

Philosophy in Classical India

The proper work of reason

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will succeed in life's ultimate goal of eliminating such frustrations. One has, therefore, a reason to strive to minimise false beliefs, and so to study the sources of true belief and knowledge. And, in so far as a study of the Nyaya system is the best method of achieving one's highest goals, one should study it through repeated reflection, discussion with others and by engaging in friendly debates (NS 4.2.47–9).

This then is the reason why the study of epistemology and critical inquiry, in short of the Nyaya philosophy, is instrumental in achieving one's final aims. There is an elegant explanatory closure here. One might not be inclined to agree with every step in the explanatory chain. While it is plausible that there is a dependency between the degree of success or failure of one's plans and the extent of falsity in one's beliefs, it is less easy to see that the dependency is mediated by the *moral* value of one's actions. Even if one were tempted to omit that link, or regard the tie between rationality and moral behaviour differently, the explanatory scheme affords a marvellous account of the relationship between the study of philosophy and the quest for life's final ends.

1.4 PERCEPTION

The Buddhist asserts that perception of objects is itself a rational activity. One does not, properly speaking, perceive the object at all, but only patterns of colour, sound, touch, smell and taste. From their sequence in time and arrangement in space, one infers the presence of an object of one kind or another. Reason here is a mental faculty of construction, synthesis and superimposition. It brings order to the array of sensory data. The early Naiyayika, however, has tied reason to explicit demonstration and proof. He has no place for the idea of reason as an inner mental faculty of sensory integration. Since there is no logical connection between the capacity to see an object and the capacity to describe it, one is led instead to the idea that objects enter *directly* into the content of perceptual experience. The Naiyayika rightly worries that if reason has a role in the construction or synthesis of the *objects* of perception, then realism about those objects is threatened. However, he allows reason to have a role in the *organisation* of the totality of one's perceptions. Kalidas Bhattacharya accurately, if enigmatically, assessed the idea when he said that 'thought as judgement, according to Nyaya, is either the perception of a passive unity of different data in substantive-adjective relation, or, going beyond perception, conscious management of data through actual use of language.'¹⁴

I begin with the *Nyayasutra* definition. Vatsyayana would later classify the *sutras* into three kinds: 'naming' *sutras*, which introduce a topic or concept for analysis; 'defining' *sutras*, which offer a definition of the concept in question; and 'critical' *sutras*, which examine and evaluate the adequacy of the proposed definition. A definition is a property co-extensive with the concept to be defined. A definition is faulty if it is either too wide or too narrow – showing that it has

neither of these faults is the purpose of the ‘critical’ *sūtras*. The Nyaya method here is not very different from the technique of finding necessary and sufficient conditions. Notice however that it does not tell us what the essence of the thing defined is, but rather gives us a syndrome, a criterion for distinguishing between it and all other kinds of thing.

Nyayasūtra 1.1.4 is a ‘defining’ *sūtra*. It is the definition of perception:

Perception is an awareness which, produced from the connection between sense-organ and object, is non-verbal, non-errant, and determinate in nature.

A perception is an awareness that stands in a certain special relation to its object. The attempt is to define that relation in purely non-cognitive terms. If the attempt is successful, then perception is a physical anchor between the subject and the external world. It is not itself cognitive, but rather supplies the raw material for cognition and so for reason.

What constraints are there on the physical relation that obtains between a perceiver’s perceptions and the object perceived? A first constraint is just that the relation be physical, so that it is not explicated in terms of semantic relations such as that of denotation. This is what is meant by the assertion that perception is ‘non-verbal’. Second, the relation has to have the right extension: it needs to hold between perceptions and the sorts of object one is normally regarded as capable of perceiving. Uddyotakara (c. AD 500) has a clear discussion of this point.¹⁵ He notes that the relation must be capable of obtaining between the perceiver’s perceptions and objects which are both nearby and far away; it must be a relation capable of obstruction by solid, opaque objects; it must connect the perceiver not only with the objects themselves, but also with their perceptible properties such as colour and shape, as well as with the perceptible properties of those properties; it must connect the perceiver not only with the front surface of a whole object, but with the object as a whole (for one sees the table and not just its surface); and finally, he asserts that it connects the perceiver with the *absences* of things, for apparently one can say that one *sees* the absence, and not merely that one fails to see.

It is hardly surprising that the Naiyayikas find themselves unable to describe a single physical relation which obtains in all (and only) these circumstances, but perhaps they do not need to. For if it is part of the concept of perception only that it is grounded in a physical relation with a certain extension, then an adequate physicalist theory of perception needs only to specify what the extension of the underlying physical relation is. The discovery of the way that relation is realised in actual human perception might be a task assigned to the psychologist of perception, not to the philosopher.

The real interest in the *Nyayasūtra* attempt to give a physical description of perception lies in the remaining two conditions. The point is that, no matter how well one succeeds in describing the underlying physical connection, there

will be cases where that connection obtains, but the resulting awareness is not genuinely perceptual. Vatsyayana points to cases of perceptual illusion and perceptual confusion:

During the summer the flickering rays of the sun intermingled with the heat radiating from the surface of the earth come in contact with the eyes of a person at a distance. Due to this sense-object contact, there arises an awareness as of water. Such an awareness might be (mis-)taken as perceptual; hence the clause 'non-errant'. An errant one is of that wherein it is not. A non-errant one is of that wherein it is – this is a perception.

Perceiving with the eyes an object at a distance, a person cannot decide whether it is smoke or dust. Such an indecisive awareness resulting from sense-object contact might be (mis-)taken as perceptual; hence the clause 'determinate in nature.'

These ambiguous passages led to a 'vortex of controversy' (Matilal 1995: 310) and eventually to a sophisticated theory of content. It is alleged that a person witnessing a mirage does not see the refracted sun's rays, even if in the right sort of physical connection with them. Neither does he see water, for there is none to be seen. Someone witnessing a mirage does not *see* anything, but only seems to see water. And a person who witnesses a ball of dust in the distance does not *see* the dust if he is uncertain whether it is dust or smoke. An object is not seen if it is not seen distinctly.

In both cases there is a natural temptation to say that the person does see something, but does not understand or know what it is that they see, or that they misconstrue what it is that they see, or that their perceptual appearance is non-veridical. One sees the refracted rays of light, but mistakes them to be water; one sees the ball of dust, but fails to determinate it as such. To say this would be to concede that the existence of an appropriate physical connection is sufficient for object perception. The difficulty with such a move is that, although it does indeed extrude rationality from the perceptual, it does it so completely that the perceptual cannot be a basis for rational thought. The 'objects' of perception are merely things in which one stands in a certain special physical relation, on a par with other objects one comes into physical contact with (e.g. by standing on or picking up). However, if perception is to be a foundation for rationality, there must be a way in which it is understood as making objects available in thought, as placing them within the ken of the observer.

Might we analyse the two additional clauses in terms of belief? If a person witnessing a mirage does not see the refracted rays of the sun, perhaps it is because he falsely believes them to be water. Similarly, one can perhaps say that the person looking at the ball of dust does not see it because he does not believe that it is dust (does not know whether it is dust or not). We might then think of taking the additional clauses as defining the perception of an object in terms of a physical connection, together with the absence of a belief that it

is something it is not, and the absence of doubt or disbelief that it is something that it is. That is:

S's perception is of object x iff:

- (1) S's perception stands in a relation R with x .
- (2) R is physical (non-verbal).
- (3) for all F , if S believes that Fx then Fx .
- (4) for all F , if Fx then S does not disbelieve that Fx .

There are two objections to such a proposal. First, clauses (3) and (4) are much too strong. It is clearly possible to perceive an object and at the same time have false beliefs about it. I might, for example, perceive the table and yet believe that it is made of space-filling infinitely divisible stuff. Second, since belief implies rationality, the definition of perception in terms of belief is contrary to the attempt to extrude reason from perception.

The proper implication of the *Nyayasutra* definition is that the perception of objects is modulo a property. When I see an object (my desk, for instance) I do not simply see it, but I see it *as a table*. Here, the clause 'as a table' is to be read as an adverbial modifier of the seeing relation R . I stand in a 'table-seeing' relation to the object. The relativisation of the seeing relation by a property allows a reconstruction of Vatsyayana's cases. The person who witnesses a mirage stands in a 'water-seeing' relation to the refracted rays. The errancy lies in the fact that they are seeing the refracted rays *as water*, when in fact the rays are not. And the person who witnesses a ball of dust, but fails to distinguish it as dust or smoke stands neither in a dust-seeing relation to the dust-ball, nor in a smoke-seeing relation, but equivocates. The correct way to read the definition then is:

S's perception is of object x iff:

- (4) for some F , S sees x as an F , where

S sees x as an F iff:

- (1) S's perception stands in a relation R with x .
- (2) R is physical (non-verbal).
- (3) Fx .

Clause (4) excludes the case of the ball of dust, for since there is no definite way by which the person sees the dust, the person does not see any object. It is necessary for object perception that the object is seen in some definite way. Clause (3) excludes the case of the mirage, for the person attempts to see the rays modulo *water* but the rays are not water. Notice here that 'non-errancy' signifies simply an absence of warping, a lack of discord between the perception

and its object, and is not explicated in terms of a correspondence between the object and a perceptual content. We should think of this absence of warping as a property of the perceptual relation, much as transparency is a property of clear glass. Both are characterised in terms of the lack of a distortion or corruption of what is seen, and not in terms of representational correspondence. The passivity of perception is preserved; perception remains free from interpretation and construction.

It follows from the definition that if one perceives an object, and one does so by seeing it modulo its having a certain property, then it does indeed have that property. This is so even though one does not see *that* the object has the property. Perceiving x as F does not imply believing that x is F , but it does imply that one would be justified were one to believe that x is F . Perception is an evidential support for reason, without itself being reasoned (an idea echoed in Roderick Chisholm's critical cognitivism¹⁶). Later Nyaya writers draw a distinction between perception that is 'with imagination' and perception that is 'without imagination'. Bimal Matilal explains the philosophical use here of the term 'imagination' or *vikalpa* as standing 'for anything that, let us say, the mind adds to, or recognises in, the "given".'¹⁷ In the Nyaya theory the object perceived (x) and also the mode under which it is perceived (F) constitute the perceptual given. It is the work of the 'imagination' to bring them together into a propositional judgment (x is F).

Buddhist objections to the Nyaya definition focus on instances where perception does seem to imply belief and inference. There is the case of Uddyotakara's rather remarkable claim that we perceive absences. I am looking for a pot. I look in the kitchen and see no pot. Uddyotakara says: I see the kitchen as qualified by absence-of-pot and thereby see the absence. The Buddhist Dharmakirti objects that this is really a piece of reasoning, an inference from non-observation. The inference runs thus. None of the objects which I perceive in the kitchen is a pot. If there were a pot in the kitchen, I would see it, for my perceptual faculties are working normally and all other *ceteris paribus* conditions for perception are met. Therefore, there is no pot in the kitchen (see Chapter 4.9). Dharmakirti's point is well taken, but it does not constitute a refutation of the theory. We may simply give up the strange claim that absences can be perceived.

Nyayasutra 2.1.31 rehearses an argument, apparently again due to Buddhists, which if sound *would* constitute a refutation. The argument is that our ordinary perceptual claims are disguised inferences. I cannot see the whole table from any one place. When I say that I see the table, what I mean is that I infer that there is a whole table on the basis that I have seen a part (its front surface). We never see wholes, but infer their existence from our more immediate perceptions. If the argument is that all perception is inferential, then Gautama's counter in *Nyayasutra* 2.1.32, that we see at least front surfaces, is conclusive. If the argument is that all perception of wholes is inferential, the Nyaya reply is that the whole is present in each of its parts. So we can perceive a whole just as we can perceive a property. One says that one

sees the colour or shape of the flower in virtue of seeing the flower; so too one sees the whole in virtue of seeing a part.

What is at stake is the amount of work done in perception by reason. The Buddhist presses the Naiyayika on the point that there is, in perception, an extrapolation and interpretation of what is immediately given. Allowing properties to enter the (non-conceptual) content of perceptual experience as adverbial modifiers offers a way of avoiding the unpalatable consequence that the perception of a whole is an inference. Attention is drawn to two kinds of properties of wholes: those that are properties of the whole without being a property of any its parts, and those that are properties of the whole only because they are properties of every part (see Chapter 3.6). The second sort ‘saturate’ the object, in rather the same way that sesame oil saturates the sesame seed. The property being-a-table or being-a-cow, on the other hand, applies to the whole, but not to any of its parts. It follows that seeing modulo such a property is seeing the whole and not its parts. This Nyaya rejoinder to the Buddhist criticism depends on one’s being able to regard the property being-a-cow as an entirely objective feature of the perceived situation, not as itself a mere concept or mental construct. It is for this reason that, in the war for hegemony between the Buddhist and Nyaya philosophical views, some of the severest battles were those over the reality of universals and wholes.¹⁸

1.5 MIND, ATTENTION AND THE SOUL

Is the mind rational? Is it conscious? That depends on what we mean by ‘mind’. The Naiyayika, as generally for thinkers in classical India, sees in the mind (*manas*) something distinct from the soul (*atman*). It is the soul alone which is the seat of reason, *qua* thinker, perceiver, enjoyer of pleasures and sufferer of pains. The mind is a mere instrument of the soul. It is that by which the soul controls the senses. The mind is given a second function: it is also that by which the soul perceives its own mental states. So the mind is both an inner sense and the controller of the outer senses, but all the while entirely directed by the soul. The mind is mechanical.

An enduring metaphor for the senses, due at least to Prasastapada, is as windows onto the world. In a room with a window on every wall, each one represents a possibility of sensory contact with some aspect of the world. But only a possibility: in order to see out, one has to direct one’s attention to one window rather than another. In the case of the senses, this role is assigned to the mind. It is a faculty of attention, that by which the soul directs its gaze through one sense rather than another. Another metaphor is helpful here. Think of the senses as converging railway tracks, meeting at a point and becoming a single track. The mind is the set of points at the junction. It is that by which the controller (the soul, the signalman) channels its attention in one direction rather than another.

4 Reduction, exclusion and rational reconstruction

4.1 HOW TO PRACTISE POVERTY IN METAPHYSICS

The philosophical quest for unification is ancient and powerful. It is the *leitmotiv* of the Upanisads, a dramatic enactment of the search for hidden connections. There are indeed good reasons for seeking unity in a philosophical theory. For any theory which introduces as primitive a distinction between different domains of thing has left at least one thing unexplained – the reason for the distinction. As a methodological principle, the philosopher should not introduce a distinction simply to fix technical problems. We might recall Nagarjuna's maxim – the special reason for a proposed distinction must be given. We might recall too the nominalist slogan of William of Occam – do not postulate entities beyond necessity. Occam in fact rejected the Aristotelian categories, and argued for simplicity as a constraint on rational theory construction.

The Buddhist philosopher Dinnaga (c. AD 480–540) is uncompromising in his search for unity and simplicity in philosophical explanation. He is an ontological reductionist and a nominalist. It will be instructive to begin our examination of his thought by comparing him with Nagarjuna. Both are Buddhists, and in this context what that means is that they both reject the ontological commitments of common sense. Common sense commits us to an ontologically rich world, of individuals and properties, of parts and wholes, and most importantly of a concrete connector of 'inherence', which binds everything together in a categorial hierarchy. Nagarjuna's philosophical method is a debunking one – he wants to undermine common sense (and any other conceptual scheme) by revealing as false the commitments it incurs. In exposing the ontological 'emptiness' of our conceptual schemes, the end of rationality is the elimination of conceptualisation (the end of reason is the *end* of reason).

Dinnaga's approach is different. His method is one of rational reconstruction. He tries to show that the ontological commitments made by common sense are reducible to a much smaller, more parsimonious set. The basic conceptual scheme of common sense is preserved, but revealed in philosophical analysis

to be far less ontologically committed than it represents itself as being. The end of rationality for Dinnaga is to rebuild our old conceptual superstructures on new, leaner, foundations.

Let us distinguish four basic metaphysical positions – irrealism, reductionism, metaphysical pluralism and additive (non-pluralist) realism. The irrealist denies that things of some type exist, be they belief-states, universals, moral values or entities of another type. He wants to do away with all talk of such things (and either substitute a new vocabulary, or else leave only silence). One variety of irrealism is eliminativism, according to which talk of the kind in question is strictly false. Another variety is non-factualism, a position which maintains that the linguistic role of such talk is not fact-assertive, but rather emotive, prescriptive, or in some other way non-factive. The reductionist's position is perhaps subtler. The existence of things of the type in question is not denied as such, but only their ontological primitiveness. The reductionist's thesis is that statements mentioning those things can, without loss of content, be translated into statements not mentioning those things. A reductionist about universals will translate statements mentioning universals into statements about classes. A reductionist about belief-states translates the statements of intentional psychology into statements about mental events or some other favoured category of basic constituents of the mental. The original statements are still evaluable as true or false, but have been divested of their manifest ontological commitments. Pluralism and additive realism, on the other hand, both take the statements at face value, as really being about (made true by) entities of the type mentioned. Where they differ is in the additive realist's commitment to there being a single proper language of metaphysics, in contrast to the pluralist's commitment to the existence of many irreducible kinds of language use.¹ We have so far encountered a version of irrealism – Nagarjuna and the Madhyamaka school, and an account of additive realism – the Vaisesika type-hierarchy. In Chapter 5, we will see how the consequences of pluralism are explored by the Jaina metaphysicians. Dinnaga completes the line-up. He is a reductionist. He wants to preserve the structure of the common-sense scheme, but to divest it of its overt ontological commitments. He wants to translate all talk of universals, wholes, inherence, qualities, motions and absences into a language with only a minimal primitive vocabulary. And the thoroughness with which he executes this programme is nothing short of extraordinary.

4.2 A SKELETAL ONTOLOGY

What is it for an object to *possess* a property? The naive answer – the answer given by common sense and encoded in Vaisesika ontology – is that the object and the property are distinct entities linked together by an entity of a third type, the concrete inherence connector. A state of affairs, an object's having a property, is an ordered triple. Something similar is true for the relationship

between a whole and its parts – the whole ‘resides’ (again by the concrete relation of inherence, or so claim the Vaisesikas) in each and every one of the parts that constitute it.

Here is a way to achieve an ontological gain. The world of individuals and their properties can be reconstrued – following G. F. Stout² and D. C. Williams³ – in terms of ‘thin’ properties or tropes, e.g. the particular blue of this vase rather than blueness as such. Blueness as such is to be identified with the class of all particular blues. What the particular blues have in common is being ‘exactly similar’ to one another: a property is a similarity class of tropes under the relation of exact similarity. Another way for two tropes to have something in common is by being tropes of the same object; e.g. the particular blue of this vase and the particular shape of this vase. Let us say that these two tropes stand in a relation of ‘concurrence’. Then an object is a similarity class of tropes under the relation of concurrence. The relation of ‘possessing a property’ is now easily explained: an object possesses a property just in case the class of tropes which is the object *intersects* with the class of tropes which is the property. And the mereological relation ‘belonging to a whole’ is equally simple: a part belongs to a whole only if the class of tropes which is the whole *subsumes* the class of tropes which is the part.

Our new ontology reduces the world of objects, universals, wholes, parts and inherence to a domain of tropes and two similarity relations. One similarity relation binds tropes into objects, the other along a different dimension into properties. The old idea of a universal – as a class of objects – finds a place here in the notion of a class of classes of tropes. The universal blueness is the class of blue objects; that is to say, a class of classes containing a blue trope. The relations of likeness and unlikeness between objects, which were used in the early Nyaya theory of rational extrapolation (Chapter 1.6), are themselves reducible to the new primitive relation of exact similarity. One object is ‘like’ another just in case the first has a trope exactly similar to a trope belonging to the second.

The ontology I have just described is very close to the one Dinnaga is developing in his great classic, the *Collection on Knowing*.⁴ At the centre of his system is a new theory of concepts. Dinnaga rethinks the very nature, role and function of a concept. The traditional theory is that a concept *is* a criterion and *has* a boundary. The criterion ‘... possesses blueness’ delimits a region in the space of objects. It marks out a group of objects on the basis of a common shared trait. Dinnaga’s new theory is that a concept *is a* boundary and *has* a criterion. Objects are indeed brought together, but only as groups of essentially disparate things, which happen to be penned in by a single perimeter fence. It is a mistake to think of concepts as bringing objects together on the basis of their sharing a common trait. The function of a concept, like a fence, is rather to keep things out. So Dinnaga says that the role of a concept is to *exclude*. The boundary of a concept is a line drawn in the space of objects. On one side falls the excluded, and whatever is left falls within the

concept. A concept's function is to exclude, to keep things out, to prevent entry. A concept is not a criterion, which some objects meet and others do not (like being red, or living in Paris). It is a pure boundary, a fence, keeping some objects out and leaving the remainder within.

A concept excludes what is other. The relation of 'otherness' here is a relation of *exact dissimilarity*. This is the basic relation in Dinnaga's system. We have defined a property as a similarity class of tropes. Indeed, from any arbitrary trope, one can construct a property – the class of tropes exactly similar to the arbitrary one. If we take exact *dissimilarity* instead as our primitive relation, then what we have now to construct is that property which is the class of tropes *not* exactly *dissimilar* to the arbitrary trope. A property is the complement of a dissimilarity class.

The reduction of ordinary statements about objects, qualities and universals is a translation into exclusion-statements. For reasons that I will explain later, I am going to take the exclusion relation to be the relation of non-intersection (so a class of tropes excludes all those other classes which do not intersect with it). Then the task facing us will be to show how an ordinary statement such as 'the lotus is blue', which apparently attributes the universal blueness to an object of a certain type, can be translated into a statement concerning the non-intersection of classes of tropes. If we succeed, we will have shown that the rich ontology of common sense is reducible to a minimal ontology of tropes and two similarity relations.

4.3 MARKING AND SIMILARITY

The key ingredients of Dinnaga's new ontology are set out in a few sentences in the first chapter of the *Collection on Knowing*:

There are two means of knowing, perception and inference, because two marks are knowable. (I 2ab)

Apart from the self-marked (*svalaksasa*) and that which is marked by generality (*samanya-laksana*) there is nothing else. What we shall prove is that perception has the self-marked as its object, and inference has as its object that which is marked by generality.

Among these,

Perception is that which is free from conceptual construction (*kalpana*). What then is this conceptual construction? – the association of name, genus, etc. (I 3cd)

In an Abhidharma treatise, too, the following is stated: 'One who has the ability to perceive grasps something blue, but does not grasp "this is blue".' 'One grasps an object in the object, but one does not grasp an element (*dharma*) in the object.' If perception is completely devoid of conceptual construction,

then why is it [further] stated that ‘the five kinds of sensory cognition have aggregates as their support’? Again, it is mentioned that ‘they take as an object a self-marked in so far as it is self-marked by a sensory field not in so far as it is self-marked by a substance.’ (*ad* I 4ab)

How is this to be understood?

Being caused by many objects, [a perception] reaches a whole as its own object. Since it is caused by many substances, it is said, in respect of its field, that it takes the whole as its object; but not by conceptually constructing a unity within that which is many and separate. (I 4cd)

A thing possessing many forms (*rūpa*) cannot be cognised in all its aspects by a sense-faculty. The object of a sense-faculty is the form (*rūpa*) which is indescribable and self-revealing. (I 5)

Illusory cognition, cognition of the conventional truth, inference, that which is inferred, memory and desire are pseudo-perceptions (*pratyaksabhasa*), accompanied by obscurity. (I 7cd–8ab)

An illusory cognition is a pseudo-perception because it arises conceptually constructing water, etc. out of such things as vapour floating over sand. Cognition of the conventional truth is a pseudo-perception because it superimposes something extraneous upon things which are only conventionally true, and thus functions through the conceptualisation of forms of these. Inference and that which is inferred are pseudo-perceptions because they arise through the conceptualisation of what formerly has been perceived.

Dinnaga developed his system out of the Abhidharma in which he had been educated, and in which he had initially written. It is a cardinal doctrine of Abhidharma Buddhism that there is a single kind of thing: the category of *dharma*. A *dharma* is an ingredient, a factor, a fundamental constituent. It is neither a substance nor a property, but that which constitutes both. The Abhidharma literature suggests several different schemes for the classification of *dharmas*. Of these, the chief divisions are those into the five Groups, the twelve Spheres (the six sense-faculties and their six fields), and the eighteen sorts of Base (the six sense faculties, their six fields and six corresponding kinds of mental event).⁵ Although there is a strong phenomenistic bias in these classifications, the fundamental meaning of *dharma* is not ‘sensedatum’ as such, but ‘basic ingredient’ of any kind. They are the ingredients out of which ordinary physical objects and their properties, as well as our sense-faculties and mental lives, are all constructed.

Dinnaga’s opening assertion is that there are precisely two sorts of thing. There are the entities which are the ‘self-marked’ (*sva-laksana*), and there are

the things which are the ‘marked by generality’ (*samanya-laksana*). What are they? An influence, certainly, must be the distinction made in the same terms in the Abhidharmika literature. An architect⁶ of the Abhidharma states:

One examines the body by its own and general marks, as well as sensation, mind and *dharmas*. Their own-mark is precisely [their] own nature (*svabhava*), while the mark of generality is the non-eternality of the conditioned [*dharmas*], the unhappiness of the defiled [*dharmas*], and the emptiness and non-substantiality of all *dharmas*.

Here the self-mark of a *dharma* is its essence or ‘own nature’, while its general mark is something that it shares with others. A particular shade of blue – for example, the blue of this vase – has both common and unique qualities. Its common attributes are the things it shares with other *dharmas*, for example, being blue, being a colour. Its unique qualities are things it does not share with others, such as its specific blue shade. The self-mark in Abhidharma is not identical to a *dharma* or trope, but something unique to one.

In Dinnaga’s new system, the self-marked things are characterised in three ways. Dinnaga says that they are: (1) the objects of perception; (2) free of conceptual construction; and (3) indescribable. How do we explain these three features? One option is to take it that a ‘mark’ of a trope is a class containing it. Objects and properties are grouped together as classes that are multiply occupied and so ‘general’, while individual tropes are classified by themselves into singleton classes, and so ‘particular’. One can then fit the three features by interpreting conception and language as having only multiply occupied classes of tropes in their field of operation, and by taking perception to be a vehicle for perceiving single tropes. Broadly speaking, this is the interpretation of Dinnaga preferred, for example, by Richard Hayes⁷ and Bimal Matilal.⁸

A second option is to take it that by ‘mark’ Dinnaga is referring to a way in which tropes can be grouped. Tropes can be grouped by the relation of concurrence into objects, or else by the relation of exact similarity into properties. Given a particular trope, one can form the class of tropes exactly similar to it, or, along a different axis, the class of concurrent tropes. The property blueness is then said to be ‘marked by generality’ in the sense that it is the class which collects together all the particular blues. An object such as the vase, on the other hand, can be said to be ‘self-marked’ in the sense that it is the class which collects together all the tropes that constitute the particular object. The explanation of the three characteristics of the self-marked is now that language and conceptual construction are operations which group tropes by exact similarity into properties, and perception is an operation which groups tropes by concurrence into objects.

This seems to be the interpretation preferred by Masaaki Hattori⁹ and Shoryu Katsura.¹⁰ Hattori writes that ‘[t]he thing in itself, which exists as the indivisible unity of various aspects, is grasped in its totality only by means of

perception free from conceptual construction' (1980, p. 62). Katsura's interpretation of Dinnaga is a development of Hattori's position. He says (1991, pp. 137–8):

I would like to propose an even more radical version of the framework than Hattori's. Namely,

There cannot be anything (in the external reality) which possesses either *svalaksana* or *samanyalaksana* at any time.

I would like to assume that in Dinnaga's system *svalaksana* is the object itself which is to be grasped directly by perception, which is neither expressible nor identifiable at that moment, but which is later identified by our conceptual thinking (*kalpana*) and given a certain name, while *samanyalaksana* is the general feature common to individual objects which is to be grasped by our conceptual thinking, e.g. inference and verbal communication, and which is a concept or a name itself.

I favour this second interpretation. According to it, Dinnaga's understanding of self-mark and generality-mark differs from the Abhidharmika theory, which follows more closely the first interpretation. This indeed is the innovation in Dinnaga's new system. The Abhidharmika holds that a *dharma* is the bearer of both specific and general marks. Dinnaga's view is that the 'marks' are not types of properties of tropes at all, but rather kinds of similarity relation among them. Indeed, it would not be correct to say that a trope 'possesses' an object or a property, as these have here been defined. The relation, rather, is one of constitution. An *object* possesses a property if it intersects with it, and objects and properties are both *constituted* from tropes, but neither stands in the possession relation to its constituents.

Dinnaga says that self-marked objects are objects of perception, but are not conceptually or linguistically constructed. We need not infer from this that he is introducing a notion of uninterpreted data of pure sensation. The ineffability and unconstructedness of objects might be a simple consequence of the fact that language and conceptual construction are vehicles for the relation of exact similarity. Language and thought group tropes along the axis of generality and not on the axis of concurrence: they 'construct' properties, not objects. As to being the pure objects of perception, this does not imply that tropes are mere sense-data either. The alternative is to take Dinnaga as asserting that perception is the vehicle for grouping tropes along the axis of concurrence. For as we can see from the passage cited, Dinnaga thinks that we perceive an aggregate when our perception is caused by a multitude, and that this multiple causation does not involve conceptual construction. Perception is a non-constructive, purely causal, process of grouping tropes via concurrence into objects. Inference is a conceptual process of grouping tropes via exact similarity into properties.

4.4 THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN CONCEPTUAL CONSTRUCTION

Dinnaga's view of conceptual construction is thoroughly linguistic:

What then is this conceptual construction? – the association of name, genus, etc. (I 3d)

In the case of proper names, a thing is expressed as discriminated by a name; e.g. 'Dittha'. In the case of universal-terms, [it is] as discriminated by a universal; e.g. 'the cow'. In the case of quality-terms, [it is] as discriminated by a quality; e.g. 'the white thing'. In the case of action-terms, [it is] as discriminated by an action; e.g. 'the cook'. In the case of substance-terms, [it is] as discriminated by a substance; e.g. 'the staff-bearer' or 'the horned'.

Here, some maintain that what is expressed is a thing discriminated by a relationship. Others hold that a thing is expressed as discriminated by nothing but empty (*arthasunya* – 'meaningless') words. [In any case,] that which is devoid of such conceptual construction is perception.

Conceptual construction is the association of an object with a feature in tandem with the application to that object of a noun-phrase. One conceptually constructs whenever one judges that an object possesses a feature. A 'feature' here is any group collected together by a similarity relation; it is a predicative notion spanning all the categories in the Vaisesika type hierarchy.¹¹ Conceptual construction is a linguistic activity, because features are those classes whose extensions are fixed by noun-phrases. A noun-phrase collects together objects on the basis of an exact similarity relation.

Dinnaga sometimes writes in a nominalist vein, taking the order of explanation here to *run from* word *to* collection:

One must necessarily admit that what an object has in common belongs to the particular object. But it is not in the object. Therefore,

the word itself is the thing that objects have in common. (V 10b)

The instantiations such as the pot and so forth are similar owing to their being expressible by the word 'real', but not owing to any intrinsic property of the objects named.

We should then say that objects have exactly similar tropes because denoted by the same noun-phrase. But whichever order one takes the explanation to flow in, the important point is that language is a vehicle for the relation of exact similarity.

We can now see better why *objects* in Dinnaga's ontology are inexpressible. To denote an object, a word would have to be able to pick out a concurrence class

of tropes, but words always and only pick out exact similarity classes. So words never denote objects.

Might not one argue that it is nevertheless just the role of a proper name to denote particular objects? Dinnaga himself mentions proper names such as 'Dittha', which he says express things possessing names. Can we not say that the name 'Dittha' picks out that class of concurrent tropes which constitute Dittha? If Dinnaga is a nominalist about the exact similarity relation, why not also about the relation of concurrence? But this is not Dinnaga's intention. What he has in mind, perhaps, is rather the use of a name to track an object over a period of time. A proper name is semantically akin to a general term in that its denotation spans any *temporal slice* of an object. That is in fact the grammarians' explanation of the function of proper names within a theory that all terms are general,¹² and it is from grammarians that Dinnaga borrowed in his philosophy of language.¹³ Proper names group temporal slices by the exact similarity relation into a diachronically extended object; their function is not to group tropes into an object at a single time.¹⁴

Might one not denote objects indirectly, via a suitably large conjunction of noun-phrases? The simple noun-phrase 'lotus' denotes the class of lotuses. The compound noun-phrase 'blue lotus' denotes the class of blue lotuses – a smaller class. Surely if one were to conjoin sufficiently many noun-phrase qualifiers, one would eventually construct a compound noun-phrase which denotes a singleton class containing just one object.

Dinnaga's argument against this possibility rests on what Nicholas Rescher¹⁵ has called the 'cognitive opacity of real things', the fact that an object has more properties than can ever be cognised. Thus Dinnaga:

A thing possessing many properties cannot be cognised in all its aspects by the sense. (I 5ad)

An object has many properties. But we do not become aware of them all through the inferential sign. (II 13ab)

Although that which is expressed by a word has many properties, it is not cognised in its entirety through a word. (V 12ab)

To cognise an object as *such* is to cognise it along with all its properties. A sense-faculty, touch say, informs us only about the tactile properties of the object. So through no one sense-faculty can we perceive all the states of affairs involving the object. Likewise, inferential signs and words inform us only about specific properties of the object, the property with which the sign or word is correlated. So if to cognise an object is to cognise it along with all its properties, then objects cannot in this way be constructed in conception.

Rescher makes out the contrast as one between real and fictional things. Fictional particulars, he says in a nice phrase, are of 'finite cognitive depth'. There is a limit to the amount of new non-generic information one can find out about them. But –

[w]ith real things, on the other hand, there is no reason in principle why the provision of non-generically idiosyncratic information need ever be terminated. On the contrary, we have every reason to presume these things to be cognitively inexhaustible. A precommitment to description-transcending features – no matter how far description is pushed – is essential to our conception of a real thing. Something whose character was exhaustible by linguistic characterization would thereby be marked as fictional rather than real.

For Dinnaga, the salient contrast is the one between the self-marked and the generically marked – the objects and properties in his system. Properties are conceptual constructs. They are potential contents of conception because it is possible, in principle, to know everything about them. What this means, if the trope-theoretic analysis of the contrast is the correct one, is that one can in principle know every member of a class of exactly similar tropes – the entire set of blues, for example. (Is *this* really possible? See below.) Objects, on the other hand, are not potential constructs of conception because it is not possible, even in principle, to know everything about them. Again, on the trope-theoretic analysis, what this means is that one cannot know every member of a class of concurrent tropes – all the trope-constituents of this vase, for example.

How then *do* objects enter one's mental life, if not by our constructing them in conception? Dinnaga's answer is that they are non-conceptually made available to us in perception. The concurrent tropes that comprise an object jointly cause a perception of that object (*ad* I 4ab). Such perception is non-propositional: one sees the blue thing, but not *that* it is blue (I 4cd). Perception is the vehicle for apprehending concurrency, conception the vehicle for apprehending exact similarity.

4.5 THE EXCLUSION THEORY OF MEANING

Dinnaga's fundamental insight is into the nature of concepts. It is that concepts delimit by exclusion. The insight is encoded in his theory of meaning:

That which is based on words is not a means of knowing separate from inference. Because [a word] expresses its own meaning through the exclusion of others. (V 1)

A word excludes others. (V 11d)

A word indeed speaks about things qualified by the exclusion of others. (*ad* V 36)

The role of a word is to exclude what is other. A more traditional Indian theory of meaning associates terms with 'bases for application' (*pravṛtti-*