

The Relevance of Nyāya Philosophy in Philosophical Counseling

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Abstract

After giving a short description of mind in Nyaya philosophy and philosophical counseling as life lessons, the present paper suggests that the methods of philosophical counseling can be enriched through the use of Nyaya sutras. The concept of mind and the formation of perception in an individual as described in Nyaya can be applied to philosophical counseling. In fact, the paper attempts to show that the methods that are being used in philosophical counseling have a clear bearing on some of the concepts of Nyaya. Furthermore, the present study proposes that the philosophy of Nyaya has remarkable potential to expand the sphere of philosophical counseling by imparting the wisdom of openness to the multi-layered meaning of lived reality.

Keywords: Nyāya, Manas, philosophical counseling, Darśana, perception

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“Mana evamanuṣyāṅāmkāraṅambandhamokṣayoḥ.

Bandhāyaviṣyāsaktammuktyainirviṣayammanah.”

This above quotation from the Brahmbindu Upanisad bears testimony to the fact that the Indian philosophical tradition has been quite serious about one of the

most intriguing yet challenging cognitive faculties, the mind, from time immemorial. From Vedās to medieval Sanskrit literary works, there is a visible preoccupation with the thought of manas tattva. Mind or ‘manas’ makes the intelligentsia all the more busy in the twenty-first century. With the boom of artificial intelligence in the modern age human mind is again under tedious scrutiny. However, the truth that the quoted lines if translated in English suggest, ‘the mind is the source of both bondage and liberation’ is universally acknowledged. It is the mind that reacts to a situation and this situation would be the root of psychological issues depending on how it is interpreted, which often is based on core beliefs. If these beliefs help to find a situation normal or positive, the emotional and behavioral reactions of a person are positive. However, if the scenario is viewed as a threat to mental sickness, it may result in psychological problems. Depression, anxiety, and different kinds of phobias are bondages that restrict us from living a fulfilling life, and herein the branch of philosophical counseling intrudes in. Along with several other modes of psychological well-being, philosophical counseling also tries to help clients who wish to address worries or resolve obstacles that emerge in everyday existence by providing alternatives to existing outlooks. Nyaya philosophy could be of great help to philosophers who intend to converse with clients to help them solve their problems because it encourages people to think critically about the perceived reality. Its emphasis on logical reasoning and discussion has a miraculous ability to reevaluate our long-standing beliefs and thus reaffirm the foundation of a healthy mental state. Our paper aims to establish the relevance of Nyaya Philosophy as an aid to the philosophers who engage themselves in the act of philosophical counseling.

The thought of using Nyaya philosophy concerning the mind and its activity is nothing new. Kisor Kumar Chakrabarti’s *Classical Indian Philosophy of Mind: The Nyaya Dualist Tradition* tries to explicate the “Nyaya as an essentially devoted philosophy of mind². Again, Vandana Upadhyay in her article *Mind in NyāyaVaiśeṣika with a Comparison to Artificial Intelligence (AI)*” seems to be oscillating between whether or not recreation of mind is possible in a machine³. Prashant Mishra and Kailash Chandra Barmole in their conference paper entitled “The Role of Nyaya Philosophy in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy” recommend the use of Nyaya Sutras in CBT. They proposed to use Nyaya Sutra in a more refined manner⁴ to suit the purpose of the therapist but the way to refinement is not described in detail in the article. Furthermore, since the authors of the article are great scholars in the field of Clinical Psychology, they restrict their discussion to the use of Nyaya for rationalistic situational interpretation alone. Our paper aims to unfold the multi-dimensional use of Nyaya philosophy as a method of philosophical counseling. Our lack of experience in cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) forbids me to comment on whether such use of Nyaya philosophy could

apply to CBT or not. Therefore, it remains open to scholars/researchers/theorists to judge and empirically test the relevance of Nyaya in psycho-therapy.

Mind, Knowledge Acquisition, and Opinion Formation in Nyāya Philosophy

Nyāya is the only Indian philosophical system that prioritizes procedures and grows from there a well-developed logic theory. Nyaya derives from the Sanskrit verbal root *ni*, which means to guide or transmit (*nīyantianenaitinyāyaḥ*). The study of *Pramāṇa Śāstra* (epistemology), *Tarka Śāstra* (the science of reasoning), or *Ānvikṣiḥi* (the science of critical inquiry) is included in Nyaya. Accordingly, the mind or *manas* gets due attention in this field of study as one of the nine *Kāraṇa Dravyas*. All knowledge, according to Nyaya philosophy, is obtained by *Manas*, *Buddhi* (intellect), and *Indriya* (senses). When any of these three factors is compromised, the perceived knowledge is likewise impacted⁵. Five *Indriyas*, according to Nyaya *Darsana*, the nose, tongue, eyes, skin, and ears are composed of the five components *Prthvi*, *Ap*, *Teja*, *Vayu*, and *Ākāśa*. These senses make touch with the outside world and then transmit their impressions to the mind⁶. Without the mind, sense organs are unable to comprehend objects since the mind is the only factor that can guarantee perception. But, internal experiences, such as pain, pleasure, desire, and aversion, cannot be understood by the senses and point to the presence of a different faculty known as the "mind." As Gautama says: *Yugapajñānānutpattiḥmanasoliṅgam*⁷ (*Nyāya Darśana*, 1.1.16.).

The mind has eight characteristics including *Paratva* (superior entity), *Aparatva* (non-superior entity), *Samkhyā* (numerical), *Parmiti* (limitation), *Prthakatva* (distinction), *Samyoga* (union), *Vibhāga* (separation), and *Vega* (velocity)⁸ and it performs the functions like remembering, inference, verbal cognition, doubt, intuition, dream, speculation and internal perceptions like pain, pleasure, anger, desire etc. However, the mind can do a single-factorial task at once, even though it appears that multiple functions of the mind are taking place at the same time, in reality, the functions are only successive. Now these successive functionalities initiate the acquisition of knowledge. However, the *Jñānotpatti Prakriyā* (development of knowledge) according to *Nyāya Darśana* is realized by the *Sannikarṣa* (joining) of soul, mind, senses, and sense objects. "Among sixteen *Padārtha* of *Nyāya Darśana*, the first nine, viz., *Pramāṇa* (means of valid knowledge), *Prameya* (objects of right knowledge), *Samśaya* (doubt), *Prayojana* (purpose), *Driṣṭānta* (example), *Siddhānta* (conclusive assertion), *Avayava* (member or part of *Nyāya* syllogism), *Tarka* (argument or judgment), and *Nirnaya* (decision), are used for attaining the true knowledge or to understand the objects as they are. The last seven *Padārtha*, i.e. *Vāda* (discussion or debate), *Jalpa* (controversy), *Vitaṇḍa* (cavil), *Hetvābhāsa* (fallacy), *Chala* (stratagem), *Jāti* (analog), and *Nigrahasṭhāna* (point of defeat), are used to prove one's views"⁹. So the problem may arise either in the perception of a situation, event, or words of another person or in deciphering its meaning. So we have to ensure first

that we have a proper understanding of any object and this process incorporates either one or more than one of four ways: *Pratyakṣa* (perception), *Anumāna* (inference), *Upamāna* (comparison), and *Śabda* (verbal testimony)¹⁰. *Pratyakṣa* is instantaneous, direct cognition while *Anumāna* is the intermediate knowledge that uses experience and ideas to form concept of the present. *Upamāna* is a way of forming knowledge from its resemblance with an already known thing. The teachings and words of renowned wise persons as well as written scriptures belong to *Śabda*. All these contribute to the complex process of knowledge acquisition and forming perception of it which affects our senses, intellect, body, and soul and regulates our activities.

Philosophical Counseling as Life Lessons

More often we come across questions like what is the meaning of self, how do we relate to others, what are our obligations to our near and dear ones, what is the purpose of life or the value of love, and so on in our day-to-day existence. Philosophical counseling, as a method, helps in being a support in finding answers to such questions. To define philosophical counseling as an approach it is better to take into account what it is not. It differs from academic philosophy in the sense that it does not try to formulate abstract theories based on generalized assumptions. Philosophical counseling is an approach to handling a person's challenges, predicaments, and life hurdles through philosophical self-examination. Again we must not confuse it with other 'talk therapies' specifically with psychological sessions where mental and emotional illness are treated as symptoms and analysed in terms of authoritative preconceived scientific assumptions. Philosophical counseling is a form of philosophizing where a thorough examination of the self is undertaken and the basic assumptions, beliefs, and common conceptions of the counselee are put under serious scrutiny. In other words, when we attempt philosophical counseling we aim to examine a person's views of the world and what makes such a worldview possible. Such analysis is helpful to the philosophical counselor to provide thinking tools to the individuals through which they develop the means to deal with their life problems in their unique ways.

Use of Nyaya in Philosophical Counseling

What we assess in philosophical counseling is a question of serious reflection- is it the conscious state of mind or the workings of the unconscious? E. Veening's opinion is that the philosophical counselor must adhere to the conscious thought processes of the client for the unconscious realm of the mind is the sphere of the psychologists¹¹. Others held that the unconscious has a role to play in the consciousness, so it seems to be impossible to ignore it altogether. However, majority of the philosophical counselors attempt to understand, as stated earlier, the ways through which a person interprets his/her life and the world and relates to reality. Now this understanding of reality may not be a conscious endeavor of

an individual nor is it unconscious. The philosophical counselor's role is to assess the inconsistencies, draw implications, uncover various meanings, and provide alternative lines of thought. In this process, Nyaya's philosophy might be helpful. Nyaya tells us the process of knowledge acquisition which starts with cognition and passes through the *Anumāna* or *Upamāna*, sometimes it involves doubts and misunderstanding in acknowledging the purpose which leads to mental distress. To find out the root of distress the Philosophical counselor might take the help of Nyaya which provides details of how the senses transmit the impression of the world to the manas and how the manas form perception with the help of intellect. The Philosophical counselor can draw an overall picture of interconnections, structures, and patterns in one's life through the careful exposure of hidden presuppositions and factors leading to certain conceptions. For example, a man has difficulty in associating himself with women. An examination of his attitude may reveal that certain *Dr̥ṣṭānta* (example) has contributed to the formation of the presupposition that women are treacherous. Once the roots of this belief are exposed there is a possibility that this view might change through rational ways of thinking, and thus the problem of the man gets resolved.

Philosophical counseling uses several approaches, well-known among these are "G. Achenbag's open-ended inquiry, A. Hoogendijk's Pluralism of Dialogues, and E. Veening's Metalogue"¹². In Achenbag's approach, the philosophical counselor thinks through the unsolved difficulties with his visitor, and instead of providing him with any sort of advice the philosophical practitioner asks questions to provide deeper insight into the visitor's predicament. The conversation is similar to that of *Vāda* (discussion or debate) where despite being convinced that they are correct, both sides are open-minded and willing to listen to, comprehend, and accept the opposing side's explanation. The main purpose of conversation in open-ended inquiry, however, restricts itself to making the visitor aware of how and what s/he thinks and re-evaluate them critically. The inconsistencies, culture-specific thinking, and distorted thoughts of the visitor are laid before the visitor in a sensitive way to provide a new self-explicatory inclination to the counselee through which s/he gets the lead to resolve his/her problems. J Hoogendijk's Pluralism of Dialogues has, again, an analogy to *Chala* (stratagem). In Nyayasutra 1.2.10, Gautama defines *Chala* as "the opposition offered to a proposition by the assumption of an alternative meaning"¹³. The method of inquiry like *Chala* consists of the fact that the deliberate misunderstanding of perception is reassessed through arguments in favor of one point of view over another, and in the end, each of the arguing sides gains fresh perspectives. Here the philosophical counselor provides his/her interpretation of a predicament, and thus through the consideration of multiple alternatives the healing process initiates. Here, the counselee takes the other into the self without losing himself/herself. For example, a person might be in distress for having lost connection with an old friend after an accident. She starts to believe that the

friend is not a true friend of her because she does not stand by her side in need. The philosophical practitioner might give alternative perspectives like “your friend might be too busy to contact you” or “your friend might want to give you time to recover”¹⁴. Such hypotheses are helpful for the client to come to a particular understanding of her friend’s behavior.

In the process of living, we continuously interpret the world according to individual as well as collective perceptions. In the context of individual perceptions *Samsāya* (doubt), *Prayojana* (purpose), paradox, and contradictions create confusions that cannot be rationally analyzed by the persons within the situation. Therefore, Veening recommends the practitioner concentrate on the structure of the conversation in place of the subject matter. The categories like *Vāda*, *Jalpa*, *Vitaṇḍā*, *Hetvābhāsa*, *Chala*, *Jāti*, and *Nigrahasthāna*, can be used to study such a structure of conversation. The main purpose of Veening’s method is to overcome the confusion hidden in the maze of language usage and in this process, the sutras of Nyaya specifically *vak-chhala* (verbal quibble), *Samanya-chhala* (generalizing quibble) and *upacara-chhala* (figurative quibble) could be of great help.

There is a myth that philosophy acquaints us with the truths of life. But in the modern era, the belief in universal truths is losing ground. In philosophical counseling, the truths are merely contextual - ideas or meanings are variable across cultures and can hardly be grasped in a single version, there seem to be equally legitimate alternate ways of life-related discourses. So instead of giving us theories on reality, philosophical counseling offers a practical understanding of logical connections between socio-linguistic reality and a person’s thinking within a context. One may consider it to be the study of human subjective perspectives alone, but that would be a wrong interpretation according to Nyaya because a person’s perception is shaped by his/her socio-economic-linguistic background. For instance, if a person feels claustrophobic, he/she must rely on ideas like freedom, phobia, stagnation, etc. which are the product of the world he/she lives in. Nyaya helps the philosopher to decipher this foundational network of ideas which changes across space and time and makes the counseling process an endeavour to open up new horizons.

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