

No Black Scorpion is Falling: An Onto-Epistemic Analysis of Absence

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Abstract An absence and its locus are the same ontological entity. But the cognition of the absence is different from the cognition of the locus. The cognitive difference is caused by a query followed by a cognitive process of introspection. The moment one perceptually knows y that contains only one thing, z , one is in a position to conclude that y contains the absence of any non- z . After having a query as to whether y has x one revisits one's knowledge of y containing z and comes to know that x is absent from y . Thus the knowledge of the absence of x logically follows from the knowledge of y containing z through the mediation of a query. This analysis goes against the thesis according to which an absence is an irreducible entity that is to be known through senses, and is inspired by the Mīmāṃsā views, especially the Prābhākara views, on absence and its cognition.

Keywords Nyāya · Bhāṭṭā · Prābhākara · Absence

Introduction

Let us consider the sentence, 'No black scorpion is falling upon this table'. A. N. Whitehead, who uttered the sentence in 1934, knew that it was true. How did he know that there was an absence of falling black scorpions in the space above the table in front of him? Was that absence a separate 'entity' over and above the empty space above the table? Different Indian philosophical schools have been debating over these two questions and have offered different answers. A couple of general questions underlie the aforementioned questions: 1. Is an absence ontologically different from its locus? 2. Does a separate epistemic tool (*pramāṇa*) other than sense organs apprehend an absence? 1 is an ontological question while 2 is

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	Question 1	Question 2
Nyāya	Yes	No
Bhāṭṭa	No	Yes
Prābhākara	No	No

epistemic. The answers offered by three realistic schools are presented in the following table:

The problem this paper would attempt to address is as follows. Let us assume that the absence of x and its locus l are the same entity. In that case, the moment one perceives l , one should also cognize the absence. But it need not happen every time. One need not cognize the absence of black scorpions the moment one sees empty space. Also, one has a feeling that the absence of x is there in l . This located-ness too will not be accounted for if we say that the absence is the same as its locus. On the other hand, let us then assume that they are different ontological entities. In that case, the world will be overpopulated with infinite entities. The data that inform one of a table with an empty space above it inform one of the infinite absences in that very space. Without any additional data, just from the knowledge of the table and the space above it, one ‘derives’ the knowledge of the absences. Had the absence been completely ontologically different from its locus, the knowledge of the former could not follow the knowledge of the latter without any additional data.

The cognitive dimension of the problem is this. Let us assume that the senses that capture the empty space above Whitehead’s table do capture the absence of black scorpions with the help of some auxiliary factors. But then we must say that Whitehead actually *saw* an absence in that space. Does one see an absence? What does one *see* when one cognizes an absence? It is certainly not the absentee. It is of course the locus, but not just the locus. There is a difference between seeing an empty space above a table and knowing the absence of black scorpions in that space. Which ontological entity corresponds to the additional content of the former? Or is there any such entity? I shall try to address these questions.

This paper will critically evaluate the views of three realistic schools. I would argue that perhaps the Naiyāyika’s attitude towards absence suffers from ontological extravagance and epistemic miserliness; for it would be more economical to state that an absence is not ontologically different from its locus, and more philosophically significant to accept a separate epistemic or cognitive tool for knowing absence.

I would defend both the Mīmāṃsā positions and claim that they are, in a sense, incommensurable since their concepts of *pramāṇa* (epistemic instrument) are different. They perhaps have been debating at cross-purposes.

The debate over absence is a thread that runs through a number of fundamental philosophical issues that include the logic for asserting (or denying) that something is, the very concept of *pramāṇa*, and the causal mechanisms in Indian epistemology. While defending their view on absence a school revisits their basic concepts and discovers new points, a philosopher clarifies what they said before in some other context. This paper is an attempt to locate a few fundamental epistemological concepts of different schools—on the map of ideas.

Background

The western logician would understand the sentence, ‘No black scorpion is falling upon the table’ as the following: *it is not the case that there exists a black scorpion that is falling upon this table*, or equivalently *for all x if x is a black scorpion, then x is not falling upon this table*.¹ Thus the negative word ‘not’ would not be directly linked with a worldly reference, but with a function that maps a truth-value onto another. Thus, in the western logical framework, ‘not’ and other negative words do not have ontological references; they are logical connectives. This attitude is clearly demonstrated in the writings of Aristotle who in *De Interpretatione* says that ‘An affirmation is a positive assertion of something about something, a denial is a negative assertion’.²

On the contrary, the Indian logician claims that the negative words have an ontological reference which is absence. Thus, ‘No black scorpion is falling upon the table’ refers to an absence of falling black scorpions. The sentence is to be understood as:

An absence whose counter-positive or absentee (pratiyogin) is the falling black scorpions is there in the space above the table.

The Indian philosopher would say that negative words such as ‘no’, ‘not’ and ‘non-’ do have ontological references. Why do Indian philosophical schools relate negative words to ontology? I think the answer lies in their tendency to enumerate and categorize the entities in accordance with linguistic uses.

Most of the Indian schools that were interested in ontological categoriology began their journey from linguistic intuitions.³ Sanskrit grammarians categorized Sanskrit words into four heads; words denoting universals (*jāti-śabda*), words denoting attributes (*guṇa-śabda*), words denoting actions (*kriyā-śabda*) and words denoting individuals (*yadṛcchā-śabda*).⁴ Patañjali mentions this categorization in his *magnum opus Mahābhāṣya*. But he accepts only three categories; words denoting universals, words denoting attributes and words denoting actions.⁵ The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika ontology categorizes all the entities into seven groups (*padārtha*); substance (*dravya*), attribute (*guṇa*), action (*karman*), inherence (*samavāya*), universals (*jāti*), particular (*viśeṣa*) and absence (*abhāva*). Four categories are shared by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and the early grammarians Patañjali mentions. There are negative words in a natural language. So there is absence, the corresponding ontological entity. The remaining two Vaiśeṣika categories are logically required for the interpretation of the world in terms of others. Most of the Neo Naiyāyikas accept

¹ $\sim \exists x(Bx \wedge Fx)$ or $\forall x(Bx \rightarrow \sim Fx)$ when $Ba = a$ is a black scorpion; and $Fa = a$ is falling upon this table.

² Source: Matilal (1968, p. 88). Matilal (1968, pp. 88–90) outlines a brief history of western views on negation.

³ Professor Gangadhar Kar (Jadavpur University, Kolkata) drew my attention to this issue.

⁴ *catuṣṭayī śabdānām pravṛttiḥ—jātiśabdāḥ, guṇaśabdāḥ, kriyāśabdāḥ, yadṛcchāśabdāś ca. Mahābhāṣya*, Patañjali, *Aṣṭādhyāyī Pratyāhāra Sūtra* 2. See Kar (2003, p. 179).

⁵ *trayī śabdānām pravṛttiḥ—jātiśabdāḥ, guṇaśabdāḥ, kriyāśabdāḥ iti na santi yadṛcchāśabdāḥ. Mahābhāṣya*, Patañjali, *Aṣṭādhyāyī Pratyāhāra Sūtra* 2. See Kar (2003, p. 180).

this categorization. In fact the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers use the term *padārtha* to refer to an entity. *Pada* means ‘word’ and *artha* ‘meaning’. Thus the ontological world of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school (and for that case the world of most of the Indian schools) consists of ‘meanings of words’. Since the negative particles are (unitary) words, they must have ontological references. The philosophical issue is about the ontological independence of the reference.

The Naiyāyika thinks that the sense organs apprehend an absence (and the knowledge of the negative facts is perceptual) while the Bhāṭṭa claims that one must accept non-apprehension or *anupalabdhi* as a separate epistemic tool that apprehends an absence. The Prābhākara’s view on this is a little different.

The Nyāya View

Matilal (1968, pp. 109–142) has translated the entire section on the ontology of absence (*Abhāvavāda*) from *Tattvacintāmaṇi* (*TCM*) of Gaṅgeśa. Instead of quoting Matilal, I would summarize the arguments defending the separate ontological status of absence. I shall strengthen the Nyāya view by supplying it with additional arguments (NO3 onwards) from *Nyāyasiddhāntamuktāvalī* (*NSM*), an auto-commentary on *Bhāṣāpariccheda* (*BP*) of Viśvanātha.

Ontology

NO1: The locus without x , i.e., the locus of the absence of x (i.e., $\neg x$) is not identical to $\neg x$. Had they been the same, then one would cognize $\neg x$ even when x is there in the same locus. Nor can one say that the cognition of the mere locus is identical to $\neg x$; because in the cognition of the mere locus, x does not appear as an absentee.

Comment: What Whitehead saw was empty space above the table in front of him before he uttered his famous *Black Scorpion* sentence. Thus it seems that the absence of black scorpions is nothing but the space above the table. But this identity is not correct according to the Naiyāyika. Let us assume that the space itself is the absence of the black scorpion. Suppose Skinner has brought a black scorpion and let it fall upon the table in front of them. Now what Whitehead sees is a black scorpion in the space above the table. Thus he sees both a black scorpion and its absence, since the space = the absence of black scorpions. This is absurd. Therefore, we must say that the assumption was incorrect.

One may say: ‘The absence of black scorpions is nothing but the cognition of empty space above the table. The absence is subjective since it depends on the query of the cognizing subject. The absence resides only in the cognition of its locus.’ But this is not correct. For such a cognition does not contain black scorpions. On the contrary, the cognition of the absence of black scorpions contains black scorpions in the sense in which it is about the set of black scorpions.

NO2: As one cognizes that ‘there is x in y ’, one also cognizes that ‘there is an absence of x in y ’. There is no intuitive difference between the location of x in y and that of $\neg x$ in y . Saying that y is the same as $\neg x$ is to deny the naïve intuition about the located-ness of an absence in a locus.

NO3: Asserting that $\neg x$ is the same as its infinite loci is accepting infinitude of $\neg x$. It would be more economical to accept a single absence of x .⁶

Comment: Suppose x is there in y . Thus x is absent from y_1 , and...and, y_n . If one claims that the absence of x is the same as its locus, then there is n number of absences of x , since $\neg x$ has n number of loci. It would be more economical to accept one $\neg x$ that is present in n number of loci than to assert such an absurd identity.

NO4: Gillon (2001, p. 96) defends Jayanta's theory of absence based on causal arguments:

Moreover, absences are negative states of affairs, and they too can be both causes and effects. A negative state of affairs might be a cause: an absence of light in a room might cause someone to stumble. A negative state of affairs might be an effect: a short-circuit caused there to be an absence of electric power. And a cause and its effect might both be negative states of affairs: an absence of oxygen in a room might cause someone to go unconscious.[W]hat one knows is the negative fact of a colleague's absence from his office and one knows it by means of perception.

Epistemology

Let us now consider the epistemic question: does an epistemic tool other than the sense organ apprehend absence? The Naiyāyika's answer is negative. Here are their arguments.

NE1: In order to (directly) know the absence of x in y , one must perceive y . While perceiving y , one perceives $\neg x$ which is a qualifier (*viśeṣaṇa*) of y . When sense organs can capture an absence it is unnecessary and uneconomical to accept another epistemic tool other than sense organs.⁷

Comment: According to Nyāya, when one sees an absence $\neg x$ in y , one's eye is connected with the locus y through the connection of contact (*saṃyukta-sannikarṣa*) and with the absence $\neg x$ through the connection of contacted-qualifier-ness (*saṃyukta-viśeṣaṇatā*). The Naiyāyika considers $\neg x$ as a qualifier or adjective of y . The knowledge of $\neg x$ is caused by the non-apprehension or non-experience (*anupalabdhi*) of x . This non-experience must have the cognitive fitness (*yogyatā*). The fitness is the following condition: while non-experiencing x in y , x , i.e., the object of non-experience must be such that it would be experienced had it been present there.⁸ E.g., one does not see a bacterium with bare eyes. Thus the non-experience of a bacterium is not fit; for it would not be experienced had it even been present there. A black scorpion is perceptible. Thus the non-experience of a black

⁶ *anantādihikarānāmakatvakaḥpanāpeṣayā atirikatvakaḥpanāyā eva laḡhīyastvāt. NSM, Abhāvavāda. See Śāstrī (1968, pp. 86–87).*

⁷ *tathā ca indriyāṇām abhāvapratyakṣe jananiye yogyānupalabdheḥ saḡakāritāmātreṇa nirvāhe atirikatpramāṇakalpanam anucitam iti bhāvāḥ. Dinakarīyam in Shastry (1923, p. 446).*

⁸ *tatra yogyatā' py apeṣitā. sā ca pratiyogisattvaprasaṅjanaprasaṅjitapratiyogikatvarūpā. tadarthaś ca pratiyogino ghaṭādeḥ sattvaprasaktyā prasaṅjita upalambharūpaḥ pratiyogī yasya so 'bhāvapratyakṣe hetuḥ. tathāhi yatra ālokaṣyogādikaḥ vartate, tatra 'yady atra ghaṭaḥ syāt tarhi upalabhyaeta' ity āpādayitum śakyate. NSM, Yogyānupalabdhipariṣā. See Śāstrī (1968, pp. 296–297).*

scorpion is a cause for the knowledge, ‘No black scorpion is falling upon this table’. The cognitive process is based on a counterfactual reasoning: had x been here, it would appear; it is not here since it is not appearing.

NE2: Gaṅgeśa says that the sense-object connection required for knowing the absence of x in y is qualifier-ness (that connects a sense organ with the absence that qualifies y). The knowledge is perceptual since the intuition ‘I know [$\neg x$]’ is direct, i.e., not caused by inference or anything else.⁹ Nobody even feels that any epistemic instrument other than sense organs operates in such cases.¹⁰

The Bhāṭṭa View

Kumārila, the pioneer of the school, believed that an absence could not be apprehended by sense organs, and accepted a separate epistemic instrument called ‘absence’ (*abhāva*) as the apprehender of absences.¹¹

Ontology

BO1: Absence is not a non-entity (*avastu*).¹² It is an entity and is a property of its locus. An absence and its locus are non-different, since, according to Mīmāṃsā, a property-possessor (*dharmin*) and its property (*dharma*) are ontologically non-different (*abhinna*).

Comment: Kumārila thinks that a thing and its properties such as the universal, color etc. are non-different (*abhinna*). In brief, his logic for saying so is the following. Had a thing *qua* qualificandum (*viśeṣya*) been totally different from its qualifiers (*viśeṣaṇas*), they would not always appear together in our cognition.¹³ A cow, its color and cow-ness never appear separately. The opponent may say, ‘They are different since they are conceptualized differently despite the fact that they are related’. Kumārila would ask them, ‘What is the relation between a property P and the property-possessor X ?’ The opponent’s answer could be, ‘Inherence, which is a relation itself and does not need another relation in order to be related with its terms P and X ’. Kumārila would say, ‘Why multiply your ontology by accepting P , X and inherence? Rather accept that P and X are the same ontological entity.’ Then how can Kumārila account for the fact that P and X are conceptualized separately? He says, ‘Even though they are the same thing, they are not absolutely identical

⁹ *vāyavādau rūpādyabhāvadhīh vāyavādau rūpādyabhāvavaprāṭiṭeḥindriyānuvidhānena tajjanyatve siddhe indriyasambaddhaviśeṣaṇatāyāḥ pratyāsattikalpanāt. tajjñānaṃ pratyakṣam, jānāmīti anubhavasya liṅgādyaṅanyatvāt. TCM, Anupalabdhyaprāmānyavāda. See Tarkavagish (1990, pp. 690–691).*

¹⁰ *indriyajanyā eva, na anupalabdihilingajanyā, anupalabdheḥ ajñānāt. Ibid (p. 685).*

¹¹ Sharma (1966, p. 298) rightly says that many scholars including S. N. Dasgupta and Radhakrishnan thought that non-apprehension (*anupalabdhi*) as a separate epistemic instrument was accepted by Kumārila. But this was wrong. The epistemic instrument that apprehends absence is itself called ‘absence’ by Kumārila.

¹² *na cāvastuna ete syur bhedās tenāsya vastutā. Ślokaṅkārtika (SV) of Kumārila, Abhāvaprāmānyavāda, 8. See Jha (1971, p. 573).*

¹³ *yadi hy ekāntato bhinnam viśeṣyāt syād viśeṣaṇam, svāmurūpam sadā buddhiṃ viśeṣye janayet katham. Ibid, 142 (p. 283).*

(*atyantam abhinnau*). The mode of cognitively apprehending X creates the difference between P and X .¹⁴ From the perspective of ontological existence they are the same. From the perspective of aspects such as color, form etc. they are different.¹⁵

BO2: Everything has two essences, positive and negative. When a thing x is known as x , its positive essence is apprehended. When x is known as something else, its negative essence is apprehended.¹⁶

Comment: When a black scorpion *qua* black scorpion is known, its positive essence is apprehended. For such an apprehension, the senses are required. When the black scorpion is known to be absent from a table, the latter gets cognized as the absence of the former. Thus the absence of every non- x is the negative essence (*para-rūpa*) of x .

BO3: The distinction between the locus y that contains the absence $\neg x$ and $\neg x$ is cognitive (*buddhimātrakṛto bhedaḥ*).¹⁷

Comment: Despite their ontological unity, $\neg x$ and its locus seem to be different. The difference is imposed by the consciousness (*buddhi*) of the cognizing subject. Kumārila does not mean to say that the difference is illusory; rather it is very much real since it never gets epistemologically invalidated (*bādhita*) by any other cognition.¹⁸ The point is, it is not ontological.

Epistemology

BE1: What one knows is either that which is dominant (*udbhūta*) or that which is sought after (*jighrṛkṣita*). One never knows that which is neither dominant nor sought after. One's verbal behavior regarding the entity is based on one's positive or negative judgment.¹⁹

Comment: The empty space above the table is the absence of black scorpions. But when one sees the empty space, one's senses apprehend the existing features, the positive essence, of the empty space. In this case, the dominant (*udbhūta*) essence is the positive one. When one wants to know whether any black scorpion is falling upon the table, one has a query (*jighrṛkṣā*). Without this query, nobody knows

¹⁴ *buddhibhedāc ca naikatvaṃ rūpādīnāṃ prasajyate. SV, Pratyakṣagata dharmānimitattvasūtra*, 148. Jha (1971, p. 286).

¹⁵ *ekānekatvaṃ iṣṭaṃ vā sattārūpādīrūpataḥ. Ibid.*

¹⁶ *svarūpapararūpābhyāṃ nityaṃ sadasadātmake, vastuni jñāyate kaiścid rūpaṃ kiñcit kadācana. SV, Abhāvaprāmāṇyavāda*, 12. See Jha (1971, p. 575).

Compare:

That true and positive meaning of the antinomies is this: that every actual thing involves a coexistence of opposed elements. Consequently to know, or, in other words, to comprehend an object is equivalent to being conscious of it as a concrete unity of opposed determinations. The old metaphysic, as we have already seen, when it studied the objects of which it sought a metaphysical knowledge, went to work by applying categories abstractly and to the exclusion of their opposites.

Encyclopaedia of The Philosophical Sciences (1830) by Hegel. See Wallace (2009, p. 177).

¹⁷ *SV, Abhāvaprāmāṇyavāda*, 23. See Jha (1971, p. 579).

¹⁸ *na caupacārikatvaṃ vā bhrāntir vāpi yadṛcchayā. Ibid*, 10 (p. 574).

¹⁹ *yasya yatra yadodabhūtir jighrṛkṣā vopajāyate, cetyate 'nubhavas tasya tena ca vyapādiśyate. Ibid*, 13 (p. 576).

an absence since it is a dormant (*anudbhūta*) feature of its locus. That is why when I experience the absence of falling black scorpions, I do not experience the absence of an armadillo. Sartre (1956, p. 10) calls this query ‘expectation’.²⁰ Without expecting Pierre there in the café, he could not make the judgment that Pierre was absent from the café.

The dominant essence and dormant essence co-occur in an entity.²¹ When one apprehends the dominant essence without any query, one states, ‘ x is y ’. When one expects y to be there in x , and apprehends x as an absence of y , one states, ‘ x has the absence of y ’. Thus one’s description of a thing depends on one’s cognition of the thing.

BE2: One may see just y without cognizing that x is absent from y . After some time, when somebody asks one whether one cognized x in y , one remembers y and cognizes that y had an absence of x .²² The cognition that x was absent from y does not depend on senses; for the job of the senses was to capture y . The basis of the claim that senses in this case did not capture the absence of x is the fact that one did not cognize the absence of x in y while cognizing y .

BE3: Here is the epistemic process of generating the knowledge of absence:

Step 1: One cognitively apprehends an entity y and one’s senses etc. capture various positive features of y . Then one remembers x and expects to cognize x in y .²³

Step 2: One does not capture x in y perceptually or inferentially or through any other epistemic instrument.²⁴

Step 3: Without depending on the senses etc., one knows that x is absent from y .²⁵

Comment: Perceiving y is not knowing that y has $\neg x$. When one sees an empty space, one does not cognize the infinite things that are absent from y . Knowing that y has $\neg x$ is a different cognitive process. We may notice here that Kumārila does not mention the condition that in order to be known as the absentee of an absence, x must be an entity such that it would be known had it been there in y . Thus the non-apprehension of x must be cognitively fit (*yogyā-anupalabdhi*). Sharma (1966, p. 299) writes:

Pārthasārathi Mīśra (circa 900 A.D.) seems to be the first Mimāṃsaka who, after about 300 years of Kumārila, introduced ‘*anupalabdhi*’ to the system.

²⁰ Sartre (1956, p. 10):

I myself expected to see Pierre *to happen* as a real event concerning this café. It is an objective fact at present that I have discovered this absence, and it presents itself as a synthetic relation between Pierre and the setting in which I am looking for him.By contrast, judgments which I can make subsequently to amuse myself, such as, “Wellington is not in this café, Paul Valery is no longer here, etc.”—these have a purely abstract meaning; they are pure applications of the principle of negation without real or efficacious foundation.

²¹ *tasyopakāṛakatvena vartate ṁśas tadetarah. SV, Abhāvaprāmānyavāda*, 14. See Jha (1971, p. 576).

²² *svarūpamātram dṛṣtvāpi pāścāt kiñcit smarannapi, tatrānyānāstitām pṛṣtas tadaiva pratipadyate. Ibid*, 28 (581).

²³ *grhītvā vastusadbhāvaṃ smṛtvā ca pratīyoginam... Ibid.*, 27 (p. 581).

²⁴ *pramāṇapañcakam yatra vasturūpe na jāyate, vastusattāvabodhārthaṃ tatrābhāvapramāṇatā. Ibid*, 1 (p. 572).

²⁵ *mānasam nāstitājñānam jāyate 'kṣānapekṣaṇāt. Ibid.*, 27 (p. 581).

Defending Kumārila's tradition against the Buddhist reasoning, Pārthasārathi modified the Mīmāṃsā theory of Negation (*abhāvapramāṇa*), and admitted that, in fact, the negative cognition is an inferential judgment.

Gillon (2001, p. 92) says that the Bhāṭṭa view 'suffers from the very same dilemma just raised with respect to Dharmakīrti's view, namely the dilemma of having either to concede the perception of some negative facts or to accept, for any negative fact said to be known, an infinite regress of inferences of negative facts.' The dilemma according to Gillon (2001, p. 92) is the following:

[H]ow do I know that I do not know that my colleague is present in his office? ...On the one hand, if Dharmakīrti holds that I perceive that I do not know that my colleague is present in his office,...then Dharmakīrti accepts thereby not only the existence of negative facts, in this case, negative mental facts, but also their perceptibility, both of which he wants to deny. On the other hand, if Dharmakīrti holds that I infer that I do not know that my colleague is present in his office,...then there must be an inference to ground that claim, just as there is an inference to ground the initial claim that my colleague is not present in his office... An infinite regress of inferences becomes inescapable, despite Dharmakīrti's protestations to the contrary.

The charge of infinite regress of inferences against the Bhāṭṭa is perhaps groundless. And Pārthasārathi never admitted that 'the negative cognition is an inferential judgment.' I quote Pārthasārathi who discussed and answered this objection in *Śāstradīpikā*:

*vyāpakānivr̥t̥tyā vyāpyānivr̥ttim anumimānena avaśyaṃ dr̥ṣāntadharmiṣu nivr̥ttidvayam avagamya tayoś ca niyamam avadhārya sādhyadharmiṇi pakṣe ca sādhanabhūtāṃ darśānānivr̥ttim kenacit pramāṇena avagamya tato dr̥ṣyānivr̥ttir anumātavyā, nivr̥tteś ca abhāvātmikāyāḥ na pratyakṣeṇa grahaṇam sambhavati, nivr̥t̥tyantareṇa tadanumāne tadapi nivr̥ttirūpatvān nivr̥t̥tyantareṇa anumātavyam tadapi tathā itī anavasthāpatih. ato 'vaśyaṃ kvacit pramāṇāntarabhūtayā anupalabdhyā abhāvaḥ pratyetavyaḥ, pramite ca tasmin paścād bhavatv anumānam.*²⁶

Translation: In order to infer the denial of the pervaded (*vyāpya*) from the denial of the pervader (*vyāpaka*), one must experience their co-occurrence in some cases and ascertain the rule of their co-occurrence. After having done that, when one cognizes the denial of the perception of *x* through some epistemic tool, one infers the denial of the presence of *x* there. One cannot perceive a denial since it is nothing but an absence [and an absence is not to be perceived]. If, in order to infer the absence of *x*, one has to infer the absence of the perception of *x*, then one must need another inference [which the inference of the perception can be grounded on], and *ad infinitum*. Thus one must apprehend an absence through some epistemic instrument. Let one infer something else after having known the absence!

²⁶ Dravida (1916, p. 245).

Comment: x , the pervader (*vyāpaka*) pervades y , the pervaded (*vyāpaka*) if and only if all cases of y are cases of x . Thus fire pervades smoke since every case of smoke is a case of fire. Before inferring x from y , one must experience that wherever y occurs, x too occurs. Since all the loci of y are included in the loci of x , y must not occur in a locus where x does not occur. Thus after having known that x pervades y , when one comes to know that x is absent from the locus l , one knows that y too is absent from l . This rule, i.e., the denial of the pervader leads one to the denial of the pervaded (*vyāpaka-nivṛtṭyā vyāpya-nivṛtṭih*), is comparable to *Modus Tolens*. The Buddhist, according to the Bhāṭṭa, says that one knows that wherever there is a perceptible entity x , there is the perception of x . So if there is no perception of x (*darśana-nivṛtṭi*), there would be the absence of x (*drśya-nivṛtṭi*). Thus one infers x 's absence from the very fact that x is not perceived. Pārthasārathi's point is that this inference is impossible. Suppose in order to know any absence one needs inference. Then in order to infer the absence of x , one needs to know the absence of the perception of x , which one has to infer from something else and *ad infinitum*. That is why the Buddhist's position is absurd. Absence (*abhāva*) is the only epistemic instrument that enables one to epistemically capture an absence. It does not depend on inference; nor is it dependent on sense organs. In BE2, I have stated Kumārila's argument that claims that the knowledge of absence does not depend on sense organs.

The Prābhākara View

The Prābhākara thinks that the locus of the absence of x is the same as the absence. In order to know an absence one does not require any special epistemic tool. A very important point to be noted! There is a myth that according to Prabhākara, the knowledge of absence is perceptual. Dasgupta (1922, p. 398) writes: 'Prabhākara holds that non-perception of a visible object in a place is only the perception of the empty space, and that therefore there is no need of admitting a separate *pramāṇa* as *anupalabdhi*'. Gillon (2001, p. 92) too shares this view. This misconception invites a lot of problems in understanding the Prābhākara's view on absence. Prabhākara never explicitly said that the knowledge of absence is perceptual. Śālikanātha clearly shows that in order to know an absence it is just not enough to perceive its locus; another cognitive process too is involved in this case. That process, according to him, is not epistemic (*prāmāṇika*). Here is an outline of the Prābhākara view on absence:

Ontology

PO: The absence $\neg x$ and its locus are the same entity.

Comment: Śālikanātha writes: 'One who thinks that an absence is a separate entity must admit that the mere ground is known when one knows an absence on the ground. The cognition of absence can be caused by the mere ground. Then why

should one accept a separate ontological entity?²⁷ The absence of x , according to Śālikanātha, is nothing but x 's not being captured by any epistemic instrument.²⁸

Epistemology

PE: The following is the cognitive process that generates the knowledge of the absence of x :

Step 1: One cognizes y that possesses the absence of x .

Step 2: One has a query (*anusandhāna*) as to whether there is x in y .

Step 3: After having the query, one revisits one's knowledge of y which at the same time reveals itself (i.e., knowledge of y), one's self, and y . One finds that one's self, that is revealed by the knowledge of y , is not associated with x . Thus one knows that x is absent from y .²⁹

Comment: The Prābhākara has a doctrine called *tripuṭīpratyakṣavāda*, the doctrine of tri-objective perception, which states that the perceptual cognition of x has three objects to reveal; the cognition itself, x and the cognizing self. Thus while perceiving x one intuits, 'I perceive x '. Ganganath (1978, pp. 32–33) writes: 'Prabhākara defines *pratyakṣa* as *sākṣāt pratītiḥ*, direct apprehension,—pertaining to the apprehended object, to the apprehending person and to the apprehension itself.' So the knowledge of the mere locus y reveals the knowledge itself, y and the cognizing self. In order to know the absence of x in y , one requires another cognitive process, i.e., the reconsideration of the knowledge of y . As the knowledge reveals the cognizing self of the subject, they come to know that their self, as revealed by the knowledge, is not related with x (*tadarthāsaṃsrṣṭānubhavayukta*); for no epistemic instrument has generated the knowledge of x . This in a sense is revisiting one's own self. Thus no extra object that was not revealed by the knowledge of y gets revealed in this process.³⁰ The difference between the cognition of y that contains the absence of x and the cognition of the absence of x is this: the former is not preceded by any query whereas the latter is.³¹

The 'Absence = Locus' Thesis and Objections Against it

Let us first examine the claim that the absence is not ontologically different from its locus. Let us assume that □ and ◻ are a mere ground and a ground just with a carpet respectively. We assume that □ and ◻ do not represent anything; they are those objects themselves. A carpet is ontologically different from a ground since the

²⁷ *yo 'pi hi pṛthagbhūtam abhāvam āha, tenāpi bhūtalasyāpi pramīyamānatā 'py aṅgīkaraṇīyaiva. tayaiva ca nāstitvavyavahāropapatteḥ kim arthāntarābhyupagamena? Rjūvimalā* by Śālikanātha, *Anupalabdhinirūpaṇam*. See Sastri (1929, p. 92).

²⁸ *apramīyamānatvam eva nāstitvam. Ibid.*

²⁹ *na ca apramīyamānataiva prameyam, yasmāt tadarthāsaṃsrṣṭānubhavayuktatā eva ātmanas tasya arthasya apramīyamānatā. Ibid.*

³⁰ *sā ca avasthā ātmanah svasaṃviditā eva. na atah prameyam avaśīsyate. Ibid.*

³¹ *bhāvavyavahāro vināpi dr̥śyānupalambhānusandhānena bhavati. abhāvavyavahāras tu dr̥śye 'pi tasminn arthe kevalopalambhānusandhānād ity etasmād eva. Ibid.* (p. 95).

content of the cognition of mere ground, which is □, is different from the content of the cognition of a ground with a carpet, which is ⊞. The latter has got additional features. What do we picture when we think of a ground just with a carpet? It is ⊞. What do we picture when we think of that very ground as a possessor of the absence of a pot? It is once again ⊞. There is no additional feature. That is why the identity theorist says that an absence is the same as its locus.

Objection 1

If one is claiming that an absence is identical to its locus, then one must admit that there are infinite absences of x ; for x is absent from infinite loci. It would be more economical to hypothesize that the absence of x is one ontological entity that is present in infinite loci.³²

I take the liberty of answering this traditional objection. The identity theory I denies that an absence is a separate ontological entity. Thus according to I , the absence of x is the entire locus where x is absent. Suppose the locus of x is l . Then the entire non- l is the absence of x . We say that y is the absence of x since y is part of non- l . Thus there is no infinity of loci of an absence.

Objection 2

Suppose mere y is the absence of x ; now when I cognize y with x , I cognize y too; therefore in my cognition of the combination of x and y , both the absence of x (which is identical to y) and x should appear.³³ After all, what is mere-ness (*kaivalya*) of a thing over and above the thing itself?³⁴

The Prābhākara answers: the cognition of y with x is different from the cognition of y .³⁵ One knows the absence of x in y only after attaining the cognition of y . Thus the Prābhākara claims, although 'I know mere y ' and 'I know the absence of x in y ' are two different conceptualizations (*vyavahāra*), they have the same object. The mere ground = an absence of a carpet on the ground = □.³⁶ The difference is rather cognitive, not ontological. Kumārila too would agree with the Prābhākara on this.³⁷

³² See NO3.

³³ Compare:

saty apī ghaṭe prasāṅgāt. Tattvacintāmaṇi by Gaṅgeśa, *Abhāvavāda*. See Tarkavagish (1990, p. 693).

³⁴ *atiriktakaivalyānabhyupagamāt. Ibid.*

³⁵ *saṃyuktopalambhāt kevalopalambhasya anyatvāt. Rjuvimalā, Anupalabdhirūpaṇam*. See Sastri (1929, p. 92).

³⁶ Compare:

Black: I'll try and put it in some other way. I still say that looked at from the point of view of positive cash value, a table and a table with no bread on it are one and the same thing. And I'll prove it by drawing it on a sheet of paper. In either case all I draw is a table. So your negative statement says more than you've drawn, and therefore more than can possibly be concretely given. Buchdahl (1961, p. 176).

³⁷ See BO3.

Objection 3

‘If we identify the absence of a pot with the ground, we fail to provide an adequate explanation of the cognition that the ground has an absence of a pot on it (in fact, we destroy the cognitive difference between the cognition that the ground has an absence of a pot on it and the cognition of the ground), and ignore an essential feature of negation, viz., the dependence of an absence upon its counterpositive.’³⁸ One intuits that a locus and its locatee are different things.³⁹

The aforementioned intuition is a mental construct; it is not based on any epistemic datum (*upalambha*). The root of it is the following. The cognition of absence must contain a locus as its content. The cognition that *x* is absent from *y* follows the direct cognition of *y*. Before attaining this cognition, I have a query, ‘does *y* contain *x*?’ Thus my query itself does look for one thing, i.e., whether *x* is located in *y*. But no epistemic instrument presents *x* to me. So I intuit that *x* is not there *in y*. The query imposes its content on its answer. The content of the cognition of the absence of *x* is not different from the content of the cognition of *y* in terms of representation; there is no additional feature in the former. There is just a cognitive addition. We need not overpopulate our ontology for this mental construct.

Objection 4

‘How is he [Prabhākara] to account for the fact that, when I see simply my colleague’s chair, what I come to know is his absence and not one of the infinity of other absences which are also then present?’⁴⁰

The Prābhākara answer would be the following. Just perceiving my colleague’s chair is not knowing all those infinite absences. If I have a query about the presence (or absence) of my colleague in his chair, and see simply my colleague’s chair, I come to know the absence of my colleague in the chair. The tripartite content the cognition of my colleague’s chair represents does not contain him or her. The knowledge of absence depends on the query one has.

Objection 5

Gillon raised another objection that was based on a causal theory. ‘[A]n absence of light in a room might cause someone to stumble’, while the mere room does not do that.⁴¹ So an absence and its locus should be considered as different entities. McGrath (2005, p. 125) cites a related case: ‘[S]uppose Barry promises to water Alice’s plant, doesn’t water it, and that the plant then dries up and dies. Barry’s not watering the plant – his omitting to water the plant – caused its death.’ This raises a

³⁸ Perszyk (1984, p. 268).

³⁹ *abhede ādhārādheyabhāvānupapattiś ca. TCM, Abhāvavāda*. See Tarkavagish (1990, p. 693).

⁴⁰ Gillon (2001, p. 93).

⁴¹ See NO5.

moral question too: is Barry responsible for the death of the plant? If he is, then absence of water – not just mere ground – the absence that is caused by Barry’s not watering the plant seems to cause the death.

At a moral level, Barry should be held responsible for the plant’s death. He would be held responsible just by not watering it, by not doing his duty. The cause of the plant’s death is absence of water (or watering), not Barry’s ‘not watering the plant’. And absence of water in ground is nothing but ground without water. They are the same ontological entity. I am not saying that absence of water does not have any causal ability. All I am saying is, it is not different from its locus. I am not saying that absence of water is ‘not there’. I am trying to say that it does not have an independent existence. Whatever causal efficacies are attributed to such an absence can be attributed to its locus.

Theories of Absence: In Light of Epistemic Validity

In this section I shall critically examine the theories of absence proposed by three philosophical schools in light of their theories of epistemic validity (*prāmāṇya*). This is an effort to make a map of ideas associated with epistemic validity and absence. This section will explore the principles that guide a school in denying or asserting the ontological existence of something. The question whether x has a separate ontological existence can be reduced to the following: does x figure in the content of a valid cognition separately? Perhaps in the Indian framework, this question is not about the thing-in-itself. It is about the object or the thing-in-cognition (*viśaya*).

Nyāya Theory

In the beginning of this paper I said that the Nyāya view on absence is ontological extravagance and epistemic miserliness. In the preceding section, I tried to show that the absence-locus-identity thesis was more economical and philosophically significant than the separation thesis. On the basis of those very arguments I claim that the Naiyāyika’s world is overpopulated. Now I shall try to explain what I meant by ‘epistemic miserliness’.

Suppose the cognition, ‘ x is absent from y ’ is valid. Now this need not be brought forth the moment the cognition of y is generated. The cognition of y is generated by, suppose, the eye. The Naiyāyika claims that the eye gets connected with y through the connection of contact (*saṃyoga-sannikarṣa*) in order to generate the cognition of y and with the absence of x through the qualifier-ness connection (*viśeṣaṇatā*) in order to generate the cognition of the absence.⁴² The Naiyāyika has to say that an absence is an independent ontological entity, since they believe that a sense establishes a connection with an absence in order to apprehend it. And what is the result? Knowing an empty ground results in knowing \square , and knowing an absence of a carpet on that very ground too is knowing \square . What is it the special connection is adding to the sensual representation of the mere ground while capturing an absence

⁴² See NE2.

in it? Nothing. There are additional features in the content of the cognition of absence. That is why knowing the empty ground is not knowing the infinite absences that are there on the ground. But those differences are rather cognitive than sensual. Had the addition been perceptual, there would be an additional sensual representation. For perception represents the appearance of an object. If this makes sense then there is something else that captures an absence by yielding a non-sensual-representational cognitive content. Yes, the cognition of absence must be preceded by the cognition of a locus. But they need not be co-temporal.

The Naiyāyika assigns the responsibility of capturing an absence to a sense organ. But why? They would say that in order to know the absence of x in y , one has to perceive y anyway; therefore we need not recruit another epistemic instrument. But I think they overburden senses with unnecessary duties. One may capture the absence of x in y even after the sense that captured y is done with its job. Here Kumārila has something interesting to offer. One has been to Caitra's house in the morning. Now somebody asks one whether Caitra was there in his house. One remembers the house and says, 'Caitra was absent from his house'.⁴³ This does not require any perceptual connection. It is an introspection of some sort. Cognizing an absence does not require the locus to be connected with the epistemic system at the time of the cognition. So non-apprehension could be the epistemic instrument that operates through a counterfactual reasoning (mentioned in NE1).

The cognition ' S is P ', according to Nyāya, is (epistemically) valid if and only if the entity referred to as S really has P -ness, i.e., the property of being P .⁴⁴ The causal instrument (*karaṇa*) that brings forth such a piece of cognition is its epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*). Suppose what triggers the generation-process of the valid cognition of an absence is N . Through generating a counterfactual reasoning, it finally generates the cognition of the absence. As there is no additional sensual representation I am not ready to identify N with perception. I have tried to argue, following the Mīmāṃsaka, that N is not the cognition of pervasion (*vyāpti*). But the Naiyāyika must admit that N is an epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) since it triggers the generation of a piece of valid cognition. Let us then name it non-apprehension.

Bhāṭṭa and Prābhākara Theories

Mohanty (1966) argues that the Bhāṭṭa theory and the Prābhākara theory of epistemic validity (*prāmāṇya*) are incommensurable. I would argue that their theories of absence too are incommensurable. The incommensurability is due to the fact that the Bhāṭṭa and Prābhākara views on epistemic validity (*prāmāṇya*) are different.

I would adopt the Bhāṭṭa definition offered by Umbeka—rather Mohanty's (1966, p. 9) version of the definition: 'the property of being uncontradicted in its object'. I cognize x and no other cognition contradicts this cognition, i.e., nothing invalidates the content of this cognition. So my cognition of x is valid. I would add another comment Kumārila makes: 'Validity is the certainty (*pariccheda*) generated by an

⁴³ See BE2.

⁴⁴ For a detailed discussion on the Nyāya theory of *prāmāṇya* see Mohanty (1966, pp. 37–47).

epistemic instrument'.⁴⁵ In fact, Sucarita says that an epistemic instrument is that which generates certainty.⁴⁶ The uncontradicted certain cognition of the absence of x must be valid according to this theory. Thus the causal instrument (*karaṇa*) that generates it must be an epistemic instrument. According to the Bhātṭa theory, the epistemic instrument is 'absence' (*abhāva*).

According to the Prābhākara, the criterion of epistemic validity is 'independence in manifesting the object'.⁴⁷ They believe that with regard to its object, every certain (doubt-free) cognition is valid; it is invalid only insofar as its pragmatic success is concerned.⁴⁸ Prabhākara, who equates validity with certitude, defines validity in the following passage:

Certain cognition is caused by the manifestation of the nature of the object (*svalakṣaṇamātrābhīdhāna*); [not by the manifestation of something else]. For the epistemic instrument captures what an object is. In the case of the cognition of the absence of x , the epistemic instruments fail to capture x . [It is untenable to say that the failure of epistemic instruments is an epistemic instrument itself.] Thus the aforementioned definition of the epistemic instrument, i.e., the manifestation of the own nature of the object, is right.⁴⁹

According to this school, valid cognition is about the positive aspects of its objects; not about some other object. The job of an epistemic instrument is to capture its object only. The cognition of the mere ground does not capture any pot. The object of the cognition, 'the absence of pot on a ground possessing a carpet' is ☐. The cognition of a ground with a carpet too is about ☐. The additional content is due to the reason explained in Step 3, PE. It is caused by an introspection of some sort—an introspection that does not involve any epistemic instrument. Śālikanātha goes further and tells us:

Certain cognition (*niścaya*) is nothing but the unipolar determination (*avadhāraṇa*): 'This is x only' ('*ayam eva*'). Determination is knowing x as something different from non- x (*arthāntara-vyavaccheda*). What an epistemic instrument yields is the certitude with regard to its object. All the causal factors (*kāraṅkas*) are related to the effect. The epistemic instrument is nothing but the causal instrument (*karaṇa*), i.e., the causal factor that triggers the process of generating the effect through some causal activity.⁵⁰ By nature, any unipolar determination regarding x blocks the generation of the cognition of

⁴⁵ *paricchedaphalatvādd hi prāmāṇyam syāt. SV, Abhāvaprāmāṇyavāda*, 47. See Jha (1971, p. 587).

⁴⁶ *yad eva tu paricchedaphalaṃ tad eva tu pramāṇam. Kāśikā* commentary on 5.8.47, *SV*. Source: http://fiindolo.sub.uni-goettingen.de/grettil/1_sanskrit/6_sastra/3_phil/mimamsa/mimsalovu.htm.

⁴⁷ Mohanty (1966, p. 7).

⁴⁸ For a detailed discussion, see Mohanty (1966: pp. 6-8).

⁴⁹ *ataḥ svalakṣaṇamātrābhīdhānān niścayaḥ. svarūpeṇa pramāṇasya samadhigamyamānatvāt sarvapramāṇānām. tasmāt kāryapratyastamayān nāsti ity anena pūrvoktasya eva lakṣaṇasya sādhitā ucyate. Bṛhaṭī* by Prabhākara, *Anupalabdhinirūpaṇam*. See Sastri (1929, p. 94).

⁵⁰ *tasmāt kāryasamadhigamyatvāt sarvakāraṇānām pramāṇaṃ hi nāma karaṇakāraṅgam. sarvaṃ ca kāraṅgaṃ kāryasamadhigamyam. kāryaṃ ca pramāṇasya arthaniścayārthalakṣaṇam. niścayaś ca 'ayam eva' iti sāvadhāraṇo 'mubhavaḥ. avadhāraṇam ca arthāntarād vyavacchedaḥ. Rjūvimalā, Anupalabdhinirūpaṇam*. See Sastri (1929, p. 94).

non- x . [I.e., ‘this is x ’ essentially implies that ‘this is not non- x ’.] One has the cognition of the mere ground. The causal conditions that yield this cognition fail to yield the cognition of anything else. [The failure leads one to cognizing that ‘There is no pot here’.] Thus, one’s cognition of the absence of other things is derived from the cognition of the mere locus.⁵¹

Since no epistemic instruments capture x —rather they fail to capture x —when the subject cognizes that ‘ x is absent from y ’, the cognition of absence is not caused by any epistemic factor. According to Śālikanātha, two epistemic instruments (*pramāṇa*) are different only when the objects they capture are different; they cannot be different just because there are two different linguistic or conceptual usages (*vyavahāra*).⁵² ‘The mere ground’ and ‘the absence of x on the ground’ are two different *vyavahāras*, concepts or linguistic usages; but they are not about two different objects (*prameyas*). The job of the epistemic instruments is to capture an object. But cognizing absence is an introspection of some sort (see PE). If ‘epistemology’ is to be equated with ‘the study of *pramāṇas*’, then, according to the Prābhākara, cognizing absence is trans-epistemic since it is beyond the scope of *pramāṇas*.

Let us now compare the two Mīmāṃsā views. Is an absence the same as its locus? The Prābhākara answer is a straightforward ‘yes’. The Bhāṭṭa would say that ontologically speaking, they are the same thing; but at the cognitive level they are different. Does one need an epistemic instrument other than senses in order to cognize absence? The Prābhākara says, ‘no; but a trans-epistemic process (i.e., the introspection) is required’. The Bhāṭṭa says, ‘the process that is required here is absence (*abhāva*) and it is epistemic’. The difference of opinion is due to the difference in their theories on *pramāṇya*. For the Bhāṭṭa, when two uncontradicted (*abādhitā*) cognitions are caused by two different cognitive procedures x and y , x and y are triggered by two different epistemic instruments. Thus ‘this is mere ground’ and ‘there is no pot on this ground’ are caused by two separate epistemic instruments. For the Prābhākara, the criterion is the *prameya*, the object that is being known. The ground is captured by the eyes, and an absence in it is known through introspection. The introspection reveals a feature of the object captured; it does not involve any additional sensual representation. For Śālikanātha, ‘ x has just y ’ is by definition ‘ x has the absence of non- y ’.⁵³ It seems that ‘ x that has just y does have the absence of non- y ’ is almost an analytic proposition for the Prābhākara who thinks that a *pramāṇa* captures an object that is not obtained just from a definition.

⁵¹ *yasmād arthāntaravyavacchedo 'py upalambhakasāmagrīsākalye kevalam na lakṣanam, tatpramāṇānutpādātma eva, tasmāt kāryapratyastamayāt pramāṇakāryasaṃvidanudayāt kevalopalambhād iti yāvat. nāstīti vyavahāro yasmāt tasmād anena pūrvoktasya eva pramāṇalakṣaṇasya sādhutocyate. Ibid.*

⁵² *prameyānyatvena hi pramāṇānyatvaṃ bhavati. na hi vyavahārānyatvamātrāt prameyānyatvam iti na pramāṇāntaram idam. Ibid (p. 95).*

⁵³ Consider again: ‘*avadhāraṇam ca arthāntarād vyavacchedaḥ*’. See Footnote 50.

Conclusion

Russell (2010) thinks that ‘if you say “Socrates is not alive”, there is corresponding to that proposition in the real world the fact that Socrates is not alive’,⁵⁴ and what makes the proposition “Socrates in alive” false is once again the negative fact that Socrates is not alive.⁵⁵ Russell (2010, p. 45) scrutinizes Demos’ (1917) views that deny negative facts, and says that ‘it is simpler to take negative facts as facts’. I too find Russell’s thesis simpler than Demos’. Rosenberg (1972) shows that Russell’s views on negative facts are somewhat inconsistent. I think, apart from the issues related to inconsistency and stuff, there are other philosophically significant issues that need reconsideration.

Let us consider Russell’s proposition, “Socrates is not alive”. It is certainly true. The question is: what is the source of its truth? Russell’s answer is: the irreducible negative fact that Socrates is not alive. The Naiyāyika’s answer is: the irreducible physical absence of Socrates in this world. Perszyk (1984) agrees with both the analyses.⁵⁶ Suppose we say that the source of the truth of the proposition is the positive fact that the world consists of ‘just *a, b, c* etc.’ or ‘*a, b, c* etc., and nothing else’. We may notice here that the phrases like ‘just’, ‘only’, ‘and nobody else’ or ‘but no Socrates’ refer to some absence. Thus we cannot finally avoid irreducible absences. That is why Russell (2010, p. 44) says: ‘You would come back to the necessity for some kind or other fact of the sort that we have been trying to avoid’. Buchdahl (1961, pp. 177–178) writes:

White: Admittedly you draw a table, when asked to draw a table with no bread on it. ... If you wanted to describe what you had been drawing it wouldn’t be enough to tell me you had drawn a table. The least you would have to say would be that it is an “empty table.”

The Naiyāyika too would tempt you in such a way that you finally use phrases like ‘just’ or ‘merely’ or ‘and nothing else’ (*kevala, mātra*) while trying to reduce a negative event to a positive one. The moment you utter such a phrase you are entrapped by them. Gaṅgeśa says, if you say that [the] absence [of a pot on a ground] is nothing but the knowledge caused by the mere ground, your thesis would be incorrect; for the meaning of ‘mere’ is nothing but absence, and you do not perceive any mere-ness [other than absence].⁵⁷

I think all this happens only when some cognitive process or language interrupts with ontology. For me doing ontology is making an inventory of the world. And my claim is that such an inventory does not need any absence. Suppose the world consists of four individuals; ♀, ♂, ♀, and ♂ whose names are *a, b, c* and *d* respectively.

⁵⁴ p41.

⁵⁵ p45.

⁵⁶ Preszyk (1984, p. 272):

What makes the negative sentence true is the fact that the boarding pass is not in my coat pocket, and if this is what is meant by a ‘negative fact’, let there be negative facts.

⁵⁷ *tanmātrajanitā seti cen na. mātrārthasyābhāvāt tasya cāparijñānāt. TCM, Abhāvavāda. See Tarkavagish (1990, p. 695).*

Thus the world is $\uparrow _ \downarrow _ \downarrow _ \downarrow$. Let us pretend that these are not symbols, but those individuals themselves. Let us also pretend that $\uparrow _ \downarrow _ \downarrow _ \downarrow$ is the real world. Let us suppose that each of these individuals has just one name. Now you ask me whether d is part of our world. I would look at $\uparrow _ \downarrow _ \downarrow _ \downarrow$ and tell you *yes*. Then you ask me whether Socrates is part of this world. I would look at the same inventory and say *no*. I do not need any more things in my inventory for answering your second question than I need for answering the first one. Yes, there is a difference between the propositions, ‘The world consists of a, b, c and d ’ and ‘Socrates is not part of the world’ (which can be translated into ‘Socrates is not alive’). Thus there is a difference between the cognition about $\uparrow _ \downarrow _ \downarrow _ \downarrow$ and the cognition about the absence of Socrates too. I will try to show that the difference is due to some cognitive process.

I am by no means saying that there is no absence of Socrates in our world. All I am saying is: at the ontological level that absence is the same as $\uparrow _ \downarrow _ \downarrow _ \downarrow$. At the cognitive level, the story is different. The western philosophers, as much as I know, did not discuss the cognitive issue about how an absence is known. Buchdahl’s (1961) paper reports a debate between two persons, Black and White. White thinks that one ‘sees’ that a certain (non-blue) wall is not blue while Black thinks that one does not.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, neither of them tells us how one knows that the wall is not blue. As we have already seen, the Indian philosophers have a lot to offer on this epistemological/cognitive issue. The Naiyāyika may say: ‘The content of the cognition ‘Socrates is (physically) absent from our world’ is heavier than the content of the cognition about $\uparrow _ \downarrow _ \downarrow _ \downarrow$. This additional content corresponds to the independent ontological entity called absence’. I would argue that the source of this additional content is twofold. First of all, following Śālikanātha, I would claim that the moment I come to know $\uparrow _ \downarrow _ \downarrow _ \downarrow$, I am in a position to conclude that anything other than a or b or c or d is absent from our world. Secondly, I am led to the specific conclusion that he is absent after having a query as to whether Socrates is there in the world. The general conclusion is implicit while the specific one explicit. According to the Prābhākara, the specific conclusion follows a process of introspection. According to the Bhāṭṭa, it follows the epistemic process called non-apprehension. I think any Mīmāṃsaka would agree with Buchdahl’s (1961, p. 164) Black who says that some judgment is involved in knowing an absence; that mere perception will not do. We may notice that terms denoting absence do normally respond to a question or query or expectation that imposes parts of its content on the one who cognizes an absence. When I say that our world consists of a, b, c and d , and you ask me whether Socrates is part of it, I tell you, ‘No, it has a, b, c and d only’. This is just to deny the imposition. There is a lot of wisdom in the following statement of Heinemann (1943–1944, p. 127): ‘Negation is primarily not a relation of being, but of meaning’. As long as I stick to the inventory of the world, I do ontology. And as long as I do ontology I do not need any absence. The moment I look at the inventory with a query about x , which is not there on the list, I cognize the absence of x . It makes me think that the absence of x is somehow there in my inventory.

⁵⁸ Buchdahl (1961, p. 163).

Buchdahl (1961, p. 178) writes: '[T]here are no metaphysical principles that make tables more "ultimate" as furniture than "empty tables." But I suspect that this is a quarrel as to whether you can or cannot do metaphysics, so I guess we'd better adjourn and leave the whole subject for another day.' But I am not ready to adjourn and leave the whole subject for another day. For I believe that there is at least one criterion that makes a table part of the inventory and refuses to accept the absence of bread as an irreducible item. *If I count x just by counting y, and if y is part of my world, (i.e., x need not be counted separately) then x is not part of my world.* In order to cognize the absence of bread on a table, I have to know that Π (let us pretend it is a real table with nothing on it) is part of the inventory. So Π is the same as the absence of bread or Socrates or an elephant. No absence is part of my inventory in that case. This criterion has a twofold function; the 'census function' and the 'population-control' function. This makes absences both reducible and dispensable.

Gale (1972, p. 460) takes an interesting position on negative events. He on the one hand does not think that negative statements are reducible to positive ones, and on the other hand accepts that the world is fully describable in positive statements and that there are no negative events. I am interested in his general theses and am not concerned with the details of the paper. I think his position is pretty close to that of the Prābhākara though the latter takes the cognitive matters related to absence lot more seriously than the former does. Of course, the Prābhākara will not talk about propositions; they are interested in cognitions. The Mīmāṃsaka always separates the cognitive issues from the ontological ones, while, I think, Russell, Demos, Buchdahl and many other western thinkers conflate the two issues. That is why western discussions on absence still lack clarity. But the Indian philosophers of the first millennium could realize that they were dealing with two different, but deceitfully related, questions while discussing absence.

Following Bradley, Buchdahl's (1961, p. 166) Black was trying to say that there was something subjective about 'negatives and their objectives'. I think it is 'subjective' insofar as the cognizing subject does not cognize an absence unless they impose the corresponding absentee on the locus. An absence does not force itself on the subject.⁵⁹ But it is not just subjective. It is rather intersubjective, and its truth is its intersubjectivity.

Let us conclude with the story of an imaginary robot that is asked by you to rebuild the Harvard dining room where Whitehead was talking to Skinner in 1934. The robot wants you to provide it with the required materials. You have provided it with dining tables, chairs, Whitehead, Skinner and every other thing the room contained at that time. Suppose the robot is endowed with abilities to perceive and infer (on the basis of observations) and has no other cognitive ability. Now somebody tells it that there was the absence of black scorpions in the room at that time. What will it do then? Will it ask you to bring the absence of black scorpions? You cannot bring such a *material*. You can just tell it that 'it's not required'. But the robot will perhaps not be able to understand how to add such an absence without

⁵⁹ Buchdahl (1961, p. 173):

[W]hen someone comes into a room with a chair in it, the statement "there is a chair" will force itself upon him, but that if he comes into an empty room, the corresponding negative statement depends upon a previous attitude, certain interests, etc.

having it in its inventory. For its camera-eye does not capture an absence. On the other hand, just by looking at a limited number of materials, you know that finally the room will contain infinite absences that include the absence of black scorpions; because you have a cognitive faculty the robot does not have. Perhaps this explains why it is wiser to adopt ontological economy and to minimize the burden on senses as far as absence is concerned than to accept absence as an entity that is to be captured by senses.

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