Prajñākaragupta’s Interpretation of *svalakṣaṇa*

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0. Introduction

As some scholars have pointed out, when Dharmakīrti says that a valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) is a cognition which does not deceive our expectation toward its object (*avisamvādi jñānam*), he confronts the following problem: If the Buddhist theory of momentariness claims that an object-moment to be cognized by a cognition should be differentiated from an object-moment to be obtained through a practical activity, how can one establish the validity of the cognition? To solve this problem Dharmottara introduces the concept of a “continuum” (*santana*). According to him, what is to be obtained through a practical activity on the basis of a cognition is a continuum of moments and not an object-moment. But Tosaki (1989: 184, n. 9) has expressed strong doubts about Dharmottara’s view. It is obvious that Dharmottara’s solution is still inconsistent with the Buddhist theory of momentariness.

In this paper I shall show that Prajñākaragupta has a different strategy for dealing with the problem. In Prajñākaragupta’s view, one and the same object-moment can be both something to be cognized by a cognition and something to be obtained through the cognition; that is, what is to be cognized by a cognition is nothing more than an object-moment to be obtained through this cognition.

1. *svalakṣaṇa* as the Object of a Valid Cognition

As is well known, Dharmakīrti holds that, although an object of a valid cognition is either a particular (*svalakṣaṇa*) or a universal (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*), in the final analysis, only a particular is an object of a valid cognition. He says:

PV III 53d–54ab: *meyām tv ekaṁ svalakṣaṇam*

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tasmād arthakriyāsiddheḥ sadasattāvicaśraṇāt /
“[In the final analysis,] however, the object of a valid cognition (prameya) is a particular (sva-lakṣaṇa) alone, because a person accomplishes his or her aim on the basis of [a particular]. For [a thoughtful person] examines whether or not [a particular] exists.”

The same view is put forward in his PVin II also.\(^2\)

PVin II 48, 1–8: ata eva
prāmāṇyam vastuviśayam dvayoḥ (7ab)
pratyakṣaṁnumāṇaṁyoh, arthakriyāyogyavīṣayatvād vicārasya, sukhadhukkhasādhane jñātvā yathā-rham pratipitsaṁ hi kīmciit parīkṣante prekṣāpūrvarakārīnāh, na vyasanītāya.

“Therefore, the validity of the two [types of cognitions], perception and inference, is [to be judged] with respect to a real thing (vastu). For [a person] examines whether or not [a given thing] has the capacity to bring about his or her aim. For, after understanding what causes pleasure and [what removes] pain,\(^3\) thoughtful persons, wishing to obtain a certain thing answering the intended purpose, examine [whether or not it has the capacity to bring about their purpose]. This is not from their bad habits.\(^4\)

It is clear from these statements that, when Dharmakīrti says that a particular or a real thing is the only object of a valid cognition, perceptual or inferential, he intends to imply that an object-moment to be obtained through a practical activity is an object of a valid cognition. But how can such an object-moment, which is yet to occur at the time when a valid cognition is taking place, be called meya ‘something to be cognized by the valid cognition’?

2. Is the Object to be Obtained a Continuum?

Dharmottara, who seems aware of this difficulty, divides an object of a valid cognition into two types: a direct object (grāhya) and an object to be obtained (prāpaṇiya, adhyavaseya). For perception, the former is an object-moment (i.e., a particular) and the latter is a continuum (i.e., a “particular”); while for inference, the former is an internal object (i.e., a universal) and the latter is an external one (i.e., a “particular”).\(^5\) It is important to note in this connection that the continuum for perception and the external object for inference are simply a conceptual construct and hence unreal.

Prajñākaragupta disputes Dharmottara’s view by saying the following:

PVA 216, 24–27: tatsaṁtāne pravṛttatvāt pravṛttir iti cet, kathā prathamakaṇṣaṇasya sāntānaṁ, na cānya vṛttam anayatra vṛttam bhavati, itāhā cet anumānam api svarūpe vṛttam arthe ’pi vṛttam eva bhavet, upacāramātram etat, na paramārtheney api\(^6\) nattaram, pratyakṣam api ekatra vṛttam

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anyatṛāpi vṛttam iti nopacārād etad anyat.\(^7\)

"[Objection:] [It can be said that perception] occurs [with respect to an object-moment to be obtained], since [the perception] occurs with respect to a continuum [of object-moments where the object-moment appears].

[Answer:] How [could it ever be established that] the first object-moment is a continuum? In addition, it is not possible that one and the same perception occurs with respect to different object-moments. If such were the case, it would also follow that one and the same inference occurs with respect not only to the inferential cognition itself [i.e., the fire-image appearing to this inferential cognition] but also to an [external] object [i.e., externally existing fire].

[Objection:] In the case [of inference], [an internal object] is metaphorically called [an 'external' one] and not in the true sense of the word.

[Answer:] This does not constitute an answer, either. The statement made by you that perception occurs with respect to one thing [i.e., an object-moment] and to another [i.e., a continuum] is nothing other than a metaphorical expression."

The point made by Prajñākaragupta is clear. According to him, an object of a valid cognition (meya) should be one.

3. The Object of a Valid Cognition is a Future Object-moment

According to Prajñākaragupta, an object of a valid cognition is defined as an object-moment yet to occur (bhāvin) and this object-moment is the one to be obtained through a practical activity. Consider the following statement by Prajñākaragupta.

PVA 414, 24–28: atha vartamānabhāvinor ekatām avasāya pravartate, tathā sati bhāvyarthavittir evāsau, na vartamānāvatīthī.\(^8\)\(^9\) prātyāḥ hi vedanasatyatānumīyate, tato vartamānarūpasyāprāptībhāvinaś ca viparyayād bhāvivīṣayam eva pramāṇam, vartamānabhāvas tu sann api tatrāsatyaḥ, pratyaksam api bhāviny eva pramāṇam.

"[Objection:] A person takes action after judging that a present object-moment (vartamāna) and a future object-moment (bhāvyarthā) are identical with each other.

[Answer:] If so, the cognition [on the basis of which the person takes action] is not the one which cognizes a present object-moment but the one which cognizes a future object-moment. For the validity (satyatā) of a cognition [of an object-moment] is inferred from the obtainment [of the object-moment]. Even if there is the property of being a present object-moment in the [future object-moment] [because the two object-moments are identified with each other], [this property is] something unreal (asatyā). Perception is also a valid cognition with respect only to a future object-moment."

It is important to note here that Prajñākaragupta argues that what has a claim to be regarded as an object of a valid cognition is just a future object-moment, which is to be obtained
through a practical activity. Clearly, unlike Dharmottara he attaches more importance to what is to be obtained through a valid cognition (prāpti) than to what is to be grasped by a valid cognition (grahaṇa).

4. Perception and Inference are Erroneous

But a question arises: How can a future object-moment be an object of a valid cognition? For, at the time when a cognition occurs with respect to a present object-moment, a future object-moment will have not occurred. Prajñākaragupta finds a clue for solving this question in the following statement by Dharmakīrti.

PV III 56a–c: abhirṛayaṇīsamvādād api bhṛanteḥ pramāṇatā /
   gatir apy anyathā drṣṭā

The first half of this verse can be rendered as follows:

“[Inference], though it is an erroneous cognition, [can be regarded as] a valid cognition since it fulfills our expectation.”

According to Prajñākaragupta, however, pāda c admits of three interpretations,

PVA 217, 23: anyathāpi gatir drṣṭā. bhṛāntaṇi gatir drṣṭā.

“[Interpretation 1:10] It is seen that a cognition of [an intended object] occurs even in a different manner, that is, [an intended object] is cognized even through an erroneous cognition.”

PVA 217, 23–24: atha vā gatih pādavihaṇaḥ, tadanyathāpi pararūpeṇa pratipattāv api drṣṭā.

“[Interpretation 2:11] Alternatively, the word gati means ’taking a step toward [something]’ (pādavihaṇa). [Accordingly, the following is meant:] It is seen that, even if one understands [a certain object] as something different from it (tadanyathāpi = pararūpeṇa pratipattāv api), one takes a step toward [its obtainment].”

PVA 218, 2–4: ... gatir api prayākṣābbhitamah 'nyathā drṣṭā pararūpeṇaiva, na kācit pravṛttivisaṁy

“[Interpretation 3:12] It is seen that even a cognition which is regarded as perception [apprehends a certain object] just as something different [from it] (anyathā = pararūpeṇaiva). No cognition apprehends an object toward which one takes action, as such (svarūpeṇa). On the contrary, both [perception and inference] apprehend something different [from such an object] —a real entity [i.e., the first object-moment] or a cognition itself. Therefore, what difference is there [between perception and inference] with respect to a real entity yet to occur.”

Let us note the third interpretation. As shown above, in Prajñākaragupta’s view a future object-moment is an object of a valid cognition. It is evident that a future object-moment is not an object of the cognition whose object is a present object-moment. In terms of the future object-moment, however, it can be said that the future object-moment has been errone-
ously cognized by the cognition of the present object-moment. It is important to note that he has stated that the validity of a cognition of an object-moment is inferred from the attainment of the object-moment \( (prāptyā hi vedanasatyatānumiyate) \). If the validity of a cognition is conditioned by the attainment of its object, it does not matter if the cognition is erroneous. What is considered to be the present object-moment is an external object-moment in the case of perception and an image appearing to a cognition in the case of inference.

5. Conclusion

In order to solve the problem of the time-gap between an object-moment to be cognized and an object-moment to be obtained, Dharmottara and Prajñākaragupta propose two different solutions. From the point of view of what is to be cognized by a cognition at the time when the cognition takes place, the former holds that an object of a valid cognition should be divided into two types: a direct object \( (grāhya) \) and an object to be obtained \( (prāpaṇiya, adhyavaseya) \); while, from the point of view of what is to be obtained through a cognition, the latter holds that it suffices to say that a cognition of a present object-moment is an erroneous cognition with respect to a future object-moment. It is clear that Prajñākaragupta tries to solve the above-mentioned problem within the framework established by Dharmakirti: Prajñākaragupta applies Dharmakirti’s logic to establish the validity of an inferential cognition to a valid cognition in general.

We have the famous phrase of Dharmakirti: “A cognition itself is known for itself, [but] its validity [is known] through a practical activity \( (prāmānyam vyavahārena) \)” (PV II 4d–5a). As far as the validity of a cognition is concerned, it seems that Dharmakirti also attaches more importance to what is to be obtained than to what is to be cognized.

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Notes: 1 ) See Shah (1967: 188–189), Tosaki (1989: 175–176), Katsura (1984: 222–223), etc. 2 ) See also PVSV 45, 32–46, 9 and Dunne (2004: 115, n. 98). 3 ) See PV in T (D177a6–7; P208a1–3). 4 ) See PV in T (D177b3; P2008a7). 5 ) See NB T 71, 1–72, 3, Oki (1999), Arnold (2009), etc. 6 ) \( paramārthenetā yapi MsB, don dam par ... zhes bya bar yang T; paramārthaśataye pi PVA \). 7 ) = R (D34a2–4; P41b1–4). 8 ) \( vartamāna-MsB, da itar ba T; pravartamāna- PVA \). 9 ) MsB, T; ins. \( prakṛṣṭā cāsau vittih PVA \).
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10) See Y (D109a3–4; P144a5–7).

11) See Y (D109a4–5; P144a7–8).

12) See Y (D110a5–6; P145b6–7).

**Abbreviations:**


PVinṬ = Pramāṇaviniścayatīkā (Dharmottara): D4229, P5227.


R = Pramāṇavārttikāṭikā ad PV III (Ravigupta): D4225, P5722.

T = Tibetan translation of PVA: D 4221, P 5719.

Y = Pramāṇavārttikālaṃkāraṭīkā Supariśuddhi (Yamāri): D4226, P5723.


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