

Buddhist Physicalism II

The Problem of Ownerless Consciousness

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Buddhist anti-physicalism

- Classical Indian Buddhist realists hold that consciousness is ultimately real
 - Dualism:
 - Vaibhāṣika, Theravāda: 4 types of non-physical dharmas: *vedanā*, *saṃjñā*, *saṃskāras*, *viññāna*; instances of first three are invariably accompanied by the fourth
 - Sautrāntika: 4 categories collapsed into one, *viññāna*;
 - Idealism: Yogācāra: only *viññāna* is ultimately real
- All agree that *dharmas* are momentary, existing for just a moment and then ceasing, but causing successor *dharmas* to arise
- The continued existence of a person just consists in the occurrence of a causal series of sets of impersonal, momentary *dharmas* arranged person-wise
- Classical Indian Buddhist rejection of physicalism largely motivated by claimed incompatibility of physicalism with karma/rebirth ideology
 - standard accusation that Indian materialism promotes immorality
 - karmic seeds as nonphysical entities capable of action at a distance

But what is consciousness (*vijñāna*)?

- Cog sci/philosophy of mind distinction: *creature* consciousness vs. *state* consciousness
 - creature consciousness is the property attributed to an organism by virtue of its representing its environment in such a way as to enable the organism to successfully engage with its environment
 - a creature may be said to be conscious in this sense by virtue of its having conscious states
 - state consciousness: a mental state the creature is aware of being in (there is something it is like for the creature to be in that state)
- Buddhists deny the existence of a self, and hold that a person is only conventionally and not ultimately real
- Hence for a Buddhist, the occurrence of a conscious state is subjectless
- What then is the intrinsic nature of consciousness?
 - recall the intrinsic nature test for something's being ultimately real
 - if consciousness is subjectless, what makes it be the sort of thing that it is independently of the existence of other things?
 - is there a nature common to all the states we consider to be conscious states?

- Standard answer of classical Indian philosophers: illumination (*prakāśa*)
 - consciousness illuminates its object just as the light of a lamp illuminates the items in the room
- But is the property of illuminating intrinsic?
 - the problem of the implicit accusative: illumination is always the illuminating (making manifest) of something else
 - the problem of the implicit dative: is a state's being a conscious state a matter of its representing **for its subject** how the environment is? can illuminating/representing/informing/manifesting be subjectless?
- Yogācāra will attempt to solve these problems by invoking ultimate non-duality of subject- and object-poles of a cognition
- We'll evaluate this solution later

The problem of meta-cognition

- If cognition is an ultimately real component of the useful fiction *person*, how is it cognized?
- Why this matters: enlightenment is said to come about when one directly cognizes that each of the ultimate constituents of a person is impermanent and non-self
- Hence if consciousness is an ultimately real constituent of the person, it must be possible for it to be directly cognized
- If cognition is ultimately real, it is momentary, and direct cognition is of something that currently exists
- One does not directly cognize the cognitions of others
- In a given mental stream there is only one cognition occurring in a given moment
- Hence either an ultimately real cognition is directly cognized by itself, or else it is directly cognized by some distinct element occurring at that moment

Other-illumination (introspective, *paraprakāśa*) accounts of meta-cognition

- Vaibhāṣika view: a cognition is cognized by the simultaneously existing mental concomitants (*caitta dharmas*), while the latter, in addition to the body, are each cognized by a simultaneously existing cognition
- Problems:
 - If *caitta dharmas* are mere accompaniments of cognitions, they only perform auxiliary roles, they do not themselves cognize
 - If on the other hand (and as Sautrāntikas hold), there is no real distinction between *caitta dharmas* and *citta* (consciousness/cognition), this thesis becomes a form of the self-illumination account
 - which is undermined by the principle of irreflexivity: an entity cannot operate on itself (fingertip doesn't touch itself, knife blade doesn't cut itself, etc.)
- Sautrāntika view: relax the simultaneity condition; introspection involves cognition of an immediately preceding cognition presented through memory

Self-illumination (reflexive, *svapprakāśa*) accounts of meta-cognition

- Yogācāra view: every cognition is self-cognizing, cognizing both its object and itself
- Response to objection that this violates principle of irreflexivity: counter-example of light that illuminates itself as well as other objects
- Two problems with counter-example:
 - 1. ambiguity of ‘light’: the lamp that emits light, or the light emitted by a lamp
 - a lamp can exist without illuminating, hence illuminating cannot be its intrinsic nature
 - 2. something can be said to be illuminated only if it can also exist in the unilluminated state, and light cannot exist in the dark
- Problem of solipsism:
 - first-person attribution of consciousness involves no application criteria (cognition as something ‘known by acquaintance’)
 - third-person attribution involves application criteria: speech or action
 - hence two distinct concepts: others are not conscious in the way that I am, but in some distinct (‘analogical’?) way

Dignāga's argument against the Sautrāntika view:

1. One only remembers one's own experiences.
2. To remember an experience is to recall not just the content of the experience but also the cognizing of that content.
3. For some content that occurred at t_1 to be remembered at some later time t_n , the content must have been experienced at some earlier time.
4. Suppose, for *reductio*, that cognition C does not cognize itself.
Then the remembering at t_n of the experience at t_1 requires that there have occurred a cognizing of C by some cognition occurring later than t_1 but earlier than t_n , say at t_{n-1} .
But since this cognition is likewise later than the experiencing at t_1 , it too must involve a remembering of the experience that occurred at t_1 .
And one only remembers what one has previously experienced, etc., etc.
5. Only by conceding that the remembered cognition at t_1 cognized itself can an infinite regress be prevented.
∴ remembering an earlier experience as an experience requires that the remembered experience be reflexively self-aware.

Dignāga's response to the irreflexivity objection

- Every cognition has two forms: the noematic form (O) whereby it represents the object A; and the noetic form (S), that whereby it functions to cognize the object
- But since cognitions are ultimately real, they cannot be mereological sums
- Hence the distinction between O and S must be the result of our 'beginningless ignorance' whereby we superimpose the subject/object or grasped/grasper distinction
- Those ultimately real entities we think of as cognitions, being beyond the subject/object dichotomy, are inexpressible
- Paradox of ineffability?

Dharmakīrti's argument for reflexivity:

1. S just is the cognizing of O
 2. Hence the cognizing of O is not distinct from the cognizing of S (by the identity of S and O)
 3. Hence one cognizes O only if one cognizes S
 4. One only seeks to obtain an object A if one is aware of A
 5. In order to be aware of A one must be aware of the cognizing of A (by (3))
 6. Suppose cognition of cognition of A occurs only after cognition of A
 7. But one does not cognize A unless one cognizes S
 8. Then an infinite regress results from the supposition
- ∴ if cognition did not cognize itself there would be no acting to obtain one's goals, and all would go to hell in a handbasket (*astaṅgataṃ viśvaṃ syāt*)

Assessing the argument

- Suppose we accept the identity of S and O, i.e., we accept (1)
- (2) and (3) then follow
- But (4) is true only if we understand ‘aware of A’ as meaning cognition of A under a concept that links its occurrence to attainment of some goal
 - Perception of blueberry ice cream only leads to action of getting ice cream if the blue I see is cognized under the concept *blueberry ice cream*
- How about the use of ‘cognize’ in (3): ‘one cognizes O only if one cognizes S’? Does it require that one cognize S under the concept S?
- Compare: Sagarmatha = Zhumulangma (Nepali and Chinese names for Mt. Everest)
- So when I see Sagarmatha, I see Zhumulangma; but when I see Everest from Nepal and call it Sagarmatha, do I know it to be Zhumulangma?
- Hence the regress is not generated, and Dharmakīrti has failed to rule out the other-illumination alternative

Assessing Dignāga's memory argument

- Might succeed against the Sautrāntika view
- And alternative introspectionist accounts are implausible
 - two cognizings in a single moment?
 - mutual reciprocal dependence?
- So might give us reason to reject a higher-order perception (HOP) version of the other-illumination account of meta-cognition
- But what about a higher-order thought (HOT) account?
- Kumāriila's abductive inference account: the supposition that a cognition occurred is what explains the object's coming to have the property of intentional-objectness
- How intentional-objectness cognized: from speech or action
 - in case of blue, saying or thinking 'blue', or reaching for the blueberry ice cream

- Why meta-cognition can only occur through abductive inference:
 - Caitra's cognition cannot be the object of another of Caitra's cognitions
 - Because it is a cognition, like that of another person. (ŚV Śūnyavāda 176-7)
- To avoid solipsism, must be the case that same concept applied in first-person ('Caitra') and third-person ('another person') attributions
- So consciousness something we posit in order to explain some phenomenon, like dark matter posited to explain facts about universe's expansion
- Hence Dignāga's memory argument fails to refute all other-illumination views
 - and its difficulties—solipsism, ineffability, violation of irreflexivity—make it the less attractive account of meta-cognition
- Leaving open possibility that consciousness not ultimately real, instead a useful fiction
- Opening the door to a Buddhist physicalism?
- Next time: meeting the challenges faced by Buddhist physicalism