Yoga Philosophy
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Yoga Philosophy and the West
Part 1
Models of Understanding and Colonialism
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Abstract

• In this webinar we will contrast two basic approaches to understanding: one based on logical inference we could call “explication,” and the other based on what one believes or “interpretation.” While closely associated with the Western tradition (for historical reasons that will be discussed), interpretation violates basic requirements of reason but can also be shown to generate many of the -isms (such as racism) that we are contending with today. The contrast between the two options is entailed by the opening lines of the *Yoga Sūtra* (I.2-4): only one option is reasonable. Participants in this webinar will learn how to apply critical thinking skills in everyday life as part of their practice of yoga.
Logic

• Three forms of logic: deduction, induction and abduction (inference to the best explanation)
Three Standards

• Deduction: Standard is Validity (if the premises are true, the conclusion has to be true)

• Induction: Standard is Strength (the data set has to support the extrapolation)

• Abduction/inference to the best explanation: Standard is relative success of an explanation compared to available alternatives
What all reason has in common

• Reason is about the support that premises/data/explanations, provide for conclusions

• Not the same as what is true, or what we believe is true.
Examples

• P1. This is a Yoga Alliance Webinar
• P2. You are viewing a Yoga Alliance Webinar
• Therefore: The Presenter’s Name is Shyam Ranganathan
• (Invalid)

• P1. Asparagus is a type of cat.
• P2. Cats are kind of reptile.
• Therefore, Asparagus is a kind of reptile.
• (Valid)
Sound Arguments

• Valid + true

• P1. Philosophy is a discipline
• P2. Disciplines require special training to master
• Therefore, philosophy requires special training to master
Inductive Arguments

• Some members of YA that identify as women are white.
• Therefore: YA Members are white
• (Week)

• Members of YA that identify as a woman are > than Members of YA that identify as a man
• Therefore: YA Members are generally self identifying women
• (Strong)
Cogent Inductive Arguments

• Annual temperature has been rising for some time
• The rise coincides with anthropogenic greenhouse gases
• The presence of such gases increases temperature
• Therefore, there is global warming
• (Cogent=strong + credible evidence)
• Possible there could be other factors, and that some parts of the globe do not evidence such warming
• Not dependent upon validity
Two Models of Understanding

• **Interpretation**: explanation by way of what one takes to be true/believes/or would say.

• **Explication**: explanation by way of validity (showing or revealing the logical support of someone’s reasons for their conclusion)

• Origins of fallacies: interpretation
Fallacies

• Expectation that good explanations have to be based on what one believes or is true
• Objecting to an argument because the conclusion is consistent with other explanations
• Criticisms that leave in tact an argument: such as, *ad homonym, tu quoque*
Political Problems

• Interpretation is imperialistic: it imposes the explainer’s beliefs on the explained
• Interpretation is colonialism, as it treats the explained as a prop for the explainer
Beginning of the *Yoga Sūtra* (I.2-4)

- Either we relate to our mind as though it is something that influences us
- Or we control mental influence so that we can be autonomous (abide in our essence as knowers)
Yoga Sūtra  I.1-4

- atha yogānuśāsanam
- yogaś-citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ
- tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe ʿvasthānam
- vṛtti-sārūpyam-itaratra
Yoga Sūtra  I.1-4 (My Translation)

• Thus, with certainty, (we) delve into the definitive explication of yoga.
• Yoga is the control of the (moral) character of thought.
• Then, the seer can abide in its essence.
• Otherwise, there is identification with the character of thought.
Interpretation vs. Explication

• Interpretation gives an illusory sense of independence, as it seems like we are thereby explaining things by our beliefs.
• But it really is a state of being influenced by our experiences (vṛtti-sārūpyam-ītaratra I.4).
• Explication is possible if we take responsibility for stilling, controlling and organizing mental content, like into arguments (yogaś-citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ)
• Then we are not psychologically influenced by what we contemplate
Problem with interpretation

- Anti-logical
- It leads us to uncritically accept our experiences as though they are basic facts, and not contingent on choices that we have
- Imperialistic: it imposes on the interpreted the beliefs of the interpreter
- Converts our naïve point of view into a frame that we try to understand others by
Discriminative Marginalization

• If we have beliefs about paradigm cases, of what it is to be a person, we can then employ these in our interpretations to generate the *isms*

• EG the belief that the paradigm case of a person is a white heterosexual male will produce a string of isms: everyone will judged by their deviation from the paradigm case

• One cannot engage in this if one abandons interpretation
Historical Questions

• My research I note:

• Interpretation is recommended by major contemporary philosophers in the Western tradition

• It is entailed by or motivated by the *linguistic account of thought* —> then explaining a thought is explaining it in terms of what you would say

• Linguistic account of thought also assumed in the background of contemporary Western philosophy

• Goes back to the ancient Greeks, who had one word for thought, language and reason: *logos*
Western tradition

• Unique in its historical endorsement of the linguistic account of thought

• East Asian Tradition: it was controversial

• South Asian Tradition: no one endorsed it
Developing Logic: Yoga

• In everyday life, we can protect against the tendencies to interpret by engaging in a few tasks:

• With respect to any belief you have, turn it into a conclusion and ask what reasons there are to support this---what premises if true would mean this conclusion has to be true.

• If there are no good reasons, it’s a saṃskāra
Developing Logic: Yoga 2

• Ask whether a belief you have is a genuine inductive extrapolation (in which case, there can and will be exceptions) and how good the evidence is for that.

• Ask: what amount or level of exceptions is consistent with this extrapolation?
Limited Bibliography

