

Chapter 6

Review of the *Pramāṇas*

[The *Review of the Pramāṇas* (*Pramāṇapārāyaṇa*) is a long essay about epistemology, organized around the definition of the key term *pramāṇa*, and a discussion of the number and types of *pramāṇas*. Throughout the essay, Śālikanātha refers to verses. These were written by Śālikanātha himself, and constitute a verse-summary of the chapter called *A Sliver of the Moon* (*Amṛtakalā*).]

Scholars have carried on all kinds of debates
about the definition, number, purpose,
and result of the *pramāṇas*.
Thus, to set the record straight on these matters,
I am undertaking this *Review of the Pramāṇas*.

6.1 The Definition of Pramāṇa

[In the first part of this essay, Śālikanātha reviews the definitions that two other philosophical schools have provided of the term *pramāṇa*, and concludes with the definition that he accepts.]

What, then, is this thing we call a *pramāṇa*?

A non-contradicted cognition

[This is the definition of the Buddhists (Dinnāga, Dharmakīrti, and their followers).]

A *pramāṇa*, to begin with, is not a “non-contradicted cognition.” If it were, then memory would also be a *pramāṇa*, since it is a non-contradicted cognition.

[Objection (memory is not a non-contradicted cognition) and response.]

Now some would say that memory is not actually “non-contradicted cognition.” This is because, due to its conceptual form, it does not grasp the particular characteristic—the only thing that is ultimately real—but rather delineates a composite figure that is not a real entity. It is thus comparable to the cognition that there are two moons.¹ The reference is to diseases that produce double vision. If that were the case, however, inference would not be a *pramāṇa* either, since inference too has a conceptual form.

[Objection (the difference between memory and inference is determination) and response.]

These people would respond that inference is in fact a *pramāṇa* for the following reason: the objects of inference, which has a conceptual form, are indeed unreal entities; nevertheless, they are determined to be real entities; and insofar as these objects are not contradicted by other determinate objects, namely the particular characteristics that are in fact real, we say that inference is a *pramāṇa*. In this case, however, memory once again appears as a *pramāṇa*. For memory, like inference, arises only under the determination of particular characteristics.

[A critique of “determination.”]

And further, how could inference be non-contradicted if it always involves the determination of its proper object, which is not a real entity, as a real entity? That would be like the cognition of silver in mother-of-

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1. *two moons*: See “The Path of Reason,” vv. 58–60.

pearl.

What's more, if, on account of its conceptual form, inference does not grasp the particular characteristic in the first place, how is it going to determine it on top of that? Surely determination does not happen without grasping. For how could a form that is not grasped in the first place become an object of determination? It simply contradicts our awareness to say that memory and inference alike do not make an external entity into the content of a cognition.² For we are in fact aware that both of these, although they are conceptual, grasp an entity that is cognized in the first place by perception.³

[Objection (non-contradiction is practical efficacy) and response.]

These opponents might argue as follows. By the term “non-contradicted,” we do not mean something that grasps a thing as it really is, but rather, something that presents to us an entity that we can practically interact with.⁴ Suppose an object appears to a person in a certain way. If, in the course of action, he encounters it in precisely the same way, then we are entitled to say that he has had a non-contradicted cognition of it, and this is what we call a *pramāṇa*. Furthermore it is said:⁵

A *pramāṇa* is
a non-contradicted cognition,
and non-contradiction is
a state of practical interaction.

And:⁶

2. The claim that Śālikanātha rejects is the Buddhists' contention that the proper objects of cognitions that arise through memory and inference are not real objects but conceptual constructs.
3. Mīmāṃsakas generally held that perception is the basis for all other cognitions, unlike Dīnāga and Dharmakīrti who claimed that inference has a separate domain from perception.
4. See the glossary for a note on *prāp-* and its translations.
5. Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttika* 1.1.
6. Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇaviniścaya* 1.10.

A person who distinguishes a thing
on the basis of perception or inference
and proceeds with practical interaction,
is not contradicted.

Yet memory would become a *pramāṇa* even on this revised definition.

One might think that memory is not a *pramāṇa* because a person who remembers something does not necessarily encounter the same thing in the course of action. Yet precisely the same thing could be said of inference, when inference concerns things in the past, for in inference person does not actually *encounter* the same thing that once *appeared* to him.

[What it means to be “capable of being encountered.”]

One might respond that, even if one does not actually encounter the real entity that was cognized through inference, that entity nevertheless is capable of being encountered, since inference arises in the first place from a sign that is connected with that entity.⁷ In that case, however, memory must be considered a *pramāṇa* again. For the sequential correlation between a thing and the cognition is the same in memory and in inference. For inference is capable of presenting objects to us precisely because it is sequentially connected with them: first there are the particular characteristics of fire, then those of smoke, then the perception of smoke, and then the conceptualization of smoke, and then the inference. And memory works in the same way: first there is a thing, then an experience of that thing, then a mental formation, and then the memory. By this logic, memory would be a *pramāṇa* because its objects are similarly “capable of being encountered.”

[A refined definition from the Buddhists.]

7. The Buddhist opponent’s argument is that if the entity were not “out there” for us to potentially, although not necessarily, encounter, then it would not produce the inferential sign which we perceive in the first place and which serves as the starting-point of an inference. Since we perceive smoke, which is a sign of fire, we know that fire exists even if we don’t actually encounter it.

Now suppose one thinks the following. Although it is true that the objects of memory are “capable of being encountered,” it is nevertheless not a *pramāṇa*, because any unique aspect that memory presents to us has already been presented by experience. Inference, however, is a *pramāṇa*, [40] because it presents us with a particular characteristic that has not already been presented to us. On this suggestion, however, a *pramāṇa* is not being defined simply as something that presents to us an entity that we are capable of interacting with. Rather, it adds a further qualification: *pramāṇa* is a non-contradicted cognition that presents something with which we have not been presented before.

[What it means for a cognition to “present” its object.]

One might say with regard something with which we have already been presented, there is nothing that can present it to us again.⁸ But that is false. For “presenting” something is tantamount to “being connected with a thing,” and why shouldn’t that be said of another cognition?

[The relation between “presentation” and “interaction.”]

Suppose one says that a *pramāṇa* should be defined not solely in terms of presenting something to us, but in terms of getting us to act with respect to something: that which both presents us with something and impels us to act on it is a *pramāṇa*. But there is nothing at all in this new definition. A cognition that is not a *pramāṇa* can impel us to act as well.⁹ Impelling us to act is nothing other than presenting us with something on which it is possible for us to act. And that is common to both inference involving things in the past and memory. And if impelling us to act makes its way into the definition of a *pramāṇa*, then non-conceptual cognitions would not not be *pramāṇas*, since they do not themselves cause us to engage in action, while the conceptual

8. The sense of this objection is that the language of “presenting” *by definition* refers to the presentation of particular characteristics that, also by definition, cannot ever be presented more than once: they are absolutely unique.
9. Śālikanātha means that we act when we remember something, and not just when we are presented with something by a *pramāṇa*.

constructions that arise from them would be accorded the status of *pramāṇas*, since they present us with something and cause us to act.¹⁰

[The status of recurrent cognitions.]

This definition would also exclude subsequent cognitions of a recurrent cognition. For in recurrent cognitions, the object of the prior and subsequent cognitions is the same thing. No problem, you might say, since we don't want to consider recurrent cognitions to be *pramāṇas* in any case. But that is incorrect. We don't generally admit that the status of these cognitions as *pramāṇas* is qualified by a prior cognition. And it is the common-sense understanding of *pramāṇa* that theorists like ourselves should follow. One might say, alternatively, that each momentary aspect of a thing is different, and thus all of these different aspects present us with something with which we have not been presented before, but this is false. If we do not even notice these differences, how can our definition of a *pramāṇa* depend on them? Besides, I will refute the theory of momentariness in the essay called "Mīmāṃsā's Life-Saving Treatment" below.

That's enough of this position.

A secure and non-contradicted cognition that grasps what has not already been grasped

[This is the definition of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and his followers.]

The definition of a *pramāṇa* as "a cognition that is secure and non-contradicted, and which grasps what has not already been grasped" does not stand up to scrutiny, either.

[The definition excludes recurrent cognitions.]

10. This remark is again directed at Dinnāga's theory that the objects of perception alone are real entities because perception alone does not impose factitious concepts onto them: we only ever act, says Śālikanātha, on the basis of conceptual cognitions, and never on the basis of non-conceptual cognitions.

This definition would exclude subsequent cognitions of recurrent cognitions from being *pramāṇas*, because these have as their objects a thing that has already been cognized through a prior cognition. In fact, it does not make any sense for a cognition's being a *pramāṇa* to depend upon whether it is under the determination of temporal distinctions. For even if such distinctions exist, they are often far too minute for us to notice.

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[The word "secure" is redundant.]

Moreover, why should the word "secure" be brought in here? They say that it serves to exclude doubtful cognitions. But what is a doubtful cognition anyway? The philosophers define doubt as a cognition with regard to some entity whose particularity has not been determined, the content of which is an indefinite particular, which results from: a) the observation of properties that are common to several entities; b) the awareness of several properties with reference to a single entity; c) the lack of consensus among discussants who are engaged in determining the particularity of the entity in question.

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For example, with reference to some entity whose particularity is obscured in the darkness, one might observe its mere tallness and ask: is it a post or a man?¹¹

Another example. One might say that air is perceptible, because it can be touched, just like earth (which is can be touched, and is perceptible); but one might also say that air is imperceptible, because it is not a substance with a visible form, just like space (which does not have a visible form, and is not perceptible).¹²

A third example. Some say that sound is eternal, and others say that it is not eternal. In this case, the disagreement of discussants leads to a doubt for one who wishes to know the truth.¹³

11. This is an example of the first case, where the only property perceived is one that is common to several distinct entities.
12. This is an example of the second case, where we understand properties that are signs for contradictory qualities.
13. *Śabda-* is used in the sense of both "sound" and "language." The Naiyāyikas typically

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But this definition is incorrect. What actually arises with respect to the two properties that are in doubt is not a single cognition, but in fact two cognitions, each of which is a recollection of a qualifier.¹⁴ Since it is not possible to definitively ascribe either one of these qualifiers to the property-possessor in question, it is not possible for the person experiencing such a cognition to undertake any definitive action with respect to it. He is in doubt, and indeed this is what people commonly mean by the word “doubt.” And because the recollections of the two qualifiers only grasp what has already been grasped, they are not *pramāṇas* on this definition anyway. Hence there is no need for the word “secure.”

[All simple cognitions are “non-contradicted.”]

The mention of the word “non-contradicted” in the definition also does not distinctively characterize *pramāṇas*, because all cognitions are non-deviating.¹⁵

Suppose one says that we can point to two cases of a deviant cognition: first, the cognition of silver with respect to mother-of-pearl, and second, the cognition of a reflected object.¹⁶ Neither of these cases, however, involves a deviant cognition.

[Perceptual error: silver and mother-of-pearl.]

If the cognition of silver did not actually have silver for its object, then indeed we would speak of it as deviating from the real thing that is

focus on the first sense in their attempt to prove that it is not eternal; the Mīmāṃsakas focus on the second sense in their attempt to prove that it is eternal. This is an example of the third case, where topics of disagreement between philosophers are called doubtful.

14. “Qualifier” is *viśeṣaṇa-*, those properties by which the particularity (*viśeṣa-*) of an entity is cognized.
15. Śālikanātha uses non-deviation (*avyabhicāra-*) as a synonym for non-contradiction (*avisamvāda-*). Technically, non-contradiction refers to contradiction by other cognitions, and non-deviation refers to deviation from the actual thing (*artha-*) which is the object of the cognition.
16. The cognition is “this is mother-of-pearl,” and the counter-cognition from which it deviates is “this is silver.” We speak of “deviation” in such cases because the cognitions are mutually incompatible.

its object. But since this cognition does have silver for its object, what deviation is there to speak of?¹⁷

One might say that the cognition we are talking about here is not the one that has silver as its object, but the one that has mother-of-pearl as its object. But what do we mean when to say that this cognition has mother-of-pearl as its object? Does the cognition, in other words, makes this particular piece of mother-of-pearl its object, or rather the quality of “being mother-of-pearl”?

It cannot be the first option. A particular cannot be made into the object of any cognition, because there is a difference between the form that the perception takes and what possesses that form to begin with.¹⁸ In fact, even a genuine piece of silver cannot enter into the sphere of a cognition of “being silver.” As for the second option, it makes no sense to say that “being mother-of-pearl,” a quality which does not appear in the cognition at all, is the object of the cognition.

Now suppose one says that what it means to be an object of a cognition is just entering into a state in which practical interaction is possible. In this case, however, “being mother-of-pearl” is not such an object at all, for that cognition is not what enters into the state in which practical interaction is possible.¹⁹

What makes something an object of cognition, rather, is just the fact that it appears in a cognition. Thus the object of the cognition in the present example is “being silver.” And since is not possible for the thing in front of us, which is in fact mother-of-pearl, to be silver, the cognition of which the object is “being silver” can only be a memory. And clearly it makes no sense to speak of such a memory “deviating” from its object.

17. As established in “The Path of Reason” above.
18. *the form that the perception takes*: the word *ākāra-*, literally “form,” refers to the raw and unprocessed content of a perceptual cognition. The Buddhists maintained that this form properly belonged to the perceptual cognition itself (*sākāravāda-*), and Śālikanātha maintained that it belongs to the real entity that is perceived. The sense seems to be that the content of a cognition is a mental phenomenon and not an external object.
19. The person who is under the impression that the object in front of him is silver interacts with it as if it were silver, not as if it were mother-of-pearl.

[Perceptual error: reflections. The opponent suggests that these “deviate” from their object insofar as they produce distortions and transpositions.]

As for the cognition of a reflected object, such as a face in a mirror: the face appears in the cognition, and the face is the object of the cognition. For when beams from our eyes fall upon a reflective surface such as a mirror, they are halted and turned back, and when they make contact with the face, they cause us to grasp it.²⁰

One might ask: even if this were so, what would account for the transposition of right and left, and for the appearance of particular parts as larger or smaller than they actually are? The answer is that it is not the position of the face that is grasped, but that of the mirror, and hence the face appears to be in the position of the mirror. The beams from our eyes make contact with the face that is facing the mirror, and that is why the right and left sides seem to be transposed. And because we understand the face that we see to be facing us, it likewise stands to reason that the left and right sides of this reflected face will be transposed. As for the question of relative size: the mirror is what causes the beams to be sent back toward us, and hence it is its dimensions that are at fault when we do not perceive the dimensions of the face but instead perceive the dimensions of the mirror as if they were the dimensions of the face.

Therefore there is no deviation in this case, either. I have explained this at greater detail in the essay “The Path of Reason.” The same argumentation upholds the non-deviation of a cognition from its object in absolutely every case. It is for this reason that the definition of a *pramāṇa* proposed above fails, just like the first definition.

Experience

The following verse offers a definition of a *pramāṇa*:

A pramāṇa is experience.

20. The idea is that beams from the eyes cause the eyes to perceive whatever it is that they finally “make contact with.”

On this definition, memory would not be a *pramāṇa*:

That is distinct from memory.

But what is memory? Memory is a cognition that is produced exclusively from the traces of prior cognitions. This definition entails that recurrent cognitions are not memories, since recurrent cognitions are produced from the connection of the sense-organs with their objects. The use of the word “exclusively” also entails that recognition is not a kind of memory, since recognition is produced from mental traces with the assistance of the connection of the sense-organs with their objects.

But why should memory not be a *pramāṇa*? This verse provides an answer:

Memory is not a *pramāṇa*
because it depends on previous cognitions.

For memory arises as such through adherence on a prior cognition and hence does not distinguish its object independently; therefore it is not a *pramāṇa*.

[In “partial recall,” one aspect of the memory (usually its predicative content) is presented to awareness, but other aspects (usually the subject of which this content is predicated) are not. Thus it might be thought that partial recall is independent of the original cognition.]

But in that case wouldn’t partial recall be a *pramāṇa*? No, because partial recall is just as much dependent on a prior cognition. Partial recall depends upon the traces that are produced by those cognitions in the first place.

[Recurrent cognitions are *pramāṇas*.]

How is it the case that the subsequent cognitions in recurrent cognitions are *pramāṇas*, given that they are not distinguished from partial recall? This verse responds:

Recurrent cognitions, however,
are independent from each other.

For those subsequent cognitions arise when a complex of causes, similar to that which produced the prior cognition, is in operation.²¹ Thus neither in terms of our knowledge nor in terms of their production do recurrent cognitions depend on each other. And hence it stands to reason that all of them are *pramāṇas*.

[Perceptual errors: silver and mother-of-pearl.]

You might say: if mere experience is a *pramāṇa*, then the erroneous cognition of silver with respect to mother-of-pearl would also be a *pramāṇa*. Our response is as follows:

“This is silver” is not a single cognition, but two cognitions. Of these two, “silver” is a memory. Because a memory does not have the form of an experience, there is no risk of it ever being a *pramāṇa*. “This” is a cognition that does have the form of an experience, and hence we readily admit that it is a *pramāṇa*, and the only reason we call it an “error” is because the cognition of silver, which is really just a memory, first impels us to interact with the object we grasp and then is contradicted in the course of interacting with it.

Even those who affirmed that this is a single cognition that is false would have to admit, first of all, that its falsity depends on a overturning cognition, and thus they are not capable of saying that being false belongs to the “this” portion, because there is no cognition that overturns that portion. For the “this” portion remains in effect even when the “silver” portion is overturned. And if we understand “this is silver” as a single cognition, it still makes sense for us to call it a *pramāṇa* or not a *pramāṇa* on the basis of the different objects that it delimits.

[Perceptual errors: the yellow conch.]

It turns out that the cognition of a yellow conch on the part of a person who has jaundice is a *pramāṇa* as well. For in that case, yellowness

21. Reading *pūrvā-* for *gurva-*.

and the form of the conch are both actually experienced. That is to say, the yellowness exists in the bile in the person's eye, and he actually experiences this yellowness. This has been set out at greater length in "The Path of Reason."²² As far as the experience of the form of the conch, that is beyond dispute.

This is not a problem. Who says that the cognition of a yellow conch on the part of a person who has jaundice isn't a *pramāṇa*, anyway? For if the content of a *pramāṇa* accords with reality, this is a *pramāṇa*. Again, this is actually a pair of cognitions that have a single form in common. When we consider the common form to belong to a single cognition, this pair appears to us to be a single cognition. And insofar as it impels us to interact with a similar object, and insofar as it is contradicted in the course of interacting with it, we call it an error. But it is still a *pramāṇa*. But in the absence of such contradictory interaction, we do not even call it an error.

[The analogy of warm water. Śālikanātha subscribes to Vaiśeṣika atomism, according to which heat is a property only of fire atoms, and not water atoms.]

Compare the case of warm water. In this case, the warmth that is experienced does not reside in the water, but only in the particles of fire that is interspersed among the water, since we do not accept the theory that warmth can arise in water through contact with fire. For a quality produced by heating vanishes upon reheating, and the warmth residing in the water, which does not depend on heating, vanishes once the contact with fire is severed. This is because the particles of fire are mobile: once they depart, so long as other particles of fire do not take their place, the heat will of course subside.

Thus the cognition of warm water is similar to the cognition of a yellow conch. Therefore there is no problem with saying that the cognition of a yellow conch on the part of a person who has jaundice is both a *pramāṇa* and an error. But the upholder of the "presentation

22. See "The Path of Reason," vv. 48–58.

otherwise” theory, who says that the cognition of warm water is not a *pramāṇa* because it is erroneous, has the whole world against him.

23. *the Guru*: Prabhākara.