

# The Causal Relation : Its Acceptance and Denial

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It is not at all wise to draw a watertight distinction between Eastern and Western philosophies. The causal relation is a serious problem for both. Therefore the present article seeks to discuss the problem from this broad perspective.

For the sake of precision we would first propose to define the causal relation. In this connection we are indeed reminded of a popular definition of the same available in a very famous manual named *Tarkasamgraha* which is ascribed to Annambhatta, a great exponent of Nyāya which is indeed a principal system in Indian philosophy.

How does Annambhatta define a cause? '*Kāryaniyatapurvavritti kāranam*'—'What exists uniformly before an effect is its cause'. As the definition shows, the cause is an invariable antecedent to its effect. That is to say, a cause precedes (*purvavritti*) its effect uniformly (*niyata*). Many things can be there before an effect is produced. But the cause should be chosen in view of its uniformity. Thus whatever precedes an effect is not necessarily a cause of the effect. The causal relation is a uniform (*niyata*) relation (*sambandha*). An ass for example may well be there before a jar is produced. But the ass is not a cause of the jar for it is not present prior to the effect in all cases. The ass is not therefore a uniform antecedent (*niyatapurvavritti*) to the jar.

But this does not apply to the case of the

potter. But for a potter no jar can actually be produced. Thus the potter, being uniformly present before a jar is produced, is obviously a cause. This is, however, a plain and simple idea of a cause offered by Annambhatta. This serves our propose in the present article.

We now discuss the Chārvāka theory of Accidentalism (*Ākasmikatāvāda*). It is a theory in which the very idea of a causal relation is discarded. The theory has been advanced by empiricist Chārvāka. According to him, sensuous experience is the sole source of true knowledge. Experience, however, can by no means assure us regarding a uniform or invariable relation between a cause and an effect. Thus it is hard to arrive at knowledge that every event must have a cause. Fire and burning are two different events. Fire is said to be the cause of burning. But uniformity between the two events can hardly be ascertained by dint of sensuous experience. We cannot know all cases of fire and burning. Thus the so-called causal relation, if anything at all, falls outside the scope of our knowledge. The Chārvāka therefore puts forward his own view—'*Akasmādeva bhavati*'. That is, everything in this world, which is the only world, occurs by chance. So the Chārvāka maintains that the idea of so-called causal relation has to be abandoned. This rejection gives rise to Accidentalism.

**A danger**

The denial of the causal relation is, however, dangerous, for the world we live in is a cosmos and not a chaos. In this world nothing can actually take place by chance. That this is so can well be understood from an analysis of the nature of an effect. Our attention towards the nature of an effect is drawn by Udayana in the first cluster of his famous book, *Nyāyakusumānjali*. In Kārikā 4, Udayana says ‘*sāpekshatvāt*’. The very nature of an effect is that it is occasional (*kādāchitka*), for example, the satisfaction due to partaking of food (*bhojanajanyatriptivat*).

The abovementioned satisfaction is only occasional, it is not always there. It only takes place under certain conditions. When a hungry man eats food, he is then satisfied. Thus satisfaction being occasional is an effect. This effect depends upon (*sāpekshatvāt*) some cause. Thus the effect takes place only when there is a cause behind. Otherwise an effect cannot be produced. The uniform relation, called the causal relation, should therefore be accepted as real.

With reference to the above we may now state in brief the argument of Biswanath in his *Muktāvali*. In connection with his critical consideration of *tarka* (hypothetical argument), Biswanath observes that the causal relation between a cause and an effect should be admitted. Otherwise when a Chārvāka takes fire to have smoke or takes food to satisfy his hunger, his position is not justified. Disbelief in causal relation cannot actually account for one’s mundane practices such as taking fire for smoke and so on. On this ground (*svakriyābyāghāta*), however, the Naiyāyikas at large criticize and finally reject the Accidentalism of Chārvāka. Their most fundamental argument is given by Udayana in the said Kārikā.

**Hume’s view**

We are now in a position to concentrate on the thought of David Hume, a great British philosopher. Our reason for doing so is that Hume is through and through an empiricist, accepting boldly what follows from the empiricist principle that our knowledge is derived from sensuous experience. The adjective qualifying ‘experience’ here is very important. Spiritual or mystic experience has to be kept aside in all these cases. Experience that Chārvāka or Hume accepts as the sole source of knowledge is simply a sensuous experience that our senses yield.

Hume begins by telling us that all contents of the mind are either impressions or ideas. By the term ‘impression’ he means our lively perceptions. The impressions are distinguished from ideas that are ‘less lively perceptions’. One will readily admit the difference between the perception of excessive heat and its subsequent memory. When the first one is an impression, the second one is an idea. Hume tells us that all our ideas are derived from impressions. Here obviously Hume is an empiricist accepting sensuous experience as the only source of our knowledge.

Hume further points out that human knowledge has got twofold objects, namely the relations of ideas and matters of fact. So far as the relations of ideas are concerned, our knowledge is analytic and consequently *a priori*. So far as the matters of fact are concerned, our knowledge is synthetic and consequently *a posteriori*. According to the empiricist, all synthetic knowledge is *a posteriori* and vice versa. In the former case, through an analysis of the subject-concept we can at once arrive at the predicate-concept. The mathematical sciences or the sciences of geometry, algebra and arithmetic are concerned with relations

of ideas. For knowing the relations of ideas we do not therefore depend on perception. Analytic *a posteriori* knowledge is inadmissible obviously.

Perception happens to be the only source of our knowledge of matters of fact. That the blackboard is black is known through a mere analysis of the subject-concept. That is to say, in order to know that the blackboard is black we have only to analyse the idea of a blackboard. The analysis gives our knowledge of its black colour. This is therefore a case of relation of ideas. But knowledge that the blackboard is large is a matter of fact and perceiving yields such knowledge.

We would now say a few words about Hume's view of causal relation. As we have already mentioned, our ideas are, after all, copies of the impressions. But our ideas are not entirely loose and unconnected. Those do not get joined by chance. The phenomenon called 'association of ideas' has to be considered seriously. The laws of association include resemblance of two things, contiguity in space and time, and also the causal relation. Ideas tend to call up ideas of like things, things contiguous in time and space, and also of things related as cause and effect. The importance of causal relation is thus admitted by Hume. He does not talk about chances. Our reasonings on matters of fact are based on the causal relation. Hume thus attaches importance to the relation of cause and effect. But he tells us that the causal relation is not to be treated as a necessary relation.

Why does Hume say so? We can hardly obtain knowledge of such a necessary relation through a mere analysis of the concept of a cause, as we can do at ease in the abovementioned case of a blackboard. We can conclude from the idea of a triangle in geometry that the sum of its angles is

equal to two right angles. But we cannot prove by reasoning that fire burns. Hume thus arrives at the conclusion that unlike an analytic judgement we can find no logical contradiction in judging that fire will not burn.

Our knowledge of the causal relation is actually based on experience. Having perceived in many cases that fire produces burning, we are actually led to expect from the appearance of the one, the appearance of the other. We are thus determined by custom to expect burning from fire. Mind is actually led by habit in these cases related to cause and effect.

Hume's thought about the causal relation is popularly called the Regularity Theory. Instead of uniformity, Hume explains the causal relation in terms of regularity. That fire burns is a matter of fact the denial of which does not lead to any logical absurdity. Hume therefore finds no harm in thinking that fire will not burn in future. From having regularly perceived that fire has burnt, we have actually formed a habit of thinking that fire causes burning. This justifies our fear that fire will produce burning.

### **The Entailment Theory**

Let us now turn our attention to the famous Entailment Theory of causal relation. Advocates of the theory, as rationalists, argue that an effect does not only regularly follow from its cause, but it necessarily follows from the cause. They intend to explain the said necessary relation in terms of logical necessity. As the premises in a valid deductive inference justify its conclusion, so also the cause justifies the effect. The cause entails the reason behind the effect. Thus the causal relation is a necessary relation in the logical sense. That fire and burning are two

different facts goes without saying. But fire entails the reason why it should burn. This thought about the causal relation is known as the Entailment Theory. In a valid deductive argument, the conclusion follows necessarily from its premises because reason of the conclusion is already contained in the premises. Thus the premises do justify the conclusion. In the same way, the reason of an effect is already contained in the cause. The cause justifies its effect. Apparently fire and burning are two different things. But fire contains the reason why it should burn. When thus there is a reason behind, the causal relation is a necessary relation. There is hardly anything called a chance. Nothing happens in the world by chance. It is at best possible that one is in the dark about the cause behind an effect. But this does not mean that something has taken place all of a sudden.

### **Buddha's position**

Incidentally we may mention one point. In the history of Indian Philosophy, Buddhist system occupies a unique place. Buddha does not believe in chances. His entire philosophy rests heavily upon the four Noble Truths (*Chatvāri āryasatyāni*). The first truth tells us very convincingly that there is suffering. The second Noble Truth realized by Buddha is that our suffering is not at all without reason. There is actually a cause behind. Buddha was very much convinced of the causal relation. His view in this regard is known as The Theory of Dependent Origination (*Pratitya-samutpāda*). Here Buddha draws our attention to the causal chain having twelve links.

As a matter of fact, the importance of causal relation in the domain of sciences can hardly be denied. In Inductive Logic, a distinction is made between a scientific induction and an unscientific induction. The

domain of the sciences abounds with scientific inductions. The causal relation serves as an important basis of scientific inductions. Scientific researches depend heavily upon the causal relation. Had such a relation been a mere concomitance, scientific inductions would have been at stake. Hence the significance of causal relation can hardly be doubted.

### **Kant's thought**

We would now say a few words about Kant's opinion on the causal relation. It is well known that in his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant deals at length with scientific knowledge. People in Kant's time and most people today accept scientific knowledge as knowledge in the most indisputable sense. Kant accepts people's position and discusses the characteristic features of scientific knowledge. He tells us that such knowledge is not only synthetic or augmentative but it is also universal and necessary (*a priori*). Thus scientific knowledge is synthetic *a priori* in character. Kant does not have doubt at all as to the possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge. But in his *Critique* he only tries to show how it is possible for synthetic knowledge to be *a priori*. His position here is obviously unique. The thinker like Hume is convinced that synthetic knowledge is always *a posteriori* and analytic knowledge available in mathematics is always *a priori*. Such knowledge can therefore be explained in terms of relations of ideas. The rationalist thinker holds that knowledge that is *a priori* is always analytic. Kant alone is convinced that synthetic knowledge *a priori* is possible.

In order to account for such knowledge Kant advances a synthetic view. He says, a percept without concept is blind and a concept without percept is empty. Thus the faculty of sensibility and the faculty of understanding—both are required for

knowledge. The former receives the raw material and the latter interprets the same. The faculty of sensibility is thus inactive as the receiving faculty when the faculty of understanding is active as it interprets the raw material provided by the faculty of sensibility.

Now Kant points out that space and time happen to be the *a priori* forms of sensibility. The raw material is sensed as spatio-temporally ordered. The raw materials thus sensed only form an appearance. When the appearance is understood by the faculty of understanding, that is then a phenomenon. Scientific knowledge has got the phenomenon as its object.

Now the faculty of understanding has got twelve *a priori* categories in terms of which the said appearance is thought. Of the twelve categories, the causal relation is one. Fire and burning are two different facts. But the faculty of understanding relates these two as a cause and an effect. When fire is the cause, burning is the effect.

Here it may be noted that Kant agrees with Hume that we cannot derive the causal principle from experience. But Kant argues that understanding makes experience possible by its causal synthesis. Experience of objective succession is explicable only through a necessary connection. This necessary connection is the relation of cause and effect. Objective succession can be understood only as causally related. The succession in the perception of a house from roof to basement or basement to roof is subjective, depending upon the perceiver. But the succession in the perception of movement of a ship in the sea corresponds to the succession in the object. When cognizing a subjective succession follows no fixed order, the apprehension of objective succession is bound to a fixed order. This order is the rule of causality.

It may be pointed out that Kant recognizes twelve forms of judgement, one of which is the Hypothetical Judgement (If S is P then Q is R). Kant's famous twelve categories are derived from these forms of judgement. In connection with the Hypothetical Judgement, the category of cause and effects is obtained. Such categories are really the ways that are peculiar to human understanding. Whatever we know is really sensed and understood. Nothing is actually known as it is in itself. Whatever we know is thus necessarily conditioned by the categories of our understanding. The unconditioned thing-in-itself (noumenon) is therefore unknown and unknowable. Thus the causal relation is at best a way of relating two things, such as fire and burning. The question of such a relation is quite out of place so far as the thing-in-itself is concerned. We cannot obtain scientific knowledge as to the thing-in-itself. Metaphysics as a science therefore is not possible, Kant declares; it is a natural disposition.

#### **Advaita of Shankara**

By way of a concluding remark we may make a brief reference to Advaita Vedanta of Shankara. As a consistent advocate of Monism, Shankara regards the Self or Brahman as the only Reality. Eternity is the other name of Reality. The Reality is thus beyond all changes and modifications. Whatever is subject to change and modification is necessarily non-eternal and consequently false. Now the Self or Brahman, being eternal, is neither a cause nor an effect. A cause is obviously modifiable for the sake of emergence of an effect. The Self or Brahman cannot therefore be a cause of any effect. For this obvious reason the causal relation does not hold

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