Prajñākaragupta on Inference: How Does Inference Work without External Realities?

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0. Introduction

Buddhist idealists (Vijñānavādins) hold the theory that there does not exist an external object independently of the mind and assume that there is only a continuum of cognitions (*viññānasantāna*). Within the framework of this theory, how do they account for inference (*anumāna*)? Prajñākaragupta exhaustively discusses this question in his PVA on PV III 392-396. He argues that inference can be established without assuming the existence of the external world and, from the point of view of what is really an object to be obtained through a cognition (*prāptiviśaya*), that, even for Sautrāntikas, what is to be obtained through inference must be an appearance (*pratibhāsa*) in the mind. In this paper, by examining the arguments brought forward by Prajñākaragupta, I shall show how he establishes inference within the framework of the *viññānavāda* theory.

1. Inference of fire from smoke

1. 1. In PV III 395 Dharmakīrti explains how the inference of fire from smoke can be established from the idealistic standpoint.

PV III 395: *tatrāpi dhūmābhāsā dhīḥ prabodhapaṭuvāsanām / gamayed agninirbhāsāṃ dhiyam eva na pāvakaṃ //*

“Even in that case [i.e., on the assumption that there does not exist an external object independently of the mind], a cognition in which smoke appears makes know only a cognition in which fire appears and whose latent impression is apt to being awakened, and not fire.”

Prajñākaragupta comments as follows:

PVA 414, 12-13: *dhūmābhāsā hi buddhir agnivāsanāpratibaddhā, tataḥ sā vāsanānumīyate, sā ca (ca M; om. ca PVA) vāsanā prabodhābhīmukhatvād agnipratibhāsāṃ janayatīti pāvaka-pratibhāsaprāptiā pramāṇam.*¹⁾

“Indeed, the cognition in which smoke appears is necessarily connected with the latent impression of fire; the latent impression [of fire] is inferred from that [cognition]. And the latent impression [of fire] produces the appearance of fire since it is about to be awakened. Therefore, [the inference of the appearance of fire from the appearance of smoke] is a valid means of cognition (*pramāṇa*) because one can obtain the appearance of fire [through this inference].”

Let us suppose that three different cognitions arise in a sequence.

Note that each cognition has the latent impressions of smoke and fire. Now Cognition 2 (Smoke) is necessarily connected with Impression of Fire 1; on the basis of this connection, one can infer Impression of Fire 1 from Cognition 2 (Smoke); this Impression of Fire 1 brings about Cognition 3 (Fire) through Impression of Fire 2, which amounts to saying that Cognition 3 (Fire) is inferred from Cognition 2 (Smoke).

It is important to note in this connection that Prajñākaragupta holds that, within the framework of the *viññānavāda* theory, the inference of fire from smoke must be explained on the assumption that there holds the following causal relation between cognition and impression.²⁾

Of Cognition 2 (Smoke), Impression of Smoke 1 and Impression of Fire 1 serve respectively as a primary cause (*upādāna-kāraṇa*) and as a cooperative condition (*sahakārikāraṇa*). Of Cognition 3 (Fire), Impression of Fire 2 and Impression of Smoke 2 serve respectively as a primary cause and as a cooperative condition. Cognition 2 (Smoke) serves as the awakening factor (*prabodhaka*) of Impression of Fire 2 which is the primary cause of Cognition 3 (Fire). Thus, saying that the inference of fire from smoke takes place amounts to saying that Cognition 3 (Fire) arises from Impression of Fire 2 which is awakened by Cognition 2 (Smoke). When Prajñākaragupta says that there is a necessary connection (*prati-bandha*) between Cognition 2 (Smoke) and Impression of Fire 1, he implies that Impression of Fire 1 produces Cognition 2 (Smoke) indirectly, as a cooperative condition.

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1. 2. It is also important to note that Prajñākaragupta introduces the concept of *ekasāmagryadhīnatva* ‘being dependent upon one and the same set of causes’ into his explanation of the occurrence of the inference.

PVA 415, 33-34: *tata* (*tata* PVA, *des* T; om. *tata* M) *ekasāmagryadhīnatvād gamyagamakabhāvaḥ pāvakatatkāryadhūmayor iti sakalaṃ* (*sakalaṃ* M; om. *sakalaṃ* PVA, T) *samañjasam*.

“Therefore, [in the Vijñānavādins’ view also,] the indicator-indicated relation (*gamyagamakabhāva*) between fire and smoke which results from the [fire] is established on the basis of their dependence on one and the same set of causes (*ekasāmagryadhīnatva*) and hence everything can be reasonably established [without accepting the existence of an external object].³⁾”

The use of the term *ekasāmagryadhīnatva* reminds us of Dharmakīrti’s analysis of the inference of the color (*rūpa*) of a citron from its taste (*rasa*).⁴⁾ According to Dharmakīrti, the operating process of the inference can be shown as follows:

The inference Dharmakīrti considers is precisely the inference of Color 2 from Taste 2. Of Taste 2, Taste 1 and Color 1 serve respectively as a primary cause and as a cooperative condition; of Color 2, Color 1 and Taste 1 serve respectively as a primary cause and as a cooperative condition. This implies that Color 1 is surely to produce Color 2 when Taste 1 produces Taste 2, on the basis of which it is proper to say that as Taste 1 is inferred from Taste 2, so Color 2 is inferred from Taste 2.

Thus it has been shown that the inference of color from taste and that of fire from smoke have the same structure such that the effect which the cooperative condition to produce what serves as a logical reason (*hetu*), as a primary cause, brings about is inferred.

It is to be noted, however, that those two types of inference differ in that what is cognized through the former is referred to the present, while, according to Prajñākaragupta, what is cognized through the latter is referred to the future. Dharmakīrti explicitly states that Color 3 cannot be inferred from Taste 2,⁵⁾ while Prajñākaragupta argues that Cognition 3 (Fire) is inferred from Cognition 2 (Smoke).

2. What is to be inferred?

Prajñākaragupta goes on to discuss inference from the point of view of what is really an

object to be obtained through inference. The point made by him is that, even for Sautrāntikas who accept the existence of the external world, what is said to be an object of inference must be precisely what appears in an inferential cognition and not a corresponding external object.

To begin with, Prajñākaragupta tries to establish that what is inferred is a thing which will exist in the future. It is important to note the following statement:

PVA 414, 32-33: *paramārthataḥ sakalaṃ svarūpaviśayaṃ eva, vyavahārato 'rthaviśayatā, sa ca bhāvvyarthaḥ prāptiviśaya itī tasyaivārthakriyākāritvād arthatvam.*

“On the ultimate level (*paramārthataḥ*), any [cognition] has for its object its own self alone. On the conventional level (*vyavahārataḥ*), [a cognition is said to] have for its object an [external] thing. And the [external thing] is a thing yet to occur (*bhāvvyartha*) and an object of obtainment; therefore, only such a thing is a useful thing (*artha*) because it serves to fulfill a practical purpose (*arthakriyākārin*).”

For instance, fire is regarded as useful only when it serves the purposes of removing cold, cooking food, and so forth. The fire being inferred, which is presently existent, is not the object to be obtained through an activity toward it. A future fire is to be obtained. For fire cannot serve practical purposes until it is obtained. According to Prajñākaragupta, if the obtainment of an object which serves practical purposes is taken into consideration, what is treated as an object of a cognition must be the one which will exist in the future and not the one which exists at the time when the cognition is taking place.

According to Prajñākaragupta, however, from the point of view of what is really an object to be obtained, what is inferred is not a future external fire but the future appearance of fire.

PVA 414, 17-19: *api ca bāhye 'py arthe nāgnir anumīyate, api tu bhāvī pratibhāsa eva. tadarthitvāt (de don du gnyer ba'i phyir T; tadarthatvāt M, tadirthatvāt PVA) prāṇinām, na hy apratibhāsa-mānenāgninā kasyacit prayojanam. pratibhāsārthitāyām (-ārthitāyām M, don du gnyer ba T; -ānvitāyām PVA) ca bhāvī pratibhāso bhavatu anumīyamānaḥ. kim agnyanumānena.*

“In addition, even if there exists an external thing, what is inferred is not an [external] fire but the future appearance [of fire in a cognition] because people seek it. For there is no use [in seeking] the fire which never appears [in a cognition]. And, since [people] seek the appearance [of fire], what is inferred must be the future appearance [of fire]. What is the use of inferring the fire [which exists externally]?”

Clearly Prajñākaragupta puts here his view that what never appears in a cognition is practically what is inexistent. Needless to say, this view can be traced back to Dharmakīrti who

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says in his PVI II (59, 2-3): “to be existent is to be cognized” (*upalambhaḥ sattā*).⁶⁾ According to Prajñākaragupta, what is an object of inference is the appearance of an object in a cognition; this appearance is said to be referred to the future in relation to the time when the object exists externally.

3. Three kinds of activities

We have seen that, according to Prajñākaragupta, what is considered to be an object of inference is of three kinds: an object which exists at the time when inference is taking place; an object which is to be obtained and which is said to exist in the future; an object as what appears in an inferential cognition. The same can be said of perception.

PVA 415, 2-4: *trividho vyavahāro 'yam avyutpannādibhedataḥ / tadāśrayeṇa sakalam idaṃ yuktam evekṣyate* (*nyid du T; ive- PVA, M*) //1057//
avyutpannānām vyavahāro vartamānārthaviśayaṃ pratyakṣam. vyutpannānām bhāviviśayaṃ. ativyutpannānām pratibhāsamātraviśayaṃ eva.

“This activity is of three kinds according as [one who performs the activity] is divided [into three types]: the unthoughtful (*avyutpanna*),⁷⁾ [the thoughtful (*vyutpanna*), and the extremely thoughtful (*ativyutpanna*)]. It is seen that if such [an activity] is resorted to, all this is perfectly reasonable.

The activity of perceiving [which occurs] with reference to an object that exists in the present is an activity [carried out] by the unthoughtful; [the activity of perceiving which occurs] with reference to an object yet to take place is [an activity carried out] by the thoughtful; [the activity of perceiving which occurs] with reference only to a mere appearance [in a cognition] is [an activity carried out] by the extremely thoughtful.”

According to Prajñākaragupta, thus, a cognitive activity (*vyavahāra*), inferential or perceptual, is of three kinds: the first is carried out by the unthoughtful with respect to an object that is said to exist in the present in relation to the time a cognitive activity is taking place; the second by the thoughtful with respect to an object yet to occur; the third by the extremely thoughtful with respect to a mere appearance in a cognition.

4. Conclusion

We have seen that Prajñākaragupta makes the following points regarding inference. (1) The inference of fire from smoke can be explained on the basis of the causal relation between a cognition and a latent impression (*vāsanā*). (2) The inference of fire from smoke has the same structure as that of color from taste. Both types of inference can be explained

by introducing the concept of ‘being dependent on one and the same set of causes’ (*ekasāmagryadhīnatva*). (3) In the final analysis, an object of a cognition, inferential or perceptual, should be an appearance of an object in a cognition.

Prajñākaragupta advances the theory of ‘mere appearance’ (*pratibhāsamātra*), which claims that from the point of view of the ultimate truth, a cognition is complete in itself, so that it is utterly impossible that a cognition is related to another. According to him, this theory goes even within the framework of the Sautrāntika school. For, according to the theory, what is real and hence is to be obtained is simply what appears in a cognition.

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Notes: 1) = R (D142a5-6; P169b3-4). 2) See PVA 414, 31-33; Kobayashi 2001: 203.
 3) In this respect, Manorathanandin also takes the same view. See PVV 237, 11-12. 4) See PVSV 7, 14-8, 4; Hayes & Gillon 1991: 12-13; 69. 5) See PVSV 8, 5-11; Hayes & Gillon 1991: 13.
 6) See PVA 412, 25-26. 7) J (D181a1; P207b5) ad PVA 411, 28-29: *rtogs pa ma yin pa ni dpyad pa dman pa ste*.

Abbreviations: Kobayashi 2001 = “Prajñākaragupta’s Theory of *vāsanā*,” JIBS 50-1: 202-204 (in Japanese). Hayes & Gillon 1991 = “Introduction to Dharmakīrti’s Theory of Inference as Presented in PVSV 1-10,” JIP 19: 1-73. J = *Pramāṇavārttikālaṃkāraṭīkā* (Jayanta): D4222, P5720. M = Manuscript B of PVA: S. Watanabe, ed. Patna-Narita, 1998. PVA = *Pramāṇavārttikālaṃkāra*: R. Sāṅkṛtyāyana, ed. Patna, 1953. PVin = *Pramāṇaviniścaya*: E. Steinkeller, ed. Beijing-Vienna, 2007. PVV = *Pramāṇavārttikavṛtti*: R. Sāṅkṛtyāyana, ed. Patna, 1938-40. PVSV = *Pramāṇa-vārttika-svavṛtti*: R. Gnoli, ed. Rome, 1960. R = *Pramāṇavārttikaṭīkā* (Ravigupta): D 4225, P 5722. T = Tibetan translation of PVA: D4221, P5719.

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