

Action (*karman*) in Vaiśeṣika Philosophy:

A Focus on the Relationship with Space (*dis*)

WATANABE Masayoshi

1. Introduction

The Sanskrit word “*karman*” has many meanings in various fields. In the Vaiśeṣika system, it means the physical action of an object, like “throwing upwards” (*utkṣepaṇa*) or “going” (*gamana*). The greatest theorist of Vaiśeṣika philosophy, Praśastapāda, classified action as one of the six categories. Over the years, modern scholars have investigated the basic theory of action in the Vaiśeṣika system.¹⁾ Among them, Ōami published many papers on the nature of action in the Vaiśeṣika system in recent decades, and pointed out some of its significant characteristics.²⁾ However, some topics on action still remain to be clarified. In this paper, I will show how the definition of action had changed in the history of the Vaiśeṣika system, and consider the reasons for this change. Praśastapāda stated that an action is connected with the substance by an intimate relationship known as inherence (*samavāya*), and it is the cause of conjunction or disjunction held by that substance in his *Padārthadharma-saṃgraha* (PDhS). This definition proceeds from the description of *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* (VS), which is the fundamental text of the Vaiśeṣika school. In fact, there is an important difference between PDhS’s and VS’s description on the conjunction and disjunction caused by action. In VS, an action causes conjunction and disjunction only with another material substance. On the other hand, Praśastapāda provided a more complex explanation: he conceptualized the conjunction and the disjunction with a spatial point (*dikpradeśa*), and regarded all kinds of action as the cause of the conjunction and disjunction with a spatial point in specific or unspecific direction. As shown later, this difference reflects a change in the concept of space in the Vaiśeṣika system.

2. General Definition of Action in VS and PDhS

In this section, I will summarize Kaṇāda’s and Praśastapāda’s descriptions of the definition

of action and compare both definitions. Kaṇāda defined action in VS1.1.6 and VS1.1.16 as follows:

VS1.1.6: Actions are throwing upwards, throwing downwards, bending, extending, going.

VS1.1.16: Action has a sole substance [as its bearer], has no property, is an independent cause of conjunction and disjunction.³⁾

Kaṇāda explained his definition very briefly. According to him, actions have only three important features, as shown in VS1.1.16. Among them, no explanation is needed for the fact that action has a sole substance as its bearer and no property. In regard to the last feature, two different views are expressed in VS's commentary *Vṛtti* (VSC) and PDhS's commentary *Nyāyakandalī* (NK). Śrīdhara, author of NK, stated that action is called an independent cause of conjunction and disjunction because general actions rather than any special action is the cause of conjunction and disjunction (NK, 641.10–11).⁴⁾

On the other hand, Praśastapāda enumerated a fairly long list of action's nature, although his list succeeded as the essence of Kaṇāda's definition (Cf. PDhS, 68.1–8).⁵⁾

- (1) It has a universal (*Sāmānya*) called action-ness (*karmatva*).
- (2) It has a lower universal (like going-ness).
- (3) It has a sole material substance as its bearer.
- (4) It is not a bearer of qualities.
- (5) It is momentary.
- (6) It is a result of heaviness, fluidity, efforts, and conjunction.
- (7) It is an independent cause of conjunction and disjunction.
- (8) It decays from a conjunction caused by itself.
- (9) It is not a cause of substance or other actions.

In this list, the definitions no. (3), (4), and (7) are also referred to by Kaṇāda. As one can see, definition (7) deals with conjunction and disjunction caused by action. Therefore, both Kaṇāda and Praśastapāda agreed with the theoretical necessity of conjunction and the disjunction caused by it. On the other hand, the definitions (1), (2), (5), (6), (8), and (9) are newly added by Praśastapāda. Among them, (8) is the most important for the purpose of this paper, because this definition is related to the change of the treatment for conjunctions caused by action in PDhS. In the next section, I will examine the description on conjunction and disjunction caused by action in PDhS, and try to explain the reason why

Praśastapāda constructed a new theory on conjunction and disjunction.

3. Conjunction and Disjunction Caused by Action

In PDhS, following the general definition of action, Praśastapāda explained the five kinds of actions. Moreover, there is no corresponding description in VS.

Throwing upwards is the cause of the conjunction with an upper points in the parts of the body or another substance connected with it. It is the cause of the disjunction from the lower points, and is the action resulting from weight, intentional effort, and conjunction. Throwing downwards is the cause of the opposite conjunction and disjunction. Bending is an action by which the parts of the tip of the straight substance separate from that point, combine with the root points, and the whole of the substance folds. Extending is an action by which the opposite conjunction and disjunction occur and the whole of the substance becomes straight. Going is the cause of conjunction and disjunction with unspecified spatial points. (PDhS, 68.9–69.4)⁶⁾

To explain the five individual actions, Praśastapāda here utilized the concept of spatial point (*dikpradeśa*) or simply “point” (*pradeśa*), and supposed their conjunction and disjunction. The idea of a spatial point does not appear in VS, and is first introduced in the PDhS’s chapter on remoteness (*paratva*) and nearness (*aparatva*). To put it briefly, a spatial point is a specific point in physical space (*dis*).⁷⁾ Because space is a single substance, a spatial point is not a part (*avayava*) of it, but a special form of the space qualified (*viśiṣṭa*) by its particular location. It could have a conjunction and disjunction with another substance, as Praśastapāda stated that space has these in PDhS. As a result, we can paraphrase the statement that “A substance is in that space.” This statement is synonymous with another statement that “A substance has a conjunction with that spatial point.” Because of this, Praśastapāda made it possible to describe the movement of a substance by conjunction and disjunction with spatial points. Therefore, definition (7) of action in PDhS came to have a more positive meaning: all actions necessarily produce conjunctions and disjunctions with any spatial point as its result in the theory of PDhS, whereas actions produce occasionally conjunctions and disjunctions with other substances as its result in the theory of VS.

4. Conclusion

As shown above, Praśastapāda inherited the significant part of the definition of action from VS. In both PDhS and VS, action is defined as an independent cause of conjunction and

disjunction. However, the meaning of this definition is different in both texts. In VS, an action occasionally makes a conjunction and disjunction simply with another material substance. For VS's author, Kaṇāda, it is optional whether an action is a cause of any conjunction and disjunction with something. On the other hand, in PDhS, any action necessarily makes a conjunction and disjunction with any spatial point. Therefore, unlike VS, the definition is applied to every action in PDhS. Such a difference is reflected in the development of the notion of space in the Vaiśeṣika system. In this system, there are two spatial and omnipresent substances: space (*dis*) and ether (*ākāśa*). According to Lysenko (1997, 426–427), ether had wider meanings than space in ancient times. Perhaps it is misleading to translate “*dis*” as space, because its primary meaning is mere direction. In the age of VS, the roles of space and ether still lacked specificity. Praśastapāda himself changed this situation: he assigned space the role of the fundamental substance that established spatial phenomena, and only assigned ether to a role as the bearer of sound. His explanation of action implies this reformation of the system.

Notes

1) For example, see Bhaduri (1947).

2) Ōami (1985) pointed out that the classification of action in the Vaiśeṣika system is dependent on whether it is conscious or unconscious, and stated that such classification is very characteristic of the system.

3) VS 1.1.6: *utkṣepaṇaṃ avakṣepaṇaṃ ākuñcanaṃ prasāraṇaṃ gamanam iti karmāṇi //*
VS 1.1.16: *ekadravyam aguṇaṃ samyogavibhāgeṣv anapekṣaṃ kāraṇam iti karmalakṣaṇam //*

4) Candrānanda provided quite a different explanation in VS's commentary on VSC, that is, based on the somewhat technical theory on inherence. Cf. VSC on VS1.1.6.

5) PDhS, 68.1-8: *atha karmapadārthanirūpaṇaṃ / utkṣepaṇādīnāṃ pañcānāṃ api karmatvasambandhaḥ / ekadravyavattvaṃ kṣaṇikatvaṃ mūrtadravyavṛttitvaṃ aguṇavattvaṃ gurutvadravatvaprayatna-samyogajātvaṃ svakāryasamyogavirodhitvaṃ samyogavibhāganirapekṣakāraṇatvaṃ asamavāyikāraṇatvaṃ svaparāśrayasamavetakāryārambhakatvaṃ samānājātyiānārambhakatvaṃ dravyānārambhakatvaṃ ca pratiniyatajātyiyogitvaṃ //*

6) PDhS, 68.9-69.4: *tatrotkṣepaṇaṃ śarīravayaveṣu tatsambaddheṣu ca yad ūrdhvaḥ / vibhāgbhiḥ pradeśaiḥ samyogakāraṇam adhobhāgbhiḥ ca pradeśaiḥ vibhāgakāraṇam karmotpadyate gurutvaprayatnasamyogebhyas tad utkṣepaṇam //* *tadviparītasamyogavibhāgakāraṇam karmāpakṣepaṇam //* *ṛjuno dravyasyāgrāvayvānāṃ taddeśair vibhāgaḥ samyogaś ca mūlapradeśair yena karmanāvayavī kuṭīlaḥ samjāyate tad ākuñcanaṃ //* *tadviparyayeṇa samyogavibhāgotpattau yena karmanāvayavī ṛjuḥ sam-padyate tat prasāraṇam //* *yad aniyatadikpradeśasamyogavibhāgakāraṇam tad gamanam iti //*

7) For details on remoteness and nearness, see Miyamoto (1977). I also discussed the nature of spatial point in Watanabe (2016).

Abbreviations

- NK *Nyāyakandalī: Being a Commentary on Praśastapādabhāṣya with Three Sub-Commentaries*. Ed. J. S. Jetly and Vasant G. Parikh. Geakwad's Oriental Series, 174. Vadodara: Oriental Institute, 1991.
- PDhS *Word Index to the Praśastapādabhāṣya: A Complete Word Index to the Printed Editions of the Praśastapādabhāṣya*. Ed. Johannes Bronkhorst and Yves Ramseier. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1994.
- VS See VSC.
- VSC *Vaiśeṣikasūtra of Kaṇāda: With the Commentary of Candrānanda*. Ed. Muni Śrī Jambuvijayaji. Gaekwad's Oriental Series, 136. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1961.

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Key words *Padārthadharmaśaṃgraha*, *Vaiśeṣikasūtra*, *Praśastapāda*, *karman*

(Graduate Student, The University of Tokyo)