

Chapter VI

THE NYĀYA VERSION OF THE CAUSAL THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Causal Theory of Knowledge may be described as the view that an agent knows that something is so when there is some appropriate causal connection between the fact that it is so, and the agent's belief. The clearest example is direct perception, where the fact that there is a chair in the room causes my visual state of seeing that there is, and hence causes my knowing that there is. Difficulties include identifying the appropriate relations, extending the idea to less direct cases, especially those involving such apparently non-causal things as abstract objects, and accommodating examples where there may be a causal connection, but it would be most unreasonable of the agent to believe that there is. There is then the notion of deviant causal chain to test and refine causal theories of perception and memory. Suppose, it is suggested that for me to remember an event it is enough (a) that I witnessed it, and (b) that this was the original cause of my present thought about it. Then a deviant causal chain might be that I witnessed the event because of the fact that I wrote about it in my diary, and on now reading the diary think about. A causal chain is in place but it is not enough to establish that I remember the event; it is consistent with this story that I have forgotten it entirely.

However, as for the epistemological theories in the schools of thought in India there is a strong inclination towards a causal explicability of the concept of knowledge. It appears that they seek to answer the Kantian-looking question: How is knowledge possible?

The Sanskrit word for knowledge is *pramā*, which is defined as *yathārtha anubhava*, that is valid cognition. There are as many as four, and in some cases six

varieties of valid cognition. The difference between them is said to be constituted by the difference of *pramāṇas* or instruments of validity, called *karāṇas*, which render the validity of the cognition possible.

There is a sense in which the sense of cause is built into the notion of *karāṇa*. A valid cognition or *yathārtha anubhava* arises or is brought about by the instrumentality involved. A *karāṇa* is the means through which *pramā* arises. It is a causal process and does not admit of deviation if all the processes of the causal process are properly attended to. We propose to consider the case of the causal theory of knowledge in the light of Nyāya epistemology.

Let us begin by noting the definitions *pramā* and *pramāṇa*. A true or valid cognition is *pramā*, while *pramāṇa* is the means of true cognition. For Nyāya cognition is not self-validating. It holds on to the thesis of *parathprāmāṇyavāda*. Hence, the question or issue of causal explicability of *pramā* arises.

It is often held that the core of the Nyāya theory of knowledge is constituted by defining *pramā* and *apramā* in respect of *utpatti* (genesis) and *jñapti* (ascertainment). *Pramā* is said to be *yathārthānubhava*, meaning veridical non-recollective cognition. *Jñāna* or cognition is either *smṛti*, that is, recollective cognition, or *anubhava*. *Anubhava* is a cognition other than recollective cognition: *Smṛtibhinna jñāna*. Recollective cognition is not *pramā*. A non-recollective cognition can be *yathārtha* or true only in so far as it is an exact reproduction of a true non recollective cognition of the same object, which the subject previously had. *Smṛti* has no independent claim to truth, its truth can be said to be borrowed from that of its cause, that is, the previous non-recollective cognition of the same object. In the primary sense of the term 'veridical' *smṛti* does not qualify, for it does not correspond to its object at the time of its occurrence.

But what does it mean for a cognition to be true or veridical? It is held that a cognition is true if it is arthāvyabhicārī, i.e., non-discrepant with its object. That means if a cognition represents an object as it really is, then the cognition is true. For Nyāya, the truth of a cognition depends on the actual existence of the relational complex represented by the cognition, in the objective world. The relational complex is known as or called viśiṣṭa-viśaya. Accordingly a veridical cognition is described as tadvad viśeṣyakatvā vacchinna tat prakāṛakānubhava. This how Viśvanāth has put the matter in Bhāṣāpariccheda¹ (Kārika and Muktvāvali 136).

In order to know things as they are, we are required to have some epistemic conditions fulfilled. Epistemic conditions can be said to be fulfilled when a pramāṇa is employed as a means of knowing things. A pramāṇa is a special causal condition and as such it is what enables a cognition to represent an object as it really is. Pramā is said to be pramāṇa janya that is caused truth of a cognition by pramāṇa. The, then, is dependent on a set of two conditions, one ontological, and the other epistemic. When the two conditions are fulfilled in the case of arthāvyabhicārī, a cognition comes out true. The two conditions are importantly significant, since for Nyāya, unlike Mīmāṃsā, a cognition does not reveal itself, it is revelatory of the object alone. This Nyāya thesis implies that there is a cognition is a higher order statement, only introspectively available by anuvyavasāya. Even then it would not be apparent that the cognition in question is pramā. The property of being pramā or pramāṭva is to be pragmatically verified. If on the basis of a cognition we succeed in having the objects of our desire (saphala pravṛtti) the cognition could then hold as pramā. Pramā alone leads one to successful activity; it is to be inferred post eventum.

The epistemic condition for availing oneself of pramā goes by the name pramāṇa. A pramāṇa is an instrument (karaṇa) of pramā. A pramā is caused by pramāṇa. Or to speak alternatively, pramāṇa is pramākaraṇam. This is the classical Nyāya position held by

Vātsyāyana in his bhāṣya on Nyāya Sūtra² (1.1.3): The word karaṇa belongs to a set of general terms of Indian Philosophy, and it means causal conditions conducive to the production of effect. A karaṇa is the special cause or the most effective cause of an effect. A karaṇa is unique as a cause, asādhāraṇa vyāpāra, i.e., the unique operation of which the effect is the result. The causal condition immediately after the occurrence of which the effect occurs is the most effective cause or the karaṇa. Summarily speaking the concept of pramāṇa may be explicated as that causal condition which is immediately followed by its result. A pramāṇa is a pramākarāṇa.

There is also the view advanced by Jayanta Bhatta that karaṇa is the aggregate of causal conditions, and that until the aggregate of the causal conditions is complete, the production of the effect cannot be said to be inevitable. This is the view put forward in the Nyāya-mañjarī.

One can appropriately ask: does a pramāṇa always produce or yield pramā? Apropos the standard definition, pratyakṣa pramāṇa is either the sense-organ or the specific operative relation of the sense organ with the object (indriyārtha Sannikarṣa). But is it the case that whenever we perceive through our sense the cognition is true? If it were the case there would not have been instances of illusion or misperception. Hence the sense-organ or its relation with the object is the accredited pramāṇa, it pramā results contingently, sometimes we have pramā, at other times there occurs apramā. In order to circumvent the impasse, Nyāya thinkers propose the thesis of paratah prāmānyavāda in respect of both the genesis and ascertainment of pramā or prāmānya.

Just as there may be common sense-data for veridical perception and hallucinations, so there are causal conditions common to both pramā and apramā. Hence, the causal conditions for pramā have got to be differentiated from those responsible for apramā. It is argued that for each instance of pramā there is a guṇa or excellence by which a karaṇa

must be qualified. Only if the karaṇa is qualified by guṇa, the karaṇa can be said to be pramākarāṇa. The Kariakās no. 131-134 of the Bhāṣāpariccheda³ state explicitly that the guṇa in the case of pratyakṣa is the relation of the sense-order with the object which is the actual possessor of the property which figures as the qualifier in the resulting perceptual cognition. When there is a lack of guṇa, the sense-organ or the sense-object relation would fail to produce a true perception or pratyakṣa pramā. Therefore, the sense-organs can be pramāṇa only if they are qualified by the guṇa. There are different guṇas which give rise to pramāṭva in different types of pramā. For anumiti it is yathārtha parāmarśa, for upamiti it is yathārtha sādṛśya jñāna, and for śabda-jñāna it is yathārtha vākyārtha jñāna are the different guṇas for different pramās. Absence of guṇa is called doṣa or the condition that prevents the possibility of pramā in respective cases. The karaṇa or the means of cognition must be free from defects or must not be associated with any defect that might stand in the way of cognising an object as it really is. It follows then that the karaṇa is neutral to truth and falsity of a cognition, and it attains or acquires the status of pramākarāṇa only if it be qualified by the excellence (guṇa-viśiṣṭa) and is free from defects (aduṣṭa or doṣābhāva-viśiṣṭa). Correspondingly with the guṇas attending the various veridical cognitions, we may take note of the defects responsible for erroneous anumiti, upamiti and śabda. Respectively they are erroneous parāmarśa, erroneous Sādṛśya jñāna, and erroneous apprehension of the vākyārtha. It appears that Viśvanātha's intention is to suggest that doṣas are causally responsible for apramā, while guṇas are the causes for cases of pramā. This is evident by the conception of pramā as properly caused cognition or janya jñāna, and as such distinguished from apramā. Pramā is bhramabhinnam⁴.

Now, by holding on to a causal theory of knowledge does itself solve the epistemic difficulties. They are dilemmatic in nature: (a) A person, for instance, misperceives steam to be smoke, and on the basis of his knowledge that smoke is pervaded by fire, he infers

the presence of fire at the place where he perceived smoke. Eventually he goes over to that place only to find that there was fire, no smoke at all, what he perceived to be smoke was but steam. In the case under consideration the inferential cognition does correspond to fact. The question however is: Can the *karāṇa* be regarded as *pramāṇa*? If not, the inferential cognition can hardly be said to be obtained through a *pramāṇa*. The out of the problematic situation could be suggested in the following manner: The *guṇa* required for the generation of *pramāṭva* of an *anumiti* is *yathārtha parāmarśa*. This consists in cognising the *pakṣa* as qualified by the *hetu* which is pervaded by the *Sādhyā*. It is held that unless the *parāmarśa* is valid, the *anumiti-karāṇa* is either the *parāmarśa* itself or *vyāptijñāna* (i.e., the cognition to the effect that the *hetu* is pervaded by the *sādhyā*) cannot be characterised by the *guṇa*. A *parāmarśa* cannot be true unless the *hetu* actually characterises the *pakṣa* and it itself is actually pervaded by the *sādhyā*. The *parāmarśa* is not true because the *hetu* is not present in the *pakṣa*. In the case under consideration the smoke is the *hetu*, which is not present at the place where the presence of fire is inferred. So the *anumiti-karāṇa* is not characterised by the *guṇa*, and hence should not be regarded as *pramāṇa*.

Again, let us suppose that our perceiver sees that smoke is co present at the place along with fire and steam. *Parāmarśa* in this case corresponds to the fact, and we would be tempted to call it true. But is the *parāmarśa* a real instance of *pramā*? The smoke is indeed present, but our perceiver did not see it. He perceived instead steam to be smoke. In his cognition the object which appeared as the *viśeṣya* or subject is steam, and steam, as we all know, lacks the property of smokeness (*dhūmatva*), while the property that appeared as the qualifier (*viśeṣaṇa*) is smokeness. Nyāya requires that a *pramā* has got to be *tad vad viśeṣyakatva avacchinna tat prakāraka anubhava*.⁵ All that the explanatory normative statement means is that the property which appears as the qualifier in the

cognition has got to be possessed by the object which appears as the subject in the same cognition. This truth-condition is not satisfied by the parāmarśa. A parāmarśa is a direct cognition yielded by sense-object contact. In the case under consideration both smoke and steam are co-present, though the cogniser's eyes are in contact with the steam alone. Hence steam is the subject to which smokiness is being wrongly attributed by the cogniser. In the absence of smokiness in the steam with which the cogniser's eyes are in contact, there is absence of the guṇa, namely, viśeṣanavad viśeṣya sannikarṣa, i.e., sense-contact with the thing which is the possessor of the property which appears as the qualifier. Thus the parāmarśa is false; the karaṇa of anumiti lacks the guṇa required for anumiti pramā properly so-called. In the case under review the inferential cognition (anumiti) turns out to be true, yet it cannot be said to be pramāṇa-janya, i.e., caused by pramāṇa.

In the two problematic instances the karaṇa is either vitiated (= defective) or lacks the relevant guṇa. Even though the cognition be pravṛtti samvād or happen to lead to successful activity. The pragmatic test does not save the epistemic uneasiness. The cognition is arthāvyabhicārī, non-discrepant with the object, yet leads to successful activity. The question that arises in the context is that (a) whether cognition non-discrepant with the object should be regarded as pramā in spite of the fact that it is not produced by a pramāṇa? The cognition is pramāṇa janya or caused by a pramāṇa. Again, further, (b) if the perception or cognition of steam for smoke be evaluated as pramā, should its karaṇa, though defective or lacking in guṇa be regarded as pramāṇa? The problematic instances are called from the dialectics of Śriharṣa's in Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā.⁶

It remains to be seen how Nyāya would come up with a rejoinder. We have already noted the fact that Nyāya Theory of Knowledge comprises the notion of pramā and pramāṇa, both in respect of genesis of pramātvā and its ascertainment. We found also that

Nyāya is likely to draw a distinction between a *pramā* which is obtained through some *pramāṇa* and any *yathārthānubhava* irrespective of its obtaining it. Such a distinction may not be incompatible with Nyāya theory. This can be argued unexceptionably.

The Nyāya definition of *pramāṇa* implies a causal relation between *pramāṇa* and *pramā*. And giving and accepting the relation, it follows that no occurrence of a *pramā* without a *pramāṇa* would be admissible for the theory. The property of *pramāṇajanyatva* seems to be an essential feature of *pramā*, even though the property is not mentioned in the definition of *pramā*, least it should move in a circle. It is of course clear that in absence of the said property no cognition would be deemed as *pramā*, however much it be a case of *yathārthānubhava*.

The claim to *pramātva* on behalf of a piece of cognition has to be a two-fold affair: (a) it should and does lead to successful activity, and (b) it should have its cause, i.e., *pramāṇa*. A cognition might be *yathārtha*, yet it has to stand the test of having been caused by some *pramāṇa*. A cognition however true or *yathārtha*, availed of through an improper means should be refused the status of *pramā*.

The inclination to the causal explicability of a veridical cognition is so strong with Nyāya that in exceptional or accidental cases (*Kākatālīya sambāda* or *yaddṛcchika sambāda*) of true cognition, an unseen cause or *adṛṣṭa* in the form of imperceptible consequences of the deeds of the knower in his previous birth has to be postulated. Uncaused occurrence of true cognition is a null concept for Nyāya. This process is of course resorted to only when perceptible causes are not available.

II

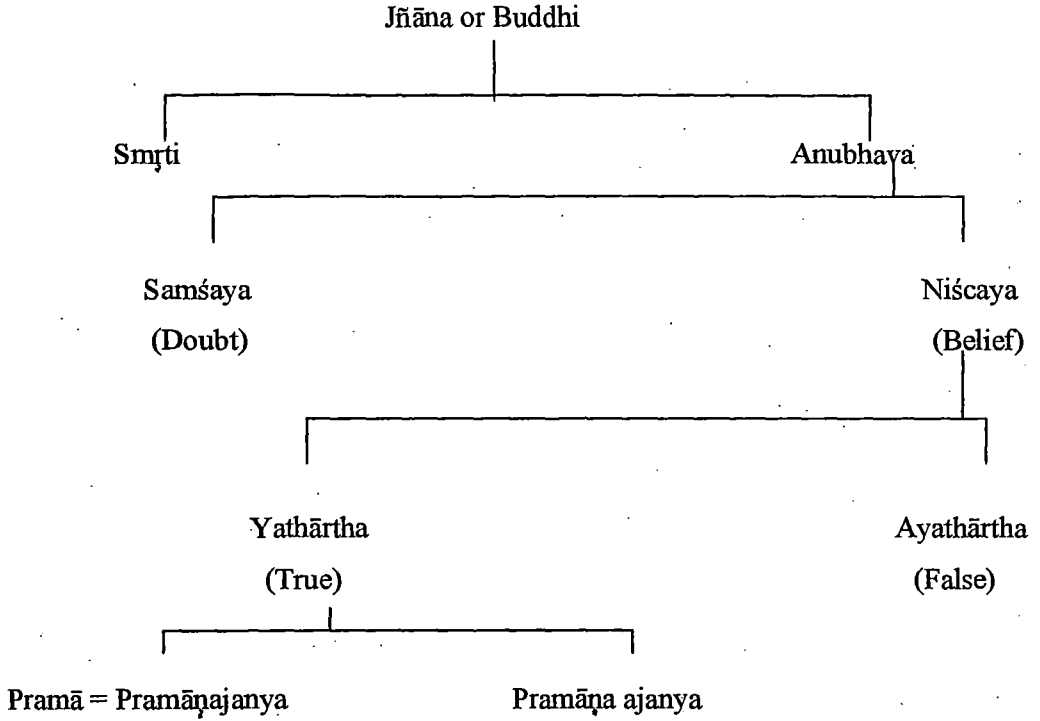
The insufficiency of *yathārthānubhava* in respect of *pramā-pramāṇa* correlation resembles closely the problem encountered the so-called JTB formula. To this problem Edmund L. Gettier had addressed himself very famously.

Pramā is said to be yathārtha niścayātmaka anubhavātmaka buddhi. In the light of the description, what is presupposed is that jñāna or buddhi is a mental state. Is pramā true belief, as it is put or held in Western epistemology? That it is so is put forward in a paper by Professor P.K.Sen⁷. Sen has argued that a pramā is a true belief (i.e., yathārtha niścayātmaka jñāna) brought about or (produced, caused) by pramāṇa. Pramāṇa is what is the cause of pramā. The element of causality of pramā in its definition renders it somewhat non-empty. There is a good deal of interdefining of the concepts of pramā and pramāṇa, as if in keeping with a net working model. Hence the definition of pramā in Nyāya is quite illuminative in the sense that pramā is related to some concepts in some identifiable ways. As an instance of net working model of definition Sen has referred to the interdefinability of truth-functional constants and the universal and existential quantifiers. Even though the concepts of pramā and pramāṇa are interdefined, the circularity involved is quite harmless in the model involved. Moreover pramā and pramāṇa are foundational notions of Nyāya epistemology, and such notions can only be apprehended in terms of interdefining the notions that form a cluster. That is the reason why there cannot be any definition of pramā independently of pramāṇa, and vice versa.

A karaṇa is a condition or causal factor. As a cause, a karaṇa is esteemed asādhāraṇa. By an asādhāraṇa karaṇa is meant that it cannot occur without the effect following it immediately. In this sense the karaṇa is a sufficient condition of the event of which it is karaṇa. But what is no less interesting to note is that karaṇa is also the necessary condition of the effect in question. Sen refers to Viśvanātha's characterising of causality anyathāsiddhiśunyasya niyata pūrvavartitā. The set of conditions is called karaṇkūta, out of which the asādhāraṇa karaṇa is selected in terms of two marks: (a) anyathāsiddhi śunyatā and (b) niyata pūrvavartitā. The first (a) stands for the sufficiency of the cause, while the second (b) stands for the necessity of the cause. Accordingly, if karaṇa is an

asādhāraṇa kāraṇa, then whenever the effect is there, it is preceded by the cause. The occurrence of the cause is a necessary condition of the effect. Now given the view that the cause or the karaṇa is both a necessary and sufficient condition for the effect, then the pramāṇa which produces a pramā is both a necessary and sufficient condition of the pramā it produces.

An important consequence follows: If the pramāṇa is a necessary condition, then a pramā cannot be produced by anything which is not a pramāṇa. And if the pramā is a sufficient condition, then it cannot fail to produce a pramā. If the pramāṇa is both a necessary and a sufficient condition, then no pramā can ever be produced by anything which fails to produce a pramā but produces something else. By adding a reference to the causality of the belief understood as both a necessary and a sufficient condition, then the gap between knowledge and pramā is excluded. A true belief is a pramā if and only if it is brought about by a pramāṇa. Otherwise a guess or an illusion may give rise to a true belief, but would not always do so. The addition of the condition of causality shows that pramā is knowledge. The epistemic thesis of Nyāya may be represented schematically as under:



The schema may be summarised as giving a definition of *pramā* as *Pramāṇa janya yathārtha niścayātmaka anubhavātmaka buddhi*. A *pramāṇajanya* true belief is a justified. A belief in order to be *pramā* will have to be justified, and a belief is justified if and only if it is brought about by the right kind of cause. Conversely, a cause is a cause of the right kind if and only if it is such that it cannot produce anything but a true belief.

The Nyāya notion of justification is introduced in terms of causality. Sen suggests that according to Gettier's notion of justification, a belief which is false can also be justified. But to the Nyāya notion of *pramāṇa*, nothing else can produce a *pramā*, except a *pramāṇa*. Nyāya would rule out Gettier's counter-examples put forward on the assumption that a belief can be both false and fully justified. Nyāya conception of justification requires us to drop the assumption. It is a great advantage of the Nyāya view that the justification condition is so strong as to argue that *pramā* is something that is essentially produced by *pramāṇa*.

References:

1. Viśvanāth, Kārikāvalī-Muktāvalī of Bhāṣāpariccheda, translated into Bengali by Gopal Chandra Mukhopadhyaya Tarkatīrtha, University of Burdhaman, 1980, 136.
2. Vāṭṣāyanabhāṣya on Nyāya Sūtra, 1.1.3.
3. Viśvanāth, Kārikāvalī-Muktāvalī of Bhāṣāpariccheda, op.cit Kārikāvalī-Muktāvalī of Bhāṣāpariccheda, op.cit., 131-134.
4. Bhāṣāpariccheda with Siddhānta Muktāvalī, tr. Swāmi Madhavananda, Advaita Asrama, Calcutta, 1977, 132-134.
5. Viśvanātha's gloss on Kārikā no. 136 in Bhāṣāpariccheda.
6. Śriharṣa, Khandanakhandakhādyā, ed. Swami Yogindrananda, Varanasi, 1979.
7. Pranab Kumar Sen, "The Concept of Pramā" in Essays in Indian Philosophy, ed., S.R.Saha, Jadavpur University, Calcutta, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1997. Also see, Srilekha Datta, "An Analysis of the concepts of Pramā and Pramāna in Nyāya" in Essays in Indian Philosophy, Jadavpur University, Calcutta, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1997

Note: The division of anubhava into samśaya (doubt) and niścaya (belief) is not actually shown in the texts, but it has been accepted by Nyāya thinkers. A yathārtha anubhava must be a niścaya, though every niścaya is not necessarily a yathārtha anubhava.