Ratnākaraśānti on *Prakāśa*

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**Summary**

In his *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* (PPU) Ratnākaraśānti claims that all dharmas are mere cognition in nature (*vijnānamātrasvabhāvah*). This view is based on his theory of illumination (*prakāśa*, shining forth). He regards the illumination/appearance of all dharmas as possible only when illumination is accepted as their nature (*prakāśamāṇanaṃ dharmanām ... ātmabhūtaḥ prakāśaḥ*). Only something luminous in nature can shine forth. An object, if it did not have the nature of being luminous, could not shine forth (*sa ced atadrūpo na tarhi prakāsate*). Thus, for him, luminous dharmas, which have the very nature of cognition, are precisely cognition in nature. Whereas Ratnākaraśānti regards illumination as cognition in nature, Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsakas regard it as an additional property produced in a cognized object (*viṣayasya grāhyasya dharmanḥ*) as a result of a cognizing action (*jñānakārya*). Naiyāyikas, etc., regard it as nothing more than the occurrence of cognition (*jñānasyotpattih*). They need no separate category called illumination. When a cognition of blue arises, blue appears to the mind. Another theorist, whom Ratnākaraśānti designates merely as *aparaḥ* (another), claims that a non-luminous object is illuminated by a luminous cognition (*arthah punar atadrūpo jñānavaśāt prakāsate*). In other words, the illumination of objects is possible not because illumination is the nature of objects but because they are connected with the illumination of cognition, just as a pot is illuminated by the light of a lamp. Ratnākaraśānti refutes these three heretic views one by one. The

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present paper aims at clarifying Ratnākaraśānti’s arguments against these views.

I. Structure of the text

In his *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* Ratnākaraśānti systematically discusses *prajñā* by dividing it into three phases: śrutamayī *prajñā*, cintāmaṇī *prajñā*, and bhāvanāmaṇī *prajñā*. The first two phases, i.e., śrutamayī *prajñā* and cintāmaṇī *prajñā*, are further divided into two subcategories according to their objects: yāvadbhāvikatāyāṁ and yathāvadbhāvikatāyāṁ for each. He explains the *prajñās* altogether in five sections as follows.

(1) yāvadbhāvikatāyāṁ
(1-1) śrutamayī *prajñā*
(1-2) cintāmaṇī *prajñā*
(2) yathāvadbhāvikatāyāṁ
(2-1) śrutamayī *prajñā*
(2-2) cintāmaṇī *prajñā*
(3) bhāvanāmaṇī *prajñā*

In the section of yathāvadbhāvikatāyāṁ, cintāmaṇī *prajñā* (2-2 above), Ratnākaraśānti claims that all dharmas are devoid of *svabhāva* (sarvadharmā nihśvabhāvāḥ) as much as they lack grāhya and grāhaka, i.e., as much as they are devoid of an object-subject-division, because they are mere cognition in nature (vijñānamātrasvabhāvāḥ).[1] In order to defend this theory of *vijñānamātra*, he further claims, on the basis of direct experience, that all dharmas that shine forth/appear have illumination (*prakāśa*) as their own nature (ātmabhūtaḥ prakāśaḥ).[2] As he explains, illumination (*prakāśa*), the property of being luminous (*prakāśamāna*), showing (*prakhyāna*), appearing (*pratibhāsa*) are synonyms.[3] And this illumination is a form/appearance (*rūpa*) that is sentient (*ajad*, not insentient), perceptible (*aparokṣa*), and clearly manifest (*parisphuta*).[4] Without illumination nothing can appear and therefore nothing can be established.[5] On the other hand, if one accepts illumination, i.e., the clear appearance of dharmas, one is led to the conclusion that all

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dhammas are cognition in nature because illumination is precisely cognition. Thus, having clarified the Yogācāra’s view of self-luminosity or the sākāra theory (that, in fact, is shared by the Sautrāntikas up to this point), Ratnakaraśānti then refutes brahmanical schools that hold the nirākāra theory, i.e., (Bhaṭṭa) Mīmāṃsakā, Naiyāyikādayaḥ, and someone else whom he simply refers to as aparahaḥ. In the following I explain his refutation of these three views of heretics not in due order (B-C-D) but in reverse order (D-C-B), because the last view is easier than the first for us.

**Synopsis of the entire PPU**

1. maṅgalam
2. trividhāḥ prajñāḥ: śrutacintābhāvanāmāmayyaḥ
3. śrutamayi prajñā (1)
4. cintāmayi prajñā (2)
5. dhammā dvābhyaṁ tattvākarābhyāṁ jñeyāḥ
   5.1. yāvadbhāvikatayah yathāvadbhāvikatayo ca
   5.2. yāvadbhāvikatayāṁ śrutamayi prajñā (1-1)
   5.3. yāvadbhāvikatayāṁ cintāmayi prajñā (1-2)
   5.4. yathāvadbhāvikatayāṁ śrutamayi prajñā (2-1)
   5.5. yathāvadbhāvikatayāṁ cintāmayi prajñā (2-2)
   5.5.1. viññānamātrasvabhāvavatvāt sarvaḥdamāyāṁ nihśvabhāvavatvam
   5.5.2. sarvaḥdamāyāṁ prakāśatmatā: jñānāsākāratvasādhanam (A)
   5.5.2.1. mśmāṃsakamatadusānam (B)
   5.5.2.2. naiyāyikādimatadusānam (C)
   5.5.2.3. aparamatadusānam (D)
   5.5.3. sautrāntikamatadusānam: bāhyam grāhyam nāsti (E)
   5.5.4. yat prakāśate tad alickam eva na vastu
   5.5.4.1. vaibhāṣikamatadusānam: aśṭādaśadhātvādiḥprātiṣedhaḥ (F)
   5.5.4.2. alickaprakāśopapādanam

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(6) PPU: siddhau tad eva jñānam iti jñānasvabhāvah sarvaḥdamāyāḥ siddhāḥ. “Once [the manifest appearance, i.e., illumination, is] established, all dharmas are established as cognition in nature, because cognition is nothing other than that.” A Buddhist view is referred to by Śrīdhara in his Nyāyakandalī as follows. NK 319.7–320.3: na ca jñānātmakatvam eva grāhyatvam. … avabhāsāmānātvaṁ eva tasya grāhyatvam iti cet.

(7) The Sanskrit titles are given by me with slight modifications in terms of the numbering. For a detailed look at the synopsis of the PPU, see Katsura’s article in this volume.
II. Other theories of prakāśa

1. The view of aparaḥ (D): A non-luminous object is illuminated by a luminous cognition (*aprakāśarūpa 'ṛthāḥ prakāśarūpajñānavaśāt prakāśate)

Cognition spontaneously shines forth because it has illumination as its own nature. An object, on the other hand, which does not have illumination as its own nature, is illuminated by cognition.\(^8\) In other words, an object is illuminated, but does not spontaneously illuminate itself (prakāśyate na ca prakāśate).\(^9\) This is the view ascribed by Ratnākaraśānti to aparaḥ. Most probably we can identify this aparaḥ as a Prabhākara.\(^8\)

\(^8\) PPU: jñānaṁ prakāśarūpatvāt svayam eva prakāśate/ arthaḥ punar atadrūpo jñānavaśāt prakāśate/ ity aparāḥ. Cf. PrP 170.5: sarvāḥ ca pratītayāḥ svayam pratyakṣaḥ prakāśante.

\(^9\) Cf. PrP 143.14–15: yac ca jñāsyā prakāśayogād ity abhedakāraṇam uktam. tad apy ayuktam. jñāsyaiś ca prakāśasambandho ghatate, tadātmakatā tu nesyaṁ eva. “Because an insentient thing cannot shine forth’ is stated as the reason for non-distinction [by Buddhists]; but this is not appropriate either. Rather, the relationship with illumination is possible only with an insentient thing; [its] having illumination as its nature is not acceptable at all.” Cf. also a similar argument at PrP 184.13–15.

The view of the present opponent accords with the final view of the Prabhākaras. Whereas Bhāṭṭa Kuṭāmaśila claims that cognition cannot directly perceive itself, Prabhākara accepts that cognition directly perceives itself, i.e., that one can be aware of awareness itself directly. For the Prabhākaraśāntas, three items are directly perceived, as the sentence “I cognize blue” shows. Cf. PrP 171.1: “idam ahaṁ grhaṁi” iti vā “idam ahaṁ smarāmi” iti vā tritayam evāvabhāsate; ŚVII 105.2–5: pratīmaṁ hi svayam ekasyāṁ samvidi tritayam—pratītiḥ prameyam caḥvem ātmaḥ. ... nāṁ ahaṁ jānāmi. Here, a self cognizes an object. All items, i.e., a soul (ātman), awareness itself (samvid), and an object such as blue, are cognized. Prabhākara further introduces a distinction between samvid and an object based on how they are cognized. Awareness is not cognized as an object of awareness (samvedatāyā) but only as an awareness (samvittaya). In other words, he distinguishes between kriyā (action) and karman (object) and thereby distinguishes awareness from an ordinary object such as blue. Bhāṭṭa: 82–83 (cf. ŚVII 106.3–5): na brūmāḥ “na samvedyā samvit” iti. samvittayaṁ hi samvedyāḥ na samvedatāyāḥ. karman vācayoṁ kṛitāṁ prameyam, na samvedyāḥ. “We do not claim that awareness cannot be cognized, because awareness can be cognized precisely as awareness but not as the object of awareness. [Q] What is this expression “to be cognized, but not to be cognized”? [A] This is an expression that means that awareness does not become an object. And [generally speaking], an object [of an awareness] and not the awareness itself is called samvedya, i.e., an object to be cognized. Therefore, [awareness] cannot be cognized separately as an object to be cognized. At the same time, it is not the case that awareness cannot be cognized at all, because the fact that all things can be objects of awareness
The most serious problem with this view, according to Ratnakaraśānti, is that an object, if it were not luminous in nature, could not shine forth (*aprakāśarūpo na prakāśate).* In response to this, the opponent claims that an object, although itself non-luminous, can be illuminated due to some relationship (*saṃbandha*) with an illuminating cognition. Ratnakaraśānti, then, questions this relationship and asks: “By means of what kind of relationship is the object made known by a cognition?” Ratnakaraśānti considers three theoretical possibilities and refutes each of them.

1.1. **Because of being bound to the same causal aggregate (ekasāmagrīpratibandhāḥ)**

The opponent claims that it is possible that an object is illuminated by a cognition because the object in question is bound to the same causal aggregate. In other words, cognition targets a particular object because the object in question is included in the same causal aggregate.

However, Ratnakaraśānti points out, the faculty of sight (which is regarded as imperceptible) is also included in the same causal aggregate and therefore would be cognized by a visual cognition, which is absurd.

1.2. **Because it is an object (viṣayatvāḥ)**

The opponent rebuts this as follows: it is true that both a color and the faculty of sight are included in the same causal aggregate. But a color is an object (viṣaya) whereas the faculty of sight is not. Thus, the object-ness (viṣayatā) of a color is the relationship that

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is based on the fact [that awareness is cognized].” Ratnakaraśānti’s usage of *prakāśyate* echoes Prabhākara’s usage of *saṃvedya*, and his usage of *viṣayatā* echoes *saṃvedyatā*, *saṃvedyabhāva* and *karmabhāva*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness as action:</th>
<th><em>saṃvittayaiva saṃvit saṃvedyā, na saṃvedyatayā</em>.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Object of awareness:</td>
<td><em>prakāśyate, na prakāśate</em>.</td>
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</tbody>
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*PPU*: sa ced atadrūpo na tarhi prakāśate. “prakāśyate, na ca prakāśate” iti vyāhatam etat.

*PPU*: kutaś ca saṃbandhād arthas tena vedyate.

*PPU*: ekasāmagrīpratibandhād iti cet. Cf. JNA 421.15–16: ekasāmagrījanyatve tu jañānabhavyah pratiniyatam vedyatvaṃ vedaḥkaraṃ cā syāt. tatpratibandhāc ca nātiprasāngah.

*PPU*: caksur api caksuvijñānena vedyeta. Cf. JNA 421.17: indriyenaḥvyāptir iti cet. Vācaspati’s *Nyāyakārikā* ad 2.4 (Goswami ed., 181.31–182.2) ekasāmagrīpratibandhena vā vartamaṇaviṣayatve netrādiṁān api tadekasāmagrīnimśeśaṇān vijnānakākāraṇān grahaṇaprasāngah.

*PPU*: aviṣayatvād iti cet. Cf. JNA 421.18–21: na, sāmagrīsāmarthyād eva nilasyaiva vedyatvenotpattire. ... vedyatvenotpattir na prakāśatvena.
specifies the target of cognition. However, Ratnakaraśanti points out, this object-ness presupposes the existence of illumination. In other words, a color becomes an object because it has illumination. Without illumination, a color cannot be an object. Ratnakaraśanti states: Even a color cannot be an object without illumination.

1.3. Because of the connection with the illumination of cognition (jñānapra-kāśasamśargāt)

The opponent further rebuts this as follows: it is true that without illumination a color is not an object and therefore is not illuminated by cognition. But once it has a connection (samśarga) with the illumination of cognition (i.e., a physical connection, either saṃyoga, samavāga; or a combination of these), it is cognized. In other words, a non-luminous object is illuminated due to the connection with the illumination of cognition, just as a pot is illuminated due to the connection with the light of a lamp.

Ratnakaraśanti points out that this view does not work either, because in the case of fruit or a flower, for example, the illumination of cognition is connected not only with its color, but also with its smell and touch. Thus, it would undesirably follow that smell and touch are also made known by the faculty of sight because a connection exists similarly with them.

Ratnakaraśanti concludes: Therefore, all objects, such as blue, which one is directly aware of are cognitions only, and not something external to cognition, i.e., something grasped by it.

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[60] PPU: rūpasāpya asati prakāśe kā viṣayatā.
[61] PPU: jñānapra-kāśasamśargād arthah prakāśate pradipālokasamśargād ghaṭādivat—ity aparuh. Cf. Śrīdhara also refers to the connection with illumination as a possible solution. NK 321.4–5: na hi "jadasya prakāśasamsargena na bhavitavyam" ity asti rājājñā.
[62] PPU: tasya śarva gandharasasparṣā api caṣṭurvajñānena vedyeran phalapū ṭuṣu ... samśargavīścēt.
[63] PPU: tasmāt saṃvedyamānah sarvo nilādir jñānam eva, na jñānabāhyas tadgrāhyo ’rthah.
2. The view of Naiyāyikādayaḥ (C): illumination is nothing but the occurrence of a cognition (∗jñānasyotpattih prakāśaḥ)

For Naiyāyikas, etc., there is no separate thing called prakāśa, a property that one may attribute to cognition (jñānasya dharmaḥ) or to its object (jñeyasya dharmaḥ). Rather, it is a mere occurrence of cognition (jñānasyotpattih). Remember that cognition is a specific quality of souls (ātmaviśeṣagūṇa) for Naiyāyikas, etc. People have an illumination of blue when a cognition of blue occurs. In other words, what theorists call “an illumination of blue” is merely an occurrence of a cognition of blue.

Similarly, an illumination of cognition exists when people have cognition of cognition. In other words, a subsequent cognition called anuvyavasāya is required to grasp a previous cognition. Cognition’s self-awareness (svasaṃvedana) is impossible.

Thus, there is nothing independent called prakāśa that is to be attributed to cognition (jñāna) or to an object (jñeya).

Ratnākaraśānti refutes this view in the following manner. He says: “Even Brahmā cannot deny the evident fact that presently existent objects have illumination as their own nature.” “If they have no illumination, even Indra cannot be aware of them.” Even if a cognition occurred, its objects such as blue would remain unmanifest inasmuch as they are imperceptible without illumination.

As shown above, for Naiyāyikas, etc., however, the illumination of an object is merely a cognition of an object and nothing more than that. Therefore, it is not the case that an object has illumination as its own nature or property.

In response to this, Ratnākaraśānti points out the following difficulty: how can cognition, which is separate from an object, be a light for an object which itself is not luminous?
Naiyāyikas, etc., might object that a cognition becomes a light for an object because it “cuts out” (paricchedā) the object, i.e., it is aware of the object.\(^\text{30}\) This solution, however, does not work, because this pariccheda (cutting out, clipping, focusing, awareness) presupposes illumination. Without the illumination of an object, an object cannot be focused on.\(^\text{31}\) Thus, one has to accept that an object has illumination as its property.\(^\text{32}\)

And once this model, which is equal to the Bhāṭṭa view, is accepted, one can easily shift to the Buddhist view according to which objects such as blue are nothing but cognitions.\(^\text{33}\)

In other words, one can move to the view that illumination is the very nature of cognition and not a property of external objects.

3. The view of Mīmāṃsākāḥ: illumination (or cognized-ness) is a result of a cognizing action, i.e., a property produced in an object (B)

For Ratnākaraśanti, illumination is the very nature of all dharmas, whereas for Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsakas it is a produced property of a cognized object (jñēyadharma). Ratnākaraśanti merely labels these opponents as Mīmāṃsakāḥ. According to these Mīmāṃsakas, illumination (prakāśa) or cognized-ness (jñātatā,\(^\text{34}\) a term which Ratnākaraśanti does not mention here\(^\text{35}\)), is not cognition in nature (jñānātma), but a property of a grasped object (visayasya grāhyasya dharmah),\(^\text{36}\) a property which is newly produced

\(^{\text{30}}\) PPU: paricchedād iti cet.
\(^{\text{31}}\) PPU: katham aprakāśamānah paricchidyate.
\(^{\text{32}}\) PPU: katham na jñeyadharmā prakāsāḥ.
\(^{\text{33}}\) PPU: siddhe ca jñeyadharme 'rthe ´ ses.am. pūrvavat.

Sucaritamiśra prefers the term jñānakarmatā (pratītau karmakārakatā, visayatva) to the old usage jñātatā, because the latter may be interpreted as jñānaviśiṣṭatā, which may cause a problem of mutual dependence between jñāna and jñātatā. ŚVK II 122.7–8: yat tu jñānaviśiṣṭatā jñātateti. tan na. tatkarmatā hi sety uktam eva. “On the other hand it is said that jñātatā (cognized-ness) is equal to jñānaviśiṣṭatā, i.e., the condition [of an object] being qualified by cognition. But this is not the case, because it was already stated that jñātatā is the condition [of a thing] being an object of cognition.” Ratnākaraśanti’s expression visayasya grāhyasya dharmah may reflect this phrase.

\(^{\text{34}}\) Cf. NKaṇ 190.8–9: tavāsau kalpitā tatsaṃbandhitā, mama tu paramārthikī (paramārthikī) ES; pāramārthikī G), yāṃ kila jñeyābhivyātipīr (jñeyābhivyātipīr) ES; jñeyābhivyākīrt G iti jñātateti vā karmateti vācāryāḥ pracaṅkṣate;

\(^{\text{35}}\) BauTBh 18.1–7: yat punar jñānasya parokṣatvapratiśādānaḥ bhāṭṭenoktam—“yathā ca rūpādi-prakāśanāyathāupapatyendriyasiddhiḥ, tathā jñānasyaśīpi siddhiḥ” iti. tathā hi tatra bhāṣyam—“na hi kaścid ajañāte ’rthe buddhim upalabhate. jñāte tv anumāṇād avagacchati” iti. vārttakah ca “taṣya jñānam tu jñātalavāṣat” iti. jñātalā ca viṣayapraṇakṣyam ucyate. See Kajiyama 1966: 50–51 for translation and notes.

\(^{\text{36}}\) Vācaspati’s view is slightly modified. NKaṇ 190.9-11: [Pūrvapakṣa:] nanu karmateti ced iyam (ced iyam) ES; ceṣaṃ G) arthadharmaha, katham (katham) ES; katham arthadharmo ’yam G) atitādiṣu sambhavatī uktam. [Uttarapakṣa:] neyam arthadharnah, kim tu jñātur āṭmano
by a cognizing action (jñānakārya).\(^{(5)}\) In other words, when a soul cognizes blue, this action brings about a result, i.e., the illumination or cognized-ness, of blue.\(^{(6)}\) Thus, blue comes to have the property called illumination, i.e., cognized-ness, as a result of a soul’s action of cognizing.\(^{(7)}\) To summarize: the cognizing action, which itself is imperceptible, causes illumination, i.e., cognized-ness, in an object; cognized-ness is perceptible, on the basis of which a cognizer postulates the existence of the imperceptible cognizing action.\(^{(8)}\)

In this way, for Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsakas an illumination is not a sentient cognition in nature but rather a property of an insentient object; and it is grasped by a soul.

3.1. Ratnākaraśaṇṭi refutes this view first by using the scheme of kriyā and kāraka, i.e., action and its accomplishing factors. He looks in particular at the instrumental cause (karaṇa) of an instance of awareness: What is the most effective cause of an instance of awareness? Only an object’s condition of having the nature of being luminous (prakāśatmatā) can be the most effective cause. It functions as the particularity (pratītiyatata) of an object by which a particular object such as blue (and not other objects

\(^{(5)}\) PPU: prakāśa ātmagrāhyam. tad asau siddha eva viṣayasya grāhyasya dharmo jñānakāryam na jñānātmā—iti mīmāṃsakāh. “Mīmāṃsakas claim: (1) Illumination is an object to be grasped by a soul. (2) Therefore, it is well established as a property of a grasped object; (3) a result produced by a cognizing action; (4) and not cognition in nature.” Cf. ŚVK II 119:14–15: atah pratītikarmataiva sanveṇḍah prakāśatepadārthāḥ “ghaṭaḥ prakāśate” īti vātāt. “Therefore, the word “shines forth (i.e. appears)” refers precisely to the [object’s] property of “being an object of the cognizing action of awareness,” just as it is the case for the expression “A pot appears.””

\(^{(6)}\) ŚVK II 124.10–12: prāptiḥ caḥ hasyaḥbhūtāpravāsathā sarvasya saasaṃvedety eke. anye tu hānādīvavahārāyogayātārthaḥ prāptīr ity āuḥ, saiva hi jñāvatātā. tad eva hi jñānaphalam. kriyāphalabhāgītā ca karmatvam.”And some people say that the fact that an object is attained [by a cognition] is a new condition that is self-evident for all. Others say that the fact that an object is attained [by a cognition] is precisely the property of an object being fit for [an agent’s] activity such as avoidance. For that alone is the property [of an object], i.e., cognized-ness. And the same thing is the result of a cognizing action. And [generally speaking] objectness is [defined as] the property of an object which has the result of an action.”

\(^{(7)}\) Cf. ŚVK II 121.27–122.1: tad yeṣām arthasya pratītāv karmākārakātā tad eva tasya viṣayatvam, tat ca rūpam pratīṭeḥ prāg abhūtaḥ parastān nisāpyata ity avasāyaṁ āṣrayaṇiṣyam, anyathā jñātājñātayor avīśesāpateḥ. tad eva jñātatādiṣadāṣpadāṁ jñānajñāne liṅgam. “There, objectness of a thing is that it is an object-factor in a cognizing action. And this property, objectness, did not exist before cognition; it comes forth [only] after cognition. One must accept this, because otherwise it would result that there is no distinction between what is cognized and what is not cognized. That property alone, which is named jñātatā or the like is an inferential mark to cognize cognition.”

ŚVK II 124.4–5: kimātmakāḥ punar arthasthā dharmah. uktaṁ karmākārakateti. “[Q] What kind of nature does the property residing in an object have? [A] It was already stated that it is the property of being an object-factor.”

\(^{(8)}\) For the abduction (arthāpatī) of cognition in the Bhāṭṭa school, see Ishimura 2015.
such as yellow) is established as being experienced.\footnote{Cognition’s having a mental image in it (sākāratva) functions as pramāṇa, i.e., vyavasthāpaka. It brings about proper distinction of cognition according to its object (pratikarmavavasthā < PV 3.302d: pratikarma vibhajyate). Cf. Tosaki 1979:397. See also PrP 174.1–3: kim ca nirākāratve prakāśasya pratikarmavyavasthānopapadhyate. na hi tasya sarvārṣeṣu kaścid viśeṣaḥ. arthākāravat tu “yasayākāro ‘sau, tasya” iti ghaṭate prativiṣayavyavasthā.}

Therefore, blue’s nature of being luminous (prakāśātmata) alone is the final (antya) and distinguishing (bheda) factor, i.e., the most effective cause (sādhakatama) of an instance of awareness, and thereby can be regarded as the instrumental cause of an instance of awareness (saṃvittau karaṇāṃ kārakam).\footnote{PPU: yataḥ prakāśātmatayātva pratiniyatatayānubhāgyamānaḥ nālādi pratiniyatam anubhūtāḥ sidhyati, nainām antareṇa kārakasahasāsmitā api. “For a particular blue, etc., can be established as the experienced object only by means of its being luminous in nature, i.e., particularity, which is being experienced. Without this [particularity] they cannot be established as such even by means of thousands of [other] accomplishing factors.”} Thus, one can designate this nature of being luminous (prakāśātmata) as the cognizing instrument (jñāna, i.e., jñānakarana), because an object is cognized by means of it.\footnote{PPU: tasmād iyaṃ evāntyajñetaṃ bhedaṃkaranāṃ sa saṃvittau karaṇāṃ kārakam.} In other words, prakāśātmata (having illumination as its own nature) alone can function as the means of valid cognition (pramāṇa) by means of which a particular object is cognized.

3.2. Alternatively, one can say that being luminous in nature (prakāśātmata) itself is awareness, because blue, which is a cognition in nature, is cognized when blue shines forth. In other words, if one does not distinguish between pramāṇa and pramā, one can regard prakāśātmata as equal to awareness, because when blue appears, what is happening there can be regarded as an event in which cognition is cognized (jñānavijñāna).\footnote{PPU: tasmād eva jñānena bhedaṃkaranāṃ pramaṇaṃ āvinācchitaḥ. “Without this [particularity] they cannot be established as such even by means of thousands of [other] accomplishing factors.”} In other words, awareness of blue, in which blue shines forth, is self-awareness of cognition.

3.3. In both cases, regardless of whether or not one distinguishes between pramāṇa and pramā, all dharmas, such as colors and so on, are precisely cognitions in nature, i.e., they have illumination as their own nature,\footnote{PPU: tasmat idam eva jñāṇaṃ yaktaḥ “jñāyaṃ ‘nema” iti kṛtvā. “For a particular blue, etc., can be established as the experienced object only by means of its being luminous in nature, i.e., particularity, which is being experienced. Without this [particularity] they cannot be established as such even by means of thousands of [other] accomplishing factors.”} because without prakāśātmata there would be no way to establish the existence of cognition\footnote{PPU: saiva vā saṃvitit prajñāno, jñānavijñānaṃ iti kṛtvā.} and because when all factors are present only that alone is seen as a cognition.\footnote{PPU: ubhayāḥ vijñānavāpi rūpāyaḥ sarvadharmaḥ siddhaḥ. “For a particular blue, etc., can be established as the experienced object only by means of its being luminous in nature, i.e., particularity, which is being experienced. Without this [particularity] they cannot be established as such even by means of thousands of [other] accomplishing factors.”} In other words, prakāśātmata alone is the epistemological evidence of cognition, and at the same time it is the ontological basis for it.
III. Ratnākaraśānti’s strategy

1. Narrower context

As the sequence of his discussion (B→C→D) shows, Ratnākaraśānti first refutes the view of (Bhāṭṭa) Mīmāṃsakas (B) that illumination is a property produced in a cognized object, i.e., the view that blue shines forth because it has illumination as its property as a result of a cognizing action. Refuting this view, he establishes his own view (A) that illumination is not a produced property of cognition (jñānakārya), but rather cognition in nature (jñānātmā), i.e., identical with cognition. His main argument is prakāśātmā, i.e., blue’s having illumination as its nature, which functions as the most efficient cause for the existence of the cognition of blue. In this way, in the first discussion he shifts from the view of property (B) to his own view of identity, i.e., the view that blue is a cognition in nature (A).

The second view, i.e., the view of Naiyāyikas, etc. (C), is worse than the Mīmāṃsā view for Ratnākaraśānti, because from the beginning they do not accept illumination as a separate category. For them, “blue appears” means “a cognition of blue arises” and nothing more than that. In other words, illumination is nothing more than the arising of a cognition (jñānasyotpattih) for Naiyāyikas. So, the first thing Ratnākaraśānti has to do is convince the Naiyāyikas to accept illumination. Ratnākaraśānti argues first that illumination must be accepted as a property of an object (jñeyadharma). In other words, he tries to persuade the Naiyāyikas (C) to adopt the Mīmāṃsā position (B). He explicitly mentions this move as follows: siddhe ca jñeyadharme ‘rthe ‘rthe śeṣam pūrevaat, once the thing in question, i.e., illumination, is established as a property of an object of cognition the rest will be the same as before, i.e., the previous argument against the (Bhāṭṭa) Mīmāṃsakas will stand. The last opponent is akin to Buddhists in that he accepts cognition as self-luminous. This view is more or less an ordinary view that we can accept as common sense, i.e., the view that an object, although itself non-luminous, is illuminated by the light of cognition. This view is further divided into three subclasses, i.e., the theories of ekasāmagrī, viṣayatva, and saṃsarga, among which the third view seems to be the most representative one. According to this view, which can be named connection theory, an object is illuminated

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A similar shift is found in Vācaspati’s Nyāyakaṇṭikā ad Vāchśierdeka 2.4 (Goswami ed., 182.15–16):

na viśijānād anyo ‘rthapraṇkāṣaḥ, kīṃ tu viśijānapraṇkāṣa eva saḥ. viśijānapraṇkāṣaḥ ca viśijānām eva.

“Illumination of an object is not different from cognition, but rather it is precisely illumination of cognition; and illumination of cognition is precisely cognition.”
due to the connection with the illumination of cognition (jñānaprakāśasamsargā).

Against this view Ratnakaraśanti argues that an object must still be accepted as luminous in nature. The key-phrase is: *aprakāśarūpo na prakāsate,* nothing non-luminous in nature shines forth. In other words, he claims that what the opponent believes to be an insentient object (jñeya) is in fact a cognition in nature inasmuch as it must have illumination as its nature (prakāsārūpa).

2. Wider context

2.1. Refutation of nirākāravāda

In these sections Ratnakaraśanti refutes (brahmanical) *nirākāravādins, i.e., Bhāṭṭa Mimāṃsakas (B), Naiyāyikas, etc. (C), and apra, i.e., Prābhākaras (D), and thus establishes the sākāra view that cognition has images (ākāra) in it. Here he focuses on the issue of whether blue, etc., are internal or external, as he states in his concluding remark in D.

2.2. Refutation of the Sautrāntikas (E)

The sākāra view is shared by both Sautrāntikas and Yogācāras. Therefore, in the immediately following section (E) Ratnakaraśanti commences to refute the Sautrāntika view that an external object is grasped via its reflection (arthapratibimba). Here Ratnakaraśanti focuses on negating the existence of an external object that is to be grasped so that he can establish that all dharmas are consciousness only (vijnaptimātra) inasmuch as they are devoid of the grāhya-grāhaka-division.

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60 The original sentence of PPU is: sa ced atadrūpo na tarhi prakāsate.
61 A similar shift is found in Vācaspätī’s Nyāyakaṇṭhā (Goswami ed., 183.1–2): tasmāt ātmapi-prakāśanaparamārthāṃ vijnānam iti varṇayata balād vijnānatādātmyaṃ niśāder abhyupagataṃ bhavati. “Therefore, a person who claims that cognition has as its true [nature] illumination of [cognition] itself and something else necessarily comes to accept that blue, etc., are identical with cognitions.”
62 Prābhākaras hold the view of nirākāra although they accept self-awareness of cognition. See PrP 183–184.
63 PPU: tasmāt samevedyamānah sarvo nilādir jñānam eva, na jñānabāhyas tadgrāhyo ‘rthah.
64 PPU: sautrāntikas te āhuh. īśtāṃ etad asmākāṃ sākāram eva naḥ sarvam jñānam. kevalam asāv ākāra ‘arthapratibimbamḥ yenārthena jñānadarpane sāksād ādihītye so ‘rthas tena jñānena samevyate. Ratnakaraśanti’s method of epistemological critique of external reality in this section is based on Dignāga’s Alambanaparikṣā. (I thank Oki Kazufumi for his comment.)
65 PPU: tasmān nāsty eva grāhya ‘rthah.
66 PPU: atāś ca na kiṃcid grāhyam iti grāhakam api na kiṃcit. tasmād grāhyāgrāhakaśaṇyām
2.3. Refutation of the reality of blue, etc.

2.3.1. Refutation of the Vaibhāṣikas (F)

Immediately after this he starts refuting the Abhidharmic view of the eighteen dhātus (together with the twelve āyatana and the five skandhas) and he rejects the view that rūpa (color/form), etc., are real entities (dravyasat), by resorting in particular to the Yogācāra’s well-known argument of neither-one-nor-many that shows the impossibility of atoms. For Ratnākaraśānti they are simply false (ālika) and not real entities (na vastu).

This view can probably be ascribed to the Vaibhāṣikas, although Ratnākaraśānti does not mention their name.

2.3.2. Justification of his own view of alīkaprakāśa

If skandhas, etc., do not exist as Ratnākaraśānti claims, then how is their appearance (tatpratibhāsa) possible? Ratnākaraśānti justifies his own view of alīkaprakāśa, i.e., the illumination of a false [image], by resorting to the idea that the mind (citta) is afflicted by residual impressions (vāsanopahata).

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viśīṇapītmatrāṁ eva sarvadharmāḥ.

That Ratnākaraśānti examines those dharmas not accepted by Sautrāntikas suggests that his target is Vaibhāṣikas. His method of ontological critique of external reality is based on Vasubandhu’s Viśīṇikā. For the distinction between the epistemological proof and the ontological proof of viśīṇapītmatrāṭa, see Oki 1992. Cf. also ŚV nirālambana 17.

PPU: tato na rūpadhātuḥ kaścid ekō 'neko va.

The opponent in question seems to presuppose the nirākāra theory of the Vaibhāṣikas and not the sākāra theory of the Sautrāntikas when he states in PPU: katham idānim asatsu skandhādiṣu tatpratibhāsaḥ. This view may be contrasted with Ratnākaraśānti’s own view of the sākāra theory which is indicated by the expression: tatpratibhāsasya viśīṇanasyaiva. Furthermore, Ratnākaraśānti’s argument of jñānasvakāraḥ in the following section suggests that he has in mind arthasyākāraḥ in the present section. PPU: sa caisa jñānasvāyāpy ākāro nilādir alīka eva na vastu. Here the particle api suggests that Ratnākaraśānti also claims: arthasvāyākāro nilādir alīka eva na vastu and that he criticizes the opponent’s view: arthasyākāro vastu.

PPU: katham idānim asatsu skandhādiṣu tatpratibhāsaḥ.

The expression pūrvavat refers back to the Sautrāntika section (E) in which Ratnākaraśānti replies to Sautrāntikas and states that desakālaniyamaṇa is possible without external objects. PPU: [Sautrāntika:] katham asatye ‘rthe ‘rthākāraṁ jñānaṁ desakālaniyamaṇaṁ ceti cet. [Siddhānta:] anarthe ‘py anādyaparikalpanāvasanopahatāc cīttād desakālaniyatārthapratibhāsajñāṇopatīteḥ. It is better to take this pūrvavat as signifying the application of the same argument to the Vaibhāṣikas and not to the Sautrāntikas who were previously refuted.
to the internal images of a cognition and by implication rejects the view of *satyākāravāda, i.e., the view that internal images are real.

2.3.3. Refutation of *satyākāravāda (G)

The previous section is immediately followed by Ratnakaraśānti’s refutation of *satyākāravidins, whom he calls sākārajñānavādins. Thus, we can better understand Ratnakaraśānti’s intention behind placing the Vaibhāṣikas (F) after the Sautrāntikas (E). When introducing the Vaibhāṣika view, he focuses on the reality of blue. First, he refutes its reality as claimed in the “external” theory of the Vaibhāṣikas and then he refutes its reality as claimed in the “internal” theory of *satyākāravādins.

3. Context recapitulated

The synopsis of the relevant portions can be recapitulated as follows:

5.5.1. sarvadharmāṇāṁ niḥsvabhāvatvam
5.5.2. sarvadharmāṇāṁ prakāśātmatā (sarvanā jñānaṁ sākāram)
   (1) Establishment of *sākāravāda (A)
   (2) Refutation of *nirākāravādas (BCD)
5.5.3. Refutation of the Sautrāntika view (E) (grāhyo 'rtho nāasty eva)
5.5.4. Refutation of the reality of blue, etc. (either external or internal)
   (1) Refutation of the Vaibhāṣika view of real dhātus, etc. (F)
   (2) Justification of his own view that blue, etc., though false, appear
   (3) Refutation of *satyākāravāda (G)

Ratnakaraśānti’s ultimate goal is to establish his own view of alīkaprakāśa (=alīkasya prakāśāḥ). To this end, he takes the following steps. He first proves that what shines forth (prakāśamāna) is an internal image (ākāra) and not an external object (5.5.2). Then he negates the existence of an external object that is to be grasped (5.5.3). Finally, he proves that what shines forth is unreal and false by refuting other views that hold that what shines forth is real (5.5.4):

5.5.2: whether cognition is nirākāra or sākāra

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63 PPU: sa caīṣa jñānasyāpy ākāro nilādir alika eva na vastu, jñānātmakatve 'py ekatvānekatvāvivahatādaavasthyāt.
66 PPU: kecit tu yogācāraḥ kecic ca madhyamikāḥ sākārajñānavādinas tad āhuḥ.
5.5.3: whether or not an external object that is to be grasped exists
5.5.4: whether prakāśamāna (either external or internal) is satya or alīka

IV. Some remarks

1. The three heretic views can be attributed to Bhātās (B), Naiyāyikas, etc. (C), and probably Prābhākaras (D) respectively. B regards illumination as the property of a cognized object, whereas D regards it as residing in cognition. C does not accept it as a separate category from the beginning.
2. Ratnakarasānti first criticizes the three non-Buddhist views (BCD) and then the Sautrāntika view (E). This order suggests that in BCD he refutes *nirākāravādas in order to establish *sākāravāda, which is common to the Yogācāras and the Sautrāntikas (together with certain Mādhyamikas).
3. Ratnakarasānti’s criticism of the Vaibhāṣikā view (F) is placed after that of the Sautrāntika view (E) in order to establish his own view of “illumination of a false thing” (alīkasya prakāśaḥ) in opposition to “illumination of a real entity,” the latter of which is either external (according to the Vaibhāṣikās) or internal (according to the *satyākāravādins (G)).

Bibliography and abbreviations

Primary literature


NKan. : Vidhiviveka of Śrī Maṇḍana Miśra with the Commentary Nyāyakaṇṭikā of Vācaspati Miśra. Ed. Mahaprabhu Lal Goswami. Varanasi: Tara Printing Works, 1986. (The edition is designated as G; I thank Dr. Elliot Stern, who kindly allows me to consult his unpublished edition of the latter half of the Nyāyakaṇṭikā; his edition is designated as ES.)


¹⁰ Ratnākaraśānti pays attention to the contrast between jñeyasya dharmaḥ and jñānasya dharmaḥ in the beginning of his criticism of the Naiyāyika view. PPU: [Naiyāyikādi:] nāyam utkalakṣaṇaḥ prakāśo jñeyasya jñānasya vā dharmaḥ.

¹⁰ For the classification of Mādhyamikas, see Katsura’s article in this volume.


PPU: *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa*. A critical edition being prepared by Luo Hong.


ŚV: *Ślokavārttika*. See ŚVK.


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