The Nyāya-concept (as Portrayed by Mr. K.K. Chakrabarti) of the Self as a Substance: Some Problems

Mostofa Nazmul Mansur*

[**Abstract:** There are three very important Nyāya-notions concerning the Nyāya-concept of the self as a substance. These are: the Nyāya-notion of the perceptual basis of the inference of the self, the Nyāya-notion of the self as substantial whole and Naiyāyikas' formal proofs for the existence of the self. In this paper, it has been argued that all these three Nyāya-notions are ill-founded and fallacious. Thus, it has been claimed in this paper that the Nyāya-concept of the self as a substance is problematic.]

Key terms: Nyāya-system, self, substance (*dravya*), qualia (*guna*), genus (*sāmānya*), species (*viśesa*), causal substratum (*samavāyi-Kārana*), dilemma objection, fallacy of the argument from ignorance, fallacy of division.

In the sixth chapter, titled "The Self as a Substance," of his book, *Classical Indian Philosophy of Mind*, Mr. Kisor Kumar Chakrabarti discusses how and why the Nyāya-system provides the grounds for regarding self as a substance (*dravya*). In this paper, I take Mr. Chakrabarti's work as a sound representation of the Nyāya-concept of the self. In the above-mentioned chapter of his book, Mr. Chakrabarti addresses three important Nyāya-notions regarding the self as a *dravya*. These are:

1. Naiyāyikas' attempt of securing the perceptual basis for the inference of the self.
2. Naiyāyikas' notion of self, the ninth substance, as a substantial whole, not a mere collection of qualia (*guna*).
3. Naiyāyikas' arguments (formal proofs) for the existence of the self.

* **Mostofa Nazmul Mansur:** PhD, Professor, Department of Philosophy, Jagangirnagar University. mansurju@yahoo.com.

Accordingly, I will discuss the Nyāya-concept of the self as a substance under three subheads mentioned above. I will try to show that the Nyāya-system fails to confirm the perceptual basis for inference of the self; it fails to offer an adequate account of the self as a 'substantial whole'; and the arguments for the existence of the self in the way these are offered by Naiyāyikas, as portrayed by Mr. Chakrabarti, are not well-founded.

1. Naiyāyikas' attempt of securing the perceptual basis for the inference of the self.

The Nyāya-system maintains that any inference must eventually be grounded in perception. (Chakrabarti, 1999 : 80).[1] But this requirement of inference generates a difficulty for inference of the self because self (as a sign-possessor) is imperceptible, and consequently, its relationship with whatever is chosen as a sign is imperceptible too. (Chakrabarti, 1999 : 80). To resolve this problem Vatsyayana introduces a kind of inference called 'known through the universal' which is termed as 'genus-mediate' inference by Mr. Chakrabarti. (Chakrabarti, 1999 : 80-79). The idea is that although the self is imperceptible, its genus or corresponding universal (*sāmānya*), *i.e*., substance (*dravya*), may be perceptible. Nyāya-Vaiśesika school holds that a substance is the substratum that contains qualia (*guna*) and action (*karma*). (Chakrabarti, 1999 : 81). But unlike modern Western philosophers, such as John Locke, Nyāya-Vaiśesika philosophers hold that substance is not a mysterious entity hiding behind the phenomena. (Chakrabarti, 1999 : 80). Neither is it a mere aggregate of qualia and action (*guna-karama-samudaya*). (Chakrabarti, 1999 : 81). Instead, Nyāya-Vaiśesika philosophers believe that a substance is perceived; and it is perceived as something ontologically different from its qualia (*guna*). For, qualia, *e.g.*, color or smell, belong to physical (*bhautika*) substance while a substance is non-physical even though it is the substratum of qualia and actions which is conceived as the causal substratum (*samavāyi-Kārana*) (Chakrabarti, 1999 : 80-81). Nyāya-Vaiśesika philosophers give an example of mango: we do not only perceive the color, taste, smell (*gunas*) or the falling (*karma*) of a mango, we also perceive the mango as 'one thing' which is independent of the relevant *gunas* and *karma*. If we did not perceive the mango as 'one thing' independent of *gunas* and *karma*, we would not have such an experience that the mango was green before and is yellow now. (Chakrabarti, 1999 : 81). Such a common perception, according to Nyāya-Vaiśesika philosophers, ensures that a

1. All cited page numbers appear in this paper refer to, if not otherwise mentioned, Chakrabarti, K. K. (1999), *Classical Indian Philosophy of Mind*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited.

substance (*dravya*) has perceptual basis. If a substance has perceptual basis, then the self, of which the substance is the genus (*sāmānya*) must have a perceptual basis. Thus, their argument for the perceptual basis for the inference of the self can be expressed in the following way:

P_1: Whatever is true of the genus (*sāmānya*) is true of the species (*viśesa*).
P_2: A substance is the genus and the self is the species.
P_3: Inference of a substance has perceptual basis.
C: Inference of the self has perceptual basis.

However, in this argument P_1 and P_3 are problematic. For P_1, it seems that Nyāya-Vaiśesika philosophers believe that whatever is true of the universal is true of the corresponding particular (note that the terms 'sāmānya' and 'viśesa' are used in Indian philosophy for the universal and particular respectively. And, also remember that Vatsyayana calls it 'known through universal.'). Their idea is that the truth of the universal confirms the truth of the corresponding particular. But such a sub-alternation relation between the universal and particular is not recognized by modern logicians. Modern logicians have shown that the particular proposition might be false even though the corresponding universal proposition is true. This phenomenon makes the P_1 problematic. Again, P_3 is rooted into a fallacious inference. What they have proven is that the togetherness of qualia and substance is perceptible. (Chakrabarti, 1999 : 80). And, from this they infer that the substance is also perceptible. But this is not a valid inference. 'A soccer team is excellent' does not imply that 'each member of that team is excellent'; 'American Indians are disappearing' does not imply that 'Fred, an American Indian, is also disappearing.' Similarly, 'the togetherness of qualia and a substance is perceptible' does not imply that 'a substance is perceptible.' Any attempt of inferring the later from the former involves *fallacy of division*.[2] And, it clearly appears that the Nyāya-Vaiśesika school commits this fallacy when it takes P_3 for granted.

2. Naiyāyikas' notion of the self, the ninth substance, as a substantial whole, not a mere collection of qualia (*guna*)

Buddhists regard that the so-called 'substantial whole' is an illusion. It is nothing but the 'collection of qualia and actions (*guna-karma-samudāya*)'. However, Naiyāyikas, as Mr. Chakrabarti shows, disagree with this Buddhist notion. Buddhists claim that if we accept the existence of the 'substantial

2. Def: Fallacy of division is committed when one infers that what is true of a collection of elements (or a whole) must also be true of the elements themselves (or the parts of the whole). [I. M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, pp. 160-61]

whole,' then we can explain how the measurability and perceptibility arise out of the immeasurability and imperceptibility. Denying the Buddhist concept here, Naiyāyikas appeal to their atomic theory. Atoms are indivisible, and hence, imperceptible. There is no reason to believe that two or more immeasurable and imperceptible things, when conjoin together, make something measurable and perceptible. (Chakrabarti, 1999 :83). But the fact is that atoms, when conjoined together, make bigger things that are measurable and perceptible. Niayāyikas, thus, claim that there must be something else that contains features like measurability and perceptibility that are not belonged to its parts (atoms). This 'something else' is the 'substantial whole,'—the unitary entity—which can contain features that are not contained by its parts. Of course, there were philosophers, contemporary to Goutama and Vatsyayana, who did not believe in the atomic theory. For them, Vatsyayana has presented a different argument. He says that things like trees can be perceived without perceiving all the parts at a time. That means that the tree is not a mere collection of its part. If it were, then we could not perceive the tree without perceiving all of the parts. So, the phenomenon that we can perceive a tree implies that tree is a 'substantial whole' over and above the mere collection of its parts. (Chakrabarti, 1999 :84).

So, there are substances, as substantial whole, which contain the qualia. Qualia depend on substances for their existence. A quale cannot exist without being a quale of a substance. Now, according to Naiyāyikas, we perceive qualia like desire, cognition, pain and so on; we have internal experiences of them. (p. 85). Like all other qualia these qualia must have a substance as their support. But they do not belong to any of the eight recognized kinds of substances.[3] (Chakrabarti, 1999 : 87). So, there must be another substance that provides support to those qualia. Thus the 'I' or the 'self' is inferred as the ninth kind of substance. This ninth kind of substance, the self, has fourteen qualia of which nine (desire, aversion, volition, pleasure, pain, cognition, disposition, merit and demerit) are non-shared specific qualia (*viśes guna*) and five (number, distinctness, dimension, conjunction and disjunction) are shared qualia. With the help of *viśes guna* self is inferred as imperceptible substance.[4] (Chakrabarti, 1999 : 86). However, none of the qualia is essential of the self. Qualia are adventitious (*agantuka*) qualities of the self; they (time to time) arise in the self and disappear from the self. But the self may persist without having them. This is why Naiyāyikas claim that the self

3. Following Mr. Chakrabarti I take Naiyāyikas' elimination of other eight substances as sound.

4. Note that the inference has perceptual basis, pp.1-2 (this paper).

persists even when no conscious activity is going on (*e.g.*, deep sleep). The non-existence of conscious activity does not imply the non-existence of the self. (Chakrabarti, 1999 : 76).

But how does the self continue to exist when there is no conscious activity or no qualia present in it? Naiyāyikas argue that even when there is no conscious activity, there are still impressions and dispositions which become firmer or fainter but may persist in such situations. (Chakrabarti, 1999 :76). Thus, it seems to me that in the Nyāya-system the self persists through its ability of bearing impressions and dispositions. And the self always possesses this ability (even it possesses this ability during the gappy period between the death and rebirth). In that case, this ability becomes such a quality of the self which is analogous to the Cartesian essence of the self (*i.e.*, the thought). But Naiyāyikas do not admit any quality as essential quality of the self. Again, if there is no such essential quality, then the self is empty at least during the gappy period between the death and rebirth. Such an empty self is nothing but an entity which ceases to have its existence at the time of death. So, Naiyāyikas have two options: either they admit the Cartesian-like essential quality of the self or they admit that the self gets demolished at the time of death. None of the options seems to be attractive to Naiyāyikas. Let me call it the *dilemma objection* against the Nyāya concept. It appears that Naiyāyikas cannot get rid of this objection.

3. Naiyāyikas' arguments (formal proofs) for existence of the self:

Naiyāyikas offer several formal proofs to prove the existence of the self. For brevity, here I will discuss only one of their formal proofs. This proof is riginated by Uddyotakara and reformulated by Mr. Chakrabarti (Chakrabarti, 1999 : 90):

P_1: Whatever is without immaterial self does not breathe, for instance, a stone.

P_2: The living body does not lack breathing.

C: Therefore, the living body is not without the immaterial self.

Using symbolic notations (*Lx*: *x* is a living body; *Sx*: *x* is with immaterial self; *Bx: x* is breathing) Mr. Chakrabarti restates the argument using symbolic logic in the following way (Chakrabarti, 1999 :90):

$$(x)(\sim Sx \supset \sim Bx)$$
$$(x)(Lx \supset \sim\sim Bx)$$
$$\therefore (x)(Lx \supset \sim\sim Sx)$$

The argument can be proved valid easily following natural derivation process in the following way:

1. $(x)(\sim Sx \supset \sim Bx)$ **[P]**
2. $(x)(Lx \supset \sim\sim Bx)$ **[P]** / $\therefore (x)(Lx \supset \sim\sim Sx)$
3. $\sim Sy \supset \sim By$ **[1, UI]**
4. $Ly \supset \sim\sim By$ **[2, UI]**
5. $Ly \supset By$ **[4, DN]**
6. $By \supset Sy$ **[3, Trans.]**
7. $By \supset \sim\sim Sy$ **[6, DN]**
8. $Ly \supset \sim\sim Sy$ **[5,7, HS]**
9. $(x)(Lx \supset \sim\sim Sx)$ **[8, UG]** [Proved]

Thus, we see, the argument is valid. So, if the premises are true, then the argument will be a sound one which will confirm the truth of its conclusion. Naiyāyikas claim that the first premise is true because it is supported by 'undisputable examples' such as bricks and stones. One could offer a counterexample like living bodies do breathe but are without immaterial self (and this is the only possible counterexample, indeed), but it would not be an 'undisputable counterexample' because Naiyāyikas would not agree with it as Mr. Chakrabarti mentions:

> The only counterexamples that may be offered are living bodies that the critic may claim, do breathe but are without the immaterial self. But this is disputed, for the Nyaya claims that the living bodies are with immaterial selves. The living bodies are the inferential subject and part of the bone of contention and hence cannot be accepted as impartial evidence that refutes the generalization. Being supported by undisputable examples and not being challenged by undisputable counter examples the premise now, …, turns out to be reasonable and acceptable. (Chakrabarti, 1999 : 91).

The second premise is true because it is accepted by both disputant parties—the Naiyāyikas and their critics. So, the argument seems to be sound, and hence, the conclusion is true.[5] Thus, it is proved that there exist immaterial selves because there are living bodies which are not without immaterial selves.

I have two observations about Naiyāyikas' 'lack of undisputable counterexample' strategy. First, this strategy is not workable because the same weapon can be used to attack the Naiyāyikas too. Consider the following argument I offer using the Nyāya-strategy:

5. Mr. Chakrabarti uses the words 'reasonable' and 'acceptable' here. But a deductive argument is either valid or invalid; a valid deductive argument is either sound or unsound (invalid arguments are always unsound). So, I take Mr. Chakrabarti's terms 'reasonable' and 'acceptable' for valid and sound.

P_1: Whatever cannot be perceived by at least one of the five fundamental sensory organs does not exist, *e.g.*, unicorn.
P_2: The immaterial self is what cannot be perceived by at least one of the five fundamental sensory organs.
C: Therefore, the immaterial self does not exist.

Using symbolic notations [*Px: x* can be perceived by at least one of the five fundamental sensory organs; *Ex: x* exists; *Sx: x* is an immaterial self], the argument can be re-expressed symbolically in the following way:

$(x)(\sim Px \supset \sim Ex)$
$(x)(Sx \supset \sim Px)$
$\therefore (x)(Sx \supset \sim Ex)$

Like before, this argument can be proved valid easily following natural derivation process in the following way:

1. $(x)(\sim Px \supset \sim Ex)$
2. $(x)(Sx \supset \sim Px) / \therefore (x)(Sx \supset \sim Ex)$
3. $\sim Py \supset \sim Ey$ [1, UI]
4. $Sy \supset \sim Py$ [2, UI]
5. $Sy \supset \sim Ey$ [4, 3 HS]
6. $(x)(Sx \supset \sim Ex)$[5, UG](Proved)

Now, the first premise is supported by an undisputable example, and the possible counterexample 'the immaterial self is not perceived by one of the five sensory organs but does exist' is disputable to the critics of Nyāya-system. The second premise is acceptable to both of the disputant parties. Thus, following the Nyāya-strategy I can claim the truth of the conclusion which is, indeed, inconsistent with the conclusion of the first argument offered by Naiyāyikas. So, this strategy is not workable for Naiyāyikas. Second, the strategy of 'the lack of counterexample' is not an acceptable strategy. Though the presence of a counterexample ensures the falsehood of a statement or generalization, the absence of such counterexamples does not imply the truth of the relevant statement or generalization. In other words, if we fail to prove the falsity of a statement, it does not mean that the statement in question is true. If we still proceed in this illegitimate way, *i.e.*, if we assume that the statement in hand is true because it has not been proven false, then we commit the fallacy of *argument from ignorance*.[6] In my opinion, Naiyāyikas commit this fallacy when they follow the 'lack of counterexample' strategy.

6. Def: Fallacy of the *argument from ignorance* occurs when it is supposed that something is likely to be true because we cannot prove that it is false. (I. M. Copi, *Introduction to logic*, pp. 140-41)

To sum up, in this paper, I have addressed three important Nyāya-notions regarding the self as a substance (*dravya*). I have tried to show that all the three notions are inadequate and most of the arguments that are offered by Naiyāyikas in this context are fallacious. Despite these criticisms, I appreciate the Nyāya-system because it was the first Indian school of thought which used systematic logic to defend its standpoint against the rival views. Naiyāyikas' use of the systematic logic instead of appealing to religious authority has succeeded to refute one of the main charges against Indian philosophy that it is generally (except the *Cārvākā* school of thought) based on religious authority, and hence, is dogmatic and non-critical. The influence of the Nyāya-system in Indian philosophy is so far-reaching that till today logic is called *Nyāya-shāstrā* (the study of Nyāya) in India.

Bibliography:

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2. Copi, I. M., 2005., *Introduction to Logic*, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.