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Comparative Philosophy and J.L. Shaw
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Introduction

Purushottama Bilimoria and Michael Hemmingsen

It gives us immense pleasure to introduce this important volume to the scholarly audience. The volume is designed and intended to felicitate and honour the work and scholarly achievements of Dr. Jaysankar Lal Shaw, one of the significant stalwarts of Indian and comparative philosophy in the contemporary analytical context.

It is doubly honourable for us to be part of this venture as Dr. Shaw – or Jaysankar-da as we lovingly call him – has been a leading and guiding force in this field in our neck of the woods, so to speak – i.e. in Australasia (meaning Australia, New Zealand and Singapore), where Bilimoria and Jay have maintained a close contact across the Tasman waters over the past some 20 years. Although Bilimoria is based in Melbourne, Australia (and increasingly in Berkeley and New Delhi) and Dr. Shaw is based in Wellington, New Zealand, he has followed Dr. Shaw’s career with much enthusiasm and zeal, and indeed derived immense inspiration and support for his own personal endeavours in terms of launching and promoting the field of comparative and East-West philosophy in Australia and New Zealand and the neighbouring Asia-Pacific regions. Bilimoria and Shaw have participated together in the founding of the Australasian Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy and helped to bring scholars and philosophers in this field from the region and abroad together over a decade-and-a-half to share and deliberate on the significant contributions that have emerged from the region and made a modest mark nationally and internationally also. This is not even to mention the enthusiasm Dr. Shaw has shown towards teaching, both in the area of Indian and...
comparative philosophy and otherwise. His support for his students is legendary, including visiting Hemmingsen at his doctoral university in Ontario, Canada. He mentors students with passion and dedication, and is always available to assist them in whatever way is required. There is no doubt in our minds that he has inspired a love of philosophy in generations of students.

This volume attests to the impact of Dr. Shaw’s career, if in no other way than the extent and quality of the articles represented here from leading philosophers, thinkers and logicians from all over the world. Jaysankar Shaw has tirelessly worked to solve some of the pressing and key problems of contemporary philosophy of language, logic, epistemology, metaphysics and morals from the perspectives of classical Indian philosophers using comparative analytical approaches, as his 11 books and some 90 published papers testify. Thus the significance, in no small, measure, of Indian, especially Nyāya logic, epistemology, semantics and cognitive ontology has not escaped the attention of Western scholars who have seen the convergence or at least a point of fecundity with the long tradition of systematic thinking in these areas. Apart from having worked closely also with the late Professor Bimal K. Matilal, Professor J. N. Mohanty, and the late Professors Sibajiban Bhattacharya and Pranab Kumar Sen, the late Pandit Visvabandhu Tarkatirtha (traditional pandit and mentor to Shaw), and the late Pandit Dinesh Shastri, he has not shied away from working and inspiring a host of younger and lesser known philosophers and graduates, from Wellington, to Honolulu to Kolkata.

Hence, a special gratitude is owed to Jaysankar-da and it is the sincere hope of the editors that this small gesture will go towards fulfilling that kalpana. Equally rewarding we believe is the importance of the issues and range of problems that are discussed in these pages, each of which directly or indirectly bear on the kinds of questions that Jaysankar-da has in his own inimitable way been grappling with and spending much time and philosophical energy trying to resolve in the interstices of Indian and contemporary (Western) analytical thinking. So each of the articles ought to be seen as a ‘gift of fruitful dialogue’ and ‘conversation’ between (seemingly) disparate traditions of thought, even if a clear and decisive ‘fusion of horizons’ is not achieved in the process. As Heidegger, following an edict of the Tao, reminded us, it is “being on the way” that is the true measure and telos of philosophising rather than some end that might be reached.

Given the breadth of Shaw’s influence across various sub-fields of philosophy, it is necessary to divide Comparative Philosophy and J. L. Shaw into four main sections: Language, Epistemology, Mathematics and Logic, and Ethics.

Language

The section on language starts with a piece by Partha S. Das, who takes up issues in the Nyāya philosophy of language, specifically Shaw’s attempt to reconcile the views of Gottlob Frege and Saul Kripke regarding definite descriptions. For Frege, we must know the sense of a proper name before we can identify the referent; a proper name can be identified with a set of definite descriptions. On the other hand
for Kripke proper names are rigid designators that are true in all possible worlds, and we cannot identify proper names with a set of descriptions. For Shaw, definite descriptions of proper names are indicators, but are not the meaning of a proper name, yet they nevertheless do refer to the proper name. In this way, Das argues, Shaw brings together the views of Frege and Kripke.

David Lumsden also discusses issues in the Nyāya philosophy of language. He suggests that taking account of the Nyāya writings on the topic of noun phrases can shed some light on pragmatic accounts of how we understand the meaning of a sentence. Specifically, the fact that the Nyāya treat noun phrases as if they are sentences in themselves, and can therefore be assigned a truth value, assists the hearer in determining a referent for the noun phrase, and as such elaborates on the psychological processes by which we comprehend an utterance in a particular context.

Continuing with Frege in the context of Indian philosophy, Amitabha Dasgupta discusses Shaw’s contribution to the issue of whether Frege’s concept of sense can be accommodated within Indian philosophy of language. It is claimed that the distinction between sense and reference has been absent within Indian theories of language (most forcefully by Prof Mohanty). This raises the question of whether a concept such as ‘sense’ is available to philosophers of language in the Indian tradition. Dasgupta discusses Shaw’s reconstruction of the Nyāya position that demonstrates that it is indeed possible for philosophers in the Indian tradition to make limited use of this concept.

Fred Kroon outlines a certain interpretation of the Buddhists’ view of empty terms, a view previously argued for by Shaw. Following this, he maintains a similar position to Shaw and the Buddhists by showing how this view can be argued for through a sympathetic interpretation of some key Buddhist ideas using recent ideas in philosophical logic.

The discussion of the philosophy of language in this volume is concluded with a piece by Tamoghna Sarkar, which examines identity relations with particular reference to the Nyāya school, and the importance of admitting the existence of identity relations in ontology, epistemology and language. Sarkar elaborates on the nature of the identity relations in Indian thought, focusing chiefly on two sub-schools in the Nyāya tradition of verbal understanding: samsargatāvāda and prakāratāvada.

**Epistemology**

The second set of papers, on Epistemology, is framed by a piece by J.L. Shaw himself on how Indian epistemology can shed light on problems in contemporary Western philosophy. Specifically, he discusses an Indian approach to Justified True Belief (JTB) and belief sentences.

Also discussing JTB is Payal Doctor, whose chapter examines epistemic luck, or conditions in which we are able to arrive at a true conclusion from incomplete or faulty premises. She contrasts the Western view with that of the Nyāya, arguing that
the Nyāya perspective, contrary to the Western one, would say that an agent with epistemic luck has achieved a certain type of knowledge, in that they can successfully function with it, even though they do not have a robust sense of knowledge achieved by defect-free causal processes.

Following this, Anand Jayprakash Vaidya looks at the nature of perception. He proposes an approach he calls *causal disjunctivism*, rooted in the Nyāya misplacement theory of illusion, that he claims is a distinct form of disjunctivism than that found in the Western tradition. This new approach should shed some light on what he refers to as the metaphysical problem of perception, or the paradox created by four plausible-sounding but jointly inconsistent claims about perception: that perception is openness to the world, that humans are fallible, that perception, illusion, and hallucination fall under the same fundamental kind for a given explanatory purpose, and that if it seems to $S$ that $Fa$, then there is something $x$, that is $F$, such that $S$ is enabled to see as if $Fa$.

Concluding this segment, Monima Chadha provides a development of the Nyāya account of the relationship between non-conceptual and conceptual content. While non-conceptual content can be a cause of conceptual content, according to the Nyāya, it is necessary but not sufficient. Hence, for the Nyāya, Chadha argues, giving a causal-explanatory account of conceptual content in terms of non-conceptual content is misguided.

**Mathematics and Logic**

Nicholas Griffin begins the Mathematics and Logic segment with a discussion of the concept of negation. Griffin provides a survey of the notion of ‘not’ throughout Western and Indian logic. In both traditions weighty issues hang on how we choose to understand negation, even though there is a great deal of contention in each. However, Griffin says, the issues under dispute differ between the two philosophical traditions.

Negation is also the topic of Purushottama Bilimoria’s chapter, specifically the logical theory of negation in the Mīmāṃsa school. He connects this scheme to the Mīmāṃsā hermeneutic of moral judgements, and further connects these two ideas to the Mīmāṃsā’s epistemological radicalism, and their treatment of negative propositions.

Toshihiro Wada outlines the logical structure of the definitions of invariable concomitance in the thought of Navya-Nyāya mathematician and philosopher, Gaṅgeśa. In particular, Wada examines the Third and Fifth definitions of invariable concomitance in Gaṅgeśa’s *Tattvacintāmaṇi*. While some might argue that these two definitions are merely two different ways of expressing the same idea, Wada suggests that their logical structures do in fact differ.

Engaging with Shaw’s position in *Some Logical Problems Concerning Existence*, Rafal Urbaniak takes issue with Shaw’s definition of mathematical existence – that an object has mathematical existence if it has all of its properties necessarily.