

MIND & ITS WORLD 1

sourcebook

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VAIBHĀSHIKA & SAUTRĀNTIKA PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS

THE DZOGCHEN PONLOP RINPOCHE

VAIBHĀSHIKA THEORY OF PERCEPTION

In the *Treasury of Knowledge*, Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Taye says:

- 15 The faculties see the object, and the consciousnesses apprehend that.
- 16 Apprehended objects and apprehending subjects as well as causes and results generally arise at the same time.

“Object” means the aggregate or form that is a collection of subtle particles.

The Vaibhāshikas say that because we have two eyes, when we see a single form, there are two eye faculties and two eye sense consciousnesses perceiving this single object. So a single form will be seen from, as it were, different directions by the two different eye faculties and consciousnesses. They say that there are two sense faculties for the eyes and a corresponding sense consciousness for each of the eyes, and that these perceive their objects individually and directly. This, of course, also applies to the nose and ears because we have two nostrils and two ears. It also applies to the tongue because the faculty of the tongue is split into two parts: the two aspects on either side of the tongue. And, of course, it is obviously true for the body perceiving tangible objects, which are perceived from the different parts of the body.

They also say that apprehended objects and apprehending subjects generally arise at the same time. The apprehended object is the cause, and its result is the apprehending subject. On the basis of the object, which is said to be the object condition,² the sense faculty, which is the dominant condition,³ arises, and based on that, the sense consciousness arises. If there is no object, the sense faculties and sense consciousnesses will not arise. For example, if there is no sound, there is no ear faculty and ear consciousness perceiving sound; they will not arise. For that reason, they say, in general terms, that causes and results arise at the same time. This means that objects and their apprehending subjects arise at the same time because if they did not arise at the same time, they could not meet. They also say that the sense faculties and sense consciousnesses directly apprehend the object. If they did not arise at the same time, there would be no way they could directly apprehend the object. When they say “generally arise at the same time,” it means that there may be some cases of certain causes and results not arising at the same time. But overall, they say that they arise simultaneously.

Vaibhāshika Process of Perception

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • object, sense faculty, and sense consciousness arise simultaneously • sense faculty and sense consciousness directly perceive the object 	Object (cause)	Subject (result)
	= apprehended = object condition	= apprehender = sense faculty (dominant condition) and sense consciousness

For example, when an object is grasped by pliers, it is done so directly. When you take pliers to hold onto an object, the contact has to be direct for the object to be held. In the same way, sense consciousnesses and sense faculties have to exist at the same time as

² San. alambanapratyaya; Tib. dmigs rkyen

³ San. adhipatipratyaya; Tib. bdag rkyen

their object in order for them to apprehend their object. Direct apprehension cannot occur if one thing arises before the other.

They also say that the sense consciousnesses and sense faculties directly apprehend their objects. The object of a given sense consciousness or sense faculty is a coarse object composed of these subtle particles. They say that not only do the sense consciousnesses directly perceive their objects, but the sense faculties also directly perceive their objects.

SAUTRĀNTIKA THEORY OF PERCEPTION

The root verses say:

- 23 The sense faculties are matter, and external objects are hidden phenomena.
- 24 Consciousnesses do not see them; aspects are experienced as objects.

When a consciousness apprehends a coarse object, is this apprehension direct as was the case with the Vaibhāṣhikas? No, it is not direct. The Sautrāntikas assert that consciousness sees an aspect⁴ of the subtle particles that have formed into the coarse object and that the subtle particles are a hidden phenomenon.⁵ The reason they give for this is that the sense faculties are matter, and because they are matter, they cannot perceive objects, for example, the eye faculty cannot apprehend a form. It is the sense consciousnesses that apprehend objects.

As we have said, the coarse objects, which are a conglomeration of subtle particles, are called “hidden phenomena.” It is only after the hidden object has ceased that apprehension of its aspect by a consciousness occurs. Therefore they say that the apprehended object and apprehending subject do not arise at the same moment; they arise at different moments. So the object that gives rise to the sense consciousness, i.e., the hidden object, has ceased when the consciousness arises. The apprehended object and apprehending subject do not arise at the same time according to this assertion; they arise at different times. The object that generates the sense consciousness has ceased when the sense consciousness arises.

So an aspect of an object arises within the consciousness, which itself is clear and aware, and then this aspect is apprehended by the consciousness. An example illustrating this is a mirror. Within a mirror an object appears, and the colors of the object appear within the mirror in such a way that it seems the mirror itself has those colors. But what has really happened is that an aspect of the object has appeared in the mirror. The aspects of color of the object appear within the mirror; however, the mirror itself does not have these colors.

Sautrāntika Theory of Perception	
1st moment	2nd moment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hidden object • sense faculty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • apprehended aspect/image of the object • sense consciousness

The Sautrāntikas say that the hidden phenomenon is not seen. I think the hidden phenomenon is not seen because it has ceased when the perceiving consciousness of the object arises. In other words, the hidden object ceases before the consciousness perceives it, so the consciousness is only able to perceive an aspect of it in the following instant, the second instant. In the first instant, the hidden phenomenon arises.

4 San. akara; Tib. rnam pa

5 San. paroksha; Tib. lkog gyur

Because, according to this school, the object and consciousness do not arise at the same time, the consciousness arises in the second instant, and so all it can perceive is an aspect of the hidden object. This is continually happening. In one instant, the hidden phenomenon arises but is not perceived directly; in the second instant, the consciousness perceives its aspect, and so on.

So the Sautrāntikas say that objects are not directly perceived. They are hidden. The perceiver perceives a projection or reflection of the object, and that projection accords with the object. The object sort of causes that projection. You perceive the projection: you do not perceive objects directly. For example, when we have our hand in a glove, the hand creates a form of a glove with different fingers and different spaces and so forth. The hand inside the glove is like the hidden object, and the reflection or projection is the outer glove. It is like a coating on the object. We do not see the actual object. We just see a form, a coating. Just like when we make beautiful wood furniture, and then we coat it with varnish. We do not perceive the true color of the wood. We perceive the coating. According to this school, the coating is our mental reflection or mind projection that arises from the object. 🙏