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Foreword

Buddhist philosophy in general is a variety of process philosophy, which rejects ontological commitment to any external, static, and substantial reality like table, chair, tree, or any other spatio-temporally structured reality or object given outside the mind on the one hand, and any ontological organizing principles like the substantial whole (*avayavin*) which unites the parts (*avayava*) and the natural classifying universal or genus (*sāmānya, jāti*) which qualifies an empirical object like table with tableness. The Buddhist epistemologist Dignāga presents only two modes of reality: (i) in the event form, technically called *svalakṣaṇa* which is conception-free mere sensation (*nirvikalpaka-samvedana*) and the 'given' in our experience; and (ii) in the continuant form, technically called *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*, which is a mental construction (*vikalpa*) out of the series of the sensory events. The latter has thus a mentally derived status, but of course, grounded in the flow of the sensations, which are actually perceptions (*pratyakṣaprṣṭhabhāvōvīkalpa*).

Now, according to Dignāga, it is obvious that there are only two forms of reality, which are captured in perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*) respectively. This is called *pramāṇavyavasthā*. For him, there is neither any other mode of

reality (*prameya*) nor any other source of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). In this schema, any third level of reality like universal is a purely conceptual reality, which functions at the level of mind only. However, it is the basis of and facilitates our thought and linguistic conventions (*pravṛttinimitta*). In this sense, it is useful, but it has no independent, external, ontological status. This way Dignāga repudiates any ontological commitment to universal. This Buddhist approach goes diametrically against Nyāya external realism. The subsequent Buddhist thinker like Dharmakīrti, Śāntarakṣita, and Ratnakīrti follow Dignāga and present their own versions to meet the challenges posed by the external realists in India.

Dr. Sonia Mehta's present book discusses in sufficient detail, various issues of universal concerning realism-anti-realism debate between Nyāya and the later Buddhist epistemologies. Since the book has its origin in her M. Phil. dissertation, written under my supervision, I understand its merits. Needless to say, I have always appreciated her academic commitment in its all forms - research, teaching, writing, and organizing academic events. I am sure the present book will be useful for both students and teachers who are working in the area of Indian philosophy.



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