

BOOK REVIEW II

Stephen H. Phillips, *Classical Indian Metaphysics: Refutations of Realism and the Emergence of "New Logic"*, Matilala Banarsidass, Delhi, 1998, pp. Xii + 391.

Students interested in classical Indian philosophy face a dual challenge. First, many key works remain untranslated, thereby demanding of even the novice a considerable linguistic competence. And should this first challenge be met, the sheer technical difficulty and subtlety of many core arguments can quickly overwhelm any but the most determined reader. That a single text should confront both of these challenges head on is a testament to its author's scholarly competence. That it does so well is a testament to its author's philosophical activity. Stephen Phillips' book *Classical Indian Metaphysics: Refutations of Realism and the Emergence of "New Logic"* confronts both challenges, and does so well. As such it is a welcome introduction to classical Indian metaphysics, offering an often detailed survey of a sizable portion of the Indian philosophical tradition between the Second and Sixteenth Centuries.

Phillips' book consists of a general historically-based introduction to what the author calls the Realist-Idealist Debate, conjoined with translations and commentaries of key sections of texts from such classical philosophers as Śriharṣa, Gaṅgeśa, Śankara Miśra, and Vācaspati Miśra II. These latter come late in the book; the reader is first gently introduced to the various topics through a series of chapters filling-out the background arguments and figures in increasing detail. The primary disputants in Realist-Idealist debate, as the author develops it, are the Advaita Vedāntin Śriharṣa and his Nyāya and

Nāyā Nyaya challengers. What is in dispute is, at its most basic level, the ultimate reality of distinctness. Śriharsa and the Advaitins deny it, the Nyāya affirms it. Phillips further asserts at several points that the Navya-Nyaya largely succeeds. I want to argue here that this particular conclusion is not justified by the arguments that he presents.

I. *Śriharsa on Distinctness*

Is there an ontological basis for the numerical distinctness of things? A necessary condition for such a basis would surely be that the appearance of the distinctness of things would withstand analysis. If distinctness is real, then we should not find ourselves faced with paradoxes or aporia whenever we attempt to justify the claim that things are more than apparently distinct. In arguing against the reality of distinctness, Śriharsa presents in the *Khandanakhandakhādyā* a series of reductio-type arguments to the effect that precisely such absurdities are the result of any attempt to find an ontological basis for distinctness. I will briefly present here the three limbs of this argument that most directly relate to the Nyāya, and then turn to the Navya-Nyāya responses to it, as Phillips presents them,¹

Phillips engages Śriharsa's argument through what he calls the *attribution dilemma*, which is familiar to most as the Bradley Regress. Consider the relation between two things, such as a qualificandum (or property-bearer) and a qualifier (or property). The relation seems itself to be another term, in addition to the two relata. But if it is another term, then regress results, for another relation must link this third term, the relation, to each of its relata. And so, on, *ad infinitum*.

An obvious response to this problem is to postulate relation as an ontologically distinct kind. Call this distinct kind inherence. Inherence might then be an ontological primitive, the essence of which is to tie qualificanda and qualifiers together. Its nature just is to be a tie, and so no further explanation of how it links to its relata is required. But now two further problems appear.

First, if we specify the essence of inherence with reference to that

which it ties together, as by saying, for instance, that inherence is a linkage between a qualifier and a qualificandum, then inherence seems to be characterized in essence by reference to the terms which it relates, and so it seems to be uncharacterizable apart from them. This is problematic, since inherence is supposed to help to ground the difference of property and substance.

Second, if inherence self-links it this way, i.e., if it links by its nature properties and property-bearers, then the asymmetry between properties and property-bearers seems to be lost. A book, for instance, may have the property of being purple, but purple doesn't have the property of being a book. If inherence relates things by a kind of selflinkage, how is this asymmetry to be maintained?

With the attribution dilemma in place, three limbs of Sriharsa's argument against distinctness can be highlighted as he brings them to bear against the Nyaya.

The first limb attacks the supposition that distinctness is real in virtue of its being in the very nature of an entity to be distinct from other things. We might say, for instance, that it is in the very nature of a pot to be distinct from a cloth. But this won't actually distinguish the pot from the cloth, since if distinctness-from-cloth is of the very *nature* of a pot, then the pot is *essentially* characterized only with reference to the cloth, and hence isn't essentially distinct from the cloth at all. Since distinctness is a relational notion, this argument seems to be easily generalized to any other apparently distinct individuals.

A second limb of the argument works to undermine the notion that distinctness is a kind of mutual exclusion or mutual absence. To say that a pot is not a cloth, it might be argued, is to express the mutual exclusion of pot and cloth by way of a *mutual absence of identity* between the two. For empiricists such as the Nyaya, it might thus be said that a real thing, such as a cloth experienced in the past, is absent now at a particular locus, such as the location of a pot.

Here Śriharsa identifies problems similar to those above. First, mutual absence and mutual exclusion remain relation notions; for instance, an absence is an absence of an absentee. But then it would seem that the attribution dilemma immediately returns - what ground the distinction between the absence and the absentee? If nothing, then it would seem that the distinctness of the cloth, which is said to be absent from the locus of the pot, is not distinct from its own absence. Second, the identity of pot and cloth is in this case denied, which seem to entail that it is absent. But is this absence of the identity of pot and cloth itself a real thing? If so, then the identity of the two would seem to be real *qua* absentee. If not, what is the basis for finding an absence of the identity of pot and cloth? It's hard to see how the empiricist Nyāya could give a non-question-begging answer.

Finally, it might be argued that numerical distinctness is grounded in a difference in properties had by particular things. The property potness is distinct from the property clothes. A pot has or instantiated potness, the cloth has or instantiated clothness, and hence distinctness of entity is grounded in distinctness of property. So the reality of distinctness is established.

Two primary difficulties with this alternative are noteworthy. First, the attribution dilemma returns; we still need an explanation of how qualifiers such as potness are distinct from what they qualify. Second, the distinctness of qualifiers such as potness and clothness now requires establishment. That is, qualifiers can serve as the basis for the distinctness of individuals only if qualifiers themselves are distinct. Obviously to say here that qualifiers are distinct in virtue of being qualified would be to introduce a regress, and a vitiating one at that, in that no term in the regress seems to explain the distinctness of the predecessor.

As even this sketch of his argument illustrates, Śriharsa's denial of the reality of distinctness must be taken seriously. Phillips argues at length that the Navya-Nyāya took it seriously, and much of the second half of his book is devoted to their response.

II Navya-Nyāya Response

Phillips makes a clear case that Nyāya philosophers such as Gaṅgeśa

were well aware of an attempt to respond to Śrīharsa's argument (p.117), even if these latter were less of a focus than longstanding quarrels with Mimamsakas. Indeed, the author takes issue with the suggestion, from E. Frauwallner and D. Ingalls, that Gangesa not be included among the Navya-Nyaya in part precisely because, he argues, Śrīharsa forced Gangesa to a deeper and less excessively formal philosophical position (cf. 119).

The degree to which the Navya-Nyaya actually succeeds in responding to the Advaitin position is, however, a bit fuzzy. Phillips opens his discussion of Gangesa's response to the idealists with an examination of Gangesa's ultimate definition of valid perceptual awareness. The basic argumentative strategy seems to be that if criteria for a determinate, valid cognition can be secured, and if the cognition of distinctness can be shown to fulfill such criteria, then the distinctness of objects cognized must be real. On the author's general but accessible presentation, a key component of Gangesa's argument involves a characterization of veridical perceptions as awareness that are products of the appropriate causal relations. Misperceiving mother-of-pearl as silver, while it involves causal processes, is a defective perception in that the qualifier imputed is not causally active in the perception (cf. 129). A veridical awareness, then, is ultimately defined as "experience with predication content about ϕ - object as ϕ . (130, 216f). That is whatever qualified constitutes the predication-content of the cognition must be present in the thing cognized, and thereby causally efficacious. This grounds the veridicality of the perception.

As a response to Śrīharsa individuation challenge, this line of approach is, as Phillips himself admits (131), likely to disappoint. The general problem is not hard to see; that the appropriate causal condition in a veridical perceptual awareness is fulfilled presupposes that the causal basis is already established. We cognize two objects, a pot and a cloth, as distinct. The cognition is veridical just in case distinctness is present and appropriately causally efficacious. Whatever its merits, it is difficult to see how Gangesa's theory of Perception will carry us an inch toward establishing that distinctness is present. Surely it is the Navya-Nyaya ontology which has to do the real work here.

On this point, two components of the Logicia ontology seem to be essential to responding to Śriharsa. The first is an account of the predication relation, which might plausibly resolve the attribution dilemma. The second is an account of identity and distinctness which might render these ultimately real.

Gangeśa attacks the attribution dilemma through two philosophical posits: inherence and self-linkage. On Phillip's presentation, inherence is an ontic primitive, which links qualities with substances and universals with instances of qualities. It is also asymmetrical, and thereby does the work of distinguishing qualificanda from qualifiers. Self-linkage is a kind of relational hook intrinsic to qualifiers. Being intrinsic to qualifiers, it cuts the relation regress, it is simply in the nature of a qualifier to link to a qualificandum. Phillips cites absences as prime examples of self-linking qualifiers (136). An absence is, for the Nyaya, a real entity, albeit not existent or present. Absences also serve as the referents of negative statements, such as "There is no elephant in this room." They are self-linking in the sense that a qualifier, such as absence-of-elephant, relates of its very nature to something, such as a locus in this room.

We may grant for the sake of argument that self-linkage solves the attribution dilemma. But now what secures the distinctness of self-linking qualifiers? If, for example, it is of the essence of the qualifier absence-of-elephant that it self-link to some locus, then the qualifier is inseparable in its essence from the locus. Of course it might be said that the locus is to be regarded as some thing general, for the qualifier obviously need not relate to some particular locus. But the individuation problem remains, for even if the qualifier is related only to something general, it still seems to be essentially characterized with reference to that general thing and so not distinguishable in essence from it.

At this point Phillips claims that Navya-Nyaya introduce a powerful new argument against the Advaitin. The core of the argument is only vaguely outlined in Gangeśa himself, and developed more explicitly by his son Vardhamāna, by Śankara Mīśra, and by Vācaspati Mīśra, II in particular.

Unfortunately the actual argument, although hailed by the author as the basis of "an overall realist victory" (146), is a bit difficult to discern.

The Navya-Nyāya argument begins with the familiar claim that all qualification presupposes distinctness, and that distinctness is in turn secured by ontically real absences. We have already seen Śriharsa reject an earlier form of this view, on the grounds that the absence of identity of pot and cloth, say, implies the reality of their identity given Nyāya empiricism. This time, however, the Navya-Nyāya add considerations about self-identity to the mix, beginning with what the author describes as "the rather trivial view that everything is identical only with itself." (147). This trivial view is nonetheless taken to serve as the basis for "the articulation of an individual's absolute identity, the qualificandum with all its qualifiers, the thick particular." (*ibid*). At the risk of severe oversimplification, the idea seems to be that, given any object one chooses, when it is considered as all of its properties there is only one thing that is absolutely identical with it, namely itself. Every object is therefore distinct in virtue of being identical with itself alone, and this distinctness, while still cognized through an absentee, is cognized not through a relation (such as inherence) but through an identity. Thus a veridical cognition that a pot is not a cloth, for instance, would, in the author's words, "capture the pot as a locus of a mutual exclusion that has the cloth as the absentee as specified by the relation of identity", rather than by the absentee itself (141). Or in other words, "a pot is just in itself a mutual exclusion whose absentee or counterpositive as specified by the relation of identity is the cloth" (*ibid*).

If this is to be the "crowning achievement of the Nyāya's ontological response to Sriharsa," as the author claims (146), one would like to hear a bit more on this point. For instance, if a pot is just in itself a mutual exclusion specified by the relation of identity, what really distinguishes the Navya-Nyāya view from the classical Buddhist account of qualification as mutual exclusion (an account which the Nyāya clearly reject)?

Several problems are potentially more serious. I note here two of them. First, when conscripted to do ontological work, self-identity is not an

obviously unproblematic concept. Self-identity seems to be a relation, but it is an odd one, in that it doesn't relate two or more terms. In itself this may not be bad, one can be one's own worst enemy, to borrow Saul Kripke's example, and perhaps one might also say, with Kripke, the self-identity is "the smallest reflexive relation."² But from the fact that some dyadic relations of the form Rxx are meaningful, it doesn't follow that all of them are. "X is to the left of X," for example, is not. Why should we think that "X is identical with X" is of the former, meaningful type? For while it is perfectly legitimate compare what appear as two numerically distinct things, and to speak of degree of closeness, sameness, identity, difference, etc., such comparison makes no sense in the context of talk about a single thing. Now if the meaning of identity statements can be plausibly argued to involve essential reference of comparison of apparently numerically distinct things, then talk of self-identity could cogently be argued to be vacuous.³

Second, suppose we do grant that self-identity is a substantive and meaningful relation. Is it ontically real? As part of the ground for real distinctness, it seems that it must be. But then what is it? Phillips thinks that Navya-Nyayaikas such as Šankara Mišra are inclined to treat it as a relation, and therefore as a species of property. But this seems seriously *ad hoc*. Does such a relation, which does not relate two terms, and which is an actual property of everything in the universe, have any claim to reality through anything more than sheer stipulation?

Perhaps on the other hand self-identity is not real, but is rather only "a manner of speaking," reflecting no underlying reality. This is the position, which Phillips attributes to Vacaspati Mišra (149). But this too is surely a problematic thing from a Nyayaika to say. Self-identity is postulated as a key component of an explanation as to why distinctness is real. Surely an Advaitin such as Šriharsa could only be pleased upon hearing - from the mouth of Nyayaika - that the ontic ground of distinctness crucially rests upon something which is itself only "a manner of speaking".

NOTES

1. Cf. pp. 103-10 for Phillips' reconstruction of these arguments. Sriharsa's own argument is substantially more detailed than what I present here; cf. esp. section 9 of Chapter 1 of the *Khandanakhandakhāḍya* translated by Ganganath Jha, Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi, 1986
2. See footnote 50, p. 108 of *Naming and Necessity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1972.
3. Wittgenstein makes a number of comments in this direction. See especially pp. 26-7, 282-3 of *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*: Cambridge, 1939, Cora Diamond, ed., University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1975. I note in passing that the appearance of numerical distinctness in all that is claimed to be necessary for the argument of this paragraph.

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