

## Reliability of a Speaker and Recognition of a Listener: Bocheński and Nyāya on the Relation of Authority

Agnieszka Rostalska

In the *Nyāyasūtras* (NS), the fundamental text of the Nyāya tradition, testimony is defined as a statement of a reliable speaker (*āpta*). According to the NS, such a speaker should possess three qualities: competence, honesty and desire to speak. The content of a discourse, including the prescriptions, is also considered reliable due to the status of a given author and the person that communicated it.

The Polish philosopher J.M. Bocheński similarly stresses the role of a speaker; he holds that an authoritative source (whose discourse is called testimony) should be competent and truthful. The conditions of trust and superiority also apply. According to Bocheński, being an authority entails a special relation—it has a subject, object and field. Notably, Bocheński develops his own typology of testimony by distinguishing between what he calls epistemic and deontic authority. He asks questions such as: Who can be the subject of an authoritative statement? Which features should the speaker possess? How is authority recognised? Is there a universal or an absolute authority? What is the field of authority? Moreover, which qualities should the listener possess?

The Nyāya philosophers, both the ancient ones, like Akṣapāda Gautama, Vātsyāyana, Vācaspati Miśra, and the contemporary scholars of Nyāya, such as B. K. Matilal and J. Ganeri, were also concerned with these issues.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the above points in a comparative manner. I will argue that both Bocheński's and the Nyāya accounts share very similar perspectives and encounter analogous problems.

*Just like in every science, authority is the weakest argument in philosophy.*

*Hence, the following advice: be distrustful towards assertions of others,*

*in particular of popular philosophers;*

*verify them for yourself before admitting them.*

Bocheński, "Advice of the old philosopher"

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Joseph (Józef) Maria Bocheński (1902–1995)<sup>2</sup> was a Polish philosopher, historian of philosophy and logician. He was a ‘renaissance man’, who studied law (Lvov/Lviv) and economics (Poznań), and also received doctorate degrees in both philosophy (Freiburg) and theology (Rome). He joined the Dominican Order and during World War II served as a chaplain in England, France and Poland, and fought as a soldier at Monte Cassino.<sup>3</sup> After the war he lectured in logic in Rome and soon became the Chair of the history of twentieth century philosophy at Freiburg University, where he was Rector between 1964 and 1966. He also founded the *Institute of Eastern Europe* and published the journal *Studies in Soviet Thought*. He was regarded as a charismatic and inspiring teacher. Even after he retired in 1972 (being almost 70) he received a pilot licence and would often pilot planes to academic conferences. In 1990 he was honoured *Doctor Honoris Causa* from the Jagiellonian University for his broad accomplishments in philosophy.

Among his many writings, Bocheński’s books were devoted mostly to logic, Thomism, analytical philosophy, communism and patriotism.<sup>4</sup> To a great extent his work focused on the epistemology of religion. He was an analytical writer, well-known for his precision and clarity as well as a style of writing that was intelligible to non-specialist readers. It is interesting to note that Bocheński did not restrict himself solely to Western thought. In his book *A History of Formal Logic* (1961) he included a chapter entitled *Indian variety of logic*, where he discussed the theories of Nyāya logicians and their debates with Buddhist, Jain and Mīmāṃsaka philosophers.<sup>5</sup> In the selection of the basic sources, he referred to logical arguments from the *Nyāyasūtras* and quoted the two key passages on testimony:<sup>6</sup>

- Word (verbal testimony) is the instructive assertion of a reliable person.

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to Elisa Freschi, Marie-Hélène Gorisse, Camillo Formigatti, James Madaio, Steven Lepez and two anonymous reviewers, whose comments were invaluable for the final shape of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> In most cases he published as Joseph Maria but also, at times, under his Dominican name: Innocent Maria Bocheński. His birth name was Joseph Francis Emanuel Bocheński.

<sup>3</sup> The Italian campaign of the II Corps in 1944. He is the author of the book *De virtute militari. Zarys etyki wojskowej* [An outline of military ethics] (1993).

<sup>4</sup> The most valued are: *ABC tomizmu* (1950) [ABC of Thomism], *Ancient formal logic* (1951), *The problem of universals: A symposium* I. M. Bochenski, A. Church, N. Goodman (1956), *Formale Logik* (1956) [English translation: *A History of Formal Logic* (1961)], *The logic of religion* (1965), *Was ist Autorität?* (1974), *Contemporary European philosophy* (1974), *Sto zabobonów. Krótki filozoficzny słownik zabobonów* [One hundred superstitions. A short philosophical dictionary of superstitions] (1987), *Logika i filozofia* [Logic and philosophy] (1993), and *Między logiką a wiarą* [Between logic and faith] (1994).

<sup>5</sup> Also, being Christian himself, in *The logic of religion* (Bocheński 1965: 21-22) he referred to religions other than Christianity and stressed the application of logic to religion as a natural and legitimate move in Brahmanical traditions (Nyāya and Vedānta) and Buddhism. He mentioned by name Dignāga as the great Mahāyāna Buddhist and creative logician.

<sup>6</sup> He relies on Vidyābhūṣana’s translation of the sūtras: *āpta-upadeśaḥ “śabdaḥ”* (NS 1.1.7); “*sa dvididhaḥ” dṛṣṭā’drṣārthatvāt* (NS 1.1.8). Later, he cites Jha’s translation of the *Nyāyasūtras* and the *Tarkasaṃgraha* of Annambhāṭṭa, a logical textbook from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

- It is of two kinds, viz., that which refers to matter which is seen and that which refers to matter which is not seen (Bocheński 1961: 427, after Vidyāhūṣaṇa 1913: 4).

Bocheński was, in that way, familiar with Indian philosophy (especially with Nyāya and Buddhism) when he wrote his later text on authority.<sup>7</sup> Although I do not argue here that Bocheński was principally inspired by the tradition of Indian logic there are striking parallels between his philosophy and Nyāya on the issue of authority. It is this fruitful convergence of ideas that I take up in this paper.

## 2. General remarks on authority

Bocheński devotes the essay *Was ist Autorität?* (1974) to the issue of authority. He reminds the reader that ‘authority’ is a term derived from the Latin *auctoritas*. If we think about it, this term is used to signify the authority, dignity (prestige) and respect of a person in a society (and many times it is connected with being influential). According to the dictionary definition, *auctoritas* denotes a particular relationship wherein a person can potentially affect the other; it implies power or leadership. Authorities provide advice, instigation or sanction, where they are bound by certain responsibilities.<sup>8</sup> Nowadays, the term authority also has political, juridical or administrative connotations of power and control (e.g., of a government or of the police), but it also indicates a person that is considered an expert in a certain field or discipline.

The notion of authority is examined by Bocheński from the point of view of an analytic philosopher<sup>9</sup> who is particularly interested in its social applications. He stresses that the main problem of the usage of the term ‘authority’ lies in its ambiguity and vagueness. In consideration of its various connotations and usages, the notion of ‘authority’ requires clarification (Bocheński 1993: 198-9). To begin with, in ordinary usage, the term authority is equivocal. For example, it may denote a relation, such as the respect held by students for a professor. It may also indicate a personal characteristic, such as cases where a person is considered an authority because they are famous (e.g.,

---

<sup>7</sup> It may also be noted that Bocheński was one of the invited speakers at the conference “The Development of Logic: East and West” hosted by the Department of Philosophy of the University of Hawaii in Honolulu (25-27. 06. 1973) as part of its East-West Philosophers' Conference program. His paper “Logic and Ontology” was published in the “Philosophy East and West” journal. During the conference he must have met and discussed with scholars of Indian Philosophy, like: Sibajiban Bhattacharyya, Karl Harrington Potter and Bimal Krishna Matilal who were the other invited speakers at the same conference.

<sup>8</sup> The remaining meanings of the term suggest an origin, where it may indicate the source or origination of something.

<sup>9</sup> In other words, Bocheński is using the method of linguistic analysis to develop his own scrupulously discussed theses.

actors, singers, sportsmen) or when authority is a personal feature (e.g., when a godfather wields authority within a certain family or a chieftain in a certain tribe).

However for Bocheński a personal characteristic is not of great importance. He supports this view by giving an example of a flight controller (Bocheński 1993: 199-200), who provides data to a pilot. In this case, the pilot has not met the controller personally and does not know if the controller has any personal characteristics befitting of authority. Regardless of that, the pilot will accept the data given by the controller.

Bocheński is primarily interested in the philosophical dimension of authority, which he considers as a relation. As such, it is wider and more fundamental. Accordingly, when the expression 'authority' is used in this paper, it is with this meaning of authority as a relation.

Bocheński (1993: 200-204) defines authority in terms of the classical definition introduced by Aristotle. According to Aristotle, a definition comprises two parts: *genus* (kind) and *differentia* (specific difference). Bocheński (1993: 195) gives the example of a cow, which may be defined as a large animal (*genus*) that produces milk and has horns (*differentia*; Bocheński 1993: 195). He is trying to determine to which category does authority belong? He distinguishes three categories: a. things (e.g., a person is an independent, autonomous thing), b. features (a property of a thing which inheres in something, e.g., a personal feature) and c. relations (names and expressions which denote features and are the signs of a relation; e.g., being a father, loving someone etc.)

Bocheński proposes the following theses:

- Authority is a relation (Bocheński 1993: 200).
- Authority is a ternary relation between the subject, object and the field of authority (Bocheński 1993: 202-203).
- P is an authority for S in the field D if and only if S acknowledges in principle all that P announces as long as it belongs to the field D (Bocheński 1993: 204).

The subject is the individual recognised as an expert; the object is the individual that recognises her or him as an expert; and the field represents all the sentences written or uttered by the subject in a specific area, i.e., the communicated content. The ternary relation occurs between the subject and the object, the subject and the field and between the object and the field.

He then further characterises the mechanism of authority as a special type of relation wherein the subject wants to communicate something to the object: to give an instruction or share certain knowledge. The subject, i.e., the speaker announces something through the use of signs, which Bocheński calls 'the bearers of thoughts', and through which the object, i.e., the listener must

acknowledge what has been asserted (by, e.g., hearing a sound or seeing a poster) and decode the information (Bocheński 1993: 206-207).

I am first going to examine the above mentioned features of authority namely, authority as a linguistic communication mechanism, authority as a relation between conscious individuals, the distinction between epistemic and deontic authority, authority as a relation between subject, object and field, and the further attributes of the speaker and the listener. Then, I will tackle the problem of the establishment of authority. Whenever I find parallels, I will refer to the Nyāya conception of authority in comparative perspective.

### 3. Authority as a linguistic communication mechanism

As I have briefly mentioned, Bocheński considers authority as a relational process during which what is at stake is the transmission of a linguistic content transmitted by means of signs. This relation is peculiar, because the object does not only understands the signs given by an authority, but also acknowledges, recognises and approves of what is being announced. The interesting question remains: what causes the inclination towards this special recognition? I will leave this question as an open one and come back to it in the section 8, which tackles the question of the recognition of authority.

The above mechanism of authority may evoke the causal mechanism of linguistic utterance as identified by Bimal Krishna Matilal (Matilal 1992: 49-50). He refers to the Nyāya tradition, where *śabda* (often translated as ‘verbal testimony’) is recognised as an important source of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) which is considered distinct from perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*) and analogy (*upamāna*).

In this mechanism, both the roles of the speaker and the listener are emphasised: the sound, or, to be exact, the linguistic utterance – which is a sentence consisting of words – is used to communicate certain knowledge or information. The important condition here is that the listener must be linguistically competent. When a person hears a sentence, he or she recalls the meanings, objects or things associated with each word (Matilal 1990: 49). One understands the meaning of the sentence and the speaker’s intention; namely, what one wants the listener to be informed about. Matilal explains:

The hearer’s knowledge of the word-meanings from the utterance of the words is generated according to the following psychological rule of association and memory. The hearer is a competent language-user, and he is acquainted with the connection between word and meaning (Matilal 1990: 52).

Later on he adds:

An awareness of the speaker's intention is necessary, and this is called *tātparyā-jñāna*. If somebody asks for a pen while writing, it may be assumed that he intends (to get) a writing pen, not a play-pen or ox-pen (Matilal 1990: 54).

In conclusion, both Bocheński and Matilal agree that authority is a relation, which involves a linguistic communication mechanism. The speaker has an intention to communicate instruction or share certain knowledge by the use of linguistic utterances. The listener must not only be linguistically competent but also acknowledge, recognise and approve of what has been asserted.

#### 4. Authority as a relation between conscious individuals

Yet, the linguistic form of the authoritative discourse is not what defines the ternary relation of authority. Indeed Bocheński further notices that the field of authority is often understood as:

- a set of real events or actions (e.g., operations of the soldiers as belonging to the field of a captain) or
- warrants and orders related to certain activities (e.g., orders communicated by the captain to the soldiers; (Bocheński 1993: 207-208).

He disagrees with the first one, claiming that things, events and real objects cannot form the field of authority. As in the case of a captain, whose field of authority does not consist of warfare itself, i.e., the set of techniques and actions used to conduct war, but rather of the set of communicated orders. What is said about events is the communicated content, i.e., the content of thoughts, which is an ideal object (Bocheński 1993: 208). We do not express the thoughts themselves but the content of thoughts. Consequently, the information which is provided is also an ideal object (Bocheński 1993: 209). To illustrate, when two people convey information about a certain thing or an event in two different languages, they express the same content of thought only in different words.

Moreover, Bocheński states that the field of authority consists of a set of ideal objects: directives or propositions. He emphasises that the field of authority consists of a set of sentences and not of a single sentence (Bocheński 1993: 210–212), like propositions in the field of geography if the subject of authority is a geographer. What is more, in this kind of relation, both the subject (i.e., the speaker) and the object (i.e., the listener) are real living individuals—they are conscious persons.

Could a group of people be considered a subject of authority? Bocheński answers negatively because a group does not possess an individual consciousness in the same way a single person does.

Bocheński, following Aristotle, and disagreeing with Hegel, holds that in a society the individual is the final subject of authority (Bocheński 1993: 213–215). However, the society is not a fictitious concept, because it includes humans and real relations, therefore it must be something more than simply the sum of individuals. A group is a sum of individuals, such as doctors, government officials, lawyers, etc. (Bocheński 1993: 213). Therefore it cannot be treated as a subject of authority. Bocheński wants to discuss only the relation between one subject, one object and the field. He explains that it is possible to dismantle the group authority to conscious individual subjects and define this relation by referring to them.<sup>10</sup>

Bocheński also inquires about the authority of computers. Is a computer not making decisions instead of a person, and as such could it not be considered a subject of authority? In Bocheński's view computers merely find the best solutions in actual cases, they do not make decisions. More precisely, it is a singular person who makes decisions and at times those decisions are based on information from computers. That makes a person and not a computer the subject of authority. Bocheński stops here and does not elaborate on this point further.

It is worth noticing that since Bocheński wrote his text in the early 1970s the technological advancements and the “computerisation of life” has significantly increased. Would we nowadays consider computers as subjects of authority? How many people turn to an internet search engine such as Google while looking for information? Accessing information through computers is simple, efficient and fast and given today's common internet presence, such as through smartphones, tablets, etc., many people no longer turn to books, dictionaries and expert opinions as they did 40 years ago. Also, there are many e-books and publications which can be found through searching machines or databases. In many instances it is through computers that literature is suggested and obtained. In this case, are computers authorities?

I argue that this contemporary situation entails a more complicated relation than the one Bocheński had in mind. First, it is a group of intelligent people, and big corporations, who engineer the virtual world, import the data and improve services. In that sense, the group, and not the computers, is considered as subject of authority. This inclines one to argue against Bocheński and to assert that groups do, in fact, constitute an authority. Indeed, if we ‘trust’ Google then, by extension, we trust the group of people who created the software. In fact, this would fall under the problem of group authority (discussed above) which Bocheński dismisses on the ground that this is not the type

---

<sup>10</sup> The analysis of group authority touches upon the issue of the indirect authority exerted by society on individuals, however for the point being made this issue is irrelevant, therefore I am going to ignore it.

of relation which he had in mind—that is, a relation between a single subject, an object and a concrete field.

Nevertheless, nowadays computers are being used as tools for expertise and analysis. Additionally, the issue gets even more complex due to the algorithmic personalised filters<sup>11</sup> introduced not only by Google but by many searching engines, social networks, electronic retailers etc.<sup>12</sup> Every search made by a single user narrows down the scope of the subsequent searches, until she gets search results tailored to her usual browsing behaviour. This technical aspect gives rise to epistemological and social implications because the information that one reaches is partially chosen by external filters or edited out, and the user might be unaware of it. For Bocheński only individuals count ultimately as subjects of authority, because of their ability to make decisions. However, personalisation influences our decisions, choices and may suggest certain solutions in a limited way. One finds it difficult to deny that changes in media and technology are not having an impact on how authority functions in society. I argue, therefore, that the relation of authority, in this case, is more complex than Bocheński allows for.

### 5. The typology of authority: epistemic and deontic

As I have already noted, Bocheński distinguishes authority as a special type of relation. He specifies that the field of authority consists of a set of propositions (words, sounds and their meanings) or a set of directives (instructions). The former indicate what there is and the later instruct of what should be done. Accordingly, he divides authority into two exhaustive types:

- epistemic: the authority of a person who knows the field better, i.e. the knower, expert, specialist (e.g., the authority of a teacher, a scientist, etc.);
- deontic: the authority of a person in charge who has the right to give orders, i.e. a superior (e.g., a boss, a manager, a director, a commander, etc.; Bocheński 1993: 235-236).

This typology is similar to the Nyāya tradition's division into Vedic prescriptions and statements of a reliable speaker, roughly corresponding to the deontic and epistemic authority, respectively.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> I owe this remark to Camillo Formigatti.

<sup>12</sup> On this topic see Pariser (2011).

<sup>13</sup> “However, Nyāya authors claim that both ordinary language and the Vedas convey descriptive statements (*siddhārtha*). By contrast, B's distinction more closely resembles the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsā distinction between ordinary linguistic communication (conveying descriptive statements, *siddhārtha*) and the Veda (conveying commands, *sādhārtha*). It is in this



Although, as stated in the *Nyāyasūtra*, verbal testimony (*śabda*) applies to perceptible and imperceptible objects, the imperceptible ones can also be known through inferential reasoning (NBh ad 1.1.8.).

Matilal (1986: 34) emphasised that for Naiyāyika philosophers, knowledge derived from scriptures must have an empirical foundation and it would be untenable to assume that they are authorless or without a speaker. The veracity of any statement is dependent on its author's infallibility and this criterion applies also to scriptures.<sup>14</sup>

According to Bocheński, the same person may have the status of being both an epistemic and deontic authority towards the same object and in the same field.<sup>15</sup> Also, it would be desired for the epistemic authority to also correspond to the deontic one, although they are mutually independent. For example, an expert in court is only an epistemic authority but never a deontic one—he provides expertise but cannot punish (Bocheński 1993: 237-238). Many misuses happen when the subject of authority of one type is confused with another, such as in a situation where a deontic authoritative speaker thinks that he is also an expert in the field.

The epistemic authoritative speaker should provide (communicate) propositions that are taken as true (or probable) by the listener. Bocheński calls this requirement a “relation between the proposition and the state of knowledge”.<sup>16</sup> This means that in the moment when the authoritative speaker communicates a proposition, the (subjective) probability that this proposition is true raises (Bocheński 1993: 242). One must be convinced about the authority's competence; namely, that she really knows the field and is more competent than the person who recognises her expertise.

## 6. Properties of the relation of authority

Bocheński characterises the relation between the subject and the object of authority as threefold: a) irreflexive, b) asymmetric, and c) transitive (Bocheński 1993: 223). He formulates the following theses:<sup>17</sup>

- In any field no one can be an authority for himself.

---

connection interesting that also Mīmāṃsā authors conceived of deontic authority (*pravartanā*) as a relation between speaker and hearer (although no field is discussed)". Footnote by Elisa Freschi.

<sup>14</sup> This position was developed against the Mīmāṃsā view that the Vedas are authorless.

<sup>15</sup> However, in this case the field is not the same but only closely related. The field of deontic authority consists of a set of directives whereas the field of epistemic authority consist of practical propositions.

<sup>16</sup> The state of knowledge is defined as the class of all sentences that are taken to be true by the intended epistemic agent.

<sup>17</sup> The translation of the theses is from Bocheński (1993: 219-223).

- It is logically possible that when A is the subject and B is the object of authority in a given field, simultaneously B is the subject and A is the object in another field.
- If P is an authority for S in the field D, then S is not an authority for P in the field D.
- When A is an authority for B in a field D, and B is an authority for C in the same field, then at the same time A is an authority for C in a field D.

He justifies the above claims by providing selected examples. Unfortunately, not all of them appear to be conclusive. To start with, in support of the irreflexivity condition (claim 1) he gives the following example: suppose he would like to know where and what he was doing on a specific date in 1962. In his agenda of 1962 it is written that at that moment he was attending a congress in Chicago; in this case, it appears that he is an authority for himself (while turning to his own handwriting in that agenda). Bocheński, however, admits that this is not the case because he is no longer exactly the same person as then because, at that time, he knew that he was in Chicago and now he does not. He states that from a logical point of view, it is impossible that a person could simultaneously know and not know something and therefore he concludes that a person cannot be an authority for oneself.

Bocheński's example is not very convincing because it touches the problem of personal identity. If I do not remember something I knew before, does it follow that I am not the same person? How does one make such a distinction? Can personal identity be based on knowledge? Bocheński, in that way, presupposes a certain theory of personal identity. However, every day I forget many important facts while, on the other hand, I know things that I have learned, seen or experienced. Also, there are cases when information is 'in the back of my mind' and only when it becomes important is it recollected. We also take stands based on some intuition and only when prompted for the motivation behind the choice we do recall the exact data.

Can, then, one speak of oneself as an authority for oneself? In the above case, a person ends up remembering something she was not aware of. In the Indian framework these two means of knowledge are clearly distinguished: by using her own memory, she knows something by the way of recollection (*smṛti*), not by authority or word (*śabda*). Therefore, this example gives a certain picture but does not address the problem of being an authority for oneself. Therefore, the irreflexive property is a problematic one.

Mutual authority is possible only in two different disciplines, not in the same one (claim 2 and 3). Bocheński justifies this assertion saying that if he is an authority in the field of logic for L., L. cannot be an authority for him in logic. Similarly, the colonel cannot be an authority for the general in the same military matter because he would be a superior of his superior, which he is not

(Bocheński (1993: 221). This suggests, then, that there is a hierarchy. Moreover, as in the case of the irreflexive property, there is always a difference in the set of epistemic conditions defining the subject and the object of an authority relation, i.e., they do not share exactly the same set of epistemic conditions.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, it is always possible to define a sub-field of expertise in which one is an expert and the other one is not.

However, is this argument convincing? After all, one might argue that two experts in the same field can be authorities for each other. Why would not two biologists value each other as authorities, if they are both experts in snails? Should we say that biologist A values biologist B as an authority concerning snails of the type D, which B knows better, but not about the ones (type E) which A knows better? Bocheński mentions the case of PhD students who know very little but if hard-working and gifted they can surpass their supervisor and become experts in their field. Is this example appropriate? Are the students beginning in a general, wider discipline (which is common to them and the supervisor) and then, through a course of specialisation, becoming experts in a different ‘field’? Or could we not simply say that they are becoming experts in a single discipline—in philosophy or biology? The problem here is that it is difficult to establish independently of the issue of authority what a field contains and where its borders are. The notion of a field is purely abstract and a field may contain many sub-fields, e.g. when we say that someone is an expert in philosophy, he or she is an expert in a particular field of philosophy, such as philosophy of mind, formal epistemology or ancient philosophy. Thus, the definition of the impossibility of mutual authority lies also in the sociology of epistemological processes, just like the impossibility of an irreflexive authority depended on psychology.<sup>19</sup>

Besides, the examples mentioned above refer to different kinds of authorities—the first instance refers to the authority of an academic supervisor and the second to the authority of an expert (i.e., the two biologists). In such cases, it would be more appropriate to claim that mutual authority is only impossible in the case of epistemic authority (scientists and experts) but not in the case of deontic authority (supervisors, etc.). It seems that even Bocheński would acknowledge this claim, because in another paragraph he admits that authority may be reversed (i.e. the roles may change), such as in the example of a pilot who is steering on one route while the co-pilot takes over and steers on the next route.

---

<sup>18</sup> I owe this remark to Marie-Hélène Gorisse.

<sup>19</sup> I owe this remark to Elisa Freschi.

Is the relation of authority transitive in the sense that if person A is an authority for person B, who is an authority for person C, A is also an authority for C (claim 4)? Although this appears ideal it does not necessarily work in real life. One's choice of a particular authority may depend on various factors, e.g. personal preferences, recommendations of friends or family. Also, the choice of authority may vary from another person's choice in the same field. For example, I may consider my general doctor a better expert than my colleague's preferred general doctor. Moreover, what if somebody does not perceive himself or herself as an authority in a certain field; such as due to the lack of self-esteem, but others regard him or her as the authority in the field?<sup>20</sup>

From the above discussion it follows that a person cannot be an authority for oneself and that there is no mutual authority of subjects in the same field. There might be cases where a mutual relation of authority seems plausible, but this applies merely to the deontic type of authority. The relation of authority is also transitive when restricted to experts in the same area, however the recognition of authority might be subjective.

What is more, Bocheński admits that even an authority may sometimes be mistaken, all in all, he or she is still a person. This leads to an important question: is there an absolute epistemic authoritative speaker? Or a universal one? For instance, some people believe in the absolute authority of their teachers (also spiritual teachers, priests, gurus) and leaders. There are also people who play the role of an absolute authority in a religious context, such as in the case of the pontiff of a monastery or an ashram.

Bocheński's position is that such epistemological claims would be *a priori* impossible and would, as such, invalidate the authority of the individuals that make them. It could still be said, that a guru, etc., has an absolute deontic authority over his disciples, which is a different matter. In this case another point of Bocheński becomes relevant, i.e. the need to distinguish between deontic and epistemic authority. According to Bocheński, the ones who have the former may not have the latter.

Further, Bocheński warns against the misuse of authority, which is of two types:

- When a person tries to extend the authority over a field that he or she is not competent in, e.g. a professor of geography is not an expert in politics,
- When there is no relation of authority, e.g. an officer is an authority for soldiers but not for civilians (Bocheński (1993: 227)).

---

<sup>20</sup> I owe this remark to Camillo Formigatti.

Authorities may be falsely recognised on the basis of unjustified generalisations, such is the case when an expert in one area is assumed to be an expert in another. Bocheński explains that this results from habit: if a person is looked at as an authority in a particular area, she or he is sometimes uncritically considered an expert also in other areas. In contrast, for Bocheński a relation of authority does not automatically transfer across fields but needs to be justified for every particular field.

### 7. Attributes of the speaker and the listener

Bocheński's emphasis on the author resembles the Nyāya stress on the reliable speaker (*āpta*) as a source of valid knowledge.<sup>21</sup> The question here is: which attributes should an authority possess? For Naiyāyika philosophers, the reliable speaker should possess three qualities (*Nyāyabhaṣya* ad 1.1.7):<sup>22</sup>

- honesty, sincerity,
- direct experience of the essence of things (*dharma*), i.e., competence,
- desire to speak of things for what they are or what they are not, i.e., intention to communicate.

Vācaspati Miśra (ca. 9<sup>th</sup> century) in his commentary on the NS adds that the direct experience of the essence of things or, in other words, gaining the direct knowledge of an object, is ascertained through any source of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*) i.e. perception, inference, analogy or testimony. Therefore, the authoritative speaker is by definition giving access to a direct experience of the essence of things.<sup>23</sup>

Bocheński would agree with the requirement pertaining to the speaker's qualities. As noted, he argues that the subject of authority should be competent, that is, more competent than the listener and must tell the truth (Bocheński 1993: 243). Trust and superiority are, therefore, the necessary conditions in this relation. Moreover, the speaker is considered reliable due to his or her previous reliability.

Who could become an authoritative speaker? According to Bocheński, a conscious individual. Each person is authoritative in at least one field—his or her personal experiences, feelings, impressions and sensations. However, no living person can be an absolute authority in all fields excluding God. Ascribing such an authoritative character to some mythological figures, dictators, or even celebrities is, on Bocheński's account, a serious misunderstanding.

<sup>21</sup> As distinguished from the Mīmāṃsā's concept of language's validity as being independent of any author.

<sup>22</sup> *āptaḥ khalu sākṣātkr̥tadharmā yathādr̥ṣṭasyārthasya cikhyāpaviṣayā prayukta upadeṣṭā [...] ṛṣyāryamlecchānām samānaṃ lakṣaṇam* (Thakur's ed.: 14).

<sup>23</sup> *Nyāyavārtika-tātparyatikā ad NS 1.1.7.* (comment in *The Nyāya-Sūtras of Gautama* vol.1 Jha's ed.: 201)

The Nyāya tradition agrees that every person can become an expert: a noble person, a barbarian or a seer (NBh *ad* 1.1.7).<sup>24</sup> Also the authoritative character of the Veda is recognised out of the fact that the Veda has a reliable source, its speaker, and its validity is due to the speaker's worthiness. Matilal (1986: 34) adds that for the Naiyāyika its author is God—a being with perfect knowledge.

Is there a universal authoritative teacher? Bocheński states clearly that no person can be an authority in all fields. Similarly, the Nyāya philosopher Vātsyāyana's (ca 5<sup>th</sup> century CE) division of authority—into the categories of sage, noble and barbarian—also suggests that there is no universal authority. Indeed each of the aforementioned types of speakers could have a distinct role and place in the society and, consequently, an appropriate area of expertise.

Thus, since the reliable speaker is only identified through the three qualities mentioned above, it is important to recognise them. In the next section, I will turn to the question of how they are established.

## 8. The recognition of authority

How is authority recognised? Both Bocheński and Nyāya philosophers emphasise that authority is established mainly through inference. For Nyāya a statement of a reliable person may concern both perceivable and unperceivable objects. In the *Nyāyasūtra*, Akṣapāda Gautama (ca. 200 BC) states that the statement of a reliable person is valid not only for objects perceived through sense perception but also for unperceivable objects that are known through inference. This means that the validity of a statement of a reliable person can be verified by means of inference when it concerns an unperceivable object and by other means (e.g. perception) if it concerns a perceivable one. Vātsyāyana adds further that this partition was made on account of the difference between the common language and the language of seers (NBh *ad* 1.1.8),<sup>25</sup> for the seers (ṛṣi) possess the ability to directly perceive objects that are not directly perceived by the common person. Vācaspati emphasises that inference is the root source for verifying the speaker's reliability—it accounts for the reliability of common speakers (Freschi and Graheli 2005: 301). Jonardon Ganeri underscores the importance of Vātsyāyana's position because:

...it implies that the scriptures do not have any special claim to our assent, but are to be believed for precisely the same reasons as any other piece of testimony, namely because the transmitter is credible. A credible person is one who is knowledgeable about the

---

<sup>24</sup> See *supra* fn. 22.

<sup>25</sup> *evam ṛṣilaukikavākyānām vibhāga iti* (NS *ad* 1.1.8).

subject matter, and who has a sincere desire to communicate that knowledge, and can come from any walk of life or branch of society (Ganeri 2001: 35).

What is in need of an establishment is the authoritative character of a given speaker and not the correctness of a given speech.

In *The Logic of Religion* Bocheński emphasises that the asserted statement must belong to the field of competence:

We may now ask ourselves: What is the structure of a justification by authority? At least two premises must be assumed in order that it may work at all. The first states that a certain person is an authority in a given field; the second, that a certain sentence has been asserted by this person and that it belongs to the field in question (Bocheński 1965: 122).

Bocheński provides the following schema of the recognition of authority:

- without justification,
- with justification:
  - through direct insight,
  - through inference from the experience of:
    - the subject of authority,
    - the group to which a subject of authority belongs (Bocheński 1996: 244).

According to Bocheński, the recognition of authority without justification should be avoided; rather, recognising authority should be based on a reasonable justification which usually is of two types: direct insight, i.e. seeing directly the truth of the statement (e.g. that it is raining) or inference (e.g. the ground is wet, so it is inferred that it must have been raining). The most common way in which an authority is recognised is inference. Bocheński adds that in the case of epistemic authority inferential reasoning consists of generalisation based on two types of experiences:

- the truth of the proposition is inferred from previous experience—e.g. when an authority was telling the truth many times, then he or she is expected to always be right in a particular field.
- inferred from what is known about the group to which an authority belongs—e.g. previous experiences with people belonging to the same discipline, such as with doctors.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> In both cases this inference is based on inductive reasoning, therefore it does not warrant its truth (Bocheński 1996: 248).

Bocheński holds that previous experience with a speaker, or a speaker belonging to the same discipline, is important for the recognition of authority. However, is authority established only through our positive experience with a speaker who previously has been sincere, so that, as a consequence, we assume that she is always telling the truth?

While discussing the issue of testimony in the Nyāya tradition, Ganeri inquires whether the hearer must establish that the speaker is competent, sincere and compassionate before the hearer is entitled to believe the speaker. He answers that to believe in any utterance while hoping that the speaker has such qualities seems improbable because “that would be an epistemic charter for the gullible” (see Fricker 1994). Ganeri refers to the Nyāya position where one ‘monitors’ the speaker through an internal ‘lie-detector’. The hearer subconsciously registers if she is blushing, nervous, irritated or fidgety and therefore does not need to form beliefs about the speaker’s truthfulness and competence:

Assent is made rational in a negative way, by the absence of evidence that the speaker is deceitful, rather than by positive evidence that she is sincere. It is rational in the same way that it is rational for one to believe that one has not just trodden on a nail. One need have no positive reason for so believing (a visual inspection of the foot, for example) for one knows that, if one had just trodden on a nail, one would have come to know about it. The ‘reasoning’ is *ad ignorantiam* and not inductive (Ganeri 2001: 36).

Would Bocheński agree with the establishment of an authority in a negative way, i.e. by the absence of any evidence that a speaker is deceitful? In the example used to support the thesis that authority is established through the medium of direct insight he states:

[S]omeone who is charged with a crime comes to me, looks me in the eyes and says: “I was not at the crime scene”. It can happen that I will believe him, but it means that I had some insight in his personality and it convinced me that he knows of what he is telling and he is telling the truth. But those are, everyone will admit, the very peculiar cases which in practice have a very little meaning. The normal way to the recognition of authority is inference (Bocheński 1996: 247).

However, is it convincing that we should include this kind of test under an additional category, namely, direct insight? Does not the belief in a person’s truthfulness or deceitfulness come from past experiences linked with the current case through inference? Or, perhaps, following contemporary Naiyāyikas, we should rather speak of the internal ‘lie-detector’ mechanism? Still, the example provided by Bocheński does not exactly parallel (as he would like) the justification of the claim that it is raining provided through the fact that one sees it directly.



## 9. Concluding remarks

Both Bocheński and Nyāya philosophers agree that authority is a linguistic communication mechanism where the speaker has an intention to communicate instruction or share certain knowledge by the use of linguistic utterances. The hearer is required to be linguistically competent and to acknowledge, recognise and approve of what has been asserted. The speaker should be reliable and have an intention or desire to instruct or share knowledge.

Indeed, authority is a relation between living individuals. Bocheński emphasises that it is a particular relation between the subject and object in a specific field. The relation is irreflexive, asymmetric and transitive. Bocheński warns against misuses which can occur when an expert in a particular field is erroneously considered an expert in another field or when there is no relation of authority at all.

Bocheński develops his own typology of authority distinguishing epistemic and deontic authority. The former applies to the authority of a person who knows the field better and provides statements. Epistemic authority, therefore, entails a knower or an expert. The latter, deontic, entails a person who is in charge; that is, one who gives orders or prescriptions such as a supervisor.

For Nyāya philosophers, testimony is defined as a statement of a reliable speaker. The knowledge coming from scriptures is also credible owing to the reliability of an author or a person who transmitted them. An authority may be a noble person, a barbarian or a seer. Naiyāyikas would agree with Bocheński that it is important that a speaker possesses three qualities: competence, honesty and desire to speak. However, no one is an absolute authority excluding God—a being who possesses perfect knowledge.

With that being said, how is authority recognised? Bocheński and Naiyāyikas answer that it is established mainly through inference. With regard to epistemic authority, Bocheński states that it is inferred from a previous experience with a specific person or with people belonging to the same discipline as the person in question. Such an inference happens through positive evidence (that the speaker is sincere) or absence of negative evidence (that one is deceitful). And, in case of doubt, one may have an 'insight' into the speaker's personality or use an internal 'lie-detector' mechanism, two methods which function in a comparable way for Naiyāyikas and Bocheński.

## References

- Bocheński, Joseph Maria. 1974. *Was ist Autorität? - Einführung in die Logik der Autorität*, Freiburg: Herder. French translation: *Qu'est-ce que l'autorité? Introduction à la logique de l'autorité*, Présenté et traduit de l'allemand par Philibert Secretan, Fribourg Suisse: Editions Universitaires 1979.

- Polish translation: *Co to jest autorytet?* In *Logika i filozofia: Wybór pism* [Logic and Philosophy: Selected Writings], edited by J. Parys, pp.187-324. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 1993.
- Bocheński, Joseph Maria. 2000. *Rady Starego Filozofa* [Advice of the old philosopher]. In *Logika & filozofia logiczna*. Edited by J. Perzanowski, A. Pietruszczak [submitted to print by Perzanowski]. Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika.
- Bocheński, Joseph Maria. 1994. *Sto zabobonów* [One hundred superstitions]. Kraków: Philed.
- Bocheński, Joseph Maria. 1965. *The Logic of Religion*. New York: New York University Press.
- Dasti, Matthew. 2008. "Testimony, Belief Transfer and Causal Irrelevance: Reflections from India's Nyāya School." *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 25.4: 281–299.
- Freschi, Elisa and Alessandro Graheli. 2005. "Bhāṭṭamīmāṃsā and Nyāya on Veda and Tradition." In *Boundaries, Dynamics and Construction of Traditions in South Asia*, edited by Federico Squarcini, 287–323. Firenze: Firenze University Press.
- Fricker, Elizabeth. 1994. *Against Gullibility*. In Matilal and Chakrabarti, 125–161.
- Ganeri, Jonardon. 2001. *Philosophy in Classical India. The proper work of reason*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Ganeri, Jonardon. 1999. *Semantic Powers: Meaning and the Means of Knowing in Classical Indian Philosophy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Matilal, Bimal Krishna and Arindam Chakrabarti, eds. 1994. *Knowing from Words*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Matilal, Bimal Krishna. 1986. *Perception. An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Matilal, Bimal Krishna. 1990. *The Word and the World, India's Contribution to the Study of Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pariser, Eli. 2011. *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*. New York: Penguin.

After an MA in Analytical Philosophy, with special focus on Philosophy of Mind and a PhD specialisation in Eastern Philosophy, Agnieszka Rostalska is currently a doctoral researcher at the Department of Indian Languages and Cultures, Ghent University. Under the project titled: “Indian realism from contemporary perspective” she tackles the problem of epistemic authority as presented in Nyāya philosophical tradition with reference to contemporary philosophical discourse, i.e. epistemology of testimony and virtue epistemology. Her research focuses on the concept of ‘reliable speaker’ (*āpta*) as developed by Nyāya philosophers of the classical period.