

# The Problem of Causation: Nagarjuna Vs Hume



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## **ABSTRACT**

Change is the law of nature. When people were made aware of this principle of nature then and there arose the problem of causation. To deal with this problem of change in this world on the basis of which this nature operates we bring in the law of causation. Everything happens due to a cause is the belief urged by the philosophers which could not be proved certain. Though this belief is uncertain, but at the same time it is not irrational because whenever something happens, we conclude that there must be some reasons for whatever has happened. Sometimes this relation also causes misunderstanding because of being ambivalent to our thought, as it is always seen that we make use of our experience. This relation of cause and effect is also used to make predictions about the future wherein cause and effect always provide an explanation to our predictions made. Now this paper deals with the justification of the belief in the theory of causation. Here it has been trying to find out the extent to which the prediction made on the basis of the theory of causation is certain. As we have already known that the problem of causation plays an important role in connection with the nature of being. So here we would try to find out whether the theory of causation relates to the relation between the causally connected particular state of affair. Here we would try to bring in some argument given by Nagarjuna and Hume. The similarity in their argument has been brought into the light to reach

out to the conclusion. On one hand, Hume has brought into the experience which can only be used to predict about our future. Our experience makes us customized in a way which make us expect the same pattern to occur repeatedly. This happens based on our prior reasoning. According to Hume because of the constant conjunction of the occurrence of events in our mind we become habitual of drawing inferences. Whereas there is no relation between the cause and effect which justifiably binds them. In this way the theory of causation has been criticized by Hume based on the absence of any necessary connection between the cause and effect. Similarly, whereas using reasoning, we can only make viewpoints about the reality. Here on this basis the application of the use of reason is insufficient to reason out of the reality.

*Keywords:* Causation, Nagarjuna, Hume

## Introduction

At the beginning of 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Greeks cosmologists were the first to raise the question regarding the nature of change, the origin of things and many more such questions. Then people started inquiring about the problem of causality. The word cause is complementary to effect such that an action 'A' which is an antecedent would definitely give rise to a consequence 'B'. Here antecedent would be the cause and consequence would be the effect. The experience of human being facing a specific kind result from the particular kind of action performed and repetition of this give rise to the belief in the causation.

Aristotle was the first to treat the principle of causality in an organized way. Although Heraclitus has also talked about the principle of change by saying that "everything is flux". According to Democritus, the world is composed of material atoms, whereas Plato contends that the world is governed by ideas. Whereas Aristotle combined the two and contended that causes govern the antithesis of form and matter whose collaboration is visible in the process of nature. Hence form and matter cannot exist separately. This was the beginning of the problem of cause-and-effect relationship. The theory of causation of Aristotle is called the theory of four causes, material, formal, efficient, and final cause. In this way he has provided the teleological explanation for the natural process which was free from psychological factors. After that, with the passage of time this was picked up by many philosophers.

With the advent of Hume, the traditional view regarding causation gets a big setback when he asked for the justification of our belief in causality. He proved that in reality we do not get any empirical evidence regarding the necessary connection between the cause and effect. For Hume causation was the construction of human mind through the resemblance of repeated occurrences of the two object's conjunction. So, it is the experience and not reason that helps to predict about the future. In the same way Nagarjuna has also tried to show that since everything is svabhava sunya and dependent on something else for its existence therefore cause and effect is also nothing on its own. Cause and effect are dependent upon each other so, there is no existence of them in reality. With this Nagarjuna has also criticized all the relation that exist between cause and effect, i.e. svatahutpatti, partahutpatti, dvabhyamutpatti and ahetutah utpatti. Nagarjuna has also criticized the relation of succession, overlapping, simultaneous occurrence, their being single entity etc. Hume and Nagarjuna have also tried to show the difficulty in establishing the certainty regarding the outcome of the belief or the prediction made on the basis of the principle of causation.

## Causation in Indian philosophy: -

Rationally speaking the things around us undergoes change and when we recognize out the feeling of continuity and sameness underlying the phenomena of change therein arises the problem. The causality implies that the entertainer of philosophical problem arose from the following source:

- 1) Vedic cosmological speculation about the cause of the origin of universe.
- 2) The Causal process by which unseen effect is brought about by the ritualistic action or any action.

Whereas the desire for assurance of productivity of action and hence the chance of attaining liberation were the driving force for these theories of causation. This problem in India was reflected in old dispute over Sat cosmology verses Asat cosmology which is found in rigveda as well as in the upanishad. Hence the Indian theory of causation is traditionally classified as:-

**1) Satkaryavada**, the theory which says that effect pre-exist in the cause in a potential state, before getting actualized in the form of a cause. Here the difference between the cause and effect is only the practical feature while identity remains the underlying feature, which is fundamental. This satkaryavada is further divided into Prakriti-parinamvada and Brahma-vivartavada. On one hand Sankhya favour Prakriti-parinamvada according to which prakriti is the real parinam of the cause. Sankhya maintain that the three gunas which constitute prakriti are ever changing and balancing each other. Hence according to Sankhya metaphysics evolution of the whole material world takes place from prakriti. Purush(spirit) on the other hand is the first principle of sankhya and prakriti being the second principle. Purush is an important factor that influence prakriti for the evolution which is the unfolding of what was already potentially present on one side and hence relieving of tension takes place, setting in the process of becoming. This notion of unchanging fundamental material, Purush, underlying the seeming flux has been criticized by Buddhist. Buddhist contended that it cannot be the same entity as everything exist for a moment. This temporary existence of the effect implies dependence of the effect upon something else which was not pre-existing (other than itself) this makes causal relation mandatory dependence on something else.

On the other hand, Advait Vedant favour Brahma-vivartavada, according to which Brahman is the only reality. Whereas the world of phenomena is only the appearance of this reality. When seen from the perspective of phenomenal reality, the jiva superimposes its own interpretation of reality onto the reality, Brahman remain hidden, and Maya is

viewed as the ultimate reality. Whereas from the perspective of Brahman, the world is merely an unreal appearance that means Brahman is only reality and jagat is mithya. This was also criticized when it was said that if Brahman is the only reality, then it cannot be known because dualism is necessary for any kind of knowledge to be obtained. Therefore, Brahman cannot be known without a subject.

**2) Asatkaryavada or Arambhavada:-** This states that effect is a new origination. It doesn't exist in the cause before its emergence. It is the positive correlate of prior negation. Nyaya vaishesika believes in this theory of causation. On one hand comes the Nyaya school of thought who believes in Asatkaryavada. Law of causation for Naiyayikas is a self-evident axiom validated by uniform empirical succession experience and known intuitively. According to them an effect does not pre-exist in the material cause and is a real emergence, a new fabrication. This was criticized by Sankhya and the Vedanta, for them something can never be produced if it does not already exist. We cannot change red into blue. Effect is always found linked with the cause and link cannot exist without the "effect already pre-existing in the cause". Whereas Buddhist did not accept the distinction between material and efficient cause. According to Buddhist every event is continuously changing so effect being only another stage.

On the other hand, the Buddhist, for whom karma is the driving force around which the whole wheel of suffering turns. Karma in its extended form provide a discursive report of origination of human being in the aspect of differences in individual allotment as well as in the commonly experienced universality. Hence a distinction needs to be drawn between the causative action (as universal causation) which calls for similarity and uniformity of cosmological ground and the causation action (as individual karma) which brings about difference in allotment.<sup>1</sup> Every individual stream or personal flux of existence follows a cycle of rebirth through which every causative process of individual karma extend itself. According to Buddhist, law of retribution (which keeps us moving from birth to death) the karmic accumulation which are preserved from the act of past, accumulated from the act of present provide causation for future existence. How do these different retributive allotments are linked with the universal causation of rebirth? To answer this causal condition is classified into hetu and pratyaya, and phala as found in Abhidharmakosh of Vasubandhu. Proximate or generative cause is Hetu and pratyaya is the remote or secondary cause. Hetu

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<sup>1</sup>Verdu Alfonso, Early Buddhist philosophy, pg no. 67

and Pratyaya are originally very much same. Although a traditional example depicts the difference between them, is that a tree, which is produced from a “seed” (seed is the hetu) whereas the necessary condition for the production such as water, sun, soil etc, are the pratyaya.<sup>2</sup> The process of individual karma, as having a causative function within the complex fabric of the hetu and pratyaya, immediately poses the following question: Is “Individual karma” a hetu or merely a pratyaya?<sup>3</sup> In terms of individual desired action, karma is hetu. It happens when the mental factor becomes the condition of the act of apperception i.e., they become so dominant and controlling then karma is called hetu. These factors are for example direct thought, effort, intention, investigation, in the context of also being the causal condition giving rise to a fruit universally shared by all sentient being. The earlier discussed three linked circuit of karmic retribution can be developed further into a more detailed cycle having co-dependent links. The principle of “interdependent co-arising” of all the successive, temporarily flowing links of the chain of individual existence is called Pratityasamutpada which is based on karma causality also known dependent origination. This principle is expressed in Majjhima Nikaya as “when this is, that is, this arising, that arises; when this not, that is not, this ceasing that cease”. It has been represented by twelve links exhibiting the chain of endless rebirth in sansara. Twelve nidanas detailed exposition is presented by the two Maggas, the Vibhasas and the Abhidhamkosa, the commercial classics of early Buddhism. It has been presented with the view of helping man get rid of the malaise of life depicting the cause of suffering and rebirth. It merely explain that the simple happening of a particular state is caused by the antecedent state.<sup>4</sup> Twelve links of causal chain are ignorance, karmic accumulation, consciousness, mind and matter, six bases or organs, contact, sensation feeling, craving, attachment, karma and becoming, rebirth, old age, decay and death.

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<sup>2</sup>Verdu Alfonso, Early Buddhist philosophy, pg no. 72

<sup>3</sup>Verdu Alfonso, philosophy of Buddhism: A Totalistic synthesis. Pg no. 9

<sup>4</sup>Tabbhavabhavibhava Karamatta Abhidhammatta Sangha Thera Narada, Manual of Abhidhamma, pg 360

## **Analysis of problem of causation by Hume :-**

Now Hume has organized the problem of causation by dividing the object of human reason into two kind, relation of ideas and matter of fact. Former is either intuitively or demonstratively certain proposition. Whereas in case of latter, the contrary of every matter of fact is possible for e.g. “the sun will not rise tomorrow is no less intelligible a proposition and implies no more contradiction than the affirmation, that it will rise”.<sup>5</sup> Reason alone cannot give us connection between distinct matters of fact. Reason can never justify causal reasoning or use of the belief that the future will be like the past or past event have some relevance to present and future cases. So, it is not an obvious truth that inference from seen to unseen cannot possibly be withdrawn as, nature keeps on changing. So rationally determining the belief in the truth of matter of fact is impossible by a priori reasoning and through this we cannot reach the knowledge of relation of cause and effect. Hume then talks about mental habit of transition or expectation when we presume that there must be some contiguity and succession. Contiguity and succession according to Hume can just be found by chance every time or it can be a coincidence. There was no any resemblance in the incidents when we looked upon carefully to the event of cause and effect. Thus it can just be the coincidence that the two things can be found associated. Hume then talked about custom or habit, through which these unjustifiable beliefs can be explained. According to him we tend to have a natural tendency to behave in a certain way to renew the same act whose repetition we have seen in the past. Then Hume talked about the necessary connection which provide basis for inference which in turn support our contention that effect must always follow the cause. According to Hume regulation of a particular sort of effect constantly followed up by a particular cause form a pattern of experience although there is no necessary connection between the two occurrences. He has also shown that principle of uniformity of nature is not possible either by reason or by experience. This is turn raises the question on the justifiability of inductive reasoning which depends upon the principle of uniformity of nature. In this way Hume has shown that we do have any ground for accepting the truth of causation on which all the matter of fact depends by the use of experience. It is only custom and habit that enforces us to believe that the future will be like the past. So it can be said that Hume being skeptic has denied that cause exist

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<sup>5</sup>Hume David, Enquiries concerning human understanding and concerning principles of morals, pg no. 20

or is in any way connected to the effect. Causation is indirectly obtained from constant conjunction of object and it is directly obtained from internal impression.

### **Analysis of problem of causation by Nagarjuna: -**

Buddha formulated theory of element as a matter of dialectical necessity. Only substance view was not enough for the rising of the conflict of reason for the emergence of dialectic consciousness. Counter thesis to oppose a thesis was required, so the theory of matter was just an initiative taken up by the Buddha. The dialectical necessity was clearly noticed by Madhyamika and unreality of substance as well as elements are projected by sunyata which talks about dharma nairatmaya and pudgala nairatmaya. Nagarjuna claimed that doctrine of element is nowhere taught by Buddha whose real aim was to teach sunyata. In the Majjhima Nikaya it is stated: “Depending on the oil and the wick does the light of the lamp burn; it is neither in the one nor in the other, nor anything in itself”. In this way Phenomena is nothing in itself. All things are unreal, they are deception and nibbana, is the only truth.<sup>6</sup>

When metaphysical theories are displayed to be internally inconsistent by critically examining them through philosophical method called dialectic. Through dialectic Nagarjuna has criticized all philosophical doctrine without giving any doctrine of his own. Nagarjuna states that no fault can be found in Madhyamika for Nagarjuna has nothing to advance of his own, given in Nagarjuna’s vighrahavyavartani. It is depicted as: “Yadi kacana pratijna syam me tata esa bhaved dosah, nasty ca mama pratijya tasman naivasti me dosah.”<sup>7</sup> The way by which Nagarjuna rejected any view was by showing its self-contradictory character and the argument he used for that matter is reduction ad absurdum. This is called Nagarjuna’s prasang and hence Madhyamikas are called vaitandika or prasangika. Hence, he applied dialectic on causality. Regarding this causality four alternative views are possible. Effect may pre-exist in cause, on this basis cause and effect are identical; Effect may be altogether a different entity and it does not pre-exist in cause. Hence cause and effect are not identical; Effect happens to both, pre-exist, and do not exist in cause; Effect neither pre-exist nor do not pre-exist in cause. Now the inherent contradiction in each of the above-mentioned views are brought about by the dialectic approach.

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<sup>6</sup>Murti TRV, Central philosophy of Buddhism, pg. 50

<sup>7</sup>Murti TRV, Central philosophy of Buddhism, pg. 51

Nagarjuna has shown that the existence of cause and effect without causation is impossible. He has presented it through dots and line. Put several dots on paper and try to connect them through a line. Now this can be done in following manners. By connecting the dot with itself; By connecting the dot with the other dots; By connecting the dot with other dots and also to itself; By not connecting the dot to anything but only to its own parts. Now if we apply cause and effect on the place of dots and causation on the place of line. It would not be justifiable to do that. As cause and effect do not have any independent existence of its own i.e., neither they are independent of each other nor are they independent of mind activity. A cause would be a cause only in relation to the effect and vice versa whereas a dot would always remain a dot even in the absence of the line. In this way Nagarjuna has tried to present that the different possible relation between cause and effect such as the relation of succession, their relation in time, the overlapping relation, the relation of simultaneous occurring, and the cause and effect being single event conflict with our views of object underlying these theories.

## Conclusion

This shows that cause and effect are not just mind dependent but also mutually dependent upon each other. In this way in this paper the similarities in argument of Nagarjuna and Hume has been brought into the light to reach out to the conclusion. On one hand Hume has brought in the experience which can only be used to predict about our future. Our experience makes us customized in a way which make us expect the same pattern to occur repeatedly. This happens because of our prior reasoning. According to Hume based on constant conjunction of the occurrence of events in our mind we become habitual of drawing inference. Whereas there is no relation between the cause and effect which justifiably binds them together. In this way the theory of causation has been criticized by Hume on the basis of the absence of any necessary connection between the cause and effect. Similarly on the other hand for Nagarjuna the knowledge of ultimate reality can only be achieved through intuitive realization. Whereas using reasoning we can only make viewpoints about the reality. Since everything is *svabhav sunya* or nothing in this world have independent existence of its own. So, Nagarjuna believes in *dharma nairatmaya* as well as *pudgala nairatmaya*. Here on this basis the application of the use of reason is insufficient to reason out to the reality. In this way these two philosophers i.e., Nagarjuna and Hume have separately in different ways tried to establish the impossibility of the principle of causality. It is on this basis impossible to have a justified belief in the occurrence of events supported by the past experience or making a prediction is impossible which would be certain about the future.

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