Whose experience validates what for Dharmakīrti?

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1 Introduction

It is well known that Dharmakīrti followed Dignāga in accepting that there are exactly two sources of new knowledge (*pramāṇa*), namely, sensation (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*), and that the criteria by which these two means of acquiring knowledge are distinguished were somewhat different for the two philosophers. Dignāga claimed that the two sources of knowledge were distinct in that sensation deals only with sensible qualities, which are always particular (*svalakṣaṇa*), whereas inference deals only with intellectible properties, which are always general (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*). Universals (*jāti*) and other general properties are never directly sensed, according to Dignāga. Rather, the intellect ignores subtle differences in sensible particulars and forms the notion that things that are not remarkably different are similar. This idea of similarity or generality is then attributed to what has been sensed so that one who is unwary may come to believe that he has actually sensed the similarity, rather than having imposed a mental construct upon sensation.

2 Dharmakīrti's theory of knowledge: an overview

2.1 Two sources of new knowledge

Dharmakīrti's set of criteria for separating sensation from inference is more complex than Dignāga's. While accepting that sensation receives only sensible properties and inference deals only in intellectible properties, Dharmakīrti adds several further considerations. These important additions are spelled out in the first three verses of the chapter on sensation of his *Pramāṇavārttika*.[1]

> PV 2.1: There are two means of knowing, because there are two types of subject matter, depending on whether it has or lacks the potential to realize

[1] In citations of passages from the *Pramāṇavārttika* (PV), the order of chapters as found in Manorathanandin's commentary will be used: 1) Pramāṇa-siddhi, 2) Pratyakṣa, 3) Svārthānumāna, 4) Parārthānumāna.

> one's goal. [Floating] hair and so forth [seen by a person with eye disease] is not a real object, because one has no striving for [it as] a goal.
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> PV 2.2: And [there are two kinds of subject matter] depending on whether or not there is similarity and depending on whether or not it is the subject matter of language, because an idea may or may not arise when some other cause [than the object] is present.
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> PV 2.3: Here, that which is capable of realizing one's goal is called real in the truest sense; the other is called real by common sense. These two [realities] are the particular and the universal [respectively].

In this passage, Dharmakīrti correlates the two types of knowable object to the two levels of truth recognized throughout Buddhist philosophy. Because the sensible particular has the capacity to realize an object (*arthakriyā-śakti*), it is real in the true sense (*paramārthasat*); because the intellectible universal lacks this capacity, it is only conventionally real (*saṃvṛtisat*).

2.2 *Arthakriyā-śakti*

The above passages make it clear that the capacity to realize an object is a key criterion to distinguish between two types of reality, and yet, as Nagatomi (1967–68), Mikogami (1979) and Katsura (1984) have all pointed out, Dharmakīrti's notion of *arthakriyā-śakti* is said to be a generic feature of both kinds of knowledge, and not merely a feature that distinguishes sensation from inference. Dharmakīrti says:

> PV 1.3: Knowledge is non-deceptive cognition. Being non-deceptive consists in being conducive to the accomplishment of a purpose. Even ideas acquired through language are knowledge, because language makes known [the speaker's] intention.

Consequently, the notion of *arthakriyā-śakti* admits of two different interpretations. As a criterion of sensation, the term refers to the ability of a particular to serve as the cause of an effect. There are two aspects of this causal capacity. First, a particular, which perishes in the very moment in which it arises, causes another particular of the same kind to take its place; that is, an evanescent visible property will be immediately replaced by another barely distinguishable visible property, and an ephemeral mental event will be immediately replaced by another barely distinguishable mental event. The second aspect of a particular's causal capacity is that a particular sensible property causes a representation of itself to occur in the cognition of a sentient being whose sense faculties are stimulated by it.

As a criterion of inferential knowledge, on the other hand, the term *arthakriyā-śakti* refers to the ability of an inference to guide a person successfully in purposeful activity, that is, activity that results in the person's successfully avoiding something undesirable or attaining something desirable. Thus, for example, if a person wished to find water but could not see any in the immediate vicinity, he might look for a set of sensible properties that he knew from past experience were associated with water; by following these clues, he would succeed in finding what he had hoped to find. And, as

a matter that is more central to Dharmakīrti's mission, if one were to have a desire to bring discontent (*duḥkha*) to an end, one might reflect on the advice of a person who knew how to achieve this goal.

2.3 The Buddha as a source of knowledge

A key aspect of Dharmakīrti's epistemological theory to bear in mind is that his overall purpose in writing his epistemological works seems to be to demonstrate that the teachings of the Buddha, and especially the four noble truths, are uniquely suited to guide people to the highest good, nirvāṇa. Other theories of the nature of discontent, its causes and the means of eliminating it, being either demonstrably false or not demonstrably true, are said to be attended by a greater risk of failure than are the basic teachings of the Buddha.

> PV 1.134: The Compassionate One is well versed in strategies for getting rid of discontent, because it is a difficult task to explain the goal, which is not within the range of the senses, and the means of attaining it.

Here Dharmakīrti clearly states his view that the goal of achieving nirvāṇa, which is the same as the cessation of the causes of discontent, is not available to the senses. The knowledge necessary to achieve nirvāṇa, therefore, is not considered to be a purely empirical matter. Rather, it requires the application of the intellectual faculty and is facilitated by the guidance of traditional Buddhist teachings (*āgama*).

> PV 1.135: Examining things through both reasoning and the traditional teachings, one [who desires nirvana] inquires into the cause of discontent through the particularities of discontent, and inquires also into the impermanence that characterizes it.
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> PV 1.136: Since one sees that there is no end of the effect so long as the cause remains, one inquires into what is incompatible with the cause in order to get rid of it.
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> PV 1.137: And the antidote to the cause is ascertained by knowing the nature of the cause. The cause is attachment, which is created by the concepts of self and ownership, and which become part of one's character.

As Vasubandhu had done before him, Dharmakīrti spares no effort in showing that the Buddhist view of the human condition is uniquely capable of leading to nirvāṇa, since Buddhism is alone in recognizing that there is no enduring self (*ātman*), and that a false belief in such a self is the root delusion from which spring all unhealthy mental states, such as desire and aversion, from which in turn arise all counterproductive and harmful verbal and bodily actions.

> PV 1.138–139: The realization that there is no self, which realization is incompatible with the cause, destroys it. The virtues and shortcomings of that cause become very clear to one who practices many methods repeatedly for a long time. And because of that lucidity of mind, the impression left by the cause is left behind.

> PV 1.140: This is what differentiates the great sage from the solitary buddhas and others who attempt to help others. [Buddhist] education is held to be nothing but the constant practice of methods [of getting rid of the fundamental causes of discontent].
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> PV 1.141–142: Since he first came into being [as a Buddha] because of the perfection [of these two virtues, namely, the desire to help others and skill as a teacher], these two things are said to be the cause [of the Buddha]. The fact of being a Buddha, which comprises three virtues, consists in getting rid of the cause [of discontent]. His well-being stems from the fact that discontent has nowhere to stand in him, because he has realized that there is no self as well as because of his methodical reasoning. The production of birth and the production of vices [such as desire] are called rebirth.
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> PV 1:143–144c: The end of rebirth comes from getting rid of the seed, namely, the view that there is a self. Because of alienation from that truth, remaining is without afflictions and torment with imperfections in body, speech and mind, or it is lack of skill in explaining the path. Getting rid of that completely is a result of practice.

3 Tensions within Dharmakīrti's theory

In the passages that have been quoted up to this point, there seems to be some inconsistency. On the one hand, it seems that it is the experience of the senses that grasps that which is true in the highest sense (*paramārtha*) of the word. On the other hand, it seems that the greatest good (*paramārtha*) is beyond the range of the senses and that one can be directed towards it only through sound reasoning. Even the judgement that the words of the Buddha provide sound advice on how best to achieve nirvāṇa is arrived at through a long chain of reasoning. One must use his words to infer the beliefs that he had in speaking them; then one must determine both that the Buddha was sincere in stating his beliefs and that his beliefs were correct. And the task of determining whether or not the Buddha's beliefs were correct requires that one be able to find some independent means of verifying what he said, a means that does not depend solely on one's unwarranted confidence in the Buddha's wisdom and benevolent intentions.

In the sections that follow, let me try to expand the problem inherent in Dharmakīrti's view of pure sensation (*pratyakṣa*), whereby it is portrayed on the one hand as the only means of acquiring knowledge of ultimate reality and is portrayed on the other hand as too weak to arrive at the knowledge necessary to enable one to achieve nirvāṇa, the greatest good.

3.1 The limitations of pure sensation

Pure sensation, as described by Dharmakīrti, has two features that reduce its effectiveness as a means of acquiring knowledge of the four noble truths, which is supposed to be important in the attainment of nirvāṇa. The first of these features may be seen as intrinsic in that it is part of pure sensation by definition, while the second may be seen as an extrinsic feature that arises because of practical considerations.

An intrinsic feature of pure sensation, as expressed in PV 2.2, is that its subject matter is always a particular, which cannot be the subject matter of conceptual thinking and which is therefore inexpressible through language. But the content of the Buddha's awakening is not a particularity at all. On the question of the contents of the Buddha's awakening, Akira Hirakawa (1990, p. 27) reports that Hakuju Ui compiled a list of fifteen different accounts of the Buddha's awakening in the Buddhist *āgama* literature. These accounts follow three basic patterns. One pattern is that Gautama became a Buddha by discovering the principle of dependent origination (*pratītya samutpāda*), for which there are two different formulations in the Buddhist *āgama* accounts; a second pattern is that he became a Buddha by mastering the four levels of meditation (*dhyāna*) and acquiring three types of extraordinary knowledge; the third pattern is that he became a Buddha by understanding the four noble truths. It is the third type of account that is stressed most often by Dharmakīrti, but it may be worth examining each of the three patterns from the point of view of Buddhist epistemologists under the influence of Dignāga.

3.1.1 Sensation and dependent origination

There are several different detailed or expanded formulas for dependent origination in the *āgama* literature,[2] but for philosophical purposes the more important version of dependent origination is the shorter one that states the basic principle of causation in the words "This [effect] comes into being when that [cause] is present. This arises owing to the arising of that. This does not arise when that is absent. This ceases owing to the cessation of that."[3] The philosophical importance of this formula of dependent origination resides in part in the fact that it is plainly reflected in the definitions of evidence (*hetu*) offered by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. In his *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, for example, Dignāga defines a sign as a property that is "present in the inferable object and what is similar to it and absence in their absence."[4] Similarly, Dharmakīrti says in the *Nyāyabindu* "an inferential sign has three characteristics: it must be known to be present with what is to be inferred, present only with what is like the subject and entirely absent in what is unlike the subject."[5] According to Dharmakīrti, one thing X can serve as a sign of a second thing Y only if there is a natural relation (*svabhāva-pratibandha*) between X and Y, and X can be said to be naturally related to Y only if X is present when Y is present and absent when Y is absent. Speaking from a metaphysical point of view, Dharmakīrti says that there are only two situations in which this kind of natural relation is found: 1) when Y is a cause of X, and 2) when X and Y have exactly the same set of causes. The stock example of the first situation is that smoke can serve as a sign of fire only because fire is a cause of smoke, which means

[2] The Mahāpadāna Suttanta of the Dīghanikāya, for example, enumerates ten factors (*nidāna*). Mahāvaggo 1.1 of the Vinaya-piṭaka, and numerous texts in the Sutta-piṭaka, enumerate twelve factors. Still other canonical texts enumerate nine, six or even fewer.

[3] "Imasmiṃ sati, idaṃ hoti; imass' uppādā idaṃ uppajjati; imasmiṃ asati, idaṃ na hoti; imassa nirodhā, idaṃ nirujjhati." This formula is found in several suttas, one of them being the Cūḷa-Sakuludāyisutta, sutta 79 of the Majjhimanikāya.

[4] *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 2.5cd: anumāne 'tha tattulye sadbhāvo nāstitāsati.

[5] *Nyāyabindu* 2.5: trairūpyaṃ punar liṅgasyānumeye sattvam eva, sapakṣa eva sattvam, asapakṣe cāsattvam eva niścitam.

that smoke is present when fire is present and absent when fire is absent. The stock example of the second situation is that the fact that something is an oak can serve as a sign that it is a tree, because the set of causes that make the property of being an oak arise are exactly the set of causes that make the property of being a tree arise; in other words, it takes no more and no less to make a given particular thing a tree than it takes to make it an oak. It is not difficult to see that the principle of causality stands behind Dharmakīrti's theory of inference to the same extent that it stands behind the Buddha's notion of how one attains freedom from distress. And so if the Buddha could say that to see dependent origination is tantamount to seeing the Buddha himself, Dharmakīrti would be entitled to say that to know the theory of inference is also tantamount to knowing the Buddha.

Now the question can be asked: what kind of knowledge is involved in seeing dependent origination? Is it sensation or inference? Given that the subject matter of a sensation can be only that which exists in the immediate present and that this type of cognition is said to be completely free of any admixture of recollections of the past or anticipations of the future, the knowledge described in the short formula of dependent origination cannot be sensation. For in order to know that X is present when Y is present and absent when Y is absent requires at least two moments, one of shared presence and a second of shared absence. Furthermore, one must retain the knowledge of one of these moments during the second moment, so that the second moment must involve some degree of thought on top of what is being immediately sensed. The cognition of even one instance of dependent origination, being the apprehension of a temporal process, is similar to the discernment of a melody, which can never be grasped if one is aware only of the note that is being played in the present instant.

The full grasp of dependent origination is, however, much more than the apprehension of a single temporal process. It is really a generalization that is supposed to be true of all sentient beings at all times. This becomes more clear when one looks at the slightly expanded formulas in which it is typically said that any form of desire (*tṛṣṇā*) ultimately results in some form of disappointment or distress (*duḥkha*). It would hardly rank as a momentous discovery if all the Buddha had meant to say was that one particular episode of desire in his life resulted in one particular episode of frustration. The Buddha's first sermon is not portrayed as his own personal recollection of, for example, scowling when he was not given permission to fulfill his desire to ride a white pony on the day of the fourth anniversary of his birth. Rather, it is portrayed as his proclamation of a discovery that all desire anywhere eventually results in some degree of frustration of some kind. It is, in other words, a piece of knowledge that has all the characteristics that Dharmakīrti attributes to inference.

3.1.2 Sensation and three types of extraordinary knowledge

A second pattern of text that describes the Buddha's awakening relates that he entered into increasingly abstracted states of meditation.[6] In the first state, it is said, the Buddha

[6]Examples of this pattern can be found in the Bhayabheravasutta, number 4 of the Majjhimanikāya. Similar discussions of these states of meditation in other contexts appear in, for example, the Sāmaññaphalasutta and the Sampasādanīyasutta, numbers 2 and 28 of the Dīghanikāya.

became aloof from the pleasures of the senses and entered into a state of elated intellectual reflection; the reflection stopped as he entered the second state, which was one of rapture and joy; at the third stage, rapture disappeared, leaving only joy; and at the fourth stage, joy disappeared and was replaced by equipoise, an emotionally balanced state free of both pleasure and pain. While in this fourth state, say the texts, the Buddha began to recall hundreds of thousands of his previous lives, including such details as his name, clan, diet and lifespan. Then, with a kind of superhuman divine vision (*dibbacakkhu*), he witnessed the dying and rebirth of all kinds of sentient being, and he saw what kinds of conduct resulted in what kinds of birth; in other words, he saw the principle of karman at work throughout the world. Finally, he "directed the mind to knowledge of" the four noble truths, that is, the nature of distress, its cause, the fact that removing the cause would eliminate the effect, and the method of removing the cause.

Once again it can be asked whether it is sensation or inference that is involved in these three types of superior knowledge. The first type of knowledge is depicted as nothing more than recalling past events, and since this is grasping what has already been grasped (*gṛhītagrahaṇa*) it would not be regarded by Dharmakīrti as a case of *pramāṇa*, or acquiring new knowledge.[7] The second superior knowledge, which consists in witnessing the deaths and rebirths of all kinds of sentient beings, is evidently the perception of a process that takes place over time. Moreover, observation of this process is said to have lead the Buddha to conclude that *in general* beings who do lovely actions achieve pleasant rebirths, while beings who do ugly actions achieve unpleasant rebirths. As in the apprehension of dependent origination, this kind of knowledge would therefore have to be classed as a kind of inductive reasoning (*anumāna*). This leaves the third form of superior knowledge, which consists in grasping the four noble truths.

3.1.3 Sensation and the four noble truths

Vetter (1988, p. xxvi–xxvii) has already discussed the apparent contradiction involved in the Buddha's turning his mind to the four noble truths while in a meditative state that has been described as being free of discursive thinking, for everything about the stock presentation of the four noble truths bears the mark of discursive thinking. But the issue of whether or not the Buddha could have arrived at the four truths through the method of practising abstracted states of meditation is one that can be set aside for the time being. What is more to the point for our discussion here is what kind of knowing is involved in grasping the four truths. And, as in all the cases discussed above, it is clear that the grasping of the four noble truths involves considerably more than the sort of pure sensation that Dharmakīrti says deals only with particulars and never with universals. Indeed, the four truths are typically presented as merely one of the many frameworks within which the general notion of causation may be discussed.

[7] PV 1.5a: gṛhītagrahaṇān neṣṭaṃ sāṃvṛtam.

3.1.4 Bodhi: arthakriyā-śakti and paramārtha

If the Buddha's accounts of his awakening (*bodhi*) are to serve as a source of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) for others, then there is a sense in which those accounts are to be regarded as having *arthakriyā-śakti* and being *paramārtha-sat*. As we have seen, both of these terms are ambiguous, but it is possible to disambiguate them. The discussion in the preceding sections has shown that regardless which traditional report one follows, the content of the Buddha's awakening must be understood within Dharmakīrti's system as having the form of generalities rather than of particularities. Therefore, if one follows the definitions given by Dignāga and accepted with certain modifications by Dharmakīrti, the type of knowledge involved in the Buddha's becoming a Buddha was inference rather than sensation, that is, it was *anumāna* rather than *pratyakṣa*. Knowing this enables us to decide among the alternative possible meanings within each set of ambiguities. When applied to the four noble truths and so forth the term "arthakriyā" must be understood in the sense of realizing a goal rather than in the sense of causing a specific effect. And the term *paramārtha* cannot be understood in the sense of an ultimately real object in contrast to an object accepted as real by human consensus; rather, it must be understood in the sense of pertaining to the highest good, namely, nirvāṇa, in contrast with what is popularly (*laukika*) regarded as good in quotidian life. Indeed, Dharmakīrti is explicit in saying that nirvāṇa must ultimately be regarded as a fiction. Nirvāṇa is commonly understood as the cessation of rebirth, but rebirth itself is an idea that makes sense only if one imposes the notion of a unified self upon a group of discrete properties. One may impose the concept of person upon what is sensed; and one may then imagine that this person has a life; and one may go even further and fancy that the person who is having one life is identical in some sense to a person who had experiences in another life. But once this complex fiction of a self undergoing a series of lives, deaths and rebirths is given up, then so is the fiction that this elaborate process comes to an end.

> PV 1.193cd-194: As long as one does not give up favouring oneself, one imagines oneself a victim of affliction and goes on suffering, and one does not live as a happy person. Even though there is no one who achieves liberation, it takes an effort to give up this false imagining.

This suggests that nirvāṇa is not regarded as an ultimately real thing, since it is nothing more than the absence of the false belief in a self, and an absence is not a thing at all. That notwithstanding, nirvāṇa can still be regarded as the highest good, since nothing is better than being free of the delusion that serves as the root cause of all discontent. Dharmakīrti's position thus turns out to be similar to the one advanced by the monk Nāgasena in book six of the *Milindapañha*. Here nibbāna is said to have no characteristics and no physical location, since it is merely a name given to the absence of the principal causes of distress. But even though it is an absence that has no real existence, it is an occasion of joy, just as the discontinuation of burning is a source of joy to a man pulled out of a pit of glowing coals. Moreover, the absence called nibbāna can even be spoken of as an achievement in the sense that it takes a great deal of discipline to bring the sources of discontent to an end.

3.2 The problem of verification

It has been shown that the content of the Buddha's awakening would be classed in Dharmakīrti's system as inferential knowledge that worked to the Buddha's own benefit (*svārtha*). But his teaching, which was based on the insights he gained through his awakening, was for the benefit of others (*parārtha*). And yet other people do not automatically benefit just by hearing this teaching; rather, for the teaching to be of any benefit to those who hear them, it must be confirmed or verified. What remains to be discussed is how this verification is to be accomplished.

As we have seen in some of the passages already cited from Dharmakīrti's work, the task of becoming free of discontent is one that takes an effort (*yatna*, PV 1.194) and the constant practice of methods (*upāyābhyāsa*, PV 1.140). This effort requires, among other things, thinking. And this thinking can be in itself a means of acquiring new knowledge.

> PV 1.5 A subjective cognition is not regarded as a source of knowledge, because it consists in grasping what has already been grasped. Thought is a source of knowledge, because it is the principal source of action upon things that one should avoid and things that one should welcome.

It is at this point that we encounter a new problem. The problem now arising is that while repeated effort in thinking may lead to a correct understanding of things, it does not necessarily do so. In fact, if one begins with a false belief and repeats it constantly, the eventual result may be an almost unassailable delusion, one in which unreal things are experienced as vividly as if they were actually present to the senses.

> PV 2.182 Those who are mad with desire, pain or fear and those who are tormented by dreams of thieves and so forth see even things that are not present as if they were present before them.

It is not the case that thinking is based passively upon what one has experienced, says Dharmakīrti, but rather, how one experiences things is affected by one's patterns of thinking and one's overall mentality:

> For experience generates convictions of certainty according to the repetition of thoughts. For example, even though there is no difference in the seeing of visible properties, there are ideas of a corpse, an object of desire and something to be eaten.[8]

An ascetic, who has repeatedly practised the exercise of gazing at corpses until he can visualize them at will, will automatically perceive an attractive woman as corpse; seeing her in this way protects him against lustful thoughts that might otherwise arise. A lecher, on the other hand, will see exactly the same visible properties that the ascetic saw, but he will perceive them as sexually exciting. And a dog, seeing exactly the same set of visible properties, will not be sexually aroused by them, for he is more likely to perceive them as a potential meal.

[8] PVSV under verse 58: anubhāvo hi yathāvikalpābhyāsaṃ niścayapratyayān janayati. yathā rūpadarśanāviśeṣe'pi kuṇapakāmināmībhakṣyavikalpāḥ.

The point that Dharmakīrti intends to make through the example that the same woman makes different impressions on the ascetic, the lecher and the dog is evidently that one tends to form ideas about what one sees according to ideas that one already has in mind as a result of having immediate goals. The example, however, also invites a further question: can any of these ideas be considered more accurate or more in conformity with reality than the other two? If one were to apply only the criterion of whether the ideas have the capacity to achieve a goal, it would appear that none of these perceptions is inaccurate, since each has the potential of fulfilling the goal of the perceiver; the ascetic successfully fulfills his goal of protecting his chastity, the lecher his of being sexually excited, and the dog his of finding nutritious victuals.

In the various kinds of perception discussed by Dharmakīrti, we find two instances of perception in which someone interprets something that is not present to the senses as vividly as if it were actually present. One of these instances, which we have already discussed, is that of the yogin who visualizes an object through repeated practice. The other is that of a person who is so stricken by a fear of intruders that he misperceives a perfectly innocent person (or a harmless noise) as an aggressive intruder. Both of these experiences can be regarded as false cognitions or misperceptions, especially if the only criterion of accurate perception is that what one believes to be present to the senses actually is present to the senses. Nevertheless, Dharmakīrti regards the yogin's perception as a genuine source of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), while he regards the fearful person's alarming misperception of harmless sights and sounds as a bogus source of knowledge (*pramāṇābhāsa*). So now it must be asked: What differentiates the panic-stricken person's perception of a harmless person as an aggressor from an ascetic's perception of a living woman as a corpse? An answer to this may emerge by reviewing several different types of cognition that Dharmakīrti discusses.

As we have seen above, Dharmakīrti recognizes two radically different kinds of cognition: those that are purely sensory in that they involve no judgement, and those that are intellectual in that conceptual judgement plays a role. All sensations are caused by the functioning of physical senses. This is the case even when yogins "see" things that are not really there, such as when they visualize living people as corpses and so forth; these acts of visualization are not regarded as the projection of mental images, but as a kind of sensation in which the organs of sense are somehow operating. Dharmakīrti takes care to distinguish these yogic visualizations from what we might call hallucinations. Hallucinations, unlike yogin visualization, are purely the product of the internal sense organ, located in the heart. Hallucinations involve a projection of an internal image into consciousness, along with a failure to be able to distinguish imagination from sensation. Therefore, a hallucination is at the root an intellectual error.

In addition to intellectual errors, there are, according to Dharmakīrti, also purely sensory errors, in which the judgement does not play a role at all. These might be called false sensations. False sensations, unlike hallucinations and dreams, do involve the senses. Moreover, Dharmakīrti insists that the errors that occur take place within the senses themselves, and not in the intellect. When one sees a rapidly twirling torch, one actually sees a circle of fire, even though there is in fact no circle to be seen. If the torch is twirling rapidly enough, one cannot help seeing the circle of fire, even if one knows intellectually that in fact there is not a continuous circle of fire. In this case, the intellect is required to correct the errors of the senses. Similarly, when one

sees an enduring physical body or a continuing psychological self instead of a series of vanishing moments, this sensory illusion can be corrected only by the intellect, and this correction can occur only if the intellect is functioning within the constraints of sound reasoning. Presumably, what makes the yogin's superimposed vision of a corpse accurate for Dharmakīrti is the fact that the feelings of disgust and loathing that it produces are shown by reason, if not by the senses, to be just the sorts of feelings that it is suitable for a man to have towards a superficially attractive woman; the vision of the corpse, in other words, conforms to what reason shows an apparently attractive person's true nature to be. If this analysis is correct, it would seem to be in conflict with the claims that it is the experience of the senses that grasps the greatest good and that the greatest good is beyond the grasp of reason.

4 Source of the tensions

As we saw in section 2.1 above, Dharmakīrti's criteria for distinguishing pure sensation from judgemental conceptualizing is more multifaceted than Dignāga's. What remains to be seen in this final section is why Dharmakīrti felt it necessary to introduce these complexities, which, if the above analysis is correct, led him into apparent contradictions. While a full solution to this problem is beyond the scope of this paper, let me offer at least a sketch of the solution.

Dignāga's theory of cognition, as we saw above, posited a radical distinction between two kinds of cognition. Sensation provides knowledge of particular sensible properties, while reason provides knowledge only of intellectible properties that are derived from sensible properties by ignoring subtle differences among sensibilia. This theory suggests that intellectible properties such as genera are not only derivative but also to some extent distorted, in that they involve some loss of information; a bulky male wrestler and a trim female gymnast may be regarded as belonging to the same genus (*jāti*) only if all the sensible differences between them are factored out and discarded. This means that a general concept, for Dignāga, is always less rich in information than any given particular to which the concept might be applicable. Given that concepts are therefore always in some sense weaker than the particulars to which they apply, it is not easy to see how a piece of reasoning could ever stand as a corrective to a raw experience. Dignāga's radical division of cognitions into exactly two mutually exclusive classes would seem to favour an epistemological stance of radical empiricism, in which each moment of sensation validates itself and remains unassailable and ultimately incorrigible. Reason ultimately lacks the power to provide any new knowledge; at best, it can eliminate some interpretations of the sensible world that are logically contradictory to other interpretations. Moreover, reason lacks the force necessary to overturn the immediate intuitions of raw experience. If the perceiving mind *feels* like an enduring self witnessing a world of enduring substances that last for more than a moment, then there is no reason to doubt that feeling. The fact that n experience that simply feels as if it contravenes Buddhist doctrine is insufficient reason to reject the experience; if anything, it would be a reason to doubt the doctrine.

The doctrine of radical empiricism may have its virtues, but it is clear that the virtue of being easily reconciled with classical Buddhist doctrine is not among them. Each

of the three classical formulations of the Buddha's awakening, as was shown above in section 3.1.1, involves the use of the intellect to arrive at a correct interpretation of the world of experience. In other words, if one is determined to defend the view that the doctrines of Buddhism are something more than a diluted and distorted account of an experience that was, in the final analysis, unique to the Buddha and utterly private and therefore unavailable to anyone else, then one must try to show why reason has the power to correct some of the false views that arise from poorly interpreted experience. By trying to construct a system of epistemology that placed an emphasis on the unique value of Buddhist doctrine, while also trying to maintain the appearance that he was offering a commentary on the works of Dignāga, Dharmakīrti created a philosophical system that was at best convoluted and at worst self-contradictory.

The final answer to the question "Whose experience validates what for Dharmakīrti?" appears to be this: the experience of the person whose interpretation of his experience is consistent with the basic doctrines of Buddhism validates exactly those doctrines. Thus, insofar as one's experiences confirm one's confidence in the Four Noble Truths, the doctrine of anātman, and the doctrines of karman and rebirth, then one is, by Dharmakīrti's standard, coming closer to the truth. While giving every appearance of trying to defend the doctrines of Buddhism by an appeal to experience and reason alone, independent of appeal to authority, Dharmakīrti ultimately makes a disappointing return to dogmatism.

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