

# Knowledge and Reality, Lecture 02

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Where and When

Pramāṇa

Scepticism

Perception

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- It's a lot more like the situation with Homer and Hesiod (or the Bible) than with Plato and Aristotle.

# Roughly

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- But a lot of the more developed works are late first millennium CE or early second millennium CE.

# Where

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- On the latter, plenty of important documents from antiquity are from Asia (at least from Asian parts of Turkey) or North Africa.



# Where

- Mostly within present-day India.

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- But some from within present-day Nepal and Bangladesh.

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- Mostly within present-day India.
- But some from within present-day Nepal and Bangladesh.
- And maybe some from within present-day Pakistan and perhaps Bhutan.

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# Common Assumptions

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- There are finitely many of these.

# Etymology

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- Pramāṇa literally means proof.
- So to know something is to have a proof of it.
- This suggests that there is a connection between knowledge and certainty.
- And yet most schools do not think that pramāṇas can only lead to very abstract mathematical knowledge.

# Infallibility

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- A knowledge-source produces knowledge.
- So if something does not produce knowledge, it produces false beliefs or lucky guesses, then it isn't a knowledge-source.
- So we may not be able to tell from the inside whether we are using a knowledge-source or not.

## Two Cases

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1. Sumeet tells me that it's raining and it is raining, and indeed he just came in from the rain. I come to know that it's raining by the pramāṇa Śabda (or Word).
2. Sumeet tells me that it's raining but he's playing a trick, and just wants me to stay inside away from the nice weather. I don't get knowledge, so I must not be using Śabda.

# Transparency

- The schools differ some on this, but most accept that we don't always know what method we're using.



# Transparency

- The schools differ some on this, but most accept that we don't always know what method we're using.
- For every pramāṇa, there is something that we might call a psuedo-pramāṇa, that feels a lot like it from the inside, but is crucially different.

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# Disjunctivism

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- The idea is that perceiving an apple and hallucinating an apple are fundamentally different kinds of experience, even if occasionally one may not be able to tell the difference.
- What philosophers used to call "Having an apple-like experience" is a disjunction: you're either seeing an

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# Scepticism

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- There were sceptics in classical Indian philosophy; indeed, there were entire sceptical schools.
- But most of them were not sceptics.
- The reason for rejecting scepticism was quite distinctive.



# Disjunctive Responses to Scepticism

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- A lot of contemporary philosophers adopt disjunctivism as a way of responding to the sceptic.
- They say the sceptic doesn't realise that things like appearances of an apple are disjunctive.
- A real perception of an apple isn't the same thing as a hallucination, so we don't have to worry about confusing them.

# Classical Indian Responses to Scepticism

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- A lot of these philosophers were disjunctivists, but this doesn't seem to have been a big part of the response to scepticism.
- Instead, the response is **pragmatic**.

# An Anti-Sceptical Argument

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2. The difference between sensible actions and stupid ones is that sensible ones are properly grounded in knowledge.
3. So some people at least, the ones who perform sensible actions, know a lot.



# Ordinary Language

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- I can't stress enough how much everything I've said so far is extremely commonplace in Anglophone philosophy post-circa-1950, and miles outside the European mainstream for the preceding several centuries.

# Ordinary Language and Scepticism

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3. So lots of people know stuff.

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- The words in a lie wouldn't have the meaning they have unless they were usually used in true sentences.
- Both suggest that vision and speech must usually be accurate.
- And this might have epistemological consequences.

# A Thought Experiment

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- Is this coherent?
- If not why not?

## Two Sceptical Arguments

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- These are known as Academic Scepticism and Pyrrhonian Scepticism.
- Rather than filling them out, I'll set up the very brief versions of each.



# A Philosophical Strategy

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# Academic Scepticism

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3. Therefore, you don't know that  $p$ .

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# Back to India

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- What's distinctive (a bit distinctive at least) is how anti-sceptics respond.

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# Academic Scepticism

- We've already seen one response to Academic Scepticism that is popular nowadays, but really isn't a big part of European(/West Asian/North African) replies.
- If you know  $p$ , there is in fact not another scenario where you use the **same** method and  $p$  is false.
- That's because you used a pramāṇa to know  $p$ , and would use a psuedo-pramāṇa to falsely believe it.

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- Academic scepticism is limited to the external world.
- There isn't a nearby scenario where I reason mathematically the same way, but two plus two is in fact not four.
- But the pyrrhonian sceptical argument is universal; anything is subject to it.



# Slingshot

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- This is an obvious problem, since it means that the pyrrhonian sceptic doesn't know that pyrrhonian scepticism is true.
- And this means their position is unstable, a fact that critics on both sides of the Indus river pointed out.
- This is what is meant by saying the position involves a "pragmatic contradiction".

## Further Replies

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- And there is an interesting division among the Indian schools on this point.

# Self-Certification

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# Self-Certification

- The threat is that one piece of knowledge requires an infinite amount of knowledge, which we don't have.
- One response, taken by Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta philosophers, is to deny that we need an infinite amount of knowledge.
- At some level, our knowledge that  $p$  just is our knowledge that our knowledge that  $p$  is known (by that very method).



# Pain

Compare these things.

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Compare these things.

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Could these be different? Could you have one without the other? If not, perhaps they are just the same thing? The headache is self-certifying, and maybe knowledge is too.

## Deny the Premise

The other option, which Nyāya philosophers take, is to simply deny step 1.

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## Deny the Premise

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- To know  $p$  requires that the method by which the belief was formed was in fact a pramāṇa.
- But we don't need to know that it was.
- At most, we need to not have good reason to believe it was not.

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# Universals

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# Universals

- Imagine I see Sumeet walking, perhaps walking in Angell Hall.
- What, precisely, do I see?
- One question: Do I see **Sumeet**, or just a bundle of properties that lets me, cognitively, non-perceptually, identify Sumeet.
- Another question: Do I see walkingness as a property of Sumeet (at that time)? Do I see **that** Sumeet is



# Individuals and Universals

- To see that Sumeet is walking, to see as it were Sumeet under the guise of walkingness, both the individual (Sumeet) and the property (walkingness) have to exist.
- We might have metaphysical reasons for rejecting each of these.

# No Individuals

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# No Individuals

- If you have a strong no-self view, then perhaps Sumeet doesn't really exist, so he can't be seen.
- Or perhaps you think only momentary individuals exist, and identifying any sequence of them with Sumeet is arbitrary.
- I'm not going to go into the metaphysics of no-self theories; I struggle enough explaining Hindu theories to try and get Buddhist ones.

# Modern European Philosophy

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- But this view, at least the perceptual version of it, becomes a really big deal in European philosophy from mid-C18 onwards, thanks to David Hume.
- Who might, maybe, have been influenced by Buddhist thinking, though that's really a story for another class.

# Nyāya vs Yogācāra

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- Nyāya philosophers think that one really can perceive proposition like things, like that Sumeet is walking.
- Yogācāra think that we just perceive objects, like Sumeet.
- So they are really the opposite of the Buddhist/Humean position that we only perceive features, not individuals.

# Persistence

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# Persistence

- To be sure, I'm not sure it's fair to say the Yogācāra think we perceive continuing things, like Sumeet.
- We just perceive objects, and maybe by cognition (perhaps mistaken cognition) we put these things into continuants.



# Realism vs Nominalism

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- One reason they don't want to say that we perceive things like walkingness is that they don't believe in properties.
- They are what came to be called **nominalists**, they don't believe that properties are real.
- Perhaps better is to call them **projectivists**; what we call properties are really patterns that we project onto the world.

# Details

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# Details

But surely there is a difference between seeing Sumeet standing and seeing him sitting.

- The Yogācāra need not deny that.
- A natural move (no idea if they make it, but it would fit) is to adopt what became known as an **adverbial** position on perception.
- We might see Sumeet “walkingly”, where the adverb modifies the seeing, not the thing seen.

## Two Questions for Nyāya

But the Nyāya position is surely more natural. And it makes sense to focus on why we might give it up.

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## Two Questions for Nyāya

But the Nyāya position is surely more natural. And it makes sense to focus on why we might give it up.

1. Metaphysical scruples about properties/propositions.
2. Whether the view can account for illusions.
3. How we acquire the concepts we (allegedly) deploy in perception.

# Illusion

The picture here is simple; perception is good and pure, but upset by bad human cognition.

- Perception is simple, but illusion is always complex.

# Acquisition

The Nyāya were not **nativists**, they did not think that concepts like **walking** were innate.

- Instead, they thought that we had a handful of Yogācāra like perceptions as infants, and from those we directly acquired concepts like **walking**.

## For Next Time

- Other pramāṇa, with a little on forms of non-deductive knowledge, but the majority on whether testimony is a pramāṇa.