

Indian Philosophy—Reading group 5

Perrett turns in this chapter to issues of metaphysics and ontology: “Whereas the *pramanas* are the means of knowledge, the *prameyas* are the knowables, cognizable entities that constitute the world” (p. 140).

Different Indian philosophers gave very different answers to (i) the *quantitative* question: ‘how many entities are there?’, and to (ii) the *qualitative* question: ‘how many different *kinds* of entities are there?’¹

Criteria of reality

Perrett begins by considering different Indian philosophers’ criteria of reality. He focuses in particular upon the following two:

- *Buddhist criterion of reality*: “to be real is to be causally efficacious” (p. 141).
- *Advaita criterion of reality*: “the real is that which is never sublated (*abadha*) by any manner or means” (p. 141).

The Buddhist position can be summarised as follows:

The Buddhist logicians favour [the following] criterion of reality: for them the mark of reality is causal efficacy (arthakriyakaritva, ‘the power of making become’). Their reasoning in favour of such a criterion of existence is basically twofold: metaphysically, the quest for ultimate reality is the quest for the causes that ultimately produce effects; epistemologically, nothing can be known which is not capable of producing a change in the knower. Thus, causal efficacy is the test of the real. (Perrett p. 144)

Here, on the other hand, is Perrett’s summary of the Advaita position:

The central idea of Advaita Vedanta is that the ultimate reality is the Self (atman), which is one though appearing as many, and that this one Self is identical with the Absolute

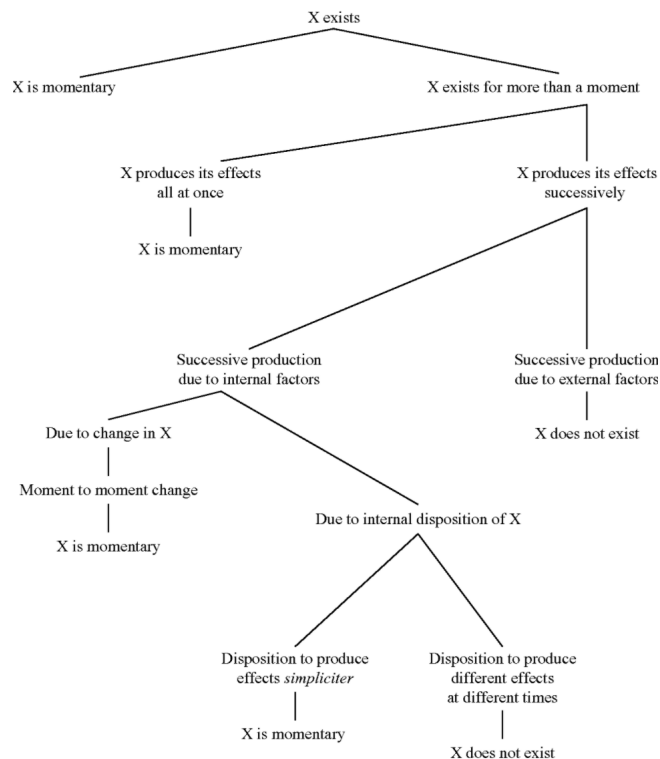
¹Here, I’m using Lewis’ terminology—see his *Plurality*.

(Brahman). *The world and the apparent diversity of individuals in it are not real. The world appearance is like the appearance of a rope as a snake, or mother-of-pearl as silver. Liberation means coming to see the whole world appearance as an illusion, much as the snake and the silver are sublated in the correction of ordinary perceptual illusions. Only the experience of Brahman can never be sublated and hence only Brahman is ultimately real.* (Perrett p. 142)

Question: How do these criteria of reality compare with others in the Western canon (e.g. that of Quine)?

Buddhist momentariness

Perrett next turns to arguments for the Buddhist view that “reality is ultimately composed of causally efficacious but momentary simples” (p. 145). He considers, in particular, what he calls a ‘master argument’ to this effect, due to Ratnakirti. Rather than go through all the details here, I’ll just reproduce Perrett’s diagram, which summarises the structure of the argument:



Nyaya-Vaisesika realism

The Naiyayikas don't have a single criterion of reality—but they do have a catalogue of seven fundamental categories of entity: “substance (*dravya*), quality (*guna*), motion or action (*karma*), universal (*samanya*), particularity (*visesa*), inherence (*samavaya*) and absence (*abhava*)” (p. 148).

Perrett singles out inherence and absence for special attention. On the former, he writes:

Inherence is the relationship that obtains between entities that cannot occur separately. It relates qualities, motions, universals and individuator to substances. It also relates universals to qualities and motions. Finally, it relates wholes to the parts that are their cause. In short, inherence is the principle that restores unity to concrete things after their categorical decomposition. (Perrett p. 149)

Question: Is it therefore fair to say that part of the motivation for introducing inherence is to avoid Bradley's regress? (Cf. Armstrong on this; also, see Perrett's later discussion at p. 164, which suggests that the correct answer to this question is 'yes'.)

On absences: the Naiyayikas gave both semantic and epistemological arguments for their existence. The semantic argument is that the truthmakers of negative existential claims are absences (cf. Armstrong's book on this—he has a different account of the truthmakers of negative existential claims). The epistemological argument “is that we experience such absences: looking for the elephant in the room, I see directly its absence” (p. 149).

Madhyamaka metaphysics

Central to Madhyamaka Buddhist metaphysics is the doctrine of emptiness (*sunyata*), according to which all entities are empty of *svabhava*, or essence. Madhyamakas present various reductios in favour of this position (p. 152).

Nagarjuna—one of the most famous Madhyamakas—is often read as being a (scientific) anti-realist (see e.g. work by Siderits and Westerhoff), but Perrett isn't convinced that's the best reading. (JR: Interestingly, Justin Holder, a D.Phil. student of Westerhoff here in Oxford, thinks that some version of 'structural realism' is more appropriate as a reading of Nagarjuna, since Nagarjuna denies that objects have *essences* but doesn't (as far as I understand)

deny that reality is comprised of *something*. For more information... contact Justin!)

Causation

Having discussed the various criteria of reality proffered by Indian philosophers, as well as these various specific views, Perrett then turns to different accounts of causation which appear in the Indian canon. As he writes,

Causation was acknowledged as one of the central metaphysical problems in Indian philosophy. The classical Indian philosophers' concern with the problem basically arose from two sources: first, the cosmogonic speculations of the Vedas and Upanisads, with their search for some simple unitary cause for the origin of this complex universe; and second, the Vedic concern with ritual action (karman) and the causal mechanisms by which such actions bring about their unseen, but purportedly cosmic, effects. (Perrett p. 155)

Perrett uses some Aristotelian jargon in this section, so I'll just remind you here of Aristotle's four different notions of 'cause': (*Physics* 2.3)

Material cause: That out of which the object in question is made. (For a table: wood.)

Efficient cause: That which created the object in question. (For a table: a carpenter.)

Formal cause: The essence of the object. (For a table: having four legs.)

Final cause: The end/goal of the object, or what the object is good for. (For a table: holding things?)

Perrett notes that Indian philosophers are usually concerned with material causes. With this in mind, he then notes that there are two central views on the relation between causes and effects:

- *Identity theory:* The effect is identical with the cause. This divides into two sub-views:
 - *Transformation theory*, according to which “the cause undergoes a real transformation into its effects through the causal process” (p. 160). (Samkhya-Yoga)

- *Appearance theory*, according to which the cause does not undergo a real transformation into its effect, because the latter is unreal: it is a mere appearance (p. 161).
- *Non-identity theory*: The effect is not identical with the cause; it is an altogether new entity. (Nyaya-Vaisesika; some Buddhists.)

Related to these were two further views:

- The Jaina non-absolutist view, according to which “from one viewpoint the effect is pre-existent in the cause and from another viewpoint it is not” (p. 158).
- Carvaka materialism, which involved scepticism about the causal relation.²

²We have already seen the Carvaka materialists in the context of induction; their views there, just as here, are akin to those of Hume.