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Immediacy and the Direct Theory of Perception: Problems from Śrī Harṣa

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This paper focuses on a critique of a powerful and widely held classical Indian theory of the role of perception in the acquisition of knowledge. I will only give an outline of the issues and a bare reconstruction of the arguments; practically all these arguments and the dozens that I do not consider here, merit more detailed and systematic development in the light of contemporary work on perceptual knowledge. What I do here will only give the merest idea of the dense and intricate nature of the attack on Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā approaches to perception by the Advaitin Śrī Harṣa in his *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍakhādya* [with Śaṅkara Miśra's commentary, Navikanta Jha (ed.), Chowkambha Sanskrit Series, Benares (1970). All page references within square brackets in the body of the paper without supplementary information refer to this book]. This attack is part of a much wider metaphysical enterprise, but I will not deal with that here.

This paper is purely a study of the theory of perceptual knowledge, not of Śrī Harṣa's larger metaphysical project. I will look at passages in that section of the text where he considers some famous definitions of perception given by Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and by Nyāya philosophers. I claim that these definitions try to [bolster] a direct theory of perception, and argue that Śrī Harṣa is able to show that they do not succeed in doing so. The requirements turn on the relationship between the notions of immediacy and discrimination. While some arguments are specific to the nature of the Indian theories, most are of wider relevance and have a bearing on contemporary version of the direct theory of perceptual knowledge. Śrī Harṣa's arguments thus give us an idea of what such theories have to do if they are to work.

I

The structure of Śrī Harṣa's critique of the various definitions of perception is perplexing if seen in itself, though clearer when seen within the broader context of his project. When looking at the

definitions, he sometimes gives methodological arguments about what the requirements are if we are to understand, through reading a definition, what perception is; and argues that certain definitions in fact fail to meet the requirements and so do not give us an idea of what perception is. At other times, he gives straightforward analytic arguments against the correctness of coherence of these definitions themselves (assuming them to be intelligible). This makes it confusing when we look at certain passages, as I do here, purely for the sake of analysing theories of perception. But the dual strategy makes sense when we remember that Śrī Harṣa's ultimate aim is to establish the soteriological claim that all attempts at constructing consistent world-views are doomed. The establishment of that claim is tantamount to the demonstration of the provisionality and indeterminacy of the world and our grasp of it.

My task in this paper is one that Śrī Harṣa would have thought modest, because it is not concerned with the ultimate question of the status of the world and the soteriology of *brahman*-realisation. I want to look at some (but only some) of the richly suggestive passages in which Śrī Harṣa takes up concepts central to the philosophical understanding of perception, and give some indication of the philosophical interest of his critique of perception in the first and single most important chapter of the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*.

Despite his stated aim of criticising all available views, Śrī Harṣa in fact virtually ignores Buddhist theories. But that is not to say that he endorses them. I will return to that in a moment.

So what are the views that he criticises? They are mostly Nyāya, on one important occasion Bhāṭṭa, and occasionally Prābhākara and Jaina. All these views have some deep features in common, in fact, we can even see them as endorsing, in some respects, the same theory of perception. (But only in some respects; there are fundamental differences, especially between Nyāya and Mīmāṁsa theories, to which I shall briefly return later.)

This common theory is that of *nirākāravāda* or the theory of 'no form'. It claims that '(perceptual) cognition is given content by its object alone as it is itself without form' (*arthenaiva viśeṣo hi nirākāratay dhīyaṃ*, as the Nyāya philosopher Udayana says in his *Kusumāñjali* [with various commentaries, Padmaprasadopadhyaya (ed.), Kashi Sanskrit Series, 30 (Benares (1950); 46]). In other words, it is a direct theory: perception is nothing other than the direct grasp of objects, and the content of perception is determined by its object (and the features which are represented in that state) alone. It is the explication of this theory that takes up the energies of Nyāya and

other philosophers, and it is a critique of such explication which Śrī Harṣa undertakes.

In modern philosophy, all variants of the direct theory are opposed by at least two other theories of perception, the representationalist theory of mental objects and the adverbial theory (though some direct theorists have been tempted by a version of the adverbial theory which I will not go into here). Briefly, the representationalist theory argues that grasp of an object through perception is really grasp of what perception represents as its object and not grasp of the object itself; the object is grasped in consciousness indirectly, through grasp of a mental object which forms the content of perception. In the earlier Western thought, this theory was propounded by John Locke, and the best-known modern exponent is Frank Jackson [*Perception*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1977)]. Matilal suggests that, with some suitable alteration, to do with both the given ontology and the role of concepts, such a view may be imputed to Sautrāntika Buddhism [*Perception*, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1986); 275ff]. Clearly, it would fall under the classical Indian scheme as a theory of 'form' (*sākāravāda*). Upon this view perceptual cognition does have a form, i.e., the mental object, which is what is grasped.

The adverbial theory is another modern one which provides opposition to the direct theory. Its fundamental claim is that the content of perception is to be determined independently of the object of perception. A perception is a certain modal state (say, seeing or hearing) of consciousness qualified by certain features (blue-ly or toot-ingly) [cf. Roderick Chisholm, *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca (1957); 122]. The state of consciousness is best described by a psychological verb and its characteristics or qualities by an adverb modifying it; hence the name of this theory. So both mental and external objects are dispensed with in the determination of content. In the seeing of blue, what there exists as content is neither the blue thing seen nor the blue image but the seeing-bluely alone. The content of perception is given simply and solely by the description of the perceptual state [Thomas Nagel, 'Physicalism', *The Philosophical Review*, 74(1965); 342].

Somewhat tentatively, I think that this comes closest to the classical Buddhist theory of 'self-cognition' (*ātmakhyātivāda*). There is the same dispensing with objects in the characterisation of content, and there is the same focus on the features of the perceptual experience itself rather than on what is experienced. There is, however, a major difference, in that contemporary adverbial theorists are mainly metaphysical realists, sometimes even physicalists, whereas the

Vijñānavādins and perhaps the Abhidharma phenomenalists are certainly not that; they deny the externality of the experienced world (that is not to say that they are simply idealists in the Berkleyan mode, but that is another story). The biggest problem for the modern adverbial theory is that it must reconcile its denial of the intentionality (the object-involving determination) of perception with a realist causal theory of perception in which the external world is causally determinative of the epistemic status of perception (and other cognitive states). Given this, perhaps the Buddhist denial of externality sits better with such an adverbial theory. (Recall the Buddhist statement, 'one has seeing of blue not that "it is blue", which Matilal says is purportedly in the *Abhidharmāgama*; [*Perception*; 307]).

What is intriguing with this way of looking at things is that there is a fundamental similarity between representationalists and adverbial theorists in the Indian scheme of things: both are *sākāravādins*. Both reject the direct theorist's view that perception by itself is a mere conduit between consciousness and objects, intrinsically empty of content. Both take perception to have its own determinate form. It is just that whereas the representationalist takes that form to be that of a mental object with the features of the object cognised, the adverbial theorist takes that form to be given by the nature (the features) of the experience itself. I admit that, in the latter case, some more work has to be done to show how the adverbialist's notion of the experiencing of blue (the appearing blue-ly to) parallels the *sākāravādin*'s notion of a form of blue in cognition, but it is not my intention here to pursue a proper taxonomy of theories, only to outline the opposition to the direct theory, which latter is the focus of this paper. In either case, the content of perception is not given by the object itself, which is the view of the *nirākāravādins*. In other words, one can detach the object and still have a description of the content of a perception in the representationalist and adverbial theories, whereas in a direct theory, this cannot be done: it is the object (and its features) which determine the character and content of a perception. This distinction fits exactly the difference between *sākāravāda* and *nirākāravāda*.

As I said, Śrī Harṣa focuses on *nirākāravāda*, but that does not mean that he supports *sākāravāda*. I will look at a passage where this is made clear, in order to justify my looking at his critique as purely a negative one of direct theories of perception.

After giving a general, sweepingly sceptical, methodological argument against the possibility of ever having workable definitions of perception, Śrī Harṣa makes a characteristic metaphysical point. His

metaphysics, which I have elsewhere called 'non-realism', is based on the argument that it cannot be established that there is a world of objects independent of cognition of it, though it cannot be denied that it is necessary to make the assumption that there is indeed such a world if we are to explain the nature or features of our cognition. The former point is anti-realist, since the realist (the Naiyāyika and the Mīmāṃsaka) argues that there is a world independent of cognition whose existence can be established; and the latter point is anti-idealist because the idealist (in the special sense in which the Vijñānavādin is) argues that it can be established that there is no such world. [See my papers, "Knowledge and the 'real' world: Śrī Harṣa and the *pramāṇas*", *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, June 1993; "The provisional world: Existenthood, causal efficiency and Śrī Harṣa', *Journal of Indian Philsophy*, March 1995.] This is a constant refrain throughout his book. At the stage under consideration, he argues that

> The existence of something is not to be accepted simply by the mark of knowledge (stipulated in a definition), for that would make the rule of acceptance too lax; but if it be accepted by virtue of the cognition being of that thing (itself), who could avoid the circularity? (294)[1]

This first alternative is the classic sceptical argument that there is always the danger that a cognition, while bearing the mark of knowledge as given in a particular definition of what it is to know, might well be erroneous. Thus, suppose it is defined that to know that there is tree in front of me is to see that there is a tree in front of me and justify my claim that there is a tree in terms of my seeing it. Then, suppose that I hallucinate that there is a tree (or in some phenomenologies, mistake a post for a tree) but take myself to be (or give justification that I am) seeing it. On the definition given, I would have to be counted as knowing the tree, which is absurd.

So, some reference has to be made to the truth of the matter, i.e., not only must I have the experience of seeing and give that justification, the cognition must be of that tree (the tree must be there). So the veridicality of a cognition must be determined by its content, and that content must be given by the object of that cognition. So it is the object which must first be determined (to exist and to be the way it is represented in cognition) in order that the veridicality or erroneousness of the cognition can be determined. This is where the non-realist strikes. For, as Śrī Harṣa has argued elsewhere [see my papers referred to], how can the nature and existence of the object be determined except through cognition (if

not of the subject concerned, then of others or at least of other sentient beings with whom the subject can check)? To say what an object is to say what is cognised of it, but to determine what is cognised is to determine what the object is. There is no breaking out of this circularity, if like any realist, one wishes to determine the veridicality of a cognition by reference to the object concerned, within a theory in which the content of cognition is taken to be determined by the object. Śrī Harṣa then presents the unwelcome alternative.

> If the content of cognition were to be specific (to the cognition itself, and not determined by its object), then clearly, the theory that cognition has its own form would have to be accepted. [295][2]

Any account of the determination of cognition which relies on appeal to the cognitive object as the content-giving entity seems to run up against an insuperable metaphysical difficulty. (It must be emphasised that Śrī Harṣa spends considerable time carefully building up the metaphysical case elsewhere in the text, and that the short shrift he gives metaphysical realism at this point should not be mistaken for an over-hasty and facile rejection of it. I propose for the sake of argument here to grant the tenability of Śrī Harṣa's non-realist line.) Śrī Harṣa proposes the alternative: give the account in terms of the content of cognition being intrinsic to it and independent of the features of the object (though, of course some extrinsic causal link to the object could be hypothesised for determining the veridicality of cognitions). But this is nothing other than *sākāravāda*, the theory that cognition has its own form, i.e., that its content can be given through the features of the cognition itself, independently of the object.

So Śrī Harṣa argues against the Nyāya (and Jaina and Mīmāṃsā) conception of immediacy in perception with the claim that their view collapses to that of the Buddhists, as if to say that that in itself is a problematic position. He nowhere makes a case that *sākāravāda* is itself defensible. As to his own views, they are not and are not meant to be (given his ultimate soteriological purpose) obvious.

Incidentally, he goes on to argue that anyone committed to the theory of intrinsic form (i.e. *sākāravāda*) would also be committed to idealism. This is an interesting argument. It is comparable to the Kantian claim that a representationalist theory, by splitting the content of cognition (in the form of mental objects) from the causal objects of cognition, gives up any real or direct grasp of the world and might as well be idealist. But to look at it any more deeply would again be to stray from the subject of this essay.

The proponents of the *nirākāra* theory are agreed that content is determined by the object alone; the object enters directly into content. An analysis of a perception must proceed by determining the characteristics of the objects perceived together with fixing the causal chain between object and perception. There is, however, a split within the direct theorists' camp. It has to do with the exact role of concepts – generic ideas – in perceptual content and the relationship between perception and judgements or knowledge-claims regarding what is perceived. The arguments centre on the difference and relationship between – and the relative epistemic weight of – the conception-free (*nirvikalpa*) and conceptual (*savikalpaka*) content of perception (*pratyakṣa*). Conception-free perception is sensation, the occurrence of certain events in the perceptual system of the subject which that subject undergoes. Conceptual content is that which represents the objects perceived by the subject as being in a certain way. Conception-free perception or sensation is constituted by what happens when a conscious subject's neural pathways register the fibrillation of the ear-drum; this is what the classical Indian philosophers would call 'pure' or 'unqualified' perception. Conception-loaded perception is constituted by the subject's representation of what is happening as her hearing of the beating of a drum; it is both the particular and discriminatory identification of this noise as of a drum, and the general or abstract identification of drumming noises.

Briefly, the Mīmāṁsakas hold that every perception (i.e., direct grasp of objects), while possessing intrinsic conception- free (i.e., sensational) content, is always and only grasped by the subject as a representation (a conception-loaded perception) of the object perceived. Knowledge-claims or judgments are only and always about that total content which is representational of the perceptual object. 'Even in vague or undefined cognitions, there is a perception of the two-fold aspect (the particular and the abstract representation)', writes Kumārila [*Ślokavārttika*, R. Tailangi (ed), Chowkambha Sanskrit Series, 11, Benares (1898); aphorism IV. v118]. Errors are explained, by the Prābhākara Mīmāṁsakas, as misjudgments on representational content (if there is a rope in front of me and I make an erroneous knowledge-claim that it is a snake, it is only because I think – infer, judge – that it is a snake, for perception always represents its object, here a rope). Conception-free perception (sensation) is itself never separable in analysis from the conception-loaded or representational content, and plays no epistemic role whatsoever. Hallucinations form a major threat to this account, but I will not go into that here. In short, perception is always representative

of its objects, and knowledge-claims (including erroneous ones) are inferential in nature (i.e., involve judgments based on the evidence).

The Naiyāyikas, on the other hand, think that perception can be discriminated between conception-free (sensational) and conception-loaded (representational) content. Analysis of perception must allow for the intrinsic presence of sensational or conception-free properties in a perception. Genuine epistemic variation is allowed at the level of perception in that there can be misrepresentation (i.e., conceptual content can fail to track or be faithful to the object involved). Inferential judgments form a separate class of knowledge-claims.

Śrī Harṣa does not exploit the differences between the direct theorists. Instead, he concentrates on their attempts to anchor the understanding of perception in a notion of directness or immediacy. One important note at this juncture: 'direct' and 'immediate' are not at all synonymous; e.g., representationalist will not deny that there is an immediate object of perception, but will claim that, since this is the mental object, there is no direct perception of the external object. This confusing point is nicely illustrated by the fact that the Buddhist *sākāravādins* also subscribe to a notion of immediacy; Dharmakīrti uses, in his own way, the notion of immediacy (*sākṣātkāritvaṃ*) in his account of perception [*Nyāyabinduṭikā*, P. Peterson (ed.), Bibliotheca Indica, Calcutta (1929); 11]. I will not examine the Buddhist use here because that would go beyond a consideration of Śrī Harṣa's critique of definitions of perceptions. But within the direct theory, of course, the two are synonymous: the direct object is that which is immediately grasped or is the immediate determinant of content.

The passages I will therefore concentrate on are about various attempts to say in what sense perception is direct and how the notion of immediacy can play a role in sharpening our understanding of direct perception as an instrument of knowledge.

Before we go into the text proper, another point must be made. As philosophers of the Indian tradition will know, the importance of perception lies in its being the prime instrument of knowledge, a *pramāṇa*. In other words, the interest that Indian philosophers had in perception was motivated not purely by the urge to understand the physical process of sense-contact and mental activity, but the role it played in the attainment of knowledge (and, ultimately, religious knowledge). The definitions of perception were generally given in an epistemological context, or at least with an epistemological motive. Their purpose was to not only say what perception was but also to say how it gave knowledge to the perceiver. So at all times, the concern was not merely with perception but with perceptual knowledge (and

error). This motivation must be kept in mind, because Śrī Harṣa often orients his critique to showing not just that there are conceptual difficulties with the definition of perception but that such definitions do not perform the function of explaining how perceptual knowledge is possible. In the text itself, the critique of perception follows the more general critique of epistemology which is constituted by the analysis of the *pramāṇas*. So there is a structural coherence to Śrī Harṣa's sequence of arguments. However, within the narrower confines of a paper devoted to a central concept of the direct theory of perception, we will just have to assume the background epistemological concern. Notwithstanding this caveat, I will deal with epistemological concerns where relevant. I make this point only to avoid giving the impression that Śrī Harṣa makes an unmotivated move into requirements for knowledge in the middle of a study of perception.

II

The first definition which Śrī Harṣa directly attacks is a famous and important one. Phyllis Granoff traces it back to Śabara [*Śabarabhāṣya*, Maheschandra Nyayaratna (ed.) Bibliotheca Indica, Calcutta (1873); 6] and Kumārila Bhaṭṭa [*Ślokavārttika*, VI. 19ff].

> Thus (the view), 'perception (as an instrument of knowledge) is that cognition produced by the contact of the sense-organs with the manifested form of that cognition', is refuted as well [282][3]

So Śrī Harṣa enunciates the Bhāṭṭa view thus:

> [B] Perception is that cognition produced by the contact of the sense-organs with the manifested form of that cognition [282]

The crucial idea here is to define perception in a direct way as consisting in sensation-specific representation of a causal object. The specificity of the object to sensation is indicated by the idea that it is a product of sensory contact with the object. That is to say, the causal role of the object is intrinsic to the production of sensation. In this the direct theory stands in contrast to the adverbial account in Western thought, where the causal element is extrinsic to the sensation. Typically, for the adverbial theory, [Panyot Butchvarov, 'Adverbial Theories of Consciousness', P. French, et al., (eds.) *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, v, Minneapolis (1980); 272-3], 'perception, so understood (by the adverbial theory), is a case of

consciousness in virtue of the state of sensing it involves, not in virtue of any causal relation in which that state enters.' This, in fact, allows the adverbial theorist to explain the erroneous judging that this is a snake as a condition in which the adverbial state is the same (seeing sensuous-ly) but the causal relation different (because with a rope). The direct theorist, in contrast, takes the causal object to be constitutive of the content of the perception, he aims to give an account in which the content of very sensuous state is object-sensitive. This sensitivity is indicated by the requirement that the cognition be specific to the causal object, so the cognitive state cannot be specified independently of the object. Such sensitivity would be epistemically desirable, because an explanation would then be available for how the subject's grasp does not in general deviate from the object (and therefore fulfils a condition for knowledge).

The notion of representation, of course, is evident in the characterisation of the perception in terms of the form of the perceived, causal object. The notion of 'form' (*ākāra*) is not easy to interpret in any brief way. Intuitively, it is what the object appears as to the subject of cognition, when what appears is what the object is. So the notion of 'form' tries to capture the thought that what an object is experienced as by the subject is what that object really is. The phenomenology is lined up with the ontology, as it were. Of course, behind this rough idea lurk many problems, particularly to do with how fine-grained the specification of that form should be in order for the requirement of perception to be met. What is the 'form' of the perception of the mango tree at the bottom of my parents' garden? What counts as adequate manifestation? Suppose we specify that form in terms of colour and shape. Then, even though three different perceptions, one of mine at dusk, one of mine in broad sunlight but without my spectacles, and one at that same time by my keen-eyed father, would all meet the terms of the form, clearly these are phenomenologically different states. But a direct theorist could argue that this is a matter of detail rather than conception. The conception is that the direct grasp of an object consists in the form of the object (intuitively characterised by a relevant cluster of its features) occuring in the representation of that object in the experience of the subject.

So, in any case, the representational or conceptual content of perception is defined in terms of the direct grasp of object as well. (As a matter of fact, there is much disagreement amongst direct theorists about what restrictions must be placed on the causal relationship between objects and concepts, evident in the different theories of error, but they can, for the moment, be bracketed. For a treatment of

error, see my 'Is the experienced world a determinate totality? Vācaspati on *anyathākhyātivāda* and *anirvacanīyakhyātivāda*', *Journal of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, 12, 1, December 1994].

Śrī Harṣa immediately points out that this definition is not sensitive enough to the object. Clearly, as a definition of how perception functions as an instrument of knowledge, it must indicate both how perception gives knowledge and how it can fail to do so (i.e., the definition must be put in such a way that it explains how there can be discrimination between veridical and erroneous perceptual states). But the definition as it stands cannot do that. For

> even an (erroneous) perception which deviates (in its representation of the object) is produced by the contact of the sense-organs with a certain manifested form of that cognition, since at least that (character) of being existent (or present) is (always) so manifested. [282][4]

The point is that at least part of the representation is that there is an object, and that is common in the content of all (presumably non-hallucinatory) perceptions, veridical or not. So there is no criterion for epistemic discrimination available in the definition. Śrī Harṣa then offers a way of tightening the definition.

> [B. 1] Perception (as an instrument of knowledge) is that cognition produced by the contact of the sense-organs with a specific manifested form of that cognition. [282]

Obviously, though the seeing of a rope and the seeing of a snake could arguably both be indiscriminately cases of seeing a something, there is a level of specificity at which the representations are discriminable, namely, when the particular characteristics of the snake and the rope respectively are represented. In that case, what would count as the perception of the one would not count as perception of the other. If, say, the eye were in contact with a fibrous, sinuous thing, and the representation (the manifestation in cognition) were of a scaly, sinuous thing, then that perception would fail to provide knowledge.

The aim of this definition is to define perceptual content in such a way as to give conditions of adequacy for the representation of an object. But, Śrī Harṣa asks, what is the correct level of specificity? Suppose the perception were of a complex, like a rope, rather than a singlet, like blue. Then, the perception of a rope would be that cognition produced by the seeing of – what? The alternatives are

these: either (i) the seeing of some (relevant or identifying) features that characterise a rope; or (ii) the seeing of all that makes it – and characterises it as – a rope. So, says Śrī Harṣa, the alternatives are: (i) some aspects of an object; or (ii) all of them.

He tackles (i) with two objections. Firstly, if that were the case, the definition would still be open to the weakness of the earlier version, namely, that it would not be able to allow for discrimination between veridical and erroneous perceptual states; secondly, it would not sufficiently distinguish between perception (which it is supposed to define) and mere sensation or conception-free processes (which is not what it is supposed to define) [282]. With regard to the first objection, without further criteria of relevance, there is nothing to say as to why the same aspects of two different objects cannot occur in one perception. Indeed, that is the whole point about the phenomenology of error. To see this, take some aspects seen of a rope: coiled, sinuous, thin in relation to length. It is obvious that these same aspects would also occur when it is a snake that is being seen; but the definition as it stands cannot give grounds for discrimination between veridicality and error. Even if it were a rope in front and the subject's representation were of a snake, the definition could not rule out that representation being of just those aspects which rope and snake have in common.

As to the second objection to (i), Śrī Harṣa works with the consensual direct theorist notion of sensation as being properties. (Most Buddhist philosophers would reject this notion of minimal grasp, because of their ontological commitment to the constructed or projected nature of all concepts of properties. In contrast, all direct theorists accept the existence of propertied objects, even if the Advaitins would accept this only in some provisional way.) Let us take a modern example. [This is a variation on a theme suggested by Peacocke in *Sense and Content*, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1983); 14ff]. When we look at a drawing of a Necker cube, we represent it sometimes as angled downwards to the plane of vision and sometimes upwards. Either of these can be understood as seeing in the representational sense. But whichever it is, there is, minimally, a sensation of white (the paper) and black (the lines), which register with us. But, while being sensations, these also occur as part of the conceptual content of the perception, because part of the representation is that of black lines on a white background (constituting, to be sure, only part of the richer idea of an illusorily switching cube). So the conception-free perceptual content, the sensation, is also propertied in some minimal way; it has, as it were, a

something to its content. The point we can understand Śrī Harṣa as making is that, with definition B.1 understood as being about only some aspects of the object, we can interpret the sensation of black and white as itself capturing some aspects of the object, but since this is, by definition, mere sensation and not the more complex perception, the definition does not pick out the latter as it should.

To sum up, the objection to (i) is that much more has to be done to make precise which aspects are relevant, if the definition is understood as requiring only the picking out of some but not all aspects of the object.

Śrī Harṣa next takes up alternative (ii): perception requires the manifestation of all aspects of an object. His own arguments are somewhat obscure at this stage, but I shall attempt a simpler reconstruction of his case. I shall draw out its implications, as it is an indication of his own, elusive position. It is that,

> the cognition, 'this is a pot', even though it is produced by the contact of the sense-organs with all the aspects which manifest themselves (as content of cognition), cannot be regarded as giving perceptual knowledge of the self, because the self is alone the determinate object of the perception (of the form 'I am'), and all knowledge-giving cognition requires a determinate object; for it is generally agreed that being of the nature of perception (as an instrument of knowledge) consists in having as an object just that which is the object of knowledge. [284][5]

Śrī Harṣa elides the crucial step in the argument, which involves the other theorists' picture of what happens in cases of awareness of objects. In it, for there to be perceptual awareness is not only for the object to be in contact with the sense-organs, but for the self to be in contact with the sense-organs: that is what distinguishes the case of a rough cloth being rubbed against me while I am asleep (when my self is not in contact with my tactile apparatus) and my perceiving (when awake) that I am being rubbed with a rough cloth (when my self is in contact with my senses). So, the self is explicitly involved in the content of perceptual cognition (as, indeed, any other), because perceiving that there is a pot is actually awareness that that is a pot. That awareness is constitutive of the perception, distinguishing it from a mere mechanical process of which there is no awareness, as when the cloth is rubbed against a sleeping person's skin, or a pot put in front of a drugged person and her eyelids prised apart. Awareness of a seen pot is nothing other than the self being manifested in the content of the visual perception, 'this is a pot'.

Now, we are considering alternative (ii), under which all aspects of a perception are manifested. Śrī Harṣa's argument is that, in that case, the opponent must admit that the self is manifested too. But, if so, then the theory will be in deep trouble, because it is a requirement that any theory of perceptual knowledge must say in what sense the cognition, 'this is a pot', is determinately knowledge of that pot, whereas, on the definition just given, that cognition is also cognition of the self, since the self (in the form of the awareness of a pot) is also part of the content of perception. Even according to his opponents, if there is to be perception of the self (which they think occurs in cases of introspection), such perception must determinately be of the self, the perception of self must be distinct from perception of objects. The definition, in attempting to explain how all aspects are manifested, ceases to account for how any perceptual awareness of, say, a pot, is an awareness of a pot and not the self. In other words, it fails to discriminate between perceptions of the self and perceptions of objects, even according to the terms of the opposing theorists.

Śrī Harṣa offers his opponent an alternative reading. In this, while it is acknowledged that the self is in contact with the sense organs and the organs in contact with the object, the representation of the object in preception is taken as a manifestation subsequent to the two-fold contact.

> [B.2] Perception (as an instrument of knowledge) is that cognition produced determinately by and after the contact of the sense-organs with a specific manifested form of that cognition. [287]

So, there is indeed awareness, but it is a precondition for perception, rather than a component of it. In that case, all aspects of the precondition for perception of an object would include manifestation of the self (if, in accordance with the opponent's theory, perceptual awareness is understod as contact of self with the sense organs); but the perception itself, the perception proper, would be a manifestation of the form of the object (its aspects) alone. [I must say that this suggestion, thrown in causally and in brief by Śrī Harṣa has to be developed in far greater detail, because it implies a quite complex and interesting theory of perceptual experience, but I cannot do it here. I shall, instead, take it as *prima facie* an acceptable theory, and look at Śrī Harṣa's objection to it].

Śrī Harṣa replies that even in such cases there is a manifestation of the self [ibid.] This simple point can be made by looking at the case where a cognition, 'this is a jar' (which obeys the conditions laid down in B.2), is followed by, say, 'I see this pot'. Such a cognition would be

a relevant counter-example to B.2. For with such a cognition, it would not be possible to detach self-perception from object-perception by way of interpreting the former as a precondition, since the self would enter into content in this way. So 'all aspects of the form manifested after contact (and the prerequisite self-awareness)' would once more include the manifestation of the self. This cognition would then have to be understood as a cognition of self, even given B. 2. But such a cognition would still have to be analysed as a cognition of the pot, just like the former one, and B. 2 does not seem able to do that.

With further tortuous argument, Śrī Harṣa has his opponent end up with the next obvious redefinition:

> [B. 3] Perception (as an instrument of knowledge) is that cognition produced specifically by and after the contact of the sense-organs with the specific manifested form of the object of cognition, i.e., excluding the self.
>
> But, of course, the obvious objection springs up.
>
> 'If now you were to add the specification 'excluding the self', then there would be no perception of the self at all'. [290][6]

B. 3 cannot then apply as a definition to perception of self because it is specifically excluded from the definition as a perceivable object. This would contradict Kumārila's own argument that the self is known as the direct object of perceptions using the notion of T. He repeatedly makes this point in the section on the theory of self [*Ātma-vāda* of the *Ślokavārttika;* XVIII: vv125- 6, v131].

This, at the very end of his criticism of Kumārila, is where we get an idea of what theory of perception we should impute to an Advaitin of Śrī Harṣa's type. For it is a tenet of Advaitic thought, from Śaṅkara onwards, that the self is not an object of knowledge, that it cannot be known through the instruments of the *pramāṇa* theory, that that is what it is to say that the self is the subject, not the object of knowledge. If the core of Śrī Harṣa's objections is that the theory as given by Kumārila results in the extrusion of the self from the objects of cognition, then given the Advaitin's conviction in this matter, there is nothing substantive left in the criticism of the Bhāṭṭa definition. It can be assimilated into a theory in which the self is always only the subject but never the object of cognition. Then, awareness would be explained by a different account of consciousness as the formal ascriptive function of any cognition, and there would be no particular difficulty with the extrusion of the self from the objects of cognition.

There is also an alternative, one given by the Nyāya philosopher, Gaṅgeśa, who often wrote in explicit reaction to Śrī Harṣa. He pushes the case that perception is not intrinsically a state that requires the contact of self with the senses, and that such contact is a separate introspective process (*anyvyavasāya*). To deal with this in any greater detail would be to unbalance this paper on the critique of perception. So, returning to the issue on hand, the task we would be left with is the one implied by Śrī Harṣa's earlier criticisms: what is the level of specificity we should require of representations of the aspects of the perceptual object?

The task of settling the level of specificity faces more than the problem of merely evolving more and more detailed accounts of representation. There is a very general problem with giving a suitably fine-grained account of the specificity of representation – the level of detail of conceptual content – within a theory of direct perception, with its demand for immediate grasp of the perceptual object. We may look at some of Śrī Harṣa's objections to Nyāya definitions of perception in this light.

III

Śrī Harṣa's analysis of various Nyāya definitions of perception has a wealth of interesting detail, though the lines he pursues are sometimes bewildering. There are many such lines of inquiry and they touch upon a variety of issues. They also slip between methodological issues and analytic ones, in the manner I have already mentioned. For this essay, I will focus on just one definition and its ramifications, though it is central to his critique of direct theories. The concept that I will focus on is that of immediacy (*sākṣātkāritva*). The role of this concept is to sharpen the notion of a direct grasp of objects as the immediacy of the object in perceptual content. The famous Nyāya definition (endorsed by other schools as well) upon which I shall concentrate is this:

(N) Perception is of the nature of immediacy (of grasp) (*sākṣātkāritvaṃ pratyakṣalakṣaṇaṃ*). [291]

This is found in most of the non-Buddhist schools. [Udayana, *Kiraṇāvalī*, J.S. Jetly (ed.), Gaekwad Oriental Series, 154, Baroda (1971); 183. Udayana also adds that it must be undeviating (*avyabhicārī*), but since Śrī Harṣa addresses that requirement in his earlier examination of the *pramāṇa* theory as a whole, he disregards it in his critique of perception. From the Mīmāṁsakas, there is Śalikanātha Miśra, *Prakaraṇapañcikā*, Subrahmanya Shastri (ed.),

Benares Hindu University Darsana Series, Benares (1961); 104. For the Jaina endorsement of this notion, Siddhasena, *Nyāyāvatāra,* A.N. Upadhye (ed.), Jain Sahitya Vikas Mandal (1971); 47.]

After various forays into methodological issues, Śrī Harṣa takes up a direct study of the notion of immediacy [301ff]. The first interpretation he takes up is:

> [N.1.1] Immediacy is the illumination of an object with specific qualifications (*svaviśeṣārthaprakāśakatvaṃ*). [301]

The specificity of qualification is intended to capture the nature of a demonstrative object. So, the inferential cognition that there is a fire on the other side of the mountain (deduced from the seeing of the smoke) would be a cognition of a referentially opaque fire: whichever fire it is that caused the smoke that is seen. In the same way, we would say, seeing a painting, 'the painter is a talented person', and while picking out a person who is indeed talented as a painter, we would nonetheless pick out the person, as the Indians would put it, only generally. In contrast, the perceptual cognition of a fire would be a grasp of a fire with 'specific qualities': that size, that flickering shape, that mix of colours. Similarly, when we consider what it would be to actually have our eyes register a person applying paint to canvas and say then to ourselves, 'the painter is a talented person', we can understand how our grasp of that person is specific now in a way it was not in the former case. Again, consider the difference between 'I want *the* red-and-blue Persian carpet you promised me yesterday, and I want *this* (pointing) red-and-blue Persian carpet that is under my feet now'. There is an intuitive level at which we seem to understand that our grasp of an object through our senses (and perhaps most vividly through our eyes) has a richness of detail with regard to the qualities of that object that other, inferential cognitions do not. So it is this characteristic of specificity which occurs as a result of a form of grasping the object – directly, immediately – just as that object is, which defines perception.

Intuitive the difference may be, but Śrī Harṣa the dialectecian is intent on showing up its conceptual incoherence. His basic objection is that there is no clear way of distinguishing between the specificity of perceptual representation and that of inferential representation. His first shot is this. Suppose we construe the definition in this way:

> [N.1.2.] Immediacy is the illumination of an object with specific qualifications which are contigently its qualifications.

The definition cannot hold because,

> if the specific qualification is only a contingent feature (*upalakṣaṇa*) (for the identification) of the object, it (immediacy) would enter the realm of inference as well. [301][7]

This objection hinges on the conception of a contingent feature (*upalakṣaṇa*) of identification. The idea is that though there are features which it is perfectly true to say that an object has, nevertheless there is a sense in which those features are such that their absence would not change the manner of the identification of the object concerned. The classic example given is that of a house with a crow sitting on the roof, it is true that is a house with a crow on the roof, but that is an *upalakṣaṇa*, because the identification of the house is not made on that basis. It is contingently true that the house can be identified as that upon which a crow is sitting, but that characteristic is not constitutive of the identity of the house.

While the *upalakṣaṇa* is easily identified in the example above, clearly it is less obvious in others. Śrī Harṣa plays on that fact. One could argue that location too plays a role in identifying a fire and is therefore a specific quality; but then, one could infer in the stock example that the fire 'is on that mountain over which the smoke is hanging', which is specific enough. Similarly, we may suppose that a painter being an expressionist is a specific enough quality of her's; but again obviously, we could (indeed usually do) infer that she is an expressionist by looking at her work. So inferential cognitions seem to be able to pick out specific qualities as well.

So the specific qualities should be ones which somehow are not ones that could be grasped through other cognitive modes. The specific qualities must be constitutive features (*viśeṣaṇa*) of the object (and therefore of the way in which it is consistently identifiable).

> [N.1.3] Immediacy is the illumination of an object with specific qualifications which are constitutive features (*viśeṣaṇa*) of the object.

Śrī Harṣa objects that even that does not work. His first objection is not terribly convincing: he seems to think that the cognition of such a constitutive feature somehow involves a regress of endless cognitions, and I will ignore it. His second objection is more to the point.

> Even if there were no regress, the grasping involved in the inference of pervasion would itself encompass the immediacy of grasp of the qualities (of the objects involved in the relationship of pervasion). [301][8]

This is tersely put and not easy to follow. Before we attempt an explanation, however, a brief word on pervasion. Pervasion (*vyāpti*) is, of course, the law-like relationship of concomitance between two entities, such that if A pervades B, then it is justifiable to deduce from the presence of B to that of A. (I give the minimal requirement here, for anything more detailed would take us into one of the most vexed areas of Indian disputation.) In the stock example of fire and smoke, the seeing of smoke licenses the inference that there is fire, since fire pervades smoke.

Śrī Harṣa's point can be made through an elaboration of the example. Wet hay causes a darker smoke to emanate while dry hay causes a whiter smoke. Arguably, the colour of the smoke in the two cases are constituent features of the two fires respectively; their identities are surely bound to the fact that they are fires activated in differently propertied hay-stacks. Now imagine that an individual sees first the one and then the other column of smoke. The two fires are grasped respectively in these inferential cognitions. But the important point is this: To perceive white smoke is to grasp a constituent feature of one fire – the feature that it is lit on dry hay; likewise, to perceive dark smoke is to grasp a constituent feature of the other fire – that it is lit on wet hay. Clearly, such grasp is needed and found, for that is how inferences from the colours of smoke to the nature of the fires are licensed. And again, clearly, these are inferential cognitions of the fire. But the inferences are about constituent features of the fires (their being lit on dry and wet hay respectively). On the definition given, inferences would be immediate too, which is absurd. So there cannot be a way of defining perception through the use of the idea that it is an immediate grasp of the object in a particular way (i.e., through grasp of specific content-giving features).

Śrī Harṣa also pays attention to the notion of specificity in the definition. His objections, tersely – and some may feel, hastily – put, nevertheless give a good idea of the difficulties which face this concept.

> If the expression 'specific qualifications' means 'that which distinguishes or differentiates', it would be too narrow to include conception-free perception. [304][9]

This is the classic but still potent objection that sensations do not by themselves discriminately pick out objects. The Naiyāyikas themselves insist on it. A subject presented with a piece of paper on which a cube and a cylinder are drawn will have sensations of black and white. She may have some minimal representational content of black and white,

as Śrī Harṣa would have to accept, given his own argument against definition B.1 earlier, but any reasonably precise requirement for discrimination within the *pramāṇa* theory would have to ask for more in order for her to be taken as distinguishing between the figures represented in the drawings. (Compare Alvin Goldman's idea that for a cognitive mechanism to discriminate or differentiate is for it to 'operate in such a way that incompatible states of the world would generate different cognitive responses' {Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge, *Journal of Philosophy*, 73/20, 1976, 771-91; 77]. A drawing cannot be both a representation of a cube and of a cylinder, because representations of these two different things would be incompatible.)

Sensations by themselves are insufficient for the sort and level of discrimination required for epistemic activity. Yet, of course, the Naiyāyikas would not want to exclude sensation from the definition of perception.

There are, however, dangers in trying to make specificity an externalist condition which can be met purely by the holding of a certain relationship between any perceptual state (including conception-free ones) and the object.

> If the expression 'specific qualifications' is taken as the manifestation 'of that individuality (of 'own-form') which the object has (in its existence) in distinction from the rest of the world', then the perception, from a distance, of a generic character too would not come under perception; but if perception were just the manifestation of a determinate difference from (the rest) of the world, there would be no occurrence of doubt, etc. [ibid.][10]

This is an externalist condition which Śrī Harṣa offers his opponent (one in keeping with Nyāya inclinations, but that is another, if closely related, story). It seems as if the specificity is given, not by the subject's discriminatory capacity to represent an object veridically as it is apart from everything else, but simply by the object of perception itself being what it is (different from everything else). Presumably, the object is the object of perception because it is the cause of that perception, though Śrī Harṣa does not explicitly say so (the Naiyāyika would be happy to accept that in any case). So long as the subject has the representation of an object (i.e., the object is manifested or illuminated in awareness), the very fact of the object being in a certain way (being determinately an entity with features individual to it) makes the perception of it a perception with specific qualifications; it must be assumed that the specific qualifications in a

veridical perception are representations of just those features which determinately individuate that object.

So, suppose there is a mango-tree at the bottom of the garden, on the left-hand side when seen from the kitchen, with its trunk one foot from the fence, etc. The subject has a perceptual jugdgement that there is a tree. On the account just given, the tree having such features as make it different from everything else (the fence, the lawn surrounding it, the avocado trees further in at the middle and to the night, etc.) makes the perception of it one with specific qualifications, even if the subject does not herself represent it that way. In that case, even the sensation she has, coming out of the kitchen door late one evening, of dark green (leaves), dark brown (the trunk), rustling (of leaves against fence) and so on, would count as perception, and therefore avoid Śrī Harṣa's earlier objection.

He counters that this will not do. For if even such perception are determinate by virtue of the specificity that all objects (except vague ones, if there are any) have, there would be no room for doubt and other such indeterminate judgemental states regarding what we experience. (I make a distinction between doubts about experience, which sort is relevent here, and doubts about the existence or nature of the objects experienced. Clearly, there is a difference between, 'what do I see?' interpreted as 'What is going on in my visual field?' (a doubt about experience) and as 'What is the entity that is causally responsible for the image I am having?' (a doubt about the object being experienced). Of course, if sight is to count as an instrument of knowledge, the answering of the first question would have to be a prerequisite for the answering of the second. One could be sure of the nature of the experience ('there is a seeing of dark green leaves of such-and-such-shape, and of a trunk of such-and-such texture') but be unsure of the object experienced ('but is it a mango tree or a fig tree? Or is there a tree at all or am I hallucinating?'). One could not be unsure of the phenomenology of experience and yet be sure of the object experienced (one could be sure on extrinsic grounds like inference or testimony). Clearly, in the present discussion of the nature of perception, it is the first question that is relevant.)

Śrī Harṣa's point is that there are such things as doubtful perceptions. The perception of generic character is one such. An example of a doubt-involving experience is one in which the subject, new to the house, looks out of the kitchen, and in poor light, has the experience of seeing a tree. Suppose that, as a matter of fact, her eyes have registered the mango-tree on the left-hand corner of the garden. Suppose that her judgement is that there is, possibly, a single tree of

some unidentified type there on the left. She is not sure if what she is seeing is a single tree or more and what species it is. She is not picking it out as it is, a particular object apart from everything else in the world.

This is a perfectly normal and coherent scenario. What is it that she should be counted as representing as being in that garden? On the Nyāya account given, it should be of that particular mango-tree, in that location, because, *ex hypothesi,* that in what is causing her perceptual experience. But, surely, if that is all there is, she should be having no doubts at all about what she is seeing? If the content of her perception is specifically qualified by the individual characteristics of that tree, then she should represent her experience as being, precisely, of that tree. (Or else, there should be other elements of content which allow for doubt, but then the perception would not be specifically qualified by the features of that tree alone.) But she represents her experience much more generally and doubtfully. So the account of what is represented in perception must be much more complex than the one given, if the phenomenology of doubt is to be explained. (There is another way out too, and that is by giving a different account of doubt. In it, the representational content is detached from the attitude of doubt, so that it is possible to say that the representation could be specified by the causal object regardless of the propositional attitude (of doubt or certainty) of the subject. This would require a complex explanation for doubt. Again, in the aftermath of Śrī Harṣa's criticism, it is with Gaṅgeśa that we find such a proposal.)

IV

These are some of the salient features of Śrī Harṣa's analysis of the non-Buddhist theory of perception. This theory has the advantage of being direct in more than one sense. It makes fewer demands on intermediate entities like mental object, it is less vulnerable to the sceptical threat which a realist faces of loss of systematic contact with an external world, it fits neatly into a theory of knowledge by accounting for how cognition is sensitive – through undeviating tracking – to its object. It does all this by making the object immediately responsible for the content of perception.

It is this immediacy of perception, this direct manifestation of the object in content such that knowledge is possible, which Śrī Harṣa argues is diffcult to secure. His arguments against both B and N definitions focus on the idea that perception can be both immediate

and specific. The direct theorist thinks that immediacy has all the theoretical benefits pointed out in the preceding paragraph. But he wants such an account of immediacy to also be part of a theory of knowledge in which perception is an instrument. It is for this reason that he wants specificity for the perceptual representation of the object. It is no good making a case for the content of perception being determined by the object if the resulting account of perception fails to meet epistemic requirements. In order for perception to give knowledge, it must be suitably discriminating about the object, it must be specific in its representation of that object. Surely that is a minimal requirement for any theory of perceptual knowledge.

We can see from what has gone that the thrust of Śrī Harṣa's fundamental objection is that immediacy and discriminating specificity are difficult to bring together. For a perception (indeed any cognition) to play an epistemic role, it must at least not represent its object as that object is not. But further, it must not accidentally represent its object as that object is. In order to non-accidentally represent an object, the subject must have cognitions which in general are undeviating (*avyabhicārā*) from their representations of the object. Let us consider a standard case in which the identical twins, Usha and Lata are seen by Udayana. He sees Lata for a few days, and one day sees Usha but represents her as Lata. The *pramāṇa* theory would hold that Udayana's perceptions have deviated. He has not discriminatingly represented Usha and Lata. Clearly, it would be a requirement for the direct theory of perceptual knowledge that Udayana's perception specifies which is Lata and which Usha. This is just to say that he must discriminate between them.

The thrust of Śrī Harṣa's argument is that this level of discrimination requires conceptual content – the ideas of who Usha and Lata are respectively – not available in immediate perception. Immediate perception is merely the light and other sensory input from the two figures which impinge on Udayana's system and register in his mind. Śrī Harṣa's point is that the immediacy the direct theorist wants is only available at the conception-free level of sensation (*nirvikalpa pratyakṣa*), when, even he acknowledges, the object may coherently be thought to enter content unmediated. But this level is, as all will agree, inadequate for the discriminatory grasp required for knowledge, a grasp provided only through conceptual perception (*savikalpa pratyakṣa*) or representation. But, Śrī Harṣa argues, this is no longer an immediate grasp of the object, or if it is, then even inferential cognitions would have to be counted as immediate. The direct theorist attempts to explain how even such discriminating

conceptual content can be direct, through his notion of specificity. And we have seen how Śrī Harṣa argues that this is not defensible.

The moral that we should draw is not that the direct theory has failed but that it is extremely difficult to find a balance between immediate grasp and conceptual grasp, between the direct presentation of object to perception and discriminating representation of that object in perception. It is a very fine balance, and we will have to leave this essay as merely an indication of the challenge we face in finding it.

We should, perhaps, admit that it is unfair of Śrī Harṣa to give such a purely negative treatment of the issue of specificity. But at least we should be grateful that his critique sensitises us to the difficulties involved. It would be possible to extract, especially from his writings on the nature of self-knowledge as being intrinsic (the *svataḥprākaśa* theory), some more positive Advaitic theory, but that is another task. I think it is sufficiently interesting to note that in the course of his larger programme, Śrī Harṣa throws light on an issue – the manner in which direct grasp and immediacy could function in a theory of perceptual knowledge – which concerns philosophers to this day.*

REFERENCES

1. *Na'tyapattyā pramāmātrāt te'rthāḥ svīkriyocitāḥ |*
   Toddhiyas tadurīkāre svāśrayaṃ kaś cikitsatu || p. 294.
2. *Athā'nyaḥ sa viśeṣaś cet taddhītvaṃ kaścid iṣyate |*
   Dattaḥ sākāravādāya viṣtaraḥ spaṣtam eva tat || p. 295.
3. *Etena bhāsamānākārendriyasaṃprayogajaṃ pratyakṣamapi nirastam.* p. 282.
4. *Vyabhicāryapi hi bhāsamānasya sattāder ākārasyendriyasaṃyogād utpadyate.* p. 282.
5. *Yāvadbhāsamānākarendriyasaṃyogajamapi bhavati ghaṭo 'yomapi'iti vijñānaṃ, na ca ātmani pratyakṣam, ātmanas tadīyāviṣayatvāt, yatra prāmaṇyaṃ tatra eva viṣaye tadviśeṣyya pratyakṣyatvasya vaktavyatvāt.* p. 284.
6. *Atha ātmavyaktirikte iti viśeṣaṇam prakṣipasi, ātmaviṣayasya pratyakṣatā na syāt.* p. 290.
7. *Saviśeṣatvasyotpalakṣaṇatve 'numānādivyāptiḥ.* p. 301.
8. *Yady aviṣrāntis tadā tādṛśasyaiva vyāptigrahādanumāyāmapi tādṛśasiddhiriti sākṣātkāritvāpattiḥ.* p. 301.
9. *Viśeṣaś ca yadivyavacchedastadā nirvikalpakā 'vyaptiḥ.* p. 304.
10. *Yadi ca taditaraviśvavyāvṛttasvarūpaprakāśaḥ, so'pi tathā tadā dūrāt sāmānya-pratyakṣasyā 'pratyakṣatvāpattiḥ.* p. 304.

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