



PROJECT MUSE®

On Knowing Universals: The Nyāya Way

Monima Chadha

Philosophy East and West, Volume 64, Number 2, April 2014, pp. 287-302
(Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press
DOI: [10.1353/pew.2014.0036](https://doi.org/10.1353/pew.2014.0036)

Philosophy East and West



A Quarterly of
Comparative Philosophy
Volume 64 - Number 2

University of Hawai'i Press

➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/pew/summary/v064/64.2.chadha.html>

ON KNOWING UNIVERSALS: THE NYĀYA WAY

Monima Chadha

Department of Philosophy, School of Philosophical, Historical and International
Studies, Monash University
Monima.Chadha@monash.edu

Seeing that nearly all the words to be found in the dictionary stand for universals, it is strange that hardly anybody except students of philosophy ever realizes that there are such entities as universals.

Bertrand Russell (1912, p. 93)

Introduction

Navya-Nyāya puts forth a unique thesis that has rarely, if ever, been proposed in Western philosophy. This school claims that we can have non-mediated, perceptual acquaintance with universals (at least some) such as wateriness and goldness. This thesis might appear to be echoed in Bertrand Russell, but—to be clear at the very outset—the Nyāya view differs in one very important respect. According to Russell, in the first instance we are acquainted with a particular white patch, but by seeing many white patches we subsequently learn to abstract whiteness, which they all have in common, and in doing so we learn to be acquainted with the universal whiteness (Russell 1912, p. 100). The Nyāya account is simpler: in perception we are confronted with universals as inhering in a particular locus, and thus are directly acquainted with the universal in the very first instance. That this unique Nyāya thesis did not receive much attention in the classical Indian philosophical discussions is perhaps due to its proximity to the controversial doctrine of *nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa* or indeterminate perception (roughly equivalent to the notion of non-conceptual perception in contemporary terms¹). *Nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa*, not unlike its Western cousin, non-conceptual perception, is saddled with the controversial “myth of the given.” This non-conceptual, pre-constructive perception—the cornerstone of Buddhist epistemology—was seriously challenged in the Indian classical era by some Naiyāyikas as well as the Hindu realist Prābhākara Mīmāṃsā School. These Naiyāyikas and Mīmāṃsakas were not concerned with the occurrence of such non-conceptual perception or its physical concomitant; their main concern was whether such a non-conceptual sensation or perception can qualify as awareness. Later Naiyāyikas, however, brought in non-conceptual perception as part of their epistemology, a move seriously questioned by Nyāya scholars right down to contemporary times.²

In this article, I abstract away from the debate about non-conceptual perception to focus on the novel and interesting Navya-Nyāya thesis that we can be perceptually acquainted with universals or properties (equating universals and properties may

sound strange to the Western mind, but the abstract-concrete distinction does not exist in Nyāya). In response to Buddhist nominalism, Nyāya philosophers present a defense of realism in the course of which they argue for a theory of real perceivable universals. I am not going to be addressing the nominalist arguments directly; I start out with the assumption that there *are* universals!

The plan of this article is as follows. Below, in the first section (Background), I give the background on the issues to be discussed here: I first briefly explicate the Nyāya notion of universals and then state the formal Nyāya position on how we might come to know universals. Following this, in the second section (Perceivability of Universals), I analyze the Nyāya arguments for the thesis that universals are perceived, rather than merely thought about or conceived. This is done by first rehearsing the arguments for a theory of real perceivable universals offered by Jayanta Bhaṭṭa in his *Nyāyamañjarī*, and then by detailing Gaṅgeśa's unique contribution to this debate—the idea that universals or qualifiers are given as objects in indeterminate or non-conceptual perception. In the final section (Direct Realism), I argue that this thesis should be welcomed by direct realists. This article aims to articulate a deep connection between direct realism about the external world and the availability of universals in non-conceptual perception, as opposed to the non-conceptual awareness of bare particulars. Thus, the Navya-Nyāya thesis should be of interest to contemporary metaphysicians and epistemologists as well as to all those interested in ancient Indian philosophy.

Background

Nyāya on Universals

It is easy for us to understand the idea of being perceptually acquainted with a bare particular, even though we may not agree that there are bare particulars in our world. However, the doctrine of being perceptually acquainted with universals is very hard to comprehend given our Platonic upbringing. But this doctrine that we are perceptually acquainted with *some* universals is central to Nyāya realism and its theory of perception. So, how do we make sense of it? Some preliminary remarks may help us understand the Nyāya notion of universals. The *Manual of Reason (Tarkasaṃgraha)* reports the standard Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika definition of a universal (*sāmānya, jāti*): a universal is something that is (a) eternal, (b) unitary, and (c) located in a plurality of things—substances, qualities, or motions (*Tarkasaṃgraha* 82).

According to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, universals exist in this very world of ours: particulars manifest them, not just copy them. Each particular is home to an individual (particularized?) universal—there is 'the cowness' of an animal, though there is also a natural universal 'cowness' to which 'the cowness' of a particular cow belongs. To be sure, the Nyāya term for a genuine universal (*jāti*) is also used for a caste or a species, but a universal is not the set of all cows or Brahmins; rather it is the property of cowness or Brahmin-ness. Universals are distinct realities having spatial manifestations at different places at the same time. In this sense, they are different from particulars, things that cannot exist in two different discontinuous places, wholly, at the

same time. Universals, in contrast, have no such constraints; they are wholly present and indefinitely repeatable in many particulars. And, there are no uninstantiated universals apart from the individuals that are their instances. In Nyāya, for a universal to exist all that is required is that it be exemplified; in a Quinean twist—*to be is to be exemplified*. There is no further requirement that it exist independently as an abstract entity or in Plato’s heaven; universals are given directly in perception insofar as their loci are perceived. Indeed, according to Nyāya, we know particulars only through their universal properties or as qualified by their properties.

It may be useful here to adopt the suggestion—by the noted Nyāya scholar Arindam Chakrabarti—that we think of a universal as a non-particular individual (Chakrabarti 1995). Examples abound: Sanskrit is what Gaṅgeśa and Matilal knew, though they are spatiotemporally separated by thousands of miles and years; fine is what several days of the year can be at the same time in different places—some in Canada and some in Australia. If we are not thinking of universals as abstract entities in Platonic heaven or in the mind, but as individuals out there in the world, it is easier to grasp the idea that they can be perceived. The Nyāya equation of universals and properties might tempt one to think that Nyāya conceives of universals as natural properties in David Lewis’ sense of the term (Lewis 1983). Not so. Nyāya universals are as robust as Armstrong’s universals: they capture facts of resemblance and the causal powers of things. Naiyāyikas will happily endorse D. M. Armstrong’s ‘One over Many’ argument as the main reason for including universals in their ontology (Armstrong 1978). Udayana puts the point thus: “Causality is regulated by universals, so is effect-hood. It is a natural universal if there is no obstruction [in establishing it]; it is a conditional [nominal] universal when we have to establish it through effort [construction?]” (Kiraṇāvālī, in Praśastapāda 1971, p. 23).

The Naiyāyikas do not accept that every property or quality yields a mind-independent genuine universal. Intuitively, Naiyāyikas distinguish between groupings that reflect natural kinds and those that reflect anthropocentric concerns by using the distinction between *jāti* (universals, e.g. cowness) and *upādhi* (nominal or titular properties, e.g. being a milkman). But their attempt to make this distinction precise by listing the criteria for a property to be a genuine universal does not succeed in capturing natural kinds. Not surprising!³ Nyāya recognizes natural kinds such as goldness and cowness, and metaphysical kinds such as substancehood and existence-ness and even some artifact kinds such as pot-hood and cloth-hood, but Nyāya does not admit colors, mental states, and most relations as part of what Matilal calls the “ontological inner circle.” The only genuine relation that qualifies as a universal, according to Nyāya, is inherence: the relation that connects real universals with particular instances that manifest them. The Naiyāyikas claim that inherence is one and non-distinct, though it has manifold manifestations and connects different types of entities. It is claimed to be objectively real, even though it is not connected with any of its relata by a further relation. Scholars have questioned whether the Nyāya distinction between genuine universals and the merely nominal or ‘titular’ properties can be defended. I think it is hard to defend the absence of all relations *sans* inherence, while simultaneously accepting universals of artifacts.

To meet the charge that once we admit the universals of artifacts we have to introduce a new universal each time Apple produces a new iPhone or a new iPad, the Naiyāyikas can bring the doctrine of *upādhi* into service to show that such issues simply do not arise. Matilal explains this quite plausibly: the idea is that we simply manipulate existing materials for our convenience and use general terms (*upādhis* or titular properties) as a convenient way of referring to classes of objects that share certain properties (Matilal 1986, p. 419). In the ultimate analysis, the properties can be unpacked and reduced to natural kinds such as earthiness. This would get rid of universals like potness and clothness, but that is not a great loss. It would also take care of the concern that if the universal cowness exists and is eternal, what would we have to say if all cows were to be destroyed following the outbreak of the deadly ‘mad cow disease’? Just as we can reduce all material things to earthiness, we can perhaps reduce all sentient things to some other more basic universal.

Nyāya on How We Know Universals

The Gautama *Nyāyasūtras* (second century) mention universals as the meaning of general terms, but there is no explanation in these original *sūtras* as to how they might be known. The theory of perceivability of real universals makes its first appearance in Candramati’s *Daśpadārthaśāstra* (probably compiled in the first half of the fifth century and preserved in Chinese), wherein he clearly distinguishes between perception of universals and perception of substances, qualities, et cetera (Potter 1977, p. 137). Candramati suggests that universals are perceived by mind (*manas*) in contact with just the self (*ātman*) without any external sense-organ intervention, while perception of substances et cetera needs external sense-organ activity as well. However, Praśastapāda (fourth century) explicitly states that universals, when they inhere in perceptible loci (e.g., ‘cowness’ in an individual cow), are perceived by the same sense organs that also perceive those loci (*Padārthadharmasamgraha* 99). This thesis is explicated in detail by Jayanta Bhaṭṭa (ninth century) in the *Nyāyamañjarī*, a commentary on the *Nyāyasūtras*, in the discussion on the theory of perceivability of universals. In arguing for this theory against the Buddhist nominalists as well as the holistic monist pan-linguist Bhartrhari and his followers, Jayanta alludes to the view that universals are given in indeterminate perception. Though Vācaspati Miśra⁴ (late tenth century), in his secondary commentary *Nyāyavārttikatātparyatikā* on the *Nyāyasūtras*, is generally credited with introducing the theory of indeterminate perception into the Nyāya system, Jayanta in the *Nyāyamañjarī* appears to have introduced it earlier. While it may be debatable who actually introduced indeterminate perception into the Nyāya system, what is important to note is that indeterminate perception did play a major role in the arguments for the perceivability of universals. Below, I will argue that the theory of indeterminate perception and the theory of real perceivable universals are both foundational to Nyāya realism.

At first sight, the two theses—indeterminate perception and perception of universals—appear orthogonal: certainly the thinkers who introduced these theses did not imply a connection. I propose that there is an important connection here that is worth exploring. To do this, in the second section, I will make recourse to the argu-

ment by Gaṅgeśa (fourteenth-century Navya-Nyāya philosopher) for the inclusion of indeterminate perception in Nyāya epistemology, as well as review Jayanta Bhaṭṭa's arguments for a theory of real perceivable universals, because he anticipates a critical argument of Gaṅgeśa that will help us identify the proposed connection.

Nyāya was under dual nominalist pressure from the Buddhist phenomenologists and from the pan-linguists. The former believe that the world is populated only by particulars or *svalaksanas*, and reject universals as dispensable imaginative constructs, or *vikalpas*, generated by linguistic practices that distort reality. The latter believe that reality is an impartite whole that is never cognized as such, except in the guise of words or word-generated concepts. Bhartṛhari says, "There is no awareness in this world without its being intertwined with the word. All cognitive comprehension appears to be penetrated as it were with the word" (Bhartṛhari 2005, chap. 1, p. 123). To the pan-linguist, words, concepts, and universals are all constructs—words are abstracted out of sentences or sentence-complexes, and concepts and universals are abstracted out of the concrete experience of the whole.

While the perceivability of real universals in determinate perception may ward off the Buddhist nominalism, it cannot address Bhartṛhari's challenge. He argues that we need not admit any real 'thing-universal' over and above the universals of different individual words: the universal of the word 'cow' is transformed into a thing-universal, which we may call cowhood, but this is only a guise superimposed on the external object. For Bhartṛhari, the object itself is guise-less, though it never appears without a guise, much like a crystal that is in itself colorless but never appears without reflecting some shade of color. Therefore, insofar as determinate perceptions are verbalizable, the qualifiers or universals presented in these perceptions are dismissed as word-generated illusions by pan-linguists. In response to this challenge from linguistic nominalism, Nyāya posits universals as objects of indeterminate perception. This is the position I want to further develop here.

In a series of papers,⁵ Chakrabarti has elaborated the Nyāya position—developed in response to Buddhist nominalists and the pan-linguists—on how we come to know universals. Unfortunately, Chakrabarti is deeply suspicious of indeterminate perception. He amends the Nyāya position to suggest that universals or concepts are given as objects only in determinate perception and thus are not merely linguistic constructs or meanings of general terms (Chakrabarti 1998, p. 318). In the last section on Direct Realism, I will critique Chakrabarti's position and demonstrate that such amendments are unnecessary and present my defense of the original Nyāya position (without amends) in support of the main thesis of this article: universals are given to us and known by us as objects of indeterminate perception.

Perceivability of Universals

Jayanta Bhaṭṭa on Perceptibility of Real Universals

In the *Nyāyamañjarī* Jayanta Bhaṭṭa is responding to the Buddhist nominalist who argues that only experience untouched by any conceptual qualification is a genuine perception because it gets in touch with real particulars as they are. Jayanta starts off

with a rhetorical question: is it a 'Royal Decree' that only the first awareness authentically touches the object and is truly visual, whereas any subsequent ones are not so? But this rhetoric soon gives way to serious consideration: even if we agree that only the first awareness is a proof of something out there, we cannot ascertain that the real particulars alone figure in such initial experience; we have no reason to rule out that the shared properties of the particulars are also given in the initial experience, and there is no reason to suppose that the initial indeterminate cognition apprehends bare particulars while the subsequent determinate cognition apprehends universals, or thought-constructs as the Buddhist prefers to call them.

According to Nyāya realists the objects of both kinds of cognitions are the same. Also, given that the duration of the initial non-conceptual perception is unobservably short, the only way we can decide whether its content presents only propertyless particulars or shared features as well is to analyze the content of the subsequent fully developed conceptualized experience of particulars that we can talk about, and use that as a basis for inferring the content of initial non-conceptual perception.⁶ If our initial experience is only of the propertyless bare particular, as the Buddhist holds, then how do the common features enter into the subsequent determinate cognition at all? The Buddhist has explained that the cognition of the general character arises due to recollection of the conventional name. Jayanta rejects the Buddhist explanation as contrary to experience, since the cognition of the common property arises without the knowledge of the conventional name. Jayanta gives an example of a person from the south of India who has never seen or heard of a camel and is ignorant of the common name 'camel.' When confronted with a convoy of camels on her/his first trip to the north of India, the south Indian sees that they are 'of the same kind', even though (s)he has no idea what the name of that kind is. According to the Naiyāyikas, verbal convention follows upon the apprehension of the general character, rather than preceding it. Furthermore, memory and recognition cannot be explained without accepting the perceptibility of universals. On perceiving another camel at a future time, the south Indian will recognize it to be of the same kind—even while (s)he lacks a word or a clear conception of that kind-making property. All this shows that (s)he must have seen the kind-making properties initially, though not as kind-making properties. Chakrabarti puts the point succinctly:

[T]he universal is what is actually uniformly seen and seen again among many particulars, not its uniform presence. Even when that characteristic of the universal—that it runs like a thread across many instances—is not grasped, that which possess[es] this characteristic, namely the universal[,] can be grasped. (Chakrabarti 2006, p. 313)

This is exactly the point that the Naiyāyikas want to make: in the initial perception the qualifier (which may be a universal) is given as such, though not as a qualifier! The only way we can account for the feeling of "Aha! Another one of that kind," even though we have no clear idea what that kind is, is to admit that we have seen the kind-making properties in the first encounter. If at first sight we only see a propertyless particular, then the second sight of another such particular is not a second sight of anything, and so on. If we limit ourselves only to bare particulars, then we

can never account for such sense of similarity, since it is only the properties that are recognizably the same across various particulars of the same kind. But we do see similarities and individuals endowed with rich properties that they share with other individuals of the same kind. Therefore, Chakrabarti recommends that we drop the myth of the given and, together with that, the myth of imperceptibility of properties or universals (Chakrabarti 2006, p. 313).

The Buddhist argues that the universal is not apprehended directly in the sense that the universal is not a simple idea arising out of sense-object contact. The apprehension of the universal involves the operation of the mind in the form of comparing and contrasting sense and memory impressions, and thus it is a thought construct rather than a percept. Jayanta responds that if a particular is given in sense-perception, there is no reason whatever to think otherwise in the case of universals. Identifying a thing as a particular is seeing it as different from other objects in certain respects, just as identifying a thing as a universal requires seeing it the same as other objects in some respects. The mind is involved in the apprehension of identity and difference, and thus in the apprehension of universals and particulars. Therefore, there is no reason to deem the cognition of a particular as a genuine perception and claim the cognition of a universal to be an imposition of the mind. The Buddhist might argue that indeterminate cognition apprehends the bare particular without any reference to generality or particularity, since both of them would involve the mind. Jayanta rightly rejects this position as unacceptable, since it would imply that we can perceive neither universals nor particulars, as for the Buddhist only indeterminate cognitions qualify as a genuine perception. Jayanta's view is that, at the stage of indeterminate perception, universals and particulars are given but not as universals or as particulars. It is only at the stage of determinate perception, wherein the mind is involved in the perception of identity and difference, that universals and particulars are cognized as such.

To insist either that the nature of a thing is exclusively particular or that it is exclusively universal is, according to Jayanta, to display ignorance about the real nature of things. The Buddhist further objects that two contradictory characters of universality and particularity cannot belong to the selfsame thing. Jayanta's answer to this is that universality and particularity are not contradictory characters, since they are perceived together in a valid perceptual cognition: were they opposed to each other they would never be perceived together in the same locus. The perception of their co-existence cannot be an illusion because it is not contradicted by subsequent experience, like the illusory silver in a shell. Jayanta is alluding to the Nyāya theory of extrinsic validity of cognition (*partahprāmānyavada*), according to which a cognition as it arises is neither valid nor invalid: it must await validation by means of a subsequent cognition.

Jayanta also draws attention to the fact that though recalling a past encounter with a universal would not be a perception, the seeing of a universal is a recognizing, *not* a remembering. Both remembering and recognizing depend on memory, but the former is not a perception while the latter is. Indeed, memory creeps into many of our perceptual sightings of familiar things, but our experiences are not robbed of

their perceptual character because of being adulterated with traces of memory. So, too, does recognition of a universal count as its perception.

Finally, Jayanta Bhaṭṭa points to the occasions when we see a heap of tiny grains of the same natural kind, such as a heap of sand or sesame seeds. What strikes the senses is the common form shared by each individual grain, not their unique individualities: we see the heap as a collection of sesame seeds. Though the individual grains are seen by the eyes, they are not seen as particulars, for we cannot identify and re-identify the same grain after a short break in looking. Similarly, when we see a universal in the initial perception, we do not recognize it as a universal because the question of recognizing it as the 'One' running through 'Many' does not arise in the initial perception. Below, we shall see similar themes explored by Gaṅgeśa, who argues that though a universal or qualifier is given in indeterminate perception, it is not given as a universal or as a qualifier.

Gaṅgeśa on the Perceivability of Universals in Non-conceptual Perception

Gaṅgeśa, in the *Tattvacintāmaṇi* (the chapter on "Perception," the section on "Indeterminate Perception"), makes a unique contribution to this debate in proposing the idea that universals or qualifiers are given as objects in indeterminate perception. Gaṅgeśa spells out his argument in terms of qualifiers rather than real universals, because the logical and epistemological role of a real universal is the same as that of a simple nominal property. Gaṅgeśa is concerned with basic, unanalyzable properties that can be grasped *as such* in our awareness. Basic properties in this sense are simple; they can be grasped without further qualification. They are, to Nyāya—in Matilal's sense—the 'epistemic firsts', comparable to pure sensations in Buddhist epistemology. According to Nyāya, not all qualifiers are universals, but all universals are qualifiers. Gaṅgeśa's examples in this section, namely 'cowness' and 'potness' et cetera, strongly suggest that he is concerned with the availability of universals in indeterminate perception.

Indeterminate perception (*nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa*) of qualifiers is a controversial, but unavoidable, posit that does essential work for the Nyāya theory of universals. Gaṅgeśa is aware that it is controversial and has been rejected by many earlier Naiyāyikas for want of any direct apperceptive or introspective evidence. So he establishes it by means of a specific inference detailed below. First, I will explicate a general version of the Navya-Nyāya argument for positing indeterminate perception, and then give the specific version of the argument as spelled out in the *Tattvacintāmaṇi*. The general version has received much attention in the secondary literature, but the focus has been the controversial posit of *nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa*. As already mentioned, I want to abstract away from that debate to focus on the objects of *nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa*: the simple universals! In other words, the strategy here is to put an old argument in the literature to a new use.

The issue for Navya-Nyāya is whether there can be any awareness of the so-called conception-free indeterminate perception. The Buddhist claims that the conception-free grasp is necessarily self-aware, though it is hard to appreciate this, given that the original grasp is devoid of any identification of the datum or a verbal

association. (Seriously, do we have an answer to the question “Can one recall such a conception-free grasp?”) Navya-Naiyāyikas believe that a sensory grasp is not necessarily cognized or revealed to the self; its cognition is contingent on being followed by an apperception. Nyāya admits that while most sensory perceptions are cognized, some arise and die without being cognized at all, and these include indeterminate perceptions because these are not followed by an apperception. This returns us to the question: how can an indeterminate perception be an awareness? In response to this Navya-Nyāya formulates two principles to explain the nature of our awareness, which, following Chakrabarti (1997 p. 122), we can state as follows:

P1: For all x , there is an f such that if x is presented to awareness, it is presented under the qualifier f .

P2: For all x , and for all f , if x is presented as qualified by f , a prior awareness of f is needed as one of its causal factors.

These principles, however, force the Navya-Naiyāyikas into an infinite regress. If perceiving x causally requires perceiving it under a mode f and if the mode has to be perceived prior to this determinate perception, then, on substituting x with f , even f needs to be perceived under a further mode g , and so on. To block this regress, Navya-Nyāya postulated an exception to P1, which, following Matilal (1986, p. 344), may be formulated as:

E1: An ultimate simple property (a natural kind or an unanalyzable titular property), may be known without any mode of presentation.

It is precisely this *exception* that enables Navya-Nyāya to admit of non-conceptual or indeterminate perception of qualifiers as such, without their being presented under a further mode or a qualifier. Therefore, Navya-Nyāya can now freely postulate indeterminate perception for the availability of ultimate simple properties as such without any further modes of presentation. The proposed connection between indeterminate perception and theory of perceivability of universals now becomes clear: the former is defended as a necessary posit to establish the latter.

Gaṅgeśa’s argument is presented by Bhattacharya (1993, pp. 10–11), using a specific form of inference (*parārthānumāna*) developed in Nyāya for explaining to others:

1. Proposition: The determinate perception of the form ‘a cow’ (or ‘that’s a cow’) is produced by the cognition of the qualifier.
2. Reason: Because this is a qualificative cognition.
3. Pervasion with an example: Every qualificative cognition is produced by a prior cognition of the qualifier—for example, inference.

4. Application: The perception of the form 'a cow' is a qualificative cognition.
5. Conclusion: Hence, it is produced by the cognition of the qualifier.

Gaṅgeśa's argument maintains a causal uniformity among *pramāna*-generated cognitions of an entity as qualified (Phillips and Tatacharya 2004, p. 398). However, there is a problem: if anything that is known through a qualifier requires a prior cognition of the qualifier, there will be a regress of cognitions. Gaṅgeśa's answer is that an indeterminate perception blocks the threat of such a regress, because the qualifier is then grasped directly rather than through another qualifier. In other words, the object is perceived through the property, but the property itself is perceived directly rather than through another property. The indeterminate perception, which precedes the determinate perception of an object through a mode, that is, as possessing a certain property, is not itself a perception through a mode. Simply put, we need to grasp the universal cowness in order to have an awareness of a particular as qualified by cowness.

The weight of the argument rests on the third sentence of the inference. Gaṅgeśa supports it offering various examples of qualificative cognition, namely inference, recognition, analogy, verbal testimony, and so on. The point is that unless some awareness of fire is present in a person, (s)he cannot infer that the hill is on fire on the basis of seeing smoke there. Similarly, unless some awareness of 'thatness' or 'that Devadatta' is present in a person, he cannot recognize that this person he is seeing now is that Devadatta. Simple properties and universals like that of fireness and thatness are given directly in indeterminate perception.

For the Naiyāyikas, determinate perception gets its content not only from the sense-object contact but also from the classificational power of the mind (Phillips 2011). With the perceptual cognition, "That's a fly," for instance, the contact with a sensory faculty is responsible for the awareness of a property bearer. The sensory connection is not by itself responsible for the qualifier portion—the thing's classification as a fly: a qualificandum as qualified by a qualifier is perceived all at once, but a determinate perception's constituents have distinct etiologies. The qualifier is usually provided by *saṃskāras* (memory dispositions): in perceiving *a* as an *F*, an *F-saṃskāra* (memory disposition) becomes a causal factor. The perception's content itself includes a qualifier through the operation of this disposition.

However, there *are* cases of determinate cognition in which the indeterminate, concept-free perception furnishes the qualifier independently of any such memory disposition, for example when a child sees a cow for the very first time; a "raw" perceptual grasping of the qualifier (cowhood) enables a determinate and verbalizable perception in the future. The opponent of the doctrine of indeterminate perception may still argue that even in the child's first-time perception of a cow, the ultimate universal cowhood is supplied by a memory disposition. Gaṅgeśa rejects this, for there is then a need to explain what stimulates the memory: the presence of a cow cannot be the memory disposition stimulant, because a visually given object is a case of sense-perception rather than remembering. To the opponent's further insistence

that the memory disposition is available from previous births, Gaṅgeśa reiterates the existence of a primary perceptual experience at some indefinite time in the past. Gaṅgeśa's argument that at some point we have to postulate a pure perceptual grasp of simple properties cannot be refuted. Gaṅgeśa is here appealing to a general law, admitted by both sides of the debate, that perception takes precedence over remembering when it is the same thing that is remembered or perceived. To further strengthen this position, he adds a counterfactual claim: if a remembering (of x) could occur when the conditions sufficient to produce a perception (of x) were in place, then the eternal words and meanings of the Vedas would be a matter of remembering, not of awareness: there are "seers" of Vedic truths; it is not just a tradition sustained by memory.

Another argument given—but not fully developed—in the same section in the *Tattvacintāmaṇi* is that objects have multiple properties, but such thick particulars—a thing with all its properties—is never presented in perception; for example, a blind person in touching a yellow object would not know its color (Gaṅgeśa's example from another context). Perception is always selective insofar as it presents only some—not all—properties of the object. In Nyāya, such selection is not arbitrary; rather it is epistemologically determined by prior cognitions from indeterminate perceptions or otherwise.

Direct Realism

Phillips suggests a reason for Gaṅgeśa to make this controversial posit: to bring out the fundamental nature of perception and its ability to grasp bare properties as such, not as qualified by other properties and relations (Phillips and Tatacharya 2004). Indeterminate perception provides the direct causal link between the sense organ and the property in the world without any intervening subjective elements. In a broader perspective, Gaṅgeśa's denial of memory stimulators forms an important argument against the pan-linguist and/or conceptualist positions, in which the language and/or mind is integral to every perception. In a first-time perception or an indeterminate cognition of the qualifier 'cowhood', there is no contribution from the language and/or mind: perception originates in the world and gets us in direct touch with the world as it is. I think, however, that Gaṅgeśa's postulation of indeterminate grasp of a property to block the threat of the aforementioned infinite regress is aimed at allowing for direct perception of the world. Direct realism follows from the necessary link between indeterminate perception and the theory of perceivability of universals explicated above.

Chakrabarti's agenda is similar, but subtly discriminable, from that of Gaṅgeśa and Jayanta. Like his Nyāya predecessors, Chakrabarti is concerned with defending realism against the idealistic thesis that the world presented to us in perception is constructed by us through some kind of a linguistic grid. However, Chakrabarti is willing to settle for a Strawsonian version of moderate realism through a defense of determinate perception as a language-independent route to concept possession. He stops short of the full-bodied direct realism favored by his Nyāya predecessors—a

mind-independent access to the world—because he is deeply suspicious of the coherence of the notion of indeterminate perception. I will defend indeterminate perception against Chakrabarti's concerns below, after first demonstrating that the Nyāya doctrine of perceivability of universals does not deliver Chakrabarti's favored version of Strawsonian realism.

Chakrabarti's defense of the claim that concept-laden determinate perception is not generated by words rests on the distinction between 'grasping concepts' and 'grasping meanings of words that express those concepts' (Chakrabarti 1998, p. 318). Chakrabarti recounts Jayanta's argument for the thesis that our mastery of the word 'cow' cannot be presupposed by our perceptual ascription of cowness to a particular object because such mastery itself presupposes a prior grasp of the concept of a cow or a capacity to recognize cowness when confronted with it. Chakrabarti assumes that grasping the concept of a cow and recognizing something as a cow are one and the same ability, which is presupposed by a grasp of the meaning of the word 'cow.' This assumption is mistaken. Grasping the concept of cow requires recognizing something as a cow only minimally; in general, it requires much more, for example, to know some of its relations to neighboring concepts and its place in the system of concepts. Someone who does not know that cows are animals would not normally be said to possess the concept of a cow. But a child who lacks the concept of an animal can still see and recognize cows.

In his admirable attempt to distinguish between 'grasping concepts' and 'grasping meanings of words that express those concepts', Chakrabarti loses sight of the subtle distinction between 'grasping concepts' and 'grasping the corresponding properties or universals.' The Nyāya doctrine of perceivability of universals can explain how we grasp properties or universals, but insofar as grasping a concept requires us to understand its place in the system of concepts and its relation to neighboring concepts it falls short, because grasping concepts requires much more than just what a determinate perception can deliver. The Nyāya doctrine of availability of universals as objects of indeterminate perception is capable of delivering a full-bodied direct realism without the aid of a conceptual/mental or linguistic grid, but it is not suited to deliver the Strawsonian realism that requires a distinction between abstract universals and property instances.

Indeterminate perception is posited as the best explanation for the availability of the qualifier, since the cognizing subject is not immediately aware of the object of indeterminate perception and there is no apperceptive (introspective) evidence for such a perception. This reasoning, contrary to Chakrabarti's concerns,⁷ does not rob indeterminate perception of its intentionality or its perceptual character. We can explain the intentional character of indeterminate perception by drawing attention to a person's first-time perception of 'a cow'; it is not given as qualifying the particular cow cognized on a perceptual occasion, but it is also not completely separate from it. On such a perceptual occasion, the causal interaction between the senses and the perceived object results in an indeterminate perception of a non-particular individual. We cannot describe this as a cognitive grasp of an instance of a universal

since it is not cognized as a qualifier; nor can it be described as a cognitive grasp of a particular or a relation. It can only be described as a dispositional grasp of 'cow-hood' as a non-particular individual that results in dispositional abilities to recognize 'more of the same.' The acquisition of such recognitional capacities may become manifest in a subject's behavior toward individual cows presented on the very same or other possible perceptual occasions. The subject may not be consciously aware of acquiring such recognitional capacities; it is sufficient that (s)he possess the relevant behavioral dispositions. Since there is no requirement that the subject of an indeterminate perception be consciously aware of acquiring such recognitional capacities, indeterminate awarenesses can be enjoyed by humans and other animals. Having smelled cows before, a hungry lion on smelling another cow in her vicinity may have a mental flash, "Aha, the same again." While the lion is in no position to assign an intentional role (as a qualifier, a qualified, or a relation) to the object of her awareness, there can be no doubt that her awareness is intentional (Chadha 2006, p. 336).

There may be some doubt whether indeterminate cognitions are perceptual, since they acquire their cognitive status only at a later time, by force of an inference; it is tempting to treat them as memories or inferential awarenesses. However, to treat them as memory impressions is wrong because they are not experienced cognitively and we cannot recall what we have not experienced cognitively. Again, they cannot be classified as inferences (even though an inference is required to bring their content to a subject's awareness), because the chief instrumental cause of the indeterminate cognitions is the interaction of the sense organs and objects in the world. Therefore, indeterminate cognition must be classified as a perception that presents to us the way the world is. And, according to the Nyāya version of direct realism, the world is richly populated by properties or universals readily available as objects of indeterminate perception.

There has been a resurgence of direct realism in recent literature in the philosophy of perception, because it offers a stronger epistemic position relative to phenomenalism and representationalism. The strongest objection to direct realism is its inability to give a satisfactory account of illusions and hallucinations. The direct realist argues that the objects of our perceptions are the real contents of the world. However, it is a well-known fact that our perceptions can be inaccurate or illusory; for example, a straight stick may appear bent when placed in water, or we may suffer from hallucinations of a mirage, which perceptions have no basis in reality. Since the objects of such perceptions are clearly not part of the real world, direct realism is under duress to explain illusions and hallucinations.

In recent literature, direct realists have appealed to disjunctivism and other theses in its vicinity to give an account of such phenomena. I am not going to discuss the success of such a move: to be honest I find disjunctivist theories counterintuitive. I will close the discussion with the Nyāya response to this problem. Nyāya theory of perception, as we have seen above, has two tiers: indeterminate and determinate perception. Indeterminate perception is simple; its object is an undifferentiated whole: the object and its properties, the qualified *a* and the qualifier *X* are grasped in

one sweep, not structured as 'a has X' or 'a is F.' It is only in a fully developed conceptual or determinate perception that we see structured wholes such as 'a is F.' Determinate perceptions are non-simple in the sense that they present two things as a structured unity: one is being characterized while the other is the characteristic, or one is the qualified while the other is the qualifier. Sensory illusion is said to be 'promiscuous' in Nyāya. Promiscuity involves indiscriminate relation between two entities. In simple indeterminate perceptions, there is only one undifferentiated whole, so the possibility of error or illusion does not arise. Rather, the promiscuity consists in uniting two entities in the qualifier-qualified relation, characterizing a thing as something that it is not. The classic example of the snake-rope illusion is promiscuous because the rope is characterized as a snake, though the snake character does not belong to it. Illusions and hallucinations arise at the level of determinate perception; they do not touch the sacrosanct indeterminate perception, which, I have shown, is the cornerstone of Nyāya realism.

Notes

- 1 – I say "roughly" because the Nyāya contrast between indeterminate and determinate perception does not map neatly onto the non-conceptual distinction precisely because indeterminate perception is known only by inference.
- 2 – See, for example, Chakrabarti 2000 and 2004.
- 3 – Lewis acknowledges this difficulty in recognizing that though there is an objective difference between natural and unnatural properties, it is a difference that admits of a degree: the imperfectly natural properties are natural to varying degrees (Lewis 1983, p. 347). Though there are important differences between Nyāya universals and Lewis' natural properties, these differences do not bear on this point.
- 4 – A good deal of scholarly debate has centered on the question of Vacaspati's date, but the consensus is that it is close to the end of the tenth century (see Potter's *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, p. 454).
- 5 – See Chakrabarti 1995, 1998, 2003.
- 6 – It is important to note here that Jayanta Bhaṭṭa is being unfair to the Buddhists on several counts. First, Jayanta only mentions the fact that non-conceptual perceptions are unobservably short and so there is no way of determining their content. The Buddhists do not agree with this; they claim that non-conceptual perceptions are reflexive and thus self-revealing. Second, Buddhists reject the idea that conceptualized perception can count as a perception, so there is not much point in insisting that we appeal to those subsequent perceptions to determine the content of the initial non-conceptualized perception.
- 7 – See, for example, Chakrabarti 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004.

References

- Annambhaṭṭa. 1983. *Tarkasaṃgrahadīpikā on Tarkasaṃgraha* (The manual of reason). Edited and translated by G. Bhattacharya. Calcutta: Progressive Publishers.
- Armstrong, D. M., 1978. *Universals and Scientific Realism: Nominalism and Realism*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bhartṛhari. 2005. *Vākyapadīya*. In *Bhartṛhari's Vākyapadīya Kāṇḍa 1*, chap. 1. Translated by Joseph Ouseparampil. Pune: Indian Institute of Indology.
- Chadha, Monima. 2006. "Yet Another Attempt to Salvage Pristine Perceptions!" *Philosophy East and West* 56, no. 2: 333–342.
- Chakrabarti, Arindam. 1995. "Non-Particular Individuals." In *The Philosophy of P. F. Strawson*, edited by P. K. Sen and R. R. Verma, pp. 124–144. New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research.
- . 1998. "Concept-possession, Knowledge of a Language and Sense-Experience." In *The Philosophy of P. F. Strawson*, edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn, pp. 315–323. Chicago: Open Court.
- . 2000. "Against Immaculate Perception: Seven Reasons for Eliminating Nirvikalpaka Perception from Nyāya." *Philosophy East and West* 50, no. 1: 1–8.
- . 2001. "Reply to Stephen Phillips." *Philosophy East and West* 51, no. 1: 114–115.
- . 2003. "Perception, Apperception and Non-Conceptual Content." In *Perspectives on Consciousness*, edited by Amita Chatterjee, pp. 89–108. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.
- . 2004. "Seeing without Recognizing? More on Denuding Perceptual Content." *Philosophy East and West* 54, no. 3: 365–367.
- . 2006. "On Perceiving Properties." In *Universals, Concepts and Qualities: New Essays on the Meaning of Predicates*, edited by P.F.S. Strawson and Arindam Chakrabarti, pp. 309–318. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.
- Jayanta Bhaṭṭa. 1982, 1983, 1984. *Nyāyamanjari of Jayanta Bhaṭṭa: With the Commentary of Grantibhaṅga by Cakradhara*. 3 pts. Edited by Gaurinath Sastri. Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya.
- Lewis, David. 1983. "New Work for a Theory of Universals." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 61: 343–377.
- Matilal, B. K. 1986. *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Phillips, Stephen. 2001. "There's Nothing Wrong with Raw Perception." *Philosophy East and West* 51, no. 1: 104–113.

- . 2011. "Epistemology in Classical Indian Philosophy." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2011 edition, Edward N. Zalta editor. plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/epistemology-india/.
- Phillips, Stephen H., and N. S. Ramanuja Tatacharya. 2004. *Epistemology Of Perception: Gaṅgeśa's Tattvacintāmaṇi: Jewel Of Reflection on the Truth (about Epistemology), The Perception Chapter (Pratyakṣa-khaṇḍa)*. Transliterated Text, Translation, and Philosophical Commentary [by Phillips and Tatacharya]. Treasury of the Indic Sciences. New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies.
- Potter, Karl H. 1977. "Indian Metaphysics and Epistemology: The Tradition of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika up to Gaṅgeśa." In *The Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Praśastapāda. 1971. *Padarthadharmasamgraha With Commentaries, With Kiranavali of Udayana*. Edited by Jitendra S. Jetly. Gaekwad Oriental Series, 154. Baroda: Oriental Institute.
- Russell, Bertrand. 1912. "The World of Universals." In *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Williams and Norgate; New York: Henry Holt and Company.