Inquiries into Dharmakīrti’ s Valid Reasons—From the View of Nyāyabindu

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Abstract. In Nyāyabindu, written by Dharmakīrti, the inference for oneself (svaṁhaanumāna) is the proper knowledge of objects through three kinds of valid reasons, which are Negation (anupalabdhiḥetu), Identity (svabhāvahetu) and Causation (kāryatetu). Such points of view are a development of former theories. In the contemporary studies of Dharmakīrti’s theory, some scholars propose to amend the “three varieties of the three-aspected mark” to the “four varieties of the three-aspected mark”. This paper is aimed at refuting this amendment. The Negation in Dharmakīrti’s theory cannot be cancelled for it is not only the key to establish the negative judgment, but also an important thinking mode of Apoha. Moreover, the perception is the basis of Dharmakīrti’s thought, which is emphasized in the premise of Negation.

Introduction

Nyāyabindu is the most widely studied part among The Seven Books on Pramāṇa of Dharmakīrti. As Cheng LU said, both western and eastern people who study Yinming(hetuvidyā) are mostly drawn towards the works of Dharmakīrti, especially Nyāyabindu, because it has the original Sanskrit text and the meaning is clear.[1]324 In Nyāyabindu, Dharmakīrti expounds his ideological system in the order of “Perception—Inference—Syllogism(pratyakṣa-svartthaumāna-parārthānumāna)”. Among them, the idea of “Valid Reasons” is explained in “Inference(anumāna)”. “Inference is twofold. For one self and for others. A cognition which is produced (indirectly) through a mark that has a threefold aspect, and which refers to an object, (not perceived, but) inferred—is internal inference.”[2]47-48 The inference is the correct cognition generated by “a threefold aspect”, and it has the function of distinguishing right from wrong cognition. [3]19-26 They are Negation(anupalabdhiḥetu), Identity(svabhāvahetu) and Causation(kāryatetu). Contemporary scholars have revised the classification of it in the study of Dharmakīrti’s valid reason thinking, believing that Identity and Causation can include all causes. On the basis of affirmation and negation, they can be divided into four types, namely “four kinds of valid reasons”.[4]62 So, should it be amend “three kinds of valid reasons” as “four kinds of valid reasons”? Before answering this question, we need to know the specific content of Dharmakīrti’s “three kinds of valid reasons” and the position of the Negation in Dharmakīrti’s valid reason thinking.

Three Kinds of Valid Reasons

Dharmakīrti explains “a threefold aspect” as two parts which are a three-aspected mark(hetus trirūpalingam) and valid reasons in Dharmakīrti. “The three aspects of the mark are (first)—‘just’ its presence in the object cognized by inference. Its presence only in similar cases(sapakṣa). Its absolute absence in dissimilar case(vipakṣa) is necessary.”[2]51-56 “Similar cases” have the attributes expressed by the predicate in the conclusion. The relation between dissimilar cases and similar cases are contradictory. According to Dharmakīrti, the subject of conclusion or a minor term must be in the mark or a middle term. This means that the minor premise must be realized in any case. Also, the mark, a middle term must be in the similar cases and must not be in the dissimilar cases. This means the mark or a middle term must be in the predicate of conclusion or the major term. Hence,
Dharmakīrti argues that the relation between the middle term and the major term is called the “invariable concomitance”. When the three-aspected marks realized, the invariable concomitance should be determined. So what is the content of the invariable concomitance? According to Dharmakīrti, the invariable concomitance is showed by valid reasons. “And there are only three varieties of the three-aspected mark, Negation, Identity and Causation.” [2]60

Identity

“Identity is a reason for deducing a property when (the subject) is sufficient for that deduction by itself. For example, Thesis. This is a tree. Reason. Because it is an Aśoka.” [2]65-67

Thesis. This is a tree.
Reason. Because it is an Aśoka.

The Aśoka and tree are identical. The Aśoka is the concept of species and the tree is the concept of genus. If the object is presence and we call the object Aśoka, since the relation of genus and its species, we can know that this is a tree through the inference. As Stcherbatsky said “They both refer to the same fact, their objective reference is identical. The difference between them is purely logical.” [5]249

Therefore, the relation of genus and its species is called Identity. We can use it to establish the following rules:
1.1 have species, have genus
1.2 no genus, no species

Causation


Thesis. Here is fire.
Reason. Because there is smoke.

Smoke is the effect of fire and fire is the cause of smoke. As long as there is smoke, there must be a fire. Now there is smoke, so there is fire. That is to say, any result should be based on reasoning. Smoke is the result of fire. When we saw the smoke, we were able to realize that there was fire in the smoke at that moment. Therefore the relation of effect or result and cause or reason is called Causation. We can use it to establish the following rules:
2.1 have effect, have cause
2.2 No cause, no effect
2.3 no effect, no valid reason

Negation

“Between these (three, the formula) of Negation is as follows. Thesis. On some particular place there is no jar. Reason. Because it is not perceived, although the conditions of perception are fulfilled.” [2]61

Thesis. On some particular place there is no jar.
Reason. Because it is not perceived, although the conditions of perception are fulfilled.

The conditions of perception are fulfilled, but we cannot perceived that there is a jar. Owing to there is not a jar. “A particular place is a place before the eyes of the observer, but not every such place (happening to be before his eyes).” [2]68 Dharmakīrti points out two conditions in the inference, —“The presence of (all) the conditions of cognition consists in the presence of an individual entity and the totality of all other conditions of cognition. It is necessary to perceive when all of the other conditions of perceptibility are fulfilled.” [2]64 That is a thing should be present on the one hand, and the other hand all other conditions of perceptibility are fulfilled. If both of the two conditions are satisfied, the perception exists and the inference exists; conversely, the perception does not exist and inference does not exist. Or if either of the conditions are satisfied, the perception exists and inference does not exist, i.e. the Negation. Therefore, the perception is the basis of the Negation and also it is rooted in the inference process. For Dharmakīrti, the Negation has two cases. “The buddhists assert that it is founded on the negative perception of present thing or to say the presence
The presence is absent means that a thing is not present or the conditions of perceptibility are not fulfilled. Therefore according the Negation to establish the following rules:

3.1 It possible that the thing is present and the conditions of perceptibility are fulfilled.

3.2 It is not possible that the thing is not present or the conditions of perceptibility are not fulfilled.

According to the logical description of disjunction, we can express 3.2 as follows:

3.2.1 It is not possible that the thing is not present and the conditions of perceptibility are not fulfilled.

3.2.2 It is not possible that the thing is present and the conditions of perceptibility are not fulfilled.

Dharmakīrti asserts “(cognition) is either affirmation or negation, (and affirmation) is double, (as founded either on Identity or on Causation).”

Affirmation that “it is (simply) because Identity and Causation (causal origin) belongs just either to a comprehended property or to a effect. Inferential reference to Reality is possible exclusively on this basis.”

Negation that “It is exclusively on the basis of such (negation) that absence can be ascertained (with logical necessity).”

According to the “three varieties of the three-aspected mark”, the Negation is the bridge to connect perceptions and inferences. Yet, I suppose to put it into the scope of inferences and meanwhile make it based on perceptions. This is because cognitive aspects of the Negation are the same as those in inferences. On the other hand, although definitions of the Negation and perceptions are contradictory, they could be compatible to some extent.

The Formulas of Valid Reasons

As is shown in Nyāyabindu, there is eleven ways to construct the form of the Negation. I would focus on the two —“Existential negation” (the first formula) and “Affirmation of something incompatible” (the fourth formula)- to unfold the reasonability of Dharmakīrti’s theory.

Existential Negation

“(The first formula) is existential (or direct) negation, it is the following one.

(The) thesis. There is here no smoke.

(Reason). Since the conditions for its perception being fulfilled, none is perceived.”

“Smoke” does not exist here because the “smoke” is not present and the conditions of perceptibility are not fulfilled what is said in 3.2.1. That is to say, if it was smoking at present, it certainly would have been perceived. So we can say here is no smoke. The purpose of this inference is to find the perception of the present smoke. “All these ten formulae of a negative judgment, beginning from the second, are (virtually) include (in the first), the (direct) non-perception of the existence of something.”

According to Dharmakīrti, the other ten formulae of a negative judgment are based on existential negation.

Affirmation of Something Incompatible

“(The) Affirmation of something incompatible (with the fact which is being denied) is as follows.

(The) thesis. There is here no sensation of cold.

(Reason). Because there is fire.”

This inference means that someone here will feel warm because there is fire, and if you feel warm, then you did not feel cold or there is no sensation of cold on that time. Therefore affirmation of something incompatible is expressed contradiction, and this relationship can establish the following rule:

4.1 Either this or that.

In the remaining nine formulas, there are three formulas that just use one of three valid reasons—“Negation of an effect”(2.3), “Negation of a term of greater extension”(1.2), “Negation of causes”(2.2); there are five formulas that use two of formulas—“The affirmation of an incompatible effect”(2.1, 4.1), “The affirmation of something subordinate to an incompatible fact” (1.1, 4.1), “The affirmation of something subordinate to an incompatible fact” (4.1, 2.3), “Affirmation of
something incompatible with a fact of greater extension” (4.1, 1.2), “The affirmation of a fact incompatible with the causes of something” (4.1, 2.2); there is only one formula that uses three valid reasons—“Affirmation of an effect of something incompatible with the cause” (2.1, 4.1, 2.2).

In a nutshell, there are only three valid reasons for inference, no matter how complex it is. So Negation has more than eleven varieties of the formulas.

The Philosophical Implications of Dharmakīrti’s Valid Reasons

Actually, Dharmakīrti did not probe into a three-aspected mark of origin. He probed into the invariable concomitance or the relationship between the middle term and the major term. Hence the essence of “a threefold aspect” is to explore the relationship between the middle term and the major term on the basis of a three-aspected mark. This relation is the affirmation (Identity and Causation) and negation (Negation). Dharmakīrti developed Dignāga’s thought. Cheng LU argued that a feature of Dignāga’s thought is the perception out of concept and inference out of concept. At the same time, he also has a special statement about the composition of concepts, believing that concepts do not express meaning from a positive point of view, but by denying the way that one party acknowledges the other, so it is also called Apoha. The essence of the Negation is Apoha in Nyāyabindu. One of the basic ideas stressed by Apoha is that the truth of things as they are or the highest reality cannot be presented in a positive way, but should be revealed in a way that consistently negates the reality of the concept, that means to perceive the truth of things in the Negation. It is precisely because someone is enlightened by Apoha in the Negation. Even if the concept is used, it is the opposite of the object which being understood.

Dharmakīrti’s “three varieties of the three-aspected mark” of Dharmakīrti is based on abundant epistemology. Especially Negation is the inference while it is similar to perception. Three kinds of valid reasons, namely Negation, Identity and Causation, are based on the perception. So affirmation and negation as inference use concepts in the basis. That is to say, the presence of affirmation and non-presence of negation do not no-exist in the ontology. Therefore, Dharmakīrti’s Negation “means the presence of a bare spot, as well as the fact of its cognition.” Valid reasons are based on the perception and the Negation is essentially reality. However, it does not exist that the thing is not present or the conditions of perceptibility are not fulfilled. As Stcherbatsky said “it is always the work of the understanding which calling in mnemonic representations interprets a given sensation on its negative side.”

Contemporary academic researchers have questioned Dharmakīrti’s valid reasons. Run-sheng LI argued it is “four varieties of the three-aspected mark”. It is significance to establish Negation in the history of Yinming, because it clearly reflects the cognition of the existence or no-existence of things, which is the comparison of indirect inference rather than experience of immediate perception. In addition to that the essence of Negation is in Identity or Causation. So there are four reasons, namely affirmative of Identity, negative of Identity, affirmative of Causation and negation of Causation. In this view, Run-sheng LI believed to amend “three varieties of the three-aspected mark” as “four varieties of the three-aspected mark”. In addition, Zong-lin JU argued that valid reasons are two varies, one is affirmation the other is negation. If they are further classified—the perspective of logical classification, such division is well. If it is from Dharmakīrti’s epistemology, “four varieties of the three-aspected mark” is not very well. Harbsmeier asserted “formal logic is concerned with validity, not with truth. The Chinese Buddhist logicians fail to focus on formal validity as such. They discuss the truth of the premises together with the acceptability of theses without noticing the crucial distinction between questions of factual truth and questions of logical consequence or formal validity.” Hence to explore only “three varieties of the three-aspected mark” from Dharmakīrti’s epistemology that we can better interpret the "only" in the valid reasons.

In conclusion, Dharmakīrti’s valid reasons should not be amend “three varieties of the three-aspected mark” as “four varieties of the three-aspected mark”. Especially, “it is that the negative judgment receives its practical significance through an inference from challenged imagination,
although it is really produced by sense-perception and only applied in life through a deductive process of an inference, whose logical reason consists in the fact of a negative experience.”[5]

Therefore, by approaching the essence of things gradually through Apoha, the essence is proved to be clear.

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References