

Text, Commentary, Annotation: Some Reflections on the Philosophical Genre

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Abstract This essay is an attempt to analyze, classify and illustrate different scholarly approaches to the Sanskrit philosophical commentaries as reflected in some influential and especially thoughtful studies of Indian philosophy; at the same time it highlights some specific features involving commentary and annotation in general, drawing from results of studies on commentaries conducted in other disciplines and fields, such as Classical and Medieval Studies, Theology, and Early English Literature. In the field of South Asian Studies, philosophical commentaries may be assessed from various overlapping and not always exclusive points of view, such as preservation of otherwise lost historical information, historical authenticity and reliability, interpretational innovation, spiritual or experiential insight, philosophical creativity, intellectual liveliness, doxographic intent, degree of incidentality, expository breadth and explanatory depth. The essay provides numerous examples taken from classical to early modern philosophical literature in Sanskrit, especially of the Brahminical and Buddhist traditions, and also discusses their diverging perception by modern scholars and interpreters.

Keywords Sanskrit philosophical literature · Commentaries · Scholia · Incidentalness · Authenticity · Originality · Exposition · Spiritual and experiential insight · Synthesis

Introduction

In this contribution to the symposium “Theory and Method in Indian Intellectual History,” I will attempt to analyze, classify and illustrate different approaches to the

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Sanskrit philosophical commentaries as reflected in some influential and especially thoughtful studies of Indian philosophy; at the same time I want to highlight some specific features of commentary and annotation in general. Because the genre of commentary as such and for its own sake has not yet been the focus of extensive or intensive research in South Asian Studies,¹ I will also draw on some studies on commentaries from other disciplines, such as Classical and Medieval Studies, Theology, and Early English Literature. In this way I hope to clarify the theoretical–methodological background and suggest new aspects to be considered, not only in my own ongoing work on the late medieval and early modern direct commentaries on the *Nyāyasūtra*, but possibly also in the work of other collaborators in the Sanskrit Knowledge Systems Project because the commentary remains a dominant mode of literary expression in the roughly two hundred years under examination.

Considering that the bulk of Indian philosophical literature was written in the form of commentaries, it is not surprising that historical and other studies of Indian philosophy normally involve scrutinizing commentaries. Naturally, different commentaries have been accorded different status and consequently have been utilized in different ways by leading scholars in the field, inasmuch as the perceived status of a philosophical commentary determines to a large extent the kind of information that one aims to derive from it or expects to be available in it. To be sure, the different assessments of philosophical commentaries, sometimes even of one and the same work, are by no means arbitrary, although the different approaches to Indian philosophy and intellectual culture in general that are responsible for this variety are often not at all clearly reflected upon. Rather, it is the heterogeneous nature—from the point of view of form and content—of these commentaries themselves, and sometimes even of a single work, that allows for and justifies different evaluations and therefore different kinds of historical, methodological and philosophical investigations based on these sources. In the following, I will focus on the aspect of content, although it cannot always be clearly separated from that of form and sometimes overlaps with it.

Reconstructing Sāṅkhya and Vaiśeṣika through Commentaries

Some commentaries retain valuable historical information otherwise lost. This is of eminent importance for those scholars whose work on Indian philosophy involves some kind of archaeology of sources, who aim to better understand its historical development and are primarily interested in what is considered ancient or original and authentic. An important example for this type of commentary is the *Yuktidīpikā* on Īśvarakṛṣṇa's *Sāṅkhyakārikā*, which preserves a wealth of information on philosophical tenets of classical Sāṅkhya that are known only from this source or have otherwise reached us only in a very sketchy form.² For this reason, the *Yuktidīpikā* was utilized extensively and profitably by Pulinbihari

¹ On the philosophical commentary cf. the insightful survey in Chenet (1998). Cf. further Brückner (1995) and Von Stietencron (1995), and on more specific features Bronkhorst (1990, 1991).

² Cf. Chakravarti (1951, p. 160); Frauwallner (1953, p. 287).

Chakravarti in his pioneering historical study *Origin and Development of the Sāṃkhya-System of Thought*³ and, practically at the same point in time, by Erich Frauwallner in his reconstruction of early classical and classical Sāṃkhya in the first volume of his famous *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*.⁴ Similarly, another commentary on the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, the *Jayamaṅgalā* by a certain Śaṅkarārya, even though it does not explicitly present older doctrines together with the names of the respective teachers propounding them in the manner of the *Yuktidīpikā*, is considered valuable by Frauwallner because it is still based on what he calls “the old tradition.”⁵ In Yoga philosophy, the *Yogabhāṣya* ascribed to Vyāsa presents us—again according to Frauwallner—with the theoretical positions of Sāṃkhya as taught in the Yoga tradition of the period;⁶ Otto Strauss, who in his remarkable and thoughtful monograph *Indische Philosophie* felicitously combines the philological–historical method with a philosophical perspective, more generally speaks of the *Yogabhāṣya* as an “indispensable explanation of and supplement to” the *Yogasūtra*.⁷ Bhoja’s eleventh-century *Rājamārtaṇḍa*, for its part, although said by Frauwallner not to go beyond the *Yogabhāṣya*, relies on old materials⁸ and thus may be accorded a status similar to that of the *Jayamaṅgalā*. The *Śābarabhāṣya*, owing to its preservation of the positions and arguments of the Vṛttikāra and other earlier commentators on the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*,⁹ would have to be placed in the same sub-category as the *Yuktidīpikā*. A further example is Cakradhara’s *Nyāyamañjarīgranthibhaṅga*, in which the commentator elucidates and identifies the teachings of lost Naiyāyikas and other classical philosophers to whom Jayanta refers in his *Nyāyamañjarī*.¹⁰

In this connection, Frauwallner’s judgment on the *Nyāyabhāṣya* as containing “valuable additions”¹¹ to the *Nyāyasūtra* deserves special mention. The context in which this assessment is made might suggest that the commentary should be assigned to the same category as the *Yogabhāṣya*. However, a closer and critical look at Frauwallner’s reconstruction of the history of Indian philosophy of nature in the second volume of the *Geschichte* shows that matters are different. As I have pointed out elsewhere, Frauwallner does *not* utilize the *Nyāyabhāṣya* for his exposition of the old philosophy of nature whose amalgamation with dialectical–epistemological teachings resulted in the formation of the Nyāya philosophical tradition. i.e., for his delineation of the “old philosophy of nature of Nyāya”; for this latter purpose he relies almost exclusively on the *Nyāyasūtra*. However, he utilizes the *Nyāyabhāṣya*, together with the *Nyāyasūtra*, extensively in his reconstruction of the theory of visual perception as part of a *different*, though

³ Cf. Chakravarti (1951, pp. 113–155 passim).

⁴ Cf. Frauwallner (1953, pp. 298–406).

⁵ Cf. Frauwallner (1953, p. 287).

⁶ Cf. Frauwallner (1953, p. 288).

⁷ Cf. Strauss (1925, p. 178).

⁸ Cf. Frauwallner (1953, p. 288).

⁹ Cf. Frauwallner (1958a, p. 24; 1968, pp. 107–113).

¹⁰ Cf. Shah (1972, pp. 5–9); Wezler (1975).

¹¹ Cf. Frauwallner (1958a, p. 22).

related, philosophy of nature claimed by him to have formed the background of Vaiśeṣika philosophy. On the basis of an analysis and evaluation of early sources on visual perception, I have argued that this specific procedure constitutes a case of arbitrary and unjustified utilization of later commentarial information in the process of reconstructing an older stratum of a philosophical tradition and is based on preconceived notions about the development of ideas.¹²

Auto-commentaries and Commentaries by Direct Disciples

A special and strong claim for historical authenticity and reliability is often made in respect to auto-commentaries or commentaries by direct disciples of the authors of foundational works; this aspect is of importance for researchers who concentrate on achieving an understanding of authorial intention that is as correct, precise and in-depth as possible. A well-known example is Kamalaśīla's commentary on Śāntarākṣita's *Tattvasaṅgraha*, which at the same time belongs to the type of commentary mentioned above inasmuch as it is a precious source for fragments from otherwise lost Nyāya works.¹³ However, even direct disciples may not have perfectly understood the ideas of their great masters. Both according to some modern scholars and a certain indigenous tradition, Devendrabuddhi, the first commentator on Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* and Dharmakīrti's direct disciple, did not succeed in fully grasping the intention of his teacher.¹⁴ Furthermore, even auto-commentaries may present a different point of view than that expressed in the *mūla*-text; a famous example is that of Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* vis-à-vis his *Abhidharmakośa* where the latter versified work summarizes the Sarvāstivāda *Mahāvibhāṣā* and the former prose commentary on it often sides with doctrinal positions of the Sautrāntikas.¹⁵ It is generally assumed, of course, that even though an author may change his mind or modify an earlier position in the time intervening between his composition of a succinct work in verses or *sūtra*-s and his writing of an explanatory, more extensive prose-commentary on it, he clearly cannot misunderstand himself or distort his own positions. Next to formal features concerning textual composition and literary style, plausibility, coherence, precision, and unambiguousness of interpretation are therefore used as criteria to determine whether a commentary is in fact an auto-commentary or not. Much disputed cases are those of Bhartṛhari's alleged *Vṛtti* on the *Vākyapadīya*,¹⁶ and of Bhāviveka's *Tarkajvālā* on the *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā*.¹⁷ If a commentary fails to pass this

¹² Cf. Preisendanz (1989, pp. 167, 171–173 and 1994). Some twenty years before he published this part of the *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, Frauwallner stressed the richness of the material offered in the *Nyāyabhāṣya*; however, owing to the lack of other sources belonging to the period, he was hesitant to base an exposition of early classical Nyāya and Vātsyāyana's own contribution to it on this commentarial work. Cf. Frauwallner (1936, p. 263 = 1982, p. 145).

¹³ Cf. Steinkellner (1961, p. 150).

¹⁴ Cf. Frauwallner (1960, p. 119 = 1982, p. 842).

¹⁵ Cf. Frauwallner (1994, pp. 76–77).

¹⁶ Cf., e.g., Aklujkar (1972, 1993), Bronkhorst (1991, pp. 219–220 and 1988), and Houben (1998, 1999).

¹⁷ Cf. Lindtner (1982, pp. 177–184) with a summary of Yasunori Ejima's position and Ruegg (1990).

test, modern scholars would not hesitate to go against the tradition and declare that an alleged auto-commentary is in fact a later composition by another author.

Superimposition and Promotion of Novel Ideas in Commentaries

Scholars who are intent on reconstructing the historical evolution of Indian philosophy following a strict philological–historical methodology assert that many commentaries have imported novel ideas into and superimposed historically later presuppositions onto their *mūla*-texts. Famous examples are Śaṅkara’s commentaries on the Upaniṣads and the *Brahmasūtra* that are used as vehicles to promote the commentator’s idealistic monism.¹⁸ According to Strauss, Śaṅkara “forces” his strict monism onto the *Brahmasūtra*,¹⁹ whereas Madhva attempts, in a “phantastic” commentary on the same work, to “impose” his own pluralism.²⁰ Commentaries of this type are thus considered a-historical in their interpretation and unreliable for the above-mentioned purpose. As a special variety of this type of commentary one may mention again the *Yogabhāṣya*. With respect to its relationship to the *Yogasūtra*, Johannes Bronkhorst—building on the observations of earlier scholars—has brought forth new arguments: he argues for a single authorship of *Sūtra* and *Bhāṣya* in the sense that the author of the *Bhāṣya* collected existing individual *yoga*-related *sūtra*-s and developed his own Sāṅkhyistic philosophical teachings while commenting upon these well-known and authoritative aphorisms from the point of view of a theoretician, not a practitioner.²¹

Timelessness and Commentaries

The evaluation of commentaries as being unreliable and a-historical may stand in direct opposition to the perception of the value of these commentaries within the respective tradition. This view is often reflected in the assessment of them by modern Indian scholars of Indian philosophy who are keen to discern some timeless “essence” of Indian philosophy, frequently with the aim of presenting the latter as superior to, or essentially different from, even diametrically opposed to Western philosophy. Concerning the *Brahmasūtra* commentaries of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, to give just one example, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan emphasizes their value vis-à-vis the largely polemical, hair-splitting and logic-obsessed post-*Sūtra* period commentarial tradition; this value lies in “re-stating the old doctrine,” a restatement Radhakrishnan considers as important as a “spiritual discovery.”²² In my analysis, Radhakrishnan is not so much concerned, at least in this context, with uncovering some original authorial intention by applying a philological–historical methodology,

¹⁸ Cf. Frauwallner (1953, p. 456) on Śaṅkara’s commentaries on the Upaniṣads.

¹⁹ Cf. Strauss (1925, p. 239).

²⁰ Cf. Strauss (1925, p. 251).

²¹ Cf. Bronkhorst (1984) and further Maas (2006, Chap. 1).

²² Cf. Radhakrishnan (1993, p. 59).

but is rather interested in the direct realization of the spiritual truth contained in the statements of Bādarāyaṇa's enigmatic *sūtra*-text, and I think that he implicitly ascribes the very same attitude to those commentators whose works he appreciates. His position thus has to be seen before the larger backdrop of Radhakrishnan's influential conception of the special character of Indian philosophy as a "vision of the truth" or "insight into the nature of reality" (*darśana*) and "experience of reality" (*anubhava*).²³ Sweeping statements of scholars like Radhakrishnan and Heinrich Zimmer who declare that without the commentaries the philosophical texts are unintelligible²⁴ should be situated in the context of their outlook on Indian philosophy as fundamentally spiritual and visionary, and thus be understood as an outflow of their unstated presupposition that the ancient philosophers, writers of basic works and commentaries alike, were not mere academic scholars, but well-grounded in their faithfully transmitted spiritual traditions and therefore blessed with a profound insight which cannot be achieved by us moderns.

Judging the "Adequateness" of a Commentary

It is thus necessary to differentiate the evaluation of commentaries addressed in the section above from the general assessment that the commentarial tradition as such preserves the respective philosophical tradition, participates in Indian thought and tradition in general, and provides valuable assistance in understanding the philosophical issues. Here again we have to make distinctions. Those commentaries which document otherwise lost doctrinal positions or are said to faithfully supplement the basic text, providing us in this manner with a more complete historical picture, have already been mentioned. Another view on commentaries considers their indispensable role in the understanding of deeply enigmatic works such as the *Brahmasūtra*, even though the partisanship of their authors is duly realized.²⁵ It may thus be their heuristic value in the attempt to gain an appropriate understanding of the basic texts which is being recognized here. In other, related cases where the available early commentarial literature is sparse or of an unimpressive intellectual quality, later and more extensive commentaries are greatly appreciated because they provide further detailed information and thus assist one to obtain a more complete view of the philosophical tradition concerned. Frauwallner, accordingly, in his exposition of the classical philosophical doctrines of the Jains, does not follow Umāsvāti's *Tattvārthasūtra* on the peculiar topic of the various forms of the senses, but uses Devanandin's and Akalaṅka's commentaries thereon because they "consider the topic more adequately."²⁶ Their "adequateness," as I understand Frauwallner's expression, consists in their presenting a clearer, more cohesive picture of the complex theory based on an assortment of older ideas about the senses. Another example is Strauss's high praise of Vācaspati Miśra's commentary on the

²³ Cf. Halbfass (1988, pp. 300–301).

²⁴ Cf. Radhakrishnan (1993, p. 58); Zimmer (1951, p. 605).

²⁵ Cf. again Strauss (1925, p. 230) and, e.g., Chenet (1998, pp. 1658–1659).

²⁶ Cf. Frauwallner (1958a, p. 336, n. 348).

Sāṅkhyakārikā,²⁷ also pronounced by many other scholars of his period and subsequently by those with a more synthetic, though not necessarily a-historical, perspective of Indian philosophy, such as Helmuth Von Glasenapp.²⁸ In contrast, the very same work is condemned as one-dimensional and meager by Frauwallner.²⁹ The motivation for this harsh assessment can only be inferred: at the time the *Yuktidīpikā*, with its many references to lost doctrinal positions of classical Sāṅkhya, was already available to Frauwallner, and from his strictly historical–philosophical perspective it completely superseded Vācaspati’s exposition of the classical Sāṅkhya tradition as presented by Īśvarakṛṣṇa.³⁰ Similarly, Vācaspati’s commentary on the *Yogabhāṣya* is declared excellent and important by Strauss³¹ and Von Glasenapp;³² Frauwallner, for his part, although acknowledging Vācaspati’s “good explanations” on the *Yogabhāṣya*, states that beyond that the *Tattvavaiśārādī* has hardly anything substantial to offer,³³ which presumably means that in all cases where the *Yogabhāṣya* is not of assistance and the basic text remains philologically and historically–philosophically enigmatic to Frauwallner, the work does not provide the required or expected trustworthy information. The assessments by Strauss and Von Glasenapp, on the other hand, can again be considered as characteristic of their more philosophically concerned and more synthetic, integrative approach, respectively, to the history of Indian philosophy.

The diversity of scholarly perspectives and of individual positions within the history of the discipline further becomes evident in the appreciation of another commentary of Vācaspati’s, namely, his *Nyāyavārttikatātparyāṭikā*, which is lauded by Strauss for its excellent explanations.³⁴ In this case, even Frauwallner—almost reluctantly, it seems—acknowledges Vācaspati’s achievements;³⁵ elsewhere, however, in an article written some twenty years earlier, he emphatically denied Vācaspati’s standing as a famed commentator, charging him among other things with a lack of thorough understanding of the doctrines of opponents presented and refuted by him, with mixing up, in this connection, distinctive trains of thought, with not sufficiently delving even into the contemporary Nyāya teachings, and with having a lack of awareness of the difficulties involved in the basic aphorisms.³⁶ I suspect that increased familiarity with the work and with the history of classical Nyāya made Frauwallner slightly change his mind about the value of the *Tātparyāṭikā*, and that the perspective conducive to a more positive assessment is

²⁷ Cf. Strauss (1925, p. 176).

²⁸ Cf. Von Glasenapp (1974, p. 204); see also p. 75 on the “clarification” provided by Vācaspati’s commentaries in general.

²⁹ Cf. Frauwallner (1953, p. 287).

³⁰ Cf. also the remarks in Frauwallner (1958b, p. 84).

³¹ Cf. Strauss (1925, p. 178).

³² Cf. Von Glasenapp (1974, p. 222) (to be read together with his general statement referred to above, no. 28).

³³ Cf. Frauwallner (1953, p. 288).

³⁴ Cf. Strauss (1925, pp. 146–147).

³⁵ Cf. Frauwallner (1958a, pp. 22–23).

³⁶ Cf. Frauwallner (1936, p. 146 = 1982, p. 264).

different from that of Strauss: Frauwallner may have appraised Vācaspati's own philosophical contribution on the basis of the ideas expressed in the *Tātparyaṭīkā*, that is, he appreciatively referred to the development of Nyāya philosophy as it occurred in this commentary.³⁷

Does Philosophy Develop in Commentaries?

This brings us to another perceived dichotomy in the status of philosophical commentaries: the distinction between “lively” and “creative” works on the one hand, and mere “doxographical” or otherwise philosophically unproductive expositions on the other. From the point of view of not only the history of Indian philosophy, but also India's intellectual and cultural history in general, a major impetus in the development of what we would consider new ideas in commentaries of the “creative” type was the supposed need to defend the authoritative *mūla*-text against criticism voiced by representatives of other philosophical traditions; commentarial activity was intimately connected with philosophical discussion³⁸ and innovation proceeded in the guise of elucidation—understood as interpretation in the broadest sense—and of defense, within an intellectual community which would probably not have sanctioned immediate modification of the teachings of basic works within one's own respective tradition, not to mention outright challenge or even dismissal of them with subsequent innovation. As I have shown with regard to the classical and medieval commentaries on the *Nyāyasūtra*, we encounter the explicit authorial attitude that commentarial activity serves the re-establishment of doctrinal positions expressed in the foundational work that have been misunderstood by opponents and therefore attacked and dismissed, with the result that their real meaning has become concealed.³⁹ Thus, philosophical development may indeed take place in commentaries,⁴⁰ at least in the commentaries whose authors provide elucidation beyond interpretation in the narrower sense, that is, who go beyond a continuous close reading of the text based on solid scholarship;⁴¹ in a way—owing to the presentation of their authors' own improved and developed arguments and ideas—these commentaries constitute rival texts to the text commented upon,⁴² although their authors would probably not have acknowledged this.

We even come across the spirited defense of central doctrines of the basic text against fictitious or defunct adversaries, such as Buddhist opponents referred and reacted to in late medieval and early modern Navya-Nyāya commentaries on the

³⁷ Cf. also Von Glasenapp (1974, p. 75) on the development of the respective philosophical traditions by means of their treatment in Vācaspati's commentaries.

³⁸ Cf. Chenet (1998, pp. 1660–1662).

³⁹ Cf. Preisendanz (2005, pp. 58–61).

⁴⁰ Cf., in a very general way, Strauss (1925, p. 145).

⁴¹ Cf. Lawler (1991, p. 100) for such a characterization of John Ridewall's commentary on the twelfth-century *Dissuasio Valerii* by Walter Map.

⁴² Cf. Lawler (1991, pp. 101–103 and 105–107) on Nicholas Trivet's commentary on the *Dissuasio Valerii* which on account of its close attention to the arguments of the basic text and its sensitive appraisal in the final analysis promotes its own “message.”

Nyāyasūtra. However, in this case the commentators' familiarity with the opponents and their works is only second- or even third-hand, the opponents' positions are quoted in the form of some standard, almost formulaic textual fragments taken over from earlier commentators who were closer in time to these opponents, and the defense of one's own position no longer leads to significantly new philosophical ideas.

Furthermore, the need to systematize, avoid contradictions and update the terminology, and the urge to prove and justify—even without being under straightforward attack—the basic tenets of the respective tradition within the frame of contemporary philosophical thought were important driving factors for the development of new ideas in “creative” commentaries.⁴³

Concerning the desire to provide proofs as a context of innovation, it has to be taken into consideration that in India ontology generally developed at a much faster pace than epistemology. The basic metaphysical theories of Sāṅkhya, Vaiśeṣika, Sarvāstivāda, Sautrāntika and even idealism (Yogācāra, perhaps also Vedānta) and materialism (Cārvāka) were all in place before the issue of means of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) became central in philosophy, with and after Vasubandhu and Dignāga. The classical commentators on practically all the foundational treatises of the mentioned traditions were therefore from the outset confronted with the fact that many of their basic ontological and metaphysical tenets could not really be proven by means of perception and inference. How did the commentators think and feel about this? Did they recognize the outdatedness of some of the crucial doctrines found in their foundational works? Can we thus consider these commentators as “benign mediators”⁴⁴ of the original authorial intent when they provide the justification for certain key tenets? As I have argued for the special case of the commentaries on the *Nyāyasūtra*, which is the only classical foundational treatise that contains extensive discussions on the means of valid cognition,⁴⁵ according to the—mostly only implicit—understanding of their authors, the individual aphorisms of the *Nyāyasūtra* already contain the opinions and positions they advance in the light of the contemporary state of philosophical discussion; the doctrinal edifice which has been sketched out in the *Nyāyasūtra*, including rival critiques and positions, thus anticipates—as we would express it—the later developments, or can harmoniously accommodate and respond to them.⁴⁶

This analysis would agree with Radhakrishnan's general statement that although change was indeed achieved, it was not considered as such and professed “to be only a new name for an old way of thinking.”⁴⁷ We may indeed be justified in generalizing this psychological attitude and consider it to occur also in connection with commentaries of this type in traditions other than *Nyāya*. This explains why, in general, no

⁴³ Cf. also the observations in Chenet (1998, p. 1663).

⁴⁴ Cf. Hanna III (1991, p. 181).

⁴⁵ The *Sāṅkhyakārikā*, which became the classical presentation of the “standard” variety of Sāṅkhya in the absence of a foundational treatise properly speaking, at least names the sources of knowledge accepted by the Sāṅkhyas and provides reasons for its basic ontological and metaphysical doctrines. Earlier, in his largely lost *Ṣaṣṭitantra*, Vārṣaganya had laid the foundations for an epistemology of the Sāṅkhya tradition; cf. Frauwallner (1958b).

⁴⁶ Cf. Preisendanz (2005, pp. 58, 62).

⁴⁷ Cf. Radhakrishnan (1993, p. 46).

express claim is made to intellectual originality or innovation on the part of individual classical and medieval thinkers; before the early modern period it is rather explicitly denied by some. Only with regard to works not ascribed to seers, saints or similar figures do we get glimpses of recognition of their arguments' weaknesses in the commentaries thereon.⁴⁸ Von Glasenapp analyses the same situation slightly differently, implying a stronger awareness of the potential for individual creative agency: Because there is only a restricted number of solutions to universal enigmas which may merely be updated and adapted by individuals, the authority of the foundational works continues and only allows some supplementation or modification in detail.⁴⁹

Another perspective on the so-called creative commentaries is of primary relevance for the intellectual and cultural history of India: the assessment that because of the dominant cultural concept of the timeless authority of foundational works philosophers felt obliged to present new materials in the form of commentaries, but could at the same time use the authority of the basic text as a vehicle for the establishment of their own ideas or even their own innovative tradition.⁵⁰ Radhakrishnan speaks of "conservative liberalism," in the form of importation of the new into the old when a tradition is faced with sudden extensions of knowledge,⁵¹ that is, "new wine in old bottles."⁵² An absolute breach with the past was thus avoided.⁵³ Strauss draws attention to the extreme case of the commentaries on the *Brahmasūtra* by Śāṅkara and Rāmānuja, Nimbārka and Vallabha, which introduce a new tradition in the guise of a commentary.⁵⁴ He consequently declares these innovative commentaries to be of high value, even though not from the point of view of a historically adequate interpretation of the *Brahmasūtra*.⁵⁵ In the area of Sāṅkhya, Vijñānabhikṣu's sixteenth-century attempt to present the teachings of medieval Sāṅkhya, just as those of medieval Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, as an aspect of the theistic Vedānta tradition he adhered to, earned him—in Von Glasenapp's eyes—the distinction of being the last important commentator on the *Sāṅkhyasūtra*; Von Glasenapp further makes special mention of Vijñānabhikṣu's basic inclusivist position.⁵⁶ Even Frauwallner acknowledges his *Sāṅkhyapravacanabhāṣya* as a commentary of the creative type which was of central importance in the middle of the second millennium.⁵⁷ Furthermore, if

⁴⁸ Cf. Preisendanz (2005, pp. 60–61) concerning Vācaspati's attitude towards Uddyotakara's *Nyāyavārttika*.

⁴⁹ Cf. Von Glasenapp (1974, p. 19).

⁵⁰ Cf., e.g., Ruben (1928, p. xvii).

⁵¹ Cf. Radhakrishnan (1993, p. 46).

⁵² Cf. Radhakrishnan (1993, p. 52).

⁵³ Cf. Radhakrishnan (1993, p. 47).

⁵⁴ Cf. Strauss (1925, p. 229), and further Von Glasenapp (1974, p. 74) on Śāṅkara's *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* and his other works, presumably his commentaries on the Upaniṣads.

⁵⁵ Cf. Strauss, loc. cit.

⁵⁶ Cf. Von Glasenapp (1974, pp. 216–217). Cf. also the introduction to Vijñānabhikṣu's œuvre in Larson–Bhattacharya (1987, pp. 375–376).

⁵⁷ Cf. Frauwallner (1953, pp. 475–476). Detailed information on the *Sāṅkhyapravacanabhāṣya* is not included in the *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie* because this work lies beyond the historical scope of its two published volumes.

Frauwallner says that the *Nyāyabhāṣya* extensively treats all problems of the basic text,⁵⁸ he may be acknowledging some creativity, but certainly does not share Walter Ruben's very resolute estimation that Vātsyāyana was a philosopher, not a philologist, and was thus not interested in philologically discerning the meaning of the *Nyāyasūtra*, but intent on presenting his own philosophy with the help of this treatise.⁵⁹ Frauwallner's laudatory judgment of Kumāri's *Śloka-vārttika* and Prabhākara's two *Tīkā*-s on the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* together with the *Śābarabhāṣya* is much more clear-cut: In his words, the two authors go beyond the basic text inasmuch as they present extensive expositions with independently developed ideas and engage in a lively discourse with philosophical opponents.⁶⁰ I suspect that the severe dearth of preserved sources for our understanding of the classical period of Mīmāṃsā philosophy plays some role in this positive evaluation. Thus, functioning in a way as historical gap-fillers, these lively and creative commentaries also belong to the first type of commentary addressed above, whereas the *Yukti-dīpikā*, pointed out as a prominent example of this type, could find a second classificatory place here: All other *Sāṅkhyakārikā* commentaries being classified by Frauwallner as mere expositions, this work is characterized by him as the only commentary that still reflects a faint afterglow of the lively and busy scholarly and teaching atmosphere of classical Sāṅkhya.⁶¹

Philosophically “Unproductive” Commentaries

What then are philosophically “unproductive” commentaries? They are first of all commentaries which are incidental⁶² in their remarks on difficult, unusual or ambiguous expressions or on special grammatical features of the basic text, their recording of variant readings, identification of quotations or references, explanation of hard-to-grasp arguments, and supplementation of the full background to terse statements or allusions. Depending on the degree of their being incidental as well as the extent and nature of explication and supplementation contained in them, such works may be designated as collections of glosses or annotations, or as scholia, rather than as commentaries. An example of this type of commentary in the philosophical commentarial literature are Vibhūticandra's famous notes on individual words and short phrases within Manorathanandin's commentary on Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika*, written into his own copy of the work, perhaps during or after instruction by his teacher Śākyaśrībhadrā and depending on

⁵⁸ Cf. Frauwallner (1958a, p. 22).

⁵⁹ Cf. Ruben (1928, p. xvii).

⁶⁰ Cf. Frauwallner (1958a, p. 24).

⁶¹ Cf. Frauwallner (1953, p. 475).

⁶² Cf. Lawler (1991, p. 97).

Devendrabuddhi's earlier commentary.⁶³ Another example is the recently discovered anonymous **Lakṣaṇaṭīkā* preserved in a single manuscript,⁶⁴ which consists of incidental glosses on three commentarial works by Candrakīrti.⁶⁵

In the field of medieval Nyāya, I would like to point out Śrīkaṇṭha's fragmentary *Ṭippanaka* (eleventh to twelfth c.) and Abhayatilaka's *Nyāyālaṅkāra* (thirteenth c.) on the *Pañcaprasthāna*, that is, the *Nyāyasūtra* together with its four "canonical" commentaries and sub-commentaries.⁶⁶ Because of the *Nyāyālaṅkāra*'s large scope, its copious glosses on Udayana's *Parīśuddhi*, some of them rather lengthy, and its occasional structural⁶⁷ remarks concerning the relationship between statements in two or even three of the treated commentaries and thus providing some overall perspective, the *Nyāyālaṅkāra* comes close to being a scholion, in the sense of a collection of continuous, occasionally also extensive, explanations on difficult passages of a basic text.⁶⁸ In its external, physical form it resembles the scholia of Late Antiquity and not those of the Middle Ages where tagged explanations constituting the scholia fill the margins and interlineary spaces of the basic text.⁶⁹ Could it be that, similar to the scholia of Late Antiquity, this work was composed as a revised and polished documentation of notes taken by the student Abhayatilaka during class?⁷⁰ This assumption is supported by the fact that in the concluding verse of the *Nyāyālaṅkāra*, Abhayatilaka expresses his indebtedness to his senior fellow student Lakṣmītilaka who revised or edited the *Nyāyālaṅkāra* very carefully; presumably, they participated in the same class on the *pañcaprasthānanyāyamahātarka*, possibly, but not necessarily, in different years.⁷¹ In this case, the described subtypes of commentary would also be valuable from the point of view of intellectual and cultural history because they would contribute to our knowledge of philosophical study as well as the mode of production of philosophical literature.

⁶³ Cf. Sāṅkṛityāyana (1938–1940, p. i). Further on Vibhūticandra and his activities cf. Steinkellner (2004, pp. 9–12).

⁶⁴ A facsimile is included in *The Facsimile Edition of a Collection of Sanskrit Palm-leaf Manuscripts in Tibetan dBu med Script* published in 2001 by the Institute for Comprehensive Studies of Buddhism at Taisho University, Tokyo.

⁶⁵ Cf. Yonezawa (1999, 2004, 2005) and Suzuki (2004).

⁶⁶ Both works have been addressed in Preisendanz (2005, pp. 69–70).

⁶⁷ Cf. Lawler (1991, p. 97).

⁶⁸ Cf. Ihm (2002, p. 315). On the derivation of the word *scholion* from *skolé* "time for learned conversation" cf. Luppe (2002, p. 55).

⁶⁹ Cf. Luppe, loc. cit. The explications were tagged to the respective lemmata by means of special referential marks; sometimes, the lemmata were repeated, similar to the *pratīka*-s and short quotations in Indian commentaries.

⁷⁰ Cf. Hadot (2002, p. 184). Different from the authors of the philosophical scholia of Late Antiquity, the author of the *Nyāyālaṅkāra* does not divide his material into lectures, but structures the composition according to the division into *prakaraṇa*-s which must have been well established by his time. However, the *prakaraṇa*-s may actually have formed single or combined units of instruction. Abhayatilaka's occasional distinction between *artha* and *bhāva* parallels the distinction between *lexis* and *theoria* in the philosophical scholia of Late Antiquity.

⁷¹ Cf. further Preisendanz (2005, p. 69).

The second type of philosophically unproductive commentaries would be continuous expository commentaries that combine various types of annotation into one text. They provide further detailed information and at the same time offer a coherent interpretation. The information may be presented, similar to that provided by scholia, in the form of rather simple and factual explications; in addition, the author may indulge in the transmission of received knowledge, that is, of philosophical or general cultural “baggage,” for example in the form of often repeated popular or standard quotations.⁷² This rather simple type of commentary, which has already been referred to above (cf. p.6.f.), would be represented by practically all commentaries on the *Sāṅkhyakārikā*, with the exception of the *Yuktidīpikā*.⁷³

Expository commentaries of a more sophisticated type, however, even if they are not philosophically creative, have not been considered by scholars to be entirely without value. Thus Strauss stresses the didactic value of the late medieval and early modern manuals, often provided with wide-ranging auto-commentaries in which difficult topics and certain problems of special interest⁷⁴ are referred to or expatiated upon; as examples from the field of Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika he mentions inter alia the *Tarkasaṅgraha* with Annambhaṭṭa’s own *Dīpikā* (seventeenth c.) and the *Kārikāvalī* (*Bhāṣāpariccheda*) with the *Siddhāntamuktāvalī* (sixteenth c.).⁷⁵ Similar to the Hypomnemata or Commentarii of the Hellenistic Period and Late Antiquity, these commentaries may have been composed by instructors on the basis of their teaching notes,⁷⁶ and may thus provide us with a glimpse of elementary philosophical instruction in the pre-colonial period.

Commentaries as “Treasures” and “Rival” Texts

Dense incidental as well as continuous expository commentaries may have yet another important value: They can sometimes be used—by means of their *pratīka*-s and other quotations or quasi-quotations—to correct the available text of the basic work as transmitted in a dominant line of manuscript transmission which may not necessarily reflect the original text precisely; they can also make us aware of alternative versions of the basic text which were current in India, or they may even allow us to reconstruct the *mūla*-text of lost works. As an example of the last case, Mallavādin’s *Dvādaśāranayacakra* immediately comes to mind, made available

⁷² Cf. Lawler (1991, pp. 99–100) on the *Grues ut dicit Isidorus* on Walter Map’s *Dissuasio*.

⁷³ Cf. Frauwallner (1953, p. 287).

⁷⁴ E.g., in the field of Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika, the topic of *pīlupākavāda* vs. *piṭharapākavāda*, the problem of the precise manner of the arising of “number” as a quality, or the issue of the elementary composition of gold, to mention just a few themes which must have been fascinating to scholastically-minded Nyāya–Vaiśeṣikas of this period.

⁷⁵ On the basis of information gathered from colophons of manuscripts of the *Kārikāvalī* and *Siddhāntamuktāvalī*, D.C. Bhattacharya has argued for the authorship of Kṛṣṇadāsa Sārvabhauma, a sixteenth-century Bengali Navya–Naiyāyika who was the teacher of Bhavānanda; cf. the reference in Matilal (1977, p. 109). See also Mishra (1966, pp. 422, 436). On the assessment p. 13 of the *Siddhāntamuktāvalī* cf. Strauss (1925, p. 147).

⁷⁶ Cf. Hadot (2002, p. 184).

through Siṃhasūri's commentary,⁷⁷ and Dharmakīrti's *Hetubindu* reconstructed from Arcaṭa's *Hetubinduṭīkā* with the additional utilization of its Tibetan translation.⁷⁸ A special case is de La Vallée Poussin's reconstruction—in the notes to his translation—of large parts of the *Abhidharmakośa* and *-bhāṣya* on the basis of Yaśomitra's commentary and the available translations into Tibetan and Chinese; it was achieved before the complete work was discovered in its original language by Rāhula Sāṃkrtyāyana in 1936.⁷⁹ In the foreseeable future we will also be able to compare Steinkellner's reconstruction of the *Hetubindu* with the edited text of the newly available manuscript of this work preserved in Lhasa.

This brings us to yet another dichotomy, involving an unintended effect of influential expository commentaries, namely, the preservation versus suppression of part of the respective tradition effected by them. It is quite possible that certain commentarial works contributed to the preservation of their *mūla*-text because of their authors' popularity. For example, it may be that among the many lost commentaries on the *Nyāyabhāṣya*⁸⁰ only the *Nyāyavārttika* has come down to us because the famed Vācaspati Miśra commented upon it.

However, expository commentaries and commentarial treatises—still another type of commentary that deals freely with the basic text and becomes a new, independent work⁸¹—especially when they belong to the creative type,⁸² potentially become some sort of true “rival” text to the basic text by surpassing it, and may even suppress it in the course of transmission. Dharmakīrti's highly original and ingenuous *Pramāṇavārttika*, originally conceived as a commentary on the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, together with its own commentaries and sub-commentaries written in India and Tibet, eventually suppressed Dignāga's work,⁸³ especially in India. The *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha*, which in spite of its largely summarizing and independently systematic mode of presentation may from the point of view of content be considered a philosophically creative⁸⁴ commentarial treatise on the *Vaiśeṣikasūtra*,⁸⁵ eventually suppressed all earlier

⁷⁷ Cf. Frauwallner (1966, pp. 5–6) on the great achievement of Jambuvijaya's reconstruction and edition of these two works.

⁷⁸ Cf. Steinkellner (1967, pp. 23–24). Steinkellner furthermore used Arcaṭa's commentary to correct the basic text as presented in the Tibetan translation (cf. Steinkellner loc. cit.).

⁷⁹ Cf. de La Vallée Poussin (1923, pp. XV–XVI) on the *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā*'s testimony to the wording of the basic Sanskrit text and further on the inefficaciousness of this non-continuous incidentally expository commentary as regards the study of the basic work.

⁸⁰ Cf. the references to the special secondary literature in Preisendanz (2005, p. 58, n. 6).

⁸¹ Cf. Ihm (2002, p. 315).

⁸² As a commentarial treatise of tremendous philosophical creativity and impact one may mention the *Gauḍapāḍakārikā* (cf. Strauss 1925, p. 239). Philosophical creativity is denied by Frauwallner of another famous commentarial treatise, the *Nyāyamañjarī* on the *Nyāyasūtras* (cf. Preisendanz 2005, p. 58), although he highly praises Jayanta for the full and precise picture of classical and early medieval Nyāya doctrines presented in this work; cf. Frauwallner (1936, p. 264).

⁸³ Cf. Hattori (1968, p. 15).

⁸⁴ Cf. Glasenapp (1974, p. 239).

⁸⁵ Cf. Nozawa (1975) for the *sūtrapāṭha* referred to and used as orientation by Praśastapāda in the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha*; cf. also Marui (1985). On the Indian view of the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* as a *Vaiśeṣikabhāṣya*, cf. Thakur (1961, pp. 16–17 and 2003, p. 10).

expository commentaries on it,⁸⁶ including Praśastapāda's own (sub-)commentary.⁸⁷ This is similar to the case of the *Śābarabhāṣya* which suppressed all pre-Śābara commentaries on the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*,⁸⁸ such as the *Vṛtti* extensively referred to by Śābara in the Tarkapāda, Bhavadāsa's *Vṛtti* and the *Bhāṣya* known to Dignāga.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the *Padārthadharmasaṅgraha* even put the transmission of the *Sūtra* into a precarious state.⁹⁰ Considering the profusion of commentaries and sub-commentaries written on it during the Navya-Nyāya period, Udayana's *Nyāyatātparyapariśuddhi* certainly became a "rival" text to Vācaspati Miśra's *Nyāyavārttikatātparyāṭikā*, but probably did not bring about the suppression of Vācaspati's work because of his fame and the popularity of his philosophical commentaries in general.

A peculiar inverted case is that of Bhāsarvajña's auto-commentary on his *Nyāyasāra*. While the concise basic text, in spite of (or rather, because of?) its independently minded innovative approach to the ontology and epistemology of Nyāya, must have become rather eminent and popular judging from the number of preserved manuscripts and expository commentaries of varying sophistication written on it,⁹¹ the highly sophisticated and wide-ranging auto-commentary, the *Nyāyabhūṣaṇa*, nearly became lost, even though it was evidently used by the more sophisticated medieval commentators on the *Nyāyasāra*, e.g., by Aparārka/Aparādityadeva (twelfth c.) and Jayasiṃha Sūri (fourteenth c.),⁹² and was still well known to a number of philosophers of the medieval period,⁹³ according to our present state of knowledge, it is preserved in only one complete manuscript and two fragmentary ones. One can merely speculate why the *Nyāyabhūṣaṇa* met with this fate: Could it be the result of its pronounced polemical character and its very detailed, complex discussions with contemporary or earlier scholars of other philosophical traditions, especially with Prajñākaragupta of the epistemological tradition of Buddhist philosophy, whose oeuvre was probably not well known after the twelfth century?⁹⁴

⁸⁶ Cf. Thakur (1961, p. 16). Thakur suggests that the "vastness of the early commentaries and the lack of meritorious students" as further factors responsible for the loss of these commentaries on the *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* (2003, p. 163).

⁸⁷ On Praśastapāda's *Vaiśeṣikasūtrabhāṣyaṭikā*, cf. Thakur (1961, pp. 14–16 and 2003, pp. 10, 166–167).

⁸⁸ Cf. Frauwallner (1968, p. 113).

⁸⁹ Cf. Frauwallner (1968, pp. 101–103).

⁹⁰ Cf. Thakur (2003, p. 10).

⁹¹ Cf. Joshi (1986, pp. 14–15) and Narayanan (1992, pp. 13–32).

⁹² Cf. Joshi (1986, pp. 17–18); Narayanan (1992, pp. 19, 22, 23).

⁹³ Cf. Narayanan (1992, p. 18).

⁹⁴ Cf. also the remarks of Vāsudeva Sūri (tenth to eleventh c.?) in his *Nyāyasārapadapañcikā* on the *Nyāyasāra*, discussed by Joshi (1986, pp. 17–18) and Narayanan (1992, p. 25), concerning the difficulties some readers may experience in following this extensive commentary.

What is Important and New in Philosophy?

In conclusion I return to the different approaches to classifying commentaries from the point of view of their content. Of course, the evaluation of a commentary as creative or philosophically unproductive depends very much on what is considered to be important by the individual scholar. When Alfred North Whitehead claims that “the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes on Plato,”⁹⁵ this is a very peculiar, not to say bizarre, point of view about what is important and what is new in philosophy, and what is not. I may mention in this connection Radhakrishnan’s rather severe statements about the majority of the post-Sūtra period commentaries, to which I have already alluded in connection with his praise of Śaṅkara’s and Rāmānuja’s *Brahmasūtra* commentaries as constituting spiritual discoveries in their re-statement of the old doctrine (cf. p. 5). While he praises Śaṅkara and Mādhava (that is, Madhva), although they present themselves as commentators, for “breaking through the crust” and “perceiving the spiritual principle” of the world,⁹⁶ he considers most other commentaries of this long period as philosophically unproductive, as compositions of what he ironically calls “professional dialecticians conscious of their mission to mankind.” He charges their authors with discussing artificial problems,⁹⁷ and the later commentators with stationariness;⁹⁸ in his opinion, in their re-establishment of the old, the commentators had to find ever new expedients to meet new difficulties,⁹⁹ a characteristic which could make at least some of their works belong to the philosophically creative type of commentary in Frauwallner’s eyes attuned to the historical evolution of what he considers genuine philosophical, not scholastic, thought.

Somewhat parallel to Radhakrishnan’s verdict about the lack of philosophical development in the commentaries, made from his point of view of philosophy as “meditation on the deep problems of life” by “inspired apostles of life and beauty,”¹⁰⁰ which may be diametrically opposed to the assessment by scholars like Frauwallner who are interested in the history of ontological and epistemological thought, the entire Navya-Nyāya literature is sometimes considered as the mere sophisticated, scholastic refinement of Gaṅgeśa’s definitions and arguments by scholars like Strauss¹⁰¹ who squint with a comparative eye at central issues of classical European philosophy; sometimes the same literature is considered as greatly innovative in logic and theory of language and almost presented as the culmination of Indian philosophy by those familiar with and involved in modern

⁹⁵ Cf. Whitehead (1929, p. 39).

⁹⁶ Cf. Radhakrishnan (1993, pp. 51–52).

⁹⁷ Cf. Radhakrishnan (1993, p. 51).

⁹⁸ Cf. Radhakrishnan (1993, p. 53).

⁹⁹ Cf. Radhakrishnan (1993, p. 51).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Radhakrishnan, loc. cit.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Strauss (1925, p. 147).

analytical philosophy, such as D.H.H. Ingalls¹⁰² and Bimal Krishna Matilal,¹⁰³ the latter on a mission impossible to convince his Oxford philosopher-colleagues that there *is* philosophy in India. Is Navya-Nyāya, with its profusion of commentaries, a mere intellectual game of coming up with further *avyāpti*-s and *ativyāpti*-s, *upādhi*-s and *viśeṣaṇa*-s, or an investigation into genuine and profound philosophical problems?

Conclusion

The critical self-reflective evaluation of earlier assessments of philosophical commentaries sketched above, together with the various attitudes stated or assumed to be behind them, as well as consideration of the related aspects of their form, also in a comparative manner—something which could only be touched upon briefly in this essay—should inform our study of philosophical commentaries in general. It will especially assist us in placing later, i.e., late medieval and modern commentaries, as well as our approach to them, within a broader, methodically aware perspective. Some additional aspects specifically relating to the Navya-Nyāya commentaries on the *Nyāyasūtra* have been elaborated by me in my contribution to the previous volume of papers of the Sanskrit Knowledge Systems group.¹⁰⁴ The most important one is the authors' distance from the foundational text of their tradition that—influenced by the political circumstances of their time—made it possible for them to return to it, albeit in a text-critical manner which cannot be observed in the classical and medieval period, and with a historicist approach to earlier commentaries and their interpretations. The consideration of these aspects and the ones discussed in the present contribution will have to be supplemented by that of additional aspects relating to intellectual and cultural history, such as the relationship of form and content to the intended readership, and the variety of authorial purpose, aspects of canonization and social aspects of composing commentaries, which could not be addressed comprehensively within the space allotted to this essay.

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¹⁰² Cf. Ingalls (1951, pp. 1–2).

¹⁰³ Cf., e.g., Matilal (1968, pp. ix–x).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Preisendanz (2005, p. 70ff).

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