

Valid Cognition (Pramana)

How we know things, as taught by Dignaga (480-540) and Dharmakirti (600-660)
in the later Indian Yogachara Tradition

A Summary by Kokyo

Mind, consciousness (vijñana): that which is aware of (knows, cognizes) an object (dharma, phenomena, something that can be known directly or indirectly)

1. Valid cognition (pramana): new (fresh) undeceiving (in accord with characteristics of object) knowing
 - a. Direct valid cognition: nonconceptual (not connecting names and referents) and nonmistaken (no nonconceptual mistakes such as seeing circle when light is spun) knowing; DVC perceives specific characteristics of phenomena (sva-lakshana)
 1. Sensory DVC: arisen dependent on dominant condition of its own sense faculty (5 sense consc.)
 2. Mental DVC: arisen dependent on dominant condition of mental faculty, the previous sense consc.
 3. Self-aware DVC: arisen dependent on dominant condition of awareness aware of itself, arisen at same time as every experience
 4. Yogic DVC: realization of selflessness, dependent on dominant condition of tranquility & insight
 - b. Seeming DVC: knowing that is either mistaken, conceptual, or both, but is experienced as DVC (such as conventional conceptual consciousness, seeing mirage as water or circle of light, inferring fire when seeing smoke, thinking of past memories or future fantasies, etc.)
 - c. Indirect/inferential valid cognition: new conceptual realization of that which is proven by valid logical reasoning (such as “sound is impermanent because it is produced, because: sound is produced, whatever is produced is impermanent, and whatever is not impermanent is not produced.”); IVC conceives general characteristics of phenomena (samanya-lakshana)
2. Nonvalid cognition (apramana): deceiving knowing (unreliable consciousness)
 - Wrong cognition: knowing that engages object wrongly (such as thinking body is permanent or self)
 - Doubt: awareness that is divided between two alternatives regarding object (such as wondering if there is rebirth or whether there is water in a distant well)