The Proof for the Existence of God in Nyāyalīlāvatī

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1. Introduction

The question about God (īśvara) has been one of the central topics in Indian traditions of thought. It is discussed by most philosophical schools, some believing, some disbelieving in God, and others believing in but rejecting any rational proof for God’s existence. Naiyāyikas and Vaiśeṣikas establish God’s existence by inference, while the atheists such as Mīmāṃsakas, Jainas, and Buddhists find such inferences fallacious.

In this paper, I analyze the proof for the existence of God in Nyāyalīlāvatī (= NL) composed by Vallabha (12c). The NL is, as Sjödin (2006: 43) says, “an independent text with the same overall structure as a classical Vaiśeṣika text.” On the other hand, the complex terminology of logic and the sophisticated debating techniques used in this work show its substantial affinity with later texts of the Navya-Nyāya tradition. Analyzing the discussion on God’s existence in NL should help us track the development of the rational theistic argument in the post-Udayana and pre-Gaṅgeśa period.

2. The Outline of the Discussion on God’s Existence in NL

In NL, as well as in the commentaries on the Padārthadharmasāngraha, the problem of God is discussed just after the discussion on the creation and destruction of the material world, both of which are said to be overseen by God in the Vaiśeṣika doctrine.

Vallabha declares that the existence of God is established through the following inference: The things under dispute (= the earth, etc.) have a maker, because they are effects, just as a pot is an effect and has a maker (NL(Ch) 239.2: vivādādhyaśītaṃ sakartṛkam, kāryatvāt, ghatavat). Then he proceeds to define the target property of having a maker (sakartṛkatva) as the property of being produced by the direct knowledge of the raw materials of the object to be made, as well as by the desire to
create it and the volition to do so. The syllogism and the definition of the target property Vallabha proposes are practically the same as those in the earlier Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika texts. God is established as the maker of the earth, etc., because they must be made by someone as long as they are effects.

The whole discussion of God in NL hereafter is devoted to confirming the validity and soundness of the above-mentioned inference. In spite of his acknowledging God as omniscient, Vallabha never tries to probe into the problem of God’s omniscience. Neither does he mention the other proofs that Udayana elaborates to establish God as the author of the Vedas in his Nyāyakusumāñjali, though it seems obvious that Vallabha’s theory of God is highly influenced by what Udayana has stated. Such Vallabha’s stance supports Vattanky’s (1993) hypothesis that the opponent here is a Buddhist, since there is no need to argue over the authorship of the Vedas with Buddhists who deny the authoritativeness of the Vedas. Moreover, this assumption is confirmed by his quoting Jñānaśrimitra.

In course of the discussion, the opponent attacks Vallabha by pointing out various faults and defects in logic, but all the refutations boil down to the single but powerful objection that a maker has to be embodied and hence perceptible. The Buddhist cites our daily experience that every maker of a product invariably has a body, and asserts that the existence of a maker is confirmed only by perceiving his body. Thus in the opponent’s view, God cannot be the maker of the earth, etc. because of the impossibility of admitting a bodiless maker. In response, Vallabha holds that the general argument demands that as products, the earth, etc. must have a maker; it just so happens that the maker of the earth, etc. has to be bodiless and hence imperceptible, as earlier Naiyāyikas and Vaiśeṣikas maintain. Through disproving the criticisms of the opponent, he demonstrates that effects-in-general (kārya-sāmānya) are not pervaded by particular embodied makers but by makers-in-general (kartr̥-sāmānya). The core idea of Vallabha on the inferential process is the same as those of his precursors: first, the property of having a maker-in-general is secured in the subject, namely the earth, etc., by employing the universal concomitance (sāmānya-vyāpti) between an effect-in-general and a maker-in-general, and then the specific target property of having an omniscient, bodiless maker is established by extrapolating it from the subsistence of the reason property in the subject (pakṣadharmaṭā).
3. Vallabha’s Refutation of the Inferential Undercutting Conditions

As explained above, the gist of the proof for the existence of God in NL is faithful to the traditions of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika theism. Most of the issues Vallabha deals with are already discussed by earlier scholars. His originality, however, is found in the reformulation of the problem and the details of the argumentation.10 As an example, take Vallabha’s examination of the undercutting conditions (upādhi) that might vitiate the inference. He demonstrates that there can be no room for upādhi to intervene in the invariable concomitance between effect-hood and the property of having a maker by rejecting all the possible candidates that could be proposed as upādhi.

Vallabha hypothetically assumes four types of possible upādhi—(a) objects (vyakti), (b) subordinate universals (avāntara-jāti), (c) some super-sensible specification (atindriya-viśeṣa), (d) and the property of being an effect of embodied makers (śarīrikāryatva). Below is how and why each type of upādhi is rejected: (a) First of all, particular objects cannot serve as upādhi, because otherwise all universal concomitance becomes questionable.11 For example, if “being this pot” is upādhi, it is found only in this pot and nothing else, not even in other pots. Then even the universal concomitance between being a pot and being made by a potter cannot be established. (b) In the same way, particular subordinate universals that are lower than effect-hood are also disqualified as upādhi.12 For example, if pot-ness is upādhi, it never pervades the target property of having a maker that a cloth has, despite the fact that every cloth has a weaver as its maker. (c) Neither can some super-sensible specification of effects be upādhi. Because, otherwise it would be totally impossible to infer a particular cause from a particular effect, since we cannot prevent the suspicion about such upādhi even when we infer fire from smoke.13 For, one can always imagine an imperceptible difference in the particular case where fire is inferred from smoke. (d) Finally, the property of being an effect of an embodied maker (śarīrikāryatva) is not upādhi. That is because the relation of the upādhi and that which is undercut by it, namely the reason, cannot be established, since they are on a par (samāna-yogakṣema) with respect to the unavailability of a counter-example.14 The opponent is trying to introduce śarīrikāryatva as the upādhi in the inference, just because there is no known counter-example where only the target property (= sakartṛkatva) is found and not śarīrikāryatva. Such being the case, the reason
property (= kāryatva) would not be pervaded by the target property since it is not pervaded by the alleged upādhi that pervades the target property. For, upādhi must pervade the target property and must not pervade the reason property. In the same way, on the other hand, since we have never seen a counter-example where sakartr̥katva is not co-located with kāryatva, it is also possible to assert that the reason property is pervaded by the target property. 15) It means that the invariable concomitance of the reason property with the target property is confirmed and the alleged upādhi cannot vitiate the inference. Thus the opponent cannot establish śarīrikāryatva as the upādhi by resorting to the unavailability of a counter-example, because the co-location between the reason property and the target property equally lacks in available counter-examples. 16)

Although every option of upādhi in the above discussion is already refuted in the earlier texts, no other precursors have gathered the preceding arguments that are related to the problem of upādhi and tidied them up briefly but clearly in a linear dialectical discourse. He also adds the new analysis of the state of being on a par (samāna-yogakṣematva), based on the discrepancy between the Buddhist theory and that of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika. 17)

4. Conclusion

The discussion on God in NL covers only one of the proofs for the existence of God, that is, the most fundamental causal argument that establishes the maker of the earth, etc. from their effect-hood. In discussing the validity of this inference, Vallabha concentrates on a single topic that the property of being an intelligent maker-cause of an effect is not confined to finite corporeal beings. He picks up the relevant arguments from the treatises of his precursors such as Vācaspati and Udayana, as well as from Buddhist sources of Jñānaśrīmitra and Ratnakīrti, and reorganizes their issues in a compact manner. In the details of the argumentation, however, we find a new level of technicality that seems to herald the terminology and methodology of the Navya-Nyāya tradition.

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Notes

1) Vattankly (1993: 146–150) summarizes the discussion on God in NL, but his summary seems incomplete. What he covers corresponds to NL(Ch) 239.2–252.4, while the discussion on God takes place in NL(Ch) 239.1–262.1.

2) Cf. Sjödin 2006: 47–51.

3) “The things under dispute” (viśāda-adhyāsita) is a stock phrase in introducing the subject of the inference of God’s existence, and Vācaspati clarifies that it means the external objects about which there is a dispute whether they have a maker or not, such as the earth, trees, etc. Cf. NVTṬ 563.11–19; Vattankly 1993: 70–71.

4) NL(Ch) 241.1–245.1: sakartṛkatvam copādānavigayāparokṣavijñaptikārśāktijanyatvam . . . . .

5) Vallabha picks some issues that has been discussed by Udayana and not by other earlier authors. For example, NL(Ch) 260.4–261.3 presupposes NKa 500.1–502.2 and/or K 68.11–18. Also the issue in NL(Ch) 261.3–262.1 has been treated in ATV 866.11–867.12, NKa 325.6–326.8 and 502.3–7.

6) Or Vallabha avoids referring to the Vedas just because he does not admit scriptural testimony (śabdā) as an independent means of knowledge (pramāṇa). Cf. NL(Ch) 526.1–530.3.

7) NL(Ch) 257.5–6: karmanirmitavaicitryan yadi viśvam anīśvaram | astv anirmitavaicitryam jagad etad ahetu kun | JNA 233.4–5: karmanirmitavaicitryan anīśāṃ yo jagaj jagāu | praṇamāmi pramāṇena tam ayyāhataśāsanam ||

8) Udayana concedes that if “body” means something directly controlled by an agent with effort (sāksāt-prayatnavat-adhiṣṭheya), the atoms should be God’s body. Yet he never admits that God has a corporeal body as human beings do. Cf. NKa 494.13–495.5; Chemparathy 1972: 143.

9) NL(Ch) 248.1–4. Cf. Bhattacharyya 1961: 107–110.

10) Cf. Vattankly 1993: 147. The below discussion of upādhi, however, is entirely neglected in Vattankly (1993). See note 1.

11) NL(Ch) 253.8–254.1.

12) NL(Ch) 254.1–3. Ratnakirti analyzes this issue more precisely based on the concept of an awareness of having been made (kṛṣa-buddhi). Cf. RNA 52.22–54.4; Patil 2009: 155–162.

13) NL(Ch) 254.3–5. Vācaspati has dealt with the same issue in explaining the concept of natural relation (svābhāvika-sambandha), but this concept is severely criticized by Ratnakīrti. This might be why Vallabha does not mention the term “natural relation” here. Cf. NVTṬ 135.8–136.9; RNA 45.32–46.19, 47.4–48.3; Patil 2009: 118–139.

14) NL(Ch) 254.5–257.1: na ca śārīrikārtyatvam upādhiḥ, ubhayor anupalabhāvyāvayabhīcārayoḥ samānāyogaksematvenopādhyupādhibhavisddheḥ. On the underlined part, NL(Ch) originally says “upādhis抽检,” but it should be emended thus according to the reading of NL(N).

15) Even though we regard sprouts as effects and fail to perceive their maker, they cannot be the counter-example because of being included in the subject of the inference, namely “the things under dispute.” In Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika doctrines, the invariable concomitance must be observed among things other than the subject, whereas in Buddhist logic, things where we find deviation never deserve to be included as the subject. See note 3. Cf. RNA 44.1–13; Patil 2009: 141–144.
16) Vallabha will suffer the same fault if he argues the validity of the inference on account of the unavailability of a counter-example. Afterwards he breaks the stalemate by expounding how it is impossible for a body or an embodied maker to pervade a maker. Cf. NL(Ch) 258.3–260.4.

17) Udayana has mentioned the problem of being on a par, but what he dismisses as upādhi is the property that shares the same extension with the reason property. Cf. ATV 842.19–843.1.

Abbreviations

ATV Udayanācārya Ātmatattvaviveka. Ed. V. Dvivedin and L. S. Dravida. Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1986.

Kir Kirāṇāvali of Udayanācārya. Ed. J. S. Jetly. Vadodara: Oriental Institute, 1991.

NKus Nyāyakusumānjali. Ed. Padmaprasādopadhyāya and Ḍhuṇḍhirājaśāstrī. Kāśī saṃskṛta granthamālā 30. Vārāṇasi: Caukhambā Saṃskṛt Śirij Āphis, 1957.

NVTT Nyāyavārttikatātparyātikā. Ed. Anantatal Thakur. New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1996.

NL Nyāyalīlāvatī.

NL(Ch) Nyāyalīlāvatī. Ed. Hariharaśāstrī. Caukhambā saṃskṛta granthamālā 64. Vārāṇasi: Caukhambā Saṃskṛt Śirij Āphis, 1991.

NL(N) Nyayalilāvatī by Shri Vallabhacārya. Ed. M. R. Telang. Bombay: Nirnayasagar Press, 1923.

JNA jñānaśrīmitranibandhāvalī. Ed. Anantatal Thakur. Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1959.

RNA Ratnakīrti-nibandhāvalī. Ed. Anantatal Thakur. 2nd rev. ed. Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975.

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