

Cārvāka Philosophy: The Ancient Indian Materialists

Epistemology, Metaphysics, and Ethics

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Built from Original Teaching Material



This presentation is based on the original handwritten notes, classroom lectures, conceptual frameworks and Philosophy Optional teaching material of Vikash Sir, The IAS Akademia.

Academically verified and enriched through primary texts and reliable scholarly research.

“

A sure shell is better
than a doubtful gold coin.

”

- The Cārvāka Maxim

While the Upanishads looked to the heavens, the Cārvākas looked strictly at the earth.

Materialism Arose from Socio-Religious Discontent

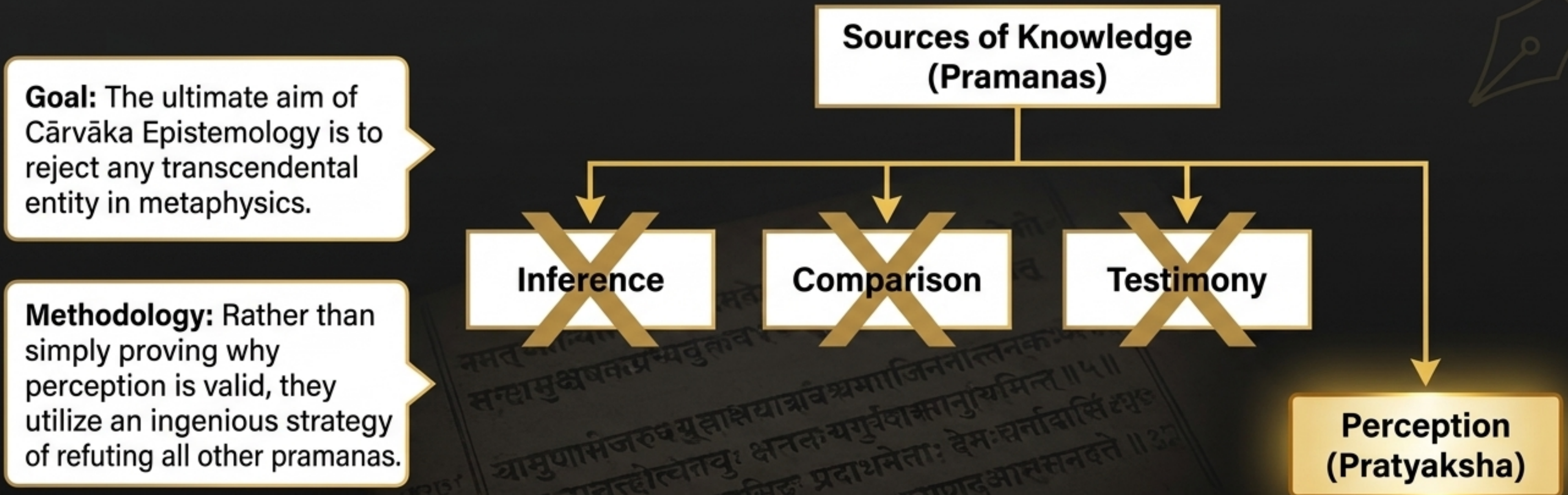


Born in discontent, materialism was traditionally founded by Brihaspati. The term 'Carvaka' may refer to his disciple, or act as a common name signifying a materialist ('Lokyata' - commoner) or one who is sweet-tongued ('Caruvak').

I Epistemology

Theory of Knowledge: The Foundation
of Cārvāka and the Refutation of the
Transcendental.

By Eliminating Alternatives, Perception Remains the Sole Truth



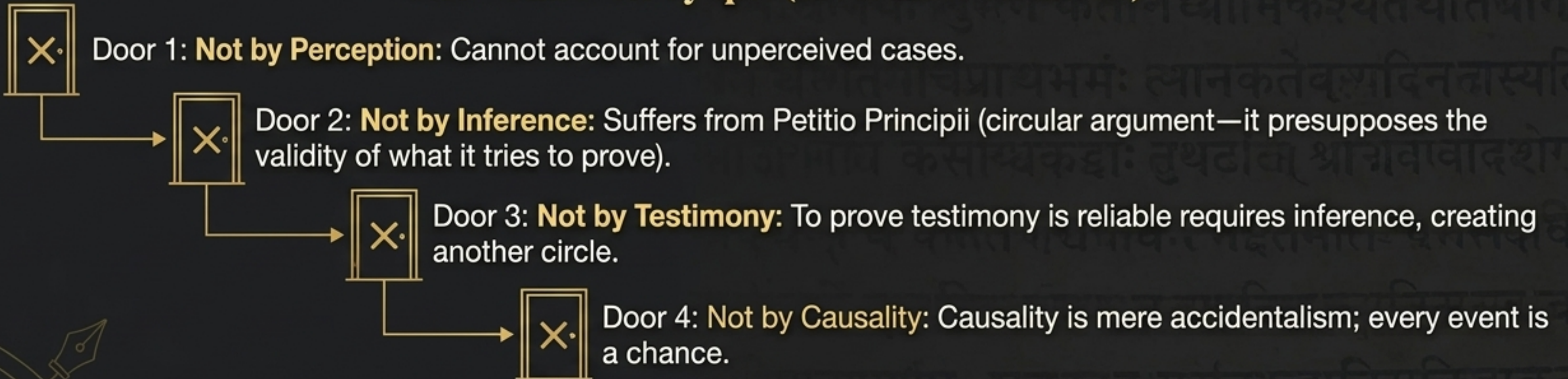
Conclusion: By elimination, Perception remains the only valid source of knowledge.

Inference is a Leap in the Dark Driven by Illicit Generalization

Core Argument

Inference relies on Vyapti (invariable relation, e.g., “Where there is smoke, there is fire”). Cārvāka argues this is mere guesswork and an illicit generalization from known to unknown cases.

The Attack on Vyapti (Invariable Relation)



The logicians find themselves stuck in the mud of inference.

Verbal Testimony Fails Without Eternal Sound

The Mimamsa Orthodoxy

- ❖ - Sound is eternal.
- ❖ - The words of the Vedas and their meanings are eternal.
- ❖ - The ground of sound is Ether (Akasha).

The Cārvāka Refutation

- Ether is not perceived, hence it does not exist.
- Without Ether, sound has no substratum and cannot be eternal.
- Verbal knowledge relies on the knowledge of words and meanings, which is based on inference (already rejected).

The Attack on the Vedas

The Vedas are self-contradictory (e.g., enjoining non-injury while demanding animal sacrifice) and function merely as a means of livelihood for priests.

II

Metaphysics

The Nature of Reality: The Logical
Outcome of Materialist Epistemology.

Svabhavavada Replaces Divine Creation with Elemental Nature

Svabhavavada (Nature of Things)



Earth



Air



Water



Fire

These are the only elements.
Ether is rejected because it
cannot be perceived.

Bodies, senses, and objects are
products of these elements in
varying proportions.

Svabhavavada over Satkaryavada

Rejects the law of causation in favor of the inherent
'nature of things' (Accidentalism).

The Redundant Divine

Because reality is explained purely by the mechanical
combination of elements, God becomes a redundant
entity, unnecessary to explain creation.

Consciousness Emerges as a Material Byproduct

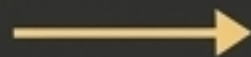
Bhutachaitanyavada: Consciousness arises from matter in specific proportions.
It is a **byproduct**, not a separate entity.

Base Elements + Specific Combination = Emergent Property

Analogy 1: Fermented Yeast (Matter) -> Intoxicating Wine (Emergent Property)



Fermented Yeast

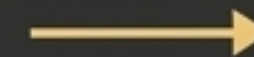


Intoxicating Wine

Analogy 2: Betel Nut + Areca (Matter) -> Red Color (Emergent Property)



Betel Nut + Areca



Red Color

Just as bile is produced by the liver, matter produces the mind.
Consciousness is qualitatively different but physically sourced.

The Soul is Indistinguishable from the Physical Body

Dehatmavada: The soul is nothing but the conscious body.

Nutrition: When the body is nourished, intelligence is nourished.

Aging: When a person grows old and the body weakens, intellectual capacity simultaneously declines.

Disease: When the body becomes disordered (e.g., fever), mental powers become dysfunctional.

Linguistic Proof: Language associates consciousness entirely with physical properties (e.g., saying 'I am fat' or 'I am tall').

III

Ethics & Criticism

Hedonism and the Paradox of Positivism:
How should we live if this is the only life?



Cārvāka Ethics Fundamentally Invert Orthodox Values

Orthodox vs. Heterodox Matrix

Criteria	Orthodox	Cārvāka
Ultimate Aim of Life	Dharma / Moksha	Enjoyment / Kama is the only end
Law of Karma	Accepted	Rejected (every event is chance, good acts can bring pain)
The Afterlife	Cycle of Rebirth	Heaven is a myth; this life is the only life
Liberation	Freedom of soul from bondage	Death alone is liberation; there is no soul to be freed

We should not throw away the **opportunity of enjoying this life** for a futile hope of **enjoyment thereafter**.

The Paradox of Positivism

If Cārvāka rejects inference to prove their point, aren't they using inference to do so?

To refuse the validity of inference from an empirical standpoint is to refuse to think and discuss. Yet, this thorough, ongoing positivism awakened Indian philosophy from its dogmatic slumbers.

PHILOSOPHY TARGET 300+

Philosophy Optional with Vikash Sir

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