



## A Comparative Look at Classical Sāṃkhya and Theravāda Buddhism

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In most modern exegeses, Classical Sāṃkhya has been described as a Hindu darśana based on a fundamental dualism between a plurality of selves (*puruṣas*) and the material world (*prakṛti*). Theravāda Buddhism, on the other hand, has often been described as a system based on the radically different position of no-self (*anattā*). However, recent research has called into question many of the assumptions behind our current understanding of Classical Sāṃkhya. Based on some recent studies, I shall argue that it is inappropriate to translate *puruṣa* as ‘self’ or ‘soul’, or *prakṛti* as ‘materiality’. Through close reading of key verses in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, I argue that *puruṣas* are best understood as impersonal and unconditioned monads, which make both subjectivity and liberation possible. Moreover, following Burley’s (2006) analysis, I apply a phenomenological interpretation of *prakṛti* and view the 25 *tattvas* not as matter, but as establishing the necessary conditions for experience. Based on this new interpretation, I am able to demonstrate several points of contact between Classical Sāṃkhya and the Theravāda such as: both systems assert an unconditioned reality (*puruṣa, nibbāna*), beyond the realm of conditionality (*prakṛti, saṃsāra*); both systems employ numeric schemas (25 *tattvas*, 5 *khandhas*) in order to provide an exhaustive list of the conditions necessary for any experience to occur; and both systems maintain that liberation can be attained through recognising all aspects of phenomenal reality as ‘not self’. Thus I conclude that, while Sāṃkhya and the Theravāda often employ different vocabulary, their renunciative soteriologies both function to achieve the same aim: to escape from suffering through the radical renunciation of experience.