Jayarāṣi would suspend his judgement, rather he would pragmatically assume that and act as if there were no elephant in the lecture room (under a banyan tree), being aware that the epistemic tools at our disposal are deficient, involve the mutual dependence of knowledge and cognitive means; nevertheless, they do seem to work most of the time.

It is in the spirit of making philosophers sensitive to the issue, referred above, of mutual dependency of true knowledge and valid methods and criteria leading to it when Jayarāṣi points out, at the outset of his work, the major deficiency of our knowledge: ‘To establish cognitive criteria (*pramāṇa*, instruments of knowledge) depends on proper definitions. Further, to establish objects of cognitive criteria depends on cognitive criteria. When proper definitions are absent, how is it possible that one would treat both the cognitive criteria and their objects as genuinely real?’ This serves also as a foundational principle of his *magnum opus* and its structure. Cognitive criteria are precisely such instruments to test the validity of our knowledge and of the process of its acquisition. Jayarāṣi systematically analyses definitions of cognitive criteria—such as perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), presumption (*arthâpatti*), reasoning based on analogy (*upamāna*), negative proof based on absence (*abhāva*), equivalence (*sambhāva*), tradition (*aitihya*), verbal or scriptural testimony (*śabda*, *āgama*)—which were formulated within most important philosophical schools in India, primarily within the schools of Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Mīmāṃsā, Buddhists and Jainas. The conclusion is that no irrefutable definition of perception is at hand (this in itself does not have to mean that perception *per se* has to be accepted as persistently unreliable). Since inference and all other cognitive criteria rely on the data fed in by perception and they are internally inconsistent, they have to be likewise considered dubitable. No sound inferences can be formulated which would not require further search for their underpinning and justification.

Jayarāṣi does not constrain himself to the examination of valid cognitive procedures and their definitions but he also examines a range of essential ideas and argues that their definitions are deficient, *ergo* the ideas cannot be accepted the way they are generally understood and defined by philosophers. The catalogue of such notions includes three compartments: (1) notions of epistemological relevance, such as the ideas of validity and non-erroneousness, the essence of consciousness (which involves his rejection of the non-material character of consciousness), sublation of previously acquired knowledge by subsequent experience, the process of production of acts of cognition, the nature of illusion, cognitive states such as recollection and memory, conceptual cognitions and conceptuality, the issue of object-representation in the mind, i.e. the relation of the conceptual image in cognition to the external thing represented in the mind, the nature of sense-object contact, valid rules of inference etc., (2) ontological concepts, such as the definition of what exists and its corollary, i.e. the idea of the real object’s ability to execute causally efficient action (*arthakriyā*), universals, ontological categories including inherence of properties in their substrata, the relation of composite wholes to their parts, momentariness and permanence, causality, visible and invisible objects, the nature of absence etc., and (3) the ethics, which primarily revolves around the idea of rebirth and karmic retribution. None of these notions the way they have so far been defined stands the test. Consequently, they either have to be rejected or a proper definition and justification of their existence should be sought.

Perhaps the most meaningful outcome of Jayarāṣi's project is that all philosophical claims are necessarily made within a particular set of beliefs, or a particular closed system, the foundations of which are based on arbitrarily accepted criteria, definitions and categories, and which first should be adequately established. This does not have to mean that the beliefs as such have to be rejected as ungrounded and false, but rather the moment we begin the process of justification and verification of our presumptions we discover that they all stand in the need of further proof and evidence, and the process is infinite. That explains why he advises to stick to the pragmatic, 'commonsensical attitude', highlighted in a verse he quotes at the very outset of his treatise: 'with respect to everyday practice of the world, the fool and the wise are similar'.¹¹ Whether we systemically reflect on sources of our knowledge and foundations of the world or not, the actual everyday practise remains the same, and both the wise and the fool may commit the same mistakes or gains, whereas our knowledge of reality is always defective and partial. He returns to the idea in the conclusion of his treatise: 'Thus, when all categories are completely dissolved in the above manner, all practical actions (which entails thought, speech and activity) can be enjoyable, without being reflected upon'. This may, on the one hand, be interpreted as a kind of *carpe diem* encouragement, which is reminiscent of the goal of Sextus Empiricus' scepticism, i.e. final tranquillity or freedom from disquietude (*ataraxia*), which results from the equipollence (*isostheneia*) of all contrary claims. Given our limitations and intrinsic inability to find certain knowledge, the only option that remains is to enjoy the world the way it appears. On the other hand, the apothegm may suggest that for all our endeavours, including reasoning, thinking, verbal communication, behaviour and ordinary life, the world of our actions is 'here and now' the way it presents itself to us. In this lies its sole validity, also when we are incapable of its final proper philosophical analysis.

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¹¹ TUS₁, p. 1.9–10 = Franco (1987: 68.6–7). This is another indication of Jayarāṣi's declared affiliation to the school of materialists (Cārvāka / Lokāyata).

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