

The Realism of Universals in Plato and Nyāya

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Abstract It has become commonplace in introductions to Indian philosophy to construe Plato's discussion of forms (εἶδος/ἰδέα) and the treatment in Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika of universals (*sāmānya/jāti*) as addressing the same philosophical issue, albeit in somewhat different ways. While such a comparison of the similarities and differences has interest and value as an initial reconnaissance of what each says about common properties, an examination of the roles that universals play in the rest of their philosophical enquiries vitiates this commonplace. This paper draws upon the primary texts to identify the following metaphysical, epistemological, semantic and soteriological roles that universals play in the philosophy of Plato and of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika:

- Metaphysical: causal of the existence of x
- Metaphysical: constitutive of the identity/essence of x
- Epistemological: cognitively causal (i.e. of the cognition of one over many)
- Epistemological: epistemically causal (i.e. of knowledge of x)
- Semantic: necessary condition of speech and reason
 - Epistemological: vindicatory of induction (Nyāya only)
 - Metaphysical: explanatory of causation (Nyāya only)
 - Soteriological: cathartic contemplation (Plato only).

These roles provide us with motivations or reasons to believe that universals exist. As we examine these motivations, we find pressures mounting against our assimilating Platonic forms and the universals of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika in the discourse about common properties. It is especially when we appreciate

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the utterly different contribution that universals make in securing our highest welfare that we realize how Plato and the two sister schools are not so much talking somewhat differently about the same thing, but talking somewhat similarly about different things. This better understanding of this difference in these philosophies opens a route for our better understanding of their unique contributions in the ongoing dialogue of philosophy.

Keywords Comparative philosophy · Universals · Forms · Ideas · *sāmānya* · *jāti* · Realism · Soteriology · Causation · Semantics · Vaiśeṣika

Introduction: How Different can ‘the same’ be?

For many eminent scholars who have offered accounts of Indian philosophy to the West, it has been a commonplace to introduce the theory of generic properties or universals (*sāmānya/jāti*) in the sister schools of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika by some sort of comparison with Plato’s treatment of universals in his theory of forms.¹ For example, D. N. Shastri construes the opposition between Nyāya realism and Buddhist nominalism as identical with the issue on which Plato took a stand with his theory of forms.² M. Hiriyanna warns us only against our conceiving ‘a *complete* resemblance’ between the Nyāya universal and the Platonic ‘idea’ on the grounds that the Nyāya ‘particulars are not viewed as copies of the universal’.³ Karl Potter adverts to the difference between Plato and Aristotle over whether universals had some kind of independent existence over and above their instances, and presents this as the ‘sort of question’ that was raised in Nyāya between Praśastapāda and Uddhyotakara on the one hand, and Vācāspati Mīśra and Udayana on the other.⁴ Bimal Matilal identifies this topic as the ‘problem of universals’ and uses Aristotle’s criticism of Plato’s forms to orient his presentation of the Nyāya doctrine.⁵

The impression the reader gets is that Plato and Nyāya, when talking about universals, were addressing the same philosophical issue. In this paper I would

¹ In speaking jointly of the doctrine of both Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika I wish not to make light of their differences, even on the subject of universals. I mean only to join the consensus of scholars who note their shared philosophical position of Direct Realism and the ample evidence in the commentaries and sub-commentaries of their mutual reliance on each other, whereby Nyāya uses Vaiśeṣika’s metaphysics to expound and defend its *pramāṇa* theory and Vaiśeṣika uses Nyāya’s epistemology and *pramāṇa* theory to defend its ontology. I will also often follow scholarly consensus by abbreviating ‘Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika’ to ‘Nyāya’ when considering views that both shared, e.g. as does Chakrabarti (1975, p. 379, n. 1).

² Shastri (1964, p. 48).

³ Hiriyanna (2000, p. 233). (My italics). Of course, even in Plato it is a moot point whether the relation between a particular and its universal is best characterized as that of resemblance or, for example, participation (τὰ μετέχοντα) at *Rep.* 476d2, *Sym.* 211b2, *Phaed.* 101c3-6 and *Parm.* 129b3 ff.

⁴ Potter (1977, p. 139).

⁵ Matilal (1986, p. 379; 2005, p. 45).

like to challenge this view by examining the arguments in each tradition that offer motivations or reasons for believing in the existence of universals. I will show how the similarity of the metaphysical, epistemological and semantic roles that universals play in the philosophy of Plato and Nyāya masks fundamental differences and casts in bold relief the difference of role that they play in the soteriology of each tradition. The aim of this exercise in comparative philosophy is to elucidate the problem of ascertaining when philosophies are talking differently about the same thing, and when they are talking similarly about different things.

As we proceed to examine what these two traditions say about universals, the meaning of the term ‘universal’ will, of course, be a moot point. In order to proceed with as few preconceptions as possible, let me define ‘universal’ simply as a common characteristic, with as wide a range as from, say, ‘humanity’ to ‘in front of this speaker’. Plato and Nyāya acknowledge that in ordinary parlance we seem to make reference to such a range of common characteristics, but both argue that some appear to be more important ontologically than others, and some seem to be so spurious as to constitute a class that is distinct from the ontologically important ones. They both discuss the extent to which the former really do exist, and the latter really do not. Plato worries over whether universal terms such as ‘mud’, ‘hair’ and ‘dirt’ actually denote forms, and Nyāya seeks to specify the conditions that prevent a universal (*sāmānya*) from enjoying the privilege of being a generic property (*jāti*), rather than being merely an imposed property (*upādhi*). So, with this broad notion of ‘universal’, let us examine what each tradition offers as motivations for our believing that they exist.

One further caveat needs to be issued as we turn to look in Plato’s dialogues for doctrine about universals. Much scholarship has recently pointed out how mistaken we are to treat the dialogue as a treatise expounding doctrines.⁶ Plato chose to write dramas, and the philosophy we find in them is not the exposition of doctrine, but rather a continual challenge addressed to the reader to engage in his or her own philosophizing. I intend the following Platonic passages not to bear witness of Platonic doctrine, but only to signify grounds that a conscientious reader might glean from the dialogues in favour of considering that some universal properties exist in some way or other.

Motivations in Plato

Scattered throughout Plato’s dialogues we find arguments by which Socrates presses his interlocutors into defining certain universals, such as holiness, courage, temperance, justice. When specifying exactly what he is seeking to define, he calls these universals ‘forms’ (εἶδη, ἰδέαι) and characterizes them as fulfilling certain functions. For us, the readers, these functions constitute

⁶ Griswold (1988), Gill (1996, 2002, 2004), Sayre (1992), Frede (1992), Tigerstedt (1977) and McCabe (2000).

motivations or reasons that Plato offers for believing in the existence of such universals. Two of these are metaphysical, two are epistemological, one is semantic and one is soteriological.

One of the metaphysical motivations is causal, in that universals are what make things what they are. In the *Euthyphro* Socrates explains that he is not asking for one or two examples of pious actions, but for ‘that form itself *that makes* all pious actions pious’.⁷ When Socrates asks Meno what virtue is, he rejects Meno’s swarm of examples, and makes the point that, although virtues are ‘many and various, all of them have one and the same form *which makes* them virtues’.⁸ In the *Phaedo* Socrates explains to Cebes why he ignores sophisticated reasons for what makes something beautiful, and clings to the ‘safe answer’, viz., ‘that it is through Beauty that beautiful things *are made* beautiful’.⁹ He counsels Cebes to protest, if challenged, that he does not know ‘how else each thing *can come to be except by* sharing in the particular reality in which it shares’, and he offers ‘Twoness’ and ‘Oneness’ as examples of such ‘realities’.¹⁰ In the *Parmenides* Socrates finds it entirely acceptable ‘if someone shows that all things are one *by partaking* of oneness, and that these same things are many *by partaking* also of multitude’.¹¹

The other metaphysical motivation is constitutive, in that universals constitute the essence of what a thing is, and thereby secure its identity in relation to other things that share the same essence. When Meno fails to understand that Socrates is seeking to know the universal ‘virtue’, rather than an account of the many types of virtue, e.g. the virtue of a man, of a woman, etc., Socrates uses the analogy of an inquiry into the nature of bees. While various species of bees differ from each other, the aim of discovering what they are, in so far as they are bees, must search for ‘this very thing... *in which they are all the same* and do not differ from one another’.¹² The universal ‘bee-ness’ is what makes one bee identical, i.e., non-different, from another bee, and constitutes what any bee essentially is, in as much as it is a bee. In the *Laches* Socrates explains that in his inquiry into what courage is, he is seeking for that which ‘is the same in all these cases’ of apparently different courageous actions.¹³ In *Republic V* Socrates explains that the forms of just, unjust, good and bad

⁷ *Euthyph.* 6d10-11: ἐκεῖνο αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος ᾧ πάντα τὰ ὅσια ὀσιά ἐστιν. (My italics.) Except where I indicate, all translations of Plato are taken from Cooper (1997). For the Greek text I am grateful to the Perseus 2.0 Digital Library (CD-ROM).

⁸ *Meno* 72c6-8: κἄν εἰ πολλὰ καὶ παντοδαπαὶ εἰσιν, ἐν γέ τι εἶδος ταῦτόν ἅπανσι ἔχουσινδι' ὃ εἰσὶν ἀρεταί. (My italics.)

⁹ *Phaed.* 100e2-3: ὅτι τῷ καλῷ τὰ καλὰ [γίγνεται] καλὰ. (My italics.)

¹⁰ *Phaed.* 101c2-4: ἄλλως πως ἕκαστον γιγνώμενον ἢ μετασχόν τῆς ἰδίας οὐσίας ἐκάστου ἂν μετᾶσχη. (My italics.)

¹¹ *Parm.* 129b5-6: εἰ ἐν ἅπαντα ἀποφαίνει τις τῷ μετέχειν τοῦ ἐνός καὶ ταῦτὰ ταῦταπολλὰ τῷ πλήθους αὐ μετέχειν. (My italics.)

¹² *Meno* 72c1-3: τοῦτο... αὐτὸ... ᾧ οὐδὲν διαφέρουσιν ἀλλὰ ταῦτόν εἰσιν ἅπανσι. (My italics.)

¹³ *Lach.* 191e10-11: τί ὄν ἐν πᾶσι τούτοις ταῦτόν ἐστιν.

‘manifest themselves everywhere in association with actions’, thereby appearing to be many, but constituting that in virtue of which all their instantiating actions are the same.¹⁴

We also find in the dialogues two kinds of epistemological reasons for believing in universals. One kind is ‘cognition-causing’ or cognitive, in that a universal is what causes the cognition in us of a property that is ‘one over many’, i.e., the cognition of one and the same property simultaneously in different places. In *Republic V*, when Socrates is examining with Glaucon what a true philosopher is, he draws Glaucon’s attention to the universality of properties such as ‘the just and the unjust, the good and the bad, and all the forms’. He points out that these properties have a ‘one over many’ nature, in that ‘each of them is itself one, but because they manifest themselves everywhere in association with actions, bodies, and one another, each of them appears to be many’.¹⁵ For example, our cognitions of these various just actions are caused by the cognition of one and the same thing, viz., the universal ‘justice’, appearing in many different places. The universal is what causes us to have the cognition of sameness in different circumstances. And so later in *Republic VI* we find Socrates reminding Glaucon of his customary manner of inquiry that ‘reverses’ the process by turning away from ‘setting down’ beauty or the good as being the many different instantiations of beautiful or good things; instead, ‘we set [them] down according to a single form of each, believing that there is but one, and call it the “the being” of each’.¹⁶ Socrates here identifies the universal as the quarry of their inquiry, as being that which causes us to have cognitions of the same thing in many places. In the *Parmenides* Socrates agrees that

whenever some number of things seem to you to be large, perhaps there seems to be some one character, the same as you look at them all, and from that you conclude that the large is one.¹⁷

The existence of largeness as an entity is inferred on the grounds that it is the cause of the cognition of one and the same character in different circumstances.

The second kind of epistemological motivation is ‘knowledge-causing’ or epistemic, in that universals cause us to know what a thing really is. When Socrates explains to Euthyphro why he does not want just examples of piety, but a statement of piety itself, his reason is ‘so that I may look upon it, and using it as a model, say that any action of yours or another’s that is of that kind is pious, and if it is not that it is not’.¹⁸ It is the knowledge of the universal

¹⁴ *Rep.* V 476a5-7: αὐτὸ [sc. εἶδος] μὲν ἓν ἕκαστον εἶναι, τῇ δὲ τῶν πράξεων καὶ σωμάτων καὶ ἀλλήλων κοινωνία πανταχοῦ φανταζόμενα πολλὰ φαίνεσθαι ἕκαστον.

¹⁵ *Rep.* V 476a5-7: αὐτὸ μὲν ἓν ἕκαστον εἶναι. . . φανταζόμενα πολλὰ φαίνεσθαι ἕκαστον.

¹⁶ *Rep.* VI 507b6-7: πάλιν αὐτὸ κατ’ ἰδέαν μίαν ἕκαστου ὡς μίᾳ οὐσίᾳ τιθέντες, “ὃ ἔστιν” ἕκαστον προσαγορεύομεν.

¹⁷ *Parm.* 132a1-4: ὅταν πόλλ’ ἄττα μεγάλα σοι δόξη εἶναι, μία τις ἴσως δοκεῖ ἰδέα ἢ αὐτὴ εἶναι ἐπὶ πάντα ἰδόντι, ὅθεν ἓν τὸ μέγα ἡγή εἶναι.

¹⁸ *Euthyph.* 6e4-6: ἵνα εἰς ἐκείνην ἀποβλέπων καὶ χρώμενος αὐτῇ παραδείγματι, ὃ μὲν ἀντοιοῦτον ἢ ὧν ἂν ἢ σὺ ἢ ἄλλος τις πράττει φῶ ὅσιον εἶναι, ὃ δ’ ἂν μὴ τοιοῦτον, μὴ φῶ.

‘piety’ that enables us to know which actions really are pious, and which are not. Socrates points out to Meno that in order to know anything about virtue they need to discover the ‘one and the same form’ of all virtues, for ‘it is right to look to this when one is asking to make clear what virtue is’.¹⁹ It is the grasp of the form that confers knowledge. In *Republic* V, when Socrates turns to respond to the ‘lover of sights’ who does not believe in forms, he uses the argument from the compresence of opposites to establish that such a person cannot know what is beautiful.²⁰ Only the grasp of the universal ‘beauty’, the ‘form of the beautiful itself that remains always the same in all respects’, can cause one to have knowledge of what is beautiful.²¹ In the *Symposium* Diotima explains to Socrates that ‘the only way that Beauty can be seen’ is to gaze upon ‘the divine Beauty itself in its one form’.²² In *Republic* X Socrates describes the knowledge necessary for manufacturing artefacts as the craftsman’s acquaintance with forms, when he says, ‘don’t we also customarily say that their makers look towards the appropriate form in making the beds or tables we use, and similarly in other cases?’²³ And perhaps the *locus classicus* for the role of forms as causes of knowledge appears in *Republic* VI where Socrates characterizes the form of the good as fulfilling a unique epistemic role: ‘what gives truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower is the form of the good’.²⁴

The semantic motivation for believing in the existence of universals is that without them, we could not converse or reason. In the *Parmenides* we find the relation between certain words and their objects construed as a kind of derivation, by which an object becomes the referent of a word if that object participates in the form associated with the word. Socrates agrees that ‘there are certain forms from which these other things, by getting a share of them, derive their names’, e.g. large things are called ‘large’ by getting a share of largeness, and just things are called ‘just’ by getting a share of justice.²⁵ What exactly constitutes this relation of ‘participation’ or ‘sharing’ is a moot point, of course, and is the central issue of this part of the dialogue. But that forms play an essential role in language and meaning turns out to be the one thing both *Parmenides* and Socrates affirm. They agree that

... if someone ... won’t allow that there are forms for things and won’t mark off a form for each one, he won’t have anywhere to turn his

¹⁹ *Meno* 72c8-d1: εἰς ὃ καλῶς που ἔχει ἀποβλέψαντα τὸν ἀποκρινόμενον τῷ ἐρωτήσαντι ἐκείνου δηλώσαι, ὃ τυγχάνει οὔσα ἀρετή.

²⁰ For a good account of this strategy of argumentation see McCabe (1994, pp. 37–47).

²¹ *Rep.* 479a1-3 & e7-8: ἰδέαν τινα αὐτοῦ κάλλους... ἀεὶ... κατὰ ταῦτα ὡσαύτως ἔχουσιν.

²² *Sym.* 212a3 & 211e3-4: ᾧ ὁρατὸν τὸ καλὸν & αὐτὸ τὸ θεῖον καλόν... μονοειδές.

²³ *Rep.* 596b6-9: οὐκοῦν καὶ εἰώθαμεν λέγειν ὅτι ὁ δημιουργὸς ἐκατέρου τοῦ σκεύους πρὸς τὴν ἰδέαν βλέπων οὕτω ποιεῖ ὃ μὲν τὰς κλίνας, ὃ δὲ τὰς τραπέζας, αἷς ἡμεῖς χρώμεθα, καὶ τάλλα κατὰ ταῦτά;

²⁴ *Rep.* 508e1-3: τοῦτο τοίνυν τὸ τὴν ἀλήθειαν παρέχον τοῖς γινωσκομένοις καὶ τῷ γινώσκοντι τὴν δύναμιν ἀποδιδόν τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέαν.

²⁵ *Parm.* 130e5-6: εἶναι εἶδη ἅττα, ὧν τάδετ’ ἄλλα μεταλαμβάνοντα τὰς ἐπωνυμίας αὐτῶν ἴσχειν.

thought, since he doesn't allow that for each thing there is a character that is always the same. In this way he will destroy the power of dialectic entirely.²⁶

Reasoned discussion simply cannot take place if forms do not exist to focus and stabilize their inquiry. In *Republic X* Socrates describes his 'usual procedure' in philosophical discussion, by which 'we customarily hypothesize a single form in connection with each of the many things to which we apply the same name'.²⁷ This single form is the single thing to which the name, used on various occasions for many different things, semantically points. Similarly in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates says that good speech requires that the speaker proceed by means of collections and divisions, i.e., 'holding in view things that are scattered about in many ways and drawing them into one form (ιδέα)', and then 'being able to differentiate again according to forms (εἶδη) at the places where things naturally subdivide'.²⁸ Only by means of such a process of definition can one make clear what he wishes to express. And the reason Socrates gives for being a lover of collection and division according to kinds or forms is 'so that I may be able to think and to speak'.²⁹ Indeed, Socrates treats as a god anyone who 'is capable of discerning a single thing that is also by nature capable of encompassing many', and he calls such a person a 'dialectician'.³⁰

Motivations in Nyāya

Let us turn to the motivations we find in Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika for our believing in universals. The word '*sāmānya*', which carries the basic meanings of 'sameness', 'equality' and 'identity', is used as an umbrella term to cover all common properties, and is most commonly translated as 'universal'.³¹ As the debate ensued between various schools in India over the existence and nature of universals, the word '*sāmānya*' was used to denote all potential candidates for being called 'universals', even the spurious cases, like Plato's mud, hair and dirt.

In due course, much effort was spent in attempts to divide the genus of universals into the two species of proper universals, i.e., *jātis* or 'natural kinds'

²⁶ *Parm.* 135b5-c2: εἴ γέ τις δῆ, ὡς Σώκρατες αὖ μή εἰσείη εἶδη τῶν ὄντων εἶναι, εἰς πάντα τὰ νυνδὴ καὶ ἄλλα τοιαῦτα ἀποβλέψας, μηδέ τι ὀριεῖται εἶδος ἑνὸς ἐκάστου, οὐδὲ ὅποι τρέψει τὴν διάνοιαν ἔξει, μὴ ἔων ἰδέαν τῶν ὄντων ἐκάστου τὴν αὐτὴν αἰεὶ εἶναι, καὶ οὕτως τὴν τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δύναμιν παντάπασι διαφθερεῖ.

²⁷ *Rep.* 596a5-7: εἶδος γάρ πού τι ἔν ἐκαστον εἰώθαμεν τίθεσθαι περὶ ἕκαστα τὰ πολλὰ, οἷς ταυτὸν ὄνομα ἐπιφέρομεν.

²⁸ *Phaedr.* 265d3-4 & e1-2: εἰς μίαν τε ἰδέαν συνωρῶντα ἄγειν τὰ πολλαχῆ διεσπαρμένα & τὸ πάλιν κατ' εἶδη δύνασθαι διατέμνειν κατ' ἄρθρα ἢ πέφυκεν. (My translation.)

²⁹ *Phaedr.* 266b3-5: ἴνα οἷός τε ὦ λέγειν τε καὶ φρονεῖν.

³⁰ *Phaedr.* 266b5-7: δυνατὸν εἰς ἓν καὶ ἐπὶ πολλὰ πεφυκόθ' ὄραν.

³¹ Halbfass (1992, p. 115).

such as ‘cow’ or ‘horse’, and improper universals, i.e., *upādhis* or ‘imposed properties’ such as ‘being a cook’ or ‘fatherhood’.³² We learn from Udāyana’s *Kiraṇāvalī* where this project stood ca. 1000 CE with his six impediments (*jātibādhakas*) that prevent a general term from actually signifying a proper universal.³³ Indeed, the debate continued after the consolidation of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika into the one school of Navya-Nyāya, as the theory of delimiters (*avacchedakas*) sought to deflect the criticism of universals as causes of differentiation in objects.³⁴ In the spirit of open inquiry into what universals are, if anything at all, I shall conform to the use of ‘universal’ as the translation of ‘*sāmānya*’, with the proviso that in our survey of Nyāya’s graduated investigation into what universals are, we allow ourselves latitude, as the Indian philosophers did, to accommodate a distinction between ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ universals.³⁵

The earliest mention of universals by Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika occurs in Kaṇāda’s *Vaiśeṣikasūtra*, sometime ca. 300–100 BCE. Here, although characteristically aphoristic, Kaṇāda introduces the notion of properties that have the capacity to define classes of things through inclusion and exclusion.³⁶ These properties range from ‘existence’, which alone of universals only includes, since all that exists has this property, through various common properties like ‘substance’, ‘quality’ and ‘action’, which delineate species within the genus of ‘existence’ in virtue of their applying to some things, but not to others.

In Kaṇāda’s exposition of his ontology, the motivation for believing that universals exist is a metaphysical one, similar to the metaphysical motivation we find in Plato by which universals constitute the essence of a thing. For Kaṇāda, universals are the principles by which the world is differentiated according to kinds, accounting for what makes one thing differ in kind from another.³⁷ Furthermore, these universals are non-identical with the individuals. Śrīdhara argues that it is not right to regard the universal as ‘the very form (*svarūpa*) of the particular (*vyakti*)’.³⁸ He grants that they are not perceived apart from each other, for we do not recognize a cow without perceiving ‘cowness’, and we do not recognize ‘cowness’ without perceiving a cow. But

³² For accounts of the evolved theory of proper and improper universals, see Matilal (1986, pp. 382–383), Halbfass (1992, pp. 118–122).

³³ Potter (1977, p. 590), Chakrabarti (1975, pp. 372–378).

³⁴ For the growing importance of delimitation (*avaccheda*) in Navya-Nyāya and Gaṅgeśa’s deployment of it against attacks by the Advaitin Śrīharṣa, see Phillips (1995, pp. 111 & 146–150).

³⁵ For detailed studies of the formulation of the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika theory of universals and their defence of it against other schools, see Dravid (1972, esp. pp. 14–52), Shastri (1964, pp. 306–373).

³⁶ *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* I.ii.4-17.

³⁷ For the preferred view that Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika viewed universals as denoting common properties rather than classes, see Potter (1977, pp. 134–135).

³⁸ *Jātir-eva na ca vyakteḥ svarūpam*, NK under PP 155, Dvivedin (1984, p. 316). For an English translation see Praśastapāda (1982, p. 660). Śrīdhara uses the more precise term ‘*jāti*’ for Praśastapāda’s ‘*sāmānya*’, presumably to preclude, at this later stage in the debate, the controversy over *upādhis*.

like the red-hot iron ball, whilst the fire and the iron ball are perceived inseparably, they are nevertheless distinct, as causes of distinct cognitions. Like Plato's forms, the Nyāya universals have distinct existences of their own that account for the generic nature of what an individual is.

The second kind of metaphysical motivation that we find in Plato, where universals play a causal role in the existence of things, does not appear as robustly in Nyāya. Nevertheless, Nyāya does argue that universals constitute a category of things that exist (*padārtha*) and gives universals a causal role in the anatomy of things that exist.³⁹ For Nyāya, from Kaṇāda onwards, everything that exists manifests universals.⁴⁰ But unlike Plato's treatment of universals as somehow constituting what a thing essentially is, universals for Nyāya are just one of a number of components that the objects of our experience must have in order to exist, and are no more essential than the object's substance (*dravya*) and qualities (*guṇas*).

We also find in Kaṇāda the epistemological motivation for believing in universals that characterizes them as causal in respect of our knowledge. Kaṇāda approaches the issue from his analysis of doubt, and argues that the existence of universals is necessary if we are to explain what doubt is. When he defines the nature of doubt, he specifies universals as one of three factors that play a part, viz., perception of the universal, non-perception of the actual particular before us, and the memory of various particulars seen in the past.⁴¹ Śaṅkara Miśra's *Upaskāra* supplies us with an example.⁴² At dusk we perceive in the distance the universal 'tallness' manifesting in an object, but we fail to perceive the specific character of the particular in which this tallness is manifesting, and at the same time we remember seeing tallness before in a post and in a man. So, we are in doubt whether the object before us is a post or a man. Without universals, doubt cannot even begin to arise with regard to our knowledge or lack of knowledge of what a thing is.

In the *Nyāyasūtra* we find the nature of doubt much more widely explored, and the commentaries of Vātsyāyana and Uddyotakara provide much that will have been available to Śaṅkara Miśra for his *Upaskāra* on Kaṇāda. Vātsyāyana explicates five sources of doubt from Gautama's definition. For our present purposes, we need only note the first two. The first source of doubt mentioned is the one Kaṇāda identified, viz., where there is 'a conflicting judgment in regard to the particular after apprehension of the universal'.⁴³ Although Gautama does not use the term *sāmānya* for 'universal' here, he does use the cognate expression *samāna-dharma*, 'same property', and Vātsyāyana offers the example of 'Man or post?' that Śaṅkara Miśra appears

³⁹ See below for a fuller account of this, and for the difference of view between Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika on the categorization of universals.

⁴⁰ *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* I.ii.4-17. Kaṇāda (1975, pp. 26–31).

⁴¹ *Sāmānyapratyakṣād-viśeṣāpratyakṣād-viśeṣasmṛteś-ca saṁśayaḥ*, VS II.ii.17. Ibid.

⁴² *Upaskāra* on VS II.ii.18-20. Ibid. He appears to have drawn this example from Vātsyāyana's *Bhāṣya* on NS I.i.23, q.v. *infra*.

⁴³ *samānadharmopapatter-viśeṣāpekṣo vimarśaḥ saṁśaya itī*, NB on I.i.23. Gautama (2003, p. 234).

to have borrowed, in order to illustrate the doubt that arises over which particular is manifesting the universal property before us. The second source of doubt that Vātsyāyana expounds equally motivates our belief in the existence of universals. This is the occasion when there is ‘apprehension of a unique property [but failure to apprehend the universal]’.⁴⁴ His example is where we grasp that the unique property of sound is to be produced by disjunction, such as by the splitting of bamboo, but we fail to discern whether sound is an instantiation of the universal ‘substance’ or of the universal ‘quality’ or of the universal ‘movement’. This account of two sources of doubt entails the view that our certain knowledge of what a thing is will be secured only if we correctly (a) identify the particular that is manifesting the universal and (b) identify the universal that is being manifested in the particular. For Kaṇāda our cognitions of substances, qualities and movements depend upon the existence of universals and particulars as epistemic primitives.⁴⁵

Nyāya grounds this epistemological motivation for believing in universals in the most fundamental form of knowledge, viz., perceptual knowledge. Far from knowing what justice, holiness or courage is, we cannot even know that this is a piece of paper without the assistance of universals. The *Nyāyasūtra* identifies perception as a valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), which gives us direct knowledge of an external, mind-independent world through immediate contact between a sense organ and the object of sense.⁴⁶ Uddyotakara states that this immediate contact is of six kinds. The third kind of contact he mentions is a threefold relation consisting in (a) the inherence of a universal property in the token quality or quality instance that (b) inheres in the substance which (c) is in contact with a sense organ.⁴⁷ For example, my perceptual knowledge that this is white paper consists in my apprehension of this page having a particular white colour which is indeed white because of the universal ‘white’ which it instantiates. Uddyotakara’s use of the instrumental case for the word universal (*sāmānyena*) illustrates the Nyāya motivation urging our acceptance of the existence of universals, for without their instrumentality, we could not have even the most fundamental knowledge that we, in fact, do have about the world.⁴⁸

Uddyotakara’s claim that we actually *perceive* universals is true to Gautama’s account of universals as having visible manifestation (*abhivyakti*).⁴⁹ Gautama contends that we actually perceive universals, but only in virtue of

⁴⁴ *anekadharmopapatter-iti*, NB on I.i.23. Ibid., p. 240.

⁴⁵ *sāmānyaviśeṣāpeksām dravyaguṇakarmasu* [sc., *jñānam*], VS VIII.i.6. Kaṇāda (1975).

⁴⁶ *indriya-artha-sannikarṣaḥ*, NS I.i.4.

⁴⁷ *samyukta-samaveta-samavāyaḥ*, NV under NS I.i.4. Gautama (2003, p. 95).

⁴⁸ *rūpādi-vṛttinā sāmānyena samyuktasamavetasamavāyaḥ*, under NS I.i.4. Ibid.

⁴⁹ *nākṛtivyaktyapekṣatvājñātyabhivyakteḥ*, NS II.ii.65 in Ibid., p. 670. Gautama is here asserting that the referent of a word is not just the universal (*jāti*), because the manifestation (*abhivyakti*) of the universal depends on the perception of the individual and its form or configuration of parts.

our perceiving their instantiations. We never perceive universals in uninstantiated glory, as Plato suggests we may be able to do.⁵⁰

This visual apprehension of universals is corroborated by Praśastapāda, who provides a fuller account in the section on universals toward the end of his *Padārthadharmasamgraha*.⁵¹ And it is in his account that we find the other epistemological motivation we found in Plato for believing in universals, in as much as they are the cause of the cognition of ‘one over many’. Praśastapāda asserts that a universal (*sāmānya*)

... pervades over all its objectives [i.e., instantiations or particulars]; has identically the same form (in all cases) inhering in many individuals; it brings about the idea of its own form in one, two or many things; and it is the cause or basis of the notion of inclusion, inhering as it does in all its substrates simultaneously.⁵²

We are motivated to believe that universals exist because, among other things, they alone can account for what, to translate more literally, ‘causes [to arise in us] the notion that accords with its own form (*ātmasvarūpa-anugama-pratyaya*) in one, two or many things’.⁵³ The explanation for why this cognition regularly arises in our minds is that its cause exists independently of our minds, as something that ‘is in all its instantiations (*sva-viśaya-sarva-gatam*), itself undivided (*abhinnātmakam*) and whose occurrence is various (*anekavṛtti*)’.⁵⁴ Praśastapāda goes on to explain.

When there continually arises the cognition of each of a series of objects as being associated by way of sameness or identity [*sāmānya*], as a result of the impression [*saṃskāra*] that is brought about by the ascertainment of this repetition from consideration of the series of past cognitions, that which causes this impression to ensue is a universal.⁵⁵

The main point to emphasize is that Praśastapāda insists on the existence of something that causes in us the cognition of different things as the being same. This point is also proclaimed succinctly in the *Nyāyasūtra*, which says that a universal (*jāti*) ‘has the nature of producing identity (*sāmāna*)’, where ‘identity’ is glossed in the tradition as ‘identical cognition’.⁵⁶ There is one thing that

⁵⁰ *Rep.* VII 540a8-9, *Phaedr.* 247d3-e4, *Sym.* 211d1-3. See below for more on this fundamental difference.

⁵¹ The section entitled *Atha sāmānyapadārthanirūpaṇam*.

⁵² *PP* 154. Praśastapāda (1982, p. 651). Śrīdhara glosses Praśastapāda’s term ‘its objective’ (*sva-viśaya*) as ‘the object in which the universal is recognized’ (*yat-sāmānyam, yatra piṇḍe pratiyate, sa tasya svo viśayah*), Dvivedin (1984, p. 313).

⁵³ *ekadvibahuṣv ātmasvarūpa-anugama-pratyaya-kāri*, Dvivedin (1984, p. 311). (My translation.)

⁵⁴ *svaviśayasarvagatam abhinnātmakam anekavṛtti[h]*, Ibid. (My translation.)

⁵⁵ *pratipiṇḍam sāmānyāpekṣam prabandhena jñānotpattāv, abhyāsa-pratyaya-janitāc-ca saṃskārād atīta-jñāna-prabandha-pratyavekṣaṇād, yad anugatam asti tat sāmānyam iti*. Ibid. (My translation.)

⁵⁶ *sāmānaprasavātmikā jātiḥ*, variously numbered in different editions, but *NS* II.ii.72 in Ghosh (2003, p. 172). (My translation.) Note Vātsyāyana’s use of the word ‘*nimitta*’ (cause) in his gloss: *yo ’rtho ’nekatra pratyayānuvṛti-nimittaṃ tat sāmānyam*.

extends in some way over many things, and is responsible for the uniform cognition that we have when cognizing these different entities. The controversy over the relation between a universal and its particulars that ensues in the commentaries of Uddyotakara and Śrīdhara matches the challenge that the young Socrates faces in the first half of the *Parmenides*.⁵⁷ Despite the considerable difficulties in explicating a coherent account of this relation, we find in both traditions that the drive to explain how we gain the apprehension of ‘one over many’, e.g. largeness when we see many large things, constitutes an epistemological motivation for our believing in the existence of universals.

These four motivations, two metaphysical and two epistemological, that are so redolent of Plato’s discussion of forms, are joined in Nyāya by two further motivations: one epistemological and one metaphysical. These additional motivations grow out of the intense debate between philosophical schools in India for hundreds of years over the principles of valid reasoning and the nature of causation.

Possibly as early as the 6th century BCE philosophers in India sought to establish what constituted the valid means of knowledge and proof of theory.⁵⁸ Nyāya fought hard in defence of logical inference (*anumāna*) against schools that targeted the problem of induction as proof that no deductive proof about the world, as opposed to mere proofs of *a priori* truths, could ever guarantee truth for its conclusion, for howsoever valid the deductive proof may be, its major premise will necessarily have been arrived at by induction. The Materialist school was particularly strident about this, and the Buddhists, from Diñnāga in the 5th century CE onwards, sought with great care in their reasoning to establish both the requirements for a major premise to be sound, and the limits on what one could claim, on the basis of this premise, as knowledge about the world.⁵⁹

Nyāya pursues its Direct Realist agenda in claiming that we can, on the basis of what we do perceive, know things about the world that we do not, or even cannot, perceive. In the stock example, we can know there is fire on the mountain when we can only see that there is smoke, on the grounds that wherever there is smoke, there is fire. Nyāya argues that this major premise was indefeasible, for it is, in fact, the result of *seeing* in the past the invariable concomitance of the property smoke with the property fire. If our major premise of ‘No smoke without fire’ had been secured merely by never finding smoke without fire in our past observations, we could never be sure that, on the next occasion, we might indeed find smoke without fire. The Nyāya theory

⁵⁷ Note in particular the appearance of the dilemma of universals existing neither wholly nor partially in their particulars in *Parmenides* 131a4–e7 and Uddyotakara’s *Nyāyavārtikā* under II. ii.61 in Gautama (1915, p. 1030).

⁵⁸ For an account of the sources of theory in the *Nyāyasūtra* and the interest in what constituted valid argument in forensic debate as far back as Medhātithi Gautama ca. 550 BCE, see Vidyābhūṣana (2002, pp. 17–21).

⁵⁹ For the Cārvāka argument against induction, see Mādhavācārya (2002, pp. 3–20). For the Buddhist criteria for invariable concomitance and its capacity only to give knowledge of generalities, not particulars, see Stcherbatsky (1962, pp. 238–242).

of universals seeks to block this objection by maintaining that it is the nature of some universals to be ‘invariably concomitant’ with or ‘pervaded’ (*vyāpya*) by others, such that where one universal is instantiated, e.g. smokey-ness, the other universal necessarily will be instantiated too, viz., fiery-ness.

Vātsyāyana argues that this special ‘*probans-probandum* relation’ (*sādhyasādhana-bhāvaḥ*), which constitutes the major premise in a syllogism, is actually perceived (*upalabhyate*) by us in the past, e.g. in the kitchen, and we are then epistemically secure in inferring the presence of fire on the mountain when we see only smoke.⁶⁰ After centuries of debate about invariable concomitance (*vyāpti*), Nyāya came to state explicitly that the relation between the two properties in a major premise, e.g. smoke and fire, lay between universals, and not between particulars, i.e., between universal fire and universal smoke, and not between our observed instances of them.⁶¹ In this way, Nyāya raises what might be condemned as a fallible inductive element in our argumentation to the epistemic ‘gold standard’ of perception. As Vātsyāyana categorically states, the step that establishes the major premise in a syllogism is itself not inductive inference, but *perception* of entailment.⁶² This particular defence of inference (*anumāna*) as a valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) not only depends wholly upon the existence of universals, but also constitutes a third epistemological motivation for our believing in them.

The additional metaphysical motivation in Nyāya appears in their account of causation. The Buddhists used Humean arguments to deny that our causal claims can ever be grounded in what we actually perceive or know. The most we can observe in the way of causal connection is constant conjunction, whereby, e.g. smoke is always preceded by fire. But we never actually discern that fire and smoke are related as cause to effect. Nyāya rebutted this sceptical view by drawing upon its theory of universals.

Udayana argues that necessity and uniformity in causation is secured by the fact that the causal relation exists ‘not between particulars as such, but between particulars having a determinate class-nature (*jāti*)’, and that ‘causal efficiency (*kāraṇatva*) is possessed by a thing by virtue of its class-nature (*jāti*)’.⁶³ He contended that, without such a restraint on the causal efficiency of particulars, any particular could be the cause of any effect, which clearly is not the case.

⁶⁰ *so 'yamekasmin dvayordharmayoḥ sādhyasāadhanabhāvaḥ sādharṃyād vyavasthita upalabhyate*, NB for I.i.36 in Ghosh (2003, p. 40). Similarly, the non-eternality of sound is asserted because of its similarity to a pot, which is produced and is therefore non-eternal. For the epistemically strong translation of *upalabhyate* as ‘is perceived’, see Gautama (1982, p. 42).

⁶¹ Athalye (2003, p. 247).

⁶² (*anumānaṃ hetuḥ*,) *udāharaṇe samdrśya pratipatteḥ | ...pratyakṣa-viśayam udāharaṇam, dr̥ṣṭenādr̥ṣṭasiddheḥ*, NB on I.i.39 in Gautama (2003, p. 316). For a translation of this passage see Gautama (1982, p. 46).

⁶³ Dravid (1972, p. 22).

[T]he universal character determines both a cause as well as an affect. . . Seedness determines the cause-character of a seed, and sproutness determines the effect-character of a sprout.⁶⁴

Once again, we find Nyāya proposing an account of the metaphysics of causation that wholly depends upon their theory of universals, and thereby offering us a powerful motivation for believing in their existence.

The semantic motivation in Nyāya for our belief in universals derives from the examination of the relation between word and object. In the *Nyāyasūtra* Gautama considers various views in the philosophy of language of his day that seek to identify the means by which a word denotes its referent. One of these views was that a word refers to its object via the universal, of which the object is an instantiation. For example, the word ‘chair’ in the sentence, ‘This chair is blue’, succeeds in correctly picking out a particular chair in virtue of the fact that the particular object is an instantiation of what a chair is, i.e., of the universal ‘chairness’. He maintains that reference to universals must at least be part of the work of denotation, and argues against the view that a word directly denotes the particular, on the grounds that without any reference to a universal, a word would pick out *any and every* particular. Without the specifying power of the universal, my use of a word may well denote a particular, but a particular ‘what’?⁶⁵ Universals are required if words are to avoid ‘promiscuity’ (*anavasthāna*) in reference, and to succeed in denoting some particulars, and not others. Thus, we are offered a compelling motivation for believing in the existence of universals, for if they were not to exist, we could not communicate in the way that we clearly do.

The *Nyāyasūtra* concludes that the work of denotation is done, in fact, by three factors, viz., the universal, the particular and the object’s form (*ākṛti*).⁶⁶ Vātsyāyana glosses the term ‘*ākṛti*’ as ‘the established arrangement of a thing’s components and of their components’.⁶⁷ Gautama defines it as ‘what is called (*ākhyā*) the distinguishing mark (*liṅga*) of the universal’, and Vātsyāyana expands on this: an object’s form is that ‘by which the universal and the distinguishing marks of the universal are made known’.⁶⁸ For example, we recognize an object as a cow, i.e. we see the universal cowness in it, only from seeing its form, in respect of its head, hooves etc.

The presence of this third factor of form (*ākṛti*) in Nyāya’s ontology introduces a serious complication into our comparison with Plato’s treatment of forms. For Nyāya, an object’s form (*ākṛti*) and its universal (*sāmānya*, *jāti*) are distinct entities. But in Book X of the *Republic*, when the carpenter looks to the form of ‘bed’ to construct his artefact, he gazes directly upon the universal itself; he does not gaze upon the form *by means of* viewing the form

⁶⁴ Sinha (1999, pp. 22–23).

⁶⁵ *na tadanavasthānāt*, NS II.ii.61 in Gautama (2003, p. 662).

⁶⁶ *vyaktyākṛtijātayas tu padārthaḥ*, NS II.ii.66 in Ibid., p. 670.

⁶⁷ *sattvāvayavānām tadavayavānām ca niyato vyūha ākṛtiḥ*, NB on II.ii.63 in Ibid., p. 665.

⁶⁸ *ākṛtir jātiliṅgākhyā*, NS II.ii.70 & *vyā jātir jātiliṅgāni ca prakhyāyante*, NB under II.ii.70 in Ghosh (2003, p. 171). (My translation.)

or configuration (*ākṛti*) of a particular bed. According to Nyāya, a universal can be made known only through the form (*ākṛti*) of a particular instantiation of the universal. The carpenter could never directly apprehend universal ‘bedness’; nor could the philosopher king ever directly perceive the form of the good.⁶⁹ Nyāya resists any suggestion we may find in Plato that the soul is able to apprehend the universals in themselves, although even in Plato we must be careful to distinguish the kind of sight involved in ‘seeing’ a form from the kind of sight used for seeing particulars, for example where Socrates and Simmias agree that they have never seen ‘with the eyes’ the just itself, the beautiful or the good.⁷⁰ Whether Plato and Nyāya are indeed talking about the same thing in their treatment of universals now appears to be a rather more difficult question.

The Soteriological Motivation

We have reviewed the metaphysical, epistemological and semantic motivations in Plato and Nyāya for our believing in the existence of universals, and the similarity of their arguments is remarkable. But under closer examination it becomes clear that there are fundamental differences in their treatment of universals. This disparity appears even more striking when we compare what they say about the place of universals in the soteriological project of securing our highest welfare.⁷¹

In the *Phaedrus* Plato portrays Socrates advocating how a human being finds his greatest happiness and wellbeing. This involves his examining ‘the truth about the nature of the soul’, and he begins by offering a proof of the existence and immortality of the soul, and of its function as the principle of movement and direction in our lives.⁷² As for the structure of the soul, he shrinks from describing ‘what the soul actually is’, since this would take a long time, and in any case, is ‘a task for a god in every way’; however, he says what the soul ‘is like’ by offering the analogy of the soul as a ‘natural union of a team of winged horses and their charioteer’, whose welfare is determined by the mastery of the charioteer and the compliance of his horses in eschewing what is base and cleaving to what is good.⁷³

⁶⁹ *Rep.* X 596b7 & 540a8-9.

⁷⁰ *Phaed.* 65d4-9. Socrates addresses this distinction when he divides the objects of cognition into the visible and the intelligible, *Rep.* VII 524c13.

⁷¹ The late Daya Krishna, with his characteristic lucidity, points out the error of viewing all Indian philosophy as subservient to the sole aim of the attainment of *mokṣa*, Krishna (1991). However, he does acknowledge the interest that Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika display on this subject, both in the foundational *sūtras* and in the commentarial tradition. Of course, if they were not interested in *mokṣa* at all, this would *a fortiori* further support my thesis in respect of the absence of role for universals in Nyāya’s ‘soteriology’.

⁷² *Phaedr.* 245c-e.

⁷³ *Phaedr.* 246a & 253d-254e. This analogy is famous for its similarity to the description of the human being in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* I.iii.3-4, and in both places the achievement of our highest welfare depends on the mind’s control of the senses, as a good charioteer masters his horses.

Socrates then uses this analogy to place universals at the centre of the soteriological project of attaining our highest good. Through elaborate imagery, he describes the soul managing, with various degrees of success, to soar to ‘the place beyond heaven’ during the periods between its embodiments, and

... being nourished by intelligence and pure knowledge, ... seeing what is real and watching what is true, feeding on all this and feeling wonderful.⁷⁴

Socrates characterizes the nourishment that the soul receives as a feeding through the eyes of the soul upon the eternal forms, which are ‘perfect, and simple, and unshakeable and blissful’.⁷⁵ In this divine realm the soul

... has a view of Justice as it is [αὐτὴν δικαιοσύνην]; it has a view of Self-control; it has a view of Knowledge—not the knowledge that is close to change, that becomes different as it knows the different things which we consider real down here. No, it is the knowledge of what really is what it is [τὴν ἐν τῷ ὄντι ὅτι ἐστὶν ὄντως ἐπιστήμην οὖσαν].⁷⁶

Socrates says that this ‘view of Reality’ is ‘the right food for the best part of the soul’, and if the charioteer is able to master his horses sufficiently well and the soul beholds any of the truths (τι τῶν ἀληθῶν), then the soul ‘will be unharmed (ἀπήμινα) until the next circuit’, and if it is always able to behold these eternal verities (κάν ἀεὶ τοῦτο δύνηται ποιεῖν), then it is ever free from harm (ἀεὶ ἀβλαβῆ εἶναι).⁷⁷

Socrates does not explain here what he means by this harm and freedom from harm of the soul, but he does describe the ‘blessed and spectacular vision’ of the eternal truths as rendering those who manage to achieve it ‘the most blessed of all’, for they are ‘wholly perfect’ (ὀλόκληροι), free from any experience of evils (ἀπαθεῖς κακῶν) and ‘pure’ (καθατοί).⁷⁸ It is this cathartic contemplation of beauty itself (αὐτὸ τὸ κάλλος), of wisdom (φρόνησις), of justice itself (αὐτὴν δικαιοσύνην), of knowledge as it truly is in reality (ἐπιστήμην...τὴν ἐν τῷ ὄντι ὅτι ἐστὶν ὄντως ἐπιστήμην οὖσαν), that purifies the soul and secures man’s highest welfare.⁷⁹

Socrates describes how, according to the degree of its knowledge of these eternal truths and of its capacity to remember them, the soul transmigrates from body to body. The philosopher has the strongest memory of these truths, and he spends his time mostly in trying to restore his vision, while embodied, of the forms that he saw in the period between lives. He primarily uses his experience of things in his embodied existence to feed through his memory

⁷⁴ *Phaedr.* 247c-d.

⁷⁵ *Phaedr.* 250c.

⁷⁶ *Phaedr.* 247d-e.

⁷⁷ *Phaedr.* 247c.

⁷⁸ *Phaedr.* 250b-c.

⁷⁹ *Phaedr.* 247d-e & 250d-e.

upon the realities that he beheld when he was ‘not buried in this thing we are carrying around now, which we call a body, locked in it like an oyster in its shell’.⁸⁰ Throughout his account, Socrates asserts that our highest welfare, both when embodied and when not, consists in beholding, contemplating and reflecting upon the forms. In this way Plato offers us a soteriological motivation for believing in universals, in as much as they are essential in the project of attaining the ultimate end of a human life.

Although in less detail, Plato describes in other dialogues the knowledge of universals as instrumental in attaining the highest good. Diotima remarks to Socrates in the *Symposium* that if one is fortunate enough to ascend, through devotion to beauty, to the apprehension of beauty itself,

... only then will it become possible for him to give birth not to images of virtue ... , but to true virtue ... The love of the gods belongs to anyone who has given birth to true virtue and nourished it, and if any human being could become immortal, it would be he.⁸¹

In the *Phaedo* Socrates urges upon his interlocutors the existence of the forms, e.g. of beauty itself, the good itself, greatness itself.⁸² He insists on the paramount importance of using one’s life to seek the knowledge of virtue and wisdom, which one must know if one is to be wise and good. This alone will secure one’s greatest welfare in the passage from one life to the next.

But now that the soul appears to be immortal, there is no escape from evil or salvation for it except by becoming as good and wise as possible, for the soul goes to the underworld possessing nothing but its education and upbringing, which are said to bring the greatest benefit or harm to the dead right at the beginning of the journey yonder.⁸³

Now let us turn to the role of universals in the soteriology of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika. These schools tell a very similar story about transmigration of the self and its liberation from all pain and suffering as constituting our greatest good.⁸⁴ For them, our highest good (*niḥśreyasa*) consists in absolute liberation (*mokṣa* or *apavarga*) from all suffering. It is an eternal state of freedom from pain, from fear, from death, and is the attainment of absolute happiness (*brahma kṣema*).⁸⁵ And when we read at the very beginning of the *Nyāyasūtra*

⁸⁰ *Phaedr.* 249c-d & 250c.

⁸¹ *Sym.* 212a2-7.

⁸² *Phaed.* 100b5-7.

⁸³ *Phaed.* 107c8-d5.

⁸⁴ The change in terminology from ‘soul’ to ‘self’ is significant. Plato does not deny the existence of a self over and above the body and the mind/soul (ψυχή), and the ambiguity of the word ‘ψυχή’ allows room for the notion of a possessor of a ψυχή, as in Socrates’ admonishment of the Athenians that they care for the ψυχή, ‘that it may be as excellent as possible’: ἐπιμελεῖσθαι... τῆς ψυχῆς ὅπως ὡς ἀρίστη ἔσται, *Apol.* 30b1-2. (My translation.) The analogy of the chariot in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* explicitly identifies a person’s self as the passenger, and not the charioteer. Plato is silent in his analogy about whether the ψυχή is all there is to a person, apart from his body.

⁸⁵ *tad-[sc. duḥkham]-atyanta-vimokṣo ’pavargah*, *NS* I.i.22 & *tad abhayam ajaram amṛtyupadam brahma kṣemaprāptir iti*, *NB* under I.i.22 in Gautama (2003, p. 225).

that our highest good is secured by attaining knowledge (*jñāna*) of the truth (*tattva*), we might be forgiven for thinking *prima facie* that the means of attaining this highest welfare is very similar to, if not the same as, Plato's; but for Nyāya the truth we must acquire is the truth of 16 categories of things that exist, not one of which is the category of universals.⁸⁶ The *Nyāyasūtra* does not mention the presence of universals in any of these categories, and we rely on Vātsyāyana to tell us they are to be included in the category of 'objects of knowledge', even though Gautama does not include them among the nine kinds of 'objects of knowledge'.⁸⁷ Furthermore, universals constitute only a small fraction of this category, whose members are infinite in number.⁸⁸ And Vātsyāyana tells us explicitly that universals are not mentioned specifically as one of the kinds of 'objects of knowledge' for the very reason that knowledge of them is not considered to be conducive to the elimination of ignorance and the attainment of our highest good.⁸⁹ The knowledge of universals, let alone the contemplation of them, simply has no role in Naiyāyika soteriology.

The *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* also begins by stating that the attainment of our highest good (*niḥśreyasa*) depends on our acquiring knowledge (*jñāna*) of the truth (*tattva*), but here we find a different set of categories of things we need to know. Universals, for Vaiśeṣika, do constitute one of these categories, but they do not enjoy any kind of priority with respect to the other categories.⁹⁰ They merely exist alongside substances, qualities, motions, individuators and the relation of inherence, as the ingredients that make up the world. Nor is knowledge of them important in the attainment of our highest good. Both Kaṇāda and Praśastapāda identify a particular kind of merit (*dharma*) as the efficient cause of the knowledge conducive to the attainment of our highest good, and this merit is acquired not through any contemplation of universals.⁹¹

The absence of any major role for universals in the soteriology of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika becomes rather clearer when we see what steps are prescribed for achieving our highest good. The *Nyāyasūtra* lists five stages, in which the elimination of wrong notions causes the eradication of defects of character,

⁸⁶ *pramāṇa-prameya-saṃśaya-prayojana-dr̥ṣṭānta-siddhāntāvayava-tarka-nirṇaya-vāda-jalpa-vitaṇḍā-hetvābhāsa-cchula-jāti-nigrahassthānānām tattva-jñānān niḥśreyasādhiḡamaḡ, NS I.i.1.* The commentarial tradition makes it clear that the term 'jāti' in this *sūtra* does not mean 'universal' or 'natural kind', as it has meant in our discussion so far, but has its other meaning of 'fallacious reason'.

⁸⁷ *ātmaśarīrendriyārthabuddhimanahpravṛttidoṣapretyabhāvaphaladuḡkkhāpavargās tu prameyam, NS I.i.9 & asty anyad api dravyaḡuṇakarmasāmānyaviśeṣasamavāyāḡ prameyam, tadbhedena cāparisaṅkhyeyam, NB under I.i.9 in Gautama (2003, pp. 180, 183).*

⁸⁸ *so 'yam pramāṇārtho 'parisaṅkhyeyāḡ, NB prior to NS I.i.1 & adbhedena cāparisaṅkhyeyam, NB under I.i.9 in Ibid., pp. 22, 183.*

⁸⁹ *asya tu tattvajñānād apavargo mithyajñānāt saṃsāra ity ata etad upadiṣṭam viśeṣeṇeti, NB under I.i.9 in Ibid., p. 183.*

⁹⁰ *dharmaviśeṣa prasūtāt dravyaḡuṇakarmasāmānyā viśeṣasamavāyānām padārthānām sādharṡyavaidharmyābhyāḡ tattvajñānān niḥśreyasam, VS I.i.4 in Kaṇāda (1975, p. 4).*

⁹¹ *yato 'bhyudayanīḡśreyasasiddhiḡ sa dharmāḡ, VS I.ii.2 in Ibid., p. 2. & tac ceśvaracodanābhivyaktiād dharmād eva, PP in Divedin (1984, p. 7).* Note that Praśastapāda adds the will of God as the proximate efficient cause.

which in turn brings about the cessation of egocentric activity that generates karmic debt, which in turn precludes future reincarnations, which thereby eliminates any possibility of further suffering.⁹² Some wrong notions, of course, are more deleterious to our welfare than others, and so, when he comments on this *sūtra*, Vātsyāyana identifies the wrong notions that most need to be eliminated, if we are to progress towards our highest good. At the top of the list are the wrong notions that we have about ourselves, i.e., of what we are and what we are not. The first wrong notion is the denial of the existence of the self (*ātman*), and the second is the identification of the self with that which is not the self, e.g. the body, the mind, emotions, possessions etc. So tenacious is the ignorance of what we really are, so binding is our identification with what we are not, that the *Nyāyasūtra* prescribes the following of Yogic disciplines (*yama* and *niyama*) and practices associated with meditation that conduce to the knowledge of the self (*ādhyātma-vidhyupāyaiḥ*).⁹³

Praśastapāda's commentator, Śrīdhara, outlines in fuller detail the process of knowledge and renunciation by which our highest good is achieved. The objects of knowledge whose true nature must be ascertained are not the universals, but the ordinary objects of the world. The process begins with a person being convinced, through his relentless suffering in the world, of the ubiquity of pain.⁹⁴ He concludes that the objects of the world, both internal and external, are the sole source of pain, and consequently develops an aversion towards them. He accepts that only the knowledge of the true nature of his self will release him from his infatuation with the getting and avoiding that characterize his ordinary self-interested actions. So, he seeks to relinquish all actions that have a selfish motive, to undertake disciplines that further purify his mind of infatuation with what is not the self, and to pursue meditation until the absence of all mental disturbances permits the complete and immediate knowledge of the self as it really is. It is this knowledge of what the self really is and of what it is not that secures our highest good, viz. the eternal and absolute release from pain. We can see from this account that the knowledge of the categories, including universals, is important only in so far as they proclaim the uniqueness of the self, as distinct from all other substances, properties, relations or existences of any kind whatsoever. The work of soteriology then begins, drawing on Yogic practices and meditation to convert a theoretical distinction that establishes the uniqueness of the self into a distinction that is experienced in practice.

⁹² *duḥkhajanmapravṛttidoṣamithyājñānām uttarottarāpāye tadanantarāpāyād apavargah*, NS I.i.2 in Gautama (2003, p. 68).

⁹³ *tadartham yamaniyamābhyām ātmasaṃskāro yogāc cādhyātma-vidhyupāyaiḥ*, NS IV.ii.46 in Ibid., p. 1095. Knowledge of truth ultimately arises only after the practice of Yogic meditation: [*tattvajñānam*] *samādhiviśeṣābhyāsāt*, NS IV.ii.38 in Gautama (2003, p. 1090).

⁹⁴ For Śrīdhara's account see Praśastapāda (1982, p. 595–598).

Conclusion: Leibnitz and the Indiscernibility of Identicals

We have examined the motivations that Plato and Nyāya offer for believing in the existence of universals, and how they serve in a response to the philosophical problems of knowledge, causation, identity, attribution and the semantic power of language. So, are Plato and Nyāya both realists about universals? Upon closer inspection, the philosophically important differences between the roles of universals in their philosophies undermine this claim. Even with only a glance in the direction of Leibnitz' Indiscernibility of Identicals, the differences no longer look like different views of the same thing.⁹⁵

What the comparative philosophy in this paper demonstrates is that, just as a word depends for its meaning upon the rest of the sentence, so what a philosopher means by one element in his theory will be informed by what he says about the rest of his theory. When we say that universals play no part in Nyāya's soteriology, whereas in Plato's they do, we can see that this fundamental difference between Plato and Nyāya of *role* for a universal really amounts to a fundamental difference of *entity* in their ontologies. We may speculate on why this is. One of Plato's interests, writing as he did shortly after the collapse of morality in war-torn Greece, appears to be the discovery of a foundation for morals and a means of personal moral transformation. Hence, his interest in the universals of ethical discourse, the problem of the unity of virtues and the normative hierarchy of forms under 'the good'. Nyāya, on the other hand, throughout the period I have examined, struggled to defend a long-established, fully-fledged Vedic orthodoxy against the vigorous assaults of the Buddhists, who sought to refute the epistemology and metaphysics of realism. Hence, their interest in the work universals could do in securing the foundations of an external, mind-independent world that defies undermining.

Whatever the factors may be that influenced the development of Plato's and Nyāya's philosophies, this examination of their treatment of universals reveals the importance of acknowledging the definitional influence of the whole when we examine the part. By assessing the soteriological import of universals, we see that we cannot understand what each tradition says about 'them' without ensuring that whatever we say is embedded in the context of what else they say in their philosophies. And when we do this in the case of universals, we remain closer to an understanding of Plato's and Nyāya's views

⁹⁵ One might object that I am comparing a thousand years of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika philosophy with only the writings of Plato, and not with any Platonic philosophy that comes after him. There is, however, a good reason for my doing this, apart from the restraints of space. Even in a thousand years of the commentarial tradition, Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika never find a soteriological role for universals. In the Platonic tradition, on the other hand, the forms never lose their superior value as somehow divine and important in securing our highest good, whether we look ahead to the Stoics for God's 'seminal principles', or to the Middle Platonists for Plato's forms as 'the thoughts of God', or to the Roman Stoic Seneca for the 'paradigms (*exemplaria*) of all things . . . which Plato calls forms (*ideas*)', or to the Neoplatonists for Platonic forms as the intelligibles (νοητά) of the Intellect (νοῦς), Long (1974, p. 228), Dillon (1977, p. 95), Seneca (1917): Epistle LXV, p. 448, Plotinus Enneads V.v.1–2.

if we conclude that they are not talking about the same thing in different ways, but rather talking about different things in similar ways.

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