

Shivdasani Conference 2009

Thinking Inside the Box:

The Concept of a Category in Indian Philosophy

Somerville College, Oxford

Saturday 10 – Sunday 11 October 2009



A RECOGNISED INDEPENDENT CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Intro

Aims

This conference explores the use of categories in Indian philosophy to include linguistic, aesthetic, universal, logical, ontological, and categories of the emotions. The goal is to shed a clear light on the modes of reasoning in the Indian philosophical traditions, illuminating its relation to Western methods and its unique contribution to philosophy across the globe.

One of the characteristic features of ancient and medieval philosophy both east and west has been its propensity to analyse existence into particular categories and make fine distinctions in different philosophical areas. This conference would focus on the way this process has operated in the Indian philosophical context. For example, in Buddhism the Abhidharma developed sophisticated categories for the analysis of mind, Samkhya for the analysis of experience, and Nyaya Vaisheshika developed ontological categories. We might even call this process of categorisation a philosophical style of thinking.

The aim of this conference is to address this question of categorisation and to raise questions about what precisely it entails, why it developed to such a high degree in the Indian context, and to raise philosophical questions about the relevance and success of such philosophical endeavours. The conference therefore has a descriptive dimension. A comparative dimension is also welcome, considering parallel processes from other philosophical traditions.

Schedule

Saturday 10 October

9.15–9.30 **Registration**

9.30–11.00 **Session One**

The Seven Category Ontology Reaffirmed

Jonardon Ganeri

Keynote Respondent: Ramprasad Chakravarthi

Chair: Gavin Flood

11.00–11.30 **Coffee**

11.30–1.00 **Session Two**

Ontological Categories in Early Indian Philosophy

Johannes Bronkhorst

Chair: Jessica Frazier

1.00–2.30 **Lunch**

2.30–4.00 **Session Three**

On bhava – the ultimate category

Eivind Kahrs

Chair: Christopher Minkowski

4.00–4.30 **Tea**

4.30–6.00 **Session Four**

Nyaya's pramana (Knowledge-Generators) as Natural Kinds

Stephen Phillips

Chair: Eivind Kahrs

7.00 **Shivdasani Conference Dinner (for speakers)**

Sunday 11 October

9.30–11.00 **Session Five**

The Analysis of Experience in Classical Samkhya

Mikel Burley

Chair: Jonardon Ganeri

11.00–11.30 **Coffee**

11.30–1.00 **Session Six**

Madhyamakas and Ontological Categories

Jan Westerhoff

Chair: Will Johnson

1.00–2.30 **Lunch**

2.30–4.00 **Session Seven**

The Concept of Categories in Vaisesika Philosophy

Shashiprabha Kumar

Chair: Ram-prasad Chakravarthi

4.00–4.30 **Tea**

4.30–5.45 **Session Eight**

From Ontology to Taxonomy: the Jaina Colonization of the Universe

Will Johnson

Chair: Nick Allen

5.45–6.00 **Concluding Remarks and move to publication**

Gavin Flood

Saturday 10 October

9.15–9.30 **Registration**

9.30–11.00 **The Seven Category Ontology Reaffirmed**

Jonardon Ganeri

Keynote Respondent: Ramprasad Chakravarthi

Chair: Gavin Flood

The six categories of being of Praśastapāda (substance, quality, motion, differentiator, universal, inherence), together with the category of non-being, constitute the ontology of classical Vaiśeṣika metaphysics. Raghunātha Śīromaṇi, the sixteenth century peer of Caitanya in Navadvīpa, put pressure on the classical system, arguing in favour of a radical expansion to include eight new categories: power (śakti), ownedness (svatva), moment (kṣaṇa), causehood (kāraṇatva), effecthood (kāryatva), number (saṃkhyā), the qualifying relation pertaining to absence (vaiśiṣṭya), and contentness (viṣayatā). In the seventeenth century, however, there was a reaffirmation of the seven category ontology in the work of thinkers like Mādhavadeva Bhaṭṭa and Jayarāma Pancānana. I will examine the philosophical significance of this reaffirmation. I will argue that Raghunātha's expansion is based on a commitment to a form of non-reductive realism. What the seventeenth century philosophers introduce is a new concept of realism, one which defends the compossibility of reduction and realism with respect to some type of entity. This 'sophisticated realism' (Dummett) is what makes it possible for the reality of entities in Raghunātha's new categories to be acknowledged, but combined with an affirmation of the seven category metaphysics. I will ask whether it is nevertheless the case that Raghunātha was right to think that there are types of property irreducible to those admitted in the traditional system.

11.00–11.30 **Coffee**

11.30–1.00

Ontological Categories in Early Indian Philosophy

Johannes Bronkhorst

Chair: Jessica Frazier

This paper will address the question whether and to what extent the ontological categories of early Indian philosophies can be looked upon as what might be called ‘natural categories’, categories that correspond in some way to the reality they intend to describe. It turns out that some of the Indian categories are of this kind, others are not. Examples will be discussed.

1.00–2.30

Lunch

2.30–4.00

On bhava – the ultimate category

Eivind Kahrs

Chair: Christopher Minkowski

Whereas some categories clearly are the outcome of mental deliberations, such as the dharma-taxonomies of the Buddhists, the padārthas of the Vaiśeṣikas, or the tattvas of the Sāṃkhya, others seem to arise from within the cognitive models of Indian culture. This paper explores the concept of bhāva as one of the categories arising from within the Sanskrit linguistic and philosophical traditions and traces its transformation into one of the core categories of Sanskrit thought.

4.00–4.30

Tea

4.30–6.00

Nyaya’s pramana (Knowledge-Generators) as Natural Kinds

Stephen Phillips

Chair: Eivind Kahrs

This paper examines Nyaya’s understanding of the sources of knowledge, especially perception and inference, as generating genuine subkinds of cognition that are discernible by introspection as well as through our own and others’ behaviour, and addresses how typological resources are used by the school in its epistemological theory. By being able to recognize a cognition as perceptual, inferential, analogical, or testimonial in character, we have access to our knowledge

such that doubt and controversy can be resolved. The hinge premise is that we may assume such cognition to be veridical. Like contemporary disjunctivists, Naiyayikas see pramana as natural processes and their results as falling into natural kinds, with close imitators, illusions, incorrect inferences, false testimonial comprehension, and so on, as something else altogether, not the same at all, though a wider uniting kind may be identified, being-a-property, being-a-psychological-property, and so on up through the categorial system. This facet of Nyaya's epistemology helps to solve an issue facing modern reliabilist externalism, which is the position that beliefs receive a default positive epistemic status in virtue of being the results of reliable processes of belief-formation. The issue is how to differentiate doxastic processes in an epistemically relevant fashion. Nyaya has a straightforward answer--identify candidates by the highest standard, one-hundred percent reliability, and correlating marks (jati-vyanjana)--an answer that this paper in the end says a word or two to defend.

7.00

Shivdasani Conference Dinner (for speakers)

Sunday 11 October

9.30–11.00

The Analysis of Experience in Classical Sāṃkhya

Mikel Burley

Chair: Jonardon Ganeri

This paper argues for an interpretation of classical Sāṃkhya according to which its schema of twenty-five categories constitutes the result of an analysis of experience as opposed to a speculative cosmogony or imaginative account of how our psychological faculties come into existence. Problems with prevalent interpretations are highlighted, notably the difficulty of understanding how physical elements can ‘evolve’ from psychological ones and that of understanding the relevance of the categorial schema to Sāṃkhya’s overall soteriological goal. An experience-oriented interpretation is then proposed, drawing analogies with aspects of Kantian and phenomenological philosophy. It is contended that the manifest categories be understood as constituents of possible experience (or experience-in-general) rather than as material entities, and the relations between them be understood in terms of synchronic conditionality rather than diachronic material causality. The proposed interpretation, it is argued, shows the Sāṃkhya system to be more internally coherent and soteriologically relevant than do alternative interpretations.

11.00–11.30

Coffee

11.30–1.00

Madhyamakās and Ontological Categories

Jan Westerhoff

Chair: Will Johnson

The status of categories within Madhyamaka philosophy is a curious one. On the one hand there is a strong tendency to reject philosophically refined analyses of the constituents which make up the world, thereby rejecting systems of categories as well. The Madhyamika, it seems, accepts whatever conventions the world accepts at the merely conventional level but does not propose any conventions of his own. In fact there appear to be good

reasons for such a view. Given that the membership of an object in a category is generally taken to be a clear example of a property an object has intrinsically, and since the Madhyamikas reject intrinsic properties (properties which exist by svabhava) they should reject categories as well.

On the other hand, however, Madhyamakas make use of the very sophisticated and intricate categorial frameworks found in traditional Indian grammar and in the Abhidharma. Furthermore they also vehemently argue against the use of other frameworks, such as that of the Naiyayikas.

This paper will explore ways of resolving this tension and investigate more generally what role categories play in the Madhyamaka system of philosophy.

1.00–2.30 Lunch

2.30–4.00

The Concept of Categories in Vaisesika Philosophy

Shashiprabha Kumar

Chair: Ram-prasad Chakravarthi

The present paper proposes to put forth a general outline of categories (padarthas) as available in the Vaisesika system of Indian philosophy. Vaisesika is usually held to be a pluralistic realism in the sense that it propounds six categories as divisions of reality and claims that all the existent, knowable and nameable entities can be covered under these six padarthas: dravya (substance), guna (quality), karma (action or motion), samanya (universal), visesa (ultimate particularity) and samavaya (inherence). Kanada, the founder of Vaisesika system, has himself declared in the beginning of his discourse that a proper knowledge of the six padarthas through twin methods of sadharmya (similarities) and vaidharmya (dissimilarities) among them, will enable one to accomplish the final goal. Accordingly, several sets of similarities among different groups of padarthas have been elucidated which definitely help in a better and clearer understanding of the Vaisesika categories. In brief, the Vaisesika concept

of categories is very comprehensive since it presents an exhaustive enumeration of reals.

4.00–4.30 **Tea**

4.30–5.45 **From Ontology to Taxonomy: the Jaina
Colonization of the Universe**

Will Johnson

Chair: Nick Allen

This paper explores the shift in Jaina thought from categorization (the ontological dualism of jiva and ajiva) to classification (the universe as a map of the Jina's mind), and reflects on a corresponding alteration in soteriological and sociological concerns.

5.45–6.00 **Concluding Remarks and move to publication**

Gavin Flood

