

*Dharmakīrti and Husserl
on Negative Judgments*

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ABSTRACT: Dharmakīrti's theory of negative judgments grew out of extensive discussions and debates on the cognition of non-existent objects (*asad-ā lambana-vijñāna*) among various Buddhist and Indian philosophical schools. As is well-known, a similar debate on the objectless presentations (*gegenstandslose Vorstellungen*) happened in the early development of phenomenology and analytic philosophy. Among various opinions on this controversial issue, I find that Dharmakīrti and Husserl hold similar views. Both of them have less interest in redefining the ontological status of non-existent objects than Russell and Meinong. Rather they engage themselves in analyzing the experiential structure of negative cognition and come up with a similar conclusion that negative judgments presuppose affirmative perceptions. This study will enrich our understanding of both thinkers.

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I. An Indian and Buddhist Controversy

Consider the following statement:

(A1) I walk into Y's office, and see that Y is not there. Then I realize that he is not in and say "Y is not in his office."

This might be a common experience we have in everyday life. In the following, I attempt to account for this experience philosophically. With this attempt, I hope to come closer to the understanding of our very experience, which is the "*Sachen selbst*" that most scholars of phenomenology turn away from by involving themselves heavily in exegesis.

To begin with, let me introduce some controversies in the accounting for this phenomenon in the history of Indian and Buddhist philosophy. As compared to the Western philosophical tradition, Indian and Buddhist philosophy is more "negative" and treats issues such as negation, absence, and non-being more extensively, thereby providing us rich sources for the understanding of the experience of negative judgments.

First of all, some Naiyāyikas (e.g., Uddyotakara) would argue that the very notion of "negative judgment" is self-contradictory, for they believe that negation is something that happens before judgment. It belongs to the realm of perception (*pratyakṣa*), so they would simplify A1 as follows:

(B1) I walk into Y's office, and *see* that Y is not there.

Here the word "see" is understood literally in the sense of perceiving with bare eyes, not in a loose sense of understanding or realizing. Seeing or perceiving is always a positive act on something. This way negation is brought into the realm of perception. Using

John Searle's distinction between propositional and illocutionary negations (Searle 1969: 32-33), we can say that the Naiyāyikas restrict themselves to propositional negation $F(\neg p)$, a position shared by the mainstream Western philosophical tradition. For them, negation turns out to be an affirmation of negative fact. The very nature of affirmation ensures that negation is part of perception.

However, as perception is always of something, the validity of a perception relies heavily on the ontological status of its objects. Truly existent objects guarantee valid perception, while false or even non-existent objects would surely produce false perceptions. The perception of a double moon is false because the second moon does not really exist. The Naiyāyikas face the problem of how one can perceive a thing that does not exist. Reexamining B1, we will realize that it is actually impossible for me to say "I see that he is *not* there." Instead I may say "I see the desk, chairs or books in his office," and may say:

(B2) I walk into Y's office, and see Y's *absence*.

This expression makes Y's absence the object of perception; absence becomes something. This surprising step was actually what the Naiyāyikas were forced to take. Otherwise they would not succeed in reducing negation to perception. But this unique position that reifies absence or non-being was challenged by many other Indian philosophical schools, which brought the Naiyāyika theory of negation into a difficult situation.

Another approach to the issue is seen in two thinkers: the Buddhist Īśvarasena and the *Mīmāṃsāka* Kumāṛila. Instead of focusing on propositional negation, both of these thinkers switch their attention to the illocutionary aspect. On their view, A1 should be revised as:

(C1) I walk into Y's office, and *do not see* that Y is there.

The expression “do not see” (*adarśana*) is further defined with the technical term of non-cognition (*anupalabdhi*). Non-cognition, in turn, is defined as the non-arising of cognitive acts including perception, judgment or inference. These two thinkers would also view the expression “negative judgment” as self-contradictory because non-cognition can be better characterized with the Searlian term illocutionary negation, $\sim F(p)$. This illocutionary negation does not have to presuppose propositional negation. Negation is not really involved in the object side as I can either express C1 or say,

(C2) I walk into Y's office, and do not see Y.

The propositional negation, i.e., the non-existence of Y, on the other hand, is built upon the illocutionary negation, i.e., the non-cognition of Y. It is through the very means of non-cognition that one learns about the negative facts such as “Y is not there.” Therefore, both Īśvarasena and Kumārila firmly insist that non-cognition is a separate means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) “over and above” perception and inference (plus verbal testimony, analogy, and presumption in the case of the latter). (See Yao, forthcoming) However, both of them have difficulty in explaining clearly what is the state of mind when neither perception nor inference is arising, which leads us to the third approach.

The third approach is found in the Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti, who developed his elaborate theory of negative judgments by arguing against the Naiyāyikas, his teacher Īśvarasena and his elder contemporary Kumārila. For our purpose, it is sufficient to summarize some of his key points on the basis of the thorough

studies of Kellner (2001, 2003) and Watanabe (2002). First of all, he does not agree with the Naiyāyikas in reducing non-cognition to perception, nor with Īśvarasena and Kumārila in counting non-cognition as an independent means of knowledge. As we discussed earlier, the former view only accounts for propositional negation while the latter only explains illocutionary negation. Instead, he includes non-cognition under inference and treats it as one of the three evidences (*hetu*) that ensure necessary inferences. Therefore, he would take “negative judgment” to mean literally: Negation is judgment.

Secondly, to make non-cognition a valid inference, Dharmakīrti distinguishes between non-cognitions of perceptible and of “imperceptible objects.” Imperceptible objects refers to super-sensory or abstract objects, the non-cognition of which, according to him, cannot determine their existence. For instance, from the non-cognition of ghosts one cannot conclude that ghosts do not exist. On the contrary, the absence of perceptible objects is proved if and only if they are not perceived when all the conditions for perception are fulfilled. Dharmakīrti limits himself to the discussion of the non-cognition of these perceptible objects, and only deals with negation of empirical objects or facts. As we will see below, this position has its advantages in avoiding issues involved with negative existential propositions.

Thirdly, the non-cognition of perceptible objects, being an inference, is based on affirmative perceptions. According to Dharmakīrti, we have to know that there is nothing there through inference instead of simply through seeing or hearing. The fact that “there is *no* pottery on the table” is known through an inferential judgment that is based on the perception of the table instead of the pottery. In other words, the negation of the existence of pottery is

an inferential judgment based on the normal perceptions of things other than pottery, e.g., the table etc.

Applying these points to the case discussed earlier, we have the following formula:

(D1) I walk into Y's office, and see only the desk, chairs, and books. Then I realize that he is not in and say "Y is not in his office."

The first sentence indicates affirmative perceptions of things other than Y. On the basis of these perceptions, I come up with an inference as expressed in the second sentence. As all the objects under discussion are perceptible, this statement would reflect Dharmakīrti's view on the issue fairly well.

II. Husserl's Contribution

Now how would Husserl address this controversial issue? Husserl's view on negative judgments can be found in his late work *Experience and Judgment* (EJ), where a separate section is devoted to negation. A more extensive treatment, believed to be an earlier unabridged version of this section, is included in the *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis* (Analyses). Some scattered sources can also be found in his *Logical Investigations*, especially Sections 11, 30-35 of Investigation Six.

As compared to his elaborations on other topics, these minor sections are far from enough to build a phenomenological theory of negative judgments. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that very few secondary sources deal with Husserl's view on negation. Even when there are a few, such as of Harvey & Hintikka (1991), Krysztofiak (1992) and Benoist (2001), most of them were inspired by relevant discussions in analytical philosophy. It is understand-

able that most of the contemporary discussions on this issue are found in analytical philosophy, especially in the field of philosophical logic. These technical discussions deal exclusively with propositional negation and make no attempt to explore the experiential basis of negation. In this connection, Husserl's brief but brilliant analysis of "the origin of negation" contributed to our understanding of the experiential aspect of this logical issue, which is exactly what I look for inspiration in Indian and Buddhist philosophy.

However, it is wrong to claim that Husserl has moved away from the mainstream conception of propositional negation. It is true that he has attempted to extend negation to the subpropositional level, and explored a conception of negation as a cognitive act instead of negation as belonging to the meaning itself. In other words, he demonstrated an illocutionary view of negation. However, as is convincingly argued by Benoist (2001), he eventually chooses a propositional view of negation. This reveals the ambiguity of the phenomenological theory of negation, "standing between act and meaning, and between language and perception." (Benoist 2001: 21) Before carefully examining Husserl's view on the issue, it can be anticipated that with this ambiguity or hesitation between an illocutionary and a propositional view of negation Husserl has come very close to the position of Dharmakīrti, who also maintains a middle-way between the propositional view of the Naiyāyikas and the illocutionary view of Īśvarasena and Kumāriila.

In his analysis of negation, Husserl asserts firmly that "negation is not first the business of the act of predicative judgment but that in its original form it already appears in the prepredicative sphere of receptive experience." (EJ 90) He demonstrates this view by engaging himself in the phenomenological description of the origin of negation in prepredicative experience, using the famous example of perceiving a red ball. In such an experience, if we observe a ball

with uniformly red color continuously either by standing in front of it and going around or rotating it, then our intention of anticipation is fulfilled: “it is a red ball.” If, however, in the progress of the perception, the back side is revealed to be: “not red, but green,” “not spherical, but dented,” then the original anticipation that ran “uniformly red, uniformly spherical” is disappointed. Thereupon, we have the negative judgments: “it is not entirely red”; “it is not perfectly spherical.”

As we will see below, Husserl’s example can be compared to the case of walking into Y’s office that we discussed earlier. Both cases indicate a prepredicative experience of negation. The Indian and Buddhist philosophers would not dispute with Husserl on the possibility of such type of experience. The key, however, lies in the philosophical accounts of such experience, which is exactly the point of controversy in the Indian side.

Husserl draws two important conclusions from his previous analysis. First, negation presupposes “normal perception” (EJ 91; Analyses 71). Here the “normal perception” refers to the perceptual process that proceeds without obstruction, as is seen in the earlier case when the red ball is perceived. Contemporary interpretations such as those of Harvey & Hintikka (1991: 61) and Krysztofiak (1992: 210) seem not to grasp this point and merge it with Husserl’s second conclusion that I will introduce later. To my understanding, this point rather indicates that negation is secondary as compared to the normal affirmative perception, and it is a modification of the latter. Husserl explicitly states this point elsewhere: “The negative judgment is not a basic form.” (EJ 292) In his example, the negative judgments “it is not entirely red” or “it is not a perfect ball” are built upon the normal perceptions of greenness or dented shape of the back side. Without these subsequent perceptions one cannot negate the original anticipation of redness or spherical shape.

If applying Husserl’s phenomenological analysis to the current case, we will have a richer account of the experience, which reveals more details on the structure of a negative cognition:

(H1) I walk into Y’s office, and see only the desk, chairs and books. Then I realize that he is not in and say “Y is not in his office.”

The same as in D1, here the affirmative statement “[I] see only the desk, chairs and books” substitutes for the negative ones “[I] see that Y is not there” or “[I] do not see that Y is there.” The normal unobstructed perceptions of desk or chairs indicate what is going on in the perceptual level when I walk into Y’s office. Definitely I do not *perceive* that Y is not there, rather I see actual things such as the desk and books.

This implies that Husserl does not have to follow the Naiyāyikas to admit to the ontological status of negative facts as a consequence of extending negation to the perceptual level. On the other hand, these affirmative perceptions of the desk etc. also eliminate the possibility of speculating about non-cognition as an independent means of knowledge, as in the case of Īśvarasena and Kumārila. On Husserl’s view, a careful analysis of the cognitive process on the perceptual or intellectual level can account for the knowledge of negative facts. There is no need to introduce a mysterious state of non-cognition. As we see, this is exactly the strategy that Dharmakīrti takes to approach the issue. He argues against the Naiyāyikas, Īśvarasena and Kumārila, refuting their extreme propositional or illocutionary views of negation. While reducing negative cognition to inference, he still emphasizes that negative judgments are formed on the basis of affirmative perceptions. So he would fully agree with H1.

But how does the affirmative perception lead to negative judgments? To understand this, we have to turn to Husserl's second conclusion, where he further specifies that negation, as a modification of original normal perception, is realized "by the disappointment of protentional anticipations of belief." (EJ 91; see Analyses 71) This point was elaborated in various ways by Harvey & Hintikka (1991) and Krysztofiak (1992), and eventually overshadowed the first conclusion discussed earlier. I agree that this observation of Husserl demonstrates his most original contribution to the issue of negation. He might be the first Western philosopher who analyses negative judgments in terms of its temporal dimension, as the key term "protention" indicates in the protention—primary impression—retention structure of time-consciousness. Negation presupposes not only normal perceptions, but also anticipations and beliefs, which are important components in the protentional dimension of consciousness. For Husserl, every cognition starts with protention, which is in the very nature of intentionality. The actual cognitive process consists in the fulfillment of such protentional anticipation. In his own example, the belief *in* "uniformly red, uniformly spherical" is the protentional anticipation. Its fulfillment is realized by a modification of disappointment: "not entirely red, but partly green," "not spherical, but dented." Therefore, with the disappointment of protentional anticipations, one comes up with the negative judgments: "it is not entirely red"; "it is not perfectly a ball."

Applying the second conclusion to our case, we will have to reformulate the statement in the following way:

(H2) I walk into Y's office, expecting and believing he is in, but see only the desk, chairs and books. Then I realize that he is not in and say "Y is not in his office."

To interpolate the phrase "expecting and believing he is in" is a crucial step to apply the phenomenological analysis to the current case. Without this anticipation, the perceptions of the desk or books do not really fit the context, for these objects are not the subject of concern at all. Only in contrast to the anticipation of Y do these perceptions start to make sense in the way that they disappointed this anticipation.

So far, it seems that Husserl's accounts of negation are too "negative," as he characterizes it in terms of the "disappointment" of anticipation and lists it along with doubt and possibility as a "modification" of consciousness. This implies that negation turns out to be "obstruction" or "failure" of normal affirmative cognitions, which makes it an invalid or secondary act, as Husserl explicitly states: "*The act of negation of the ego consists in the exclusion of validity, and the secondary intentional character [of negation] is already implicit in this expression.*" (EJ 292) This may confirm the mainstream view on the epistemological role of negation or negative judgments in Western philosophy, but does not harmonize with the positive role that negation or non-cognition plays in the epistemological systems of Indian and Buddhist philosophy. Although the Naiyāyikas, Mīmāṃsākas and Buddhists were debating about the way that negation takes place, they did not doubt its important role in their theories of knowledge. They all distinguish negation from the "modifications" of cognition that include erroneous cognition, desire and memory, which are called pseudo-perception (*pratyakṣābhāṣa*), and consider it a valid means of knowledge, either in the form of perception, inference, or independently as non-cognition.

Despite those "negative" characteristics attributed to negation, does it play a positive role in Husserl's phenomenology? We do not see an explicit answer to the question in his own writings. Instead,

it is found in some contemporary interpretations. One answer is given by Dieter Lohmar, who understands “negation as categorial intuition” (Lohmar 1992: 188). Offering no direct reference from Husserl to support his interpretation, Lohmar nevertheless is justified to make such a move. As the act that disappoints protentional anticipations, negation certainly belongs to the phase of intentional fulfillment. Categorial intuition, on the other hand, plays an important role in fulfilling intentions. Lohmar explains the relationship between negation and categorial intuition in Husserl’s example of red ball in the following way:

Der Akt der Negation beginnt, als ob die erwartete eigenschaftliche Bestimmung “rot” prädikativ konstituiert werden sollte. Der erforderliche Akt kategorialer Anschauung kann sich aber nicht mehr auf anschaulich erfüllte Sonderintentionen aufbauen. Er muß bereits auf Surrogate aus Erinnerungen und evtl. aus der frischen Retention zurückgreifen. Hierbei zeigt sich die Funktion der induktiven Gewißeheiten für die Motivation der Sonderwahrnehmung erfaßt werden, sondern das vorprädikativ bereits fraglich gewordene rot. (Lohmar 1992: 189)

Here it is important to note that the categorial intuition required for the act of negation does not build itself upon “the intuitively fulfilled particular intentions.” Instead, it has to fall back to memory or fresh retention so as to fulfill the original anticipation of the red. Therefore, the subject that is concerned in the negative judgment is not the green color that is actually perceived, but still the red, which demonstrates the function of inductive certainty (*induktiven Gewißeheiten*). The categorial intuition that works closely with memory or retention is certainly not sensory intuition, the once-for-all grasping of sensory objects. In Husserl’s terminology, categorial intuition rather refers to the acts of synthesis or abstrac-

tion that may be completed in more than one step. Therefore, he would not agree with the Naiyāyikas who reduce negation to perception, which is closely linked to sensory intuition, but rather agrees with Dharmakīrti’s view that reduces negation to inference, which is in general of an inductive nature in the Buddhist logical system.

Another answer is given by Harvey & Hintikka (1991) and Kryzstofiak (1992), who understand negation as “modality” or “creation of possible worlds.” Being inspired by relevant discussions in analytical philosophy, these interpretations are not necessarily faithful to Husserl himself. For instance, Kryzstofiak attempted to deal with the so-called “existential negative propositions” (e.g., “Pegasus does not exist”) and proposed his theory of the “creation of possible worlds” as a solution to this paradox, along with some other famous proposals: description theory, free logic, logic of fiction, etc. To my knowledge, however, Husserl himself was not so much concerned with such existential negative propositions, although he lived through the period when this problem was discussed and debated. It would be interesting to examine carefully how he would address this puzzling issue, given his close relationship with the Brentanian and Meinongian traditions. Probably, he would agree with Dharmakīrti again in distinguishing between the negation of perceptible things (e.g., “It is not a red ball”) and the negation of imperceptible things (e.g., “Ghosts do not exist”). The latter type of negation is linked to the paradox of negative existential propositions, but Dharmakīrti admits that his theory of non-cognition is not able to deal with this type of negation. How the Indian and Buddhist philosophers would tackle such an interesting issue will be the topic of another paper.

As far as empirical perceptible objects are concerned, however, the theories as developed by Husserl and Dharmakīrti are powerful

enough to explain the negative judgment regarding such objects. By way of conclusion, let me highlight the main points that are shared by both thinkers:

- 1) Both of them focus on the negation of empirical objects and show little interest in examining the ontological issues involved with the object side;
- 2) They both hold that negative judgments presuppose and build themselves upon affirmative perceptions, and hence are secondary in relation to the latter;
- 3) They both carry out detailed analysis of the experiential structure of negative cognition. Husserl further reveals its protentional dimension. Negation is therefore understood as motivated by disappointment of protentional anticipations;
- 4) They both take a middle-way position between the propositional and illocutionary views of negation, which makes their theories outstanding in their own traditions.

Despite all these striking similarities, however, it is important to be reminded that their theories of negative judgments were developed in very different traditions. It is very hard to draw direct correspondence between their respective theoretical framework and relevant concepts involved. I hope that my attempt will not turn out to be a failure, being negated by scholars from both traditions.

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