

The Classical Indian Criteriological Argument For the Existence of God

This paper concerns classical Indian rational theology, a subject that has been fairly well perused by scholars although the particular argument on which I shall focus has been almost ignored. There is no previous philosophic assessment of it, so far as I know. Rational theology is carried out in classical India primarily by the Nyāya school. There are also important contributions in the *Yoga-sūtra* and its Sanskrit commentaries. Indeed, there is an alliance here between Yoga and Nyāya and much mutual borrowing, as argued by the great Belgian scholar Camille Bulcke. (Bulcke was a Jesuit who lived in India teaching Sanskrit. His 1947 monograph, *The Theism of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika*, is a sharply written introduction to the whole general topic of classical arguments for the existence of God, or *īśvara*, along with the Nyāya theology.)¹ I would like to presuppose familiarity with Bulcke's work but will not, and so I begin with some broad context, explained with an eye towards Nyāya's criteriological argument, an argument that is also suggested within Yoga literature. It is similar to the fourth of the "Five Ways" of Thomas for proving the existence of God, the way of gradation

1. Camille Bulcke, *The Theism of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1947).

and comparative qualities. But it has a distinctively Indian flavor as well as presuppositions, as we shall see.

When one thinks of theology in India, one thinks of Vedānta, the school of philosophy that takes its orientation from the Upanishads regarded as revelation (*śruti*). Various sub-schools of Vedānta dispute the nature of *brahman* and *īśvara*, terms that in the Upanishads mean something like “the Absolute” and “God,” and neither Nyāya nor Yoga are commonly thought of as significant players on theological issues. They are counted, along with Vedānta, Mīmāṃsā, Sāṃkhya, and Vaiśeṣika, as so-called “orthodox” (*āstika*) schools, schools that accept the Veda and the Upanishads in some way or at least what today would be called Hindu religious practices—as opposed to the “heterodox” (*nāstika*) schools and practices of Buddhist, Jaina, and other authors. Nevertheless, the concept of God seems almost extraneous to Nyāya's metaphysical and epistemological theories, and Bulcke argues that the system in its earliest pre-text phases was non-theistic. Clearly, throughout all periods a very world-oriented epistemology is the school's hallmark. Yoga, too, is hardly famous for its conception of the *īśvara*, the “Lord,” who in the *Yoga-sūtra* has little to do with either the core psychological theses or the practical concerns of that the Yoga school's defining text. However, though not rejecting Vedic cultural practices (as do Buddhists and Jainas), Nyāya and Yoga proffer rational theologies in contrast to the revealed theology of Vedānta. Here Nyāya and Yoga oppose Vedānta and Mīmāṃsā, which is another school pre-occupied with interpretive principles and contending readings of scripture.

Vedāntins reject the rational arguments along with Nyāya's concepts of God and self (*ātman*) as obscuring the message of the Upanishads. Furthermore, Nyāya reasoning employs, by Vedāntic standards, a rather diminished notion of God, who does not create atoms, ether (the medium of sound), space, time, universals, or individual souls, responsible only (only?) for atomic combinations such as the earth and the like including the human body and the operation of principles of karmic justice.

Nyāya texts span almost two thousand years, and today our topic is an argument proffered by the school's greatest theologian, Udayana, who lived in about the middle of the school's span, around the beginning of the eleventh century. Nyāya takes its name from Sanskrit *nyāya*, "logical or investigative procedure," a word that within the system means, more specifically, "procedures for removing doubts and resolving disputes." Dispute over theism is broached in the oldest extant text, the *Nyāya-sūtra*, which belongs approximately to the second century, though hardly one percent is devoted to theology and theistic issues. Again, the *Nyāya-sūtra* does not organize its teachings around the ideas of God and God's creative activity. Endorse them, however, it does. Later, two arguments are formulated by the commentator Uddyotakara who lived in the fifth century. One of these was developed by a polymath who wrote works within five of the six orthodox schools, Vācaspati Miśra, who lived in the ninth century at best estimate. Vācaspati's argument became the focus of Udayana and other authors of later Nyāya—including Gaṅgeśa of the fourteenth century, who is said to have founded "New Nyāya," *navya-nyāya*, devoting a long section of his masterpiece to this one argument.

Udayana—whom Gaṅgeśa read carefully, referring to him respectfully as the “teacher,” *ācārya*—has nine arguments in a first group and nine more in a second group that argue that God is the author of the Veda. His criteriological argument, as I call it, our main topic, is the fifth of the first group of nine. Let us look first and briefly, though, at the much more central argument that is forged by Uddyotakara and defended by Vācaspati and the Nyāya mainstream in order to put ourselves more thoroughly in Nyāya's intellectual space. Not much, I admit, is made of my argument by later Nyāya philosophers.

The central-most argument runs as follows, in the standard five-part form of an “inference for others,” which in classical philosophy constitutes a formal proof:

1. Earth and the like have a conscious agent as an instrumental cause. (This is the *proposition to be proved*. “Earth and the like” are said to be the *inferential subject* and the *property to be proved* is “having a conscious agent as instrumental cause.”)
2. For, they are effects. (This is the *reason*, and “being effects” is said to be the *prover property*.)
3. Like a pot (which is an effect and has a conscious agent, namely, a potter, as an instrumental cause) and unlike an atom (which is not an effect and does not have a conscious agent as an instrumental cause). (This is the *example* which suggests the *pervasion* or *rule of invariable concomitance* underpinning the inference: whatever is an effect has a conscious agent as an instrumental cause.)

4. Earth and the like are similar (i.e., fall under the rule that whatever is an effect has a conscious agent as an instrumental cause). (This is the *application* of the rule to the inferential subject, in the manner of universal instantiation.)
5. Therefore, earth and the like have a conscious agent as an instrumental cause. (This is the *conclusion* which is the same as the proposition to be proved, except that now it has been proved.)

In symbols:

1. Ha (the “subject” or *pakṣa*, a —earth, etc.—is qualified by H , the *sādhana* or *hetu* “prover” property—being-an-effect). And
2. $(x) (Hx \rightarrow Sx)$ (wherever the H property, there the S *sādhya* “probandum” property—having-an-agent-as-an-instrumental cause).
Therefore,
3. Sa (the subject, a , is qualified by S).

Buddhist philosophers, who were Nyāya's principal adversaries in the early centuries, tried to refute the argument by pointing to counterexamples, such as growing grass. Growing grass exhibits the prover property, being-an-effect, but not the property to be proved, having-an-agent-as-an-instrumental cause. The Nyāya reply is to point out that growing grass and all such examples are in dispute, that is to say, fall within the domain of the inferential subject (*pakṣa*), here earth and the like, anything that is an effect but whose agential cause is not apparent, unlike the comparison

class, a pot, for instance, which is clearly both an effect and has an agent as an instrumental cause. Nothing that belongs to the inferential subject can be used either as an example supporting the rule of invariable concomitance or as a counterexample, since that would beg the question. The whole point of inference is to make something known that was not known previously. The point with our inference is to show that things like the earth, such as growing grass, have an agent within the causal complex that brings them about. This is not something that we know without making the inference. Logic is not abstracted from epistemology in classical India. A putative proof, for example, with a known false premise is thrown out as a fallacy even if its logic is correct.

So, by the rules governing proper inference, the putative counterexample is rejected, and the proof looks pretty good. For, cleverly it divides all things into three categories, as Vācaspati remarks. There are things that are uncreated, atoms, for instance, created things that clearly have an agential cause, such as pots, and things such as growing grass that do not clearly have an agential cause.² This last category becoming the

2. Anantalal Thakur, ed., *Nyāyavārttikatātparyāṭikā of Vācaspatimiśra* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1996), p. 563 (commentary under *Nyāya-sūtra* 4.1.21): *trayo hi bhāvā jagati bhavanti | prasiddha-cetana-karṭṛkāś ca . . . prasiddha-tad-viparyayāś ca . . . sandigdha-cetana-karṭṛkāś ca* | “For there are three kinds of entity in this universe: those well-known to have an agent as cause, those well-known not to, and those whose having an agent as a cause is in doubt.”

inferential subject is bracketed such that no examples can be pulled from the set.

However, another refutation refined by Buddhist philosophers over the centuries is not dismissed so easily.³ The Nyāya argument falls to an “undercutter,” *upādhi*, in this case the property, having-a-visible-body. An inferential undercutter is defined as a property that pervades the probandum while failing to pervade the prover, that is to say, that is entailed by the presence of the probandum while not being instanced in at least one case of the prover. In symbols:

1. $(x) (Sx \rightarrow Ux)$ (Having-an-agent-as-an-instrumental-cause, which is the S or probandum property, is pervaded by the agent's-having-a-visible-body, which is the U or undercutter property: all agents have bodies.)
2. $(\exists x) (Hx \cdot \sim Ux)$ (There is something that is an H but not a U; something that is an effect but does not have within its causal complex an agent with a visible body, e.g., growing grass.)

The two conditions being met, it would follow that there is something that is an H but not an S,

3. It appears in Mokṣākāragupta's twelfth-century textbook: Yuichi Kajiyama, *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy: An Annotated Translation of the Tarkabhāṣā of Mokṣākāragupta* (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 1998), p. 98.

3. $(\exists x) (Hx \bullet \sim Sx)$ (Something is an H but not an S.)

Thus an original apparent inference—*a* is an S, since *a* is an H (and every H is an S)—fails. In other words, the *upādhi* defeats the apparent inference by showing that the required pervasion and entailment do not hold:

4. $\sim (x) (Hx \rightarrow Sx)$ (That every H is an S is false.)

Of course, the Nyāya response is to deny that the putative undercutter, an-agent's-having-a-visible-body, pervades the probandum of the target inference, having-an-agent-as-an-instrumental-cause, and several rounds of objection and response centering on Nyāya's conception of God as an agent without a body are aired by Vācaspati and Udayana. This is also Gaṅgeśa's main concern. Vācaspati points out that God is like other imperceptible entities known by inference, atoms, for instance, and that our whole system of knowledge would break down if we were to reject inferences to imperceptible entities.⁴ God like other selves (*ātman*, the category to which God belongs) is known by God's acts.

Furthermore, God's creative activity requires, like that of any agent, familiarity with the material to be shaped, like the potter's knowledge of clay and of what to do to make a pot. God's knowledge is to be conceived as appropriate to the tasks to be undertaken, such as combining

4. Thakur, p. 566.

atoms, and if God like us had to have body to have knowledge, including the knowledge required to combine atoms, then, since bodies are combinations of atoms, there would have to be some earlier Creator to make the necessary combinations—ad infinitum. Simpler than this conception is that of a bodiless Creator whose knowledge is appropriate to the material forming earth and the like but which, unlike our knowledge, is not generated. This seems to be the core of Vācaspati's reasoning, which is repeated by Udayana.⁵

God may be bodiless in essence but God is capable of assuming a body for certain purposes. For example, God assumes a body in order to teach. God is “Guru even of the ancient teachers in not being limited by time” in the conception of the *Yoga-sūtra*.⁶ This is crucial for the criteriological argument, as we shall see. But we need at least one more bit of background information before proceeding, a principle of Nyāya metaphysics.

Nyāya's motto in reasoning about God, atoms, ether, and other theoretic entities in the sense that they are in no instances known immediately by perception is to assume only so much about a posited cause as is necessary to account for an effect in view. Nyāya philosophers on mind-body connections, for example, formulate causal principles on the basis of correlations without bias about the sorts of things that can be linked so

5. *ibid.*, p. 566.

6. *Yoga-sūtra* 1.26: *sa pūrveṣām api guruḥ kālena an-avacchedāt.*

long as the cause has the character that makes it able to perform the role for which it is proposed in the first place. Thus selves carry intentions as qualities, and atoms are colored, according to Nyāya. Furthermore, God is not omnipotent in that atoms, ether, and individual souls are eternal and uncreated, and laws of karmic justice et cetera are what they are independently of God's creative action. But God is omniscient (*sarva-jñā*), in knowing all there is to know about everything. Otherwise, God would not be capable of playing the required causal role. Only an agent thoroughly familiar with the material with which he or she works is capable of producing the intended result, like a weaver and the thread to be woven.

Udayana's theological masterpiece, *Nyāya-kusumâñjali*, "Flowers of Critical Reasoning Offered (in Devotion)," is a complex work of seventy-three verses grouped into five bunches or chapters and explained by the author in a dense prose commentary that typically for each verse runs ten or more pages in a modern edition (though probably fewer palm leaves). Along with a new translation by N.S. Dravid there is an excellent monograph by the sanskritist Georg Chemparathy who reconstructs the main themes and arguments, including the eighteen arguments for the existence of God I mentioned.⁷ The fifth among these is the criteriological

7. George Chemparathy, *An Indian Rational Theology: Introduction to Udayana's Nyāya-kusumâñjali* (Vienna: Indologische Institut der Universität Wien, 1972); N.S. Dravid, *Nyāya-kusumâñjali of Udayanācārya* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1996).

(counting according to the commentary: some words in an introductory verse have double meaning). The argument earlier had been on the table briefly, in the context of a response of Udayana's to an objection to theism. The list of arguments along with the commentary appears in his fifth and final chapter; the four previous chapters have been occupied with responses to broad objections to theism. In the verse, a set of "reasons" is listed, formal *hetus*, among which is *padāt*, "from usages." Pages later we get another verse which groups our argument with three others and a fairly long paragraph of explanation and rebuttal of, mainly, two objections.

I translate (from the edition by Dravid):⁸

(The criteria implicit in) the expertise of the likes of weavers in making cloth and other things, the conventions and rules governing the verbal acts of those of manifest competence in a language (whose speech is understandable), (the fixed conventionality of) children's learning an alphabet in a certain (customary) order, all such (standards and connected actions and abilities) depend on an independent being, since they are conventions in practice (*vyavahāra*).

8. *ibid.*, p. 409: *yad etat paṭādi-nirmāṇa-naipuṇyaṃ kuvindādīnām, vāk-vyavahāraḥ ca vyakta-vācām, lipi-tat-krama-vyavahāraḥ ca bālānām, sa sarvaḥ sva-tantra-puruṣa-viśrāntaḥ vyavahāratvāt.*

The crucial notion is of course “conventions in practice,” *vyavahāra*, which is technically the *reason* in Udayana's argument. His next sentence gives examples, indicating the inductive basis for the generalization, *Wherever conventions in practice, there an independent being*. That is to say, in however long a causal link there must be God, whose expertise is independent or intrinsic, a conscious agent as a causal factor, specifically the one who sets the conventions and standards of excellence or incorporates them.⁹

This is like the expertise that is a causal factor in the production of an (exquisite) pot the likes of which has not been encountered previously, skill in a craft that is comparatively better, and like (the stipulation of names such as) ‘Chaitra’ and ‘Maitra’ (to refer to particular individuals), and like the letters (and their arrangement) in a message, as well as the meaning of the sequences in the Paninian grammatical system.

We may reconstruct the argument using the standard classical form, which is how Udayana thinks, having been trained in classical logic.

1. Expertise in crafts as well as language requires an independent

9. *ibid.*: *nipuṇātara-śilpi-nirmita-apūrva-ghaṭa-ghaṭanā-naipuṇya-vat, caitra-maitrâdi-pada-vat, patra-akṣara-vat, pāṇinīya-varṇa-nirdeśa-krama-vat ca.*

agent to set the standards and conventions (or to embody them or to teach them).

2. For, such ability exhibits conventions in practice.
3. Like the innovative ability of the most expert craftsmen, dubbing people 'Chaitra' or 'Maitra' and other names, and the (customary) order of letters, the (stylistic flourishes of) a message, as well as usage of the conventions of the Paninian grammatical system.
4. The expertise at issue is similar.
5. Therefore, expertise in crafts as well as language requires an independent agent to set the standards and conventions.

Two presuppositions are flushed out by objections that Udayana proceeds to consider. First, does such expertise have a beginning? Does the universe have a beginning? Well, yes. Udayana points out that he has established this proposition earlier, referring to a long passage in the second chapter where the thesis of periodic creation and annihilation of the universe is defended against five objections from the Mīmāṃsaka camp along with counter-arguments against the Mīmāṃsaka thesis of the eternity of the Veda. Udayana holds that the Veda and its transmission, like everything that has to do with human activity, is created and will perish in the dissolution of the universe. Its continuity from a previous round of creation and destruction and continuity into the round to come is absolutely dependent on God, says Udayana. Udayana's main argument there in the second chapter centers on the composite nature of the universe. Everything composite disintegrates eventually. Individual selves are not

composite and, like atoms and universals, are eternal and separate from the atoms that make up matter. But human beings are composites, and little remains inhering in immortal souls, in Udayana's opinion, through a period of universal destruction. Only the moral force of karma rests with the soul during universal dissolution. This is an important constraint on God's creative activity at the beginning of a new cycle, as I shall explain. The main point is that while world creation and destruction may be cyclical, no skill-forming *saṃskāra* are continuous from one cycle to the next. That is to say, none of the "dispositional properties" that maintain excellence in crafts and conventions, *vyavahāra*, survive. Apparently, the reason why Udayana believes some karma does survive universal dissolution—that karma, namely, which is moral in character—is that without it there would be no possibility of theodicy, of the standard Nyāya theodicy, that is, to wit, that God is bound by principles of karmic justice to create a world where there is pain and suffering.

We have now bumped into the thorny topic of karma, which is a very broad notion. Karma is underpinned by dispositional properties, some of which are considered to inhere in the self as opposed to the body, as it is thought that some patterns of behavior survive an individual's death, qualifying the soul that is reborn as our habits condition our action in this lifetime. But most karma, it seems, is wiped out in a universal destruction, *pralaya*. Actually Udayana compares the state to deep sleep when the self is not conscious.¹⁰ So I hazard that he thinks that though karma-

underpinning *saṃskāra* remain through universal destruction, they are so dormant that there has to be retraining to awaken them (*udbodha*) so that they influence life. He does say quite explicitly all skills and excellences have to be re-acquired each round, arguing at length, as indicated, against the Mīmāṃsā view that the universe has no beginning and eternal patterns are never destroyed. His main point is always that everything composite disintegrates. The human being is a composite in more than one way, a composite of an immaterial self, an immaterial mind or *manas*, and a material body which is itself a combination of different types of atoms.

So in addition to the position that the universe has a beginning, Udayana defends the thesis that despite some continuity of dispositions or karma across lives—a musical ear, a talent for languages or philosophy, certain kinds of attraction and repulsion, and so on—humans are at birth on the surface blank slates whose talents have to be brought out through education and training. Talents themselves are acquired over lifetimes, through effort guided by teachers. Every craft, including speech, is learned from a teacher who has learned from a previous teacher, e.g., grammar and the semantic conventions of Sanskrit. Since, as shown, the *saṃskāra* necessary to maintain skills and conventional practices are wiped out at the time of *pralaya*, or are at least deeply dormant, there has

10. *ibid.*, pp. 180 and 183–84.

to be a first teacher who embodies, knows, or is able to invent the standards independently of all other teachers, a first guru, whose skill and knowledge are unlearned.

The supplementary reasoning to take Udayana where he wants to go, to God, namely, in the face of the rather obvious objection that in some cases humans set the standards or conventions in an art or craft, is that excellence in conventional practices is to be accounted for in one of two ways. First, there is, as is traditionally conceived, an immemorial heritage, a lineage of teachers all the way back to an original teacher, concerning the principles of yoga, for example, Shiva, the greatest and original yogin. Shiva is also traditionally conceived as fixing reference and patterns of grammatical rules, and he or another divinity (another "face of God" in the henotheistic conception of Hinduism) as setting the standards for excellence in other crafts. But of course not all crafts and not all at once, not all somehow at the beginning of a round of creation. A second kind of innovation we find among craftspeople such as potters when they, so to say, break the mold and are innovative. But there too Udayana finds Divinity. In those moments of inspired innovation, the weavers and other artists are either identical with God or Divinely moved. There is a connection here with the *avatāra* doctrine, the doctrine of special divine "Descents," more about which just below. It is this idea that Udayana suggests as he closes his exposition and moves on to the sixth argument, which concerns the Veda. But let us note first that it is the standard cases that are emphasized: most people learn skills from teachers who also learned them. Learning processes have to begin somewhere,

since there is periodic universal destruction without the relevant continuity. The exception is God, whose expertise is not dependent on a teacher. Therefore, we must suppose a God as an Original Teacher who knows the conventions and standards intrinsically without having been taught or who has originally set them or embodied them in taking a human form.

Let us focus now on the assumption of Udayana's that God assumes a body from time to time according to the nature of the action required. God is essentially bodiless, as is shown by God's ability to combine atoms in an initial creative act at the beginning of a creative cycle. Atoms lie uncombined and isolated during a period of universal destruction, *pralaya*. But after combining them, God becomes capable of assuming a body. In our passage, Udayana quotes four lines of one of the favorite sacred texts of Vedāntins, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, in what for him as a Nyāya philosopher is an unusual move (especially such a long quotation). The verses quoted are from the ninth and the third chapters (9.17a and 3.23-24a), Krishna speaking:

Father am I of the universe. Mother, Sustainer, Grandsire.

If ever I were not to engage in action unwearied,/ my example people would follow completely.// I would destroy these worlds were I not to act.

This is the doctrine of the Divine *avatāra* or “special incarnation of God.” Apparently in Udayana's conception, the main reason God assumes a body is to teach. He might well have quoted another line from

the *Gītā* (3.21), which seems to capture the principle to which he appeals:

What is done by those of superior ability, that is (followed and) put into practice by ordinary people (as best they can).

Here Krishna seems to say that God has a responsibility to teach and thus to become embodied. Despite the opposition to Mīmāṃsā and the thesis of the Veda's eternality, Udayana is religiously a traditionalist, much more so than some Nyāya philosophers. The last four arguments of our section of the *Nyāya-kusumâñjali* focus on God's act of teaching the Veda to the first human beings who then passed it down to us through a series of teachers (one generation after another memorizing immense stretches through recitation).

The reason why Gaṅgeśa a little more than three centuries after Udayana along with other New Nyāya philosophers in subsequent centuries has given little attention to Udayana's criteriological argument is, I suspect, that the causal chain back to God as originator of conventions in practice is too long to maintain the confidence in universal concomitance or pervasion required to permit inference. Gaṅgeśa explicitly rejects another argument, also proffered by Udayana, that the fact of the Veda is unintelligible without supposing God as its author and originator. Gaṅgeśa argues that the thesis of a beginningless series of teachers and students while itself also not established by inference is nevertheless a live hypothesis, not by inference ruled out. In other words, God may have authored the Veda, but the fact or character of the Veda does not show that we have to suppose God as its author. A rival possibility is a

beginningless series of teachers. Gaṅgeśa, like many other classical Indian thinkers across school, believes, or at least entertains the possibility, that some *saṃskāra*, some “mental dispositions,” are indeed forever fixed, and that there is never a truly universal *pralaya*. But this opens the different issue of where *saṃskāra* lie.

I should like now to go back and look at the standard Nyāya reason why it is God that has to be supposed given the truth of the conclusion of the inference. That conclusion is, again, that “expertise in crafts as well as language requires an independent agent to set the standards and conventions.” The best way to see how Udayana is viewing the bridge between this conclusion as stated and the existence of God is to go back to the first argument he gives, about earth and the like being effects, an argument that, as mentioned, is accepted within the Nyāya mainstream both before and after this the “Teacher.” Vācaspati explicitly brings up the question why we should suppose that the truth that earth and the like have a conscious agent as an instrumental cause requires that we suppose that the cause is God. The bridgework for Vācaspati is a matter of conceptual analysis (*iti arthāt*) and not itself inferential in the technical sense of inference as a knowledge-generator (*pramāṇa*). With a wonderful train of adjectives and descriptive nouns, Vācaspati characterizes the universe including its dimension of simultaneity. If the opponent and interlocutor’s rival conception includes being the agent with respect to all that, well, then, the interlocutor has arrived at the right concept of God and there is between them no disagreement.¹¹ We might also note that

unicity is required, he argues, since the concept of a single God is simpler than that of multiple divinities each responsible for something different—down potentially to the individual atoms, as though there were to be one divinity per atom. This is a cumbersome hypothesis because of all the problems of co-ordination. Simpler (*lāghava*) is to suppose a single God.¹²

Udayana's best case with what I call his criteriological argument would appear to be language, since no human being or even group of human beings seems capable of creating a language *ab initio*. But I think he has a good case, too, with the other examples, comparative expertise in crafts, etc., which I think hold a lesson, a strategic lesson, for those who would champion in our own day what might be called broadly a teleological argument. We will turn to the comparative-skills examples in a moment. First, I should like to point out the similarity here to a famous Mīmāṃsaka argument involving a language regress, an argument that Udayana expressly refutes in his second chapter: against Nyāya's view that the meaning of words is set by convention (*saṃketa*), the

11. Thakur, pp. 564 and 565: *aparimeyāniyata-dig-deśaindriyakâtīndriyaka-trasasthāvarādi-lakṣaṇa-kāryôtpāda-yaugapadyam*. “(That which is to be accounted for) is the simultaneity of production of effects throughout immeasurable and unlimited space at every place and location, effects perceptible and imperceptible in animals and plants and the organic world as a whole and so on.”

12. *ibid.*, p. 566.

Mīmāṃsakas argue that this presupposes a language of stipulation, *ad infinitum*. Better than this cumbersome thesis is to view the relation between word and object as natural.¹³ The Naiyāyika avoids the regress through positing God. God's omniscience including language-knowledge is ungenerated, hard-wired, intrinsic. God takes a body to teach human beings how to speak.

It is harder to see how God is required as the originator or standard-setter for expertise in crafts, especially comparative expertise. The idea seems to be that any comparative superiority suggests a limit of excellence in one who would have knowledge of everything involved. The expert can discern and say or demonstrate why X is better than Y, comprehending the notions guiding Y's production as well as X's in being able to show why X is better. Imagine that X is novel in design and that the originator of X does not merely fashion something better than Y (an "exquisite pot never before encountered" in Udayana's words) but

13. Dan Arnold connects the Mīmāṃsā doctrines of the eternity and unspoken character of the Veda (not spoken by any person, *apaurusheya*, including Shiva, Vishnu, and so on) to the arguments of Jerry Fodor that the view of language as convention faces the difficulty that the stipulations that form conventions ("Let 'tree' pick out trees") are themselves formulated in a language: "On Semantics and *Samketa*: Thoughts on a Neglected Problem with Buddhist *Apoha* Doctrine," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 34 (October 2006), pp. 415–78. Fodor speculates that the brain is hard-wired in "mentalese," that there is a core language that is not conventional. In other words, not all language is learned or even invented, since there has to be a language of invention.

also sets new standards for production of things of the type, pots, instance. Well, Udayana's view is—let us come back to this thesis—that innovation is due to God's on-going creative activity which sometimes requires incarnation, as Krishna says at *Gītā* 4.7. Udayana to close the discussion of this his fifth of eight arguments refers to such henotheistic verses of the *Yajur Veda* as those that say, for example, “to potters salutations,” *namaḥ kulālebhyaḥ*, suggesting not only the Divine origin of the craft but also Divinity in the artists themselves—especially by producing a work of such exquisite art, never encountered before, that new standards become conventionalized.¹⁴ Similarly, he says, one is creative in giving a baby the name ‘Chaitra’ or ‘Maitra’ and writing a message (Sanskrit allows great flexibility in choice of word order)—which as examples are also perplexing, indeed like the exquisite pot, except when one understands this part of Udayana's theology. The idea is that in giving a name as setting a new convention tying word to object, one does something similar to what God does, though it is only God and not human individuals who sets up the naming convention in the first place. Only God is a truly independent agent. But even the recitative ability of children with an alphabet (which for Sanskrit has its letters customarily arranged but

14. The tenth chapter of the *Gītā* lists Gods “partial manifestations,” *vibhūti*. Among mountain ranges, God is the Himalayas. Among flowers, the lotus, animals, the elephant, and so on.

also arguably according to mnemonic principles) depends upon the insights of the arranger, whoever it was that set the convention of the order of the vowels and consonants to be voiced. Much the same goes for the symbol conventions of the Paninian grammatical system, which, though arbitrary, become treasured conduits for comprehension of Sanskrit. Tradition has it—though Udayana does not say this—that Pāṇini, the greatest of grammarians (an historical figure, placed by scholars in the sixth or fifth century BCE) was an incarnation of Shiva, gracing our world to teach grammar, as he taught the Veda many eons previously.

The problem of understanding Udayana's examples as correlating the prover and probandum properties is not the only difficulty with some of them, the examples that seem drawn illicitly from the domain of the *pakṣa*, the inferential subject, to be precise. But let's skip over this. The force of the argument is clear. There are criteria for excellence in all crafts and conventional practices including speaking. For the criteria to be set requires ultimately an independent agent with all the relevant knowledge and ability. That agent is God or, if a human being, a human being Divine or Divinely inspired in the creative act.

The suppositions that inform this argument can be challenged. Many were challenged by Nyāya's adversaries, not only Buddhists but, principally, Mīmāṃsakas in later centuries. (It may be surprising, given Mīmāṃsā's reputation as the most traditional of the classical schools, but it is a eighth-century Mīmāṃsaka named Kumārila who puts forth the most sustained attack on theism within classical literature, not a Buddhist.) The argument is hardly a slam dunk and was not, as I say, nearly

as popular among Nyāya philosophers after Udayana as was the argument from effects in general. One weak spot seems to be the rather *ad hoc* expansion of Divinity to include the apparent counterexamples of human beings' acts of creative genius. However, it is indeed a common practice even now in India to regard such people as Divine or Divinely moved. So whatever the philosophic value of the argument, my exposition of it has hopefully provided some cultural insight into Nyāya theological reasoning. Then, finally, creative genius, invention of language and other instances of standard-setting do seem to be among the phenomena most resistant to explanation by science on materialist premises. Clearly they cannot be explained as results of behaviorist shaping. Strategically, then, they might be used to bolster a teleological argument for God, it seems to me. Similarly, the quantum-leap or holistic character of the consciousness that reveals standards of excellence seems to me a pretty good candidate or model for Divinity. I think this is another implication of the *Gītā's avatāra* doctrine, which, we have seen, is embraced by Udayana. But that is a subject for some other occasion.

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