

Self-sufficiently Knowable and Imputedly Knowable Phenomena

From *The Two Truths in Vaibhashika and Sautrantika*

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According to Vaibhashika

Although both superficial and deepest true phenomena – and thus all nonstatic and static phenomena – have substantially established existence, another division can be made among them according to how they are knowable: imputedly knowable or self-sufficiently knowable. Imputedly knowable phenomena (*btags-yod*, imputedly existent phenomena) are those validly knowable phenomena that, when actually cognized, rely on actual cognition of or by something else. Cognition of them requires cognition of the parts on which they rely.

Superficial phenomena that are forms of physical phenomena or ways of being aware of something are imputedly knowable. Vaibhashika asserts sensory nonconceptual cognition of an object through direct contact with it, without the medium of a mental aspect of the object. Because of that, when something made of parts is validly known, the cognition must simultaneously also take as its objects the parts on which the object depends.

Self-sufficiently knowable phenomena (*rang-rkya thub-pa'i rdzas-yod*, self-sufficiently substantially existent phenomena) are those validly knowable phenomena that, when actually cognized (*dngos-bzung*), do not rely on actual cognition of something else. Cognition of them does not depend on cognition of parts or bases for imputation.

Static phenomena, partless particles, partless moments and nonstatic noncongruent affecting variables are self-sufficiently knowable. For example, noncongruent affecting variables, such as acquisition of the new house, depend on a basis for imputation – the new house that is acquired. Moreover, both the acquisition of the new house and the new house that is acquired come into existence (arise) simultaneously. Nevertheless, Vaibhashika uniquely asserts that the acquisition itself is a separately cognized substantial entity (*rdzas*). This is because, according to Vaibhashika, acquisition is a separate substantially established phenomenon that causes the new house to be acquired. Cognition of the acquisition of the new house, then, does not rely on cognition of the new house that is acquired.

Since a person is also a noncongruent affecting variable, it too is self-sufficiently knowable. Vaibhashika asserts that a person is the mere collection (network) of the five aggregates upon which it is imputed. As such, a person is self-sufficiently knowable because, when you see a person, you do not simultaneously see the entire collection of the five aggregates upon which he or she is imputed. More fully, Vaibhashika asserts direct cognition of phenomena, which means cognition of an object requires directcontacting awareness of it and not cognition of it

through the intermediary of a mental hologram (*rnam-pa*, mental aspect) of the object. Thus, although a person is imputed on the mere collection of the aggregates, when you have cognition of a person, the consciousness just has direct contacting awareness of the person and not of the entire collection of five aggregates that are the basis on which he or she is imputed.

For this reason, Vaibhashika asserts only one level of lack of an impossible soul of a person: a person's absence of having existence established as a static, monolithic entity, independent from the aggregates on which it is imputed (*rtag-cig rang-dbang-can-gyis grub-pa*). Vaibhashika does not assert the subtle lack of an impossible soul of a person: a person's absence of having existence established substantially as a self-sufficiently knowable phenomenon. In short, all deepest true phenomena are self-sufficiently knowable, whereas not all superficial true phenomena are imputedly knowable. Some superficial true phenomena, namely noncongruent affecting variables, are also self-sufficiently knowable.

According to Sautrantika

As we have seen, Sautrantika differentiates the two true phenomena according to whether or not their existence can be substantially established by their performing a function. Those that cannot perform a function have existence established merely by their being imputed by conceptual cognition. This division does not correspond, however, to the division made between self-sufficiently knowable phenomena and imputedly knowable phenomena.

Sautrantika defines self-sufficiently knowable and imputedly knowable phenomena in the same way as Vaibhashika does, but interprets the definitions quite differently. Thus, self-sufficiently knowable phenomena are defined as validly knowable phenomena that, when actually cognized (*dngos-bzung*), do not rely on actual cognition of or by something else. Imputedly knowable phenomena are those validly knowable phenomena that, when actually cognized, do rely on actual cognition of or by something else. Cognition of them requires immediately preceding and simultaneous cognition of their bases for imputation.

- “Actual cognition” refers to manifest (*mngon-gyur*) cognition, whether with explicit apprehension (*dngos-su rtogs-pa*) or implicit apprehension (*shugs-la rtogs-pa*).
- In manifest cognition of a cognitive object, the consciousness of the manifest cognition gives rise to a mental aspect representing the object. The cognitive object appears, through that aspect, both to the person and to the consciousness of the manifest cognition. Both the person and the manifest consciousness cognize the object.
- To “apprehend” an object means accurately and decisively to determine it (*nges-pa*) as “this” and not “that.” With explicit apprehension, a mental aspect representing the apprehended object appears in the cognition; with implicit apprehension, such a mental aspect does not appear. Vaibhashika does not assert a difference between explicit and implicit apprehension, because it asserts that cognition directly contacts and cognizes its object. Sautrantika, however, asserts that cognition in which an object appears must occur

through the medium of a mental aspect of the object appearing, somewhat like a mental hologram of the object.

- “Actual cognition of something else” refers, for example, to actual cognition of the phenomenon’s basis for imputation, both immediately prior and simultaneously with cognition of the phenomenon.

Because of this change in interpretation of the definitions of the two types of knowable phenomena and of the two true phenomena, the phenomena assigned as self-sufficiently knowable by Vaibhashika and Sautrantika are nearly the reverse of each other.

Forms of physical phenomena and ways of being aware of something are self-sufficiently knowable phenomena. The cognitions that cognize them do so without needing to rely on prior and simultaneous cognition of anything else. We can see or think of a hand, for example, without our nonconceptual visual cognition or conceptual mental cognition of it first having to cognize a colored shape before cognizing a hand, or without first having to cognize five fingers. This does not mean, however, that we can cognize a hand without simultaneously cognizing some sensory quality (*yon-tan*) or some physical parts, it just means that we do not need to cognize some sensory quality or some physical parts first, before cognizing a hand.

- According to the Jetsunpa textbook tradition, the whole, its parts, and its sensory qualities constituent separate, different substantial entities. If this were not the case and they were all the same substantial entity, then the absurd conclusion would follow that one cognition, for instance visual cognition, would have to cognize the hand together with all its sensory qualities at the same time – not only a colored shape, but also a texture, a smell, a taste, and a sound. Or, when we see a hand, we would have to see all its parts. If we saw only part of a hand, we would not be seeing a hand.
- According to the Panchen textbook tradition, the whole, its parts, and its sensory qualities are the same substantial entity. Otherwise, the absurd conclusion would follow that one could cognize a hand on its own, separately from cognizing one of its sensory qualities or some of its parts.

Noncongruent affecting variables and static phenomena are imputedly knowable phenomena.

- We cannot see or think of the movement of a hand, for example, without immediately preceding cognition of the hand in one position and then simultaneous cognition of the hand in a second position.
- We cannot think of an individual substantially existing item with five fingers in terms of the static audio and meaning/object categories *hand* without first cognizing the individual item with five fingers and then cognizing both the individual item and the category *hand*.

- The hand and the movement of the hand are the same substantial entity, whereas the audio and meaning/object categories are neither the same nor different substantial entities as the hand. This is because movement has substantially established existence: it has the ability to perform a function. Categories have existence not established substantially: they lack the ability to perform a function.

Thus, all superficial true phenomena are imputedly knowable, whereas not all deepest true phenomena are self-sufficiently knowable. Some deepest true phenomena, namely noncongruent affecting variables, are also imputedly knowable.