

The Structure of Dharmakīrti's Philosophy:
A Study of Object-Cognition in the Perception Chapter
(*pratyakṣapariccheda*) of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, the *Pramāṇavārttika*,
and Their Earliest Commentaries

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, this project is indebted to John Dunne's kind assistance and oversight. It is furthermore intended as a direct continuation of his work: a "structure" erected on the "foundations" he laid down. In many ways, *pramāṇa* theory is as much an oral as a textual tradition. That is to say, even with a thorough command of Sanskrit, there is only so much to be gained through reading the texts by oneself; as is the case with basically every Indian and Tibetan lineage, in order to truly understand the tradition at a deep level, it is necessary to receive oral instruction from a qualified master. John is unsurpassed among living *paṇḍitas*, and his insight into Dharmakīrti's epistemological system animates each and every page of this study, to the extent that a comprehensive accounting of his many contributions would quickly prove tiresome. I have thus limited the specific attributions to John, in the footnotes accompanying the main text, to just those instances where his *upadeśa* is effectively my only source.

The first draft translation of the verses from the *Pramāṇavārttika* was prepared in Sarnath, India, under the auspices of the Central University of Tibetan Studies, under the guidance of Dr. Pradeep Gokhale, and under the roof of Dr. Abhay Kumar Jain, to all of whom I would like to express my deepest gratitude. In particular, Dr. Gokhale's immense patience and selfless dedication were absolutely instrumental to the success of this project. Special assistance was also provided by Khenpo David Karma Choephel, who not only reviewed the translations of several key passages, but also gave extremely helpful feedback on Chapters 4 and 5. However, this first draft translation of the Perception Chapter was prepared with constant reference to John Dunne's unpublished manuscript, and following my stay in Sarnath, John patiently re-read each verse with me individually, in some cases multiple times. John also took the time to go line by line through a very large portion of Jinendrabuddhi's *Pramāṇasamuccayaṭīkā*, included here as Appendix B, which I simply would not have been able to comprehend on my own. As such, both the in-line and the appended translations should be understood to have John Dunne as their co-author. On this note, the in-line translations have all been reviewed for accuracy. Due to time constraints, however, John was only able to review the appended selections from PV 3 (Appendix C). The appended selections from Dīnāga's PS(V) in Appendix A, and from Jinendrabuddhi's PST in Appendix B, are supplied as a courtesy to the reader, in the spirit of collaborative and open scholarship, in an effort to make this dense and challenging material more accessible. Along these lines, however, they should be regarded as a tentative or provisional draft of work in progress. Any errors in translation are of course strictly my own.

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Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this project simply could not have been completed without the love and support of my wife, Magdalini. Mere words cannot express my gratitude, but they will have to do: thank you for everything.

For my teachers

List of Abbreviations

AS	<i>Abhidharmasamuccaya</i> , of Asaṅga
AK	<i>Abhidharmakoṣa</i> , of Vasubandhu
AKBh	<i>Abhidharmakoṣabhāṣya</i> , of Vasubandhu
ĀP	<i>Ālambanaparīkṣā</i> , of Diñnāga
ĀPV	<i>Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti</i> , of Diñnāga
MMK	<i>Mūlamadhyamakakārikā</i> , of Nāgārjuna
MSĀ	<i>Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra</i> , of Maitreya
MSg	<i>Mahāyānasamgraha</i> , of Asaṅga
NB	<i>Nyāyabindu</i> , of Dharmakīrti
PS	<i>Pramāṇasamuccaya</i> , of Diñnāga
PSV	<i>Pramāṇasamuccayāvṛtti</i> , of Diñnāga
PST	<i>Pramāṇasamuccayaṭīkā</i> , of Jinendrabuddhi
PST _T	<i>Pramāṇasamuccayaṭīkā</i> , of Jinendrabuddhi (<i>dpe bsdur</i> manuscript)
PV	<i>Pramāṇavārttika</i> , of Dharmakīrti
PVSV	<i>Pramāṇavārttikasvopajñāvṛtti</i> , of Dharmakīrti
PV _{in}	<i>Pramāṇaviniścaya</i> , of Dharmakīrti
PV _{in} T	<i>Pramāṇaviniścayaṭīkā</i> , of Jñānaśrībhadra
PVP	<i>Pramāṇavārttikapañjikā</i> , of Devendrabuddhi
PVP _T	<i>Pramāṇavārttikapañjikā</i> , of Devendrabuddhi (<i>dpe bsdur</i> manuscript)
PVT	<i>Pramāṇavārttikaṭīkā</i> , of Śākyabuddhi
PVT _T	<i>Pramāṇavārttikaṭīkā</i> , of Śākyabuddhi (<i>dpe bsdur</i> manuscript)
ŚV	<i>Ślokavārttika</i> , of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa

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ཚོས་རྣམས་ཐམས་ཅད་སེམས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་འཕྲུལ་ཏེ།
 སེམས་ནི་སེམས་མེད་སེམས་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོས་སྟོང་།
 སྟོང་ཞིང་མ་འགགས་ཅིར་ཡང་སྤང་བ་སྟེ།
 ལེགས་པར་བརྟག་ནས་གཞི་རྩ་ཚོད་པར་ཤོག།

 ཡོད་མ་སྟོང་བའི་རང་སྤང་ཡུལ་དུ་འབྱུང་།
 མ་རིག་དབང་གིས་རང་རིག་བདག་ཏུ་འབྱུང་།
 གཉིས་འཛིན་དབང་གིས་སྲིད་པའི་གྲོང་དུ་འབྱུངས།
 མ་རིག་འབྱུང་པའི་རྩད་དར་ཚོད་པར་ཤོག།

All phenomena are the mind’s manifestations.
 As for the mind: there *is* no “mind.” It is empty of mind’s self-nature.
 Empty and uninterrupted, it can appear as anything.
 Having investigated well, may we discern the fundamental basis (*āśraya*).

Subjective appearance (*svābhāsa*), not experienced as it truly exists, is mistaken for an object.
 Under the power of ignorance, reflexive awareness is mistaken for a ‘self.’
 Under the power of duality, we wander in the expanse of saṃsāra.
 May we cut through the root of ignorance and delusion.

—from the “Aspiration of Mahāmudrā,” by the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje

विधूतकल्पनाजालगम्भीरोदारमूर्तये।
 नमः समन्तभद्राय समन्तस्फरणत्विवेषे॥

His noble and profound form has shaken off the net of conceptuality;
 Homage to Samantabhadra, whose radiance shines everywhere!

—Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttika* 1.1

Introduction

Nearly a century has passed since the publication of Fyodor Shcherbatskoï's (1930) *Buddhist Logic* inaugurated the modern study of Buddhist *pramāṇa* literature. Over that span, our knowledge and understanding of this literature has greatly increased. The pioneering work of trailblazing luminaries such as Erich Frauwallner and Ernst Steinkellner has since been complemented by the efforts of many scholars, indeed far too many to name individually here, who have dramatically expanded both the breadth of our access to and the depth of our comprehension of that literature.¹ Additionally, original Sanskrit manuscripts of many texts long believed to be no longer extant in the language of their composition have been discovered and edited by Rāhula Saṅkrīyāyana, Giuseppe Tucci, Ernst Steinkellner, and others. Thus, our knowledge of the Buddhist *pramāṇa* tradition advanced to the point that, by the turn of the twenty-first century, scholars of this literature no longer labored within an obscure backwater of academic inquiry, but were engaging in sophisticated dialogue with other disciplines including not just philosophy but linguistics and cognitive science as well.

Nevertheless, a most curious lacuna has stubbornly persisted throughout these decades of research. Due, no doubt, at least in part to the mid-twentieth-century “linguistic turn” in the Western philosophical tradition, which saw a great deal of emphasis placed on the structure of formal logic in relation to language, the study of Buddhist *pramāṇa* literature followed suit. This

¹ In recognition of the central importance of this type of editorial work, Sanskrit texts that are available in critical (or “close enough to critical”) editions have been cited according to the editor. Primarily, this applies to Tosaki (1979) and (1985) for the PV; Steinkellner (2005a) for the PS(V); and Steinkellner (2005b) for the PST. By contrast, citations of Devendrabuddhi's PVP and Śākyabuddhi's PVT treat the translations in the Tengyur (*dpe bsdur* edition) as primary sources. When, for philological reasons, particular attention is drawn to the Tibetan manuscript itself, reference is made to the PST_T, PVP_T, and PVT_T.

emphasis on *pramāṇa* as “Indian logic” was likely also due to contingent historical factors, such as India’s achievement of independence in 1947; midcentury scholars of Indian philosophy, perhaps most notably B.K. Matilal, were eager to demonstrate that the classical Indian discourse concerning logical analysis was at least as sophisticated as the modern English-language treatises of G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell. And then there is the highly relevant fact that, by volume, Buddhist *pramāṇa* literature is perhaps more concerned with the proper structure and formation of syllogisms and inferences than it is with any other single topic.

In the 1960s and 1970s, building on the work of Masatoshi Nagatomi and others, Shoryu Katsura and Hiromasa Tosaki produced extremely important work on the epistemological side of Buddhist *pramāṇa* theory, including the latter’s Japanese-language translation of the entire, third, Perception Chapter (*pratyakṣapariccheda*) of Dharmakīrti’s *Pramāṇavārttika* (PV). But the barrier between Japanese and European languages, and the general conditions of scholarship, resulted in a situation where, as the study of Buddhist *pramāṇa* literature became more or less subsumed under the category of “Buddhist logic,” the study of the other topics treated in this literature—particularly epistemology and eleutheriology²—languished.

In particular, prior to the turn of the twenty-first century, there had been within European-language scholarship only limited and sporadic treatment of the Buddhist theory of perception as laid out in the foundational texts of Indian Buddhist *pramāṇa* theory, the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (PS) and *Pramāṇasamuccayavṛtti* (PSV) of Dinnāga (ca. 475-550), and its voluminous expansion by Dharmakīrti (ca. 625-675), the *Pramāṇavārttika* (PV). Notwithstanding Tillman Vetter’s 1964

² Although perhaps an awkward neologism, I adopt the term “eleutheriology,” rather than “soteriology,” for the simple reason that the ultimate teleological goal in the Buddhist tradition is framed in terms of liberation or freedom (Sanskrit *mokṣa*, hence Greek *eleutheria*), rather than “salvation” construed in terms of the activity of a “savior” (Greek *sotēr*).

German translation of the Perception Chapter of Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (PVin)—an admirable effort, particularly considering that, like Masaaki Hattori's 1968 translation of PS(V) 1 into English, it was almost entirely based on the Tibetan translation from the Tengyur—it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that this unfortunate situation began to be rectified, with the foundational epistemological studies of *pramāṇa* literature undertaken by Eli Franco and Birgit Kellner. The publication of the Proceedings of the Second International Dharmakīrti Conference in Vienna (1991), Dreyfus (1997), and Dunne (2004), were all similarly revolutionary for the field of academic Buddhist studies, as they delved deep into the epistemological side of the literature.

Yet it is surely no slight on the tremendous accomplishment that these works represent, nor on the subsequent scholarship that has followed in their wake, to note that engagement with Dharmakīrti's epistemology has tended to remain narrowly circumscribed about his most basic, External Realist (*bāhyārthavāda*) or "Sautrāntika"³ account of the perceptual process. Examinations of Dharmakīrti's Epistemic Idealist (*antarjñeyavāda*) or "Yogācāra"⁴ perspective, by contrast, have been practically nonexistent. And it is a simple matter of fact that, again, nearly a hundred years after Shcherbatskoï, there still exists no complete European-language translation or study of the PV's third, Perception Chapter (*pratyakṣapariccheda*). As Eltschinger (2016, 39) aptly notes, without any hint of overstatement, "the bulky third chapter of Dharmakīrti's PV

³ Although Dharmakīrti's baseline epistemological position, which (unlike his final idealistic position) admits of "external" (*bāhya*) or extramental objects, was clearly derived in large part from the Sautrāntika tradition of Buddhist intellectual discourse, it is nevertheless important to avoid entirely conflating these two positions. Dharmakīrti himself never refers to this position as "Sautrāntika," and his earliest commentators only very rarely do so, typically preferring the designation *bāhyārthavāda*. The precise nature of the relationship between Dharmakīrti's *bāhyārthavāda* and the Sautrāntika tradition as it existed in his time is something of an open intellectual-historical question. Three primary sites of potentially major divergence between Dharmakīrti's External Realist position and the historical Sautrāntika lineage are identified below. See below, note 58 of this Introduction; and Chapter 5, note 178.

⁴ Like the External Realist (*bāhyārthavāda*) position, which Dharmakīrti never refers to by name as "Sautrāntika," Dharmakīrti never explicitly states the Epistemic Idealist (*antarjñeyavāda*) position to be Yogācāra. He does, however, use ineluctably Yogācāra concepts, including the storehouse (*ālaya*) and karmic imprints (*vāsanā*).

[remains,] in many respects—and rather shamefully after nearly four decades of intensive research on Dharmakīrti—a *terra incognita* for Western scholarship.”

The present study thus represents my attempt at shining a light on the Perception Chapter of the PV—not with the (foolhardy and in any case impossible) goal of thoroughly explaining each of its 539 verses⁵ within a single monograph, but rather of illuminating its structure and contents as a whole. The need for such a holistic study is most acutely felt with respect to the latter two-thirds of this chapter, PV 3.123-541, as this inarguably remains the least investigated and most poorly understood portion of Dharmakīrti’s philosophical contributions. It is therefore all the more tragic that these verses contain some of Dharmakīrti’s most interesting and profound material. The present study will, accordingly, focus on these critically important yet neglected verses, most particularly on what may be considered its “core,” PV 3.288-366.

On this note, there are two primary, closely interrelated problems facing any close study of the PV, which need to be addressed at the outset: (1) hermeneutical or text-critical problems concerning the PV as a text; and (2) intellectual-historical problems concerning the vast quantity of prior knowledge that Dharmakīrti assumes on the part of his readers. We will thus begin by examining the PV from a text-critical perspective, which examination will also provide the rationale for the structure and flow of this study. We then consider the corpus of Buddhist ontology and epistemology as it existed prior to Dharmakīrti. Finally, this introduction concludes with a brief overview of *pramāṇa* theory according to Dharmakīrti.

⁵ Kellner (2009, 164n11) explains: “Sāṅkṛtyāyana [counted] two stanzas that belong to Prajñākaragupta’s commentary as stanzas from the basic text. In his editions, these are [verses] 342 and 511.” These two verses, clearly written by Prajñākaragupta and not by Dharmakīrti, are neither included nor numbered by Tosaki. This convention has become common in the contemporary scholarly literature, and will also be adopted here.

I. The *Pramāṇavārttika* in Context

A. Textual Chronology

It is well known that Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* exists in a close relationship with Diñnāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya*. Less well-known is the precise nature of this connection, which will be examined in detail below.⁶ But before doing so, it would be helpful to first say a few words about the works of Diñnāga and Dharmakīrti in general terms.

Both authors composed a number of texts, the attribution of which has not generally been a matter of dispute. Hattori (1968, 6–11) identifies 22 works by Diñnāga. These concern a wide range of topics, and include a *Praise to Noble Mañjughoṣa* (*'phags pa 'jam pa 'i dbyangs kyi bstod pa*, **Āryamañjughoṣastotra*), better known as the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, of whom Diñnāga is recorded to have had a direct vision.⁷ Interestingly, this text is classified into the “tantra” (*rgyud*) section of the Tibetan Tengyur. But, this particular text notwithstanding, Diñnāga's works are on the whole divided into three parts: (1) those concerned more or less exclusively with the proper formation of logical proof-statements (such as the *Hetucakraḍamaru* and the *Nyāyamukha*); (2) those focused on the explication of Yogācāra doctrine (such as the *Yogāvatāra*); and (3) epistemological texts, generally written from a broadly “Sautrāntika” perspective (such as the

⁶ See Section I.B.2: [The Relation of the PV to the PS](#).

⁷ Cf. the Homage from the PVin:

This dull-minded world does not clearly understand the most profound words of the glorious [Diñnāga], with stainless intellect, having approached whom the Noble [Mañjuśrī] Himself looked after. Due to abject stupidity about that honored bearer of the world, condemnations are made—through even a little bit of which, misfortune arises. Therefore, out of compassion, his system shall be taught.

Steinkellner (2007, 1): *sa śrīmatānakalaṅkadhīḥ svayam upetyāryo 'nujagrāha yaṃ | vyaktaṃ tasya na vetty ayam jaḍamatir loke garīyaḥ padam || tatropāsita lokabhartari kṛtā svalpāny anarthodayā avadhīraṇeti kṛpayā tannītiruddhyotyate.*

Pramāṇasamuccaya). Dharmakīrti, on the other hand, is known to have authored seven works, three concerning *pramāṇa* and four on other topics (“three like a body” and “four like limbs”⁸ in the traditional Tibetan classification scheme). Dharmakīrti’s three *pramāṇa* works are primarily differentiated in terms of their length, with the *Pramāṇavārttika* having been written first,⁹ followed by the *Pramāṇavinīścaya* (PVin) and the *Nyāyabindu* (NB).

Most of Dinnāga’s texts are only extant in Tibetan translation, though a few were translated into Chinese by Paramārtha (499-569) and Xuánzàng (602-664). Dharmakīrti’s works were never translated into Chinese, suggesting that the *Pramāṇavārttika* may not yet have been in circulation by the time of Xuánzàng’s pilgrimage to India (ca. 635 CE). This also led to an interesting hermeneutical situation, in that the Chinese Buddhist tradition interprets Dinnāga—and the Yogācāra tradition in general—exclusively through the lens of his pre-Dharmakīrtian commentators. In particular, the Chinese Yogācāra tradition venerates the commentaries of Dharmapāla (530-561), who likely studied directly under Dinnāga at Nālandā.¹⁰ The tension between the “Dharmakīrtian” (roughly, “Indo-Tibetan”) and “Dharmapālan” (roughly, “East Asian”) interpretations of Dinnāga was perhaps most acute with respect to the issue of “pseudo-perception” (*pratyakṣābhāsa*), a topic which will be examined in Chapter 1.

⁸ *lus lta bu’i bstan bcos gsum* and *yan lag lta bu’i bstan bcos bzhi*, respectively.

⁹ See note 16 below.

¹⁰ Dharmapāla is also recorded to have taught Xuánzàng during the latter’s tenure at Nālandā, before Dharmapāla passed away at the tender age of 32. In fact, the foundational text for the tradition of Chinese Yogācāra established by Xuánzàng (known as the Fāxiǎn) was the *Chéng Wéishì Lùn* (**Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*), a composite of Vasubandhu’s (ca. 350-450) *Trimśikā* alongside ten of its Indian commentaries, with pride of place given to the interpretation of Dharmapāla; see Williams (2009, 84).

The Tibetan oral tradition often describes Diñnāga as a direct disciple of Vasubandhu (ca. 350-450), but Diñnāga’s own uncertainty¹¹ about the authorship of the *Vādavidhi* supports the modern historiographical consensus that there was at least one mediating generation in between Vasubandhu and Diñnāga. The tradition also records that Dharmakīrti’s direct teacher was Īśvarasena (ca. 575-650), who may or may not have studied directly under Diñnāga.¹² But in terms of the reception history, it would not overstate the matter to describe the Tibetan tradition as holding there to exist a direct line running from Vasubandhu, through Diñnāga, to Dharmakīrti. Along these lines, while Dharmakīrti’s explanation of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* may potentially have diverged from Diñnāga’s intended meaning in certain regards,¹³ it is a major contention of the present study that the Perception Chapter of the *Pramāṇavārttika* simply cannot be properly understood independently of the earlier epistemological works of Vasubandhu and Diñnāga. Indeed, as will be argued at length, the lack of appreciation for Dharmakīrti’s reliance upon Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*,¹⁴ as well as the heretofore imprecise understanding of the nature of the relationship between PV 3 and PS 1.2-12, have been primary factors hindering the study of this material.

In terms of the individual authors, it is possible to reconstruct a relative timeline of composition from internal references. For example, in his opening remarks in the PSV *ad* PS 1, Diñnāga states that he “composed the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* having gathered [verses] here from the

¹¹ See Chapter 1 note 6, and Hattori (1968, 114).

¹² Hattori (1968, 14n67) states that “The personal relationship between Diñnāga and Īśvarasena is doubtful, because the latter is known as a teacher of Dharmakīrti, whose dates are circa 600-660.”

¹³ Most particularly, concerning the number and types of pseudo-perception (discussed in Chapter 1); whether mental perception is a distinct type of perceptual cognition, distinct from reflexive awareness (also discussed in Chapter 1); and whether reflexive awareness may be construed as the “result” (*phala*) even under an External Realist account (discussed in Chapters 4 and 5).

¹⁴ See in particular Chapter 3, Section II.A: [The Problem of the ‘Whole’ \(*avayavin*\)](#).

Nyāyamukha and so on,”¹⁵ hence the designation *samuccaya* (“collection”). Considering the length of the PS, particularly in relation to his shorter works such as the *Ālambanaparīkṣā*, it is plausible to surmise that the PS was composed late in Dinnāga’s life, perhaps as his final contribution. By the same token, the PVin references the earlier composition of the PV,¹⁶ which must therefore have been Dharmakīrti’s first *pramāṇa* text.

Finally, at the risk of drawing unwarranted inferences from insufficient information, it is perhaps also possible to discern some development in Dharmakīrti’s style. Dharmakīrti has a wicked and sarcastic-bordering-on-abusive sense of humor that pokes through at several points in his oeuvre.¹⁷ He clearly thinks highly of his own intellect (for good reason, obviously). He was also presented by the later tradition as having had a reputation for being personally difficult; Tāranātha’s (1575-1634) *History of Buddhism in India* records that when Dharmakīrti’s direct disciple Devendrabuddhi (ca. 650-700 CE) presented the master with his commentary on the PV, Dharmakīrti disdainfully destroyed the first draft with water, and the second draft with fire, before damning Devendrabuddhi’s final, surviving effort—the **Pramāṇavārttikapañjikā* (PVP)—with faint praise.¹⁸ Yet while none of Dharmakīrti’s *pramāṇa* texts could be described as “easy” to read,

¹⁵ Steinkellner (2005, 1): *nyāyamukhādibhya iha samāhṛtya pramāṇasamuccayaḥ kariṣyate*.

¹⁶ PVin *ad* PVin1.28: “This is similar to the vision of the [Four] Noble Truths, as we have already discussed in the *Pramāṇavārttika*.” *āryasatyadarśanavad yathā nirṇītam asmābhiḥ pramāṇavārttike*. Steinkellner (2007, 27).

¹⁷ Kellner (2011, 422) similarly refers to Dharmakīrti’s “characteristically sarcastic sense of humour.” See, for example, PV 1.210-211, wherein Dharmakīrti questions why a lustful woman would be interested in finding out whether or not a eunuch is attractive; PV 3.200, in Dunne (2004, 398); PV 3.403-404, in Chapter 5; and PV 3.516. At PVin 1.14, Dharmakīrti ridicules his opponent’s position by sarcastically stating that their “praiseworthy wisdom is ‘dear to the gods,’” which is to say, idiotic (Steinkellner ed., 15.11-12: *ślodhanīyaprajñō devānām praya iti*). In general, Dharmakīrti’s rhetorical usage of humor and mockery is a rich area for further inquiry.

¹⁸ Tāranātha (1970, 239) also records Dharmakīrti has having said, “From the point of view of the style, the use of words, and of the deeper significance, [the PVP] is still incomplete. But, as explaining the literal meaning, it is on the whole satisfactory.” It should be noted however that this vignette emerges from a tradition of Tibetan scholarship that was highly motivated to build up the later commentarial tradition of Prajñākaragupta (ca. 875-925), in part by tearing down the earlier tradition of Devendrabuddhi, and should be taken with a heaping handful of salt. The same rhetorical motivation is also clearly present in Tāranātha’s (ibid., 239-40) discussion of a claim to the effect that

nor even as particularly “readable,” the *Pramāṇavārttika* and its *svavṛtti* (PVSV) are arguably in a difficulty class of their own. Indian scholastic and polemical writing of the time valued terseness, but the PV and its autocommentary are laconic to the point of sheer incomprehensibility without the aid of additional layers of commentary.¹⁹ By contrast, the prose of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (PVin)—while still terse and often quite difficult—never quite reaches the extreme inscrutability of the PVSV. It benefits from being studied alongside a commentary (of which two²⁰ survive in Tibetan translation), but is often readable without one. Dharmakīrti, in other words, may have “mellowed out” somewhat between composing the PV and the PVin; or perhaps he felt less of a need to “prove himself”; or both.

This brings us to the critical and complicated question of how to read Dharmakīrti.

Prajñākaragupta’s much later commentator, Yamāri (ca. 1000-1050), was rather the direct disciple of Dharmakīrti. Tāranātha himself describes this claim as “chronologically baseless.” Concerning the contentious relationship between the commentarial lineage stemming from Devendrabuddhi versus that stemming from Prajñākaragupta, see note [23](#) below. All of the above notwithstanding, it is quite easy to imagine Dharmakīrti the man as having been rather prickly and difficult to please in person.

¹⁹ At this point, it is perhaps even something of a cliché to note, in agreement with Dunne (2004, 4) that “leave alone the question of its philosophical content, even the straightforward meaning of a sentence sometimes [seems] utterly obscure in Dharmakīrti’s sparse style. The result is that, unless one wishes to argue from highly conjectural interpretations, one must refer to commentaries, where missing phrases are supplied and the elegantly tortuous relations of Dharmakīrti’s grammar are plausibly restated. Thus, for purely practical reasons, commentaries become an inevitable companion on any foray into Dharmakīrti’s texts.”

²⁰ These two are the *Pramāṇaviniścayaṭīkā* of Dharmottara (ca. 750-800), and the identically-titled *Pramāṇaviniścayaṭīkā* of Jñānaśrībhadrā (ca. 1050-1100). Dharmottara’s perspective was highly influential for the Gelug tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, but is somewhat idiosyncratic, even unreliable, as a straightforward interpretation of Dharmakīrti. Most saliently, Dharmottara defends the existence of extramental objects (*bāhyārtha*); however, this position cannot be reconciled with Dharmakīrti’s perspective on the issue of extramental objects (discussed in Chapter 4). Generally, Dharmottara’s perspective should be regarded as *sui generis* and a worthwhile object of study in its own right, but not necessarily as constituting a hermeneutically reliable interpretation of Dharmakīrti. Accordingly, at the few occasions in this study where a commentary to the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* has been consulted, recourse has been made only to Jñānaśrībhadrā’s PVinṬ, which explains Dharmakīrti’s Epistemic Idealist perspective in a much more straightforward (not to mention less verbose) manner.

B. Reading the PV

1. *An Overview of the PV*

As will be discussed in greater detail below, Dharmakīrti broadly modeled the structure of the *Pramāṇavārttika* on the structure of Diñnāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya*. The PS has six chapters, concerning: (1) perception (*pratyakṣa*); (2) how to formulate correct inferences for the benefit of one's own knowledge (or "inference for oneself," *svārthānumāna*); (3) how to formulate inferences that will convincingly demonstrate the truth of one's own position to others (or "inference for others," *parārthānumāna*); (4) what makes the examples used in such inferential proof-statements either legitimate or spurious (*dr̥ṣṭāntadr̥ṣṭāntābhāsa*); (5) concept formation or "other-exclusion"²¹ (*apoha*); and (6) fallacious arguments (*jāti*).²² The PV, meanwhile, has four chapters, concerning: (1) inference for oneself; (2) the establishment of epistemic reliability (*pramāṇasiddhi*) on the part of the Buddha, and by extension the truth of foundational Buddhist doctrine concerning matters such as rebirth and the Four Truths of the Noble Ones; (3) perception; and (4) inference for others. Dharmakīrti's discussion of *apoha* (tracking PS 5), and his analysis of proof-statements (tracking PS 4 and PS 6), are primarily—though by no means exclusively—woven into PV 1 and PV 4, respectively.

The order of the chapters of the PV has been a matter of some controversy. While Dharmakīrti is occasionally prone to long digressions and relentless examination of minutiae, there is clearly an internal logic to the development of the argument in the text taken as a whole. The

²¹ See below, Section III.D: [Conceptuality \(*kalpanā*\) and Universals \(*sāmānya*\)](#). See also Chapter One, Section II.B: [Exclusion \(*apoha*\)](#), [Convention \(*saṅketa*\)](#), and [Projection \(*āropa*\)](#).

²² Hattori (1968, 12).

question is what precisely it is that constitutes this internal logic or structure. On the standard account, adopted in this study, the structure of the PV is as follows. First, one learns how to formulate correct inferences, for one's own benefit (*svārthānumāna*), so that one is able to correctly determine the truth about matters with which one has no direct experience. Second, one applies this newfound skill to the problem of ascertaining whether or not the Buddha is a reliable authority (i.e., a *pramāṇabhūta*), ascertains that the Buddha is indeed authoritative, and concludes thereby that Buddhist doctrine (i.e., the *buddhadharma*) is correct. Third, one investigates the nature of direct perception (*pratyakṣa*), and comes to understand that all phenomena are just mental events (*vijñaptimātra*), and furthermore that the nature of the mind is just luminosity (*prakāśamātra*) devoid of the duality of subject and object (*advaya*). Fourth and finally, armed with all of this knowledge, one engages in the practice of logically demonstrating the truth to others, by formulating inferential proof-statements for their benefit (*parārthānumāna*), so that they are able to understand reality as oneself has.

The controversy concerning the order of the chapters, as with many of the disputes concerning the interpretation of the PV, appears to have originated with the commentarial tradition stemming from Prajñākaragupta (ca. 750-810).²³ The issue stems from the fact that the PV's

²³ The Seventh Karmapa, Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454-1506), writes (2016, 13): "Master Devendrabuddhi explains that if one were to match the order of the [PS], it would make sense to put the chapter on [*pramāṇasiddhi*, i.e., PV 2] first. However, the chapter on inference for oneself is explained first because the glorious Dharmakīrti's *Autocommentary* [i.e., the PVS] says, 'Distinguishing the actual from what is not depends upon inference, but there are misconceptions of that. Thus, I will present it.' Master Prajñākaragupta and his followers explain that this citation merely presents the reason for writing the *Autocommentary* on the chapter on inference for oneself; it does not teach that the root text of the chapter on inference for oneself is first. Therefore, they refute Devendrabuddhi, saying he confused even the order of chapters and explain that this chapter on [*pramāṇasiddhi*] is the first."

However, in what will become something of a recurring theme throughout this study, it is necessary to disentangle Prajñākaragupta's perspective from that of his commentators, especially Jayanta (ca. 925-975), whose explanation even of Prajñākaragupta's own view (to say nothing of Dharmakīrti's) was frequently inaccurate; see, for example, Chapter 1, note 71. For his part, Prajñākaragupta (1953, 3) does begin the *Pramāṇavārttikālaṅkāra* (PVA) with the *pramāṇasiddhi* chapter, but he does not explain this decision, and (apparently unlike some of his later commentators) makes no specific criticism of Devendrabuddhi regarding the order of the chapters. In fact, Prajñākaragupta does not

second chapter, establishing the Buddha as a reliable authority, is a massive 287-verse exposition on the homage from Diñnāga’s PS, which is to say, its very first verse, PS 1.1:

Saluting Him, who is the embodiment of the instruments of correct awareness, who seeks the benefit of beings, the Teacher, the *Sugata*, the Protector; for the purpose of establishing the instruments of correct awareness, I shall compose this *Samuccaya*, unifying here my theories scattered [in other treatises]. || 1 ||²⁴

In terms of the structure of its chapters, the *Pramāṇavārttika* could thus plausibly be rearranged to strictly follow the order of topics in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*. On this alternate arrangement, the “first” (in reality, second) chapter of the PV tracks this first verse of the PS. The “second” (in reality, third) chapter of the PV tracks the next eleven verses of the first chapter of the PS (i.e., PS 1.2-12), concerning the topic of perception. The “third” (in reality, first) chapter then tracks the second chapter of the PS, concerning inference for oneself, and the fourth chapter (numbered the same in both arrangements) tracks the third chapter of the PS, concerning inference for others.

In addition to following the order of the presentation in the PS, this alternate arrangement has its own, broadly empiricist internal logic. First, and most importantly, one ascertains the nature

comment upon PV 1 at all, for reasons which are obscure, but may well have been the same as Devendrabuddhi’s: Dharmakīrti himself wrote a commentary, the PVSV, to PV 1, rendering subsequent direct commentary to PV 1 (as opposed to subcommentary on Dharmakīrti’s autocommentary, the PVSV) superfluous in their eyes; see below, Section I.B.3: [The Relation of the PV to its Commentaries](#). The key point here is that Prajñākaragupta himself follows the exact same commentarial procedure as Devendrabuddhi: he does not comment upon PV 1, begins his commentary with PV 2, and proceeds through PV 3 and PV 4 without any interruption or indication that the *svārthānumānapariccheda* (PV 1) should be inserted between PV 3 and PV 4.

On this note, while the “True Imagist” (*satyākāravāda*) interpretation of Dharmakīrti was claimed by its main champion, Jñānaśrīmitra (ca. 980-1030), to be based upon Prajñākaragupta’s perspective as articulated in the PVA, my own preliminary study of the PVA has indicated that Prajñākaragupta’s perspective is considerably more nuanced than Jñānaśrīmitra would have us think. Indeed, while in the absence of any sustained study of the PVA *ad* PV 3—which will be its own massive project—it is as yet impossible to reach any definitive conclusions, I would nevertheless like to tentatively suggest that, concerning the specific issue of *ākāras*, Prajñākaragupta may very well be on the whole closer to Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi (and, thus, to Ratnākaraśānti), than to Jayanta and Jñānaśrīmitra. See, in particular, PVA *ad* PV 3.320-332.

²⁴ Steinkellner (2005, 1.1-2): **pramāṇabḥūṭāya jagaddhitaiṣiṇe praṇamya śāstre sugatāya tāyine | pramāṇasiddhyai svamatāt samuccayaḥ kariṣyate viprasṛtād ihaikataḥ || 1 ||**

of an instrument of correct awareness (*pramāṇa*), and establishes on this basis that the Buddha is a reliable authority (i.e., that the Buddha himself is a type of *pramāṇa*). Having accomplished this, one turns to perception as the foundation of all subsequent knowledge. With perception established as the empirical foundation of knowledge, one is then able to engage in inferential discourse, first learning how to correctly infer for oneself, and then learning how to provide valid demonstrations of correct knowledge to others. This is the order of the chapters that eventually became standard within the Tibetan tradition, which was in general more strongly influenced by Prajñākara's commentators than by Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi.

However, while this alternate arrangement is in a sense plausible, and has the virtue of more closely following the order of topics in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (that is, first the homage, then perception, then inference for oneself, and finally inference for others), there is simply no way to reconcile this order with Dharmakīrti's own words.²⁵ The key passage in this regard is PVSV *ad* PV 1.217, where Dharmakīrti uses a participial form (*vakṣyamāṇa*) with a future sense²⁶ in his gloss of “what is to be acquired and what is to be abandoned” (*heyopadeya*), and the “method” (*upaya*) for doing so: “that is to say, [*heyopadeya* and their *upaya* refers to] the Four Truths of the Noble Ones, in the manner that will be explained.”²⁷ The Four Truths are only discussed in the *pramāṇasiddhi* chapter, which must therefore be the second chapter of the work, with the *svārthānumāna* chapter coming first.

²⁵ Cf. Kellner (2009, 162n4) and Gnoli (1960, xv–xvi).

²⁶ Although technically a present passive participle, *vakṣyamāṇa*—not uncommonly for present passive participles—denotes future action (compare to the English passive infinitive construction, “to be stated”). This is especially the case in commentarial literature, such as the PVSV. Monier (2005, 912) has a separate entry for *vakṣyamāṇa*, apart from its root $\sqrt{vakṣ}$: “about to be said or described, to be mentioned hereafter or subsequently.” Tubb and Boose (2007, 228) also specify that *vakṣyamāṇa* means “to be stated” or “will be stated.”

²⁷ Gnoli (1960, 109.16): *yathā catūrṇām āryasatyānām vakṣyamāṇanītyā*.

Finally, it is necessary to say a few words concerning the condition of the *Pramāṇavārttika* as a Sanskrit text. As Franco and Notake (2014, xiii) note, “On the whole, [the PV has] been well transmitted, and the text was well established by Sāṅkṛtyāyana.” Kellner (2009) provides a high-level overview, rich in historical detail, of the twentieth-century efforts to produce editions of the original Sanskrit. As yet, however, no truly critical edition of the entirety of any of the PV’s four chapters has been produced. To date, the most reliable Sanskrit text of the Perception Chapter is provided in Tosaki’s (1979) and (1985) two-volume Japanese translation and analysis of the entire PV 3, despite the fact that Tosaki did not directly consult any Sanskrit manuscripts.

The Sanskrit text of PV 3 as presented here is based primarily on Tosaki’s work, with only a few deviations from his edition, mostly using readings that are recorded in Tosaki’s own footnotes. As with Tosaki’s work, no manuscripts were directly consulted in the production of this study. Fortunately, however, this study is primarily concerned with PV 3.288-366, making Kellner’s (2009, 185–202) overview of the substantial manuscript variations in PV 3.300-366 nearly as good for our purposes as direct consultation with the extant manuscripts, particularly since most of these variations are recorded in Tosaki’s footnotes. The single most significant variation is located in PV 3.327, discussed in Kellner (2009, 196–97). In general, significant philological issues are discussed in footnotes to the translations provided in the Appendices. Hopefully, careful attention to detail has sufficed to provide a more accurate Sanskrit reading on those few occasions (all documented in the footnotes) where we deviate from Tosaki. But this is not primarily a philological study, and is not intended to provide a critical edition of the Sanskrit text of PV 3.

2. *The Relation of the PV to the PS*

All texts are intertextual, relying on and responding to systems of meaning-generation (“language”) that by definition they do not and cannot originate. But the genre of South Asian scholastic commentarial literature is intertextual to a particularly extraordinary degree. Even the pretense of “original” work hardly exists; nearly all intellectual labor is performed in terms of the twin projects of (1) commenting upon the predecessors in one’s own tradition, and (2) rebutting those in other traditions—and sometimes those in one’s own—who have rebutted one’s predecessors in one’s own tradition, and so on *ad infinitum*. Complicating matters even further is the wide range of topics of disputation both between and within scholastic, commentarial, and religious traditions. In PS 1, for example, Diñnaga responds separately to the theories of the Nyāya, the Vaiśeṣika, the Sāṃkhya, the Mīmāṃsaka, and other Buddhists, specifically Vasubandhu’s perspective as expressed in the *Vādaśāstrī* (VV)—all of which Diñnāga rejects.

It is abundantly clear that the PV takes its philosophical cues from the PS. But how are we to understand the precise nature of the relationship between these two texts? To describe the PV as a “commentary” on the PS would not be entirely accurate. For the most part, Dharmakīrti does not engage in the traditional commentarial duties of paraphrasing (*padārthakoṭi*) or breaking up the compounds (*vigraha*) of the root text.²⁸ Furthermore, Dharmakīrti deviates from Diñnāga’s perspective at several junctures, perhaps nowhere in more dramatic fashion than in his reworking of Diñnāga’s account of erroneous cognition (*bhrāntijñāna*), discussed in Chapter 1. Of course, this specific example is complicated somewhat by its intertextual dynamics: Diñnāga’s intention

²⁸ Cf. Tubb and Boose (2007, 3–5).

appears to have been to “rescue,” as far as possible, Vasubandhu’s account of perceptual error in the *Vādaśāstra*, while Dharmakīrti does not labor under this concern.

Nevertheless, although the relationship between the PV and the PS cannot be described as that of a traditional commentary (*vṛtti* or *bhāṣya*) to its underlying root text, Dharmakīrti clearly structures PV 3 according to PS(V) 1.2-12, the *svāmata* (“our own [Buddhist] view”) section of PS 1.²⁹ In point of fact, PV 3 follows the structure of PS(V) 1.2-12 extremely closely, and in fine-grained detail, to a degree that has not yet been fully appreciated in the contemporary scholarly literature. On this point, perhaps the single most telling indicator of the depth of confusion still surrounding PV 3 is the fact that, even after all this time, the structure and order of its verses has not yet been satisfactorily explained.

Kellner (2010, 206n9), for example, only notes that “Dharmakīrti’s commentary on PS(V) 1.8-12 comprises 239 stanzas (PV 3.301-539),” though she does helpfully point out that PV 3.249-280 tracks PS 1.6ab, and that PV 3.287 comments on PS(V) 1.7ab. Franco (2014, 1) similarly only describes PV 3.301-541 as concerning “the result of the means of knowledge with special reference to reflexive awareness,” and doubts (*ibid.*, 1n3) whether any more fine-grained division is “tenable.” Kataoka (2016, 237), meanwhile, identifies how PV 3.301-366 tracks PS 1.8cd-10 in fine detail, but does not weigh in on how PV 3.1-300 or PV 3.367-539 relates to PS 1.2-8ab or PS 1.11-12. Most recently, King (2018, 313–16) provides indices of PV 3.301-539 in relation to PS 1.8cd-12 according to the Gelug scholars Rgyal tshab (1364-1432) and Mkhas grub (1385-1438).

²⁹ Diñnāga’s refutations of the accounts of perceptual cognition according to various other traditions constitute the remainder of PS(V) 1.13-44. Of these, the most important for our purposes is Diñnāga’s analysis of Vasubandhu’s account of perception from the *Vādaśāstra*, located in PS(V) 1.13-16. While PV 3 does not contain any explicit expansion of PS(V) 1.13-16, in the manner that PV 3 generally maps onto PS(V) 1.2-12, this passage is directly referenced by Dharmakīrti (see PV 3.294, discussed in Chapter 1, Section I.C: [Dharmakīrti’s Interpretation of PS 1.7cd-8ab](#)).

Unfortunately, Rgyal tsaab's index is both vague and largely incorrect (tabling, for example, the entirety of PV 3.301-352 to PS 1.9a). The index of Mkhas grub is much more reliable and only differs from our own in one minor detail, about which Mkhas grub might well have the better argument.³⁰

The crucial point here, and the key to understanding PV 3, is that Dharmakīrti always follows the order of Diinnāga's arguments, even when in some ways it does not necessarily make much sense to do so. For example, Dharmakīrti's initial discussion of reflexive awareness in PV 3.249-280 (*ad* PS 1.6a₂b) is not further developed until he completes lengthy excursi into the various other topics of PS 1.6cd-8cd. Nevertheless, there is an internal logic to the order of the topics in PS(V) 1.2-12. In broad strokes, these topics are:

There are only two *pramāṇas*, perception and inference (PS 1.2-3ab).

Perception (*pratyakṣa*) is devoid of conceptuality (PS 1.3cd).

The objects of sensory perception are particulars, not composites (PS 1.4-5).

Mental, yogic, and reflexively-experienced cognitions are also perceptual (PS 1.6-7ab).

There exist nonconceptual pseudo-perceptions (PS 1.7cd-8ab).

A *pramāṇa* just is the "resulting cognition" (*phala*) of which it is the *pramāṇa* (PS 1.8cd).

This "result" is always already known by means of reflexive awareness (PS 1.9a),

Because whatever appears is reflexively-experienced (PS 1.9bcd);

Therefore, the subject, object, and "result" of cognition are not separate (PS 1.10).

This can be established through an examination of memory (PS 1.11-12).

Here, then, is a detailed index³¹ of PV 3 and PVin1 in relation to PS 1.2-12:

³⁰ According to King (2018, 314), mKhas grub considers PV 3.338-340 to track PS 1.9b, and PV 3.341-352 to track PS 1.9cd. Our index considers Dharmakīrti's treatment of PS 1.9b to extend until PV 3.345, largely on the strength of PV 3.345d's reference to *arthaviniścayah*; compare to PS 1.9b, *tadrūpo hy arthaviniścayah*.

³¹ Dharmakīrti does not signpost where the boundaries between sections are, and in some cases they can be blurry. Devendrabuddhi occasionally provides such signposts, but only at a few junctures. Subsequent scholarship may well succeed in teasing out a more accurate index by paying close attention to the interplay between PV 3 and the PSV. Nevertheless, this should suffice as a first attempt at a comprehensive verse index of PV 3 in relation to PS 1.2-12.

Table 1: Index of PV 3 and PVin 1 in Relation to PS 1

PV 3	PVin1	ad PS 1	Sanskrit of PS
1-75	1-3	2abc ₁	pratyakṣam anumānaṃ ca pramāṇe lakṣaṇadvayam prameyaṃ
76-117	ad 1	2c ₂ -d ₁	tasya sandhāne na pramāṇāntaram
118-122	ad 1	2d ₂ -3ab	na ca 2 punaḥ punar abhijñāne 'niṣṭhāsakteḥ smṛtādivat
123-140	4, 13-17	3c	pratyakṣam kalpanāpoḍham
141-190	5-12	3d	nāmajātyādiyojanā 3
191-193		4ab	asādhāraṇahetutvād akṣais tad vyapadiśyate
194-224		4cd	tatrānekārthajanyatvāt svārthe sāmānyagocaram 4
225-238		5	dharmino 'nekarūpasya nendriyāt sarvathā gatiḥ svasaṃvedyaṃ hy anirdeśyaṃ rūpam indriyagocaraḥ 5
239-248	18-19abc, 20	6a ₁	mānasaṃ ca ³²
249-280	19d, 21ab-27	6a ₂ b	artharāgādisvasaṃvittir akalpikā
281-286	28-31	6cd	yoginām gurunirdeśavyavakīrṇārthamātraḍṛk 6
287	32ab	7ab	kalpanāpi svasaṃvittāv iṣṭā nārthe vikalpanāt
288-300	32cd-33	7cd-8ab	bhrāntisaṃvṛtisajjñānam anumānānumānukam 7 smṛtābhilāṣikam ceti pratyakṣābham sataimiram
301-319	34-37	8cd	savyāpārapratītatvāt pramāṇaṃ phalam eva sat 8
320-337	38-41	9a	svasaṃvittih phalaṃ vātra
338-345	ad 41ab	9b	tadrūpo hy arthaniścayaḥ
346-352	42-43	9cd	viśayābhāsataivāsya pramāṇaṃ tena mīyate 9
353-366	44-57	10	yadābhāsaṃ prameyaṃ tat pramāṇaphalate punaḥ grāhakākārasaṃvittyos trayaṃ nātaḥ pṛthak kṛtam 10
367-421	58	11ab	viśayajñānatajjñānaviśeṣāt tu dvirūpatā
422-425		11c	smṛter uttarakālaṃ ca
426-439		11d	na hy asāv avibhāvite 11
440-483		12ab ₁	jñānāntareṇānubhave 'niṣṭhā
484-510		12b ₂	tatrāpi hi smṛtiḥ
511-539		12cd	viśayāntarasañcāras tathā na syāt sa ceśyate 12

Again, though, it is important to understand that, while Dharmakīrti took his cues from Diñnāga, and hewed closely to the order of the arguments outlined above, PV 3 is less a commentary on PS 1.2-12 than a reimagining of or “spiritual sequel” to it. That is to say, Dharmakīrti expanded the position that Diñnāga had set out, in eleven maddeningly elliptical stanzas, to 539 new verses,

³² Technically speaking, this is combined with the next line due to *sandhi*: PS 1.6ab reads, *mānasaṃ cārtharāgādisvasaṃvittir akalpikā*.

substantially reworking parts of Dinnāga's epistemological system in the process. At the same time, and for this very reason, the PV cannot be properly understood apart from the PS. One of the major hermeneutical-methodological points of this study, in other words, is that the PS provides both the form and the structure of the PV, as well as much of its core argumentative content, most especially concerning the centrally-important topic of reflexive awareness.

Finally, it is worth noting that a similarly detailed index may potentially be able to be constructed, linking PV 1 (*svārthānumāna*) and PV 4 (*parārthānumāna*) with their respective corresponding chapters of the PS (i.e., PS 2 and PS 3).³³ In the absence of even a provisional Sanskrit edition of PS 2-5, however, or indeed much at all in the way of study on these chapters of Dinnāga's *magnum opus*, a detailed accounting of the relationship between PV 1 and PS 2, as well as between PV 4 and PS 3, must await future scholarship.

3. *The Relation of the PV to its Commentaries*

There are several layers of hermeneutical difficulty facing any detailed study of the PV. One major issue concerns the relation of the PV to its predecessors in Buddhist scholastic literature, particularly the PS(V). Naturally, given Dinnāga's aforementioned engagement with the various other traditions of Indian intellectual discourse, this also bears on the intellectual-historical currents to which Dharmakīrti was responding, which will be examined below; briefly, however, these may be generally categorized as the specifically Buddhist Sautrāntika and Yogācāra works of Vasubandhu on the one hand, and the cross-sectarian tradition of *pramāṇa*-theoretical works on

³³ Tillemans (2000, xvii) follows Frauwallner (1957) and Watanabe (1976) in maintaining a "three-fold division" in the structure of PV 4, such that PV 4.1-27 correspond to PS 3.1, PV 4.28-188 correspond to PS 3.2, and PV 4.189-285 correspond to PS 3.8. While eminently plausible in broad outline, and perhaps even strictly accurate, it is also possible that additional internal structure to PV 4, concerning its relationship to PS 3, may be ascertained.

the other. In other words, in order to understand the PV, it is necessary to have at least a working knowledge of the Indian intellectual milieu, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist.³⁴

As noted above, however, an even more fundamental problem facing any study of the PV is that some type of commentary is essential if we are to make heads or tails of the text. But which commentary, or commentaries? And how are we to understand their relationship to Dharmakīrti's text? A common mistake made by neophytes in this area of study—including myself when I first began!—is to think of the underlying verses of the “root text” as complete and self-contained, with the commentary as a mere supplement: that is, something superfluous, ultimately inessential, or strictly unnecessary, that is added to the purportedly original unity of the “root” (*mūla*).³⁵

While it is certainly arguable that there exist examples of this kind of relationship in South Asian literature, I would suggest that, in the context of Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti's works specifically, such a view would fundamentally mischaracterize the relationship between the “root”

³⁴ Allen's (2015, 19) remarks on Indian epistemological treatises (i.e., *pramāṇasāstra*) as a genre are apposite: “*Pramāṇasāstra* is a highly professional, technical discourse. The rules governing Indian public philosophical debate are the very same laws of logic regulating the genre of *pramāṇasāstra* which is cast in the form of dialogue and disputation, oscillating back and forth between the voices of proponent and opponent. The debate which ensues within the texts is characterized by questions and counter-questions, objections and rebuttals. Since the structure of the discourse is controlled by rhapsodies of assertions and accusations, refutations and replies, it can be difficult to discern whose voice is represented in any given passage. At times, the voice changes several times in a single passage. More often than not, however, the objection to which an author is responding is not even explicitly stated in the text. Based in part on the answer the author provides, and in part on familiarity with the opponent's views, the complete conversation can be comprehended. Reading *pramāṇasāstra* in some respects resembles overhearing one end of a telephone conversation; unless one can reasonably infer what the unheard party is saying, it is difficult to make sense out of what is actually heard.”

³⁵ This concept of the commentary as “supplement,” and its attendant critique, may be understood as a consequence or outgrowth of Derrida's (1976, 144–45) notion of the *supplement* as “a menacing aid, the critical response to a situation of distress... The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence... But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void.” Derrida's concluding remarks (157) on the “dangerous supplement” could serve as a perpetual epitaph for the “task of the translator” (i.e., *die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*), which is also the task of the commentator: “Through this sequence of supplements a necessity is announced: that of an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence, of originary perception. Immediacy is derived. That all begins through the intermediary is what is indeed ‘inconceivable (to reason).’”

verses and their commentaries. Take, for example, the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (PS) and the *Pramāṇasamuccayavṛtti* (PSV). The verses of the PS function more as a mnemonic aid, or as a skeleton to be fleshed out by the commentary, than as a series of grammatically intelligible Sanskrit sentences. That is to say, the verses primarily serve to facilitate the memorization of arguments that are developed at least somewhat more clearly in the commentary, and the two (verse and commentary) were undoubtedly composed contemporaneously.³⁶ To the extent that any “original unity” exists, then, it is not located in the verses of the PS itself, but rather in the complex textual interplay between the PS and the PSV, the “PS(/V).” Together, the two form a kind of hybrid text that is, as Sara McClintock (2010, 2) describes the relationship between Śāntarakṣita’s *Tattvasaṃgraha* (TS) and his disciple Kamalaśīla’s *pañjikā* (TSP) to this text, “a single, though admittedly bipartite, work”: the “TS(/P).”³⁷

Leaving aside for a moment the notorious difficulty of interpreting Dharmakīrti’s own autocommentary (PVSV) *ad* PV 1, I would like to suggest here that the relationship between PV 1 and the PVSV is best considered along these same lines. In other words, it is my suggestion that PV 1 and the PVSV were, in a manner precisely analogous to the PS(V), composed as a hybrid text, the “PV(/SV).” At least part of the difficulty of reading the PV may thus be understood to stem from the circumstance that it was never *supposed* to be intelligible independently of some commentary. The difference between the PS and PV in this regard is that Dinnāga composed his

³⁶ Franco (1986, 85) reports, in relation to the problem of the number of the types of pseudo-perception, that Lambert Schmithausen once proposed “that the *Vṛtti* was not written at the same time as the *kārikās*, and that Dignāga changed his mind in the meantime.” But this is not a plausible suggestion, and has not been defended in the subsequent scholarly literature. We therefore follow Steinkellner’s (2005a, III n1) conclusion “that this explanatory part in prose [i.e., the PSV] should not be considered an independent work.”

³⁷ Of course, the TS(/P) is a more complex hybrid textual structure, owing to its multiple authors, but the essence of the relationship between “text” (PS) and “commentary” (PSV) is similar.

own autocommentary to each of the chapters of the PS, while Dharmakīrti's autocommentary on PV 2-4 never existed and will never exist.

What we do have, though unfortunately only in Tibetan translation, are the *Pramāṇavārttikapañjikā* (PVP), a commentary on the PV by Dharmakīrti's direct disciple Devendrabuddhi, and a secondary commentary to the PVP by Devendrabuddhi's own disciple, Śākyabuddhi (ca. 675-750): the *Pramāṇavārttikaṭīkā* (PVT). And so my further suggestion here is that, in just the same way that the PS(/V) and PV(/SV) are hybrid texts with respect to their internal structure (verse plus commentary), we should regard the commentaries of Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi as successive textual accretions, "filling out" the textual superstructure of the PV.

Complicating matters, however, is the fact that Devendrabuddhi deferred to Dharmakīrti's own autocommentary for the first chapter of the PV, and only composed the PVP in relation to the second, third, and fourth chapters of the PV. Śākyabuddhi's secondary commentary thus comments on Dharmakīrti's autocommentary for the first chapter, and Devendrabuddhi's commentary for PV 2-4. But I would argue that this bolsters my hermeneutical-methodological suggestion, above: apart from the fact that Devendrabuddhi was Dharmakīrti's direct disciple—which, if not necessarily dispositive as to the accuracy of the former's interpretation of the latter, certainly cuts in favor of that assessment—Śākyabuddhi's methodological choice to place Devendrabuddhi's commentary on an equal footing with Dharmakīrti's autocommentary, like Devendrabuddhi's methodological choice to eschew composing a commentary on the chapter of the PV that Dharmakīrti had himself already commented upon, indicates that Dharmakīrti's immediate successors clearly considered the PVP to be the functional equivalent of an autocommentary composed by Dharmakīrti himself.

Rounding out this particular hermeneutic circle is the commentary of Śākyabuddhi's likely disciple Jinendrabuddhi (ca. 710-770),³⁸ who composed the *Pramāṇasamuccayaṭīkā* (PST), a proper and traditional direct commentary upon the PS that was heavily indebted to the Dharmakīrtian (as opposed to Dharmapālan) tradition of interpreting Diñnāga. Jinendrabuddhi's commentary is interesting for a number of reasons, not the least of which is his extensive reliance upon the PVP of Devendrabuddhi, as well as his apparent engagement with Śāntarakṣita's TS.³⁹ Even at a purely linguistic level, Jinendrabuddhi's commentary is extremely helpful for understanding the PVP, which only survives in Tibetan translation; establishing textual parallels or citations from the PVP in the PST often illuminates otherwise obscure passages from the Tibetan translation of Devendrabuddhi's PVP.

There are a number of other commentarial "hybrid structures" that exist in relation to the PV, perhaps most notably the tradition stemming from Prajñākaragupta's (ca. 800-875) magisterial *Pramāṇavārttikālaṅkāra* (PVA), the foundation for several subsequent generations of secondary and tertiary commentary on Prajñākaragupta specifically. And one of the most historically important commentators on Dharmakīrti did not, in fact, write a commentary on the PV at all; this is Dharmottara (ca. 775-850), who composed a gargantuan commentary to the PVin, as well as a shorter commentary on the NB, then either died before completing what doubtless would have been an unfathomably massive commentary on the PV, or else perhaps figured he finally had little left to say. But both Dharmottara and Prajñākaragupta appear to have been engaged in

³⁸ In the absence of a reliable chronology, I have provisionally assumed approximately twenty-five years between successive generations of commentators, and an average lifespan of approximately seventy-five years. One of the benefits of this approach, apart from its inherent plausibility, is that it places Jinendrabuddhi where Steinkellner (2005b, xlii) places him, as "an older contemporary of Śāntarakṣita's with a date of circa 710-770 C.E."

³⁹ Steinkellner (2005b, xl) concludes that "Jinendrabuddhi was so close to Śāntarakṣita as to be able to borrow from his TS while it was still under composition around C.E. 760."

fundamentally revisionist exegetical projects. Dharmottara, for example, vehemently disagreed with Dharmakīrti's position that no extramental entities exist. As for the latter, the relationship between Prajñākaragupta's own views and the earlier commentarial strata (i.e., the PVP and PVT) is not well understood, and requires further study. If nothing else, however, Prajñākaragupta goes out of his way to avoid citing Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi. And, for their part, Prajñākaragupta's successors—perhaps most notably Jñānaśrīmitra (ca. 1050) in his *Sākārasiddhiśāstra* (“Treatise Establishing True Images”)—clearly understand Prajñākaragupta to have promulgated some positions at odds with those of Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi.

Ideally, all of the various commentaries and subcommentaries on the *pramāṇa* works of Dharmakīrti should be studied in depth and detail. And hopefully, one day all of these materials will be topics of sustained scholarly analysis. In the meantime, though, it is necessary to circumscribe the range of our present inquiry. This is admittedly an imperfect approach; but we must begin somewhere. On the upside, it is no small solace that the Dinnāga-Dharmakīrti-Devendrabuddhi-Śākyabuddhi-Jinendrabuddhi commentarial lineage is relatively self-contained.

4. *Method and Outline*

Finally, let us briefly consider the method for the present study, which is to say, our plan for reading PV 3. To begin with, as a matter of genre, this study is perhaps best understood as a reimagined, twenty-first century English version of the classical Sanskrit commentary.⁴⁰ Its primary and overriding goal is exegetical: to facilitate, so far as possible, a reliable and comprehensive understanding of PV 3. Admittedly, this approach may leave much to be desired

⁴⁰ For apt reflections on the method of studying and translating Sanskrit philosophical literature by means of producing what amounts to the translator's own commentary, see Taber (2005, xi–xviii) and Kachru (2015, 1–12).

in terms of a more synthetic, cross-cultural, or interdisciplinary project; but the brute reality of the situation is that such a sophisticated approach requires firmer philological foundations than are available at present. Philology is the cornerstone of Buddhist Studies, and while (again) this is not primarily a philological study, it is perhaps more oriented toward philology than the typical contemporary *philosophical* engagement with Dharmakīrti's epistemology. This orientation is motivated by a recognition that the type of text-critical close reading engaged in here is a necessary prerequisite to any more sophisticated philosophical engagement. Put simply, this study is intended to provide a platform for that type of more advanced, interpretive work to eventually stand upon. In terms of the duties of a classical Sanskrit commentary, then, the first four traditional Sanskrit commentarial services of word-division (*padaccheda*), paraphrase (*padārthokti*), explanation of nominal compounds (*vigraha*), and syntactic analysis (*vākyayojanā*), are primarily attained through the provision of translations and the subsequent explanation of those translations; for translation is itself a form of semantic and grammatical analysis. Where significant philological issues have arisen, these are for the most part adjudicated in the footnotes to the Appendices.

With regard to the fifth and final Sanskrit-commentarial service of explaining the meaning or “answering objections” (*ākṣepasamādhāna*), as Tubb and Boose (2007, 173) note, “Those portions of a Sanskrit commentary that are not specifically devoted to glossing the words of the text are usually concerned with discussing the contents and implications of the text. Often these portions constitute the major part of a commentary on a philosophical or scientific text”; (ibid., 5) “At this level a commentary goes beyond straightforward exegesis and becomes an argumentative treatise in its own right.” Our commentary is no exception, and much of its bulk consists in working out the implications of Dharmakīrti's epistemology, connecting lines of argumentation that may on the surface appear to be only distantly related, and contextualizing these arguments within the

broader Buddhist intellectual and praxeological tradition. The commentaries of Devendrabuddhi, Śākyabuddhi, and Jinendrabuddhi are invaluable in this regard, as apart from even making it possible in the first place to understand Dharmakīrti on literally the most basic grammatical level, they additionally provide crucial context and frequently flesh out his arguments.

As noted above, this study is broadly conceived as a holistic exegesis and analysis of PV 3. But, as also noted above, a thorough treatment of each of the Perception Chapter's 539 verses would be impracticable for this type of project. The key methodological questions are, therefore, whether it is possible to ascertain some type of unifying or overarching "main point" to Dharmakīrti's far-ranging discussion in PV 3; if so, what this distilled essence of PV 3 would consist in; and where specifically within these 539 verses it may be located.

Without yet arguing the point—indeed, the rest of this study may be taken as a defense of the following proposition—it is my contention that Dharmakīrti does have something like a final position, which constitutes the main point of PV 3. In broad outline, this final position is that all ordinary phenomena (which is to say, all differentiated sensory content, such as appearances of 'blue' and 'yellow') are "internal" (*antar*) or mental (*cetana*), in the precise sense that they are best understood as being caused by latent karmic imprints or dispositions (*vāsanā*), rather than by extramental objects (*bāhyārtha*); that such karmic imprints are by nature defiled (*kliṣṭa*), which defilement manifests *inter alia* in the necessity that phenomenal appearances always appear dualistically, which is to say, structured into the duality of phenomenological object and subject (*grāhyagrāhaka*); and that, because this phenomenological duality is strictly erroneous (*bhrānti*) and distorted (*upaplava*), but as noted there is no ordinary phenomenal appearance (*ābhāsa*) in the absence of the structure (*sthiti*, *vyavasthā*) of subject and object, ordinary phenomenal appearances—'blue' and 'yellow'—must ultimately dissolve into the pure, contentless, and

undifferentiated “luminosity” (*prakāśa*) of reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvitti*), which constitutes the “ultimate epistemic instrument” (*pāramārthikapramāṇa*) that directly knows the nature of reality as such (*tathatā*).

It should be understood, however, that Dharmakīrti is nowhere near as explicit as the preceding paragraph. This may be understood, in large part, as the result his rhetorical strategy of the “sliding scale.”⁴¹ In general, that is to say, Dharmakīrti’s preferred philosophical method is to push on the logic of his interlocutors’ positions, and expose the flaws in their accounts, rather than concretely articulating his own. This is especially true at higher levels of analysis; while Dharmakīrti does defend an idealistic ontological framework, he only explicitly mentions karmic imprints or dispositions (*vāsanā*) at two crucial junctures, PV 3.336 and PV 3.396. Furthermore, the most explicit (though still highly elliptical and indirect) articulation of his final position does not occur in the PV at all, but rather only at the very end of PVin 1, wherein he states that the “ultimate epistemic instrument” has only been “hinted at” (*sūcitam*).⁴²

Keeping all of the above in mind, the upshot is that the single most critical passage of the Perception Chapter—and, therefore, the primary though non-exclusive focus of this study—is PV 3.288-366 *ad* PS 1.7cd-10. In broad outline, this study is structured according to the logical development of Dharmakīrti’s argument in this critically-important passage. Thus, Chapter 1 is an analysis of Dharmakīrti’s theory of “pseudo-perception” (*pratyakṣābhāsa*), articulated at PV 3.288-300 *ad* PS 1.7cd-8ab. The key point of this first chapter is that nearly every cognition which we ordinarily take to be “perceptual” (*pratyakṣa*), paradigmatically including the determinate identification (*niścaya*) of a sensory object (such as the determination “that is a jug”), is in fact an

⁴¹ See below, Section II: [Buddhist Epistemology and the “Sliding Scale.”](#)

⁴² See Chapter 2, Section II.D.1: [Implications of PV 3.301-319.](#)

erroneous pseudo-perception, and therefore not actually perceptual at all—at least, not on Dharmakīrti’s account of what makes a cognition genuinely perceptual. A subsidiary but critically important point in this regard is that there exist two distinct types of error, conceptual and nonconceptual. While a large portion of Dharmakīrti’s epistemology amounts to an explanation of how our everyday cognitions are in fact nothing more than conceptual pseudo-perceptions, and Dharmakīrti’s theory of conceptual pseudo-perception is analyzed at length in Chapter 1, the single most important takeaway of PV 3.288-300 is that there exist specifically *nonconceptual* forms of cognitive error. The reason this point is so critically important is that it allows Dharmakīrti to account for the erroneous distortion of phenomenological duality, the single most significant type of cognitive error, in nonconceptual terms. As we will see, the fact that the distortion of duality is nonconceptual means that this error is ontologically built into the very nature of our everyday dualistic cognitions, which in turn entails that even nominally veridical sensory perceptions must finally be understood as erroneous (specifically, as nonconceptual pseudo-perceptions), just insofar as they are normally experienced as though structured by the duality of subject and object.

Chapter 2, which tracks PV 3.301-319 *ad* PS 1.8cd, examines the causal structure of cognition according to Dharmakīrti. Much of Dharmakīrti’s argument in this passage concerns the Sanskrit grammatical metaphor at the heart of *pramāṇa* theory, which is discussed in detail. Dharmakīrti, following Diñnāga, argues here that cognition is devoid of intermediate causal activity (*nirvyāpāra*), which is in essence to say that a cognition exists strictly as an effect that is produced from its causes. In Diñnāga’s formulation, adopted by Dharmakīrti, this means that the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) for knowing a sensory object—the “instrument,” in this instance, being identified as cognition’s property of possessing the appearance of the sensory object (*viṣayābhāsātā*)—just is the “resulting” (*phala*) cognitive activity of actually knowing the sensory

object. The key point here is that, rather than transitively acting upon or “apprehending” (*√grah*) its object, cognition only arises, intransitively, due to the confluence of its causal factors. In other words, cognition only “apprehends” its object in the sense that it arises with the form of this object; in reality, however, there is no causal activity (*vyāpāra*) of “apprehension.” Crucially, this point also bears upon the distortion of phenomenological duality, which is analyzable in these terms as a strictly causal feature of cognition, i.e., a feature of awareness that is produced by one of cognition’s most important conditioning factors: the “internal impairment” (*antarupaplava*). Due to the internal impairment, cognition erroneously *appears to be* the apprehension of some phenomenal object by some phenomenal subject; but this is not so. In reality, cognition is nondual.

The underlying reasons why cognition must be understood as ontologically singular and thus in reality nondual are discussed in Chapter 3, which also marks our first foray into the crucially important argument in PS 1.9a: that, “alternatively, in [an idealistic] context, reflexive awareness is the result” (*svasaṃvittiḥ phalaṃ vātra*). In PV 3.320, Dharmakīrti begins his discussion of this point by asking a question that in effect serves as the theoretical fulcrum about which the entire Perception Chapter revolves: “what is the awareness of an object?” (*kārthasaṃvit*). Indeed, it would not overstate the matter to describe PV 3.320 as the rhetorical climax of PV 3, the key juncture or pressure point which Dharmakīrti builds his analysis toward, and then keeps pressing his opponent on until the end. The crux of the argument turns on the interlocutor’s acceptance of the preceding analysis, to the effect that a cognition may be understood as the awareness of some object “because it possesses the form of that [object]” (*tādrūpyād*). Here, however, Dharmakīrti argues that this account is unacceptable, because cognition cannot truly be said to possess the form of the object. Since his argumentation toward this end is primarily located in an earlier passage, PV 3.194-224 *ad* PS 1.4cd, Chapter 3 is primarily framed as an investigation of Dharmakīrti’s

arguments in that earlier passage. In brief, the argument in that passage is that the variegation (*citratā*) of phenomenal appearances, together with the unfixable disconnect between the gross “extension” (*sthūla*) of the object-image, as opposed to the extensionless, “subtle” (*sūkṣma*), partless and indivisible particles which are supposed to be its cause, entail that ordinary cognition cannot be understood to truly possess the form of its supposed object.

In Chapter 4, which treats PV 3.320-337 *ad* PS 1.9a, we return to the crucial issue of reflexive awareness as the “result” (*phala*). The key point here is that reflexive awareness, the inherently self-presenting nature of every cognition, just insofar as it is a cognition, may for this reason also be metaphorically understood as the “resultant cognitive activity,” which is to say, our actual knowledge of our own cognitions. This point is crucially important in relation to Dharmakīrti’s Yogācāra perspective, as it is precisely in these terms that Dharmakīrti articulates his argument for a fully idealistic ontology. In broad outline, Dharmakīrti’s argument at this juncture is that we only ever have *direct* epistemic access to cognition; and so, building upon the mereological analysis developed in Chapter 3, the notion of extramental objects (*bāhyārtha*) is found to be incoherent. Dharmakīrti thus argues that the best possible account of conventional reality is that appearances arise due to the activation (*prabodhana*) of an internal imprint or karmic disposition (*vāsanā*). But in all cases, irrespective of the underlying causal ontology, awareness is only ever “reflexively” aware of awareness itself. Therefore, this very reflexive awareness may always be considered the “result.”

Chapter 5 completes the analysis of reflexive awareness as the “result,” through the examination of PV 3.338-352 *ad* PS 1.9bcd. This passage primarily concerns the relationship between the subjective or affective features of experience, such as pleasure, and the determination (*niścaya*) of the sensory object. However, since several of the key concepts discussed here are

treated in greater detail earlier in the PV, specifically PV 3.249-280 *ad* PS 1.6a2b, the analysis in Chapter 5 also looks back toward that earlier passage, which concerns the nature of affective states such as pleasure. Most saliently, this earlier passage explains how affective states are by nature reflexively-experienced, which is to say that pleasure just is the experience (or, equivalently, the reflexive awareness) of pleasure. This point is important for two reasons. First, it helps serve to establish the argument of PS 1.9b, that “the determination of the object has [reflexive awareness] as its nature” (*tadrūpo hy arthaniścayaḥ*). Second, it sets up Dharmakīrti’s discussion in PV 3.353-366 *ad* PS 1.10, where Dharmakīrti explains how the reflexive awareness of affective states such as pleasure is in fact generalizable to the reflexive awareness of all cognition. This last passage is examined in the Conclusion to this study, which also includes some notes concerning how Dharmakīrti’s theoretical framework was incorporated into the Buddhist contemplative tradition.

Despite the wealth of additional material in PV 3.367-539 *ad* PS 1.11-12, perhaps most especially concerning the extremely interesting topic of memory and its relation to reflexive awareness, PV 3.366 marks a natural ending point for this study. It is noteworthy in this regard that the final portion of the Perception Chapter of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (i.e., PVin 1) is comprised of a verbatim citation of PV 3.353-362, followed by a brief consideration of the *sahopalambhaniyama* (roughly corresponding to PV 3.387-389, discussed in Chapter 4); PVin 1 then concludes with a maddeningly brief and elliptical mention of the “ultimate epistemic instrument.” In other words, Dharmakīrti concludes the Perception Chapter of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* without ever touching upon the discussion of memory and related topics corresponding to PS 1.11-12, in essence ignoring PV 3.367-539. Dharmakīrti’s theory of memory as articulated in PV 3 must, then, unfortunately await a future study.

Finally, as regards this Introduction, there remain two major tasks to accomplish before we are able to embark on our study of the Perception Chapter. First, it is necessary to understand Dharmakīrti's rhetorical strategy of the "sliding scale," which in turn necessitates a consideration of the earlier Buddhist intellectual tradition. Second, Dharmakīrti's epistemological project must be contextualized within the pan-Indian scholastic discourse of *pramāṇa* theory, of which it is an essential part.

II. Buddhist Epistemology and the “Sliding Scale”

A. General Considerations

One of the most important features of Dharmakīrti’s epistemological works is the situational approach he takes to dealing with rhetorical opponents, which has been dubbed the “sliding scale of analysis.” Dunne (2004, 53–69), building on McClintock (2002, 68–76) and Dreyfus (1997, 99–104), identifies two major typological divisions on the scale: External Realism and Epistemic Idealism. The External Realist position tracks the Sanskrit term *bāhyārthavāda* (“the view that external objects [exist]”), and can be further subdivided into the ignorant but “common sense” view that distributed entities or “wholes” (*avayavins*) exist, and the more refined position that only irreducible particulars (*svalakṣaṇas*) or indivisible momentary phenomena (*dharmas*) exist. On this view, such irreducible particulars are “substantially existent” (*dravyasat*), while the gross objects comprised by such particulars are only “nominally existent” (*prajñaptisat*). The latter position was definitive within the Abhidharma literature, including the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*.⁴³

While Dharmakīrti’s External Realism is closely related to this Abhidharma perspective, the two are distinct in at least one crucial respect. For Dharmakīrti, on the most basic account, “particulars” are synonymous with elementary, “atomic”⁴⁴ or fundamental particles (*paramāṇu*). However, Dharmakīrti’s predecessors in the Abhidharma discourse were concerned with the

⁴³ Cf. AKBh *ad* AK 6.4.

⁴⁴ The question of how to discuss “atomic” particles in the context of Buddhist literature is somewhat complicated. The term “atom” is derived from the Greek *a-* “not” + *tokein* “to cut”; when first discovered, it was believed that the entities we now call “atoms” are indivisible. But J.J. Thomson’s 1897 discovery of the electron, and Ernest Rutherford’s 1909 demonstration of the nuclear structure of “atoms,” dramatically changed the theoretical picture. Contemporary physicists refer to the indivisible, substructure-less, most basic ontological elements of reality as “elementary particles” or “fundamental particles.” Since this is the precise sense of *paramāṇu* in Dharmakīrti’s usage, we shall accordingly refer to these as “elementary” or “fundamental,” rather than “atomic.” Though they do not explain their terminological decisions, Duckworth et al. (2016) adopt the same convention, presumably for the same reason.

irreducible units of *experience* (i.e., *dharmas*), which they did not necessarily consider to be *ontological* constituents of reality as such.⁴⁵

Similarly, although the division between “common sense” and “refined” perspectives within External Realist ontology may in certain ways be understood to map onto the distinction between nominalism and realism in the Western philosophical tradition, this comparison comes with some important caveats. Most saliently: in Western philosophy, a “particular” can mean for example a particular chair, as opposed to the “universal” class of chairs. However, for Dharmakīrti, as well as the entire line of his Buddhist predecessors stretching all the way back to the earliest layers of the Abhidharma, a particular chair is a composite entity (*sāmagrī*), and thus from the perspective of Buddhist nominalist critique is a kind of “universal” (*sāmānya*). In fact, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, this is the precise sense in which Diñnāga writes in PS 1.4cd: “the sensory domain is a universal” (*sāmānyagocaram*). That is to say, for Vasubandhu, Diñnāga, and Dharmakīrti, the gross extended sensory object is a universal, just insofar as it is a composite of individual particulars working in concert to produce a sensory image (*ākāra*) in cognition.⁴⁶

As the preceding discussion indicates, Dharmakīrti’s ontology and epistemology hinges on a long tradition of Buddhist scholarship, with which Dharmakīrti expects his readers to be intimately familiar. In particular, Dharmakīrti was extremely indebted to the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntika tradition of Abhidharma exegesis. On this point, one of the more interesting features of the PV is that it does not contain a straightforward description⁴⁷ of the perceptual process—that

⁴⁵ Cf. Cox (2004, 549).

⁴⁶ See Chapter 3, Section I.B: [The Agglomerated Object of Sensory Cognition](#).

⁴⁷ Dunne (2004, 84n50) highlights PV 3.109, PV 3.247–248 (discussed in Chapter 1), PV 3.301–319 (discussed in Chapter 2), and PV 3.333–341 (discussed in Chapters 4 and 5) as passages from which Dharmakīrti’s causal theory of perception may be gleaned.

is, it does not straightforwardly answer the central question that Dharmakīrti poses in PV 3.320a: “what is object-awareness?”⁴⁸ To some extent, this is because, apart from characterizing perception as “devoid of conceptuality” (*kalpanāpoḍham*), neither does Diñnāga. But an important underlying reason why neither Dharmakīrti nor Diñnāga spelled out the process is because, again, their epistemological projects sat on top of centuries of prior scholarship.

The more specific contextual issue here is that both Diñnāga and Dharmakīrti were responding in part to a pre-existing dispute between Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika exegetical traditions, a dispute that was likely very much alive in their day. At a first approximation, the “sliding scale” may be understood as a refutation of Vaibhāṣika direct realism, followed by a provisional acceptance of Sautrāntika representationalism, before a decisive turn toward an idealistic (“Yogācāra”) re-interpretation of that representationalism. Taking into account, then, that both Diñnāga and Dharmakīrti were in dialogue with these Abhidharma exegetical traditions, especially as presented and represented in the works of Vasubandhu, it is worth briefly examining the layers of textual accretion to which they were responding.

B. Vaibhāṣika Direct Realism

To begin with, it should be noted that there was much in common between the Vaibhāṣikas and the Sautrāntikas. This is unsurprising considering that both were Buddhist exegetical traditions participating in the Abhidharma discourse. At the same time, they vociferously disagreed on a wide range of issues, too many to address here. But at the risk of reducing two traditions with enormous internal variegation to a single defining perspective for each, and in particular at the risk

⁴⁸ *kārthasaṃvit*. See below, Chapter 3.

of treating the Vaibhāṣikas as a mere caricature or placeholder (as they are too commonly treated), for our purposes it is nevertheless of heuristic use to specify that the most important distinction between these traditions concerns their epistemology—specifically, the direct realism of the Vaibhāṣikas, versus the representationalism of the Sautrāntikas. In other words, while a detailed examination of Vaibhāṣika direct realist epistemology on its own terms would lie outside the scope of this study, it is nevertheless extremely helpful to take a brief look at this system, if only due to what this brief look reveals about the nature of the epistemological debate taken up by Dharmakīrti, the problem of “intentionality,” and related issues.

Crane and French (2017, 3.4.1) characterize direct or “naïve” realism as the view that “experiences themselves consist of relations of awareness to objects.” From this perspective, sensory cognition is believed to operate with respect to its objects directly and without mediation, such that “what is fundamental to experience is something which itself cannot [be] explained in terms of representing the world: a primitive relation of awareness to aspects of the world.” The key point of direct realism, in other words, which makes the relation between awareness and its objects “primitive,” is that awareness is held to apprehend its objects directly, without “sense data” or any other type of intermediate mental representation. To a first approximation, this is a fair summation of the Vaibhāṣika perspective. Yet the Vaibhāṣikas’ direct realism was perhaps in a stronger philosophical position than similar modern-day theories, on account of a major problem facing all direct realist accounts of perception, which was also a critically important concern of Dharmakīrti’s: the “time-lag problem.”

The “time-lag problem” refers to the ineradicable gap in time between the moment that the cognized object exists, and the moment that it is perceived. This gap exists even from a strictly physicalist-materialist perspective, since even from such a perspective it must be acknowledged

that what the eye “sees” is not the object itself, but rather the visible light that the object either emits or reflects. Since the propagation of light is not instantaneous, but on the contrary requires a definite quantity of time, the object (i.e., that which emits or reflects light) at the time it is seen is necessarily different from the object as existed at the moment when it emitted or reflected light. Of course, one may in principle appeal to some kind of continuity between the object at t_0 (when it emits or reflects light) and the object at t_1 (when this light hits the retina), such that the two are held to be “the same” object. This kind of appeal, however, would be equally impossible from both strictly physicalist-materialist and Vaibhāṣika Buddhist perspectives, on account of the momentariness (*kṣaṇikatva*) of everything that exists. At a subatomic level, everything is in constant flux; nothing is absolutely or completely “the same” from moment to moment.

Yet despite their recognition of the momentariness of phenomena, which is foundational for Buddhism, the Vaibhāṣikas are effectively immune from the time-lag problem in a way that contemporary direct realists (at least those that hew to a strict physicalist-materialist line) are not. This is due to their *sarvāstivāda* (“Everything Exists View”) ontological position, to the effect that all phenomena exist throughout the three times of past, present, and future. As a consequence of this view, the Vaibhāṣikas maintained that causality operates both successively and simultaneously. On their account, within a specifically simultaneous causal structure—such as that of sensory awareness—cause and effect are able to exist at the same time. Cox (1988, 33) explains:

The second fundamental area of disagreement between the Sarvāstivādins [i.e., the Vaibhāṣikas] and the Dārṣṭāntikas⁴⁹ [i.e., the “Sautrāntikas”] concerns the

⁴⁹ Establishing the precise nomenclature and genealogy of the early Buddhist exegetical traditions is outside the scope of the present study. In brief, both the Vaibhāṣikas and the Dārṣṭāntikas considered themselves to be Sarvāstivādins; of these two, however, only the Vaibhāṣikas actually maintained the original Sarvāstivāda ontology. Thus, “Vaibhāṣika” and “Sarvāstivāda” are often used interchangeably. The tradition that came eventually to be known as “Sautrāntika,” meanwhile, was essentially derived from the earlier Dārṣṭāntikas. To highlight the continuity between these two traditions, terms such as “Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntika” are often used. For an overview of the historical

dynamics of conditionality. The Sarvāstivādins allow both successive and simultaneous models of causation: certain causes (*hetu*) or conditions (*pratyaya*) arise prior to their effects, while others, which exert a supportive conditioning efficacy, arise simultaneously with them. The Dārṣṭāntikas, however, allow only successive causation; a cause must always precede its effect.

The Vaibhāṣika-Sarvāstivāda doctrine of simultaneous causality was, in this way, the theoretical superstructure holding up their version of direct realism. Cox (1988, 35) explains that, for the Sarvāstivādas, “In direct perception (*pratyakṣa*), a momentary external object-field [*viśaya*] is grasped by a momentary externally directed sense organ and apprehended by an equally momentary instance of one of the five externally directed types of perceptual consciousness. This is possible only if the object-field, sense organ, and perceptual consciousness are simultaneous.” There is no time-lag problem, on such a view, because the “resulting” cognition generated by the contact between the sense-faculty and the object is held to exist at the exact same time as its generating causes: “thanks to the operation of simultaneous causality, the external object can be directly grasped, in spite of [the] universal law of momentariness.”⁵⁰ Thus, the sensory cognition and its object exist in a simultaneous, direct, and “primitive” relation.⁵¹

development of these traditions, and in particular a defense of the notion that “Dārṣṭāntika” and “Sautrāntika” should be kept conceptually separate, see Dhammajoti (2007, 14). For an alternate view, to the effect that “Dārṣṭāntika was used in a derogatory sense, more or less meaning heterodox Sarvāstivāda,” see Willems, Dessein, and Cox (1998, xii). With regard to the latter view, however, it should be noted that Cox (1988, 70n4) states that “The history of the Dārṣṭāntikas and Sautrāntikas are closely intertwined, with the Dārṣṭāntikas as the probable predecessor of the Sautrāntikas.” Dhammajoti (2007, 14) concludes: “To say the least, it is certain that the ancient [commentators] did not indiscriminately equate ‘Dārṣṭāntika’ with ‘Sautrāntika.’”

⁵⁰ Dhammajoti (2007, 137).

⁵¹ This point is critically important in relation to one of the most paradigmatic examples of perceptual error, the illusion of a circle created by a spinning firebrand (*alātacakra*); see Chapter 1, Section II.E: [The Firebrand-Circle](#). The Sarvāstivādins could appeal to simultaneous causality, and the present perception of past *dharmas*, in order to explain why the spinning firebrand appears as an uninterrupted circle. The Sautrāntikas, on the other hand, were forced to concede that, at any given moment, the point of light can only be seen by the visual consciousness at its instantaneous location. Accounting for why the spinning firebrand appears as an uninterrupted circle is therefore more complex.

This brings us to the thorny topic of “intentionality,” or what is known within the Western philosophical tradition the “intentional relation” between consciousness and its object.⁵² Intentionality is an enormous topic, far beyond a thorough treatment here. For our present purposes, it should suffice to note that there is a certain fundamental ambiguity in the way that the Western tradition speaks about intentionality. On the one hand, intentionality has been described in terms of “aboutness”—that is, a cognition’s (or, on some accounts, a linguistic proposition’s) being “about” something else, other than itself. In this sense, “intentionality” denotes a kind of externally-directed reference. A cognition is intentional in this “external” sense insofar as it is “about” or relates to some external referent; this is, roughly, John Searle’s stance.⁵³ On the other hand, intentionality has also been described in terms of the relationship between phenomenal subject and phenomenal object: that is to say, in terms of a relationship between two different types of “internal” mental entities, or perhaps two poles defining the range of a kind of mental phenomenal field. This is, roughly, the Brentanian or Husserlian sense of the term.⁵⁴

In one sense, the problem of “intentionality” will be a recurring theme for this study, since the relationship between the “apprehender” (*grāhaka*) and “apprehended” (*grāhya*), which is to say, the phenomenological subject and object, is a centrally important issue for Dharmakīrti’s project. But it must be understood at the outset that Dharmakīrti’s model of cognition is fundamentally *non-intentional*. To begin with, Dharmakīrti completely rejects the idea that there exists any kind of direct or unmediated relationship between a moment of awareness and a purportedly external (that is, *bāhya* or extramental) object; externally-directed intentionality in

⁵² Jacob (2019).

⁵³ Searle (1983).

⁵⁴ Husserl (1960).

Searle’s sense is a nonstarter.⁵⁵ But Dharmakīrti also maintains that the bifurcation of cognition into subjective and objective “aspects” (*ākāras*) is strictly and exclusively an artifact of ignorance, in fact nothing more than a type of nonconceptual cognitive error.⁵⁶ A cognition, on Dharmakīrti’s account, is ontologically singular and indivisible, and thus cannot involve any kind of real relationship between an ontologically discrete subject and object; for this very reason, as will be demonstrated at length throughout this study, Dharmakīrti maintains that the phenomenological duality of subject and object is unreal. Hence, any Brentanian or Husserlian interpretation of Dharmakīrti’s epistemology must be very carefully qualified, at least to the extent that their phenomenology treats the duality of subject and object as ineliminable and irreducible.

“Intentionality” is front and center in Vaibhāṣika perceptual theory, since they maintain the relationship between a sensory consciousness and its object to be intentional in the first, “external” sense. This position dovetailed with the Sarvāstivādins’ insistence that the objects of perception necessarily exist, in other words that there can be no non-existent object of perception.⁵⁷ This ontological stance was particularly relevant to the analysis of illusions or erroneous cognitions such as those that will be discussed in Chapter 1. According to the Vaibhāṣikas, for example, the extremely important “double moon” illusion—when, due to a misalignment between the eyes, one “sees double”—is due to the misapprehension of a really-existing causal substrate, namely, the single moon (Cox 1988, 49-50):

⁵⁵ On this point, it should be noted that, given Leibniz’ Law or the momentariness (*kṣaṇikatva*) of phenomena, the “aboutness” sense of intentionality is impossible to square with a direct realist epistemology, without invoking either a Vaibhāṣika-style simultaneous causality, or the idea that every moment of consciousness involves some kind of “spooky action at a distance” with respect to its object.

⁵⁶ See Chapter 1, Section III: [Dharmakīrti’s Theory of Nonconceptual Pseudo-Perception](#).

⁵⁷ Dhammajoti (2007, 41–44).

Sensory error, such as the visual distortions produced by ophthalmic disorders [i.e., *timira*], or the image of two moons, results from faulty sense organs and does not imply a nonexistent object-field. For example, a visual sense organ afflicted by ophthalmic disorders does grasp existent visual material form, albeit unclearly. This then results in mistaken cognition with regard to that existent object-field. In the case of the image of two moons, Saṅghabhadra explains that the visual sense organ and that initial moment of visual perceptual consciousness depend upon or see the single existent moon. However, the clarity of perception is influenced by the sense organ, which is a condition coequal with the object-field in the arising of perceptual consciousness. Therefore, the deteriorated state of the visual sense organ produces an unclear visual perceptual consciousness, which results in the confused cognition of two moons. Nevertheless, the object-field, the single moon, actually exists. This is evident because no such cognition of the moon, confused or otherwise, arises where the moon is not found.

For reasons that will become clear in Chapter 1, this explanation shares some important similarities with Dharmakīrti's own explanation of perceptual error, in terms of attributing at least part of the causal origin of the error to a defect in the sense-faculties. Like Dharmakīrti, in other words, the Vaibhāṣikas did *not* accept a purely conceptual explanation for sensory error, precisely because they maintain that all sensory cognitions—even erroneous ones—must arise from a direct causal relationship between the sense-faculty and some real entity.

C. Sautrāntika Representationalism

As noted above, one of the most interesting and counterintuitive features of the PV is that Dharmakīrti does not directly describe the mechanics of sensory perception. Instead, he largely relies on his readers' pre-existing knowledge of Sautrāntika epistemology, while subtly revising it in line with the Yogācāra perspective. However, sorting out the extent to which Dharmakīrti diverges from his Sautrāntika predecessors (most notably Vasubandhu's perspective as articulated

in the AKBh) is beyond the scope of this project.⁵⁸ Indeed, of all the intellectual-historical lacunae which this study must cursorily gloss over, none is deeper or wider than the Sautrāntika model of sensory cognition. What follows here is therefore a schematic presentation, by no means comprehensive, of Sautrāntika representationalism.⁵⁹

To define our terms, “representationalism” is the primary epistemological alternative to naïve or direct realism.⁶⁰ The essence of representationalism is the position that the object of experience is not the stimulus of sensory cognition in and of itself, but rather some kind of cognitive representation of the stimulus, often expressed as “sense data” about the stimulus.⁶¹ Thus, on a basic External Realist or Sautrāntika account, wherein it is asserted that there is such a

⁵⁸ Dharmakīrti’s External Realist position is often considered to be interchangeable with a Sautrāntika perspective, and in many respects may indeed be considered thus interchangeable. But it is possible—though as yet unestablished—that Dharmakīrti’s External Realist epistemological framework incorporated a critically important element, which was *not* shared by his Sautrāntika predecessors: the foundational Yogācāra doctrine that cognition does not exclusively arise in the image of the apprehended object (*grāhyākāra*), but rather also simultaneously arises with the image of the apprehending subject (*grāhakākāra*). That is to say, as will be discussed throughout this study, but especially in Chapters 4 and 5, Dharmakīrti asserts that cognition arises with a “dual form” (*divirūpa*), even in an External Realist context wherein extramental objects are asserted to exist.

Again, although it is not yet possible to settle this point with absolute certainty, and any attempt to do so would in any case lie outside the scope of this study, it is worth noting that, while Sautrāntika representationalist epistemology hinged on the object-image (*grāhyākāra*), it seems as though the Sautrāntikas may have had no endogenous concept of the subject-image (*grāhakākāra*). As Dhammajoti (2007, 174) explains, “the Sautrāntika notion is that the *ākāra* corresponds exactly to the external object.” In other words, Sautrāntika representationalism may not necessarily have included any account of subjective phenomenology. Furthermore, Gold (2015, 128–76) argues persuasively and at length that the phenomenological sense of “duality” (*dvaya*) in Vasubandhu’s later “Yogācāra” works should not be read back into Vasubandhu’s earlier “Sautrāntika” works. Hence, the very concept of phenomenological duality seems to have been somewhat unique to the Yogācāra tradition, though again, more research into this topic is required.

For another possible divergence between Dharmakīrti and the prior Sautrāntika tradition, concerning the possibility of multiple simultaneous cognitions, see Chapter 1 note 87. For yet another possible divergence, concerning the manner of operation of reflexive awareness, see Chapter 5, note 178.

⁵⁹ Ven. K. L. Dhammajoti and Collett Cox have done invaluable work shedding light on the post-*Mahāvibhāṣaśāstra*, pre-AK(Bh) period of Buddhist doctrinal development, but much work remains to be done. A large portion of this future work concerns the relationship between Vasubandhu’s Sautrāntika perspective and that of his Dārṣāntika predecessors, especially Kumāralāta. Another portion concerns the relationship, within Vasubandhu’s oeuvre, between his earlier and later epistemological theories, fleshing out the work begun by Gold (2015).

⁶⁰ Lycan (2015).

⁶¹ Crane and French (2017) distinguish “sense data” epistemology from other types of non-direct-realist theories, but a simple twofold division between direct realism and representationalism is sufficient for our analytic purposes here.

thing as extramental matter (i.e., *bāhyārtha*), the key epistemological point is that we do not directly perceive the fundamental particles of matter.⁶² Rather, instead of perceiving fundamental particles directly—which is in any case impossible⁶³—we perceive them by means of the effects they produce when they act in concert.⁶⁴

In Sanskrit Buddhist literature, the cognitive effect produced by the joint causal operation of fundamental particles and sense faculties is known as the “phenomenal form,” “image” or “aspect” (*ākāra*) of the object.⁶⁵ Thus the Sautrāntika position is often denoted as *sākāravāda* (“the view [that sensory cognition occurs] with an ‘image’ [of the sensory object]”). Buddhist

⁶² In keeping with the Abhidharma distinction between material and mental *dharma*s, it should be noted that, on a Buddhist account, such material particles are not the only possible objects of sensory cognition. Importantly, mental particulars—i.e., cognitions—are also the object of certain types of “direct perception” (*pratyakṣa*), specifically mental perception and reflexive awareness. See Chapter 1, Section II.C: [Mental Perception](#).

⁶³ The Buddhist insistence on the impossibility of directly seeing the elementary constituents of reality is well-known; cf. Dunne (2004, 100–114), and Chapter 3, Section I.B: [The Agglomerated Object of Sensory Cognition](#). But even from a strictly “scientific” perspective, the concept of “seeing atoms” (to say nothing of subatomic particles) is incoherent. Optical physics dictates that objects smaller than ~200nm cannot be resolved by light visible to the human eye, even in the narrowest violet range. For reference, an atom is approximately 0.1nm in diameter. Thus, even a theoretically perfectly optimal visible-light microscope cannot resolve individual atoms. Atomic-scale phenomena can be resolved using quantum tunneling effects, in effect manipulating electrons rather than photons in order to probe the structure of such atomic-scale phenomena; this is the principle underlying the operation of the Scanning Tunneling Microscope. However, using technological-prosthetic instruments to measure an extremely small electric current is not “seeing” in any phenomenologically or visual-cognitively meaningful sense.

Although there is unfortunately no space to digress upon this point at length, it is worth reflecting on how this account differs from that of Wilfrid Sellars (1965), who maintained that the “theory-contaminated observation” of an electron trail is literally a sensory perception of the actual electron itself: “‘That is an electron’ is how the trained physicist can directly and reliably perceptually respond by pointing to a streak of droplets in a cloud chamber, without having to cautiously *infer from* anything ‘more immediately’ perceptible such as the shape-and-color characteristics of the streak... In short, she can have the theory-contaminated but nonetheless genuinely perceptual observation report: ‘*This electron is doing so-and-so*’” (O’Shea 2007, 34–35). From a Dharmakīrtian perspective, however, this is ludicrous. Dharmakīrti recognizes the importance of this type of “determination immediately subsequent to perception” (*pratyakṣaprṣṭhalabdhaniścaya*), but such a cognition must precisely be understood as non-perceptual—indeed, as *pseudo-perceptual*, as expressly opposed to “genuinely perceptual.” See Chapter 1, Section I: [Dharmakīrti’s Theory of Conceptual Pseudo-Perception](#). Thanks to Karl Schmid (2018, 207–8) for bringing this passage to my attention.

⁶⁴ For a discussion of the “universal causal capacity” (*sāmānyasakti*) in relation to the common effect produced by particulars expressing their “individually-restricted causal capacities” (*pratiniyataśakti*) in concert, see Chapter 3, Section I.C: [Individual and Universal Capacities](#).

⁶⁵ Kellner (2013, 275) argues persuasively that “the characteristic use of *ākāra* in Buddhist epistemological discourse turns out to be continuous with only some of the nuances it has in Abhidharma.” However, since this is a general overview, we will heuristically treat these concepts as the same.

representationalism or *sākāravāda* first developed among the Dārṣṭāntikas, the predecessors of the Sautrāntikas, in the context of a dispute concerning what exactly it is that “sees.” The Vaibhāṣikas, in accord with their direct realist epistemology, maintained that it is the visual faculty (*akṣa*) which “sees.” Against this view, the Dārṣṭāntikas argued that it is consciousness which “sees.” For this reason, the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntika position was known as *vijñānavāda*, “the view that it is consciousness [which ‘sees’].”⁶⁶

Vasubandhu explains the Sautrāntika position, that the eye-faculty is only a causal support for the visual consciousness, as follows:

[Vasubandhu:] If the visual faculty sees, then so also the other sufficient conditions for consciousnesses should see.

[Opponent:] Certainly not every visual faculty sees.

[Vasubandhu:] Which does, then?

[Opponent:] One with a corresponding [consciousness]. It sees when it is accompanied by consciousness; otherwise it does not.

[Vasubandhu:] Then it should be said that just that consciousness sees, with the visual faculty as the support.⁶⁷

Vasubandhu’s point here is that the mere causal conjunction of sense-faculty and sense-object is not *ipso facto* cognitive. Consider, for example, the eye of someone who has just died; the causal supports for visual cognition (most saliently, the light and the eye) are the same, but there is no

⁶⁶ Dhammajoti (2007, 62–92). It is important to note that, in the later discourse, and in most contemporary scholarship, *vijñānavāda* is synonymous with *vijñaptimātratā* and *antarjñeyavāda* (i.e., “Epistemic Idealism”), the view that all phenomena are mental and no strictly extramental objects exist. Part of what is at stake in tracing the intellectual-historical development of Sautrāntika epistemology is accounting for the shifting interpretations of *vijñānavāda*, from “the view that consciousness perceives” to “the view that all phenomena are cognitive.”

⁶⁷ *yadi cakṣuḥ paśyed anyavijñānasamaṅgino 'pi paśyeta | na vai sarvaṃ cakṣuḥ paśyati | kiṃ tarhi sabhāgaṃ savijñānakaṃ yadā bhavati tadā paśyaty anyadā neti | evaṃ tarhi tad eva cakṣurāśritaṃ vijñānaṃ paśyatīty astu* Pradhan (1975, 30.4-6). Translated by Gold (2015, 70).

“seeing.” Therefore, the most salient restricting or determining factor (*niyāmaka*)⁶⁸ that governs whether or not “seeing” occurs is not the causal support for the visual cognition, but the presence or absence of the visual cognition itself.

Crucially, on the Sautrāntika model, a sensory cognition necessarily arises as an effect, subsequent to its causes. This is because, unlike the Vaibhāṣikas, the Dārṣṭāntikas and the Sautrāntikas maintain that causality is strictly sequential, and therefore that *dharmas* only exist in the present moment: their ontology was explicitly opposed to the Sarvāstivāda view that all phenomena exist throughout the three times of past, present, and future. Both the Dārṣṭāntikas and the Sautrāntikas specifically denied that cause and effect could exist simultaneously. Thus, the Dārṣṭāntikas and the Sautrāntikas insisted that “to exist” could only mean “to perform a function in the present moment” (Cox 1988, 33):

Dārṣṭāntikas equate a factor's existence with its present activity. One cannot meaningfully distinguish a factor's intrinsic nature from its activity, and thereby speak of its existence in the past or future. Further, they argue, factors do not exist as isolated units of intrinsic nature that manifest a particular activity through the influence of other isolated conditions. For the Dārṣṭāntikas, the process of causal interrelation is the only fact of experience; the fragmentation of this process into discrete factors possessed of individual existence and unique efficacy is only a mental fabrication.⁶⁹

This commitment to sequential causality, and concomitant denial of *sarvāstitva* (i.e., the past, present, and future existence of *dharmas*), had a number of extremely important consequences.

⁶⁸ See Chapter 2, Section II.C: [The “Determiner” \(*niyāmaka*\)](#).

⁶⁹ It is interesting to note that we may observe here, in embryonic form, the essentials of Dīnāga and Dharmakīrti's ontology. In particular, consider the inseparability of “intrinsic nature” (i.e., *svabhāva*) from causal activity, which is to say, causal features or properties (these being momentary and thus strictly identical with the causal activity of the *dharma* in question). The intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) of a “particular” (*svalakṣaṇa*) just is that particular's defining characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa*), which in fact is nothing other than the particular's causal activity (*arthakriyā*) in the present instant.

First, as Cox highlights, there is on this view literally nothing that exists other than the stream of cause and effect. At one moment, this stream includes the sense faculties and the objects as distinct causal factors (*kāraḥ*);⁷⁰ at the next moment, their causal conjunction has produced the sensory-cognitive image, which is then part of the causal stream, in addition to the causal derivatives of the phenomena from the prior moment (in other words, the subsequent moment's causal derivative of the faculties, and the subsequent moment's causal derivative of the object).

Second, for this very reason, it is not the case that consciousness “sees” in the sense of actively or transitively participating in the process as some kind of “agent” (*karṭṛ*) of seeing. As Vasubandhu writes in the AKBh, consciousness does not properly speaking “do” anything at all; the “action” of cognizing is devoid of agent (*karṭṛ*), patient (*karman*), or instrument (*karāṇa*). These may be *conceptually* distinguished, for the purpose of rational analysis or debate, but such distinctions are only mental fabrications (trans. Cox 1988, 39):

In that case, when it is said in the scripture that “perceptual consciousness (*viññāna*) is aware (*viññānāti*),” what does perceptual consciousness do? It does not do anything. Just as it is said that the effect conforms to the cause since it attains its existence (*ātmalābha*) through similarity (*sādrśya*) [to its cause] even without doing anything, in this way also it is said that perceptual consciousness is aware since it attains its existence through similarity [to its object] even without doing anything. What is [this that is referred to as] its “similarity”? It is the fact that it has the aspect [*ākāratā*] of that [object]. For this reason, even though that [perceptual consciousness] has arisen due to the sense organ, it is said to be aware of the object-field and not of the sense organ. Or, just as the series of perceptual consciousness is the cause with regard to a given [moment of] perceptual consciousness, so there is no fault in saying that perceptual consciousness is aware, since one can apply the word “agent” [*karṭṛ*] to the cause.⁷¹

⁷⁰ See Chapter 2, Section I: [The Kāraḥ System and Cognition](#).

⁷¹ Pradhan (1975, 473.23-474.3): *yat tarhi viññānaṃ viññānāti 'ti sūtra uktaṃ kiṃ tatra viññānaṃ karoti | na kiṃcit karoti | yathā tu kāryaṃ kāraṇaṃ anuvīdhīyāta ity ucyate | sādrśyenā 'tmalābhād akurvad api kiṃcit | evaṃ viññānaṃ api viññānāti 'ty ucyate | sādrśyenā 'tmalābhād akurvad api kiṃcit | kiṃ punar asya sādrśyam | tadākāratā | ata eva*

We will return to this crucially important point in Chapter 2.

Third, as Vasubandhu explains in this passage, the production of a cognitive image (*ākāra*) or mental representation is a pure effect of the interplay of causality. It exists in a relationship of what Dunne (2004, 100–110) terms an “isomorphic correspondence,” or “similarity” (*sadṛśya*), to its causal supports. That is to say, there exists a structural causal isomorphism between the causal features of the object, and the causal features of the image that corresponds to the object. There will be a great deal more to say about the image’s “conformity with the object” (*arthasārūpya*) below, in Chapter 3.

Fourth, for all of these reasons, the sensory cognition constitutes a kind of trustworthy “information” about the world, insofar as it necessarily and by nature tracks the causal features of its object. Crucially, however, this information does not yet constitute “knowledge” in the ordinary sense. Like most other traditions of Indian epistemology, the Sautrāntikas held that the initial moment of perception is indeterminate or nonconceptual (*avikalpika*), and that actionable knowledge about the sensory object—paradigmatically, a determinate judgment such as, “That is a jug”—only arises after the initial indeterminate cognition. There is, in other words, a very important distinction to be made between the sensory cognition of an object, and determinate knowledge about that object. This point will also be revisited in Chapter 2.

The key takeaway here is that the process of acquiring actionable knowledge by means of the senses occurs in several distinct phases. At the first moment t_0 , the object exerts its causal influence on the faculties. This gives rise to a cognitive image bearing the form of the object at the next moment, t_1 . Crucially, however, this image of the object is only a “snapshot,” *not* of the object

tad indriyād apy utpannam viṣayaṃ vijānātī 'ty ucyate ne 'ndriyaṃ | athavā tathā 'trā 'pi vijñānasamtānasya vijñāne kāraṇabhāvād vijñānaṃ vijānātī 'ti vacanān nirdoṣaṃ kāraṇe kartṛśabdānirdeśāt ||

as it exists at t_1 , but as it existed at t_0 . In other words, there is always a gap or “time lag” between the existence of the object and the existence of the nonconceptual sensory image. This epistemic problem is further exacerbated by the fact that determinate conceptual judgments about the object are not possible until at least the next moment, t_2 .⁷²

On Dharmakīrti’s model, this is not an insurmountable problem. As we will see, for Dharmakīrti, what determines the epistemic trustworthiness or reliability (i.e., the *prāmāṇya*) of a cognition is ultimately adjudicated on practical grounds. Insofar as the twice-removed-from-its-object, inherently erroneous conceptual cognition at t_2 nevertheless has the quality of being able to induce action (*pravarttakatva*) toward the object, and also has the quality of being able to facilitate the attainment (*prāpakatva*) of the object as the result of such action, it is an “instrumental” or trustworthy cognition (i.e., a *pramāṇa*). But this perspective is not without limitations, of which Dharmakīrti was well aware. Throughout this study, we will repeatedly examine how Dharmakīrti’s epistemological arguments culminate in the position that even such seemingly practically-efficacious cognitions are not, in the final analysis, ultimately reliable.

D. Yogācāra Idealism

This brings us to the last of Dharmakīrti’s major intellectual-historical influences within the Buddhist tradition: Yogācāra. The precise nature of Dharmakīrti’s relationship to Yogācāra is a longstanding and notoriously thorny question in Buddhist Studies. As discussed above, at a first approximation, Dharmakīrti’s “sliding scale of analysis” may be understood as a shift from Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma typology, through Sautrāntika External Realism, to a final position of

⁷² See Chapter 1, Section II.C.2: [The Instrumentality of Mental Perception](#).

Yogācāra Epistemic Idealism. However, as Jonathan Gold (2015, 20) has noted, the distinction between Sautrāntika and Yogācāra—even or perhaps especially when only considering the works of Vasubandhu—can be difficult to demarcate. For his part, Dharmakīrti spends the majority of his time arguing from a broadly Sautrāntika perspective. He only calls the External Realist position into question at a few critical junctures, most particularly PV 3.333-336, which constitutes the clearest example of Dharmakīrti shifting from the Sautrāntika to the Yogācāra position. Dharmakīrti’s argument in this passage will be thoroughly addressed below, in Chapter 4. But the key question here is how we should understand Dharmakīrti’s relation to the Yogācāra tradition. To that end, it is first necessary to say a few words about this tradition.

In brief, Yogācāra may be identified as what the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* proclaims itself to be: the “Third Turning of the Wheel of Dharma,” following the “First Turning” of the Buddha’s teaching on the Four Nobles’ Truths (*catvāri āryasatyāni*) concerning the existence, cause, cessation, and remedy of suffering, and the “Second Turning” of the Mahāyāna teachings on emptiness (*sūnyatā*), the essencelessness (*niḥsvabhāvatā*) of all phenomena. The Third Turning may be understood as a systematization of the Buddha’s emphasis on the mind, already present in the oldest layers of Buddhist literature. This took shape in three main intellectual-historical developments, all of which may be found in the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*: (1) the re-working of the traditional Abhidharma framework of six consciousnesses (five sensory consciousnesses plus the sixth mental consciousness) to include the seventh “defiled mind” (*kliṣṭamanas*) consciousness and the eighth “storehouse consciousness” (*ālayavijñāna*);⁷³ (2) the formulation of the “three

⁷³ Cf. Waldron (2003).

natures” (*trisvabhāva*) theory of reality;⁷⁴ and (3) the idealistic philosophical argument that all phenomena are “mind only” (*cittamātra*) or “mental representation-only” (*viññaptimātra*).

Of these, it is undoubtedly the last that has caused the most consternation among critics both ancient and modern. Lusthaus (2002, 533–34), for example, argues that Yogācāra should be understood in strictly “therapeutic” terms; on this view, meditation (i.e., the “activity of yoga,” *yogācāra*) serves as “the laboratory in which one could study how the mind operated,” rather than as a basis for metaphysical speculation. Thus, Lusthaus contends that “Yogācāra tends to be misinterpreted as a form of metaphysical idealism primarily because its teachings are taken for ontological propositions rather than epistemological warnings,” and concludes that “Yogācāra may be deemed a type of epistemological idealism, with the proviso that the purpose of its arguments was not to engender an improved ontological theory or commitment.”

Adjudicating the extent to which such interpretations of Yogācāra *in general* are viable lies outside the scope of the present study, though it should be noted that there are many good reasons to doubt their viability.⁷⁵ For our purposes, the key question is how Dharmakīrti grapples with the issue of ontological idealism. It should be understood first of all that the notion of a rigid divide between ontological and epistemological idealism is incoherent on Dharmakīrti’s view, because Dharmakīrti does not recognize a distinction between “phenomenon” *qua* perceptible entity and “phenomenon” *qua* existent entity; as he writes in the PVSV, “to exist just is to be perceived.”⁷⁶ But, as will be explored at greater length in Chapter 4, the various threads of Dharmakīrti’s

⁷⁴ For an overview of Three Natures theory, see Boquist (1993); D’amato (2005); and Brennan (2018). See also Yiannopoulos (2012, 62–102); Chapter 3, note [107](#); and Chapter 5, note [168](#).

⁷⁵ For a particularly trenchant critique of Lusthaus’ and similar interpretations, see Schmithausen (2005).

⁷⁶ PVSV *ad* PV 1.3: *sattvam upalabdhir eva*. Cf. Dunne (2004, 85n52).

argumentation eventually converge on the position that appeals to extramental matter are simply insufficient to the task of explaining the causal origin of our sensory cognitions. In fact, Dharmakīrti explicitly maintains that sensory content must ultimately be understood to derive from karmic imprints or dispositions (*vāsanā*), rather than from extramental objects—a view, as we will see, that strongly supports the “False Imagist” (*alīkākāravāda*) interpretation of his system.⁷⁷

In sum, it is certainly true that Yogācāra, like all Buddhist literary and philosophical traditions, cannot be understood separately from its practical or therapeutic purpose. And it is also true that Yogācāra philosophical analysis is intended to buttress the contemplative practice of its adherents. We will accordingly have several occasions to turn to the question of how the Yogācāra perspective articulated in the *Pramāṇavārttika* interfaces with nondual meditation practices such as Mahāmudrā. For example, the eleventh-century author Sahajavajra (ca. 1050-1100), a student of the centrally important Mahāmudrā master Maitrīpa (ca. 1007-1085), considered the Mahāmudrā tradition to be heavily indebted to Dharmakīrti. But Sahajavajra understood part of that indebtedness to consist precisely in the specifically *ontological* refutation of extramental matter. In his commentary to the Maitrīpa’s *Tattvadaśaka*, he writes:

For the most part, on this path, we follow Dharmakīrti, the crown jewel of those who engage in *pramāṇa*. By relying on him and following his path, we are employing the presentation of all those [*pramāṇas* that he discusses]—it is not that we negate those through our own minds. “But by following his path, a [real] nature [of things] would be established.” That is not the case. “How is it then?” Temporarily, due to [certain] purposes, [Dharmakīrti] gives an extensive presentation of external objects, but through progressively superior reasonings, he completely eradicates [the notion of external objects]. Through those [reasonings], he also completely eradicates [any notion of a real] nature. That these stages [in his

⁷⁷ See Chapter 3, Section II.B: [The Critique of Variegation and the “False Imagist” View \(*alīkākāravāda*\)](#).

approach] have to be distinguished is very clearly stated [in the *Pramāṇavārttika*], such as in [PV 3.360, PV 3.209, and PV 3.215cd].⁷⁸

As indicated in the verses cited by Sahajavajra, however, it is also crucially important to understand that ontological idealism is not the terminus of Dharmakīrti's "sliding scale." Just as, in the traditional sequence of the Four Yogas of Yogācāra, the yoga of "mind only" is an intermediate stage,⁷⁹ so too Dharmakīrti's idealistic account of the sensory-cognitive process is not the final word on the matter. Taken to its logical conclusion, which Dharmakīrti only ever hints at but his commenters more fully flesh out, in the final analysis there can no longer be any mental content at all (Dunne 2004, 317):

If we trust Śākyabuddhi's opinion, the ultimate *pramāṇa* would be the pure, non-dual, reflexive awareness of the mind itself. But while this ultimate instrumental cognition is the means to Dharmakīrti's final soteriological goal, it is not useful for practical action in the world (i.e., *saṃsāra*). If the ultimate instrument of knowledge is indeed some pure form of reflexive awareness, then there are no longer external objects—or even mental content—on which to act.

But what could it possibly mean to speak of "knowledge" that is "not useful for practical action in the world"? This takes us to the question of how to assess Dharmakīrti's relationship with the pan-Indian epistemological discourse of *pramāṇa* theory, to which we now turn.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Based on the translation in Brunnhölzl (2007, 149).

⁷⁹ Cf. Bentor (2002). See also Yiannopoulos (2012, 177–86) and (2017, 240–43).

⁸⁰ The topic of *pramāṇa* is vast and complex, and those without any prior knowledge are encouraged to consult Dunne (2004) and Patil (2009). Chapter 2, below, also contains some additional information on the Nyāya and grammatical context of *pramāṇa* discourse. The following section only comprises a general overview of the most salient features of Dharmakīrti's *pramāṇa* theory.

III. The Instruments of Correct Awareness (*pramāṇas*)

A. Correct Awareness

All sentient beings wish to obtain happiness and the causes of happiness, and wish to avoid suffering and the causes of suffering. At the opening of PVin 1, Dharmakīrti prefaces his epistemological analysis by positioning it as therapeutic, helping sentient beings to obtain what they want and avoid what they do not want, through clarifying the nature and types of “correct awareness” (*samyagjñāna*). It is, after all, difficult to slake thirst if one mistakes a mirage for water, and difficult to avoid being poisoned if one mistakes a toxic mushroom for a safe and delicious truffle. Correct awareness—for example, the cognition of a poisonous mushroom as poisonous, rather than as safe—is therefore essential:

Since correct awareness (*samyagjñāna*) is a necessary precondition for obtaining what is beneficial and avoiding what is unbeneficial, this [text] has been composed for the purpose of instructing the ignorant.⁸¹

The entire point of *pramāṇa* discourse is establishing how to attain such a correct awareness: that is, ascertaining what exactly the means or “instrument” is, through the employment of which one is able to attain correct awareness.

The Sanskrit word *pramāṇa* (“instrument of correct awareness” or “epistemic instrument”) is an instrumental derivation of the prefix *pra* plus the root $\sqrt{mā}$, “to know correctly”; from the same roots are derived “agent who knows” (*pramātr*), “object of knowledge” or “epistemic object,” (*prameya*), and “state [or action] of knowing” (*pramiti*). The abstract quality of being such

⁸¹ Steinkellner (2007, 1): *hitāhitapṛāptiparihārayor niyameṇa samyagjñāna pūrvakatvād aviduṣāṃ tad vyutpādanārtham idam ārabhyate ||*

an instrument, “instrumentality,” is *prāmāṇya* or *pramāṇatā*. The question of “correctness” is central to what defines a cognition as a *pramāṇa*, and Dharmakīrti adjudicates this question along two distinct theoretical axes: whether a cognition is “wrong” (*viśaṃvādi*, *viparīta*) or not, and whether a cognition is “erroneous” (*bhrānta*) or not. In brief, a cognition exhibits “error” (*bhrānti*) insofar as it construes something that is not X as being X (*atasmimś tadgrahaḥ*).⁸² *Bhrānti* is derived from the Sanskrit root $\sqrt{bhrām}$, meaning in this case “to wander” in the sense of “to deviate.” This is also the original sense of the English “to err,” as in a wandering “knight errant.” A cognition exhibiting *bhrānti* thus “errs” or “deviates” from reality, as in the classic example of a rope that is mistaken for a snake.⁸³

But even a cognition that is “erroneous” in this sense may nevertheless be “correct” (*saṃvādi*), or at least “not wrong” (*aviśaṃvādi*), insofar as it accurately re-presents at least some aspect(s) of its object. That is to say, the mere fact that a cognition is “erroneous” does not necessarily entail that it is “wrong” (*viśaṃvādi*), because an “erroneous” cognition may nevertheless possess the two qualities—engendering activity toward its object (*pravarttakatva*), and actually allowing the attainment of the object (*prāpakatva*)—that are the hallmark of a *pramāṇa*.⁸⁴ The paradigmatic case of an instrumental cognition (*pramāṇa*) that is correct, despite being erroneous, is an inference.⁸⁵ As will be discussed in greater detail below, Dharmakīrti strictly

⁸² Cf. Funayama (1999, 75n9).

⁸³ The idea of “error” here may perhaps also be compared to the Aristotelian notion of *hamartia*, from the verb *hamartanein* meaning “to miss the mark” or “to fall short of an objective.” In both cases, there is a moral tinge. *Hamartia* was Aristotle’s term for the fatal flaw leading to a tragic hero’s demise, and in New Testament Greek it is the term for what is typically rendered in English as “sin.” Although the Dharmakīrtian concept of *bhrānti* is not typically associated with ethical wrongdoing, it is intimately related to the beginningless ignorance (*anādyavidyā*) possessed by every sentient being, for which we are all in some sense individually culpable.

⁸⁴ Hirianna (2009, 209). Regarding *pravarttakatva*, cf. also Miyo (2014).

⁸⁵ Cf. PVSV *ad* PV 1.75d, discussed in Dunne (2004, 140–44). Cf. also PV 3.55-57.

defines conceptuality (*kalpanā*) as error; hence, every inferential cognition is erroneous, because every inferential cognition is conceptual, even though a well-constructed inference is “instrumental” to the extent that it allows for correct knowledge (i.e., *samyagjñāna*). Put slightly differently, a “wrong” cognition cannot be a *pramāṇa*, but an “erroneous” or “misleading” cognition may be a *pramāṇa*, provided it meets the necessary criteria.

For Dharmakīrti, in other words, the final court of appeals for whether a cognition is “wrong” or not consists in its ability to facilitate the attainment of one’s goal. This is, clearly and unabashedly, a teleological account of knowledge. That is to say, Dharmakīrti construes the “correctness” of an instrumental cognition in relation to its practical utility for action in the world. In terms of the final goal of liberation (*mokṣa*) or awakening (*bodhi*), the idea is that the attainment of nirvāṇa is the most practical and useful of all possible goals. But in ordinary circumstances, the issue of correctness amounts to a question of whether or not the cognition accurately represents the causal functionality (i.e., the *arthakriyā*)⁸⁶ of its object. So, for example, the mistaken cognition of a field of red poppies as being ‘fire’ is deceptive, because red poppies do not possess the causal capacity to provide warmth. By the same token, a ‘rope’ misidentified as a ‘snake’ can never have its venom extracted, because ropes do not possess the causal capacity (*arthakriyā*) to produce venom. By contrast, as long as they actually possess the appropriate causal capacities, particles erroneously conceptualized as a single unified ‘rope’ can nevertheless be used to bind. The determinate judgment (*niścaya*) of a ‘rope’ as a ‘rope’ is therefore “correct,” despite being “erroneous” insofar as it is necessarily conceptual.

⁸⁶ See Dunne (2004, 272–77).

The upshot here is that, whether or not it is “erroneous,” a given cognition is only “wrong” (*visaṃvādi*, *viparīta*) to the extent that it does *not* facilitate the attainment of the desired object (i.e., insofar as it lacks *prāpakatva*). In other words, the conceptualization of fundamental particles which do actually have the causal capacity, when operating in concert, to perform the expected function of a ‘rope,’ as being a ‘rope,’ is “erroneous” (because conceptual); but this identification is nevertheless “correct,” because the particles in question are able to perform the expected function of a ‘rope.’ The mistaken conceptualization of those particles as being a ‘snake,’ on the other hand, is both “erroneous” and “incorrect,” because these particles can never perform the causal functions expected of a ‘snake.’ To summarize, veridical determinate judgments such as the identification of a ‘rope’ as a ‘rope’ are “correct,” despite being “erroneous.” Mistaken identifications, such as the misidentification of the ‘rope’ as a ‘snake,’ are “erroneous” both because they misconstrue their object, and because they are conceptual; leaving the question of error aside, however, they are additionally “incorrect” or “wrong,” because the particulars in question cannot perform the functions expected of a snake.

This brings us to the two types of *pramāṇa* according to Diṅnāga and Dharmakīrti.

B. Perception and Inference

As is well known, Dharmakīrti follows Diṅnāga in asserting that there are two and only two instruments of correct awareness: *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*.⁸⁷ These terms remain in the original Sanskrit for now, because it is critical to understand that, while *pratyakṣa* is most commonly

⁸⁷ Scripture (*āgama*) is accepted by Dharmakīrti and his Buddhist followers as a *pramāṇa* under certain very specific circumstances—essentially, only in relation to “radically inaccessible” (*atyantaparokṣa*) phenomena that are otherwise unknowable by perception and ordinary inference—but is even in this case understood as a special type of “scripturally based inference” (*āgamāśritānumāna*). Cf. McClintock (2010, 307–39).

translated as “perception,” and while this translation is serviceable (and would be difficult to replace in any case), it can also be extremely misleading in the context of Buddhist epistemological literature. Diñnāga’s axiomatic description of “perception,” for example, makes no direct reference to the sensory faculties:

Perception is free from conception. || 3c ||

That cognition which does not possess conceptuality, is perception.⁸⁸

And neither does Dharmakīrti’s:

Perception is free from concepts and non-erroneous.⁸⁹

Note that Diñnāga here defines “perception” and “nonconceptual cognition” as more or less coextensive: all perceptions are nonconceptual cognitions, and all nonconceptual cognitions are, it would seem, “perceptions.” This definition introduces a number of theoretical problems into his epistemological system, and is accordingly one of the few places where Dharmakīrti substantially reworked Diñnāga’s fundamental position. But neither Diñnāga and Dharmakīrti refer to the sense-

⁸⁸ Steinkellner (2005, 2): **pratyakṣam kalpanāpoḍham** | *yasya jñānasya kalpanā nāsti tat pratyakṣam*. Kachru’s (2018, 173) restatement of Diñnāga’s point here is quite helpful: “Properly perceptual content, in other words, is not sentence-shaped, and it is incapable of being taken up in judgments.” Although the question of whether perception should be characterized as conceptual or not was a major point of contention in the medieval Indian context, no less than in contemporary English-language philosophical literature, it is largely beside the thrust of this study of Dharmakīrti’s perspective. Dharmakīrti takes it as axiomatic that perception is nonconceptual; and so, in the context of explicating his view, do we. For a brief consideration of the debate over conceptual or “determinate” perception in the context of PV 3, see below, Chapter 2, Section I.C: [Determinate Perception and Temporal Sequence](#). For a critical analysis of Dharmakīrti’s account of nonconceptual perception, as in effect constituting a species of Wilfrid Sellars’ “Myth of the Given,” see Arnold (2018). See also below, Chapter 1, note [108](#).

⁸⁹ *pratyakṣam kalpanāpoḍhamabhrāntam*. NB 4, PVin 1.4a. In terms of the technical requirements for a *pramāṇa*, the nonconceptuality of perception should be understood to guarantee that a perceptual cognition illuminates a previously-unknown object (*ajñātārthaprakāśa*), while its nonerroneousness should be understood to guarantee its ability to obtain the desired effect (*prāpakatva*). Many thanks to John Dunne for providing this explanation.

faculties in their definition of “perception,” and indeed both insist that sensory cognition is just one type of “perception.” In general, “perception” is defined by its nonconceptuality.

This somewhat counterintuitive articulation has caused no end of troubles for contemporary scholarship on Buddhist *pramāṇa* literature. The idea that any nonconceptual and nonerroneous cognition which both (1) engenders action toward (*pra* + √*vṛt*) and (2) facilitates the attainment (*pra* + √*āp*) of its object is, necessarily and by definition, a “perception,” must sound bizarre to ears trained by the Western philosophical tradition. Without getting into the various Western schools of thought, it is fair to say that “perception” in both ordinary and technical usage is typically held to involve some sort of contact between the sense-faculties and the object(s) of cognition. Nor is this unique to the Western tradition! Even the etymology of the Sanskrit *prati* + *akṣa*, literally “that which is before (or ‘against’) the eye,” suggests our ordinary and intuitive understanding of perception, which was also largely shared by, for example, the Nyāya tradition.

Now, to be clear, causal contact between the sense-faculty and the sensory object is indeed fundamental to one particular type of perception, namely, sensory perception (*indriyapratyakṣa*). But, to repeat, on the Buddhist account articulated by Dīnāga and Dharmakīrti, “perception” does not *necessarily* involve the sense-faculties at all. Indeed, both Dīnāga and Dharmakīrti identified four different types of *pratyakṣa*, of which “sensory perception” is only one type. “Mental perception” (*mānasapratyakṣa*), “yogic perception” (*yogipratyakṣa*), and reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvitti*) are all also held to be types of “perception.”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Franco (1993) has suggested that Dīnāga intends the “self-apprehension” of desire and so on to be a species of mental perception, and thus that Dīnāga only asserted the existence of three types of perception (sensory, yogic, and mental). However, for reasons that will be addressed below, the weight of hermeneutical evidence bears strongly against this conclusion; it is essentially impossible to make philosophical sense of PS 1.7ab or PS 1.9-10 if reflexive awareness is not its own type of perception. See Chapter 1, Section II.C.1: [Mental Cognition and Mental Perception](#).

In this regard, it is helpful to consider that the Sanskrit word *pratyakṣa* can function both as a noun, i.e. “perception,” and as an adjective meaning “direct,” “perceptual,” or “perceptible.”

This is, I would like to suggest, one sense of PVin 1.1a:

The two instruments of knowledge are the direct (*pratyakṣa*) and the inferential (*anumāna*). || 2ab₁ ||⁹¹

This could also be rendered as: “There are two instruments of knowledge, perception and inference.” Such a translation would doubtless be more in keeping with the traditions of English-language scholarship, which tend to render *pratyakṣa* as “perception” (sometimes “direct perception”) and leave it at that. But such a translation could easily obscure more than it reveals.

The key point here is that it is all too easy to conflate *pratyakṣa* in the technical sense—a “direct instrument of correct awareness” (*pratyakṣapramāṇa*)—with “sensory perception.” Sensory perception is, indeed, a direct instrument of correct awareness, but according to Dharmakīrti it is only one of four such direct instruments. What these four direct instruments all have in common, i.e., what defines them as “direct” as opposed to “indirect” or inferential instruments of correct awareness, is the fact that they both lack conceptuality and are non-erroneous. And, to jump ahead a bit, this criterion of non-erroneousness is why, in the final analysis, only nondual reflexive awareness is a direct instrument of *truly* correct awareness. Because sensory cognition is always already tainted with the “internal distortion” (*antarupaplava*), even sensory cognition must ultimately be understood as a kind of spurious or pseudo-perception (*pratyakṣābhāsa*).⁹² But this insight applies only at the highest level of analysis, for in ordinary life

⁹¹ Steinkellner (2005, 1): **pratyakṣam anumānam ca pramāṇe**

⁹² See Chapter 1, Section III.C: [Duality and the Internal Distortion](#).

sensory perception (i.e., *indriyapratyakṣa*) can and does function as an instrument yielding serviceable knowledge, despite its ultimately erroneous nature. Hence, as we will see, Dharmakīrti distinguishes between such ordinary instruments, and the “ultimate instrument” (*pāramārthikapramāṇa*) of nondual, undistorted, contentless reflexive awareness.⁹³

C. Yogic Perception and Instrumentality

Let us consider, for example, the case of *yogipratyakṣa* (“yogic perception”), as it illustrates both this point and a number of important and related issues.⁹⁴ Dharmakīrti begins his discussion by noting that, for adepts, the Four Nobles’ Truths appear “vividly” (*spaṣṭam*):

The cognition of yogins has previously been discussed.⁹⁵ The meditatively-induced [cognition] of the [Four Nobles’ Truths], in which the web of concepts has been rent, appears extremely (*eva*)⁹⁶ vividly. || 281 ||⁹⁷

The question of “vividness” is of central importance here, as it ultimately constitutes the distinction between conceptual and nonconceptual cognitions; as Dharmakīrti will later put it, “an awareness with a vivid appearance is nonconceptual.”⁹⁸ We will return to the issue of vividness below, in Chapter 1.

⁹³ See Chapter 2, Section II.D: [Omniscience and the Nature of Awareness](#).

⁹⁴ The following is in essence a summation of Dunne (2006). See also Woo (2003) and Franco and Eigner (2009).

⁹⁵ Cf. PV 2.146cd-279.

⁹⁶ PVP_T (508.5) renders *spaṣṭam evāvabhāsate* as *gsal ba shin tu snang ba yin*.

⁹⁷ Tosaki (1979, 376): *prāg uktam yoginām jñānam teṣām tad bhāvanāmayam | vidhūtakaḥpanājālam spaṣṭam evāvabhāsate || 281 ||*

Based on Dunne (2006, 516).

⁹⁸ PV 3.299bc: *yaiva dhīḥ sphuṭabhāsinī | sā nirvikalpo*. See Chapter 1, Section III.A: [The Vivid Appearance of Cognition](#).

The key point here is that, typically, vivid experiences are of real objects. But, crucially, it is *also* possible to have a vivid experience of something unreal:

Those confused by [states] such as derangement due to desire, grief or fear, or those confused by dreams of thieves and so on, see things, although unreal, as if they were in front of them. || 282 ||⁹⁹

The differentiating factor between vivid and non-vivid cognition is thus *not* whether the object of the cognition “really” exists, but whether the cognition is conceptual:

An [awareness] which is connected to concepts does not have the appearance of a vivid object. Even in a dream it is recalled that something is remembered, and that which is remembered does not have that kind of [vivid] object. || 283 ||

Even though unreal, [the objects in meditation such as] unattractiveness¹⁰⁰ [and meditation on] the earth-totality¹⁰¹ are said to be vivid and non-conceptual, [for] they are constructed through the power of meditative conditioning. || 284 ||

Therefore, that to which one intensively meditatively conditions oneself, whether it be real or unreal, will result in a vivid, non-conceptual cognition when meditation is perfected. || 285 ||¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Tosaki (1979, 378): *kāmasokabhayonmādacaurasvapnādyupaplutāḥ | abhūtān api paśyanti purato ’vasthitān iva* || 282 ||

Trans. Dunne (2006, 516).

¹⁰⁰ This is a reference to the traditional Buddhist contemplative practice of engendering a visceral feeling of disgust direct toward an object of attraction, such as visualizing an attractive woman as a bag of flesh and bodily fluids, in order to break the mental habit of considering this attractive object to be “objectively” desirable. On this topic, see also Chapter 5, Section II.C.3: [Some Practical Considerations](#).

¹⁰¹ This is a reference to another traditional Buddhist contemplative practice, of visualizing the entire cosmos as a single element.

¹⁰² Tosaki (1979, 378–80): *na vikalpānubaddhasya spaṣṭārthapratibhāsītā | svapne ’pi smaryate smārttaṃ na ca tat tādṛgarthavat* || 283 || *aśubhāpṛthivīkṛtsnādy abhūtam api varṇyate | spaṣṭābhaṃ nirvikalpān ca bhāvanābalanirmītam* || 284 || *tasmād bhūtam abhūtaṃ vā yad yad evādhibhāvyaṭe | bhāvanāpariniṣpattau tat sphuṭākālpadhīphalam* || 285 ||

Based on Dunne (2006, 516).

Why is this point so important? Because, unlike ordinary hallucinations, certain specific types of hallucinatory vivid experiences of unreal objects, derived from intense meditation, are in fact asserted to constitute a distinct type of “direct” *pramāṇa*—“yogic perception” (*yogipratyakṣa*):

In this context, a correct (*saṃvādi*) perceptual cognition generated through meditation, as for example of the previously discussed [sixteen] realities [of the Four Noble Truths], is asserted to be a *pramāṇa*. Remaining [types of meditatively-induced vivid appearances] are distorted (*upaplava*).¹⁰³ || 286 ||¹⁰⁴

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider just how radical a stance this is, and how much it cuts against an overly simplistic definition of *pratyakṣa* as “perception.” Dharmakīrti’s position here is not simply that vivid hallucinations are somehow perceptual merely because they possess a vivid appearance. On the contrary, Dharmakīrti’s argument goes much further: the point here is that, because the instrumentality (*prāmāṇya*) of a cognition is strictly defined in relation to its capacity to help one obtain what is beneficial and avoid what is harmful, a specific class of vivid hallucinatory cognitions of admittedly unreal objects are to be considered instruments of “correct” awareness, just insofar as they are “undeceiving” (*avisamvādi*) in relation to final awakening (*bodhi*) or liberation (*mokṣa*). As Dunne (2006, 515) explains,

But why are such cognitions trustworthy (*saṃvādi*)? This points, of course, to the central criterion of reliability (*prāmāṇya*), and a complete answer would require much discussion. In brief, however, for Dharmakīrti the answer must always be that a reliable cognition presents its object in a way that enables one to achieve one’s goal. Clearly, the teleological context of yogic perception is liberation (*mokṣa*)

¹⁰³ Thus, for example, vivid cognitions of everything being the earth-element, or of people being walking skeletons, and so on, are not to be counted as “yogic perceptions.” Devendrabuddhi (PVP 507.19-20) notes that “Not every yogic cognition is perceptual” (*de la ’dir rnal ’byor pa ’i shes pa thams cad mngon sum ma yin no*), and specifically includes the “earth-totality” among the “remainder” that are to be regarded as distorted (210.15-16: *lhag ma nye bar bslad pa yin || dper na zad par sa la sogs pa lta bu’o*).

¹⁰⁴ Tosaki (1979, 380): *tatra pramāṇam saṃvādi yat prāṇnirṇītavastuvat | tad bhāvanājam pratyakṣam iṣṭam śeṣā upaplavāḥ* || 286 ||

Based on Dunne (2006, 516).

itself. Hence, if the direct experience of a concept is to be an instance of yogic perception, that experience must move the meditator closer to liberation. In the Buddhist context, this means that the perception induced by meditating on that concept causes changes in one's mental dispositions that lead to fewer negative mental states (*kleśa*), less suffering, and more happiness. These changes are in part effected through the intensity of the yogic experience, where the salvific concepts somehow appear "as if they were in front of one." Thus, on this model, the object is "true" or *bhūta* because the intense experiences induced by meditation are soteriologically efficacious in a manner verified by one's behavior in body, speech and mind. Granted, the concepts in question are ultimately unreal, but it seems that, if one's goal is achieved, their irreality is irrelevant.

The key point, in other words, is that these specific instances of hallucination are "not wrong" (*avisamvādi*), just insofar as they propel one toward the final *telos* of perfect awakening.

The other critical point here concerns the status of conceptuality. We have established that conceptuality and vividness are mutually exclusive, and that *pratyakṣa* ("perception") is devoid of conceptuality. Where does this leave inference (*anumāna*)?

D. Conceptuality (*kalpanā*) and Universals (*sāmānya*)

In the first verse of the Perception Chapter (PV 3.1), Dharmakīrti asserts that there are two instruments of correct awareness, because there are two types of epistemic object (*prameya*).¹⁰⁵ These two are commonly translated as the particular (*svalakṣaṇa*) and the universal (*sāmānya*). Generally, within an epistemological paradigm that accepts the existence of objects external to the mind (*bāhyārthavāda*), "particulars" may be understood as either fundamental particles (*paramāṇu*) of matter, or as momentary and ontologically-indivisible mental events (*vijñapti*, *vijñāna*, etc.). A *sāmānya*, on the other hand, is a "sameness" (from *sāma*, "likeness" or "similarity"). The basic idea of a "universal" is that there exists something by virtue of which all

¹⁰⁵ PV 3.1ab₁: *pramāṇaṃ dvividhaṃ meyvadvaidhyāc.*

members of a given class universally belong to that class: for example, some kind of “chair-ness” due to which all chairs are chairs.¹⁰⁶

In both the Indian and Western philosophical traditions, there are two basic stances about universals. The position that universals really and truly exist, and moreover that they exist independently of their instantiation in any particular class-member, is termed “realism.” The contrary position, that universals are unreal or non-existent, is termed “nominalism,” the idea being that a universal is in fact only a “name” (Latin *nomen*) for the class.¹⁰⁷ The Buddhist tradition is vehemently nominalist, maintaining that any and all universals are nothing but fabrications of the mind. This nominalism extends all the way back to the pre-Mahāyāna Abhidharma literature discussed above, which maintains an extremely important distinction between particulars (i.e., *dharmas*) held to have “substantial existence” (*dravyasat*), and the composite objects they form, which are understood to have a merely “designated existence” (*prajñaptisat*). For Dharmakīrti, as well, anything that is truly real must be absolutely particular and irreducible; in other words, anything which possesses distribution (*anvaya*) across multiple instantiations is unreal and non-existent.¹⁰⁸ A distributed entity can only be considered to “exist” as a kind of mental fabrication. And, without putting too fine a point on it, this mental fabrication is conceptuality (*kalpanā*).

For Dharmakīrti, that is to say, a universal (i.e., a *sāmānya*) is a conceptualization, in the sense that it is the end result of this process of mental fabrication. The process of fabrication itself is known as *anyāpoha* or “other-exclusion.” *Anyāpoha* (or *apoha* for short) is an extremely dense

¹⁰⁶ To be precise, Dharmakīrti maintains that there are three different kinds of universals, based respectively upon real things, unreal things, and both. Cf. Dunne (2004, 116n101).

¹⁰⁷ In addition to these two positions, sometimes an in-between position termed “conceptualism” is added. For an overview of conceptualism in the Indian context, Dravid and Ram (2001). See also Dreyfus (1997, 127–41).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Dunne (2004, 110).

and complex topic, a thorough treatment of which would require much more space than we are able to devote to it here,¹⁰⁹ though it will come up repeatedly in relation to ordinary sensory cognition. Briefly, however, the basic idea is that the mind selectively and subliminally omits certain causal features of individual objects, in order to construct a sense of their being “the same.”

Consider, for example, a red chair and a blue chair.¹¹⁰ Every chair is different, and the blueness or redness of a chair cannot truly be separated from that chair. But for the purpose of achieving some practical goal in the world—say, making sure that there is adequate seating at a social gathering—the causal capacity of the red chair to produce the visual cognition of red is “excluded” or filtered out, *mutatis mutandis* for the capacity of the blue chair to produce the cognition of blue. What is *not* filtered out is the causal capacity of the chairs to serve as a seat. In terms of this causal capacity (i.e., the causal capacity to produce the determinate judgment “that is a ‘chair’”), the chairs may be considered as “the same,” even though there is no real “chair-ness.”

Thus, there are two basic operations of conceptuality: (1) conflating two or more particulars by projecting onto them a mentally-fabricated “extension” (*anvaya*) or “sameness” (*sāmānya*), and (2) abstracting the ontologically-inseparable causal properties of a single particular from that particular, mentally treating it as a “property-possessor” (*dharmin*) that possesses discrete “properties” (*dharmas*). In terms of the example of a chair, for example, the error of conflation consists in seeing all the particles which comprise the ‘chair’ as part of a single unitary ‘chair,’ or in erroneously seeing all ‘chairs’ as in some sense the same. The error of abstraction, on the other hand, consists in treating the causal capacity of the particulars construed in this instance as ‘chair’-

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Dunne (2004, 116–44) for an overview. See also McCrea and Patil (2010), and Siderits, Tillemans, and Chakrabarti (2011).

¹¹⁰ Strictly speaking, as outlined above, on the Buddhist account a ‘chair’ is a composite entity and therefore in some sense a “universal.” This example has only been chosen for its simplicity.

particles to generate the determination “That is a ‘chair,’” as though these particulars’ causal capacity to generate the determinate identification ‘chair’ could be ontologically isolated from all their other various causal capacities. That is to say: because particulars are ontologically singular (*eka*), there is no real ontological difference among their *merely conceptually-abstractable* properties, nor between these “properties” (*dharmas*) and the particular as a “property-possessor” (*dharmin*). The “property” or “nature” (*svabhāva*) of the particular is not something ontologically distinct from the particular itself.¹¹¹ Consider an electron: is the electron one entity (*vastu*), and its electric charge another? We may certainly speak of the electron as a “property-possessor” (*dharmin*), which “possesses” a certain quantity of electric charge as its “property” (*dharma*), and thereby conceptually distinguish between the electron and its charge; in reality, however, the electron is not ontologically distinct from its electric charge.¹¹² Thus, as Eltschinger aptly explains, “The intrinsic error of a conceptual construction consists of unifying what is multiple and dividing what is ultimately one.”¹¹³

Nevertheless, for ordinary practical purposes, it is certainly the case that an “erroneous” conceptual cognition of a chair may both engender action toward (*pra + √vṛt*) the chair, and facilitate the attainment (*pra + √āp*) of finding a place to sit. In other words, conceptual cognitions can also be *pramāṇas*. Thus, the key question here is: what is it, exactly, that makes a cognition “wrong”? The answer is: it depends on the frame of reference. As discussed above, Dharmakīrti

¹¹¹ Cf. Dunne (2004, 153–61).

¹¹² Indeed, we may *conceptually isolate* various “properties” of the electron, such as its spin or other quantum numbers, from the electron as a “property-possessor.” However, it is not the case that the electron is one ontological entity, while its spin or orbital angular momentum (or whatever) is another, ontologically-distinct entity. By definition, what it means for an entity (*vastu*) to be a fundamental particle (*paramāṇu*) is precisely for that entity to be ultimately simple (*eka*), ontologically indivisible, and substructure-less. See also the Conclusion.

¹¹³ Eltschinger (2014), 264.

changes his frame of reference depending upon the presuppositions of his interlocutor. In the context of an External Realist ontology, for example, there is nothing *necessarily* erroneous about the determination that something (such as a ‘red chair’) exists externally to the mind. This determination is only a problem from a perspective that maintains all phenomena to be “internal” or mental (i.e., *antarjñeyavāda*). Similarly, the fact that the objects of inferential cognitions are ultimately unreal mental fabrications (i.e., universals, *sāmānyas*) does not in any way deprive inference of its practical utility in the world. On the contrary, as we have already seen, it is precisely this practical utility (i.e., *prāpakatva* and *pravarttakatva*) in terms of obtaining what is beneficial and avoiding what is harmful that, for Dharmakīrti, defines epistemic reliability (i.e., *prāmānya*) in general. Thus, to the extent that correctly-formed inferential cognitions enable someone to obtain what is beneficial and avoid what is harmful, inferential cognitions are indeed *pramāṇas*.

Yet despite its “transactional” (*vyāvahārika*) utility, inference (*anumāna*) is necessarily erroneous, at least insofar as there is error built into every conceptual construction. In other words, insofar as the objects of inference (i.e., universals) are unreal, and inferential cognitions themselves thus necessarily involve mental fabrication, they are inherently erroneous. Not only that, the very process of conceptualization through which the universal is constructed necessarily entails making a kind of cognitive mistake, systematically turning a blind eye towards actually-present causal features of the object in question (such as the redness or blueness of the two chairs, in the example above, in order to bring them both under the same category ‘chair’).

This is why, as Dharmakīrti puts it in the PVSV *ad* PV 1.98-99ab, “ignorance just is conceptuality” (*vikalpa eva hy avidyā*). But conceptuality is not our only problem. As we ascend the “sliding scale,” even nonconceptual sensory cognitions are understood to be problematic, because they too arise due to beginningless ignorance:

This lack of ability [to apprehend real objects] on the part of conceptual cognitions is due to ignorance (*avidyā*). Nor is it the case that only [cognitions] which depend upon external [factors] are erroneous—rather, [cognitions can be erroneous] due to an internal defect (*āntarād api viplavād*), too, as in the case of [floating] hairs and so on.

[Objection:] “If the defect arises due to ignorance, there is the unwanted conclusion (*prasaṅga*) [that this would apply] to visual cognitions, and so on, as well.”

No: (1) because this [ignorance] is the defining characteristic of conceptuality; for ignorance just is conceptuality. Ignorance misrepresents (*viparyasyati*) by its very nature. Nor, indeed, are sensory cognitions conceptual. Alternatively, [from the standpoint of *antarjñeyavāda*,] no: (2) as we will discuss [in the Perception Chapter], there is a flaw in relation to sensory cognitions as well, since they are nondual [but] appear dualistically.

Although all [these cognitions] are defective, ‘until the revolution of the basis’ (*ā āśrayaparāvṛtter*) there is a distinction between a *pramāṇa* and that which has the [spurious] appearance [of a *pramāṇa*], on account of the concurrence between what is desired and the appropriate causal capacity [of the object], even though [e.g. sensory cognition] is not [actually a *pramāṇa*] in reality (*mithyātve 'pi*); [it is a *pramāṇa*] because it is conducive [to obtaining what is desired], as in [a baby’s] perception of [her] mother [for milk].¹¹⁴

Here we may note several important points. First, Dharmakīrti acknowledges that the same fundamental problem of lacking instrumentality in ultimate terms applies both to conceptual cognitions as well as to ordinary sensory cognitions. That is to say, inasmuch as ordinary sensory cognitions are tainted by duality, they cannot ultimately be instrumental, because they are not absolutely correct. Second, however, this does not prevent them—any more than it prevents conceptual cognitions—from being reliable, to a limited extent, within the circumscribed context

¹¹⁴ Gnoli (1960, 50–51): *aśaktir eṣā vikalpānām avidyāprabhāvāt | na vai bāhyāpekṣā eva bhrāntayo bhavanti | kiṃ tu viplavād āntarād api keśādivibhramavat | avidyodbhavād viplavatve cakṣurvijñānādiṣv api prasaṅgaḥ | na | tasyā vikalpalakṣaṇatvāt | vikalpa eva hy avidyā | sā svabhāvenaiva viparyasyati | naivam naivam indriyajñānāni vikalpakāni | na vā teṣv apy eṣa doṣo 'dvayānām dvayanirbhāsād iti vakṣyāmaḥ | sarveṣāṃ viplave 'pi pramāṇatadābhāsavyavasthā ā āśrayaparāvṛtter arthakriyāyogyābhimatasamvādanāt | mithyātve 'pi praśamānukūlatvān māṭṣamjñādivat.*

Cf. also Dunne (2004, 61n17) and Eltschinger (2005, 158-159). Eltschinger, in particular, translates this passage slightly differently.

of ordinary transactional (*vyāvahārika*) reality. There is, in other words, an important distinction to be drawn between what counts as instrumental before we have attained final awakening, and what counts as instrumental in the final analysis. Dharmakīrti is taciturn on this point, only bringing it up in a few locations, most notably here and in another famous passage at the end of PVin 1.¹¹⁵ As we will see, however, it is clear that the only candidate for such an ultimate instrument is pure reflexive awareness.

Third, and finally, the distinction between genuine epistemic instruments and their spurious imitations (*tadābhāsa*)—in other words, between “perception” (*pratyakṣa*) and “pseudo-perception” (*pratyakṣābhāsa*)—is an essential component of the context for this discussion. The point here is precisely that a sensory cognition, such as a baby’s perception of her mother, can only be considered instrumental in relation to some worldly objective, such as obtaining milk. Ultimately, however, even these kinds of “correct” sensory cognitions must be understood as nonconceptual “pseudo-perceptions,” on account of their phenomenological duality. But this point requires a great deal of further analysis as to the nature of perceptual error, which we will now commence.

¹¹⁵ See Chapter 2, Section II.D: [Omniscience and the Nature of Awareness](#).

Chapter One: Pseudo-Perception

Dharmakīrti maintains that there are two types of perceptual error (bhrānti): conceptual and nonconceptual. Conceptual error accounts for most ordinary cognitions of ordinary objects under ordinary circumstances. That is to say, for Dharmakīrti, the determinate identification of some object—such as a ‘jug’—is not a perception at all, but rather a spurious or “pseudo-perception” (pratyakṣābhāsa), in the sense that these cognitions appear (ā + √bhās) as though they were perceptual, but in fact fail to meet the technical requirements necessary for a genuine perception (pratyakṣa). Nonconceptual error, on the other hand, arises due to an impairment (upaghāta) in the sensory faculty (indriya) or, more broadly, in the psychophysical basis (āśraya) of sensory experience—whatever this might be. The most important example of nonconceptual error is the dualistic phenomenological structure of perceiving subject and perceived object. Because phenomenological duality is nonconceptual error, all dualistic cognitions must in the final analysis be understood as nonconceptual pseudo-perceptions.

Defining the conditions under which a seemingly genuine perceptual event fails to be an authentic veridical perception is an extremely important task for any epistemological theory, and Dharmakīrti’s system is no exception. In Buddhist *pramāṇa* literature, the technical term for such a spurious or “pseudo-perception”¹ is *pratyakṣābhāsa*: a cognition which “seems” or “appears” (ā + √bhās) to be a perception (*pratyakṣa*), but in fact is not. That is to say, a *pratyakṣābhāsa* (or *pratyakṣābhā*) is a *bahuvrīhi* compound meaning “something with the appearance (*ābhāsa*) of a perception”—the implication being that it is not actually a genuinely perceptual cognition.

Dharmakīrti’s discussion of pseudo-perception is something of an outlier within the PV. At first glance, the passage in which he treats this issue (PV 3.288-300) does not necessarily seem to have much to do with the rest of the text. Furthermore, Dharmakīrti almost entirely disregards the underlying argument from PS(V) 1.7cd-8ab, the ostensible source for this discussion. As we will see, Dinnāga’s presentation of pseudo-perception essentially constitutes a commentary on

¹ *Pratyakṣābhāsa* is sometimes rendered as “perceptual error,” though “pseudo-perception” is a preferable translation for this term; “error” is better reserved for *bhrānti*, which is derived from the Sanskrit root √bhrām, literally “to wander” or “to err.” Obviously, however, these two concepts are very closely related.

Vasubandhu’s presentation of perception and pseudo-perception from the *Vādaśāstrī* (VV).² In effect, Dinnāga was attempting to “fix” Vasubandhu’s account of pseudo-perception from a critically important passage of this text.

The problem with Vasubandhu’s account, at least from Dinnāga’s perspective in the PS, is that it only describes cognitive error (*bhrānti*) in conceptual terms, as the conceptual misidentification of nonconceptual sensory content. Effectively, because in this passage Vasubandhu strictly defines perception as a cognition which arises due to its object (*tato ’rthād vijñānaṃ pratyakṣam*), he cannot account for nonconceptual cognitive error, such as the appearance of two moons when intoxicated. Thus—although the interpretation of Dinnāga on this point has been a matter of some controversy—according to Dharmakīrti’s explanation, in addition to the three types of conceptual error highlighted by Vasubandhu, Dinnāga introduces a fourth type of strictly nonconceptual error.

Unlike Dinnāga, however, Dharmakīrti was not responding to the VV, and so was free to re-work this passage of the PS(V) to suit his needs. Rather than strictly follow Dinnāga’s typology of pseudo-perceptions, Dharmakīrti instead groups the three types of conceptual pseudo-perception together, and then introduces a new type of distinction between them. In effect, although he does not quite explicitly articulate it in this way, and the line is somewhat blurry, Dharmakīrti draws a distinction between a conceptual *mistake* (such as the misidentification of a rope as a snake), and a conceptual *pseudo-perception*: that is, a conceptual cognition with the

² The *Vādaśāstrī* was an important source for both Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti. Anacker (1984, 34) notes that the *Vādaśāstrī* preceded both the PS(V) and the PV in defining “pervasion” (*vyāpti*) as invariable ontological concomitance (*avinābhāva*), and more generally re-worked the Nyāya approach to syllogisms in such a manner that “Dinnāga’s ‘wheel of justifications’ (*hetucakra*), sometimes held to be the first complete Indian formulation of what constitutes the validity and invalidity of an argument, is in fact nothing of the kind: it is a pedagogic device mapping out in detail what Vasubandhu’s criteria already presuppose.” Nevertheless, Dinnāga took issue with the attribution of the *Vādaśāstrī* to Vasubandhu; see below, note [6](#).

seeming *appearance* (*tadābhāsa*) of being perceptual, but which, being conceptual, is in fact not perceptual at all. As it turns out, the paradigmatic cases of conceptual pseudo-perception are “correct” ordinary conceptual cognitions, such as the veridical ascertainment or determination (*niścaya*) of objects such as a ‘pot,’ as well as the *apparent* ($\bar{a} + \sqrt{bhās}$) temporal persistence (that is, the quality of *seeming to be* “the same” from moment to moment) of such ordinary objects. In other words, Dharmakīrti’s theory of conceptual pseudo-perception is, in a sense, Dharmakīrti’s theory of ordinary object-awareness.

However, Dharmakīrti’s primary concern in this passage is to establish the existence of strictly *nonconceptual* forms of cognitive error, a category of error which he (controversially) attributes to Diñnāga. Whether or not it is a justifiable interpretation of Diñnāga, on Dharmakīrti’s account, nonconceptual error is to be distinguished from conceptual error by virtue of the fact that it arises due to a “distortion” (*upaplava*) in the “basis” (*āśraya*) of cognition, as opposed to being due to faulty mental engagement with an otherwise correctly-generated cognition. Nonconceptual perceptual error—such as that caused by the *timira* eye-disease (“myodesopsia” or optical “floaters”)—is critically important to Dharmakīrti’s final idealist position because, unlike conceptual error, it provides a model for understanding the “internal distortion” (*antarupaplava*), which bifurcates experience into phenomenologically subjective and objective aspects. As we will see, Dharmakīrti’s ultimate point here is that every cognition which appears ($\bar{a} + \sqrt{bhās}$) to be structured by the duality of subject and object is, precisely on that account, erroneous.

In this chapter, we will begin by examining the intellectual history of pseudo-perception as an epistemological category within the Buddhist *pramāṇa* literature, tracing Dharmakīrti’s perspective in the PV, through Diñnāga’s brief discussion of this issue, back to the *Vādaśāstrī*. We then turn to Dharmakīrti’s explanation of conceptual pseudo-perception, which is based upon his

theories of conceptuality and mental perception (*mānasapratyakṣa*). Mental perception is a critically important topic, both for the present discussion of perceptual error, as well as for this study as a whole, since it is in the context of mental perception that Dharmakīrti defines the object (*artha*) of experience as that which “projects” (\sqrt{r}) its form (*rūpa*) into cognition, thus causing cognition to arise with an object-appearance (*viṣayābhāsa*) that is isomorphic to the object. In this way, Dharmakīrti’s theory of conceptual pseudo-perception constitutes an integrated model for how cognition ordinarily operates on an everyday basis. This chapter concludes with a discussion of nonconceptual pseudo-perception, most importantly concerning the “distortion” or “impairment” (*viplava, upaplava*) of subject-object duality.

I. Pseudo-Perception in the Buddhist *Pramāṇa* Tradition

A. Perception and Pseudo-Perception in the *Vādaividhi*

On Dharmakīrti's account, nonconceptual error has its origin in the psychophysical “basis” (*āśraya*) of cognition, which in the most basic case may be understood as the sense faculties (*akṣa*, *indriya*). It is precisely the fact that its origin lies in the sense faculties which distinguishes nonconceptual pseudo-perception from conceptual pseudo-perception:

There are four kinds of pseudo-perception. Three kinds are conceptual, and one is nonconceptual, arisen from impairments (*upaplava*) in the basis (*āśraya*). || 288 ||

Two [types of conceptual pseudo-perception] are discussed in order to establish that they do not arise from the sense-faculties, on account of the mistakes that have been observed [in other philosophers' theories]. The mention of inference and so on, [which has already been] established [to be conceptual], is just for proving that the previous two [are also conceptual]. || 289 ||³

We will examine Dharmakīrti's argument here in greater detail below. For now, it should suffice to note that Dharmakīrti identifies two overarching types of pseudo-perception, three conceptual and one nonconceptual. Conceptual pseudo-perceptions are “not generated by the sense-faculties” (*anakṣaja*), implying that nonconceptual errors by contrast *are* generated by the sense-faculties.

Dharmakīrti's mention of “inference and so on” (*anumānādi*) is a reference to Diñnāga's inclusion of inference as a type of pseudo-perception in PS 1.7cd-8ab. In other words, Dharmakīrti explicitly presents his typology of pseudo-perceptions—three conceptual types and one nonconceptual type—with reference to the PS, as the correct way to interpret Diñnāga. However,

³ Tosaki (1979, 383–85): *trividhaṃ kalpanājñānam āśrayopaplavodbhavam | avikalpakam ekañ ca pratyakṣābhañ caturvidham || 288 || anakṣajatvasiddhyartham ukte dve bhrāntidarśanāt | siddhānumādivacanaṃ sādhanāyaiva pūrvayoḥ || 289 ||*

scholars have argued about how many types of pseudo-perception Dinnāga intended to lay out, in particular whether Dinnāga asserts the existence nonconceptual error, since the first appearance of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*. Since the issue of nonconceptual error is so important, it is worth examining this point in some detail.

Within the Buddhist intellectual tradition, going all the way back to the Abhidharma, perception has always been understood as a causal process. In the most basic terms, the contact (*sparśa*) between a sensory faculty (*indriya*) and an appropriate object-field (*viśaya*) produces a particular modality of sensory cognition (*indriyajñāna*). For example, contact between the visual faculty (*akṣa*, *cakṣu*) and visible matter (*rūpa*) produces visual awareness (*cakṣurvijñāna*) This much was commonly agreed-upon; but the question of how to more precisely define perception was contentious. Dinnāga’s discussion of “pseudo-perception” concerns just this controversy: specifically, Vasubandhu’s definition of perception from the *Vādaśāstra*, to the effect that “a perception is a cognition due to the object” (*tato ’rthād vijñānaṃ pratyakṣam*).

As highlighted above, Dinnāga’s presentation of pseudo-perception in PS 1.7cd-8ab is in essence a summary and systematization of the three specific examples of cognition which Vasubandhu specifically rules out from being genuine perceptions in the critically important passage from the *Vādaśāstra* where Vasubandhu defines perception. Since Dinnāga refers to this passage at length (i.e., PS 1.7cd-8ab, as well as PS 1.13-16), it is worth reproducing in full:

“A perception is a cognition that comes about due to that object [of which it is the perception].” That cognition which arises only on account of the object-field (*viśaya*) after which it is named, and not through anything else, nor through [both] that object and something else—this cognition is direct perception: such as “cognition of visible form,” etc., or “cognition of pleasure,” etc. In this way, [1] erroneous cognitions (*bhrāntijñāna*) are rejected, such as the cognition of mother-of-pearl as silver. For that “silver-cognition” is designated as “silver,” but it does not arise on account of silver, but rather through mother-of-pearl. [2] Cognition of the conventionally-existent is also rejected by this [definition]. For example, the “cognition of a jug,” [and again, on another occasion] the “cognition of [another]

jug,” are designated in this way, as ‘jugs’ or whatever; however, those [cognitions of a jug] do not arise due to them [i.e., jugs]—because they are not a cause, as they [only] exist conventionally—for they only arise on account of [particles of] visible matter and so on that are in proximity [to each other].⁴ [3] Inferential cognition is also rejected by this [definition], because it arises due to the cognition of smoke and the memory of its relation with fire, as well, not due to fire exclusively.⁵

In fact, PS 1.13-16 is an extensive critique of Vasubandhu’s definition of perception here, as “a cognition due to the object” (*tato ’rthād vijñānaṃ pratyakṣam*). And Diñnāga even goes so far as to call Vasubandhu’s authorship of the *Vādaśāstra* into question on the basis of this definition.⁶

Diñnāga’s problem with this definition is that, for several reasons, there must be more involved in the causal production of a perceptual cognition than the phenomenal object by itself: most saliently, the senses. As Diñnāga writes, “the [cognition] is not just exclusively due to the [object]” (*tat tata eva na*, PS 1.14b). Diñnāga thus contends that sensory cognition must in some way be generated by the senses—that is, derived at least in part from the causal activity of the sense-faculties.

In PS 1.7cd-8ab, however, Diñnāga’s critique is less a direct refutation of Vasubandhu’s view in this passage, than an emendation to it. Here, Diñnāga groups together, as “pseudo-perceptions,” the three examples of non-perceptual cognitions mentioned by Vasubandhu; but he then also introduces a fourth category:

⁴ See Chapter 3, Section I.B: [The Agglomerated Object of Sensory Cognition](#).

⁵ Steinkellner (2005b, 87.3-11): *tato ’rthād vijñānaṃ pratyakṣam iti | yasya viśayasya vijñānaṃ vyapadiśyate yadi tata eva tad utpadyate nānyataḥ nāpi tato ’nyataś ca tajñānaṃ pratyakṣam | tadyathā rūpādijñānaṃ sukhādijñānaṃ iti | etena bhrāntijñānaṃ nirastam yathā śūktikāyāṃ rajatajñānaṃ | tad hi rajatena vyapadiśyate rajatajñānaṃ iti | na ca tadrajatād utpadyate śūktikayaiva tu tad upajanyate | saṃvṛtijñānaṃ apy anenāpāstam | tathā hi tad ghaṭādibhir vyapadiśyate ghaṭajñānaṃ ghaṭajñānaṃ ity evam | na tu tat tebhyo bhavati teṣāṃ saṃvṛtisattvenākāranatvāt | rūpādibhya eva hi tathā sanniviṣṭebhyas tadbhavati | anumānajñānaṃ apy anenaiva nirastam | dhūmajñānasambandhasmr̥tibhyām api hi tad bhavati nāgnita eva.*

Cf. also Hattori (1968, 95–96) and Anacker (1984, 40).

⁶ Cf. PS(V) 1.13, translated in [Appendix A: PS\(V\) 1.2-16](#). See also Kachru (2015, 420n146).

Pseudo-perception is [1] erroneous [cognition], [2] the cognition of the conventionally-existent, and [3] [cognitions involving the conceptualization of prior experience, such as] inference and inferential [cognition, as well as cognition] which is mnemonic or desiderative; together with [4] the myodesopsic (*sataimiram*). || 7cd-8ab ||⁷

Diñnāga's autocommentary partially explains why the first three types of cognition are not perceptions, but remains frustratingly silent regarding the fourth:

Here, erroneous cognition (*bhrāntijñānam*) is a pseudo-perception, because it involves (for example) the conceptualization of water in the case of a mirage and so on. [Cognition] with respect to conventionally-existent things [is a pseudo-perception] due to the superimposition of another object [i.e., the superimposition of a universal,] because it occurs due to a conceptualization in relation to the [particles of] visible matter. Cognitions such as inference, its result, and so on conceptualize prior experience; therefore, they are not perceptions.⁸

It must be admitted here that these translations may be fairly characterized as begging most or all of the philological (and, on that account, most or all of the philosophical) questions at stake. The problem is that there does not exist and will almost certainly never exist one standard translation or interpretation of this passage. The above translation reflects Dharmakīrti's perspective, in terms of the enumeration of the four different types of pseudo-perception, grouped into three conceptual types and one nonconceptual type. Let us examine this point in greater detail.

⁷ Steinkellner (2005a, 3.16-17): **bhrāntisaṃvṛtisajñānam anumānānumānikam || 7 || smārtābhilāṣikaṃ ceti pratyakṣābhaṃ sataimiram |**

⁸ Steinkellner (2005a, 3.18-20): *tatra bhrāntijñānam mrgatṛṣṇādiṣu toyādikalpanāpravṛttatvāt pratyakṣābhāsam saṃvṛtisatsu arthāntarādhyāropāt tadrūpakalpanāpravṛttatvāt | anumānataphalādirñānam pūrvānubhūtakalpanayeti na pratyakṣam ||*

B. Nonconceptual Error in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*

The primary philological problem here concerns the compound *sataimiram*, rendered above as “together with the myodesopsic,” since *timira* denotes the condition of optical “floaters,” known in medical parlance as myodesopsia.⁹ The question, in essence, is whether or not Dharmakīrti was correct in asserting that *sataimiram* is intended to designate a fourth, specifically and exclusively nonconceptual, type of perceptual error. The matter is complicated further by the absence of any mention of *timira* or indeed any gloss at all of *sataimiram* in the PSV, which many scholars have taken as evidence that Dinnāga only asserts three types of pseudo-perception.¹⁰ Despite this

⁹ See below Section III.B.2: [Myodesopsia \(*timira*\)](#).

¹⁰ Funayama (1999, 77), for example, writes: “In this way, two different views about the origin of perceptual error are found in Dignāga’s works: one, his unique epistemology that every erroneous cognition belongs to a conception, including a cognition of a double moon; and two, the rather commonplace idea that a cognition of a double moon is caused by some kind of sensory defect. These two attitudes were not fully integrated by Dignāga himself.” Funayama (1999, 77n20) apparently follows Hattori (1968, 36, 96n53, 122n6) and Franco (1986, 90–94) in basing this interpretation on PSV *ad* PS 1.17ab: *na ca vyabhicāri viṣayaṭve manobhrānti viṣayatvād vyabhicāriṇaḥ*. Hattori, for example, renders this as: “Nor is there a possibility of [sense-cognition’s] having an erroneous object because an erroneous cognition [necessarily] has as object an illusion produced by the mind (*mano-bhrānti*).”

However, the “[necessarily],” which as indicated by the square brackets is supplied by the translator and does not represent anything in the text of the PSV, is doing entirely too much exegetical work, unduly reading the translator’s perspective into the text. In context, Dinnāga’s statement here is only aimed at demonstrating the superfluousness of the qualifier *avyabhicāri* (“non-deceptive”) in the Nyāya definition of perception (*indriyārthasannikarṣoṭpannam jñānam avyapadeśyam avyabhicāri vyavasāyatmakam pratyakṣam*), and makes no claim to the effect that *all* error is *necessarily* mental. Jinendrabuddhi explains:

[Naiyāyika]: “If there is no [qualification ‘non-deceptive’], in that case, a cognition such as the double moon, which arises from impaired sense-faculties, with a deceptive object-field, would also be perceptual; therefore, in order to exclude [such cognitions], it is necessary to make [this qualification].”

No, it is not like that, because a [cognition that arises from impaired senses, such as the double moon etc.] is rejected just by means of [the qualification] “apprehending a proximate object” (*arthasannikarṣagrahaṇa*) [because there is no proximate second moon]. Otherwise, [if “non-deceptive” is to be part of the definition of perception, the definition of perception] should state thus: “generated by the senses,” as opposed to “arisen from the proximity of sense-faculty and object,” because that [cognition of a double moon] would not be excluded [by a definition of perception as being generated by the senses, since the double moon illusion arises from impaired sense-faculties; thus the additional qualifier of being ‘non-deceptive’ would be necessary].

Steinkellner (2005b, 100.12-15): *nanv asati tasminn akṣopaghātaṃ yad vyabhicāri viṣayaṃ dvicandrādijñānam tasyāpi pratyakṣatā syāt | tatas tannirāsāya tadavaśyaṃ kartavyam | naitad asti arthasannikarṣagrahaṇenaiva tasya*

contemporary scholarly quasi-consensus, however, it is my contention that, to the contrary, Dharmakīrti has the better hermeneutic argument here.¹¹

Chu (2004, 127–28) outlines three positions regarding the interpretation of *sataimiram*, which can be summarized as follows (my synopsis):

- 1) The position of a certain unnamed “almost-ācārya” (*ācāryadeśīya*), as reported by Kui-ji (632-682), that all errors, including the double moon illusion, are mental conceptual constructions; in other words that nonconceptual pseudo-perceptions do not exist.
- 2) The position of Sthiramati (ca. 550) and Dharmakīrti, that there do exist strictly nonconceptual errors, which arise from defects in the sensory faculty.
- 3) The position of Dharmapāla (ca. 550), which Chu both argues in favor of and asserts was also held by Jinendrabuddhi, that the double moon illusion is “a mental construction resulting from the defect of a sense faculty”; in other words, that the sense faculties play a role in the production of the double moon illusion, but that the appearance of the second moon itself is conceptual.¹²

Hattori and Franco adopt the first position outlined by Chu, that Diñnāga only intended to enumerate three types of pseudo-perception, all of them conceptual.¹³ In other words, according to Hattori and Franco, Diñnāga holds all error to be conceptual, which is to say, the result of faulty mental engagement. Eltschinger, on the other hand, follows Chu in holding to the third position;

pratīkṣepāt | anyathendriyajam ity evaṃ vācyam syāt na tv indriyārthasannikarṣoṭpannam iti tasya vyavacchedyābhāvāt |

See also Appendix B, note 45, concerning the relationship between this passage and a parallel passage in Jinendrabuddhi’s remarks *ad* PS 1.7cd-8ab.

¹¹ That said, it should be noted that, short of attaining the *siddhi* of perfect knowledge of other minds, there is no way to ascertain Diñnāga’s intent with absolute certainty.

¹² Interestingly, Dharmakīrti appears to be aware of this third position, but specifically rules it out. See PV 3.295-296, below, in Section III.B.1: [The Causal Origin of Nonconceptual Sensory Error](#).

¹³ Hattori (1968, 96) notes: “I take the word ‘*sataimiram*’ as an adjective modifying *pratyakṣābham*,’ but not as mentioning a separate type of *pratyakṣābhāsa*.” Though Franco (1986, 82–83) disagrees with several points of Hattori’s interpretation, he similarly maintains that “there is nothing in [this passage] to commit [Diñnāga] to the view that sense organs produce wrong cognitions,” and he characterizes Diñnāga’s theory of error as holding that “the mind is always the cause of wrong cognitions.”

Eltschinger (2014, 256) thus states that *sataimiram* “should be interpreted here along the lines of Jinendrabuddhi, i.e., as pertaining to ignorance, and not as being related in any way to the eye-disease known as *timira*.”

Despite the great erudition displayed in Chu (2004) and Eltschinger (2014), however, this is undoubtedly a misreading of Jinendrabuddhi.¹⁴ Far from arguing that *sataimiram* is “not... related in any way” to *timira*, Jinendrabuddhi explicitly follows Dharmakīrti in arguing that *sataimiram* is an “exception” (*apavāda*) to the general rule that nonconceptual cognitions are perceptual; therefore, he argues, a “sensory cognition that is defective on account of either internally or externally impairing conditions is said to be a pseudo-perception, even though it is devoid of conceptualization.”¹⁵ In other words, Jinendrabuddhi explicitly states that *sataimiram* (“together with the myodesopsic”) refers to the entire class of nonconceptual pseudo-perceptions that are created by impaired sense-faculties, paradigmatically including “myodesopsic” (*taimirika*) cognitions that are created due to the ophthalmic disease of myodesopsia (*timira*).

¹⁴ The passage cited by Chu appears to be in the voice of an interlocutor, and the position articulated there is not endorsed by Jinendrabuddhi, who responds to this objection by continuing to insist that *sataimiram* is a metonym for the entire class of nonconceptual pseudo-perceptions. See the discussion of this point in Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.7cd-8ab](#), note [51](#).

¹⁵ Jinendrabuddhi comments (for the entirety of the relevant passage, cf. Appendix B: [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.7cd-8ab](#)):

But the fourth pseudo-perception should be seen as an exception (*apavāda*) to this; it is not an instance of something that has been rejected [as a candidate for being a *pratyakṣa*] by implication due to the statement of its definition. Otherwise, there would be an inconsistent (*vyabhicāra*) definition. Therefore, by mentioning it as an exception, a sensory cognition that is defective on account of either internally or externally impairing conditions is said to be a pseudo-perception, even though it is devoid of conceptualization. So here, when [Dīnnāga says] “together with the myodesopsic,” myodesopsia ought to be seen merely as a metonym (*upalakṣaṇa*) for all the conditions which impair the sense-faculties—really! (*kila*)

Steinkellner (2005b, 61.9-13): *caturthas tu yaḥ pratyakṣābhāsaḥ so 'pavādo 'tra draṣṭavyaḥ na tu lakṣaṇavacanenārthāpattyaḥ nirākṛtasyodāharaṇam | anyathā lakṣaṇavyabhicāraḥ syāt | tasmāt tenāpavādavacanena bāhyābhyanantaropaghātāpratyayopahatendriyajñānam kalpanāpoḍhatve 'pi pratyakṣābham ucyate | sataimiram ity atra tu timiraṃ sarvendriyopaghātāpratyayopalakṣaṇamātraṃ kila draṣṭavyam.*

But, leaving aside the question of how to interpret Dinnāga, the more serious problem with this account is that it has led to a fundamental misreading of Dharmakīrti. Because of this confusion concerning the nature of *timira*, Eltschinger (2014, 303) winds up arguing that, for Dharmakīrti, all cognitive error arises, “among other factors, from the latent tendencies of erroneous conceptual constructs,” such that (ibid., 308) the “internal cause of error [i.e., *antarupaplava*] consists in the latent tendency of a contrary conceptual construct (*viparītavikalpavāsanā*).” As has already been mentioned above and will be further examined in great detail below, however, the “internal impairment” or *antarupaplava* is a defect in the most fundamental psychophysical basis of cognition, which produces phenomenological duality as a *specifically nonconceptual* type of error.¹⁶ In other words, the distorted duality of subject and object is *not conceptual* and is not predicated upon conceptual constructs. Indeed, the nonconceptual nature of subject-object duality is precisely what separates Dharmakīrti’s Buddhist account of nonduality from Abhinavagupta’s Śaiva¹⁷ theory of nonduality on the one hand, and Vasubandhu’s Yogācāra account on the other.¹⁸

¹⁶ Some other type of impairment—call it the “imprint for conceptuality” (*vikalpavāsanā*)—may be similarly responsible for the deeply ingrained tendency, on the part of all sentient beings, to conceptualize their experience. Indeed, it is an interesting and open (if perhaps ultimately unresolvable) question, if the internal impairment, construed as an imprint responsible for phenomenological duality or “imprint for duality,” is in some way the same thing as this “imprint for conceptuality.” But this is conjectural and beside the point here, which is that in PV 3.288-300 Dharmakīrti identifies the internal impairment as a type of defect that is responsible for causing a specifically *nonconceptual* type of distortion, namely, the distortion of the phenomenological duality of subject and object.

¹⁷ Cf. Prueitt (2016, 238-250). It is however important to note that the Śaivas understood the nature of conceptuality quite differently from Dharmakīrti; as Prueitt (2016, 238) explains, “For these Śaivas, the defining line between a concept and what is not a concept is whether or not a thing is defined through the exclusion of its counterpart (*pratiyogin*). Since subject and object in normal sensory perception depend on each other, they are conceptual.”

¹⁸ See Chapter 5, note [30](#).

C. Dharmakīrti's Interpretation of PS 1.7cd-8ab

For his part, Dharmakīrti clearly asserts that nonconceptual error arises from impairment of the faculties (*indriya*) or “basis” (*āśraya*), and is thus *not* mental or conceptual:

The fourth [type of pseudo-perception] is an exception [to the general rule that nonconceptual cognitions are *pratyakṣas*]. Concerning this, [Dinnāga] states that [nonconceptual error] arises from impairment (*upaghāta*). In this context, myodesopsia (*timira*) is merely a metonym (*upalakṣaṇa*) for impairment [in general]. || 293 ||

Some say that even this [fourth type] is mental. For them, that text [i.e., the PSV *ad* PS 1.15] is contradicted: “The sensory faculties are the cause of [erroneous] cognitions such as ‘blue’¹⁹ or the double-moon [illusion].” || 294 ||²⁰

Once again, Dharmakīrti—somewhat unusually for the PV—engages with the PS in explicitly exegetical, even classically commentarial, terms. His point is that nonconceptual pseudo-perception is just an exception to Dinnāga’s initial definition of perceptual cognition at PSV 1.3c: “A cognition which does not possess conceptuality is a perception” (*yasya jñānasya kalpanā nāsti tat pratyakṣam*). Notably, this definition makes no reference to error, nor any provision for a cognition which is nonconceptual, yet erroneous, since a “perception” in the technical sense (i.e., a *pratyakṣa*) is by definition an instrument of correct awareness (i.e., a *pramāṇa*).

The essence of Dharmakīrti’s exegetical argument here is that Dinnāga acknowledges the existence of nonconceptual pseudo-perceptions—that is, cognitions which are nonconceptual, but nevertheless *not* instruments of correct awareness—later in the PS, in Dinnāga’s critique of Vasubandhu’s definition of perception from the *Vādaśāstra*. Specifically, at PSV *ad* PS 1.15,

¹⁹ That is, the false appearance of snow-mountains as being blue, instead of white.

²⁰ Tosaki (1979, 387–89): *apavādaś caturtho 'tra tenoktam upaghātajam | kevalam tatra timiram upaghātopalakṣaṇam || 293 || mānasaṃ tad apīty eke teṣāṃ grantho virudhyate | nīladvicandrādīdhiyām hetur akṣāny apīty ayam || 294 ||*

Diñnāga explicitly states that the double moon illusion has the sense-faculties (*caḥsurādi*) as its cause (*kāraṇa*).²¹ In other words, since this error is caused by the sense-faculties, as opposed to faulty mental engagement, it must be nonconceptual.

To be clear, the question of whether or not Diñnāga intended *sataimiram* to designate a fourth, nonconceptual type of pseudo-perception must remain to some extent unresolved, as there are simply not enough data to reach a definitive conclusion. This question additionally lies somewhat beside our main point, of ascertaining Dharmakīrti’s view. Again, Dharmakīrti certainly refined Diñnāga’s epistemological theory, and some of these refinements may well have gone so far as to constitute a substantial reworking. Furthermore, as we shall see, Dharmakīrti’s systematization of this passage in particular did involve a certain amount of hermeneutic violence perpetrated on the PS. But at the very least it is by no means obvious or certain that Dharmakīrti introduces an entirely new category—i.e., nonconceptual error derived from impaired sensory faculties—that Diñnāga did not intend to put forth in the PS.

At the end of the day, the hermeneutical problem here boils down to a conflict between, on the one hand, Diñnāga’s axiomatic definition of perception in general as being only that cognition which is “free from conceptualization” (*kalpanāpoḍham*), critiquing as superfluous the additional Nyāya criterion that perception is “not misleading” (*avyabhicārin*);²² and, on the other hand, Diñnāga’s recognition that there are erroneous nonconceptual cognitions, such as the two-moon illusion, which Diñnāga himself explicitly asserts are caused by defects in the sense-faculties.²³

²¹ See [Appendix A: PS\(V\) 1.2-16](#).

²² Cf. PSV *ad* PS 1.17ab, and PST *ad cit* (note [10](#), above).

²³ Cf. also ĀPV *ad* ĀP 2cd (Duckworth et al. 2016, 42): “When a person sees a double moon because of defective sense faculties, there may be an appearance of that double moon, but it is not the object of that cognition.”

dbang po ma tshang ba'i phyir zla ba gnyis mthong ba ni der snang ba nyid yin du zim kyang de'i yul ma yin no ||

Interpreters of the PS both ancient and modern are thereby left with a difficult choice: either assert that Diñnāga did not recognize the existence of erroneous nonconceptual cognitions which arise from impaired sense-faculties, with all the obvious problems that this entails (not the least of which is Diñnāga's clear assertion elsewhere that the senses are indeed the cause of the double moon); or admit that such a cognition merely constitutes an exception (*apavāda*) to Diñnāga's definition of "perception" as being, in effect, any and all nonconceptual cognitions. The latter is Dharmakīrti and Jinendrabuddhi's approach, and it is followed in this study.

In conclusion, then, let us stipulate the following two points. First, Dharmakīrti asserted two distinct categories of pseudo-perception, nonconceptual and conceptual, which respectively arise and do not arise due to some defect in the psychophysical bases of cognition. Second, this is at the very least a defensible reading of the PS(V). We will return to the topic of nonconceptual error below. But first, let us examine Dharmakīrti's account of conceptual error.

II. Dharmakīrti's Theory of Conceptual Pseudo-Perception

A. Commentarial Problems

Of all the ways in which Dharmakīrti modifies Diñnāga's presentation in the PS, likely none are more dramatically different from the source text than the account of conceptual pseudo-perception. No doubt this is in large part because Diñnāga himself does not theorize or systematize the notion. Rather, as mentioned above, Diñnāga only cites in passing the three types of non-perceptual cognitions mentioned by Vasubandhu in the VV: (1) an erroneous cognition (*bhrāntijñāna*), such as the mistaking of mother-of-pearl for silver; (2) the cognition of a conventionally-existent entity (*saṃvṛtisajjñāna*) such as a 'jug'; and (3) inferential cognitions and their results (*anumānānumānikajñāna*). Vasubandhu does not identify these three types of cognition as "pseudo-perceptions." Rather, he only lists them as paradigmatic examples of cognitions which are not to be taken as perceptual. Diñnāga, however, groups these three together under the category of "pseudo-perception" (*pratyakṣābhāsa*), before amending to these three conceptual types of pseudo-perception a fourth, specifically and exclusively nonconceptual, type.

The underlying hermeneutical problem is that, because Vasubandhu really only uses them as examples, the three types of non-perceptual cognition mentioned in the VV do not easily admit of any overarching systematization. An "erroneous cognition" is clearly "wrong" (*visaṃvādi*), because it is incapable of appropriate telic functionality (*arthakriyā*). For example, a rope that is misapprehended as a 'snake' cannot produce venom, and a mirage misapprehended as 'water' cannot slake thirst. However, the cognition of conventionally-existent entities such as 'jugs,' while "erroneous" insofar as they are conceptual, are—precisely—conventionally useful, and hence in

an important sense “not wrong” (*avisamvādi*).²⁴ And inference is an entirely different category of cognition from perception! Furthermore, Dinnāga’s taxonomic classification notwithstanding, it is unclear how these are all supposed to be understood as *pseudo*-perceptions, i.e., as cognitions which *seem* or *appear* to be perceptual, but are not. Such spuriousness is at least arguably understandable for the first two, though for different reasons. But, by definition, exactly no one is in danger of mistaking an inference for a perceptual cognition.

Dharmakīrti’s commentarial “solution” to this intractable hermeneutical problem is, in effect, to ignore the details of Dinnāga’s approach, and instead focus on the big picture. In terms of Dharmakīrti’s theoretical project as a whole, that is, the single most important point at stake here is the existence of nonconceptual error, which arises from a defect in the sensory faculties or the psycho-physical basis of cognition, and *not* from mental or conceptual activity. This is the main point, which Dharmakīrti discusses at some length in this passage. By contrast, Dharmakīrti hardly discusses conceptual error here at all. Although the issue is touched upon elsewhere in the PV, from which mentions his underlying point must be gleaned, the entirety of his rather cryptic remarks concerning conceptual pseudo-perception is contained in four verses:

Two [types of conceptual pseudo-perception] are discussed in order to establish that they do not arise from the sense-faculties, on account of the mistakes that have been observed [in other philosophers’ theories]. The mention of inference, [which has already been] established [to be conceptual], is just for proving that the previous two [are also conceptual]. || 289 ||

Two [types of] conceptual cognition—the one based upon a convention (*saṃketa*), and the one that superimposes another object—sometimes cause error, because they immediately follow a perception. || 290 ||

²⁴ See the Introduction, Section III.A: [Correct Awareness](#).

Just as the conceptual cognition of a remote object (such as a recollection), which is dependent upon convention (*samaya*), does not apprehend a perceptual object, likewise, without the recollection of what has been experienced, there is no cognition with respect to “pots” and so on; and [a cognition] following that [recollection] is excluded from consideration as a perception. || 291-292 ||²⁵

Needless to say, this is not much of an explanation; we will, accordingly, expand upon these verses below. However, it must be noted at the outset of this discussion that Dharmakīrti’s exegesis here is simply not a plausible account of the PS. It is, in particular, extremely difficult to accept that Dīnnāga “only” mentioned inference in order to demonstrate that erroneous cognition and the cognition of the conventionally-existent are both conceptual. Furthermore, in the PS, Dīnnāga makes no mention of cognition that is “based upon convention” (*saṅketasaṃśraya*), referring instead to the “conceptualization of prior experience” (*pūrvānubhūtakalpanā*).

One fundamental issue here is that the definition of “error” (*bhrānti*) as “the misapprehension of not-X as X” (i.e., *atasmimś tadgrahaḥ*) applies equally well as a characterization of both erroneous cognition (*bhrāntijñānam*) and the cognition of conventionally-existent entities (*saṃvṛtisajjñānam*). In other words, on the Buddhist account, both the correct identification of a rope as a ‘rope,’ and the incorrect identification of a rope as a ‘snake,’ are “erroneous cognitions.”²⁶ The difference between these two is only that, in terms of conventional reality, the former is “not wrong” (*avisamvādi*). But they are both “erroneous” (*bhrānta*).

Unlike the ordinary cognition of conventionally-existent entities, however, Dharmakīrti has almost nothing to say about strictly incorrect conceptual cognitions (such as the

²⁵ Tosaki (1979, 385–87): *anakṣajātvasiddhyartham ukte dve bhrāntidarśanāt | siddhānumādivacanaṃ sādhanāyaiva pūrvayoḥ || 289 || saṅketasaṃśrayānyārthasamāropavikalpane | pratyakṣāsannavṛttivāt kadācid bhrāntikāraṇam || 290 || yathaveyaṃ parokṣārthakalpanā smaraṇādikā | samayāpekṣiṇī nārthaṃ pratyakṣam adhyavasyati || 291 || tathā ’nubhūtasmarāṇam antareṇa ghaṭādiṣu | na pratyayo ’nuyamś tac ca pratyakṣāt parihīyate || 292 ||*

²⁶ Jinendrabuddhi recognizes this problem, and addresses it at length; see Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.7cd-8ab](#).

misidentification of a ‘rope’ as a ‘snake,’ or of a mirage as ‘water’), in this passage or anywhere else. Dharmakīrti acknowledges that such misidentifications are “wrong” (*viśamvādi*), but they are not really what he means by a conceptual *pseudo-perception*. Rather, Dharmakīrti is much more concerned with determinate judgments (*niścaya*), occurring shortly after a perceptual cognition—i.e., “immediately following a perception” (*pratyakṣāsanna*)—that the cognizer mistakenly confuses for the nonconceptual perceptual event itself. In effect, Dharmakīrti’s account of conceptual pseudo-perception is a counterargument against the position that perceptual cognition is conceptual or determinate (*savikalpaka*).²⁷

Hence, although Dharmakīrti refers to these as “two conceptual cognitions,” his argument makes more sense if we consider these to be two aspects of the same thing, or two components that define a conceptual pseudo-perception as such. Put slightly differently: although there does exist the special case of blatantly erroneous cognitions, such as ropes being mistaken for snakes or mirages being mistaken for water, Dharmakīrti is more interested in explaining everyday determinate perceptual judgments. His point is simple and straightforward: insofar as these kinds of cognitions necessarily involve a remembered convention (i.e., a universal) being applied onto particulars, they are conceptual pseudo-perceptions. In this way, the cognition of conventionally-existent entities (i.e., *samvṛtisajjñāna*) is the paradigmatic case of pseudo-perception.

²⁷ See below, Chapter 2, Section I.C: [Determinate Perception and Temporal Sequence](#). On this point, Coseru (2012, 183), argues that “Dignāga distinguishes between perceptual judgments (*savikalpa pratyakṣa*) and pseudo-perceptions (*pratyakṣābhāsa*).” However, the phrase *savikalpa pratyakṣa* does not appear anywhere in PS 1 or the PV, and the notion of “determinate perception” (the more typical translation of *savikalpikapratyakṣa*) is specifically refuted by both Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti. Indeed, the refutation of determinate perception is foundational to their epistemological system. Coseru (ibid.) furthermore argues that this distinction “becomes normative for the Buddhist epistemologists.” However, as this chapter demonstrates at length, Dharmakīrti clearly considers determinate judgments (*niścayas*) to be a type—indeed, the paradigmatic and most important type—of conceptual pseudo-perception. It is precisely such judgments which ordinary beings typically confuse with genuine perception.

B. Exclusion (*apoha*), Convention (*sañketa*), and Projection (*āropa*)

As indicated by reference to the problem of “determinate perception” (*savikalpaka pratyakṣa*), the core issue here concerns the relationship between perception and conception—specifically, that according to Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti, perception is strictly non-conceptual (*kalpanāpoḍha*), and that a conceptual cognition which *appears as though* it were perceptual must therefore be understood as a conceptual *pseudo-perception*. Unsurprisingly, the cognitive mechanics of conceptuality are front and center in this discussion. Devendrabuddhi thus begins his comments *ad* PV 3.288 with a brief rundown of *apoha* theory:

First of all, with respect to a ‘jug,’ in terms of accomplishing the single effect of holding water and so on, [particulars] such as [particles of] matter are different from things other than them that do not possess that effect; that difference is their non-difference. The conventional application of the word [“jug”] to that [particular] is for the purpose of connecting all at once the collection of [particulars] such as [particles of] matter to their effect. Later, on the basis of that convention, the conceptualization of that which is termed a “jug” is applied to those [particulars] which are different from others [without the expected effects], by superimposing a single [identity] such as being a “jug” onto them.²⁸

Thus:

On the basis of a linguistic convention that, being applied to a plural collection that performs a single effect, excludes collections which are other than that, there arises [a cognition] that imputes [onto the aforementioned collection] a single thing such as “jugness” as being distributed across all of the material substance of the jug. Therefore [Dinnāga] says: [PSV *ad* PS 1.7cd-8ab] “[Cognition] with respect to conventionally-existent things [is a pseudo-perception] due to the superimposition of another object [i.e., the superimposition of a universal,] because it involves the

²⁸ PVP (511.9-17): *re zhiḡ bum pa la gzugs la sogs pa chu la sogs pa 'dzin pa la sogs pa 'bras bu gcig sgrub par byed pa'i sgo nas de las gzhan pa'i de'i 'bras bu can ma yin pa dag las tha dad pa nyid tha dad pa med pa yin no || de la 'jig rten sgra 'god pa gang yin pa de ni cig car gzugs la sogs pa'i tshogs pa rang gi 'bras bu la sbyor ba'i don to || brda de la brten nas | phyis don gzhan las tha dad pa dag la yang bum pa la sogs pa gcig tu sgro btags nas | bum pa zhes bya ba'i rnam par rtog pa 'jug par 'gyur ro ||*

conceptualization of its nature.” By dividing things in this way, conceptual cognition having linguistic convention as its basis is just linguistic conceptuality.²⁹

On the Buddhist account, in other words, the cognition of a ‘jug’ is not “the cognition of a ‘jug’” *per se*, because in reality there is no ‘jug,’ only an agglomeration of irreducible particulars (at a first approximation, “jug-particles”). Rather, the cognition of a ‘jug’ is just a cognition produced by a manifold of fundamental particles with various causal properties.³⁰ Most saliently, these agglomerated particulars each individually possess the causal capacity, when in proximity to one another, to induce the veridical determinate judgment (*niścaya*) “that is a ‘jug.’”³¹ However, each of these particulars also possesses an arbitrarily large number of other causal properties, such as the ability to induce judgments of ‘hardness’ or ‘softness’ or ‘brownness’ or whatever.³² The determination of the agglomerated particulars as a ‘jug’ therefore entails the *exclusion* of all of their causal properties which are not related to the facilitation of the judgment, “That is a ‘jug.’”

Schematically: certain causal capacities of these particulars—such as their ability to work together to hold water—are isolated (“excluded”) from the totality of their causal capacities, and on this basis the convention (*saṅketa*) or concept (*vikalpa*) of a ‘jug’ is mentally fabricated. This concept of a ‘jug’ is then projected or superimposed (*āropa*, *samāropa*) onto the perceptual, sensory cognition of the particulars. This later determination of the earlier indeterminate sensory

²⁹ PVP (512.2-8): *tshogs pa'i mang po 'bras bu gcig byed pa can dag la de las gzhan pa'i tshogs pa rnam par gcod pa ston par byed pa'i rten brda la brten nas | bum pa nyid la sogs pa gzhan gcig bum pa'i rdzas thams cad kyi rjes su zhugs par sgro 'dogs par byed pa skyed par 'gyur ro || de nyid kyi phyir kun rdzob tu yod pa dag la don gzhan la sgro biags nas de'i ngo bo rnam par rtog pa 'jug pa nyid kyi phyir ro zhes gsungs so || de ltar rab tu phyed bas brda'i rten can rnam par rtog pa'i shes pa gcig po'i sgra'i rtog pa nyid yin no ||*

³⁰ To repeat, strictly speaking, the “property” or “nature” (*svabhāva*) of the particular is not something ontologically distinct from the particular itself. Cf. Dunne (2004, 153–61).

³¹ This is the “universal-related causal capacity” (*sāmānyaśakti*). See Chapter 3, Section I.C: [Individual and Universal Capacities](#).

³² See Chapter 2, Section II.D.3: [The Infinitude of Causal Information](#).

cognition as having been the cognition of a discrete whole ‘jug’ is therefore, precisely, a *pseudo-perception*, which is to say, a cognition that has the spurious “appearance” (*ābhāsa*) of being a perception (*pratyakṣa*), because it occurs so quickly after the initial, indeterminate, genuinely-perceptual sensory cognition (*pratyakṣāsannavṛttivāt*, PV 3.290c). In fact, because it is conceptual, and conceptuality just is error, even a *veridical* determinate judgment is literally an “erroneous cognition” (*bhrāntijñānam*), despite being “not incorrect” (*avisamvādi*).

Consider, by way of contrast, the *incorrect* identification of a mirage as water. The confusion of a mirage for ‘water’ occurs because both mirages (that is, heated air-particles) and water share an extremely important causal property: the ability to refract light in such a way so as to produce the appearance of a wavy reflective surface. In other words, despite the fact that the mirage and the water are different in nearly every other respect, the fact that they are both alike insofar as they both possess the causal capacity to produce a wavy appearance means that it is possible to mentally *exclude* all of their other causal features, apart from this conceptual construction of “waviness.” The upshot here is that, when mistaking a mirage for water, the cognizer correctly recognizes a certain conceptual exclusion—“waviness”—as being a feature of his experience. But the cognizer then makes the incorrect determination that the object of his cognition is water, merely because it possesses the ability to produce a wavy reflection. The problem, of course, is that not everything which possesses the ability to produce a wavy reflection is water. Another example is the mistake, common to novice bakers, of using salt instead of sugar (or vice versa). On the basis of the exclusion of all properties other than being white granules—most importantly, excluding their taste—the one is misidentified as the other. The underlying cognitive mechanisms, however, are the same as in the case of the cognition of conventionally-existent ‘jugs’ and so on: causal properties are excluded, a convention is formed, and that

convention is erroneously projected onto experience. In this specific regard, all conceptual cognitions are “erroneous” (*bhrānti*), whether they are “correct” (*avisamvādi*) or “wrong” (*visamvādi*).

Thus, as Dreyfus (1996, 214) explains,

According to Dharmakīrti’s system, the judgments that categorize perceptions and allow us to act successfully are forms of memory in two different but related ways: they apprehend an object which has been apprehended by perception previously but which is already gone (due to the momentary nature of reality). These judgments also subsume an individual under an already conceived (and unreal) universal category. Dharmakīrti describes such recollective consciousnesses as relative cognitions (*samvṛtijñāna, kun rdzob shes pa*).

In this way, as will be examined in more detail below, the cognition of conventionally-existent entities should ultimately be understood in relation to recognition (*pratyabhijñā*). This is because every conceptual cognition necessarily involves the subliminal recollection (*smṛti*) of prior experience, and is therefore in some sense “re-cognitive.” Thus, for example, after learning the exclusions appropriate to the conventional designation ‘water,’ every subsequent cognition of ‘water’ relies upon the recollection of the prior experience of ‘water,’ and the recognition of the ostensible “sameness” between that prior experience of ‘water’ and the present experience of ‘water.’ This is true whether the cognition of something as being ‘water’ occurs in relation to actual ‘water’ (i.e., in a *samvṛtisajjñāna*) or in relation to a mirage (i.e., in a *bhrāntijñāna*). Similarly, inferring the presence of water (i.e., *anumānajñānam*), as for example from observing rainfall at a distance, also requires the activation of a concept of ‘water’ based on the prior experience of water.

C. Mental Perception

1. *Mental Cognition and Mental Perception*

To summarize the preceding discussion: the true objects of sensory experience are momentary particulars, blipping into and out of existence at every instant. However, in the cognition of an ordinary person (*prthagjana*), these particulars *appear*—falsely—to constitute gross objects which are continuous and stable across time. That is, ordinary cognition *seems to be* the sensory perception of unitary and perdurant wholes. In fact, however, this purported ‘whole’ is only a conceptual, mental construction, being applied at every moment onto the nonconceptual sensory experience of irreducible, momentary particulars. Therefore, the cognition of what appears to be a unitary persistent object is in fact a spurious or pseudo-perception: a conceptual cognition with the false appearance of being perceptual.

Naturally, this account raises a whole host of questions, centered around the problem of how conceptual and sensory-perceptual cognitions are supposed to be related. As we will see, a crucial part of the answer to this problem involves the simultaneous operation of at least six different cognitive modalities within the psychophysical continuum (*cittasantāna*), i.e., the five sensory consciousnesses (*indriyavijñānas*) plus the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*).³³ However, it must be noted that Dharmakīrti’s account of ordinary cognition—that is, the cognition of what ordinary beings ordinarily refer to as “objects,” under ordinary epistemic conditions—is highly schematic, and clearly not intended to serve as a thorough explanation.

³³ See below, Section II.D: [Object Persistence and Pseudo-Perception](#). It should be noted that, while Dharmakīrti does not make explicit reference to the *ālayavijñāna* (i.e., a seventh or eighth cognitive modality, depending upon the specific presentation) in his account of simultaneous cognitions, it would be extremely difficult to account for multiple simultaneous cognitions in the absence of the *ālaya*. See note [88](#), below.

As mentioned above, one of the great ironies of the “Perception Chapter” is that the mechanics of sensory perception are barely discussed within it. Instead, Dharmakīrti is much more concerned to argue that vanishingly few—perhaps even, in the final analysis, literally none—of our ordinary sensory cognitions should be understood as genuinely “perceptual” (*pratyakṣa*) in the technical sense (i.e., non-conceptual and non-erroneous). Thus, the following account may be understood as Dharmakīrti’s best possible explanation of how ordinary object-cognition works, within the framework of relative or conventional truth. However, all such ordinary cognitions must finally be understood as epistemically unreliable. Past a certain point on the sliding scale, that is to say, the idea that cognition bears upon any real “object” (*artha*) at all ceases to be intelligible.

In any case, the essence of Dharmakīrti’s explanation is that conceptual and nonconceptual cognition are related through the sixth, “mental consciousness” (*manovijñāna*), the type of cognition associated with the mental faculty (*manas*).³⁴ Just as the objects of sensory cognition are metaphorically “apprehended” by the sensory faculties,³⁵ the objects of mental cognition are “apprehended” by the mental faculty. The difference is that, unlike the sensory faculties, which take “sense-sphere particulars” (*āyatanasvalakṣana*)³⁶—at a first approximation, agglomerations of fundamental particles acting in concert—as their object-fields, the mental faculty takes mental particulars, in the form of *other cognitions*, as its object-field. But in order to understand this point, it is first necessary to examine Dharmakīrti’s account of “mental perception” (*mānasapratyakṣa*), a notoriously tricky topic that still has yet to be adequately treated in the scholarly literature.³⁷

³⁴ Cf. Funayama (1999, 76n15) concerning how “the exact meaning of *manas* (the mind) is a problem in the case of the Buddhist *pramāṇa* tradition,” given the varied ways in which Dīnāga and Dharmakīrti deploy this term.

³⁵ See Chapter 2, Section II.B: [Cognition Has No “Functioning” \(*vyāpāra*\)](#).

³⁶ See Chapter 3, Section I.B: [The Agglomerated Object of Sensory Cognition](#).

³⁷ Kobayashi (2010), Hayashi (2011), and Woo (2019) are valuable contributions, but primarily examine mental perception through the lens of Prajñākaragupta’s commentary. Bhatt and Mehrotra (2000, 44–46) provide an excellent,

To review, there are according to Dharmakīrti four types of perceptual cognition, where a “perceptual cognition” (i.e., a *pratyakṣa*) is defined as nonconceptual and non-erroneous, and as meeting the conditions of both engendering action toward (*pravartaka*), and facilitating the attainment of (*prāpaka*), some practical goal in the world. These four types of perceptual cognition are sensory perception, yogic perception, mental perception, and reflexive awareness. Sensory and yogic perception have already been treated in enough detail for the present discussion. Reflexive awareness will be examined at length in Chapters 4 and 5. As for mental perception, commentators have been arguing about this topic, especially concerning whether Dīnāga even intended for mental perception and reflexive awareness to be understood as distinct types of perception, ever since the PS began circulating.

The hermeneutical problem, unsurprisingly, lies in the opaqueness of Dīnāga’s text, which (just like PS 1.7cd-8ab) cannot be translated without begging the philological and philosophical questions at stake in its interpretation:

The nonconceptual reflexive awareness of [affective states] such as desire, and [the nonconceptual mental cognition] of an object, are also mental [as opposed to sensory perception]. || 6ab ||

Additionally, because they do not depend upon the senses, both a nonconceptual mental cognition which is engaged with³⁸ the cognitive image (*ākāra*) of an

brief overview of mental perception in Dharmakīrti’s system. Out of an abundance of hermeneutic caution, owing to the as yet not entirely clear relationship between mental perception (*mānasapratyakṣa*) and mental attention (*manaskāra*), I have refrained here from characterizing mental perception as they do, i.e., “the element of attention when an *indriya pratyakṣa* arises.” But this is certainly a plausible interpretation. It should also be noted that Bhatt and Mehrotra correctly explain that, “though the object of *mānasa pratyakṣa* in the Buddhist tradition is an internal one, nevertheless, it is caused jointly by the external object and its sense perception.” This explanation of mental perception must be contrasted to any that involve some kind of direct mental “extrasensory perception” (i.e., “ESP”) of the external object, such as that apparently articulated by Kobayashi (2010); see below, note 38.

³⁸ Kobayashi (2010, 235) reads *anubhavākārapravṛttam* here as “occurs in the form [*ākāra*] of direct experience.” While this is not an entirely implausible reading—*pra* + *√vrt* can indeed mean “occur,” and has been translated this way elsewhere in this study—such an interpretation introduces intractable philosophical problems into the relationship between mental perception (*mānasam pratyakṣam*) and the external object-field such as visible matter, which mental perception takes as its object-support (*rūpādviṣayālabhanam*). Specifically, Kobayashi (ibid., 236) claims that “when

experience, taking an object-field such as visible matter as its object-support, as well as reflexive awareness in regard to desire and so on, are mental [as opposed to sensory] perception.³⁹

On this reading, in other words, Diñnāga distinguishes between two types of perception here, both of which may be understood as “mental” insofar as they do not depend upon the senses.

By contrast, many contemporary commentators, most notably Franco (1993) and (2005), as well as Arnold (2012, 165–67), have effectively settled into the opinion that Diñnāga intended for reflexive awareness to be understood as only a special case of mental perception, or else that reflexive awareness is somehow indistinguishable from mental perception. To be clear, this is a defensible reading of the Sanskrit of the “root verse”—though, it should be noted, considerably less defensible when taking Diñnāga’s autocommentary into consideration. The root of the problem is that Diñnāga’s Sanskrit here is rather sloppy and ungrammatical.⁴⁰ Jinendrabuddhi tries to clean up the grammar with a convoluted gloss, breaking the compound “the nonconceptual internal awareness of both objects and [affective states] such as desire” (*artharāgādisvasaṃvittih*)

[Diñnāga] argues that there is a mental cognition which cognizes an external object, he probably means that there is a cognition which cognizes an external object independently of the external sense organs.” This is true, though not in the way that Kobayashi seems to mean; there is nothing in the PS(V) or elsewhere to suggest that by “mental perception” Diñnāga intends some kind of direct mental “extrasensory perception” (i.e., “ESP”) of external phenomena. On the contrary, Diñnāga’s point is just that mental perception “cognizes the external object” in the sense of taking the external object as its object-support (*ālambana*), but *not* in the sense of having it as its object-field (*viṣaya*), since only sensory cognition takes visible matter and so on as its object-field (*rūpādiviṣaya*). For more on the distinction between *viṣaya* and *ālambana*, see also Appendix B, note 29, and [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.14cd](#).

³⁹ Steinkellner (2005a, 3): **mānasam cārtharāgādisvasaṃvittir akalpikā** | *mānasam api rūpādiviṣayālanbanam avikalpakam anubhavākārapravṛttaṃ rāgādiṣu ca svasaṃvedanam indriyānapekṣatvān mānasam pratyakṣam*.

⁴⁰ The essence of the grammatical problem is that, according to both Diñnāga’s own explanation in the PSV and Dharmakīrti’s interpretation, the word *artha* within the compound *artharāgādisvasaṃvittih* should be understood as an object (such as “visible form,” *rūpādiviṣayālanbanam*) pertaining to a nonconceptual mental cognition (*mānasam... avikalpakam*), as opposed to the “desire and so on” (*rāgādiṣu*) pertaining to reflexive awareness. But there is no straightforward way to construe *artha* with *mānasam* in the root verse. As mentioned above, Jinendrabuddhi’s “solution” is to split this compound (*artharāgādisvasaṃvittih*) into *arthasaṃvitti* and *rāgādisvasaṃvitti*. The translation above reflects this gloss, insofar as it breaks the compound along these lines.

into, effectively, *arthasya ca rāgadisva* [sic] *ca saṃvittiḥ* (“the awareness of both [external] objects and of one’s own desire and so on.”)⁴¹

Despite Jinendrabuddhi’s tortuous grammatical analysis, however, I think he has the right idea here: Diñnāga does not and indeed *cannot* mean that the reflexive awareness of affective states such as desire is the exact same thing as the nonconceptual mental apprehension of a preceding sensory cognition (“engagement with the cognitive image of an experience”). In this passage, that is to say, Diñnāga is drawing attention to the fact that there also exists a “mental”—*as opposed to sensory*—type of perceptual cognition (*mānasam pratyakṣam*): in other words, cognitions which are nonconceptual and non-erroneous, but which do not rely upon the five physical senses (*indriyānapekṣa*). Therefore, the *category* of “mental perceptions,” in the sense of perceptions which do not rely upon the five physical senses, includes reflexive awareness *as a type of non-sensory perception*. However, only the nonconceptual mental apprehension of immediately-preceding cognitions is a “mental perception” (*mānasapratyakṣa*) in the technical sense.⁴²

More broadly, within the context of Diñnāga’s perspective in PS 1.2-12 taken as a whole, it is clear that mental perception and reflexive awareness cannot be the same thing. As will be discussed in greater detail below, reflexive awareness simultaneously presents both subjective and objective cognitive content (i.e., *grāhakākāra* and *grāhyākāra*). Reflexive awareness is, in other words, the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) “by means of which” a moment of cognition is able to “reflexively” know what is currently happening in that very moment of cognition. By contrast, a

⁴¹ See Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.6ab](#). Jinendrabuddhi’s *rāgadisva* is itself essentially ungrammatical.

⁴² Kobayashi (2010, 236–37) strikes upon the same point when he notes that “in short, the word *mānasa* at the beginning of the above passage from the PSV refers to a cognition which is distinguished from self-awareness because of the difference in their objects, whereas the same word at the end of the passage refers to a cognition under which self-awareness is subsumed.” This again highlights the difficulty of accounting for all the various senses of *manas* in the epistemological corpus of Diñnāga and Dharmakīrti.

mental perception is only a subsequent (t_2) effect produced by the causal interaction between a prior (t_1) cognition and the mental faculty (*manas*), in which sense the mental faculty “engages with” (*pra + √vṛt*) that prior cognition. Thus, reflexive awareness and mental perception are not equivalent, even for Dinnāga.

2. *The Instrumentality of Mental Perception*

The main issue at stake in this discussion concerns the “instrumentality” (*prāmāṇatā*) of mental perception, defined as a “nonconceptual mental cognition that is engaged with the image of [a prior] experience” (*mānasam... avikalpakam anubhavākārapravṛttam*). The qualifier “nonconceptual” is necessary because, unlike sensory cognition, which is nonconceptual by definition on Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti’s model, a mental cognition (*manovijñāna*) may be either conceptual or nonconceptual. That is to say, all conceptual cognitions are mental cognitions: a conceptualization (*vikalpa*) just is a mental cognition which has taken a prior cognition as its object, and “excluded” certain causal or phenomenal features from it. But what would it mean for there to be a nonconceptual and nonerroneous mental cognition?

Put slightly differently, the question here is what it means to say that a mental cognition is a “perception” in the technical sense (i.e., a *pratyakṣapramāṇa*). This is a major problem for the Buddhist *pramāṇa* tradition to address, because one of the defining features of instrumental cognitions, for all participants in the *pramāṇa* discourse, is that an instrumental cognition must “illuminate” or make known a previously-unknown object (*ajñātārthaparakāśa*).⁴³ The issue is that, since mental cognition exclusively takes another cognition as its object; and, when the object of

⁴³ Dunne (2004, 308–9).

the mental cognition is a preceding sensory cognition, that preceding sensory cognition has already cognized or “illuminated” the epistemic object (*prameya*), for example the particles comprising the ‘jug’ or whatever; then, in what sense could a mental cognition ever illuminate a previously-unknown object? At the outset of his remarks on mental perception (PV 3.239-248 *ad* PS 1.6a₁), Dharmakīrti thus has an interlocutor protest:

[Opponent:] “If it apprehends what has previously been experienced, mental [perception] lacks the quality of being an epistemic instrument (*apramāṇatā*). If [mental perception] apprehends what has not been seen, then even the blind would have vision of objects.” || 239 ||⁴⁴

Dharmakīrti’s initial response to this objection proceeds on the basis of the momentariness (*kṣāṇikatva*) of all phenomena. If all phenomena are indeed recognized as being momentary, then the “time lag”⁴⁵ between the (t_0) moment when the epistemic object exists as the cause of the sensory cognition, and the (t_1) moment when the sensory cognition exists as an effect, necessarily entails that the object as it existed when it caused the sensory cognition (i.e., the object as it existed at t_0) is not the object as it exists at t_1 , when the sensory cognition exists. Thus, the opponent is left without a rhetorical leg to stand on, since he cannot appeal to even that immediately-subsequent sensory cognition as an “illuminator” or “knower” of the present (t_1) object—by definition, the only thing it ever illuminates is the object as it has always already ceased being. The time-lag problem, in other words, necessitates a reconceptualization of what it means to have reliable knowledge about objects “in the present moment” in order to act upon them “later,” and it is

⁴⁴ Tosaki (1979, 340): *pūrvānubhūtagrahaṇe mānasasyāpramāṇatā | adṛṣṭagrahaṇe 'ndhāder api syād arthadarśanam* || 239 ||

⁴⁵ See the Introduction, Section II.C: [Sautrāntika Representationalism](#).

precisely in these terms that Dharmakīrti eventually articulates such a reconceptualization, at PV 3.245-248.

Dharmakīrti then briefly entertains an objection to the effect that phenomena are not momentary, but points out that this would create intractable problems for the stipulation that a *pramāṇa* illuminates a previously-unknown object.⁴⁶ Of course, all phenomena are indeed momentary, and so the intricacies of this counterfactual response need not concern us here. The key point is that, according to Dharmakīrti, a mental perception (*mānasapratyakṣa*) is just a mental cognition that arises as the immediately-subsequent effect of one or more immediately-preceding cognitions, as the direct result of a causal interaction between those sensory cognitions and the mental faculty. For this reason, the content of a mental perception is “restricted” (*niyata*) by the content of the sensory cognition which is its immediately-preceding cause (*samanantarapratyaya*). And so, if the immediately-preceding cognition lacks visual-cognitive information, due to blindness or some other impairment in the visual faculty, then that information cannot be a feature of the subsequent mental perception; therefore, the blind cannot see:

⁴⁶ See PV 3.240-242, translated in Appendix C, [PV 3.239-248 ad PS\(V\) 1.6a₁](#).

Therefore, a mental [perception], which arises from the sensory cognition that is its immediately preceding condition, strictly apprehends something else [other than the object of the sensory cognition].⁴⁷ Thus, there is no sight on the part of the blind. || 243 ||⁴⁸

The cause [of a mental perception] is a sensory cognition that is exclusively (*eva*) reliant upon an object which has continuity (*anvaya*) with its own object. Therefore, although [strictly speaking] something else [apart from the object-field of sensory cognition] is apprehended, that [mental perception] is considered to have a restriction in terms of what is apprehended. || 244 ||⁴⁹

Schematically, then: a strictly causal interaction between a sense-faculty and an object, both existing at t_0 , produces the sensory cognition of that object in the next moment (t_1). This sensory cognition—a mental particular—causally interacts with the momentary mental faculty that exists in the exact same moment that the sensory cognition exists (i.e., t_1). This causal interaction between the mental faculty and the sensory cognition, both existing at t_1 , then produces a mental cognition (*manovijñāna*) that exists in the next moment (t_2), in a manner that is precisely analogous to the production of the immediately-preceding sensory cognition.

Furthermore, because each sensory faculty is causally active at t_0 , producing each modality of sensory cognition simultaneously⁵⁰ at t_1 , it is just this perceptual mental cognition at t_2 which is able to “bind” together all the various simultaneous sensory cognitions, thereby accounting for the apparently multi-modal nature of the cognitive object.⁵¹ Thus, for example, both the visual and the

⁴⁷ In other words, the visual cognition apprehends (or fails to apprehend) a visual object, while the mental cognition apprehends a mental object. In the case under discussion, this “mental object” is the preceding visual cognition. Concerning the requirement that each *pramāṇa* have its own object, see also Chapter 5, Section III.C: [Difference in Object \(*visayabheda*\)](#).

⁴⁸ Tosaki (1979, 342): *tasmād indriyavijñānānantarapratyayodbhavam | mano 'nyam eva grhṇāti viṣayaṃ nāndhadṛk tataḥ* || 243 ||

⁴⁹ Tosaki (1979, 343): *svārthānvayārthāpekṣaiva hetur indriyajā matih | tato 'nyagrahaṇe 'py asya niyatagrāhyatā matā* || 244 ||

⁵⁰ See below, Section II.D: [Object Persistence and Pseudo-Perception](#).

⁵¹ A wrinkle in this explanation—which, to be clear, is not explicitly provided by Dharmakīrti—is that it would seem to necessitate that a mental cognition is able to simultaneously apprehend a manifold of sensory cognitions. Thus, it

tactile cognitions of a ‘jug’ that is simultaneously being seen and touched, are re-presented in a single “bound” mental cognition.⁵² This mental cognition is produced by the causal contact between these simultaneous sensory cognitions—which are, themselves, mental particulars—and the mental faculty.

Conceptualization, under ordinary circumstances,⁵³ only *then* (at t_3) operates with respect to the preceding (t_2) mental-perceptual cognition, “excluding” its various non-‘jug’-related features in order to reach the determinate perceptual judgment (*niścaya*), “that is a ‘jug.’” To repeat: determinate judgments, such as “that is a ‘jug,’” typically arise only once the original sensory cognition of the ‘jug’ has been apprehended by a nonconceptual mental perception. This subsequent determinate judgment, being conceptual, *is not* the mental perception.⁵⁴

would appear, in much the same way that sensory perception takes an agglomeration of particulars (the “sense-sphere particular, *āyatanasvalakṣaṇa*) as its object-support, so too does mental perception.

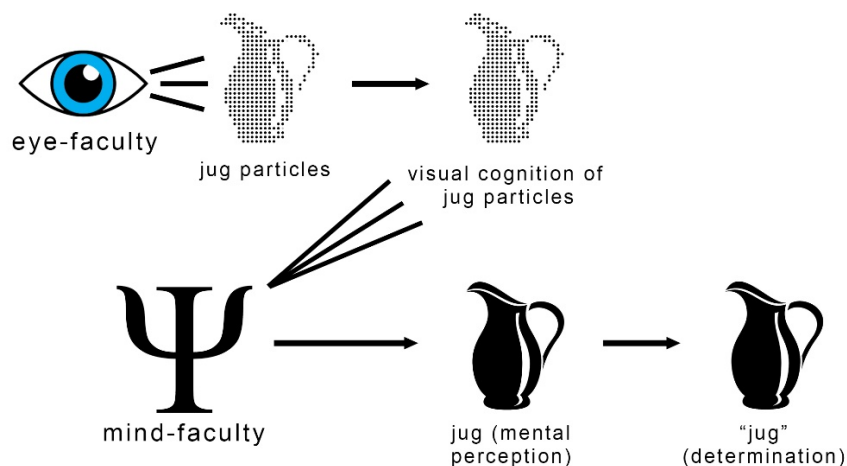
⁵² Although there is no space here for an examination of this point, it seems that the main issue at stake in PS 1.5 is the multi-modal (i.e., visual plus auditory plus tactile and so on) nature of mental cognitions, in particular the fact that a single momentary mental cognition presents various different types of causal properties of the object, relating to the different sensory modalities. See Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.5](#).

⁵³ An important exception to this general rule is the “determination immediately subsequent to perception” (*pratyakṣaprṣṭhalabdhaniścaya*); cf. Dunne (2004, 289–304). Indeed, it would appear that the difference between sensory cognitions which are capable of producing such an immediately-subsequent judgment, and sensory cognitions which are thus incapable, lies precisely in whether or not an intermediate “bridging” mental perception is required in order to reach a definitive determination. That is to say, these immediate judgments may represent direct conceptualizations of sensory experience itself, rather than conceptualizations of mental cognitions; for someone with the appropriate habituation and training, in other words, it is possible to reach a definitive determination at once, without first “loading” the contents of sensory cognition into the mental channel.

⁵⁴ This is, to be clear, a necessary feature of mental perception, given Dinnāga’s and Dharmakīrti’s stipulation that perception is nonconceptual, and their repeated assertion that mental perception is indeed nonconceptual (*akalpikā*). Furthermore, there is absolutely nothing in Dharmakīrti’s texts, nor in those of his earliest commentators, to suggest that he considered mental perception to be conceptual or determinate. According to Kobayashi (2010) and Woo (2019), on the other hand, Prajñākaragupta asserts that mental perception is determinate. Irrespective of its potential philosophical merits, however, and whether or not this is in fact accurate as an interpretation of Prajñākaragupta, such a position is untenable as an interpretation of Dharmakīrti.

Woo (ibid., 38), unfortunately, asserts that Dharmakīrti considers mental perception to be a “determinate cognition,” such that “mental perception is both perceptual and conceptual.” In addition to the other intractable problems with this perspective, however, Dharmakīrti’s theory of the “determination immediately subsequent to perception” (*pratyakṣaprṣṭhalabdhaniścaya*; see above, note 53) militates against such an interpretation. If mental perceptions are by definition both immediately subsequent to sensory cognition, and determinate, then what exactly would be the

Figure 1: Sensory Perception, Mental Perception, and Determinate Judgment



Hence, both sensory perception and mental perception are “perceptual” (*pratyakṣa*), just insofar as they are devoid of conceptuality and non-erroneous.⁵⁵ The t_1 sensory cognition is “perceptual,” because it is the immediately subsequent effect of the causal interaction between the sense-object and the sense-faculty. And the t_2 mental cognition is also “perceptual,” because it is the immediately subsequent effect of the causal interaction between the sensory cognition and the mental faculty. In this way, mental perception knows or “illuminates” a preceding cognition, rather than an external object. Thus, in terms of the problem of “illuminating a previously-unknown object,” the object illuminated by sensory perception (i.e., an agglomeration of particulars) is different from the object illuminated by mental perception (i.e., the previous moment’s sensory cognition). Therefore, both sensory and mental perception illuminate previously-unknown objects.

difference between mental perception in general, and immediately subsequent determinations in particular? Indeed, how would Dharmakīrti’s account of mental perception differ at all from Nyāya-style determinate perception?

⁵⁵ Of course, sensory and mental perception can only be considered non-erroneous from a provisional standpoint. At a higher level of analysis, they are inherently erroneous, insofar as they are always already distorted by the “internal impairment” (*antarupaplava*).

3. *Mental Perception, Mental Pseudo-Perception, and Determination*

To bring this discussion back to conceptual pseudo-perception: the reason why mental perception is so critically important is that it provides the “bridge” between a sensory cognition as raw epistemic input, and a determinate judgment as refined epistemic output. Much of the intellectual-historical impetus behind the Buddhist *pramāṇa* tradition following Dīnāga was the felt need to refute the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika position that perception is itself determinate or conceptual.⁵⁶ Accordingly, to whatever extent it represents an accurate interpretation of Dīnāga’s theory of mental perception, Dharmakīrti’s theory of mental perception is also intended to explain why a determinate judgment such as “that is a ‘jug’” is, precisely, a *pseudo*-perception: that is, a cognition which *seems like* a genuinely perceptual event, but is in fact only a spurious imitation. Dharmakīrti’s point is that, in order for one to reach such a determinate judgment, one must first recollect a convention formed through prior habituation, which is then recognized as being similar to the causal features of the sensory image, and then applied to this image—all of which happens *after* the object has already been cognized, first by sensory perception, and (usually)⁵⁷ then by mental perception. The process simply happens so fast, in just one or two moments, that the subsequent conceptual determination is conflated with the initial sensory perception.⁵⁸

But all of this necessitates—and not for the last time!—a redefinition of the basic terms of *pramāṇa* discourse. Dharmakīrti argues that, for these reasons, perceptual “instrumentality” should be conceived, not in terms of knowing the object itself as it exists at the same instant as the

⁵⁶ See Matilal (2005, 1–26).

⁵⁷ Again, an important exception is a specific kind of determination that occurs immediately subsequent to sensory perception, which for that reason should probably be understood as a kind of conceptualization that operates directly upon sensory cognition, rather than upon mental cognition. See above, note [53](#).

⁵⁸ See for example Jinendrabuddhi’s remarks on this point in Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.5](#).

cognition (which is in any case impossible, on account of the “time lag” problem), but rather in terms of the causal history and causal features of cognition. In other words, the point here is that what it means for an object to be “apprehended” is, in fact, only for the object to directly causally produce a cognition which has the form or nature of that object (*arthasārūpya*).

Unlike the conceptual cognition or determination, that is to say, the mental perception of the object possesses a still un-conceptualized form of that object, on account of the purely causal line running from the external object itself, through the sensory cognition, to the mental-perceptual cognition. Hence, what it means for a sensory or mental cognition to be perceptually “instrumental” is for that cognition to be nonconceptual and nonerroneous, and possess the form of the object, thereby both prompting (*pra + √vrt*) and facilitating the attainment (*pra + √āp*) of some practical goal:

Opponent: “How can the object, which does not exist at the same time as the instrumental activity (*kriyā*), [but] does exist at the time [that it] itself is cognized, be an auxiliary cause (*sahakārī*) of sensory cognition?” || 245 ||

Because that which does not exist prior [to the effect] has no causal power [to produce that effect], and⁵⁹ because that which exists after [the effect has arisen] is useless, all causes exist prior [to their effects]. Thus, there is no object which exists together with its own cognition. || 246 ||

Opponent: “How can that which is apprehended exist at a time that is different [from its apprehension]?”

Those who understand reason (*yuktijñā*) know that ‘being that which is apprehended’ (*grāhyatā*) is just being a cause which is capable of projecting its form into a cognition. || 247 ||

For although an effect may have many causes, that [cause] in conformity with which [the cognition] has arisen, and into which the [object] has projected its form, is said to be ‘apprehended’ by the [cognition]. || 248 ||⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Reading *cānupayogataḥ* (PV_T *dang*) over **vānupayogataḥ*. See Tosaki (1979, 344n19).

⁶⁰ Tosaki (1979, 344–47): *tadatulyakriyākālaḥ kathaṃ svajñānakālikaḥ | sahakārī bhaved artha iti*

This is a crucially important point, to which we will repeatedly return: there is nothing that it means for something to be “apprehended” by cognition, or to be the “object” of cognition, over and above that thing being the primary cause for why cognition appears in the way that does, or “projecting” (\sqrt{r}) its “form” (*rūpa*) into cognition.

That said, one interesting wrinkle here concerns the instrumentality of the initial sensory cognition. It is clear that this cognition allows for the obtainment (*prāpaka*) of the object. But does it engender action (*pravārtaka*) toward the object? As Dreyfus (1996, 223) notes, following Sakya Paṇḍita, initial sensory perception seems in some ways to be like a fool who sees objects but cannot characterize them, while subsequent conceptual cognition is like a blind but clever person who follows behind, explaining what the fool is seeing. Thus, sensory cognition does engender action toward the object, but only (for ordinary beings) mediatedly, through contributing to the production of the subsequent conceptual determination, despite the fact that the latter is by definition not perceptual.⁶¹

D. Object Persistence and Pseudo-Perception

1. Conceptual Pseudo-Perception, Memory, and Recognition

There is another extremely important way in which Dharmakīrti argues to the effect that ordinary everyday cognitions, typically taken to be genuinely perceptual, are in fact only pseudo-perceptual. This concerns what is referred to in the cognitive-scientific literature as “object persistence.”⁶² For

cedakṣacetasaḥ || 245 || *asataḥ prāg asāmarthyāt paścād cānupayogataḥ* | *prāgbhāvaḥ sarvahetūnām nāto 'rthaḥ svadhiyā saha* || 246 || *bhinakālaṃ kathaṃ grāhyam iti ced grāhyatāṃ viduḥ* | *hetutvam eva yuktijñā jñānākārāraṇakṣamaṃ* || 247 || *kāryaṃ hy anekahetutve 'py anukurvad udeti yat* | *tat tenārpitadrūpaṃ grhītam iti cocyate* || 248 ||

⁶¹ Cf. Dunne (2004, 262–68).

⁶² Cf. Scholl (2007).

Dharmakīrti, as indeed for contemporary scientific discourse, reality is understood to be momentary. As Garfield (2018a, 121) aptly notes, “Given Leibniz’ Law, nothing retains numerical identity over time. Nonetheless, we instinctively regard ourselves and the things and people around as enduring substances with diachronic identities.” In other words, at a subatomic level (and often at the macroscopic level as well), the epistemic object is changing moment by moment. How, then, do we account for its apparent stability through time? Dharmakīrti’s answer is that this apparent stability is only a conceptual pseudo-perception. That is to say: insofar as each discrete moment of an object’s continuum is being conceptually pseudo-perceived as “the same,” when in reality there is no “sameness” (i.e., no *sāmānya*), the object’s apparent stability or persistence through time can only be due to the operation of some kind of memory—something very much like “working memory”⁶³—which joins together or concatenates all these discrete momentary cognitions.

While there is unfortunately no space in this study for a detailed examination of Dharmakīrti’s theory of memory, a brief discussion will shed a great deal of light on Dharmakīrti’s model of ordinary, everyday cognition, and why he considers it to be pseudo-perceptual. A key point in this regard is that the process of temporal concatenation is entirely mnemonic and conceptual, and therefore (with one very important quasi-exception, which we will return to shortly) does *not* involve nonconceptual sensory error:

Except for [cases such as the firebrand that involve] sensory error (*indriyavibhrama*), the concatenation (*ghaṭana*) of multiple entities, which is erroneous (*vibhrānta*) due to not noticing the difference [among them], is a mnemonic conceptual [cognition]. || 497 ||⁶⁴

⁶³ Cf. Miyake and Shah (1999) and Osaka, Logie, and D’Esposito (2007).

⁶⁴ Tosaki (1985, 181): *ghaṭanam yac ca bhāvānām anyatrendriyavibhramāt | bhedālakṣaṇavibhrāntaṃ smaraṇam tad vikalpakam || 497 ||*

Devendrabuddhi comments:

Except for sensory error: sensory error does not involve concatenation; nevertheless, there is an appearance [of different objects] as being simultaneously concatenated, such as the phenomenal form of a circle [in the illusion of a firebrand]. But this is *not* an error which concatenates different objects that are not noticed [as being different]. So, [when there is the cognition] “This just is this”—when the visual cognition is [in fact] of various different things which are discontinuous (*chod pa ~ *vichinna*)—the concatenated [cognition], which is a kind of mnemonic [cognition], with the nature of recognition (*ngo shes pa = *pratyabhijñā*), does not rely upon a sensory [cognition] in which a single thing is appearing. **Multiple things are concatenated:** various different objects arise without mutual concatenation; with respect to these, [a cognition] that joins them together, “This just is this,” without noticing the difference [between them], is erroneous. Although earlier and later objects are different, there is error because [this difference] is not noticed. This is a mnemonic, conceptual [cognition]. It is not a sensory cognition.⁶⁵

In other words, apart from specific cases of sensory error—such as the extremely important example of the firebrand (*alātacakra*), to which we will return below—the illusion of object-persistence is due to the operation of memory, which concatenates the disparate moments of the object’s continuum into an apparent (but illusory) sameness.

Although Dharmakīrti never fully spells out how this kind of subliminally mnemonic cognition differs from deliberate recollection (*smṛti*), the specifically mnemonic nature of this type of conceptual pseudo-perception is abundantly clear from his explanation of how sequences of phonemes (i.e., “words”) are cognized. This is an important example that recurs multiple times in the PV, and constitutes the overarching context for the passage under discussion (i.e., PV 3.484-

⁶⁵ PVP (627.13-628.3): *dbang po'i 'khrul pa las gzhan du | dbang po'i 'khrul pa ni bsre bar byed pa ma yin na yang 'khor lo la sogs pa'i rnam par cig car bsre bar snang ba yin gyi | de'i khyad par mtshon pa med par don bsre bar 'khrul pa ma yin no | ji ltar de nyid 'di yin no | zhes chod pa gzhan dang gzhan mthong ba yod na bsre ba ngo shes pa'i ngo bo dren pa bzhin du don gcig tu snang ba'i dbang po la brten pa ni ma yin no || dngos po rnam ni bsre byed pa | dngos po gzhan dang gzhan skyes pa phan tshun mtshams sbyor ba can ma yin pa dag la de nyid 'di yin no zhes sbyor ba gang yin pa de ni | tha dad mtshon med 'khrul pa can | don snga phyi tha dad pa dag yin na yang nye bar mtshon pa med pa'i rgyus 'khrul pa | dran pa gang de rnam rtog yin || dbang po'i shes pa ni ma yin no ||*

510 *ad* PS 1.12b₂), from which the preceding verse was drawn.⁶⁶ The point of this example is that, because sound is momentary, in reality, each component phoneme of a word no longer exists at the moment that the next phoneme in the sequence exists. The cognition of a word is therefore the conceptual concatenation of a sequence of temporally-distinct auditory cognitions.⁶⁷ This conceptual cognition is re-cognitive (i.e., a species of recognition or *pratyabhijñā*), because it involves the recollection or recognition of conceptually-excluded elements from multiple prior cognitions, holding them all together in “working memory.” And, in exactly the same way, the cognition of an object that appears to be “the same,” moment by moment, is a conceptual concatenation of the sequence of prior cognitions of that object.

Put slightly differently, the point here is that Dharmakīrti does not rigidly distinguish among language, conceptuality, and memory. The temporal extension of a ‘jug,’ and the linguistic extension of a word (*śabda*)—that is, the ability of a single word or name to refer to multiple entities, as in “This is a ‘jug,’ like that other ‘jug’”—both involve the same basic cognitive processes. In the case of using the word ‘jug’ or forming the determinate judgment “That is a ‘jug,’” a convention (i.e., an exclusion based on prior experience) is first recollected, and then projected onto a sensory image that is caused by many particulars working in concert. During an episode of object-persistence, the conceptual ‘jug’ is “recollected” by being held in working memory, and then projected onto the next moment of the sensory cognition caused by the multiple particulars that are conceptualized as the ‘jug.’ It may be strange or counterintuitive to consider

⁶⁶ Most broadly, this passage constitutes the argument for reflexive awareness on the basis of memory, which is part of Dinnaga’s infinite regress argument; see Kellner (2011, 416). But Dharmakīrti begins his discussion of this issue, in PV 3.484, by noting that if cognition were not reflexively-aware, then a lengthy (*dīrgha*) sonic sequence of many “measures” (*bahūmātra*) of notes or phonemes could not be cognized as a single word or musical phrase.

⁶⁷ Cf. PV 3.495.

object persistence to be in some sense “linguistic,” but Dharmakīrti’s point here does indeed seem to be that the same mental processes which allow for language use are at work in cognitions which might on the surface seem to have nothing to do with language. At the end of the day, it is all the same “haze” of conceptuality.

Crucially, however, this process does not happen due to deliberate ratiocination. The conceptualization and projection happen subliminally and extremely quickly, without any purposeful intention on the part of cognizer—indeed, without the cognizer necessarily even noticing or desiring what is happening. Furthermore, this process happens at nearly every moment, and has been happening since beginningless time. That is to say, for ordinary beings, (almost) every cognition involves this kind of conceptual pseudo-perception, this kind of cognitive error:

The appearance of a property (*rūpa*) as that [universal] or the apprehension of an object (*artha*) in that way [i.e., as a universal] is a cognitive error (*bhrānti*), which is created by the mental conditioning that comes from seeing [things that way] since beginningless time. || 29 ||⁶⁸

When Dharmakīrti states that “ignorance just is conceptuality,” this is precisely what he means. The “haze” of conceptuality, the rarely-interrupted continuum of conceptual mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), is nothing other than beginningless ignorance (*avidyā*).⁶⁹ And it is just this ignorance, just this omnipresent conceptuality, that obscures the vividness—which is to say, the lack of conceptuality, memory, or language—of sensory cognition.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Tosaki (1979, 94): *tasyāṃ rūpāvabhāso yas tattvenārthasya vā grahaḥ | bhrāntiḥ sā 'nādikālinadarśanābhyāsanirmitā || 29 ||*

⁶⁹ That said, the identification of *conceptuality* as ignorance leaves open the question as to the relationship between phenomenological *duality* (the “internal error”) and ignorance; both ultimately are sourced to beginningless karmic imprints (*vāsanā*).

⁷⁰ Although Dharmakīrti does not explicitly make this argument, and the terminology is something of an anachronism, it is nevertheless tantalizing to consider this point in relation to the *amanasikāra* (“non-mental-engagement” or “non-attention”) approach to Mahāmudrā meditation advanced by Maitripāda (ca. 1025). In the Abhidharma context,

2. Simultaneous Cognition and Re-cognition (pratyabhijñā)

An under-appreciated key to Dharmakīrti's account of ordinary cognition—which, again, is schematic, provisional, and eventually superseded by more refined analysis—is that, as an epistemological or cognitive theory, it is built upon the simultaneous occurrence of conceptual mental and nonconceptual sensory cognitions.⁷¹ In order to account for the object's apparent stability through time, that is, Dharmakīrti maintains that the conceptual mental cognition at t_2 , which is produced from the nonconceptual sensory cognition at t_1 , coexists with the nonconceptual sensory cognition at t_2 , that produces the conceptual mental cognition at t_3 , and so on. This intertwined sequence of simultaneous conceptual and nonconceptual cognitions is what gives rise to the illusion of continuity.

Schematically, the first moment of the object's continuum produces the first moment of sensory cognition, at the second moment of the object's continuum. The first moment of sensory cognition then produces the first moment of mental cognition (whether or not this mental cognition is a “mental perception” in the technical sense), which categorizes or determines the object as for

manasikāra refers to one of the five universal mental factors (*sarvatraga*), a form of mnemonic attention that accounts for object-persistence; the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (1950, 6.2) defines *manasikāra* as “that which functions to hold the mental object” (*manaskāraḥ katamaḥ | ālambanacitta dhāraṇakarmakaḥ*). As discussed below, object-persistence is something of a double-edged sword, necessary for ordinary practical action in the world, yet on Dharmakīrti's account inherently distorted and ultimately problematic, for all the reasons outlined above. That *manasikāra*—in effect, the subtle continuity of conceptuality—should have to be suspended during meditative equipoise (*samāhita*) therefore makes a great deal of intuitive sense. But Dharmakīrti only ever hints in this direction.

⁷¹ Hayashi (2011, 149) notes that both Prajñākaragupta and Sa skya Paṇḍita insist on the simultaneity of sensory and mental cognition, though the latter erroneously attributes the view that they are strictly sequential to the former, likely on the basis of Jayanta's subcommentary. Hayashi concludes that, “judging from the broader context of Prajñākaragupta's epistemology, [Jayanta's] is not an appropriate interpretation.” Relatedly, a critical question for future studies of the PV and its commentaries, particularly in relation to the controversy between the “False Imagist” (*alīkākaravāda*) and “True Imagist” (*satyākāravāda*) exegetical traditions, is the extent to which Prajñākaragupta may have been more broadly misunderstood by his subcommentators. For example, in the “Treatise Establishing the Truth of Images” (*sākārasiddhiśāstra*), Jñānaśrīmitra (1987, 367.22) attributes his own perspective on the inadequacies of “pure luminosity” (*prakāśamātra*) to the “author of the [*Pramāṇavārttika*]bhāṣya” (*bhāṣyākāra*), i.e., Prajñākaragupta. My preliminary studies of Prajñākaragupta's PVA, however, suggest that he may have held a more nuanced perspective on this issue than did his commentators, particularly Jñānaśrīmitra.

example a ‘jug,’ at (schematically) the third moment⁷² of the object’s continuum, simultaneously with the second moment of sensory cognition.⁷³

In this way, the continuous and ongoing cognition of the ‘jug’ as a stable and persistent entity is a kind of coordinated illusion between the five sensory consciousnesses and the mental consciousness. Thus, at every subsequent moment, the preceding moment’s (t_{n-1}) sensory and mental cognitions feed into the present (t_n) moment’s conceptual mental cognition (i.e., pseudo-perception) of the ‘jug.’ The ‘jug’ thus appears to be stable across time, because the mental faculty concatenates the sequential cognitions of the moments of the ‘jug,’ in precisely the same manner that the mental faculty concatenates the sequential cognitions of the phonemes of a word. Because the concatenation is mnemonic and conceptual, it cannot be perceptual, no matter how much it might appear so; again, it is precisely a conceptual *pseudo*-perception.

The apparent persistence of the ‘jug’ through time thus constitutes a type of “recognition” (*pratyabhijñā*). Recall PV 3.497 from above: “Except for [cases like the firebrand-circle that involve] sensory error, the concatenation of multiple entities, which is erroneous due to not noticing the difference [between them], is a mnemonic conceptual [cognition].” The passage continues:

How could that which is associated with language (*jalpa*) possess a vivid appearance? There is no association with words on the part of that which is apprehended by the senses; this has already been investigated.⁷⁴ || 498 ||

⁷² Strictly speaking, it would only be the third moment in the case of an immediately-subsequent judgment, when there is a “jump” directly from the sensory cognition to the conceptual determination. If there is no such immediately-subsequent judgment, the sensory cognition would be loaded into the mental channel at the third moment, and then the conceptual determination would happen at the fourth moment (or later).

⁷³ Woo (2019) articulates a similar perspective; however, his position that mental perception is conceptual and determinate (see above, note 54) leads him to postulate that the concatenated conceptual continuity is in fact perceptual—i.e., a sequence of *mānasapratyakṣas*—rather than pseudo-perceptual. Again, as an interpretation of Dharmakīrti, this position is untenable.

⁷⁴ Cf. PV 3.141-190 *ad* PS 1.3d.

If the conceptualization of a visual cognition concatenates [a sequence that is] interrupted by [cognitions of the other] senses: then, in the absence of a proper reason which negates both the object and the cognition of the [object], the two of which are continually appearing, on what account is there “interruption”?

Opponent: “Because cognitions are restricted by their causal capacity.”

Why is this considered [to establish the interruption]? || 499-500 ||⁷⁵

The question here is how to account for the apparent continuity of the phenomenal object, when one sensory modality (such as visual cognition) is interrupted by another sensory modality (such as auditory cognition), when for example attention switches from one modality to another. The argument is relatively simple. If multiple cognitions *cannot* exist simultaneously, then conceptual cognitions must intrude upon or “interrupt” (*vi + √chid*) the continuity of nonconceptual cognitions, such that the conceptual determination of the sensory object could only occur due to some type of interrupting alternation between conceptual and nonconceptual cognitions. Furthermore, in such a case, nonconceptual sensory cognitions of different modalities (such as hearing vs. seeing the object) would also have to “interrupt” each other.

Against this view, Dharmakīrti argues that the apparent persistence of the object is the result of a strictly mnemonic, conceptual concatenation, and that this concatenation occurs at the same time as the sequential sensory cognitions. Therefore, even when the sensory-cognitive modality changes, the conceptual continuity can remain. There is no “interruption,” in other words,

⁷⁵ Tosaki (1985, 181–84): *tasya spaṣṭāvabhāsitvaṃ jalpasamsargiṇaḥ kutaḥ | nākṣagrāhye 'sti śabdānāṃ yojaneti vivecitam || 498 || vicchinnaṃ paśyato 'py akṣair ghaṭayed yadi kalpanā | arthasya tatsaṃviteś ca satataṃ bhāsamānayoḥ || 499 || bādḥake 'sati sanniyāye vicchinna iti tat kutaḥ | buddhīnāṃ śaktinīyamād iti cet sa kuto mataḥ || 500 ||*

because the continuity of subliminal mnemonic conceptual concatenation remains, even when the attention shifts from one sensory modality to another.⁷⁶

But the opponent claims that Dharmakīrti’s argument is illegitimate, because there cannot be multiple simultaneous cognitions:

Opponent: “Because simultaneous cognition is not observed.”

Dharmakīrti responds:

This is exactly what needs to be examined. There can [still] be a restriction of causal capacity, in terms of these [cognitions] being of the same type. || 501 ||⁷⁷

According to Devendrabuddhi, what Dharmakīrti means here by cognitions of the “same type” (*samānajatīya*) is that there are two main categories of cognition, conceptual and nonconceptual (i.e., sensory). The opponent, who appears to be a Buddhist, cites an unidentified Sūtra, to the effect that “there is no possibility for two cognitions to arise at the same time.”⁷⁸ However, Devendrabuddhi explains that this is only meant to apply to cognitions of the same type: in particular, there cannot be two simultaneous conceptual cognitions, because conceptual cognitions must always occur in sequence.⁷⁹ In fact, as we shall see, Dharmakīrti ultimately asserts that all of the six different cognitive modalities may operate simultaneously; what is prohibited would be

⁷⁶ This is, naturally, closely related to the issue of “inattentional blindness.” See below, Section II.E.2: [The Example of the Firebrand](#).

⁷⁷ Tosaki (1985, 184–85): *yugapadbuddhyadrṣṭeś cet tad evedaṃ vicāryate | tāsāṃ samānajatīye sāmārthyanīyamo bhavet || 501 ||*

⁷⁸ PVP (630.7-9): *lung ni 'di yin te 'di ltar sems gnyis lhan cig 'byung ba gang yin pa 'di ni gnas ma yin te go skabs med do zhes 'byung ba yin no zhe na |*

⁷⁹ PVP (630.12-15): *bcom ldan 'das kyis 'di skad du rigs mthun pa 'i blo gnyis cig car 'byung ba bzlog par mdzad pa yin no zhes bya ba 'i tha tshig go | de yang rigs pa yin te | 'di ltar rnam par rtog pa rnams rim gyis 'byung ba yang dag rtogs pa nyid yin no ||*

See also PV 3.178 and PVP *ad cit*.

two simultaneous cognitions of the same given modality (such as two simultaneous visual cognitions).⁸⁰ But the basic point here is that conceptual cognitions are the direct cause of conceptual cognitions, and nonconceptual cognitions are the direct cause of nonconceptual cognitions.

3. *Recognition as Pseudo-Perception*

Interestingly, Dharmakīrti does not draw any hard and fast line between the apparent continuity or persistence of a ‘jug,’ and more typical examples of recognition, such as the identification of regrown hair as being “the same” as hair which was previously cut. Again, this aspect of his system is somewhat under-theorized, most likely because working out a detailed account of ordinary cognition was not his primary concern, as evidenced by the use of subjunctive and conditional forms when pushed by the interlocutor to provide more elaborate explanations: “*let* cognitions be simultaneous”;⁸¹ “There *can be* a restriction in terms of causal capacity,”⁸² such that conceptual cognitions only arise from conceptual cognitions, and nonconceptual cognitions only arise from nonconceptual cognitions; and so on. Dharmakīrti is, in other words, largely content to simply point out that, with the exception of certain types of nonconceptual error (such as the firebrand-circle), what appears to be the cognition of perdurant entities is in fact merely a conceptual pseudo-perception, while providing only schematic and provisional clarification as to the precise causal mechanics of this process.

⁸⁰ See Section III.A.1: [Two Tracks](#).

⁸¹ PV 3.137d: *santu sakṛddhiyaḥ*.

⁸² PV 3.501cd: *tāsām samānajātīye sāmārthyaniyamo bhavet || 501 ||*

Hence, for Dharmakīrti’s purposes, it is sufficient to simply note that recognition, which is specifically excluded from being a *pramāṇa*,⁸³ possesses the exact same mnemonic structure as conceptual pseudo-perception. He thus concludes the account of recognition in this passage by describing it in *precisely the same terms* as conceptual pseudo-perception: that is, as a cognition which is qualified by the recollection of previous experience, and by the imputation of another object:

There is no [recognition] cognition, “This is just that,” in the absence of the recollection of prior experience (*pūrvānubhūtasmarāṇa*) and the imputation of some quality (*taddharmāropana*). And how could this exist in [a cognition] that is generated by the senses (*akṣaja*)? || 505 ||⁸⁴

To return to the main point of this discussion, then, according to Dharmakīrti, what makes a conceptual cognition a pseudo-perception is not that it is entirely wrong—correct determinate judgments are, again, very useful—but rather that it is *misconstrued as being perceptual*.

Memory is, in other words, a double-edged sword. Memory is an absolutely essential component of perceptual judgments, which are ordinarily needed for practical action in the world. At the same time, however, memory necessarily introduces error or distortion into the cognitive process, since memory is inherently conceptual and “ignorance just is conceptuality.”⁸⁵ Again: every determinate judgment is necessarily erroneous, just insofar as it is conceptual. Put slightly differently, the point here is that memory and conceptuality are in a sense two sides of the same coin. *Remembered sights and sounds* (etc.) *are concepts*; they are precisely “exclusions,” in the

⁸³ Cf. PS 1.2d₂-3a: **na ca || 2 || punaḥ punar abhijñāne [pramāṇam].**

⁸⁴ Tosaki (1985, 188): *pūrvānubhūtasmarāṇāt taddharmāropanād vinā | sa evāyam iti jñānaṃ nāsti tac cākṣaje kutaḥ || 505 ||*

⁸⁵ PVSV ad PV 1.98-99ab: *vikalpa eva hy avidyā*. See the Introduction, Section III.D: [Conceptuality \(*kalpanā*\) and Universals \(*sāmānya*\)](#).

sense that all the causal features of the nonconceptual sensory cognition, other than those which have been remembered, are excluded.

An important corollary to the preceding analysis is that, on Dharmakīrti's account, conceptuality and memory are not exclusively linguistic or mental, but rather also involve the construction of multi-modal cognitions, with input from various sensory modalities. The pseudo-perceptual illusion of continuity is a concatenation of precisely these types of multi-modal, mnemonic, conceptual mental cognitions. Memory thus provides the metaphorical "glue" which accounts for the preservation of sequence in a series of momentary sensory cognitions that are extended across a period of time, such as the individual auditory cognitions of multiple phonemes that are finally concatenated into the single linguistic cognition of a whole word. And memory also furnishes the recollected convention that is necessary for recognition and judgment.

Crucially, however, none of this is to say that there is necessarily anything "wrong" with the sensory content of a recognition or any other pseudo-perceptual cognition. Consider, for example, the mistaken identification of a mirage as 'water.' It is not necessarily the case that there is anything wrong with the sensory information provided by the immediately-preceding nonconceptual visual cognition. On the contrary, the misidentification only happens because the sensory cognition accurately reproduces the causal capacity of heated air-particles to induce the perceptual judgment of "waviness." In other words, the error lies in the way that the cognizer conceptually *interprets* the preceding cognition. A trained eye can readily distinguish between genuine water and a mirage. Similarly, a trained yogin can see the objects of sensory cognition as individual particles, rather than as distributed unitary wholes.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Cf. Taber (2005, 179n23).

This stands in marked contrast with nonconceptual pseudo-perceptions, for which the sensory content itself has been incorrectly generated. But before moving on to a discussion of Dharmakīrti’s theory of nonconceptual pseudo-perception, it will be helpful to linger just a bit longer on the topic of simultaneous cognition and mnemonic concatenation, since these issues, in the context of a critically important cognitive error—the illusion of the firebrand-circle (*alātacakra*)—serve to vividly illustrate the difference between conceptual and nonconceptual pseudo-perception.

E. The Firebrand-Circle

1. *Simultaneous or Sequential?*

One of the finer points of disagreement between the Yogācāra and other traditions (both Buddhist and non-Buddhist) concerned whether multiple cognitions can exist simultaneously.⁸⁷ For the most part, as discussed in the Introduction to this study, Dharmakīrti argues from an External Realist

⁸⁷ As mentioned in the Introduction, Section II.C ([Sautrāntika Representationalism](#)), much work remains in order to establish the epistemological positions of the historical Sautrāntika tradition with certainty; the following suggestions are therefore still somewhat provisional and speculative. But, without yet being able to establish this point with certainty, it seems as though Dharmakīrti’s “External Realist” perspective differs from the historical Sautrāntika position in three crucial regards. First, as outlined here, it appears that the Sautrāntikas maintain cognition (like causality as such) to be strictly sequential, and thus do not accept that multiple sensory cognitions (i.e., multiple *cittas*) could exist simultaneously. Thus, as Dhammajoti (2007, 114) notes, the *Mahāvibhāṣāśāstra* records that the Dārṣṭāntika master Dharmatrāta (ca. 150) “says that the *citta-caitta-dharmas* arise one by one. It is like [people] passing through a narrow path; not even two can [pass through] together, how much less still, a number of them.” In other words (ibid., 115), “no two *cittas* can arise simultaneously.” In fact, it appears that the early Dārṣṭāntikas, and in all likelihood their Sautrāntika successors, share this position with the Vaibhāṣikas: Dhammajoti (ibid., 127) notes that “in both [Dharmatrāta’s] and [the Vaibhāṣika master] Śrīlāta’s doctrines, there is one continuous mental flow.”

The second key point on which Dharmakīrti, and the Yogācāra tradition more generally, appear to have diverged from Sautrāntika epistemology concerns the notion of the “apprehending aspect” (*grāhakākāra*) of cognition. Again, without yet being able to conclude as much with absolute certainty, it seems as though the Sautrāntikas do not account for this subjective aspect of cognition; thus, as Dhammajoti (2007, 171) explains, the image (*ākāra*) of the object “corresponds exactly to the object,” without any room for the subjective variations in the quality of experience which are the hallmark of the subjective aspect. For a discussion of these subjective variations, and their relation to the “double-formedness” (*dvirūpatā*) of cognition in terms of subject and object, see Chapter 5, Section II.D: [Subjective Variation in the Quality of Experience](#). The third and final potentially major point of divergence between Dharmakīrti and the earlier Sautrāntika tradition concerns the manner of operation of reflexive awareness; see Chapter 5, note [178](#).

perspective that is largely coextensive with a generic Sautrāntika position. Occasionally, however, Dharmakīrti appeals to exclusively Yogācāra concepts,⁸⁸ even when the underlying ontology remains “External Realist” to the extent that the reality of extramental objects is not necessarily being called into question. Thus, in his concluding arguments⁸⁹ regarding PS 1.3c (*pratyakṣaṃ kalpanāpoḍham*, “perceptual [cognition] is devoid of conceptuality”), Dharmakīrti states his preference for an explanation involving multiple simultaneous cognitions:

Because a conceptual and a nonconceptual cognition occur simultaneously, or (*vā*) because they occur [in] rapid [succession], an ignorant person determines the two to be a single thing. || 133 ||⁹⁰

Devendrabuddhi explains:

Conceptual and nonconceptual cognitions occur simultaneously. Due to—i.e., **because**—these cognitions occur **simultaneously**, ignorant cognizers—not seeing this—apprehend them as being the same, even though the nature of the conceptual and the nonconceptual are different, by virtue of their different appearance.⁹¹ This is an explanation in accord with the assertion that cognition is simultaneous. [Alternatively,] since they occur rapidly, even though the conceptualization and the

⁸⁸ Indeed, the foundational Yogācāra concept of the “storehouse consciousness” (*ālayavijñāna*) is intimately related to the model of multiple simultaneous cognitions. As Waldron (2003, 135) explains, “The [*Mahāyānasamgraha*] critiques the standard [i.e., Abhidharma] model in which the forms of manifest cognitive awareness arise sequentially and argues instead that the various forms of *vijñāna* must arise simultaneously in order for the seeds and impressions to be able to be infused (*paribhāvita*) into the *ālayavijñāna*, and thus, by extension, for karma to be able to operate. (The seeds are, after all, a way of discussing the karmic relationship between cause and effect.) Moreover... it argues that without the *ālayavijñāna* and the simultaneity it affords there would be no sufficiently continuous and homogeneous medium through which the seeds and impressions could be transmitted in an unbroken succession of momentary processes of mind, and without this the very continuities the Buddhist world-view requires—of the afflictions, of karma, and of gradual progress along the path—would also be inexplicable.” Thus (ibid., 137; emphasis original), “any theory that holds that the six forms of cognitive awareness arise sequentially one at a time, like beads without a string, would have trouble explaining not only how these seeds could continue from one moment to the next, but *how they could ever be infused into another form of vijñāna in the first place.*”

⁸⁹ According to Devendrabuddhi (PVP 416.11-13), PV 3.140 marks the end of Dharmakīrti’s explanation of PS 1.3c. Dharmakīrti’s discussion of PS 1.3c runs from PV 3.124-140, but the critical concluding passage concerning the simultaneity of cognition, using the example of a spinning firebrand, runs from PV 3.133-140.

⁹⁰ Tosaki (1979, 213): *manasor yugapadvṛtteḥ savikalpāvikalpayoḥ | vimūḍho laghuvṛtter vā tayor aikyaṃ vyavasyati || 133 ||*

⁹¹ That is, respectively, nonconceptual cognitions appear vividly, while conceptual cognitions appear non-vividly. See below, Section III.A: [The Vivid Appearance of Cognition](#).

seeing are in a state (*ngang tshul can ~ *bhāvin*) of sequential arising, because they occur rapidly they are apprehended as being the same thing on account of an illusion of uninterruptedness (*rnam par chad pa med par khrul pas ~ *vicchinnavibhramāt*). In terms of the ultimate, we do not accept this [second] answer. For this reason, not being satisfied with this [second answer], we will later explain that the cognitions occur simultaneously.⁹²

Note how these two explanations are related to the two modes of conceptual pseudo-perception discussed above. In PV 3.290cd, Dharmakīrti asserts that conceptual pseudo-perceptions “sometimes cause error, because they immediately follow a perception.” This is, of course, true with respect to subsequent determinate judgments, whether or not the simultaneous existence of multiple cognitions is accepted. But, as we have seen, elsewhere Dharmakīrti also asserts that the apparent persistence of objects through time is a form of conceptual error, derived from the simultaneous operation of conceptual and nonconceptual cognition. Dharmakīrti’s point in this verse, in other words, is that such an “illusion of uninterruptedness” could potentially be explained on the basis of a rapid alternation between conceptual and nonconceptual cognitions, but that an explanation which admits the existence of multiple simultaneous cognitions is strictly superior. And so, as he continues developing this argument, Dharmakīrti pushes the issue to the point where he explicitly states that multiple cognitions do indeed occur simultaneously.

⁹² PVP (409.4-14) ad PV 3.133: *rtog bcas rtog pa med pa 'i yid || yid kyi rnam par shes pa de dag ni cig car du ni 'jug phyir ram | rgyu 'i phyir rtogs pa po rmongs pa dag snang ba tha dad pas rnam par rtog pa dang bcas pa dang | rnam par rtog pa med pa 'i rang bzhin tha dad du (D: de) zin kyang de ma mthong bar de dag la ni gcig tu zhen pa de ni rnam par shes pa cig car 'jug par khas len pa la brten nas bshad pa yin no || 'jug pa myur phyir rnam par rtog pa dang mthong ba dag go rims bzhin du 'byung ba 'i ngang tshul can yin na yang 'jug pa myur ba 'i phyir de dag rnam par chad pa med par 'khrul pas gcig tu zhen par 'gyur ro || don dam par kho bo cag lan 'di 'dod pa ma yin no || de nyid kyi phyir kho bo 'di la mgu ba mi rten pas phyis rnam par shes pa cig car 'jug par ston par 'gyur ro ||*

2. *The Example of the Firebrand*

As is so frequently the case, Dharmakīrti's main target at this juncture is the notion of determinate or conceptual perception. A large part of the appeal of an epistemological theory which asserts that perception is conceptual is that, at least theoretically, there is no need to explain the apparent persistence of objects: sure, this apparent persistence might be conceptual, and sure, the apparent unity of the object might be conceptual as well, but what is the problem with that? Indeed, the opponent argues, if perception were *not* conceptual, there would be a problem. Since, on Dharmakīrti's account, the determinate identification of the object is a different cognition from the nonconceptual sensory awareness, the determination would "interrupt" the continuity of the perception, or "knock" perception off of its object.

Dharmakīrti's point in response is that, if perception were indeed conceptual, shouldn't the occurrence of any other concept (such as thinking of a 'horse' while cognizing a 'cow') interrupt the continuity of sensory perception?

Opponent: "[If perception were not conceptual, and the cognition of a 'cow' and so on were only this kind of coordinated illusion between conceptual and nonconceptual cognitions, then] seeing (*darśana*) would be interrupted (*vicchinna*) by virtue of being obstructed (*vyavadhānena*) with concepts."

Well (*vā*), for other [theorists who maintain that perception is conceptual], how could [there *not* be interruption] when there is a concept of a different kind of thing?
|| 134 ||⁹³

In other words, if it is asserted that sensory perception is conceptual, and furthermore asserted that multiple simultaneous cognitions cannot coexist, how can the perception of a 'cow' be

⁹³ Tosaki (1979, 214): *vikalpavyavadhānena vicchinnaṃ darśanam bhavet | iti ced bhinnajātīyavikalpe 'nyasya vā katham || 134 ||*

uninterrupted, even while thinking of a ‘horse’ or whatever? It must be granted, either that the (ostensibly) conceptual perception of the ‘cow’ can occur at the same time as the conceptual thought of the ‘horse,’ or else that the sensory perception of the ‘cow’ is in fact nonconceptual, while the thought of the ‘horse’ is conceptual.

It is in the context of this argument that the rhetorical opponent introduces the critically-important example of the illusion of a circle created by a spinning light or firebrand (*alātacakra*). The opponent’s argument here is that conceptual perception has its own inherent strength, which “forces” the appearance of continuity, even when the thought of something else intrudes:

Opponent: “The place where [the sensory object currently] exists is understood to be overpowering (*balavān*) [in relation to the next cognition], as in the case of a firebrand.” || 135ab ||

This argument has a certain intuitive appeal: in effect, that the illusion of the firebrand occurs because the cognitions happen in rapid succession, one after the other, and so the “force” of the present moment’s cognition of the light as being in a certain place carries over into the next moment. Thus, in terms of the preceding argument, the conceptual perception of the cow “forces” the awareness of the cow to persist, even when the thought of a horse intrudes.

But Dharmakīrti responds, not coincidentally, with reference to the problem of the successive cognitions of the phonemes of a word:

Elsewhere, too, this [overpowering factor] is the same; [for example] two [successive] phonemes (*varṇayor*) [would] be heard simultaneously. || 135cd ||⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Tosaki (1979, 216): *alātadr̥ṣṭivad bhāvapakṣas ced balavān mataḥ | anyatrāpi samānaṃ tad varṇayor vā sakṛcchrutiḥ* || 135 ||

In this way, Dharmakīrti draws a direct comparison between the illusory continuity of a firebrand-circle, and the illusory continuity of the sounds in a word. His point here is that the cognitive mechanisms to which the opponent is appealing, in order to explain the firebrand-circle, would make it impossible to account for the preservation of sequence in a word. The reason is that, just like the various parts of a cow, the illusion of the firebrand-circle appears all at once. However, the sounds of a word are cognized as a sequence. Therefore, if conceptual perception operated by “overpowering” the next cognition, the sounds of a word would have to appear all at once; in terms of the paradigmatic example, it would be impossible to distinguish between the Sanskrit words *rasa* (“flavor”) and *sara* (“lake”), since they are composed of the exact same phonemes (*sa* and *ra*), only in a different sequence.

In his rather extensive and interesting comments on this verse, Devendrabuddhi also relates the problem here to the very important issue of what in contemporary times has been called “inattentional blindness,”⁹⁵ in essence when a failure of attention causes a failure to determine what has been seen (the most famous example being a man in a gorilla-suit who was not noticed by experimental subjects who were asked to perform a cognitive task while the man in the gorilla-suit walked around).⁹⁶ Devendrabuddhi writes:

⁹⁵ Mack and Rock (1998).

⁹⁶ Chabris and Simons (2010). Of course, the question of how to interpret the phenomenon of inattentional blindness is closely related to the question of whether sensory perception is conceptual. That is to say, a large part of the cognitive-scientific or philosophical problem here concerns precisely what it means to say that something is perceived: can something be (nonconceptually) perceived, without being (conceptually) determined? Briefly, in the terms of contemporary research, Dharmakīrti’s model here admits of both “early” and “late selection”: the cognizer’s expectation, habituation, and acuity (etc.) all causally condition the production of the initial nonconceptual sensory cognition, which is then processed (i.e., conceptualized) into a determinate judgment. The key point, from Dharmakīrti’s perspective, is that “early selection” effects cannot be understood as conceptual processing, since they only shape the production of the initial nonconceptual sensory cognition, rather than operate upon it; in other words, “perception” (in the mode of sensory cognition) must be nonconceptual.

The visual cognition [of a spinning firebrand] which appears as a circle: someone else says, “In this case, too, the [determinate] cognition arises just like the thought, ‘I have seen a circle,’ due to the concatenation [of prior cognitions].”

This is wrong, since there is also impairment by way of *not* seeing. For example, it is like someone who saw an object, but did not make a determination, later reaching the conclusion (*zhen pa*), in regard to the object, that “I did not see [it].” Therefore, there is no hard rule (*nges pa = *niyama*) to the effect that the place where something is present is overpowering [in that way].⁹⁷

In other words, if the apparent continuity of a perceived ‘cow,’ culminating in the determinate judgment “that is a ‘cow,’” is the result of the cow’s “overpowering” (*balavān*) presence—just like the overpowering presence of a spinning firebrand leads to the erroneous apprehension of a circle of fire—then what are we to make of cases where the percept was seen, without the perceiver having realized that it was seen? Why is the presence of some objects so overpowering that it causes sensory errors, while the presence of other objects is so weak that the cognizer does not even realize they were seen? By the opponent’s logic, the only reason why anyone should ever reach the determination of not having seen some object, is due to the absence of that object.

Devendrabuddhi continues:

Even in the case of seeing a firebrand, though, [the opponent’s explanation] does not have the character of clearing up the question on this topic. Because there *is* a question: is [the illusion of the firebrand-circle *really*] due to the concatenation of [a sequence of] active visual cognitions? Or, in this case, as well, is there an active (*’jug pa = *pravṛtti*) visual cognition which has the appearance of a circle, i.e., which is defective [and] empty of an object (*don gyis stong pa ~ arthaśūnya*), having been produced by an impaired sense-faculty?⁹⁸

⁹⁷ PVP (411.1-7): *’on kyang ’khor lor snang ba’i mthong ba yin no zhes mtshams sbyor ba’i phyir lo mthong ngo snyam (P: ngo bo mnyam) pa’i blo ’byung ba de dang ’dra bar ’dir yang zhes bya ba ni gzhan gyi yin no || de ni rigs pa ma yin te | ’di ltar ’ga’ zhig gi tshe ma mthong bas kyang gnod pa nyid yin te | dper na don mthong ba nges par ma byas pa physis dmigs par gyur pa na kho bos mthong ngo zhes zhen par byed pa lta bu’o || de bas na dngos po’i sa phyogs stobs dang ldan pa yin no zhes bya ba ni nges pa ma yin no ||*

⁹⁸ PVP (411.8-12): *mgal me mthong ba yang skabs su bab pa’i the tshom za ba sel bar byed pa’i ngang tshul can ma yin te | ’di la yang ci dbang po nyams par byas pa las don gyis stong pa rnam par bslad pa ’khor lor snang ba’i*

The answer is clear: although the firebrand-circle appears with the content from multiple momentary sensory cognitions, it is not in fact a mnemonic concatenation of those multiple sensory cognitions. This is because, being a mnemonic mental operation, concatenation only applies to conceptual cognitions. By contrast, defective *sensory* content only appears due to some impairment in the sense-faculties, which gives rise to the erroneous appearance of a circle.

Devendrabuddhi explains:

Furthermore, concatenation does not come from visual cognitions; on the contrary, it is due to memory. [Memory], however, concatenates from that which has been made its object. That which is its object-field is not vivid, in the way that the object-field of a visual cognition [is vivid]. Thus, on account of the concatenation of the object-field of a visual cognition and the object-field of a mnemonic (*dran pa'i yul* ~ *smṛtigocara*) cognition, the circular appearance [of the firebrand] would not be completely vivid, because the two [i.e., visual and mnemonic cognitions] have different phenomenal forms (*rnam pa = *ākāra*). But one does see the appearance of a single, vivid firebrand-circle. Therefore, it is not a [good] answer to say, “Due to concatenation, it is acceptable that the continuity [of the firebrand] is apprehended uninterruptedly.” The seeing itself does not do the concatenation, because [visual cognition] does not apprehend a phenomenal form which is a past object-field.

Even though this is the case, having accepted [provisionally the opponent's position], the following should be stated: “elsewhere, too, it is the same.” Someone asks: “Because [seeing] is interrupted by a different type of concept, the other [philosopher] has offered an answer, so why is seeing not stopped?” This and that answers are offered due on account of the rapid occurrence [of cognitions]. In terms of our position, even though conceptual and visual [cognitions] may arise sequentially, it is implied that there are established seeing and [conceptual] apprehension that are not stopped [by each other]. [The verse continues,] **a word would be heard all at once**. If this were due to the rapid occurrence [of sequential cognitions], concatenating as in the case of the visual cognition of an uninterrupted firebrand-circle and so on, then the occurrence of words like *sara* [“lake”], being extremely rapid, could not be apprehended sequentially. Thus, there would be no

difference heard from a different sequence; for example, like *sara* and *rasa* [“flavor”].⁹⁹

In other words, the upshot here is that there are some pseudo-perceptual cognitions of apparently spatiotemporally-extended entities that arise due to impaired sense-faculties (such as the firebrand), and there are some such cognitions that are the result of concatenation (such as the cognition of a word). The former are nonconceptual, do not precisely preserve temporal sequence, and appear vividly; the latter are conceptual, preserve the precise temporal sequence of their concatenated elements, and appear non-vividly. Thus, after litigating the minutiae of a second objection,¹⁰⁰ Dharmakīrti concludes:

⁹⁹ PVP (411.12-412.15): *gzhan yang mtshams sbyor ba yang mthong ba las ma yin gyi | 'on kyang dran pa las ni yin no | 'di yang yul du byas pa las mtshams sbyor bar byed pa yin gyi | 'di'i yul gang yin pa de gsal ba ni ma yin te | mthong ba'i yul bzhin no | des na dran pa'i yul dang mthong ba'i yul mtshams sbyor bar byed pa'i phyir 'khor lor snang ba yongs su gsal bar 'gyur ba ma yin te de dag ni rnam pa tha dad pa can nyid yin pa'i phyir ro | mgal me'i 'khor lo snang ba gsal ba gcig po 'di mthong ba yang yin no | des na mtshams sbyor bar byed pa'i phyir | rgyun mi 'chad par 'dzin pa'i rigs pa yin no zhes bya ba yang lan nyid ma yin no | mthong ba nyid kyang mtshams sbyor bar byed pa ma yin te | de ni 'das pa'i yul gyi rnam pa 'dzin pa ma yin pa'i phyir ro | de ltar na yang khas blangs nas brjod par bya ste | de gzhan la yang mtshungs pa yin | rigs tha dad pa'i rnam par rtog pas chod pa'i phyir gzhan gyis kyang len gdab pa'i phyir ji ltar mthong ba rnam par chad par thob par mi 'gyur zhe na | 'jug pa myur ba la sogs pas lan du brgal ba gang yin pa de dang de ni kho bo'i phyogs la rnam par rtog pa dang | mthong ba dag la rim bzhin du 'byung ba yod na yang rnam par chod pa can ma yin pa'i mthong ba dang zhen pa rab tu bsgrub pa'i phyir | gzhung btsugs pa nyid yin no | yi ge cig car thos pa yin | gal te myur bar 'jug pa'i phyir rnam par chad pa med par mgal me'i khor lo la sogs pa la mthong ba la mtshams sbyor ba de'i tshe | mtsho zhes bya ba de lta bu la sogs pa'i yi ge dag gi 'jug pa ches shin tu myur ba de ltar na | go rims med par 'dzin par 'gyur ro | de ltar na go rims tha dad pa las mnyan pa tha dad par mi 'gyur ro | dper na mtsho dang ro zhes bya ba lta bu'o | de bzhin du myur du mthong ba 'jug pa dang | chu'i thigs pa 'thig pa la sogs pa'i sngon po dag la [D: em. yang] 'jig pa myur ba'i phyir gcig tu 'dzin pa'i zhen par 'gyur te | mgal me'i 'khor lo mthong ba bzhin no ||*

¹⁰⁰ Briefly: in PV 3.136-137, the opponent argues, on the basis of inattentive blindness—“although the sense-faculties are [all] simultaneously connected with their [respective] objects” (*sakṛtsaṅgatasarvārtheṣv indriyeṣv satsv api*), those simultaneous connections do not generate multiple simultaneous active sensory cognitions—that, even in the absence of simultaneous cognition, temporal sequence can be preserved by a kind of multi-modal conceptual cognition which is “mixed with the momentary [auditory] cognition at the end of the word” (*nāmaparyantakṣaṇikajñānamiśraṇāt*). Dharmakīrti mocks this argument—“Whoa, trippy!” (*tac citram*)—by noting that such a “mixture” would, in fact, constitute simultaneous cognitions; “therefore, let the two [conceptual and nonconceptual] cognitions be simultaneous” (*tasmāt santu sakṛd dhiyaḥ*).

A [cognition] possessing the impairment of extension (*anvayapratighāta*) due to the rapid spinning of a firebrand establishes the illusion of a circle by means of a [single] visual cognition (*dr̥k*), not by means of the concatenation (*ghaṭanena*) of multiple visual cognitions (*dr̥śām*). || 140 ||¹⁰¹

Naturally, this brings us to the topic of nonconceptual error and pseudo-perception, to which we now turn.

¹⁰¹ Tosaki (1979, 226): *śīghravṛtter alātāder anvayapratighātīnī | cakrabhrāntiṃ dr̥śā dhatte na dr̥śām ghaṭanena sā*
|| 140 ||

III. Dharmakīrti's Theory of Nonconceptual Pseudo-Perception

A. The Vivid Appearance of Cognition

1. *Two Tracks*

“Vivid” (*sapaṣṭa*, *sphuṭa*) is one of the most critically important terms in the PV. Although Dharmakīrti never provides a detailed explanation of this term, the basic idea is relatively clear: whatever appears as the direct result of the causal interaction between a sense-faculty and an appropriate stimulus, appears vividly. Thus, in one sense—insofar as whatever appears, necessarily appears as the direct result of *some* causal stimulus—whatever appears, necessarily appears vividly. However, with the description of certain types of cognition as “vivid,” Dharmakīrti is trying to capture the difference between, for example, *seeing* a manifest blue-patch, as opposed to *imagining* or *remembering* ‘blue’: in other words, the difference between nonconceptual and conceptual cognition.

Schematically: whatever appears in a nonconceptual cognition appears vividly, while the conceptual content of a conceptual cognition (though, crucially, *not* the mere appearance of the conceptual cognition itself) appears non-vividly. Thus, vividness may be understood as the lack of conceptuality, while conceptuality may be defined as the lack of vividness. Hence, the distinction between conceptual and nonconceptual pseudo-perception is the same as the distinction between conceptual and nonconceptual cognition in general: what is nonconceptual is vivid, and what is conceptual is not vivid. In other words, a nonconceptually erroneous cognition appears vividly, while a conceptually erroneous cognition appears non-vividly.

Although it is never quite spelled out in precisely these terms, Dharmakīrti clearly embraces a model in which there are two distinct cognitive “tracks,” conceptual and

nonconceptual, where the nonconceptual “track” includes the five sensory consciousnesses, while the conceptual “track” is comprised of the sixth mental consciousness, and perhaps the seventh “defiled mental” (*kliṣṭamanas*) consciousness as well.¹⁰² As discussed above in the context of PV 3.501, the key point in this regard is that conceptual cognition can exist simultaneously with nonconceptual cognition, but that two conceptual cognitions cannot exist simultaneously within a single cognitive continuum.

Nonconceptual cognition is always vivid, because it arises from causal contact with objects, whether we like it or not, no matter whether our minds are engaged or not.¹⁰³ This in turn is because sensory cognition arises due to a strictly causal relationship of essential concomitance (*svabhāvavapratibandha*) between the cognition and its causes.¹⁰⁴ Whenever the sensory cognition bearing the image of the object-field exists, there must have been an immediately preceding causal interaction between faculty and object-field; and whenever there is no causal interaction between faculty and object-field, sensory cognition does not exist.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² As is well known, one of the defining features of the Yogācāra as opposed to the earlier Abhidharma traditions such as the Sautrāntika concerned the Yogācāra assertion of eight consciousnesses as opposed to six (five sensory plus one mental). In the PV, Dharmakīrti only explicitly mentions the eighth “storehouse” consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) on one occasion (PV 3.520), concerning an argument that is largely *unrelated* to Yogācāra ontology. That said, Dharmakīrti (in the PVSV *ad* PV 1.98-99ab; see Introduction, note [114](#)) also refers to *āśrayaparāvṛtti*, a process that requires the existence of the *ālayavijñāna*. He never references the seventh “afflicted mental” consciousness (*kliṣṭamanas*) by name in the PV; however, given his Yogācāra leanings, it is interesting to consider what role, if any, Dharmakīrti understood the afflicted mental consciousness to play. Certainly it is possible that, to the extent the defiled mind is interpretable as the continuous *conceptual* overlay of a “self,” it can be understood as being closely related to the conceptual continuity of the mental consciousness, though *kliṣṭamanas* may also be interpretable as the continuous *nonconceptual* appearance of the “subject-image” or *grāhakākāra*. For a detailed discussion of *kliṣṭamanas* in relation to classical scholastic Abhidharma and Yogācāra, cf. Waldron (2003, 146–48).

¹⁰³ That the mental consciousness may be directed at will is clear (PV 3.185, PVin 1.9abc). But Dharmakīrti also asserts, in keeping with the “two track” model of cognition, that while conceptual and nonconceptual cognitions exist simultaneously, multiple simultaneous *conceptual* cognitions are not possible (PV 3.178). An interesting consequence of these two points taken in tandem is that, while the mental consciousness is engaged in thinking about something else, it cannot conceptualize the sensory object (PV 3.175).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Dunne (2004, 148–53).

¹⁰⁵ See also Dharmakīrti’s accepted definition of “the sensory” (*aiṅdriya*) as “that which is invariably concomitant with the presence or absence of the sense-faculties” (*yad akṣāṇām bhāvābhāvānurodhi*) in PV 3.296, below.

The mental consciousness, by contrast, may be directed at will, though this type of volitional mental activity is necessarily conceptual. As Dharmakīrti writes in PVin 1.4d, “conceptual mental cognition (*manovijñāna*), without relying on the proximity of an external object’s capacity [to generate an image of itself], is generated by a conceptual imprint (*vikalpavāsanā*); apprehending an object that is not restricted to the senses, it apprehends [its object] through some relation to experience, either together or separately.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, when we remember or imagine ‘blue,’ the conceptually-constructed ‘blue’ is generated by activating the latent conceptual imprint for ‘blue,’ rather than by coming into direct causal contact with an actual blue-patch. For this very reason, the mental consciousness may be suspended; we may (in principle) choose to generate or not to generate an imaginary ‘blue.’ This is precisely what Dharmakīrti points out at the very beginning of his discussion on the nonconceptual nature of perceptual cognition (PV 3.123-140 *ad* PS 1.3c, *pratyakṣam kalpanāpoḍham*):

¹⁰⁶ Steinkellner (2007, 8.5-7): *vikalpakaṃ tu manovijñānam arthaśaktisannidhānānapekṣam vikalpavāsanotthāpitam aniyatendriyārthagrāhi kutaścid anubhavasambandhāt saha pṛthag vā gṛhṇīyāt.*

Perception is devoid of conceptualization. This is established by perception itself (*eva*). Concepts, which are shot through (*saṃśraya*) with language, are individually [i.e., reflexively] known (*pratyātmavedya*) by all [beings]. || 123 ||¹⁰⁷

Even one who, having withdrawn (*saṃhṛtya*) the mind from everything, abides with internal stillness (*stimitena*), [still] sees visible form through the visual faculty. This is cognition generated by the senses.¹⁰⁸ || 124 ||¹⁰⁹

Dreyfus (1997, 350) compares this verse to the phenomenological “reduction” (*epoché*) of the Husserlian tradition. And, leaving aside the absence of any bracketing of the “natural attitude” (*natürliche Einstellung*) in this passage, there is indeed a certain similarity between Husserlian phenomenology and the contemplative practice being described here. However, while there are many interesting parallels between Dharmakīrti’s and Husserl’s phenomenological systems, any direct comparison between the two must be very carefully qualified. For example, according to Devendrabuddhi, there is a crucially important yet often-overlooked aspect to this practice. Namely: even though there is no *conceptuality* in such awareness, the phenomenological *duality* of subject and object still remains.¹¹⁰ For Husserl, as indeed for basically every subsequent Western phenomenologist, this is not a problem: the phenomenological duality of subject and object is irreducible and unproblematic. For Dharmakīrti, by contrast, duality just is cognitive distortion.

¹⁰⁷ Tosaki (1979, 206): *pratyakṣaṃ kalpanāpoḍhaṃ pratyakṣeṇaiva sidhyati | pratyātmavedyaḥ sarveṣāṃ vikalpo nāmasaṃśrayaḥ* || 123 ||

¹⁰⁸ Dharmakīrti takes it as axiomatic that sensory perception is nonconceptual, and there is no space here to engage with critiques of this position. For a critical analysis of Dharmakīrti’s account of nonconceptual perception, as in effect constituting a species of Wilfrid Sellars’ “Myth of the Given,” see Arnold (2018). But without pursuing the issue here, it may perhaps be fair to respectfully ask: how many of those (like Sellars) who deny the existence of nonconceptual cognition, have ever even attempted to “withdraw the mind from everything, abiding with internal stillness”? How many have ever sat down on a cushion and successfully quieted mental chatter for ten consecutive minutes?

¹⁰⁹ Tosaki (1979, 206): *saṃhṛtya sarvataś cintāṃ stimitenāntarātmanā | sthito 'pi cakṣuṣā rūpam iḅṣate sā 'kṣajā matih* || 124 ||

¹¹⁰ PVP (402.5-6) *ad* PV 3.123: *des ni mthong ba la* [D: *las] *gzung ba dang 'dzin pa yod pa yang rtog pa med pa nyid yin no zhes bshad do* ||

To repeat: conceptual and nonconceptual cognitions are on two separate cognitive “tracks.” Thus, while a certain kind of ignorance is indeed “just conceptuality,” simply removing conceptuality does not entirely solve the problem of cognitive error, because there still remains the *nonconceptual* error of duality, on account of which every dualistic cognition (which is to say, nearly every cognition) is a nonconceptual pseudo-perception. In order to properly understand this point, however, it is first necessary to discuss the manner in which both conceptual and nonconceptual cognitions are vividly presented “to” or “within” awareness.

2. Reflexive Awareness and Vividness

One of the most important features of Dharmakīrti’s ontology concerns the “Janus-faced”¹¹¹ nature of concepts: that concepts are unreal *qua* mentally-constructed universal, but real *qua* mental particular. As Dunne (2004, 129–30) writes,

An image in a conceptual cognition, when construed as qualified by an exclusion, seems to be an entity repeated in multiple instances. Construed in that fashion, even the mental content of a conceptual cognition—the image that appears in that awareness—is unreal. Hence, it too cannot be said to be either permanent or impermanent. Should we then conclude that the mental image itself is unreal? No, we should not, for when considered simply as mental content, that image is a particular... In short, the image in a conceptual cognition is both real (as a unique mental event) and unreal (as an apparently distributed universal).

Dharmakīrti expresses this point in PV 3.9cd-11a:

[Opponent:] “If a universal is a real thing (*artha*) in terms of having the nature of awareness, there would be the absurd conclusion [that it is a particular].”¹¹²

¹¹¹ Dunne (2006, 513).

¹¹² In their translation of this verse, Franco and Notake (2014, 51) supply: “Thus, the universal would be a particular and have a vivid form.”

Since it is indeed asserted (*tatheṣṭatvād*) [that a universal is a particular], there is no problem. [That is,] in terms of having the nature of an object (*artha*), there is a sameness (*samānatā*), because [the image has] the same form (*samarūpa*) with respect to each [object], based upon that [object's] exclusion from [other objects]. [But] it is not a real thing (*avastu*), because it is that which is expressed by language.
 || 9cd-11a ||¹¹³

Or, as Devendrabuddhi comments, “Since the universal is also by nature awareness itself, we accept that it is a particular. Hence, there is no contradiction.”¹¹⁴

It is precisely in relation to this issue that Dinnāga first describes the operation of reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvitti*). Reflexive awareness is a topic of central importance, and will be discussed at length in Chapters 4 and 5. But for the present purposes, at a first approximation, we may understand reflexive awareness to be just the immediate (i.e., un-mediated) presence of the contents of cognition to the cognizing mind. Thus, after his account of the four different types of perception (PS 1.4-6), Dinnāga relates the vivid appearance of the sensory image to the nonconceptual presentation of even conceptual cognitions:

Even a conceptual cognition is asserted to be [perceptual] in terms of reflexive awareness, [though] not with respect to the object, on account of the conceptualization. || 7ab ||

Just like desire and so on,¹¹⁵ although [conceptual cognition] is not perceptual with respect to [its] object, there is no fault [in considering conceptual cognition to be perceptual] insofar as it is aware of itself.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Tosaki (1979, 70–71): *jñānarūpatayā 'rthatve sāmānye cet prasajyate || 9 || tatheṣṭatvād 'rtharūpatvena samānatā | sarvatra samarūpatvāt tadvyāvṛttisamāśrayāt || 10 || tad avastv abhidheyatvāt.*

¹¹⁴ PVP (302.9-11): *shes pa 'i ngo bo nyid yin pa 'i phyir spyi yang rang gi mtshan nyid yin par 'dod pa de ltar na 'gal ba med do ||*

Trans. Dunne (2004, 130n124).

¹¹⁵ Affective states such as desire are held to be instrumental. See Chapter 5, Section II: [Pleasure and Pain](#).

¹¹⁶ Steinkellner (2005a, 3): **kalpanāpi svasaṃvittāv iṣṭā nārthe vikalpanāt | tatra viṣaye rāgādivad eva apratyakṣatve 'pi svaṃ saṃvettīti na doṣaḥ.**

In other words, insofar as conceptual cognitions are immediately present to the mind, in precisely the same way that sensory perceptions are immediately present to the mind, conceptual cognitions are reflexively-experienced. That is to say, conceptual cognitions are also known “by means of” the direct perceptual instrument (*pratyakṣapramāṇa*) of reflexive awareness, from which they are not ontologically separate; because, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, and will indeed be a recurring theme throughout the rest of this study, every cognition has an identical nature (*sadrśātman*), just insofar as every experience is reflexively-experienced.

3. Reflexive Awareness as Pramāṇa

As discussed in the Introduction, the PV closely follows the overarching structure of the PS.¹¹⁷ With respect to that structure, Dharmakīrti’s discussion of the four types of perception (sensory, mental, yogic, and reflexive) in PV 3.123-286 follows PS 1.4-6. Similarly, in PV 3.288-300, Dharmakīrti discusses pseudo-perception, drawing on PS 1.7cd-8ab. In between these two sections—i.e., at verse 287—Dharmakīrti comments specifically and exclusively on PS 1.7ab:

Whichever cognition (about whatever) that apprehends a linguistic object, this cognition is conceptual with respect to that [object]. But the nature [of the cognition] is not a linguistic object. Therefore, every [cognition] of that [nature] is perceptual. || 287 ||¹¹⁸

Despite the fact that perception is defined as strictly nonconceptual, that is to say, conceptual cognitions are nevertheless “perceptual,” just insofar as their content is presented by reflexive awareness. Their instrumentality (*prāmāṇya*) exists, not with respect to their objects, which are

¹¹⁷ See the Introduction, Section I.B.2: [The Relation of the PV to the PS](#).

¹¹⁸ Tosaki (1979, 381): *śabdārthagrāhi yad yatra taj jñānaṃ tatra kalpanā | svarūpañ ca na śabdārthas tatrādhyakṣam ato 'khillam || 287 ||*

misapprehended or unreal, but in terms of their status as a mental particular. Conceptual cognition is not “perceptual” in relation to the *concept*, but in relation to *itself*—reflexively. By the same token, a cognition in which there is the appearance of two moons is not perceptual in relation to the second moon, even though the second moon appears vividly. Rather, the cognition of two moons is “perceptual” in relation to itself, in terms of its mere appearance. In other words, a cognition with the form of two moons is not a reliable epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) for being correctly aware of two moons; it is, however, an instrument for being correctly aware of the fact that a cognition with the form of two moons is currently occurring.

This point is critically important, because it highlights the radical distinction between reflexive awareness and every other type of perception. Dharmakīrti’s theory of nonconceptual pseudo-perception provides a model for understanding phenomenological duality, not as the mental or conceptual misinterpretation of an otherwise correctly-generated cognition, but rather as *a structural defect built into every single ordinary sensory cognition*. That this problem specifically and explicitly applies to sensory “perception” is precisely the point. Dharmakīrti’s point here is that, from a more rarefied perspective, even a nominally “perceptual” sensory cognition is in fact only *pseudo*-perceptual: from a higher position on the “sliding scale,” an ordinary sensory perception should be understood as a vivid and nonconceptual, *but erroneous*, cognition, which is only *mistaken* for a genuinely perceptual (i.e., *nonerroneous*) mental event.

On this note, it may be difficult to see how the cognition of two moons could be construed as a “pseudo-perception,” in the sense of a cognition which is mistaken for a genuine perceptual event (i.e., the veridical perception of two moons). But, put slightly differently, Dharmakīrti’s point here is that even the “correct” cognition of a *single* moon is actually defective (*uplava*, *viplava*) or wrong (*visaṃvādi*), just insofar as it appears to be dualistically-structured, with

subjective and objective aspects. Reflexive awareness is crucial, then, because (among other functions) it provides a kind of epistemological backstop; it is undistorted by nature, no matter how conceptually or nonconceptually erroneous the cognitive content that it presents may be.

This finally brings us to the question of what, precisely, defines “nonconceptual error” or “nonconceptual pseudo-perception” as such.

B. Myodesopsia and Defects in the Basis

1. *The Causal Origin of Nonconceptual Sensory Error*

The defining feature of nonconceptual pseudo-perception, as aptly characterized by Prueitt (2017, 31), is that its error is “given in the cognitive image itself,” prior to any subsequent conceptual interpretation of that image. When a mirage is mistaken for water, as we have seen, the problem does not lie with the nonconceptual visual cognition in and of itself: it has been correctly-generated, and is accurately presenting the causal features (i.e., the “waviness”) of the sensory object. The problem only lies in the conceptual misinterpretation of the image.¹¹⁹

Hence, the defining feature of *conceptual* pseudo-perception is that there is nothing “wrong” or “deceptive” (*visamvādi*) about the nonconceptual sensory image, which has only been erroneously conceptualized. Thus, for example, a mirage is easily identifiable as a mirage, and not

¹¹⁹ Dunne (2004, 88): “In the most typical form of a conceptual illusion, the image in perception arises in such a way that an unschooled person is confused by the similarity between the perceived object and some other object. He thus “superimposes” (*samā + √ruh*) some aspect of the similar object onto the perceived object. Hence, when a person unfamiliar with mirages sees a mirage, the similarity between the mirage and water confuses the perceiver, and he superimposes the fact of being “water” onto the mirage. The resulting judgment, “this is water,” is a case of conceptual illusion. For our purposes, the key issue here is that the nonconceptual content (i.e., the image) of that perception is not itself flawed. It is the perceiver’s inability to correctly interpret the image, and not the image itself, that is causing the error. On the basis of the same kind of perceptual content, a person with the correct mental conditioning—familiarity with mirages—would not make that error. In other words, it is possible to distinguish a mirage and water merely by sight.”

as water; the problem or pseudo-perceptuality would lie in the erroneous judgment, “That is ‘water,’” rather than the sensory image itself. Similarly, with respect to the apparent persistence of a conventionally-existent ‘jug,’ the problem is not with the sensory image itself—which accurately tracks the causal features of its causal substrate, i.e., the particulars which contribute to the production of the image of the ‘jug’—but rather, with the erroneous conceptualization of those particles as all being “the same” in terms of their single effect of holding water (or whatever). In other words, when jug-particles are erroneously construed as a ‘jug,’ there is (at least arguably)¹²⁰ nothing wrong with the nonconceptual visual cognition of those jug-particles; the problem, the *reason why* such a cognition is a pseudo-perception, lies in the erroneous conceptualization of the jug-particles as a ‘jug.’

By contrast, nonconceptual pseudo-perceptions involve sensory content which is inherently defective, on account of some defect or impairment (*viplava, upaplava*) in its causal “basis” (*āśraya*), which warps the normal cognition-generation process. The classic example of nonconceptual pseudo-perception is myodesopsia or “floaters” (*timira*), i.e., the illusion of floating hairs, caused by a specific type of defect in the visual faculty. However, while this is an important example, and one which we will examine in more detail below, it is also somewhat tricky to understand correctly. A more straightforward example, also classic within the *pramāṇa* literature, is jaundice, which, in addition to its effects on the liver, is understood by the Indian intellectual-

¹²⁰ One potential hiccup within Dharmakīrti’s system is that, as discussed above, object persistence is a kind of conceptual pseudo-perception. On the other hand, it is argued at PV 3.104-107 that ordinary beings cannot directly perceive the momentariness of phenomena. That is to say, the image of the object, as generated and presented within awareness, is typically *not* capable of engendering the determination that the object is momentary. To the extent that the error here would thus appear to lie within the causal process that generates the image, rather than with the subsequent conceptual processing of the image, it would seem to indicate that object persistence could perhaps be considered a nonconceptual (rather than a conceptual) pseudo-perception. Again, though, it is important to understand that Dharmakīrti is not strongly committed to any of these provisional positions. The main point here is just that phenomenological duality is a type of nonconceptual error, arising from the “internal defect” (*antarupaplava*) in the psychophysical basis of cognition.

historical tradition to impair the eyes in such a way that what is white appears to be yellow. In this case, it is not that the experience of white is somehow being misinterpreted as an experience of yellow; rather, the experience itself is an experience of yellow. Similarly, a visual cognition which includes the appearance of two moons, when the eyes are crossed due to intoxication and so on, is not being misinterpreted. When our eyes are crossed, there really does appear to be a second moon, vividly present, right there in the visual field.

The key point, which accounts for the vividness of the second moon—indeed, the vividness of nonconceptual pseudo-perception in general, which is precisely defined *as* nonconceptual, on account of its vividness—is that nonconceptual error arises directly from its sensory causes, in exactly the same way that nonconceptual sensory cognition arises directly from its sensory causes. That is to say, both nonconceptual perceptions and nonconceptual pseudo-perceptions exist in a relationship of essential concomitance (*svabhāvapratibandha*) with their sensory causes. The difference between the two is that “instrumental” (and thus genuinely “perceptual”) nonconceptual sensory cognition arises from a causal process in which nothing has gone disastrously wrong, in a way that would prevent the cognition from facilitating the attainment of what is desired. By contrast, non-instrumental (and thus “pseudo-perceptual”), nonconceptual sensory error arises from a causal process which has been “warped” or made defective in some way. From a basic External Realist perspective, it is clear that the object cannot be causally responsible for its own cognitive misrepresentation.¹²¹ Therefore, the defect must lie in the sensory faculty, since the contact (*sparśa*) between faculty and object does not exist independently of these two.

¹²¹ From an Epistemic Idealist perspective, on the other hand, it is at least arguable that, insofar as objects only appear due the presence of psychophysical imprints (*vāsanā*), which are necessarily and by nature defiled (*kliṣṭa*), the sensory-cognitive process has always already gone wrong just as soon as there is an object to be perceived, and the nature of the object itself is just as defective (or, contributes just as much to the defectiveness of the causal process that produces the sensory image) as the defective sense-faculties. However, Dharmakīrti does not pursue this line of argumentation;

Recall that, in his initial comments concerning nonconceptual pseudo-perception at PV 3.294, Dharmakīrti asserts that the sense-faculties are the cause of erroneous cognitions such as the two moons. He then reiterates this point when rebutting an opponent who attempts to argue that nonconceptual (i.e., vivid) error is somehow mental:

Opponent: “[The sensory faculty is] the cause [of the two-moon error, but only] indirectly [because the mind is the direct cause of the two-moon error].”

When the object of sensory cognition is being examined, what kind of opportunity (*prastāva*) is there for the mental in this [discussion]? What, indeed, is the sensory (*aindriya*)?

Opponent: “That which is invariably concomitant with the presence or absence of the sensory faculties.”

This [concomitance with the faculties] is common [to both correct sensory cognition and sensory errors such as the appearance of two moons].

Opponent: “[Sensory error such as the appearance of two moons is] constituted by a warping (*vikriyā*)¹²² [in the sensory faculty].”

This is exactly that! Why would it be refuted? || 295-296 ||¹²³

The opponent here accepts the basic stipulation that sensory cognition is just that which invariably arises (or does not arise) with the presence (or absence) of its causes, most saliently the object and the sensory faculties. The question concerns the nature of the relationship between the sensory faculties and the distorted sensory cognition. Clearly, there is no actual second moon. So, what

again, his primary concern is with establishing that nonconceptual error arises from a defect in the basis (*āśraya*) of cognition, which is to say, from the most basic perspective, the sensory faculties.

¹²² This is something of a play on words (*śleṣa*); *vikriyā* can mean “change” in a relatively innocuous sense, which is how the term is used by the Sāṅkhyas, to whom this argument is primarily responding. However, it can also mean a “change” in the sense of a change *for the worse*, which is how Dharmakīrti is deploying the term here. It is difficult to capture this nuance, but hopefully the valences of the English term “warping” are at least structurally similar.

¹²³ Tosaki (1979, 390): *pāramparyeṇa hetuś ced indriyajñānagocare | vicāryamāṇe prastāvo mānasasyeha kīdrśah || 295 || kiṃ vāindriyaṃ yad akṣāṇāṃ bhāvābhāvānurodhi cet | tat tulyaṃ vikriyāvac cet saiveyaṃ kiṃ niṣidhyate || 296 ||*

causes the appearance of a second moon? The mind cannot be the cause, because the appearance of the second moon is vivid and sensory. In this way, Dharmakīrti maneuvers the opponent into acknowledging that the second moon appears because the sensory faculties are “warped.” Thus, nonconceptual error is strictly “arisen from impairments in the basis” (*āśrayopaplavodbhavam*)¹²⁴ or “generated by the sense-faculties” (*akṣaja*).¹²⁵

Because of this, the error appears whether we would like it to or not, just like genuinely perceptual sensory cognition:

If [the two moon illusion and so on] were [conceptual], like the error (*bhrānti*) of [mistaking a rope for] a snake and so on, there could be the cessation of that [two moon illusion] even while there is still impairment of the faculty; and [the illusion] would not cease even when the impairment in the faculty had ceased. || 297 ||¹²⁶

Thus, it is precisely because sensory error is nonconceptual that it cannot be induced by means of thoughts or concepts:

[If a nonconceptual error such as the two-moon illusion were conceptual,] it could sometimes be placed in the minds of others with words [in the same way that the snake illusion can be induced by shouting “Snake!”]. It would require the recollection of what has been seen [which is impossible in the case of the two moons, because a second moon has never been seen].¹²⁷ And it would not appear vividly. || 298 ||¹²⁸

¹²⁴ PV 3.288b.

¹²⁵ PV 3.289a.

¹²⁶ Tosaki (1979, 391): *sarpādibhrāntivac cāsyāḥ syād akṣavikṛtāv api | nivṛttir na nivartteta nivṛtte 'py akṣaviplave* || 297 ||

¹²⁷ See PV 3.360-362, discussed in the [Conclusion](#).

¹²⁸ Tosaki (1979, 391): *kadācid anyasantāne tathavāpyeta vācakaiḥ | dṛṣṭasmṛtim apekṣeta na bhāseta parisphuṭam* || 298 ||

In other words, no amount of thinking can “fix” the double moon. And so, it is at this very juncture that Dharmakīrti asserts vividness and nonconceptuality to be precisely the same thing:

Whether on the part of one who is asleep, or on the part of one who is awake, an awareness with a vivid appearance is nonconceptual. An [awareness that appears] otherwise [than vividly] is strictly conceptual, either way. || 299 ||¹²⁹

Again, Dharmakīrti never rigorously defines “vividness,” nor explains in precisely which sense the appearances of a dream are vivid. But the issue seems to concern the direct (i.e., *pratyakṣa*) nature of the causal relationship between the stimulus and the cognition of the stimulus. Sensory cognitions are directly caused by their stimulus. But what is the stimulus for the appearances of a dream? There is no clear answer to this question in the PV; logically, however, the explanation has to be something like: mental particulars stored in the “storehouse” (*ālaya*).

The interesting thing about such dream-particulars is that, while they do indeed directly cause a certain kind of sensory cognition, they do not possess the same causal properties as their waking counterparts. A dream blue-particular may cause the cognition of ‘blue,’ but a dream water-particular cannot slake (“real”) thirst. And, since the correctness or wrongness of a cognition is determined in terms of that cognition’s ability to attain the desired goal, dream-cognitions are “wrong” (*viśaṃvāda*), despite being vivid. Hence Dharmakīrti’s need to amend Diñnāga’s axiomatic description of perception as nonconceptual (*pratyakṣaṃ kalpanāpoḍham*), with the additional qualification of being non-erroneous (*abhrāntam*): the whole point of asserting the existence of nonconceptual pseudo-perception lies precisely in the fact that some nonconceptual

¹²⁹ Tosaki (1979, 393): *suptasya jāgrato vā 'pi yaiva dhīḥ sphuṭabhāsinī | sā nirvikalpobhayathā 'py anyathaiva vikalpikā || 299 ||*

cognitions are *not* perceptual instruments (i.e., *pratyakṣapramāṇas*), because they are erroneous, despite being nonconceptual:

Therefore, the instrumentality (*prāmāṇya*) of that [cognition] is denied, even though it is nonconceptual, because it is wrong (*viśaṃvādāt*). For this reason, pseudo-perception is said to be of two kinds. || 300 ||¹³⁰

Thus, according to Dharmakīrti, there are two main types of pseudo-perception: conceptual and nonconceptual. Dinnāga's fourfold classification scheme is nowhere to be found.

2. *Myodesopsia* (timira)

As highlighted above, the paradigmatic example of a defect in the “basis” of cognition is *timira*, a type of ocular disease. While this term can refer to a wide variety of medical conditions, including general darkness of vision or even blindness, in the context of Buddhist *pramāṇa* literature it typically refers to a specific phenomenon: the appearance of “floating hairs” or “floaters” in the visual field.¹³¹ Indeed, the association with the appearance of floating hairs is so strong that in this context the Sanskrit word for “hair” (*keśa*) is often a synonym for *timira*.

In medical terminology, this particular condition is referred to as myodesopsia. Myodesopsia is caused by stringy deposits of cell debris or other biomatter lodged in the eye's vitreous body, the clear gel that fills the space between the lens and the retina. These deposits, suspended in the vitreous, cast a shadow on the retina. What the affected person sees is not the deposits themselves, but rather the shadows that they cast on the retina. Now, this might seem a gratuitous digression into anatomical esoterica, but the point here can easily be catastrophically

¹³⁰ Tosaki (1979, 393): *tasmāt tasyāvikalpe 'pi prāmāṇyaṃ pratiśidhyate | viśaṃvādāt tadarthañ ca pratyakṣābhaṃ dvidhoditam || 300 ||*

¹³¹ In Latin and French, floaters are referred to as *muscae volitantes* or *mouches volantes*, “flying mosquitoes.”

misunderstood. In the context of *pramāṇa* literature, the reason why a myodesopic cognition (*taimirikajñāna*) of floaters is an erroneous pseudo-perception is because it appears to be a cognition of something that is not there (i.e., “floating hairs”). The potential problem, from a more contemporary perspective, is that strictly speaking there *is* something there: the debris floating in the vitreous, or more accurately the shadows that this debris casts on the retina. There is, in other words, a real physical correlate for the experience of floating hairs, even if this physical correlate is literally and strictly “internal” (*antar*) to the visual faculty.

However, from Dharmakīrti’s perspective, and from the perspective of classical Indian epistemology (both Buddhist and non-Buddhist) more generally, cognition only arises from the causal contact between the relevant faculty and a real object (*artha*). Since Dharmakīrti understood myodesopsia to be a defect located entirely within the psycho-physiological apparatus of vision—which is certainly accurate, insofar as the vitreous is, after all, part of the eye—in a very important sense, a myodesopic cognition is not *really* a cognition. It is, rather, a “non-cognition (*ajñāna*),”¹³² precisely because there is no real object that is causally interacting with the defective faculty:

[There is no fault] when those [hairs] are construed in that way [i.e., as objects], either, because it is not denied [that universals are knowable objects]. The vivid appearance [of hair] is due to the fact that it is an object (*artha*), in terms of having the nature of awareness. However, a thought such as “[This is] a ‘hair’” has a universal as its object; the appearance of the hair [on the other hand] lacks an object (*anarthakam*). || 8-9ab ||¹³³

The issue, in other words, is that something is going wrong in the visual apparatus, and as a result, incorrect—but nevertheless vivid and nonconceptual—cognitions are being generated, without

¹³² See Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.7cd-8ab](#).

¹³³ Tosaki (1979, 69): *teṣām api tathābhāve ’pratiśedhāt sphuṭābhatā | jñānarūpatayā ’rthatvāt keśādīti matiḥ punaḥ || 8 || sāmānyaviśayā keśapratibhāsam anarthakam |*

reference to any real object. Thus, the cognition of floating hairs is a “real object” in the sense that this cognition is itself known by means of reflexive awareness; however, the “hairs” themselves, as the artifact of an impairment in the visual faculty, are not a real object.

Alternatively, consider again the case of the double moon illusion. This, too, is a “non-cognition,” just insofar as there is no *artha* (that is, no real second moon) that is producing the appearance of the second moon. Now, strictly speaking, the illusion does not necessarily come about due to any impairment in either individual eye. Rather, the error arises due to a misalignment between the eyes, for example on account of drunkenness; someone who has lost an eye cannot see double.¹³⁴ The point here is that it is important not to be too literal when reading or translating *akṣa* as “the eye” or even as “the visual faculty,” unless by “visual faculty” we include both eyes, the optic nerve, the visual cortex, and so on—in other words, the entire psychophysical *basis* of visual sensory cognition.

This is why Dharmakīrti identifies the source of nonconceptual error as a “defect in the basis” (*āśrayopaplava*),¹³⁵ generally, and only by way of metonymic example refers to the sense-faculties, specifically:

The fourth [type of error] is an exception [to the general rule that nonconceptual cognitions are perceptual]. Concerning this, he states that [nonconceptual error] arises from impairment (*upaghāta*). In this context, myodesopsia (*timira*) is merely a metonym (*upalakṣaṇa*) for impairment [in general]. || 293 ||¹³⁶

¹³⁴ However, someone who has lost an eye also has no depth perception, which is its own kind of visual-cognitive impairment. That depth perception is a feature of properly-functioning visual cognition highlights the complexity of sensory cognition; there is much more to visual awareness than just what meets the eye.

¹³⁵ PV 3.288b.

¹³⁶ Tosaki (1979, 387): *apavādaś caturtho 'tra tenoktam upaghātajam | kevalam tatra timiram upaghātopalakṣaṇam* || 293 ||

It is, accordingly, critically important to understand that a defective *physical* sense-faculty is only a source for one particular type of nonconceptual error. Physical impairments such as jaundice or myodesopsia do constitute defects in the basis of *sensory* experience; but the physical sense-organs are not coextensive with the basis of perceptual cognition in general. Again, sensory (i.e., *indriyaja*) cognitions are a strict subset of “perceptions” or direct instruments of correct awareness (i.e., *pratyakṣas*).¹³⁷ Hence, the “basis” of cognition is a more general category than the physical sense-faculties, and “distortion” is a more general category than the physical or psychological impairment of those faculties. Indeed, the ultimate point of this entire line of argumentation is that there is a fundamental and “internal defect” (*antarupaplava*), in essence phenomenological duality itself, which warps the cognitions of each and every sentient being.

On this note, it certainly appears that Dharmakīrti’s characterization of nonconceptual error as a defect in the “basis” deliberately echoes the Yogācāra description of the attainment of Buddhahood as a “revolution in the basis” (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*).¹³⁸ As is well known, going back at least to Vasubandhu’s *Trimṣikā*, the *āśraya* in this sense is a synonym for the “storehouse

¹³⁷ It should be noted in this regard that, on the classical Buddhist model, the mind (*manas*) is also considered a type of sensory faculty (*indriya*). It may therefore be tempting to consider the distortion of phenomenological duality to be the result of some kind of defect in the mental faculty, specifically, akin to myodesopsia in the visual faculty. This interpretation has the benefit of avoiding some of the theoretical problems, related to duality, which are caused by the model of multiple simultaneous cognitions; see Chapter 3, note 123. It must be noted, however, that on such an interpretation, sensory cognitions themselves would presumably have to be nondual by nature, because duality would arise due to the warping effect of a defective mental faculty.

But while not necessarily impossible, this interpretation would seem to cut against Dharmakīrti’s final, Epistemic Idealist account, wherein the cause of sensory cognition is understood to be latent karmic imprints (*vāsanā*), which are necessarily defiled (*kliṣṭa*) by nature. Again, while this point is not explicitly thematized or systematized, it seems that, on Dharmakīrti’s model, “defilement” consists at least in part in an “imprint for duality,” meaning that sensory appearances must appear dualistically, or else they could not appear at all; this conclusion is, furthermore, directly implied by the *sahopalambhaniyama* argument, discussed in Chapter 4, Section III ([Inference and External Objects](#)) and Chapter 5, Section II.D ([Subjective Variation in the Quality of Experience](#)). Nevertheless, the status of *manas* as an *indriya*, and the interpretation of duality as an *indriyaja* type of *bhrānti*, remains an interesting topic for contemplation. Many thanks to Sara McClintock for bringing these questions to my attention.

¹³⁸ See also Eltschinger (2004), which painstakingly documents and teases out the various strands of Dharmakīrti’s philosophy that contribute to his account of the “revolution in the basis.”

consciousness” (*ālayavijñāna*). The logical connection here is straightforward: the internal defect, which exists in latent form as a karmic “seed” (*bīja*) within the storehouse consciousness, warps cognitions with “characteristic duality” (*dvayalakṣaṇa*), the experience of which in turn strengthens the psychophysical “imprint” (*vāsanā*) of duality, in the process depositing more defective dualistic “seeds” in the storehouse and thereby perpetuating the cycle. In describing the source of nonconceptual error as a “defect in the basis,” and casting the imprint of duality as “internal distortion,” then, Dharmakīrti is in effect providing an epistemological gloss on the Yogācāra position that the perfected nature (*pariṇiṣpannasvabhāva*) is the absence of the unreal fabricated nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*)—i.e., erroneous duality—within the dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*).¹³⁹ But this point requires further analysis.

C. Duality and the Internal Distortion

1. *Phenomenological Duality as Cognitive Error*

As noted in the Introduction, scholarship on Dharmakīrti has come a very long way over the past century. The present study would not have been possible without the contributions of a great many scholars. And yet, it is still common to encounter basic misunderstandings about one of the most important terms in Dharmakīrti’s philosophy: the duality or “dyad” (*dvaya*) of phenomenological subject and object.

The most fundamental misunderstanding in this regard is the idea that Dharmakīrti somehow did not consider phenomenological duality to be erroneous—in other words, that he considered duality to be an unproblematic, inherent, and/or ineradicable feature of awareness.

¹³⁹ See the Introduction, note [74](#), and Chapter 3, note [107](#).

Thus, for example, Coseru (2012, 235–73) argues at length that Dinnāga’s and Dharmakīrti’s epistemology finally rests on the “intentional structure” of phenomenological subject and object, to the extent that he is “not at all convinced that Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, and their successors can be interpreted unambiguously to claim that perception lacks intentionality,”¹⁴⁰ because “[every] state of cognitive awareness, according to Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, and their successors, has this dual-aspect: that of a self-apprehensive intentional act (*grāhakākāra*) and that of a world-directed intentional object (*grāhyākāra*).”¹⁴¹

Coseru’s argument in this intricately-constructed passage hinges on an idiosyncratic interpretation of reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvitti*) that ultimately owes more to Husserl and Merleau-Ponty than it does to Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti. Without addressing Coseru’s argument there in detail, it suffices to point out that, while Dharmakīrti certainly does argue that ordinary sensory cognition does indeed ordinarily arise with a dualistic intentional structure, for Dharmakīrti, this “necessity of arising together” (*sahopalambhaniyama*)¹⁴² constitutes an argument *against* the ontological reality or ultimate intelligibility of this dualistic intentional structure.¹⁴³ Nor is this the only juncture where Dharmakīrti explicitly maintains the

¹⁴⁰ Coseru (2012, 256).

¹⁴¹ Coseru (2012, 259).

¹⁴² Cf. Iwata (1991); Kellner (2011) and (2017a). See also below, Chapter 4, Section III ([Inference and External Objects](#)); and Chapter 5, Section II.D ([Subjective Variation in the Quality of Experience](#)).

¹⁴³ See PV 3.387-390, discussed in Chapter 4, Section III.A: [Theoretical Preliminaries](#). An interesting question related to this point, which we will explore in more detail below, concerns its consequences for non-dualistic cognition. Simply put: if the dualistic structure of subject and object is an inherent feature of sensory cognition, what happens to sensory cognition once the error of duality has been removed? This is the essence of the debate between the “True Imagist” (*satyākāravāda*) and “False Imagist” (*alkākāravāda*) positions, though putting the question this way might load the interpretive dice in favor of the False Imagist perspective, since it would seem to follow straightforwardly from this formulation that sensory cognition must ultimately disappear. For an overview of the False Imagist position as laid out by Ratnākaraśānti, cf. Kajiyama (1965); Yiannopoulos (2012); McNamara (2019); and Tomlinson (2019).

phenomenological duality of perceiving subject and perceived object to be nothing more than a type of error or distortion:

Even though the nature of awareness is undifferentiated, those with distorted vision (*viparyāsītadarśana*) characterize it as though it were differentiated into object, subject, and awareness. || 353 ||

[This characterization is distorted] because, even though, for those whose eyes are impaired by magic spells (*mantra*), shards of clay appear in some other manner [such as elephants], despite lacking that nature, those [clay shards] are not seen in that way by those whose eyes are not garbled. Or [this is] like how, in the desert, something small is seen as large from afar. || 354-355 ||

Although this structure (*sthiti*) of the apprehended, apprehender, and awareness as knowledge-object (*meyā*), means, and result does not [really] exist, it is constructed (*kriyate*) in accord with [distorted] experience. || 356 ||¹⁴⁴

We will return to this crucially-important passage in the Conclusion to this study. At present, the main point to understand is that the structure of subject and object is strictly erroneous.

On this note, while we will examine Dharmakīrti's arguments for ontological idealism at length in Chapter 4, it should be understood that the critique of duality is closely tied to those arguments. In other words, while Dharmakīrti acknowledges that cognition ordinarily has an objective aspect which appears "as though externally-situated"¹⁴⁵ or "externally-oriented,"¹⁴⁶ this apparently external orientation must be understood as a type of cognitive error. Consequently, the fact that cognition *appears* ($\bar{a} + \sqrt{bhā}$) to represent an external world cannot be taken as a warrant for the belief that it *does* represent an external world. That is to say, Sautrāntikas and other

¹⁴⁴ Tosaki (1985, 41–43): *avibhāgo 'pi buddhyātmā viparyāsītadarśanaiḥ | grāhyagrāhakaśamvittibhedavān iva lakṣyate || 353 || mantrādyupaplutākṣāṇām yathā mṛcchakalādayaḥ | anyathaiivāvabhāsante tadrūparahitā api || 354 || tathaiivādarśanāt teṣām anupaplutacakṣuṣām | dūre yathā vā maruṣu mahān alpo 'pi drśyate || 355 || yathānudarśanaṃ ceyam meyamānaphalasthitiḥ | kriyate 'vidyamānā 'pi grāhyagrāhakaśamvidām || 356 ||*

¹⁴⁵ PV 3.212b: *bahir iva sthitaḥ*.

¹⁴⁶ PV 3.427a: *bahirmukham*.

representationalists or “sense data” theorists acknowledge that cognition only ever has access to the external world “by means of” the cognitive image or phenomenal form (*ākāra*) that external objects are causally responsible for producing; therefore, an external realist *ontology*, in the context of a representationalist *epistemology*, ultimately rests on the seeming externality of the objects which are represented via “sense data” or cognitive images. Therefore, given that cognition is only ever *directly* aware of cognitive appearances, it only makes sense to posit an extramental cause for these appearances if their seeming externality is undecieving. In this way, the critique of duality also functions as a critique of externality, because it removes the warrant for taking the apparent externality (i.e., the “external orientation”) of the object-appearance at face value. If the structure of phenomenological duality is nothing but error, then the “internal/external” dichotomy which it appears to represent must be erroneous as well.¹⁴⁷

2. *The Nonconceptual Nature of Dualistic Error*

Concerning Dharmakīrti’s account of phenomenological duality, there is another, very nuanced problem in the contemporary secondary literature: the misidentification of this duality as a type of *conceptual* error. But, as has already been pointed out several times, Dharmakīrti maintains that the warped appearance of subject and object is in fact a *nonconceptual* species of error. Thus, first-person phenomenal subjectivity or “for-me-ness”¹⁴⁸ cannot be understood in exclusively nonconceptual terms: on Dharmakīrti’s view, it is simply not the case, as Garfield (2015, 197) claims, that “my representation [i.e., *ākāra*] of myself as a continuing subject of experience [i.e., the *grāhakākāra*] requires a conceptual construction of a unity from a multiplicity of cognitive

¹⁴⁷ Many thanks to John Dunne for clarifying this point.

¹⁴⁸ Zahavi and Kriegel (2016). See also Chapter 5, Section I.C: [“Svasamvitti \(ii\)” Is Not Inherently “First-Personal.”](#)

processes and states occurring over time.” To be clear, the conceptual construction of such an “autobiographical self”¹⁴⁹ *does occur*; however, the implicit sense of first-person identity or “for-me-ness” that accompanies all ordinary cognition is *not conceptual* and cannot be reduced to this type of conceptual construction.¹⁵⁰

Along these same lines, Eltschinger (2014, 271), in his otherwise excellent exegesis, repeatedly glosses beginningless ignorance (*anādyavidyā*) or “nescience” as a conceptual apprehension of “personalistic false view” (*ātmadr̥ṣṭi*), the mistaken apprehension of oneself as a unitary and perdurant whole, like a ‘jug’:

Dharmakīrti’s specification of nescience as the personalistic false view... is made responsible for an ordinary person’s superimposition of erroneous aspects [i.e., *ākāras*] such as self and one’s own, which are the causes of the defilements and actions leading to painful existence. In this perspective, “personalistic false view” might well be just an arbitrary designation referring to that part of nescience which, insofar as it superimposes such aspects, is primarily the cause of subsequent defilements.

In a sense, Eltschinger is correct here. It is indeed the case that the concept of “self” is superimposed upon the teeming mass of the five bundles (*skandhas*), and that this superimposition is a conceptual pseudo-perception: specifically, the cognition of a conventionally-existent entity (i.e., ‘oneself’). Furthermore, Eltschinger (2014, 271–78) is likely correct in arguing that the personalistic false view is the fundamental form of *conceptual* ignorance. Moreover, both Vasubandhu,¹⁵¹ and significant elements of the later Indian Buddhist *pramāṇa* tradition—especially, though not necessarily exclusively, the “True Imagist” (*satyākāravāda*) position of

¹⁴⁹ See MacKenzie (2008).

¹⁵⁰ For a more thorough critique of Garfield’s presentation, cf. Thompson (2018). See also below, Chapter 5, Section I: [Reflexive Awareness and “Self-Appearance” \(*svābhāsa*\)](#).

¹⁵¹ See Chapter 5, note [30](#).

Jñānaśrīmitra¹⁵²—did consider phenomenological duality to be in some sense conceptual. However, it is abundantly clear that this was not the case for Dharmakīrti, who considered duality to be a species of specifically nonconceptual error, as evidenced (*inter alia*) by his direct comparison of duality with myodesopsia.¹⁵³

At the risk of speculating in excess of what the text permits, we may note in passing that there seem to be two main ways in which ignorance manifests according to Dharmakīrti: as an imprint for conceptuality (*vikalpavāsanā*), and as an imprint for duality. It is not at all clear how these two are related, or whether they are both somehow contained within the “internal impairment” (*antarupaplava*). However, it is critically important to understand that the *concept* of oneself, and the *cognitive image* of oneself (i.e., the *grāhakākāra* or “aspect of the apprehender”) are different things—even if, insofar as the subjective aspect can be conceptually “excluded” from cognition, this feature of cognition may be understood to lie at the heart of the conceptual construction of the “self.”

That is to say, even if the “internal impairment” is somehow causally responsible for both the nearly omnipresent “haze” of conceptuality, as well as the nonconceptual distortion of phenomenological duality, these two manifestations of ignorance—the conceptual and the nonconceptual—are distinct. The deeply-ingrained *tendency to conceptualize* (i.e., the “imprint for conceptuality”), in and of itself, cannot be what is responsible for the *nonconceptual* error of dualistic phenomenological bifurcation. In other words, it is not the case that this “subject-image” or “aspect of the apprehender” is merely a “projection” or “superimposition” (*āropa*), like the

¹⁵² See Tomlinson (2019, 250–60). As outlined in Prueitt (2016), this was also the position of Abhinavagupta; and, as mentioned in Chapter 5, note [30](#), Vasubandhu also characterized duality as conceptual. Much more research into the question of the relationship between duality and conceptuality in Indian Buddhism is needed.

¹⁵³ See PV 3.362, in the [Conclusion](#).

erroneous projection of a ‘mirage’ onto water. The *concept* of oneself is a mental construction fabricated through the process of “exclusion” (*apoha* or *vyāvṛtti*), like any other concept. The *image* of oneself, on the other hand, is a *nonconceptual* feature of every ordinary cognition. It is the nonconceptual, first-person sense of one’s own subjectivity, or of cognition’s “for-me-ness.”

In this way, by characterizing “the internal cause of error” as only “the latent tendency of a contrary conceptual construct,” Eltschinger rather understates the nature of the existential problem that we face as ordinary, unawakened sentient beings. Suspending conceptuality is necessary, but not sufficient, because the underlying cause for the error of duality lies not merely in faulty conceptual mental engagement, but in the very nature of the sensory-cognitive apparatus as such. Therefore, without healing the internal impairment through nondual contemplative practice—that is, without thorough habituation (*bhāvanā*) to, or meditation (*bhāvanā*) upon, the nondual and luminous nature of mind—we will continue to experience the world dualistically; and, since dualistic cognition is inherently distorted, and distorted cognitions are not instrumental, which is to say that they are not capable of facilitating the acquisition of what we want (happiness) and the avoidance of what we do not want (suffering), so long as we are not thoroughly habituated to the nondual and luminous nature of mind, we will continue to suffer.

On this note, Eltschinger (2014, 299) writes that “perception is basically the same with regard to its operation and objects before and after the revolution of the basis (*āśrayaparivṛtti*).” But this cannot be the case. Dharmakīrti explicitly argues that even a nominally “correct” sensory cognition is not, in the final analysis, an ultimately reliable epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*), precisely because it is tainted by duality. Hence, it is impossible for those without “supreme vision” (*paradarśa*) to be aware of the “true nature” (*tattva*) of their cognitive content:

As is the case with myodesopsia etc., those who are by nature confused (*upapluta*) by ignorance have cognitive presentations (*viññapti*) with false images (*vitathākāra*) that arise in dependence on their respective conditions. || 217 ||

But the true nature (*tattva*) is not known by any whose view is not supreme, because it is impossible for those [presentations to arise] without the distortion (*viplava*) of subject and object. || 218 ||¹⁵⁴

We will return to this passage in Chapter 3. Briefly, though, the underlying problem here is that sensory cognition, prior to the “revolution in the basis,” cannot truly be a “perception” in the technical sense—that is, sensory cognition cannot be an ultimately reliable instrument of ultimately correct awareness—because the contents of sensory cognition are in fact derived from defiled (*kliṣṭa*) karmic imprints (*vāsanā*). Sensory cognition is therefore necessarily tainted by the internal distortion, and thus necessarily arises dualistically. In other words, “perception” before and after the attainment of this kind of “supreme vision” is qualitatively different in kind; specifically, for an “ultimately instrumental cognition” (*pāramārthikapramāṇa*), it would appear that “there are no longer external objects—or even mental content—on which to act.”¹⁵⁵

Put slightly differently: despite being categorized as a “pseudo-perception,” the cognition of a double moon is obviously deceptive or wrong. Again, precisely no one would mistake the vivid nonconceptual cognition of two moons for a genuine, epistemologically-reliable or “instrumental” perceptual event. Dualistic cognition, however, is not obviously misleading at all—despite being, on account of its dualistic presentation, inherently erroneous. And in fact, like a

¹⁵⁴ Tosaki (1979, 315–16): *yathāsvaṃpratyayāpekṣād avidyopaplutātmanām | viññaptir vitathākārā jāyate timirādivat || 217 || asaṃviditatattvā ca sā sarvāparadarśanaiḥ | asaṃbhavād vinā teṣāṃ grāhyagrāhakaviplavaiḥ || 218 ||*

¹⁵⁵ Dunne (2004, 317).

baby’s perception of her mother,¹⁵⁶ despite being “erroneous,” such cognitions are necessary for the survival of ordinary beings.

Indeed, on this note, Jinendrabuddhi goes on a lengthy and very interesting excursus, specifically asserting with regard to a cognition “about a white conch, on the part of someone whose eyes are impaired by jaundice, [such that the cognition has] the appearance of a yellow conch,”¹⁵⁷ that, “On the part of such [cognitions] of this kind—and others as well—even though these [cognitions] are misleading because they apprehend what is not-X as being X (*atasmimstadgrahāt*), nevertheless, due to the connection with a real thing, those [cognitions] are not inaccurate in regard to a desired goal; [therefore] instrumentality of some sort is ‘in bounds’ (*nyāyya*).”¹⁵⁸ Jinendrabuddhi thus concludes his discussion of PS 1.7cd-8ab:

In this way, a nonconceptual cognition is perceptual, even though it is misleading, in regard to that for which it is accurate; but in regard to that for which it is inaccurate, it is a spurious simulacrum of a [perceptual *pramāṇa*] (*tadābhāsa*). This is established. That being the case, there is no contradiction at all, just like the case of conceptual cognitions. That is to say, it is not contradictory for a conceptual cognition, in relation to reflexive awareness (*svādhigama*), to be perceptual, [but] in relation to an external object, to be the spurious simulacrum of a [perceptual *pramāṇa*]. Likewise, the cognition [of a yellow conch] which has been discussed is also both, in relation to different aspects of the object-field.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ See the Introduction, Section III.D: [Conceptuality \(*kalpanā*\) and Universals \(*sāmānya*\)](#).

¹⁵⁷ Steinkellner (2005b, 62.14-15): *yatpunar etat kāmaloṣṭhalocanasya śukre śaṅkāḍau pīṭaśaṅkāḍinirbhāsam*.

¹⁵⁸ Steinkellner (2005b, 63.3-4): *tasyaivam prakārasyaṅyasyāpi cātasmiṃstadgrahād bhrāntasyāpi vastuni pratibandhādīpsitārthāviśaṃvādinah kvacit pramāṇyam eva nyāyyam |*

¹⁵⁹ Steinkellner (2005b, 65.2-6): *evam bhrāntasyāpi nirvikalpasya yatra saṃvādas tatra pratyakṣam | yatra tu viśaṃvādas tatra tadābhāsatvam ity etat siddham bhavati | na caivaṃ sati kaścidvirodhaḥ kalpanājñānavat | yathā hi kalpanājñānasya svādhigamāpekṣayā pratyakṣatvam bāhyaviśayāpekṣayā tadābhāsatvam na virudhyate tathā yathoktasyāpi jñānasya viśayabhedāpekṣayā tadubhayam iti ||*

For the rest of this lengthy and very interesting discussion, see Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.7cd-8ab](#). See also Funayama (1999, 85–92) and Coseru (2012, 182–91) for Kamalaśīla’s critique of this view.

In other words, it is only as one starts ascending the Bodhisattva *bhūmis*¹⁶⁰ that the erroneousness of ordinary dualistic sensory cognitions starts becoming epistemologically relevant. Hence, while one might wonder why the sensory cognition of a double moon is described as a “pseudo-perception”—who, exactly, would mistake such a cognition for veridical awareness?—it is important to remember that it is really the argument against phenomenological duality which animates Dharmakīrti’s account of pseudo-perception. Practically every moment of every day, sentient beings mistakenly construe their dualistic cognitions as genuinely perceptual, instrumental cognitions.

¹⁶⁰ Although Mahāyāna literature includes many different accounts of the path to Buddhahood, including different numbers of “grounds,” “stages,” or “levels” (*bhūmis*), in general, for the Yogācāra tradition, it is understood that there are five paths (*pañcamārga*) and ten *bhūmis* (*daśabhūmi*). Bodhisattvas on the first “path of accumulation” (*sambhāramārga*) and the second “path of joining” (*prayogamārga*) are still considered to be Bodhisattvas, but of inferior rank. The third “path of seeing” (*darśanamārga*) constitutes the first moment at which the Bodhisattva directly perceives emptiness (*śūnyatā*) or the nature of reality as such (*tathatā*), marking the transition from ordinary being to Noble One (*ārya*). The Bodhisattva thus enters the first *bhūmi* either at this time, or immediately subsequent to this realization. The fourth “path of cultivation” (*bhāvanāmārga*) constitutes the ascent up the *bhūmis*, to the fifth and final “path of no more learning” (*asaikṣamārga*), the final *bhūmi* of perfect Buddhahood (Asaṅga 2019, 1405-1421).

Tillemans’ (2018, 84) remarks concerning the relation between the “path of seeing” and object-cognition are also apposite, and further support the “False Imagist” (*alīkākaravāda*) account: “There is even a very strong push to get rid of *all* customary objects; when one attains the state of the Noble Ones (*ārya*) and first understands correctly on the “path of seeing” (*darśanamārga*), one no longer experiences any of them until one gets out of one’s meditative state and must deal with the world of ordinary people.” Concerning this distinction between meditative equipoise and post-meditation activity on the part of Ārya Bodhisattvas, see also below, Chapter 4, note [175](#).

Chapter Two: The (Non-)Causal Structure of Cognition

Dharmakīrti's analysis of cognition is bound by a causal model that he must, in the final analysis, repudiate. This model is based in the classical Sanskrit grammatical concept of the four "kāraṅkas" or constituent components of an event: the agent (kartṛ), instrument (karaṇa), and patient or object (karman) of the action, as well as the action or event as a whole (kriyā). Up to this point, Dharmakīrti has for the most part treated the "instrument of correct awareness" (i.e., the pramāṇa) as an entity that is distinct from the object known (i.e., the prameya or artha). At PV 3.301-319 ad PS 1.8cd, however, Dharmakīrti argues that cognition only "seems" or "appears" (ābhāti) to possess this kind of causal functionality (vyāpāra); in reality, the image of the epistemic object is not separable from the epistemically instrumental cognition bearing that image, nor is either separable from the epistemic activity (pramā) as such, which in turn can only be metaphorically stated to possess causal functionality.

The portion of the *Pramāṇavārttika* that the subsequent commentarial literature has designated the "resulting [cognition generated by the] knowledge-instrument," or "knowledge-instrument [construed as the] result" (*pramāṇaphala*) section, is among the most dense and challenging passages of the entire text. In effect, the main argument of this passage is the equivalence of these two formulations: in other words, that the "instrument" of the action of knowing, and the "result" of the action of knowing, are in fact identical.

This passage, which glosses Diñnāga's statement in PS 1.8cd that "the result just is the instrument" (*pramāṇam phalam eva sat*), lays the foundations for the shift to idealism, while also elucidating the ultimate, nondual structure of cognition. Indeed, Dharmakīrti articulates the transition to idealism precisely in terms of Diñnāga's immediately subsequent (PS 1.9a) assertion that "reflexive awareness [may] alternatively [be considered as] the result" (*svasaṃvittiḥ phalam vātra*). That is to say, Dharmakīrti's argument against External Realism at that later juncture explicitly builds upon the argument in this passage: that the cognitive image of the sensory object (*grāhyākāra*) is both the means for knowing the object, and the resulting knowledge of it. In both passages, the lynchpin of the argument is the underlying ontological unity of cognition, such that

any supposed distinction between agent (*kartr*) and patient (*karman*) is nothing more than a conceptual fabrication.

The essence of Dharmakīrti's argument here is simple: there is no sensory—as opposed to conceptual or determinate—knowledge, over and above the production of a sensory cognition. In other words, a perceptual cognition is both the means of attaining (*sādhana*) perceptual knowledge (i.e., the *pratyakṣa-pramāṇa*), as well as the actual perceptual knowledge (i.e., the *pramā* or *pramiti*) that is to be attained (*sādhya*) by those means. But, precisely on this account, in the final analysis it is only the cognition itself, rather than the sense-faculty, the external object, or the contact (*sannikarṣa*) between the two—these being the most commonly-proposed alternatives—that is the instrument (*karana*) for the action (*kriyā*) of knowing.

That is to say: no matter how a cognition is produced, and no matter its conditioning causal factors (*pratyaya*), only the ontologically indivisible and momentary awareness itself is the “final differentiating factor” (*antyabhedaka*) or “restricting feature” (*niyāmaka*) which accounts for its contents. Naturally, all of this feeds directly into the discussion about the “awareness of awareness,” i.e., “reflexive awareness,” which also functions simultaneously as the means and result, in this same way and for these same reasons. But in order to fully and properly understand this point, and Dharmakīrti's theory of reflexive awareness more generally, it is first necessary to understand his prior account of the causal structure of cognition.

This chapter begins with an analysis of the basic constituents of an action, applied to cognition. We then turn to Dharmakīrti's main argument in this passage, before concluding with a preliminary discussion of reflexive awareness and ontological idealism in relation to this argument.

I. The *Kāraṅka* System and Cognition

A. *Karaṇa*, *Sādhakatama*, and *Pramāṇa*

The system of *kāraṅkas* or “event-makers” (Patil 2009, 37) was originally developed by Patañjali (ca. 200 BCE) in his “Great Commentary” (*Mahābhāṣya*) on the foundational works of Sanskrit grammar, and later applied to epistemology by Gautama (ca. 200 CE) in his *Nyāyasūtras*. The essence of this system was the analysis of an “event” or “action” (*kriyā*) into its constituent elements (Patil 2009, 37–39):

Of the six semantic relations, or “semantic roles,” described in the [*kāraṅka*] theory, three are especially important for Nyāya and Buddhist epistemology: the “patient” (*karman*); the “agent” (*kartr*); and the “instrument” (*karaṇa*).

Consider the sentence “Devadatta cuts the tree with an axe.” In this sentence the event [*kriyā*] is the action denoted by the verb “to cut.” The Naiyāyikas analyze this event as being constituted by two sub-events, an intermediary, or “functioning,” event (*vyāpāra*) and a final, or “culminating,” event (*phala*). The final, or culminating, event is, in this case, the cutting of the tree. This is the event in which we are most interested. It is helpful to think of it as the final effect of the action expressed by the verb. Since the tree is the locus of this final effect, it is said to be the patient [*karman*] of the event. The functioning event is an intermediary event in the causal chain that begins with the agent’s effort (*kṛti*) and culminates in the final effect. This event is usually represented by the initial contact (*saṃyoga*) of the axe with the tree. According to the Naiyāyikas, the agent [*kartr*] of an event is the one who performs the action that is the first member in the causal chain that culminates in the final effect of the event. This action is sometimes described as the “effort” (*prayatna*) motivated by a specific desire (*icchā*) of the agent. It is also described as what instigates (*pra + √yuj*) the event. In the above sentence, the agent is Devadatta. According to the Naiyāyikas, the instrument is the cause par excellence (*sādhakatama*)¹ of the event. It is usually represented by the axe. On this view, the instrument (i.e., the axe) is the cause whose functioning (i.e., contact with the tree) culminates in the final effect of the event (i.e., the cutting of the tree). Given this interpretation, an instrument is closely associated with a functioning

¹ The concept of the *sādhakatama*, and in particular the requirement that it exist in an “unmediated” (*avyavahita*) causal relationship with the effect—in other words, that nothing intervenes between the operation of the instrument *qua* “cause par excellence,” and the production of the effect—is extremely important, and ends up being the lynchpin in Dharmakīrti’s argument in this passage. See below.

event and, in an important sense, it is the instrument that functions. An instrument can be described, therefore, as a cause whose functioning is just the intermediary event that culminates in the final effect. Given this conceptual vocabulary, the Naiyāyikas argue as follows: The complex event denoted by the verb “to cut” is constituted by an intermediary event “e” (i.e., the axe’s contact with the tree) and a final event “f” (i.e., the cutting of the tree). Devadatta is the agent of “e” and the tree is the patient of “e.” The axe is the instrument whose functioning produces the intermediary event that culminates in the final event “f.”²

In other words, on the standard Nyāya account, the action (*kriyā*) of “cutting” is mediated by the subsidiary “functioning event” or “intermediate activity” (*vyāpāra*), i.e., the application of the instrument (the axe) to the object (the tree). In their model, which was standard for most non-Buddhist epistemology, the action of “cutting” is an effect (*phala*) that is produced by this “intermediate activity.” Schematically, then, the causal conjunction of the axe and the tree—i.e., the moment of contact (*sparśa*) between instrument and patient, which constitutes the “intermediate activity”—is the cause, and the action of “cutting” is the effect.³

A key point of this Nyāya approach, and a primary object of the Buddhist critique thereof, was the primary instigating role attributed to the desire (*icchā*) of the agent (*kartr*). To the extent that, as Patil notes, “The functioning event [i.e., *vyāpāra*] is an intermediary event in the causal chain that begins with the agent’s effort (*kṛti*) and culminates in the final effect,” this model of causal activity is predicated on the notion of a unified self (*ātman*), i.e., the agent whose exercise of will gets the causal ball rolling. Needless to say, then, the foundational Buddhist position that there is “no self” (*anātman*) is a critically important component of Dharmakīrti’s critique. But we will address this point in further detail below.⁴

² Cf. also Matilal (1985, 372–78) and Ganeri (1999a, 51–62).

³ Many thanks to John Dunne for clarifying this point.

⁴ See below, Section I.B: [Grammar, Ontology, and Eleutheriology](#).

This grammatical approach to the analysis of actions or events, initially developed by the Naiyāyikas, eventually came to define the discourse of Indian epistemology (Patil 2009, 39–40):

The conceptual framework provided by the theory of event-makers is directly applied by the Naiyāyikas to the mental event denoted by the verb “to know.” Consider, for example, the sentence “Devadatta knows ‘p’ by means of ‘I.’” In this sentence, the event is the awareness-event denoted by the verb “to know.” Knowing-events, like cutting-events, are understood in terms of two subevents, an intermediary or functioning event and a culminating event. The culminating event is the warranted awareness (*pramiti*) that “p,” where “p” is the object or content of that state of awareness. As such, “p” is taken to be the locus of the culminating event and is therefore the patient of the event. The functioning intermediary of the event is associated with the instrument “I” and is an intermediary in the causal chain that begins with the action of an agent and culminates in the final effect... With this conceptual vocabulary, the Naiyāyikas interpret the event denoted by the verb “to know” (*pramā*) as follows: They say that knowing-events are constituted by an intermediary event “e” and a culminating event “f.” Devadatta is the agent of “e” (*pramātṛ*) and “p” is the patient (or object) of “e” (*prameya*). Warranted awareness is the culminating event “f” (*pramiti*). “I” is the instrument (*pramāṇa*) whose functioning produces the intermediary event that culminates in the final effect “f.”

The grammatical framework for epistemology, a crucially influential legacy of the *Nyāyasūtras*, thus forms the theoretical foundation for every participant (both Buddhist and non-Buddhist) in what would over the course of centuries take shape as the *pramāṇa* discourse. In terms of this foundational Nyāya model, to say that some epistemic object (*prameya*) is known “by means of” some epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*), just is to say that there is a resultant action of “knowing” (*pramā*) which is caused by the “intermediate activity” (*vyāpāra*), i.e., the application of the epistemic instrument to the epistemic object.

Within this specifically epistemological context, just as with regard to the Nyāya account of causal activity in general, a central role is attributed to the “instrument” (*kaṛaṇa*) of the action. That is to say: although in some sense all of the various *kāraṇas* (the agent, the patient, etc.) might be considered “causes” (*kāraṇas*) or conditions (*pratyayas*) of the action, only the instrument (i.e., the *kaṛaṇa*) is the “cause par excellence” or “most prominent causal factor” (*sādhakatama*).

The term *sādhakatama* bears both a semantic and a grammatical relationship to the philosophical issues at stake. The suffix *-tama* denotes a superlative, while the formulation *X-aka* means “that which makes or does X,” or “X-er.” Thus, the Sanskrit root \sqrt{kr} (“to make” or “to do”) plus the suffix *-aka* generates *kāraka* (“event-maker” or, more literally if less elegantly, “doing-doer”). Similarly, a *sādhaka* is an “accomplisher” (from \sqrt{sidh} , “to accomplish, establish, prove”), and so *sādhakatama* may be literally translated as “most [accomplishing] accomplisher.” Meanwhile, although the *kāraṅkas*, including the term *kāraka* itself, are derived from the root \sqrt{kr} , the “instrument”—*karāṇa*, formed from the root *kr* plus the instrumental suffix *-ana*—is also frequently designated (in the PV and elsewhere) by the term *sādhana*, formed from \sqrt{sidh} plus the same instrumental suffix. In other words, a *karāṇa* (“that by means of which something is done”) is a *sādhana* (“that by means of which something is accomplished”) or a *sādhaka* (“accomplisher”). The question then becomes: which *sādhaka*, out of all the various entities which might plausibly be considered as a “cause” (*kāraṇa*) or “accomplisher” of an action, is the “most accomplishing accomplisher” (*sādhakatama*).⁵ The consensus view among participants in the *pramāṇa* discourse was that, out of all the *kāraṇas* (“causes”) which are *sādhakas* (“accomplishers”) by virtue of contributing to the action, the *sādhakatama* (“most accomplishing accomplisher”) is the *karāṇa* (“instrument”). Matilal (1985, 373) explains:

Thus, the axe is regarded as a typical example of a *Karāṇa* [“instrument”] with reference to the relevant event e.g., felling of a tree. As a product, this event is a result of a complex of causes. But of those so-called causes the axe enjoys a special position by virtue of which it is regarded as a *karāṇa*, and not simply a *kāraṇa* [i.e., a “cause” in the generic sense]. A *Karāṇa* has, thus, been defined as the *asādhāraṇa*

⁵ Patil (2009, 38n17) elaborates: “The term ‘par excellence’ [-*tama*] is interpreted in various ways. Some Naiyāyikas, for example, maintain that an instrument (*karāṇa*) is the cause that finally produces the event; the cause that seizes the effect (*phalopādāhāyakaṃ kāraṇam*); or the cause that is excluded from a nonconnection with the culminating effect (*phalāyogavyavacchinakāraṇam*). Given these interpretations, the contact of the axe with the tree would be the instrument.”

Kāraṇa, or the unique or uncommon cause. But wherein lies its uniqueness or uncommonness? ... That a *karaṇa* [“instrument”] is a *kāraṇa par excellence*, or more clearly, a *kāraṇa* [“cause”] *par excellence*, is unanimously accepted by almost all scholars. But regarding the true character of this excellence or supremacy of *karaṇa* over other causes, opinions vary.

Matilal lays out the three main Nyāya views in this regard, the details of which are not particularly relevant to the present study.⁶ For our purposes, the most important point in this regard is that Dharmakīrti frames his argument in PV 3.301-319 precisely as an analysis of the question of which “cause” (*kāraṇa*) truly deserves the designation of “instrument” (*karaṇa*) *qua sādhanatama*:

As for the “instrument of the action” (*kriyāsādhana*), it is indeed not the case that every [cause] is the instrument for every patient; rather, that [cause], due to which there is the action, is the instrument of that⁷ [action]. || 301 ||⁸

Or, as he writes later in this passage:

Even though every causal factor (*kāraṇa*) is a contributor to the action, that which finally differentiates (*antyam bhedakam*) [it from some other action] is considered to be the most efficient cause (*sādhanatamam*) of the [action]. || 311 ||⁹

Thus, Dharmakīrti follows the basic outline of this theory, and adopts its terminology.

⁶ These three main views are summarized in Patil (2009, 39n18). Briefly, they are: (1) the classical Nyāya view that the instrument is “the cause which possesses the functioning” (*vyāpāravatkāraṇam karaṇam*); (2) the view, most closely associated with the post-13th century New Nyāya (*navyanīyāya*), and clearly indebted to Dharmakīrti, that the instrument is “that which does not produce the relevant effect with delay” (*ayadvilambāt prakṛtakāryānuṣṭāh*); and (3) Jayantabhaṭṭa’s (ca. 800 CE) idiosyncratic view, which was in some ways shared by Dharmakīrti, that the entire causal complex must be regarded as the instrument. This last position lines up with Dharmakīrti’s position to the extent that Dharmakīrti insisted on the ultimate indivisibility of the causal complex and the strictly conceptual or metaphorical character of any isolated instrument. See below, Section III.B: [“It is Asserted that a Real Thing is Undifferentiated.”](#)

⁷ Reading *tasyāḥ* [*kriyāyāḥ*] rather than *tasya* [*karmaṇaḥ*]. Cf. Tosaki (1979, 396n4).

⁸ Tosaki (1979, 396): *kriyāsādhanam ity eva sarvaṃ sarvasya karmaṇaḥ | sādhanam na hi tat tasyāḥ sādhanam yā kriyā yataḥ* || 301 ||

⁹ Tosaki (1979, 404): *sarveṣāṃ upayoge ‘pi kārakāṇāṃ kriyām prati | yad antyam bhedakam tasyās tat sādhanatamaṃ matam* || 311 ||

However, Dharmakīrti also significantly altered the *kāraṅka* theory, by insisting on the ontological identity of instrument-*qua-sādhakatama* and event-*qua-kriyā*. As Dunne (2004, 270–71) writes,

Dharmakīrti adds a significant twist to his argument, for his analysis does not follow the typical *kāraṅka*-theory discussed earlier. On that theory, an instrument of knowledge would be the instrument (*karāṇa*) for the production of a resulting action (*kriyā*) that is an instrumental effect (*pramāṇaphala*) consisting of the act of knowing (*pramiti*). There is thus a cause-effect relationship between an instrument of knowledge and the instrumental effect that arises from it, and as such, the instrument of knowledge and the instrumental effect are distinct... [Dharmakīrti] instead maintains that instrument and action are identical; specifically, they are the awareness' objective aspect (*grāhya*) and subjective aspect (*grāhakākāra*), respectively.

The “significant twist”¹⁰ introduced by Dharmakīrti was thus the notion that this distinction between instrument and result or instrument and action is artificial, and so there is in fact no

¹⁰ While Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti's assertion of the identity of instrument and result certainly cut against the predominant thrust of the *kāraṅka* system, it is perhaps better to understand the argument here as emphasizing a pre-existing point of tension within that system, as opposed to inventing an entirely new approach to it. Thus, for example, the arch anti-Buddhist Mīmāṃsā luminary Kumāriḷa Bhaṭṭa (ca. 650) argues along similar lines that the question of whether a momentary cognition ought to be considered as the means (*pramāṇa*) or as the result (*phala*) of the sensory-cognitive process is to some extent arbitrary. In his comments on verse 56 of the Perception Chapter (*pratyakṣapariccheda*) of Kumāriḷa's *Ślokavārttika*, Taber (2005, 68–69) notes:

In the above discussion it has been assumed that a *pramāṇa* such as perception is a *means* of knowledge that yields something else as its result. This is indicated by the grammatical form of the word *pramāṇa* itself. However, one needn't always be bound by the grammatical forms of words; sometimes words have meanings that deviate from their etymology. Thus, the *pramāṇa* perception could also be the *result* of the process [of] perception, not the means. More often than not, in fact, we think of perception as the result of the functioning of the senses—a cognition or awareness of some kind—not the functioning of the senses itself... One may choose the sense faculty or the connection of sense faculty and object (or any of a number of other connections) as the means; in that case the cognition will indeed be the result. However, on that view, if MS 1.1.4 is taken as saying that perception is the *cognition*—or, what comes to much the same thing, the *arising* of a cognition or a cognition *as it is arising*—then it will actually be identifying the *result* of the act of perception as “perception.” If one chooses the cognition as the means, on the other hand, then some other awareness produced by the cognition, or else indeed the “manifestness” of the object, will be the result.

This is not to say that Kumāriḷa's perspective on these issues was the same as Dharmakīrti's; on the contrary, Kumāriḷa explicitly refuted the ontological identity of means and result, insisting that no matter how these are construed, they must be understood as ontologically distinct. There were furthermore several other points of vehement disagreement as well, perhaps most importantly concerning the “self-illuminating” (*svaprakāśa*) nature of cognition, which

relationship of cause and effect between the instrumental cognition and the resulting knowledge, or between the supposedly intermediate “functioning event” (*vyāpāra*) and the actual action (*kriyā*). On the contrary, Dharmakīrti argues, following Dinnāga (PS 1.8d), that “the resulting [cognition] just is the instrumental [cognition]” (*pramāṇam phalam eva sat*).

B. Grammar, Ontology, and Eleutheriology

Now, this might all seem like semantic hair-splitting, but it is important to remember that such grammatical questions animated Dharmakīrti’s cultural and intellectual milieu. For Sanskrit grammarians such as Pāṇini and Patañjali, that is to say, Sanskrit grammar is not “just” Sanskrit grammar. The Sanskrit language is, rather, a map of the cosmos or a reflection of the deep structure of reality, since Sanskrit was not any ordinary language, but the language of the uncreated and eternal wisdom that resounds throughout space and time (i.e., the Vedas).¹¹ From this perspective, the *kāraṅkas* are not merely grammatical heuristics or useful fictions, but real entities with ontological heft. Thus, when Dharmakīrti concludes this line of argumentation by critiquing the ontological separation of the *kāraṅkas* generally (PV 3.319), it is implicitly and by extension a critique of the purported relationship between Sanskrit grammar, the Vedas, and the nature of reality. To deny that *karāṇa* and *karman* and so on refer to ontologically distinct entities is, in other words, precisely to deny that the grammatical distinction between them is anything other than an artifact of conventional language-use, and thereby to deny that the structure of Sanskrit grammar bears any special relationship at all to the structure of the cosmos.

Kumārila denied. At the same time, it is difficult to disagree with Taber’s (2005, 170n76) assessment that Kumārila and Dharmakīrti were to a significant extent “arguing past each other” (see also below, note 19), since they agreed on so many of the foundational points at stake.

¹¹ Bronkhorst (2011, 2–35).

Among the many consequences of this denial, perhaps the most important was the elimination of any causal role played by an independent and ontologically-distinct agent (*kartr*). This is because the non-Buddhist epistemological consensus included an eleutheriological component: the view that it is the Self (*ātman*) which cognizes, acts, and attains liberation (*mokṣa*). The non-Buddhist position in this way constitutes a kind of “common sense” framework, such that the Self is the agent or “knower” (*pramātr*), employing an “instrument of knowledge” (*pramāṇa*) in order to attain the result of knowledge (*pramiti*). Indeed, as Gold (2015, 96–97) notes, the Buddhist tradition of *pramāṇa* literature was inaugurated in response to Pakṣilasvāman Vātsyāyana’s (ca. 450) commentary on the tenth verse of the *Nyāyasūtras*, wherein Vātsyāyana asserts the reality of the Self against the foundational Buddhist teaching that there is “no Self” (*anātman*). In the AKBh, for what appears to have been the first time in the Buddhist tradition, Vasubandhu responded to Vāstyāyana’s argument in its own, *pramāṇa*-theoretical terms:

And how is this to be understood, that the word “self” indicates only the continuum of aggregates, and does not apply elsewhere? Because there is neither perception nor inference [of the “self”]. For there is perception—apprehension—of existent *dharmas* where there is no interval [*asaty antarāye*]. Such is the case for the six sensory objects and the mind. And there is an inference for the five sensory organs. In this case, the inference is that with a cause in place [*sati kāraṇe*], when another cause does not exist, no result is seen, and when it does exist it does come about, as with a sprout. Or, with the cause in place that consists in a manifest sensory object and attention, no grasping of a sensory object is seen for blind or deaf, etc. people whereas it is for people who are not blind or deaf, etc. So, in that case, too, there is determined to be the existence and nonexistence of another cause. And that other cause is the sensory organ—that’s the inference. And no such inference exists for the self, so there is no self.¹²

¹² Pradhan (461.4-20), trans. Gold (2015, 100): *katham punar idam gamyate skandhasaṃtāna evedam ātmābhīdhānam vartate nānyasmīn abhidheya iti | pratyakṣānumānābhāvāt | ye hi dharmāḥ santi teṣāṃ pratyakṣam upalabdhir bhavaty asaty antarāye | tadyathā ṣaṇṇām viṣayānām manasaś ca | anumānam ca | tadyathā pañcānām indriyānām | tatredam anumānam sati kāraṇe kāraṇāntarasyaḥbhāve kāryasyābhāvo dr̥ṣṭo bhāve ca punarbhavas tadyathānkurasya | saty eva vābhāsaprāpte viṣaye manaskāre ca kāraṇe viṣayagrahasyābhāvo dr̥ṣṭaḥ*

Vasubandhu makes a number of points in this passage which prefigure Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti's contributions. For example, Vasubandhu's emphasis on the primacy of the sense-faculty in the causal history of sensory cognition doubtlessly informs Dinnāga's assertion at PS 1.4ab that perception (*pratyakṣa*) is named after the sense-faculty (*akṣa*), as opposed to the object-field (*viṣaya*), "because [the faculty] is the unique cause"¹³ (*asādhāraṇahetutvād*) of the perceptual cognition. Note, too, the characterization of the cognition-generation process in strictly causal terms (that is, in terms of what Dharmakīrti would call a "relationship of essential concomitance" or *svabhāvapratibandha*): when the causes of a perceptual cognition are in place, the cognition occurs, and when they are not in place, the cognition does not occur.

But by far the most provocative aspect of Vasubandhu's argument here is his off-hand reference to perception as only existing "when there is no interval, such as [between] the six object-fields and the mind" (*asaty antarāye tadyathā ṣaṅṅāṃ viṣayāṅṅāṃ manasaś ca*). As we will see, it is precisely this lack of interval between the sense-object (finally understood as the cognitive image or *ākāra*) and the mind that characterizes Dharmakīrti's argument for the identity of *pramāṇa* and *phala*. That is to say, the claim that *pramāṇa* and *phala* are not ontologically distinct, because there is no "interval" between them, is tantamount to the claim that the purported analysis of a cognition (or, indeed, any *kriyā*) into constituent components is only a kind of mental game.

The point here is that, from a Buddhist perspective, there is no temporally-distributed "action" (*kriyā*) in the sense meant by the Nyāyas, and hence no intermediate "functioning" (*vyāpāra*) event. That is to say, there is nothing that supervenes across all the instants of an

punaś ca bhāvo 'ndhabadhirādīnām anandhābadhirādīnām ca | atas tatrāpi kāraṇāntarasyābhāvo bhāvaś ca niścīyate | yac ca tatkāraṇāntaram tadindriyam ity etad anumānam | na caivam ātmano 'stīti nāstyātmā.

¹³ PS 1.4ab: **asādhāraṇahetutvād akṣais tad vyapadiśyate |**

“action,” uniting them as a composite entity, nor any ontologically real relationship between an ontologically-distinct *kartr*, *karaṇa*, and *karman*. In reality, all there is, is a succession of moments, a “stream of cause and effect.”¹⁴ These moments are causally related *to each other*, but they are not individually analyzable in terms of the kind of discrete causal elements (agent, instrument, patient, etc.) found in the *kāraṇa* system. The *kāraṇas* are, on this account, merely conceptual imputations being projected onto the “stream of cause and effect.”

C. Determinate Perception and Temporal Sequence

The inseparability of *pramāṇa* and *phala* has particular epistemological salience in relation to one of the central debates between and among the various Indian philosophical traditions: the question of whether perception is “determinate” (*savikalpaka*) or “indeterminate” (*nirvikalpaka*).¹⁵ This issue is complex and multifaceted,¹⁶ but in brief, the dispute concerns the relationship between sensory and conceptual cognition. Most succinctly, the question is: does a perceptual (*pratyakṣa*) cognition categorize its object, or not? Put slightly differently: if a perceptual cognition is strictly nonconceptual or indeterminate, and therefore does not categorize its object, should such an indeterminate cognition nevertheless be considered an epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*)?

The earliest Nyāya definition of perception held that perception was determinate (*vyavasāyātmakam*).¹⁷ Over time, however, the various non-Buddhist schools, especially the

¹⁴ See the Introduction, Section II.C: [Sautrāntika Representationalism](#).

¹⁵ These terms are often also translated, somewhat more literally, as “conceptual” and “nonconceptual,” respectively.

¹⁶ Taber (2005, 5–7) is an excellent summary of the contours of this debate. See also Matilal (2005, 1–26).

¹⁷ Taber (2005, 166n36) notes that, on some important and relatively early Nyāya accounts, the definition of perception includes both determinate and indeterminate cognitions: “one can take the word ‘inexpressible’ *avyapadeśya* in the definition at NS 1.1.4 to be referring to nonconceptualized perception and the expression ‘determinate’ *vyavasāyātmaka* as indicating conceptualized perception... This is, implicitly, Vācaspatimiśra’s reading.” Chatterjee (1978, 189–90) summarizes:

Nyāya, more or less converged on the position that perception is a two-stage process. First, there is a nonconceptual and indeterminate cognition of the object, and then there is a conceptual and determinate cognition of the same object.¹⁸ On this general non-Buddhist model, the initial, nonconceptual perception (*pratyakṣa*) is the instrument (*karāṇa*) which “possesses functioning” (*vyāpāravat*). In other words, it is the “instrument of knowing” (*pramāṇa*). The subsequent determinate knowledge (*pramiti*) or conceptual activity of “knowing” (*pramā*), on the other hand, is produced by the “intermediate functioning” (*vyāpāra*), which is to say, the application of this epistemic instrument to the epistemic object (*prameya*). Again: according to the non-Buddhists, the action of “knowing” is an effect (*phala*), produced by the “intermediate functioning” which is its cause. A key point here is that, owing to the temporal and ontological distinction, on the non-Buddhist account, the resultant activity of “knowing perceptually” is understood to be conceptual, even if the “instrumental” sensory-perceptual cognition itself is understood to be nonconceptual.

The grammarian philosophers (*śābdikas*) along with others take the extreme view that all perceptions are *savikalpala* or determinate, since every perception must be expressed in a verbal proposition and is completely predicative in its character. This is met by another extreme view, held by the Buddhists and some Vedāntists, that *nirvikalpaka* or indeterminate perception alone is valid, while *savikalpaka* or determinate perception is false knowledge. Between these two extremes we may place the other systems of philosophy which accept both *nirvikalpaka* and *savikalpaka* perceptions as true knowledge. Thus, among the different theories of perception in Indian philosophy there seems to be a sort of gradation from the most abstract to the most concrete view of perception.

Chatterjee does not explain who these “others” that agree with the Grammarians as to the determinate nature of all perceptions are, but he may have had in mind the extraordinarily influential Bhartṛhari (ca. 400 CE). Bhartṛhari is a very interesting figure for many reasons, not the least of which was his clear influence on Dinnāga. Bhartṛhari is often included among the Grammarians, but his radical stance as to the omnipresence of language and the ultimately linguistic nature of reality as such also places him among those, like the Buddhists and the Vedāntins, who maintained that ordinary empirical “reality” is in fact illusion (*māyā*). Cf., for example, *Vākyapadīya* I.86.

¹⁸ On some accounts, particularly the Vaiśeṣika, perception operates by directly apprehending the perceptual object *qua* its class, as for example in the apprehension of a cow as “cow”; this is the idea behind the theory of the *pramāṇa* as the “qualifying cognition” (cf. PV 3.313-315, and below, note 51), since the universal or class-signifier exists in a relationship of necessary inherence with the perceptual object; to perceive the object is necessarily to perceive the class to which the object belongs. On such accounts, the initial perception must be considered determinate or conceptual (i.e., *savikalpaka*). But the temporal structure remains, just insofar as this initial determinate perception must nevertheless give rise to subsequent resulting knowledge (“That which I have seen is a ‘cow’”) in order to be considered a *pramāṇa*.

On this note, while there are many non-Buddhist accounts of the two-step perceptual process, and although Dharmakīrti was responding to several different critiques of Dinnāga in the PV, the passage concerning the identity of *pramāṇa* and *phala* (PV 3.301-319, *ad* PS 1.8cd) appears to have been most specifically directed against the Mīmāṃsā luminary Kumāṛila.¹⁹ In the section of his *Ślokavārttika* dealing with this issue, Kumāṛila's aim was to defend basically all of the non-Buddhist accounts against Dinnāga's objections (Taber 2005, 19–20):

Kumāṛila, interestingly, proceeds to defend all of the theories that accept some kind of interaction between sense faculty and object as viable options against the various criticisms raised by Dinnāga in his *Pramāṇasamuccaya*; indeed, it is only Dinnāga's own proposal, that the cognition is *both* *pramāṇa* and *phala*, that Kumāṛila deems unacceptable. Thus, the aim of this section of [Kumāṛila's] *Pratyakṣapariccheda* appears to be the complete demolition of the discussion of perception in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* – not only is Dinnāga's proposal wrong, every one of the theories he attacks is potentially right, or at least not wrong for the reasons he gives...

Taber lists a number of theories about perception, all of which Kumāṛila defends against Dinnāga's critique. He then goes on to discuss Kumāṛila's own position:

Even theories that hold the *cognition* of the object to be the means of knowledge, with which Kumāṛila's own is to be grouped, can be shown to be coherent. Here, of course, the main problem is to explain how *pramāṇa* and *phala* are distinct, that is, how a cognition, which itself is a knowing of an object, can be construed as a means for the arising of *another* cognition that will be construed as the result (as it is on most theories of this sort). This can be done in various ways: the *pramāṇa* could be a cognition of a qualifying feature of an object, such as the color blue, and the *phala* an awareness of that same object as qualified by that feature, for example, "The pot is blue." Or the *pramāṇa* could be a *nonconceptualized* perception of the qualifying feature and the *phala* a conceptualized awareness of it. Or the *pramāṇa*

¹⁹ Or perhaps not; Taber (2005, 170n76) states that it is his belief that "neither Kumāṛila nor Dharmakīrti had before him the other's writings. Neither quotes the other; more significantly, they appear in many instances to be arguing past each other." Taber hypothesizes instead that "these theories and arguments must have been in circulation for some time among other Buddhist and Mīmāṃsaka teachers (whose names are lost to us) before they were provocatively summarized—no doubt also given new shape—by Dharmakīrti and Kumāṛila."

could be an awareness of the qualified object, the *phala* an awareness of it as desirable, undesirable, or neither ([*ŚV Pratyakṣapariccheda*] 70–73).

Therefore, Kumāriila concludes: “Only the Buddhist proposal, then—that is, Diñnāga’s position—which *identifies pramāṇa* and *phala* as different aspects of the same cognition, is untenable.”

In other words, according to Kumāriila, *pramāṇa* and *phala* must be distinct.

Along these lines, while Kumāriila defended the existence and instrumentality (*prāmāṇya*) of conceptualized perception at great length²⁰ in the *Ślokavārttika*, his main argument in this section was simply that *both* a nonconceptual cognition of the object (insofar as it engenders a conceptual determination), *and* a conceptual cognition of the object (insofar as it facilitates subsequent knowledge), should be considered *pramāṇas*. In other words, for Kumāriila, and for the non-Buddhist traditions in general, temporal sequence is a *sine qua non* of the perceptual process.²¹ According to these non-Buddhists, a perceptual cognition must be understood precisely as an *instrument (karaṇa)*, i.e., as a “means of knowledge” (*pramāṇa*), possessed of causal “functioning” (*vyāpāra*), that produces knowledge (*pramā*)—the specific action (*kriyā*) in question—as its result (*phala*), at some later point in time, once the functioning is complete.

Diñnāga and Dharmakīrti, by contrast, argued first of all that perception as such is strictly nonconceptual and indeterminate, and furthermore that the perceptual cognition *qua* instrument is ontologically identical to the perceptual cognition *qua* effect.²² But in order to fully appreciate this

²⁰ Cf. Taber (2005, 93–148), concerning *ŚV pratyakṣapariccheda* 111–254.

²¹ This is no doubt one of the main reasons Kumāriila strongly critiqued Bhartṛhari, who argued against the reality of time. Cf. Taber (2005, 93–94, 120–25).

²² In fact, while the notion of *pramāṇa* and *phala* existing in a relation of temporal sequence is one of the primary objects of Dharmakīrti’s critique in this section, he also explicitly refuted the idea that an ontologically-distinct *pramāṇa* and *phala* could exist at the same time. In other words, the central point here is just that *pramāṇa* and *phala* cannot be construed as ontologically-independent entities, even if they are asserted to exist simultaneously. See PV 3.315, in Appendix C, [PV 3.301-319 ad PS\(V\) 1.8cd.](#)

point and all its ramifications, it is necessary to delve into the details of why, precisely, Dharmakīrti maintained that the cognition “with the form of the object” (*arthasārūpya*) was both instrument and result. Among its many other consequences, this point is the fulcrum on which Dharmakīrti’s “shift” to idealism will eventually turn, and thus deserves particular attention.

II. Cognition and Causality

A. Instrument and Result in Buddhist Epistemology

As discussed above, the Perception Chapter (PV 3) is structured according to PS 1.2-12. This passage (PV 3.301-319), arguing for the identity of instrument and result, glosses PS(V)1.8cd:

Because it is cognized as having an intermediary function (*vyāpāra*), the resulting cognition (*phala*) just is the instrumental cognition (*pramāṇa*). || 8 ||

For, in this context, it is not the case that the resulting cognition is something different from the instrumental cognition, as [asserted] on the part of outsiders [i.e., non-Buddhists]. Rather, the awareness (*pratīti*) of just that cognition which is the result (*phala*) [appears] as having an intermediary function (*savyāpāra*), by virtue of the fact that it arises with the image (*ākāra*) of the object-field. In dependence on that, *pramāṇa*-ness (*pramāṇatva*) is metaphorically ascribed to it, even though it is without intermediary functioning (*nirvyāpāra*). For example, it is said that an effect (*phala*) arising in conformity with a cause (*hetvanurūpa*) “obtains the form of the cause (*heturūpa*),” even though there is no intermediary function [of obtaining this form]. Just so in this case as well.²³

The basic point here is simple: a cognition that arises with the image or aspect (*ākāra*) of an object, or which bears the form of the object (*artharūpatā*), is nothing other than the awareness or knowledge (*adhigama*) of the object. The two are one and the same; any difference ascribed to them is purely “metaphorical” (*upacārya*). As Jinendrabuddhi explains,

For it is not the case here [in our system], as on the part of non-Buddhists, that the result is something different from the *pramāṇa*. So let there not be this kind of mistake. The meaning indicated by “[**Rather, the awareness**] of **just that**” (*tasyaiva*) and so on is that there is simply nothing at all with the inherent nature of being arranged (*vyavasthita*) as the instrument (*sādhana*) or as the instrumental object (*sādhya*), because in all cases the convention of instrument and instrumental

²³ Steinkellner (2005a, 3–4): *savyāpārapratītatvāt pramāṇam phalam eva sat || 8 || na hy atra bāhyakānām iva pramāṇād arthāntaram phalam | tasyaiva tu phalabhūtasya jñānasya viśayākāratayā utpattiyā savyāpārapratītiḥ | tām upādāya pramāṇatvam upacaryate nirvyāpāram api sat | tadyathā phalam hetvanurūpam utpadyamānam heturūpam grhṇātīty kathyate nirvyāpāram api tadvad atrāpi |*

object does not escape having the nature of cognition.²⁴ And that is the case here as well; since the cognition has the nature of being knowledge (*adhigama*), it is understood (*pratīti*) as the instrumental object. Thus, it is metaphorically designated as the result (*phala*). And because that very [cognition] contains the image (*ākāra*) of the object-field, “it is cognized as having an intermediate function;” hence, it is metaphorically designated as the *pramāṇa*; that is to say, it is conventionally called that. In other words, that cognition which is bearing the property of having an image of the object-field (*viṣayākāratā*), even though it exists without any intermediate function, *appears* [as though] with an intermediate function (in the form of knowledge about its object-field), [and] not otherwise. Therefore, this very property of having an image of the object-field, which constitutes the nature of the [cognition], is the *pramāṇa*.²⁵

In other words, as will be explained in greater detail below, the sensory cognition with the image (*ākāra*) or appearance (*ābhāsa*) of the object just is the knowledge (*pramiti*) of the object. But it is also that which allows for—i.e., the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) “by means of which”—there is the knowledge of the object.

Thus, the “property of having the image of the object-field” (*viṣayākāratā*) or “property of having the appearance of the object-field” (*viṣayābhāsatā*) on the part of a sensory cognition may, for heuristic purposes, be designated as the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*). But it must be understood that, because a cognition is a mental particular, and a particular is by definition ontologically singular, this is strictly a heuristic fiction: in reality, the cognition is nothing other than this image. That is to say, it is *not* the case that the cognition is a real “quality-possessor” (*dharmin*), which possesses an ontologically discrete “quality” (*dharma*) of having the appearance

²⁴ This follows the Tibetan translation (PST_T): *rtogs pa 'i ngo bo las ma 'das pa nyid kyi phir* (~ *pratītirūpānatītatvāt*), rather than MSS *pratītirūpānupātītvāt* (?).

²⁵ Steinkellner (2005b, 65.11-66.3): *na hy atra bāhyakānām iva pramāṇād arthāntaram phalam iti mā bhūd ihāpi tadvad eva doṣaḥ | tasyaiva tv ityādināyam arthaḥ sūcitaḥ naiva vyavasthitasvabhāvaṃ kiñcid asti sādhyam sādhanam vā pratītirūpānupātītvāt* [sic; cf. note 24] *sarvatra sādhyasādhanavyavahārasya | ihāpi cāsti | jñānasyādhigamarūpatvāt sādhyatvapatītir iti phalatvam upacaryate | tasyaiva ca viṣayākāraparigrahāt savyāpārapratītir iti pramānatvam upacaryate vyavahiyata ity arthaḥ | tathā hi tajjñānam viṣayākāratam dadhānam nirvyāpāram api sat svaviṣaye 'dhigamātmanā vyāpāreṇa khyāti nānyathā | tasmāt saiva tasyātmabhūtā viṣayākāratā pramāṇam iti ||*

of the object.²⁶ Rather, the property of having the image of the object just “constitutes the nature” (*ātmabhūta*) of the cognition. In this way, the distinction between the epistemic instrument (i.e., that “by means of which” the sensory object is known) and the actual sensory knowledge of the object, as well as the distinction between the sensory cognition’s possession of the form of the object and the sensory cognition itself, collapses.

Dharmakīrti’s discussion in the *pramāṇaphala* section takes this point almost for granted, and then expands upon it. That is to say, Dharmakīrti asserts the identity of epistemic instrument and resultant cognitive activity, on precisely these grounds. But he also goes a step further, and investigates the nature of the instrument, which (unlike Diñnāga) he explicitly thematizes—in agreement with the various non-Buddhist traditions—as the “accomplishing means par excellence” (*sādhakatama*). The question is: what exactly is it about a given cognition that constitutes its *sādhakatama*-hood, which is to say, its “epistemic instrumentality” (*prāmāṇya*)?

For Dharmakīrti, the *sādhakatama* of the activity of “perceptually” (*pratyakṣa*) “knowing” (*pra + √mā*) is defined as that feature of a cognition which, being in place, guarantees that the cognition in question constitutes perceptual knowledge. In other words, it is that aspect of the cognition—specifically, as we will see, the “objective aspect” (*grāhyākāra*) or “image of the object-field” (*viṣayākāra*)—which is both necessary and sufficient to establish that the cognition in question is a perceptual instrument (i.e., a *pratyakṣapramāṇa*). Accordingly, Dharmakīrti rejects out of hand any candidate for the *sādhakatama* that is “mediated with regard to the action”²⁷ of knowing (Dunne 2004, 272):

²⁶ Cf. Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.5](#).

²⁷ PV 3.310d: *vyavadhānāt kriyām prati*.

To support the claim that instrument and instrumental effect are actually identical, Dharmakīrti effectively proposes an entirely new²⁸ way of understanding what constitutes an instrument: rather than being the cause of some resultant activity (*kriyā*), it is instead that which is unmediated (*avyavahita*) with regard to the activity... [W]hen the activity (*kriyā*) in question is an indubitable cognition (*pramiti*), the instrument is thus “that through which, when all other causes are in place, the convention of ‘knowing’ is satisfied without further mediation.”²⁹ In short, it is that which requires nothing further in order for one to be currently having a cognition of the object.

In a sense, most of the rest of the PV is concerned with the implications and ramifications of this point; to skip ahead a bit, one of the main payoffs is that the ontological identity of instrument and result ultimately extends to the object of knowledge (*prameya*) as well, because in the final analysis all that is ever truly known *directly* (*pratyakṣataḥ*) is the cognition bearing the form of the object. For this very reason, the shift to idealism beginning at PV 3.320 occurs precisely in the context of Dīnnāga’s discussion of reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvitti*) as the “result,” since every cognition is known by means of itself, which is to say, reflexively.

We will address all of these points in time. Here, the first issue concerns Dīnnāga’s assertion that the instrument lacks intermediary functioning (*vyāpāra*). The specific example that he uses, of metaphorically speaking about an effect “obtaining the form” (*heturūpaṃ grhṇāti*) of its cause, even though there is in reality no activity of “obtaining,” gets picked up by Dharmakīrti:

Just as, in common parlance (*loke*), an effect is said to have assumed the form of its cause, even without performing any activity (*akriyāvattvepi*), because it arises with a nature similar to its causes. || 309 ||³⁰

²⁸ While certainly innovative, it is perhaps a bit of an overstatement to consider this an “entirely new” development in the *pramāṇa* discourse. See above, note [10](#).

²⁹ Cf. Dunne (2004, 384).

³⁰ Tosaki (1979, 401): *yathā phalasya hetūnām sadṛśātmatayodbhavād | heturūpagraho loke 'kriyāvattve 'pi kathyate* || 309 ||

As Devendrabuddhi (PVP 524.5-6) explains, the metaphor here is akin to when a son is said to “take after” his father, even though there is no real activity of “taking”: the son’s appearance is simply an effect that is caused (in large part)³¹ by the appearance of the father.

But it is worth noting here that, like much of Diñnāga and Dharmakīrti’s perspective, this argument was heavily indebted to Vasubandhu’s articulation of Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntika ontological and epistemological theory. Cox (1988, 39) summarizes the Dārṣṭāntika view:

Perception, like all experience, can be described only provisionally as consisting of individual factors possessing unique activities; actually, in the case of perception, as in all causal relations, there exists no distinct agent or cause possessing its own activity of producing a distinct effect.³² Instead, there is simply a stream of experience, or more precisely, a stream of cause and effect (*hetuphalamātra*). These provisionally designated individual causes and effects can be said to have activity only in the sense that they constitute a conventionally-existing collocation of factors. In the experience of perception, words such as sense organ, object, or perceptual consciousness can be used only figuratively to refer to moments abstracted from the causal process as a whole; there is no single factor that perceives or others that are perceived.

In fact, Vasubandhu articulates a perspective remarkably similar to that of Diñnāga. Again, this should not be at all surprising. As Tosaki (1979, 44) and Chu (2008, 238n41) have pointed out, Diñnāga’s arguments in the PS presupposed intimate familiarity with the AKBh, and at certain

³¹ The metaphor of the father as the primary cause of the son’s appearance, used as a way to explain the causal relationship between the object and the object-appearance, is also used at PV 3.401. See Chapter 5, Section II.D.1: [Sharpness and Dullness](#).

³² Unsurprisingly, this perspective was not unique to Vasubandhu, but was held in common by the Dārṣṭāntikas. (Collet Cox 1988, 77n43): “See NAS 25 p.484.b.9ff where the Dārṣṭāntika master, Śrīlāta rejects the Sarvāstivādin thesis that perceptual consciousness is defined according to its unique function of being aware (*viñānāti*). His intention is to deny that perceptual consciousness exists as an agent, or as a distinct factor having its own unique activity.”

points (very much including this particular juncture) could be considered a kind of short-hand summation of it:³³

In that case, when it is said in the scripture [*sūtra*] that “perceptual consciousness (*vijñāna*) is aware (*vijānāti*),” what does perceptual consciousness do? It does not do anything. Just as it is said that the effect conforms [*anuvīdhīyate*] to the cause since it attains its existence (*ātmalābha*) through similarity (*sādṛśya*) [to its cause] even without doing anything, in this way also it is said that perceptual consciousness is aware since it attains its existence through similarity [to its object] even without doing anything. What is [this that is referred to as] its “similarity”? It is the fact that it has the aspect of that [object]. For this reason, even though that [perceptual consciousness] has arisen due to the sense organ, it is said to be aware of the object-field and not of the sense organ. Or, just as the series of perceptual consciousness is the cause with regard to a given [moment of] perceptual consciousness, so there is no fault in saying that perceptual consciousness is aware, since one can apply the word “agent” to the cause.³⁴

We may thus observe, here in the AKBh, several threads of Dharmakīrti’s argument which have already been touched upon, such as the lack of any true causal functionality, and the concomitant indistinguishability of agent *qua* cause and action *qua* effect. But we may also see in this passage

³³ Indeed, not only does Vasubandhu deny the reality of causal activity, he also denies the intelligibility of any ontological distinction between agent and action, and explicitly ties this to the lack of real causal activity (trans. Gold 2015, 75):

Others say: If the eye sees, then what else, aside from the eye that is become the agent, may be called the “action of seeing”? This is unacceptable. For if it is granted that the consciousness cognizes, and in that case there is no difference between the agent and the action (*na ca tatra kartṛkriyābhedaḥ*), then for the other case it should be accepted just as it is in that case. It is said that the eye “sees,” because it is the support for the seeing eye-consciousness, just as it is said that a bell “resonates,” because it is the support for the resonance.

Pradhan (1975, 31.3-7): *anye punar āhuḥ | yadi cakṣuḥ paśyati kartṛbhūtasya cakṣuṣaḥ kā 'nyā dṛśikriyeti vaktavyam | tad etad acodyam | yadi hi vijñānaṃ vijānātīṣyate | na ca tatra kartṛkriyābhedaḥ | evam atrāpi | apare punar bruvate | cakṣurvijñānaṃ darśanaṃ tasyāśrayabhāvāc cakṣuḥ paśyatīty ucyate | yathā nādasyāśrayabhāvāt ghaṅṭā nadatīty ucyata iti |*

³⁴ Pradhan (1975, 473.25-474.3), trans. Cox (1988, 39): *yat tarhi vijñānaṃ vijānāti 'ti sūtra uktaṃ kiṃ tatra vijñānaṃ karoti | na kiṃcit karoti | yathā tu kāryaṃ kāraṇam anuvīdhīyata ity ucyate | sādṛśyenā 'tmalābhād akurvad api kiṃcit | evaṃ vijñānaṃ api vijānātī 'ty ucyate | sādṛśyenā 'tmalābhād akurvad api kiṃcit | kiṃ punar asya sādṛśyam | tadākāratā | ata eva tad indriyād apy utpannaṃ viśayaṃ vijānātī 'ty ucyate ne 'ndriyaṃ | athavā tathā 'trā 'pi vijñānasamānāsya vijñāne kāraṇabhāvād vijñānaṃ vijānātī 'ti vacanān nirdoṣaṃ kāraṇe kartṛśabdānirdeśāt |*

See also Dhammajoti (2007, 164).

another extremely important point, discussed at length in Chapter 3, which ends up forming the theoretical backbone of Dharmakīrti's idealistic shift: the "similarity" (*sādrśya*) between cause and effect, which entails the lack of any true activity on the part of the effect.

Briefly: on a basic account, this "similarity" is the "conformity" (*sa + √rūp*) between the causal features of the object-field (*viśaya*) and the causal features of the object-image (i.e., the *grāhyākāra*) that is produced from the causal contact between the object-field and the sense-faculty. However, for reasons that we will explore more thoroughly in Chapter 3, this conformity is deceptive and cannot ultimately be relied upon; even a sensory cognition which ostensibly conforms to the object, in other words, cannot in the final analysis serve as a truly reliable epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*). Instead, at least according to Śākyabuddhi, the ontological basis for an ultimately reliable instrument must lie in the "similarity of nature" (*sadrśātman*) necessarily held in common by all cognitions, which Dharmakīrti identifies as their nature in terms of being a "mere experience" (*anubhavamātra*): the reflexive nature of awareness.³⁵

B. Cognition Has No "Functioning" (*vyāpāra*)

As discussed above, the *pramāṇaphala* section of the PV constitutes a kind of commentary on PS 1.8cd: "Because it is cognized as having an intermediate function, the resulting cognition (*phala*) itself is the knowledge-instrument (*pramāṇa*)."³⁶ In his autocommentary, Dinnāga asserts that, in consequence, "*pramāṇa*-ness is metaphorically ascribed to it," i.e., ascribed to the cognition which arises with the image of the object, "even though [in reality] there is no intermediate functioning."³⁷

³⁵ See below, Section II.C.2: [The Causal and Non-Causal Nature\(s\) of Cognition](#).

³⁶ PS 1.8cd: *savyāpārapratītatvāt pramāṇam phalam eva sat || 8 ||*

³⁷ PSV *ad* PS 1.8cd: *tām upādāya pramāṇatvam upacaryate nirvyāpāram api sat |*

In terms of the metaphor of cutting with an axe discussed above, the idea is that the t_2 “cutting” is not mediated by any initial t_1 “contact”; rather, each state of affairs, at both t_1 and t_2 , constitutes its own causal activity (i.e., its own *kriyā*), neither of which depends upon the will (*icchā*) of an agent (*kartṛ*) for its intelligibility as an action. There is only the uninterrupted “stream of cause and effect.” Any conceptual consolidation of this stream into a spatially- or temporally-distributed action of “cutting” or “knowing”—or division of this stream into ontologically distinct *kāraṅkas*—can only ever be provisional, metaphorical, and conventional.

Of course, this example highlights what will become a recurring theme throughout the remainder of this study: that Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti stretch *pramāṇa* theory in a Procrustean manner, near or perhaps even past the breaking point, by deploying its terminology in ways that are fundamentally at odds with its general assumptions. That is to say: the central animating concept of *pramāṇa* theory is that knowing or cognizing may, and indeed must, be analyzed into discrete components. To assert that all of these various components are actually the same thing, and concomitantly that all of these “events” occur at the same time, is in effect to break the whole system. To be clear, there is nothing necessarily *wrong* with Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti’s approach, and it is easy to understand why they were inclined to adopt the widely-shared terminology of the *pramāṇa* discourse, rather than invent an entirely new theoretical framework. But it is important to understand how their adoption of this terminology worked at cross purposes to their philosophical arguments.

To name but one example, which is particularly relevant at this juncture: the tension between the practical worldly focus of *pramāṇa* theory in terms of human aims (*puruṣārtha*) on the one hand, and the insistence on the identity of means and result on the other, creates an irresolvable aporia. In ordinary worldly terms, perceptual “knowledge” is determinate. The

perceptual cognition of a ‘jug’ is typically understood to be the cognition of the ‘jug’ *as a ‘jug,’* as opposed to an indeterminate cognition of fundamental particles. However, for Diñnāga and Dharmakīrti, perceptual cognition definitionally cannot be determinate. Hence, Devendrabuddhi had to introduce a distinction between the “mediated” (*vyavahita*) and “unmediated” (*avyavahita*) instrumental effect (*phala*), in essence corresponding to the difference between determinate “knowledge” in terms of ordinary human aims on the one hand, and “knowledge” as a unique momentary cognition *simpliciter* on the other.³⁸ As Dunne (2004, 270–71) explains,

In contrast to the *kāraṅka*-theory and the context of a human aim *qua* mediated effect, Dharmakīrti’s analysis of an instrument of knowledge in terms of what Devendrabuddhi calls an unmediated effect does not employ a causal model, in part because Dharmakīrti follows Dignāga in rejecting the distinction between instrument (*karāṇa*) and effect (*kriyā*, *phala*) as found in the *kāraṅka*-theory. Dharmakīrti thus rejects the notion of understanding instrumentality in terms of a causal relationship between two distinct entities—the instrument and its effect. He instead maintains that instrument and action are identical; specifically, they are the awareness’ objective aspect (*grāhya*) and subjective aspect (*grāhakākāra*), respectively.

Thus, in the limited context of human aims, Dharmakīrti is provisionally willing to tolerate the “mediation” of a temporal delay between the activity of the instrument (i.e., the arising of a sensory cognition bearing a form which isomorphically corresponds to the causal substrate of the ‘jug’) and the arising of the result (i.e., the subsequent determinate judgment “that is a ‘jug’”). In ultimate terms, however—that is, when considering the momentary perceptual cognition produced by the particles that form the basis for the subsequent conceptual determination of those particles as a ‘jug,’ as just a perceptual cognition bearing the form of the single effect produced by those particles, without any reference to the subsequent conceptual judgment of those particles as a

³⁸ Cf. Dunne (2004, 261–79).

‘jug’—the instrument *qua sādihakatama* (i.e., the form or image of the object-field, “by means of which” the object is known) exists *without any temporal or ontological mediation* with respect to the action of knowing *qua* “result” (i.e., that very perceptual cognition, from which the object-image is not ontologically distinct). In other words, even if in ordinary human terms the nonconceptual sensory cognition of jug-particles is “instrumental” just because it subsequently produces the determinate judgment “That is a ‘jug’” as its effect, in ultimate terms, the instrumentality of a momentary sensory cognition only applies to that momentary sensory cognition itself, which is in this sense its own “effect.” Put slightly differently, the point here is that there is no causal process involving discrete causes and effects on the ultimate account.

Nevertheless, while Dharmakīrti maintains that the putative relationship between an action and its causal factors cannot withstand analysis—and, in any case, the entire causal structure must eventually fall away—he is required by the strictures of the *pramāṇa* discourse to offer at least a plausible candidate for a discrete epistemological instrument. His solution, to which we now turn, is to identify the object-image as the “determiner” (*niyāmaka*) of that cognition’s content.

C. The “Determiner” (*niyāmaka*)

1. *Causal Regularity and the Analysis of Cognition*

Buddhist analysis, going all the way back to the Abhidharma, takes causal regularity for granted. The works of Dharmakīrti are no exception, and as Dunne (2004, 161) notes, these works evince “a strong rejection of random (*ākasmika*) causality and thus a strong commitment to the regularity of causality.” In Dharmakīrti’s system, there are two primary units of causal analysis. The first, and the foundational, is the momentary indivisible particular (*svalakṣaṇa*). Strictly speaking, such particulars are the only type of entity (*vastu*) that Dharmakīrti acknowledges to be real. However,

in conventional (*vyāvahārika*) terms, it is also possible to refer to a “causal complex” (*hetusāmagrī*). The notion of the “causal complex” is quite complicated, and a detailed treatment would lie beyond the scope of the present study.³⁹ There are, however, two features of causal complexes which are relevant here.

The first is that a causal complex is always, to some extent, artificially delimited. For example, in conventional terms, it is possible to refer to a causal complex of particulars with certain causal properties, from which non-‘jug’-related properties have been “excluded” (*vyāvṛtta*), as on that basis collectively constituting a ‘jug.’ However, if, as Dunne (2004, 164) notes, “when Dharmakīrti uses the term [‘causal complex’], he means for it to refer to *all* the causes and conditions that contribute to the production of a particular effect,” it is important to understand that, in ultimate terms, the sum total of causal contributors to the jug (including the totality of all the causal antecedents of the particles in question) extends throughout time and space. Hence, to refer to a bounded complex as being causally responsible for the ‘jug’ as a discrete effect is to artificially delimit a particular “slice” of causal pie.

We will revisit this point shortly. At this juncture, the other important feature of causal complexes is that, just as they are restricted in time and space, they are also “restricted in causal capacity” (*śaktinīyama*) (Dunne 2004, 161-62):

[Dharmakīrti] expresses [causal] regularity primarily through various forms of the verb [*ni + √yam*], to “restrict.” In terms of an entity’s ability to produce effects, he affirms a “restriction in causal potentials” (*śakti-nīyama*), which is to say simply that any given entity by its nature is only capable of producing some effects: an apple seed cannot produce an elephant. And in terms of an entity’s causes, he claims that an entity’s causal potentials are restricted precisely because they have arisen from certain causes: it is impossible for an apple seed to produce certain types of

³⁹ For a detailed examination of the “causal complex” and its relation to the two senses of *svabhāva* (as “nature” and “property”), cf. Dunne (2004, 161–73).

effects because it is impossible for it to arise from certain kinds of causes. While these notions of restriction are negative in character, they amount to positive claims: an entity has the potentials to produce certain types of effects because it has arisen from certain types of causes. There is thus a beginningless chain of causes and effects: the range of an entity's causal potentials are determined by its causes and conditions, and those causes and conditions are themselves effects whose range of possible causal potentials is likewise determined by their causes and conditions.

The key point here is that cognitive processes must be analyzed in causal terms. That is to say, a unique momentary cognition (i.e., a mental particular) exists as the product or effect of a causal complex, in a manner precisely analogous to the production of an apple or a jug. The main difference between the two is that, as Dharmakīrti argues at PV 2.114ab, cognitions can only be caused by other cognitions; purely physical causes have a “restriction in causal capacity” (*śaktiniyama*) that prevents them from being able to produce mental events on their own.⁴⁰

However, unlike jugs or other purely physical⁴¹ entities, cognitions have a special feature. Although neither Dharmakīrti nor his premodern commentators ever quite frame the issue in these terms, it is clear that cognition must possess a nature (*svabhāva*) with both causally-structured and non-causally-structured properties (*svabhāvas*).⁴²

2. *The Causal and Non-Causal Nature(s) of Cognition*

As has already been discussed at some length, on Dharmakīrti's account, what distinguishes sensory cognition from conceptual cognition is that sensory cognition exclusively arises as the

⁴⁰ PV 2.114ab: “Because cognition is restricted in causal capacity, one [cognition] is the cause of one [cognition of the same type].” *viññānaṃ śaktiniyamād ekam ekasya kāraṇam*. See also Chapter 1, Section III.A.1: [Two Tracks](#).

⁴¹ That is, “purely physical” on an External Realist account; from an idealist perspective, there are of course no “purely physical” entities.

⁴² Cf. Dunne (2004, 203–22) for an in-depth discussion of the two primary senses of *svabhāva*, as “property” and “nature.”

direct result of a causal interaction between the sense-faculties and the object-field. Sensory cognition is thus directly responsive to changes in its causal conditions, such as differences in the object-field. In other words, sensory cognition is causally structured, such that the object-field (*viṣaya*) can be spoken of as the primary cause (*upādānahetu*), and the object-image (*grāhyākāra*) as the effect, which varies according to variations in its causes and conditions.

At the same time, however, Dharmakīrti argues that there is an inherent feature or essential property (*svabhāva*) of cognition which is *not* responsive to such changes, a feature which is in fact incapable of change, and therefore identical for every cognition: the “merely experiential” (*anubhavamātra*) or reflexively-aware nature of cognition.

In this context, [every] awareness, which has a similar nature by virtue of merely being an experience, must have a nature such that it is distinguished in regard to each patient (*karman*). || 302 ||⁴³

Devendrabuddhi explains:

In this context, in terms of mere experience, **with respect to a patient** such as form, **awareness, which has a similar nature, must have a nature**—i.e., the nature of being an instrument (*byed pa'i rang bzhin des ~ sādhakātmanā*)—**such that each patient**, each object, **is distinguished** with a designation such as: “This is a cognition of blue” or “this is a cognition of yellow.” If this were not so, every object would be the cognized patient (*shes bya = *jñeya*) of every cognition, and not just some, because there would be no difference [between cognitions].⁴⁴

⁴³ Tosaki (1979, 397): *tatrānubhavamātreṇa jñānasya sadṛśātmanah | bhāvyaṃ tenātmanā yena pratikarma vibhajyate || 302 ||*

⁴⁴ PVP (521.10-522.4): *gzugs la sogs pa las | de la nyams myong tsam du ni | shes pa 'dra ba'i bdag nyid can | bdag nyid des byed pa'i rang bzhin des | 'gyur na gang gis | las so so la ste don so so la rnam 'byed 'gyur | 'di ni sngon po'i shes pa yin zhing | 'di ni ser po'i shes pa yin no zhes bya ba la sogs pa'i tha snyad kyis so || de lta ma yin na don thams cad shes pa thams cad kyi shes byar 'gyur ba'am | 'ga zhig kyang ma yin te | bye brag med pa'i phyir ro ||*

Dharmakīrti's point here is that every cognition, by its very nature, presents its own contents to itself. But this minimal reflexive awareness is insufficient to account for any specific cognitive content—such as 'blue' or 'yellow'—precisely because it does not exist in any kind of causal relationship to anything other than itself (Dunne 2004, 276n93):

That reflexive awareness is noncausal follows from its simultaneity with its object, namely, the awareness that is reflexively perceived itself. Indeed, what can be most confusing about reflexive awareness is the notion that it is a cognition distinct from its object. This distinction is clearly the case for all forms of perception, including mental perception (*mānasapratyakṣa*), for in all cases the object (*grāhya*) of perception is its cause (see, for example, PV 3.224) ... In contrast, what Dignāga first identifies as the three aspects of an awareness—namely, reflexive awareness, the objective aspect (*grāhyākāra*), and the subjective aspect (*grāhakākāra*)—are all ultimately identical and hence simultaneous. The notion that reflexive awareness is cognizing the subjective and objective aspects is merely a way of conceptualizing the process of knowing.

In other words, to the extent that reflexive awareness may be considered an “effect,” it is only insofar as one moment of awareness may be considered causally responsible for the next moment of awareness, in an unbroken continuity extending since the “beginning” of beginningless *saṃsāra*.⁴⁵ But, because it is noncausal in terms of its relationship to any extrinsic conditioning factor, mere reflexive awareness is completely “unrestricted” (*anīyama*) and contentless—except, perhaps, for the undifferentiated “luminosity” of reflexive awareness itself, to whatever extent this may be considered “content.” Therefore, Dharmakīrti argues, there must be some determinative or “restricting factor” (*niyāma*): something, that is, which restricts the range of experience for a given cognition, at a given moment in time, to a given patient (*karman*) or object of knowledge (*prameya*).

⁴⁵ And, on the Mahāyāna account at least, this continuity remains unbroken, past the “end” of endless *saṃsāra*; the model of final Awakening as the “transformation of the basis” (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*) hinges on the purification, rather than the “extinguishment” (*nirvāṇa*), of awareness.

The first point he makes in this regard is simply that the determinative factor cannot be the causes (*kāraṇas*) of the cognition:

While there may be a difference among the causes of that [cognition], that difference, not being of [that cognition's] nature, is not what (through differentiation) restricts that [otherwise] undifferentiated [cognition] to a distinct patient. || 303 ||⁴⁶

In other words, anything extrinsic to the nature (*svabhāva*) of the cognition is mediated by the nature of the cognition; whatever the “restricting factor” determining the contents of cognition is, it must be inherent to the cognition itself. This is the heart of the argument, and we will return to it. But first, it is important to revisit the context of this discussion, since it is easy to misunderstand Dharmakīrti's point about how differences in the causes of cognition cannot ultimately account for differences in the phenomenal content of cognition.

3. *Determinative Factor (niyāmaka) as Instrument (pramāṇa)*

It must be emphasized that the argument here is *not* that the contents of cognition arise randomly or without a causal relationship to some stimulus. As the product or effect (*phala*) of a causal complex (*hetusāmagrī*), a cognition does indeed possess a restriction of causal capacity (*śaktiniyama*) in terms of what appears; just as an apple seed cannot produce an elephant, the appearance of an elephant does not (ordinarily)⁴⁷ arise from an apple, and the cognition of ‘blue’ does not (ordinarily) arise from a yellow-patch. Rather, the question here concerns just what

⁴⁶ Tosaki (1979, 303): *anātmabhūto bhedo 'sya vidyamāno 'pi hetuṣu | bhinne karmany abhinnasya na bhedena niyāmakaḥ || 303 ||*

⁴⁷ In point of fact, the well-known trope of a magician's illusion, such as when shards of clay appear in the form of an elephant, is a very important metaphor for Dharmakīrti in this context. See, for example, PV 3.354. Even with respect to this particular example, though, there is some causal reason (the magician's spell) *why* the shards of clay appear as an elephant. For further ruminations on the well-worn example of the magician's elephant, see Gold (2006).

exactly it is, *by means of which* or *by virtue of which* a given cognition may be identified as the knowledge of, for example, an apple or a blue-patch.

Dinnāga's point, which constitutes the core of Dharmakīrti's argument, is simple. "Knowledge of blue" is an effect, within awareness, that arises from the causal interaction between the object-field (i.e., the "primary cause," *upādānahetu*) and the sense-faculty; in other words, the appearance of a 'blue' image in cognition just is what it means to be "knowing blue." Therefore, it is only the presence of this effect—i.e., the presence of the image in cognition—which finally (*antyam*) determines whether one is knowing 'blue' or 'yellow.' Therefore, the image is the instrument. But the cognitive image is ontologically identical to the cognition itself, because a cognition is an indivisible mental particular. Therefore, the cognition in which blue appears, and the instrument "by means of which" blue is known, are in fact identical.

To return to the preceding discussion, then, the upshot here is that none of the cognition's prior conditioning causal factors are unmediated with respect to the instantaneous act of cognizing (which is to say, the momentary cognition) itself. Changes in the causes of a cognition, up to and including differences in its object-field (*viśaya*) or patient (*karman*), cannot finally account for the phenomenal characteristics of the cognition, because all such causal differences are mediated through the nature of the cognition in question. As Jinendrabuddhi writes,

That is to say: just [by referring to] "the instrumental means (*sādhana*) of an activity (*kriyā*)," it is not the case that every instrument is [the instrument] of [every] action, nor that every activity is [the activity] to be accomplished (*sādhya*) by [every] instrument, due to the resulting fallacy of infinite regress. Rather, that due to which the activity unmediatedly (*avyavadhānena*) attains accomplishment is the instrument of the action. And only this [activity] is the activity to be accomplished on the part of that [instrument]. So, with respect to a patient such as visible form, there must be some essential property (*svabhāva*) of the cognition—which is similar in nature [to all to other cognitions] in terms of having the nature of being an experience—that constitutes the instrument, due to which the arrangement (*vyavasthā*) by means of a distinction is made, as in, "This is a cognition of blue;

that is a cognition of yellow.” Otherwise, every cognition would be [the cognition] of everything, or else no [cognition] whatsoever [would be the cognition] of anything at all, because there would be no difference [between cognitions, which are identical in terms of having the nature of merely being an experience].⁴⁸

Hence, in the context of human aims, cognition may be said to “act” upon the blue-patch, and to that extent the blue-patch may be understood as the patient of the action of knowing.

But at a deeper level—or, from a higher position on the sliding scale—Dharmakīrti insists that cognition only *metaphorically* “acts” upon its own individual patient (*svakarman*): the form of the object (*artharūpa*), which is the nature of the cognition itself. Thus, rather than an agent-patient causal relationship, Dharmakīrti speaks instead of a “locating,” “structuring,” or “placing” (*vyavasthāpaka*) feature of awareness—the subjective aspect—in relation to which the objective aspect is “located,” “structured,” or “placed” (*vyavasthāpya*). This point will be further developed below, in Chapter 5. The key point to understand here is that this structuring-structured relationship is purely metaphorical, and so the agent and patient of cognition are *only metaphorically or heuristically* differentiated from one another. In other words, nothing extrinsic to the cognition ultimately determines (*ni + √yam*) what the cognition appears as or feels like. All of those external factors—the sense-faculties, object-field, habituation, expectations, and so on—may or even must condition the cognition in some way; but this conditioning is only ever mediated by something that is of the very nature of the cognition itself (i.e., the “objective aspect” or *grāhyākāra*).

Therefore, Dharmakīrti argues, it is only some inherent, intrinsic difference (*ātmabheda*) *within cognition* that is the “determining factor” (*niyāmaka*) which is responsible for the

⁴⁸ Steinkellner (2005b, 66.4-10): *tathā hi na kriyāsādhanam ity eva sarvasyāḥ kriyāyāḥ sarvaṃ sādhanam sarvā vā kriyā sarvasya sādhyā anavasthāprasaṅgāt kiṃ tarhi tasyāḥ kriyāyās tatsādhanam yā yataḥ sādhanād avyavadhānena prasiddhim upayāti | saiva ca tasya kriyā sādhyā | tatra rūpāḍau karmaṇy anubhavātmanā sādṛśyātmano jñānasya tena svabhāvena karaṇabhūtena bhāvyam yenedaṃ nīlasya jñānam idaṃ pītasyeti vibhāgena vyavasthā kriyate | anyathā sarvaṃ jñānam sarvasyārthasya syāt na vā kasyacit kiñcit aviśeṣāt ||*

differences in how cognition appears; and, in turn, it is just this intrinsic difference which is the *pramāṇa*. For it is only *by means of* some change in the intrinsic nature of an experience that the quality of the experience changes. The intrinsic difference is, in this way, the “instrument” (*sādhana*), i.e., the “cause par excellence” (*sādhakatama*), which finally determines, without mediation, the quality of the experience:

Therefore, this [action (*kriyā*)] is established to have as its instrument an intrinsic difference (*ātmabheda*) on the part of the [cognition], due to which there is a restriction of the action to the [specific] patient, [as when one determines,] “This is the awareness of that.” || 304 ||⁴⁹

In this way, neither the sense-faculties, nor the connection (*sambandha*) between the sense-faculties and the object, nor anything else—besides the object-image—can be held to possess the “instrumentality” (*prāmāṇya*) which defines the instrument of reliable cognition (*pramāṇa*):

⁴⁹ Tosaki (1979, 398): *tasmād yato 'syātmabhedād asyādhigatir ity ayam | kriyāyāḥ karmaniyamaḥ siddhā sā tatprasāadhanā || 304 ||*

Therefore, the instrumentality (*prāmāṇya*) of [mere] seeing (*ālocana*),⁵⁰ the connection between the sense faculty [and the sense-object], and qualifying cognitions,⁵¹ is not accepted, because these are mediated with regard to the activity.
|| 310 ||

Even though all the causal conditions contribute to the activity, the one that is a final (*antyam*) differentiating factor (*bhedaka*) is considered to be its most efficient cause (*sādhakatamam*). || 311 ||

The sense-faculties are not endowed with this quality [of being the most efficient cause], since they are causes common to all [perceptual cognitions]. For, even when there exists some difference between them, on what account [could one say] “This is the [cognition] of that,” in the absence of the [cognition’s possession of the] form of the [object]? || 312 ||⁵²

The point here is that it is just the cognition’s “property of possessing the appearance of the object-field” (*viśayābhāsātā*), which—to repeat—is *not ontologically separable from the cognition as*

⁵⁰ The reference here is to *ālocanamātra* (“mere seeing”), an originally Sāṅkhya theory of the relationship between the senses and the mind that amounts to the claim that the initial indeterminate “seeing” (*ālocana*) does not yet constitute cognition of the object. As counterintuitive as this might sound, as Taber (2005, 165n33) notes, “It should be kept in mind that in Sāṅkhya a function of the sense faculty as such is not conscious. Consciousness of an object arises only in the self [*puruṣa*], which witnesses changes brought about in the senses [*indriya*], mind [*manas*], and intellect [*buddhi*].” The strong distinction that the Sāṅkhya draw between the strictly causal (which is to say, on their account, non-cognitive and therefore non-epistemic) operation of *buddhi* and *manas* as a function of Nature (*prakṛti*) on the one hand, and the passive observation of these causal operations by *puruṣa* on the other hand, was one of the defining features of the Sāṅkhya system, and one of Dharmakīrti’s primary objects of critique. See for example PV 3.268-280, wherein Dharmakīrti refutes the Sāṅkhya position that affective states such as pleasure are “non-cognitive” or “unilluminated” (*apracetana*) features of *buddhi*, and as such (according to the Sāṅkhya) pleasure and so on are not reflexively known (i.e., “self-illuminated” or *svapṛakāśa*, which is Dharmakīrti’s position). For another reference to *ālocanamātra* as, in effect, just the initial nonconceptual sensory perception, see Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.8cd](#).

⁵¹ This is a reference to the theory of “qualifying” (*viśeṣaṇa*) and “qualified” (*viśeṣya*) cognitions, a detailed examination of which is beyond the scope of the present discussion. Briefly, however, one model of the relationship between *pramāṇa* and *phala* maintained that the cognition of some “qualifying” property (such as ‘blue’) was the *pramāṇa*, while the cognition of the object as thus “qualified” (i.e., of the object as a ‘blue’ object) was the *phala*. Dharmakīrti’s point here is simply that, no matter how it is categorized, a cognition with the form of the object is a *pramāṇa* for knowing that object, while a cognition lacking the form of the object is not. Thus, if a cognition (whether “qualifying” or “qualified”) possesses the form of the object, it is a *pramāṇa* for the *pramiti* of that object, as well as the *pramiti* of that object (*pramāṇa* and *phala* being, again, ontologically identical); and if the two possess the same exact object-image, they cannot be ontologically distinct. For more detail on this point, cf. PV 3.313-315, translated in Appendix C, [PV 3.301-319 ad PS\(V\) 1.8cd](#).

⁵² Tosaki (1979, 401–4): *ālocanākṣasambandhaviśeṣaṇadhīyām ataḥ | neṣṭam prāmāṇyam eteṣām vyavadhānāt kriyām prati || 310 || sarveṣām upayoge 'pi kārakāṇām kriyām prati | yad antyaṃ bhedakaṃ tasyās tat sādhakatamaṃ matam || 311 || sarvasāmānyahetutvād akṣāṇām asti nedrśam | tadbhede 'pi hy atadrūpasyāsyedam iti tat kutaḥ || 312 ||*

such, that serves as the “most accomplishing factor” (*sādhakatama*) or “restricting factor” (*niyāmaka*) and thus determines the actual contents of the cognition. The reason is that it is just this image (*ākāra*) or appearance (*ābhāsa*) which, being in place, necessitates that the cognition is the cognition “of” that image:

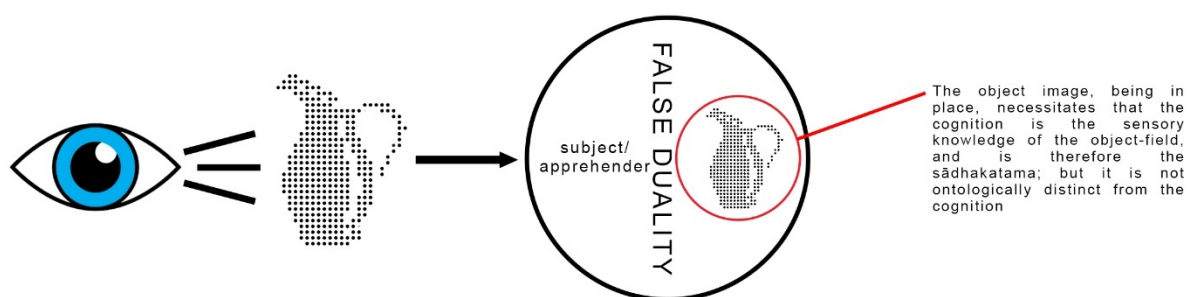


Figure 2: Sensory Image as Determining Factor

Clearly, then, given that the *sādhakatama* or *pramāṇa* is also understood to be the mental representation (*vijñāpti*) or form (*rūpa*) of the object (*artha*), insofar as it is causally derived from that object, the central issue here concerns the relationship between the instrument (*karana*)—which must be of the same nature as the cognition itself—and the presumably-external patient (*karman*) of cognition.

4. Internal and External Stimuli

Consider three different experiences of ‘blue’: an experience of ‘blue’ generated by some blue object (*artha*); an experience of ‘blue’ within a dream; and a vivid, nonconceptual experience of ‘blue’ generated by meditative concentration (*samādhi*).⁵³ These experiences are all “restricted”

⁵³ This would be, for example, a vividly-appearing, nonconceptual experience of blue, as generated by the classical Abhidharma practice of “totalizing blue” (*nīlakṛtsna*); cf. *Abhidharmasamuccaya* II.3.2 (*abhisamayavyavasthāna*). Of course, despite being vivid and nonconceptual, such a meditatively-generated experience of everything being blue would not necessarily constitute a yogic *perception*, insofar as it is at least questionable whether or not such an experience fulfills Dharmakīrti’s criterion from PV 3.286, of being “undeceiving” (*saṃvādi*) in the same manner as

(*niyama*), in the sense that they are specific cognitions of ‘blue’ rather than an undifferentiated mere experience, on the one hand, or a cognition of ‘yellow’ on the other. Yet all three of these cognitions are equally experiences of ‘blue,’ and cannot be distinguished from each other *qua* experiences of ‘blue’ by appealing to their respective causes.⁵⁴

That is to say: from this perspective, it does not matter at all whether the stimulus for a cognition of ‘blue’ is internal or external to the mind, since it is not the mere presence of a real and externally-existing ‘blue’ object which determines whether or not there occurs a cognition of ‘blue.’ During a dream-cognition of ‘blue’ or a vivid contemplative awareness of ‘blue,’ for example, the faculties are inoperative or irrelevant. Hence, the cause for a dream-cognition of blue cannot be an externally-existing blue patch, but it cannot be the sense-faculties, either. The direct stimulus for a dream-cognition of blue can only be an internal imprint (*vāsanā*) of ‘blue,’ but even the mere existence of this imprint “somewhere” within the storehouse consciousness (*ālaya*) is insufficient to determine whether or not a given dream-cognition is the dream-cognition of ‘blue.’ All three causal processes equally result in the awareness of ‘blue’:

the vivid nonconceptual experience of the Four Noble Truths. See the Introduction, Section III.C: [Yogic Perception and Instrumentality](#).

⁵⁴ To be clear, these cognitions may still be distinguished from each other on other grounds, such as different affective qualities (e.g., a cognition of ‘blue’ that is experienced as pleasant, and a cognition of ‘blue’ that is experienced as unpleasant). In other words, this analysis deliberately excludes subjective variations in the quality of experience, such as those discussed in Chapter 5, Section II.D: [Subjective Variation in the Quality of Experience](#). If nothing else, the passage of time makes each cognition of “the same” object unique, even for each individual observer.

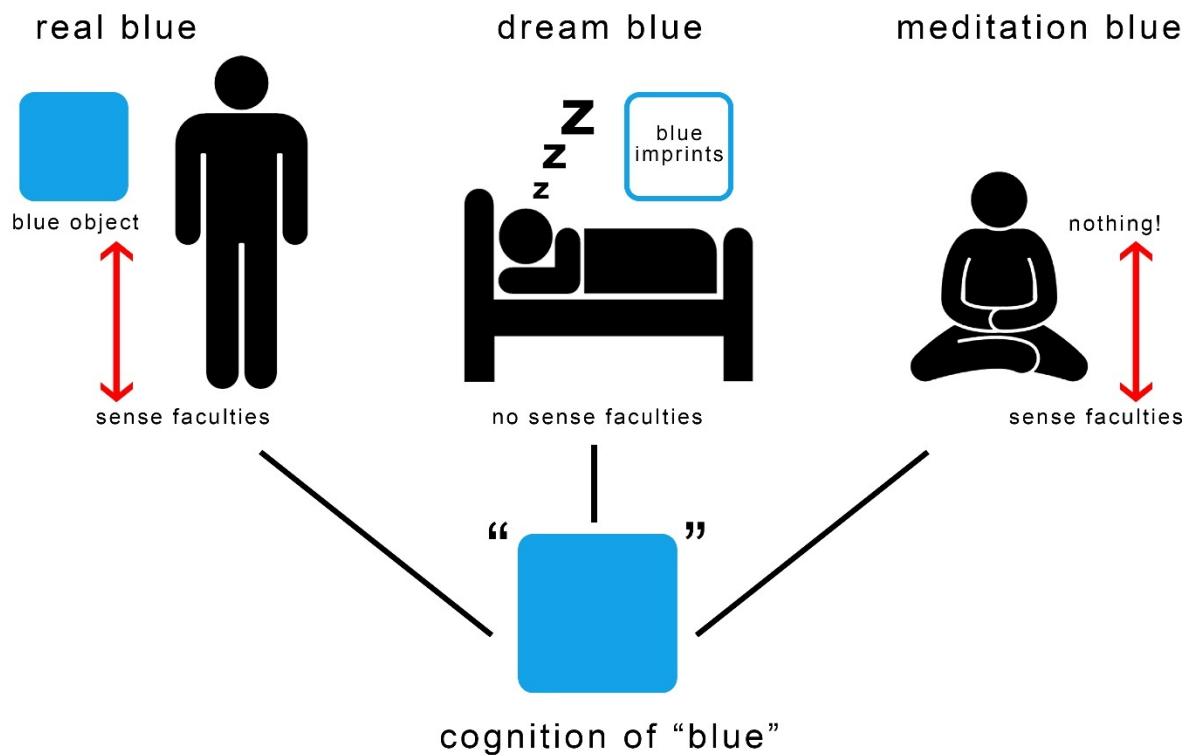


Figure 3: Three Cognitions of 'Blue'

Of course, a blue-patch is typically part of the causal complex that generates a waking cognition of 'blue,' just as a blue imprint is part of the causal complex that generates a dreaming cognition of 'blue.' The point here is that it is not the blue-patch or the blue imprint *in and of itself* which determines whether or not the contents of the cognition are 'blue.' Rather, the only candidate for that which causes a cognition of 'blue' to be different from a cognition of 'yellow,' whether waking or dreaming or meditating, is some difference within the nature of these cognitions, such that one has the nature of being a cognition of 'blue' while the other has the nature of being a cognition of 'yellow.' However, no matter what the causes are that produce this difference, it is only this internal or inherent difference (*ātmabheda*) itself which finally differentiates (*antyabhedaka*) or determines (*ni + √yam*) how the cognition appears.

Hence, the phenomenal difference between a cognition of ‘blue’ and a cognition of ‘yellow’ can only finally be accounted for by reference to each respective cognition’s intrinsic causal properties (i.e., its *svabhāva*), because—unlike the causal complex existing in the prior moment, t_0 , that is responsible for the generation of the t_1 cognition in question—only the t_1 cognition’s intrinsic causal properties are temporally and causally unmediated (*avyavadhāna*) with respect to the t_1 cognition itself. In the final analysis, then, the only thing that determines the content of a cognition is the content of the cognition, which is ontologically identical to the cognition. The only thing that determines the quality of an experience is the quality of the experience itself, which is ontologically identical to the experience.

Thus, as discussed above, the particular aspect (*aṃśa*)⁵⁵ of this intrinsic nature which Dharmakīrti ultimately identifies as the determining factor (*niyāmaka*) of cognition—and, hence, the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) “by means of which” the object is known—is the form of the object (*artharūpa*) or image of the object-field (*viṣayākāra*) possessed by the cognition in question. This tracks Dinnāga’s argument in PSV *ad* PS 1.8cd, to the effect that, “Since the cognition that is the result arises *with the image of the object*, it is cognized as having an intermediate function [even though it doesn’t actually have one].”⁵⁶ It will, accordingly, be necessary to examine the relationship between the cognition and the form of the object in detail. But before turning to a more detailed discussion of the object-image, it is worth pausing briefly at this juncture to consider three important implications of the preceding line of argumentation.

⁵⁵ It is crucially important to keep in mind that, for Dharmakīrti, cognition is ontologically simple and singular, and therefore ultimately indivisible. For the purpose of participation in the *pramāṇa* discourse, however, he identifies certain conceptually-excluded “aspects” of cognition which may be “slotted” into the various roles required by the system, such as the *pramāṇa* and the *prameya*. This point ties directly into the idealistic shift; see below, Chapter 4, Section I.A: [The “Slots” of Pramāṇa Theory](#).

⁵⁶ PS 1.8cd: *tasyaiva tu phalabūtasya jñānasya viṣayākāratayā utpattiyā savyāpārapratītiḥ*.

First, although Dharmakīrti will not explicitly make the dramatic “shift” to idealism until PV 3.320, the argument in this passage clearly prefigures that shift. To assert that there is nothing that it means to cognize an object, other than to experience a cognition with the form or in the image of that object—or, conversely, to deny that any external factor is determinative (*ni + √yam*) with respect to the contents of cognition—is precisely to assert that all appearances are “mental representations only” (*viññaptimātra*), insofar as this amounts to the claim that all we ever have *direct* epistemological access to are cognitive images bearing a causally and temporally mediated relationship to (purportedly) external stimuli.

Far from being merely a technical argument about Sanskrit grammar or against the Nyāyas’ epistemological appropriation thereof, in other words, Dharmakīrti’s account of *pramāṇa* and *phala* thus buttresses the structure of his overarching theoretical commitments. As Dunne summarizes,

[O]n Dharmakīrti’s view the only facet of knowing that can meet these criteria of an instrument of knowledge is the “objective image” (*grāhyākāra*) or “object-simulacrum” (*viśayasādrśya*)—i.e., the appearance (*pratibhāsa*, *pratibimba*) in a cognition. Furthermore, since the image is actually an aspect of the mind arising in the form of an image, and since the mind is ultimately undifferentiated, the instrument is ultimately nothing but the mind (i.e., the cognition) itself. Thus... an instrument of knowledge is once again shown to be nothing but the awareness itself, i.e., the instrumental cognition.

While Devendrabuddhi does not explicitly connect the argument in the *pramāṇaphala* section to the idealistic shift—most likely owing to the related facts that his commentary was written in a fairly strict word-by-word style, and that in just a few verses (starting at PV 3.320) Dharmakīrti himself makes this connection—Jinendrabuddhi explicitly connects the epistemological dots:

How can [cognition] appear as if it has that [intermediate functioning], even though it is without such intermediate functioning? Dinnāga says: “**For example...**” and so on. In this context, only a single image (*ākāra*)—such as the image of ‘blue’—

is experienced. This [image] must necessarily be accepted as being of the nature of cognition. Otherwise, the [cognition] could not have any connection with the object. And therefore, an external entity distinct [from cognition], whether or not [the entity] has that form,⁵⁷ is not observed. Moreover, [such an external entity] does not constitute the object-support (*ālambana*). Why does it not constitute [the *ālambana*]? He will explain the way in which it does not constitute [the *ālambana*] in the analysis of the *Vādaividhi* [in PS(V) 1.13-16].⁵⁸

Second, as highlighted above, this line of argumentation stretches the *pramāṇa*-theoretical discourse very nearly to the breaking point. For the most part, Dharmakīrti argues in a manner that is at least intelligible to his non-Buddhist interlocutors, even if they would disagree with his analysis. But this passage (PV 3.301-319) inaugurates a sequence of arguments, extending to the end of PV 3, that are more or less unintelligible by the standards of non-Buddhist *pramāṇa* discourse. It is one thing to argue, as many non-Buddhist *pramāṇa* theorists did, that the instrument of knowledge is a cognition, rather than (say) the sense-faculty, or the contact with the object. It is quite another thing to argue that the instrument of knowledge is not only identical to the resulting cognition, it is in fact only a metaphorically-individuated feature of that cognition, and really the whole theoretical structure is mistaken and wrong. This is the rhetorical equivalent of agreeing to sit down for a game of chess, then using the pieces to play Go. One can only imagine how baffling and frustrating this must have been for his non-Buddhist interlocutors, even if Dharmakīrti's rhetorical strategy is predicated on the idea that a truly intelligent and "judicious person"

⁵⁷ That is, the form (*ākāra*) in which it appears in cognition, as a mental representation (*vijñapti*). For example, an entity may appear 'blue' in cognition, whether or not it is actually 'blue.' Or, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, the actual external entities are dimensionless fundamental particles, which despite being dimensionless produce an effect (viz., the *grāhyākāra*) that appears extended (*sthūla*).

⁵⁸ Steinkellner (2005b, 68.3-7): *katham yathāvyapāram antareṇāpi tadvattayā pratibhāsata ity āha tadyathetyādi | iha nīlādyākāra eka evānubhūyate | sa vijñānasyātmabhūto 'vaśyam abhyupeyaḥ | anyathā tasyārthena sambandho na syāt | na ca tasmāt tadākāram atadākāraṃ vā bahirvyatiriktaṃ vastūpalambhyate | na cālambanaṃ ghaṭate | katham ca na ghaṭate | yathā ca na ghaṭate tathā vādaividhiparīkṣāyāṃ vakṣyati.*

(*pūrvaprekṣākārin*)⁵⁹ will necessarily come to understand the superiority of the Buddhist perspective.

Third, and relatedly, the limitations of the *pramāṇa* discourse become more and more apparent, the closer Dharmakīrti's analysis approaches ultimate reality. The tools of *pramāṇa* theory, which were designed both to facilitate and to provide a philosophical account of ordinary practical action in the world, work well enough for a low-level approximation. But as the analysis ascends higher and higher on the "sliding scale," toward the final eleutheriological goal, the entire system begins to break down. The close association between omniscience and the "merely experiential" nature of awareness, which hinges on but ultimately supersedes the kind of causal analysis outlined above, is a paradigmatic example of this breakdown. However, this is a sufficiently subtle and complex issue as to require its own extended discussion.

D. Omniscience and the Nature of Awareness

1. Implications of PV 3.301-319

As discussed above, although Dharmakīrti never quite frames the issue in exactly this manner, it is clear that cognition has both causal and non-causal aspects. The non-causal aspect of cognition is its reflexively-aware or "merely experiential" nature, which is the same for every cognition. That is to say, every cognition, by virtue of being a cognition, presents its own contents to the cognizing mind (from which it is, of course, not separate). We will examine this reflexively-aware feature of cognition in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5. At the present juncture, the main point is simply that this reflexively-aware feature of awareness is undifferentiated and changeless. For this

⁵⁹ Cf. McClintock (2010, 52–61). See also Chapter Four, Section II.B.2: [A "Judicious" Investigation of the Cause of Sensory Cognition](#).

very reason, specific experiential *content* must possess some kind of differentiation in terms of a unique causal history or etiology. This is the point of PV 3.302: cognition is automatically self-presenting, but this automatic self-presentation is insufficient to account for the phenomenal features of whatever it is that cognition is presenting.

While, again, Dharmakīrti never explicitly puts the matter in these terms, it is possible to deduce some very interesting implications from this line of reasoning. To be entirely clear: the following discussion is speculative and provisional. It is perhaps best considered as a kind of thought-experiment, working out some of the consequences of Dharmakīrti's axioms and arguments. The key underlying point is that, while commenting upon these verses, both Devendrabuddhi and Jinendrabuddhi repeatedly note that, in the absence of some causally-derived “determinative factor” (*niyāmaka*), identified as the image or form of the object (*viṣayākāra*), either cognition would know everything or cognition would know nothing.⁶⁰

The extremely interesting thing about this point is that, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, in the very next section of the PV (PV 3.320-352), corresponding to PS 1.9, Dharmakīrti argues directly *against* the epistemic reliability (i.e., the *prāmāṇya*) of this very causal factor! Furthermore, while Dharmakīrti eventually winds up asserting that, in the final analysis, the image or form of the object can only be derived from latent karmic imprints (*vāsanā*), it could not possibly have escaped either Dharmakīrti or his commentators that, in terms of Buddhist eleutheriology, any imprint—indeed, causal conditioning as such—is defiled (*kliṣṭa*), and therefore must be completely eradicated in order to attain final unconditioned nirvāṇa. Indeed, on the classical

⁶⁰ In fact, Jinendrabuddhi's comments may have been a direct citation of Devendrabuddhi's. Compare Jinendrabuddhi (Steinkellner 2005b, 66.9-10): *anyathā sarvaṃ jñānaṃ sarvasyārthasya syāt na vā kasyacit kiñcit aviśeṣāt*, and PVP (521.15-16): *de lta ma yin na don thams cad shes pa thams cad kyi shes byar 'gyur ba'am | 'ga zhig kyang ma yin te | bye brag med pa'i phyir ro ||*

Buddhist account, what distinguishes nirvāṇa from liberation (*mokṣa*) according to other Indian religious traditions is precisely the fact that it is not conditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) by causal factors.

We are thus left in something of a hermeneutic aporia. The object-image (*grāhyākāra*), the only ultimately relevant causal factor internal to cognition and hence the only final candidate for a *pramāṇa* in the context of sensory cognition, is introduced as a way to account for the variegation of phenomenal content. The alternative, that no such causally-regulating factor exists, is presented as an argument by unacceptable consequence (*prasaṅga*): would it not be absurd to claim, as must be the case in the absence of any restricting factor (*niyāmaka*), that cognition knows everything, or that cognition knows nothing? Indeed, it would be absurd. However, taking the rest of PV 3 into consideration, it seems an inescapable consequence of Dharmakīrti's position that, at the very least, this causal regulating factor does not actually provide any ultimately reliable information about reality, and—perhaps—vanishes entirely upon the attainment of Buddhahood.

In a critically important passage at the end of the Perception Chapter of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (PVin 1.58d), to which we will return, Dharmakīrti explicitly connects the final absence of any object to the “ultimate *pramāṇa*”:

[Opponent]: “How can he speak of one [cognition] as a *pramāṇa*, and another as distorted (*upaplava*), while denying (*vyatirecayan*) that any cognition has an object, since there could be no difference [between the two]?”

The one is not said to be a *pramāṇa*, even on the part of the unawakened, because it sees conventional reality in an unreliable way (*anāśvāsikam*), due to the fault of being defective (*visandhi*) on account of psychophysical imprints for a distortion. The other, in this context, is said to be a *pramāṇa* in dependence on its reliability for conventional interaction for as long as *samsāra* endures on account of its stable psychophysical imprints. And it is spoken of as having the nature of a conventional *pramāṇa*. Even in this [conventional] context, though, other [theorists], being

confused, dispute the world.⁶¹ But those who diligently cultivate the wisdom that is only born of contemplation make the turn towards the ultimate *pramāṇa* (*pāramārthikapramāṇam*), which is imperishable, flawless, and without error. This, however, has only been hinted at (*sūcitam*), slightly.⁶²

On this basis, I would like to suggest that, contrary to superficial appearances, the argument above (i.e., that, in the absence of a *grāhyākāra*, cognition would not know anything) should not be interpreted strictly or exclusively as a *reductio ad absurdum*.

Rather, with this argument, Dharmakīrti is “hinting at” (*√sūc*) something about the ultimate nature of the mind, and providing a sketch of how the mechanics of omniscience and Buddhahood actually work.⁶³ On the most straightforward account, the elimination of karmic imprints and causal conditioning would result in the total absence of any phenomenal content other than the “luminosity” (*prakāśa*) of reflexive awareness, if this is even categorizable as “content.” Hence, cognition would indeed not know anything at all, since there could not be anything to know, i.e., no object or patient of knowledge (*prameya*). This appears to be the perspective of Śākyabuddhi,

⁶¹ The reference here is somewhat unclear, but most likely concerns a certain nihilistic bent of extreme (perhaps proto-Candrakīrtian) Madhyamaka skepticism.

⁶² Steinkellner (2007, 43.12–44.6): *so 'pi katham sarvajñānānām viṣayaṃ vyatirecayann upaplavetarayoḥ pramāṇetaratām brūyāt viśeṣābhāvāt | upaplavavāsanāvisandhidoṣād aprabuddhasyāpy anāśvāsikaṃ vyavahāram utpaśyann ekam apramāṇam ācakṣīta aparam āsaṃsāram aviśliṣṭānubandhaṃ dṛḍhavāsanatvād iha vyavahārāvisaṃvādāpekṣayā pramāṇam | sāmvyāvahārikasya caitat pramāṇasya rūpam uktam atrāpi pare mūḍhā viṣaṃvādayanti lokam iti | cintāmayīm eva tu prajñām anuśīlayanto vibhramavivekanirmalam anapāyi pāramārthikapramāṇam abhimukhīkurvanti | tadapi leśataḥ sūcitam eveti ||*

⁶³ It is important to note, on this point, that it is by no means clear what specifically Dharmakīrti has in mind as far as where or how he has “hinted at” or “indicated” (*√sūc*) the ultimate *pramāṇa*. Given the total absence of any direct mention in the actual text and argumentation of the PV and PVin, or indeed any mention of the “ultimate *pramāṇa*” anywhere else in his extant works at all, one suspects that the “hints” are contained in the logical implications of his system; hence the kind of (necessarily provisional) deductive analysis here. Indeed, Dharmakīrti is quite tight-lipped about this ultimate *pramāṇa* that is exclusively relevant to those “who cultivate the wisdom born of contemplation,” raising the tantalizing possibility that it may represent an intersection between his *pramāṇa*-theoretical take on Yogācāra, and whatever tantric or proto-tantric contemplative practices may have been circulating in his milieu. Later Buddhist epistemologists, perhaps most notably Ratnākaraśānti, drew a very clear line between this “ultimate *pramāṇa*” and the practice of Mahāmudrā. Dharmakīrti flourished at approximately the same time (ca. 600 CE) as the earliest attestations of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* and the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi*. Might Dharmakīrti’s oblique “hint” here represent an early instance of tantric secrecy?

and in rough outline corresponds to the “False Imagist” (*alīkākāravāda*) perspective defended most famously by Ratnākaraśānti (ca. 1000).⁶⁴ As Dunne (2004, 317) writes,

If we trust Śākyabuddhi’s opinion, the ultimate *pramāṇa* would be the pure, non-dual, reflexive awareness of the mind itself. But while this ultimate instrumental cognition is the means to Dharmakīrti’s final soteriological goal, it is not useful for practical action in the world (i.e., *samsāra*). If the ultimate instrument of knowledge is indeed some pure form of reflexive awareness, then there are no longer external objects—or even mental content—on which to act.

On this account, in the final analysis, there can be no real phenomenal variegation. The patient-differentiating feature of awareness—that aspect of the nature of a cognition, on account of which there is a difference between blue and yellow—is actually a “bug” and not a “feature.” That is to say, the phenomenal difference between ‘blue’ and ‘yellow’ only arises due to a beginningless distortion in the psychophysical basis (*āśrayopaplavodbhavam*)⁶⁵ of cognition, which accounts for the presence of the karmic imprints (*vāsanā*) due to which ‘blue’ and ‘yellow’ are able to appear. In this way, every phenomenal distinction, such as that between ‘blue’ and ‘yellow,’ is actually just a nonconceptual error produced by the “internal distortion” (*antarupaplava*). At the end of the day, all that remains is the “luminosity” (*prakāśa*) of pure, undifferentiated reflexive awareness.

However, if it can be granted that—in this specific way—perhaps the “unacceptable consequence” (*prasaṅga*) that cognition would not know anything at all in the absence of an object-image is not necessarily as terrible as it sounds, then perhaps it can also be granted that the same is true with respect to the other horn of this dilemma. In other words, it appears that one of the unspoken assumptions here is that cognition is, in the absence of some kind of determining

⁶⁴ Cf. Kajiyama (1965), Yiannopoulos (2012), McNamara (2019), and Tomlinson (2019); and below, Chapter 3, Section II.B: [The Critique of Variegation and the “False Imagist” View \(*alīkākāravāda*\)](#).

⁶⁵ See above, Chapter 1, Section III.C: [Duality and the Internal Distortion](#).

factor, *actually capable of knowing everything*. That is to say, the argument in PV 3.302 posits that any given cognition *can* cognize all phenomena; cognition only fails to know everything on account of some “restriction” (*niyama*) in its nature. Put slightly differently, the causal factor within cognition is, literally, a “restrictor” (*niyāmaka*), because bare cognition *qua* “mere experience” is entirely unrestricted.

2. *Omniscience and the Immediately Subsequent Judgment*

Recall that *apoha* operates by excluding causal information that is irrelevant for the purpose of obtaining some goal—excluding the redness⁶⁶ of fire, for example, when one’s goal is to obtain warmth. Heuristically, the point is that some qualities of (for example) paper, such as its acid content, are not obvious to the casual observer, while other qualities such as color may be obvious but are irrelevant for the practical purpose of reaching the determinate judgment (*niścaya*), “That is ‘paper,’” when looking for something to write on. However, both of these qualities, and many more, are present in the paper; they are just “excluded” (*vyāvṛtta*) from the non-perceptual, conceptual determination of the paper as ‘paper.’ More generally, “obscure” or “epistemically remote” (*parokṣa*) qualities, unnoticed and/or unnoticeable to the casual observer, are a real and essential element of the causal makeup of particulars, whether or not these properties are ever the feature of a subsequent determinate judgment about those particulars.

To take another example: perhaps the most important of these obscure qualities, which Dharmakīrti discusses at some length,⁶⁷ is momentariness (*kṣaṇikatva*). Momentariness is an

⁶⁶ Technically: excluding the causal capacity of the particles in question to induce the veridical judgment “this is red,” since there is no real universal “red-ness” that exists to be excluded.

⁶⁷ Cf. PV 3.77-111.

essential property of everything that exists, but ordinary unawakened beings cannot directly apprehend phenomena as momentary. However, someone who is appropriately habituated, such as a properly trained yogin, can directly know the momentariness of phenomena. Similarly, a properly trained or habituated paper expert—for example, a seasoned paper salesman—can easily determine the acid content of a given piece of paper, from just a quick glance at it. In other words, properly trained and habituated beings are able to form an “immediately subsequent definitive determination” (*pratyakṣapṛṣṭhalabdhaniścaya*),⁶⁸ following the initial indeterminate perceptual cognition, of properties of the object that are hidden or obscure to those who are not properly trained or habituated. As Dunne (2004, 184) explains,

Dharmakīrti claims that, in a correct judgment immediately subsequent to a perception, the predications one makes of an individual are markedly conditioned by mind-dependent factors such as expectation, need, context, perceptual acuity, habituation, and so on. Thus, when a child who studies under his father sees him coming from afar, he will first conceive of that person as “father” rather than “teacher.” Or, in a more gruesome example, when a dog, a libertine, and a *yogin* gaze upon a dead woman’s body, the dog sees it as food, the man sees it as a woman, and the *yogin* sees it as a corpse.

The specific context of that discussion concerns the manner in which the perceptual object is conceptually identified, but the point extends more generally, because the perceptual object (i.e., the momentary unique particular) contains much more information than is typically understood: “even though any perception necessarily contains all the data that the object can provide to the perceiver, the determinations that the perceiver draws from that data are dependent upon the

⁶⁸ Cf. Dunne (2004, 287–309) and Chapter 1 note [53](#).

perceiver's dispositions."⁶⁹ Thus, as Dunne notes, "the number of possible property-*svabhāvas* is theoretically limitless."⁷⁰

This point is mostly developed in PV 1, but Dharmakīrti (surely not coincidentally) also mentions it here, in the discussion of *pramāṇaphala*:

Although there is contact with the entire nature [of the sensory object], it is cognized in terms of only some of its qualities. This [contact] cannot be the determining factor (*niyama*), because contact is not differentiated [such that it would account for the fact that only some qualities are apprehended]. || 316 ||⁷¹

And indeed, earlier in the PV, Dharmakīrti explicitly asserts that, not only does the perception contain all the data that the object can provide to the perceiver, a properly-trained perceiver is in principle capable of perceiving all this data. The classic example, used by Dharmakīrti, is the momentariness (*kṣaṇikatva*) of phenomena:

⁶⁹ Dunne (2004, 184n59).

⁷⁰ Dunne (2004, 157n25).

⁷¹ Tosaki (1979, 409): *sarvātmanāpi sambaddham kaiścid evāvagamyate | dharmaiḥ sa niyamo na syāt sambandhasyāviśeṣataḥ* || 316 ||

A person who under certain circumstances does not see the difference [between the previous and subsequent moments of a continuum] due to the cognitive error [which conflates those moments] does not recognize the [impermanence of that thing]. An example is the ball-trick. ⁷² || 104 || ⁷³

That is, even up to to case of children, when people see something such as a lamp that they do not conflate with the occurrence of a subsequent [moment in that lamp's continuum], they determine without using inferential evidence that the lamp is impermanent. || 105 || ⁷⁴

Part of Dharmakīrti's point at this juncture is that no one is confused about the impermanence of a lamp, which visibly flickers from moment to moment. Therefore, it is not necessary to infer the impermanence of a flame. But most phenomena are not like the lamp—and, of course, even with regard to the lamp, we do not ordinarily observe its subatomic instability. Thus, ordinary beings need inference, in order to understand the momentariness of phenomena.

This does not apply, however, to advanced meditators:

⁷² Devendrabuddhi explains: “Because of cognitive error (*'khrul phyir*), the difference [between the successive moments] of momentary things, which have the nature of being impermanent and so on, are not seen; no determination (*nges pa*, **niścaya*) is made. What is this like? It is like the difference between balls. Just as two balls, even though they are seen to be different, are apprehended by the observer as not being different, because of a cognitive error [induced by the balls' moving] extremely rapidly. [The determination of impermanence] is like the determination: ‘Those are two balls,’ [even though they appear to be just one ball]. And due to what cause is there this error? Due to the similarity of what is different. Although entities which possess destruction [at every moment] (i.e., which are momentary) are seen to be different, an aspect of this difference is not noticed; this is *the* cognitive error, by means of which what is different [appears] similar, because there is the apprehension, ‘This is just that.’ Although impermanence is apprehended, it is not determined.”

PVP (387.21-388.9): *mi rtag pa nyid la sogs pa'i rang bzhin can gyi dngos po gang yin pa de 'khrul phyir te | rgyu'i phyir skad cig ma rnams kyi tha dad ma mthong ba yin no || nges par ma byas pa nyid yin no || ci dang 'dra bar zhe na sgong gi tha dad bzhin | ji ltar sgong gnyis tha dad par mthong du zin kyang shin tu myur ba la sogs pa'i 'khrul pa'i rgyu mtshan gyis lta ba po tha dad pa med par zhen pas sgong de gnyis yin no zhes nges pa de dang 'dra bar ro || rgyu gang las 'khrul pa yang yin zhe na | 'dra ba gzhan ni yod phyir ro | dngos po skad cig mar 'jig pa can tha dad par dmigs pa dag la yang cha tha dad par ma mthong ba ni 'dra ba gzhan 'byung bas 'khrul pa de nyid 'di yin no zhes zhen pa'i phyir | mi rtag pa bzung du zin kyang ma nges pa yin no ||*

⁷³ Tosaki (1979, 180): *kvacit tad aparijñānam sadṛśāparasambhavāt | bhrānter apaśyato bhedaṃ māyāgolakabhedavat || 104 ||*

⁷⁴ Tosaki (1979, 181–82): *tathā hy alīṅgam ābālam asaṃśliṣṭottarodayam | paśyan paricchinnaty eva dīpādi nāśinaṃ janaḥ || 105 ||*

On the part of one who does not see an effect [such as a sprout] occur immediately after [observing the cause, such as a seed], there is ignorance about the causal capacity that is an essential quality of that thing because the one who is making the determination [i.e., the perceptual judgment] lacks the acuity [that would enable them to make that determination]. || 106 ||

One states an inference in order to remove those [kinds of misunderstandings]. However, those of great cognitive capacity can determine all the aspects [of a thing] simply by looking at it. || 107 ||⁷⁵

Thus, the million-dollar question here is: in principle, just how much causal information can the object-field provide to the perceiver? While, once more, Dharmakīrti never directly addresses (nor, to be clear, even poses) this question, in keeping with his presentation and the broader Buddhist intellectual tradition it is possible to extrapolate an answer: *all* the data.

3. *The Infinitude of Causal Information*

As mentioned above, a causal complex (*hetusāmagrī*) is always to some extent artificially delimited. From a mundane perspective, the paper-particulars⁷⁶ comprising a sheet of paper function as a causal complex that serves as the object-field (*viṣaya*) for a sensory cognition that can produce the subsequent determinate judgment, “This is paper.” However, from a more transcendent perspective, the paper-particulars are in reality part of a “beginningless chain of causes and effects.” In principle, then, the entire beginningless causal history of the paper-particles is present within them at every moment. Furthermore, since over the span of beginningless *saṃsāra*, through their causal antecedents, those paper-particulars have interacted with every other

⁷⁵ Tosaki (1979, 182–83): *bhāvasvabhāvabhūtāyām api śaktau phale 'dr̥ṣaḥ | anānantaryato mohō viniścetur apāṭavāt || 106 || tasyaiva vinivṛṭtyartham anumānopavarṇanam | vyavasyantīkṣaṇād eva sarvākārān mahādhiyaḥ || 107 ||*

⁷⁶ Again, technically speaking, these are only particulars which are capable of producing the subsequent determinate judgment “this is ‘paper,’” insofar as they form a proper basis for the exclusion of all their non-‘paper’-related causal capacities; in reality, there are no ‘paper-particles,’ there are just particles with this type of causal capacity.

particular, the causal history of *all* particulars is present within the paper-particulars, as a kind of record or ledger.⁷⁷ Hence, it is not necessary to maintain, like the Sarvāstivādins, that the past and future are really existent in order to know any arbitrary piece of information *about* the “past” or “future,” since the “past” (i.e., no-longer-existent causal antecedents of present particulars) and “future” (i.e., not-yet-existent causal descendants of present particulars) are causally connected to the present. Saṃsāra can be understood as a kind of self-similar fractal, every infinitesimal point of which contains all of the information in the entire function.⁷⁸

In other words, just as an expert in paper can glean causal information from the causal continuum of the paper-particles that is obscure to non-experts, in just that way, fully awakened Buddhas could have epistemic access to all “irrelevant” information, simultaneously: not just the acid content of paper, but the complete causal history of each of its constituent infinitesimal particles, and so on. On this account, it is not that sentient beings *do not have access* to all of the information in the multiverse, which would at some level have at least the potential to be encoded within each and every cognition; it is, rather, that sentient beings are “inattention-blind” to this information, in a way that Buddhas are not.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Of course, it is important to emphasize that, even if it is granted for the sake of argument that all the causal *information* in the multiverse is available at every instant, this does not amount to an assertion that all the *causes* are immediately present as perceptible phenomena. The point is just that every moment of awareness bears some causal relationship to every particular in the multiverse, not necessarily that every particular in the multiverse is causally capable of producing a sensory cognition at every moment.

⁷⁸ The 14th Dalai Lama writes (2006, 89): “Similarly, in beautiful poetic verses, the [*Flower Ornament Sūtra*] compares the intricate and profoundly interconnected reality of the world to an infinite net of gems called ‘Indra’s jeweled net,’ which reaches out to infinite space. At each knot on the net is a crystal gem, which is connected to all the other gems and reflects in itself all the others. On such a net, no jewel is in the center or at the edge. Each and every jewel is at the center in that it reflects all the other jewels on the net. At the same time, it is at the edge in that it is itself reflected in all the other jewels. Given the profound interconnectedness of everything in the universe, it is not possible to have total knowledge of even a single atom unless one is omniscient. To know even one atom fully would imply knowledge of its relations to all other phenomena in the infinite universe.”

⁷⁹ See Chapter 1, note [96](#). Again, this is not to say that all of this causal information is *necessarily* available within any given cognition, insofar as nonconceptual “early selection” effects might in some way spoil the causal relationship

The difference between Buddhas and ordinary sentient beings in this regard is not that the nature of their minds is any different, which cannot be the case for several reasons, perhaps most importantly that reflexive awareness is noncausal and therefore unchanging. Indeed, it is precisely the unchanging nature of reflexive awareness as the ultimate nature of the “basis” (*āśraya*) which provides for the continuity, necessary within Mahāyāna eleutheriology, between *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. The difference between Buddhas and ordinary beings, rather, lies in the fact that the cognition of ordinary beings is causally “restricted” with respect to its objects. This restriction (*niyama*) may appear to be a disadvantage, and of course in many ways it is. However, consider the “information overload” that would result if it were not in place; the minds of sentient beings are simply not equipped to handle the unrestricted flow of causal information.

Discussions of “dependent origination” (*pratītyasamutpāda*) easily devolve into vague generalities, or are often limited to the somewhat platitudinous definition: “when this arises, that arises; when this does not arise, that does not arise.” At this juncture, however, it is possible to gain a direct and meaningful understanding of dependent origination. The key point is that every particular (*svalakṣaṇa*) or fundamental particle (*paramāṇu*) bears within itself all the causal information in the multiverse, by virtue of its causal connection (i.e., its relationship of dependent origination) to every other particular in the multiverse. This is not some kind of magic trick. On the contrary, this is the underlying logic behind the frequently repeated Buddhist claim that, by knowing the “one taste” of the true nature of phenomena,⁸⁰ the awakened mind knows all phenomena. Omniscience is not completely beyond any kind of rational comprehension at all. If

between the cognition and the particulars which cause it. At the same time, insofar as every cognition is a mental particular, every cognition should in some sense be causally related to every other particular.

⁸⁰ Ratnākaraśānti makes precisely this connection, drawing a straight line between the ultimate *pramāṇa* of undifferentiated reflexive awareness, and knowledge of all phenomena. Cf. Yiannopoulos (2012, 184).

“ignorance just is conceptuality,” then the elimination of “conceptuality” in this deeper sense—bringing to a halt the subliminal exclusion of the overwhelming majority of causal information, information that we typically do not even recognize it is possible to be aware of—necessarily entails omniscience, the ultimate opposite of ignorance.

4. *Models of Omniscience*

The definitive examination of omniscience in the Indian Buddhist tradition is McClintock (2010).⁸¹ McClintock identifies three main models of omniscience: *dharmic*, *capacity*, and *total*.⁸² Dharmic omniscience is the idea, typical of the earliest strata of the Pāli Suttas, that the Buddha’s omniscience only consists in knowing everything that is eleutheriologically relevant for the goal of attaining liberation from suffering (*mokṣa*). Capacity omniscience is the notion that “one may be omniscient in the sense that one may attain an unlimited capacity to know whatever one wishes simply by directing one’s attention to the object in question” (McClintock 2010, 31). Total omniscience is, in effect, the simultaneous exercise of this capacity with respect to all possible objects of knowledge; not only *can* the Buddha know all *dharmas*, he *does* know all *dharmas*, all at once.

Dharmakīrti’s exact perspective on omniscience is difficult to tease out. His discussion of omniscience in PV 2 tends toward the “dharmic” model; however, some passages in the PVin hint that, at the very least, Dharmakīrti accepted the possibility of total omniscience.⁸³ Precisely

⁸¹ Cf. also McClintock (2000), and Moriyama (2011) and (2014).

⁸² McClintock (2010, 29–38).

⁸³ Cf. McClintock (2010, 133–38) for an in-depth discussion of the contours of Dharmakīrti’s perspective on the matter. See also Moriyama (2011, 337) for discussion of a passage from PVin 2 that lends support to the position that Dharmakīrti understood the Buddha’s omniscience to include the knowledge of all *dharmas*.

adjudicating the extent to which he adopted any one of these models is in any case beyond the scope of this discussion. But, in keeping with the concept of the sliding scale, it is worth noting that Dharmakīrti's famous mocking dismissal (PV 2.29-33) of the idea that the Buddha needs to know the number of bugs in the world—"if one who sees far is a *pramāṇa*, let us worship vultures!"⁸⁴—occurs in the rhetorical context of defending the Buddha's status as a reliable spiritual guide to non-Buddhists. This is quite a different context than that of these passages, in the latter half of the Perception Chapter, wherein Dharmakīrti outlines his final position.

In sum, then, we may discern two distinct theoretical models for total omniscience that are hinted at or at least potentially implicit in this passage. The first, and arguably the more straightforward, is that omniscience functions as the total lack of differentiated sensory content: all that remains is undifferentiated luminosity. This perspective emphasizes the noncausal element of cognition, i.e., reflexive awareness. But this first model runs into problems in terms of how to account for the knowledge of specific phenomena; Ratnākaraśānti, in his defense of this perspective, infamously maintained that Buddhas, out of their infinite compassion, actually retain a tiny bit of ignorance—without which there could be no karmic imprints—in order to see what sentient beings see.⁸⁵

The second model of omniscience at least debatably implicit in this argument emphasizes the causal features of cognition: specifically, the effectively infinite amount of information contained in each and every particular. Contact with one particular is, by extension, contact with the causal history of all particulars. A blue-patch is, on this account, still restricted in its causal capacity (*śaktiniyama*), in terms of the kinds of effects (such as a cognition of 'blue') it is able to

⁸⁴ PV 2.33cd: *pramāṇam dūradarśī cedeta grdhrānupāśmahe* || 33 ||

⁸⁵ Cf. Yiannopoulos (2012, 183) and Tomlinson (2019, 98–104).

produce. Thus, for ordinary beings, a proximate blue-patch cannot produce the determinate knowledge of a remote (*parokṣa*) yellow-patch. In fact, even on this model, it is not necessarily the case that the adept “sees” the remote yellow-patch, in the sense of having the remote yellow-patch causally produce a vivid sensory cognition of ‘yellow.’ Rather, it is just that, because of not being “inattention-blind” to the full range of causal information contained in the blue-patch, the adept is able to form a correct determinate judgment about the existence and causal properties of the remote yellow-patch.

However, this model is not without its theoretical issues, either. Perhaps the most fundamental problem is that, although phenomenological duality is held to be a type of nonconceptual distortion, a cognitive state capable of gleaning such esoteric causal information from phenomena must presumably be profoundly undistorted, which is to say, nondual. This in turn would seem to imply the existence of nondual phenomenal content, which at a first approximation appears to have been the “True Imagist” (*satyākāravāda*) interpretation of Dharmakīrti. In the absence of much substantive research into this position,⁸⁶ it is unclear how the True Imagists accounted for the existence of nondual phenomenal content, but the notion is paradoxical to say the least. What would it mean to have a sensation of ‘blue’ without at the same time having the first-person subjective feeling that one is having the sensation of ‘blue’? This is precisely the point on which several interpreters of Dharmakīrti⁸⁷ have insisted that cognition must always be dualistic, and while Dharmakīrti clearly maintained that cognition is not actually dualistic and that phenomenological duality is nothing more than a distortion (*upaplava*) or defect

⁸⁶ Notable exceptions include Kajiyama (1965), Komarovski (2015), and Tomlinson (2019). However, much work remains to be done.

⁸⁷ Primarily Arnold (2010) and Coseru (2015).

(*upahata*), it is nevertheless a well-taken point that phenomenal content in the absence of phenomenological subjectivity would seem to be a contradiction in terms; indeed, in his comments *ad* PS 1.11d (PV 3.387-415), Dharmakīrti himself argues as much, maintaining that there is a “restriction such that [subject and object must] appear together” (*sahopalambhaniyama*).⁸⁸

At the end of the day, it is perhaps best to consider these problems as a reflection of the inherent limitations of *pramāṇa* theory, or even of language in general. It is a well-worn trope in the Buddhist tradition that concepts are like a finger pointing at the moon: a helpful or even necessary guide, but not the thing (i.e., the moon) itself. Linguistic descriptions of rarefied cognitive states may help to elucidate something about those states, and there is certainly utility in logical analysis, but there is no substitute for the thing itself. The closer our analysis approaches the ultimate, the more that language and theory are inadequate to the task.

⁸⁸ Cf. Iwata (1991). See also Chapter 4, Section III ([Inference and External Objects](#)); and Chapter 5, Section II.D ([Subjective Variation in the Quality of Experience](#)).

III. The Form of the Object and the Unity of Cognition

A. The Form of the Object (*artharūpa*) as Means and Result

To step back for a moment: everyone participating in the *pramāṇa* discourse, including Dharmakīrti, agrees that reliable knowledge (*pramiti*) requires an instrument capable of engendering it (i.e., a *pramāṇa*). This much was held in common by all participants. The specifically Buddhist aspect of Dharmakīrti's argument in PV 3.301-304 is twofold. First, he argues that every momentary cognition is identical *qua* "mere experience." Second, and consequentially, he argues that whatever it is which distinguishes one experience from another experience must be a difference between the two that lies within the very nature of the respective experiences. Dharmakīrti then identifies this "intrinsic" or "essential difference" (*ātmabheda*) as the cognitive image (*ākāra*) or form (*rūpa*) of the object:

For even if, apart from the property of having the form of the object (*artharūpatā*), there is another differentiating factor (*bhedaka*) of cognition [such as a difference in the sense-faculties,⁸⁹ which causes a difference in the cognition] through its own difference, [this other difference] does not in any way correlate the [cognition] with the object. || 305 ||

Therefore, the instrument (*sādhana*) for the knowledge (*adhigati*) of that which is to be known (*prameya*) is the property of having the form of that which is to be known (*meyarūpatā*). In the case of any other [alleged] instrument, the relation (*sambandha*) [of the cognition] to its patient is not established. || 306 ||⁹⁰

Similarly, in response to a rhetorical opponent (most likely another Buddhist) who argues that prior causal conditioning is what determines or regulates (*ni + √yam*) the cognition, Dharmakīrti

⁸⁹ Cf. PVP (522–23) *ad cit.*

⁹⁰ Tosaki (1979, 399): *arthena ghaṭayaty enāṃ na hi muktvā 'rtharūpatām | anyañ svabhedāj jñānasya bhedako 'pi kathañcana || 305 || tasmāt prameyādhigateḥ sādhanam meyarūpatā | sādhanē 'nyatra tatkarmasambandho na prasidhyati || 306 ||*

responds by asserting that it is only the image of the object, as it exists within the momentary cognition, which can be said to possess “instrumentality” (*pramāṇatā*), because it is only the image of the object which finally accounts for the difference between cognitions:

The property of being a *pramāṇa* (*pramāṇatā*) on the part of a [cognition] is that due to which there is a difference [in the determination (*niścaya*)], even when there is no difference in the [sensory contact and so on].

Opponent: “[That difference is] due to psychophysical conditioning (*saṃskāra*).”

No; because, if [that cognition also] does not have the form of the object (*atadrūpye*), it is not established, either. || 317 ||⁹¹

Or, as Jinendrabuddhi writes:

Therefore, this restriction—“this is just the awareness (*adhigati*) of blue, and [that is] just [the awareness] of yellow,” and so on—is not established on account of [anything] other than conformity to the object (*arthasārūpya*). Therefore, that [conformity] itself is the instrumental means (*sādhana*) for the awareness of the object. This is so because, even though there is a causal contribution (*upayoga*) on the part of all the constituents of an activity (*kāraṅka*), the essential connection (*sambandha*) “this awareness is of that object” is only established *without mediation* on account of that [conformity]. And this is [what constitutes] its property of being an instrumental means (*sādhanatva*), in terms of its property of being the basis for the structure (*vyavasthā*) [of instrument and action], [though] *not* in terms of being a producer (*nirvartaka*), because [the instrumental means and the awareness *qua* activity or result] are not different.⁹²

Dunne (2004, 272) explains:

In establishing the instrumentality of an instrumental cognition in these terms, Dharmakīrti... recognizes that one must be able to distinguish between cognitions.

⁹¹ Tosaki (1979, 409–10): *tadabhede 'pi bhedo 'yaṃ yasmāt tasya pramāṇatā | saṃskārāc ced atādrūpye na tasyāpy avyavasthiteḥ || 317 ||*

⁹² Steinkellner (2005b, 67.4-8): *tasmād yo 'yaṃ niyamo nīlasyaiveyam adhigatiḥ pītasyaiva cetyādikaḥ so 'rthasārūpyād anyato na sidhyati | tatas tad eva sādhanam arthādhigateḥ sarvakāraṅkopayoge 'py asyārthasyeyam adhigatir iti sambandhasya tata evāvyavadhānena siddheḥ | tac ca tasya sādhanatvaṃ vyavasthāsamāśrayatvena na tu nirvartakatvena abhedāt ||*

That is, if an instrument of knowledge is that which enables one to claim that a cognition of an object is occurring, one must be able to distinguish the case where a cognition of that object is occurring from a case where such a cognition is not occurring. With this in mind, Dharmakīrti also claims that the instrument of knowledge is the “final differentiator” (*antyabhedaka*)⁹³ of cognitions. Thus, not only does it provide the basis for claiming that a cognition is occurring, but it also accounts for the differences between the contents of cognitions. As Devendrabuddhi points out, on Dharmakīrti’s view the only facet of knowing that can meet these criteria of an instrument of knowledge is the “objective image” (*grāhyākāra*) or “object-simulacrum” (*viśayasādrśya*)—i.e., the appearance (*pratibhāsa, pratibimba*) in a cognition.

Highlighting how the *Pramāṇavārttika* does have something like a rhetorical arc, despite its many digressions, most of the explicit details concerning this model of cognition occur near the beginning of Dharmakīrti’s discussion of instrumentality, in the second chapter of the PV (i.e., PV 2.4abc):

Also, awareness is instrumental because a cognition is differentiated due to the differentiation of the awareness’ objective image; this is the case because that cognition only occurs when that objective image is present.⁹⁴ || 2.4abc ||

Devendrabuddhi comments on that earlier passage:

The cognition of an object (*don rtogs pa ~ arthādigama*) is an unmediated instrumental effect. That is, that through which, when all other causes are in place, the convention of “knowing” (*rtogs pa = pratipatti*) is satisfied without further mediation is an instrument of knowledge. And nothing but the [conformity with the object (*yul dang ’dra ba ~ viśayasārūpya*)] has that lack of mediation, for it is through that image that instances of knowing are distinguished from each other, even though they are indistinguishable in terms of their nature of being experiences [(*nyams su myong ba’i bdag nyid = anubhavātman*)]. Hence, **due to the differentiation of the objective image**—i.e., due to that quality of the cognition—the awareness, i.e., **the knowing, is differentiated**. And **since this** effect exists **when that is present**—i.e., when the object-image is present—awareness is therefore instrumental. If when “y” is present, “x” comes into existence, it makes

⁹³ Cf. PV 3.311, above.

⁹⁴ Trans. Dunne (2004, 268). *viśayākārabhedāc ca dhiyo ’dhigamabhedataḥ | bhāvād evāsya tadbhāve.*

sense that “y” is the most efficient cause of “x.” But if at some point there were no such effect [i.e., “x”] when “y” was present, then one would realize that “x” depends upon some other mediating causal factor. That being the case, since that former cause, “y” is mediated by something else on which it depends to produce x, y would not be the most prominent causal factor [(*phul du byung ba can gyi byed pa nyid ~ sādihakatamatva*)]. Therefore, it would not be the instrumental cause [(*byed pa nyid ~ karaṇatva*)]. Even when the sense faculties and so on are present, they do not [necessarily] have the causal function of producing an awareness because they are mediated by the [conformity to the object]. But if the [conformity] is present, it is necessarily known because it is not mediated by anything else for that knowing to occur.⁹⁵

These comments are much more extensive than the schematic gloss that Devendrabuddhi provides on PV 3.305-306.⁹⁶ Apart from not wanting to repeat himself, one likely reason for the relative paucity of details in this regard is that, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, the discussion in PV 3 is not primarily concerned with the instrumentality of the object-image (nor, ultimately, of sensory cognition) at all. The topic comes up in PV 3, in the context of commenting on PS 1.8cd, as a kind of lemma along the way to proving that reflexive awareness is the only truly reliable epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*)—and, therefore, that reflexive awareness is also the only truly reliable form of “perception” (*pratyakṣa*). That is to say, although it is provisionally acceptable to consider the object-image as the *pramāṇa* and *phala*, if we take the entire arc of PV 3 into consideration—especially its downward slope, from the climax at PV 3.320, to the end at 539—it is abundantly

⁹⁵ Trans. Dunne (2004, 269). *tshad ma'i 'bras bu ma chod pa yang don rtogs pa yin no || de yang rgyu thams cad nye ba na yang gang las chod pa med par rtogs pa'i tha snyad thob pa na de tshad ma yin no || ma chod pa de yang yul dang 'dra ba las gzhan la yod pa ma yin no || des na blo ni nyams su myong ba'i bdag nyid du tha dad pa med du zin kyang de don so so la tha dad par byed pa yin no || de ltar na yul rnam [D: *rnams] can ni tha dad phyir te shes pa'i chos yin pa'i phyir | blo rtogs pa tha dad pa yin pas te rgyu de'i phyir ro || de yod na ste yul [D: *lam] gyi rnam pa can yod na 'bras bu 'di yod phyir | blo ni tshad ma nyid yin no || gang yod pa nyid yin na gang 'gyur ba de ni de'i shin tu sgrub par byed pa yin par rigs so || de yod na yang 'ga' zhig gi tshe 'bras bu med pa yin na ni | ltos par bya ba gzhan 'di la yod do zhes rtogs par 'gyur ro || de'i tshe snga ma de nyid ltos par bya ba gzhan des chod pa'i phyir phul du byung ba can gyi byed pa nyid du mi 'gyur ro || de bas na byed pa nyid du ma yin no || dbang po la sogs pa yod pa la yang bya ba med pa yin te | yul dang 'dra bas chod pa'i phyir ro || 'dra ba nyid yod na ni gdon mi za bar de rtogs te | de'i de ni 'ga' zhig gis kyang chod pa ma yin no ||*

⁹⁶ PVP (522–23).

clear from context that the point of Dharmakīrti's discussion in this chapter is to establish the ontological unity of means and result, in order to situate the analysis of sensory cognition within a broader causal analysis that will ultimately be used to deconstruct the epistemic reliability or instrumentality of sensory cognition as such.

The crux of the issue concerns the relationship between the object-image and the object itself (i.e., the *artha*). Dharmakīrti's analysis is predicated on what he calls the image's "conformity to the object" (*arthasārūpya*), an extremely important term that will be thoroughly analyzed in Chapter 3. In brief, though, the idea is that the object-image (*grāhyākāra*) arises in causal isomorphism with the object, such that the object-image has the nature (*rūpa*) of, or just is, the "form of the object" (*artharūpa*). Thus, a cognition of 'blue' arises in conformity with the blue nature of a blue object, while a cognition of 'yellow' arises in conformity with the yellow nature of a yellow object.⁹⁷ As we will see, in the very next passage of the PV (PV 3.320-352 *ad* PS 1.9), Dharmakīrti calls into question the very idea of a reliable causal conformity between the object and the cognition of the object, on the basis of a critique of this supposed conformity that he has already developed at length (PV 3.194-224 *ad* PS 1.4cd). At this juncture, however, Dharmakīrti is temporarily content to admit that this conformity backstops the epistemic reliability (*prāmāṇya*) of sensory cognition.

In this limited and provisional context, Dharmakīrti's argument is that, because the contents of any given cognition are the sole and final court of appeals as to what the contents of that cognition actually are, the contents of a cognition are simultaneously that which is known (i.e.,

⁹⁷ Technically speaking, of course, the nature of the object is not yellow; rather, the particulars which comprise the object have the causal capacity to produce the veridical judgment "this is yellow," and this causal capacity is the basis of an *apoha*-exclusion which leads to that judgment. The judgment, in turn, is not "veridical" based on any absolute criteria, such as conformity to a context-invariant meaning of "yellow." Rather, judgments are only "veridical" to the extent that they facilitate the attainment of what is desirable and the avoidance of what is undesirable.

the *prameya*) as well as the means by which it is known (i.e., the *pramāṇā*). Thus, when a cognition arises with the form of an object, the object is known by means of that cognition. In other words, the instant in which the cognition is generated is the same instant in which the object is known by means of its form (*rūpa*) or image (*ākāra*) as presented to awareness. The presentation of the object-image (*grāhyākāra*) “to” or “within” awareness is nothing other than the arising of a cognition that has the nature of an image of the object. And because, in the final analysis, only the object-image is unmediated (*avyavahita*) with respect to the “activity” (*kriyā*) of knowing the object, the only candidate for the “instrument par excellence” (*sādhakatama*) is the object-image. In this way, the (cognition with the nature of the) object-image—the “instrument” (*pramāṇa*)—just is the awareness of the object-image, which is the “result” (*phala*) that thus constitutes reliable knowledge (*pramiti*) about the object.

To conclude this part of the discussion by returning to the question of grammar, then, there are two ways that we may analyze the compound *pramāṇaphala* in line with this argument. On the one hand we have a *ṭṛtīyātatpuruṣa*, “resulting [cognition generated by the] knowledge-instrument” (*pramāṇena yena phalam tat pramāṇaphalam*). On the other hand, we have a *karmadhāraya*, “knowledge-instrument [construed as the] result” (*phalam yat pramāṇam tat pramāṇaphalam*). The first of these is, in essence, the Nyāya definition of *pramāṇaphala*. But Dharmakīrti’s overarching point in this passage is that these two interpretations amount to the same thing, because the difference between them is only metaphorical or conceptual.

B. “It is Asserted that a Real Thing is Undifferentiated”

1. *The Form of the Object as Intrinsic Patient*

As discussed above, the general overarching context of *pramāṇa* discourse concerns practical action in the world. Thus, on the one hand, Dharmakīrti is to some extent forced to admit that an external object can be the “patient” (*karman*) of the “action” (*kriyā*) of knowing. The argument at PV 3.301-304 is thus directed at establishing that the most prominent causal factor (i.e., the *sādhakatama*) for a cognition is some internal or inherent difference (*ātmabheda*) within the nature of the cognition, rather than an external object in and of itself. The question then becomes how to account for the phenomenal difference between a cognition of ‘blue’ and a cognition of ‘yellow,’ given that the nature of cognition *qua* “mere experience” (*anubhavamātra*) is identical in all cases. Dharmakīrti’s answer, in PV 3.305-306, is to assert that (cognition’s possession of) the form of the object is the only possible candidate for this intrinsic difference. Hence, that which cognition cognizes (i.e., the *prameya*)—from an Epistemic Idealistic perspective, the “apprehended aspect” (*grāhyākāra*),⁹⁸ which is to say, the form of the object—is the most prominent causal factor (*sādhakatama*) or “final differentiator” (*antyam bhedakam*), and therefore, by the generally accepted definition of the term, the *pramāṇa*.

But it is precisely at this juncture, and with reference to these points, that Dharmakīrti begins the shift toward Epistemic Idealism. Although Dharmakīrti is careful in PV 3.301-306 to

⁹⁸ From an External Realist perspective, as already discussed, Dharmakīrti states that the cause of the cognition should be considered that which has the property of being the ‘apprehended’ (*grāhyatā*), i.e., the object of knowledge (*prameya*). In keeping with this definition, from an Epistemic Idealist account, it may theoretically be possible to assert that the *prameya* is, strictly speaking, the *vāsanā*—which would be, on this account, *arthas* insofar as they possess *arthakriyā*—that are causally responsible for the production of the *grāhyākāra*. In this case, however, it would remain to be determined whether “knowing the *vāsanā*” can be distinguished from “knowing the *ākāra* caused by the *vāsanā*.”

bracket the question of the relationship between the *karana* (i.e., the “instrument” in the sense of *sādhakatama*) and the patient (i.e., the *karman*) of cognition, for the next several dozen verses—and, arguably, for most of the remainder of PV 3—this relationship takes center stage. For, while in terms of ordinary practical action in the world, it is perhaps necessary to accept that the patient of cognition is the external object (*bāhyārtha*) that exists in the world, Dharmakīrti’s ultimate point here is that, strictly speaking, in terms of the unmediated instrumental effect,⁹⁹ the patient of a given cognition must also be just another aspect (*aṃśa*) of the nature of that same cognition. In other words, a cognition of ‘blue’ cannot be differentiated from a cognition of ‘yellow’ on the basis of the presence of a real blue or yellow object; whatever it is that distinguishes the appearance of ‘blue’ from the appearance of ‘yellow,’ this distinguishing or determining factor (*niyāmaka*, *niyama*)—not just on the subject-side (that is, in terms of the agent or instrument), but on the object-side as well—must be “internal” to the cognition itself. Thus, insofar as he admits the existence of a patient (*karman*) of knowledge (i.e., *prameya*), Dharmakīrti insists that it is an internal, intrinsic, or reflexive patient (*svakarman*):

⁹⁹ See Dunne (2004, 270–71), cited and discussed above in Section II.B, [Cognition Has No “Functioning” \(*vyāpāra*\)](#).

And this [form of the object] is of the very nature of that [cognition]. By virtue of this, the resulting cognition (*phala*) is not something other [than the instrument]. And, bearing that [form of the object] within itself¹⁰⁰ (*ātmani*), by virtue of having the nature of being an awareness of the object (*arthādhigamanātmanā*), the cognition appears as though it has intermediary functioning (*savyāpāra*), by virtue of functioning with respect to an intrinsic patient (*svakarmaṇi*), because, due to that [form of the object], there is the establishment of that [cognition as instrumental], even though [the cognition] itself does not act (*akāarakam api svayam*). For example, in common parlance (*loke*), [an effect] is [sometimes] said to have assumed the form of its cause, even without having [performed] any activity (*akriyāvattvepi*), because an effect arises with a similarity in nature to its causes.
 || 307-309 ||¹⁰¹

In other words, Dharmakīrti’s argument is that both the instrument, construed as an “inherent difference” (*ātmabheda*), and the patient, construed as a “self-” or “intrinsic patient” (*svakarmaṇi*), are constitutive of the nature of the cognition in question. The nature of cognition is such that it contains both its own “patient” and its own “instrument”; cognition only ever cognizes itself, by means of itself. In this sense, every cognition is reflexive; it “acts”—metaphorically, without any real causal “activity”—upon itself, as both agent and patient. As Jinendrabuddhi eloquently puts it, making use of transitive reflexive constructions in Sanskrit:

[Someone] could [say] this: “Because they are not distinct entities, if the [resulting] cognition and the aspect (*aṃśa*) [of the object] are the same, the activity (*kriyā*) is itself a contributing factor (*kāraṇa*). So this [idea] is demolished.”

This is not true, since even though the entity is not differentiated, the qualitative distinction (*dharmabheda*)—“the property of having the form of the object to be known (*prameyarūpatā*), and the awareness of the object”—is accepted, on account of the conceptualization of the difference in terms of exclusions¹⁰². And [this is the

¹⁰⁰ Or, “within its nature.”

¹⁰¹ Tosaki (1979, 400–401): *sā ca tasyātmabhūtaiva tena nārthāntaram phalam | dadhānam tac ca tām ātmany arthādhigamanātmanā || 307 || savyāpāram ivābhāti vyāpāreṇa svakarmaṇi | tadvaśāt tadvyavasthānād akāarakam api svayam || 308 || yathā phalasya hetūnām sadrśātmatayodbhavād | heturūpagraho loke 'kriyāvattve 'pi kathyate || 309 ||*

¹⁰² In other words, excluding the objective (i.e., *prameyarūpatā* or *sārūpya*) or subjective (i.e., *adhigama*) “aspect” (*ākāra*, *aṃśa*) from the other.

case] because the structure (*vyavasthā*) of establisher and established is observed in terms of a difference between the [self-appearance/*svābhāsa*¹⁰³ of] cognition and the appearance [of the object, i.e., the *viṣayābhāsa*], even though the thing itself [i.e., the cognition] is not differentiated. For example, [one can say], “wine, being imbibed, intoxicates,”¹⁰⁴ “one holds oneself,” or “[the mind] apprehends by means of the mind”; [in these cases], this convention of establisher and established is not based on anything real. So this objection should not be made.¹⁰⁵

In other words, just as it can be said that someone “holds himself well,” without it really being the case that this person is actually engaged in a real action of “holding” himself at all, cognition may be said to cognize itself, reflexively. In grammatical terms, cognition may thus be analyzed as both the knowing agent and the known object. But this is strictly heuristic and metaphorical; in reality, no such action of “knowing” takes place.

2. *Phenomenological Duality and Ontological Differentiation*

The preceding analysis is a primary—but far from the only—reason why neither reflexive awareness specifically nor cognition generally can possibly be understood as an ontologically dualistic phenomenon on Dharmakīrti’s account. As Dunne (2004, 39–45) and others have noted, the analytic technique of “mereology,” or the reduction of apparently distributed wholes into their constituent parts, is a defining feature of South Asian Buddhist philosophy. Broadly speaking, Buddhist philosophy denies the existence of any whole or “part-possessor” (*avayavin*). This is one of the primary arguments against phenomenological duality that we will see in Chapter 3, to the

¹⁰³ See Chapter 5, Section I: [Reflexive Awareness and “Self-Appearance” \(*svābhāsa*\)](#).

¹⁰⁴ “Wine” (*madhu*) is here both the passive object of *nīpīyamānaṃ*, as well as the active agent of *madayati*.

¹⁰⁵ Steinkellner (2005b, 67.9-68.2): *syād etat vastuno 'bhedāj jñānāṃśayor aikye yaiva kriyā tadeva kārakam | ato hatam etad iti | tad asat yato vastuno 'bhede 'pi yo 'yaṃ dharmabhedah prameyarūpatārthādhigatis ceti so 'bhyupagamam yata eva vyāvṛtibhedopakalpitah abhinne 'pi vastuni vijñānapratibhāsabhedena sādhyasādhanavyavasthādarśanāc ca | yathā nīpīyamānaṃ madhu madayati ātmanātmānaṃ dhārayati buddhyā grhṇātīti nāyaṃ vastusanniveśī sādhyasādhanavyavahāra ity acodyam etat ||*

effect that a singular cognition cannot really possess two images (viz., that of the subject and that of the object). And, as discussed in Chapter 1, Dharmakīrti explicitly describes dualistic cognition as a species of nonconceptual pseudo-perception.

But, even apart from these explicit assertions, real phenomenological duality, in the sense of a real ontological distinction between subject (*grāhaka*) and object (*grāhya*), or instrument (*karana*) and patient (*karman*), would irreparably break just about literally everything in Dharmakīrti's ontology and epistemology. Thus, comparisons of Dharmakīrti's epistemology to that of Brentano or Husserl, such as we find in Coseru (2012), certainly have their place; the phenomenological reduction (*epoché*) of experience into constitutively subjective and object-representative aspects, as well as the notion that these aspects are immediately and reflexively present to the cognizing mind, bear real and important structural similarities to Dharmakīrti's thought. Yet, at the same time, it would be a grave hermeneutic error to derive from these similarities the conclusion that Dharmakīrti's philosophy is intelligible as *Phänomenologie* in the Brentanian or Husserlian mold. Brentano and Husserl considered phenomenological duality to be irreducible, ineliminable, and unproblematic. Dharmakīrti, on the other hand, argues that duality is generated by the "internal impairment" (*antaruplaplava*); that the cognitive defect of duality can be eliminated by healing this impairment through yogic practice; and that, until such time as duality is thus eliminated, duality fundamentally distorts each and every one of our cognitions, creating enormous problems and suffering for sentient beings.

The complexity of any direct comparison between Dharmakīrti's epistemology and contemporary Western phenomenology is even more acute with respect to the issue of "intentionality." Since "intentionality" is one of the most poorly-defined terms in the Western philosophical tradition, despite being one of the most important, there is no possibility of treating

it in detail here. The point is simply this: to the extent that “intentionality” denotes anything definite, it is typically understood to involve an “intentional relation” between subject and object, such that the subject (*qua* cognizing agent) acts upon the object (*qua* cognized patient), whether this intentional object is held to exist internally or externally to the mind. Intentionality, in other words, typically denotes a transitive causal process occurring between two ontologically distinct causal factors. The problem with reading Dharmakīrti’s account of the relationship between phenomenological subject (i.e., *grāhakākāra*) and object (i.e., *grāhyākāra*) as “intentional” is that this kind of causal story about perception—the idea that perception involves a transitive (“intentional”) relationship between ontologically distinct subjects and objects—is *precisely what Dharmakīrti is refuting in this passage.*

This is, pointedly, not to say that Dharmakīrti was unaware of the theoretical issues introduced by such a non-intentional account of cognition. On the contrary, as discussed in Chapter 4, at PV 3.330-331 Dharmakīrti specifically acknowledges that this dualistic structure is constructed “in accordance with the manner in which those who are in error observe [an awareness which is in reality] devoid of the images of subject and object.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, for ordinary beings under ordinary circumstances, cognition just is dualistic, and so an accurate description of ordinary cognition necessarily requires that it be characterized as dualistic. Put slightly differently, the point here is that experience necessarily remains dualistic, until it stops being ordinary—that is, until there is a moment of transcendent gnosis (*prajñāpāramitā*), and one becomes a “noble being” (*ārya*) on the bodhisattva *bhūmis*.¹⁰⁷ Whether cognitive content as such can remain in these types of exotic states is something of an open question, though for reasons explored at length in

¹⁰⁶ PV 3.330cd: *avedyavedakākārā yathā bhrāntair nirīkṣyate*. See Chapter 4, Section IV.B: [The Simile of the Lamp](#).

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter 1, note [160](#).

this study, it is very difficult to see how the notion of “nonintentional sensory content” (such as a nondual experience of ‘blue’ and ‘yellow’) could make sense even on its own terms, far less on Dharmakīrti’s model.

But let us “bracket” the question of intentionality, since this issue cannot be resolved at present. The upshot here is that, to whatever extent the cognition at t_1 is analyzable as the product of a causal complex which includes some object or stimulus at t_0 , *the t_1 cognition itself cannot be meaningfully analyzed in causal terms*, i.e., as anything other than an ontologically simple and unitary particular. The fact that both the “instrument” and the “patient” of the cognition are in reality the same thing—the form of the object, which is to say, the nature (*svabhāva*) of the unique momentary particular t_1 cognition itself—militates against any attempt to construe these two as ontologically distinct entities.

In this way, Dharmakīrti’s take on the *kāraṅka* system constitutes a refutation of dualistic, intentional, or transitive accounts of cognition. That is to say, one way of thinking about this passage is that it argues to the effect that a model of cognition which involves some subject being aware of some object as a causal process—the subject as the agent, the object as the patient, and the *pramāṇa* as the instrument—is doubly wrong. Not only is such phenomenological duality ontologically unacceptable, the entire causal “structure” (*sthiti* or *vyavasthā*), the causal story being told about agents acting on patients, is baseless. The phenomenological and epistemological “cash value” of the ontological identity of instrument and action in general is, precisely, the ontological identity of subject and object.

However, in keeping with the “sliding scale,” Dharmakīrti engages with his audience in ways that are contextually appropriate. And here, in the context of a conversation about epistemic instruments and the knowledge that results from their application, the discourse requires at least

the provisional acceptance of something designated as the “instrument” and something else designated as the “action.” In this specific context, then, Dharmakīrti maintains that, to the extent that a relationship between these two things may be admitted, it must take into account their simultaneity—because, as we have seen, the instrumental cognition just is the resulting cognition, hence the patient of the action as a whole (i.e., the *kriyā*) is the same as the patient of the instrumental “functioning” (*vyāpāra*). Thus, there may in a sense exist some difference between action and agent, but this difference is only conventional or conceptual:

Opponent: “It is contradictory for action (*kriyā*) and instrument (*karāṇa*) to be identical.”

This is not true, because a [conceptually constructed] difference between [the subjective and objective] qualities [of cognition] is provisionally accepted (*abhyupagama*); [however,] it is asserted that a real thing (*vastu*) is undifferentiated. || 318 ||

Such is exactly the case for any structure (*saṁsthiti*) of action (*kriyā*) and causal factors (*kāraṇa*),¹⁰⁸ because even in the case of [causal factors] that are thought to be different, the relation (*bhava*) [of action and causal factors] occurs through imputation.¹⁰⁹ || 319 ||¹¹⁰

Hence, another way of thinking about Dharmakīrti’s conclusion for this line of argumentation is that the argument here is not an argument against phenomenological duality *per se*; rather, this argument *presupposes* nonduality. At this point in PV 3, Dharmakīrti has already (PV 3.194-224,

¹⁰⁸ Devendrabuddhi (PVP 529.5-6) explicitly states that this point is meant to apply to all causal activity, and not just cognition: “For example, like [the paradigmatic case of] the axe and so on” (*dper na sta re la sogs pa lta bu ste*). In other words, even though (unlike the *pramāṇa* and *pramāṇaphala*) the tree and the axe are ontologically distinct, the designation of the former as the “patient” and the latter as the “instrument” is just a conceptual imputation. As Sara McClintock (personal communication) has pointed out, this argument owes much to Madhyamaka analysis. In particular, compare Dharmakīrti’s point here to Nāgārjuna’s argument in MMK 8.12 and MMK 23.15.

¹⁰⁹ Or “as an imputation” (*āropeṇa*).

¹¹⁰ Tosaki (1979, 411): *kriyākaraṇayor aikyavirodha iti ced asat | dharmabhedābhyupagamād vastv abhinnaṁ itīṣyate || 318 || evaṁprakārā sarvaiva kriyākāraṇasaṁsthitih | bhāveṣu bhinnābhimateṣv apy āropeṇa vṛttitah || 319 ||*

PV 3.288-300) demonstrated that duality is a type of nonconceptual cognitive error. When Dharmakīrti speaks about an instrumental cognition (i.e., a *pramāṇa*) in these verses, he means a cognition that is already understood to be nondual. And Dharmakīrti maintains this ontological framework—to the effect that cognition may be conceptually divided into “structuring” and “structured,” “apprehender” and “apprehended,” and so on, but that this conceptual division does not in any way reflect a real ontological division—for the duration of PV 3, and re-articulates it at several junctures.¹¹¹ Indeed, this framework is an essential element of the explicit idealistic shift beginning in PV 3.320, to which we now turn.

¹¹¹ Cf., for example, PV 3.363-366.

Chapter Three: Isomorphism, Variegation, Nonduality

Dharmakīrti's theory of perception may be considered representationalist, in the sense that he asserts the "directly" (pratyakṣataḥ) presented object of a "perceptual" (pratyakṣam) cognition to be the cognitive image or phenomenal form of its object-field (viśayākāra)—in other words, a mental representation (vijñapti), which mediates the knowledge of the object that it re-presents. Both the epistemic reliability or "instrumentality" (prāmāṇya), and the practical utility, of sensory cognition thus hinge on the extent to which this cognitive image is an accurate representation of its underlying causes. But just how accurate can this representation ever really be? At a critically-important juncture—in effect, at the point on the sliding scale where Dharmakīrti initiates the transition to epistemological idealism—Dharmakīrti directly critiques the supposed conformity or isomorphism (sārūpya) between the image and the object. He adduces several arguments as to why, in the final analysis, there can be no truly reliable correspondence between the image and the object: the variegation (citra) of the image, its apparent spatial extension (sthūlatva), and the fact that it always appears as the objective element (grāhyākāra) of a dualistic cognition, even though this duality is itself nothing but a form of nonconceptual error. These critiques form the basis for the transition to idealism.

It is well-known that Dharmakīrti embraces a representationalist epistemology, wherein the knowledge of the epistemic object (*prameya*) that is "apprehended" (*grāhya*) in a sensory cognition is understood to be mediated "by means of" its cognitive image or representation (*ākāra*) in the mind. In this sense, the "image of the apprehended" (*grāhyākāra*) is held to be the "instrumental means of knowledge" (*pramāṇa*). Less well-understood, however, is the relationship between Dharmakīrti's representationalism and his idealism—as well as, within the context of Dharmakīrti's idealism, the relationship between his idealistic epistemology and his idealistic ontology. Much of this lack of understanding is doubtless due to the fact that Dharmakīrti's arguments for idealism ultimately turn on his and Dinnāga's somewhat idiosyncratic re-definition of the "resulting cognition" or "result" (*phala*), a notoriously tricky topic. But it is precisely in terms of such a causal analysis—that is, precisely in terms of an analysis of the sensory image and/as the "result"—that Dharmakīrti first explicitly asserts an idealistic epistemology.

Dharmakīrti's approach may be fruitfully contrasted to that of Dinnāga. In the PS, Dinnāga assumes an idealistic perspective, but does not specifically or explicitly argue for idealism.¹ On the contrary, at PSV *ad* PS 1.9bc, Dinnāga simply acknowledges that both cognition itself (*jñāna*) and an external object (*bāhyārtha*) may be construed as the epistemic object (*prameya*). Dharmakīrti, whose perspective was more explicitly idealistic, and who was thus left in something of a hermeneutic bind, opts to introduce the discussion of idealistic epistemology in the context of his explanation of PS 1.9a: "Alternatively, in this context, reflexive awareness is the result" (*svasaṃvittiḥ phalaṃ vātra*). It is, in other words, just in terms of a discussion of what it means for reflexive awareness to be the "result" (*phala*) that Dharmakīrti initiates the shift up the sliding scale, from External Realism to Epistemic Idealism.

However, Dharmakīrti's analysis at that juncture (PV 3.320-332 *ad* PS 1.9a) hinges on argumentation that was developed earlier in the Perception Chapter (PV 3.194-224 *ad* PS 1.4cd), and is only sketched out in the barest terms during his treatment of reflexive awareness as the result. Accordingly, in this chapter, we will only briefly touch upon PV 3.320ff., before examining Dharmakīrti's earlier critique of the supposed conformity or isomorphism (*sārūpya*) between the object and the sensory image. We will then return to PS 1.9a, and Dharmakīrti's analysis thereof, in Chapter 4.

¹ Dinnāga's argumentation for Yogācāra idealism is most explicit and extended in the *Ālambanaparīkṣā*(*vṛtti*), translated and analyzed in Duckworth et al. (2016).

I. Object-Isomorphism (*arthasārūpya*)

A. The Instrumentality of Sensory Cognition

Immediately following his establishment of nonconceptual error as a distinct form of pseudo-perception (PV 3.288-300),² and his refutation of the idea that the instrument and the result of a cognition are ontologically-distinct entities (PV 3.301-319),³ Dharmakīrti poses a question-and-response that is, in effect, the fulcrum about which the entire Perception Chapter revolves:

What is the awareness of an object (*arthasaṃvit*)?

[Opponent:] “The experience of an object (*arthavedana*) is just that perceptual cognition (*pratyakṣam*) which is an experience that is restricted to a specific individual (*prativedana*).” || 320abc₁ ||⁴

Devendrabuddhi identifies the interlocutor here as a Sautrāntika,⁵ in other words, a fellow Buddhist representationalist. Dharmakīrti and his Sautrāntika opponent thus share the epistemological position that “object-awareness” is not the unmediated knowledge of external reality. Rather, the two agree that to be aware of an object is to be aware of a mental representation or cognitive image (*ākāra*) which, in some as yet unspecified way, both correlates to the object and mediates knowledge of it.

Throughout all four chapters of the PV, Dharmakīrti defends representationalist epistemology against the direct realist view that cognition directly apprehends its objects without any intermediate cognitive representation. At this juncture, however, Dharmakīrti presses the

² See Chapter 1.

³ See Chapter 2.

⁴ Tosaki (1985, 4): *kārthasaṃvid* [] *yad evedaṃ pratyakṣaṃ prativedanam | tad arthavedanam*.

⁵ PVP (529). See below, note [15](#).

matter further: what, exactly, is the nature of the relationship between sensory cognition and the object of sensation? On what account is a given sensory experience able to be designated as the experience of some object?

Why [is an individually-restricted perceptual cognition the experience of an object]?

[Opponent:] “Because it has the form of that [object].” || 320c₂d₁ ||⁶

Up to this point in the argument, such conformity (*sā* or *anu* + $\sqrt{rūp}$, also *tadrūpa*, *tādrūpya*, etc.) or isomorphism with the object has indeed been the ground upon which Dharmakīrti justifies the “instrumentality” (*prāmāṇya*) of perception.

To review: particulars, being causally efficacious, produce sensory cognition as their effect: “if there is no cause for error, the [particular], by nature, induces appearances that conform to itself.”⁷ The sensory cognition, which is ontologically identical with the cognitive image (*ākāra*) that it may metaphorically be said to possess,⁸ is then conceptualized or processed through an “other-exclusion” (*anyāpoha*), in accordance with the desires, expectations, habituation, etc., of the perceiver. The end result of this processing is a definitive judgment or determination (*niścaya*) which, being conceptual, is necessarily erroneous.⁹

Nevertheless, insofar as the underlying sensory cognition is produced without any “cause for error”—which is to say, as long as there is no “distortion in the basis” (*āśrayopaplava*) causing it to be generated incorrectly—the initial sensory cognition which is the basis for the subsequent

⁶ Tosaki (1985, 4): *kena* [] *tādrūpyād*.

⁷ Tosaki (1979, 184): *so 'sati bhrāntikāraṇe | pratibhāḥ pratisandhatte svānurūpāḥ svabhāvataḥ* || 109 ||

⁸ See Chapter 2, Section III.B: [“It is Asserted that a Real Thing is Undifferentiated.”](#)

⁹ See the Introduction, Section III.D: [Conceptuality \(*kalpanā*\) and Universals \(*sāmānya*\)](#).

definitive judgment must by necessity reliably track at least some of the causal features of the particulars that produced it, because it is the immediate and non-defective result of a purely causal process. Hence, despite being “erroneous,” the definitive conceptual judgment or “exclusion” (*apoha*) which takes that sensory cognition as its basis of exclusion is actually able to facilitate obtaining what is beneficial or avoiding what is harmful (*hitāhitaprāptiparihāra*), and the underlying sensory cognition is therefore an epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*).¹⁰

However, this basic account glosses over a number of thorny theoretical problems. For example: what, precisely, is the epistemic object (*jñeya*, *meya*, *prameya*)? Is “that which is apprehended” (*grāhya*) the external object which causes the production of the sensory cognition? Is it that object’s causal descendant, upon which one ultimately acts? Or is “that which is apprehended” in fact only the “apprehended image” (*grāhyākāra*), i.e., the sensory-cognitive form of the object that exists as (or “within”) the sensory cognition itself? In other words: what is the exact nature of the relationship between the object that causes the sensory cognition, and the cognition which “apprehends” that object by virtue of being produced by it? As Dharmakīrti frames the issue at the end of the section on mental perception (PV 3.239-248), discussed above:¹¹

Because that which does not exist prior [to the effect] has no causal power [to produce that effect], and because that which exists after [the effect has arisen] is useless, all causes exist prior [to their effects]. Thus, there is no object which exists together with its own cognition. || 246 ||

[Opponent:] “How can that which is apprehended exist at a time that is different [from its apprehension]?”

¹⁰ Note that the preceding account is all in the context of determinate knowledge as the mediated (*vyavahita*) effect; in terms of the special case of cognition taken as an unmediated effect, the instrumentality of the sensory cognition lies in the mere fact of its appearance, whether or not it is subsequently conceptualized. See Dunne (2004, 270-71).

¹¹ See Chapter 1, Section II.C: [Mental Perception](#).

Those who understand reason know that ‘being that which is apprehended’ (*grāhyatā*) is just being a cause which is capable of projecting its form into a cognition. || 247 ||

For although an effect may have many causes, that [cause] in conformity with which [the cognition] has arisen, and into which the [object] has projected its form, is said to be ‘apprehended’ by the [cognition]. || 248 ||

Schematically: Dharmakīrti asserts that irreducible particulars (*svalakṣaṇas*) can be understood as the objects which are known by sensory cognition, insofar as [1] they are the real entities (*vastu*) with causal efficiency (*arthakriyā*) that are actually able to fulfill the aims of beings, in terms of obtaining what is beneficial or avoiding what is harmful; and [2] because they are real and causally efficacious, they are responsible for the production of the cognitive image which bears their form.

However, these particulars are only ever indirectly known, since as discussed in Chapter 2 their apprehension is mediated (*vyavadhāna*) by a sensory-cognitive image or “aspect” (*ākāra*). That is to say: the particles themselves are a necessary supporting condition (*sahakārin*) for the production of the image, but only the image—and *not* the particles which are its cause—is directly (*pratyakṣataḥ*) cognized. In other words, for Dharmakīrti, even an External Realist (*bāhyarthavāda*) ontological framework entails an idealist epistemology (i.e., Epistemic Idealism or *antarjñeyavāda*), to the extent that even if external physical matter is the cause and causal correlate of sensory cognition, the only thing that is ever actually directly cognized is a mental image or representation. And in fact, this holds whether the cause of cognition is held to exist internally or externally. For, even when the object *qua* cause of the cognition is understood as internal psychophysical imprints (*vāsanā*), it is not the case that these imprints are themselves observed; rather, what is seen is the effect (i.e., the sensory image) that they produce.

However, even though perception (*pratyakṣa*) only ever directly operates with respect to the image, rather than the object *qua* cause, this does not matter in terms of obtaining what is

wanted or avoiding what is unwanted, because the causal features of the image exist in an isomorphic relationship with those of the object that caused the image, whether this object is construed as internal or external. That is to say, the image “follows the form” (*anu* + $\sqrt{rūp}$) or nature (*rūpa*) of the object. In other words, the particulars which are acted upon, being direct causal descendants of the particulars which produce the image, possess causal capacities (*śakti*) that are captured by or expressed in the image; therefore, by acting with respect to the image—as though the image were the object—one nevertheless achieves one’s goal, despite the fundamental confusion of mistakenly taking the awareness of a cognition (*jñānaśamvit*) as the awareness of an external object (*arthasamvit*).¹² For example, stepping back to the External Realist perspective for a moment, the plasma particles of a fire, which have the causal capacity to generate a sensory cognition that is the basis for a subsequent determination of those particles as ‘fire,’ also possess causal properties such that they are a source of warmth. Hence, the cognitive image generated by the particles, and the accompanying (“erroneous”) conceptual determination of ‘fire,’ facilitates the accomplishment of one’s goal, such as staying warm, even though it is the particles and not the image which is warm.

This is the basic Buddhist External Realist representationalist paradigm, often referred to as “Sautrāntika,” after the philosophical tradition in which it first emerged. Typically, Dharmakīrti and his earliest commentators do not name this position as “Sautrāntika,” preferring instead the more general designation *bāhyārthavāda* (“the view that objects are external [to the mind]”). Here, however, Devendrabuddhi specifically identifies the rhetorical interlocutor as a Sautrāntika:

When cognition itself arises with the appearance of an object, there is a restriction (*ngeś pa* = **niyama*) such that it possesses a discrete subject and object—but not,

¹² Cf. PVSV *ad* PV 1.1.

however, [such that there is] an external object.¹³ That being the case, if there is no activity (*bya ba* = **kriyā*) whatsoever which has the nature of [being] the knowing of the object, what exactly should be posited as the resulting knowledge (*tshad ma* 'i 'bras bu = **pramāṇaphala*)? With this in mind, the author of the treatise [i.e., Dharmakīrti] asks the Sautrāntika (*mdo de pa*): “**What is the awareness of an object?**” Since the object (*don* = **artha*) of this object-awareness is exclusively that which is experienced (*rig par bya ba* = **vedya*), [object-awareness] is not the awareness of an [external] object.

The [Sautrāntika] responds: “[The experience of an object] is asserted to be **that perceptual cognition which is reflexively, individually-known**, i.e., not known¹⁴ by someone else.”¹⁵

At this crucial juncture, then, Dharmakīrti pushes back on the Sautrāntika account—that what defines perceptual cognition as such is the cognition’s isomorphism or “similarity” (*sadrśya*) to its object, a definition which Dharmakīrti himself has for the most part uncritically adopted right up until this very juncture—in a manner that threatens to blow up (and, arguably, does in fact blow up) the entire epistemological project:

But that [definition] is insufficient. || 320d ||¹⁶

¹³ That is, the “restriction that [subject and object must always] appear together” (*sahopamabhaniyama*).

¹⁴ The word *gzhan* in the manuscript of the Tibetan translation of Devendrabuddhi’s commentary here (529.18) presents a philological problem. There is a strong possibility of manuscript error, either that *gzhan* is an erroneous insertion, or (as translated above) that it is missing a qualification along the lines of *so so rang rig gzhan gyis* **ma rig pa*’i *mngon sum*, highlighting the sense of *prati* (Tib. *so so*) as the restriction of the cognition to an individual being’s mental continuum. This is, indeed, the substance of Devendrabuddhi’s immediately-subsequent restatement of the opponent’s objection: “[In other words,] if [the opponent] were to ask: ‘If this [definition of perception] applies to the perceptions of each individual continuum, why then is it objected to?’” (529.19-20: *rgyud so so*’i *mngon sum la de yod pa nyid yin na* | *ci*’i *phyir de la yang snyon par byed ce na*). Alternatively, if genuine, the Sautrāntika interlocutor’s response here may be a reference to the Sautrāntika understanding of reflexive awareness as a discrete, “other” (i.e., *gzhan*) mental factor: specifically, the *caitta* of *svasaṃvedanā*, which they hold to be ontologically distinct from the perceptual *citta*. See below, Chapter 5, note [178](#).

¹⁵ PVP (529.12-19): *rnam par shes pa nyid yul du snang bar skye na gzung ba dang* ’dzin pa tha dad pa dang ldan par nges pa yin gyi | *phyi rol gyi don yod pa ma yin pa de ltar na don rtogs pa*’i ngo bo bya ba ’ga’ zhig kyang yod pa ma yin na | *gang tshad ma*’i ’bras bu nyid du rnam par ’jog par ’gyur zhes dgongs nas | *bstan bcos mdzad pas mdo sde pa la* | *don rig gang yin zhes* ’dri ba mdzad pa yin no | *don rig pa* ’di’i *don rig par bya ba nyid kyi phyir don rig pa ma yin no* | *so so rang rig gzhan gyis* [em. *ma rig pa*’i] *mngon sum gang yin* ’di ’dod do zhes bya ba smras te.

¹⁶ Tosaki (1985, 4): *vyabhicāri tat* || 320 ||

As we shall see, the “insufficiency” or “inconsistency” (*vyabhicāratva*) of the opponent’s definition of object-awareness ultimately turns on a fundamental disjunct between the nature of that which produces the sensory cognition—a manifold of extensionless particulars—and the apparently singular yet nevertheless extended and variegated nature of the sensory image that is produced. This argument serves two closely-related purposes. First, it serves as the basis for the shift to Epistemic Idealism. Second, it fatally undermines the instrumentality (*prāmāṇya*) of sensory cognition as such. In other words, the shift to Epistemic Idealism, in and of itself, is not the endpoint of Dharmakīrti’s analysis; ultimately, the purportedly isomorphic relationship between the cause or object (i.e., the *artha*) of a sensory cognition, and the sensory cognition itself, must be understood as inconsistent or unreliable (*vyabhicāri*). As Dharmakīrti and his commentators make clear, this is necessarily the case, whether the object of sensory cognition is understood as external (“physical” particles) or internal (“mental” imprints). And this, in turn, is the primary reason why, in the final analysis, the only candidate for a truly reliable instrument of correct awareness (i.e., a *pramāṇa*) is pure reflexive awareness.

In order to fully appreciate these points, however, it is first necessary to understand the manner in which particulars produce their cognitive image, since it is precisely as a critique of this causal relationship that Dharmakīrti articulates the closely-related arguments for idealism and against the reliability of ordinary sensory cognition.

B. The Agglomerated Object of Sensory Cognition

1. Particulars and Sensory Cognition in the PS

It is quite ironic, but nevertheless true, that nowhere in the Perception Chapter does Dharmakīrti provide a sequential and detailed account of the sensory-perceptual process. In fact, the passages

critiquing the epistemic reliability of ordinary sensory cognition¹⁷ are much longer and more comprehensive than the few scattered asides concerning the exact manner in which particulars are causally responsible for the production of a sensory cognition.

To some extent, this is doubtlessly an artifact of PV 3 having been structured as an expansion and reworking of PS 1.2-12, a passage which similarly fails to provide such an account. Dinnāga's reticence may, in turn, be understood in large part as the result of his having presupposed a vast amount of knowledge on the part of his readers, especially the works of Vasubandhu, most particularly the *Viṃśikā* and the *AKBh*, a critically-important passage from which we will examine below. For example, in his introductory comments (PSV) to PS 1.4cd, Dinnāga directly references one of the primary arguments among the various Abhidharma schools: the question of what, exactly, it is that "cognizes" or "sees" (*viñānāti*). In this connection, Dinnāga first cites the *Dārṣṭāntika* position¹⁸ that it is not the visual faculty (*caḥṣu*), but rather a cognition (*viñāna*), produced by the complete assemblage (*samāgrī*) of its causal conditions, which "sees" (*viñānavāda*).¹⁹ Not coincidentally, this is in essence the position defended by Vasubandhu in the *AKBh*. That is to say, Dinnāga (and by extension Dharmakīrti) explicitly base their analysis on the Abhidharma presentation of Vasubandhu, who was in turn responding to a long tradition of Abhidharma scholarship. Hence, in order to piece together a more detailed account of the sensory-

¹⁷ Primarily, PV 3.194-224 *ad* PS 1.4cd, and PV 3.320-366 *ad* PS 1.9-10.

¹⁸ Cf. Dhammajoti (2007, 96–97).

¹⁹ Cf. Dhammajoti (2007, 69–90). Indeed, the view that it is consciousness which sees (*viñānavāda*) appears to have been the dominant position among the Abhidharma schools, with the notable exception of the *Vaibhāṣikas*. On this point, it should be noted that *Dārṣṭāntika viñānavāda* is distinct from both *Sautrāntika sākāravāda* ("the view that [sensory cognition occurs] with an image [of the object]") and *Yogācāra antarjñeyavāda* ("the view that the object of cognition is internal [i.e., mental]"). However, the connection among these views is obvious: it is a short step from the view that it is consciousness which sees, to the view that what consciousness sees is consciousness, to the view that the fact that consciousness only ever sees consciousness entails that there is nothing outside the mind.

perceptual process, so that we may more fully appreciate Dharmakīrti's Yogācāra critique beginning at PV 3.320, it is helpful to begin by returning to the PS and its engagement with the Abhidharma literature.

To review the structure of the PS: following the salutation at PS 1.1, Dinnāga argues (PS 1.2abc₁) that there are only two *pramāṇas*, perception and inference, because there are only two types of knowledge-object: respectively, the particular and the universal.²⁰ He then systematically excludes [1] the union of perception and inference (PS 1.2c₂d₁);²¹ [2] recognition (PS 1.2d₂-3ab₁);²² and [3] memory (PS 1.3b₂)²³ as separate *pramāṇas*, before strictly defining perception as being nonconceptual (PS 1.3cd), which is to say, devoid of label (*nāma*) or any other type of conceptual categorization (*jātyādi*).²⁴ At PS 1.4ab, Dinnāga then explains that perception (*pratyakṣa*) should be named “at-the-faculty” or “[in regard to] each [being's own] faculty” (*prati + akṣa*), rather than “at-the-object” (*pratiṣaya*) or something else,²⁵ because the faculty (*akṣa*) alone is the unique or “uncommon cause” (*asādhāraṇahetu*) of perceptual cognition.²⁶

With his preliminary comments in the PSV *ad* PS 1.4cd, Dinnāga then turns to one of the central theoretical questions at stake: given that perception, by definition, can only apprehend particulars, but also that particulars are infinitesimally small and for this reason cannot be perceived by ordinary people, in what sense is the cognition of manifold agglomerated particulars

²⁰ **pratyakṣam anumānam ca pramāṇe lakṣaṇadvayam | prameyam**

²¹ **tasya sandhāne na pramāṇāntaram**

²² **na ca || 2 || punaḥ punar abhijñāne**

²³ **'niṣṭhāsakteḥ smṛtādivat |**

²⁴ **pratyakṣam kalpanāpoḍham nāmajātyādiyojanā || 3 ||**

²⁵ **pratyakṣam ucyate na pratiṣayam**

²⁶ **asādhāraṇahetutvād akṣais tad vyapadiśyate |**

a “perception”? The question is framed as an interrogation of the Abhidharma, of which Dinnāga’s response is ultimately articulated as a defense:

It is also stated in the Abhidharma: “One for whom visual consciousness is complete (*samaṅgin*) knows blue, but does not [know that he is seeing] ‘blue.’”²⁷ [And:] “In regard to the object, one perceives (*sañjñī*) the object, but one does not perceive the category²⁸ (*dharma*).” In what way, then, do the five [sensory] cognitions have agglomerated object-supports,²⁹ if they do not conceptualize [their objects] as unitary?”

Well, as [Vasubandhu writes at AKBh *ad* AK1.10], “They [are asserted]³⁰ to have particulars as their object-fields in regard to a sense-sphere particular (*āyatanaśvalakṣaṇa*), not a substance-particular (*dravyaśvalakṣaṇa*).”³¹

In other words, as we will see, despite being an agglomeration, a manifold of infinitesimal particulars that interact both with each other and with a sensory faculty so as to produce a sensory cognition *is* a (very peculiar) kind of particular: it is a “sense-sphere particular.”

²⁷ This is a reference to the issue of determinate or conceptualized perception (*savikalpakapratyakṣa*). See Chapter 2, Section I.C: [Determinate Perception and Temporal Sequence](#).

²⁸ For a discussion of this usage of *dharma* (i.e., “category” rather than “ontologically irreducible phenomenon”), see Cox (2004).

²⁹ *sañcitāmbanāḥ pañca vijñānakāyāḥ*. Dinnāga does not mark off this phrase with the quotation marker *iti*, but it is likely a citation of AKBh *ad* AK1.44b (Pradhan 1975, 34.1-2): “Neither a single fundamental particle of the sense-faculty, nor a single fundamental particle of the object-field, produces cognition, because the five types of sensory cognition have aggregated object-supports” (*na caika indriyaparamāṅgur viṣayaparamāṅgur vā vijñānaṃ janayati | sañcitāśrayāmbanatvāt pañcānāṃ vijñānakāyānām*).

In other words, both the faculty-*āyatana* (the “internal *āyatana*”) and the object-*āyatana* (the “external *āyatana*”) are only causally efficacious when multiple particles are operating in concert. Following this statement, Vasubandhu immediately thereafter goes on to note that, for this very reason, fundamental particles themselves are imperceptible (*ata evānidarśanaḥ paramāṅgur adṛśyatvāt*). See below, note [81](#).

³⁰ See the discussion in Appendix A, note [3](#).

³¹ Steinkellner (2005a, 2.20-23): *abhidharme ’py uktam – cakṣurvijñānasamaṅgī nīlaṃ vijñānīti no tu nīlam iti, arthe ’rthasañjñīti na tu dharmasañjñīti. kathaṃ tarhi sañcitāmbanāḥ pañca vijñānakāyāḥ, yadi tad ekato na vikalpayanti. yac cāyatanaśvalakṣaṇaṃ praty ete śvalakṣaṇaviṣayā na dravyaśvalakṣaṇaṃ iti.*

Dharmakīrti begins his remarks *ad* PS 1.4cd—the famous “*citrādvaita*” section,³² wherein Dharmakīrti first extensively critiques both subject-object duality (*dvaya*) and the apparent phenomenal extension (*sthūlatva*) of the cognitive image—by referencing this very same controversy:

[Opponent:] “That which has been aggregated (*saṃcita*) is composite (*samudāya*), i.e., a universal (*sāmānya*). And sensory cognitions are about that [kind of universal *qua* aggregation]. But the cognition of a universal is necessarily associated with conceptuality.” || 194 ||³³

Yet, as we will see, while in this section Dharmakīrti is very much concerned with the issue of agglomerated particulars, he does not directly address this problem, pivoting instead to the wider ramifications he would like to discuss—ramifications which ultimately include his arguments for idealism.³⁴ However, because Dharmakīrti’s approach in this passage turns on Diñnāga’s explanation of the relationship between particulars and the sensory image, in order to fully understand the context of Dharmakīrti’s discussion in the PV, as is so often the case, it is quite helpful to turn to Jinendrabuddhi’s comments in the PST.³⁵

³² This nickname for the passage in question did not originate with Dharmakīrti, nor with Devendrabuddhi, nor Śākyabuddhi. It appears to have originated with Prajñākaragupta, though this (in all fairness, relatively minor) intellectual-historical point is in need of further clarification.

³³ Tosaki (1979, 297): *sañcitaḥ samudāyaḥ sa sāmānyam tatra cākṣadhīḥ | sāmānyabuddhiś cāvaśyaṃ vikalpenānubadhyate* || 194 ||

³⁴ Perhaps not coincidentally, Dharmakīrti defends the substance of Diñnāga’s argument, but does not adopt the technical term *āyatanasvalakṣaṇa*, in much the same way that he defends the substance of Diñnāga’s argument for the dual-formedness (*divirūpatā*) of cognition, but prefers the terminology of *grāhyākāra* and *grāhakākāra* to Diñnāga’s *viśayābhāsa* and *svābhāsa*.

³⁵ While the following discussion primarily references PS(V) 1.4cd, Diñnāga’s analysis in PS(V) 1.14 is also highly relevant. See, in particular, Appendix B, [PST *ad* PS\(V\) 1.14cd](#).

2. *PSṬ* ad *PS 1.4cd* and the “sense-sphere particular” (āyatanasvalakṣaṇa)

According to Jinendrabuddhi, the essence of the problem here is that any type of agglomeration, construed as a singular phenomenon, would by definition be a distributed entity, and could therefore only be the object of a conceptual cognition:

How does this philosophical position (*siddhānta*), that “**the five types of sensory cognition have agglomerated objects**,” make sense, if they do not conceptualize (*vi + √kṛp*) the object-support as singular? It is to be considered as follows. The word “agglomerated” (*sañcita*) expresses a conglomerate (*samudāya*). For “agglomeration” (*sañciti*), “that which has been agglomerated” (*sañcita*), “conglomeration” (*sañcaya*), and “conglomerate” (*samudāya*), are synonyms, because [the suffix *-ya* expresses] a state [and not an action].³⁶ And it is a conglomeration (*sañcaya*), not of only one fundamental particle, but rather of many, as their common quality (*sādhāraṇa dharma*). If sensory cognition engaged with that [conglomerate *qua*] universal (*sāmānya*), then it would be conceptual. For the cognition of a universal is necessarily known as conceptual; for the [Abhidharma] philosophical tradition (*siddhānta*) does not accept a universal as truly real (*vastusat*). Therefore, that very [cognition] conceptualizes this [universal *qua* conglomerate]. Having considered this [objection], [Dīnāga says] “**Well, as [Vasubandhu writes...]**,” and so on.³⁷

Jinendrabuddhi thus explains the problem here in terms of an implicit comparison between the “common quality” of the multiple particles contributing to the causal production of the sensory image, and the “single effect” (*ekaṃ kāryam*)³⁸ from which all the other causal properties of particulars are “excluded” (*apoha*) in the conceptualization process. For example, when the

³⁶ Cf. Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, III.3.114.

³⁷ Steinkellner (2005b, 43.16-44.6). *sañcitālanbanāḥ pañca vijñānakāyā iti yo 'yaṃ siddhāntaḥ sa katham yujyate yadi tad ekata ekatvenālanbanam na vikalpayanti | evaṃ manyate sañcitasābdena samudāya ucyate bhāve niṣṭhavidhānāt | sañcitiḥ sañcitam sañcayaḥ samudāya iti hi paryāyāḥ | sa ca sañcayo naikasyaiva paramāṇoḥ api tu bahūnām sādhāraṇo dharmāḥ | tatra sāmānye yady akṣadhīḥ pravarteta tadāsau vikalpikā syāt | sāmānyabuddhir hi niyatam vikalpenānubadhyate | na hi sāmānyam vastusat siddhānta iṣyate | tasmāt saiva tad vikalpayatīti kṛtvā yac cetyādi.*

³⁸ Concerning the ability of multiple particles to produce the sensory image as their single effect, cf. Dunne (2004, 109). See also below, Section I.C: [Individual and Universal Capacities](#).

particulars that are understood to comprise a ‘jug’ are conceptualized as being a ‘jug,’ all of those particulars’ various causal properties *except* their ability to operate in such a way as to facilitate the containment of liquid when in proximity to other similar particulars—i.e., the “single effect” of holding water—are subliminally discarded or excluded from consideration.³⁹ Just so, with respect to the particulars that comprise some blue-patch, only their shared “common quality” of being able to produce the image of ‘blue’ when in proximity to other similar particulars is relevant to the production of the ‘blue’ image; all of their other causal properties are irrelevant. The question, then, is how such a universal or conglomerate is able to produce a *nonconceptual* sensory cognition.

On this point, Jinendrabuddhi highlights the key term used by Dinnāga, which may have been Vasubandhu’s original formulation:⁴⁰ the “sense sphere-particular” (*āyatanasvalakṣaṇa*). It is precisely in regard to such a “sense sphere-particular” that sensory cognition is understood to have a particular as its object:

³⁹ Concerning the “single effect” in terms of *apoha* theory, cf. PVSV *ad* PV 1.108cd, and Dunne (2004, 119–26).

⁴⁰ That is to say, Vasubandhu’s perspective in this regard may have diverged from his Sautrāntika predecessors’. As Dunne (2004, 79n38) notes, “It does not appear that Vasubandhu’s discussions of ‘sense sphere particulars’ (*āyatanasvalakṣaṇa*) and ‘conglomerated particles’ (*saṃghātaparamāṇu*) are to be taken as characteristic of the Sautrāntika position sketched in AKBh.”

The sense sphere-particular (*āyatanasvalakṣaṇa*) is that which is apprehended by the eye-consciousness and so on; it is in regard to this that “**the five [sensory] cognitions [are said to] have particulars as their object-fields, not substance-particulars,**” i.e., distinct particulars (*bhedāḥ*) which are substantially blue⁴¹ or whatever. By negating the property of being an object-field on the part of substance-particulars such as blue, it is stated by implication that the object-field [of sensory cognition] is a non-difference, i.e., a universal (*sāmānyam abhinnam*), of [or with respect to] those [substance-particulars]. But then the fact [that perception is] devoid of conceptuality is contradicted. So how is it possible to interpret the [Abhidharma] treatise in another way? That is the idea here.⁴²

Dinnāga responds to this objection by assenting to its underlying thesis: insofar as the object of sensory cognition is a multiplicity of agglomerated particulars, the object of sensory cognition may indeed be understood as a type of universal. However, because this universal is not conceptually constructed, but is only a “universal” insofar as it is an “agglomeration,” and furthermore consists in a real “common quality” or single effect produced by its constituent particles, it may also be considered a peculiar type of particular—namely, the “sense-sphere particular.”

In this way, the object *qua* cause of sensory cognition is a kind of non-conceptualized universal (insofar as any distributed entity must be considered a universal):

⁴¹ In Abhidharma ontology, individual *dharma*s themselves are understood to possess phenomenal qualities such as blue, or to be of the earth-element and so on.

⁴² Steinkellner (2005b, 44.6–44.10) *āyatanasvalakṣaṇaṃ cakṣurvijñānagrāhyatvādi tat praty ete svalakṣaṇaviṣayāḥ pañca vijñānakāyāḥ na dravyasvalakṣaṇam iti | dravyaṃ nīlādibhedāḥ | nīlādidravyasvalakṣaṇaviṣayatva pratiṣedhena sāmārthyāt teṣāṃ yat sāmānyam abhinnam sa viṣaya ity uktam bhavati | ataś ca kalpanāpoḍhatvaṃ virudhyate | tat katham tac chāstram anyathā netuṃ śakyata iti bhāvaḥ ||*

In that [Abhidharma] context, because [cognition] arises from a manifold object (*anekārtha*), with respect to [sensory cognition’s] own object, the sensory domain is a universal [in the sense of a composite]. || 4cd ||

Because it arises from a manifold of substantial entities, that [cognition] is said to have as its own sense-sphere an object-field that is a universal (*sāmānya*), though not because of conceptualizing a non-difference in different things.⁴³

According to Dinnāga, then, the object of sensory cognition is in fact a “particular” (*svalakṣaṇa*), only not in the sense of an individual fundamental particle (*paramāṇu*), but rather in the sense of a “sense-sphere particular” (*āyatanasvalakṣaṇa*). The sense-sphere particular is in this way a kind of non-conceptual “universal.”⁴⁴ It is a single effect or “common quality,” produced by the simultaneous operation of that portion of various particulars’ individual causal capacities which, when these particulars are proximate to each other, facilitates the production of the sensory image. The question, then, is how a cognition which engages with (*pra + √vṛt*) that “common quality” can be understood as perceptual, since it is ordinarily understood that a cognition which engages with multiple particulars in terms of such a “single effect” is, precisely, conceptual.

⁴³ Steinkellner (2005a, 2.24-26): **tatrānekārthajanyatvāt svārthe sāmānyagocaram || 4 || *anekadravyotpādyatvāt tat svāyatane sāmānyaviśayam uktam, na tu bhinneṣv abhedakalpanāt.***

⁴⁴ In his discussion of PS(V) 1.4cd, Arnold (2018, 138) apparently takes Dinnāga to be articulating a position to the effect that the *āyatanasvalakṣaṇa* is conceptualized: “The difference between ‘universal’ and ‘particular’ does not, for Dignāga, finally track the intuitively plausible distinction between (respectively) *type* and *token*; even the individual ‘tokens’ we typically take ourselves to perceive turn out to represent the deliverances of conceptual thought.” If I understand Arnold correctly, this means that, on Arnold’s explanation, the *āyatanasvalakṣaṇa* is a “deliverance of conceptual thought.” Thus, according to Arnold (ibid., 151), “the content even of what we typically consider ‘perceptual’ awareness turns out, in light of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti’s mereological reductionism, invariably to involve an element of conceptual construction.”

However, this is not a tenable interpretation of the *āyatanasvalakṣaṇa*. To begin with, Arnold does not account for Dinnāga’s own explicit statement in the PSV that the *āyatanasvalakṣaṇa* is a peculiar type of universal, “though not because of conceptualizing a non-difference in different things” (*na tu bhinneṣv abhedakalpanāt*). In other words, as explained below in Jinendrabuddhi’s commentary (to which Arnold does not refer), the *āyatanasvalakṣaṇa* is only a “universal” insofar as it is the single effect produced by a manifold of fundamental particles, rather than being mentally constructed through *apoha*. More generally, this terminology (which, it should be noted, is not adopted by Dharmakīrti) is simply a way for the Buddhist epistemological tradition to address the problem that individual fundamental particles are “supersensible” (*atīndriya*) or invisible; see below, Section II.A.3: [The Variegation of Cognition and the Cognition of Variegated Entities](#).

Jinendrabuddhi explains the difference between this type of universal *qua* conglomerate of particulars, versus the more familiar understanding of a universal *qua* conceptual construct, in part (as he often does) by defending Diñnāga’s formulation on the grounds of Sanskrit grammar, but also by means of an appeal to the idea that each particle possesses its own individual causal capacity (*pratiniyataśakti*), an extremely important topic to which we will shortly return:

Opponent: “A universal is conceptualized as being non-different, and the object-field of sensory cognition is a real entity called a fundamental particle, which is not the same (*aneka*) [as other particulars]. So how could it serve as a universal object-domain?”

There is no such fault. Just this unique real entity *qua* fundamental particle, expressed [both] with the word ‘agglomerated’ and with the word ‘sense sphere-particular’ (*āyatanasvalakṣaṇa*), is the same as [those other proximate fundamental particles with which it exists in a relationship of] mutual dependence, in terms of the similarity consisting in its own individually-restricted (*pratiniyata*) capacity to produce cognition. ‘Universal’ (*sāmānya*) just [means] ‘the same’ (*samāna*), because the nominal derivative process (*taddhita*) is applied to its own meaning, like how “that which relates to the four castes” (*cāturvarṇya*) [can have the same meaning as “four castes” (*caturvarṇa*)].

The following is [the meaning of] what [Diñnāga] has stated. He said that [the object] is an **agglomerated object-domain** and a **sense sphere-particular**. Therefore, [he also said,] “**But this is not because of a conceptualization of being non-different on the part of things that are different,**” and so on, and this statement is connected with “**it is said to have a universal as its object-field.**” This means that it is not due to a conceptualization of non-difference, in relation to things that are [actually] different, that [sensory cognition] is said to have an agglomerated object-field or an object-field which is a sense sphere-particular. It should be seen that the treatise was composed with [the phrase] “**not a substance-particular,**” as well, which is a denial [in the case of sensory cognition] of a restriction to a single fundamental particle-substance; it is not an implication (*sāmarthyākṣipta*) that there is a [real] universal which is the object-field. Thus, there is no contradiction.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Steinkellner (2005b, 45.9–46.3): *nanu ca sāmānyam abhinnakalpitam indriyajñānasya ca viṣayaḥ paramāṇvākhyam anekam vastu | tat katham sāmānyagocaratvam upapadyate | naiṣa doṣaḥ | yat tat sañcitasābdenāyatanasvalakṣaṇasābdena cokatam anekam paramāṇuvastu tad eva pratiniyataviññājananasāmarthyena sādharmyeṇa parasparāpekṣayā samānam | samānam eva sāmānyam svārthe*

But before addressing the question of how precisely it is that particles, each with its own individual causal capacity, may operate jointly so as to produce a sensory cognition, it is worth reiterating that Dharmakīrti only addresses this issue very briefly in PV 3, within just two verses, despite its obvious and crucial importance to any theory of sensory cognition (trans. Dunne 2004, 396-397):

Due to a relation with other things [i.e., other particles], fundamental particles that are different [from their own immediately-prior causal antecedents] arise [such that they now possess the ability to produce an awareness].⁴⁶ They are said to be ‘aggregated’; for they are the condition for the production of a [sensory] cognition. || 195 ||

Moreover, this distinctive quality [of being able to produce a sensory cognition] on the part of [those subsequent] particles does not occur without the other particles [with which their causal antecedents were in proximity]. Hence, since [the cognition] does not have any necessary relation to a single [particle], the cognition is said to have a universal [in the sense of a group of aggregated particles] as its object-domain. || 196 ||⁴⁷

taddhitavidhānāc cāturvarṇyavat | tad etad uktam bhavati sañcitagocaram āyatanasvalakṣaṇagocaram cuktam iti | na tu bhinneṣv abhedakalpanād iti sāmānyaviṣayam uktam ity anena sambandhaḥ | na tu bhinneṣv abhedakalpanayā sañcitaviṣayam āyatanasvalakṣaṇaviṣayam cuktam ity arthaḥ | na dravyasvalakṣaṇam ity anenāpy ekaparamāṇudravanyamanirākaraṇam śāstraṃ kṛtam draṣṭavyam na sāmānyākṣiptam sāmānyaviṣayatvam ity aviruddham ||

⁴⁶ Devendrabuddhi comments here, translated in Dunne (2004, 103-104n77): “Due to a relation with other things—i.e., due to the presence of conditions which create the property-*svabhāva* that is the capacity to produce an awareness—*other infinitesimal particles*—those that have the capacity to produce an awareness—*arise* from their substantial causes, namely, previous infinitesimal particles [in the same continuum] that do not have that capacity. The word ‘aggregated’ expresses those particles that have their respective capacities which are attained when they are in proximity with this and that other particle.”

PVP (453.21-454.5): *don gzhan dang ni mngon 'drel phyir | rnam par shes par skyed par byed pa'i nus pa'i rang bzhin skyed pa'i rkyen nye ba'i phyir | rdul phra rab nye bar len pa'i rgyu sngar nus pa med pa dag las rnam par shes pa skyed par byed pa'i nus pa | rdul phran gzhan dag skye 'gyur ba | de dag gzhan dang gzhan thag nye ba'i gnas skabs thob par gyur ba'i so sor nus pa rnams bsags pa'i sgras bshad do ||*

⁴⁷ Tosaki (1979, 297): *arthāntarābhisambandhāj jāyante ye 'navo 'pare | uktās te sañcitās te hi nimittam jñānanmanah || 195 || aṇṇāṇam sa viśeṣaś ca nāntareṇāparān aṇṇū | tad ekānīyamāj jñānam uktam sāmānyagocaram || 196 ||*

Furthermore, Dharmakīrti does not directly reference the *āyatanasvalakṣaṇa* in this context (although Devendrabuddhi does do so, directly citing PSV *ad* PS 1.4cd in his comments *ad* PV 3.195-196).⁴⁸ What are we to make of this reticence?

Rather than indicating some kind of improper omission, it likely makes more sense to regard this lacuna as indicative of Dharmakīrti's primary motivation. That is to say: although PV 3 is nicknamed the “perception chapter” (*pratyakṣapariccheda*), and the generation of sensory images is of course an extremely important topic, a precise account of the sensory-cognitive process is in some ways ancillary to Dharmakīrti's primary interest. By “perception” (*pratyakṣa*), Dharmakīrti strictly means a cognition which is non-conceptual and non-erroneous. Sensory perception (i.e., *indriyapratyakṣa*) is certainly non-conceptual; but is it really, ultimately, non-erroneous? Although Dharmakīrti never quite comes out and says as much, it is a clear implication of PV 3.194-224 (*ad* PS 1.4cd), and even more so of PV 3.320-366 (*ad* PS 1.9-10), that ordinary

⁴⁸ PVP (454.10-11): *skye mched kyi rang gi mtshan nyid la de dag gi rang gi mtshan nyid kyi yul can yin gyi rdzas kyi rang gi mtshan nyid ni ma yin no zhes bya ba* (= **āyatanasvalakṣaṇam praty ete svalakṣaṇaviṣayā na dravyasvalakṣaṇam iti*). The commentary continues (trans. Dunne 2004, 103-104):

“In regard to this objection concerning the *āyatanasvalakṣaṇa*, the special quality of producing cognitions that arises in fundamental particles due to their relation with other things (*don gzhan* = **arthāntara*) [i.e., other particles] arises from the transformation of their former respective continua that are in mutual conjunction (*phan tshun nye bar 'gro ba*). This distinctive quality will not arise without other particles that are occurring without interstice, because that kind of particle on its own does not have the nature of producing cognition. Hence, **since awareness does not have any necessary relation to a single particle**—since awareness does not have the property (*rang bzhin* = **svabhāva*) of being necessarily related to the establishment of a substance which is a single particle, and since the capacities of those particles together produce a single cognition as their effect—they are said to be the common object of an awareness. As a universal (*spyi* = **sāmānya*), they are all the object of the cognition, but the cognition is not necessarily related (*nges pa* = **niyata*) to any single one of them. In other words, that cognition is the common effect of all of them.”

PVP (454.11-455.3): *di la yang rdul phran rnam kyi gang don gzhan dang 'brel ba las rnam par shes pa skye bar byed pa'i khyad par skye bar 'gyur ba'i khyad par de yang gal te yang de dag phan tshun nye bar 'gro ba la sogs pa la rten pa can bdag nyid ji lta ba bzhin du rgyud snga ma yongs su gyur pa las skye bar 'gyur ba de na yang | de yul chod pa med pa la sogs pa la gnas na | rdul phran gzhan dag med par ni | med par 'gyur te | de 'dra ba ni skyed par byed pa'i rang bzhin can nyid ma yin pa'i phyir ro || de bas na de gcig nges med phyir | shes pa de ni rdul phran gyi rdzas kyi rnam par 'jog par nges pa'i rang bzhin can ma yin pa nyid kyi phyir dang | de dag gi lhan cig pa'i nus pa rnam ni 'bras bu rnam par shes pa gcig skyed par byed pa'i phyir shes pa mtshungs pa'i spyod yul can du bshad | spyir de dag tham cad ni de'i spyod yul can yin kyi | shes pa de re re la so sor nges ma pa yin te | de dag thams cad kyi de ni thun mong gi 'bras bu yin no zhes bya ba'i don to ||*

sensory cognition is in fact ineradicably erroneous from the standpoint of Epistemic Idealism, if not necessarily from the standpoint of External Realism.

The upshot is that a detailed treatment of the causal mechanics underlying sensory cognition would be superfluous with respect to the main thrust of PV 3. This is especially the case, considering that it is precisely for these reasons that most of its second half is concerned with reflexive awareness—which is, on Dharmakīrti’s account, inarguably non-erroneous—as expressly opposed to sensory cognition. Nevertheless, in the interest of both comprehensiveness in our treatment of sensory cognition, as well as a thorough understanding of the theoretical background to Dharmakīrti’s critique thereof, it is worth briefly examining this issue.

C. Individual and Universal Capacities

1. *Particulars in Proximity*

While, again, Dharmakīrti never provides a step-by-step account of how the sensory cognition-generation process works, it is possible to stitch such an account together on the basis of his ontology. The crux of the process is that, while there is no such thing as an “emergent” property, in the sense of a property that only “emerges” from a whole causal complex, without being reducible to individually-held properties of the constituents of that complex, some properties of fundamental particles are only causally-efficacious or active when a given particle is proximate to other particles. That is to say, while every particle possesses its own “individually-restricted causal capacity” (*pratiniyataśakti*)—paradigmatically, the ability to produce its own immediate successor-particle—some particles also possess certain causal capacities that are only capable of producing effects *after* that particle has been brought into proximity with other, similar particles. Thus, a particular’s “joint causal capacity” (*sāmānyāśakti*)—in the case of sensory cognition, the

capacity to generate a nonconceptual “universal” (*sāmānya*) or pseudo-agglomeration *qua* sense-sphere particular—does not result from any one individual particular, but rather from each individual particular’s proximity to other particulars. As Dunne writes,

On the one hand, one may speak about the causal potential [i.e., the *pratiniyataśakti*] that color-particles⁴⁹ have without regard to any particular kind of conglomerate of which they might be predicated. The most typical example is the potential to produce visual awareness. With regard to this type of causal potential, one cannot distinguish between color-particles: they all have such a causal potential. On the other hand, the color-particles may be considered in terms of the causal potential that *each particle* gains as a result of its proximity to other particulars in a particular kind of conglomerate [i.e., the *sāmānyaśakti*]. The color-particles that are in proximity to other particles so as to form what appears to us as a water-jug gain the capacity to contribute to the effects we conceptualize in terms of a water-jug, such as the effect of containing water.⁵⁰

Therefore, “the general causal potential [*sāmānyaśakti*] applies not to extended entities, but to the particles that, due to their proximity to other particles, *each* gain a special causal potential that enables them to together perform the functions that we associate with a water-jug.”⁵¹

Of course, since each particle is unique and momentary, it is not exactly the case that the particle itself “gains” anything; to be more precise, at t_0 , the particles are not yet producing a joint single effect, but they are proximate to each other. These proximate particles then each produce their own t_1 causal descendants, which—by virtue of having been produced in this way, in proximity to each other—are capable of producing a joint single effect, that arises at t_2 :

⁴⁹ In Abhidharma ontology, individual *dharmas* themselves are understood to possess phenomenal qualities such as blue.

⁵⁰ Dunne (1999, 358–59).

⁵¹ Dunne (1999, 361).

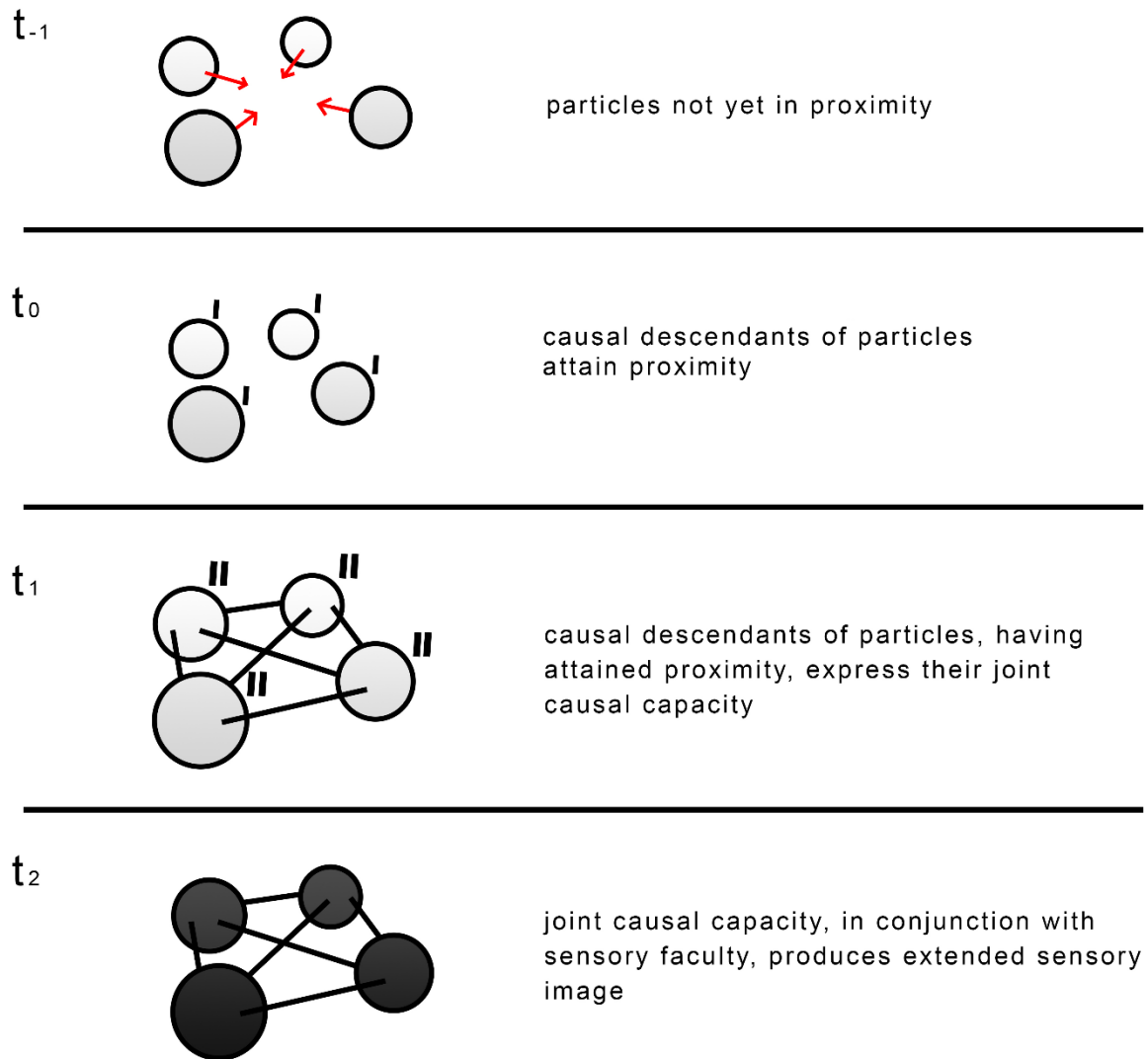


Figure 4: Individual Causal Capacities and Joint Single Effects

Jinendrabuddhi explains:

[PS 1.4c] **“In that context, because it arises from a multiplicity of objects (*anekārtha*) ...”** and so on: “In that context,” i.e., in the context of the [Abdhidharma] treatise. “Because it arises from a multiplicity of objects” means “because it arises from a multiplicity of fundamental particles.” Those fundamental particles, which arise from their own causes and conditions, just existing in a state of having attained mutual proximity to one another, individually possessing the capacity to produce cognitions, are what is expressed with the word “agglomerated”

(*sañcita*). They are “arisen together” (*sañjāta*) in a “pile” (*cita*), which is a synonym for an “assemblage” (*caya*), hence they are “agglomerated” (*sañcita*).⁵²

After another brief interlude on the finer points of Sanskrit grammar,⁵³ he continues:

For they have been agglomerated (*sañcita*), brought into close contact, by [their] mutually intertwined conditions. Non-identical particles of this type generate [sensory cognitions] with their own appearance; thus, it is stated that “[**the five types of sensory cognition have] agglomerated object-supports (*sañcitāmbanāḥ*).” For this reason, [the five types of sensory cognition] take all those [fundamental particles], which are designated ‘agglomerations,’ without distinguishing [them individually], as their object-supports—not only a single substance.**

So it is said: “**But they [have particulars for object-fields] in terms of the sense-sphere particular (*āyatanasvalakṣaṇa*),” and so on. In this case, too, those fundamental particles produce visual (etc.) cognitions in the manner described, i.e., only in concert—not only individually. Therefore, **due to the fact that it is produced by a multiplicity of objects, with respect to its own object**, [sensory cognition] is said to have **a universal as an object-domain (*sāmānyagocara*)**. To break it down (*vigraha*): it is that of which the object-domain is a universal.⁵⁴**

In other words, just as the particulars that are understood to comprise a ‘jug’ possess the joint causal capacity (*sāmānyaśakti*) to operate together in such a way so as to facilitate the containment of liquid—i.e., so as to produce the single effect of holding water—in just that way, the particulars

⁵² Steinkellner (2005b, 44.11-45.1) *tatrānekārthajanyatvād ityādi | tatreti śāstre anekārthajanyatvād ity anekaparamāṇujanyatvād ityarthāḥ | svahetupratyayebhyo ye paramāṇavo jāyante te 'nyonyasannidhānāvasthā prāptā eva santāḥ pratyekaṃ vijñānopajananasamarthāḥ sañcitasabdenoktāḥ | sañjātaṃ citaṃ cayaparyāyam eṣāṃ iti sañcitāḥ |*

⁵³ See the translation in Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.4cd](#) for this section; briefly, however, the issue concerns how to derive *sañcita* from *sañjāta* (“arisen together”) and *cita* (“pile”).

⁵⁴ Steinkellner (2005b, 45.3-9) *parasparopasarpaṇapratyayair hi te sañcitāḥ saṃhatīkṛtāḥ | tais tathāvidhair anekaiḥ svapratibhāsā janyanta iti sañcitāmbanā ity uktāḥ sarvāms tān sañcitākhyān aviśeṣāṇāmbante naikam eva dravyam iti kṛtvā || yac cuktam āyatanasvalakṣaṇaṃ praty eta ityādi atrāpi tair eva yathoktāiḥ paramāṇubhiḥ sahi tenaiva cakṣurādi vijñānaṃ janyate na svakenaiva | tasmād anekārthajanyatvāt svārthe sāmānyagocaram ity uktam | sāmānyam gocaro 'syeti vigrahaḥ |*

that comprise some blue-patch possess the joint causal capacity of being able to produce the image of ‘blue.’ Thus, the sense-sphere particular is the single effect of multiple agglomerated particulars.

2. *Three Key Takeaways*

There is, needless to say, much more that could be said on the topic of individual and joint causal capacities, which are among the least-understood features of Dharmakīrti’s work. And, even from a contemporary scientific perspective, there is much to recommend this account, given the imperceptibility of fundamental particles. Once more, however, it is important to note that in PV 3 (and arguably in general) Dharmakīrti is ultimately less concerned with providing a detailed account of how exactly it is that particles causally contribute to the production of a sensory cognition bearing their form, or indeed with explaining the precise manner in which these particulars isomorphically correspond to the sensory image, than he is with critiquing this supposed isomorphism, and refuting the instrumentality of sensory cognition on idealistic grounds.

To be clear, Dharmakīrti does insist that, to the extent that sensory cognition is epistemically reliable—which, under ordinary circumstances, for ordinary purposes, it most certainly is—it is just the isomorphism between the object-field and its cognitive image or appearance which grants sensory awareness its status as a reliable epistemic instrument. The issue is that the analysis of ordinary sensory cognition reveals the flaws in its supposed instrumentality (*prāmāṇya*). Put slightly differently, the idea behind the “sliding scale” as a rhetorical strategy is that the relentless examination of what it means for a cognition to be genuinely “perceptual” (*pratyakṣa*) leads one first to the understanding that sensory cognition cannot be understood to causally derive its contents from extramental matter, and thereby to the conclusion that sensory appearances as such are inherently mistaken—even if, for normal transactional (*vyāvahārika*)

purposes, this error or mistakenness (i.e., *bhrānti*) is basically irrelevant. In any case, to conclude the present discussion, let us note three key takeaways.

First, to review, from a provisional perspective wherein it is granted that extra-mental particles exist, these particles can only facilitate the production of a sensory cognition when they are physically proximate to each other, through the activation of their joint causal capacity (*sāmānyaśakti*). This joint causal capacity is a strict subset of each individual particle's total causal capacity. That is to say, particles produce other effects—paradigmatically, their own successor-particles—besides and simultaneously with this single effect.⁵⁵ But it is critically important to remember that, in ontological terms, there is no real difference between the particular as a property-possessor (*dharmin*) on the one hand, and its causal capacity as a property (*dharma*) on the other. That is to say, the subset of a particle's causal capacities governing its ability to interact with other particles so as to produce a joint single effect is *conceptually* abstractable from its other causal capacities; however, this conceptual abstraction, isolation, or exclusion (i.e., *apoha*, *vyāvṛtti*, etc.) is only a heuristic fiction.

Second, the fact that the causal substrate of sensory cognition is a distributed entity or agglomeration (i.e., the *āyatanasvalakṣaṇa*) necessitates a re-evaluation of the sensory cognition's purported isomorphism with its object (i.e., its *arthasārūpya*). One of the most important issues here, which we will shortly examine in detail, concerns the fundamental disjunct between this manifold causal substrate vs. its singular appearance in cognition. But, apart from this very important issue, it is also worth noting another important difference between Dharmakīrti's model here and the classical Abhidharma account. In standard Abhidharma ontology, substantially-

⁵⁵ This entails, of course, that a single particular may participate in multiple causal complexes. See Dunne (2004, 167n39) and PV 3.533-34.

existent particles are, themselves, substantially ‘blue’ or whatever.⁵⁶ Hence, in that context, the isomorphism between the blue-particle and the appearance of ‘blue’ in cognition is able to be understood as a 1:1 correspondence between the property of the particle and the property of the cognition.

While Dharmakīrti is largely content with this Abhidharmic framework, it is also clear that he sees isomorphism primarily as a matter of practical telic efficacy in terms of obtaining or avoiding what is wanted or unwanted, rather than as a principle of absolute ontological correspondence. Past a certain point on the sliding scale, in other words, the question of whether or not the particles themselves are ‘blue’ ceases to be intelligible; the question instead becomes a matter of whether or not the particles possess the causal capacity to produce the phenomenal appearance of ‘blue,’ and thus whether a determinate judgment to the effect that “this is ‘blue’” is conventionally accurate, irrespectively of whether or not this causal capacity to produce the appearance of ‘blue’ is reducible to the particles actually possessing the quality of being ‘blue.’ That is to say: any *phenomenal* quality attributed to a particle is, ultimately, only intelligible as the joint causal capacity to produce that phenomenal quality, because no single particle by itself is capable of producing a phenomenal appearance. Ultimately, *contra* Abhidharma ontology, there is no such thing as a ‘blue’ particle; there are only particulars with the causal capacity to produce the phenomenal appearance of ‘blue.’⁵⁷

⁵⁶ See above, note [41](#).

⁵⁷ It may be noted in passing that this analysis also constitutes a rebuttal to Wilfrid Sellars’ (1991, 142) contention that “*being red* is logically prior, is a logically simpler notion, than *looking red*; the function ‘x is red’ to ‘x looks red to y.’ In short, that it just won’t do to say that *x is red* is analyzable in terms of *x looks red to y*.”

But what would it mean to say, for example, that an electron which is part of the causal complex comprising a “red” object “is” red? As discussed in note [63](#) of the Introduction, atomic-scale phenomena are literally invisible, in the straightforward sense that they are smaller than the smallest wavelength of radiation which is perceptible by human beings. In physical—as opposed to phenomenological or visual-cognitive—terms, “redness” is a property of light in

Third, and finally: it is only natural to ask here whether a cognition which takes even such a non-conceptualized universal as its object can truly be considered non-erroneous. On the one hand, the isomorphism between the causal properties of the particulars and the causal properties of the sensory image which they produce extends to the mode of their existence. That is to say, particulars are only capable of producing sensory cognition as an effect after they have been agglomerated; similarly, the image which they produce is manifold or variegated (*citra*). On the other hand, however, an agglomeration is not a real entity. In fact, the only real entities in this equation are extensionless particulars. This in turn entails a fundamental disjunct between the cause of the cognition (i.e., extensionless particulars) and the manner in which the cognition “of” those particulars appears (i.e., as a spatially-extended agglomeration). And this disjunct remains in place, whether those particulars are construed as internal imprints or external particles. As we shall see, this is precisely the ground on which Dharmakīrti argues against the ultimate epistemic reliability—which is to say, against true *arthasārūpya*—on the part of sensory cognition. But since the vast majority of this argumentation takes place in an earlier section of the PV (PV 3.194-230), not-coincidentally concerning PS 1.4cd, it is necessary to turn to this earlier section before resuming the discussion of PV 3.320-332 *ad* PS 1.9a in Chapter 4.

the 405-480 THz range; it is not a property of electrons. Furthermore, the definition of a “visible” wavelength spectrum only applies to a particular class of being: animals can see both above (UV) and below (infrared) the human range.

II. Variegation and Nonduality (*citrādvaita*)

A. The Problem of the ‘Whole’ (*avayavin*)

1. *Vasubandhu’s Critique of Vaiśeṣika Ontology*

As discussed above, Dharmakīrti’s elaboration of PS 1.4cd only lightly touches upon the problem of the causal relationship between particles and sensory cognition. Instead, he zeroes in on a related (but separate) issue, which fills a gap in the later argumentation between PV 3.321 and 322. The issue in this passage, for which it has been named in some of the subsequent Indian commentarial literature⁵⁸ the *citrādvaita* (“variegation-nonduality”) section, begins with the problem of variegated or multicolored (*citra*) entities, but extends the notion of “variegation” (*citratā*) to any case involving multiplicity within supposed singularity.

Interestingly, Dharmakīrti’s primary intellectual-historical touchstone for this section—which, to repeat, is only tangentially related to Dinnāga’s explicit argumentation at the corresponding juncture (1.4cd) in the PS—appears to be a somewhat oddly-situated excursus⁵⁹ from the AKBh. In that passage, Vasubandhu’s primary concern is to refute the Vaiśeṣika position that there exists a discrete whole (*avayavin*), separate from its parts, as in the example of a whole cloth and its constituent threads:

⁵⁸ See above, note [32](#).

⁵⁹ The third chapter of the AK concerns the nature of the cosmos (*loka*). AK 3.100ab, upon which Vasubandhu’s discussion is ostensibly a commentary, concerns the destruction of the world at the end of the *kalpa* by means of fire, water, and wind. Having asserted that, at the end of all this destruction, “no part of those destroyed [realms], not even a particle, remains” (*tābhiś ca bhājanānāṃ sukṣmo ’py avayavo nāvaśiṣyate*), Vasubandhu abruptly transitions to a critique of Vaiśeṣika cosmology—according to the commentarial tradition, the theory of “Kaṇabhūk” (likely Kaṇāda, ca. 600?-200? BCE) that fundamental particles remain even after the destruction at the end of the *kalpa*. Vasubandhu’s critique of Vaiśeṣika ontology and epistemology takes place within this context.

[According to the Vaiśeṣikas], “The grass mat is something else, other than the grasses, and the cloth (*paṭa*) is something else, other than the threads.”

But just those [grasses or threads], being assembled in a certain way, obtain this or that designation [such as “mat” or “cloth”], similar to [how] a line⁶⁰ of ants [does not exist apart from the individual ants]. How can this be known? Because there is no apprehension of the cloth when there is [sensory] contact (*saṃyoga*) with a single thread. For if the cloth existed at that time [when there was sensory contact with a single thread], what would be the obstacle (*pratibandha*) to apprehending [the whole cloth]? If the entire [cloth] does not occur [in each thread], then in that [one thread] there would exist a ‘cloth-part,’ not a cloth. And the cloth would be merely a collection [of its threads]. And what ‘cloth-part’ is there, other than the threads?⁶¹

Toward the end of the *citrādvaita* section, Dharmakīrti references the same issue:

If the colors (etc.) of a cloth (*paṭa*) constituted a [simple or] singular (*eka*) [entity], then they could not be analytically distinguished [from each other]. And when the analyzed parts are eliminated, a separate unanalyzed whole is not observed.

|| 222 ||⁶²

But Vasubandhu’s critique also dips into epistemological territory, in ways that Dharmakīrti clearly picks up, and then uses as a basis for subsequent phenomenological analysis, to the effect that a variegated cognition (such as one which appears ‘blue’ in one part but ‘yellow’ in another part) cannot be real, in the same way and for what amount to the same reasons as the whole cloth.

⁶⁰ Compare to Dharmakīrti’s discussion of a “row” or “line” (*mālā*) of houses (etc.) at PV 3.155-157. Dharmakīrti also specifically refutes the Vaiśeṣika ontology of ‘wholes,’ and the Vaiśeṣika account of the relationship between a ‘whole’ cloth and its threads, at PV 3.148-152.

⁶¹ Pradhan (1975, 189.15-18): *anyo vīraṇebhyaḥ kaṭo ’nyaś ca tantubhyaḥ paṭa iti | ta eva hi te yathāsaṃniviṣṭās tāṃ tāṃ saṃjñāṃ labhante | pipīlikāpaṅktivat | katham gamyeta ekatantusaṃyoge paṭasyānupalambhāt | ko hi tadā sataḥ paṭasyopalabdḥau pratibandhaḥ | akṛtsnavṛttau paṭabhāgo ’tra syān na paṭaḥ | samūhamātraṃ ca paṭaḥ syāt | kaś ca tantubhyo ’nyaḥ paṭabhāgaḥ.*

Also translated in Pruden (1991, 492) and Gold (2015, 87).

⁶² Tosaki (1979, 318): *paṭādirūpasyaikatve tathā syād avivekitā | vivekīni nirasyānyadā ’viveki ca nekṣyate || 222 ||*

Also translated in Dunne (2004, 411). See also the illuminating discussion of Prajñākaragupta’s perspective in Inami (2011).

2. Simultaneous and Sequential Cognition, Again

That Dharmakīrti is likely making reference to this passage of the AKBh is further suggested by Dharmakīrti's critique of a position which appears in AKBh *ad* AK 3.100ab, but not in PS 1⁶³—the notion that the perception of a discrete whole occurs due to the perception of its parts in rapid succession. Vasubandhu specifically refutes this position:

And if [it is argued that the whole cloth is apprehended due to] sequential sensory contact (*saṃnikarṣa*) with the parts: [in that case] there can be no [simultaneous] cognition of the parts, by means of both the visual and tactile faculties.⁶⁴ Therefore, since the [conceptual] determinate cognition (*vyavasāya*) of a whole would be due to sequential sensory contact, the cognition of that [whole] is just about the parts; like [how the rapid sequential cognitions of] a firebrand⁶⁵ [are conceptualized as a] circle [but there is in reality no whole firebrand-circle].⁶⁶

⁶³ Dinnāga refutes the Vaiśeṣika account of perception in PS 1.21-24, but does not specifically critique their ontology in terms of the problem of a 'whole' (*avayavin*), and makes no reference at all in that passage to the notion that the perception of a 'whole' may occur due to rapid sequential cognitions of the 'parts.'

⁶⁴ Gold (2015, 88) appears to have construed the grammatically dual *caḥṣuḥsparśanābhyām* with the grammatically plural *avayavānām*: "...with parts that are being touched by the eye." Aside from the grammatical impossibility of this interpretation, however, it also misrepresents the argument. Yaśomitra explains that Vasubandhu's point here is to the effect that, if a whole is apprehended through sequential contact with the manifold elements which comprise it as a variegated basis (*anekāśraya*) for cognition, then there can be no simultaneous apprehension of that whole by means of both the visual and the tactile faculties, as these are different sensory modalities with differing bases for cognition (*yugapad anekāśrayasaṃyogābhāvāc caḥṣuḥ sparśanendriyayoḥ | evam anyeṣām api avayavānām grahaṇam na syāt*) (Yaśomitra 1970, 341.24-26). Vasubandhu's argument is thus clearly intended to draw on the apparently multi-modal (e.g., visual and tactile) nature of sensory cognition, and to problematize the Vaiśeṣika opponent's position (to the effect that the cognition of the purported 'whole' happens sequentially) on the basis of the fact that there are simultaneous cognitions of different modalities; see Chapter 1, Section II.D: [Object Persistence and Pseudo-Perception](#). Compare also to Dharmakīrti's engagement—not strictly a refutation—with an interlocutor who notes that a single object (*ekārtha*) may serve as the basis for multiple sensory cognitions (*buddhīnām*), by virtue of the fact that it is a variegated basis (*nānāśrayatayā*) for different modalities of sensory cognition (PV 3.234-235).

⁶⁵ See Chapter 1, Section II.E: [The Firebrand-Circle](#).

⁶⁶ Pradhan (1975, 189.20-21): *kramasaṃnikarṣe cāvayavānām caḥṣuḥsparśanābhyām avayavavijñānaṃ na syāt | tasmāt krameṇa saṃnikarṣād avayavivyavasāyād avayaveṣv eva tadbuddhir alātacakravat ||*

Also translated in Pruden (1991, 492) and Gold (2015, 88).

Compare Vasubandhu’s approach here to Dharmakīrti’s discussion of sequentiality in the *citrādvaita* section, which directly refers to his earlier argument concerning the issue of sequential cognitions in relation to the illusion of the firebrand-circle (PV 3.135):

[Opponent:] “Well, even though they occur in the same perceptual field (*āyatana*), [if they do not constitute a discrete ‘whole,'] various [particles] are not observed simultaneously.”

Then how is there the apparent simultaneous apprehension of scattered sesame seeds and so on? || 197 ||

[The objection that successive cognitions occur] rapidly [and hence one mistakenly apprehends the multiple successive objects of those cognitions as one entity] has already been refuted [at PV 3.135].⁶⁷ And why would [sesame seeds and so on] that are falling down sequentially not be apprehended simultaneously? Moreover, all cognitions are equal in duration, so why would some have sequential appearances while others are simultaneous? One would be forced to absurdly conclude that the apprehension of every object is, therefore, non-sequential.⁶⁸ || 198-199 ||⁶⁹

This is a centrally-important issue, because it establishes the epistemological stakes for an otherwise ontological discussion about the relationship between parts and wholes. As we will see, Dharmakīrti’s critique of the sensory image turns on an analysis of this image as a kind of ‘whole,’ ostensibly comprised by a variety of phenomenological elements. Thus, the simultaneous apprehension of disparate objects (such as sesame seeds and lentils in various different locations on a table) in effect becomes a way to think about the simultaneous apprehension of ‘blue’ and ‘yellow’ within the same visual field, or as attributed to a ‘single’ multicolored object.

⁶⁷ See Chapter 1, Section II.E.2: [The Example of the Firebrand](#).

⁶⁸ The precise point being made here is, admittedly, slightly different from Vasubandhu’s, but the thrust is the same: both Vasubandhu and Dharmakīrti are arguing that it is impossible to establish the simultaneous apprehension of multiple elements within a single sensory field on the basis of rapid successive cognitions of those variegated elements.

⁶⁹ Tosaki (1979, 298–300): *athaikāyatanatve 'pi nānekam grhyate sakṛt | sakṛd grahāvabhāsaḥ kiṃ viyukteṣu tilādiṣu || 197 || pratyuktaṃ lāghavañ cātra teṣv eva kramapātiṣu | kiṃ nākramagrahas tulyakālāḥ sarvāś ca buddhayaḥ || 198 || kaścit tāsv akramābhāsāḥ kramavatyo 'parāś ca kim | sarvārthagrahaṇe tasmād akramo 'yaṃ prasajyate || 199 ||*

On this note, Jinendrabuddhi⁷⁰ clarifies Dharmakīrti's point here in a manner that connects it to several of the most important threads of argumentation in the PV. To begin with, on the Vaiśeṣika account, it is impossible to explain how multiple discrete seeds (or whatever), which are all visible at the same time, but not part of the same putatively discrete whole entity (such as a pile), could be seen at the same time. However, in addition to bringing the issue of the phonetic sequence of words into this discussion, Jinendrabuddhi also ends his comments by asserting that the entire sensory field is, for this reason, necessarily cognized all at once:

They say: "Even though a substance-particular which is not the same (*aneka*) [as any other particular] is included in a single sense-sphere of visible matter (or whatever) by virtue of having the single effect of a sensory cognition, it is not simultaneously apprehended [with other particles]; on the contrary, [it is] only [apprehended] sequentially."

To those [who say this], it should be said: if there is no simultaneous apprehension of many substance-particulars, then how is there the simultaneous apprehension of sesame seeds and lentils and so on which are located in different places? For it is not the case that they make another, single substance of which there would be the apprehension, due to the fact that they are not conjoined and due to the fact that they are [legumes] of different types."

Opponent: "By virtue of an error, due to the fact that the seeing occurs extremely quickly, in that case, there is a determination of non-sequentiality, even though [the seeing] is sequential."

Well then, when they are falling quickly in sequence, there should also be the determination that "I apprehend [them] all at once," because the quickness is the same! And since the observation of syllables (*varṇa*) such as *ra-* and *sa-* occurs quickly, shouldn't there be a determination of non-sequential apprehension? And therefore, due to the difference in sequence, there would be no distinction in what is heard, as in the case of words such as *rasa* and *sara* and so on.⁷¹ And with regard

⁷⁰ Interestingly, despite the fact that the PST is a fairly strict word commentary on the PS(V), Jinendrabuddhi follows the sequence of Dharmakīrti's arguments in PV 3, rather than the content of the PS(V), exclusively. He thus inserts this aside, which functions as a commentary on PV 3.197-199, at the appropriate juncture in his comments *ad* PS 1.4cd, despite the fact that sequentiality is not any part of Diñnāga's argument there (nor indeed does Diñnāga critique the Vaiśeṣika ontology of 'wholes' at all; see above, note 63). Compare these comments also to Devendrabuddhi's somewhat less extensive discussion of PV 3.197-199 (PVP 455.6-456.16).

⁷¹ See Chapter 1, Section II.E.2: [The Example of the Firebrand](#).

to falling drops of water which are traveling quickly, there could be no determination of [their] apprehension—when there is the thought, “I am apprehending [the drops] sequentially”—due to the rapidity of [successive] visual cognition. Therefore, to the extent that something is an element of the sensory field (*gocara*), it should only be cognized simultaneously [with everything else in the sensory field].⁷²

Jinendrabuddhi’s conclusion, that the entire sensory field is cognized simultaneously, would indeed appear to be a necessary consequence of Dharmakīrti’s perspective as expressed at PV

3.206bcd-207:

And things which have been apprehended sequentially are not combined by a [single] variegated cognition, because [on the opponent’s view] there is no apprehension of a manifold (*aneka*) by means of a single [cognition]. Therefore, let it be established that a single [cognition may have] various [simultaneous] objects. Hence, too, [sensory cognition] is nonconceptual, since while conceptualizing one object, one sees another. || 206bcd-207 ||⁷³

That is to say, just as with the illusion of the firebrand, what distinguishes the conceptual concatenation of multiple cognitions from the nonconceptual awareness of a manifold is, respectively, the presence or absence of temporal sequence. In the case of the firebrand, the manifold is constituted by the spatially extended appearance of the circle. Likewise, when cognizing a painting that is both ‘blue’ and ‘yellow,’ or a pile of sesame seeds, or whatever, the

⁷² Steinkellner (2005b, 46.4-14): *ye tu ekendriyavijñānakāryatvenaika rūpāyatanādisaṅgrāhe ’pi nānekam dravyam yugapad grhyate api tu krameṇaivety āhuḥ ta idaṃ vaktavyāḥ yadi yugapad bahūnām drayānām grahaṇam nāsti katham tarhi tilamāśādīnām vicchinnadeśāvasthitānām sakṛdgrahaṇam iti | na hi tair asaṃyuktatvād vijātīyatvāc ca dravyāntaram ekam ārabdham yasya grahaṇam syāt | darśanasya laghuvṛttivād bhrāntīyā kramavaty api tatrākramādhyavasāya iti cet kramapātiṣv api tarhi teṣu lāghavasya tulyatvāt sakṛd eva grhṇāmīty adhyavasāyaḥ syāt | kiṃ ca rephasakārādiṣu varṇeṣu laghuvṛttivād darśanasya kramagrahaṇādhyavasāyaḥ syāt | tataś ca kramabhedāc chrutibhedo na syād rasaḥ sara ity evam ādiṣu śabdeṣu | āsubhramaṇodakabindupātādiṣu ca darśanasya lāghavāt krameṇa grhṇāmīti bhāve grahaṇādhyavasāyo na syāt | tasmād yāvad gocarībhūtam tat sarvaṃ yugapad eva pratīyate iti ||*

⁷³ Tosaki (1979, 306–7): *grhīteṣu krameṇa ca | na citradhīsamkalanam anekasyaikayā ’grahāt || 206 || nānārthaikā bhavet tasmāt siddhā ’to ’py avikalpikā | vikalpayann apy ekārthaṃ yato ’nyad api paśyati || 207 ||*

Translated also in Dunne (2004, 400).

manifold appears simultaneously. That this simultaneous apprehension of a manifold is nonconceptual is further demonstrated, in keeping with the “two track”⁷⁴ model of cognition, by the fact that one can see a nonconceptually variegated manifold, while thinking of (i.e., conceptualizing) something else. Devendrabuddhi comments (Dunne 2004, 400n10):

In other words, just as mental cognition (*yid kyi blo* = **manovijñāna*) has the nature of apprehending various objects [simultaneously], likewise, what contradiction is there if sensory cognition (*dbang po 'i blo* = **indriyajñāna*) also apprehends its own various objects [simultaneously]? That is to say, it is not at all unacceptable. Hence, even though there is no single thing with a variegated nature, with respect to the ‘blue’ and so on of a painting (or whatever), the cognition that arises with a [multicolored or] variegated appearance is singular; therefore, **let it be established that a single has various**—i.e., that a single [sensory] cognition engages with various object-fields (*yul du ma ~ nānāviśaya*). Hence, since [sensory cognition] is produced by many objects, it can be said that [sensory cognition] is a cognition with a ‘universal’ [in the sense of a conglomerate] as its object-field.⁷⁵

There is a certain pregnant ambiguity in Devendrabuddhi’s position here, insofar as it is not entirely clear whether the phenomenal variegation in question necessarily pertains only to an individual discrete blue-and-yellow object (such as a painting), or if this analysis may also pertain to a separate blue object and yellow object that are present at different locations in the visual field.⁷⁶ On the one hand, the practical focus of *pramāṇa* theory suggests that the analysis here pertains to the objects of practical activity in the world, such as paintings. And there is nothing to indicate that Dharmakīrti or his commentators even considered this to be a question. Furthermore, this issue

⁷⁴ See Chapter 1, Section II.A.1: [Two Tracks](#).

⁷⁵ PVP (461.20-462.7): *de ltar na ji ltar yid kyi blo don du ma 'dzin pa 'i ngang tshul can 'dzin pa yin pa de ltar na | dbang po 'i blo yang rang gi yul du ma 'dzin pa la 'gal ba ci yod | de ltar na gang de ni cir yang mi rung ngo | gang gi phyir 'di ltar ri mo la sogs pa 'i sngon po la sogs pa la ngo bo sna tshogs pa can gcig med par yang sna tshogs par snang ba can gyi blo gcig tu 'gyur ba de 'i phyir don du ma can gcig yul du ma can gyi blo gcig 'jug par 'gyur ba de ltar 'grub 'gyur ro | de bas na don du mas bskyed par bya ba nyid yin pa 'i phyir | spyi 'i spyod yul can gyi rnam par shes pa zhes bya ba yang ngo ||*

⁷⁶ This ambiguity may be relevant in terms of contemporary cognitive-scientific debates concerning “object selection,” in particular concerning the selection of multiple visual objects. See, for example, Xu and Chun (2009).

is about to become irrelevant, because it is precisely the variegation of the phenomenal object that necessitates the shift to Epistemic Idealism, in ultimate consequence of which the intelligibility of any type of sensory or mental content is problematized.

On the other hand, it is a clear implication of the preceding analysis that, in some sense, the entire sensory field is cognized all at once, and that in this sense the entire sensory field constitutes the sensory object *qua* “sense-sphere particular.” That is to say, it is a clear implication of Devendrabuddhi’s and Jinendrabuddhi’s commentaries (and thus, at least arguably, of the PV itself) that the sense-sphere particular (*āyatanaśvalakṣaṇa*) includes all the substance-particulars contributing to the causal production of the sensory image, whether or not these substance-particulars may be construed as part of “the same” mid-size dry object. In other words, the particulars of a blue object ‘right here’ do not exist in the kind of relationship of proximity to the particulars of a yellow object ‘over there,’ such that the ‘blue’-particulars directly support the production of ‘yellow’ in cognition; however, both the ‘blue’-particulars and the ‘yellow’-particulars, in their own way, contribute to the production of the variegated (‘blue-and-yellow’) visual image. In this way, both types of particulars are part of the same conglomerated causal complex, and hence, part of the same sense sphere-particular.

In any case, we now have the beginnings of a comprehensive model for Dharmakīrti’s account of cognition at the External Realist level of analysis. A causal complex, comprised of a multitude of infinitesimal particulars, interacts with the sense-faculty so as to produce a sensory image or mental representation. But, as discussed in Chapter 1, Dharmakīrti asserts the existence of multiple simultaneous sensory cognitions. Thus, each modality of sensory cognition (auditory, visual, and so on) cognizes its entire sensory field (*qua* sense-sphere particular) all at once. Some of these modalities, such as touch and vision, may overlap in terms of their objects (that is, the

same object may be apprehended by both the visual and the tactile faculties); others, such as smell and hearing, may not. At the same time, the sixth, mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) coordinates with the sensory consciousnesses to facilitate apparent object-persistence. And underlying all of these simultaneous cognitions is their simultaneous presentation, as a single moment of the mental continuum, through reflexive awareness.

Before advancing to a discussion of reflexive awareness, however, it is first necessary to continue our analysis of variegated entities.

3. *The Variegation of Cognition and the Cognition of Variegated Entities*

Just like the previously-discussed issues of the ontology of a ‘whole’ and the sequential perception of its ‘parts,’ the PS does not directly reference any philosophical problems related to the sensory cognition of a variegated entity.⁷⁷ Once again, however, AKBh3.100ab does indeed address this very issue, and thus appears to be one of Dharmakīrti’s primary sources:

[A whole cloth cannot be ontologically distinct from its threads] because, while threads are different in terms of color, material, and motion⁷⁸ (*kriyā*), it is impossible for [an ontologically discrete] cloth to have color and so on. If [a whole cloth made out of multicolored threads] is variegated in terms of its color and so on, it would be made out of different types [of material, contradicting its supposed singularity]. And if one of the sides (or the inside) is not variegated, then either the cloth would not be seen there, or one would see variegation there.⁷⁹ If motion is also variegated, then that would be extremely variegated (*aticitra*)! Or, in terms of a difference with regard to light and heat, [if fire were an ontologically singular entity] there would be no cognition of the glow (*prabhā*) of fires [as varying] in color or tangible quality (*sparśa*) between the beginning, middle, and end.

⁷⁷ In fact the term *citra* only appears once in PS 1, at PS 1.27c, but the context there is quite different, concerning the variegation of the three *guṇas* in Sāṅkhya ontology.

⁷⁸ Yaśomitra (1970, 341.32-33) explains that the sense of *kriyā* here is in terms of motion in different directions, such that one part of the cloth can be moving up while another part is moving down (*bhinnakriyās ūrdhvādhogamabhedāt*).

⁷⁹ Compare to PV 3.205ab.

[Vaiśeṣika: “But if there is no ‘whole’ such as the cloth, separate from the parts such as the threads, then since fundamental particles are supersensible (*atīndriya*), something made out of those parts would not be sensible. So then the whole world should be imperceptible; why isn’t it?”]⁸⁰

Although fundamental particles are supersensible (*atīndriyatva*), their assembly is perceptible (*pratyakṣatva*);⁸¹ just as the eye and so on [while different] create a [single] effect [i.e., visual awareness], and just as those with myodesopsia perceive a disheveled mass of hair [as opposed to one individual hair at a time].⁸²

In fact, as an aside, toward the end of this passage, Dharmakīrti makes an oblique reference to Vasubandhu’s argument here, that no one individual factor of sensory cognition (such as the eye) can produce sensory cognition, just as no one individual particle can produce sensory cognition:

⁸⁰ This is a paraphrase of Yaśomitra (1970, 342.15-19), who marks this interpolated objection as a new line of thought: *atha matam | yadi tantvādibhyo ‘vayavebhyo na paṭādyavayavī vyatirikto ‘sti | paramāññānām atīndriyatvāt | na ca tair avayavaiḥ aindriyaka ārabdha iti | kṛtsna jagad apratyakṣam syāt | pratyakṣam ca gavādi drśyate | tasmād atīndriyaiḥ paramāññubhir arthāntaram anyad aindriyakam ārabdham iti siddham ity atrocyate |*

Pruden (1991, 493), based on the Chinese commentarial tradition, also interpolates a similar explanation.

⁸¹ The question of the perceptibility of fundamental particles was very much a live issue, not only between Buddhists and non-Buddhists, but also within the internal Buddhist Abhidharma debate, such as between the Sarvāstivāda-Vaiśeṣikas and the Dārṣṭāntika-Sautrāntikas. Cf. Dhammajoti (2007, 142): “For the Sarvāstivādins, in a *pratyakṣa* experience, whether sensory or mental, the cognitive object as the *ālambanapratyaya* is actually the object out there existing at the very moment when the corresponding consciousness arises. It is a real entity, just as a single object is real. [The Vaiśeṣika master] Saṃghabhadra argues that a sensory consciousness necessarily takes a physical assemblage or agglomeration of atoms (*saṃcaya*, *saṃghāta*, *saṃasta*) as its object. What is directly perceived is just these atoms assembled together in a certain manner... [thus] Saṃghabhadra rejects Śrīlāta’s [Sautrāntika] theory that the object of visual perception is a unified complex (*sāmagrī*, *saṃghāta*) of atoms. In return, Śrīlāta ridicules the Vaiśeṣika notion of assembled atoms as a cognitive object, comparing it to the case of a group of blind persons who, like an individual member, is incapable of vision. Saṃghabhadra answers this, and states that even an individual atom is in fact visible, even though its visibility is almost nil, on account of its being very subtle for visual consciousness which can grasp only a gross object.” In sum, then, Vasubandhu seems to agree with the Sautrāntikas that individual fundamental particles are imperceptible, but sides with the Vaiśeṣikas to the effect that the individual causal capacities of particles work together so as to produce the perceptible object *qua* object-*āyatana*. See also note 63 in the Introduction.

⁸² Pradhan (1975, 189.21-190.2): *bhinnarūpajātikriyeṣu tantuṣu paṭasya rūpādyasambhavāt | citrarūpāditive vijātyārambho ‘pi syāt acitre ca pārśvāntare paṭasyādarśanam citradarśanam vā | kriyā ‘pi citrety aticitram | tāpaprakāśabhede vāgnīprabhāyā ādimadhyānte tadrūpasparśayor anupapattiḥ | paramāññvatīndriyatve ‘pi samastānām pratyakṣatvaṃ yathā teṣām kāryārambhakatvaṃ cakṣurādīnām ca taimirikāñām ca vikīrṇakeśopalabdhiḥ | teṣām paramāññuvad ekaḥ keśo ‘tīndriyah |*

Also translated in Pruden (1991, 492–93) and Gold (2015, 88–90).

On the other hand, what is the contradiction if many [particles], simultaneously possessing the special quality [of being able to produce cognition] when arising together, [but not individually,] were to be the cause of cognition—as indeed is the case with the sense-faculties and so on? || 223 ||⁸³

The close connection between these two passages is further suggested by Devendrabuddhi's commentary to this particular verse (PV 3.223), which begins with a paraphrase of the interpolated Vaiśeṣika objection, couched in the exact same terminology (*dbang po las 'das pa'i rdul phra rab* = **atīndriyaparamāṇu*)⁸⁴ used by Vasubandhu:

Someone else says: “How could it be that each supersensible particle by itself cannot be seen, but when aggregated they can [be seen]? If there is no such thing as the nature of being a ‘whole,’ nothing at all should be visible.”⁸⁵

Although it is not possible [to see] each individual fundamental particle, what is the contradiction if many [fundamental particles], having arisen with the special quality [of being able to produce a sensory cognition] due to each being different from [their antecedents] on account of the condition of [those antecedents'] mutual proximity to each other, are the cause of the cognition—such that they are the means for cognizing (*rtogs par byed ~ adhiḡamaka*) the ‘whole’?⁸⁶

And Dharmakīrti himself even paraphrases⁸⁷ Vasubandhu's Sanskrit:

⁸³ Tosaki (1979, 319): *ko vā virodho bahavaḥ samjātātīśayāḥ sakṛd | bhaveyuh kāraṇam buddher yadi nāmendriyādivat || 223 ||*

Also translated in Dunne (2004, 411).

⁸⁴ See note [81](#), above.

⁸⁵ Compare also Devendrabuddhi's 'ga' *zhig kyang mthong bar mi 'gyur ro* to Yaśomitra's *kṛtsna jagad apratyakṣam syāt* from the interpolated Vaiśeṣika objection.

⁸⁶ PVP (473.12-19): *gzhan gyis ji ltar dbang po las 'das pa'i rdul phra rab so so tha dad pa mthong ba'i lam du mi 'gyur ba de ltar bsags pa na yang de dag nyid yin pas na | gal te yan lag can gyi ngo bo med par 'gyur na 'ga' zhig kyang mthong bar mi 'gyur ro zhes brjod pa gang yin pa 'di la yang | rdul phra rab so so tha dad pa la nus pa med na yang | gal te so so re re phan tshun nye bar 'gro ba la sogs pa'i rkyen las gzhan dang gzhan las | skye phul byung bar gyur pa na | mang po blo'i rgyu ni 'gyur ba la | de'i tshe 'gal ba dag ni ci zhig yod | gang gis na yan lag can rtogs par byed |*

⁸⁷ Compare *aticitra* to *citratara*.

Alternatively, how could one see the form of something that is not singular, such as a multicolored (*citra*) butterfly?

Opponent: “That multicolor is a single [real thing, distinct from other colors].”

Then that [multicolor] is even more psychedelic (*citratarā*) [than the multicolored butterfly]! || 200 ||

For there is no single entity, ‘multicolor,’ just as a figure of [different types of] jewels is not a single entity. And the blue portion⁸⁸ (and so on) in a multicolored cloth is the same. || 201 ||⁸⁹

While Dharmakīrti is at least arguably following along with Vasubandhu’s line of thought in this passage, he does not simply recapitulate it. Rather, Dharmakīrti builds on Vasubandhu’s analysis, because he has an important additional point to make.

That is to say, Vasubandhu’s only real point here is that no whole exists independently of its parts, and by extension, that a singular entity cannot possess internal variegation in terms of its color or any other quality. By contrast, Dharmakīrti takes this general point, but then also applies it to an analysis of cognition. In other words, Dharmakīrti’s argument here is that, just as there is no real ultimate singularity in the case of purportedly variegated or multicolored entities such as paintings, there is similarly no real ultimate singularity with respect to the necessarily-variegated cognitive image that is produced by the contact between the faculty and the object: the variegated cognition of a painting is just as unreal (*qua* ‘whole’) as the variegated painting.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Dunne (2004, 398) apparently prefers the variant reading recorded by Tosaki (Tosaki 1979, 201), of **pratibhāsa* (“appearance”) for *pravibhāga* (“portion”). However, both Sa skya Paṇḍita’s canonical translation of the PV, and the Tibetan translators of Devendrabuddhi’s PVP, indicate an underlying *pravibhāga* (with *rnam par dbye* and *rnam par phyē*, respectively). I have therefore elected to translate this verse assuming *pravibhāga* as the correct reading.

⁸⁹ Tosaki (1979, 301–2): *naikaṃ citrapataṅgādi rūpaṃ vā drśyate katham | citran tad ekam iti ced idaṃ citrataran tataḥ || 200 || naikaṃ svabhāvaṃ citraṃ hi maṇirūpaṃ yathaiva tat | nīlādipravibhāgaś ca tulyaś citrapaṭādiṣu || 201 ||*

Also translated in Dunne (2004, 398).

⁹⁰ Of course, one important difference between the painting and the cognition of the painting is that the painting is ostensibly comprised of multiple particulars, while the cognition is a single mental particular. Indeed, cognition’s

One of the most important takeaways of this argument is that, insofar as the phenomenological duality of subject and object constitutes a kind of internal variegation, phenomenological duality is unreal. However, since Dharmakīrti's argument to that effect also directly concerns the issue of phenomenal extension—and Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi's commentaries treat the issue in detail here, but only very briefly when it comes up again in PV 3.321-322—it is worth drilling down into the analysis of extension in the *citrādvaita* section, as this is the point on which the shift to epistemic and ontological idealism will eventually turn:

Opponent: “So then in regard to what is there this experience, on the part of that [cognition]?”

This is precisely what is under investigation. And how are these particles conforming to that extended appearance? || 321 ||

That [cognition] does not possess the form of the object. Or, if it did, it would be insufficient (*vyabhicāri*) [to define that cognition as the awareness of the object]; it would not be able to establish [that the cognition] has the nature of being an experience of that [object]. || 322 ||⁹¹

In other words, the disjunct between the variegation of the object-field and the singularity of cognition, no less than the disjunct between the extended appearance of the object-image versus the dimensionless nature of the infinitesimal particulars which are its primary cause, exposes the insufficiency of any definition of sensory perception that would tie the epistemic reliability of a sensory cognition to its ability to accurately represent its object *qua* cause.

status as a single irreducible particular is one of its most important features, and an indispensable element of Dharmakīrti's arguments in PV 3. Nevertheless, in basically the same way as a painting, the ultimate unreality of cognition is framed in terms of a “neither one nor many” (*ekānekavicāra*)-style analysis; in other words, the fact that sensory cognition cannot be finally established as either completely singular or completely manifold establishes that it is not truly real (see below). Reflexive awareness, on the other hand, does not have this problem.

⁹¹ Tosaki (1985, 5–6): *atha so 'nubhavaḥ kvāsya tad evedaṃ vicāryate | sarūpayanti tat kena sthūlābhāsaṅ ca te 'navaḥ || 321 || tan nārtharūpatā tasya satyāṃ vā vyabhicāriṇī | tatsaṃvedanabhāvasya na samarthā prasādhane || 322 ||*

B. The Critique of Variegation and the “False Imagist” View (*alīkākāravāda*)

1. *Variegated Images Are Unreal*

As outlined above, the first part of the *citrādvaita* section establishes that there is no abstract quality (*guṇa*) of variegation (*citratā*) which can be attributed to a purported whole (*avayavin*). Variegation is, on the contrary, only attributable to an ostensible conglomerate on the basis of the various properties of its real constituent elements. Thus, when considering a multicolored entity such as a butterfly, it is not that there is any real quality of being ‘multicolored,’ any more than there is a real ‘butterfly’ that exists apart from its constituent particulars; on the contrary, ‘multicolor’ is just the simultaneous appearance of ‘blue’ and ‘yellow’ and so on, on the basis of blue-particulars and yellow-particulars⁹² and so on.

At this point, Dharmakīrti has a rhetorical interlocutor raise the obvious follow-up question: if variegated entities are unreal, insofar as variegation could only be the property of a ‘whole’ considered to be distinct (in some indeterminate sense) from its variously-qualified constituent elements, then what are we to make of the variegated appearance of cognition?

Opponent: “If singularity is not possible with respect to entities that have variegated appearances, then, to begin with, how could a cognition (which is singular) possess a variegated appearance?” || 208 ||⁹³

⁹² Or, again, to be more precise, particulars with the causal capacity, when operating in conjunction with other particulars, to generate the phenomenal appearance of blue and yellow and so on.

⁹³ Tosaki (1979, 309): *citrāvabhāseṣv artheṣu yady ekatvaṃ na yujyate | saiva tāvat katham buddhir ekā citrāvabhāsinī* || 208 ||

Translated also in Dunne (2004, 401).

Dharmakīrti responds to this point in a manner that, at least according to Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi’s explanation, all but establishes the “False Imagist” interpretation of the PV:

The wise⁹⁴ state what is entailed by real things themselves: whatever way they think of objects, in that way those objects disappear.⁹⁵

Opponent: “Might there be variegation within a single [cognition]?”

There should be no [variegation] within cognition, either. [But] if it amuses oneself [to believe] this about things, who are we to object to that? || 209-210 ||⁹⁶

Devendrabuddhi explains the key point here:

“If there were ultimate variegation within a single cognition, then in ultimate terms that variegated cognition would establish that a real entity [i.e., the cognition] can also be variegated.⁹⁷ Likewise, [the external variegated entity] would be real.” This is what the questioner is getting at. The author of the treatise [Dharmakīrti]

⁹⁴ Dunne (2004, 402n13) notes that “Devendrabuddhi... makes it clear that the ones doing the analyzing [the “wise,” *vipaścitaḥ*] here are the Buddhas.”

PVP (463.7-8): *m khas pa r nams kyis gang gsungs pa | de ni dngos stobs 'ongs pa yin | sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das kyis so ||*

⁹⁵ Devendrabuddhi comments (PVP 463.9-12): “**Whatever way they think of objects:** that is, when one rationally analyzes them as either singular or manifold, they **disappear**—they are devoid of existing—in that way, i.e., in that fashion [as either singular or manifold]. In other words, they do not abide in terms of any essential nature whatsoever.”

ji lta ji lta don bsams pa | gcig dang du ma'i rnam pa gang dag gis rigs pas dpyad pa na | de ni de lta rnam pa de dang | rnam par bral zhing stong par 'gyur te | rang bzhin 'ga' zhig la yang rnam par mi gnas so zhes bya ba'i tha tshig go ||

Translated in Dunne (2004, 402n13).

⁹⁶ Tosaki (1979, 309–11): *idaṃ vastubalāyātāṃ yad vadanti vipaścitaḥ | yathā yathā 'rthās cintyante viśīryante tathā tathā || 209 || kiṃ syāt sā citrataikasyāṃ na syāt tasyāṃ matāv api | yadīdaṃ svayam arthānāṃ rocate tatra ke vayam || 210 ||*

⁹⁷ Śākyabuddhi writes (PVT 502.18-503.2): “*Then in ultimate terms that variegated or multicolored awareness would establish that the real thing was also variegated or multicolored.* This means the following. An ultimately singular cognition arises with a variegated/multicolored cognitive image due to that kind of [i.e., a variegated] object (*artha*). The external real thing that determines the cognition which apprehends that image is thereby established. *Likewise*—as is the case with the singular cognition that has a variegated/multicolored cognitive image—it would be real.”

don dam par blo sna tshogs pa des dngos po yang sna tshogs par 'grub par 'gyur ro zhes bya ba la sogs pa la | ji lta dang por don dam par blo gcig sna tshogs pa'i rnam pa can de lta bur gyur pa'i don nyid kyis skyed par 'gyur ro | de nas 'dzin par byed pa'i blo de'i rnam par 'jog par byed pa'i phyi rol gyi dngos po yang 'grub par 'gyur ro | de bzhin du ste | sna tshogs pa'i rnam pa can gyi blo gcig bzhin du bden par 'gyur ro ||

Translated in Dunne (2004, 403n13).

responds: **there should be no [variegation] within cognition, either.** “Singular” and “variegated” are contradictory qualities. If something is singular, it ultimately does not have a variegated nature;⁹⁸ if it nevertheless appears with a variegated cognitive image (*rnam pa sna tshogs pa = *citrākāra*), then those [variegated] cognitive images of that [singular entity] do not ultimately exist. One must accept this position because [otherwise] the singularity [of the cognition] would be countermanded. Apart from a different or non-different cognitive image, there is ultimately no other basis for the establishment [of something as] one or many. In this regard, if one were to maintain that cognition is ultimately both singular and variegated, then [all phenomena] without exception—which [considered all together] is variegated—would be one single substance. In this way, [there would be] flaws such as that everything would be produced simultaneously. Therefore, if something is singular,⁹⁹ it cannot have a manifold image.¹⁰⁰

The clear implication of this argument is that, to the extent that the cognitive image is necessarily variegated (cognition does not appear as an undifferentiated singularity), and is therefore subject

⁹⁸ Śākyabuddhi comments (PVT 503.7-10): “If [the cognition] is singular, it ultimately does not have a [variegated] nature. That is, it does not have a variegated essential nature because if its essence were variegated, then it would be contradictory for it to be singular. Instead, the cognition appears with a variegated cognitive image due to cognitive error (*'khrul pa = *bhrānti*).”

de bas na gcig nyid yin na ngo bo sna tshogs pa ma yin pa yang zhes bya ba rang bzhin sna tshogs pa ma yin na yang ste | ngo bo sna tshogs pa nyid yin na gcig nyid 'gal ba'i phyir ro | 'on kyang 'khrul pa'i dbang gis sna tshogs pa'i rnam pa nyid du snang bar 'gyur ro ||

Translated in Dunne (2004, 403n13).

⁹⁹ Śākyabuddhi comments (PVT 504.3-6): “Therefore, if it is singular, it cannot have a plural image. If cognition is singular, then it cannot have a manifold cognitive image; rather, cognition just has the nature of mere reflexive awareness which is devoid of duality.”

de'i phyir gcig nyid yin na rnam pa du ma can ma yin no zhes bya ba ni blo gcig yin na rnam pa du ma can du mi 'gyur gyi 'on kyang blo ni gnyis kyi ngo bos dben pa rang rig pa tsam gyi bdag nyid can kho na yin no zhes bya bar dgongs so ||

Translated in Dunne (2004, 403n13).

¹⁰⁰ PVP (463.14-464.6): *gal te blo gcig la sna tshogs de don dam par cir 'gyur | don dam par blo sna tshogs pa des dngos po yang sna tshogs par 'grub par 'gyur ro | de bzhin du bden par 'gyur ro zhes bya ba ni 'dri ba po'i bsam pa'o | bstan bcos mdzad pas | de yi blo yang mi 'gyur ro | zhes bya ba smos te | gcig dang sna tshogs pa zhes bya ba de ni 'gal ba yin no | gcig nyid yin na don dam par ngo bo sna tshogs pa ma yin pa yang rnam pa sna tshogs par snang ba don dam par de'i rnam pa de dag kyang yod pa ma yin no zhes nan gyis 'dod par bya ste gcig pa nyid nyams par thal ba'i phyir ro | gcig dang du ma nyid dag gi gnas pa'i rten don dam par rnam pa tha dad pa dang tha dad pa med pa ma gtogs par 'ga' zhig kyang yod pa ma yin no | de la gal te don dam par blo sna tshogs pa dang gcig yin par 'dod pa de'i tsho | sna tshogs pa ma lus pa yang rdzas gcig tu 'gyur ro | de ltar na cig car skye ba la sogs pa'i skyon yod do | de'i phyir gcig yin na yang rnam pa du ma can ma yin no ||*

Translated in Dunne (2004, 402-403n13).

to mereological analysis, it cannot be ultimately real.¹⁰¹ And this, in turn, entails another extremely important conclusion. If there were such a thing as real ultimate variegation, then a variegated cognition could truly isomorphically conform to the variegation in external reality. But the lack of ultimate variegation in reality entails that a variegated cognition itself is necessarily and inherently flawed, because it is an inaccurate presentation of reality. Therefore, there can be no true isomorphic conformity on the part of a variegated cognition, because real phenomena (that is, particulars) lack variegation.

Of course, this opens up a whole host of other questions. Most saliently: if the image is unreal in this way, then what, precisely, is its final ontological status? Dharmakīrti seems content to allow the question to linger (“who are we to object?”), though this and other passages strongly indicate that his ultimate position—unstated, at least in part doubtlessly due to the fact that such an ultimate position lies by definition beyond thought and language—is that cognitive images must in some way “disappear” (*vi + √śr̥*)¹⁰² upon the attainment of Buddhahood.

Indeed, given that there is a restriction to the effect that the phenomenal subject and object always arise together (*sahopalambhaniyama*), the elimination of the subject-object “structure” (*vyavasthā*) would seem to necessarily entail the elimination of cognition’s “structured”

¹⁰¹ Komarovsky’s (2015, 150) explanation of *alīkākāravāda* according to Śākya mchog ldan (1428-1507) is endorsed here: “As [Śākya mchog ldan] understands it, the Satyākāravāda/Alīkākāravāda distinction ultimately boils down to the question of the reality of mental appearances. Although Yogācāras in general do not accept the existence of an external material world, according to Satyākāravāda, its appearances or “representations” reflected in consciousness have a real or true existence, because they are of one nature with the really existent consciousness, their creator. According to Alīkākāravāda, neither external phenomena nor their appearances and minds that reflect them really exist and they are therefore false. What exists in reality is only primordial mind described as self-awareness (*rang rig, svasamvedana*) or individually self-cognizing primordial mind (*so so(r) rang gis rig pa’i ye shes*).”

Concerning the requirement that gnosis (i.e., *prajñā*) or “primordial mind” (*ye shes*) be “individually self-cognized,” (*pratyātmavedanīya*) see Chapter 5, Section I.D: [Cognitively-Natured-Ness \(*jñānarūpatva*\) and Subjectivity](#); Chapter 5, note 44; and Kapstein (2000, 112–13).

¹⁰² Cf. PV 3.209d, above.

(*vyavasthāpya*) objective phenomenal content, as well as its “structuring” (*vyavasthāpaka*), subjective, affective dimension. This is the essence of the “False Imagist” view (*alīkākāravāda*).

2. False Object, False Image

Bracketing for a moment the question of the ultimate ontological status of cognitive images, however, it is certain that—whatever its ontological status—a variegated image must, by definition, be erroneous. As Śākyabuddhi writes in his commentary to PVP *ad* PV 3.210,

[Opponent:] “If there is no variegated external real thing, and if there is no singular cognition with a variegated image, then how does cognition appear with the color [or form] (*gzugs* = **rūpa*) of the external object in a manner that is restricted (*nges pa can ~ niyameṇa*) to a particular time and place?”

In response to such a qualm, [Devendrabuddhi] says, “*On the other hand, if one claims that the nature of things...*” and so on.¹⁰³ One speaks of an “object” due to the imaginative apprehension of that which is by nature the cognizer’s cognitive error as being an object. Those appearances are not [actually] objects because the constructed nature (*kun tu brtags pa ’i rang bzhin* = **parikalpitasvabhāva*) does not exist in any way whatsoever.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Devendrabuddhi’s explanation *ad* PV 3.210, upon which Śākyabuddhi is commenting here, is as follows: “*If one is content to have this be the objects’ essence—that is, even though they do not have that nature [of being external], they become apparent (gsal ba ~ vyakta) in terms of that nature; if ultimately abiding in that manner is their true nature (de kho na nyid = *tattva), why should we bother refuting it? The idea is that one should just let it be so.*”

PVP (464.6-9): *’on kyang gal te ’di bdag don ’dod na | de ’i ngo bo can ma yin par ’gyur ba dag kyang | de ’i ngo bo sgo nas gsal ba gang yin pa de dang don dam par gnas pa de kho na nyid yin na de la bdag gi ’gog par byed pas | ci zhig bya ste de ltar ’gyur ro zhes bya bar dgongs so ||*

Translated in Dunne (2004, 403n13).

¹⁰⁴ PVT (504.6-12): *gal te phyi rol gyi dngos po sna tshogs pa med cing | blo sna tshogs pa ’i rnam pa can gcig med na ’o na ji ltar yul dang dus nges pa can gyi phyi rol gyi gzugs nyid du snang ba yin zhes de skad du ’dogs pa la | ’on kyang gal te ’di bdag don ’dod na zhes bya ba la sogs pa smos te | sgrub pa po ’khrul pa ’i ngo bor don du mngon par zhen pa las don zhes brjod kyi de dag don nyid ni ma yin te | kun tu brtags pa ’i rang bzhin ni gtan nas med pa nyid yod pa ’i phyir ro ||*

Translated in Dunne (2004, 403n13).

The reference to the “constructed nature” here requires some additional clarification. For the most part, neither Dharmakīrti¹⁰⁵ nor his commentators¹⁰⁶ adopt the characteristic technical terminology (as opposed to the broad theoretical framework) of Yogācāra. Here, however, Śākyabuddhi uses the foundational Yogācāra rubric—and, by extension, the idealistic ontological framework—of the “three natures”¹⁰⁷ to explain the critique of the variegation of the sensory image. As we will see in our discussion of PV 3 *ad* PS 1.9-10, it is precisely in terms of this critique that Dharmakīrti articulates and explains his shift to epistemic and ontological idealism.

¹⁰⁵ One important exception is PV 3.520, where Dharmakīrti directly references the *ālayavijñāna*.

¹⁰⁶ Śākyabuddhi also invokes the three natures, and an idealistic ontology, in his commentary to Devendrabuddhi’s explanation (see above, note 99) of PV 3.209cd: “...*the way in which they think of objects* refers to external blue and yellow and so on. He says “object” in order to refute the notion that it is distinct from consciousness, but not [to refute] the notion that consciousness is by nature *paratantra* [i.e., the dependent nature]. This will also be explained later. ‘The way in which [they disappear]’ means they are not [established as] either singular or multiple. [When Devendrabuddhi says] ‘in terms of any essential nature whatsoever,’ he means that the object cannot be established as external, but also cannot be established as having the nature of consciousness. In other words, they are not established as appearing separately (*chags ~ bhaṅga*).”

PVṠ (502.4-11): *ji lta ji ltar don bsam pa | zhes bya ba ni phyi rol gyi sngon po dang ser po la sogs pa ’o | don smos pa ni rnam par shes pa las tha dad pa ’gog par byed pa yin gyi rnam par shes pa gzhan gyi dbang gi bdag nyid ni ma yin no | de yang ’og nas ston par ’gyur ro | ji lta ji ltar zhes bya ba ni gcig dang du ma nyid kyis so | rang bzhin ’ga’ zhig la zhes bya ba ni phyi rol la ma yin zhing rnam par shes pa ’i bdag nyid la yang ma yin te | chags par snang ba ’i rnam par mi gnas so zhes bya ba ’i don to ||*

Translated in Dunne (2004, 402n13).

¹⁰⁷ The three natures are an enormous topic, and largely outside the scope of this discussion, since (again) for the most part neither Dharmakīrti nor his commentators present their perspective on *pramāṇa* theory in terms of these Yogācāra categories. Briefly, however: the dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*) is the flow of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), analyzable into the eight collections of consciousness (that is, the five sensory consciousnesses, the sixth mental consciousness, the seventh “defiled mind” [*kliṣṭamanas*], and the storehouse consciousness [*ālayavijñāna*]). But the cognitions of the dependent nature are falsely presented as though they were structured by the phenomenological duality of subject and object; hence, the false duality of subject and object is known as the imagined or “constructed nature” (*parikalpitasvabhāva*), and the dependent nature—which does exist, but falsely appears in this way—is also referred to as “false construction” (*abhūtaparikalpa*). Unlike the dependent nature, the illusory constructed nature does not actually exist. In other words, the dependent nature is in fact empty of the constructed nature. And this emptiness—the lack of false duality within the causal flow of cognition—is the “perfected nature” (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*), which also exists. Cf. D’Amato (2005) and *Madhyāntavibhāga* I.1: **abhūtaparikalpo ’sti dvayaṃ tatra na vidyate | śūnyatā vidyate tv atra tasyām api sa vidyate || 1 ||**

The key point to understand at this juncture is that, as mentioned in Chapter 1,¹⁰⁸ on the classical Indian model of cognition, a cognition requires an object: a mental event without an object is, strictly speaking, not a “cognition” (*jñāna*) at all. Hence, just as the pseudo-perceptual appearance of floating hairs is not a cognition—because the hairs are not an object (i.e., an *artha*), but rather only an artifact of some distortion in the visual-sensory apparatus—in just that way, the appearance of a sensory image is not really a cognition, because the sensory image *qua* epistemic object (*prameya*) or apprehended-aspect (*grāhyākāra*) is only an artifact of distortion (specifically, the “internal distortion” or *antarupaplava*) in the sensory-cognitive apparatus.

In other words, phenomenal variegation in terms of ‘blue’ and ‘yellow’ establishes the unreality of the sensory image; but there is another, even more basic problem. Because cognition is ontologically singular, but phenomenal subject and object are always presented together (*sahopalambhaniyama*), the appearance of a phenomenal object necessarily entails the presence of the dualistic structure of subject and object. But this duality constitutes a type of phenomenal variegation. Hence, duality entails that the dualistic cognition is a pseudo-perceptual “non-cognition” (*ajñāna*). In other words, the dualistic phenomenal variegation of a cognition establishes its ontological unreality. Therefore, any cognition which appears variegated in terms of subject-object duality (which is to say, *every ordinary cognition*) is a pseudo-perceptual “non-cognition.” In this way, the dualistic phenomenal variegation necessarily concomitant with the appearance of any sensory image establishes that the sensory cognition “containing” that image—which, to repeat, is not ontologically separate from the sensory image itself—is false or unreal (*alīka*), even though, despite this unreality, like the “hairs” of myodesopsia it nevertheless appears.

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter 1, Section III.B: [Myodesopsia and Defects in the Basis](#).

Although standard Yogācāra analysis is silent on the question of whether phenomenal content disappears once the adventitious duality of the constructed nature is removed from the dependent nature, Dharmakīrti maintains that phenomenal content cannot be experienced in the absence of subject-object duality:

And there is no definition [of anything] outside of [being defined] as the image of the subject or object. [Those definitions do not ultimately make sense;] therefore, since [phenomena] are empty of definition, they are clarified as being essenceless. || 215 ||

Every distinctive definition of things such as the aggregates are delimited by activity (*vyāpāra*). That [activity] is not ultimate; therefore, those things are also devoid of [ultimate] definition. || 216 ||

Those who are by nature confused with ignorance, as with myodesopsia and so on, have cognitive presentations (*vijñapti*) that arise with false images (*vitathākāra*), in dependence upon their respective conditions. || 217 ||

The true nature of reality (*tattva*) is not known by any [ordinary beings] whose vision is not supreme, because it is impossible for them [to experience cognition] without the error (*viplava*) of subject and object. || 218 ||¹⁰⁹

Therefore, since the phenomenal “object” of sensory cognition (i.e., the sense-sphere particular, which is to say, the single effect of all the various conglomerated particulars causally contributing to the production of the sensory image) only arises as part of a necessarily-distorted dualistic structure, and thus falls within the constructed nature, this “object” does not really exist, because the constructed nature does not really exist.

Concluding his comments on PVP *ad* PV 3.210, Śākyabuddhi writes:

¹⁰⁹ Tosaki (1979, 314–16): *na grāhyagrāhakākārabāhyam asti ca lakṣaṇam | ato lakṣaṇasūnyatvān niḥsvabhāvāḥ prakāśitāḥ || 215 || vyāpāropādhiḥ sarvaṃ skandhādīnāṃ viśeṣataḥ | lakṣaṇam sa ca tattvan na tenāpy ete vilakṣaṇāḥ || 216 || yathāsvaṃpratyayāpekṣād avidyopaputātmanām | vijñaptir vitathākārā jāyate timirādivat || 217 || asaṃviditattvā ca sā sarvāparadarśanaḥ | asaṃbhavād vinā teṣāṃ grāhyagrāhakaviplavaḥ || 218 ||*

Also translated in Dunne (2004, 410).

What is being asserted? [Devendrabuddhi] says, “Even though they do not have that nature, they become apparent (*gsal ba ~ spaṣṭa*) in terms of that nature.” “Even though they do not have that nature” [means:] even though they do not have the nature of being external. They *become apparent*—they appear (*snang ~ ā + √bhās*)—*in terms of that nature*—in terms of being external. “If ultimately abiding in that manner is their true nature (*de kho na nyid ~ tattva*)” [means:] appearing as though having a nature that they do not have is how they *ultimately*—really—abide, because there is a *pramāṇa* that establishes [this appearance].¹¹⁰ Therefore, [that appearance] is not unmistaken suchness. The idea here is that since the cognition of them as external objects is contradicted by a *pramāṇa*, that appearance of them as external is not [their] true nature.

It is correct that the experience of external objects is erroneous; [it is] not [correct to claim that that experience is] not erroneous. What is correct [i.e., the fact that the external appearance is an error] is not presented in that [sensory cognition itself]; nevertheless, we refute that which is presented by false conceptual cognition, which is contradicted by a *pramāṇa*. Hence, as in the case where nonexistent things such as hairs and flies appear to a person whose eyes are impaired by myodesopsia, an external object, even though nonexistent, appears to those whose eyes are covered by the myodesopsia of ignorance. Since it is appropriate to present this notion in this context, the author of the treatise [Devendrabuddhi] says, “Just let it be so.”¹¹¹

Importantly, we may once again observe here the “Janus-faced”¹¹² nature of cognition. Construed as the apprehension of an *artha*—whether this *artha* is understood as existing externally to, or internally within, the mind—a dualistic cognition is an unreal, false construction. Construed as a

¹¹⁰ That is, the false or mistaken appearance of cognition is established to be how the cognition actually appears, “by means of” the *pramāṇa* of reflexive awareness.

¹¹¹ PVT (504.12-505.6): *'dod pa de yang gang yin zhe na | de'i ngo bo can ma yin par 'gyur ba dag kyang de'i ngo bo'i sgo nas gsal ba zhes bya ba smos pa la | de'i ngo bo can ma yin pa zhes bya ba ni phyi rol gyi ngo bo can ma yin par gyur pa dag kyang ngo | de'i ngo bo'i sgo nas kyang de'i phyi rol gyi ngo bo'i sgo nas gsal zhing snang ba'o | de dang de'i don dam par gnas pa de kho na nyid yin na zhes bya ba ni de'i ngo bo can ma yin par snang ba de don dam par te dngos su gnas pa yin te | sgrub par byed pa'i tshad ma yod pa'i phyir ro | de nyid kyi phyir de kho na nyid phyin ci ma log pa ma yin te | 'dir phyi rol gyi don du rtogs pa ni tshad mas gnod pa nyid kyi phyir de kho na nyid ma yin no zhes bya bar dgongs so | gang gi tshe phyi rol gyi don mthong ba ni 'khrul pa nyid yin par rigs kyi ma 'khrul pa ni ma yin te | rigs pa de la mi ston mod kyi | kho bo tshad mas gnod pa'i log pa'i rnam par rtog pas ni ston pa 'gog par byed pa yin no | de bas na rab rib kyis 'khrul pa'i mig can la skra shad dang sbrang ma la sogs pa med pa snang ba bzhin du ma rig pa'i rab rib kyis khyab pa'i mig can la phyi rol gyi don 'di med na yang snang ngo zhes de skad du bstan pa rigs pa nyid yin pa'i phyir bstan bcos mdzad pa de ltar 'gyur ro zhes bya bar dgongs so ||*

Translated in Dunne (2004, 404n13).

¹¹² Cf. Dunne (2006, 513).

sheer moment of awareness, however, in which various false appearances arise, dualistic cognition—like conceptual cognition—is real insofar as it is a mental particular or mental event. Thus, irrespective of what exactly it is that happens to ordinary dualistic sensory cognitions as the conditions for their production (most saliently, *vāsanā* or *bīja*) are uprooted through progress on the path to Buddhahood, there is (to some extent) no problem with acknowledging the mere fact of their appearance: “Just let it be so.” The key point is that, just as Ratnākaraśānti explained that Buddhas, out of their boundless compassion, retain a tiny bit of ignorance in order to see what ordinary sentient beings see,¹¹³ Dharmakīrti maintains that Buddhas must deliberately ‘blind’ themselves in order to explain conventional reality to those still obscured by ignorance:

Thus, ignoring the ultimate, [Buddhas] close one eye like an elephant¹¹⁴ and propagate theories that involve external objects merely in accord with worldly conceptions. || 219 ||¹¹⁵

But the intractable unreliability of the sensory image does not stop here.

C. Extension and Isomorphism

In the *citrādvaita* section (PV 3.194-224 *ad* PS 1.4cd), Dharmakīrti critiques the spatial extension of the sensory image in the exact same terms that he will deploy, albeit much more succinctly, at PV 3.321-322:

¹¹³ Cf. Yiannopoulos (2012, 183) and Tomlinson (2019, 98–104).

¹¹⁴ Dunne (2004, 410n19): “As Manorathanandin explains (*ad cit.*), an elephant’s eyes are on the sides of its head; hence, it can choose not to look at what is occurring on one side by simply shutting one eye.”

¹¹⁵ Tosaki (1979, 316): *tad upekṣitatattvārthaiḥ kṛtvā gajanimīlanam | kevalaṃ lokabuddhyaiva bāhyacintā pratanyate* || 219 ||

Also translated in Dunne (2004, 410).

Therefore, neither the objects nor the cognition has a spatially extended appearance (*sthūlābhāsa*) because, since that [kind of spatially-extended] nature has already been disproved in the case of a singular entity, it is also not possible in the case of what is manifold. || 211 ||¹¹⁶

On the surface, this is a relatively straightforward application of the general “neither one nor many” argument to the particular case of sensory cognition. That is, the critique in Dharmakīrti’s root verse most directly concerns the problematic ontological status of the cognition, which (as a mental particular) must be singular, but has an extended (*sthūla*) and therefore variegated (*citra*) appearance. As Devendrabuddhi writes,

Since the appearance of an object’s individual cognitive image is not its true nature in this way, *therefore, neither the objects*—which are claimed to be the apprehended—*nor the cognition*—which is claimed to be the apprehender—have a spatially-extended appearance; in other words, that which appears with a spatially extended cognitive image does not exist either externally or internally. That is, that which appears to be spatially extended must be reckoned as either singular or plural. First of all, a *singular* entity cannot appear to be spatially extended because spatially extended singularity *has already been disproved*. It has already been clarified that the entity which would have [spatial extension]—i.e., a singular ‘whole’—does not exist.¹¹⁷

But Devendrabuddhi also highlights the point to which Dharmakīrti will return in PV 3.321-322—that there is a fundamental disjunct between the lack of extension inherent to the fundamental particles, and the extension inherent to the image which they produce:

¹¹⁶ Tosaki (1979, 312): *tasmān nārtheṣu na jñāne sthūlābhāsa tadātmanaḥ | ekatra pratiṣiddhatvād bahuṣv api na sambhavaḥ* || 211 ||

Also translated in Dunne (2004, 404).

¹¹⁷ PVP (464.9-17): *gang gi phyir 'di ltar don gyi rnam pa so sor snang ba de kho na nyid ma yin pa de phyir don dang ste | gzung bar bya ba nyid du 'dod pa dag dang | shes pa la 'dzin pa nyid du 'dod pa yang | rags snang ma yin | gang 'dir rags pa 'i rnam par snang ba de phyi'am nang na yod pa ma yin no | de ltar na rags par snang ba de gcig gam du mar 'gyur grang na | re zhig gcig la rags par snang ba ma yin te | rags pa gcig nyid ni bkag pa nyid kyi phyir ro | gang la yod par 'gyur na | yan lag can gyi ngo bo gcig po 'ga' zhig kyang yod pa ma yin no zhes sngar bsal zin to ||*

Translated in Dunne (2004, 404n14).

That kind of property-svabhāva—a spatially extended image—is also not existent in the case of what is many—namely, color, which consists of fundamental particles. That is, the extended appearance of which the cognition has the image does not exist in the individual fundamental particles. And if the aggregated entity does not have any singular essence, with what could the cognition be similar ('dra ba ~ sadrśya)?¹¹⁸

Śākyabuddhi elaborates:

Even if fundamental particles are mixed with other [fundamental particles], they do not lose their nature of being fundamental particles. As, even when they are aggregated, they are fundamental particles by nature, a cognition possessing an extended image cannot have fundamental particles as its object-field. That being the case, it cannot be determined by a non-erroneous awareness because a cognition (*rtogs pa*) that has one cognitive image cannot apprehend some other thing [with a different cognitive image]. Otherwise, one would incur an overextension.¹¹⁹

The argument here turns on the question, to which we will shortly return, of what exactly it is that constitutes the *artha* (“object”) of sensory cognition—indeed, the question of what exactly an *artha* is. In the general pan-Indian model from which *pramāṇa* theory originally emerged, sensory perception was understood as “direct” (*pratyakṣa*) because it was understood to directly apprehend the *artha*. Thus, that which is apprehended (*grāhya*) is one and the same with the *artha*. The Buddhist representationalist response to this position was that, on the contrary, what is actually seen or cognized is a mental image or phenomenal form (*ākāra*) produced by the *artha*. Crucially, however, this is not necessarily the same thing as saying that cognition fails to apprehend the

¹¹⁸ PVP (464.17-21): *de dag nyid rags pa'i rnam pa de lta bu'i mang po la yang | rdul phra rab kyi gzugs rnams la yod pa ma yin rdul phra rab re re la gang shes pa rags par snang ba'i rnam pa yod pa ma yin no || tshogs pa la yang de'i ngo bo gcig yod pa ma yin na | gang gis na rnam par shes pa 'dra bar 'gyur |*

Translated in Dunne (2004, 404n14).

¹¹⁹ PVT (505.16-21): *rdul phra rab gzhan dang 'dres na yang rdul phra rab rnams kyi rdul phra rab kyi ngo bo nyams pa ma yin te | tshogs pa na yang de dag rdul phra rab kyi ngo bo nyid yin na rags pa'i rnam pa can gyi shes pa'i rdul phra rab yul ma yin pa de ltar na 'khrul pa med pa'i sems kyis nges par mi nus te | rnam pa gzhan rtogs pas rnam pa gzhan 'dzin pa mi srid pa'i phyir ro ||*

Translated in Dunne (2004, 404n14).

“external” object (that is, the *bāhyārtha*) which produces this “internal” cognition. On an External Realist view, specifically, it is not the case that there is no external *artha*; rather, it is precisely this external *artha* which possesses the *arthakriyā* (“telic efficacy,” or more literally, “object-activity”) that satisfies the desires of the cognizer. Hence, on that view, it is still the case that the external *artha* is in some sense that which is apprehended (*grāhya*) by cognition. The epistemological point, from an External Realist perspective, is just that it is only an *image* of the apprehended object (i.e., the *grāhyākāra*) which serves as a means of reliable knowledge (i.e., a *pramāṇa*) for the *artha*.

Here, however, we see the beginning of the shift to an Epistemic Idealist perspective. The fundamental problem leading to this shift concerns the isomorphic correspondence (that is, the *sārūpya*) between the cognition and the object. From an External Realist perspective, as noted, it is just the isomorphism between the ‘blue’ particular and the cognition of ‘blue’ which provides for the instrumentality or epistemic reliability of that cognition; “if there is no cause for error, the [object *qua* particular], by nature, induces cognitions that conform to itself.”¹²⁰ Even from this External Realist perspective, however, the only candidates for the *artha*—that is, the real and causally-efficacious external substrate for the cognition—are fundamental particles, which are dimensionless by definition. There is, for this reason, a necessary and inherent *lack* of isomorphic correspondence between the extensionless *artha* and the extended *arthākāra* (“object-image”). No matter how apparently useful or accurate, a sensory image can never represent its ostensible object with perfect fidelity. This is why, as discussed above, Dharmakīrti asserts that in the final analysis, what it means for something to be apprehended is only for it to be the cause of the cognition bearing its form—a point that he repeats at multiple junctures in PV 3, including here:

¹²⁰ Tosaki (1979, 184), PV 3.109bcd: *so 'sati bhrāntikāraṇe | pratibhāḥ pratisandhatte svānurūpāḥ svabhāvataḥ*
|| 109 ||

Apart from being a cause, there is nothing else at all that could properly constitute something being that which is apprehended (*grāhyatā*); that with the image of which cognition arises is what is said to be apprehended. || 224 ||¹²¹

To return at long last to the initial frame for this discussion, then: following his assertion that the criterion of “similarity” (*sadrśya*) between the object and its cognition is “insufficient” (*vyabhicāri*) to establish that a sensory cognition is the awareness of the object (PV 3.320-321), Dharmakīrti states (PV 3.322) that the reason for this insufficiency lies in precisely this problem of correspondence between extensionless particles and the extended image. However, at that juncture, neither Dharmakīrti nor his commentators explain this problem in any but the most cursory fashion. The preceding discussion of the fundamental disconnect or anisomorphism between the *artha* and the *ākāra*, as laid out in PV 3.194-224, thus fills in a gap in argumentation between PV 3.321 and PV 3.322, which is otherwise left unexplained.

But before turning to PV 3.320-366 *ad* PS 1.9-10, however, it would be helpful to remain just a little longer in the *citrādvaita* section, as Dharmakīrti, Devendrabuddhi, and (especially) Śākyabuddhi make a number of points there which will be extremely illuminating with respect to the subsequent discussion of reflexive awareness in Chapter 4.

D. Variegation and (Non)duality

The key verse on this point, and indeed one of the most critically important verses in the entire *Pramāṇavārttika*, ties the critique of the object-image, on the basis of extension and variegation, to a critique of the dualistic structure of cognition:

¹²¹ Tosaki (1979, 320): *hetubhāvād ṛte nānyā grāhyatā nāma kācana | tatra buddhir yadākārā tasyās tad grāhyam ucyate || 224 ||*

Also translated in Dunne (2004, 411).

This part [of cognition]—which is situated as though external—is different from the internal determination [i.e., the part that is situated as though internal]. Hence, the appearance of difference in an [actually] undifferentiated awareness is cognitive distortion (*upaplava*). || 212 ||¹²²

On the surface, this is a relatively straightforward application of the “neither one nor many” critique, this time to the structure of cognition as a “whole.” The essence of Dharmakīrti’s point here is that, insofar as ordinary cognition is constitutively dualistic, such that it is necessarily presented as though it had a phenomenological subject and object, it may be analyzed into parts—specifically, the part that appears to be internal or subjective, and the part that appears to be external or objective.¹²³ Concerning the former, it should be noted that here, for the first time, Dharmakīrti introduces a manner of conceptualizing the subjective aspect of awareness, as the internal “determination” (*pariccheda*) or determining factor. We will return to this subtle but extremely important point in Chapter 4, as it highlights the crucial role played by reflexive

¹²² Tosaki (1979, 313): *paricchedo 'ntar anyo 'yaṃ bhāgo bahir iva sthitaḥ | jñānasyābhedino bhedapratibhāso hy upaplavaḥ* || 212 ||

Also translated in Dunne (2004, 406).

¹²³ An important subsidiary issue here, which there is unfortunately no space to consider in detail, is the precise nature of the cognition in question at PV 3.212. The term for “cognition” (*jñāna*) here is grammatically singular, and there is no reason to suspect that Dharmakīrti has anything other than a single cognition in mind. At the same time, as discussed above in Chapter 1, Dharmakīrti asserts that there are multiple simultaneous sensory cognitions. How, then, are we to account for the relationship between phenomenal subject and object, given that there are in fact multiple cognitions occurring simultaneously? Are the subjective aspects of all these various cognitions somehow the same? Or are there multiple subjective aspects, one for each sensory modality? Neither of these explanations is without theoretical problems. Dharmakīrti unfortunately gives us no clues, and there are no clear answers. One possibility, though, is that the specific cognition in question here is the “bound” multi-modal mental cognition, and that, by virtue of whatever contemplative practice it is that collapses the subject-object duality of this specific cognitive modality, the entire dualistic structure for all the various simultaneous cognitions collapses, in other words that the various cognitive modalities are “coupled” in some way such that the absence of the dualistic structure for one entails the absence of the dualistic structure for all. (That cognition could be somehow “decoupled,” such that some modalities are nondual while others are simultaneously dualistic, is perhaps a theoretical possibility; but this would introduce even more intractable problems). How this coupling of the dualistic structure of multiple cognitions would work at the theoretical level—why, that is to say, either the collapse of the dualistic structure for one modality necessarily causes the subsequent collapse of this structure for all modalities; or else, when this dualistic structure collapses, it necessarily collapses for all modalities simultaneously—remains unclear. Thanks to John Dunne for bringing this issue to my attention.

awareness. In any case, the basic argument here is that, just as with the standard mereological analysis, insofar as cognition may be analyzed into constituent elements, it cannot be real as a purported “whole.”

But, as with so much at this level of analysis, there are some unresolved aporias, such as: if, as has been argued at length, cognition is in fact ontologically singular, and the linguistic (as opposed to the phenomenological) division between its subjective and objective aspects is only a conceptual construction,¹²⁴ how much ontological purchase does this critique really have? With other examples, such as cloth, the mereological analysis proceeds because the purported ‘whole’ can be ontologically broken down into constituent elements such as threads, or even further into substantially-existent (*dravyasat*) infinitesimal particulars. But Dharmakīrti is pointedly *not* claiming that the two aspects of cognition are ontologically-distinct particulars. Indeed, the analysis proceeds from the opposite assertion: that cognition is an ontologically singular mental particular, from which its two aspects are not in fact separable. Indeed, the analysis proceeds from the opposite assertion: that cognition is an ontologically singular mental particular, from which its two aspects are not in fact separable. Dualistic cognitions are certainly erroneous (*bhrānti*), insofar as they misrepresent what is not-X as being X (*atasmiṃs tadgrahaḥ*), i.e., insofar as they appear with subjective and objective aspects. But how does this distorted *phenomenal* appearance establish the *ontological* unreality of dualistic cognition?

¹²⁴ The error of duality is an artifact of the *antarupaplava*, a fundamental distortion in the basis (*āśraya*) of ordinary experience, and as discussed in Chapter 1 is therefore nonconceptual. But linguistic reference to a subjective or “apprehending aspect” (*grāhakākāra*), and an objective or “apprehended aspect” (*grāhyākāra*), proceeds on the basis of conceptualization. Cognition is, in fact, ontologically singular; but just as, in the case of ‘fire,’ the causal capacity of a particular to produce warmth may be conceptually excluded from its other causal capacities, such as its ability to produce an image with the color ‘red,’ the causal capacity of a mental particular to produce the subjective aspect may be conceptually excluded from the causal capacity to produce the objective aspect—from which, again, neither the particular itself, nor the former (nor any other) causal capacity, is ultimately ontologically separate.

One possible response would be that the purpose of the “neither one nor many” analysis (*ekānekavicāra*) here is to establish the profound unintelligibility of the phenomenon under investigation, rather than its mere “unreality” (*abhūtatva*) in some simplistic sense. Śākyabuddhi notes, “It is easy to see that the spatially extended cognitive image which is asserted to be what one experiences does not ultimately exist because when one analyzes whether it is singular or plural, it does not withstand such an analysis.”¹²⁵ As Prueitt (2018, 61) explains,

Dharmakīrti provides a head-on argument against aligning how things work with what things are. In his shift from causal analysis to determine truth in the conventional world to neither-one-nor-many analysis to indicate that the structures required for causality to operate cannot ultimately really exist, Dharmakīrti denies that our theories about how our world works could be grounded in a reality that reaches beyond these theories. A mind-independent world populated by external objects is more than just unobservable; it is logically impossible. Even turning to a causal account of perception that eschews reliance on external objects cannot ground conventional truth in ultimate reality, for the divisions of a moment of cognition cannot withstand neither-one-nor-many analysis any more than external objects can. Determining what ultimately exists is not a question of getting causality right. Ultimately, causality itself, along with all the structures and divisions it presupposes, is an error.

In other words, the goal of this analysis is to demonstrate the radical disconnect between ordinary appearances and ultimate reality, up to and including the refutation of causality as such.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ PVT (506.21-507.2): *mngon sum du 'dod pa'i rags pa'i rnam pa ni gcig dang du mas dpyad mi bzad pa'i phyir don dam par med pa nyid yin pa ni bla ste* |

Translated in Dunne (2004, 405n14).

¹²⁶ It may be noted in this regard that the preceding analysis highlights Dharmakīrti’s continuity with Vasubandhu, in terms of what Gold (2015, 139) describes as Vasubandhu’s “dedication to the causal priority of reasoning.” As Ratié (2013, 368) notes, there is a “rationalist optimism at the basis of such arguments as Vasubandhu’s mereological critique of the external objects: these arguments all presuppose that what is absurd from a rational and theoretical point of view *must be impossible from a factual point of view*” (emphasis original). In other words, for Dharmakīrti, as for Vasubandhu, the fact that in logical principle the object-image can never perfectly conform to the actual object entails that in practical, factual epistemic terms it cannot serve as an ultimately-reliable source of knowledge about it.

On this note, Devendrabuddhi makes it clear that the “neither one nor many” analysis is meant to apply whether the cognitive object (i.e., the *prameya*) is understood to be internal or external to the mind, and thus serves as a bridge between the External Realist and Epistemic Idealist positions. That is to say, the conclusion that cognition cannot be truly real pertains, whether the *artha* is considered to be external (fundamental particles) or internal (imprints):

[Opponent:] “Even though there is no external object, the awareness that has that dualistic appearance ultimately exists.”

This also does not make sense, as the *internal determination* means the definitively determined experience of the subject-image which is internal (*nang gi bdag nyid = *adhyātmaka*) and determined to be a single entity. This is the one from which the other aspect *is different*; that other aspect is the one that is *established such that* in the considerations of childish beings *it seems external*. Whether or not external objects exist, cognition has a dual nature, but it does not ultimately make sense for a single cognition to have two cognitive images, because this would undermine [its] singularity.¹²⁷

Śākyabuddhi elaborates:

Due to these cognitive images that appear to be external and internal, cognition is dualistic, regardless of whether or not there are external objects. Hence, even if there are external objects, one must admit that awareness includes a cognitive image because without a cognitive image, apprehension is impossible. And even if external objects do not exist, cognition nevertheless arises with that cognitive image [i.e., with an image that appears to be external]. That being the case, in terms of just what appears (*gsal ba kho nar ~ prabhāsa eva*), awareness is dualistic. However, dualistic awareness is not real; rather, it is structured (*rnam par bzhag pa = vyavasthita*) through cognitive error because in conventional terms, real things are

¹²⁷ PVP (464.21-465.7): *phyi rol gyi don ni med mod kyi | rnam par shes pa nyid gnyis su snang ba can don dam par yod do zhe na | dedang de yang rigs pa ma yin no | 'di ltar nang gi yongs gcod nang gi bdag nyid gcig tu yongs su gcod pa 'dzin pa'i rnam pa nyams su myong ba nges pa yin no | cha 'di gang las gzhan | phyi rol bzhin du gnas pa yin | byis pa rnams kyis dpyad na'o | phyi rol gyi don yod pa dang med kyang rung | blo ngo bo gnyis pa can nyid yin gyi | blo gcig la don dam par rnam pa de gnyi ga rigs pa ma yin te | gcig nyid nyams pa'i phyr ro ||*

Translated in Dunne (2004, 406n15).

established in accord with the way that they are imaginatively determined. If that were not the case, how could the duality in a singular awareness be real?¹²⁸

In other words, the apparently dualistic structure of cognition cannot be real, because this duality is a form of variegation; no real entity can be variegated, because only that which is ontologically singular is actually real. Put slightly differently, if subject and object were ontologically distinct, then they could not both pertain to the same cognition.

This, then, is the terminus of our investigation into object-isomorphism (*arthasārūpya*). On the one hand, such isomorphism between the cognition and the object (*artha*) is necessary in order to establish that a given cognition is in any meaningful sense the awareness of that object. On the other hand, there can be no perfect correspondence between dimensionless particles (or, for that matter, psychophysical imprints) and an extended phenomenal appearance, which is subject to neither-one-nor-many analysis both on the basis of its extension, as well as on the basis of its necessary inclusion of both subject- and object-images.

This would seem to entail the conclusion that, just as the dualistic structure is erroneous, so too is the appearance of sensory content itself erroneous. However, rather than pursue that thread of argumentation, at this juncture, Devendrabuddhi's concern is only to establish that, no matter whether the *artha* is construed as internal or external, its *appearance* just is a cognition:

On the other hand, if the appearance of its object-image were not a cognitive appearance, then it would no longer be the cognitive image of the cognition's

¹²⁸ PVT (508.2-11): *nang dang phyi rol du snang ba'i rnam pa 'dis kyang phyi rol gyi don yod pa dang med kyang rung ste | blo ngo bo gnyis pa can nyid yin no | de ltar na phyi rol gyi don yod na yang shes pa rnam pa dang bcas pa khas blang bar bya ste | rnam pa med pas 'dzin pa mi srid pa'i phyir ro | phyi rol gyi don med na yang shes pa nyid de'i rnam par skye ba de ltar na gsal ba kho nar ngo bo nyid gnis pa can yin no | 'on kyang ngo bo nyid gnyis pa can gyi shes pa de yang bden pa ma yin par 'khrul pa'i dbang gis rnam par gzhag pa yin te | ji ltar mngon par zhen pa bzhin du tha snyad la dngos por rnam par gzhag pa'i phyir ro || de ltar ma yin na ji ltar na blo gcig la ngo bo gnyis bden par 'gyur.*

Translated in Dunne (2004, 406n15).

object; that being the case, one could not say, “This is the awareness of that” just by virtue of the mere fact of experience. Hence, one must accept that the image is similar to the cognition’s object (*artha*). Moreover, there is no similar image other than what is internal to cognition, so cognition itself is what appears to cognition.¹²⁹

This is the essential insight which provides for the final definitive shift to Epistemic Idealism. As such, it will be considered in greater detail below, when we finally return to PV 3.320-332 *ad* PS 1.9a (“alternatively, in this case, reflexive awareness is the result”).¹³⁰ Indeed, as we will shortly see, Dharmakīrti ultimately articulates this shift precisely in terms of reflexive awareness as the “result” (*phala*). By way of setting up that discussion, then, let us conclude this section with Śākyabuddhi’s explanation of the difference between reflexive awareness and the subjective aspect of cognition—a notoriously slippery¹³¹ distinction, which is not always rigorously-maintained—from his comments on this verse (PV 3.212):

With the word “subject” we do not mean to express reflexive awareness—the internal cognition that arises in various forms such as the pleasant and the unpleasant—such that [by expressing it with the term “subject” we would be saying that] it does not exist. Rather, [we mean the following]: cognitive appearances such as blue seem to be external to awareness, but when one analyzes whether those appearances are singular or plural, they are unable to withstand that analysis; hence, they are not suchness (*de kho na nyid* = **tattva*).

Therefore, there is ultimately no object that is distinct from awareness, and since that [object] does not exist, we say “the subject does not exist”; in saying this we mean the “subject” that occurs in expressions or concepts that are constructed (*rab tu brtags pa* = **prakalpita*) in dependence on the [apparently external object], as in “This is the real entity that is the subject which apprehends that object, which is the real entity that it cognizes.” Since an agent and its patient are constructed in

¹²⁹ PVP (465.7-12): *ci ste yang de gzung ba'i rnam par snang bar gyur pa | blo'i snang ba ma yin pa de'i tshe | blo'i yul gyi rnam pa ma yin pa de ltar na nyams su myong ba yod pa tsam las 'di'i shes pa 'di yin no zhes bya bar mi 'gyur bas na | blo'i don dang 'dra ba 'dod par bya'o | de yang nang du 'dus pa nas gzhan 'dra ba gcig yoa pa ma yin pa de ltar na | blo nyid blor snang ba can yin no ||*

Translated in Dunne (2004, 406n15).

¹³⁰ **svasaṃvittiḥ phalaṃ vātra**

¹³¹ See Chapter 5, Section I: [Reflexive Awareness and “Self-Appearance”](#) (*svābhāsa*).

dependence upon each other, these two [i.e., subject and object] are posited in dependence on each other. The expression “subject” does not express mere reflexive awareness, which is the essential nature of cognition itself. The essential nature of cognition is not constructed in mutual dependence on something else because it arises as such from its own causes. The essential nature of cognition is established as mere reflexive awareness. Since it is devoid of the above-described object and subject, it is said to be non-dual.¹³²

In other words, as will be discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 5, subjectivity and reflexivity are closely related, but the latter is not reducible to the former, because reflexive awareness is the essential nature of cognition, while subjectivity only exists within the dualistic structure of subject and object, and is therefore strictly a form of nonconceptual error or distortion. Before turning to the analysis of subjectivity, however, let us first examine Dharmakīrti’s account of the relationship between reflexive awareness and ontological idealism.

¹³² PVT (509.19-510.17): *'di ltar 'dzin pa'i sgras nang rtogs pa'i ngo bo dga' ba dang mi dga' ba la sogs pa'i rnam pa du mar 'byung ba can rang rig par mi brjod na | gang gis na de yang med par 'gyur | 'on kyang de rnam par shes pa las phyi rol bzhin du sngon po la sogs par snang ba gang yin pa de gcig dang du mas dpyad mi bzod pa nyid kyi phyir de kho na nyid ma yin no || de bas na re zhig don dam par rnam par shes pa'i gzung ba tha dad pa yod pa ma yin te | de med pa'i phyir de la ltos nas rab tu brtags pa'i rtogs pa'i ngo bo'i gzung ba 'di'i 'dzin pa'i ngo bo 'di yin no zhes bya ba'i 'dzin pa de yod pa ma yin no zhes brjod de | byed pa po dang las phan tshun ltos pas rab tu brtags pa nyid yin pa'i phyir ro || de nyid kyi phyir phan tshun ltos nas de dag rnam par gzhag pa'i phyir ro zhes bshad pa yin no || rtogs pa'i ngo bo rang rig pa tsam yang 'dzin pa'i sgras brjod pa ma yin no || rtogs pa'i ngo bo ni phan tshun ltos nas rab tu brtags pa ma yin te | rang gi rgyu nyid las de de ltar skyes pa nyid kyi phyir ro || rtogs pa'i ngo bo de nyid rang rig pa tsam du gnas so || ji skad du bshad pa'i gzung ba dang 'dzin pa dang bral ba nyid kyi phyir gnyis med pa zhes brjod do ||*

Translated in Dunne (2004, 407n14).

Chapter Four: Reflexive Awareness and Idealism

According to Dharmakīrti, the awareness of an object is nothing more than the appearance of a cognition with the form of that object. Since cognition is ontologically simple and unitary, and since there is accordingly no discrete agent (kartṛ) nor patient (karman) of cognition, awareness is only ever directly (pratyakṣataḥ) aware “of” itself, reflexively. Therefore, no matter whether the causal stimulus of sensory cognition is considered to be external extramental matter, or the activation of internal mental imprints (vāsanā), reflexive awareness can be understood as the “result” (phala) of every cognition. Importantly, Dharmakīrti’s analysis of this point also constitutes his argument for an idealistic ontology as the best possible account of conventional reality. Ultimately, however, the nondual nature of cognition, and the concomitant absence of any real structure of agent, means, and result—combined with the fact that, on the highest idealistic account, only defiled (kliṣṭa) mental imprints could possibly be the causal stimulus of sensory cognition—point toward a final teleological or eleutheriological state, wherein neither differentiated sensory content, nor pleasure and pain as ordinarily (that is, “subjectively” or “first-personally”) experienced, remain.

Pramāṇasamuccaya 1.9-12, the concluding three verses of the *svamata* (“our own [Buddhist] view”) section of PS 1, together with the corresponding verses of the *Pramāṇavārttika* (PV 3.320-539) and *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (PVin 1.34-58), constitute perhaps the single most crucial passage of the Dinnāga-Dharmakīrti epistemological corpus.¹ Dinnāga’s basic argument in this passage is straightforward, if dense: although, in the specific case of sensory cognition, it is possible to regard the cognitive appearance of a putatively external object as both the means for knowing (*pramāṇa*) that object, and the resulting knowledge (*phala*) of it, reflexive awareness may also be considered the “result” (*phala*) of every cognition—even when it is asserted that external objects exist—just insofar as (1) every object is only ever known “by means of” cognition itself, in the form of this object-appearance; and (2) each and every cognition—whether conceptual or non-conceptual, genuinely perceptual or pseudo-perceptual, and so on—is inherently, reflexively self-presenting,

¹ The present discussion is greatly indebted to Moriyama (2008) and Kellner (2010), particularly regarding the translation and interpretation of PS 1.9-12. Iwata (1991), Chu (2008), Kyuma (2005), Arnold (2008) and (2010), and Kellner (2017a) and (2017b) are also important touchstones for Dharmakīrti’s treatment of this passage.

self-manifesting, or self-illuminating (PS 1.9). Therefore, the supposed triadic structure of epistemic object, means, and result—as mapped, for example, onto the triad of the objective aspect, subjective aspect, and reflexive awareness—does not truly exist in reality, because the elements of this triad are not ontologically distinct (PS 1.10). Finally, the fact that cognition has both objective and subjective appearances, as well as the fact of its reflexively self-illuminating nature, can be established on the basis of memory; and, if cognition were not reflexively self-presenting in this manner, there would be various unacceptable consequences (PS 1.11-12).

Needless to say, there is a great deal to understand about these topics. Indeed, Dharmakīrti’s expansion of just these three verses takes up nearly half of the length of PV 3 as a whole, and contains the full extent of his argumentation for an idealistic ontology (which, it should be noted, is not an explicit feature of Diñnāga’s presentation in the PS).² In this chapter, we will systematically examine the various threads of Dharmakīrti’s discussion corresponding to PS 1.9a (i.e., PV 3.320-337), where Dharmakīrti most clearly and emphatically articulates the “shift” to an idealistic perspective; Dharmakīrti’s unpacking of PS 1.9bcd (i.e., PV 3.338-352) will be discussed in Chapter 5; and, finally, PV 3.353-366 *ad* PS 1.10 will be discussed in the Conclusion. Although in this chapter and the next we will occasionally refer to material from Dharmakīrti’s treatment of PS 1.11-12 (PV 3.367-539), especially the *sahopalambhaniyama* or “necessity that [the subjective and objective aspects of cognition always] appear together,” a systematic study of this final portion of the *Pramāṇavārttika*—which is concerned, in large part, with the structure of memory and its relation to reflexive awareness—must unfortunately remain a desideratum for now.³

² Diñnāga’s arguments for idealism are primarily located in the ĀP(V), translated by Duckworth et al. (2016).

³ For a translation and analysis of PV 3.425-483, see King (2018).

We begin our analysis here by examining Dinnāga's statement at PS 1.9a, that "alternatively, in this context, reflexive awareness [may be considered] the result" (*svasaṃvittiḥ phalaṃ vātra*), in light of Dharmakīrti's usage of this technical point as the basis for his articulation of Yogācāra idealism. We then pivot to an extended discussion of Dharmakīrti's idealistic perspective, with a particular emphasis on the issue of the causal substrate of appearances, and the thorny problem of whether and how external objects may be inferred, before concluding with some reflections on the implications that this line of reasoning has for the "ultimate epistemic instrument" (*pāramārthikapramāṇa*).

I. Reflexive Awareness as the Result

A. The “Slots” of *Pramāṇa* Theory

1. *Pramāṇa Theory as Language-Game*

As discussed in Chapter 3, PV 3.320 marks the beginning of Dharmakīrti’s treatment of PS 1.9a: “alternatively, in this context, reflexive awareness is the result” (*svasaṃvittiḥ phalaṃ vātra*). This treatment is primarily framed as an explanation of the different ways in which the various elements of cognition may be fitted into the “slots” required by the pre-existing *pramāṇa* discourse. Specifically, these elements are the *pramāṇa* (“epistemic instrument”), the *prameya* (“epistemic object”), and the *phala* (“resultant cognitive activity”), discussed in Chapter 2.⁴

To review the flow of argumentation: Dīnnāga first states at PS 1.8cd that the epistemic instrument—initially identified as cognition’s quality of possessing the image of the object (*viṣayākāratā*)—is itself the resultant cognitive activity, “because [the object-image] is cognized simultaneously with the intermediate activity” (*svyāpārapratītatvāt*, PS 1.8c₁), which is just to say that there is in fact no such intermediate causal activity (*nirvyāpāra*).⁵ Dīnnāga then explains that reflexive awareness may alternatively be considered the result. The basic underlying reason is that every object-appearance (*viṣayābhāsa*) is always necessarily accompanied by the “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) of cognition—at a first approximation,⁶ the cognition’s subjective or

⁴ See Chapter 2, Section I.A: [Karana, Sādhakatama, and Pramāṇa](#).

⁵ See Chapter 2, Section II.B: [Cognition Has No “Functioning” \(vyāpāra\)](#).

⁶ It should be noted that the Sanskrit word *svābhāsa* does not appear in PV 3. Dharmakīrti’s preferred terminology of the “subjective aspect” (*grāhakākāra*), while clearly closely related to Dīnnāga’s concept of the “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) of cognition, was also likely intended to clean up some of the ambiguity or “slipperiness” in the latter term. See below, Chapter 5, Section I: [Reflexive Awareness and “Self-Appearance” \(svābhāsa\)](#).

affective features—from which the object-appearance is not ontologically separate. Hence, every ordinary (i.e., dualistic) cognition is actually a case of the mind reflexively presenting this subject-object structure. Therefore, the “resultant” (*phala*) cognitive activity is just this reflexive awareness of both appearances.

To clarify further, the idea here is that every cognition is reflexively cognized without any intermediate causal activity; or, put slightly differently, that every cognition is cognized simultaneously with the strictly metaphorical “intermediate activity” (*vyāpāra*) of presenting or cognizing “itself,” including its affective features, such as its pleasurability or painfulness. We will discuss the affective features of cognition, which are built into the subject-image or “aspect of the apprehender” (*grāhakākāra*), in Chapter 5. Here, the key point is just that, once more, cognition is not ultimately separable into discrete subjective and objective aspects, nor is the reflexively-aware nature of cognition in any way ontologically distinct from these two aspects.

Thus, in one crucially important sense, to say that the object-appearance constitutes both the instrument and the result is *already* to say that reflexive awareness is the result. This is, indeed, the primary force of Dinnāga’s argument at PS 1.9a. On the other hand, neither Dinnāga nor Dharmakīrti argues that, by the same token, the subjective aspect of cognition might perhaps be considered the result;⁷ and, indeed, at PV 3.346, in the context of PS 1.9cd, Dharmakīrti goes out of his way to specifically deny that this subjective aspect should be understood as the *pramāṇa*, at least with regard to the cognition of putatively external objects.⁸ Why might this be?

⁷ The relationship between the “first-personal” subject-image (*grāhakākāra* or *svābhāsa*) and reflexive awareness is extremely slippery, and will be explored at length in Chapter 5. These concepts are exceptionally closely related, to the point that they are easily conflated. But one way of understanding the difference between the *grāhakākāra* and *svasamvitti* lies precisely in the fact that, at various points, Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti refer to both of these as the *pramāṇa*, but they refer to only the latter as the *phala*.

⁸ Cf. PV 3.346, discussed in Chapter 5 Section III.C.1: [Cognition and Causal Activity, Revisited](#).

To answer this question, it is helpful to see how the *pramāṇa* discourse involves a kind of philosophical “language-game.” The idea behind this “game” is that, depending upon the discursive context, the different conceptually-abstracted elements of cognition may be “slotted” into the various thematic roles required by the *pramāṇa* system. For example, as discussed in Chapter 2, Kumāriḷa is content to play by many different sets of rules, as long as the ontological distinction between *pramāṇa* and *phala* is maintained. Thus, as Taber (2005, 19–20) explains, according to Kumāriḷa, “the *pramāṇa* could be a cognition of a qualifying feature of an object, such as the color blue, and the *phala* an awareness of that same object as qualified by that feature, for example, ‘The pot is blue.’ Or the *pramāṇa* could be a *nonconceptualized* perception of the qualifying feature and the *phala* a conceptualized awareness of it. Or the *pramāṇa* could be an awareness of the qualified object, the *phala* an awareness of it as desirable, undesirable, or neither ([ŚV *Pratyakṣapariccheda*] 70–73).”⁹ The key point, for Kumāriḷa, is that Diṅṅāga’s rule—that the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) and the resultant cognitive activity (*phala*) must be ontologically identical—is unacceptable. Kumāriḷa is willing to play by nearly any set of rules except that one.

For Dharmakīrti, on the other hand, the central contextual question governing the game concerns whether or not the existence of mind-independent or “external” (*bāhya*) matter is admitted. Thus, for example, in a context wherein external objects (*bāhyārtha*) are admitted, there is no problem with considering the epistemic instrument—and therefore, by extension, the result—to be cognition’s isomorphism with respect to the object (*arthasārūpya*), or its property of possessing the appearance of the object (*arthābhāsātā*).¹⁰ But whether the epistemic object

⁹ See Chapter 2, Section I.C: [Determinate Perception and Temporal Sequence](#).

¹⁰ See Chapter 3, Section I: [Object-Isomorphism \(*arthasārūpya*\)](#).

(*prameya*) is understood to exist externally or not, reflexive awareness may always be construed as the result, because every cognition is always reflexively-experienced. And, as we shall see, in the final idealistic context, reflexive awareness *must* be construed as the instrument, precisely because it is *only* “by means of” reflexive awareness that there is ever any knowledge, or cognition, at all.

Regardless of the ontological context, in other words, every *pramāṇa*-theoretical account that is viable by Dharmakīrti’s standard necessarily possesses certain features in common. Chief among these necessary features is the possibility of construing reflexive awareness as the metaphorical “result,” because it is only *as reflexively-experienced* that there is ever any experience of anything at all.¹¹ That is to say, reflexive awareness may always be construed as the result, even if in the External Realist context it is also possible for the object-appearance to be construed as the “result.” In the Epistemic Idealist context, however, reflexive awareness must be construed as the result.

2. *Perceptuality and Nonconceptuality, Revisited*

As discussed in Chapter 1, the preceding analysis also extends to conceptual cognition. Conceptual cognition, no less than nonconceptual cognition, is reflexively-experienced. In these analytic

¹¹ Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti’s defense of this position against their non-Buddhist interlocutors lies outside the scope of the present study. Briefly, however, their most important argument is that, if cognition were not inherently self-experiencing, but had to be experienced by a subsequent second cognition, then there would be an infinite regress, such that a third cognition would be necessary to experience the second cognition, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Hence, as Dinnāga writes in PS 1.12ab₁, “If [a cognition] is experienced by means of another cognition, there is an infinite regress” (*jñānāntareṇānubhave ’niṣṭhā*). For a critical evaluation of Dinnāga’s argument, see Kellner (2011). Dharmakīrti’s comments corresponding to PS 1.12ab₁, specifically, are found in PV 3.472-483; however, he also engages with the infinite regress argument in the context of his critique of the Mīmāṃsā denial of reflexive awareness, found in the immediately preceding passage, PV 3.425-471 *ad* PS 1.11d (*na hy asāv avibhāvite*, “because what is not experienced [cannot be remembered]”), most particularly in PV 3.439-440. For a translation of PV 3.425-483, see King (2018). See also Appendix B, [PST *ad* PS\(V\) 1.12](#), for Jinendrabuddhi’s comments on this passage.

terms, a conceptual cognition (*vikalpa*) is intelligible as the experience of a specific type of mental object, constructed (\sqrt{klp}) through “exclusion” (*apoha*), that is cognized by the sixth “mental consciousness” (*manovijñāna*).¹² As discussed in the context of PS 1.7ab and PV 3.287 *ad cit*,¹³ even conceptual cognitions are in this sense “perceptual,” and thus in a corresponding sense “nonconceptual,” insofar as they are reflexively-experienced. That is to say, the *experience* of having a conceptual cognition is fundamentally nonconceptual, because according to the Buddhist epistemological tradition, experience *as such* is fundamentally nonconceptual. This is the central insight informing Dinnāga’s assertion, at PS 1.9b, that the conceptual determination of the object has the nature of reflexive awareness (*tadrūpo hy arthaniścayaḥ*), a point which will be analyzed in greater detail in Chapter 5.¹⁴

The upshot here is that, as also discussed in Chapter 1, every cognition—whether “perceptual” or not, whether “instrumental” or not, whether structured by the distortion of erroneous phenomenological duality or not, whether conceptual or not, and so on—just insofar as it appears, is necessarily a *pratyakṣa-pramāṇa* (i.e., a “direct perception” in the technical sense) with respect to itself as a mental particular (Dunne 2004, 275):

[One] can claim that *all* cognitions are instrumental in a minimal sense. Although neither Dharmakīrti nor Devendrabuddhi is explicit on this issue, it would appear that an alternative interpretation of *arthakriyā* must also be applied on this interpretation, since the entire point here is to evaluate a cognition without reference to goals. Following Nagatomi, the alternative interpretation suggested—but never clearly stated—by Dharmakīrti or the earliest commentators is that of *arthakriyā* as mere causal functionality: an entity has *arthakriyā* in the simple sense that it has effects. On this interpretation of *arthakriyā*, an awareness would be trustworthy in the minimal sense that it is a real mental event: it has *arthakriyāsthiti* in the mere

¹² For a discussion of the mental consciousness and its objects, see Chapter 1, Section II.C: [Mental Perception](#).

¹³ See Chapter 1, Section III.A.3: [Reflexive Awareness as Pramāṇa](#).

¹⁴ See Chapter 5, Section III: [The Affective Features of Conceptual Determination](#).

sense that it is established (*sthita*) as a causally efficient moment of consciousness. This minimal trustworthiness [i.e., *prāmāṇya*] amounts to the claim that, regardless of the determinate interpretation of a cognition's content, one can always reliably know that one *is* cognizing. Since this minimal trustworthiness is applicable to *all* awarenesses, all awarenesses can be considered trustworthy.

Hence, even cognitions that lack “instrumentality” (*prāmāṇya*) from the perspective of accomplishing worldly aims, or which are “distorted” (*bhrānta*) by duality or conceptuality (or anything else), may be considered “perceptions” (i.e., *pratyakṣas*) in this technical and narrowly-circumscribed sense.

As discussed in Chapter 1, for example, the misleading nonconceptual cognition of two moons (*dvicandra*) or myodesopsic hairs (*timira, keśa*) is both the instrument by means of which there is a *reliable awareness of the unreliable appearance* of two moons, and itself the *actual reliable awareness of that unreliable appearance* (Dunne 2004, 278):

[In] the case of a cognition in which appears the accomplishment of one's aim, it is the causal functionality of that cognition itself—the very fact of its appearance—that makes it trustworthy. In other words, the trustworthiness of the visual perception of fire is that it leads one to have, for example, a subsequent sensation of warmth. But the trustworthiness of that sensation of warmth is nothing but the fact of that sensation itself. In this sense, the trustworthiness of a cognition in which appears the accomplishment of one's aim (*arthakriyānirbhāsa*) is, much like reflexive awareness and the perception of illusory hairs, based primarily upon its *arthakriyā* as the mere causal efficiency of the cognition itself.

In just this narrow sense, then, the reflexive awareness of a conceptual cognition is both the reliable instrument (*pramāṇa*) “by means of which” there is awareness of the underlying concept, as well as the “resulting” (*phala*) awareness of that concept. This is because the conceptual content is presented nonconceptually, which is to say, “by means of” reflexive awareness.

Irrespective of the ontological context or epistemological frame, in other words, the reflexive awareness of conceptual determinations may also be considered the resulting cognitive

activity, which is to say, the actual awareness of the concept (*vikalpa, sāmānya*) or determinate judgment (*niścaya*) in question. For example, reflexive awareness presents the determination, “That is a ‘jug,’” in exactly the same manner that it presents sensory content. Furthermore, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, precisely because this content is not ontologically distinct from the subjective or affective features of cognition—which is to say, again, that reflexive awareness simultaneously presents both the object-image and the subject-image—the awareness of the ‘jug’ just is the awareness of one’s affective disposition toward the ‘jug.’

But to conclude this brief introductory sketch by way of review: on Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti’s model, each and every cognition, just by virtue of its very existence, has the reflexive awareness of “itself” as its own “result.” Everything that appears, appears by virtue of the fact that it is presented to, manifest in, or illuminated by cognition (i.e., *prakāśatayā*). As we will see, this is the underlying justification for Dharmakīrti’s shift to Epistemic Idealism.

3. A General Overview of PS 1.9

To return to the question posed above, though, as to why the subject-image (i.e., the *grāhakākāra* or *svābhāsa*) is not typically construed as the epistemic instrument, and similarly can never be construed as the result: the key point in this regard is that the subject-image does not typically¹⁵ fit into a discursively-acceptable “slot” for the *pramāṇa*, except in a very specific Epistemic Idealist context, wherein the subject-image has been wholly identified with (or subsumed under) reflexive

¹⁵ It should be noted that, while Dharmakīrti only *specifies* that the subject-image should be construed as the epistemic instrument in relation to the knowledge of an internal epistemic object (i.e., an *antarjñeya*), this is not necessarily to say that the subject-image can *never* be the instrument within an External Realist ontology. The paradigmatic example of such a case would be introspection, or attentive awareness to one’s own present affective state. Indeed, the (reflexive) awareness of the affective features of experience, such as desire or pleasure, is a crucial part of Dharmakīrti’s overarching argument; see Chapter 5.

awareness.¹⁶ In such a case, however, the duality of subject and object no longer applies, rendering the subject-image—which depends for its theoretical salience, its distinctiveness as aspect of cognition, upon a dualistic opposition with the object-image—unsuitable to be considered as the *phala*. But these points are not really understandable independently of the rest of PS(V) 1.9:

Alternatively, reflexive awareness is the result,

For cognition arises with a double appearance, its own appearance (*svābhāsa*) and the appearance of the object (*viśayābhāsa*). The result is the reflexive awareness of both appearances.¹⁷ Why?

Because the determination of the object has [reflexive awareness] as its nature.

For, when the object (*artha*) is a cognition, inclusive of the object-field (*saviśaya*),¹⁸ at that time, one cognizes the object in conformity with how it is reflexively experienced, i.e., as either desirable or undesirable. But when the epistemic object (*prameya*) is strictly an external object, then,

The epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) is the property of having the appearance of the object-field, on the part of that [cognition].

For, in this case, even though the nature [of the cognition] is [still] reflexively-known by the cognition, nevertheless, the epistemic instrument is just the [cognition's] property of possessing the appearance of the object, without regard to that [reflexively-known nature]. This is because the object is

Known by means of that [appearance]. || 9 ||

¹⁶ See the [Conclusion](#).

¹⁷ Arnold (2010, 349n62), (2012, 171–72) has repeatedly suggested that *tasyobhayābhāsasya* should be translated as “[cognition’s self-awareness] having either appearance.” This interpretation is both grammatically and philosophically untenable; for a discussion of this point, see Appendix A, note 4.

¹⁸ The interpretation of *saviśayam* here has been a matter of some controversy, centered around whether it indicates that PS 1.9b is intended as an exclusively idealistic (“Yogācāra”) account, or whether it is supposed to be applicable in all circumstances (that is, to a “Sautrāntika” perspective as well). See the discussion in Appendix A, note 5. Briefly, however, it is perhaps best to split the difference: Dīnāga’s point, in essence, is that even the Sautrāntikas must accept that cognition has no *direct* access to any external object. Even if there are external objects, in other words, it must be understood that “the object is a cognition, inclusive of the object-field” (*saviśayam jñānam arthaḥ*). Indeed, this may be seen as a pivotal juncture on the “sliding scale,” highlighting how even those who maintain the existence of external objects must nevertheless acknowledge that external objects are only ever known insofar as they are the object-field of a cognition, paving the way for the acceptance of an idealistic ontology. See also Chapter 5, Section III.B.1: [Dharmakīrti and Jinendrabuddhi on PS 1.9b](#).

For, in whichever way the image of the object appears to cognition, as desirable or undesirable or whatever, the object-field is cognized in just that form. Thus, in reliance upon the reflexive awareness of a cognition [that is presented as having] multiple¹⁹ images, the property of being an epistemic instrument and the property of being an epistemic object are metaphorically assigned (*upacaryate*) like this and that. But all phenomena are devoid of causal activity (*nirvyāpāra*).²⁰

Dinnāga’s presentation of reflexive awareness as the “result” thus incorporates a discussion of both the objective and the subjective aspects of cognition, as well as the simultaneously- and reflexively-experienced nature of both of these aspects. The particularly close relationship between the subjective aspect and reflexive awareness is another integral element of the presentation here, which also touches upon the affective features of experience, such as the felt desirability or undesirability of the experiential object.

We will consider these points in detail below. The upshot of this argument, in broad outline, is that the reflexive awareness of subjective, affective states such as desire or pleasure, themselves held to be “perceptual” (*pratyakṣa*) in the technical sense,²¹ is ultimately generalizable to the reflexive awareness of all cognitions. But before turning to an extended analysis of the subjective aspect of cognition, which we will examine in Chapter 5, let us first consider the flow of Dharmakīrti’s argumentation concerning PS 1.9 in broad outline.

¹⁹ That is, two images (the image of the apprehender and the image of the apprehended). See Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.9d](#).

²⁰ Steinkellner (2005, 4): **svasaṃvittiḥ phalaṃ vātra dvyābhāsaṃ hi jñānam utpadyate svābhāsaṃ viśayābhāsaṃ ca | tasyobhayābhāsasya yat svasaṃvedanaṃ tat phalam | kim kāraṇam | tadrūpo hy arthaniścayaḥ | yadā hi saviśayaṃ jñānam arthaḥ, tadā svasaṃvedanānurūpam artham pratipadyata iṣṭam aniṣṭam vā | yadā tu bāhya evārthaḥ prameyaḥ, tadā viśayābhāsataivāsya pramāṇam | tadā hi jñānasvasaṃvedyam api svarūpam anapekṣyārthābhāsataivāsya pramāṇam | yasmāt so ’rthaḥ tena miyate || 9 || yathā yathā hy arthākāro jñāne pratibhāti śubhāśubhādītvena, tattadrūpaḥ sa viśayaḥ pramiyate | evaṃ jñānasvaṃvedanaṃ anekākāram upādāya tathā tathā pramāṇaprameyatvam upacaryate | nirvyāpāras tu sarvadharmāḥ ||**

²¹ That is, non-conceptual (*kalpanāpoḍha*) and non-erroneous (*abhrānta*). See below, Chapter 5, Section II: [Pleasure and Pain](#).

As discussed above, Dharmakīrti's comments on PS 1.9a begin at PV 3.320, where Dharmakīrti asks the central animating question of PV 3: "What is object-awareness?" (*kārthasaṃvit*). After running through various possibilities concerning the relationship between objects and awareness in PV 3.321-325, and finding them all to be insufficient or inconsistent (*vyabhicāri*), in PV 3.326-332 Dharmakīrti eventually settles on the fact that experience itself is the only thing that is ever *directly* experienced. This entails that the apparent bifurcation of experience into an experiencing cognition and an experienced object is strictly erroneous, "like the [purported] difference between myodesopic hair and the cognition [of that hair]."²² This prompts the interlocutor to ask, at PV 3.333, whether the "objective" contents of sensory cognition may be understood to derive their appearance from extramental matter. In PV 3.333-336, Dharmakīrti answers in the negative: not only is there "no isolated external object,"²³ in fact the cause responsible for the phenomenal characteristics of these contents (such as the appearance of blue or the appearance of yellow) must finally be understood as an "activator of latent karmic imprints,"²⁴ which is to say, not as an external object at all, but on the contrary as a purely "internal" (*antar*) or mental entity.

4. *Rational Analysis and the Nature of Reality*

In this way, although he does not frame the issue exactly in terms of a distinction between the relative and the ultimate, Dharmakīrti asserts an idealistic ontology to constitute the best possible account of relative or conventional truth (*saṃvṛttisatya*). In other words, with regard to the

²² PV 3.331d: *keśādiṅṅānabhedavat*.

²³ PV 3.335d: *nārtho bāhyo 'sti kevalaḥ*.

²⁴ PV 3.336b: *vāsanāyāḥ prabodhakam*.

question of how best to account for the nature of the objects of our experience within the “logical space of reasons,” Dharmakīrti clearly comes down on the idealistic, Yogācāra side of the debate.

Now, it may perhaps fairly be asked to what extent this account is intelligible as “conventional,” since it relies on exotic notions such as the storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) and latent karmic imprints (*vāsanā*).²⁵ We are certainly far afield from the ordinary world of mid-size dry goods. But it should be noted that this is a problem for any “atomic” theory of reality, precisely insofar as the world of our experience is not ordinarily presented to us as being comprised of indivisible particles. In fact, the contemporary scientific paradigm is arguably in even more dire straits, insofar as the picture of reality that it presents is even more radically disconnected from the world of ordinary experience: the theoretical picture offered by contemporary particle physics is full of bizarre phenomena, such as “superstrings” vibrating in the eleven-dimensional space of “M-Theory,”²⁶ or the spontaneous production of quarks in quantum chromodynamics (QCD), which prevents a single individual “free quark” from being isolable *even in theory*—“there is no isolated external object” (*nārtho bahyo ’sti kevalaḥ*), indeed—calling into question what it would even mean to speak of “a quark” in the singular as a theoretical entity.²⁷

This is not necessarily to dispute the contemporary scientific paradigm; perhaps there really are eleven dimensions, rather than the four with which we are experientially acquainted. The point is simply this: the rational investigation of conventional reality, pushed to its utmost limits,

²⁵ Many thanks to Sara McClintock and Mark Risjord for raising this question.

²⁶ Cf. Greene (1999, 184-209; 283-319).

²⁷ Greiner et al. (2007, 125) note that, “Since no free quarks have been observed experimentally, one imagines that the quarks are tightly confined inside the hadrons [i.e., larger composite particles, which are modelled as containing the quarks like a balls inside a bag: this is the “bag model”]. Inside of this confinement volume they behave mainly as free particles. [However,] all bag models must be regarded as pure phenomenology [i.e., as an informal description of experimental results, as opposed to mathematically rigorous theory]. It is at present unclear how strong any relationships between such models and QCD are.”

inevitably leads to counterintuitive conclusions about the nature of conventional reality, pointing toward the radical incommensurability of our ordinary deluded experience with the ultimate nature of reality as such. Put slightly differently: is a causal explanation of gross phenomena that appeals to activated karmic imprints really less inherently plausible than one which appeals to “supersymmetric branes”? Can we even be certain that these are not, in some way, the same thing?

In any case, the key point underlying Dharmakīrti’s shift to idealism at this juncture is the analytic critique of “object-isomorphism” (*arthasārūpya*) developed in PV 3.194-224 and referenced at PV 3.320-322, as discussed in Chapter 3. The issue here, in other words, is not merely that an “isolated” external object is never available to sensory cognition—though this is, of course, an important element of Dharmakīrti’s analysis. But this argument builds on that earlier critique: what would it even mean for sensory cognition to derive its object-appearance from extramental matter? To begin with, sensory cognition could never perfectly “conform” to extramental matter (i.e., to fundamental particles), since cognition does not appear to be “of” dimensionless particles, but rather seems to have the appearance of gross extended phenomena. Furthermore, while the object-appearance may have some practical utility, it cannot be “instrumental” in the ultimate sense: that is to say, it cannot afford access to “suchness” or the nature of reality as such (i.e., *tattva*), because “the emptiness of duality is precisely the suchness of [awareness].”²⁸ This lack of ultimate instrumentality would remain, in other words, even if one were to somehow have (as some highly advanced yogins²⁹ have) a cognition that appeared to be “of” fundamental particles, because such a cognition—being possessed of an object-appearance, even one so exotic and refined—

²⁸ PV 3.213cd: *tasmāt tad eva tasyāpi tattvaṃ yā dvayaśūnyatā*.

²⁹ Taber (2005, 179n23).

would thereby necessarily also possess a subject-appearance, and would therefore be structured by the distortion of duality.³⁰

Since even such a hypothetical “perfect-fidelity” representation of extramental fundamental particles would have to be dualistically structured, in other words, such a cognition still would not constitute an *ultimately* instrumental awareness (i.e., a *pāramārthikapramāṇa*), because it would still be presenting itself inaccurately: a cognition, being real and causally efficacious, must be ontologically simple and irreducible, meaning that it cannot possess parts, therefore its apparent bifurcation into subjective and objective elements is strictly erroneous.³¹ And while it may perhaps in theory be possible to acknowledge this point, while still stubbornly clinging to an ontology that asserts the existence of extramental matter, Dharmakīrti’s “neither one nor many” (*ekānekavicāra*) analysis ultimately obviates the ontological question, since whether it is derived from internal or external stimuli, sensory appearance as such must finally be understood as deceptive or inaccurate (i.e., *viśamvādi*). That is to say, as will be discussed in the Conclusion to this study, in the final analysis the very notion of an “object” (whether internal or external) becomes incoherent: “In reality, the nature which phenomena are perceived to have does not exist, since they do not have either a singular or a manifold nature” (PV 3.359).³²

In sum, Dharmakīrti clearly maintains an idealistic ontology to constitute the best possible account of conventional reality (*saṃvṛtisatya*), which is to say, the rational explanation of our ordinary everyday experience with the fewest number and least impactful of theoretical gaps or

³⁰ Recall PV 3.218: “The true nature of reality (*tattva*) is not known by any [ordinary beings] whose vision is not supreme, because it is impossible for them [to experience cognition] without the error (*viplava*) of subject and object.”

³¹ Recall PV 3.212cd: “Hence, the appearance of difference in an [actually] undifferentiated awareness is cognitive distortion.”

³² *bhāvā yena nirūpyante tadrūpaṃ nāsti tattvataḥ | yasmād ekam anekaṃ vā rūpaṃ teṣāṃ na vidyate || 359 ||*

inconsistencies. However, as Dharmakīrti continues his relentless analysis of sensory cognition, pushing his readers ever further up the “sliding scale,” even this idealistic account must eventually fall by the wayside. Rational analysis can only reach so close to ultimate truth.

B. Object, Object-Image, and Object-Awareness

1. *The Cause of Object-Awareness*

Up to this point, the analysis of the objective aspect of cognition has proceeded on the basis of the assumption that the object-image is the cognitive representation of some extramental stimulus. To review: on the basic, External Realist account, it is held that an external object (*bāhyārtha*) comes into causal contact with the sense-faculties, producing an “internal” (*antar*) sensory cognition as the immediately-subsequent effect of this causal contact. Due to the strictly causal nature of the relationship between the object *qua* cause on the one hand, and the sensory cognition *qua* effect on the other, the cognition is understood to possess causal conformity or isomorphism with respect to the object (*arthasārūpya*). For this reason, the sensory cognition is held to be a reliable instrument (*pramāṇa*) “by means of which” there is knowledge of the object.

As discussed in Chapter 3, however, this supposed isomorphism is inherently, structurally flawed. For a variety of reasons, especially the extended (*sthūla*) appearance of the image, as opposed to the dimensionless nature of the particulars which are its direct and primary cause, there can be no ultimately authentic isomorphism. Hence the lingering rhetorical force, and philosophical importance, of the question posed by Dharmakīrti at that juncture: what does it actually mean to be aware of an object (*kārthasaṃvit*)? Owing to the mutually-acknowledged “time-lag” problem, both Dharmakīrti and his Sautrāntika interlocutors can agree that the “object” of cognition is only the primary causal factor (*upādānahetu*) responsible for generating the

cognition which bears that object's image. The Sautrāntika interlocutor's initial answer to Dharmakīrti is thus that the awareness of an object just is that cognition which bears the phenomenal form (i.e., the *ākāra*) of the object. Dharmakīrti's critique of the supposed isomorphism between the object and the object-cognition, articulated at PV 3.321-322, then cuts the legs out from under this argument, by highlighting how the cognitive representation can never perfectly conform to the object, and therefore can never serve as an ultimately reliable source of knowledge about it.³³

But while the critique of isomorphism is a critically important component of Dharmakīrti's overarching epistemological theory, Dharmakīrti's critique here is not limited to the defective isomorphism between the object and the representation of the object; it also bears upon the very nature of the epistemic object itself. At issue is the status of the epistemic object *qua* cause, rather than the defective or unreliable relationship between this cause (whatever it might be) and the cognition *qua* effect. This point comes into sharp relief in the commentarial literature. Just like Devendrabuddhi in his PVP *ad* PV 3.320, as examined in Chapter 3,³⁴ Jinendrabuddhi begins his comments *ad* PS 1.9a by immediately launching into a discussion of idealism,³⁵ precisely in terms of the cause of the object-appearance:

³³ See Chapter 3, Section II: [Variegation and Nonduality \(*citrādvaita*\)](#).

³⁴ See Chapter 3, Section I.A: [The Instrumentality of Sensory Cognition](#).

³⁵ As is often the case, Jinendrabuddhi's comments here are a shorthand summary of Devendrabuddhi's, though in this case Jinendrabuddhi is, interestingly, not drawing upon Devendrabuddhi's initial comments *ad* PV 3.320, but rather upon the PVP (538–39) *ad* PV 3.336, an extremely important verse, to which we will shortly turn.

[Someone] postulates this: “Even when other causes are present, the non-arising of a cognition *qua* effect indicates [the presence of] another cause; this should be the external object. Therefore, the external object is proven through negative concomitance (*vyatireka*).”³⁶

The interlocutor’s objection here concerns the ostensible insufficiency of purely “internal” or mental causes in order to account for the apparent content of sensory cognition, explained in terms of the Indian system of formal logic with regard to inference. We will examine the inference of external objects in greater detail below.³⁷ Briefly, however, the opponent’s hypothesis here is that there exists a negative concomitance or restriction (*vyatireka*) between external objects and sensory cognition, such that (1) sensory cognition *only* arises when there is an external object, not otherwise; and that (2) in the absence of an external object, the cognition does not arise. Thus, in terms of the classical threefold syllogism in Indian logic,³⁸ the implicit inference is that “this place is the locus of an external object, because it is the locus of a cognition of that object.”

As we will see, Dharmakīrti takes this postulation as an opportunity to articulate the Epistemic Idealist perspective, such that this negative concomitance between the external object (which functions as the *sādhya* or “property to be proven”), and the sensory cognition (which functions as the *hetu* or “inferential evidence”), can also be explained “due to a deficiency in the ripening of the karmic imprints for the cognition.”³⁹ But before examining this alternative hypothesis in detail, let us first resume our discussion of the “slots” of *pramāṇa* theory.

³⁶ Steinkellner (2005b, 68.8-19): *yadapīdaṃ kalpyate – satsv apy anyeṣu hetuṣu jñānakāryāniṣpattiḥ kāraṇāntaraṃ sūcayati | sa bāhyo ’rthaḥ syāt | tasmād vyatirekato bāhyārthasiddhir iti |*

This passage is also translated, from the Tibetan, in Kyuma (2011, 314n28).

³⁷ See below, Section III: [Inference and External Objects](#). See also Kyuma (2011, 313–15).

³⁸ That is, “This place (the ‘subject,’ *sādhya* or *pakṣa*) is the locus of some quality (the ‘property,’ *sādhya*), for some reason (the ‘evidence,’ *hetu*, *liṅga*, or *hetuliṅga*).” Cf. Dunne (2004, 25-28).

³⁹ *vijñānavāsanāparipākavākyād*, PST ad PS 1.9a. See below, Section I.B.3: [Arthasamvit and Jñānasamvit](#).

2. *Shifting Contexts, Shifting Roles*

The difference in view between Dharmakīrti and his Buddhist representationalist (“Sautrāntika”) interlocutor turns on the ontological status of the objects of cognition—specifically, whether it is necessary for there to exist external objects, as causes, in order to account for the internal content of sensory cognitions as effects, or whether both the causes of sensory cognition and the sensory cognition itself may be understood as purely internal. To put things in terms of a grammatical metaphor: Dharmakīrti and his interlocutor both agree that the direct or “accusative” (*dvitīyā*) object of cognition is only ever cognition, itself, in some form. In other words, all that cognition is ever *directly* aware of is a cognitive image, form, or representation. The interlocutor simply insists that this cognitive image is just the “instrumental” (*tr̥tīyā*) means by which something outside of cognition is known. In this sense, according to the interlocutor, the cognitive image exists “for the purpose of” knowing a “dative” (*caturthī*) object: the external object, which possesses the causal functionality (*arthakriyā*) that one wishes to acquire or avoid (such as water, which has the power to slake thirst).

Jinendrabuddhi uses the dative case in this way, in his explanation of the question posed at the end of PS 1.9a: “The result is the reflexive awareness of both appearances. Why?”

Why? For what reason? Because [someone might think that], “It is not reasonable to consider [reflexive awareness] as the result, simply because reflexive awareness occurs.⁴⁰ Indeed, on an External Realist account (*bāhyārthapakṣe*), this just is not possible! For the eye-faculty and so on function in order for there to be knowledge (*adhigamāya*)⁴¹ of the object, but not [in order for there to be knowledge] of a

⁴⁰ That is, simply because every cognition is reflexively-experienced.

⁴¹ This is a purposive (“for the sake of”) dative (*caturthī*), in the sense outlined above.

cognition.⁴² And it is not the case that the apprehension of the object is only the apprehension of a cognition, because the object is distinct from the cognition. Thus, it is not acceptable for reflexive awareness to be the result”—this is the question, for one who is thinking [like this].⁴³

Against this position, Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti argue that there is no such object that exists apart from or outside of cognition. On their idealistic account, that is to say, which recapitulates the Yogācāra perspective of Vasubandhu, the stimulating cause of sensory cognition is only mind (*cittamātra*), in the form of latent imprints (*vāsanā*) held in the intersubjective storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) until their activation (*prabodhana*).

The key point here is that reflexive awareness may be considered the “result,” irrespective (*anapekṣya*) of whether the epistemic object is considered to be an external object, or cognition itself in the form of that external object, or cognition just construed as the result of an activated internal imprint. As Jinendrabuddhi explains:

Hence, the following is said: it is not exclusively when one regards (*apekṣate*) cognition as the epistemic object of the epistemic instrument, that the object is cognized in conformity with reflexive awareness, [and] thus, that reflexive awareness is the result. Rather, even when [one regards] an [external] object-field (*viśaya*) [as the epistemic object], in that case as well [reflexive awareness is the result].

In this regard, in the context of a presentation (*vyavasthā*) wherein reflexive awareness is the result, and an external object does not exist, [Dinnāga] will say that the apprehending aspect possesses instrumentality (*prāmānya*).⁴⁴ Therefore,

⁴² In other words, on an External Realist account, it is (the opponent argues) inappropriate to consider reflexive awareness as the epistemically meaningful or practicable knowledge—the *phala*—because this knowledge is supposed to be “about” an external object, not “about” cognition itself.

⁴³ Steinkellner (2005b, 69.16-70.2): *kiṃ kāraṇam iti kayā yuktyā | na hi svasaṃvittiḥ sambhavatīty eva phalatvena kalpayitum yujyate | bāhyārthapakṣe tv asambhāvanīyam evaitat | viśayasya hy adhigamāya cakṣurādayo vyāpāryante, na tu vijñānasya | na ca vijñānopalabdhir eva viśayopalabdhaḥ, vijñānād viśayabhedāt | ataḥ svasaṃvitteḥ phalatvam anupapannam iti manyamānasya praśnaḥ ||*

⁴⁴ Cf. PV 3.363-366 and PS 1.10, discussed in the [Conclusion](#).

one might have a doubt⁴⁵ about the following: when there does not exist an external object which is the epistemic object (*prameya*), the apprehending aspect is asserted to be the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*); likewise, even when there *does* exist an external object which is the epistemic object, the apprehending aspect is still (*eva*) the epistemic instrument. To eliminate that [doubt], he says: “**But when...**” and so on.⁴⁶ Even when reflexive awareness is presented as the result, however, when there is an external epistemic object, **the epistemic instrument is the cognition’s property of having the appearance of the object-field**, but [the instrument is] *not* the apprehending aspect, as in the context of Mental Representations Only (*viññaptimātratā*).⁴⁷

Jinendrabuddhi is here laying out the rules of the “language-game” described above, concerning which element of cognition may be slotted into which role of the *pramāṇa* system. The most important point in this regard is, again, that reflexive awareness may be considered the result, irrespective of the underlying ontology.

That is to say: if an external object (*bāhyārtha*) is accepted as the epistemic object (*prameya*), i.e., that which one has the desire to know (*jijñāsa*), then the resultant cognitive activity (*phala*) may be considered either reflexive awareness, or cognition’s possession of the form of this purportedly external object; but in this case, the object-image must be construed as the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*). When it is understood that there are no external objects, however, the subject-image (*grāhakākāra*) is to be construed as the epistemic instrument, and reflexive

⁴⁵ The reference to a “doubt” (*āśaṅkā*) here concerns Jinendrabuddhi’s explanation of the purpose (*prayojana*) for the compound *saviśayam* in PSV *ad* PS 1.9b; see above, note 18. This passage is the direct continuation of that earlier discussion, translated and discussed in Chapter 5, Section III.B.1: [Dharmakīrti and Jinendrabuddhi on PS 1.9b](#).

⁴⁶ That is, the last sentence of PSV *ad* PS 1.9b: *yadā tu bāhya evārthaḥ prameyaḥ tadā*: “But when the epistemic object is strictly an external object, then...”.

⁴⁷ Steinkellner (2005b, 71.9-72.2): *ata etad uktaṃ bhavati – na kevalaṃ yadā jñānaṃ pramāṇasya prameyam apekṣate, tadā svasaṃvedanānurūpam arthaṃ pratipadyata iti svasaṃvittiḥ phalam, api tu yadāpi viśayam, tadāpīti || ihāsatī bāhye ’rthe svasaṃvedanaphalavyavasthāyāṃ grāhakākārasya prāmāṇyaṃ vakṣyati | tataś cāsati bāhye ’rthe prameye yathā svasaṃvedanaphalavyavasthāne grāhakākāraḥ pramāṇam iṣṭam, tathā sati bāhye ’rthe prameye grāhakākāra eva pramāṇam ity āśaṅkā syāt | atas tannirāsāyāha – yadā tv ityādi | bāhye prameye svasaṃvedanaphalavyavasthāyāṃ api viśayābhāsataiva jñānasya pramāṇam iṣyate, na tu viññaptimātratāvad grāhakākāraḥ ||*

awareness as the result. In other words, to a large extent, which feature of cognition occupies which “slot” of the *pramāṇa* system is predicated on what specifically one is interested in knowing. This is an important and subtle point, which requires some additional analysis.

3. Arthasaṃvit and Jñānasaṃvit

In broad outline, there are two primary ways in which sensory cognition may be characterized.⁴⁸ In the first case, sensory cognition is characterized as the awareness of an external object (*arthasaṃvit*), which is to say that one attends to the cognition’s property of possessing the form of this object (*viṣayābhāsātā*), and thereby forms a determinate judgment or ascertainment (*niścaya*) regarding that object-image: for example, “That is a ‘jug.’” In the second case, sensory cognition is characterized as the awareness of cognition itself (*jñānasaṃvit*),⁴⁹ which is to say that one attends to the cognition just as a cognition—paradigmatically, though by no means exclusively, in order to ascertain one’s present affective disposition (desire, aversion, and so on). Thus, for example, one attends to the cognition of the ‘jug’ and forms the determinate judgment, “I desire this ‘jug.’” Crucially, however, one can attend to cognition just as cognition in this manner *irrespective of whether its object-image is understood to causally derive its appearance from internal imprints or from an external object*. In other words, the mere fact that one attends to (or is interested in) cognition just as cognition, does not in and of itself constitute an idealistic ontological framework for this attention.

⁴⁸ While every aspect of this study is greatly indebted to John Dunne’s insight, this section perhaps more than any other is the product of his assistance.

⁴⁹ Interestingly, while Dharmakīrti repeatedly uses *arthasaṃvit* throughout PV 3 (at 320a, 348a, 350d, and in compound at 506a), *jñānasaṃvit* only appears once, in compound with *arthasaṃvit* at 506a (*na cārthajñānasaṃvityor*), and there as part of an interlocutor’s objection. The terminological distinction acquired greater relevance in later literature, particularly in the Tibetan tradition, where *arthasaṃvit* and *jñānasaṃvit* are known as *don rig* and *shes rig*, respectively.

There are two extremely important takeaways here. First, the manner in which the various features of cognition are to be “slotted” into the thematic roles required by the *pramāṇa* system depends at least in part upon one’s goal (*artha*). Most commonly, this goal is the knowledge of some object (*artha*). Concern for knowing an object is indeed the primary context for Diñnāga’s presentation in PS 1.9, as well as the impetus behind the central animating question posed by Dharmakīrti at PV 3.320: “What is object-awareness?” (*kārthasaṃvit*). However, this need not necessarily be the case. While not explicitly thematized in the PS or PV along these lines, one of the main points of this passage is that the subjective features of cognition, i.e., the “aspect of the apprehender” (*grāhakākāra*), can be the target of one’s interest or attention, which is to say that the subject-image may in certain circumstances be the epistemic object (*prameya*). This is paradigmatically the case for introspective examination concerning the affective features of one’s own present experience, such as desire or anger or confusion.

The key point in this regard is that, during such introspective episodes, one “uses” the subjective aspect (*grāhakākāra*) of cognition as an “instrument” (*pramāṇa*), in order to directly (*pratyakṣa*) perceive just these subjective contents of one’s own experience. Thus, as Dharmakīrti writes, in a verse to which we will return in the Conclusion:

In the context [of Epistemic Idealism], the determinative feature (*pariccheda*) of cognition is considered to be the subject-image, because it has reflexive awareness as its nature. Therefore, the [subject-image] is the instrument of [reflexive awareness]. || 363 ||⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Tosaki (1985, 49): *tatra buddheḥ paricchedo grāhakākārasammataḥ | tādātmyād ātmavit tasya sa tasyāḥ sādhanam tataḥ || 363 ||*

This strictly metaphorical (*aupacārika*) “action” of the subjective aspect upon itself—which *must not be understood* as “apprehension” (√*grah*) in the common, transitive sense—is why this type of awareness is designated “reflexive.” In other words, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, in cases such as these, the subjective aspect of cognition may be understood just as reflexive awareness.⁵¹ Hence, because these subjective contents or affective features of awareness are not ontologically distinct from their reflexively-experienced (*svasaṃvitti*) nature (*svabhāva*), the reflexive awareness of these features just is the resulting knowledge (*phala*) of them. In this way, for such introspective cognitions, reflexive awareness is the result, irrespective of whether their objective content—in which, again, for such introspective cognitions, one is essentially uninterested—is understood to derive from internal imprints or extramental matter.

Thus, as will be discussed in greater detail in the Conclusion, the second key takeaway here is that this type of reflexive structure, where reflexive awareness serves as both instrument and result, is generalizable to cognitions where one *is* interested in the object-appearance:

Just as in a [particular] case where the epistemic instrument (*māna*) is its own object (*ātmaṣaye*), such as the sensation of desire, this [reflexive] structure of result, object, and means of knowledge is suitable for application in all cases. || 364 ||⁵²

The key point here is that it is attention to the contents of cognition, just as *cognitive* contents, which defines “the awareness of cognition [as cognition]” (*jñānasamvit*), and reflexive awareness as the result. In other words, the same type of attention that can be paid to one’s present affective

⁵¹ It is critically important to understand, however, that despite this “slippage” between the subjective aspect of cognition and its reflexively-aware nature, these two must not be entirely conflated. See Chapter 5, Section I: [Reflexive Awareness and “Self-Appearance”](#) (*svābhāsa*).

⁵² Tosaki (1985, 50): *tatrātmaviṣaye māne yathā rāgādivedanam | iyaṃ sarvatra saṃyojyā mānameyaphalasthitih*
|| 364 ||

disposition (i.e., one's own phenomenal subjectivity), can also be paid to the phenomenal object, just as an object-appearance (*viṣayābhāsa*) that is appearing to awareness. In this case, because one is primarily interested in the object-appearance just as an object-appearance, rather than as the phenomenal form of some kind of practical object (*artha*) in the world upon which one wishes to act, the reflexive awareness of that object-appearance is the result—*whether or not this object-appearance is characterized as having derived its phenomenal characteristics from extramental matter.*

Thus, regarding the awareness of the phenomenal object (as opposed to the awareness of the phenomenal subject, which is a separate case), there are four ways in which the elements of a knowledge-act (*pra + √mā*) may be fitted into the slots required by *pramāṇa* theory. From a basic External Realist perspective, the external object (*bāhyārtha*) is considered the epistemic object (*prameya*), and cognition's property of possessing the form of this object (*viṣayābhāsatā*) may be considered both the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) and the result (*phala*), which is to say, the actual sensory knowledge of the object in question.

Alternatively, from a more advanced External Realist perspective, the epistemic object (i.e., the external object itself) and the epistemic instrument (i.e., the cognitive image or form of this object) are left intact from the first account, because one has not yet accepted that the notion of an extramental object is metaphysically incoherent; nevertheless, reflexive awareness is considered the result, because in this case one is aware of the fact that the object-appearance is necessarily and by definition cognitive, and so it is only *as reflexively-experienced* that there is ever any experience of this object-appearance.

On the third version, a basic Epistemic Idealist account, the epistemic object is understood to be cognition itself, in the form of the object-image, rather than any purportedly external object,

because one has come to understand that there is no such thing as an extramental object. On this account, the subjective aspect is the epistemic instrument, because one is “using” the reflexively-experienced nature of awareness (which, as in the introspective case above, may under these specific conditions be identified as the subjective or “apprehending aspect” of cognition) as an “instrument” in order to pay attention to the specifically cognitive nature of the object-image. For the same reason, in this case, reflexive awareness is the result.

Finally, while neither Diñnāga nor Dharmakīrti ever explicitly articulate an “advanced” Epistemic Idealist position, it is a clear implication of their system—derived by Jinendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi, and championed by Ratnākaraśānti—that, in the final analysis, there is only the pure “luminosity” (*prakāśa*) of reflexive awareness. But since the very structure of instrument and result necessarily relies upon the distortion of duality, which no longer exists at that level, in the final analysis there is neither *prameya*, nor *pramāṇa*, nor *phala*,⁵³ in any ordinary sense.⁵⁴

Table 2: Four Presentations of Prameya, Pramāṇa, and Phala

	<i>Prameya</i>	<i>Pramāṇa</i>	<i>Phala</i>
External Realist (Basic)	External Object	Object-Appearance	Object-Appearance
External Realist (Advanced)	External Object	Object-Appearance	Reflexive Awareness
Epistemic Idealist (Basic)	Object-Appearance	Subject-Appearance	Reflexive Awareness
Epistemic Idealist (Advanced)			

⁵³ Metaphorically, of course, one might still refer to transcendent gnosis (*prajñāpāramitā*) as a kind of “ultimately instrumental cognition” (*pāramārthikapramāṇa*). By the same token, it is not uncommon for this gnosis to be described as knowing a kind of ultimate “epistemic object (*prameya*): “suchness” (*tathatā*), or the nature of reality (*dharmatā*), and so on. See Chapter 5, note 96. See also below, Section IV.C: [Reflexive Awareness and the Ultimate Pramāṇa](#). To the extent that this “ultimately instrumental cognition” and ultimate epistemic object are parsable as reflexive awareness, it may be tempting to list reflexive awareness as *prameya*, *pramāṇa*, and *phala* on the fourth and final account. However, the general terms of *pramāṇa* discourse require at least a terminological distinction between *prameya* and *pramāṇa*. Furthermore, the underlying idea here is that, at this level, the entire epistemological structure has collapsed. Thanks to John Dunne and Sara McClintock for elucidating this point.

⁵⁴ Iwata (1991, 4) includes a similar table to this one, but with only two rows, which correspond to these two “big picture” categories. Iwata terms these “Bāhyārthavāda (Sautrāntika)” and “Yogācāra,” and designates the *phala* according to each system as *arthasaṃvitti* and *svasaṃvitti*, respectively. Hitting on this same point in his presentation of Dharmakīrti’s perspective on PS 1.9, Kataoka (2016, 231) identifies the *pramāṇa* and the *phala* for the first three rows, designating basic External Realist as “Sautrāntika₁,” the advanced External Realist as “Sautrāntika₂,” and the basic Epistemic Idealist as “Yogācāra”; he does not, however, identify the *prameya*.

In effect, this fourfold division constitutes the four most important junctures of the “sliding scale.” The most important juncture, serving as the “bridge” linking External Realist with Epistemic Idealist analysis, is when reflexive awareness is construed as the result. As outlined above, that reflexive awareness is the “result” can be understood, even in an ontological context wherein extramental matter is admitted. Once this has been understood, it is only a short step from “all cognitions are cognitions of cognitive contents” to “the phenomenal features of cognitive contents cannot be causally derived from extramental matter.”

That is to say, according to Dharmakīrti, understanding how and why reflexive awareness is the “result” constitutes the first philosophical move in a chain of analysis which leads inexorably to the conclusion that the notion of extramental matter is incoherent. We now turn to this analysis.

II. The Object of “Object-Awareness”

A. Defining the Object of Experience

1. *The Immediately-Preceding Condition* (samanantarapratyaya)

As discussed above, the key question animating Dharmakīrti’s shift to an idealistic ontology is: what accounts for the appearance of objects? The default, “common sense,” External Realist explanation is that only a mind-independent external reality could possibly cause phenomenal appearances to arise. But is this truly the case? Following his denial, at PV 3.322,⁵⁵ that the object-appearance actually possesses the form of the object, Dharmakīrti continues to develop this argument by interrogating what it means for something to be known or experienced:

If the definition of ‘that which is experienced’ (*samvedya*) is ‘that due to which [the sensation] arises, with which [the sensation] conforms’: an immediately-preceding cognition with the same object would be ‘that which is experienced.’ || 323 ||⁵⁶

In a manner very similar to his problematization of the definition of object-isomorphism in PV 3.320-322, Dharmakīrti here problematizes the definition of “that which is experienced” (*samvedya*). To some extent, this argument is an artifact of the pan-Indian scholastic preoccupation with precise definitions, which are supposed to be neither too broad nor too narrow, but to capture only that which they define, and nothing else. The underlying point here, however, extends beyond a merely provincial concern for a proper formal definition. Again, the question is: what, exactly, does it mean for something to be ‘that which is experienced’?

⁵⁵ See Chapter 3, Section II.A.3: [The Variegation of Cognition and the Cognition of Variegated Entities](#).

⁵⁶ Tosaki (1985, 7): *tatsārūpyatadūpattī yadi samvedyalakṣaṇam | samvedyaṃ syāt samānārthaṃ vijñānaṃ samanantaram* || 323 ||

At a first approximation, particularly given the stipulation that an “object” is just that which is capable of projecting its form into cognition (*jñānākārārpaṇakṣamam*),⁵⁷ the quality of being an isomorphic cause of the experience in question constitutes a reasonable and straightforward answer to this question. Yet, as Dharmakīrti points out, this definition is in fact overly broad, insofar as the immediately-prior cognition is the immediately-preceding condition (*samamantarapratyaya*)⁵⁸ for the production of the immediately-subsequent cognition, and insofar as these two cognitions causally conform to each other. So, the question remains: what, exactly, does it mean for something to be ‘that which is experienced’? As Kellner (2017a, 111) explains,

The argument in 323 questions that causation-cum-resemblance unequivocally establishes that perception has *external* objects. Assume a situation where a person has two perceptions with identical object-appearances, for example, blue, in immediate sequence. This situation is less contrived than it might initially seem. Given that the Sautrāntika assumes objects as well as mental events to be of only momentary existence, any seemingly continuous perception would in fact just be a succession of perceptual events with identical appearances. And many of our perceptions, if not all, are seemingly continuous.⁵⁹ In this situation, the earlier perception is a cause of the later one; in the technical terminology that Abhidharmic analysis developed to classify the causes of perception, it is the “immediately preceding homologous condition” (*samanantarapratyaya*); hence we can dub this argument the *samanantarapratyaya*-argument. Both perceptions have the same form of blue. The preceding perception therefore fulfils both conditions for being an object—causation and resemblance—and it could therefore just as well be considered the object of the later one! The Sautrāntika believes that his definition of the object of perception by causation and resemblance limits the role of the “object” to an external object, but this is inconclusive...

Although the argument is premised on an ontology of exclusively momentary events, it does not logically depend on it. All that is needed is a realist view that considers mental events to have other mental events among their causes. When this is granted, a sequence of two cognitions with the same mental image would trigger the problem that both the external object and the preceding cognition fulfil the

⁵⁷ PV 3.247d. See above, Chapter 1, Section II.C.3: [Mental Perception, Mental Pseudo-Perception, and Determination](#).

⁵⁸ See below, Section III.A.2: [Immediately-Preceding Condition and Immediately-Preceding Cognition](#).

⁵⁹ See Chapter 1, Section II.E: [The Firebrand-Circle](#).

definition of an object of perception, that is, to cause a subsequent cognition that has the same form.

As we will see, the premise that the immediately-preceding condition for a present cognition is the immediately-preceding cognition in the sequence also constitutes the lynchpin of subsequent argumentation concerning the non-existence of extramental objects. But for now, the key point is simply that a definition of the epistemic object as being the isomorphic cause for a subsequent cognition bearing that object's form is incapable of picking out a specifically *extramental* object as this cause. Such a definition is, therefore, too wide.

2. *The 'Intimate Relationship' Between the Seeing and the Seen*

In response to this critique, the opponent then hypothesizes that the object of experience is that in regard to which there is a subsequent conceptual determination:

[Opponent:] “The experience is of that [object], in regard to which there is a determination (*avasāyadhī*)—‘this has been seen’ or ‘this has been heard.’”

What is under investigation is precisely this intimate relationship (*pratyāsatti*)⁶⁰ between the seeing (*darśana*) [of the object] and the seen (*dṛśya*)⁶¹ [object], by virtue of which⁶² that [cognition in question] is considered to be the experience (*darśana*) of this [object]. This determinate judgment (*vinīścaya*), on the part of the

⁶⁰ Arnold (2008, 10) reads *pratyāsatti* here as “successiveness,” a reference to “the fact that our judgments seem successively to follow our perceptions.” But it is clear from the context provided by PV 3.325, as well as by Devendrabuddhi's comments *ad cit* (see below), that the *pratyāsatti* in question is primarily between the *dṛśya* (the “seen” object) and the *darśana* (the “seeing” cognition), rather than between either of these and the subsequent definitive judgment (*vinīścaya*). Kellner (2017a, 120n23) thus glosses *pratyāsatti* as “the close connection between a cognition and its object.” And, indeed, Dharmakīrti's main point here is that the *dṛśya* and the *darśana* occur simultaneously, because they are in fact the same thing. That said, this point certainly also extends to any supposedly direct or immediate connection between the initial nonconceptual sensory cognition and the subsequent conceptual determinate judgment.

⁶¹ Interestingly, both Sa skya Paṇḍita's revised canonical translation of the PV, as well as the pre-canonical translation embedded in PVP_T (532.15-16), render this *dṛśya* as *snang* [*ba*], which is more typically the translation for *ābhāsa* (“appearance”).

⁶² Emending **yena*, which lacks a clear referent and makes little sense, to *yayā* [*pratyāsattiḥ*].

one who sees [the object], [occurs] on the basis of the connection between the two.
 || 324-325 ||⁶³

As Kellner (2017a, 111) succinctly summarizes:

The Sautrāntika responds by pointing to a subsequent determinative cognition (*adhyavasāya*): When a determinative cognition with the content “this was seen” or “this was heard” arises after a perception, it must have been preceded by an experience of that which was seen or heard, that is, of the object. But such a determination simply does not occur with respect to an immediately preceding cognition, hence that cognition is not the object. We do not determine “this preceding cognition was seen.” Yet, Dharmakīrti insists, it is precisely the close connection (*pratyāsatti*) between perception and its object that is under scrutiny: only when such a connection exists can a subsequent determination arise. That connection remains to be accounted for. And, to complete Dharmakīrti’s argument, if it were to be accounted for by causation and resemblance, then there would be no reason why the determination should not just as well refer to the preceding and homologous condition; the initially raised problem remains.

In other words, there is no “seeing” of the object, over and above the appearance of the object as “seen.” Thus, the opponent’s appeal to an especially “intimate relationship” (*pratyāsatti*) between the causal stimulus of cognition on the one hand, and its determination or ascertainment on the other, amounts to begging the question. That is to say, the issue under investigation is precisely the nature of the relationship between the objective phenomenal features of sensory cognition and their cause, whatever this may be. One cannot appeal to an external cause as that which is responsible for these features, in order to explain *why* an external cause must be responsible for these features.

This argument also highlights the continuity between Dharmakīrti’s idealistic epistemology and the works of Vasubandhu, including the latter’s pre-Yogācāra texts. As Gold

⁶³ Tosaki (1985, 8): *idaṃ dr̥ṣṭaṃ śrutam vedam iti yatrāvasāyadhīḥ | sa tasyānubhavaḥ saiva pratyāsattir vicāryate*
 || 324 || *dr̥ṣyadarśanayor yayā* [em. MSS *yena] *tasya tad darśanam matam | tayoh sambandham āśritya draṣṭur eṣa*
viniścayah || 325 ||

(2015, 136) notes, in relation to Vasubandhu’s perspective in the AKBh, which is clearly reflected in Dharmakīrti’s perspective both at this juncture specifically as well as in the PV generally, it is not the case that there exists any real distinction between what “sees” and what is “seen”:

If the mental object *just is* the mental event’s appearance, then there is no need to say that the mental event “sees” and the object “is seen.” What *is* necessary is that we acknowledge that the way that the mental event seems to appear—as a mind with a distinct mental object, a perceiver and a perceived—is just an illusion, a mistaken image, “appearance only.” If we acknowledge that this apparent division between separate entities, the seer and the seen, is just an illusion, then we can say that the mental event is unitary, it *just is* this appearance. We have no need to say that one mental event “investigates,” and another mental event “is investigated.” They are merely cause and effect.

But at this point in the argument, based on the insight articulated at PV 3.325, Dharmakīrti shifts from a discussion of the causes of cognition, to a discussion of the nature of cognition *qua* experience. That is to say, in terms of the flow of his argumentation concerning PS 1.9a, at this juncture Dharmakīrti temporarily drops the issue of the causal support for object-awareness, only briefly circling back to it later on (PV 3.333-336). And in fact, a more or less purely phenomenological analysis of cognition constitutes Dharmakīrti’s primary frame of argumentation for the remainder of PV 3. Dharmakīrti barely addresses the mechanics of how sensory cognition might work from an idealistic perspective at all, only explicitly referencing the Yogācāra theory of imprints (*vāsanā*) at two specific verses, PV 3.336 and PV 3.396, without ever going into the precise details of how imprints are causally responsible for the appearance of objects. Hence, before taking up Dharmakīrti’s phenomenological analysis of experience in PV 3.326ff., which we will return to below, let us first continue our discussion of imprints as the cause of sensory cognition, concerning PV 3.333-336.

B. External vs. Internal Causes of Object-Awareness

1. *The Sautrāntika Hypothesis*

As discussed in the Introduction, Dharmakīrti's rhetorical strategy should be understood in terms of a "sliding scale." That is to say, Dharmakīrti's approach is to relentlessly interrogate the nature of sensory cognition, and thus to eventually arrive at a conclusively idealistic position. It is precisely this thorough analysis which leads the reader to understand the inherent and irremediable flaws with the position that the object *qua* cause of sensory cognition lies outside the mind. Dharmakīrti's rhetorical strategy in this regard comes out vividly in this passage:

Opponent: "What fault is there, if an external [object] were to be experienced?"

There is none at all. [But] what, precisely, would be expressed [by this statement] that 'an external object is experienced'? || 333 ||⁶⁴

As Devendrabuddhi explains, the question that Dharmakīrti poses here is not really genuine. How could it be? Devendrabuddhi thus provides a sophisticated hermeneutical analysis of the rhetorical force behind this question, explaining that, by asking the opponent to account for what "the experience of an external object" would even mean, Dharmakīrti backs the opponent into a logical corner, from which the only escape is the acceptance of an idealistic ontology:

The opponent asks a question: "If that which is experienced by awareness is an external object, with a nature that is different from that of cognition, **what fault is there** [that requires the rejection of external objects], such that one would say that reflexive awareness is the result?"

⁶⁴ Tosaki (1985, 17): *yadi bāhyo 'nubhūyeta ko doṣo naiva kaścana | idam eva kim uktaṃ syāt bāhyo 'rtho 'nubhūyate* || 333 ||

This verse is also translated in Taber (2010, 291) and Arnold (2008, 12).

Even though there is no harm to us at all [if this were the case], nevertheless, the state of affairs in reality (*dnegos po'i gnas skabs*) is not like that. Thinking this, [Dharmakīrti] says, “**There is no problem at all.**” If there were—i.e., if there were a fault—there could be no [external object]. Intending to demonstrate this very nonexistence [of any external object], seeing the hollowness (*gsog nyid ~ riktatva*) of the opponent’s account, ‘an external object is experienced,’ he poses the question: “**What, precisely, would be expressed by this statement, that an external object is experienced?**” [Dharmakīrti’s] intention here is that there is no meaning whatsoever to the account that “This is experienced by this cognition,” if the mind lacks the image [of the object], and the object is some other thing [apart from the mind], because [in this case] a specific connection [between the object and the mind] is not established.⁶⁵

In other words, as Gold (2015, 147) notes, with reference to the perspective of Vasubandhu, mental representation or “‘appearance only’ [*vijñaptimātra*] is not a skeptical rejection of the evidence of the senses; rather, it is the *best explanation* of the evidence, based upon a careful consideration of observable, conceivable relations of causes and effects.”

Furthermore, while Dharmakīrti’s main concern at this juncture is an investigation of the primary cause (*upādānahetu*) of sensory cognition, it is worth reiterating a point from Chapter 1: that although cognition has an objective aspect which appears to be “externally-oriented” (*bahirmukham*),⁶⁶ this apparently external orientation must be understood as a type of cognitive error, because in reality cognition is singular, which is to say that it does not possess ontologically-distinct internally-oriented (“subjective”) and externally-oriented (“objective”) elements. Consequently, the fact that cognition spuriously *appears* ($\bar{a} + \sqrt{bhā}$) as though it represents an

⁶⁵ PVP (536.7-18): *gal te rnam par shes pa las tha dad pa'i ngo bo ci rol gyi don blos myong 'gyur na nyes pa ci yod par gyur na | gang gis bdag nyid rig pa 'bras bur brjod ces gzhan dag 'dri bar byed do | kho bo cag la gnod pa ni cung zad med mod kyi 'on kyang dnegos po'i gnas skabs ni de ltar ma yin no snyam du bsams nas skyon ci yang med ston par byed do | gal te yod par 'gyur na | skyon yin na yod pa yang ma yin no | med pa nyid ston par bzhed nas | phyi rol don de myong 'gyur ba | zhes bya ba'i tha snyad gsog nyid du zigs pas gzhan la | phyi rol don de myong 'gyur ba | brjod pa 'di nyid kyis cir 'gyur | zhes bya bas 'dri bar mdzad do | gang gi tshe blo rnam pa med pa yin zhing | yul don gzhan du gyur pa de'i tshes 'brel pa'i khyad par ma grub pa'i phyir 'di ni blo 'dis nyams su myong ba yin no zhes bya ba'i tha snyad 'di'i don 'ga' zhig kyang yod pa ma yin no zhes bya bar dgongs so |*

⁶⁶ PV 3.427a.

external world cannot be taken as a warrant for the belief that it *does* represent an external world. Sautrāntikas and other representationalists acknowledge that cognition only ever has access to the world “by means of” the cognitive image or phenomenal form (*ākāra*) that external objects are supposed to be causally responsible for producing; but an external realist ontology, in the context of a representationalist epistemology, ultimately rests on the *seeming externality* of the objects which are represented via “sense data” or cognitive images. Therefore, the critique of duality also functions as a critique of externality, because it removes the warrant for taking the apparent externality (i.e., the “external orientation”) of the object-appearance at face value. If the structure of phenomenological duality is nothing but error, then the “internal/external” dichotomy which it appears to represent must be erroneous as well.⁶⁷

2. A “Judicious” Investigation of the Cause of Sensory Cognition

Following the somewhat disingenuous answer to the rhetorical question posed at PV 3.333, to the effect that there is “no fault” if an external object is postulated as that which is to be experienced (*anubhūyeta*), Dharmakīrti zeroes in on the relationship between the object-image and the object:

If a cognition has the image of an [object], the [cognition] is qualified (*viśeṣiṇī*) by the image. [So] it is worth investigating, whether this [cognition as qualified] due to something external, or something else. || 334 ||⁶⁸

Devendrabuddhi explains:

⁶⁷ Many thanks to John Dunne for clarifying this point.

⁶⁸ Tosaki (1985, 18): *yadi buddhis tadākārā sā 'sty ākāraviśeṣiṇī | sā bāhyād anyato veti vicāram idam arhati* || 334 ||

This verse is also translated in Taber (2010, 291) and Arnold (2008, 12).

The intent of the “**investigation**” mentioned is as follows. If it is accepted that cognition has an image such as ‘blue,’ then the experience of an image of ‘blue’ (or whatever) is an experience of itself. This is so because, if this were not the case, then since that [cognition which is supposed to] possess the image would indeed *not* possess the image, then—as before [i.e., PV 3.325]—the relationship between the experience [and that which is experienced] would not be established.

That is, other than the image which is that which is experienced (*samvedya*), one does not perceive some other, external factor responsible for changing (*rnam par sgyur bar byed pa ~ vikāra*) [that content] into an image of ‘blue’ and so on. [And so] a judicious person (*rtog pa sngon du gtong ba can = *prekṣāpūrvakārin*),⁶⁹ not seeing that [external causal factor], wonders: “Is this cause internal, or external?” Hence, the arising of this doubt is the basis for the investigation. But also, due to this investigation, [one discovers that] an external object is not established. That is the meaning here.⁷⁰

The issue here thus concerns the investigation of a “judicious person,” who is interested in finding out what exactly it is that is responsible for changes in the quality of experience. As discussed in Chapter 2,⁷¹ Dharmakīrti maintains that the factor which ultimately “determines” or “restricts” (*ni +√yam*) the objective content of cognition can only be the image of the object as present within cognition, rather than any internal or external cause. At this juncture, then, the question of the causal stimulus of a sensory cognition is reframed as a question about what exactly it is that “qualifies” or “distinguishes” (*vi +√śiṣ*) the phenomenal features of cognitive content.

The upshot here is that such a “judicious person” must recognize that the contents of cognition are strictly cognitive, which is to say that what appears in cognition is not the *cause* of

⁶⁹ Literally, a judicious person in this sense is “one who analyzes before they act.” For more on this extremely important concept, cf. McClintock (2010, 52–61).

⁷⁰ PVP (537.13-538.2): *dpyod par bzhed pa'i dgongs pa ni | 'di ltar sngon po la sogs pa'i rnam pa can gyi blo 'dod pa na | 'dis sngon po la sogs pa'i rnam pa nyams su myong ba na bdag nyid gyur pa nyams su myong ba yin no || de ltar ma yin na rnam pa dang ldan pa des rnam pa dang ldan pa nyid ma yin pas na | snga ma bzhin du nyams su myong ba'i 'bral pa ma grub pa'i phyir ro | ji ltar myong bar bya ba'i rnam pa las bzlog pa sngon po la sogs pa'i rnam par sgyur bar byed pa | gzhan phyi rol du 'gyur ba dmigs par mi 'gyur ro | rtog pa sngon du gtong ba can gyis de ma mthong bar nang nyid dam phyi rol rgyu nyid du 'gyur ro snyam pa de bas na | the tshom du 'gyur ba ni dpyod pa'i rten yin la rnam par dpyod pa las kyang pyhi rol gyi don grub pa yod pa ma yin no zhes bya ba ni 'di yin no ||*

⁷¹ See Chapter 2, Section II.C: [The “Determiner” \(*nivāma*\)](#).

the object-appearance, whatever this might be, but rather *only the object-appearance itself*. That is to say, even if one wishes to maintain that there are extramental objects, a “judicious person” must acknowledge that any cognition which could be designated as “the awareness of an object” (*arthasaṃvit*) is, in fact, only the awareness of a cognition (*jñānasaṃvit*) bearing phenomenal features which ostensibly correspond to the causal properties of the object.

This leaves open the question of what, exactly, it is that causes the object-appearance or the content of cognition to have the phenomenal features that it does. Of course, it is *possible* that these phenomenal features might be derived from extramental matter. But, at least according to Dharmakīrti’s Yogācāra account, a truly “judicious person” must eventually recognize that all appeals to external, extramental causes for the contents of cognition are ultimately unsatisfactory.

3. *External Objects and the Sahopalambhaniyama*

Dharmakīrti then explains the nature of such a judicious investigation, with respect to the necessarily cognitive nature of object-cognition:

The appearance of ‘blue’ is the seeing [of ‘blue’], because that which is devoid of any additional qualification (*upādhi*) by ‘seeing’ is not apprehended; [and because] when that [which is qualified by seeing] is apprehended, that [object] is apprehended. There is no isolated (*kevalaḥ*)⁷² external object. || 335 ||⁷³

This is the essence of the *sahopalambhaniyama* argument, which we will examine in greater detail below. Briefly, however, the essence of this argument is that any perceptual contents are always

⁷² Tosaki (1985, 19n56), against **kevalam*. See also PV 3.507.

⁷³ Tosaki (1985, 19): *darśanopādhirahitasyāgrahāt tadgrāhe grahāt | darśanaṃ nīlanirbhāsaṃ nārtho bāhyo ’sti kevalaḥ || 335 ||*

Translated also in Arnold (2008, 13); Taber (2010, 291); and Kellner (2017a, 115).

already cognitive, which is to say that they necessarily present themselves just as a cognition. Thus, no appeal to the objective contents of perceptual awareness—such as the phenomenal form (*ākāra*) of ‘blue,’ appealed to in an attempt to establish that the cause of this awareness of blue is some real extramental ‘blue’ matter—ever escapes the domain of cognition. As Kellner (2017a, 115) explains,

The argument [in PV 3.335] is very close to a *sahopalambhaniyama*-inference, if not fully identical with it: the conclusion is that there is no external object “by itself” (*kevalaḥ*), a conclusion that can plausibly be understood to mean that there is no external object that would be different from cognition, that is, separate or independent from cognition. The reasoning to support this conclusion consists in a joint apprehension, expressed in two claims that structurally correspond to the ones from stanza 388. But there may be some significance to the characterization of perception as an “additional qualifier” (*upādhi*) of the apprehended object. It is one thing to say that when blue is apprehended, it is always apprehended as qualified by its perception, but it is another thing to say that when blue is apprehended, its perception is also apprehended. Whenever I perceive blue, I am aware of blue perceptually, but this does not have to mean I am aware of the perception of blue (or of perceiving blue). The argument presented in 335 may therefore be a weaker form of the *sahopalambhaniyama*-argument that does not yet involve the innate reflexive awareness of perception, *svasaṃvedana*, in quite the same way as the inference from PVin. But the conclusion, that there is no external object by itself— independent from cognition—seems to be the same in all versions of this intriguing argument.

Part of the issue here concerns the close and slippery relationship between reflexive awareness and the subjective aspect of cognition, which we have already touched upon and which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5. But there is also a clarification that needs to be made.

In the terminology of Kellner’s formulation here, there is a distinction to be drawn between the fact that “whenever I perceive blue, I am aware of blue perceptually”—in Dharmakīrtian language, the fact that the object-appearance (*viśayābhāsa*) or phenomenal form (*ākāra*) of blue is presented to cognition by means of reflexive awareness—and the fact that that “this does not have to mean I am aware of the perception of blue,” which is to say that this reflexive presentation of

blue is not *necessarily* the subject of a determinate judgment (*niścaya*), such as “I am currently seeing blue.”⁷⁴ More generally, the issue here concerns the difference between a certain kind of minimal, global reflexive awareness, consisting in nothing over and above the fact that a mental event is occurring at all, and a specific mode of reflexive awareness—identified, in this particular case, with the subjective aspect (*grāhakākāra*) or “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) of cognition—that acts as the epistemic instrument, and thus allows for introspective or reflective conceptual judgments, such as “I am currently experiencing X” or “I experienced Y in the past.”

Again, we will return to this issue below in Chapter 5. At this juncture, the key point to understand is simply that there is no awareness of blue which does not present itself as being precisely *the awareness* of blue. In this way, there is no such thing as an “isolated” (*kevalaḥ*) blue, i.e., a blue which would exist “by itself,” separately from the self-appearance of the cognition of which this blue is the object-appearance. As Devendrabuddhi explains,

In other words, [the ‘seeing’ of blue is the same thing as the ‘seen’ blue] because there is no separate apprehension [of an objective ‘seen’ apart from a subjective ‘seeing,’ and vice versa]. If [cognition] were ultimately manifold [in the sense that it truly possessed two aspects], then it would not be possible, on the basis of the perception of one definite entity (*nges pa*), for there to be the perception of something else, different from it.⁷⁵ Therefore, even though they appear to be separate,⁷⁶ they are just the same, because they are [always] perceived at the same time, like the two moons. **The appearance of ‘blue’ is the ‘seeing’ [of blue].**

⁷⁴ See Chapter 5, note [77](#).

⁷⁵ The meaning of this phrase (*de las gzhan pa dmigs pa*) is somewhat unclear, but based on the following sentence, as well as Śākyabuddhi’s commentary (see note [76](#)), Devendrabuddhi seems to be referring to the subjective and objective aspects of cognition as the “definite entities” (*nges pa*) in question. In other words, this is yet another reference to the *sahopalambhaniyama*, as the point of the argument is precisely that the presence of the objective aspect necessarily entails the presence of the subjective aspect, and vice versa.

⁷⁶ Śākyabuddhi (PVT 550.9-12) specifies that subject and object only appear to be separate, since “this is stated in regard to an apprehension made while there is still delusion; in reality, there is no duality of experiential happiness and so on, as opposed to the experienced blue and so on. This has already been explained at length [in PV 3.249-280, concerning the reflexive awareness of pleasure and so on; see Chapter 5, Section II ([Pleasure and Pain](#))].”

'khrul pa bzhin du zhen pa la brten nas de skad du brjod do | de kho na nyid du ni bde ba la sogs pa myong ba nyid sngon po la sogs pa'i myong ba yang gnyis su med pa nyid yin no zhes rgyas par bstan zin to ||

There is no isolated external object. That is, it is not the case that, due to a perceptual act (*dmigs pa ~ upalambha*) which is distinct from the perception of the cognition (*rnam par shes pa'i dmigs pa ~ vijñānopalambha*),⁷⁷ there is an apprehension [of blue] that would thereby not be included in the nature of awareness. This is a concluding summary.⁷⁸

In short, any appearance of an object (*viṣayābhāsa*) necessarily includes the cognitive nature of that appearance, which is to say, the “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) of the object-cognition.

This appeal to the inseparability of the phenomenal presentation of subject and object, with regard to the question of external objects, is precisely why Dharmakīrti’s later comments concerning the inferability of external objects (PV 3.390d-397) occur in the context of the *sahopalambhaniyama* argument (broadly, PV 3.387-415). Notably, these comments also contain the only other direct mention of karmic imprints (*vāsanā*) in PV 3, apart from PV 3.336—the very next verse in the sequence which we are currently examining, and arguably the single most explicitly Yogācāra juncture in the entirety of the Perception Chapter (PV 3).

⁷⁷ In context, “the perception of the cognition” here refers to the presentation of the self-appearance (*svābhāsa*) of cognition, which is to say, the subject-image (*grāhakākāra*). For the reconstruction of *shes pa'i dmigs pa* as **jñānopalambha* and *shes bya'i dmigs pa* as **jñeyopalambha*, as well as further reflections on this point, cf. Iwata (1991, 84–91, 77n58).

⁷⁸ PVP (538.9-16): *tha dad par med par dmigs pa'i phyir ro zhes bya ba'i don to | don dam par du ma nyid yin na nges pa gcig dmigs pa las de (D: *te) las gzhan pa dmigs par rigs pa ma yin no || de'i phyir tha dad par snang ba nyid yin na yang gcig tu dmigs pa'i phyir gcig nyid du yin te | zla ba gnyis pa bzhin no | sngon por snang ba mthong ba yin || phyi rol yan gar don yod min | rnam par shes pa'i dmigs pa la bzlog pa'i dmigs pas 'dzin pa ni | gang la blo'i rang bzhin gyi khongs su 'dus pa med pa ma yin no zhes bya ba ni mjug bsdu ba'o ||*

C. Dharmakīrti's Yogācāra

1. *Negative Concomitance (vyatireka) and the Cause of Cognition*

At the heart of Dharmakīrti's argument for an idealistic ontology lies his contention that there need not be any external, mind-independent matter in order to account for the causally-regulated nature of sensory appearances:

The restricting factor (*vinīyama*) for cognitions is only some particular activator (*prabodhaka*) of the internal imprint for some particular [cognition] at a particular time and place (*atra*); hence, [cognition] does not depend upon an external object [for this restriction].⁷⁹ || 336 ||⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Manorathanandin's (Sāṅkṛtyāyana ed., 220) comments on this verse have been a source of some controversy; see Arnold (2008, 15–16), and Ratié's response (2013, 358–62). While the latter is undoubtedly the more accurate representation of Manorathanandin's perspective, it must be noted that Manorathanandin's comments in this regard are (not uncommonly for Manorathanandin) at best orthogonal to the actual point of this verse. In context, PV 3.336 is simply Dharmakīrti's assertion that the causal "restricting factor" (*vinīyama*) which determines the contents of cognition need not—and, in fact, does not—exist externally to the mind. *Pace* Manorathanandin, however, this verse does not set out to respond to a Sautrāntika objection, to the effect that the mere non-observation of an external object fails to conclusively prove the non-existence of external objects. Such seems to be implied by Manorathanandin's offhand reference to the paradigmatic example of a ghost (*piśāca*), the mere non-observation (*anupalabdhi*) of which is insufficient to establish its non-existence: "Manorathanandin's comparison of the external object with a *piśāca* thus seems to imply that the endeavor to prove or refute the existence of the external object is as hopeless as an attempt to determine whether a particular place is occupied by some imperceptible demon" (Ratié 2013, 360).

Elsewhere, in the context of PV 3.211—where the spatial extension of particulars is explicitly discussed, in a manner that closely echoes Vasubandhu's arguments in *Vimśikā* 11-15—Śākyabuddhi does make some comments which are quite similar to Manorathanandin's here, in terms of pointing his readers to Vasubandhu's arguments against materiality, in response to a hypothetical objector who questions the idealistic Yogācāra ontology; see Dunne (2004, 404n14). However, it must be emphasized once again that this is *not* Dharmakīrti's argument in this particular verse (PV 3.336). On the contrary: Dharmakīrti's point, elaborated upon by Devendrabuddhi and Jinendrabuddhi, is simply that the absence of internal mental imprints for 'white' accounts just as well for this non-observation or non-arising as the absence of an external object. Therefore, the non-observation of cognition as an effect, in the absence of a real external object as a cause, does not establish the existence of external objects. Put slightly differently, rather than Dharmakīrti's response to a hypothetical objection along the lines laid out by Manorathanandin, PV 3.336 represents Dharmakīrti's *own* objection, to the effect that the restricting factor which determines the objective contents of cognition need not be (indeed, simply *is not*) extramental matter.

⁸⁰ Tosaki (1985, 20): *kasyacit kiñcid evātra vāsanāyāḥ prabodhakam | tato dhiyāṃ vinīyamo na bāhyārthavyapekṣayā* || 336 ||

This verse is also translated in Dunne (2004, 277).

As mentioned above, the Sautrāntika interlocutor's framing argument with respect to the issue of ontological idealism is that, because no cognition of 'white' arises in the absence of a real external 'white' object, even when all the other causes of visual cognition (the preceding moment of visual cognition, properly-functioning faculties, light, and so on) are assembled, such a real external 'white' object must be present in order for there to exist a cognition of 'white.' According to the External Realists, there is thus a negative concomitance (*vyatireka*) between the epistemic object and the cognitive image of that object, such that an object-image does not arise when an external object is not present.

In his answer to this opponent, Jinendrabuddhi, following Dharmakīrti's Epistemic Idealist argument at PV 3.336 and Devendrabuddhi's comments thereon, responds that the absence of properly-activated internal mental imprints for 'white' accounts just as well for the non-arising of the cognition of 'white' as does the absence of a real external 'white' object:

This is also wrong, because it is also possible that the non-arising of a cognition *qua* effect is due to a deficiency in the ripening of an imprint (*vāsanā*) for the cognition. Therefore, it is not possible for there to be any awareness of [anything] apart from consciousness. And consciousness only arises as reflexively-cognized (*svasaṃviditam*); therefore, reflexive awareness just is the result.⁸¹

As Kellner (2017b, 318) explains,

Determining cause and effect, and drawing inferences on the basis of causal relations, is equally possible without assuming external objects, and this is actually the method preferred by the "wise" (*viduṣām*).⁸² One might formulate an inference to prove external objects along the following lines: When all other causes for

⁸¹ Steinkellner (2005b, 68.10-12): *tad apy ayuktam, yato vijñānakāryaniṣpattir vijñānavāsanāparipākavaikalyād api sambhavati | tasmān na vijñānavyatiriktasya kasyacit saṃvittiḥ sambhavati | vijñānam eva tu svasaṃviditam utpadyata iti svasaṃvittir eva phalam |*

The first part of this passage is also translated, from the Tibetan, in Kyuma (2011, 314n28).

⁸² This is a reference to PV 3.397. See below, Section III.B.3: [The Role of the Storehouse in Idealistic Inference](#).

perception are assembled, and perception still does not arise, this implies that an additional cause is needed—and that further cause might well be the external object. But Dharmakīrti not only expresses this inference in the hypothetical. He also adds, immediately after stating it: *unless* the Vijñānavādin should claim that that additional cause is a special material cause [*upādānahetu*]⁸³ of the cognition, that is, a preceding mental episode in the same mental series [*samanantarapratyaya*].⁸⁴ The non-arising of perception when a certain number of its causes are present does not conclusively establish that the missing additional cause has to be an external object: it only does so if the possibility of an internal cause is willfully ignored, or set aside.

But Dharmakīrti's insistence here on a locative restriction, in terms of the time, place, and manner of the imprint's activation, raises an extremely important issue, in terms of the intellectual-historical context of this discussion, that is worth considering on its own.

2. *Restriction in Time and Place*

A common objection against idealism, in the Western⁸⁵ as well as the Indian context, is the notion that idealism necessarily amounts to solipsism, the position that only oneself or one's own mind exists: in other words, that an idealistic ontology as such necessarily entails that "everything is subjective."⁸⁶ To begin with, this objection is misplaced in regard to the Buddhist tradition, insofar

⁸³ Above, this term has been translated "primary cause."

⁸⁴ See below, Section III.A.2: [Immediately-Preceding Condition and Immediately-Preceding Cognition](#).

⁸⁵ Taber's (2010, 289) observations concerning the general reluctance of contemporary Western philosophers to consider idealism as a serious position are worth considering: "To be sure, few philosophers would deny the existence of the external world today, but that has nothing to do with the fact that idealism has been decisively refuted in Western philosophy—it hasn't. Rather, it has to do with the fact that philosophers have simply moved on to other positions (while related positions such as anti-realism and skepticism continue to surface)."

⁸⁶ Gold (2015, 169) neatly explains the fundamental problem with such a perspective: "Many Tibetans, and some modern scholars, argue that Yogācāra philosophers, including Vasubandhu, affirm the ultimate reality of the subjective mind. This is a textbook error that comes from reading the denial of duality as equivalent to the denial of external reality. They are two separate stages in an argument, or, better, two separate, causally related stages in the elimination of 'wrong view.' The difference between the two moments can be stated plainly: duality is two things, and external objects (or mental objects) make up just one of the two things being denied. Also to be denied is internal reality, the mind itself as subject."

Concerning Yogācāra analysis as a graded process, in terms of distinct stages of analysis, see also note [101](#) below.

as the nonexistence of any hypostatized subject or “self” is absolutely foundational and non-negotiable for Buddhism. Furthermore, as has already been discussed at length, Dharmakīrti maintains that phenomenological duality—paradigmatically including the first-person sense of subjectivity—is nothing but a form of cognitive error or distortion.

However, there is an additional response to be made here, to the effect that this objection against idealism typically hinges on a denial that a purely idealistic ontology could account for causal regularity. “If everything is only mind,” so this line of thinking goes, “then anything could appear at any time.” This is a major underlying motivation for the argument that an external cause is necessary in order to account for the existence of internal sensory content. It is also the first, primary, and framing objection raised by Vasubandhu’s interlocutor in *Vimśikā* 2, following the declaration that all phenomena are mind or “mental representations only” (*viññaptimātra*) in *Vimśikā* 1⁸⁷ (trans. Silk):

[Opponent:] “If manifestation [or ‘mental representation,’ *viññapti*] does not [arise] from an external object, it is not reasonable that there be restriction as to time and place, nor nonrestriction as to personal continuum, nor causal efficacy.” || 2 ||

What is being stated here? If there is the arising of manifestation of material form and so on without any external object of material form and so on, and [consequently the manifestation] does not [arise] from a [real] external object of material form and so on, why does [such a manifestation] arise in a particular place, and not everywhere; why does it arise only in that place at some time, not always; and why does it arise without restriction in the minds of all those present there in that place at that time, and not in [the minds] of just a few? For instance, while a hair and so on may appear in the mind of one with eye disease, it does not [appear] to others [free of that disease].⁸⁸

⁸⁷ See below, Section II.C.3: [Idealism and Solipsism](#). For an extended analysis of *Vimśikā* 2-3, see also Kachru (2015, 202–12).

⁸⁸ Silk (2016, 32): gal te rnam rig don min na || yul dang dus la nges med cing || sems kyang nges med ma yin la || bya ba byed pa’ang mi rigs ’gyur || 2 || ji skad du bstan par ’gyur zhes na | gal te gzugs la sogs pa’i don med par

This is precisely the same issue addressed by Dharmakīrti at this juncture, highlighting how Dharmakīrti has transitioned from a broadly “Sautrāntika” perspective, as evidenced by his use of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* as an intellectual-historical touchstone, to Yogācāra, as evidenced by his explicit reliance upon foundational Yogācāra concepts such as karmic imprints (*vāsanā*). Dharmakīrti continues to rely on Vasubandhu, but this reliance now occurs in a new register.

The key point here, which will be discussed in greater detail below, is that the causal regularity that inherently links some stimulus *qua* cause with some appearance *qua* effect is not in question. The issue, rather, is how best to account for this regularity. Dharmakīrti’s point, based on Yogācāra perceptual theory, is that an explanation centered around the activation of latent imprints functions at least as well as—indeed, given the mereological critique of material particles articulated in *Vimśikā* 11-15, strictly *better* than—an explanation that appeals to extramental matter as the causal stimulus for sensory cognition.

The upshot of this argument is that the mere absence of external objects, or more generally the impossibility and incoherence of an observer-independent “objective” reality, does not entail the absence of any “external” (that is, outside one’s own *individual* mind) constraints on the contents of sensory cognition; in fact, quite the opposite. It is an essential feature of the Yogācāra perspective that every being’s continuum is understood to exert causal influence upon every other being’s continuum, creating a shared intersubjective illusion—*samsāra*—that is causally restricted in terms of how it is able to appear, its fundamentally hallucinatory nature notwithstanding.⁸⁹ As

gzugs la sogs pa'i rnam par rig pa 'byung ste gzugs la sogs pa'i don las ma yin na | ci'i phyir yul la lar 'byung la thams cad na ma yin | yul de nyid na yang res 'ga' 'byung la thams cad du ma yin | yul dang dus de na 'khod pa thams cad kyi sems la nges pa med pa 'byung la 'ga' tsam la ma yin | ji ltar rab rib can nyid kyi sems la skra la sogs pa snang gi | gzhan dag la ni ma yin ||

⁸⁹ In keeping with his general reluctance to explicitly invoke the storehouse consciousness and related concepts, Dharmakīrti does not specifically address the problem of intersubjectivity in the PV, and his direct argumentation against solipsism is primarily confined to the *Santānātarasiddhi* (“Proof of Other Minds”). A detailed examination of

Kachru (2015, 254–311) argues at length, on the Yogācāra model, intersubjective karmic habituation, stored as latent dispositions in the storehouse, is constitutive of “the mental” as a category, and indeed of cognition as such: “The constraint beings experience when confronted by a world is nothing more and nothing less than the result of the store of past actions which constitute particular types of subjects of experience as well.... The concept of intentionality is inseparably bound up with the concept of being a particular kind of living being, which in turn, involves a notion of the world a living being constitutes, and the world that is available for such a being to experience.” In sum, as Tzohar (2017, 325–26) succinctly explains,

One of the various explanatory roles performed by the notion of the storehouse consciousness is that of explaining how our lifeworld can be causally accounted for by karma. An account of this process appears, for instance, in the first chapter of Asaṅga’s *Mahāyānasamgraha* (MSg), where our common surrounding “receptacle world” (*bhājana-loka*) and personal sense sphere (*prātyatmikāyatana*)—respectively, our shared intersubjective experiences and what will be described for now, for lack of a more accurate translation, provisionally as “private” experiential content—are traced, respectively, to the maturation (*vipāka*) of similar and dissimilar karmic seeds (*bīja*) and impressions (*vāsanā*) in the storehouse consciousness. So, simply put, whatever causal mental activity is shared at any given moment by our respective mind-streams will appear as intersubjective, and whatever causal mental activity is not shared will be experienced privately. We can all have a simultaneous perception of the same object because of our shared karmic seeds and impressions, but we do not perceive it in exactly the same way (in terms of visual perspective, for instance) and we do not know one another’s accompanying thoughts because that portion or activity of our mind-streams is not shared.

This brings us to the problem of solipsism in relation to Yogācāra idealism.

these issues would thus lie outside the scope of the present study. The Yogācāra explanation of how intersubjectivity works at a causal or mechanical level is more thoroughly developed in texts such as the MSg and the *Viṃśikā*. For an overview, cf. Tzohar (2017). See also Kachru (2019, 171-212).

3. *Idealism and Solipsism*

The preceding analysis highlights several problems with Arnold's (2009, 138) or, indeed, any interpretation of Dharmakīrti's Yogācāra idealism as "methodological solipsism." To be clear, Arnold's perspective here is only singled out for its philosophical sophistication: it serves, in other words, as a particularly illustrative index of the interpretive traps against which a reader of the *Pramāṇavārttika* must be vigilantly on guard.

In the articulation of Dharmakīrti's idealistic perspective as "methodological solipsism," for example, Arnold claims that "[Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti's] account of our acquaintance with the content of our awareness is fundamentally independent of how things are in the world. This is the sense in which these thinkers are committed to an account of mental content—an account of what thought is *about*—as intelligible with reference only to a subject." It is perhaps natural to equate idealism with subjectivism. However, as has already been discussed at length in Chapter 1,⁹⁰ and as will be revisited in the discussion of the subject-image in Chapter 5, the very notion of "subjectivity" conceived along these lines is antithetical to the Yogācāra tradition, and by extension, to the Buddhist *pramāṇa* discourse.

But this is not the only, nor really the main, problem with such an interpretation. Arnold (2008, 5) expands upon this line of thinking elsewhere (emphasis original):

[Proponents] of Sautrāntika and Yogācāra are commonly committed to the view that what we are immediately aware of—which is different from the ontological issue of *what there is*—is only things somehow intrinsic to cognition. On my understanding, the salient point of this epistemological claim is that mental content is taken to be autonomously intelligible. This is the idea, in other words, that we can know *how things seem to us* quite apart from any considerations about how

⁹⁰ See in particular Chapter 1, Section III.C: [Duality and the Internal Distortion](#); and note [86](#), above.

things really are—which is to say, the idea that we might find it intelligible that our own thoughts are not about a *world*.

Arnold (ibid., 26) ultimately links this view to the “characteristically Buddhist commitment to the non-conceptual character of our self-awareness”:

The thought, that is, that uninterpreted sensations (rather than judgments) represent the basis of our experience leads, on this reading, to the *interiorizing* of awareness; what is uniquely indubitable, from the perspective of such a view, is finally only the character of occurrent awareness *as* awareness. On the contrasting view I have commended the intrinsically objective (the ‘world-disclosing’) character of our experience requires reference to such constitutively intersubjective things as concepts and discourse—to the conceptual capacities in virtue of which we are ‘minded.’

There is much to recommend Arnold’s overarching point here, to the effect that there is a kind of meta-philosophical connection between the view that cognition—even conceptual cognition—is characteristically non-conceptual, and the view that “what is uniquely indubitable... is finally only the character of occurrent awareness *as* awareness.”⁹¹ But it is impossible to square the rest of this argument with the Yogācāra tradition as it has been handed down to us through the works of Vasubandhu, Dinnāga, and Dharmakīrti.

To begin with, the assertion that it is “conceptual capacities in virtue of which we are ‘minded’” begs the question as to what precisely constitutes “mindedness.” The Buddhist epistemological tradition after Dharmakīrti did run into trouble in its attempt to account for how “uninterpreted” nonconceptual sensations could count as knowledge (*pramiti*), which is more typically understood (especially by non-Buddhists) as determinate and conceptual.⁹² But this is

⁹¹ For further reflections on this connection, cf. Arnold (2018).

⁹² See Dreyfus (1996) and Dunne (2004, 252–318). See also Chapter 2, Section I: [The Kāraṅka System and Cognition](#).

quite a different problem from that of accounting for what it means to say that a being is sentient, i.e., “minded.” On the Buddhist account, it is just reflexive awareness—*not* any capacity for conceptualization⁹³—which constitutes “mindedness.”

Furthermore, the attempt to characterize Yogācāra epistemological and phenomenological analysis as some type of subjective “interiorization,” as opposed to a “world-disclosing” objectivity, is misplaced. On the contrary: precisely in consequence of calling into question the premises of what it would even mean to draw this kind of a distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, “inside” and “outside,” Yogācāra is fundamentally concerned with intersubjectivity. Indeed, on Kachru’s (2015) reading of the *Viṃśikā*—endorsed wholeheartedly here—cognition *as such* constitutively requires the presence of the constitutively intersubjective storehouse consciousness, i.e., the locus of those latent dispositions which eventually manifest as cognitive content.⁹⁴ On this account, in other words, cognition must be understood as *constitutively intersubjective*, precisely because the storehouse consciousness (in the absence of which, on this model, there can be no sensory content) is constitutively intersubjective.

⁹³ As discussed in the Introduction, Dharmakīrti asserts that “ignorance just is conceptuality” (*vikalpa eva hy avidyā*). And what defines an ordinary sentient being as an ordinary sentient being—as opposed to a Buddha—is precisely the fact that sentient beings are ignorant and Buddhas are not. It may accordingly be the case that, on Dharmakīrti’s account, there is something characteristically conceptual about the minds of ordinary sentient beings. Call this characteristic the “imprint for conceptuality” (*vikalpavāsanā*). It nevertheless remains the case that, on the traditional Buddhist account, Buddhas possess minds, albeit minds which (unlike ours) are perfect; on this point, see also Kachru (2015, 560–67). The Yogācāra tradition, in particular, modeled Buddhahood as a “revolution of the basis” (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*), a transformation of the storehouse consciousness from a defiled and ignorant to an undefiled and perfectly-awakened state—a state which, therefore, must be utterly devoid of conceptuality. The key point here, which also serves as the theoretical lynchpin for advanced contemplative practices such as Mahāmudrā and rDzogs chen, is that it is reflexive awareness which defines mind as mind, or experience as experience. And reflexive awareness, construed as the very nature of the storehouse consciousness, or what remains once it has been completely emptied of its store of karmic seeds, is the same throughout this process of “revolution.” In other words, on the Buddhist model, it is not the case that it is our “conceptual capacities in virtue of which we are ‘minded.’” On the contrary, what defines “mindedness” on the Yogācāra account is reflexive awareness, which may thus be identified in these terms as “buddha-nature” (*tathāgatagarbha*). See also below, note [178](#).

⁹⁴ Cf. Waldron (2003, 112–39) and MSg I.

Crucially—this point *cannot be emphasized enough*—this also provides a model for the constitutively intersubjective nature of Buddhahood.⁹⁵ On the classical Yogācāra account, Buddhahood consists in a “revolution of the basis” (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*): a transformation of the storehouse consciousness from a defiled to an undefiled state. But the “defilement” (*kleśa*) in question is nothing other than the presence of these latent dispositions (*vāsanā*) or “seeds” (*bījas*).⁹⁶ As mentioned above, this does create a problem for systematic Yogācāra epistemological theory, because on such an account it is not at all clear how Buddhas—who are by nature free from ignorance and defilement, and therefore cannot possess any such dispositions—would be able to have enough in common with sentient beings to share in their sensory perceptions. This is why Ratnākaraśānti had to state, with his tongue no doubt planted firmly in his cheek, that in terms of their “pure worldly wisdom” (*'jig rten pa'i ye shes*)—though, importantly, *not* their utterly

⁹⁵ While there is no space to pursue this point here, it is worth noting that intersubjectivity is a key feature of the “three embodiments” (*trikāya*) system, which constitutes an integral part of the Yogācāra model of Buddhahood. In contrast to the earlier model of the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus (Makransky 1997, 29–35), that is, which only distinguished between the Buddha’s “true embodiment” (*dharmakāya*) and the Buddha’s physical form (*rūpakāya*), Yogācāra literature further distinguished the Buddha’s physical form into two different types of embodiment: the “manifest body” (*nirmāṇakāya*) and the “communal enjoyment body” (*sambhogikakāya* or *sambhogakāya*). As Makransky (1997, 104–5) notes, “Because the glorious forms identified as *sambhogikakāya* were described in various Mahāyāna sūtras in terms of their blissful sharing of the dharma with their retinues of bodhisattvas, they were characterized particularly in terms of their *sambhoga*, ‘enjoyment’ or ‘bliss,’ from which was derived the name. When our earliest commentarial sources describe *sambhogikakāya*, they do not describe it by reference to its *own* experience of enjoyment, but by reference to its *sharing* of the enjoyment of dharma with its retinue of disciples.” See, for example, MSĀ IX.60, cited by Makransky (*ibid.*). It should be noted that the *trikāya* system eventually became normative in Mahāyāna Buddhism, even for Mādhyamikas who otherwise eschewed Yogācāra doctrine.

⁹⁶ Cf., for example, MSĀ X.12: “Buddhahood is the elimination, extremely vast and completely obliterating, of the seeds [i.e., *bīja*, which is to say, *vāsanā*] of the afflictive and cognitive obscurations that for so long have been constantly present. It is the attainment of the fundamental transformation [i.e., *āśrayaparāvṛtti*] with its supreme qualities, accomplished by the path of the utterly pure nonconceptuality and the wakefulness [i.e., *jñāna* or *prajñā*] of the extremely vast field.”

Cf. also Mipham’s comments (based on Sthiramati’s) *ad* MSĀ XIX.84: “Moreover, all conditioned things are also the effects of the mind. It is because of habitual tendencies [i.e., *vāsanā*] left in the mind that it appears as though there are external objects. Beyond that appearance, there are no external objects. There is no such thing as a self-sufficient external entity that is not due to karmic action as accumulated by the mind.”

Translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee (2014).

transcendent wisdom—Buddhas retain a “tiny bit of distortion” (*cung zad ’khrul pa*), just in order to be able to interact with sentient beings.⁹⁷ But the point remains that, on the Yogācāra model, both Buddhahood as such and cognition as such are constitutively intersubjective: *inter alia*, what makes a Buddha, a Buddha, is the fact that a Buddha teaches the Dharma, and thus provides sublime refuge (*śaraṇa*) for the ignorant beings who are caught in *saṃsāra*.

To return to Arnold’s perspective as an index for a certain class of interpretations, though, it must moreover be understood that, on Dharmakīrti’s idealistic account, the question of “what we are immediately aware of” is not at all different from “the ontological issue of what there is,” except perhaps in the narrowly limited sense that karmic imprints considered strictly as ontological entities might (or, on the other hand, might not) in some sense be theoretically distinguishable from the cognitions which they produce by being activated or awakened.⁹⁸ But even given this purely hypothetical and theoretical distinction, Dharmakīrti’s overarching point here is that both what we are immediately aware of (the “seen” blue), and what there *is* (the “seeing” of the blue, or the activated imprint for blue), are “only mind” (*cittamātra*) in some form or another. They are, in other words, precisely the same ontological stuff. And, as outlined above, it is just this consideration of “how things seem to us” which, on Dharmakīrti’s account, inexorably leads a judicious person to an idealistic conclusion regarding “how things really are.”

⁹⁷ Cf. Yiannopoulos (2012, 183) and Tomlinson (2019, 98–104).

⁹⁸ Interestingly, some post-Dharmakīrti Nyāyas, such as Śrīdhāra (ca. 990 CE), appear to have picked up on this theoretical distinction between imprints and cognition, and critiqued the Buddhist position along these lines. See, for example, the *Nyāyakandalī* as translated by Jha (1982, 283): “If the *vāsanā* were the cause of the particular purposes served in the world, then your theory differs from ours only in name—what you call *vāsanā* we call *artha*, ‘object.’”

Finally, for all of the reasons outlined above, the notion that Yogācāra idealism somehow entails that, as Arnold claims, “our thoughts [i.e., cognitions]⁹⁹ are not about a world” is ill-founded. Even if mental imprints may be described as “internal” to mind and mental processes (*cittacaitta*), in a manner that “external” matter cannot, this is pointedly *not* to say that there is no “world” outside of one’s own individual continuum (*santāna*), or that our cognitions have no referent (*artha*) whatsoever outside of our own individual continua.¹⁰⁰ Yogācāra idealism, in other words, is in no wise reducible to any kind of solipsism, “methodological” or otherwise. On the contrary: the point of Yogācāra analysis in this regard is simply that the referents of cognition have no existence outside of mind and mental processes *generally*. Put slightly differently: at higher levels of yogic practice (*yogācāra*), in which there is no distortion of duality, and therefore, properly speaking, neither any phenomenological object *nor any phenomenological “subject,”* if it is no longer the case that cognition has any “external” referent, it is by extension also the case

⁹⁹ Arnold’s rejection of the very possibility of nonconceptual cognition results in problematic translations, such as “thought” (normally, e.g., *vikalpa*, *kalpanā*, etc.) as a translation for *buddhi*, *jñāna*, etc. (better as “cognition,” “awareness,” or “consciousness”). The Buddhist argument to the effect that cognition as such is essentially nonconceptual may, or may not, be correct; but it does those who are interested in studying this material, especially those without any background in Sanskrit, no favors to muddy the philological waters in this way.

¹⁰⁰ Kachru (2015, 246–47) explains this point very well:

Does giving up extensional objects mean giving up on the notion of a world (as involving more than one subject)? No. One reason it pays to attend to cosmology is that as motivated by Vasubandhu it affords us a close link between talk of worlds and living beings (not construed as individuals, aggregated one at a time, but resolutely as types of beings). To speak of a world is not by itself to get at what is actual, but what is possible and impossible for certain types of beings... The deep problem for Vasubandhu has to do with providing an account of worlds in purely mentalistic terms, for on his view, it is the talk of minds in terms of worlds that allows him to forego the constraints that objects are thought to provide. But his insight, I believe we can show, stems from his recognizing that it is the *availability* of content that one wants to explain, and not the presence or absence of objects.

Kachru’s emphasis on the *availability* of content, irrespective of whether or not this content is ever actually manifest, dovetails with Śākyabuddhi’s account of how the intersubjective storehouse consciousness serves as the immediately-preceding cognition/condition (*samanantarapratyaya*) for a cognition with the appearance of smoke, even when one personally does not have one’s own cognition with an appearance of fire; see below, Section III.B.3: [The Role of the Storehouse in Idealistic Inference](#).

that cognition no longer has any “internal” referent, either.¹⁰¹ As Vasubandhu writes in his autocommentary *ad Viṃśikā* 1 (trans. Silk):

The Great Vehicle teaches that what belongs to the triple world is established as Manifestation-Only (**vijñaptimātra*), because it is stated in [the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*]: “O Sons of the Conqueror, what belongs to the triple world is mind-only.” Mind, thought (**manas*), cognition, and manifestation are synonyms. And here this ‘mind’ intends the inclusion of the concomitants [of mind] (**caitta*). “Only” is stated in order to rule out external objects. This cognition itself arises having the appearance of an external object. For example, it is like those with an eye disease (*rab rib can = *taimirika*) seeing non-existent hair, a [double] moon and so on, but [in reality] there is no object (**artha*) at all.¹⁰²

“There is no object at all” (*don gang yang med do*). Vasubandhu’s position here is not simply that the contents of one’s own sensory cognitions are only intelligible with respect to “internal” mental phenomena, or that they are “autonomously intelligible” in the sense outlined by Arnold. On the contrary, and very much in keeping with the “False Imagist” approach, he maintains that these contents are not ultimately intelligible (at least, not to ordinary beings)¹⁰³ at all!

¹⁰¹ When studying the Yogācāra tradition, particularly in regard to its idealistic dimensions, it is critically important not to lose sight of the fact that seeing phenomena as “mind only” is only one phase—typically presented as the first or second—in a fourfold process of development. Thus, for example, Ratnākaraśānti writes that, “In the second stage the yogis reflect on the perception of all phenomena as products of mental-processes-only (*sems tsam = *cittamātra*), which appear due to habitual tendencies of clinging to objects. Since objects grasped as external to the mind do not exist as they are conceptualised, their grasper cannot exist in that way either... In the third stage the yogis apply non-appearance to the false marks of manifest appearances, as meditators on the formless realms pass beyond the perception of form, by perceiving infinite space. Thereby they relinquish all false marks of the object and subject and view them as space, utterly immaculate and limitless, empty of duality, sheer luminosity” (Bentor 2002, 42–43). See also Yiannopoulos (2012, 177-186).

¹⁰² Silk (2016, 30–31): *theg pa chen po la khams gsum pa rnam par rig pa tsam du rnam par gzhas ste | mdo las | kye rgyal ba'i sras dag 'di lta ste | khams gsum pa 'di ni sems tsam mo zhes 'byung ba'i phyir ro || sems dang yid dang | rnam par shes pa dang | rnam par rig pa zhes bya ba ni rnam grangs su gtos pa 'o || sems de yang 'dir mtshungs par ldan pa dang bcas par dgongs pa 'o || tsam zhes bya ba smos pa ni don dgag pa'i phyir ro || rnam par shes pa 'di nyid don du snang ba 'byung ste | dper na rab rib can rnams kyis skra zla la sogs pa med par mthong ba bzhin te | don gang yang med do ||*

¹⁰³ As highlighted by Vasubandhu in the final verse of the *Viṃśikā*, the mind of a Buddha is categorically distinct from that of sentient beings in this regard. See Kachru (2015, 557–67) for a philosophical sketch of how such a “Buddha’s-eye view” might be described. See also note [193](#), below.

III. Inference and External Objects

A. Theoretical Preliminaries

1. *Non-Perception (anupalabdhi) as Inferential Evidence (hetu)*

The essence of the problem with inferring an external object is simple. Anything that could ever serve as inferential evidence (*hetu* or *līṅga*) for an external object, in order to serve as such evidence, would have to be cognized; being cognized, however, this evidence would necessarily be presented as the objective aspect of a cognition, thus negating its ability to serve as evidence for the existence of external matter, i.e., something “outside of” or “apart from” cognition. More briefly: in order to infer an external object, some kind of evidence must first be perceived; but whatever evidence is perceived is always already perceived as the contents of the cognition in which it is perceived. Thus, for example, in terms of the classic model of an inference of the presence of fire (*agni*), made on the basis of a cognition of smoke (*dhūma*), the smoke—which is to say, the inferential evidence—must first be perceived, in order for the inference to take place.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Although PV 3 contains no explicit argumentation to this effect with regard to the specific issue of whether the existence of external objects can be ascertained by means of inference, there is argumentation along these lines concerning a closely-related issue: namely, whether the contents of a cognition are ascertained by means of a temporally subsequent inference, as opposed to by means of simultaneous reflexive awareness. These arguments occur in the context of PV 3.440-483, Dharmakīrti’s comments *ad* PS 1.12ab₁, where Dīnāga states that if cognition were experienced by means of another cognition—as some Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā opponents assert—that there would then be an infinite regress (*jñānāntareṇānubhave ’niṣṭhā*); for more on Dīnāga’s perspective concerning this issue, see Kellner (2011) and Appendix B, [PST *ad* PS\(V\) 1.12](#).

While a detailed examination of Dharmakīrti’s remarks in this passage would be outside the scope of the present study, it is worth briefly going over their structure and flow. In PV 3.440-447, Dharmakīrti states the problem of infinite regress, and concludes his initial remarks by noting that “an object could not be illuminated in a [cognition] in which there is no illumination” (PV 3.446cd, *yat [buddhyām] tasyām aprakāśāyām arthaḥ syād aprakāśitaḥ*). Dharmakīrti then states another *reductio* in PV 3.448-459, to the effect that, if a cognition were known by means of a subsequent inferential cognition, which takes the prior cognition as its object-support (*ālambana*), then we should experience the pleasure or pain of others whose pleasure or pain we observe, and whose pleasure and pain we thus take as the object-support for our own inferential cognition. For a translation and analysis of this latter passage, see Moriyama (2010).

Dharmakīrti then notes that, in the absence of the inherently perceptual quality of being reflexively self-knowing, (the contents of) cognition could only be known by means of some inferential evidence (PV 3.460ab, *api*

This point been obscured somewhat in the contemporary analysis of Dharmakīrti's idealistic perspective, owing in large part to a rather odd fixation with the idiosyncratic remarks of Manorathanandin in his commentary *ad* PV 3.336.¹⁰⁵ These remarks need not detain us at length; it suffices to note that they concern the extent to which the nonexistence of external objects may be regarded as “proven” or “established” (*siddha*). The supposed problem addressed by Manorathanandin is that, within Dharmakīrti's logical system, non-observation (*anupalabdhi*) can only serve as probative (*sādhaka*) inferential evidence with regard to an entity that should ordinarily be visible (*dṛśya*), such as a pot. In other words, the non-observation of a pot on the table serves as probative evidence that there is no pot on the table. But the non-observation of an ordinarily invisible (*adṛśya*) entity, such as a ghost or demon (*piśāca*), cannot serve as probative evidence: absence of evidence, in such cases, is not evidence of absence.¹⁰⁶

However, it should be remembered that the overarching frame here concerns the analysis of a “judicious person” (*pūrvaprekṣākārin*), which is to say, someone who takes all of the relevant

cādhyakṣatābhāve dhiyaḥ syāl liṅgato gatiḥ), but that there is nothing which could serve as such evidence (PV 3.460cd-462abc₁). Most relevantly to the topic at hand—in what amounts to the exact same appeal as in the case of the argument for external objects—the opponent then hypothesizes that the appearance or manifestation (*vyakti*) of the object is the inferential evidence (PV 3.462c₂d-463a₁, *vyaktir arthasya cen matā liṅgaṃ*). But Dharmakīrti immediately replies that this manifestation, the supposed evidence, is in fact nothing but a cognition (PV 3.463a₂, *sāiva nanu jñānaṃ*), because there can be no ascertainment of manifestation with regard to any evidence, if that manifestation itself is not first experienced (PV 3.463cd, *vyaktāv ananubhūṭāyāṃ tadvyaktatvāvinīscayāt*). In other words, the evidence must be cognized (i.e., “illuminated” or made manifest in the mind) in order to serve as evidence; however, this only re-affirms that there is no object (*artha*) outside of cognition. The rest of PV 3.464-483 treats various peripheral issues related to this topic, but the key point—particularly concerning the problem of the inference of external objects—is stated in PV 3.473a₂b: “For inferential evidence does not illuminate that which has not been observed” (*liṅgaṃ hi nādrṣṭasya prakāśakam*). Only awareness can illuminate.

¹⁰⁵ See above, note 79. It should additionally be noted in this regard that Manorathanandin's invocation of the non-observation (*anupalabdhi*) of a ghost (*piśāca*), as an analogy for the non-observation of extramental matter, is not found in any of the commentaries of Devendrabuddhi, Śākyabuddhi, or Prajñākaragupta *ad* PV 3.333-336.

¹⁰⁶ For more on the topic of *anupalabdhi*, within both Indian logic generally and Dharmakīrti's system specifically, cf. Katsura (1992); Steinkellner (1992); Kellner (1997a), (1997b), (1999), (2001), and (2003); Taber (2001); Yao (2011); and Gorisse (2017).

facts and logical arguments into consideration before reaching a conclusion.¹⁰⁷ The issue, in other words, is not that any one individual piece of information—not even the fact that purportedly external objects are themselves never directly perceived—necessarily *proves* all objects to be internal or mental. Rather, the idea is that a truly judicious person, understanding not only that external objects are never directly perceived, but also all the other problems with the External Realist perspective (as highlighted in the *Vimśikā*, PV 3.194-224, PV 3.320-337, and elsewhere), should conclude that the Epistemic Idealist account is correct.

Furthermore, as discussed above, PV 3.336 is primarily a refutation of the opponent’s contention that external objects are a necessary condition in order to account for the fact that appearances are “restricted” (*niyama*) in that they only arise at certain times and places (i.e., when and where there is an external object causing these appearances). In PV 3.336, then, Dharmakīrti articulates an alternative hypothesis, to the effect that the activation (*prabodhaka*) of karmic imprints (*vāsanā*) explains this restriction, as to the time and place in which appearances arise, just as well as the opponent’s view—and thereby, given all of the other relevant argumentation against External Realism, constitutes a strictly superior account. As is quite often the case, in other words, Manorathanandin’s comments on PV 3.336 are somewhat beside Dharmakīrti’s actual point in that verse. In any event, since Dharmakīrti’s comments concerning the inferability of external objects occurs in the context of the *sahopalambhaniyama* argument, let us return to this passage, in order to address the problem of inferring external objects.

¹⁰⁷ See note [69](#) above.

2. *Immediately-Preceding Condition and Immediately-Preceding Cognition*

While the philosophical argument for the necessity that the appearance of an object is always necessarily accompanied by the appearance of cognition itself (i.e., the *sahopalambhaniyama*) is somewhat more fleshed out in *Pramāṇaviniścaya* 1.54,¹⁰⁸ the basic point is straightforward:

The object which is being experienced necessarily (*niyamena*) occurs simultaneously with the cognition [of that object]; in what manner is the difference of that experienced object from this [cognition] established?¹⁰⁹ || 387 ||¹¹⁰

In other words, as has been outlined extensively above, every awareness of an object necessarily presents itself just as an awareness, which is to say, with the “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) of being a cognition.¹¹¹ But the apparent difference between this “self-appearance” or subjective aspect of cognition on the one hand, and its object-appearance (*viṣayābhāsa*) on the other—in other words, the phenomenological duality of subject and object—is strictly erroneous:

Moreover, the difference [between subject and object] is seen by those with distorted cognition, as in the case of a moon that is not double [but appears as double]. There is no restriction [requiring simultaneous perception] in awareness (*saṃvittinīyama*) with respect to the difference between blue and yellow. || 388 ||¹¹²

That is to say, the *sahopalambhaniyama* is not relevant to the differences—such as appearing blue or yellow—that constitute phenomenal variegation. The restriction only applies to the phenomenal

¹⁰⁸ For a translation and brief analysis of PV in 1.54cd, see Kellner (2011, 420–23).

¹⁰⁹ *kenākāreṇa*. This may also be rendered as, “in what regard?”.

¹¹⁰ Tosaki (1985, 70): *sakṛt saṃvedyamānasya niyamena dhiyā saha | viṣayasya tato 'nyatvaṃ kenākāreṇa sidhyati* || 387 ||

¹¹¹ See also Chapter 5, Section I: [Reflexive Awareness and “Self-Appearance” \(*svābhāsa*\)](#).

¹¹² Tosaki (1985, 71–72): *bhedaś ca bhrāntivijñānair dr̥śyetendāv ivādvaye | saṃvittinīyamo nāsti bhinnayor nīlapītayoḥ* || 388 ||

subject and object of a cognition, where the apparent difference between these two is seen only by those who are in error (*bhrāntivijñānaiḥ*). Therefore, the cognitive object cannot be distinct from the cognition in which it appears:

It is not observed to be the case that there is an object without experience. It is also not observed to be the case that an experience without an object is being experienced.¹¹³ Hence, there is no separation between the two.¹¹⁴ Therefore, it is irrefutable (*durvāra*) that there is no differentiation from cognition, on the part of an object which appears at the time of the cognition. || 389-390abc ||¹¹⁵

The key point here, so far as the overarching argument concerning external objects is concerned, is that *there is no object* in the absence of an observation or experience of that object (*nārtho 'saṃvedanaḥ*). As Dharmakīrti states in the PVSV *ad* PV 1.3, “existence is just perception” (*sattvam upalabdhir eva*).¹¹⁶ Something is only ever an “object” insofar as it appears within some cognition.

While this point is ultimately supposed to be taken by a “judicious person” as indicative of the nonexistence of external objects, Dharmakīrti is also careful to specify that it is in fact possible to construct a logically sound inference to the effect that an external object is the cause of the sensory cognition bearing its form, as long as one ignores the central role of the immediately-preceding cognition (which, Dharmakīrti implies, one really should not do):

¹¹³ Devendrabuddhi (PVP 567.10) glosses *saṃvedana* with *upalambha* (*dmigs pa*), “observation.” It is worth reflecting on the quantum-theoretical valences of this argument: there is no un-observed object, and there is no objectless observation (or “measurement,” i.e., $\sqrt{m\bar{a}}$). See also the [Conclusion](#).

¹¹⁴ That is, there is no difference between the experienced object and the experience of the object.

¹¹⁵ Tosaki (1985, 72–73): *nārtho 'saṃvedanaḥ kaścid anarthaṃ vāpi vedanam | dr̥ṣṭaṃ saṃvedyamānaṃ tat tayor nāsti vivekitā || 389 || tasmād arthasya durvāraṃ jñānakālāvabhāsinaḥ | jñānād avyatirekitvaṃ.*

¹¹⁶ See also Dunne (2004, 85n52).

An external (*bheda*) [object] may be inferred as the cause [of sensory cognition] because perceptual cognitions do not occur, even if the other causes are present, but [one can use this inference only] if [the Yogācārin] does not say that the restriction [of cognition to a particular appearance in a particular time and place] is due to the immediately preceding cognition.¹¹⁷ || 390d-391 ||¹¹⁸

Dharmakīrti provides here, in extremely compact form, two possible accounts as to why a given cognition possesses the particular appearance that it does, and is “restricted” (*niyama*) in terms of the particular time and place in which it may arise, as discussed above in the context of PV 3.336.

Both accounts proceed from the understanding that cognition does not arise when only its “other causes”—the stock examples in PV3¹¹⁹ include light (*āloka*), attention (*manaskāra*), and so on—by themselves are in place. The question, in other words, is what constitutes the true “primary cause” (*upādānahetu*) of cognition, or, put slightly differently, what precisely it is that serves as the final restricting factor (*niyāmaka*)¹²⁰ that governs whether and how a cognition arises, given

¹¹⁷ Compare to PVin 1.58c₂d:

An external object can be established, due to negative concomitance. || 58 ||

The fact that the effect (i.e., the cognition) does not arise, even when all the other sufficient causes are present, indicates the absence of [some] other cause. This [other cause] could be an external object—if someone does not say that the negative concomitance with the effect (*kāryavyatireka*) is due to the absence of a particular [i.e., an “internal” type of] primary cause (*upādāna[hetu]*).

Steinkellner (2007, 43.9-12): *bāhyasiddhiḥ syād vyatirekataḥ* || 58 || *satsu samartheṣu anyeṣu hetuṣu jñānakāryaniṣpattiḥ kāraṇāntaravaikalyaṃ sūcayati | sa bāhyo 'rthaḥ syāt | yady atra kaścid upādānaviśeṣābhāvakṛtaṃ kāryavyatirekaṃ na brūyāt |*

This translation is based on Krasser (2004, 142–43).

¹¹⁸ Tosaki (1985, 73–74): *hetubhedānumā bhavet* || 390 || *abhāvād akṣabuddhīnām satsv apy anyeṣu hetuṣu | niyamam yadi na brūyāt pratyayāt samanantarāt* || 391 ||

¹¹⁹ See, in particular, PV 3.405, discussed below in Chapter 5, Section III.C: [Difference in Object \(*visayabheda*\)](#).

¹²⁰ It should be noted that this sense of “restriction” (*niyama*) is slightly different from that discussed in Chapter 2. The theoretical role played by this restricting factor is the same, in terms of identifying the most salient “bottleneck” with respect to the question at hand—i.e., that which, being in place, essentially guarantees a given result barring unforeseen obstacles (thanks to John Dunne for this clarification of the concept). But the specific question in this context is slightly different. In the prior context, that is, concerning the relationship between the *pramāṇa* and the *phala*, the question was what guarantees that a present perceptual event is occurring. In that context, the answer was the object-image; see Chapter 2, Section II.C: [The “Determiner” \(*niyāmaka*\)](#). Thus, for example, the determinative factor (*niyāmaka*) for the perception of ‘blue’ is the presence of a ‘blue’ image in awareness. At this juncture, on the other hand, the question is what determines whether a given cognition can or will occur. In this context, that is to say,

that all of its other necessary conditions are present. On the first, External Realist account, Dharmakīrti notes—in the subjunctive mood (*bhavet*)—that it is *possible* to infer an external object as this primary cause. However, he immediately clarifies, this is *only* possible if one fails to understand that the immediately-preceding cognition can just as easily serve as this primary cause, without having to posit any external objects.¹²¹ On the superior, Epistemic Idealist account, then, the negative concomitance (*vyatireka*) between cause and cognition can be fully accounted for by identifying the immediately-preceding cognition as the most salient, primary causal factor.

Classical Abhidharma causal analysis stipulates four types of condition (*pratyaya*) that need to be met in order for a cognitive event to arise: the object-support condition (*ālambanapratyaya*), the contributing condition (*adhipatipratyaya*), the immediately-preceding condition (*samanantarapratyaya*), and the primary causal condition (*hetupratyaya*).¹²² The “other causes” mentioned in PV 3.390d are the contributing conditions. The question at stake thus concerns the nature of, or the relationship among, the object-support, the immediately-preceding condition, and the primary cause. On this note, it is an interesting wrinkle that, in Sanskrit Buddhist literature, the word *pratyaya* means both “condition” as well as “cognition.” Thus, in classical Buddhist analysis, the immediately-preceding condition (*samanantarapratyaya*) is considered to be the immediately-preceding cognition (*samanantarapratyaya*). Building on this classical analysis, Dharmakīrti’s point here is in effect that the immediately-preceding cognition may be

the restricting factor with regard to the appearance of ‘blue’ is the presence of some stimulus which is capable of *causing* the image of ‘blue’ to arise. The question then becomes whether this causal stimulus exists externally to the mind or not.

¹²¹ Devendrabuddhi (PVP 568.12) notes that the first approach is only for the spiritually immature (*byis pa'i blo rnams*).

¹²² AKBh 2.49.

understood to function not only as the immediately-preceding cognition, but also as the object-support condition and the primary causal condition, as well.

3. The “Production-Mode” (tadutpatti) Inference of External Objects

To step back for a moment: in the part of the *sahopalambhaniyama* passage we are currently examining, Dharmakīrti is concerned with the problem of inferring external objects. Although there were some meta-epistemological disputes among the various Indian intellectual traditions, with regard to the elements of a syllogistically-valid inference, the details of these disputes do not concern us here. The upshot is that every Indian tradition, including the Buddhist tradition, accepted the same basic framework. Within this shared framework, an inference (*anumāna*) is understood as a correct determination (*niścaya*) to the effect that a subject or “property-possessor” (*dharmin*) bears a certain predicate or “property” (*dharma*) that “is to be proven” (*sādhya*) by adducing some type of inferential evidence (*hetu* or *liṅga*).¹²³ The essential point of inference thus concerns the relationship between the evidence and the predicate, as an inference is only valid to the extent that the presence of the evidence actually guarantees or proves (in Sanskrit terminology, is a “*sādhaka*” for) the presence of the predicate. Hence, on the classic example, some place is reliably inferred to be the locus of fire, because it is directly observed¹²⁴ to be the locus of smoke.

One of the most urgent and pressing issues, within this framework, concerns the precise nature of the relationship between smoke and fire, i.e., the evidence and the property. On what grounds does the presence of smoke incontrovertibly prove the presence of fire? To perhaps

¹²³ Cf. Dunne (2004, 25–34).

¹²⁴ For Uddyotakara’s (ca. 500) remarks to the effect that “inference must... be grounded in perception,” see Dunne (2004, 32n42). This requirement, that the evidence must be directly perceived, also ties into Dharmakīrti’s argument regarding the inferentiability of external objects. See note [104](#), above.

oversimplify a centuries-long debate, by Dharmakīrti's time it was widely agreed that, in order for an inference to be valid, the relationship between the evidence (e.g., smoke) and the property (e.g., fire) must be one of mutual "pervasion" (*vyāpti*). This "pervasion" itself is the sum of two closely-related terms, "positive concomitance" (*anvayavyāpti*) and "negative concomitance" (*vyatirekavyāpti*). Positive concomitance amounts to a relationship of *necessity*, such that whenever the evidence is present, the property is *necessarily* predicable of the subject: "wherever there is smoke, necessarily there is fire." Negative concomitance, meanwhile, is a relationship of *restriction*, to the effect that the presence of the evidence is *restricted* to instances where the property is present: "there is smoke *only* where there is fire."¹²⁵ In general, these two were also understood to constitute a logical implication and its contrapositive: the presence of the evidence necessarily entails the presence of the property ($E \rightarrow P$), and the absence of the property necessarily entails the absence of the evidence ($\neg P \rightarrow \neg E$).¹²⁶

But what about cases where (what seems to be) smoke appears for some reason other than an underlying fire, or where fire burns without producing smoke?¹²⁷ One of Dharmakīrti's most important contributions to the development of Indian logic was his formalization of the

¹²⁵ Dunne (2004, 28–29). See also Tillemans (1999), and Matilal (1985).

¹²⁶ This accounts for the internal logic of the External Realist's objection from above (Section I.B.1: [The Cause of Object-Awareness](#)), to the effect that the existence of external objects is proven on the basis of negative concomitance (*vyatireka*). According to the opponent, that is, sensory cognition (the evidence) is necessarily absent from some locus when an external sensory object (the predicate or property of that locus) is absent. Although Devendrabuddhi and Jinendrabuddhi do not engage with this argument in quite these terms, their explanation of Dharmakīrti's perspective can be reconstructed along the following lines: the fact that there exists *some* type of negative concomitance, such that cognition is necessarily absent when *something* is absent, is not in question. The question, rather, is what this "something" is. In other words, the Epistemic Idealist accepts that there is an invariable concomitance (*vyāpti*) between cognition *qua* evidence and some stimulus *qua* locational property to be inferred; the issue is the nature of this stimulus.

¹²⁷ Indeed, it was precisely for this reason that Nyāya logicians stipulated the requirement of an additional, extraneous, necessary condition (*upādhi*) of the pervasion, such as the fact that the fuel of the fire in question is wet enough to produce smoke, rather than being so dry that it does not. See Gangopadhyay (1971).

relationship between the property and the evidence on the closest thing to solid ontological footing that his overarching anti-realist metaphysical commitments could allow. This ontological foundation for inference is the inherent “natural relationship” or “essential concomitance” (*svabhāvapratibandha*) between the predicate and the evidence.

As might be imagined, the *svabhāvapratibandha* is an enormous topic, about which a great deal could be said.¹²⁸ But the basic point is simple: according to Dharmakīrti, the natural relationship, which guarantees the pervasion of both positive and negative concomitance between the predicate and the evidence, must be “natural” in the sense that it involves an ontologically essential relationship between the two. This is, in other words, a relationship in terms of their inherent nature or properties (*svabhāva*).¹²⁹

According to Dharmakīrti, there are only two such ontologically essential relationships: absolute identity, and direct causal production. As Dunne (2004, 152–53) explains,

On Dharmakīrti’s view, a *svabhāvapratibandha* comes in two forms or modes. It may be a case of “production-from-that” (*tadutpatti*), which I will call the “production-mode,” or it may be relation of identity (*tādātmya*), which I will call the “identity-mode.” These two relations provide the basis for Dharmakīrti’s two forms of affirmative evidence (*vidhi*). They are respectively: *kāryahetu*, “evidence consisting of an effect” or simply “effect-evidence”; and *svabhāvahetu*, “evidence consisting of a *svabhāva*” or “*svabhāva*-evidence.” ... The reliability or “accuracy” (*avyabhicāra*) of these two modes of evidence are based respectively upon the two modes of *svabhāvapratibandha*, production and identity. That is, an effect can serve as evidence for its cause because, on the relation by production, certain *svabhāvas* of the effect (such as smoke) cannot occur without certain *svabhāvas* in the cause (such as fire). Likewise, a *svabhāva* can serve as evidence because, on the identity relation, the *svabhāva* adduced as the evidence (such as “being a sugar maple”) necessitates the presence of the *svabhāva* to be proven (such

¹²⁸ See Dunne (2004, 145–222) for an overview and bibliography.

¹²⁹ For a discussion of the two primary senses of *svabhāva* (as “property” and “nature”), cf. Dunne (2004, 153–73).

as “being a tree”). In other words, it is not possible for the entity in question to “be a sugar maple” if it is not also “a tree.”¹³⁰

This point is extremely important in relation to the inference of external objects. In effect, as discussed above, the External Realist’s argument is that there exists a relationship of “negative concomitance” or restriction (*vyatireka*) between sensory cognition (i.e., the evidence) and external objects (i.e., the predicate). While not explicitly designated as such in this passage, this is clearly an instance of the “production-mode” (*tadutpatti*): the idea is that there exists a direct causal relationship between the external object (*qua* cause) and the sensory cognition thereof (*qua* effect), such that—in a manner precisely analogous to the causal relationship between smoke and fire—the *svabhāva* of a given cognition, possessing a given object-image, could not exist without having been produced by the *svabhāva* of some external object. In this way, the object and the object-image enjoy an inherent “natural relationship” of *svabhāvapratibandha*. And, for the External Realist, this object is external to the mind.

4. “Production-Mode” Inference in an Idealist Context

Dharmakīrti agrees with his Sautrāntika interlocutors that the causal relationship between cognition and its stimulus constitutes a “natural relationship” or “essential concomitance” (*svabhāvapratibandha*) in the “production-mode” (*tadutpatti*), such that the existence of some stimulus may be inferred from the appearance of that cognition which is its effect. Taking this analysis a step further, it is indeed possible to establish that some¹³¹ of the particular phenomenal

¹³⁰ There is, of course, a great deal more to say concerning *tadutpatti*; see Dunne (2004, 174–92) for an overview. See also Hayes and Gillon (1991), Lasic (2003), and Gillon and Hayes (2008).

¹³¹ As we will see, the causal characteristics of the perceiver are also highly relevant. See Chapter 5, Section II.D: [Subjective Variation in the Quality of Experience](#).

characteristics of the cognition are derived from the particular causal characteristics of this stimulus. But the question remains: must this stimulus *necessarily* exist externally to the mind?

Once again, the Epistemic Idealist suggestion is expressed in the subjunctive mood, as an “alternative” (*vā*) to the External Realist hypothesis, which itself is not refuted so much as re-contextualized into an epistemological hierarchy within which it occupies a subordinate position:

As in the case of the production of a sprout from a seed or the proof of fire from smoke, if the kind of definition (*sthiti*) of [something as] causative (*kāraṅka*) or indicative (*jñāpaka*) that [according to the external realist] relies upon external objects is [instead] conceptualized in that way in dependence on cognitions having appearances of that nature which are restricted in their emergence; then what would be the problem? || 392-393 ||¹³²

Dharmakīrti’s basic point here is relatively straightforward. At issue is the “definition” (*sthiti*) of something (such as a seed) as the cause (*kāraṅka*) for the production of something else (for example of a sprout), which also serves to define the effect as an “indicator” (*jñāpaka*) of the cause (in the way that smoke is indicative of fire). From an External Realist perspective, these definitions or arrangements are justified by the existence of external objects that exhibit these causal regularities. But if no such external objects exist, it would seem that all such justifications are lost.

Dharmakīrti responds by arguing that these arrangements or definitions, which for the external realist must depend on external objects, can be explained just as well by the regularities that are observed in terms of appearances (*nirbhāsa*). The *appearance* of smoke, he argues, is restricted in its emergence (*niyataśaṅgama*): it necessarily follows from *some* appearance of fire, even if this fire does not necessarily appear *to oneself* (which is, of course, what necessitates the

¹³² Tosaki (1985, 75): *bījād aṅkurajanmāgner dhūmāt siddhir iīdṛṣī | bāhyārthāśrayiṇī yāpi kārakajñāpakasthitiḥ || 392 || sāpi tadrūpanirbhāsās tathāniyatasamgamāḥ | buddhir āśṛitya kalpyeta yadi kiṃ vā virudhyate || 393 ||*

These verses are also translated in Moriyama (2013a, 59) and McNamara (2019, 79–80).

inference in the first place). Similarly, the appearance of a sprout is causally regulated or restricted (*niyamam*), such that it necessarily follows from the appearance of a seed. This also addresses the underlying ontological question, since there is no longer any need to appeal to anything outside of the mind: at this level, appearances are the only thing that are being discussed, and so, all that is necessary is to explain how appearances are causally related to each other. At least in theory, appearances can be accounted for solely with reference to the mind and mental factors, via the notion of karmic imprints or dispositions (*vāsanā*).

However, this approach raises an interesting subsidiary issue. As discussed in Chapter 2, Dharmakīrti explicitly denies that there is any real structure of epistemic agent/instrument and patient/activity. How can this be squared with his invocation of such a structure here? Devendrabuddhi's commentary answers this question by adding several layers of depth to the discussion, framing PV 3.392-393 as the response to an opponent¹³³ who denies that the Yogācāra perspective has the ability to incorporate any such epistemic structure:

Opponent: “When there is no external object,¹³⁴ in that case, the cognition in which a sprout appears to arise from a seed is only a delusion, so [the seed and sprout] just

¹³³ As Sara McClintock (personal communication) notes, “The degree to which rhetorical considerations of audience are important to the hermeneutics of interpreting Buddhist *pramāṇa* texts really cannot be overstated. The various positions are at least in part structured as they are in order to answer specific audiences.”

¹³⁴ Śākyabuddhi comments (PVT 577.2-6): “**When there is no external object:** this introduces the misgivings of the opponent. According to those who maintain that cognition is without an object-support (*rnam par shes pa dmigs pa med par smra ba ~ vijñānanirālambanavāda*; see below), the seed and the sprout do not ultimately exist; nevertheless, there is a structure of seed and sprout, owing to the objective aspects of the cognitions in which they appear. However, the objective aspect of cognition does not exist in reality (*de kho na nyid du = *tattvena*).”

gal te yang gang gi tshe phyi rol gyi don med pa zhes bya ba la sogs pas gzhan gyi bsam pa'i dogs pa bsu ba yin te | rnam par shes pa dmigs pa med par smra ba'i sa bon dang myu gu don dam par yod pa ma yin gyi 'on kyang sa bon dang myu gur snang ba'i blo'i gzung ba'i rnam pa las sa bon dang myu gu rnam par gzhas pa yin no | blo'i gzung ba'i rnam pa yang de kho na nyid du yod pa ma yin no ||

The reference to **vijñānanirālambanavāda* is noteworthy, as the idealistic strain of Buddhist philosophy much more commonly refers to itself as *vijñaptimātra(tā)vāda* or *antarjñeyavāda*. Interestingly, the section of Kumāriila's *Śloka-vārttika* dedicated to the refutation of Yogācāra refers to the latter as *nirālambanavāda*; for a translation and analysis of this section, see Allen (2015, 69–114) and Jha (1985, 119–48). Although the precise formulation of this objection as articulated by Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi is not found in the *nirālambanavāda* chapter of the

do not exist. Therefore, [the seed] is not causative and [the sprout] is not an effect. How, then, can there be the presentation [of the seed] as causative, as when one says, “a sprout is produced from a seed.” [This structure cannot exist in an Epistemic Idealist context] because [in that context] there is no mutual relationship of cause and effect, with regard to the two appearances of the seed and the sprout. The same also applies [when you] speak of fire and smoke, because it is impossible for there to be the relation of cause and effect (*rgyu dang 'bras bu'i dngos po = *kāryakāraṇabhāva*); [the fire] is not what is indicated (*gamya*) and [the smoke] is not indicative (*gamaka*).

On the other hand, if external objects *do* exist, then there is an externally-existing fire, and that [external fire] is the cause of the smoke; in this way, the smoke is indicative (*go bar byed pa ~ gamaka*) of fire. According to Mental Representations Only (~ *vijñaptimātratā*), however, the fire does not exist at the time that the smoke is known.¹³⁵ This being the case, how could something be defined as indicative, as when one says that ‘Fire is established due to smoke, which is indicative of it.’ [According to the Epistemic Idealists,] external objects are completely devoid of any definition of [things as] causative and so on.”¹³⁶

Ślokavārttika, Śākyabuddhi’s choice of terminology might nevertheless be intended to reflect the perspective of a Mīmāṃsā opponent—perhaps even Kumāriḷa himself—since much of the *nirālambanavāda* chapter of the *Ślokavārttika* is concerned with what Kumāriḷa perceives to be his Yogācārin interlocutor’s failure to abide by the proper requirements of inferential logic. Concerning this objection in particular, see especially vv. 167-177, translated in Allen (2015, 109–10) and Jha (1985, 143–44). It is also worth pointing out in this regard that the position that cognition is ultimately devoid of object-support is at least arguably tantamount to the position that cognitive appearances as such are false (i.e., *alīkākāravāda*).

¹³⁵ Compare the objection here to *Ślokavārttika nirālambanavāda* vv. 183-189, translated in (Allen 2015, 110–11) and Jha (1985, 145–46). In addition to momentariness, Kumāriḷa’s critique also bears on the relationship between the immediately-preceding and immediately-succeeding cognitions. Śākyabuddhi comments (PVT 577.14-19):

“**The fire does not exist at the time that the smoke is known:** i.e., at the time when there is the appearance of the smoke which constitutes the inferential evidence (*rtags = *līnga*). According to the Epistemic Idealists, the smoke is a cognition with the appearance of smoke, but an external fire (which would generate the [smoke] in that place) does not exist, because they do not accept [external objects]. However, at that time, a cognition in which there is an appearance of fire is not experienced, because [the inferential determination of the presence of fire] is something that arises at a later time.”

du ba rtogs pa'i dus na me yod pa [D: em. de] *ma yin pa zhes bya ba ni rtags su gyur pa'i du ba snang ba'i dus na shes bya nang gi yin par smra ba'i du bar snang ba'i blo du ba yin la | de nyid skye bar 'gyur ba de'i gnas skabs na phyi rol gyi me yod pa ma yin te | de khas mi len pa'i phyir ro || de'i tshe mer snang ba'i blo yang myong ba ma yin te | de ni physis 'byung ba'i ngang tshul can nyid yin pa'i phyir ro ||*

¹³⁶ PVP (568.18-569.9): *gal te gang gi tshe phyi rol gyi don med pa'i tshe blo sa bon las myu gu snang ba 'khrul pa nyid yin pas na med pa nyid yin pa'i phyir de byed pa po nyid ma yin zhing 'bras bu nyid kyang ma yin no | de ji ltar sa bon las myu gu skye ba zhes bya ba'i byed pa po rnam par gzhas pa yin | sa bon dang myu gu snang ba dag la ni phan tshun rgyu dang 'bras bu nyid med pa'i phyir ro || de bzhin du me dang du bar smra ba dag la yang rgyu dang 'bras bu'i dngos po nyid mi rung ba'i phyir ro || go bar bya ba dang go bar byed pa nyid ma yin no || yang phyi rol gyi don yod na | phyi rol gyi me yod pa yin zhing de du ba'i rgyu yin pa de ltar na du ba me'i go bar byed par 'gyur ro || rnam par rig pa tsam nyid la yang du ba rtogs pa'i dus me yod pa ma yin pa de ltar na | shes par byed pa du ba*

It should be noted that there is more than a little purchase to the opponent’s argument here, especially on the False Imagist account which (it is my contention) constitutes the most straightforward interpretation of Dharmakīrti, and is at the very least implicit in the commentaries of Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi. It is indeed very difficult, if not impossible, to rigorously account for causal regularity—to say nothing of phenomenal appearances!—in ultimate terms.

Nevertheless, Dharmakīrti is committed to providing a “best possible” (if admittedly counterintuitive)¹³⁷ rational explanation of conventional reality, within which it must be possible to account for this type of causal relationship from an ontologically idealistic perspective.¹³⁸ As noted in the verses cited just above (PV 3.392-393), one can simply appeal to the causal regularity in the cognitions themselves, which exhibit the kinds of constraints that are necessary in order to speak about causality, and thereby draw inferences on that basis. Expanding on the rhetorical question that ends the verse, Devendrabuddhi explains:

What is the problem? There is none whatsoever. It is asserted that there is reliance upon the definition of [something as] the effect [of something else], because the generation [of that thing] is restricted to [some other] real thing, as when one says, “the sprout comes from the seed.” But likewise, one can conceptualize [this causal relationship] as the occurrence of a cognition which has the appearance of a seed, when there is its cause, namely, a cognition having the appearance of a sprout. Here there is no contradiction by any *pramāṇa* whatsoever. [On the contrary,] it is impossible to maintain an account [of cause and effect] which *does* rely upon external objects, because external objects are not established.¹³⁹

las me grub pa yin no zhes shes par byed pa ji ltar gnas pa yin | phyi rol gyi don la ni byed pa po la sogs pa'i rnam par gzhas pa thams cad 'bad pa yin no zhe na |

¹³⁷ Concerning this problem, see above, Section I.A.4: [Rational Analysis and the Nature of Reality](#).

¹³⁸ Note that this implies a kind of “intermediate” idealistic perspective, lying in between an External Realist perspective and a “structureless” ultimate view. See note [101](#), above.

¹³⁹ PVP (569.9-570.2): *de la skyon de yod pa ma yin te | 'di ltar | sa bon las ni myu gu (D: *myug) skye dang | zhes bya ba | de ltar phyi rol don rten can byed pa por gnas pa gang yin pa dang du ba las me grub pa zhes shes par byed pa'i tha snyad 'jug pa gang yin pa de yang gal te phyi rol gyi don la ltos pa med par dngos por rtogs pa la brten nas | de yi ngo bor snang ba can | myu gu la sogs par snang ba | de ltar nges 'byung ba | sa bon la sogs par bye brag tu*

Devendrabbuddhi’s response thus articulates the basic position outlined above, that it is possible to account for causal regularity strictly in terms of cognitive appearances. The cognition of a sprout exists in a “production-mode” (*tadutpatti*) “natural relationship” or “essential concomitance” (*svabhāvavpratibandha*) with the cognition of a seed, such that the former necessarily arises immediately subsequent to the latter. Therefore, it is possible to infer the presence of the cognition of a seed, on the basis of the cognition of a sprout.

B. Inference in the Context of Epistemic Idealism

1. *The Problem*

To review, Dharmakīrti’s position is that the epistemic structure of inference—that an effect is indicative (*jñāpaka*) of its cause, owing to their inherent natural relationship of production (*tadutpatti*)—can be accounted for within a strictly idealistic ontology. The key point of this idealistic ontology is that the appearance of smoke is by nature necessarily correlated with (or “restricted” to) the appearance of fire. But this raises a problem.

The temporal sequence of an inference is that, first, the inferential evidence is perceived; then, on the basis of this direct perception, the presence of the quality “to be proven” (*sādhya*) is subsequently inferred. In other words, first there is a cognition of smoke, and then there is a cognition of fire. This is not a problem on the External Realist account, because even though the cognition of fire occurs after the cognition of smoke, the fire exists independently of its cognition:

snang ba'i blo las de ma thag tu 'byung zhing skye ba'i myu gu la sogs par snang ba can gyi blo gang yin pa de la de skad ces bya'o || de lta bur gyur pa'i | blo ston pas ni rtogs byed na || 'gal ba dag ni ci zhig yod || cung zad kyang yod pa ma yin no || ji ltar sa bon las myu gu zhes bya ba skye ba dngos po la so sor nges pa'i phyir | 'bras bu rnam par gzhag pa la brten pa'i 'dod pa de ltar sa bon du snang ba can gyi blo rgyur gyur pa yod na myu gur snang ba can gyi shes pa byung bar gyur pa rtogs pa na tshad ma dang 'gal ba med pa nyid yin no || phyi rol gyi don la brten pa can gyi rnam par gzhag pa can 'di ni ston par dka' ba nyid yin te don ma grub pa'i phyir ro ||

the whole point of External Realist ontology is that the “fire” (i.e., the external object *qua* cause of the sensory cognition) has material existence outside of the mind. According to the Epistemic Idealist position, however, fire actually only consists in a cognition with the phenomenal appearance (*pratibhāsa*) of fire. Thus, on their account, when one infers the existence of fire from smoke, fire would only come into existence *after* smoke: again, if the things we call “smoke” and “fire” are actually just mental manifestations or representations, then “fire” does not exist until the cognition of fire occurs, because “fire” just is a cognition with the appearance of fire. But, to repeat, in the context of inference, the cognition of fire occurs *after* the cognition of smoke, and not before. Thus, it would seem that fire is actually arising due to smoke, and the causal regularity required for such inferences has been turned upside-down. Dharmakīrti articulates the problem in this verse:

[Opponent:] “Smoke would not be the product of fire. Hence, there could be no knowledge of the cause on the basis of the effect. Or, if [the cognition of smoke] is the cause (*kāraṇatā*) [of fire], how could it be conclusively (*ekāntataḥ*) known?”
 || 394 ||¹⁴⁰

Fascinatingly, however, Dharmakīrti does not deny the essence of the opponent’s point here, to the effect that the earlier cognition of smoke must in some sense be the cause of the later cognition of fire (which is also true in an External Realist context). Rather, he re-frames the opponent’s argument as an opportunity for the most explicit and extended—in fact, what amounts to the only detailed—discussion of the relation between the storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) and perceptual cognition in the entire *Pramāṇavārttika* corpus.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Tosaki (1985, 76): *anagnijanyo dhūmaḥ syāt tat kāryāt kāraṇe gatiḥ | na syāt kāraṇatāyāṃ vā kuta ekāntato gatiḥ*
 || 394 ||

¹⁴¹ The storehouse consciousness is mentioned briefly at PV 3.520-522, but only in connection with Diñnāga’s argument that, in the absence of reflexive awareness, cognition would not be able to move from one object to another (PS 1.12cd, *viṣayāntarasañcāras tathā na syāt sa ceṣyate*). The relation of the storehouse to karmic imprints and sensory cognition is not discussed at that location.

2. The Solution

At this juncture, Dharmakīrti appeals to unambiguously Yogācāra concepts, such as the storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) and karmic imprints (*vāsanā*), in order to account for the content of sensory cognitions within a fully idealistic ontological context. However, Dharmakīrti’s own discussion to this effect is maddeningly brief, comprising only two “root” verses (PV 3.395-396). Even Devendrabuddhi’s commentary is quite terse. Fortunately, the mechanics are fleshed out in Śākyabuddhi’s extremely interesting and provocative remarks.

Despite its brevity, though, Dharmakīrti’s explanation is not particularly difficult to understand. In response to the opponent’s argument at PV 3.394, that within a Yogācāra framework the prior perceptual cognition of smoke must be understood as the cause of the subsequent inferential cognition of fire, Dharmakīrti notes that this is indeed the case, but that the cognitive continuum (*cittasantāna*) which contains the vivid sensory appearance of smoke is only transformed¹⁴² into a cognition (specifically, a non-vivid conceptual cognition) of fire:

Even in this case, the cognition with the appearance of smoke makes known a cognition with the appearance of fire with an imprint that is ready for activation (*prabodhapaṭuvāsanā*)—it does not make known an [external] fire. || 395 ||¹⁴³

As Devendrabuddhi explains:

¹⁴² Kachru’s (2015, 63) remarks on the *Vimśikā* are apposite: “[For] Vasubandhu there is an important kind of causation, indeed ultimately a paradigmatic kind of causation, which does not consist in a relation between entirely separable types of events. For one thing, it involves dispositions [i.e., *vāsanā*]. For another thing, it does not involve complete heteronomy or separability of the types of events cause and effect are taken to be: it is instead, a view on which causation consists in *change* (theorized in a particular way as a sequence of intrinsic change) from *A* to *B*, where these are phases of a continuum, with *A* being identified as dispositional power associated with some phase of a process, and *B* as a kind of directed end of a sequence of change which *A*, given certain conditions, can induce.”

¹⁴³ Tosaki (1985, 77): *tatrāpi dhūmābhāsā dhīḥ prabodhapaṭuvāsanām | gamayed agnirbhāsāṃ dhiyam eva na pāvakam* || 395 ||

Even in this case, when it is asserted that fire is inferred on the basis of smoke, **the cognition with the appearance of smoke**—which is designated the inferential evidence—makes known a cognition with the appearance of fire. What kind of cognition? One that has an imprint ready for activation. To break it down (*vigraha*): there is a cognition in which there are imprints ready for activation. [The present perception of smoke] indicates a future cognition with the appearance of fire—**but not [external] fire**.¹⁴⁴

The cognition of smoke is thus an “indicator” (*jñāpaka*) of fire, because it causes the knowledge (*gamayet*) of a future cognition with the appearance of fire. In other words, the latent imprint for this future cognition of fire must already be “ready for activation” (*prabodhapaṭu*), and then the perceptual cognition with the appearance of smoke actually activates it, causing the inferential cognition with the appearance of fire to arise. Hence, at one moment, the mental continuum manifests with the vivid appearance of smoke; at a later moment, it manifests with the non-vivid appearance of fire; but both appearances are just the result of activated imprints.

However, this answer still leaves one of the opponent’s most important points unaddressed. Namely: even if the preceding analysis may be stipulated for the sake of argument, it nevertheless remains the case that, in terms of one individual being’s mental continuum, there was no cognition of fire prior to the cognition of smoke. Again, this is precisely what necessitates the inferential process in the first place! And since, within an Epistemic Idealist framework, there are no extramental objects to appeal to, on what basis may fire be asserted as the causal basis of the perception of smoke? On an idealist account, that is to say, there is no external fire which could serve as the cause for the cognition of smoke. The only possible candidate for the cause of a cognition of smoke, is a cognition of fire. But—again—in the context of a discussion of inference,

¹⁴⁴ PVP (570.18-571.3): *de la'ang du ba las me rjes su dpog par 'dod na du bar snang ba'i blo rtags kyi ming can mer snang ba'i blo nyid ni rtogs par 'gyur ro || ci 'dra ba zhig ce na | bag chags gsal bar sad pa dag || blo gang las bag chags gsal bar sad pa yod pa zhes bya bar tshig rnam par byar ro || mer snang ba can gyi ma 'ongs pa'i blo nyid kyi go bar byed par 'gyur gyi me ni ma yin no ||*

the whole point is that *there was no initial cognition of fire*. So, in what sense is smoke the effect of fire?

3. *The Role of the Storehouse in Idealistic Inference*

Dharmakīrti continues:

A cognitive continuum (*cittasantāna*), with a matrix (*garbha*)¹⁴⁵ of imprints that are capable of that [i.e., a cognition of fire,] manifests a cognition with the appearance of smoke. Because of this, smoke arises from fire. || 396 ||¹⁴⁶

Devendrabuddhi's comments on this verse are somewhat formulaic and frankly rather unhelpful on their own. This is doubtless a major part of the reason why Śākyabuddhi, in one of the more remarkable passages of the entire *Pramāṇavārttika* corpus, expands at length upon them:

The meaning, in summary, is as follows: a cognition with the appearance of smoke does not arise from just any consciousness. Rather, the cause of the appearance of smoke is a continuum that, through a transformation (*yongs su gyur pa = *pariṇāma*),¹⁴⁷ is capable of producing a cognition that is a consciousness with the appearance of smoke. That which is not the cause for a consciousness that is a cognition with the appearance of fire will not be observed as the cause for a cognition with the appearance of smoke in some place, because a cognition with the appearance of smoke is correctly observed together with a cognition that has the appearance of fire, as in a kitchen.

Opponent: “Well, let us suppose that a cognition with an appearance of fire is the cause for [a cognition with] the appearance of fire. But [when one is inferring fire from smoke] there is no other distinctive kind of cognition that has the capacity to generate the appearance of fire.”

¹⁴⁵ One might even translate *garbha* here, with a nod to the more concrete and literal sense of the word, as “womb.” Devendrabuddhi (PVP 571.7-8) glosses the term as “cause or support for arising” (*skye ba'i rgyu dang rten*). Dharmakīrti's lexical choice here may also be an indirect reference to *tathāgatagarbha* (“Buddha Nature”) theory, given the close theoretical association between *tathāgatagarbha* and the *ālayavijñāna*.

¹⁴⁶ Tosaki (1985, 78): *tadyogyavāsanāgarbha eva dhūmāvabhāsinīm | vyanakti cittasantāno dhiyaṃ dhūmo 'gnitas tataḥ || 396 ||*

¹⁴⁷ See note [142](#) above.

This is not the case, because the cognition with the appearance of smoke, which constitutes the inferential evidence, arises even in the absence of an earlier cognition with the appearance of fire. That is to say: even when there is awareness of a cognition with the appearance of smoke immediately after an appearance of fire, even in that case, the [actual] cause of the smoke is a consciousness (*blo ~ *buddhi*) called the “storehouse consciousness,” which has the *capacity* to generate a cognition with the appearance of fire. Therefore, a cognition with the appearance of smoke arises from a stream of consciousness that, through a transformation of the continuum, has the capacity to produce the appearance of fire. That being the case, [with smoke as evidence] one infers its cause, the consciousness continuum that has the *capacity*¹⁴⁸ to generate the appearance of fire.”¹⁴⁹

Or, as Jinendrabuddhi summarizes:

[Opponent:] “So, [in an idealistic context,] how could there be an inference of a cause from an effect?”

Why wouldn’t there be?

[Opponent:] “Because a cognition with the appearance of smoke strictly manifests earlier; the cognition with the appearance of fire manifests afterward. For that [inferential cognition of fire] is not experienced, prior to the cognition in which there is an appearance of smoke. Therefore, the smoke would not be a product of fire: so how could there be an inference of fire by means of that [smoke]?”

This is not a problem. For a mind-stream (*cittasantāna*), containing a specific imprint (*vāsanā*) for the production of a cognition with the image of fire, causes a

¹⁴⁸ Compare this formulation to Kachru’s remarks concerning the “availability” of content in note [100](#).

¹⁴⁹ PVT (579.19-580.19): *'dir bsdus pa'i don ni du bar snang ba can gyi blo ni shes pa thams cad las skye ba ma yin gyi | 'on kyang rnam par shes pa mer snang ba'i blo rgyun yongs su gyur pas skyed par nus pa gang yin pa de nyid du bar snang ba'i rgyu yin no || mer snang ba'i blo'i [D: blos] rnam par shes pa rgyur gyur pa ma yin pa ni la lar du bar snang ba'i shes pa'i rgyu nyid du dmigs par mi 'gyur te | tshang mang la sogs pa mer snang ba'i blo dang bcas par du bar snang ba'i blo yang dag par dmigs pa'i phyir ro || gal te 'o na mer snang ba'i blo nyid du bar snang ba'i rgyu yin pa ni bla ste | mer snang ba skyed par nus pa blo'i khyad par gzhan yod pa ma yin no zhe na | ma yin te rtags su gyur pa du bar snang ba'i blo ni sngar 'byung ba'i ngang tshul can mer snang ba'i blo med par yang 'byung ba'i phyir ro || de bas na gang gi tshe yang mer snang ba de ma thag du du [D: om. du] bar snang ba'i blo rigs [D: *rig] pa yin pa de'i tshe yang mer snang ba'i blo bskyed par nus pa kun gzhi rnam par shes pa zhes bya ba'i blo du ba'i rgyu yin no || de bas na rgyu [D: rgyud] gzhan gyur pa'i sgo nas mer snang ba skyed par nus pa'i rgyun gyi rnam par shes pa las du bar snang ba'i blo 'byung bar rgyun gyi rnam par shes pa rgyur gyur pa mer snang ba skyed par byed pa'i nus pa rjes su dpog par byed do || de ltar na 'bras bu las rgyu nyid dpog par 'gyur ro || mer snang ba'i blos rang gi nye bar len pa rnam par shes pa snga ma mer snang ba'i blo skyed par byed pa'i nus pa dpog par byed pa'i don gyis 'byung bar 'gyur ba'i me snang ba'i blo rjes su dpog par 'gyur te | du bar snang ba'i blo'i rgyur gyur pa rgyun gyi rnam par shes pa skad cig ma phyi ma phyi mar gyur pas mer snang ba'i blo'i rgyu yin no zhes de ltar rjes su dpog pa'i phyir ro zhes bya ba 'di yin no ||*

cognition with the appearance of smoke—not just anything at all—to arise. Hence, the cognition of smoke that is making that [fire] known is making known [or indicating] the cognizer’s future cognition—whose imprint is ready for activation—in which there will be the image of fire.¹⁵⁰

There is, unfortunately, nowhere near enough space here to treat this argument with the detail it deserves. But in brief outline, the idealistic perceptual model articulated here is as follows.

Every cognition of smoke, by virtue of the fact that it is a cognition of smoke, carries within itself latent imprints that are inherently associated with the appearance of fire, because of the *svabhāvapratiḅandha* that obtains between (the cognition of) smoke and (the cognition of) fire. In other words, these particular latent imprints, that are associated with the appearance of fire, are an absolutely necessary feature of every genuine cognition of smoke, because of the causal association between the appearance of smoke and the appearance of fire that was pointed out in PV 3.392-393. That is to say, at some level, anything that can be correctly designated as the appearance of smoke must have been caused by a cognition that occurs in a continuum with a ready *capacity* to generate a subsequent cognition with the appearance of fire. Again, it is just this necessary relationship of “inherent association” or “essential concomitance” (i.e., *svabhāvapratiḅandha*) which preserves the ability to infer fire on the basis of smoke, irrespective of the underlying ontology with respect to the question of external objects.

The key point in this regard is that, within an idealist ontological framework, the object of inference (i.e., the *sādhya*dharmā) is not an actual appearance of fire, *because there has not been*

¹⁵⁰ Steinkellner (2005b, 75.12-76.4): *atha yad idaṃ kāryāt kāraṇānumānam, tat katham | katham [om. *ca n.e. PSTṚ] na syāt | yato dhūmapratibhāsi jñānam pūrvam evāvīrbhavati, paścād analapratibhāsi | na hi tat prāg dhūmapratibhāsino jñānāt saṃvedyate | tato 'nagnijanya eva dhūmaḥ syād iti katham tenāgner anumānam | naiṣa doṣaḥ | dahanākārajñānanavāsānāviśeṣānugata eva hi cittasantāno dhūmābhāsām dhiyam utpādayati, na tu yaḥ kaścit | atas taṃ gamayad dhūmajñānaṃ prabodhapaṭuvāsānāṃ dahanākārāṃ buddhīm bhaviṣyantiṃ pratipattur gamayati |*

any appearance of fire within one's own mental continuum. Rather, one only infers the fact that one's own mental continuum possesses the *capacity* to generate the appearance of fire, in the future, under the appropriate circumstances (such as proximity).¹⁵¹ But the cause of the appearance of smoke is still a cognition, or, perhaps better stated, a mental event: it is just the activity of the storehouse consciousness, manifesting latent imprints which are capable, depending upon the circumstances, of generating *both* the appearance of fire (whether vivid because perceptual, or non-vivid because inferential), *and* the appearance of smoke. Thus, as Śākyabuddhi writes of the “appropriating cognition” (a synonym¹⁵² for the storehouse consciousness):

[Dharmakīrti writes], “**Because of this, smoke arises from fire.**” [Devendrabuddhi comments,] “**From fire.**” The ‘fire’ is an appropriating cognition (*len pa'i rnam par shes pa* = **ādānavijñāna*) which is capable of generating a cognition that has the appearance of fire. Because [the cognition of smoke] arises from that [appropriating cognition], it is said that ‘a cognition with the appearance of smoke arises from fire.’ However, the intended meaning [of ‘due to fire’] is *neither* due to an external fire, *nor* due to a cognition with the appearance of fire.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Concerning the *kāryānumāna* or “inference of capacity,” cf. McClintock (2010, 188-191). At PV 1.8, Dharmakīrti notes that effects (such as the future cognition of fire) cannot be invariably inferred from causes (such as the present cognition of smoke), because “a hindrance might occur” (*pratibandhasya sambhavāt*): one might never actually have a cognition with the appearance of fire. But in the PVSV he goes on to note that “the *capacity* to produce the effect, however, does not depend on any other substance, so it is not contradictory to infer it [from the complete complex of causes]. One can infer that this complete complex of causes has the capacity to produce the effect through the transformation of a subsequent series of potentials because no other condition for the transformation of the potentials is necessary.” Therefore, the inference is reliable. Many thanks to John Dunne and Sara McClintock for elucidating this point and providing these references.

Gnoli (1960, 7.7-9): *yogyatāyās tu dravyāntarānapekṣatvān na virudhyate 'numānam | uttarottaraśaktipariṇāmena kāryotpādanasamartheyaṃ kāraṇasāmagrī.*

¹⁵² Cf. *Samḍhinirmocanasūtra* 5.3 and Waldron (2003, 95). See also the discussion of “The Ādānavijñāna as Samanantarapratyaya” in the Ch’eng Wei-Shih Lun (**vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*) of Xuánzàng (1973, 539–41). In general, the relation between the specifically Yogācāra features of Dharmakīrti’s epistemology, and classical Yogācāra scholasticism, remains an area ripe for further research.

¹⁵³ PVT (582.20-583.3): *rgyu de'i phyir me las du ba yin || me las zhes bya ba ni mer snang ba can gyi shes pa skyed par nus pa'i len pa'i rnam par shes pa nyid me yin te | de las 'byung ba na du bar snang ba can gyi blo me las 'byung ba yin no zhes brjod kyi phyi rol gyi me'am mer snang ba'i blo las kyang ma yin no zhes bya ba'i don to ||*

In other words, according to Śākyabuddhi, the “fire” in question is *not even an actual cognition with the actual appearance of fire*. It is, on the contrary, pure potentiality—an ever-receding epistemic horizon, or the infinitely-deferred arrival¹⁵⁴ of a “presence” that is always already adulterated with the necessity of its absence. That is to say, what distinguishes this pure potentiality from manifest fire is precisely its necessary and inherent lack of manifestation (*vyakti*), the fact that it does not and cannot have the phenomenal appearance (*ābhāsa*) of fire. And here, I suspect, is the true import of Dharmakīrti’s argumentation concerning inference in the context of ontological idealism: the terminus of this investigation, the endpoint of rational analysis regarding the nature of the “objects” which we understand to be the cause of sensory appearance, lies precisely in their disappearance. All that is or could ever be manifest—indeed, phenomenal manifestation (*vyañjana*) itself—is only the trace left behind by this disappearance, a trace which we might call *karma*, dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), or the “dependent nature” (*paratantrasvabhāva*).¹⁵⁵

Concluding this portion of the *sahopalambhaniyama* section, in the next verse, Dharmakīrti ties together all of the preceding discussion:

This is the view (*vāda*) of the wise, even though (*tu*) [Diñnāga] described the dual form [of cognition] with reference to external objects. And that [duality] is established on the basis of the rule that [cognitive images always arise] together with [the] awareness (*saṃvit*) [of them]. || 397 ||¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ That is, the *différance*; cf. Derrida (1973, 129-160).

¹⁵⁵ See Chapter 3, note [107](#).

¹⁵⁶ Tosaki (1985, 79): *asty eṣa viduṣāṃ vādo bāhyaṃ tv āśritya varṇyate | dvairūpyaṃ sahasaṃvittinīyamāt tac ca sidhyati || 397 ||*

Dharmakīrti thus brings our attention back the fact that, as outlined above, Dinnāga’s analysis of the duality of cognition is most explicitly conducted with reference to the cognition of ostensibly external objects. But Dharmakīrti’s treatment of the PS builds on Vasubandhu’s and Dinnāga’s contention, articulated primarily in the *Viṃśikā* and the *Ālambanaparīkṣā*, that such ostensibly external objects do not in fact exist. And, while those arguments have been fairly described as “metaphysical,” Dharmakīrti’s overarching argument here is primarily phenomenological, concerning the inherently cognitive nature of cognition.

That is to say, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, the *sahopalambhaniyama* can also be understood as a restriction to the effect that ordinary experience is always ordinarily experienced “first-personally,” along with its affective features, which are ontologically built into it. These inherently first-personal features constitute the “subject-image” (*grāhakākāra*) of cognition. Indeed, it is just this “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) of the inherently cognitive features of cognition which links reflexive awareness both with idealism, as has been discussed here, and with phenomenological subjectivity, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

But before turning to this topic, let us close the present discussion by briefly returning to Dharmakīrti’s purely phenomenological analysis of cognition in PV 3.327-332 *ad* PS 1.9a, as it is precisely there that Dharmakīrti comes the closest to positively describing this “view of the wise.”

IV. The Luminous Nature of Mind

A. Idealism and Experience

As outlined above, Dharmakīrti's discussion of idealist ontology is limited in scope, most likely because it constitutes a rather counterintuitive and paradoxical end to the process of rational investigation into the nature of conventional reality. Although Dharmakīrti revisits ontological idealism at certain crucial junctures, it is not a major focus for the remainder of PV 3. Rather, the primary concern for the remainder of the text is a phenomenological analysis of cognition, articulated as a robust defense of the proposition that cognition is both inherently self-knowing (i.e., reflexively-experienced) and ultimately nondual.

The lynchpin of this argument is Dharmakīrti's contention that awareness (*saṃvit*) or experience (*anubhava*) is the nature of anything and everything that is ever experienced, because—again—even if one were to maintain that mind-independent matter exists, it must be recognized that such matter is only ever an “object” insofar as it produces a cognition bearing its form, which form-bearing cognition is the only thing that is ever *directly* (i.e., *pratyakṣataḥ*) observed:

The experience is of that [moment of awareness, and] it is of the nature of that [moment of awareness]; it is not [the experience of; or, of the nature] of anything else at all.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, the fact that the [moment of awareness] is the nature of that [experience] constitutes the property of [that moment of awareness] being directly (*pratyakṣa*), individually-known (*prativedya*). || 326 ||¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Dharmakīrti's Sanskrit here is quite dense and difficult to translate. There is also something of a play on words (*śleṣa*). The point is that *tasya* construes with both *anubhava* and *ātmā*. In other words, the experience is “of that” cognition, but it is also “of the nature of that” cognition. The sentence can be grammatically construed in either way, and has both meanings. Put slightly differently, the point here is that the experience is ontologically identical to the cognition of which it is the experience. Thanks to John Dunne for this clarification.

¹⁵⁸ Tosaki (1985, 10): *ātmā sa tasyānubhavaḥ sa ca nānyasya kasyacit | pratyakṣaprativedyatvam api tasya tadātmā* || 326 ||

There is not something else to be experienced by the [cognition]. There is not something else that is the experience of that. [This is so] because there would be the same problem on the part of a [second-order experience], as well.¹⁵⁹ Therefore, the [cognition] illuminates itself. || 327 ||¹⁶⁰

[Opponent: “If there is no external object, what accounts for the experience of ‘blue’ and so on?”]

That color (*rūpa*) such as ‘blue’ is [a property] of the [cognition], and it is also the experience. [As such], it is commonly called the experience of ‘blue,’ even though it is an experience of its own nature.¹⁶¹ || 328 ||¹⁶²

In this way, it is established that an experience is only ever the experience “of” that very experience, which is to say that it is *not* the experience “of” anything else at all. In other words, at the highest level of analysis, the nature and structure of “knowing” or “measurement” as an

¹⁵⁹ That is to say, it is not the case that experienced is experienced by a second-order “experience₂ of experience₁”; any experience is the immediate, reflexive experience of that very experience. This is the infinite regress argument for the reflexivity of awareness: if cognition were *not* reflexively self-knowing in this way, in other words if a second cognition were necessary in order to know the contents of the first cognition, then a third cognition would be necessary in order to know the contents of the second cognition, and so on *ad infinitum*. See Kellner (2011).

¹⁶⁰ This translation corresponds to the reading in Tosaki’s (1985, 10n31) footnote, rather than the body text. For a discussion of the variants of PV 3.327, and why the reading adopted here is preferable, cf. Kellner (2009, 196–97).

¹⁶¹ Devendrabuddhi (PVP 534.8-15) comments by way of introducing the next verse (PV 3.329):

Although [cognition] arises with the nature of ‘blue’ or whatever, [it does so] due to the activation of an individually-restricted internal causal capacity, i.e., without contacting any real [‘blue’] entity. Thus, it is commonly understood (*grags pa ~ prasiddha*) [to be the cognition of ‘blue’]. It is not the experience of a blue object.

Opponent: “How is it, then, that it is the nature of awareness which is being experienced, such that even though it arises as an experience of its own nature, it is nevertheless designated that way [as an experience of ‘blue’]?”

It is not the case that it is “self-illuminating” in the sense that it illuminates “itself” by “itself” in ultimate terms, i.e., by differentiating itself into patient, agent, and action. What then?

nang na gnas pa’i nus pa so sor nges pa’i [em. *pas] *sad pa las dngos po la reg pa med par sngon po la sogs pa’i bdag nyid du skyes par gyur pa na yang de ltar grags pa yin no | don sngon po nyams su myong ba ni ma yin no | gal te ji ltar na shes pa’i bdag nyid nyams su myong bar ’gyur ba gang gis rang gi ngo bo nyams su myong bar gyur pa na yang de skad du brjod ce na | bdag nyid kho nas bdag nyid las dang byed pa po* [em. *las dang po pa] *dang byed pa la sogs pa tha dad pa’i sgo nas don dam par gsal bar byed pa’i phyir bdag nyid gsal bar byed pa ni ma yin no ||*

¹⁶² Tosaki (1985, 10–12): *ātmā sa tasyānubhavaḥ sa ca nānyasya kasyacit | pratyakṣapratiivedyatvam api tasya tadātmātā || 326 || nānyo ’nubhāvyas tenāsti tasya nānubhavo ’paraḥ | tasyāpi tulyacodyatvāt tat svayaṃ tat prakāśate || 327 || nīlādirūpas tasyāsau svabhāvo ’nubhavaś ca saḥ | nīlādyanubhavaḥ khyātaḥ svarūpānubhavo ’pi san || 328 ||*

epistemological activity (i.e., *pra + √mā*), is strictly idealistic. At the conventional level of what is “commonly said” (*prasiddha*), one may speak of a cognition as being the cognition of ‘blue,’ but in fact there is only ever cognition itself, in the form or with the appearance of ‘blue.’ As Dharmakīrti writes at the corresponding juncture of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*, PV in 1.38:

There is not something else to be experienced by cognition (*buddhi*). There is not something else that is the experience of that [cognition], because cognition is devoid of subject and object. The [cognition] just illuminates itself. || 38 ||

For the defining quality of the object has been refuted (*vyastam*). Thus, in no context is there any experience of it because, in this context also, [experience] is devoid of the defining characteristics of object and subject. Therefore, the experience is of cognition [and] is of nature of cognition;¹⁶³ it is not of anything else whatsoever. The fact that the [cognition]¹⁶⁴ is the nature of the experience is what [constitutes it as] that which is directly, individually-experienced. And because the [cognition] is the nature of that [experience], it [reflexively] illuminates itself. Hence, it is also said to be “illuminating of itself,” like light. [What is called] “an experience of blue and such” is just an experience with that kind of nature.¹⁶⁵

In this way, even an ordinary experience of ‘blue’ has the nature of luminosity insofar as it is self-illuminating, and it is in fact devoid of any discrete subject or object.

B. The Simile of the Lamp

It is at precisely this juncture that Dharmakīrti invokes the simile of the lamp, one of the oldest tools used to explain the reflexivity of awareness:

¹⁶³ This involves the same play on words (*śleṣa*) as in PV 3.326; see above, note [157](#).

¹⁶⁴ Emending MSS *asyām* to *asyāḥ*. Compare *pratyakṣapratiśedyatvam apy asyāḥ [buddheḥ] tadātmataiva* to the parallel construction in PV 3.326cd: *pratyakṣapratiśedyatvam api tasya [jñānasya] tadātmataiva*. Thanks to John Dunne for suggesting this correction.

¹⁶⁵ Steinkellner (2007, 35.8-36.1): **nānyo ’nubhāvyo buddhyāsti tasyā nānubhavo ’paraḥ | grāhyagrāhakavaidhuryāt svayaṃ saiva prakāśate || 38 ||** *vyastam hi viśayalakṣaṇam iti na kvacid anubhavo nāpy asya kaścit tatrāpi grāhyagrāhakalakṣaṇavaidhuryāt | tasmād ātmaiva buddher anubhavaḥ | sa ca nānyasya kasyacit | pratyakṣapratiśedyatvam apy asyāḥ [em. *asyām] tadātmataiva | sā ca tadātmīyāt svayaṃ prakāśate | tenātmanaḥ prakāśikety apy ucyate prakāśavat | nīlādy anubhava ity api tatsvabhāvo ’nubhava eva ||*

Just as an illuminating (*prakāśamāna*) light (*prakāśa*) is considered to be the illuminator (*prakāśaka*) of itself (*svarūpa*), because of having that nature (*tādātmyāt*), just so, awareness (*dhī*) is aware of itself (*ātmavedinī*).¹⁶⁶ || 329 ||¹⁶⁷

Jinendrabuddhi, commenting on the parallel passage from the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (PS 1.9b), explains the point here with reference to a grammatical metaphor:

Opponent: “But how does a cognition experience itself, just by itself? For an agent-patient relationship on the part of just that [self-same cognition] does not make sense.”

It is as follows: ultimately, there is no relation of patient, etc., on the part of that [cognition]. Nevertheless, because of having that as its nature, that kind of convention [i.e., of being called “self-illuminating”,] is not contradicted in this case, as with light. For light is an illuminator of itself, [and] does not rely upon another source of light [in order to be illuminated]. Nor does it actually (*bhāvataḥ*) shine upon (*prakāśayati*)¹⁶⁸ itself. Rather: arising with the nature of luminosity, it is said to be an illuminator (*prakāśaka*) of itself. In the same way, awareness, arising with the nature of experience, is conventionally designated “an illuminator (*prakāśika*) of itself.” Even in the context of the External Realist perspective, the object is only determined in accord with experience; but that experience is not in accord with the object, as has been previously explained.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Devendrabuddhi comments (PVP 534.18-535.1): “Furthermore, a light does not rely upon another light in order to illuminate itself; nor is it, in ultimate terms, an agent of illumination (*gsal bar byed pa* = **prakāśaka*) with regard to itself. Rather, because it arises with the nature of being an illuminator, it is said to be ‘self-illuminating’ (*bdag nyid gsal bar byed pa*). Just so, in terms of perceptual experience, awareness is self-illuminating, because it illuminates by nature.”

sgron ma yang bdag nyid gsal bar byed pa la sgron ma gzhan la stos pa med cing bdag la don dam par gsal bar byed pa ma yin no | 'on kyang gsal bar byed pa'i bdag nyid du skyes par gyur pa na bdag nyid gsal bar byed pa zhes brjod de de bzhin du mngon sum gyi myong bar rang bzhin gyis gsal bar byed pa yin pa'i phyir blo bdag nyid gsal bar byed pa yin no ||

¹⁶⁷ Tosaki (1985, 13): *prakāśamānas tādātmyāt svarūpasya prakāśakaḥ | yathā prakāśo 'bhimatas tathā dhīr ātmavedinī* || 329 ||

¹⁶⁸ Capturing the sense of the transitive (i.e., *parasmaipada*), causative verbal form, as opposed to the more typical intransitive (i.e., *ātmanepada*) forms such as *prakāśate* and so on.

¹⁶⁹ Steinkellner (2005b, 70.11-18): *katham punar ātmanaivātmānam anubhavati jñānam | na hi tasyaiva karmakarṭṭkaraṇabhāvo yujyata iti cet, evam etat | naiva tasya paramārthataḥ karmādibhāvaḥ | tathāpi tādātmyāt prakāśavat tatra tathāvyavahāro na virudhyate | prakāśo hy ātmaprakāśanaḥ bhavati, na pradīpāntaram apeḥṣate | nāpy ātmānam bhāvataḥ prakāśayati | kevalam prakāśātmatayotpadyamāna ātmanaḥ prakāśaka ity ucyate | tadvad anubhavātmānopajāyamānā buddhir ātmanaḥ prakāśiketi vyavahriyate | bāhyapakṣe 'pi yathāsaṃvedanam evārtho 'vasīyate | na hi yathārtham anubhava iti prāg evoktam ||*

In other words, although it is necessary to do the work of discursive analysis from within language, and perforce necessary to use conventions such as agency, objecthood, and activity while undertaking such analysis, it is extremely important to keep in mind that thought and language are inherently limited in their ability to convey ultimate truth.

For that is, in effect, what is at stake here: insofar as the best possible account of conventional reality holds that all phenomena are only mind, and furthermore maintains that the true nature of the mind is nondual and therefore cannot be either ontologically or phenomenologically divided into a real subject and object, the mind that is a “knower” (*vedaka*) of ultimate reality (*tathatā*, *dharmadhātu*, etc.) cannot be distinct from the ultimate reality that is “known” (*vedya*). Reflexive awareness—“luminosity” (*prakāśa*)—and “suchness” (*tathatā*), or the true nature of reality (*dharmatā*), are in fact two sides of the same coin.

Even under ordinary circumstances, however, cognition is always an ontologically simple and singular particular, which is only ever “knowing” itself (*ātmavedinī*) or its own nature (*svarūpa*). There is, therefore, never any “knowing” subject or “known” object in the sense ordinarily meant:

And so (*ca*), if what is known (*vedya*) is an object that is something else [apart from awareness], it is impossible to establish a knower and a known on the part of that [awareness]. This structure (*vyavasthā*)—i.e., the distortion of separately-characterized apprehender and apprehended, like the [apparent] difference between myodesopsic hair (*keśa*) and the cognition [of that hair]—is constructed in accordance with the manner in which those who are in error observe (*nir + √īkṣ*)¹⁷⁰ [an awareness] that is [in fact]¹⁷¹ devoid of the images of knower and known.¹⁷²
 || 330-331 ||¹⁷³

When [that structure is constructed in that way], then the characterization of [cognition as having] an apprehended and an apprehender [in accordance with ordinary distorted experience] is not objectionable [in conventional terms]; [even] then, because there is no awareness of anything else, reflexive awareness is asserted to be the result (*phala*). || 332 ||¹⁷⁴

Under ordinary circumstances, in other words, it really does appear as though we are “first personal” subjects, who experience a “third personal” phenomenal world comprised of various objects. While this account is fallacious from the standpoint of those engaged in advanced contemplative practice, it is accurate in terms of the phenomenology of those who are not counteracting the internal distortion.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Or, perhaps somewhat more interpretively, “give an honest report on.” Thanks to John Dunne for this gloss.

¹⁷¹ Devendrabuddhi (PVP 535.21) inserts *don dam par*. Compare to Manorathanandin’s (Sāṅkrtyāyana ed., 218) *vastutaḥ*.

¹⁷² There are several different possible ways to construe the various elements of this sequence. Tosaki, for example, in essence following Manorathanandin, places *avedyavedakākārā* with *tasyāś cārthāntare vedye durghaṭau vedyavadakau* (“And so, if what is known is an object that is something else, it is impossible to establish a knower and a known on the part of that [awareness], which is devoid of the images of knower and known”), leaving the passive construction *bhrāntair nirīkṣyate* without a nominative object. The translation above reflects Devendrabuddhi’s commentary (PVP 535.2-536.2).

¹⁷³ Tosaki (1985, 14–15): *tasyāś cārthāntare vedye durghaṭau vedyavedakau | avedyavedakākārā yathā bhrāntair nirīkṣyate || 330 || vibhaktalakṣaṇagrāhyagrāhakākāraviplavā | tathā kṛtavvyavastheyam keśādijñānabhedavat || 331 ||*

¹⁷⁴ Tosaki (1985, 15–16): *yadā tadā na samcodyagrāhyagrāhakalakṣaṇā | tadā ’nyasaṃvido ’bhāvāt svasaṃvit phalam iṣyate || 332 ||*

¹⁷⁵ In emic Buddhist terms, this may be understood as follows. From a Yogācāra perspective, “emptiness” primarily means the absence of subject-object duality. In terms of the “five paths” model (see Chapter 1, note 160), the third “path of seeing” (*darśanamārga*) constitutes the first time that the Bodhisattva has a direct, authentic experience of emptiness; in other words, what is “seen” on the “path of seeing” is just this absence of subject and object. Immediately subsequent to this moment, the fourth “path of training” or “path of meditation” (*bhāvanāmārga*) begins. Again, it is just this emptiness of subject and object in which one “trains,” to which one is “habituated,” or upon which one “meditates” (*bhāvanā*). Later “stages” (*bhūmis*) are understood to be irreversible, but until some more advanced point

The key point is that, even from such a mundane perspective, both subject and object are simultaneously and thus nondually presented “by means of” reflexive awareness. And this is true of each and every cognition, without exception. Hence, no matter whether one is the most benighted amoeba, a denizen of the lowest hell, or a perfectly-awakened Buddha, the luminous and reflexive nature of one’s awareness is exactly the same. Every moment of awareness—up to and including perfect, transcendent gnosis (*prajñāpāramitā*)—has a structurally identical nature (*sadṛśātman*), just insofar as it is a moment of awareness.¹⁷⁶

This is the key point upon which Dharmakīrti’s analysis of the reflexive nature of awareness turns. By extension, this is also the key point on which Dharmakīrti’s analysis of the “subjective aspect” (*grāhakākāra*) of cognition turns. In Chapter 5, we will take up these closely-intertwined points, which is to say, the close and slippery relationship between subjectivity and

along the path, even Ārya Bodhisattvas—that is, extraordinary “noble beings” who have directly experienced emptiness on the “path of seeing”—do not *continually* experience emptiness.

In the Tibetan tradition, this point is frequently expressed in terms of a distinction originally made by Asaṅga in the eighth chapter of the *Mahāvāyānasamgraha*, between “meditative equipoise” (*mynam gzhag, samāpatti*) or genuine “nonconceptual awareness” (*nirvikalpañāna*), during which the emptiness of subject-object duality is directly experienced, and “post-meditation” or “cognition subsequent to that [experience]” (*rjes thob, tatpr̥sthalabdhajñāna*), which is conceptual and/or dualistic. As expressed in the famous dictum of the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje (1284-1339) (trans. Mathes 2013, 63): “When you do not realize this, you are confused; when you realize it, you are liberated... if you see the nature of nonduality, buddha nature (*rgyal ba’i snying po*) is actualized.” On this account, in other words, lower-level Ārya Bodhisattvas oscillate between seeing and not seeing the “nature of nonduality”—depending upon whether or not they are meditating appropriately—until the unbreakable, vajra-like or “adamantine *samādhi*” (*rdo rje lta bu’i ting nge ’dzin*) kicks in at the tenth and final *bhūmi*, and one thereby ascends to the fifth and final “path of no longer being a student” (*aśaiksamārga*), which is to say, perfect and complete Buddhahood. See also, in this regard, Mipham’s comments *ad* MSĀ XIX.69, translated in Maitreyanātha et al. (2014).

¹⁷⁶ The Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, writes (trans. Mathes 2013, 64): “This very mind presents the aspect of an unfolding play that, in its momentary consciousness, is unimpeded in itself. In view of this, [its] nature (*rang bzhin*) is present as emptiness and as natural luminosity. These two are the ground, given that from it the individual forms of the accumulation of mental factors and the seven accumulations of consciousness appear unimpeded and in one moment. In the impure state it has been taught as being the “mind,” “mental faculty,” and “consciousness.” When pure, it is expressed by the terms *three kāyas* and *wisdom*.”

In other words, as Mathes (*ibid.*) summarizes, “The true nature of mind (*sems nyid*) [is] called mind in an impure state and wisdom in a pure state.” *Nota bene* that Rangjung Dorje here, in the context of a synthesis of Yogācāra and Mahāmudrā, articulates a model of cognition in which all the various cognitive modalities operate simultaneously “in one moment.” See Chapter 1, Section II.D.2: [Simultaneous Cognition and Re-cognition \(*pratyabhijñā*\)](#).

reflexivity. But as important as these points are in terms of reasoned philosophical discourse, from an eleutheriological perspective, they are ultimately less consequential than the implications this has for contemplative or yogic praxis, which is to say, *yogācāra*. Before turning to the question of the relationship between subjectivity and reflexivity, then, it is worth concluding the present discussion of reflexive awareness and idealism by sketching out some of these implications.

C. Reflexive Awareness and the Ultimate *Pramāṇa*

The previously-examined passage, PV 3.326-332, arguably constitutes the closest that Dharmakīrti ever comes to explicitly describing what he refers to in PVin 1, without any further explanation anywhere in his extant oeuvre, as the “ultimate *pramāṇa*.”¹⁷⁷ Accordingly, while neither the simile of the lamp, nor the metaphor of “luminosity” (*prakāśa*) as a term for reflexive awareness, is Dharmakīrti’s original contribution, it is nevertheless possible to observe here, in embryonic form, a synthesis of the metaphor of illumination, with the affirmation of an idealistic ontology, and the refutation of phenomenological duality. This synthesis would resound for centuries, right down to the present day, as the theoretical superstructure or philosophical framework for the advanced contemplative practices of Mahāmudrā and rDzogs chen.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ See Chapter 2, Section II.D: [Omniscience and the Nature of Awareness](#).

¹⁷⁸ Being tantric contemplative practices, Mahāmudrā and rDzogs chen lie outside the scope of the present study, which at this juncture only seeks to broadly contextualize them in terms of the medieval Indian Buddhist intellectual discourse. Essential academic work on Mahāmudrā and rDzogs chen includes Germano (1992); van Schaik (2004); Karmay (2007); Higgins (2013); Mathes (2013); Higgins and Draszczyk (2016); and Jackson (2019). For an “insider” perspective aimed at actual practice, see Thrangu Rinpoche (2003); Tsele Natsok Rangdrol (2009); and Dakpo Tashi Namgyal (2019). In general, much work remains to be done on the connection between Mahāmudrā and Buddhist epistemology. To that end, one of the most important works on this connection is the *Ocean of Literature on Logic* of the Seventh Karmapa, Chödrak Gyatso (1454-1506), the first volume of which (constituting *inter alia* a commentary on the entirety of PV 2) has been translated as Gyatso (2016). See also the [Conclusion](#) to this study, for a discussion of what appears to be the utilization of *pramāṇa*-theoretical terminology by the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje (1284-1339), in his famous “Aspiration of Mahāmudrā” (*nges don phyag rgya chen po 'i smon lam*).

The idealistic ontological underpinnings of this synthesis bring us right back to the question of whether or not there exists phenomenal content for noble beings (i.e., for Buddhas and for Bodhisattvas on the *bhūmis* who are abiding in meditative equipoise).¹⁷⁹ The problem is that, from an idealistic perspective, as discussed at length above, the only candidate for the object *qua* cause of sensory cognition is a latent karmic imprint (*vāsanā*) held in the storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*). But such imprints are, by definition, defiled (*kliṣṭa*).¹⁸⁰ In other words, as the contemplative analysis of the objects of perception becomes ever more refined, those objects themselves become harder and harder to account for in epistemological or ontological terms.

As mentioned above,¹⁸¹ it is an interesting and unresolved question, whether the imprint for duality—the “internal distortion” (*antarupaplava*)—is its own specific type of imprint, built into the conditions for ordinary sensory experience yet at least in principle ontologically separable from them; or whether the internal distortion is a necessary and ontologically-inseparable feature of any imprint that is capable of engendering a sensory cognition. The unresolved theoretical question, in this latter case, would be *why* it is that the karmic imprints responsible for the production of sensory cognition are necessarily structured such that the sensory cognition produced must be dualistic. One possible explanation is that, in order for there to be a sensory cognition, this sensory cognition must have some spatiotemporal location. That is to say, the cognition must be locatable in regard to some type of reference point—and this reference point which orients the experience would have

¹⁷⁹ See Chapter 1, note [160](#).

¹⁸⁰ See above, note [96](#).

¹⁸¹ See Chapter 1, Section III.C: [Duality and the Internal Distortion](#).

to be the subjective “aspect of the apprehender” (*grāhakākāra*).¹⁸² On this account, there can be no cognition in the absence of some defined reference point.¹⁸³

On the other hand, if the distorted “imprint for duality” could somehow be severed from the imprint *qua* cause of sensory cognition, then this might in theory allow for the possibility of nondual sensory content,¹⁸⁴ which is to say, phenomenal appearances that are somehow *not* structured by subject-object duality.¹⁸⁵ Of course, even given this theoretical possibility, the attainment of Buddhahood necessarily entails the total absence of karmic imprints, and therefore (it would be logical to surmise) the final absence of even such nondual content. In other words, whether the imprint for duality can in principle be severed from the imprint for sensory cognition, or not, it is clear that on Dharmakīrti’s account the ultimate absence of imprints necessarily entails the ultimate absence of sensory content such as ‘blue’ and ‘yellow.’

Crucially, however, the absence of imprints, and concomitant absence of ordinary phenomenal content, is not on Dharmakīrti’s Yogācāra model the same thing as the absence of

¹⁸² See Chapter 5, Section I: [Reflexive Awareness and “Self-Appearance”](#) (*svābhāsa*).

¹⁸³ Many thanks to John Dunne for elucidating this point.

¹⁸⁴ In the Mahāyāna Sūtra literature, it is explained that sublime and exotic phenomena are able to appear, once phenomenological duality has been removed. See, for example, Mipham’s comments *ad* MSĀ XII.44: “The habitual tendencies associated with the afflictive and cognitive obscurations, or the various habitual tendencies of duality, are present in the all-ground consciousness. Hence, it is also referred to as the ‘the entirety of seeds.’ When the all-ground that otherwise possesses these seeds is divested of the stains of duality, it transforms, and hence the threefold phenomena that appear from it likewise undergo transformation. The abode (the appearances of an environment), the objects (the appearances of the six objects), and the body (the appearances of the six faculties) thus all transform. When this happens, impure environments with ravines, thorny abysses, and so on, will no longer appear. Instead, a world environment that is of the nature of precious jewels will appear, filled with undefiled and delightful objects to be enjoyed by the senses, such as wish-fulfilling trees and pools of nectar.”

Translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee (2014).

¹⁸⁵ This is perhaps the most straightforward way to interpret the *sākāravāda* position opposed to Ratnākaraśānti’s *alīkākaravāda*. That said, Jñānaśrīmitra’s account of *sākāravāda* does not appear to have been formulated along these lines, but rather in terms of duality construed as *conceptual* variegation; see Tomlinson (2019, 250–60). Although Jñānaśrīmitra attributes this position to Prajñākaragupta, it is still very much unclear whether or to what extent this is an accurate representation of Prajñākaragupta’s perspective, since as outlined above Dharmakīrti is quite explicit that duality is a specifically *nonconceptual* type of error. More research is needed to address this question.

awareness as such.¹⁸⁶ In other words, Dharmakīrti—according to his earliest commentators, but also as represented by Ratnākaraśānti and the “False Imagists”—maintains an implicit distinction between ordinary, dualistic, contentful cognition, and the nature of awareness as such.¹⁸⁷ No matter what might appear, awareness always has an identical nature in terms of mere experience, which is to say, insofar as it always non-transitively illuminates “itself.” Furthermore, following the Yogācāra model of Awakening as the “transformation of the basis” (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*), there must exist an ontological continuity between ordinary, afflicted mind on the one hand, and the mind free from all defiled imprints on the other. As discussed above,¹⁸⁸ reflexive awareness provides this continuity. This would appear to be why Dharmakīrti explicitly describes gnosis (*prajñā*) as mental or cognitive (*bauddha*).¹⁸⁹

The upshot here is that awareness is always inherently “self-illuminating” (*svaprakāśaka*), whether it illuminates defiled dualistic content, or its own ultimately undefiled nature of pure luminosity, which is to say, nothing except its own reflexively-aware nature, coextensive with ultimate suchness. Therefore, the fact that awareness is inherently self-illuminating, and that by definition a momentary and ontologically-singular cognition could only ever be aware “of” itself,

¹⁸⁶ Ratnākaraśānti considered one of his primary rhetorical opponents to be Candrakīrti, author of the *Madhyamakāvatāra*; cf. Yiannopoulos (2012, 188–97). The root of their controversy is that, according to Candrakīrti, Buddhas no longer have any cognitions, and only benefit beings through the force of their prior aspirations, like a potter’s wheel that keeps spinning even after the potter has left the studio. See Eckel (1992) and Dunne (1996).

¹⁸⁷ Although not classically framed in these exact terms, one might regard this as a distinction between *ākāra* and *prakāśa*. This clearly resonates with the rDzogs chen distinction between *sems* and *rig pa*, or the Mahāmudrā distinction between *rnam shes* and *ye shes*; see also above, notes [175](#) and [176](#). For a philosophical analysis of the distinction between *sems* and *rig pa* within the Tibetan intellectual tradition, specifically, see Higgins (2013). In general, though, much work remains to be done concerning the history of the development of rDzogs chen and Mahāmudrā (and, relatedly, *gzhän stong*) in relation to the Indian Buddhist epistemological tradition.

¹⁸⁸ See Chapter 2, Section II.C.2: [The Causal and Non-Causal Nature\(s\) of Cognition](#).

¹⁸⁹ Cf. PVin 1.23, discussed below in Chapter 5, Section II.A: [The Nonconceptual Nature of the Affective Features of Experience](#). See also Chapter 5, note [61](#).

entails that, in the final analysis, after all the defiled dualistic imprints have been removed, there is only illumination (*prakāśamātra*).¹⁹⁰

And indeed, while Dharmakīrti only ever hints at the nature of the ultimate *pramāṇa*, Śākyabuddhi effectively names it as pure “reflexive awareness-only” (*svasaṃvedanamātra*).¹⁹¹ Similarly, in his comments *ad* PSV 1.9d, explaining Diñnāga’s statement that “one metaphorically speaks of [the elements of cognition possessing] the qualities of being a *pramāṇa* and a *prameya*” (*pramāṇaprameyatvam upacaryate*), Jinendrabuddhi writes that “the fact (*svarūpa*) of conventional *pramāṇa* and *prameya* is spoken about, for the sake of eliminating the delusion of those who are mistaken. However, only the transcendent, ultimate *pramāṇa* is unproblematic, devoid of error, and stainless; and only its field (*gocara*) is the true *prameya*.”¹⁹²

Of course, while both more elegant and more straightforward than any other theoretical explanation of “ultimate” yogic praxis, this perspective is not without its own difficulties. In particular, how would it be possible to give a completely rigorous philosophical account of “pure illumination” (*prakāśamātra*), or awareness without subjectivity? An ironclad conceptual explanation is likely impossible—and, indeed, this impossibility, demonstrating the limits of philosophical analysis, is likely an important part of Dharmakīrti’s overall point. As he writes in

¹⁹⁰ This is the essence of Ratnākaraśānti’s perspective; see Yiannopoulos (2012). For Jñānaśrīmitra’s critique of this view, see Tomlinson (2019).

¹⁹¹ Cf. Dunne (2004, 406n15) for Śākyabuddhi’s comments *ad* PVP *ad* PV 3.212: “[Devendrabuddhi] says *childish beings* because [the duality of object and subject] appears in that fashion only to those who are confused. The bodhisattvas who have realized that *dharmas* are selfless [exclusively] know mere reflexive awareness (*rang rig pa tsam* = **svasaṃvedanamātra*).

¹⁹² Steinkellner (2005b, 75.1-3): *vyāvahārikasya pramāṇasya prameyasya cedam svarūpam uktam atrāpi vipratipannānām sammohanirāsāya | lokottaram eva tu vibhramavivekanirmalamanapāyi pāramārthakam pramāṇam tasyaiva ca gocaro bhūtam prameyam iti ||*

the conclusion to the *Santānāntarasiddhi*: “The omniscient gnosis of the Buddhas is inconceivable, because it completely transcends the domain of thought and language.”¹⁹³

D. Concluding Remarks on PS 1.9a

In the end, we may heuristically distinguish between two senses of reflexive awareness. In terms of the final eleutheriological goal, pure, undistorted, nondual, and undifferentiated reflexive awareness is the ultimate—indeed, the only—*pramāṇa*, which cannot be separated from ultimate reality as *prameya*. From a more mundane perspective, however, there is also a “conventional” type of reflexive awareness, largely coextensive with the self-appearance (*svābhāsa*) of cognition. To be clear, these are not actually two different things; reflexive awareness is reflexive awareness. But it is worth drawing this distinction, as it is easy to lose track of the various roles that reflexive awareness fulfills.¹⁹⁴ And, again, with respect to the explicit context of these verses, the key point here is that reflexive awareness is ordinarily the simultaneous presentation of both aspects of an ordinary, dualistic cognition. As Dharmakīrti concludes:

Therefore, a single [cognition] has a dual form (*dvirūpa*), since it is experienced and remembered in that way; the result (*phala*) is the awareness of both aspects of [cognition]. || 337 ||¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Dharmakīrti (2002, 16–18): *bcom ldan 'das kyis don thams cad thugs su chud pa ni bsam gyis mi khyab ste | rnam pa thams cad du shes pa dang brjod pa 'i yul las 'das pa 'i phyir ro ||*

¹⁹⁴ This is the basic force of Sa skya Paṇḍita's and Go rams pa's tripartite explanation of reflexive awareness. Cf. Brunnhölzl (2014, 1185–87).

¹⁹⁵ Tosaki (1985, 21): *tasmād dvirūpam asty ekaṃ yad evam anubhūyate | smaryate cobhayākārasyāsya saṃvedanaṃ phalam || 337 ||*

Devendrabbuddhi, explaining this conclusion, goes on to describe the preceding analysis as but one option in terms of how the various elements of cognition may be slotted into the roles required by *pramāṇa* theory:

Since there is no isolated external object, **therefore**, it is said that, in regard to a **single** cognition, due to contamination by ignorance, there is a **dual form** (*tshul gnyis* = **dvirūpa*), namely, the form (*ngo bo* = **rūpa*) of the object-field, and the form of the cognition (*shes pa'i ngo bo* ~ *jñānarūpa*). It is **experienced that way**, and when it is recollected in the manner that it [initially] appeared, too, an appearance in accord with **that way** it was seen **is remembered**.¹⁹⁶ This being so, because there is no experience of anything else, **the awareness of both aspects of the cognition**, i.e., reflexive awareness, is the **result**. This has been the explanation [of PS 1.9a] up to [PSV *ad* PS 1.9a] starting with “For cognition arises with a double-appearance,”¹⁹⁷ and going up to “reflexive awareness is the result.” In this way, the image of the apprehended is the *prameya*, the experience itself is the result, and the image of the apprehender is the establishing instrument (*grub par byed pa* = **sādhaka*). So, this is one version (*rtog pa* = **vikalpa*) of the result, in the context of there being no external object.¹⁹⁸

Since the presentation of the other “options,” in particular the presentation of the subjective aspect as the *pramāṇa*, rests on the analysis of differences in the subjective features of cognition, such as the relative dullness or sharpness of the perception, or the perceived object’s desirability or undesirability, we now turn to an analysis of the subjective aspect of cognition, where these differences are located.

¹⁹⁶ That is, cognition is remembered as having been a first-person experience, along with its subjective attributes such as desirability. See PV 3.367-421 *ad* PS 1.11ab, and below, Chapter 5.

¹⁹⁷ *des ni gnyis su snang ba'i shes pa skye bar 'gyur ro* = **dvyābhāsam hi jñānam utpadyate*.

¹⁹⁸ PVP (539.12-540.2): *gang gi phyir de ltar phyi rol gyi don yan gar ba med pa de'i phyir | shes pa gcig la ma rig pas bslad pa'i phyir tshul gnyis yod pa yul dang rnam par shes pa'i ngo bo dag tu bshad par 'gyur ba yod pa yin no | gang zhig de ltar nyams myong dang | ji ltar snang ba bzhin du dran pa'i dus na yang mthong ba bzhin du snang ba nyid dran par 'gyur ro | de de ltar na gzhan myong ba med pa'i phyir | 'di'i rnam pa gnyis | rnam par shes pa'i myong nyid de | rang rig pa gang yin pa de nyid ni 'bras bu yin no | des ni gnyis su snang ba'i shes pa skye bar 'gyur ro zhes bya ba nas brtsams te | rang rig pa de ni 'bras bu yin no zhes bya ba'i bar de rnam par bshad pa yin no | de de ltar gzung ba'i rnam pa ni gzhal bya yin zhing | bdag nyid nyams su myong ba 'bras bu yin la | 'dzin pa'i rnam pa ni grub par byed pa yin pa de ltar na | don med pa la 'bras bu'i rtog pa 'di ni gcig yin no ||*

Chapter Five: Subjectivity and Reflexivity

Dharmakīrti analyzes cognition in terms of a “subjective aspect” (grāhakākāra), an “objective aspect” (grāhyākāra), and reflexive awareness (svasaṃvitti), which are all ontologically inseparable from each other. In other words, because reflexive awareness presents or is “of both appearances” (ubhayābhāsasya), both “subjectivity” and “reflexivity”—which must, to some extent, be disambiguated—are features of the object-image. In other words, the object-image is reflexively-experienced, and so the reflexive awareness of the object-image necessarily and simultaneously includes the “subjective” or affective features of cognition—such as its hedonic tone, e.g., pleasure, pain, or neutrality. More generally, even the “objective” features of cognition vary according to the causal properties of the observer, as in the case of sensory errors, which are causally derived from the subject rather than from the object. In this way, the reflexive awareness of the subjective or affective features of cognition, which are always present even when conceptually determining the object, provide a model for the reflexive awareness of cognition in general, up to and including transcendent gnosis (prajñāpāramitā).

For a long time—indeed, since even before the composition of the *Pramāṇavārttika*—the question of the precise nature of the relationship between the Yogācāra concepts of the “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) or subjective aspect of experience (*grāhakākāra*) on the one hand, and reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvitti*) on the other, has been a thorny issue beguiling the study of Buddhist epistemology. It is very easy to conflate these two, as the theoretical dividing line between them has not always been clear, even to earlier Indian and Tibetan commentators.

However, it should already be evident from the preceding analysis that subjectivity and reflexivity cannot be understood as strictly identical, if for no other reason than the fact that subject-object duality is strictly characterized as a type of cognitive error, as discussed in Chapter 1. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 4, reflexive awareness simultaneously presents both the subjective aspect and the objective aspect, because these two aspects are not in fact ontologically distinct; hence, reflexive awareness necessarily includes both aspects, while the subjective aspect—construed as a quasi-independent, conceptually-isolated feature of cognition—does not. That is to say, reflexive awareness *presents* both aspects of dualistic cognition, but it *itself* cannot

be *inherently* dualistically-structured, without losing the possibility for nondual form(s)¹ of awareness that is at the heart of Diñnāga and Dharmakīrti’s Yogācāra eleutheriological project. Hence, interpretations of reflexive awareness that characterize this reflexivity as dualistically or “intentionally”-structured fundamentally miss the hermeneutic mark. For example, Garfield (2015, 149) writes: “The only cogent model of reflexivity... is representational. After all, reflexive awareness has to have an intentional structure, and its intentional content must be known via a representation. Hence, every cognitive state must represent itself on this view.”² Irrespective of its potential philosophical merits, however, this is not a tenable interpretation of reflexive awareness according to Diñnāga and Dharmakīrti, for all the reasons that will be outlined below.

This point has particular salience in relation to Dharmakīrti’s assertion, in the context of his comments *ad* PS 1.10, that the reflexive experience of the affective features of cognition (such as pleasure or desire) is generalizable to the reflexive experience of all cognition. To foreshadow the Conclusion to our study, this generalizability is entailed by the fact that the affective

¹ A subsidiary question here, which there is unfortunately no space to consider at length, concerns whether and how one nondual, contentless cognition may be distinguished from another. That is to say: are there multiple forms of nondual awareness? According to Phakchok Rinpoche (personal communication), it may be possible to understand the True Imagist view as an intermediate stage of “pure” nondual appearances, in between ordinary “impure” dualistic awareness and a final stage of non-appearance. But it is difficult to see how one cognition consisting solely in the nondual union of emptiness and luminosity, by necessity entirely devoid of even “pure” nondual appearances, may be distinguished from another. On the one hand, in other words, it makes intuitive sense that there is nothing which could serve to distinguish between different instances of pure “luminosity-only” (*prakāśamātra*), which in addition to lacking the structure of phenomenal object and subject (i.e., the *grāhyagrāhakabhāva* or *-sthiti*), by definition lack any differentiated sensory content such as blue or yellow. On the other hand, however, this would seem to imply that a state of “luminosity-only” reached through exoteric methods, such as training in the general Yogācāra path of the Mahāyāna, cannot be distinguished from this same state as attained through esoteric tantric practices. Unlike the general exoteric methods, however, esoteric tantric practice necessarily requires ritual initiation (*abhiśeka*). What, then, are we to make of this requirement for initiation? In what sense, to what extent, or for what reasons is it actually required in order to reach this state?

For an examination of Ratnākaraśānti’s perspective on the relationship between Yogācāra and tantric methods, which amounts to a synthesis of the two, see also Yiannopoulos (2017). Concerning the topic of “sūtra Mahāmudrā,” which is to say, Mahāmudrā attained via exoteric means (i.e., without initiation), cf. Mathes (2007) and van Schaik (2004).

² To be clear, Garfield presents this as the perspective of Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), but appears to endorse this view.

dimensions of an experience, such as the desirability or undesirability of the experienced object, are inseparably built into the experience of the object. More specifically, such affective features are built into the subjective aspect of cognition, because this subjectivity also constitutes what Jinendrabuddhi terms the “cognitively-natured-ness” (*jñānarūpatva*) of cognition: the inherently cognitive, reflexively-experienced nature of cognition or experience as such, which in PV 3.302 Dharmakīrti refers to as the “similar nature” (*sadṛśātman*)³ of every cognition.

In other words, the inherently “illuminative” (*prakāśika*) nature of cognition paradigmatically includes the subjective or affective dimensions of experience. Hence, this luminous nature constitutes the “self-appearance” of these inherently cognitive features of cognition, which for ordinary beings under ordinary circumstances may also be understood as cognition’s seeming to be “first-personal.” And it is precisely this “self-appearance”—which can refer both to the “first-personal” sense of cognition appearing to or for “oneself,” as well as the fact that cognition always presents “itself” just as cognition—that has caused so much confusion in the scholarly literature, both classical and contemporary. Indeed, it is likely for this very reason that Dharmakīrti eschews Dinnāga’s terminology of “self-appearance” and “object-appearance,” preferring instead to refer to the apprehending or “subjective aspect” (*grāhakākāra*), and apprehended or “objective aspect” (*grāhyākāra*), of cognition.

This chapter is primarily concerned with an overview of the relationship between subjectivity and reflexivity. But since Dharmakīrti presents much of the argumentation that is necessary to understand this relationship in an earlier section of the *Pramāṇavārttika*, concerning the nonconceptual nature of the reflexive experience of desire and so on, PV 3.249-280 *ad PS*

³ See Chapter 2, Section II.C.2: [The Causal and Non-Causal Nature\(s\) of Cognition](#).

1.6a2b (*artharāgādisvasaṃvittir akalpikā*), our analysis of subjectivity also reaches back to this earlier section. We then complete our analysis of Dharmakīrti's argument to the effect that the subjective and objective aspects of cognition are always necessarily experienced together (i.e., the *sahopalambhaniyama*), before examining how this necessity plays out in terms of the reflexive experience of conceptual determinations, with reference to both External Realist and Epistemic Idealist ontologies.

I. Reflexive Awareness and “Self-Appearance” (*svābhāsa*)

A. Text-Critical Considerations

The notoriously thorny question of the precise nature of the relationship between reflexive awareness and the subjective aspect of cognition is closely tied to one of the persistent nuisances vexing contemporary scholarship on the *Pramāṇavārttika*: the difficulty of wrestling with the heretofore obscure connections among Dharmakīrti’s multiple presentations of reflexive awareness throughout PV 3. A non-negligible part of this difficulty concerns establishing where these presentations even begin and end. It is fairly clear that the first discussion of reflexive awareness, tracking PS 1.6ab, runs from PV 3.249-280. Beyond this, however, the boundaries are much less definite.

To a large extent, this particular problem has stemmed from a lack of appreciation for the careful attention that Dharmakīrti pays to the complex inner structure of the PS, which is to say, the close structural relationship between PS 1.2-12 and PV 3. As outlined in the Introduction, the 539 *ślokas* of PV 3 evince granular detail in their close correlation to the individual words and phrases of the PS(V). But this point has been mostly overlooked in the contemporary scholarly literature, particularly regarding the “*terra incognita*”⁴ of PV 3.288-539 *ad* PS 1.7cd-12. For example, Rāhula Sāṅkṛtyāyana, in his editions of Manorathanandin’s (1938) and Prajñākaragupta’s (1953) commentaries, indexes PV 3.422-483 as the “consideration of reflexive awareness” (*svasaṃvedanacintā*), and PV 3.484-501 as the “proof of reflexive awareness” (*svasaṃvittisiddhiḥ*). But these are Sāṅkṛtyāyana’s own editorial insertions, found in none of the

⁴ Eltschinger (2016, 39).

extant manuscripts. Franco (2014, 1) similarly only describes PV 3.301-541 as concerning “the result of the means of knowledge with special reference to reflexive awareness,” and doubts whether any more fine-grained division is “tenable.” Kellner (2009, 162), Kataoka (2016, 237), and King (2018, 283–310) provide partial indices of PV 3 in relation to the PS, but do not specifically address the issue of how the earlier discussion of reflexive awareness relates to its later treatment.

The reason this text-critical point matters with regard to the interpretation of the PV is that Dharmakīrti’s multiple discussions about reflexive awareness occur in relation to several distinct passages of the PS(V). Specifically, PV 3.249-280 is concerned with the discussion of reflexive awareness as a distinct type of epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*), originating in Dinnāga’s statement at PS 1.6a2b, that the reflexive awareness of desire is nonconceptual (*artharāgādisvasaṃvittir akalpikā*).⁵ Dharmakīrti’s chief concern in the corresponding passage of the PV is to establish such sensations as “perceptual” (i.e., *pratyakṣa*) in the technical sense: in particular, to establish them as nonconceptual (*akalpikā*). By contrast, while reflexive awareness is a crucial element of Dinnāga’s position as laid out in PS 1.9-12 (corresponding to PV 3.320-539), it is not always the main topic in this passage. Indeed, Dinnāga takes a substantial detour in PS 1.9cd, mirrored in PV 3.346-352, to reiterate that the image of the object (and *not* reflexive awareness) is the epistemic instrument in the context of External Realism.⁶ Dharmakīrti’s discussion in the latter third of PV 3 thus mostly revolves around reflexive awareness, without necessarily always keeping it as the primary focus.

⁵ See Chapter 1, Section II.C: [Mental Perception](#).

⁶ See below, Section III: [The Affective Features of Conceptual Determination](#).

However, the bigger problem by far has been a failure to appreciate the manner in which these discussions of reflexive awareness (that is, PV 3.249-280 *ad* PS 1.6a₂b, and PV 3.320-539 *ad* PS 1.9-12) are integrated at the level of epistemological theory. The key point is that, whether the epistemic object (*prameya*) is understood to exist internally or externally with respect to the mind, a sensory cognition is only ever directly aware “of” itself: not as an “object,” in a sense that would imply some kind of transitive relationship between the “apprehending” and “apprehended” aspects of cognition, but rather in the sense that both of these aspects (the bifurcation of which is, again, only a form of cognitive distortion) are simultaneously presented through, or “illuminated” (*prakāśyate*) by means of, reflexive awareness. Thus, the nonconceptual (*akalpikā*) and inherently non-erroneous (*abhrānta*) nature of the reflexive experience of affective states, such as desire or pleasure, serves as a model for the nonconceptual and inherently non-erroneous nature of the reflexive experience of every experience, just insofar as it is an experience. Indeed, as we will see, the mechanics of the reflexive awareness of desire is indistinguishable in principle from the mechanics of reflexive awareness writ large.

But another key takeaway, both in terms of his initial discussion of the reflexively-experienced or “self-knowing”⁷ nature of affective emotions (vis-à-vis PS 1.6a₂b), as well as in his later treatment of reflexive awareness broadly corresponding to PS 1.9-12, is that the subjective features of experience are inseparably—which is to say, ontologically—built into the nature of experience. In other words, attraction, aversion, indifference, and so on are built-in features of the subjective, “apprehending aspect” (*grāhakākāra*) of cognition. Hence, every cognition always necessarily includes the reflexive awareness of its “subjective” features.

⁷ See below, Section II.B: [Pleasure and Pain as “Self-Experiencing.”](#)

B. “*Svasaṃvitti* (i)” Is Not *Svasaṃvitti*

1. *Jinendrabuddhi’s Initial Definition of Reflexive Awareness*

As discussed above, Dīnāga initially introduces reflexive awareness at PS(V) 1.6a2b, simultaneously with mental perception, so let us briefly revisit this passage:

The nonconceptual reflexive awareness of [affective states] such as desire, and [the nonconceptual mental cognition] of an object, are also mental [as opposed to sensory perception]. || 6ab ||

Additionally, because they do not depend upon the senses, both a nonconceptual mental cognition which is engaged with the cognitive image (*ākāra*) of an experience, taking an object-field such as visible matter as its object-support, as well as reflexive awareness in regard to desire and so on, are mental [as opposed to sensory] perception.⁸

We have already discussed mental perception, in the context of Dharmakīrti’s theory of conceptual pseudo-perception.⁹ As for “the reflexive awareness of desire and so on,” at this juncture, it is necessary to reiterate a crucially important point: that there is a great deal of slippage between the “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) of cognition on the one hand, and reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvitti* or *svasaṃvedana*) on the other. Indeed, this slippage or ambiguity is almost certainly the reason why Dharmakīrti quietly drops Dīnāga’s terminology,¹⁰ preferring instead to speak of the “apprehending aspect” (*grāhakākāra*) of cognition.

This slippage extends so far that, in the context of his comments *ad* PS 1.6a2b, Jinendrabuddhi even identifies the former as the latter:

⁸ Steinkellner (2005a, 3): *mānasam cārtharāgādisvasaṃvittir akalpikā | mānasam api rūpādiviṣayāḷambanam avikalpakam anubhavākārapravṛttaṃ rāgādiṣu ca svasaṃvedanam indriyānapekṣatvān mānasam pratyakṣam.*

⁹ See Chapter 1, Section II.C: [Mental Perception](#).

¹⁰ In fact, the Sanskrit word *svābhāsa* does not appear in PV 3.

“And reflexive awareness with regard to desire and so on”: awareness of [awareness] itself is reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvedana*); awareness is that by means of which [something] is experienced (*saṃvedyate*). This is construed as the aspect of the apprehender (*grāhakākāra*), [cognition’s] property of having the nature of experience. For, precisely due to the fact that they have an experiential nature, desire and so on—being illuminated by virtue of this fact of having the nature of experience—make themselves known. And this is referred to as “reflexive experience” (*ātmasaṃvedanā*). Hence, this property of having an experiential nature is the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) for those [affective states such as desire], while the awareness, which actually (*bhāvarūpaṃ*) has the nature of knowing itself, should be understood as the result (*phala*). But the nature of those [affective states such as desire] is the epistemic object (*prameya*).¹¹

There is quite a lot going on in this passage, which primarily concerns how affective states such as desire are to be construed in terms of the “slots” of *pramāṇa* theory.¹² We will return to this point below, since it is extremely important, as it constitutes the overarching theoretical frame for Dharmakīrti’s discussion of the subjective aspect of cognition.

But at this juncture, the main issue concerns Jinendrabuddhi’s identification of this subjective aspect (i.e., the *grāhakākāra*) as cognition’s “property of having an experiential nature” (*anubhavasvabhāvatva*). Jinendrabuddhi’s comment here notwithstanding, it is critically important to understand that reflexivity and subjectivity are *not* identical (which indeed will become clear even within the context of Jinendrabuddhi’s own presentation). This point is extremely subtle, and very frequently misunderstood. Accordingly, it requires special attention.

¹¹ Steinkellner (2005b, 53.9-14): *rāgādiṣu ca svasaṃvedanam iti | svasya saṃvedanam svasaṃvedanam | saṃvedyate 'neneti saṃvedanam | grāhakākārasaṅkhyātam anubhavasvabhāvatvam | anubhavasvabhāvatvād eva hi rāgādayo 'nubhavātmatayā prakāśamānā ātmānaṃ saṃvedayante ātmasaṃvedanā iti ca vyapadiśyante | atas tad anubhavātmataṃ eṣāṃ pramāṇam | yat punar bhāvarūpaṃ saṃvedanaṃ svādhigamātmakam tat tatsya phalaṃ veditavyam | ātmā tu teṣāṃ prameyaḥ |*

¹² See Chapter 4, Section I.A: [The “Slots” of Pramāṇa Theory](#).

2. Williams' Distinction in its Intellectual-Historical Context

Much of the persistent confusion surrounding this critically important issue can be traced to Paul Williams' (1998, 4–5) articulation of a distinction between what he terms “*svasaṃvitti* (i)” and “*svasaṃvitti* (ii),” following the division made in a Tibetan commentary written by the 19th century dGe lugs master, Thub bstan chos kyi grags pa (1823-1905). The division in this commentary, in turn, is based on Bhāviveka's (ca. 500-560) pre-Dharmakīrtian critique of Yogācāra and reflexive awareness (Williams 1998, 4-5):

As it is said in [Bhāviveka's] *Tarkajvālā*: ‘According to the Cittamātrin [i.e., Yogācāra], consciousness has a twofold appearance. It appears to itself and it appears as the object. The consciousness which appears as the object—having taken on the aspect of an external object—becomes an object for the consciousness which appears to itself.’ Thus is set forth the position of the *pūrvapakṣa*.

(i) That which is spoken of as appearing to itself is the subjective aspect. That which is spoken of as appearing as the object is the objective aspect. That very objective aspect which has taken on the aspect of the object is explained as the object of the subjective aspect. Therefore, the experience of the objective aspect by the subjective aspect is explained as the meaning of ‘self-awareness’ [i.e., *svasaṃvitti*, Tib. *rang rig*]. Thus what is called self-awareness is a separate subjective aspect.

(ii) Accompanying all the consciousnesses that are aware of others there is also a mere luminosity, a mere awareness, of its own nature, turned solely inwards, without dependence on the external object, and [here] all the dual-appearances of object and subject are posited as a mistake.

In a footnote to the paragraph describing “*svasaṃvitti* (i),”¹³ Williams asks an unanswerable question (emphasis original): “Is the self-awareness the result of the cognition by the subjective aspect—the *experience* of the objective aspect by the subjective aspect—or identical with the

¹³ Williams (1998, 4n5).

subjective aspect itself?”. The problem is that this question is ill-formed, because “*svasaṃvitti* (i),” as described, has very little to do with *svasaṃvitti* according to Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti.

This critique is in no way meant to malign Williams’ study, which remains the gold standard account of how the issue of reflexive awareness was debated within the context of Tibetan polemics following the pivotal reign of the “Great” Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682),¹⁴ and in particular as this issue was presented within the contributions of the 19th century Nyingma lineage holder, ’Ju Mi pham (1846-1912). However, it must be emphasized, *in the strongest possible terms*, that this supposed distinction between “*svasaṃvitti* (i) and (ii)” is *only based on Bhāviveka’s (ca. 500) pre-Dharmakīrtian account of reflexive awareness*. Furthermore, this supposed distinction is *purely an artifact of inter-sectarian Tibetan polemics, occurring more than a thousand years after the first circulation of the PS and PV*. Therefore, this is distinction is, *at best, only marginally and tangentially related to reflexive awareness as presented in the epistemological texts of Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti*. Daniel McNamara aptly describes this dynamic: “Williams’ oft-cited distinction between two types of self-awareness is, then, a citation from a Gelugpa commentary, written with a highly specific (and specifically Tibetan) agenda, explaining the views of a 6th-century [pre-Dharmakīrti] Indian thinker who *denies* self-awareness.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Williams makes no special reference to the Fifth Dalai Lama, but his reign is a useful heuristic dividing line between earlier and later periods of scholastic debate concerning the doctrines of the dGe lugs school, in this case regarding the topic of reflexive awareness. The precise content of earlier doctrinal controversies, for example between the founder of the dGe lugs, Tsong kha pa (1357-1419), and his disciple mKhas grub (1385-1438), versus Sa skya scholars such as Śākya mchog ldan (1428-1507) and Go rams pa (1429-1489), is not necessarily directly reflected in later scholastic polemics, such as the 19th century conflict at the center of Williams’ study, between Mipham and Thub bstan chos kyi grags pa, however much this later dispute may have been indebted to earlier controversies on the same or similar topics.

¹⁵ McNamara (2012).

3. “*Svasaṃvitti (i)*” as Mental Perception

Accordingly, it is necessary to engage with Williams’ distinction in its proper intellectual-historical terms: in particular, recognizing that this distinction is based upon Bhāviveka’s critique of Yogācāra. Inasmuch as this distinction was formulated prior to Dharmakīrti, moreover, it must not be taken as in any way normative for the Dharmakīrtian tradition of Indian Buddhist *pramāṇa* theory. However, contemporary scholarship has often largely ignored this historical context, and instead uncritically adopted Williams’ distinction as a framework for interpreting Dharmakīrti.

Arnold (2010, 324) is a paradigmatic case in point (emphasis original):

The first [“*svasaṃvitti (i)*”] reflects what I will characterize as a basically *perceptual* understanding of *svasaṃvitti*; on this view, self-awareness is to be understood as a distinctive kind of perceptual awareness—one distinguished by its particular object or content (viz., one’s “self,” or one’s “own” mental states), but otherwise evincing the same structure and character as ordinary perception. While first-order perceptions, then, are *of* the ordinary objects of experience, *svasaṃvitti* consists in the essentially second-order awareness *of* those first-order cognitions.

While this might arguably¹⁶ be a reasonable thumbnail sketch of some Buddhist theories of reflexive awareness—or, at least, a “straw man” version of them, set up by 19th century Tibetan scholars, just to be knocked down—it should, at this point, be amply evident that this is not an acceptable interpretation of reflexive awareness according to Dīnāga and Dharmakīrti.

¹⁶ It should be noted that, while plausible, Arnold’s interpretation does not obviously, directly, or unproblematically map onto “*svasaṃvitti (i)*” even as described by Williams. Indeed, it might be more straightforward to interpret Williams’ “*svasaṃvitti (i)*” as just the *grāhakākāra*, since this position at least has support in Jinendrabuddhi’s commentary, above. Of course, it should be understood that even from this perspective, it is not really the case that there is an experience of the objective aspect “*by*” the subjective aspect, since cognition is in fact devoid of causal activity (i.e., it is *nirvyāpāra*); see Chapter 2, Section II.B: [Cognition Has No “Functioning” \(*vyāpāra*\)](#). But this point is not worth litigating in any detail, since—again—“*svasaṃvitti (i)*” is essentially a spurious construction.

To begin with, according to Dharmakīrti, reflexive awareness is specifically and exclusively a “first order” awareness, such that *every* cognition is reflexively-experienced.¹⁷ This is, indeed, the lynchpin of the infinite regress argument, to the effect that if such a second-order cognition were necessary in order to know the contents of a first-order cognition, then a third-order cognition would be necessary in order to know the contents of the second-order cognition, and so on *ad infinitum*.¹⁸

Assuming Arnold’s characterization to be correct, then, “*svasaṃvitti (i)*” in Arnold’s sense should best be understood as a way of thinking or talking about mental perception (*mānasapratyakṣa*). As discussed in Chapter 1, it is mental perception which essentially consists in the second-order awareness of first-order cognitions. This is also closely related to memory. While a detailed discussion of Dharmakīrti’s account of memory must unfortunately await a future publication, in thumbnail sketch, the argument is that memory should be understood along exactly these lines, as a mental cognition which takes the entirety of a preceding cognition (i.e., both its subjective and its objective aspects) as its object. “*Svasaṃvitti (i)*” is thus a fundamentally mnemonic mental perception, allowing for conceptual determinations of the type, “I was feeling sad at that time”: since the affective features of the earlier cognition are presented within the subsequent mnemonic cognition, those features may be conceptually abstracted from it (i.e., made the object of an *anyāpoha*).¹⁹

¹⁷ MacKenzie (2007) is an excellent overview of the “reflexivity thesis,” both in general and in the works of Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti specifically, as well as of competing theories of self-awareness. See also MacKenzie (2017) for a discussion of “self-illumination” (*svaparakāśa*) versus “other-illumination” (*paraparakāśa*) in Indian epistemology.

¹⁸ See Kellner (2011); PV 3.425-483; and Chapter 4, note [11](#).

¹⁹ Cf. PV 3.367-386. It should be noted that this point constitutes the heart of Dharmakīrti’s explanation of Dinnāga’s contention, in PS 1.11ab, that the double-formedness of cognition—i.e., the fact that it has both a subjective and an objective aspect—is established “due to the difference between the [initial] cognition of an object, and the [subsequent mnemonic] cognition of that [earlier cognition]” (*viśayajñānatajjñānaviśeṣāt tu dvirūpatā*). Dharmakīrti’s discussion

However, even this explanation requires reiterating the crucial caveat that a mental perception, like every other cognition, is in fact “devoid of causal activity” (*nirvyāpāra*), which is to say yet again that *there is no act of “apprehension” happening*.²⁰ For Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti, it is simply not the case that a subject ever “apprehends” an object in any causally-meaningful sense. On the contrary: an impairment in the psychophysical basis (*āśrayopaplava*) of cognition produces *the distortion* of phenomenological duality, analogous to how an impairment in the visual faculty (such as misalignment between the two physical eyes) produces the erroneous awareness of two moons.²¹ In reality, however, there is no discrete subject or object, nor any activity of apprehension, any more than there are in fact two moons.

The distorted cognition of “childish” or spiritually immature (*bālaka*) ordinary beings thus arises with *the appearance* of “first-personal” subjectivity (*svābhāsa*) and *the appearance* of objecthood (*viśayābhāsatā*), but this is nothing more than an artifact of our own ignorance. In reality, cognition only “possesses an object” in the sense that it arises in a form which is isomorphic to its primary cause (*upādāna*) or object *qua* stimulus. In the case of mental perception or “*svasaṃvitti* (i)” —which, to repeat, is not properly *svasaṃvitti* at all—this cause is the prior moment’s complex of sensory and/or mental cognitions.²² As Dinnāga writes in the PSV *ad* PS 1.6ab, mental perception arises with the “image of an experience” (*anubhavākāra*). Mental perception thus “takes” a prior experience or cognition as its “object,” *not* in the sense of somehow

of the *sahopalambhaniyama* follows immediately thereafter (PV 3.387ff.). For Jinendrabuddhi’s commentary on this passage, see Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.11ab](#).

²⁰ See Chapter 2, Section II.B: [Cognition Has No “Functioning” \(*vyāpāra*\)](#).

²¹ See Chapter 1, Section III.B: [Myodesopsia and Defects in the Basis](#).

²² See Chapter 1, Section II.C: [Mental Perception](#).

actually, transitively “apprehending” that preceding experience, but on the contrary *only* in the sense that it arises with the image of that prior experience.

Fortunately, “*svasaṃvitti* (i)” has not been the focus of much discussion in the contemporary scholarly literature, likely owing to an implicit understanding that this ostensible sense of the term is less interesting and less important than the second. Unfortunately, the discussion of “*svasaṃvitti* (ii)” has been plagued by many of the same underlying problems beguiling the discussion of “*svasaṃvitti* (i),” problems to which we now turn.

C. “*Svasaṃvitti* (ii)” Is Not Inherently “First-Personal”

The fundamental problems with the contemporary analysis of “*svasaṃvitti* (ii)” are neatly demonstrated in Arnold (2010, 327),²³ in Arnold’s explanation of how he understands this second sense of *svasaṃvitti* (emphasis original):

On my reading, then, of verses 1.8cd-9 of his *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, Dignāga should thus be understood to argue in effect for what I have elsewhere referred to as *epistemic idealism*²⁴—for the view that whatever one says about how finally to

²³ But, by no means, only there. See, for example, Garfield (2018a, 120–21), where it is claimed that “the essential reflexivity of awareness,” identified as a species of Sellars’ “Myth of the Given,” consists in the fact that “what is given is that my experience is mine; that I am a subject; that everything I experience has a for-me-ness. Givenness in this sense consists in the fact that an ego or subject is known to be present in every experience. This, I suspect, is the deepest and the most seductive version of the Myth of the Given. It is tantamount to what Buddhist philosophers regard as self-grasping and is the very thesis against which the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness is aimed.”

However, this is not a tenable interpretation of the relationship between reflexive awareness and first-person subjectivity, for the exact same reasons that Arnold’s interpretation is not tenable, as outlined below.

²⁴ It should be noted that Arnold’s term “epistemic idealism” does not map onto Dunne’s “Epistemic Idealism” as a gloss for *antarjñeyavāda*. Rather, Arnold (2008, 15) defines “epistemic idealism” in this sense as “the view... that what we are immediately aware of must be understood in terms of the intrinsic properties of cognition. What makes this an instance of epistemic idealism (idealism, that is, only with regard to *what we know*) is that this remains compatible with an ontological commitment to really existent external objects; all that has been given up is the claim that such existents could be the direct objects of our awareness.”

A subsidiary problem with Arnold’s analysis here is thus that, on such an account, any type of representationalist or sense data theory—that is, any epistemological theory wherein the epistemic object, up to and including real extramental matter, is only ever *directly* known by means of some type of mediating cognitive representation—would be “epistemically idealist” in this sense. However, most sense data theorists, very much including Buddhist

explain the contentfulness of cognition (whether in terms of a really existent world of external objects or not), the fact of its *being contentful* should be reckoned as both explanatorily basic and intrinsic to cognition. Moreover, the occurrence of a contentful cognition just is the occurrence of a subjectively experienced cognition; Dignāga’s argument that *svasaṃvitti* is finally all that could be referred to as ‘*pramāṇa*’ thus advances the claim, on my reading, that anything known can finally only be, we might say, *first-personally* known. This represents a view that proponents of both “Sautrāntika” and “Yogācāra” can hold, since, whether or not one is inclined finally to advert to external objects, it is incontrovertible that it is only *as known* that it makes any sense to say that even these are accessible.

To begin with, as discussed at various points above, the question of whether cognition is inherently “contentful” (i.e., *sākāra*) or not was in fact a major source of contention for the later Indian Buddhist scholastic tradition, with the False Imagists such as Ratnākaraśānti arguing that, in the final analysis, the contentfulness of cognition is *not* “explanatorily basic and intrinsic to cognition,” but is rather only an artifact of ignorance; and that, upon the attainment of the final eleutheriological goal, all differentiated sensory content disappears without a trace (i.e., leaving no *vāsanā* whatsoever). Furthermore, one of the primary contentions of the present study is that the False Imagist perspective is the most straightforward, hermeneutically and philologically responsible reading of the *Pramāṇavārttika*, and additionally at the very least implicit in Devendrabuddhi’s and Śākyabuddhi’s perspective.²⁵

Nevertheless, it should be understood that there would not necessarily be anything wrong with Arnold’s account here if, following Jinendrabuddhi’s initial slippery identification of the subjective aspect of cognition with reflexive awareness, it were truly the case that these two are

representationalists such as the Sautrāntikas, would no doubt vehemently object to the characterization of their epistemological system as “idealistic” in any way.

²⁵ For a general overview of the controversy between the True vs. False Imagists, see Kajiyama (1965). For the influential Tibetan scholar Śākya mchog ldan’s appropriation of Ratnākaraśānti’s *alikākāravāda*, see Komarovski (2015). For a detailed analysis of the position of Ratnākaraśānti’s chief “True Imagist” opponent, Jñānaśrīmitra, see Tomlinson (2019).

strictly coextensive. If, in other words, reflexive awareness as a defining *sine qua non* of cognition as such—in Dharmakīrti’s parlance, the “similar nature” (*sadṛśātman*) of every cognition, as cognition—if this were the exact same thing as the first-personal or subjective aspect of cognition, its “for-me-ness,”²⁶ then Arnold’s explanation of “*svasaṃvitti* (ii)” here might be fine. The problem, however, is that this is not so.

This problem should come as no surprise, given the extensive preceding analysis of Dharmakīrti’s arguments to the effect that phenomenological duality is strictly distorted and erroneous. To say that duality is cognitive error is precisely to say that the dualistic structure, constituted by the “intentional” relationship between phenomenal subject and phenomenal object, is cognitive error. It is, in other words, precisely to say that “first-personality” as such is cognitive error. As Śākyabuddhi explains (trans. Dunne):

These statements have been made by those who, due to their stupidity, do not understand duality. That is, with the word “subject” we do not mean to express reflexive awareness—the internal cognition that arises in various forms such as the pleasant and the unpleasant—such that by expressing it with the term “subject” we would be saying that it does not exist. Rather, we mean the following. Cognitive appearances such as blue seem to be external to awareness, but when one analyzes whether those appearances are singular or plural, they are unable to withstand that analysis; hence, they are not suchness. Therefore, there is ultimately no object that is distinct from awareness itself, and since that object does not exist, we say “the subject does not exist”; in saying this we mean the “subject” that occurs in expressions or concepts that are constructed in dependence on the [apparently external object], as in “This is the real entity (*ngo bo = *rūpa*) that is the subject which apprehends that object, which is the real entity that it cognizes.” Since an agent and its patient are constructed in dependence upon each other, these two [i.e., subject and object] are posited in dependence on each other. The expression “subject” does not express mere reflexive awareness, which is the essential nature of cognition itself. The essential nature of cognition is not constructed in mutual dependence on something else because it arises as such from its own causes. The

²⁶ Zahavi and Kriegel (2016).

essential nature of cognition is established in mere reflexive awareness. Since it is devoid of the above-described object and subject, it is said to be non-dual.²⁷

In other words, reflexive awareness constitutes the mere “cognitively-natured-ness” (*jñānarūpatva*) of cognition, which is closely related to—though, crucially, *not* coextensive with—the “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) or “apprehending aspect” (*grāhakākāra*) of cognition. Unlike reflexivity, in other words, “subjectivity” is a false construction that only arises in dependence upon “objectivity.” But the dualistic structure of subject and object is nothing but cognitive distortion. Therefore, reflexivity is not in any way reducible to subjectivity, “first-personality,” or “for-me-ness.”

Like so much of Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti’s system, this point too was already present within Vasubandhu’s Yogācāra works. As Gold (2015, 167–68) writes (emphasis original):

How could Vasubandhu deny the obvious fact that we have experience that is structured as—as he puts it—“dual”? How could that be an illusion? And, how can he be denying all but the causal reality, if he advocates not one, but *three natures*, only *one of which* (the second) is the causal nature?²⁸ To use John Searle’s famous terminology, how could one plausibly deny that there is a difference between the *first-person ontology* of consciousness and the *third-person ontology* of ordinary causality? In answer to this, I would say that Vasubandhu’s view is not implausible if we take into consideration the thoroughgoing nature of his antirealism. I am not denying that Vasubandhu allows that the *first-person ontology* is how we *experience* the world; the “first person” perspective, the perspective of there being a world as experienced by a subject, is the construction named as “dual” and glossed as *grāhya-grāhaka*. Vasubandhu does allow that this exists, but *only as an appearance*. This is why, along with the “third person” perspective that is the causal nature (the dependent nature) and the “first person” perspective that is the “dual” construction (the fabricated nature), Vasubandhu as Yogācāra includes a *third nature*, which is just the fact that the “first person” is not real as it appears (the perfected nature).

²⁷ Dunne (2004, 407).

²⁸ See the Introduction, note [74](#).

Therefore, this is not to deny that we *seem to have* a “first personal” perspective—and that this appearance, this “seeming,” is part of reality as properly described. One reason that philosophers such as Searle believe that the first-personal perspective is irreducible is that there is no way to explain what we experience without at some point at least implicitly appealing to the subject of experience, which means that you must always bring in a first-personal perspective by the back door, if not the front. But Vasubandhu has provided us a way to describe this *apparent*²⁹ “first person” fully from a *third-personal* perspective...

This is not to deny that there is something called “consciousness”; it is only to deny that its “perspective” is truly an intentionally structured relationship between two distinct entities (the subject and the object). In truth, like the light passing through your window—or like a camera pointed at your window—the “consciousness” takes the form of the visual data and passes it on, in a new form, to other mental events. There is no need here for a human subject; it is only cause and effect... Since I can only see through my eyes, it seems to me that I must exist somewhere behind my eyes. Vasubandhu’s denial of subjectivity, then, amounts to the claim that, whenever we *think* we are subjects “viewing” something, in fact there are only a series of perspectively shaped moments of consciousness. Although our experiential world is “dual” in appearance—it appears as though it is being processed by a subject—in fact the *reality* and the *unity* of the subject are only a habitual, conceptual³⁰ imposition after the fact.

Now, what might it mean to have a cognition that is not structured in terms of a subject and object?

In a sense, such a cognition could not “mean” anything, because it would transcend or be empty of the structures that make meaning possible.³¹ This is, indeed, the answer implied by our analysis so far.

²⁹ As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Sanskrit word *ābhāsa*, like its equivalent in English (“appearance”), means both that which is simply apparent or manifest, as well as that which merely appears or seems to be the case, but is not really so. Hence “spurious perception” or “pseudo-perception” for *pratyakṣābhāsa*, “a [cognition] with the [misleading] appearance (*ābhāsa*) of being a perception.” Along these lines, “something that spuriously *appears* to be one’s own first-personality” would be a reasonable, if interpretive, translation of *svābhāsa*.

³⁰ Vasubandhu, unlike Dharmakīrti, describes phenomenological duality as “constructed” or “conceptual” (*vikalpa*). It should be noted on this point, however, that Vasubandhu’s definition of “conceptuality” did not involve *apoha*, as *apoha* theory was developed later, by Dīnāga. That is to say, it is not clear at present exactly what Vasubandhu meant by “conceptuality,” or how Vasubandhu’s understanding of conceptuality relates to that of Dīnāga and Dharmakīrti. More research into this question is required.

³¹ On the other hand, if it can be granted that nondual cognition is intelligible as pure luminosity-only (*prakāśamātra*), and that this pure luminosity is intelligible as a direct (i.e., *pratyakṣa*) experience of the nature of reality as such (*dharmatā*, *tathatā*, etc.), there would remain the possibility that such a nondual experience of ultimate reality may

To be clear, such an account—asserting on the one hand that there is no object-awareness in the absence of phenomenological subjectivity, but on the other hand that this very subject-object structure is strictly a form of cognitive error, and that in its absence, only the undifferentiated (which is to say, in a sense, “contentless”) luminosity of reflexive awareness remains—this is definitely counterintuitive, and can certainly be critiqued on philosophical grounds. As an interpretation of Dharmakīrti, however, it is not really open to debate; there is no question that this is his position.³² Even the True Imagists (*satyākāravādins*), who disputed the account of ultimate cognition as pure contentless luminosity (*prakāśamātra*), were forced to at least pay lip service to the idea that the duality of subject and object is strictly cognitive error.³³

Moreover, this is precisely what Thub bstan chos kyi grags pa—at the end of a commentarial game of “telephone” stretching over more than a millennium—related in his latter account of reflexive awareness (that is, Williams’ “*svasaṃvitti* (ii)”), to the effect that “all the dual-appearances of object and subject are posited as a mistake.” Again: *the appearance of the subject is “first-personality” or “for-me-ness.”* The absence of the subject-object structure therefore necessarily entails the absence of any “first person” sense of being the one “to whom” or “for whom” the cognition is occurring.³⁴ As Gold (2015, 134) eloquently and succinctly puts it, “This

be communicated or induced by other than discursive linguistic means: the possibility, that is, of something like the guru’s “pointing out” (*ngo phrod*) of Mahāmudrā or rDzogs chen.

³² Indeed, Kumāriḷa acknowledges as much at ŚV *Nirāḷambanavāda* 178-179, in his argument against a Yogācāra interlocutor who posits that difference in cognition (*jñānabheda*) produces difference in *vāsanā*, and that difference in *vāsanā* produces difference in cognition: “[This explanation] obtains [the fault of] circularity; for, according to you, the pure nature of cognition does not possess any intrinsic differentiation” (*prāptam anyonyasaṃśrayam | svacchasya jñānarūpasya na hi bhedaḥ svato ’sti te* || 179 ||). Though intended by Kumāriḷa as a refutation, the undifferentiated nature of awareness is rather more a “feature” than a “bug,” according to the Yogācāra perspective articulated here.

³³ See Tomlinson (2019, 240–60).

³⁴ In his insightful study of Jñānaśrīmitra’s “True Imagist” (*sākāravāda*) perspective, Tomlinson (2019, 35) attempts to split the difference here, describing reflexive awareness as “a nonintentional first-person acquaintance with the intrinsic subjective character of consciousness.” He goes on to explain (*ibid.*, 41) that, “When I speak of a first-personal or subjective perspective, this is not meant to suggest that self-consciousness has a subject-object structure

means not just that we perceive objects to exist where they do not exist; it also means that we are not even the subjects of our own experience.”³⁵

or relation (*grāhyagrāhakākāra or -bhāva*). Rather, I mean to capture something of the unique peculiarity of consciousness... what William James referred to as the ‘warmth and intimacy’ that my conscious states have, through which I know immediately that they belong to me and not to someone else.” Thus, on Tomlinson’s account (ibid., 89), “Ratnākaraśānti tells us that bare manifestation (*prakāśamātra*) is another way to describe what philosophers of mind today refer to as subjective character, or the fact that conscious states have a subjective feel: they can be experienced first-personally (*svasamvedya*). Rather than intentionality, this subjective character alone is the criterion of consciousness.”

There is unfortunately no space here to engage with Tomlinson’s study in the detail that it richly deserves. Briefly, however, despite this study’s many virtues, it must be noted that the preceding account of *prakāśamātra* is highly problematic, since it draws what amounts to a spurious distinction between transitive or intentional first-personality, and some kind of undefined, “nonintentional first-person” subjectivity. But what could “nonintentional first-personality” even mean? For Dīnnāga and Dharmakīrti, the presence of a phenomenological “first person” or subject is, *ipso facto*, the presence of the subject-object structure or relation (*grāhyagrāhakākārasthiti or -bhāva*). That is to say, there is *no such thing* as “nonintentional first-personality,” at least on the Buddhist account; and it is difficult to see how such a construction may be understood, even outside of a specifically Buddhist context. Furthermore, as explained above, according to Dīnnāga and Dharmakīrti there is no such thing as “transitive awareness,” at all, ever, because it is *never* the case that awareness—whether it spuriously appears to be structured by the erroneous distortion of duality, or not—ever actually transitively “apprehends” an object. On the contrary, cognition is strictly devoid of causal activity (*nirvyāpāra*), and is accordingly only ever metaphorically spoken of (*upacaryate*) as cognizing an “object,” to the extent that cognition *non-transitively* arises with the image of that object.

Therefore, *prakāśa(mātra)* simply cannot be understood as the “subjective character” or “subjective feel” of cognition. Reflexive awareness is, of course, closely related to this subjective character, for the reasons outlined below; but, for Ratnākaraśānti, as for Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi (and, it would appear, for Dharmakīrti as well), the ultimate unintelligibility of “objective” cognitive content precisely entails the ultimate unintelligibility of “first-personal” subjectivity.

³⁵ Compare Gold’s formulation here to Kachru (2015, 550–68). Garfield (2015, 197), arguing against the Yogācāra account of reflexive awareness, notes that “I have no better knowledge of my inner life than I do of the external world.” He might be surprised to learn that this is precisely Vasubandhu’s point in *Vimśikā* 21 (trans. Silk 2016, 141):

How is the [knowledge of one’s own mind] also inconsistent with reality?

Because one does not know [other minds or even one’s own] in the way that [such knowing of minds] is the scope of a Buddha || 21 ||

Because we do not know that in the way that that [knowledge] is the scope of the buddhas, with respect to its nature as inexpressible. Both [knowledges, of one’s own mind and of those of others,] are inconsistent with reality, because [all that non-buddhas are able to know is an] erroneous appearance. This is because they fail to reject the conceptual fantasy of subject and object.

tad api katham ayathārtham | ajñānād yathā buddhasya gocaraḥ || 21 || yathā tan nirabhilāpyenātmanā buddhānām gocaraḥ | tathā tadajñānāt tad ubahyaṃ na yathārtham vitathapratibhāsatayā grāhyagrāhakavikalpasyāprahīṇatvāt |

It should be reiterated here, as mentioned in note 30 above, that (unlike Dharmakīrti) Vasubandhu describes phenomenological duality as a type of conceptual (i.e., *vikalpa*) error. However, what precisely Vasubandhu understands to constitute “conceptuality” remains something of an open question.

Hence, while it is certainly possible to come up with various Buddhist-flavored epistemological or phenomenological theories, any interpretation of Diñnāga or Dharmakīrti which asserts the irreducibility of “first-personality” as a criterion of cognition as such, necessarily and by definition misses the hermeneutical mark. Simply put: such interpretations are irreconcilable with the plain meaning of the PV, as well as with the most straightforward, internally-consistent, and intellectual-historically responsible reading of the PS. Given the theoretical priors common among contemporary scholars, particularly those located in or around academic Philosophy departments, these types of accounts may arguably make more sense than Diñnāga and Dharmakīrti’s perspective. But such accounts are incommensurable with their perspective, and (more importantly) are philologically unworkable as an interpretation of it.

However, this is pointedly *not* to say that such interpretations are fabricated out of whole cloth. There are good philosophical reasons for these misunderstandings, centered around Diñnāga’s failure to rigidly distinguish between subjectivity and reflexivity, or what might be called the “slippage” between these two terms, to which we now turn.

D. Cognitively-Natured-Ness (*jñānarūpatva*) and Subjectivity

1. Individually-Restricted Experience vs. Subjective Experience

The root of the problem here is that reflexivity is an inherent property of awareness as such, while subjectivity or “first-personality” is not; however, the theoretical dividing line between these two is not entirely clear in the commentarial literature.³⁶ This is not an insurmountable theoretical

³⁶ Moriyama (2010, 274) hits upon much the same point regarding this unresolved tension: “One possible solution is to consider the *svābhāsa*-factor not as *grāhakākāra* relating to *grāhyākāra*, but as the mere appearance of a cognition itself without relating to any objects. This kind of *svābhāsa*-factor seems absolutely identical to self-awareness as the result of a means of valid cognition, and thus it can be omitted in the schema of PS 1.9. This

difficulty for the Buddhist tradition on its own terms, in the sense that, at the highest levels of analysis and contemplative practice, in the absence of subject-object duality, “then there are no longer external objects—or even mental content—on which to act.”³⁷ In other words, on the Yogācāra model, the theoretical aporia created by this slippage ultimately dissolves. Reflexivity remains, as pure “luminosity-only” (*prakāśamātra*), while subjectivity—construed in these terms as an artifact of ignorance—does not. Nevertheless, it would be helpful to examine this problem from the perspective of an “intermediate” idealistic analysis, which is to say, an analysis that is pitched “in between” baseline External Realism on the one hand, and the ultimate perspective of pure luminosity-only on the other, in order to understand what the contours of this problem indicates about the Buddhist understanding of the nature of the mind.

The essence of the slippage is that the “cognitively-natured-ness” (*jñānarūpatva*) of cognition is not rigorously distinguished from the first-person feeling of subjectivity (i.e., the *grāhakākāra*). When Jinendrabuddhi glosses the “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) of cognition in his later comments *ad* PS 1.9a, it is remarkably similar to his earlier gloss of *svasaṃvitti* from PS 1.6a₂b, cited above,³⁸ with the key difference that at this juncture he now introduces the concept of “cognitive-nature-hood” (*jñānarūpatva*):

Self-appearance is that which contains an appearance of itself, which is to say, an appearance of its own form (*svarūpa*). This means the aspect of the apprehender

conclusion is only tentative, but, in my opinion, it helps to explain the relationship between *sākārajñānavāda* and the self-awareness of the Sautrāntika, while stopping one step before Yogācāra idealism.”

It should be noted in this regard that Dharmakīrti does not adopt Diñnāga’s terminology of “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) and “object-appearance” (*viśayābhāsa*), preferring instead his own nomenclature of the “apprehending aspect” (*grāhakākāra*) and “apprehended aspect” (*grāhyākāra*) of cognition.

³⁷ Dunne (2004, 317).

³⁸ See above, Section I.B.1: [Jinendrabuddhi’s Initial Definition of Reflexive Awareness](#).

(*grāhakākāra*).³⁹ The appearance is just the form (*svarūpa*) of the cognition itself, i.e., it is the cognitively-natured-ness (*jñānarūpatva*) of cognition, which just appears by virtue of its own nature.⁴⁰

Likewise, in his comments *ad* PV 3.337,⁴¹ Devendrabuddhi refers to the *svābhāsa* as the “form of the cognition” (*shes pa'i ngo bo = *jñānarūpa*). In other words, the “cognitively-natured-ness” of cognition is, at least under certain circumstances, interpretable as its “first-personality.”

The underlying insight here, articulated in the *sahopalambhaniyama*, is that every cognition presents itself just as a cognition. For example, the cognition of blue presents itself *as the cognition* of blue. This is, in only slightly different ways, both what it means for cognition to be reflexively-experienced, and what it means for cognition to be subjectively-experienced. In a conventional (*vyāvahārika*) context, “cognitively-natured-ness” necessarily includes subjectivity or “first-personality”; what it means for there to be an experience, in ordinary circumstances, just is for that experience to be dualistically-structured, such that objective content seems to be presented to a first-personal subject. In the ultimate (*pāramārthika*) context, however, this is not the case: experience is reflexive, but not subjective.

Put slightly differently, “subjectivity” is analyzable as a nonconceptual error or distortion related to the fact that an experience, which must by nature be reflexively-experienced, is also necessarily restricted to a particular individual (*pratiniyata*).⁴² Despite the fact that they are both

³⁹ Jinendrabuddhi’s gloss of the *svābhāsa* as the *grāhakākāra* here cuts decisively against Arnold’s (2012, 171–72) interpretation of the *svābhāsa* as, in effect, *jñānaśaṃvit*. See Appendix A, note 4.

⁴⁰ Steinkellner (2005b, 69.8-10): *svam ābhāso 'syeti svābhāsaṃ svarūpābhāsam grāhakākāram ity arthaḥ | svarūpam evāsya jñānasyābhāsaḥ yad eva hi jñānasya jñānarūpatvam tenaiva svena rūpeṇābhāsa ity ity kṛtvā |*

⁴¹ See above, Chapter 4, note 198.

⁴² While, again, there is unfortunately no space in the present study for any extended consideration of Dharmakīrti’s account of memory, it may be noted here that the continuity of memory—grounded in the continuity of reflexive awareness—provides something like a basis for individuating the continua of sentient beings from each other. For a brief account of how memory, in the mode of “autobiographical self-awareness,” relates to reflexive awareness on the

identical just in terms of being reflexively-experienced, in other words, your reflexively-experienced experience is different from my reflexively-experienced experience, because your experience is restricted to you, and my experience is restricted to me. On the Buddhist model, there may be no such thing as a “self” (*ātman*), ontologically speaking, but there are individual psychophysical continua (*santāna*),⁴³ and the experiences of each individual continuum are restricted to each individual continuum; this is, precisely, what it means for awareness to be “individually-known” (*pratyātmavedana*). Therefore, every experience—up to and including the experience of transcendent gnosis (*prajñāpāramitā*)—must be “individually-known.”⁴⁴ As paradoxical as it might sound, however, this is not the same thing as an experience being

one hand, and the Buddhist doctrine of “no-self” (*anātman*) on the other, cf. MacKenzie (2008). Concerning memory as a unique and individuating feature of conscious observers, see also note 27 in the Conclusion.

⁴³ This is less paradoxical than it might at first sound, given that each continuum is classically explained as an amalgam of five “bundles” or “heaps” (*skandhas*), which broadly fall into the category of the psychological (*nāma*) and the physical (*rūpa*). Just as it is possible to refer to a conventionally-existent “jug,” without there being any real “jug” that truly exists over and above its constituent particulars, on the Buddhist model there is no “self” over and above the momentary, mutually-causally-interacting psychophysical processes of the five *skandhas*. As MacKenzie (2008, 264) points out, “One does not need to appeal to Persons in order to give an account of the referent of ‘I.’ Despite our intentions, ‘I’ might *in fact* refer to a suitably organized series of interrelated mental and physical events, a *skandhasantāna*.”

That said, it is understandable how reflexive awareness, *qua* the ultimate nature of awareness, could be mistaken for a “self,” insofar as reflexive awareness by definition only ever presents the experiences of one individual continuum. This is the essence of the argument of the later (ca. 950-1000 CE) Mīmāṃsā Bhaṭṭa Rāmakantha; cf. Watson (2010). The implications of this individuation of mental continua on the basis of reflexive awareness, particularly given the close association between reflexive awareness and memory, must unfortunately await a future publication.

⁴⁴ As Brunnhölzl (2014, 1186) explains, “If the Tibetan tradition gives a distinct explanation of the meaning of *so so* [= *prati*] in *so so rang rig pa'i ye shes* [= *pratyātmavedanīyajñāna*], this is usually done in two ways. First, in the explanation usually preferred by adherents of [“Other-Emptiness,” i.e., *gzhan stong*], *so so* refers to the fact that the final unmediated realization of the nature of our mind can be accomplished only by this very mind’s wisdom and not by anything extrinsic to it, such as a teacher’s instructions or blessings. In other words, the only way to really personally *know* what the wisdom of a buddha or bodhisattva is like is to experience it in our own mind. In this sense, such wisdom is truly inconceivable and incommunicable, which is part of what the term “personally experienced wisdom” indicates, since it is one’s very own “private” experience unshared with others. Of course, in this context, it should be clear that “personal” or “private” does not refer to an individual person in the usual sense, since the wisdom of the noble ones encompasses the very realization that there is no such person or self. Nevertheless, it is an experience that occurs only in distinct mind streams [i.e., *cittasantānas*] that have been trained in certain ways, while it does not happen in others.” Concerning the requirement that gnosis be individually-known, and perspective on the historical usage of *pratyātmavedanīya* as a technical term in the Majjhima Nikāya, see also Kapstein (2000, 112–13).

subjectively or “first-personally” known, because as discussed above subjectivity or “for-me-ness” is nothing but cognitive error.

Hence, rather than an “apprehender” who engages in the causal activity of apprehending on the one hand, and some object which is “apprehended” on the other, there is only what the later commentarial tradition, apparently beginning with Dharmottara, terms a “structured/structuring relationship” (*vyavasthāpyavyavasthāpakabhāva*).⁴⁵ The internal distortion (*antarupaplava*) in the psychophysical basis (*āśraya*) of cognition warps the process through which cognition is generated, such that it *seems as though* cognition is the apprehension of some object or patient “by” some subject or agent. In reality, however, the subjective aspect is only the “structurer” (*vyavasthāpaka*) of the cognition—metaphorically, of course, without there actually being any real causal activity (*vyāpāra*) of “structuring”—by virtue of the fact that the subject-image *seems to be* a first-personal zero-point orienting the objective aspect about itself. In this sense, the objective aspect is “structured” (*vyavasthāpya*). Thus, in terms of a mathematical simile, the “structuring” element is like the (0,0,0,0) origin-point of a four-dimensional coordinate system, defining points in time and space relative to itself. But again, in reality, the opposition of “structurer” and “structured” is only an erroneous artifact of ignorance.

2. *The Cognitive Nature of the Buddhas’ Awareness*

This distinction between the “cognitively-natured-ness” or reflexivity of awareness on the one hand, and “first-personal” subjectivity on the other, is precisely the reason why Dharmakīrti is so concerned to establish the existence of strictly nonconceptual forms of cognitive error, and to

⁴⁵ See Arnold (2005, 46–47).

furthermore establish subject-object duality as the paradigmatic case of such error.⁴⁶ It is true, for example, that there exists a specifically conceptual type of error in relation to the false belief in a “self,” consisting in the conceptual projection or superimposition (*āropa*) of personal identity onto what is in reality nothing more than a conglomeration of aggregates (i.e., the five *skandhas*).⁴⁷ This is a particular species of conceptual pseudo-perception, precisely analogous to the conceptual pseudo-perception of conventionally-existent entities such as ‘jugs.’⁴⁸

But there is also a *nonconceptual* type of error in relation to the self, a pre-theoretical distortion which has nothing to do with any “belief,” whether implicit or explicit, in the existence of a self. This highlights the importance of the example of two moons for the nonconceptual nature of the distortion of duality. The meaning of the example of two moons is that, just as the erroneous experience of two moons is nonconceptually given in awareness, prior to and independently of any “belief” in the existence of two moons, in just this way, ordinary experience is given with two types of appearance: the appearance related to the cognition’s being a cognition, i.e., its “self-appearance,” and the appearance related to the cognition’s being the cognition of an object, i.e., its “object-appearance.” But in reality, there is only a singular experience: a single “moon.”

At the risk of straying too far into an emic Buddhist perspective, it is worth cashing out this distinction in eleutheriological terms. The upshot here is that, even for Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the meditative equipoise (*samāhita*) of ultimate nondual gnosis (*prajñā* or *jñāna*), such sublime states of awareness still present themselves *just as awareness*—because gnosis has

⁴⁶ See Chapter 1, Section III.D.1: [Phenomenological Duality as Cognitive Error](#).

⁴⁷ See above, note 43.

⁴⁸ See Chapter 1, Section II.D: [Object Persistence and Pseudo-Perception](#).

the nature of awareness,⁴⁹ and thus, like every awareness, by nature presents “itself” (*svam*) just as “awareness” (*saṃvitti*). Again: every moment of awareness, just insofar as it is a moment of awareness, has an identical, reflexively-experienced nature. For ordinary beings under the sway of the internal distortion (*antarupaplava*), however, this cognitively-natured-ness of cognition is erroneously experienced as “first-personality,” which is to say, the experience of “oneself” (*svam*) in the mode of a phenomenological subject.

Put slightly differently: for ordinary beings under ordinary circumstances, there is no difference between cognition being reflexively-experienced, and cognition being subjectively-experienced, because the warping effect of the internal distortion causes the “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) of the inherently cognitive features of cognition (i.e., cognition’s *jñānarūpatva*) to appear in the manner of phenomenological subjectivity.⁵⁰ For Buddhas and bodhisattvas in meditative equipoise, however, this no longer holds true: the inherently cognitive nature of cognition, which is to say, its “luminosity” (*prakāśatva*), is experienced *without* the distortion of subject-object duality, and thus without any sense of being the one “to whom” or “for whom” this experience is occurring—in other words, without any sense of this experience being “for me.” In short, the ultimate nondual gnosis must be experienced *reflexively*, or else it could not be experienced at all; however, it cannot be experienced *subjectively* or “first-personally,” since this

⁴⁹ Indeed, Ratnākaraśānti reserved his most vehement criticism for the position of Candrakīrti, which Ratnākaraśānti understood as a position to the effect that Buddhas no longer possess any mind or awareness at all. See Chapter 4, note 186. See also Dharmakīrti’s statement in *Pramāṇaviniścaya* 1.23 (Steinkellner ed., 23.5), that pleasure and so on are “strictly mental, just like gnosis” (*[sukhādayaḥ] bauddhā eva prajñādivat*). PVin1.23 is translated and analyzed below, in Section II.A.1: [Individual Experience as “Unshared” \(*asādhāraṇa*\) and Inexpressible](#).

⁵⁰ Sara McClintock (personal communication) notes that there might also be an intermediate conceptual stage: “This would be analogous to the person who knows they have an eye disease and knows as well that there are not really two moons, but nevertheless has the perceptual image of two moons as a result of their sense faculty impairment. Similarly, Buddhists on the path might come to realize that duality is ultimate unreal, but they could still experience things first-personally while knowing that this is false.”

would entail the presence of a distorted subject-object phenomenal structure, which would be radically incompatible with that gnosis.

Aside from its eleutheriological relevance, this point is crucially important to Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti's epistemological model, because pleasure and pain, desirability and undesirability, etc., are all understood as “subjective” features of cognition, in the sense that they are more closely related to the appearance of the cognition *as a cognition*, than they are to the appearance of the object (though they are, importantly, not actually separate from the appearance of the object). This is precisely why Dharmakīrti eventually defines the subjective aspect, rather than the objective aspect, as the *pramāṇa* in the context of Epistemic Idealism. Indeed, at PV 3.364, to which we will return in the Conclusion, Dharmakīrti even goes so far as to draw an explicit parallel between the reflexive structure of desire and the reflexive structure of cognition in general:

Just as in a [particular] case where the knowledge-instrument (*māna*) is its own object (*ātmaviśaye*), such as the sensation of desire, this structure of result, object, and means of knowledge is suitable for application in all cases. || 364 ||⁵¹

In other words, as will be mentioned again in the Conclusion, the “means for knowing” a present experience of desire (i.e., the *pramāṇa* for knowing desire), just is the desire which is presently being experienced. But this desire is also the “object” known by the experience of desire (i.e., the *prameya*). In this sense, desire “knows itself,” reflexively: that is to say, it is *svasamvitti*. And what is true of affective states such as desire in this way is, by extension, true of the subjective aspect of cognition—identified, in the final analysis, with the “cognitively-natured-ness” of cognition—generally. Put slightly differently, in contemplative terms: when the subjective aspect of cognition

⁵¹ Tosaki (1985, 50): *tatrātmaviśaye māne yathā rāgādivedanam | iyaṃ sarvatra samyojyā mānameyaphalasthitih* || 364 ||

is “instrumentalized” to attend to the reflexively-experienced nature of awareness, the subject-object structure collapses, because there is no longer *pramāṇa* nor *prameya*.

But before turning to the specific issue of how the subjective aspect (particularly when construed as reflexive awareness) is able to function as the epistemic instrument, it is first necessary to understand the relation between the subjective aspect of cognition on the one hand, and affective states such as pleasure and pain on the other, since it is precisely the reflexive experience of pleasure and pain that is held to be generalizable to the reflexive experience of all cognition—up to and including the ultimate, transcendent gnosis (*prajñāpāramitā*).

II. Pleasure and Pain

A. The Nonconceptual Nature of the Affective Features of Experience

1. *Individual Experience as “Unshared” (asādhāraṇa) and Inexpressible*

As discussed above, the overarching context for Dharmakīrti’s initial discussion of reflexive awareness (PV 3.249-280 *ad* PS 1.6a₂b) is his concern to establish affective states such as pleasure and desire as “perceptual” (*pratyakṣa*) in the technical sense. By his definition of “perception,” this requires that they be both nonconceptual and non-erroneous. Dharmakīrti thus begins this first discussion by noting that, just as perceptual cognition in general is by definition nonconceptual, so too is the reflexive awareness of affective states such as pleasure and pain. But he initially expresses this point by framing it in terms of linguistic convention (*samaya*).

To review: for Dharmakīrti, language and conceptuality are intimately related, to the point of being nearly coextensive. On the basis of a single joint effect, such as holding water, multiple particulars are the subject or “quality-possessor” (*dharmin*) of a conceptual “exclusion” (*apoha*), such that they are considered “the same” (*sama*) in terms of their ability to produce this effect, which is their “property” or “quality” (*dharma*). On the basis of this mentally-fabricated “sameness” (*sāmānya*), or universal, there then arises a linguistic convention (*samaya*) connecting the universal with an arbitrary spoken or written sequence, such as ‘jug,’ that is used for the purposes of communication.

One of the key points here is that, for Dharmakīrti, language is inherently communicative: what makes a linguistic convention able to function is the fact that its meaning—i.e., the conceptual universal constructed by the process of *apoha*—is shared in common (*sādhāraṇa*) among all interlocutors, in other words that this conceptual semantic content is more or less stable and

repeatable.⁵² This, in turn, is precisely what distinguishes conceptuality from nonconceptuality, since the latter is strictly particular (i.e., *svalakṣaṇa*), and thus both “unshared” (*asādhāraṇa*) and non-linguistic:

Since the nature of [affective states] such as pleasure is unsuitable for linguistic convention (*aśakyasamaya*), it is not enjoyed by anyone else (*ananyabhāk*) [other than oneself]. Thus, the reflexive awareness of these [affective states] is not associated with language. || 249 ||⁵³

It should be noted in this regard that, much like the discussion at PV 3.320, there is only a faint and blurry line here, between what is “individually-experienced” (*pratyātmavedanīya*), and what is “reflexively-experienced” (*svasaṃvedanīya*). That is to say, Dharmakīrti’s point here is framed most specifically in terms of an argument to the effect that pleasure and pain are unshared and not held in common, unlike linguistic conventions, which must be “shared” or “common” (*sādhāraṇa*) in this sense.⁵⁴ But it is precisely this lack of commonality which defines experience as individually-restricted (*pratiniyata*). Again, while it is not quite the case that the individually-experienced and the reflexively-experienced qualities of cognition refer to the exact same thing, both are inherent and inseparable features of cognition as such.

⁵² One might even say “iterable,” in the Derridean sense; cf. Derrida (1988, 1–24).

⁵³ Tosaki (1979, 348): *aśakyasamayo hy ātmā sukhādīnām ananyabhāk | teṣām ataḥ svasaṃvittir nābhijalpānuṣaṅginī* || 249 ||

⁵⁴ See also Jinendrabuddhi’s comments in this regard, in Appendix B ([PST ad PS\(V\) 1.6ab](#)). Jinendrabuddhi intriguingly provides an even more detailed account of the argument here, concerning pleasure’s “unsuitability for linguistic convention,” than is found in either Devendrabuddhi’s PVP or Sākyabuddhi’s secondary commentary—despite the fact that this argument, concerning the unsuitability of pleasure etc. for language, is not found in the PS itself at all, and only indirectly in the PV. Rather, in these comments *ad* PS 1.6a₂b, Jinendrabuddhi seems to be drawing most specifically on PV in 1.21–24.

This point comes into particularly sharp relief in the parallel passage from the *Pramānaviniścaya*, where Dharmakīrti directly connects the non-shared and non-linguistic nature of pleasure with its status as a perceptual *pramāṇa*:

Pleasure and so on are reflexively-experienced. || 19 ||

The reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvedana*) of [affective states] such as pleasure is also perceptual (*pratyakṣa*). Pleasure and so on are singled out (*grahaṇa*) for the purpose of exemplifying a vivid (*spaṣṭa*) experience, because the reflexive awareness of all cognitions is perceptual. For it is not possible that conceptuality exist within the reflexive awareness of pleasure and so on, because,

Since the nature of pleasure and so on is unsuitable for linguistic convention (*aśakyasamaya*), it is not enjoyed by anyone else (*ananyabhāk*) [other than oneself].⁵⁵

A pleasure (or whatever) that has not arisen with a nature such that it is restricted to a specific individual (*pratiniyata*),⁵⁶ is not made into an object by awareness, because [pleasure] has that nature.⁵⁷

We will return in the Conclusion to the key takeaway here, which is that the reflexive awareness of pleasure and so on is singled out, among other reasons,⁵⁸ for its utility in illustrating the

⁵⁵ This is an “interstitial verse” (*antaraśloka*), technically numbered PVin 1.21ab. It is identical to PV 3.249ab.

⁵⁶ Jñānaśrībhadrā (PVinṬ 482.7-12) comments: “If [an opponent] were to say, ‘[Pleasure and so on] are made into an object by the future reflexive awareness of a verbal sign (*sgra* = **śabda*),’ [that is not correct, because] a particular [moment of] pleasure (or whatever) that has not arisen with the nature of being restricted to a specific individual is not made into an object, i.e., is not actually experienced, because [pleasure and so on] have the defining characteristic that their nature arises in one’s own experience. That is to say, it is not ascertained even in the slightest by someone who is different from oneself; it is inexpressible and inaccessible [by others].”

*gal te rang rig pa ma 'ongs pa'i sgra'i yul du byed do zhe na | bde ba la sogs pa rang gi mtshan nyid so sor nges pa'i bdag nyid ma skyes pa rnams yul du bya ste yang dag par myong ba ni med do | rang myong ba de skyes pa de'i bdag nyid kyi mtshan nyid [D: *kyi] yin pa'i phyir de yang med do || de ltar rang nyid las gzhan cung zad kyang mi rtogs pa de 'di rang nyid mngon par brjod pa dang sbyor bar byed pa ma yin te |*

⁵⁷ Steinkellner (2007, 20.8-21.1): **sukhādīnām svavedanam || 19 ||** *sukhādīnām svasaṃvedanam api pratyakṣam | sukhādīgrahaṇam spaṣṭasaṃvedanapradarśanārtham, sarvajñānānām ātmasaṃvedanasya pratyakṣatvāt | na hi sukhādīnām ātmasaṃvedane vikalpaḥ sambhavati, yasmād aśakyasamayo hy ātmā sukhādīnām ananyabhāk | nānuditaḥ pratiniyataḥ sukhādīyātmā viṣayīkriyate saṃvittiyā, tasyās tadātmaripatvāt |*

⁵⁸ Chiefly, that the experience of pleasure is obviously vivid, easy to see, and clearly mental (except according to the Sāṅkhyas, with whom Dharmakīrti engages in an extended debate concerning this point in PV 3.268-280).

mechanics of reflexive awareness in general. At this juncture, the main point to understand is that affective states such as pleasure are strictly non-linguistic, because they are restricted to a specific individual's mental continuum, and therefore "unshared." Hence, it is the strictly non-linguistic nature of affective states which backstops their status as perceptual *pramāṇas*:

Hence, the reflexive awareness of those [affective states such as pleasure] is not associated with language. || 21 ||

Since it is unsuitable for linguistic convention, the reflexive awareness of pleasure and so on is not suffused with language. It is a perceptual *pramāṇa*.⁵⁹

The other major point, directly connected to the unshared and inexpressible nature of affective states such as pleasure, is the fact that they are strictly "internal" (*antara*) and mental:

Someone else⁶⁰ says: "[Affective states] such as pleasure are not internal, nor are they mental (*cetana*). The experience of those [states] is cognized due to an experience of the words and so on which are their nature." For this [philosopher] as well:

Even without any difference in the external object, there is a different in delight and the torment [occurring for different observers]. Therefore, Pleasure and so on arise by virtue of difference in habituation (*bhāvanā*); they are not located in the nature of objects. || 23 ||

For if [affective states] such as pleasure had the nature of language and so on, then, when there is no difference in the word and so on [for a given object], there would not be any difference, owing to a difference in habituation, in the pleasure or pain [experienced by different observers], the way that there is a difference in the appearance of 'blue' or whatever. They do not depend upon any special quality

⁵⁹ Steinkellner (2007, 21.6-8): **teṣām ataḥ svasaṃvittir nābhijalpānuṣaṅginī || 21 || aśakyasamayatvān na sukhādīnām ātmasaṃvittir āviṣṭābhilāpā | sā pratyakṣaṃ pramāṇam ||**

⁶⁰ Jñānaśrībhadrā (PVinṬ 484.14-16) identifies the "other" interlocutor here as the Sāṅkhya, in keeping with the identification of the interlocutor at the corresponding juncture of PV 3 (268) as a Sāṅkhya. Interestingly, he goes on to note that this Sāṅkhya position differs from that of the Vaiśeṣikas, who agree with the Buddhists that pleasure is "internal," though they disagree with the Buddhist position that it is a mental factor (*cetana*):

gzhan ni grangs can no bye brag pa dang sangs rgyas pa gnyi ga'i ltar nang gi yang ma yin la | sangs rgyas pa ltar sems pa can yang ma yin no ||

(*atiśaya*) [of the object], [but rather] follow the habituation: they are strictly mental (*bauddha*), like gnosis (*prajñā*)⁶¹ and so on.⁶²

As we will see, the point about “habituation” (*bhāvanā*) dovetails closely with the analysis in the *Pramāṇavārttika*. In effect, Dharmakīrti is drawing attention here to the fact that the desirability of the object cannot be located in the object itself, and thus that qualities such as desirability are therefore only features of *the experience* of the object. Such features thus vary subjectively (and causally) with the dispositions, proclivities, and karmic makeup of the observer. And this applies irrespective of whether the experienced object is understood as external or internal to the mind.

2. (Experiences of) Pleasure and Pain are Particulars

The key underlying reason *why* pleasure and pain are “unsuitable for convention” is because they are particulars (*svalakṣaṇas*), as opposed to universals. In other words, pleasure and pain are given as nonconceptual features of cognition, in exactly the same way that “objective” sensory content such as ‘blue’ and ‘yellow’ are given as nonconceptual features of cognition, and for exactly the same reason: they are particulars.⁶³

⁶¹ Strictly speaking, it is possible that *prajñā* here only refers to the mental factor (*caitta*) of “discernment.” Dharmakīrti does not elaborate, and Jñānaśrībhadrā does not provide any gloss. However, this reading would be somewhat odd and out of place. *Prajñā* here is more likely intended as a synonym for transcendent gnosis (*prajñāpāramitā*), or at least as a “play on words” (*śleṣa*) signifying both, since within the *pramāṇa* literature the more typical Buddhist word for “gnosis” (*jñāna*) almost always means “cognition” in a general sense. Thanks to Khenpo David Karma Choephel for raising this issue to my attention.

⁶² Steinkellner (2007, 23.3-5): *nāntarāḥ sukhādayo nāpi cetanāḥ | tadātmanāḥ śabdādīnām anubhavāt tadanubhavakhyātir ity aparāḥ | tasyāpi aviśeṣe 'pi bāhyasya viśeṣāt prītitāpayoḥ | bhāvanayā viśeṣeṇa nārtharūpāḥ sukhādayaḥ || 23 || yadi hi śabdādyātmanaḥ sukhādayaḥ syuḥ śabdādyaviśeṣe bhāvanāviśeṣāt prītiparītāpaviśeṣo na syān nilādyābhāsaviśeṣavat | te 'napekṣita tad atiśayā bhāvanānurodhino bauddhā eva prajñādivat ||*

⁶³ That said, there is a crucial difference between the givenness of ‘yellow’ and the givenness of pleasure: the experience of ‘yellow’ can be erroneous, as in the case of a white conch that is seen as yellow, while the experience of pleasure can never be erroneous. To experience pleasure is, by definition, to be correctly aware (i.e., to have a *samyajjñāna*) that one is experiencing pleasure; see below, Section II.B.1: [Pleasure Knows Non-Erroneously](#). This

To review: according to Dharmakīrti, a cognition is an ontologically simple and indivisible particular. However, although singular in this way, cognition manifests such that it may be understood as having various properties. The preceding analysis has largely focused on the conceptual abstraction (i.e., the *anyāpoha*) of these properties with reference to the object-image: the abstraction, for example, of the object-image’s capability to generate the judgment “that is blue,” to the exclusion of its capability to generate the judgment “that is a circle,” in the case of a ‘blue circle.’⁶⁴

But the key point here is that, in exactly this same way, the subjective or affective features of a cognition may be conceptually abstracted from it. So long as the internal impairment (*antarupaplava*) distorts the process of cognition-generation, cognition appears as though it has a subjective and an objective aspect. On the basis of this distorted dualistic appearance, the part that seems internal (“subjective”) and the part that seems external (“objective”) may be conceptually isolated from each other, and thereby spoken of respectively as the “aspect of the apprehender” (*grāhakākāra*) and the “aspect of the apprehended” (*grāhyākāra*). In exactly the same way that causal features of the object-image (such as its property of possessing a blue appearance) may be isolated, then, causal features of the subject-image (such as its property of including a pleasant hedonic tone) may also be isolated.

Again, up to this point, we have largely been concerned with the phenomenal features of the object-image. But Dharmakīrti’s point here is that, because the phenomenal features of the subject-image have been causally-generated, these phenomenal features of the subject-image must

inherent non-erroneousness is precisely why the reflexive awareness of pleasure is generalizable to the reflexive awareness of all cognition in general; see the [Conclusion](#).

⁶⁴ See Chapter 1, Section II.B: [Exclusion \(*apoha*\)](#), [Convention \(*saṅketa*\)](#), and [Projection \(*āropa*\)](#).

be understood in exactly the same terms as the phenomenal features of the object-image.⁶⁵ In the epistemological analysis of sensory cognition up to this point, it has been sufficient to treat the object-image as a particular, with the crucial caveat that this object-image is not in fact ontologically separable from the cognition “in” which it appears. Likewise, in terms of the present discussion, it is sufficient to treat the subject-image as a particular, with the caveat that neither this subject-image, nor any of its phenomenal features, are ontologically separable from the cognition “in” which it appears. Nor—crucially—is it separable from the object-image.

Causal functionality is a critically important part of the reasoning here, since Dharmakīrti maintains that only particulars are causally efficacious, and that anything which is causally efficacious must be a particular: only particulars can be causes or effects.⁶⁶ Hence, just like the “objective” phenomenal features of sensory cognition, the “subjective” or affective features of cognition (such as pleasure and pain) are strictly the result of the causal process whereby the cognition has been generated:

It is observed that pleasure and so on arise accordingly (*yathāsvam*) when there is a suitable sense faculty together with a suitable object, as well as an appropriate [immediately-preceding] cognition; this is also the same for cognitions. || 252 ||

And it is observed that pleasure and so on, or a cognition, do not arise whenever these [factors] are absent, or do not fail to arise whenever these [factors] are present. And therefore, both [pleasure and cognitions] arise from that [complex of factors], and not from anything else. || 253 ||

⁶⁵ It should be kept in mind, however, that unlike the subjective aspect, the reflexively-experienced nature of cognition is strictly non-causal, and thus cognition possesses both causal and non-causal property-natures (*svabhāvas*). See Chapter 2, Section II.C.2: [The Causal and Non-Causal Nature\(s\) of Cognition](#). This highlights yet another way of thinking about the difference between reflexive awareness and the subjective aspect of cognition: the subjective aspect of cognition varies according to its causal conditions (it may for example include pleasure or pain), but the reflexively-experienced nature of cognition does not.

⁶⁶ Cf. Dunne (2004, 83).

Furthermore, the distinction between pleasure, pain, and so on is only due to differences among these [factors], just as that very cognition may be dull, sharp, or uncertain [due to differences among those factors].⁶⁷ || 254 ||⁶⁸

In particular, Dharmakīrti’s note here that pleasure arises or does not arise (*janmājanma vā*), depending upon whether or not the appropriate conditions are in place (*asatsu satsu caiteṣu*), establishes that pleasure exists in a relationship of essential concomitance (*svabhāvapratibandha*) with its causes, in exactly the same manner as sensory cognition, which similarly arises or does not arise strictly depending upon the presence or absence of its causes.

The point here is that the arising of pleasure is a strictly causal process, just like the causal process that correlates a seed and a sprout.⁶⁹ As such, and given the fact that the immediately-preceding condition (*samanantarapratyaya*) for a moment of pleasure is an immediately-preceding cognition,⁷⁰ pleasure must be understood as part of a stream (i.e., a *santāna*) of mental causes and mental events. Since only particulars can exercise causal functionality (*arthakriyā*)—in other words, because only particulars can be real causes or real effects—pleasure and so on must be particulars. Specifically, they must be mental particulars, which is to say, cognitions.

Just like the sensory cognition of which they are an ontologically-inseparable feature, then, pleasure and pain are particulars⁷¹ because they have been causally-produced; and particulars are

⁶⁷ Cf. PV 3.398-406, examined below in Section II.D: [Subjective Variation in the Quality of Experience](#).

⁶⁸ Tosaki (1979, 351–52): *sārthe satīndriye yogye yathāsvam api cetasi | dṛṣṭam janma sukhādīnām tat tulyam manasām api || 252 || asatsu satsu caiteṣu na janmājanma vā kvacit | dṛṣṭam sukhāder buddher vā tat tato nānyataś ca te || 253 || sukhaduḥkhādibhedaś ca teṣām eva viśeṣataḥ | tasyā eva yathā buddher māndyapāṭavasamśayāḥ || 254 ||*

⁶⁹ Cf. PVin 1.22 (Steinkellner ed., 21.15): *yathā śālibijādibhyas*.

⁷⁰ That is, the “appropriate [prior] cognition” (*yathāsvam api cetasi*) mentioned in PV 3.252b, above.

⁷¹ More precisely, pleasure and pain and so on are ontologically-inseparable features of a momentary particular cognition which is experienced to be pleasurable or painful or whatever, in exactly the same way (and for exactly the same reasons) that the appearance of ‘blue’ is an ontologically-inseparable feature of a momentary particular cognition that has the appearance of ‘blue.’

“unsuitable for language,” because language, which is inherently conceptual, exclusively traffics in universals. On this note, the close association between Dharmakīrti’s earlier explanation of PS 1.6a₂b, and his later discussion of reflexive awareness with reference to PS 1.9b, is further indicated by a comment he makes in the latter context, regarding the desirability of the determined object:

If [it is asserted that] conceptualizations, not sensory cognitions, are what have the appearances that are desirable or undesirable, then [this is refuted because] it is observed that, also in the case [of sensory cognition], there is non-continuity (*asandhāna*) of cognitions in the case of a severe illness. || 344 ||⁷²

Here, “non-continuity” (*asandhāna*) simply means that, just as conceptualizations can be variable in ways that are not constrained by the object, so too sensory cognitions are not necessarily consistent. The idea is that, in response to a hypothetical objection to the effect that desirability (etc.) is only a feature of the subsequent conceptual determination (*niścaya*), rather than of the initial nonconceptual sensory cognition, Dharmakīrti points out that different nonconceptual sensory cognitions of the “same” object⁷³ can appear desirable in some cases and undesirable in others; Devendrabuddhi (PVP 542.13-16) discusses how the same food given to different animals can provoke vomiting (implicitly, a nonconceptual reaction) in some animals, but delight in others.⁷⁴ The reference to “severe illness” (*ariṣṭa*) is, according to Devendrabuddhi, an allusion to

⁷² Tosaki (1985, 29): *iṣṭāniṣṭāvabhāsinyah kalpanā nāḥsadhīr yadi | ariṣṭādāv asandhānaṃ dṛṣṭaṃ tatrāpi cetasām || 344 ||*

⁷³ An important part of the ontological stakes for the present discussion concerns not only the fact that objects are not “the same” from moment to moment, but also that they can never be presented to the awareness of two different beings in exactly the same manner. This is precisely what it means for the subjective features of experience to be ontologically built into the experience of the object, or, equivalently, for the subjective and objective features of experience (i.e., the *grāhakākāra* and *grāhyākāra*) to be ontologically inseparable.

⁷⁴ An unanswered question here concerns how exactly it is possible to experience attraction or aversion towards the object of nonconceptual sensory perception, which by definition has not yet been conceptually identified. For example, how can one feel disgust toward some food before positively identifying it? A possible explanation might involve

jaundice (542.11: *mig ser*), as those who suffer from jaundice are said to feel immediate (i.e., nonconceptual) disgust when presented with certain foods, such as butter. Thus, the same person can have radically different, immediate sensations when encountering the same food, depending upon the state of their body.

The upshot here is that, according to Dharmakīrti, the affective features of awareness, such as desire or aversion or indifference, are *nonconceptually, ontologically, and inseparably* built into the nature of an experience. This is how Dharmakīrti expresses the point, from classical Abhidharma literature, that “feeling-tone” (*vedanā*) is both one of the five “bundles” (*skandhas*) comprising the psychophysical continuum of sentient beings, as well as one of the five omnipresent mental factors⁷⁵ accompanying every cognition.

B. Pleasure and Pain as “Self-Experiencing”

1. *Pleasure Knows Non-Erroneously*

To review, the overarching context for the present discussion concerns Dinnāga’s inclusion of “the reflexive awareness of pleasure and so on” as a type of perception. The underlying point here is that “pleasure” and “the reflexive awareness of pleasure” are strictly synonymous: pleasure *just is*

“early selection” effects (see Chapter 1, note 96), in other words, that the sensory apparatus presents the phenomenal object in such a way that it is already experienced to be desirable or undesirable, even before it is conceptually processed through “late selection.” Thus, for example, an infant need not know exactly what a ‘spider’ is in conceptual terms, or that ‘spiders’ are dangerous, in order to instinctually react with fear to the nonconceptual appearance of the spider. There might just be something about the human sensory apparatus that presents spiders (etc.) as scary.

⁷⁵ The Mahāyāna tradition, following Asaṅga’s AS I.3 (Rahula and Boin-Webb 2001, 74-75), acknowledges five such “universally conjoined” (*sarvatragasamprayoga*) mental factors. Different Nikāyas had different numbers and different terminology; for example, the second chapter of the Theravāda *Abhidhammatthasangaha* (Thera 1987, 100-101) lists seven “universally-shared mental factors” (Pāli *sabbacittasādhāraṇa cetasika*). In AK II.23-24, Vasubandhu enumerates ten “major groundings” (*mahābhūmikas*), i.e., mental *dharmas* that are all present in every momentary cognition (Pradhan 1975, 54.9: *ime kila daśa dharmāḥ sarvatra cittakṣaṇe samagrā bhavanti*). But every Abhidharma system—which is to say, the Buddhist tradition as a whole—maintains that some type of feeling-tone (*vedanā*), whether pleasurable or painful or neutral, accompanies every ordinary cognition.

the experience of pleasure. In epistemological or *pramāṇa*-theoretical terms, then, the central animating question here is: what does it mean to say that pleasure, itself, is perceptual? By Dharmakīrti's general definition, in order to be "perceptions" (*pratyakṣas*) in the technical sense, cognitions must meet two criteria: they must be nonconceptual (*kalpanāpoḍha*) and non-erroneous (*abhrānta*). Experiences of pleasure and pain have now, at least in theory, been established as nonconceptual. But what of the latter criterion?

To step back for a moment, the reason why Dīnāga and Dharmakīrti focus on pleasure and pain in this way is because they understand pleasure and pain to be inherently self-experiencing, in the sense that to experience pleasure is necessarily and by definition to be aware that one is experiencing pleasure;⁷⁶ for this reason, there is definitionally no such thing as an "erroneous" experience of pleasure. This point is extremely important, because Dharmakīrti

⁷⁶ Dharmakīrti notes in PVin 1.22 (Steinkellner ed., 22.5) that it is not possible to experience pleasure or pain without noticing the fact that one is experiencing pleasure or pain: "Also, they do not [exist] without mental engagement, since even when both [faculty and object] are collected together, they are absent in the mind of someone lost in torpor" (*nāpy amanaskārāḥ, ubhayasannidhāv api middhādiviplutadhiyo 'bhāvāt*); for a discussion of "torpor" (*middha*) in the context of Yogācāra analysis, see Kachru (2015, 229–37).

Unnoticed pain is thus, on Dharmakīrti's account, not experienced. While there is no space to develop this point in detail, it should be noted that this argument pre-empts critiques such as that of Śāntideva in *Bodhicāryāvatāra* 9.24 (concerning the bite of a poisonous animal that occurs while one is asleep, so that one has no memory of the pain associated with the bite, the prior occurrence of which must accordingly be inferred; this highlights yet again the close connection between memory, identity, and reflexive awareness), or Ganeri's (1999b, 481) somewhat less exotic example: "An example frequently cited against self-intimation [i.e., reflexive awareness] is the case of a walker who, engaged in intense conversation, fails to notice that his legs are gradually beginning to ache. During a lull in the conversation, he suddenly becomes aware that his legs are aching. What we should say of this case, perhaps, is that the walker had the pain all the time, but was not aware of it all the time."

There is, again, unfortunately no space here to devote to a detailed analysis of this point, concerning for example the extent to which a certain degree of pain may be experienced in the cognitive "background" as an almost-unnoticed dull sensation, until the cause of this pain is brought to one's attention, at which point it promptly becomes acute. The most important takeaway is just that attention constitutes a separate quality, apart from the reflexively-experienced ("self-aware") nature of cognition as cognition. In other words, every cognition (which is to say, every moment of the mental continuum) is "self-aware," even if not every moment of the mental continuum is causally capable of engendering a subsequent determination to the effect that it was in fact "self-aware" or reflexively-experienced (or "painful" or "pleasurable"), owing to a lack of attention. This is most highly relevant with respect to the "self-awareness" of states that most contemporary Western academics would not even consider properly cognitive, such as coma and deep sleep; see note 77.

ultimately maintains that it is generalizable to all cognition: to be aware is necessarily and by definition to be aware that one is aware, and in precisely this sense, awareness is always and everywhere reflexively-experienced.⁷⁷ Again, as Dharmakīrti writes in PVin 1.19d, “‘Pleasure and so on’ are singled out for the purpose of exemplifying a vivid experience, because the reflexive awareness of all cognitions is perception.”⁷⁸

In other words, the inherent non-erroneousness of the reflexive awareness of one’s own pleasure or pain—the fact that the experience of pleasure is both the means by which it is known (*pramāṇa*) that there is a currently-occurring experience of pleasure, and the actual experience of the pleasure or pain that is thus known (*phala*)—exemplifies, and is generalizable to, the inherent non-erroneousness of reflexive awareness in general. And indeed, it is precisely this inherent non-

⁷⁷ This is not to say, however, that one will always be “aware that one is aware” in the sense of being able to make a subsequent determinate judgment (*niścaya*) to the effect that one is or has been aware. This is directly connected to the fact that, even though reflexive awareness as such is nondual, this does not necessarily mean that cognition is ordinarily *determined* to be nondual. As Śākyabuddhi writes (trans. Dunne 2004, 407-408): “Since the essential nature of awareness is established by reflexive awareness, it is not the case that one is compelled to admit that all beings would see suchness. That is, even though the essential nature of awareness is apprehended as partless by reflexive awareness, as a result of its connection with the seeds of error, that reflexive awareness does not produce a subsequent definitive determination of the nature of cognition as non-dual in the way that it has been perceived. Therefore, even though reflexive awareness has already apprehended the non-dual nature of cognition, it is as if it has not been apprehended.”

Regarding the failure to ascertain a given mental moment as reflexively-experienced, the most important edge cases here are exotic states such as coma, deep sleep, and the period between death and rebirth (i.e., the *antarābhāva* or *bar do*). States such as those characterized by “torpor” (*middha*; see note 76) may not allow for ordinary phenomenal contentfulness, or for a *conceptual* determination to the effect that one is or has been aware, but on the Yogācāra model of cognition they cannot in principle constitute an obstruction to the unbroken continuity of mind *qua* reflexive awareness. That is to say, on the Yogācāra model, particularly as applied in the context of advanced contemplative practices such as Mahāmudrā and rDzogs chen, it must be understood that the continuity of reflexive awareness is unbroken even in states such as coma and deep sleep; see also Chapter 2, Section II.C.2: [The Causal and Non-Causal Nature\(s\) of Cognition](#). Therefore—it is claimed—advanced practitioners are able to recognize the luminosity of reflexive awareness, even in states such as coma or deep sleep; see, for example, Tsong kha pa (2014, 387–439). In fact, recognizing the luminosity of reflexive awareness during such states is a crucial part of advanced contemplative training in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, and recognizing this luminosity during the *antarābhāva* is particularly critical. For ordinary untrained beings such as ourselves, however, this is not yet possible. Concerning the relation between luminosity, contemplative training, and the *antarābhāva*, see also Dzogchen Ponlop (2008, 161–86) and Rangdrol (2010, 45–64).

⁷⁸ Steinkellner (2007, 20.9-10): *sukhādīgrahaṇaṃ spaṣṭasaṃvedanapradarśanārtham, sarvajñānānām ātmasaṃvedanasya pratyakṣatvāt* |

erroneousness that distinguishes reflexive awareness from all the other *pramāṇas*, including ordinary sensory perception, which for the reasons outlined in Chapter 3 is always necessarily erroneous from an ultimate perspective.

But, in order to establish this inherent non-erroneousness, Dharmakīrti must first establish that such states are in fact immediately, reflexively, “self-” aware in this way:

Some [say]: “They are not even knowers (*avedaka*) of other things; how could they know their own nature? [Rather], they are to be known (*vedya*) by means of [another] cognition, having the same object as its basis.” || 250 ||⁷⁹

The opponent here argues that it is inappropriate to consider affective states such as pleasure or pain to be agentive “knowers” (*vedaka*) of anything, whether themselves or anything else. Rather, pleasure is strictly an object of knowledge (*vedya*), something that has to be known by means of some other cognition.⁸⁰

But, as we have already seen, Dharmakīrti denies that there is any such thing as a “knower” in this agentive sense. He thus reframes the discussion, from being about whether or not pleasure are “knowers” in this strictly spurious sense, to the fact that they must be cognitively-natured:

Entities that have, or do not have, a given nature arise from causes which have, or do not have, that nature. How, then, could [affective states] such as pleasure be non-

⁷⁹ Tosaki (1979, 349–50): *avedakāḥ parasyāpi te svarūpaṃ katham viduḥ | ekārthāśrayiṇā vedyā vijñāneneti kecana* || 250 ||

⁸⁰ Devendrabuddhi (PVP 489.21-490.1) attributes this position to the Vaiśeṣikas (*bye brag pa*). According to Devendrabuddhi, that is, this objection most specifically concerns the Vaiśeṣika position that pleasure (*sukha*), rather than being properly cognitive, is only a quality (*guṇa*) that inheres in the substance (*dravya*) of the mind (*manas*) or the self (*ātman*). This attribution is also reflected in Jinendrabuddhi’s comments, below. But while this objection is rooted in Vaiśeṣika metaphysics, which maintains that “qualities” (*guṇas*) are always ontologically dependent upon and subsidiary to the “substance” (*dravya*) in which they inhere, it also captures a wide range of views, to the effect that pleasure as an entity can only be experienced by means of some other type of entity: in other words, that pleasure is not “self-experiencing.”

cognitive (*ajñāna*), given that they arise from a cause which is not other than cognition? || 251 ||⁸¹

This is yet another reference to Dharmakīrti's insistence that a cognition can only arise from an immediately-preceding cognition. According to Dharmakīrti, that is, only cognition can give rise to cognition, since cognition is the immediately-preceding condition (*samanantarapratyaya*) for cognition.⁸² By extension, anything which arises with cognition as its immediately-preceding condition must be cognitive. Since, as noted above in PV 3.252, cognition is a necessary immediately-preceding condition for the experience of pleasure and pain, pleasure and pain must therefore be cognitive.⁸³

2. *Pleasure is a First-Order Feature of Awareness*

The key point here is that, in a manner precisely analogous to the analysis of the epistemic object (*prameya*) discussed in Chapter 4, for an entity “to be experienced” just means for that entity to have a cognitive nature. Irrespective of the underlying ontology, that is to say, and just insofar as an object is experienced, the experience of the object (or the object *as experienced*) has a cognitive nature. Hence, because every cognition (which is to say, everything with a cognitive nature) has a “similar nature” (*sadrśātman*) in terms of being reflexively-experienced, and that which is reflexively-experienced is self-experiencing by definition, everything with a cognitive nature is

⁸¹ Tosaki (1979, 350): *tadatadrūpiṇo bhāvās tadatadrūpahetuḥ | tat sukhādi kim ajñānaṃ vijñānābhinnahetujam* || 251 ||

This verse is identical to PVin1.22 (Steinkellner ed. 21.11-12), though Dharmakīrti provides some additional prose commentary in the latter, partially translated below.

⁸² See Chapter 4, Section III.A.2: [Immediately-Preceding Condition and Immediately-Preceding Cognition](#). This is also the crux of Dharmakīrti's proof of rebirth; see Franco (1997).

⁸³ That said, Dharmakīrti argues at length with a Sāṅkhya who denies that pleasure and pain are cognitive, owing to the peculiarities of Sāṅkhya doctrine. See PV 3.268-280, and note [103](#) below.

inherently self-experiencing. In exactly the same way that object-awareness is inherently self-experiencing, then, pleasure and pain are also inherently self-experiencing, because they have a cognitive nature. And it is precisely this self- or reflexively-experiential nature that constitutes their non-erroneousness: it is impossible for awareness to be mistaken about the fact that awareness is occurring, irrespective of how otherwise distorted or inaccurate it might be.

In contrast to this view that pleasure and pain are inherently self-experiencing, however, Jinendrabuddhi writes in the voice of an opponent at PST *ad* PS 1.6a₂b:

In this regard, some claim: “The basis [i.e., the subject or *dharmin* under discussion] is not established. To be specific: that which is to be proven (*sādhya*) is the nonconceptuality of reflexive awareness. But, first of all, that [reflexive awareness of pleasure or whatever] does not even occur with the cognition. How much more so could it occur with pleasure and so on, which do not have a cognitive nature? For those [sensations such as pleasure, are apprehended as inhering in the same thing (*artha*), due to their inherence (*samavāya*) in a single soul (*ātman*) along with cognition [which is also inhering in that soul]. Hence, they themselves only have the nature of being epistemic objects (*prameyas*). That is to say, they are not experiencers of anything else; how, then, could they be experiencers of themselves?”⁸⁴

While rooted in Vaiśeṣika metaphysics,⁸⁵ particularly the notion of a relationship of inherence and the postulation of a self or soul (*ātman*), this objection captures a wide range of views—including contemporary views—to the effect that pleasure is *not* self-experiencing by nature, but is rather some particular kind of mental quality, which can only be experienced by means of some other

⁸⁴ Steinkellner (2005b, 54.10-55.1): *atra kecid āhuḥ āśrayāsiddhiḥ | tathā hi svasaṃvitter nirvikalpakatvaṃ sādhyam | sā ca jñānasyāpi tāvan na samastī | kutaḥ punaḥ sukhādīnām ajñānarūpāṇām | te hy ekasminn ātmani jñānena saha samavāyāt tenaikārthasamavāyinā gr̥hyanta iti svayaṃ prameyarūpā eva | atas te parasyāpi na saṃvedakāḥ kṛtaḥ punarātmana iti |*

⁸⁵ See note [80](#) above.

separate mental quality or cognition. In essence, the argument here is that “pleasure” and “the experience of pleasure” are not the same thing. But Jinendrabuddhi responds:

Those [who argue like this] must necessarily accept that a cognition has the image (*ākāra*) of pleasure and so on. Otherwise, [pleasure and so on] simply would not be knowable (*vedya*) for that [cognition]. For it is not logical that the mere presence of a cognition constitutes the awareness of an object, because since that [mere existence of awareness] is undifferentiated with respect to everything, one would come to the absurd conclusion that [otherwise] all objects would be apprehended. A cognition which is devoid of the image of something is not a knower (*vedaka*) of that thing, like how the cognition of a cow is [not the knower] of a horse. And [on the opponent’s account] the cognition of pleasure and so on is devoid of the image of pleasure and so on. [This is a proof by] the pervasion of a contrary quality (*vyāpakaviruddha*⁸⁶).⁸⁷

To review PV 3.301-304 as discussed in Chapter 2, part of the theoretical background for this argument is that the ability of cognition to take on the form (*ākāra* or *rūpa*) of any object entails a distinction between the undifferentiated, non-causal nature of cognition as an “illuminator” (*prakāśaka*) of its object, versus the differentiated and causal nature of its “illuminated” (*prakāśya*) content.⁸⁸ That is to say, the non-causal nature of cognition “illuminates” sensory appearances that vary according to their causal origin (such as the latent imprint or *vāsanā* for ‘blue’). And only

⁸⁶ Within the *pramāṇa* discourse, logical proof requires “pervasion” (*vyāpti*) between the evidence and the predicate. Hence, one of the enumerated logical fallacies or “pseudo-reasons” (*hetvābhāsa*) is the pervasion of a quality that is incompatible with the quality to be proven (*sādhya*). In this case, the opponent has claimed that a cognition can be a knower of pleasure, without itself being experienced as pleasurable (or, equivalently, without having a pleasurable *ākāra*). Jinendrabuddhi’s point is thus that a cognition’s being a “knower” of pleasure is mutually exclusive with its not being *experienced as pleasurable*.

⁸⁷ Steinkellner (2005b, 55.2-5): *tais tajjñānam avaśyaṃ sukhādyākāram abhyupeyam anyathā tasya te vedyā eva na syuh | na hi jñānasattaivārthānām saṃvedanā yuktā tasyāḥ sarvatrāviśeṣāt sarvārthagrahaṇaprasaṅgāt | yajjñānam yadākārahītam na tat tasya saṃvedakam | gojñānam ivāśvasya | sukhādyākārahītam ca sukhādijñānam | vyāpakaviruddhaḥ ||*

⁸⁸ For more on this distinction, and Jñānaśrīmitra’s critique thereof, cf. Tomlinson (2019, 206–72). See also Chapter 2, Section II.C.2: [The Causal and Non-Causal Nature\(s\) of Cognition](#).

that which is “illuminated” is experienced; in order for pleasure to be experienced, then, it must be illuminated by the “luminosity” (*prakāśa*) of reflexive awareness.

Thus, in a manner structurally identical to the relation between *pramāṇa* and *phala* in the context of object-awareness—which is to say, just like how the sensory knowledge of “blue” is nothing more than the appearance of a specifically blue *ākāra*—there is nothing that “pleasure” could mean, over and above the appearance of a specifically pleasurable image (*ākāra*). And, exactly like the appearance of ‘blue,’ this appearance of a pleasurable image is “illuminated” just by virtue of the fact that it appears “to” or “within” awareness, as discussed at PV 3.327.⁸⁹ Just as the experience of ‘blue’ is nothing more than the appearance of a blue *ākāra*—i.e., an object-image that “has” (or, more accurately, just constitutes) the appearance of ‘blue’—in just this way, the experience of pleasure is nothing more than the appearance of a pleasurable *ākāra*, i.e., a subject-image that “has” (or, more accurately, just constitutes) the appearance of pleasure.⁹⁰

Jinendrabuddhi has the interlocutor grant this point, and continues:

Opponent: “Let us stipulate that the cognition has the image of that [affective state such as pleasure]. So what?”

So this: pleasure or whatever *just is* a [cognition] that is accompanied by an image of delight or torment or whatever; hence, pleasure etc. is established as having a cognitive nature (*jñānarūpa*). For it is established for those [Vaiśeṣikas and so on] as well that a real entity (*vastu*) with a cognitive nature (*bodharūpa*) has a form

⁸⁹ See Chapter 4, Section IV.A: [Idealism and Experience](#).

⁹⁰ One possible wrinkle here concerns the necessity of attention (*manaskāra*). Such attention is, of course, necessary in order for there to be a subsequent definitive conceptual judgment (*niścaya*) of the epistemic object. But it would appear to at least potentially be the case, on Dharmakīrti’s account, that an unnoticed image of ‘blue’ is nevertheless the object of the initial nonconceptual sensory cognition, even if it is not attended-to, and thus never becomes the object of a subsequent judgment. See the discussion in Chapter 1, Section II.E.2 ([The Example of the Firebrand](#)) on “inattentive blindness.” By contrast, at PVin 1.22, Dharmakīrti explicitly states that there is no such thing as unnoticed pleasure or pain (see note 76 above). How this might complicate a more rarefied idealistic analysis, wherein the subject-image of cognition is understood to be the *pramāṇa*, is unaddressed. That is to say, if unnoticed pleasure is not experienced, then, from the perspective of Epistemic Idealism, wherein the subject-image is the *pramāṇa*, is it by extension also the case that unnoticed features of the object-image are also not experienced?

which is satisfying or whatever (*sātādirūpa*). In this regard, let one make designations (*sañjñā*) as desired, such as, “a cognition is pleasant or unpleasant” and so on. There is nothing objectionable here. The manner in which an image that is cognized as delightful (or whatever), has not been fashioned by a pleasure (or whatever) that has a non-cognitive nature, is explained elsewhere; but here, for fear of [writing] too much text, [the present discussion] is not extended.

Even for one who claims, “Pleasure and so on are not mental, nor are mental (*cetana*);⁹¹ on the contrary, they are strictly epistemic objects (*prameyas*), with natures that are the opposites [of things which are internal and mental]”: for one [who says this], as well, it is established that [pleasure] is a real entity, with a cognitive nature, possessed of an image of delight and so on, by virtue of the approach discussed [above]. And it is the reflexive awareness of just that [cognitively-natured entity with the image of delight or whatever] which is said to be the perception [of pleasure and so on]—not [the awareness] of a pleasure (or whatever) which is devoid of that [cognitive nature and image of delight], theorized by others. And that reflexive awareness will be established [in PS 1.9-12]; so it is not the case that the basis is not established.⁹²

Besides highlighting yet again the close connection between this passage (PS 1.6a2b) and the later discussion of reflexive awareness (PS 1.9-12), Jinendrabuddhi neatly illustrates here how there is nothing that “the sensation of pleasure” refers to, over and above the appearance of a cognition with the image of pleasure—just as, previously, it was established that there is nothing that “the sensation of ‘blue’” refers to, over and above the appearance of a cognition with the image of ‘blue.’

⁹¹ This is a direct citation of PVin 1.22, Steinkellner (2007, 22.13): *nāntarāḥ sukhādayo nāpi cetanāḥ*. This precise formulation is not found in the PS or PV, though the opponent’s argument here closely resembles the Sāṅkhya interlocutor’s position in PV 3.268. It should also be noted that the opponent’s usage of *cetana* as an adjective here does not track the Buddhist technical term *cetanā* in the sense of “volition” or “intention.”

⁹² Steinkellner (2005b, 55.6-56.2): *bhavatu jñānaṃ tadākāraṃ tataḥ kim iti cet idaṃ tato yat tad eva hlādaparitāpādyākārānugataṃ sukhādīti siddhaṃ sukhādi jñānarūpaṃ | bodharūpaṃ hi vastu sātādirūpaṃ teṣāṃ api siddham | tatra jñānaṃ sukhaṃ duḥkhaṃ ity ādikā yatheṣṭaṃ sañjñāḥ kriyantāṃ | nātra kaścin nivārayitā | yathā jñātaḥlādādika ākāro ’jñānarūpasukhādikṛto na bhavati tathānyatra pratipāditam | iha tu bahugranthabhayān na pratanyate || yo ’py āha nāntarāḥ [em. MSS *antārāḥ] sukhādayo nāpi cetanāḥ kiṃ tarhi tadviparītasvabhāvāḥ prameyā eveti tasyāpi yathoktanīyā hlādādyākārabodhātmakaṃ vastu siddham | tasyaiva ca svasaṃvedanaṃ pratyakṣam uktam na tadvyatirikṭasya sukhādeḥ paraparikalpitasya | tac ca svasaṃvedanaṃ sādhaiṣyamāṇam iti nāsty āśrayāsiddhiḥ ||*

In other words, the affective features of experience—pleasure, pain, and so on—are literally nothing, if not inherently experiential. And they are only given to be experienced insofar as they constitute an aspect (*ākāra*) of experience. But although the two aspects of experience are not actually ontologically distinct, it is possible to speak of them separately, for discursive or analytic purposes. In these terms, pleasure (etc.) may be discursively categorized or described as features of the subjective aspect of experience, even though both aspects are presented simultaneously by means of reflexive awareness.

Again, this highlights how the reflexive awareness of pleasure and pain (and, by extension, reflexive awareness in general) is necessarily non-erroneous by nature. But it also brings us to the relationship between the subject-image and the object-image, which is not really a “relationship” at all, since these two are in fact ontologically identical.

C. Pleasure Experiences the Pleasurable Object

1. *Affective Disposition as a Necessary Feature of Subjectivity*

In Chapters 3 and 4 we discussed, at length, how the nonduality of cognition plays out in terms of the fact that the object-appearance necessarily presents itself simultaneously with the “self-appearance” or “subjective aspect” of cognition (i.e., the *sahopalambhaniyama*). In concrete terms, this means that the object-appearance is by definition reflexively-experienced.

But in the context of PVin 1.22, which is identical to PV 3.251,⁹³ while responding to an objector who claims that pleasure and so on do not themselves have the nature of being experiential (*naiva sukhādayaḥ samvedanarūpāḥ*), neither in and of themselves nor with regard to objects, but

⁹³ See note [81](#), above.

are on the contrary only qualities (i.e., *guṇas*) that are experienced by means of a separate cognition which coalesces them into the sensory object (*ekārthasamavāyinā tu jñānena samvedyanta ity*), Dharmakīrti makes a very interesting claim, more succinctly and definitively than in the parallel passage from the PV: “[Affective states] such as pleasure do not arise without an object. Pleasure etc. is bound to an object which is appropriate to each [affective sensation], because they do not exist in the absence of an association with that [object].”⁹⁴ This is, in effect, also one of the points that Dharmakīrti makes at PV 3.252 and at PV 3.255,⁹⁵ regarding the presence of an object (*sārthe*) as one of the necessary causal conditions that must be in place in order for pleasure (etc.) to arise.

At first glance, this may seem to introduce a categorical distinction between the subjective and objective aspects of cognition, since the reverse would not appear to hold true. After all, it would be absurd to claim that the experience of an object cannot arise without an accompanying feeling of pleasure or pain. But this would be a misreading of the argument. Recall that the *sahopalambhaniyama* constitutes a restriction such that the “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) and “object-appearance” (*viṣayābhāsa*) of cognition must always be observed together. In the classical commentarial literature, no less than the contemporary scholarly literature, this restriction is typically framed as it has been in the analysis up to this point: as an argument to the effect that there is no appearance of an object, such as ‘blue,’ which is not always already accompanied by the self-appearance of the cognition “in which” or “to which” that object-appearance appears. But precisely because this restriction is in effect, we may also put the formulation in the reverse: there

⁹⁴ Steinkellner (2007, 22.2-3): *tatra sukhādyutpattir nāviṣayā yathāsvaṃ viṣayopanibandhanānām sukhādīnām tatsannidhānābhāve 'bhāvāt |*

⁹⁵ PV 3.255: “Cognitions, [experiences of] pleasure, and so on, arise by virtue of falling upon (*nipātena*) an object, in the absence of which—how, exactly, could pleasure and so on be cognized?”

Tosaki (1979, 353): *yasyārthasya nipātena te jātā dhīśukhādayaḥ | muktvā taṃ pratipadyeta sukhādīn eva sā katham || 255 ||*

is no cognition, or more specifically, no *self-appearance* of cognition, which does not present “itself” as the experience or appearance of *some object*.⁹⁶

The point here is that the *sahopalambhaniyama* functions in both directions. That is to say, it is not only the case that there is no object-appearance which does not simultaneously occur with the “self-appearance” of the fact that this object-appearance is cognitive; it is also the case that there is no “self-appearance” of cognition which does not simultaneously occur with the appearance of some object. Put slightly differently, the idea is that there is no affective dimension of experience in the absence of some object of experience toward which one is affectively disposed. Thus, for example, there is no such thing as “desire” as a total phenomenological abstraction, separate from some particular experiential object that is subjectively (and reflexively) felt to be desirable. Crucially, however, this desirable object need not be the sensory content of an object-appearance. On the contrary, the desirable object may be—indeed, typically is—a mental construction or conceptual universal. As we will see below, this is precisely the point of Dinnāga’s statement that the conceptual determination of the object has reflexive awareness as its nature, because this determination just is reflexively-experienced as desirable or undesirable.⁹⁷ But the underlying point is that, framed in these terms, the *sahopalambhaniyama* means that there is no object of experience in the absence of some type of affective disposition toward that object.

⁹⁶ Building upon the prior analysis in Chapter 4, Section IV.B ([The Simile of the Lamp](#)) and Section I.D.2 ([The Cognitive Nature of the Buddhas’ Awareness](#)), it should be noted that this point may be understood to apply—metaphorically—even in the ultimate context. Indeed, the true nature of reality (*dharmatā*, *tathatā*, etc.) is not infrequently described as the metaphorical “object” of transcendent gnosis (*prajñāpāramitā*) and its synonyms. For example, the Eighth Karmapa, Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507-1554), in his *Lamp that Excellently Elucidates the System of the Proponents of ‘Other-Emptiness’* [gzhan stong] *Madhyamaka*, writes (trans. Brunnhölzl 2014, 809): “The cognizing subject that is the type of realization that realizes this very *dharmakāya* does not depend on any other hosts of reference points, but is self-awareness by nature.”

⁹⁷ PSV *ad* PS 1.9b: *svasaṃvedanānurūpam arthaṃ pratipadyata iṣṭam aniṣṭam vā*. See below, Section III: [The Affective Features of Conceptual Determination](#).

Thus, while it is of course possible to cognize ‘blue’ without an accompanying sensation of pleasure or pain, it is not possible to cognize ‘blue’ without the cognition of ‘blue’ presenting itself just as a cognition; and, in the absence of desirability or undesirability, there would nevertheless be a neutral or indifferent disposition, which in classical Buddhist analysis constitutes its own distinct type of “neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant” (*adukkhamasukhā*) feeling-tone (*vedanā*).⁹⁸ On the Buddhist account, going all the way back to the Abhidharma, there is no escaping having some kind of feeling about the object of experience, even if this “feeling” (*vedanā*) is a neutral lack of interest. Hence, whether the sensation of ‘blue’ is pleasant, unpleasant, or simply neutral, this pleasantness or unpleasantness or neutrality is a necessary and built-in feature of the subjective aspect or “self-appearance” of the cognition, which is to say, an inherent feature of the way in which the cognition presents itself just as a cognition.

Put slightly differently, the upshot here is that the subjective features of cognition are an inherent and inseparable aspect of every object-cognition, irrespective of whether the object in question is a conceptual universal, or external to the mind, or not. Thus, there is no nonconceptual awareness of any object, nor any conceptual determination of any object, that fails to include (for example) information about how one is affectively disposed toward the object—even if this disposition is strictly neutral. Again: because the object-image, subject-image, and reflexive awareness are not in fact ontologically separate, the presentation of the object-image necessarily constitutes the presentation of the subject-image, which paradigmatically includes the affective features of the cognition, such as the desirability or undesirability of the object as it “appears to” or “shows up in” cognition. In other words, the same reflexive awareness that presents the

⁹⁸ Cf. AKBh 1.14c.

objective content of the conceptual determination, also presents the subjective features of that determination, from which it is not actually separate.

2. *The Object is ‘Transferred’ (saṅkrānta) into the Pleasure, and Vice Versa*

The preceding analysis underlies Dharmakīrti’s contention that pleasure—or, equivalently, “the reflexive experience of pleasure”—in and of itself constitutes the experience of the pleasurable object. This point is extremely important, for it is precisely the inseparable ontological relationship between affective disposition (*qua* subject-image), and object-image, that accounts for the argument in PV 3.338-345 *ad* PS 1.9b: “the determination of the object has the nature of [reflexive awareness].”⁹⁹ The argument in that context hinges on a point developed in PV 3.266-267: that, in Dharmakīrti’s terminology, pleasure is a “knower” or “experiencer” (*vedaka*) of its object.¹⁰⁰ In other words, pleasure is cognitive.

In this earlier passage, following a sequence of arguments to the effect that pleasure cannot be an ontologically distinct quality (*guṇa*) which is cognized in isolation, either simultaneously with or subsequently to the cognition of the pleasurable object,¹⁰¹ and that furthermore pleasure and so on cannot arise solely from the sense-faculties or any other purely “internal element” (*antarāṅga*),¹⁰² but on the contrary require the presence of a pleasurable object, Dharmakīrti

⁹⁹ PS 1.9b: **tadrūpo hy arthaniścayaḥ |**

¹⁰⁰ It should be recalled throughout the following discussion, however, that Dharmakīrti ultimately repudiates the distinction between “knower” and “known.” See PV 3.330-331, discussed in Chapter 4, Section IV.B: [The Simile of the Lamp](#). Furthermore, as has repeatedly been emphasized, cognition is in fact “devoid of the causal activity” (*nirvyāpāra*) of “apprehending” or “knowing” its object in any transitive sense. See Chapter 2, Section II.B: [Cognition Has No “Functioning” \(vyāpāra\)](#).

¹⁰¹ Cf. PV 3.256-259. A variation on this argument continues in PV 3.262-265.

¹⁰² Cf. PV 3.260-261.

concludes¹⁰³ his primary discussion of PS 1.6a2b in the PV by noting that, for these reasons, the experience of pleasure just is the experience of the pleasurable object. Therefore, pleasure is an “experiencer” (*vedaka*) of its object, because the form of the object is placed into the pleasurable cognition of the object, thereby “transferring” the form of the object into the affective feeling of pleasure:

Therefore, pleasure and so on exclusively arise due to their objects. And they are experiencers (*vedakāḥ*) of these objects—the appearances of which are transferred (*saṅkrānta*) into themselves—as well as of their own natures. || 266 ||

For they experience the nature of the object, which becomes their own nature (*svātmabhūta*). Hence, [pleasure] is said to be the experience of an object; but the object-support (*ālamba*) is [metaphorically] the [pleasurable cognition’s] property of having the appearance of the [object]. || 267 ||¹⁰⁴

As Devendrabuddhi explains, this “transference” means that the pleasure has an appearance which includes a “reflection” (*gzugs brnyan* = **pratibimba*) of the object.¹⁰⁵ But Devendrabuddhi

¹⁰³ PV 3.268-280 is somewhat ancillary to the main points under discussion. While interesting in its own right, this passage is in essence a digression concerning the specifically Sāṅkhya position that pleasure (*sukha*) is a feature of gross consciousness (*buddhi*), itself a “material” evolute of *prakṛti* (“Nature”). According to Dharmakīrti—it must be noted here that the Sāṅkhyas would likely have vigorously disputed his characterization of their system, particularly the rather unfair treatment of it given in PV 3.279—this entails that pleasure is “externally-situated” (*bahihsthita*) with respect to the pure, and purely “internal,” consciousness of *puruṣa* (“the Subject”). Thus, according to Dharmakīrti, pleasure cannot be properly cognitive (*apracetana*) on the Sāṅkhya account (PV 3.268).

Much of Dharmakīrti’s critique in this passage concerns the Sāṅkhyas’ assertion of a strong ontological duality between *puruṣa* (in essence, pure subjectivity) and *prakṛti* (which includes anything that could ever be an object). The most important argument in this regard is found at PV 3.272, wherein Dharmakīrti notes that if this strong duality between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* holds in ultimate terms, then because both the apprehending gross consciousness (*buddhi*) and its apprehended objects are only evolutes of *prakṛti*, *pumān* (a synonym for *puruṣa*) could never apprehend anything. In any case, Dharmakīrti’s primary treatment of PS 1.6a2b concludes with PV 3.267.

¹⁰⁴ Tosaki (1979, 361–62): *tasmāt sukhādayo ’rthānām svasaṃkrāntāvabhāsinām | vedakāḥ svātmanaś caiṣām arthebhyo janma kevalam || 266 || arthātmā svātmabhūto hi teṣāṃ tair anubhūyate | tenārthānubhavakhyātir ālambas tu tadābhatā || 267 ||*

¹⁰⁵ PVP (498.13-14): *de la ’pho ba ni gzugs brnyan du snang ba can yin pa de ltar na |*

Neither Devendrabuddhi nor Śākyabuddhi further elaborate on this point. As such, any more detailed interpretation must remain tentative. But the point here seems to be that, owing to the ontological inseparability of subject and object, the affective quality of experience varies according to the phenomenal features of the object-appearance. Thus, for example, both eating a piece of delicious chocolate and seeing a beautiful sunset while on vacation in the mountains

continues his commentary *ad* PV 3.266 in a manner that makes explicit the connection between this passage, and the later discussion of reflexive awareness in the context of Epistemic Idealism:

Hence, i.e., because their nature isomorphically conforms (*don dang 'dra ba ~ arthasā + √rūp*)¹⁰⁶ to the object, pleasure (etc.) is an experience [of the object]; because it is experiential, it is **said to be an experience of the object**. But this is merely a conventional designation in worldly terms; it is not actually the experiencer of an external object. This is what [the verse]¹⁰⁷ shows. That is to say, [pleasure] is a knower which has the nature of being internal. In the way that was just explained, there is ultimately no [external] object. Ultimately, it is just that **pleasure and so on exclusively arise due to their objects**; however, those [cognitions] are not truly cognizing external objects. Hence, “when the object is of

may be described as pleasurable experiences. But each constitutes a different *kind* of pleasure. Schematically, in other words, the pleasure of eating artisan chocolate, and the pleasure of viewing a golden-pink sunset, are phenomenologically distinct: the experience of the chocolate is “reflected in” or “transferred into” the pleasure of eating the chocolate, and the experience of the sunset is “reflected in” or “transferred into” the pleasure of viewing the sunset. In this way, causal or phenomenal features of the pleasurable object “show up” in the feeling of pleasure itself (which, again, is not actually separable from the phenomenal appearance of the object).

In more technical Dharmakīrtian terms, the idea here is that both the experience of chocolate and the experience of the sunset share certain causal features in common, such that the subjective feeling of pleasure may be conceptually isolated from each experience, and made the subject of a determination: “This experience is pleasurable.” Just as there is no real universal of ‘blueness,’ but certain experiences may nevertheless be (up to a point) accurately described in ordinary language as experiences of ‘blue,’ in just this way, there is no real universal of ‘pleasurability,’ but certain experiences may nevertheless be accurately described as experiences of ‘pleasure’—to be specific, ordinary, worldly, defiled pleasure. Just like experiences of ‘blue,’ however, each individual experience of ‘pleasure’ is different from every other experience of ‘pleasure,’ because an experience is a momentary and unique particular. As mentioned in Chapter 2, note 54, if nothing else, the passage of time makes each cognition of “the same” object unique, even for each individual observer. In the case of the difference between the pleasure of eating chocolate and the pleasure of viewing a sunset, this difference is even more overt. But the principle is the same.

Assuming the above characterization to be correct, then, Dharmakīrti’s account of how the object-appearance is “reflected in” or “transferred into” the feeling of pleasure—and, by extension, “transferred into” the affective features of experience in general—opens up a number of avenues for further analysis. To take one particularly salient example, it might lead to a consideration of how pleasure derived from wholesome (*kuśala*) activity may be distinguished, perhaps even *phenomenologically* distinguished, from pleasure derived from unwholesome (*akuśala*) activity.

¹⁰⁶ See Chapter 3.

¹⁰⁷ Devendrabuddhi here cites a verse that appears to be either spurious or lost. His comments track a mysterious half-verse in the canonical Tibetan translation: *de myong phyir na 'jig rten 'dogs | phyi rol don ni dngos su min ||*. But this verse does not appear in any of the extant Sanskrit manuscripts, nor in any later commentary. Thanks to John Dunne for pointing this out.

the nature of the experience,”¹⁰⁸ in that context, the [object] is cognized by virtue of arising in the nature of awareness; this does not occur for external objects.¹⁰⁹

From a more rarefied perspective, in other words, it should be understood that pleasure and so on do not experience external objects at all, because there is no such thing.

We will return to this point in the Conclusion, where we take up Dharmakīrti’s discussion of the subjective aspect of cognition as the epistemic instrument in the context of Epistemic Idealism. To return to the topic at hand, though, the key takeaway here is that “pleasure experiences the object.” That is to say: as outlined above, the generation of pleasure is a strictly causal process. Hence, pleasure and so on are only the causally-generated “subjective content,” corresponding to the “objective content” or object-appearance of a sensory cognition, from which the affective feature such as pleasure is not ontologically separate. Hence, the appearance of the object is “transferred” into the subjective aspect, which thereby “reflects” the appearance of the object. In this way, insofar as the nature of pleasure is causally isomorphic with regard to the nature of the epistemic object, it is a “knower” of that object.

3. *Some Practical Considerations*

Because cognition is ontologically nondual, then, the same pleasure which is an inherent feature of the subjective aspect of cognition, is *a fortiori* an inherent feature of the cognition as such.

¹⁰⁸ That is, in the context of Epistemic Idealism. Compare *gal te nyams su myong ba’i bdag nyid du gyur pa de don yin pa de’i tshe* to PSV ad PS 1.9b: *yadā hi saviṣayaṃ jñānam arthaḥ*.

¹⁰⁹ PVP (498.9-499.1): *des ni don dang ’dra ba’i bdag nyid du ’gyur ba’i phyir | bde ba la sogs pas yang dag par myong ba yin no || de myong phyir na don yang dag par myong ba yin no zhes ’jig rten na tha snyad ’dogs pa tsam yin gyi | phyi rol gyi don ni myong bar byed pa | dngos su min zhes ston par byed do || de de ltar na | nang gi bdag nyid rig byed yin || don ni bshad ma thag pa’i tshul gyis don dam par ma yin no || don dam par bde ba la sogs pa de dag don las skye ba tsam yin gyi | phyi rol de dag de rnams kyis yang dag par rig pa ma yin no || de ltar na gal te nyams su myong ba’i bdag nyid du gyur pa de don yin pa de’i tshe | de’i bdag nyid kyis skyes pa’i phyir de rig par ’gyur na | de ni phyi rol tu gyur pa’i don dag la yod pa ma yin no ||*

Hence, the pleasure that is experienced, is nothing other than the experience of the pleasurable object (i.e., the pleasurable experience that arises as the result of the epistemic object placing its form into cognition).

This is precisely why a desirable object seems to be “objectively” desirable, in other words why it can be so difficult to imagine how an object which seems so desirable or undesirable to oneself may be conversely undesirable or desirable to another. Recall PS(V) 1.9b: “For the determination of the object has [reflexive awareness] as its nature; because, when the object is a cognition, inclusive of the object-field, one cognizes the object in conformity with how it is reflexively experienced, i.e., as either desirable or undesirable.”¹¹⁰ Because the form of the object has been “transferred” into the subjective aspect of the initial nonconceptual cognition, the subsequent conceptual determination of the object does not possess a rigid distinction between the pleasurable affect and the object-appearance. The conceptual determination of the object therefore includes one’s own affective disposition towards the object, in the same way (and for essentially the same reason) that it includes the appearance of the object.

Consider, for example, the determinate identification of some object-appearance as ‘a slice of chocolate cake.’ Owing to our karmic constitution as human beings who find certain flavors and caloric densities to be appealing, we would typically find this ‘slice of chocolate cake’ to be desirable. On the other hand, an athlete on a ketogenic diet might find the cake to be thoroughly, even viscerally,¹¹¹ unappealing. The key point in this regard is that, just like the initial nonconceptual sensory cognition, the subsequent conceptual determination of an object presents

¹¹⁰ PS(V) 1.9b: **tadrūpo hy arthaniścayaḥ** | *yadā hi saviṣayaṃ jñānam arthaḥ, tadā svasaṃvedanānurūpam artham pratipadyata iṣṭam aniṣṭam vā.*

¹¹¹ See the discussion of PV 3.344 above in Section II.A.2: [\(Experiences of\) Pleasure and Pain are Particulars.](#)

itself just as a cognition, which is to say, with the “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) of being a cognition. As outlined above, this entails that the conceptual determination is necessarily inclusive of some affective dimension, whether desirability or undesirability or neither. And this subjective or affective dimension of the determination is simultaneously and reflexively experienced along with the “objective” features of the determination, because the two (i.e., the conceptual object-appearance of the determination, and the self-appearance of the affective features of that conceptual determination) are not separate. Thus, the determination of some object-appearance as ‘a slice of chocolate cake’ includes, built ontologically within itself, our affective disposition toward the cake, whether positive, negative, or neutral. More generally, the experience which “knows” the object of experience, experiences the object just in the manner that it is presented to experience: as desirable or undesirable or whatever. This is precisely what it means for the object to be reflected in the desire, and for the desire to be reflected in the object.

While there is unfortunately no space here to pursue this point further, it should also be noted that this argument has a certain practical or ethical valence, in addition to its epistemological purchase. In terms of mental discipline, for example, this point underscores the importance of learning to recognize the ways in which our sensory perceptions are pre-theoretically and nonconceptually colored by our habituations and dispositions (i.e., our *bhāvanā* and our *vāsanā*). The experience of desiring an object, for example, can and should be analyzed in terms of how the object appears to be “objectively” desirable, despite the fact that its apparent desirability is not in fact an “objective” a feature of the object at all, but rather only of the way in which the object appears *to us*, as an aspect of our own awareness. However, this is not the only issue here. It is not the case, in other words, that we only project our desires onto object-appearances after they have

been conceptually identified. This we may do as well, of course;¹¹² but a crucial part of the point here is that, due to our habituations and karmic dispositions, a desirable object-appearance often “shows up” in awareness as already being desirable, even prior to being conceptualized. This is why, on the Buddhist model, a large part of ethical training must consist in reorienting our habits and dispositions, such that we re-train ourselves to *want* to acquire what is wholesome (*kuśala*) and to *want* to avoid what is unwholesome (*akuśala*)—i.e., respectively, what facilitates or hinders the attainment of buddhahood—rather than simply “forcing” ourselves to act in a certain way.

Finally, before moving on, it should be emphasized yet again that Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti insist that cognition is in fact devoid of causal activity (*nirvyāpāra*). Hence, the philosophical terminology referring to agentive “experiencers” and patientive “objects” is strictly conventional or metaphorical. A cognition arises, with a certain image or aspect (*ākāra*); on this basis, it is designated as the experience of that which caused it to have this image. But there is no activity of “taking” or “acquiring” the image, only a “stream of cause and effect,” producing a “reflection” (*pratibimba*) of the object within cognition.

¹¹² Thus, for example, it is also the case that we may first conceptually identify some indistinct or unknown object, then evaluate its causal functionality or “telic efficacy” (*arthakriyā*), and only afterwards finally experience desire toward this object. Consider, for example, someone who does not know much about whiskey, but who is interested in exploring the world of fine spirits. To such a person, a bottle of Lagavulin might initially seem virtually indistinguishable from a bottle of Jim Beam. That is to say, the Lagavulin does not initially “show up” in experience as desirable. But after learning a little bit, one experiences desire toward the bottle of Lagavulin—toward which one had previously been indifferent—because it has been conceptually ascertained that the Lagavulin will fulfill the telic efficacy expected of an excellent bottle of whiskey. Subsequently, having been habituated to associate the bottle of Lagavulin with the causal functionality of great whiskey, the Lagavulin bottle “shows up” in awareness as desirable.

In more explicitly ethical terms, we might note that the same process also applies to ethical conduct. That is to say, as spiritually immature (*bālaka*) ordinary beings, we often do not even know what is virtuous and what is non-virtuous. Indeed, non-virtuous conduct frequently “shows up” in awareness as a desirable course of action. But after learning about ethical conduct, the ten non-virtuous actions (killing, lying, stealing, sexual misconduct, etc.), and so on, we come to understand that only virtuous conduct leads to lasting happiness and liberation from suffering. In other words, virtuous conduct fulfills the causal functionality (*arthakriyā*) for experiencing what we wish to obtain, while non-virtuous conduct fulfills the causal functionality for experiencing what we wish to avoid (i.e., continued suffering). Over time, through study and practice, we then eventually come to have virtuous conduct “show up” in awareness as desirable, and non-virtuous conduct “show up” as undesirable. On this point, see also note [74](#), above.

4. Metonymical “Pleasure” and Internal Objects

It is of course possible to make discursive theoretical distinctions between the feeling of pleasure on the one hand and the pleasurable object on the other, or the subjective and objective aspects of cognition, and so on. But the upshot of the preceding argumentation is that, in the rarefied context of Epistemic Idealism, “pleasure” should be understood to function as a kind of metonym for the causally-regulated features of the subjective aspect of cognition—and, by extension, as a metonym for the subjective aspect itself. Furthermore, owing to the close and “slippery” relationship between the subjective aspect and the reflexively-aware nature of cognition, pleasure in this metonymical sense now also functions as an index for *how* the reflexively-aware nature of cognition presents its subjective content (but also, by extension, its objective content) to “itself.” In other words, pleasure just is the experience of pleasure; and because the experience of pleasure is by nature self-experiencing, as discussed above, “pleasure” in this sense serves to illustrate the manner in which cognition as such is self-experiencing.

The key point in this regard is that, again, there is nothing presented to or within cognition which is not *ipso facto* cognitive. This is precisely what links the analysis of reflexive awareness as the “result” (*phala*), as discussed in Chapter 4, with the subsequent analysis to the effect that the subjective aspect *qua* reflexive awareness is the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) in the specific context of an idealistic ontology. In this idealistic context, as we will examine in the Conclusion, “pleasure” *qua* subjectivity—or, as Dharmakīrti will put it, the fact that affective features such as pleasure are inextricably “yoked” (*yogya*)¹¹³ to reflexive awareness—fits into the “slot” for the instrument, because “pleasure” (in this metonymical sense) is nothing other than the way in which

¹¹³ PV 3.365. See the [Conclusion](#).

the self-appearance of the cognitive nature of cognition presents that cognitively-natured-ness to “itself”; and, since the context has been defined as idealistic, there is furthermore nothing “outside of” cognition to know.

This point comes out most vividly when the epistemic object is understood to be strictly internal to cognition, because pleasure itself is obviously and strictly “internal” (*antar*)—i.e., both restricted to a specific individual (*pratiniyata*), and itself mental (*cetana*). Metonymical “pleasure or whatever” (*sukhādi*), which is to say, the instantaneous reflexive awareness of one’s own present affective disposition, is therefore best construed as the epistemic instrument when the epistemic object is also understood to be internal to the mind. Indeed, the fact that metonymical “pleasure” is strictly internal, combined with the fact that metonymical “pleasure” experiences the object, serves precisely to demonstrate that the object is actually always internal.

More broadly, in other words, the reflexively-experienced nature of pleasure illustrates the nondual and inherently reflexively-experienced nature of cognition as such. The line between the subjective experience of pleasure on the one hand, and the objective image of the pleasurable object on the other, cannot ultimately be maintained. The experience of pleasure is the experience of the pleasing object, and the experience of a pleasing object is the experience of the pleasure thus generated. And the same applies to cognition or experience in general: experience experiences itself, by nature.

D. Subjective Variation in the Quality of Experience

1. Sharpness and Dullness

To review, the overarching context for this discussion is PS 1.9, which constitutes Dinnāga’s analysis of the relationships among reflexive awareness, the subjective features of experience, and

the conceptual determination of the object. Above, in Section I, we discussed Dharmakīrti's explanation of PS 1.9a, to the effect that reflexive awareness may always be considered the "result" (*phala*). We then turned to the immediately preceding analysis of Dharmakīrti's theory of pleasure and pain, as articulated in PV 3.249-280 *ad* PS 1.6a2b, since this earlier passage (concerning the reflexive awareness of pleasure and so on) is a critically important foundation for the later discussion of reflexive awareness and conceptuality in PV 3.338-352 *ad* PS 1.9bcd.

Below, in Section III, we will examine Dharmakīrti's account of PS1.9bcd, concerning the reflexive awareness of the affective features of a conceptual determination. But before moving on to this topic, it is worth first making yet another brief detour, this time skipping ahead a bit, in order to complete our survey of the *sahopalambhaniyama*. For, in the final section of the *sahopalambhaniyama* argument, Dharmakīrti expounds upon the nature of subjective variations in the quality of experience, in a manner that will prove quite helpful to that later discussion. While the following analysis is not specifically framed with reference to pleasure and pain, it should be kept in mind throughout this discussion that pleasure and pain are causally mediated in exactly the same way as (for example) differences the relative acuity of perception. That is to say, just like the desirability or undesirability of the object-image, the sharpness or dullness of the object-image is a subjective variation in the quality of experience, causally mediated via conditioning factors that cannot logically be located in the object itself, and which must therefore lie within the observer.

When we last left the *sahopalambhaniyama* in Chapter 4, Dharmakīrti had just noted that an ontologically idealistic perspective constitutes the "view of the wise" (*viduṣām vādaḥ*),¹¹⁴ and that although Diñnāga initially described the dual form of cognition with reference to external

¹¹⁴ PV 3.397.

objects, this duality also applies (and can be proven) within such an idealistic context. Having completed his examination of the way in which the object-image is always necessarily presented simultaneously with a subject-image, Dharmakīrti next turns his attention to the way in which subjective factors necessarily mediate the phenomenal characteristics of the object-image.

The crux of the argument is that, much like how different observers may find the same object to be pleasing or displeasing, depending upon their habituation (which is to say, depending upon the causal process mediating the production of the specifically subjective features of the sensory cognition), different observers also have differing sensory impressions, even apart from the differing *affective* features of their respective individual cognitions:

It is observed that cognition in regard to the same object bears a difference in appearance, starting with dullness or sharpness or obscuration, by virtue of a difference in the sensory faculty. Every cognition of that object would have the same form (*ekarūpa*), because the form of the object is not different, if the cognition, coming from the object, were not to have the appearance of the object.

|| 398-399 ||¹¹⁵

Devendrabuddhi introduces this passage by construing it as a separate argument for the double-formedness of cognition, specifically as a response to direct realist opponents who deny that sensory cognition arises with a phenomenal representation of the object.¹¹⁶ This highlights yet again how Dharmakīrti's articulation of the *sahopalambhaniyama* occurs within the context of Diñnāga's remarks at PS 1.11ab, concerning the argument for the double-formedness of cognition on the basis of memory. In other words, the *sahopalambhaniyama* constitutes a restriction such

¹¹⁵ Tosaki (1985, 80): *jñānam indriyabhedena paṭumandāvilādikām | pratibhāsabhidām arthe bibhrad ekatra dr̥śyate || 398 || arthasyābhinnarūpatvād ekarūpaṃ bhaven manaḥ | sarvaṃ tadartham arthāc cet tasya nāsti tadābhatā || 399 ||*

¹¹⁶ PVP (571.19-21): *'dir yang tshul gnyis grub par bya ba la ci don la sogs par rigs pa gzhan ston par mdzad de don las de shes pa skye bar 'gyur ba der snang yang yod min yul gyi rnam pa can med pa de'i tshe |*

that both aspects of cognition necessarily accompany each other, but also, by extension, that there is in fact an objective aspect of cognition (i.e., that cognition arises with the image or phenomenal form of its object).

In a sense, then, this argument concerns the intractable difficulties presented by any non-representationalist epistemology. How is it that an object, which is supposed to be the same for all observers, can be perceived differently by different observers? Why, for example, is the visual appearance of the same object (say, the letters on an optometrist's chart) blurry to those with weaker vision, yet sharp to those with stronger vision? It is precisely the difference in the phenomenal *appearance* which must be accounted for, since the letters themselves are the same. Appealing to the object itself will not do. As Dharmakīrti points out here, if the differences in the way that an object appears to different observers are exclusively due to the object itself, then a single object can only be responsible for a single mode of appearance: the letters *themselves* must be either inherently blurry or inherently sharp. Nor, as Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi note, would it be possible in such a case to account for sensory errors, such as when a white conch appears yellow due to jaundice.¹¹⁷ How can the same conch be causally responsible for cognitions with the phenomenal appearance of both white and yellow? The only reasonable answer is that it is a difference in the sense faculties, such as their relative acuity (or more specifically, to return to

¹¹⁷ PVP (572.7-8): “Starting with (*ādika*)’ includes a difference in the appearance of the apprehending cognition, with regard to how the object appears, [such as] appearing with erroneous coloration” (*sogs pa smos pas ni ji ltar yongs su snang ba’i don la phyin ci log pa’i kha dog du snang ba’i khyad par ’dzin pa’i shes pa snang bar gzungs so*).

Śākyabuddhi (PVT 583.20-584.1) further specifies that this is meant to refer to cases of sensory error such as the stock example of a white conch that appears yellow due to jaundice: *phyin ci log pa’i kha dog tu snang ba’i khyad par zhes bya ba ni dung dkar po la sogs pa ci ltar snang ba bzhin gyi kha dog dkar po las phyin ci log pa sogs par snang bar mig ser can dag gi shes pas rjes su rtogs pa’i phyir ro* ||

Concerning this issue, see also Chapter 1, Section III: [Dharmakīrti’s Theory of Nonconceptual Pseudo-Perception](#).

the discussion in Chapter 1, the presence or absence of some kind of “warping”¹¹⁸ factor), which determines how the object-image appears.

But it is critically important to understand that this argument does not *exclusively* concern the problems with a direct realist epistemological paradigm. Rather, it also highlights how even a representationalist epistemology must be made to account for subjective variations in the quality of experience: how, in other words, the “mental representation” or cognitive image (*ākāra*) in question possesses phenomenal characteristics that are causally derived from the observer, as well as from the observed. Devendrabuddhi makes the point explicit in his concluding comments to this verse: “Thus, since it is to be accepted that [cognition] is strictly unitary, because it is established that cognition has a subjective appearance, [cognition] possesses two forms.”¹¹⁹ Śākyabuddhi further explains that this means there is a “remainder” (*lhag ma ~ śeṣa*), which is the image of the cognition itself (*rnam par shes pa'i rnam pa = *vijñānākāra*)—i.e., the “self-appearance” of cognition—in addition to the image of the object.¹²⁰ In other words, the fact that cognition appears with the image of the object, combined with (1) the fact that this image of the object always necessarily occurs simultaneously with the subjective image of cognition itself (i.e., cognition’s “self-appearance”), and (2) the fact that these two images are ontologically inseparable, entails that the way in which the object appears is always already colored by the way in which the subject appears. As Ganeri (1999b, 470) explains, with reference to the subject-image,

¹¹⁸ See Chapter 1, Section III.B.1: [The Causal Origin of Nonconceptual Sensory Error](#).

¹¹⁹ PVP (572.10-12): *de ltar na gcig nyid khas blang bar bya ba yin pas na | yul can du snang ba'i shes pa grub pa de bas na | tshul gnyis pa can nyid yin no ||*

¹²⁰ PVT (584.4-7): *don dam par gcig pa nyid khas blang bar bya ba yin pa de yang lhag ma rnam par shes pa'i rnam pa yin pa de ltar na yul du snang ba'i rnam par shes pa grub pa yin no || de bas na rang las rtogs pa'i ngo bo 'dzin pa'i tshul gnyis pa can nyid grub pa yin no ||*

[Diñāga] had in mind something analogous to a distinction easily drawn for paintings and photographs. A photograph is always a photograph of something, but it also has its own qualities, like brightness, sharpness and contrast, factors which depend on the way the photograph was taken rather than on what it was of. An expert who looks at a photograph and says that it is overexposed or underdeveloped, pays attention just to these features of the photograph itself, and may perhaps fail to notice even that the photograph was of, for example, a face.

Once again, then, it is critically important to keep in mind that the dual-formedness of cognition does not in any way entail that the subjective aspect (*grāhakākāra*) and the objective aspect (*grāhyākāra*) of cognition are different, discrete ontological entities. On the contrary, the point here is that—in a manner precisely analogous to the preceding discussion, concerning how “pleasure experiences the object”—there is no such thing as an object-appearance in the abstract, separate from subjective variations in the quality of the experience of that object-appearance. In other words, just as *affective* subjective features (such as pleasure and pain) are an inseparable and inherent quality of the experience of the object, so too are *non-affective* subjective features (such as the relative dullness or sharpness of the sensory cognition) inseparable and inherent qualities of the experience of the object.

To be clear, one may describe the dullness or sharpness of the object-image—like the brightness, sharpness, and contrast of the photograph in Ganeri’s example—as “objective,” insofar as the relative degree of acuity is a phenomenal feature of the object-image; and, in a sense, this is indeed correct. But the underlying point here is that, even in this case, it must be understood that such non-affective features are *not* causally derived from the object itself, but rather from the observer. In this sense, such non-affective phenomenal features are “subjective.” And, in any case, one of the main overarching points here is that the fact that cognition has a unitary nature means precisely that the theoretical dividing line between its “subjective” and “objective” features cannot ultimately be maintained. Thus, as Dharmakīrti writes:

Since [cognition] arises in dependence upon the object, imitating (*anukurvataḥ*) its form, its difference [from the object]—in whatever respect—must be due to something else [other than the object]. || 400 ||

For example, although a son has the form of his [father], in dependence upon the father, [he is] different from the father—in whatever respect—due to some other reason [besides the father]. || 401 ||¹²¹

In other words, the varying ways in which “the same” object may appear to different observers must be due to causal factors specific to each observer—not due to the object itself. And this point applies directly to the analysis of pleasure and pain as well: the reason that “the same” object appears as pleasurable or desirable to some observers, but not to others, is not due to any inherent quality of the object itself, but rather only due to the differing dispositions and constitutions of those different observers.

Crucially, this point also serves to illustrate the superiority of an idealistic ontology. Devendrabuddhi explains: “Although imitating the form of the object, cognition differs from it in some regard, due to something else; [in other words,] there is also a difference in terms of obscuration (or whatever), due to the activation of internal imprints.”¹²² Once more, in other words, the critical question here concerns the cause which is responsible for the variations in the phenomenal qualities of experience. Just as the earlier investigation exposed the fatal flaws in any explanation of these variations which relies upon external objects rather than internal imprints, so too does the analysis here. The difference is that, since the investigation at this juncture is exclusively concerned with *subjective* variations, there can be no question of appealing to an

¹²¹ Tosaki (1985, 81): *arthāśrayeṇodbhavatas tadrūpam anukurvataḥ | tasya kenacid aṃśena parato 'pi bhidā bhavet* || 400 || *tathā hy āśrītya pitaraṃ tadrūpo 'pi sutāḥ pituḥ | bhedaṃ kenacid aṃśena kutaścīd avalambate* || 401 ||

¹²² PVP (572.18-20): *don gyi rnam pa nyid rjes su byed pa yin na yang rnam pa gzhan gyi cha shes pa gzhan las te nang gi bag chags sad pa las kyang 'dren ma la sogs pa 'i khyad par gyis tha dad 'gyur ba 'i phyir |*

external object. Whatever the “restricting factor” (*niyāma*)¹²³ is, it must lie within the observer. In this way, the analysis of subjective variations in the quality of experience serves to push the reader toward Dharmakīrti’s final position: once it has been acknowledged that the phenomenal features of the object-appearance may change in dependence upon causal factors which are internal to the observer, there is very little analytical work left for “judicious persons” (*pūrvaprekṣākārin*) to do, before they reach the conclusion of Epistemic Idealism.

2. *The Example of the Halo*

The preceding analysis takes on an entirely new dimension when applied to the issue of nonconceptual sensory errors, as initially discussed in Chapter 1.¹²⁴ This turn in the argument has already been foreshadowed by Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi’s invocation of the example of a white conch which appears to be yellow.¹²⁵ If the conch truly is white, then what accounts for the fact that it appears to be yellow? Different observers, including those with impaired faculties who see it to be yellow but nevertheless recognize their faculties to be impaired, might be able to come to the agreement that properly-functioning sense faculties *should* result in a cognition of the conch as white; but this does nothing to change the fact that, for someone with impaired faculties, the actual phenomenal experience is of a yellow conch (or of two moons, and so on). In other words, the difference between the nonerroneous sensory cognition of some object, and the nonconceptually erroneous sensory cognition of that “same” object, is precisely a subjective

¹²³ See Chapter 2, Section II.C: [The “Determiner” \(*niyāma*\)](#).

¹²⁴ See Chapter 1, Section III: [Dharmakīrti’s Theory of Nonconceptual Pseudo-Perception](#).

¹²⁵ See note [117](#), above.

variation in the quality of the experience of different observers. Here, Dharmakīrti presses the point:

Those whose eyes are weak see a halo (*maṇḍala*) in the shape (*ākāra*)¹²⁶ of the eye on a peacock’s feather, brightly shining blue and red, around a source of light.

|| 402 ||¹²⁷

As Devendrabuddhi quite rightly notes, it is impossible for the halo to be an inherent feature of the very nature of the light source, because the halo is a feature of the sensory-cognitive image (i.e., the *viṣayākāra*) that is produced from the light source, but not of the object-field (i.e., the *viṣaya*) itself.¹²⁸ In other words, the halo cannot be an inherent feature of the light source, because the halo appears to some observers (specifically, those with weak eyes), but not to others. Therefore, cognition has the *appearance* of an object-field—rather than directly “apprehending” it in some naïve direct realist sense—but the phenomenal features of the object-appearance vary subjectively, according to the causal makeup of each observer.

To be clear, it is not being denied here that there is something about the causal properties of the light source, when interacting with the causal properties of certain observers’ sense-faculties, which produces the appearance of a halo. But the *appearance* of the halo, *as an appearance*, can only be understood as a strictly *subjective and phenomenal* feature of the sensory cognition of the light source; the halo does not exist “objectively,” in the sense of existing independently of any

¹²⁶ Devendrabuddhi (PVP 573.9-10) glosses *ākāra* here as *~samsthāna* (*rma bya’i mdongs kyi rnam pa can rma bya’i mdongs kyi dbyibs* [D: *dbyings] *can no*). But Dharmakīrti’s use of the term *ākāra* here is perhaps something of a deliberate play on words (*śleṣa*): the point is that the shape (*ākāra*) of the halo is nonconceptually given to experience as a kind of distorted cognitive image (*ākāra*).

¹²⁷ Tosaki (1985, 82): *mayūracandrakākāraṃ nīlalohitabhāsvaram | sampāśyanti pradīpāder maṇḍalaṃ mandacakṣuṣaḥ* || 402 ||

¹²⁸ PVP (573.12-14): *de mar me’i ngo bo yin no zhes nges par nus pa ma yin te | mar me’i rnam pa dang yul tha dad pa ’dzin pa’i phyir ro || de’i phyir blo de nyid de ltar snang ba yin pas ni blo yul du snang ba yin no ||*

observer, the way that (from an External Realist perspective) the light source itself may perhaps be seen as an “objective,” observer-independent entity. And any attempt to posit the halo as its own ontologically-discrete entity, separate from or “external to” the source of light, creates intractable theoretical difficulties:

If the [halo] were to have the nature of being external to the [light source]—how insufferable (*akṣamā*) for those with clear faculties! Furthermore, in which way would the sense faculties of one who sees it as real be defective? || 403 ||¹²⁹

In other words, if the halo were truly its own real entity, distinct from the observed light source on the one hand and the observer on the other, then there must be something defective about the faculties of those who are unable to see it! Such a halo would have to be supersensible (*atīndriya*), beyond the reach of ordinary, properly-functioning sense faculties, and only visible to those whose vision is weak or impaired. But this, naturally, is nonsense. Thus, Dharmakīrti remarks with his trademark sarcastic wit,

This one who sees the supersensible [halo] has a clear eye, corrected by ocular disease (*timira*)! So how is it that this [eye] is unclear with respect to an object that is visible (*dṛṣya*) to the eye of another? || 404 ||¹³⁰

The upshot here is that, given the definition of the sensory object as that which causes the sensory cognition to possess the phenomenal appearance that it does, by virtue of placing its form into that cognition,¹³¹ the only candidate for the object *qua* cause is the light source:

¹²⁹ Tosaki (1985, 82–83): *tasya tadbāhyarūpatve kā prasannekṣaṇe 'kṣamā | bhūtaṃ paśyaṃś ca taddarśī kathaṅ copahatendriyah* || 403 ||

¹³⁰ Tosaki (1985, 83): *śodhitam timireṇāsya vyaktam cakṣur atīndriyam | paśyato 'nyākṣadṛṣye 'rthe tad avyaktam katham punaḥ* || 404 ||

¹³¹ See Chapter 1, Section II.C: [Mental Perception](#).

Apart from the background light (*āloka*), the eye, and the [requisite] attention (*manaskāra*), one single other thing—[the light source¹³²—is understood to have causal power (*śakti*). There is no other cause apart from it. And how could that which is not a cause be an object (*viṣaya*)? || 405 ||¹³³

In other words, only the object—in this case, the source of light—has the causal power to place its form into sensory cognition. The halo is not truly an object at all, but rather merely an artifact of the warped way in which impaired sensory faculties contribute to the process of generating a sensory cognition. If this were not the case, and the halo were its own real ontological entity, rather than a strictly phenomenal feature of the subjective (or, at least, the not quite entirely “objective”) aspect of cognition, why should it only appear around a light source? In such a case, what would it need the source of light for, exactly?

If this [halo] really (*eva*) is the cause of the cognition, why does it need the light source? Nor are both the cause, since the cognition arises exclusively from the light source. || 406 ||¹³⁴

In subsequent verses, Dharmakīrti pursues this line of argumentation even further, litigating the minutiae of the effects on visual cognition of the relative distance between the observer and the object (PV 3.407), the brightness or dimness of the background light (PV 3.408-413), and “the Unseen” (*adrṣṭa*, PV 3.414).¹³⁵ The details of these arguments need not detain us here. The bottom line is summarized in PV 3.415:

¹³² Cf. PVP (575.7-8): *gzhan gcig gi mar me'i nus pa rtogs par 'gyur gyi | dkyil 'khor gyi ni ma yin no ||*

¹³³ Tosaki (1985, 84): *ālokākṣamanaskārād anyasyaikasya gamyate | śaktir hetus tato nānyo 'hetuś ca viṣayaḥ katham || 405 ||*

¹³⁴ Tosaki (1985, 84): *sa eva yadi dhīhetuḥ kiṃ pradīpam apekṣate | dīpamātreṇa dhībhāvād ubhayan nāpi kāraṇam || 406 ||*

¹³⁵ Taber (2005, 184n33) notes that “in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thought *adrṣṭa* is an ‘unseen’ force, if you will, which is invoked to account for otherwise inexplicable phenomena, such as karmic retribution.”

Therefore, the awareness arising in dependence upon the object contains the difference in the appearance, in accordance with the cause [of the difference]. Remaining [explanations] are [just] the wrong views of the foolish. || 415 ||¹³⁶

In other words, subjective variations in the quality of an experience are inherent features of the experience of an object, and do not exist separately from the object-appearance. This applies both to affective variations, such as pleasure and pain, as well as to non-affective variations, such as the dullness or sharpness of the experience, or the nonconceptual sensory errors that arise due to the observer's own impairment. In the case of a halo, for example, the object—that with the causal power to place its form in cognition—is the light source. The halo, while apparent, is only the result of this light being warped by a defective sensory faculty. It has no real ontological existence apart from the observer's mind, and is accordingly only a subjective feature of the sensory awareness of the light source.

¹³⁶ Tosaki (1985, 94): *tasmāt saṃvid yathāhetu jāyamānā 'rthasaṃśrayāt | pratibhāsabhidāṃ dhatte śeṣāḥ kumatidurnayāḥ || 415 ||*

III. The Affective Features of Conceptual Determination

A. The Determination of the Object is Reflexively-Experienced

Having completed our overview of Dharmakīrti's initial discussion of the reflexive awareness of pleasure and pain, and subjective variations in the quality of experience generally, we are now finally in position to return to the argument in PS(V) 1.9bcd. So far, our study of the Perception Chapter has mainly focused on nonconceptual, sensory cognition. But a key point of PS 1.9b, and one of the key points of PV 3 taken as a whole, is that the preceding analysis applies not only to nonconceptual perceptual cognition, but also to conceptual cognitions such as inferences and determinate judgments. To repeat: conceptual cognitions are also reflexively-experienced.¹³⁷ The essential difference between conceptual and nonconceptual cognitions is simply that conceptual cognitions do not possess the vivid appearance of a nonconceptual perceptual object, because they are not directly causally derived from their object. Rather, the objective aspect of a conceptual cognition presents a non-vivid conceptual exclusion (*apoha*) or universal (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*), in effect a type of mental object, such as inferential evidence (*liṅga*). But the underlying epistemic structure is exactly the same: conceptual cognitions, just like nonconceptual cognitions, are reflexively-experienced in both their subjective and objective aspects, simultaneously.

The upshot here is that, just as the initial nonconceptual sensory cognition of the epistemic object is reflexively-experienced, in just this way, the subsequent conceptual determination of the object also has reflexive awareness as its nature. And this is true no matter whether the determined object is held to exist internally or externally with respect to the mind. In other words, even under

¹³⁷ See Chapter 1, Section III.A: [The Vivid Appearance of Cognition](#); and Chapter 4, Section I.A.2: [Perceptuality and Nonconceptuality, Revisited](#).

an epistemological paradigm wherein a cognition—including, paradigmatically, a conceptual cognition such as a determinate judgment—is taken to derive its object-appearance from extramental matter,¹³⁸ the knowledge of the object (i.e., the *phala* or *pramiti*) must be understood just as an experience. In this sense, because every experience is reflexively self-experiencing by nature, reflexive awareness may always be considered the “result.” This is also precisely the sense in which even nominally non-perceptual cognitions such as inferences may be properly understood as “perceptions” (*pratyakṣas*): because they are perceptual, in terms of the perceptual *pramāṇa* of reflexive awareness, *with respect to themselves as cognitions*.¹³⁹ In these terms, the actual knowledge (*pramiti*) of a conceptual determination just is the nonconceptual reflexive awareness of that conceptual determination.

The other key point of PS 1.9b is that, because the two aspects of cognition are not in fact ontologically-distinct entities, the reflexive awareness of the objective aspect (whether vivid or non-vivid, conceptual or nonconceptual) necessarily simultaneously includes the reflexive awareness of the subjective aspect. Because of the *sahopalambhaniyama*, that is to say, the object-appearance of cognition is always presented simultaneously with the self-appearance of cognition. And this self-appearance of cognition paradigmatically includes the felt desirability or undesirability of the object-appearance, or whatever other affective or non-affective subjective variations in the quality of experience, *because these subjective variations in the quality of*

¹³⁸ Of course, it should be recalled that, even within an External Realist paradigm, a determinate judgment is only a second- or third-order derivation from the putative external matter that is its nominal object. To review: a conceptual cognition involves an “exclusion” (*apoha*), which selectively omits causal information or phenomenal features from an immediately-preceding sensory or mental cognition. This preceding sensory or mental cognition in turn constitutes either the first- or second-order cognition of the object in question, respectively, depending upon whether the judgment is made immediately and directly from the initial sensory cognition (i.e., *pratyakṣaprṣṭhalabdhaniscaya*), or whether it is made on the basis of a mental-cognitive perception (*mānasapratyakṣa*) which takes that initial sensory cognition as its own object. See Chapter 1, note [53](#).

¹³⁹ Cf. PS 1.7ab and PV 3.287, discussed in Chapter 1, Section III.A: [The Vivid Appearance of Cognition](#).

experience are the very nature of the subjective aspect of cognition. Put slightly differently, the point here is that, if reflexive awareness is *not* considered to be the “result,” then it is difficult to account for how the determined object is experienced to be pleasant or unpleasant.

This, again, is why Dharmakīrti goes through such pains to demonstrate that pleasure is a “knower” (*vedaka*) of the object: pleasure, which is to say, *the reflexive awareness of pleasure*, simultaneously discloses *both* the self-appearance or subjective “feeling” (*vedanā*) of pleasure, *as well as* the pleasing object-appearance. And this is what Dinnāga means by “one cognizes the object in conformity with how it is reflexively experienced, i.e., as either desirable or undesirable.”¹⁴⁰ As Jinendrabuddhi writes *ad* PS 1.9d,

That is to say, in whichever way (*yathā yathā*) the image of the object presents itself (*sanniviśate*) within cognition, as attractive or unattractive or whatever, reflexive awareness manifests (*prathate*) in that exact way. And in whichever way [reflexive awareness] appears, the object is ascertained in that exact way, as having a form (and so on) that is attractive or unattractive or whatever. For if [cognition] arises with that image, then there must be the awareness of [the cognition] itself as being like that [i.e., attractive or unattractive or whatever]. And it must therefore be the case that the ascertainment of the object [occurs] by dint of that [awareness]—not otherwise.¹⁴¹

Hence, the experience of an object—up to and including the case of a determinate judgment, wherein this “object” is a conceptual universal—is, *a fortiori*, the experience of the desirability or undesirability of that object as it is experienced in that moment.

¹⁴⁰ PSV *ad* PS 1.9b: *svasaṃvedanānurūpam arthaṃ pratipadyata iṣṭam aniṣṭaṃ vā |*

¹⁴¹ Steinkellner (2005b, 72.14–73.2): *tathā hi yathā yathārthākāro jñāne sanniviśate śubhāśubhādirūpeṇa, tathā tathā svasaṃvittiḥ prathate | yathā yathā ca sā khyāti, tathā tathārtho niścīyate śubhāśubhādirūpādiḥ | yadi hi tadākāram utpannam syāt, tadā tādrśasyātmanah svavittiḥ syāt | tataś ca tadvaśād viṣayaniścayo bhavet, nānyathā.*

B. A Comprehensive Ontological Perspective

1. *Dharmakīrti and Jinendrabuddhi on PS 1.9b*

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the question of how to interpret PV 3.320-352 *ad* PS(V) 1.9 in terms of the ontological distinction between External Realism and Epistemic Idealism has generated no small amount of controversy, particularly (though by no means exclusively) in the Japanese-language scholarly literature.¹⁴² Much of this controversy revolves around the question of whether PS(V) 1.9b, specifically, should be read as Dinnāga’s articulation of an exclusively idealistic “Yogācāra” perspective, or whether this particular passage is intended to apply generally, i.e., for an externalist “Sautrāntika” perspective as well.

It is perhaps best to note, first of all, that this question could never be definitively answered based on Dinnāga’s text, precisely because the text is too ambiguous to yield anything other than an under-determined meaning. Indeed, for commentators ancient and modern, part of the appeal of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* may be its pronounced ambiguity, since it allows commentators to assert a considerable range of interpretations without fear that the text itself will be used to show an interpretation’s implausibility, except in the most outlandish cases. One might, however, follow the subsequent history of the interpretation of the text by Dharmakīrti and his followers and basically split the difference: Dinnāga’s point, in essence, is that even the Sautrāntikas must accept that cognition has no *direct* access to any external object.

Even if there are external objects, in other words, it must be understood that, at least under some conditions, “the object is a cognition, inclusive of the object-field” (*saviṣayaṃ jñānam*

¹⁴² See the discussion in Appendix A, note 5.

arthah). Thus, even if this argument requires or asserts an idealistic *epistemology*, it is in a sense agnostic as to the underlying *ontology*. Indeed, this may be seen as a pivotal juncture on the “sliding scale,” highlighting how even those who maintain the existence of external objects must nevertheless acknowledge that external objects are only ever known insofar as they are the object-field of a cognition, paving the way for the acceptance of an idealistic ontology, once the arguments against the existence of extramental objects are deployed.

Again: for Diñnāga, as for Dharmakīrti, it is simply never the case that one is *directly* aware of anything other than cognition. Thus, according to Dharmakīrti’s interpretation of Diñnāga, even representationalists (like the Sautrāntikas) who assert the existence of extramental matter must accept that the determination of the object necessarily includes the subjective variations in the quality of that determination, such as the felt desirability or undesirability of the determined object. This is because, axiomatically, representationalists accept that the epistemic object is only ever known “by means of” the cognitive image or representation. And since this cognitive image is by definition cognitive, it is presented just as a cognition, which is to say, with the “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) of its “cognitively-natured-ness” (*jñānarūpatva*), paradigmatically including its subjective or affective features.

Even leaving aside the question of how to interpret Diñnāga on his own terms, however, there is still the issue of how to understand Dharmakīrti’s perspective. On this note, Kellner (2010, 225) has suggested that Jinendrabuddhi “departs from Dharmakīrti,” insofar as Dharmakīrti articulates an “internalist interpretation of PS(V) 1.9b in PV 3.339.” The crux of the problem, regarding Jinendrabuddhi’s commentary specifically, concerns his explanation of PSV *ad* PS 1.9b, “For when the object is a cognition, inclusive of the object-field” (*saviṣayaṃ jñānam arthaḥ*):

Now, why wasn't only this much said [by Dinnāga]: “The object is cognized, in conformity with the experience, as desirable or undesirable”? What is the point of, “For, when the object is a cognition, inclusive of the object-field”?

There is a purpose [for this phrase], since previously [at PS 1.6ab] it was stated that reflexive awareness is an epistemic instrument, and that the nature (*svarūpa*) of a cognition is known by means of [reflexive awareness]; hence, it is clearly determined that reflexive awareness is the result of that very [cognition]. And therefore, if it is exclusively said¹⁴³ that the object is cognized as being desirable or undesirable, in conformity with reflexive awareness, for some there might be a doubt as to whether this presentation (*vyavasthāna*) of [reflexive awareness as] the result is exclusively made when reflexive awareness is the perceptual [*pramāṇa*].

But (*ca*) [reflexive awareness] is the result (*phala*) for every epistemic instrument. Thus, for the purpose of eliminating that doubt, [Dinnāga] said: “For, when the object is a cognition, inclusive of the object-field.” The word “object” (*artha*) expresses the epistemic object (*prameya*).¹⁴⁴ And “together with the object” is an indeclinable compound in the mode of totality (*sākalye* 'vyayībhāvaḥ).¹⁴⁵ Hence, it is stated that it is not exclusively when one expects (*apekṣate*) the epistemic object of the epistemic instrument to be a cognition, that the object is cognized in conformity with reflexive awareness, [and] thus reflexive awareness is the result. Rather, even when [one expects] an [external] object-field (*viśaya*) [to be the epistemic object], in that case as well, [reflexive awareness is the result].¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ PST_T (80.16-17) has 'dod pa 'am mi 'dod pa 'i don rtogs par byed do zhes pa 'di tsaṃ brjod pa na | for MSS *iṣṭam aniṣṭam* **veṭīyatyucyamāṇe* (emended, on the basis of this Tibetan translation, to *vety evocyamāṇe*).

¹⁴⁴ It should be noted that this gloss cuts somewhat against Jinendrabuddhi's argument. That is, what distinguishes External Realist ontology as such is the assertion that the epistemic object (*prameya*) is an external object, even if this external epistemic object is only ever known by means of its cognitive representation or image. But Jinendrabuddhi is trying to argue that Dinnāga's position at PS 1.9b is meant to apply in all ontological contexts, i.e., both when the epistemic object is internal and when the epistemic object is external.

¹⁴⁵ Concerning the interpretation of this compound (*sākalye* 'vyayībhāvaḥ), see the discussion in Appendix A, note 5.

¹⁴⁶ Steinkellner (2005b, 71.1-11): *atha saṃvedanānurūpam arthaṃ pratipadyata iṣṭam aniṣṭam vety etāvad eva kiṃ noktam | kiṃ yadā hi saviṣayam jñānam arthaḥ tadety anena | asti prayojanam yasmāt prāk svasaṃvedanam pramāṇam uktam, tena ca jñānasvarūpam eva saṃvedyata iti svasaṃvedanam tasyaiva phalam iti sphuṭam avasīyate | tatas ca svasaṃvedanānurūpam hy arthaṃ pratipadyata iṣṭam aniṣṭam vety evocyamāṇe* [em. MSS **veṭīyatyucyamāṇe*; see note 143] *svasaṃvedanam eva pratyakṣam adhiḥkṛtyedaṃ phalavyavasthānam iti kasyacid āśāṅkā syāt | sarvasya ca pramāṇasyedaṃ phalam iti | ata āśāṅkānivāraṇārtham yadā hi saviṣayam jñānam artha ity uktam | arthaśabdaś cāyam prameyavacanah | saviṣayam iti ca sākalye 'vyayībhāvaḥ | ata etad uktam bhavati na kevalam yadā jñānam pramāṇasya prameyam apekṣate, tadā svasaṃvedanānurūpam arthaṃ pratipadyata iti svasaṃvittiḥ phalam, api tu yadāpi viṣayam, tadāpiti ||*

In other words, Jinendrabuddhi has a rhetorical interlocutor ask what the point of this phrase is supposed to be, since it is already understood that every cognition is known by means of reflexive awareness, i.e., that reflexive awareness can always be construed as the epistemic instrument. In response, Jinendrabuddhi asserts that there is a purpose for this phrase, because it might be unclear whether the presentation of reflexive awareness *as the result* applies exclusively when reflexive awareness is construed as the epistemic instrument. Dinnāga therefore mentions *saviṣayam jñānam* “in the mode of totality” (*sakalye ’vyayībhāvaḥ*) in order to eliminate this doubt or uncertainty. Hence, in addition to the possibility of construing reflexive awareness as the instrument, reflexive awareness can also always be understood as the result, even when it is maintained that there exists an external object-field.

How well Jinendrabuddhi’s explanation here actually tracks with Dinnāga’s intended argument constitutes something of an open and likely unresolvable question. For our purposes, though, the key question is not Jinendrabuddhi’s perspective, or even Dinnāga’s, but rather Dharmakīrti’s. Does Jinendrabuddhi actually “depart from Dharmakīrti,” insofar as Dharmakīrti explains PS(V) 1.9b along exclusively idealistic or “internalist” lines?

As it turns out, while Dharmakīrti does advance an idealist or “internalist” perspective in PV 3.339, specifically, this is not true for his discussion of PS 1.9b taken as a whole (i.e., PV 3.338-345). In fact, in a manner which is precisely analogous to the multiple and partially-overlapping ontological perspectives provided in the analysis of PS 1.9a (PV 3.320-337), discussed above in Chapter 4, Dharmakīrti provides both External Realist and Epistemic Idealist explanations of the main point here, to the effect that the conceptual determination of the object has reflexive awareness as its nature. Jinendrabuddhi’s all-inclusive explanation thus tracks Dharmakīrti’s perspective exactly, irrespective of whether or not this perspective in turn tracks

Dinnāga’s own. Indeed, Dharmakīrti begins his analysis by framing it in terms of an External Realist perspective:

When something other [than the mind]¹⁴⁷ is [considered to be] the object-field— i.e., the cause of the mental representation (*vijñapti*)—[that extramental object] is not¹⁴⁸ established as something desirable or undesirable in and of itself (*tadbhāva*); and the experience of that [mental representation] is accordingly [desirable or undesirable]. || 338 ||¹⁴⁹

Even from the most basic External Realist perspective, in other words, it must be understood that the desirability or undesirability of the object is in fact a subjective feature of the cognition in which the object appears, rather than an “objective” feature of the object’s true nature.

2. *Determination is Always Reflexively-Experienced*

Dharmakīrti then clarifies that, from an Epistemic Idealist perspective, conceptual determinations should properly be understood as experiences of experience itself:

¹⁴⁷ Devendrabuddhi glosses (540.4): “Something else, i.e., an external object” (*gzhan te phyi rol gyi don*).

¹⁴⁸ This verse presents a philological challenge. See the discussion in Appendix C, note [195](#).

¹⁴⁹ Tosaki (1985, 22): *yadāniṣpannatadbhāva iṣṭo ’niṣṭo ’pi vā paraḥ | vijñaptihetur viśayas tasyās cānubhavas tathā || 338 ||*

When the cognition [is understood to] include the object-field (*yadā saviṣayam jñānam*),¹⁵⁰ then, because the object is construed as an aspect of cognition, the determination of the object is just an experience of [the determining cognition] itself. || 339 ||¹⁵¹

As an aside, this also highlights how, for Dharmakīrti, both duality and conceptuality—both, in their own ways, artifacts of ignorance—may be present, even when cognition is properly understood in intellectual (and perhaps even in experiential or contemplative) terms as lacking any extramental stimulus. That is to say, Dharmakīrti implicitly acknowledges that, even for those who practice *yogācāra* and correctly realize that all phenomena are only mind, there may still be conceptual determinations, and these determinations may still be presented dualistically.

Thus, as Jinendrabuddhi writes, albeit in a slightly different (though closely related) context:¹⁵²

On this point, there are two views: the view that the epistemic object is internal (*antarjñeyavāda*), and the view that objects are external (*bāhyārthavāda*). For the Epistemic Idealists (*antarjñeyavādins*), in the state of not seeing the nature of reality (*tattva*), there is an epistemic instrument and an epistemic object, but (*ca*) they are just not ultimately established. Rather, the experience (*darśana*) of a

¹⁵⁰ Dharmakīrti appears to gloss *saviṣayam* here as the standard *saha viṣayeṇa*, implying an idealistic perspective, rather than in Jinendrabuddhi's all-encompassing sense. However, it must be noted that the contrasting perspectives which Dharmakīrti articulates at PV 3.338 and 339 together provide the same kind of comprehensive gloss on Dinnāga's phrase as Jinendrabuddhi's. In other words, Dharmakīrti is careful to specify that the conceptual determination of the object has the nature of reflexive awareness, whether the object is considered to exist externally (338) or internally (339) with respect to the mind, in what amounts to the same way that Jinendrabuddhi does.

This point can be clarified by a rhetorical analysis. Because the PST constitutes a direct commentary on the PS(V), Jinendrabuddhi's concern was essentially grammatical, since he had to explain how the single compound *saviṣayam* could apply to these two different ontological contexts. Dharmakīrti, not being thus bound by a rigid commentarial format, could gloss this particular phrase in a more straightforward way, while still maintaining that the argument in PS 1.9b (corresponding to PV 3.338-345) is meant to apply irrespective of the ontological context. And this is the substance of Jinendrabuddhi's point.

¹⁵¹ Tosakī (1985, 24): *yadā saviṣayam jñānam jñānāmśe 'rthavyavasthiteḥ | tadā ya ātmānubhavaḥ sa evārthaviniścayaḥ || 339 ||*

¹⁵² The context for Jinendrabuddhi's comments here is his discussion of Dinnāga's refutation of the definition of perception from Vasubandhu's *Vādaividhi*. See Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.14cd](#).

presentation with an object and an instrument of epistemic measurement (*meyamānavyavasthita*) accords with the experience of those who are in error.¹⁵³

Once again, in other words, it is critically important to understand *yogācāra* as a graduated process, rather than as an “all or nothing.” Recognizing that all phenomena are “mind only” (*cittamātra*) is but the first stage of this process. Those who have recognized “mind-only” are still in error to the extent that their experience of “mind only” is dualistically structured in terms of a phenomenal subject and object, or to the extent that they possess the imprint of conceptual ignorance which allows for determinations to be made in the first place.¹⁵⁴ Ultimately, however, the distorted dualistic structure of instrument and result, to say nothing of the ignorance that is coextensive with conceptuality as such,¹⁵⁵ must vanish.

But to return to the matter at hand, concerning the ontological context of PV 3.338-345 *ad* PS 1.9b: Kellner notes in this connection that Dharmakīrti “conveniently... omits Dignāga’s *arthaḥ* and thus turns the condition into ‘when cognition bears the object’” (*yadā saviṣayaṃ jñānam*). This point is well-taken, in the sense that Dharmakīrti’s gloss of this phrase, in PV 3.339 specifically, does imply an exclusively Epistemic Idealist perspective in that particular verse. At the same time, as highlighted by PV 3.338, Dharmakīrti explicitly explains the argument in PS 1.9b along both “externalist” and “internalist” lines. Indeed, in this passage, he primarily articulates an External Realist perspective:

¹⁵³ Steinkellner (2005b, 90.6-8): *iha dvaye vādino 'ntarjñeyavādino bāhyārthavādināś ca | tatrāntarjñeyavādinām adṛṣṭatattvāvasthāyāṃ pramāṇaṃ prameyaṃ cāpariniṣpannam eva tattvataḥ | kevalaṃ bhrāntatānāṃ yathādarśanam idaṃ mānameyavyavasthitidarśanam |*

¹⁵⁴ Recall that, as discussed above, Ratnākaraśānti argues that Buddhas retain a “tiny bit of ignorance,” just in order to be able to share enough in the experiential world of ordinary unawakened sentient beings that they are able to conventionally interact with the latter. See Chapter 4, Section II.C.3: [Idealism and Solipsism](#).

¹⁵⁵ Recall PVSV *ad* PV 1.98-99ab: “ignorance is just conceptuality” (*vikalpa eva hy avidyā*).

Whether the nature of the [cognition] is experienced as a desirable image (*iṣṭākāra*), or otherwise, the object is sensed (*pravedita*) as being desirable or undesirable by virtue of this [image]. || 340 ||¹⁵⁶

Even if an external object were to exist, the nature [of that object] can only be ascertained [as desirable or undesirable] in accord with how it was experienced—it could not be [ascertained as desirable or undesirable] by virtue of its own nature (*svarūpa*), since there would be the fault of a non-singular nature.¹⁵⁷ Even if it is accepted [that an entity is desirable or undesirable by virtue of its inherent essential nature], there could be no experience [of an inherently desirable or undesirable object] as different [in terms of desirability and undesirability] on the part of two [different people]. || 341-342ab ||¹⁵⁸

As an aside, Dharmakīrti does not specify here whether the “desirable image” in question is the subject-image or the object-image (i.e., the *grāhakākāra* or the *grāhyākāra*), but in a sense this is precisely the point: when an object is experienced to be desirable, its desirability is simultaneously reflected in both the subjective and the objective aspects of the cognition—which, again, are not actually distinct, because cognition is in fact nondual.

However, Dharmakīrti’s main point here is that the desirability or undesirability of the cognized object is a strictly cognitive feature of the object-cognition, irrespective of whether the object *qua* causal stimulus of this object-cognition is understood to exist internally or externally to the mind. Subjective variations in the quality of experience—paradigmatically, but not exclusively, affective features such as pleasure or desire—are not, in other words, an observer-independent feature of the object’s real nature. Even if it is asserted that sensory cognition derives its object-appearance from extramental matter, that is to say, it must nevertheless be granted that

¹⁵⁶ Tosaki (1985, 25): *yadīṣṭākāra ātmā 'syā anyathā vā 'nubhūyate | iṣṭo 'niṣṭo 'pi vā tena bhavaty arthaḥ praveditaḥ* || 340 ||

¹⁵⁷ That is, a single entity would have the nature of simultaneously being both desirable and undesirable.

¹⁵⁸ Tosaki (1985, 25–27): *yadīṣṭākāra ātmā 'syā anyathā vā 'nubhūyate | iṣṭo 'niṣṭo 'pi vā tena bhavaty arthaḥ praveditaḥ* || 340 || *vidyamāne 'pi bāhye 'rthe yathānubhavam eva saḥ | niścītātmā svarūpeṇa nānekātmavadoṣataḥ* || 341 || *abhyupāye 'pi bhedenā na syād anubhavo dvayoḥ |*

the felt desirability (etc.) of an object pertains solely to the nature *of the object-cognition* (specifically, the object-cognition’s subjective aspect), rather than to the actual object itself.

Dharmakīrti similarly concludes¹⁵⁹ his analysis of PS 1.9b along these lines, by setting aside the question of ontology, since this analysis is meant to apply in all cases:

Therefore, even if the epistemic object (*prameya*) is external, it is correct that reflexive experience (*svānubhava*) is the result (*phala*), because the object is determined precisely in accord with the manner in which its nature [is reflexively experienced]. || 345 ||¹⁶⁰

In other words, since the object-image is ontologically identical to the cognition itself, the appearance of the object-image (or, the existence of an object-appearance) is actually the reflexive awareness of the object-cognition itself. But since the object-image is also ontologically identical to the subject-image, the object can only ever be determined in the manner that it is subjectively experienced, i.e., as desirable or undesirable or whatever.

C. Difference in Object (*viṣayabheda*)

1. *Cognition and Causal Activity, Revisited*

To step back for a moment and examine the flow of argumentation at PS(V) 1.9 in broad outline: according to the Dharmakīrtian tradition of interpretation, PS 1.9a argues that reflexive awareness may always be understood as the “result,” irrespective of the ontological context. Then, as

¹⁵⁹ PV 3.342cd-343, translated in Appendix C ([PV 3.338-345 ad PS\(V\) 1.9b](#)), concerns a minor argument, to the effect that “the Unseen” (*adr̥ṣṭa*) can be causally responsible for the apprehension of an inherently desirable object as undesirable. PV 3.344 was briefly discussed above, in Section II.A.2: ([Experiences of Pleasure and Pain are Particulars](#)).

¹⁶⁰ Tosaki (1985, 30): *tasmāt prameye bāhye ’pi yuktaṃ svānubhavaḥ phalam | yataḥ svabhāvo ’sya yathā tathāivārthaviniścayaḥ || 345 ||*

discussed above, PS 1.9b explains that this is because the determination of the object has reflexive awareness as its nature. Thus, the desirability or undesirability of the object must be understood as a built-in (and “subjective”) feature of the experience of the object, demonstrating in turn that the object is only ever known (*vedya*) insofar as it is thus “subjectively” experienced, irrespective of whether the object itself is held to exist internally or externally to the mind. In other words, because of the restriction to the effect that the object-appearance is always necessarily accompanied by the self-appearance of the cognition “in which” or “to which” this object-appearance appears (i.e., the *sahopalambhaniyama*), the reflexive awareness of the object-appearance—which is not actually separate from the reflexive awareness of the self-appearance of cognition—can always be considered the “resulting” (*phala*) knowledge of the object.

By all accounts, at PS 1.9cd, Dinnāga then shifts to an exclusively External Realist perspective. “But when the epistemic object is strictly an external object,” he writes, “the epistemic instrument is the property of having the appearance of the object-field, on the part of that [cognition] [9cd₁]. The nature [of the cognition] is that which is reflexively known by the cognition. Nevertheless, in this case, without regard to that [reflexively-known] nature, the epistemic instrument is just the [cognition’s] property of possessing the appearance of the object. This is because the object is known by means of that [appearance] [9d₂].”¹⁶¹

In PV 3.346-352, corresponding to PS(V) 1.9cd, Dharmakīrti is accordingly careful to explain that, in this specifically External Realist ontological context, it is not appropriate to construe the subjective aspect of cognition as the *pramāṇa*:

¹⁶¹ PS(V) 1.9cd: *yadā tu bāhya evārthaḥ prameyaḥ, tadā viśayābhāsataivāsya pramāṇam | tadā hi jñānasvasamvedyam api svarūpam anapekṣyārthābhāsataivāsya pramāṇam | yasmāt so ’rthaḥ tena mīyate || 9 ||*

In this case, when there are external objects, one simply relies upon the [cognition's] property of having the appearance of the object, as the epistemic instrument for that [object]. But [in this case, one does] not [rely upon] the subjective nature [of the cognition as the *pramāṇa*], even though it is present, because its object is not separate [from cognition]. || 346 ||¹⁶²

In an External Realist context, that is to say, the epistemic instrument should only be considered cognition's property of possessing the form of the object (*viṣayābhāsatā*). This is because an epistemic instrument exists “for the purpose of” knowing some epistemic object; and, in an External Realist context, unless one is specifically interested in attending to the affective features of one's own experience, the epistemic object “to be known” (*vedya*) by definition exists outside of the mind. Therefore, when analyzing the relationship between the epistemic instrument and the epistemic object in terms of the knowledge of an external object, specifically, it would be inappropriate to consider the subjective aspect as the instrument, because the subjective aspect of cognition only “apprehends” the objective aspect of cognition—it does not “apprehend” the external object directly.

But it is critically important to recall here, once again, that cognition is in fact devoid of causal activity (*nirvyāpāra*), which is to emphasize yet again that under no circumstances is there any transitive activity of “apprehension” occurring. To repeat: it is *not* actually the case that the subjective aspect of cognition “apprehends” the objective aspect, so much as that this subjective aspect may be spoken of as the “structuring” (*vyavasthāpaka*) element of cognition, about which the object-image is “structured” (*vyavasthāpya*).¹⁶³ Indeed, despite already having clearly stated

¹⁶² Tosaki (1985, 31): *tadārthābhāsataivāsya pramāṇaṃ na tu sann api | grāhakātmā 'parārthatvād bāhyeṣv artheṣv apekṣyate || 346 ||*

¹⁶³ See above, Section I: [Reflexive Awareness and “Self-Appearance” \(*svābhāsa*\)](#).

that cognition is devoid of causal activity in the PSV *ad* PS 1.8cd,¹⁶⁴ Dinnāga concludes PSV *ad* PS 1.9d by going out of his way to repeat this critically-important point: “but all phenomena are devoid of causal activity” (*nirvyāpārās tu sarvadharmāḥ*).

This once again highlights how phenomenological duality is nothing more than a form of cognitive error or distortion. Contemplative adepts who have intellectually—or even, to some incomplete extent, experientially—come to understand that cognition is not the awareness of some real external world, but rather the manifestation of latent karmic imprints, are themselves still in error to the extent that their awareness still appears as though there were a “structuring” apprehending subject and a “structured” apprehended object. Jinendrabuddhi thus comments, *ad* PS 1.9d:

“But all phenomena are devoid of causal activity”: this points out that an awareness of cognition (*jñānaśamvedana*) is distorted. For, in reality (*tattvataḥ*), it is impossible to have a conventional interaction, which is by nature an experience with a non-singular image,¹⁶⁵ with any phenomenon, because images are not truly established. Although this is just error, those who are blinded by ignorance nevertheless “see” cognition, which¹⁶⁶ is [in reality] without the images of knower and known.¹⁶⁷

In other words, even properly understanding “object-cognition” to be the awareness of a cognitive image of the object (i.e., *jñānaśamvit*), rather than mistakenly construing sensory cognition as the

¹⁶⁴ See Chapter 2.

¹⁶⁵ That is to say, conventional interaction with ordinary phenomena requires that cognition appear bifurcated into the subject-image and the object-image (“multiple images”).

¹⁶⁶ The Sanskrit manuscript has an extra *tat* (see note [167](#)), which has no correlate in the Tibetan translation, serves no identifiable purpose, and makes no sense.

¹⁶⁷ Steinkellner (2005b, 75.4-7): *nirvyāpārās tu sarvadharmā iti | etena tasya jñānaśamvedanasya bhrāntatvam udbhāvitam | na hi tattvataḥ kasyacid dharmasyānekākāradarśanātmako vyavahāraḥ sambhavati, ākāraṇām apariniṣpannatvāt | bhrāntir eva tu sā, yad avidyāndhā avedyavedakākāram [em. MSS *avidyāndhās tadavedyavedakākāram] api jñānaṃ tathā paśyanti |*

awareness of an external object *per se* (i.e., *arthasamvit*) in some unproblematic sense, is insufficient on its own. Even from a baseline Epistemic Idealist perspective, there is still work to do, in order to eliminate the ignorance which produces the dualistic distortion of subject and object.

But it is a direct implication of Jinendrabuddhi’s argument here, in line with the “False Imagist” perspective, that all cognitive images must eventually disappear. That is to say, Jinendrabuddhi explicitly states here that cognitive images *as such* are “not truly established” (*apariniṣpanna*);¹⁶⁸ in this way, Jinendrabuddhi explicitly denies that there is any kind of conventional interaction (*vyavahāra*) in ultimate terms (*tattvataḥ*). For neither the first¹⁶⁹ nor the last¹⁷⁰ time, then, we are left in something of a theoretical aporia. That is to say: if even a causally isomorphic nonconceptual sensory cognition, nonerroneous for all practical conventional purposes, and furthermore correctly characterized as the awareness of a cognition (rather than the awareness of purportedly extramental matter); if even such a cognition as this must nevertheless still be understood as erroneous, just insofar as it is structured by the phenomenological duality of subject and object, then in what sense can this type of cognition be understood as an epistemically-reliable instrument of knowledge (i.e., as a *pramāṇa*)?

¹⁶⁸ While not explicitly framed in terms of the Yogācāra theory of the “three natures” (*trisvabhāva*; see Chapter 3, note 107), it is impossible to miss the resonance of the perfected nature (*pariṣpannasvabhāva*) with Jinendrabuddhi’s point here concerning the lack of *pariṣpanna* on the part of *ākāras* (*ākārāṇām apariniṣpannatvāt*). Briefly put: to the extent that interaction with conventionally real, causally-efficacious phenomena (i.e., the dependent nature or *paratantrasvabhāva*) requires the presence of unreal phenomenological duality (i.e., the constructed nature or *parikalpitasvabhāva*), such interaction—and the dual cognitive images which they require—cannot be features of the perfected nature. This bears more than a passing resemblance to Ratnākaraśānti’s “False Imagist” account of the three natures, for which see McNamara (2019).

¹⁶⁹ See Chapter 3, Section II.B: [The Critique of Variegation and the “False Imagist” View \(*alīkākaravāda*\)](#). See also Chapter 4, Section II.C: [Reflexive Awareness and the Ultimate *Pramāṇa*](#).

¹⁷⁰ See PV 3.352, below, in Section III.C.4: [“Honestly, I don’t understand such a thing, either.”](#) See also the [Conclusion](#).

Echoing Dharmakīrti's discussion of the "ultimate *pramāṇa*" in PVin 1.58,¹⁷¹

Jinendrabuddhi continues his commentary *ad* PS 1.9d:

Well, if every cognition on the part of those who do not know reality is just distorted, then how can there be a presentation of *pramāṇa* and what is other [i.e., what is non-*pramāṇa*]? [It is] due to the presence of a specific imprint for error.¹⁷² Since cognitions of touching [water], slaking [thirst], refreshment, and so on can occur, due to a cognition in which there is the appearance of water (or whatever)—which [cognition of water], due to not belying conventional reality, is a *pramāṇa*—[while] the other [type of cognition], because it is devoid of that specific kind of imprint, is not a *pramāṇa*; there is, therefore, no problem.¹⁷³

Ordinary dualistic cognitions may thus be divided into the "instrumental" and the "non-instrumental" (i.e., *pramāṇas* and non-*pramāṇas*), depending upon whether or not they contradict conventional reality. Ultimately, however, precisely because conventional reality is not ultimately real, no dualistic or conventional cognition can serve as a means for knowing ultimate reality.

This aporia is resolved, to the extent that it can be resolved, in PV 3.353-366 *ad* PS 1.10, examined in the Conclusion to this study. At the present juncture, Dharmakīrti only repeats the key point underlying this analysis: that, even when external objects *are* admitted, it is nevertheless still the case that the object is presented, along with the paradigmatically subjective features of the object-cognition, by means of reflexive awareness:

¹⁷¹ See Chapter 2, Section II.D: [Omniscience and the Nature of Awareness](#).

¹⁷² *upaplavavāsanāviśeṣasadbhāvāt*. Compare to PVin1.58: *upaplavavāsanāvisandhidoṣād*.

¹⁷³ Steinkellner (2005b, 75.7-11): *yadi tarhy atattvavidāṃ sarvam eva jñānam upaplutam, katham pramāṇetaravyavasthā | upaplavavāsanāviśeṣasadbhāvāt | yato jalādipratibhāsino jñānāt sparśanāhlādatrptyādipratyayānāṃ sambhavaḥ, tadvyavahārāvīsaṃvādāpekṣayā pramāṇam, itarat tathāvidhavāsanāvīrahād apramāṇam ity adoṣaḥ ||*

Since the nature of the object is presented (*niviṣṭa*) in cognition as [desirable or undesirable], it is determined as [desirable or undesirable]—“This [object] is presented thusly”—through reflexive awareness (*ātmasaṃvit*). || 347 ||¹⁷⁴

Hence, the nature of the object is not observed apart from that very [reflexive awareness of the object-appearance], which is asserted to be the awareness of the object (*arthasaṃvit*).¹⁷⁵ The object as presented in cognition is the instrument (*sādhana*) of the [awareness]; the [awareness] pertaining to that [instrument] is the [resultant] activity (*kriyā*). || 348 ||¹⁷⁶

This line of argumentation highlights the role of reflexive awareness as what has been called a “bridging concept,”¹⁷⁷ linking External Realist (“Sautrāntika”) and Epistemic Idealist (“Yogācāra”) epistemological theories.¹⁷⁸ That is to say, as discussed above, the basic cognitive structure of objective aspect, subjective aspect, and reflexive awareness is the same in all cases.

¹⁷⁴ Tosaki (1985, 32): *yasmād yathā niviṣṭo ’sāv arhātmā pratyaye tathā | niścīyate niviṣṭo ’sāv evam ity ātmasaṃvidah* || 347 ||

¹⁷⁵ This translation follows the sense of Devendrabuddhi’s (543.20-21) comments, which appear to read *yataḥ* as a relative pronoun with the ablative sense of “apart from” (*ma gtogs pa gzhan*). However, it is also possible to translate the first two *padas* as “Hence, this very [reflexive awareness] is asserted to be the awareness of the object, because (*yataḥ*) the nature of the object is not observed [directly, i.e., without first entering into awareness, which is by nature reflexively-aware].” This appears to be how Manorathanandin (Sāṅkṛtyāyana ed., 223) interprets this verse, and is also how Moriyama (2008, 209) translates it. Since both interpretations are grammatically possible, and both meanings are philosophically possible, this may be another instance of Dharmakīrti playing on words (*śleṣa*).

¹⁷⁶ Tosaki (1985, 32–33): *ity arthasaṃvit saiveṣṭā yato ’rthātmā na dṛṣyate | tasyā buddhiniveśyarthāḥ sādhanam tasya sā kriyā* || 348 ||

¹⁷⁷ Kellner (2010, 205).

¹⁷⁸ While Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti treat reflexive awareness as though it operates in the same manner, whether from the Sautrāntika or from the Yogācāra perspective, this treatment may obscure some of the intricacies of the Sautrāntika account. Specifically, within Sautrāntika ontology, *vedanā* is understood to be a *caitta*, which is in some way ontologically distinct from *vijñāna* as *citta* (Dhammajoti 2007, 114–32). In other words, on the Sautrāntika account, to the extent that reflexive awareness (i.e., *svasaṃvedana*) is analyzeable just as a type of *vedanā*, it may need to be understood as a discrete *dharma* (i.e., a *caitta*), distinct from sensory cognition (i.e., the *citta* of *indriyavijñāna*).

Indeed, on the Sautrāntika model, *vedanā* in general is not simultaneous with *vijñāna*, but rather arises subsequently to it, raising the possibility that on at least some Sautrāntika accounts, the “reflexive awareness” occurs *after* the sensory cognition; in fact, according to Yao (2005, 97–113), this is precisely the view of Kumāralāta’s influential student Harivarman (ca. 250-350). Such an account would in turn draw a sharp line between the Sautrāntikas and Dharmakīrti, for whom reflexive awareness is an inherent, simultaneous, and ontologically-inseparable feature of every *vijñāna*. In any case, as Dhammajoti (2007, 125) notes, “It is clear... that in Śrīlāta’s doctrine, *vijñāna* may or may not be accompanied by *vedanā*. However, the existential [i.e., ontological] status of the two mental *dharma*s—where *vijñāna* is accompanied by *vedanā*, and where the distinct function of sensation is being exercised—remains obscure.”

Whether the object is internal or external, cognition arises with a certain object-appearance, due to the causal factors conditioning its production; in the case of an internal object, these causal factors are simply understood to be latent dispositions or karmic imprints (*vāsanā*).

However, this “bridging” dual role played by reflexive awareness raises a potential *pramāṇa*-theoretical problem, since—in the External Realist context—on the one hand, it is said that cognition is aware of an external object, while on the other hand, it is also said that cognition is only reflexively aware of itself. How, or in what sense, can cognition be aware of two things at the same time?

2. *Kumārila’s Critique of PS 1.9*

Despite the preceding analysis—to the effect that, in the context of External Realism, the epistemic object should be considered extramental matter—the fundamental insight undergirding Dharmakīrti’s presentation of External Realism is that there is no such thing as “the awareness of an object,” over and above the awareness of the cognitive image or phenomenal form (i.e., the *ākāra*) of that object. In other words, an “object-cognition” is nothing more than the reflexive awareness of a cognition which has causal features that isomorphically correspond to the causal features of its patient or object (in addition to whatever other causal features that influence the subjective or affective mode of its presentation, as per the analysis of subjectivity and the self-appearance of cognition, above). And this reflexive awareness of the object-appearance—in other words, the feature of object-cognition that is inherently self-illuminating or self-presenting—is not, in ontological terms, anything other than the object-cognition itself. Therefore, even when it is asserted that there exists extramental matter, and that cognition is thus aware “of” an external

object in some provisionally-meaningful sense, this account must precisely be understood as provisional, to the extent that what cognition is *directly* (i.e., *pratyakṣataḥ*) aware “of” is itself.

However, this raises a potential problem from the perspective of standard *pramāṇa* theory. To review, *pramāṇa* theory in general proceeds from the principles of Sanskrit grammar, according to which an action (*kriyā*) is divided into several distinct components (*kāraṅas*).¹⁷⁹ Paradigmatically, an action is analyzable as the activity of an agent (*kartr*), upon a patient (*karman*), by means of an instrument (*karāṇa*). These are supposed to be ontologically distinct, which was the essence of the Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā objection to Dinnāga’s position that the *pramāṇa* and the *phala* (i.e., the *karāṇa* and the *kriyā*) are ontologically identical.¹⁸⁰ But furthermore, in theory, for any one given action, there is not supposed to be any overlap, such that two or more agents would act upon the same patient, one agent would employ two or more instruments in order to accomplish the same action, and so on. Rather, there is supposed to be a 1:1:1:1 correspondence between the agent, the instrument, the patient, and the action.

As Moriyama (2008, 207–8) notes, this created an opening for Kumārila and the Mīmāṃsikas to critique Dinnāga’s position. On the one hand, the epistemic object (*prameya*) of reflexive awareness is the object-image (*viśayākāra*) of cognition, or just the object-cognition itself; on the other hand, however, the epistemic object of the object-image is the actual external object (*bāhyārtha*). That is to say, from Dinnāga’s perspective, to the extent that reflexive awareness may be considered a *karāṇa* or instrument, its *karman* or patient is “itself,” in the form of the reflexively-experienced object-appearance. However, to the extent that this very object-appearance may also be considered the *pramāṇa*—which Dinnāga himself was careful to specify

¹⁷⁹ See Chapter 2, Section I: [The Kāraṅa System and Cognition](#).

¹⁸⁰ See Chapter 2, Section III: [The Form of the Object and the Unity of Cognition](#).

at PS 1.8cd, and reiterates at PS 1.9cd—the patient of the object-appearance must be understood as the external object, rather than as cognition.

From the perspective of classical non-Buddhist *pramāṇa* theory, this is self-contradictory. How could the same cognition have two different objects, which is to say, two different patients? For, as has been discussed at length, Dīnnāga was careful to specify that the object-image of cognition and the reflexive awareness of cognition are not actually ontologically distinct entities. So how could one single entity (i.e., one single cognition) have two different objects, namely, the external object on the one hand, and the object-image on the other? As Kumāriḷa writes in the *Ślokavārttika*, *pratyakṣapariccheda* verse 79 (trans. Moriyama),

On the other hand, [the Buddhist claim] that self-awareness is the result is not correct, because this [self-awareness] will be refuted [later].¹⁸¹ It is also not correct because if the means of valid cognition is the object-form (*viṣayākāra*) [of the cognition], then [the means of valid cognition and self-awareness] have different objects (*bhinnārthatva*).¹⁸²

In other words, as Moriyama (2008, 208) explains, “If one emphasizes that a mental form depends causally on an external object, an additional explanation is required for the necessity of self-awareness that does not relate to external objects; if one maintains the theory of self-awareness,

¹⁸¹ A large portion of the *Śūnyavāda* (“Those With the View of Emptiness,” i.e., Buddhists) chapter in the *Ślokavārttika* is comprised of Kumāriḷa’s attempt to refute Dīnnāga’s theory of reflexive awareness. For an overview of some of Kumāriḷa’s arguments in this regard, including an analysis and partial translation of *Śūnyavāda* 10-34, see Taber (2010). In response to Kumāriḷa’s critique there, or perhaps in response to structurally-identical Mīmāṃsā critiques that were circulating in the period when Dharmakīrti was composing the *Pramāṇavārttika* (see Chapter 2, notes 10 and 19), a large portion of PV 3 (primarily, PV 3.425-483) attempts to establish reflexive awareness as an inherent, “first order” feature of cognition.

¹⁸² Moriyama (2008, 207n7): *svasaṃvittiphalatvaṃ tu tanniṣedhān na yujyate | pramāṇe viṣayākāre bhinnārthatvān na yujyate || 79 ||*

For another translation of this verse, see also Taber (2005, 81).

the means of accessing external objects is closed. Buddhist epistemologists are now in a dilemma between these two alternatives.” Or, as Jinendrabuddhi explains the objection:

Opponent: “But does not one wish to demonstrate here that, with regard to the awareness, the isomorphism with the object-field is the instrument? Thus, since it should be said¹⁸³ that [reflexive awareness] appears [in whichever way it does] by dint of that [conformity with the object-field], what is the point [of positing reflexive awareness as the *pramāṇa*]—since the object is said to be **“known by means of that”** [property of possessing the appearance of the object-field (*viṣayābhāsātā*)]?”¹⁸⁴

In other words, the opponent here takes at face value Dinnāga’s statements at PS 1.8cd and PS 1.9c, that (1) the cognition’s property of possessing the form of the object (*viṣayābhāsātā*) is the epistemic instrument, and furthermore that (2) this epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) is the “resultant” activity of knowing the object (*phala*). Thus, on the opponent’s interpretation, Dinnāga has claimed that the epistemic object (which is to say, the *prameya*) is known “by means of” cognition’s property of possessing its form, which furthermore constitutes the actual knowledge of the object. This much is at least arguably acceptable to the opponent.

In such a case, however, it is just the presence of the form of the object which causes there to be the awareness of the form of the object. In other words, the presence of the object-appearance *ipso facto* establishes the awareness of the object; in Dharmakīrti’s terminology, it is just this object-appearance which is the “determining factor” (*niyāmaka*) with regard to the awareness of

¹⁸³ This is a reference to the immediately-preceding discussion, to the effect that “in whichever way [reflexive awareness] appears, the object is ascertained in that exact way, as having a form (for example) that is attractive or unattractive or whatever” (*yathā yathā ca sā [svasaṃvittiḥ] khyāti, tathā tathārtho niścīyate śubhāśubhādirūpādīḥ*). See Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.9d](#).

¹⁸⁴ Steinkellner (2005b, 73.3-5): *nanu ceḥa viṣayasārūpyasya saṃvidam prati sādhanatvaṃ pratipādayitum iṣṭam | ato yasmāt sā khyāti tadvaśād iti vaktavye kim arthaṃ yasmāt so ’rthas tena mīyate ity uktam |*

the object.¹⁸⁵ What, then, is the purpose of positing that this object-appearance is known “by means of” reflexive awareness? It would seem to be superfluous.

3. *Jinendrabuddhi’s and Dharmakīrti’s Responses*

Jinendrabuddhi answers this objection on behalf of Diñnāga, responding that the identification of reflexive awareness as the *pramāṇa* is not superfluous:

There is a purpose. For reflexive awareness does (*karoti*) that which is to be done (*kārya*) on the part of object-awareness (*arthasaṃvit*): i.e., the ascertainment of the object. It has been stated thus in order to indicate this point: that one should just see the object-awareness as the result, *metaphorically*. Hence, there is in this way no difference in the object-field (*viśayabheda*) between the epistemic instrument [i.e., the object-appearance] and the resulting cognitive activity [i.e., reflexive awareness], inasmuch as (*iti kṛtvā*) there is awareness just about that—namely, the external [object]—in relation to which there is an instrument.

Why, then, is reflexive awareness said to be the result? Because, ultimately, due to having that [reflexive awareness] as the [cognition’s] nature, reflexive awareness is said to be the result. Metaphorically, however, that [reflexive awareness] should be seen as awareness of the object from the standpoint of the effect; this is not contradictory.¹⁸⁶

The key point in this regard is that cognition has reflexive awareness as its nature, or (equivalently) is by nature reflexively-experienced. Thus, “the awareness of ‘blue,’” “the appearance of ‘blue,’” “the presence of a ‘blue’ object-image (*viśayākāra*, *grāhyākāra*, *viśayābhāsa*, etc.),” and “the reflexive awareness of a ‘blue’ object-appearance” are all synonyms. Indeed, any cognition or

¹⁸⁵ See Chapter 2, Section II.C: [The “Determiner” \(*niyāmaka*\)](#).

¹⁸⁶ Steinkellner (2005b, 73.5-8): *asti prayojanam | sā hi svasaṃvit, arthasaṃvido yat kāryam arthaniścayaḥ, tat karoti | ata upacāreṇārthasaṃvid eva kāryato draṣṭavyety amum arthaṃ sūcayitum evam uktam | evaṃ hi pramāṇaphalayoḥ viśayabhedo na bhavati, yatraiva sādhanam bāhye, tatraiva saṃviditi kṛtvā || kathaṃ tarhi svasaṃvittiḥ phalam uktam | paramārthatas tādātmyāt svasaṃvittiḥ phalam uktam | upacāreṇa tu kāryato ’rthasaṃvittir eva sā draṣṭavyety aviruddham |*

Translated slightly differently in Moriyama (2008, 210).

appearance (“the awareness of X”) is always synonymous with the reflexive awareness of that cognition or appearance (“the reflexive awareness of X”). It is only that, for heuristic purposes, or as a matter of emphasis, certain features of cognition (such as its reflexively-experienced nature) may be discussed separately from other of its features (such as the manner in which its phenomenal characteristics isomorphically correspond to the causal characteristics of its object *qua* stimulus).

Similarly, Dharmakīrti begins his response to the Mīmāṃsā objection by reiterating one of Dīnāga’s central points, that the whole system or structure of epistemic instrument and epistemic object (i.e., *pramāṇa* and *prameya*) is merely metaphorical:

Since the [awareness] appears in the manner in which the object presents, because the cognition (*sthiti*)¹⁸⁷ of the object has that [awareness] as its nature, even though it is [in fact] an awareness of itself (*svavit*), it is considered to be the awareness of the object (*arthavit*). || 349 ||¹⁸⁸

Object-cognition is thus only “considered” (*matā*) to be the awareness of some real external object, because this consideration is good enough for the purpose of accomplishing mundane transactional tasks, in a limited provisional sense. In discursive epistemological terms, that is to say, it is possible to metaphorically construe the “object” of sensory cognition as an external stimulus, just as it is possible to metaphorically construe the “object” of reflexive awareness as cognition itself, or of its object-appearance specifically.

But these accounts are all only metaphorical manners of speaking, or different ways of arranging the conceptually-abstracted features of cognition into the “slots” of *pramāṇa* theory. In

¹⁸⁷ Devendrabuddhi (PVP 544.8) glosses *sthiti* as *adhigati* (*gnas skabs rtogs pa’i ngo bo*), as does Manoranandin (Sāṅkṛtyāyana ed., 223).

¹⁸⁸ Tosaki (1985, 34–35): *yathā nivisate so ’rtho yataḥ sā prathate tathā | arthasthites tadātmatvāt svavid apy arthavin matā* || 349 ||

reality, “the object-appearance” just is “the reflexive awareness of the object-appearance.”

Therefore, it is not the case that the cognition and the reflexive awareness of the cognition have different objects:

Therefore, there is also no difference in object (*viṣayabheda*)¹⁸⁹ [between object-awareness and reflexive awareness]. When one examines the nature [of object-awareness], the result is said to be reflexive awareness, because object-awareness has [reflexive awareness] as its nature. || 350 ||

The object, whether of one type or another,¹⁹⁰ is the cause of the cognition which appears in that way. Thus, the [external] object (*artha*) is considered to have the property of being the epistemic object (*prameya*). || 351 ||¹⁹¹

Not coincidentally, Jinendrabuddhi connects this point (in PST *ad* PS 1.9d) to Dharmakīrti’s discussion of the inferability of external objects, in relation to the fact that any evidence which could ever serve to demonstrate the existence of an extramental object must first be cognized, obviating its ability to serve as conclusive evidence for specifically *extramental* matter:

“**In whichever way**” and so on: this means that an external object is ascertained by virtue of the cognition’s image of the knowledge-object (*jñeyākāra*). And it is in this regard that [Dharmakīrti] says, [at PV 3.392, that the object’s lack of differentiation from awareness can be inferred] “like fire is inferred by means of smoke.”¹⁹² But [fire] is not directly inferred by means of [smoke]; rather, [it is inferred] *by means of a cognition of smoke* as having been caused by that [fire]. Likewise, although it is said that the object is known (*mīyate*) by means of the [object-appearance], nevertheless it should be understood that [the object-

¹⁸⁹ Compare to Kumāriḷa’s *bhinnārtha* (*ŚV Pratyakṣapariccheda* 79, discussed in note [182](#), above).

¹⁹⁰ Devendrabuddhi (PVP 545.6) notes: “In whichever way [the object] appears, i.e., as desirable or undesirable” (*’dod pa dang mi ’dod pa nyid la sogs pa ’i rnam pa ci ’dra ba*). But as John Dunne (personal communication) has noted, both the argument and the underlying Sanskrit apply equally well to phenomenal characteristics, such as appearing blue or yellow. That is to say, an object cannot be determined as ‘blue’ or ‘yellow,’ without first appearing in a manner that is blue or yellow.

¹⁹¹ Tosaki (1985, 35–36): *tasmād viṣayabhedo ’pi na svasaṃvedanaṃ phalam | uktam svabhāvacintāyāṃ tādātmyād arthasaṃvidah || 350 || tathā ’vabhāsamānasya tādr̥ṣo ’nyādr̥ṣo ’pi vā | jñānasya hetur artho ’pīty arthasyeṣṭā prameyatā || 351 ||*

¹⁹² See Chapter 4, Section III: [Inference and External Objects](#).

appearance is known] by means of reflexive awareness, which is the establishing instrument.¹⁹³

Even when the existence of extramental matter is asserted, in other words, the awareness of a purportedly extramental object is nothing more than the awareness of a cognition bearing the form of that object, or (more specifically) of that cognition's property of isomorphically corresponding to its object *qua* cause. Thus, in the final analysis, every cognition is just the awareness of cognition. Therefore, reflexive awareness is the “result,” even when the object-appearance is construed as the “instrument” for discursive or epistemological purposes.

4. “*Honestly, I don't understand such a thing, either*”

This brings us to what is personally my favorite verse of the entire Perception Chapter, the conclusion of Dharmakīrti's remarks *ad* PS 1.9cd, wherein Dharmakīrti rather humorously acknowledges the irresolvable theoretical aporia created by the preceding line of analysis. To wit: if cognition is only ever aware of cognition itself, which can only be understood as the cognition “of” an object to the extent that it bears the form of that object; but this form is always and everywhere necessarily defective, along the lines discussed in Chapter 3; then in what sense, in the final analysis, can it really be said that there is ever any awareness of an object at all?

[Opponent]: “Having set aside the form of the object (*artharūpa*), how could there be an apprehension of the object, on the part of that [cognition] which [ostensibly] has the appearance [of the object]?”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Steinkellner (2005b, 72.10-14): *yathā yathetyādi | jñānasya jñeyākāravaśena bāhyo 'rtho niścīyata ity arthaḥ | atra ca yathā dhūmenāgnir anumīyata ity ucyate, na cāsau sāksāt tenānumīyate, kiṃ tarhi taddhetukena dhūmajñānena, tathā yady api so 'rthas tena mīyata ity ucyate, tathāpi tatsādhanayā svasaṃvideti veditavyam |*

¹⁹⁴ Devendrabuddhi (PVP 545.14-16) explains the opponent's question: “If the cognition, which has the appearance of the object, does not really have its nature—[the nature of] a real object which is desirable or undesirable, in whichever way its image [appears]—then how is that [cognition] the apprehension of the object?” (*ji ltar rnam pa*

Honestly, I don't understand such a thing, either. || 352 ||¹⁹⁵

Dharmakīrti, in other words, openly acknowledges that there is no rigorous answer to this question. And perhaps we, as readers of the *Pramāṇavārttika*, might find this unsatisfying. But it is important to keep in mind that the *pramāṇa* discourse was understood by all its participants to be oriented first and foremost toward practical concerns.

The question that animates *pramāṇa* theory, in other words, is the eminently practical question of how it is that we can reach certain, irrefragable knowledge. But for non-Buddhists of a realist bent, such as the Naiyāyikas, Vaiśeṣikas, and Mīmāṃsikas, it was essentially enough to define the conditions under which ordinary human knowledge may be considered irrefutable.¹⁹⁶ Indeed, for Kumāriila in particular, it was a major theoretical imperative to *disprove* the existence of exotic forms of gnosis and other yogic knowledge, such as that attributed to the Buddha.¹⁹⁷ Ordinary human knowledge, on such accounts, is the only kind of knowledge that there is.

While still very much concerned with ordinary human knowledge—and, indeed, articulating on this account a representationalist epistemology which bears more than a passing resemblance with Kumāriila's own—Dharmakīrti, as a *Buddhist* epistemologist, disputes the premise that ordinary “transactional” (*vyāvahārika*) human knowledge constitutes the only or even the most important practical goal toward which epistemology can or should be deployed. On the

'ga' zhig ltar | 'dod pa mi 'dod pa la sogs pa don dngos te dngos rang bzhin med par don snang can | shes pa de ji ltar don 'dzin zhe na).

¹⁹⁵ Tosaki (1985, 37–38): *yathā kathañcit tasyārtharūpaṃ muktvāvabhāsinaḥ | arthagrahaḥ kathaṃ satyaṃ na jāne 'ham apīdrśam || 352 ||*

¹⁹⁶ The Sāṅkhyas and the Vedāntins, on the other hand, were more concerned with exotic liberative forms of gnosis, and in many ways were more closely aligned with the Buddhists than with their other Vedic brethren on this particular point.

¹⁹⁷ See, for example, ŚV *Nirālambanavāda* 88–98.

contrary: while Dharmakīrti is very much concerned with such ordinary human knowledge, it is necessarily subordinated to ultimate transcendent gnosis (that is, *prajñāpāramitā* and its synonyms). This is, so to speak, the ultimate *pramāṇa*, which is a “knower” (*vedaka*) of the ultimate *prameya*: the ultimate nature of reality itself (that is, *dharmatā* and its synonyms).

Put slightly differently: for Dharmakīrti, as for his many interlocutors in the *pramāṇa* discourse, there is no such thing as “knowledge” in the abstract. Rather, knowledge is always a “knowledge-for,” which is to say, a mental event that exists for the purpose of achieving some practical goal. In most circumstances, this goal is definable in worldly terms: acquiring something that is desired, or avoiding something that is undesired, as Dharmakīrti lays out the purpose of his *pramāṇa*-theoretical project at the beginning of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*.¹⁹⁸ Indeed, this practical orientation for epistemological theory was shared by all participants in the *pramāṇa*-theoretical discourse, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike. On the Buddhist cosmological model, however, mere worldly aims cannot ever be truly satisfying on their own. That is to say, without solving the underlying problem of our own ignorance and defilement, which binds us to the cycle of *saṃsāra*, we will never truly be able to acquire what we want (happiness) or avoid what we do not want (suffering). Construed in these terms, final liberation from suffering—*nirvāṇa*, or the attainment of perfect Buddhahood—is the most practical of all possible goals. But for all the reasons laid out above, no matter how much they might help us to achieve mundane transactional goals, ordinary dualistic cognition *as such* is incapable of facilitating the attainment of this ultimate *telos*.

¹⁹⁸ See the Introduction, Section III.A: [Correct Awareness](#).

Thus, as Jinendrabuddhi writes (*ad PS 1.9d*), of how to arrange the elements of cognition within the “slots” of *pramāṇa* theory, in an idealist context wherein the subjective aspect of cognition should be construed as the epistemic instrument:

First of all, with respect to nonconceptual [cognition], the apprehending aspect is the perceptual instrument (*pratyakṣam pramāṇam*) that is devoid of conceptuality. The vividly-appearing apprehended aspect is the particular (*svalakṣaṇa*) which is the epistemic object (*prameya*). With regard to [cognition that] arises from an inferential sign (*liṅga*), as well, the apprehending aspect is the inferential instrument (*anumānaṃ pramāṇam*). The non-vividly-appearing apprehended aspect is the epistemic object, a universal (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*) [which seems] as though distributed across distinct individuals. **“Metaphorically assigned (upacaryate),”** i.e., conventionalized (*vyavahriyate*).¹⁹⁹ This is indicated by the fact (*svarūpa*) that the convention of epistemic instrument and epistemic object is spoken about, for the sake of eliminating the delusion of those who are mistaken. However, only the transcendent, ultimate instrument is imperishable, devoid of error, and stainless;²⁰⁰ and only its field (*gocara*)²⁰¹ is the true *prameya*.²⁰²

Inferences, no less than sensory cognitions, are *pramāṇas* in an ordinary sense: they help us to attain practical goals in the world. And even in a refined idealistic context, wherein it is understood that nothing exists apart from cognition and cognitive processes, it is possible to understand the relation of the “elements” of an inferential cognition—that is, its subjective and objective aspects, which are not actually “elements” in the sense of ontologically discrete phenomena—in the terms of the *pramāṇa* discourse.

¹⁹⁹ PSV *ad PS 1.9d*: *pramāṇaprameyatvam upacaryate* |

²⁰⁰ *vibhramavivekanirmalam anupāyi pāramārthikaṃ pramāṇam*. Compare to PVin 1.58 (Steinkellner ed., 44.4-5): *vibhramavivekanirmalam anupāyi pāramārthikapramāṇam*.

²⁰¹ Compare to the discussion of the *buddhagocara* in *Viṃśikā* 21 (see Chapter 5, note 35).

²⁰² Steinkellner (2005b, 74.11-75.3): *nirvikalpe tāvad grāhakākāraḥ kalpanāpoḍhaṃ pratyakṣam pramāṇam, spaṣṭapratibhāso grāhyākāraḥ svalakṣaṇam prameyam | liṅgaje 'pi grāhakākāro 'numānaṃ pramāṇam, vyaktibhedānuyāyivāspaṣṭapratibhāso grāhyākāraḥ sāmānyalakṣaṇam prameyam iti | upacaryate iti vyavahriyate | etenaitat sūcayati vyāvahārikasya pramāṇasya prameyasya cedam svarūpam uktam atrāpi vipratipannānām sammohanirāsāya | lokottaram eva tu vibhramavivekanirmalam anupāyi pāramārthikaṃ pramāṇam tasyaiva ca gocaro bhūtaṃ prameyam iti ||*

In an idealistic context, that is to say, the subjective aspect of a cognition can be described as the epistemic instrument, and the objective aspect described as the epistemic object. In these terms, keeping in mind that there is no real activity of “apprehension” occurring, a nonconceptual instrument (i.e., a cognition that is “perceptual” in the technical sense) may be construed as the subjective aspect’s “apprehension” of a vivid objective aspect; while a conceptual instrument (i.e., a correct inference) may be construed as the subjective aspect’s “apprehension” of a non-vivid objective aspect, the conceptual universal which constitutes the object to be known, such as the fire to be inferred.

However, this method of conducting epistemological inquiry is only useful up to a point. In the final analysis, no dualistic appearance can ever constitute the kind of knowledge that is useful for actually solving our deepest problems. Where does that leave a rigorous account of differentiated sensory appearances, which always necessarily present themselves dualistically? As Dharmakīrti humorously admits, it leaves any such attempt at rigor in an aporia that is unresolvable in strictly rational terms.

Conclusion

Our study of the Perception Chapter (*pratyakṣapariccheda*) of the *Pramāṇavārttika* is nearly complete. To review: in Chapter 1, we examined the closest thing to a comprehensive model of ordinary object-cognition that Dharmakīrti ever provides. This model ultimately hinges on the Yogācāra doctrine of eight simultaneously-operating cognitive modalities. At every moment, the objects *qua* causes of sensory cognition produce sensory cognitions of the five modalities. Thus, all five sensory-cognitive modalities are simultaneously operative, alongside the continuity of mental cognition (*manovijñāna*). One or more of these six simultaneous cognitions is then “apprehended” as the “object” of the mental faculty, which is able to “bind” cognitions of multiple different modalities together, thereby producing a single, multi-modal (yet ultimately partless) mental cognition. Because it is produced as the direct result of the causal interaction between the mental faculty and the mental particulars (i.e., the cognitions) which the mental faculty takes as its object-field (*viśaya*), this multi-modal mental cognition is nonconceptual: it is a “mental perception” (*mānasapratyakṣa*). But this nonconceptual mental cognition is subsequently conceptualized, which conceptualization constitutes the content of a subsequent determinate judgment or definitive ascertainment (*niścaya*). And, during an ongoing sensory encounter with an object, the mental cognition continuously projects the conceptualization onto sensory awareness, in what amounts to a subliminal type of recognition (*pratyabhijñā*). For these reasons, the vast majority of cognitions which are ordinarily understood to be “perceptions”—definitionally including all cognitions which apprehend the epistemic object as the member of some class (*jāti*), such as a ‘jug’ or a ‘cow’ or whatever—are in fact only “pseudo-perceptions” (*pratyakṣābhāsa*). In fact, every cognition other than “pure luminosity” (*prakāśamātra*), or reflexive awareness devoid of the phenomenological structure of subject and object, is only pseudo-perceptual.

While the role of conceptuality is certainly a central concern for Dharmakīrti's thought, in the Perception Chapter, he is primarily concerned with the nature of the initial, nonconceptual sensory cognition. Indeed, the account of ordinary object-cognition sketched out above is highly schematic, and clearly only intended to be provisional. The more pressing issue concerns how we are to understand the “instrumentality” (*prāmāṇya*) of sensory cognition, on its own terms. In other words, as also discussed in Chapter 1, even if we grant the existence of external objects, by definition a perceptual sensory cognition must lack conceptuality—a position that is expressly opposed to the theories of determinate or “conceptual perception” (*savikalpika pratyakṣa*) that Dharmakīrti relentlessly critiques. At a higher level of analysis, however, even such perceptions must finally be understood as nonconceptual *pseudo-perceptions*, just insofar as they present in awareness as though structured into subject and object.

Chapters 2 and 3 extended the analysis of sensory cognition, by examining its causal structure and the source of its supposed epistemic reliability or “instrumentality.” As outlined in those chapters, this instrumentality is supposed to derive from the isomorphism (*sārūpya*) between the object and the form of the object as it is present in cognition. In other words, a sensory cognition is supposed to be a means for attaining reliable knowledge (i.e., a *pramāṇa*) in regard to an object, just insofar as the phenomenal features of the sensory cognition isomorphically correspond to the causal features of the object which is its stimulus or cause. This account is acceptable for practical purposes in conventional (*vyāvahārika*) terms. But Dharmakīrti presses the point: what does it really mean for there to be the awareness of an object (*kārthasaṃvit*)? How can this awareness ever truly be reliable, given the unbridgeable gap between the “subtle” (*sūkṣma*) and extensionless nature of the infinitesimal particulars which are its cause, versus the apparently gross or “extended” (*sthūla*) nature of the sensory appearance itself? In fact, how could it be the case that this sensory

awareness truly exists at all, given that it fails to be either properly singular or properly manifold, instead falling prey to the “neither one nor many analysis” (*ekānekavicāra*)?

In Chapters 4 and 5, we saw Dharmakīrti use this line of reasoning to re-frame the question of epistemic reliability entirely. As it turns out, the object *qua* cause of sensory cognition should not be characterized as something that exists “external” (*bāhya*) to the mind at all; rather, on the best possible account of conventional reality—which is to say, the rational explanation of our ordinary everyday experience with the fewest number and least impactful of theoretical gaps or inconsistencies—this causal stimulus should be understood as an “internal” (*antar*) karmic imprint or latent disposition (*vāsanā*). On this best possible account, in other words, the causal stimulus for sensory awareness is just the “activation” (*prabodhana*) of a particular imprint, rather than the proximity of a real external object. But, whether the object is understood to be internal or external, Dharmakīrti resolutely insists that reflexive awareness is most appropriately considered to be the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*), because it is only ever *as reflexively-experienced* that there is ever any awareness or experience at all.

Critics of reflexive awareness, both ancient and modern, frequently misunderstand this point. Do you doubt that you are currently experiencing something? If not, then you have conceded that your experience is reflexively-experienced. This may be seen as rather thin gruel with which to feed a comprehensive epistemology. But Dharmakīrti would in all likelihood have largely (though perhaps not entirely) *agreed* with Garfield’s (2015, 148) characterization, that this minimal reflexive awareness “may in the end be too thin to count as any kind of knowledge worth having, in addition to being so odd, that it is hard to see it as knowledge in the sense that anything we count as knowledge is knowledge.”

The central question here is: what, in the final analysis, *is* knowledge? Is knowledge necessarily propositional or “sentence-shaped,” which is to say, conceptual? There are, perhaps, good reasons to think so—reasons which Dharmakīrti openly admits. At a minimum, however, it must be acknowledged that there is a fundamental disconnect between what we typically understand to be the objects of our experience, and the infinitesimal fundamental particles which constitute these macro-objects on both the contemporary scientific and traditional Buddhist accounts. Much of 20th and 21st century English-language epistemology consists in the attempt to rectify these “two images” of reality, in the terminology of Wilfrid Sellars.¹ But, to step back for a moment from the give-and-take of the “logical space of reasons,” it may help to re-examine this problem in terms of teleology. That is to say: for ordinary, practical purposes in the world, there is perhaps nothing particularly troubling about this disconnect. To the extent that the determinate identification of an agglomeration of particles as a ‘jug’ is “good enough for government work” with respect to storing water, for example, perhaps it is sufficient to count this determination as “knowledge.”

The problem with such an approach, from a Buddhist perspective, is that true knowledge should be above any kind of reproach. The root cause of our suffering is our lack of knowledge (*avidyā*). As long as our knowledge remains imperfect, we will continue to suffer. Therefore, in order to solve the problem of suffering once and for all—as opposed to, say, temporarily slaking our thirst by identifying a ‘jug’ of ‘water’—we must attain perfect, irrefragable knowledge. Conventionally-useful cognitions that are merely “good enough for government work” will not get the job done. Certainly, we need to be able to identify ‘water’ in order to continue to survive, and

¹ Tillemans (2018).

we need to continue to survive in order to eventually attain perfect knowledge. But, from a Buddhist perspective, the instrumentality of an ordinary cognition of ‘water’ (for example) can only be understood as temporary and provisional, because it is only instrumental in relation to the temporary and intermediate goal of slaking thirst. Dharmakīrti has his sights set on a loftier *telos*: the complete and permanent elimination of any thirst (*tr̥ṣṇā*), desire, or suffering at all.

From this perspective, the disconnect between the dimensionless nature of the fundamental particles that (on both the Buddhist External Realist and the contemporary scientific accounts) we know to be the cause of sensory appearance, and the extended nature of those appearances, is indeed a major problem. This disconnect entails that, in principle and *a priori*, our sensory awareness can never give us absolutely reliable information about the supposed objects of sensation. And this would still be the case, even if our experience were not always already distorted by the “internal impairment” (*antarupaplava*) of subject-object duality. It would furthermore still be the case, even if we properly understood that the cause of sensory appearance is not extramental matter at all, but rather only karmic imprints. In terms of the final eleutheriological goal of liberation (*mokṣa*) from the endless cycle of *saṃsāra*, neither nonconceptual sense-generated cognition nor conceptual mental determinations can be understood as ultimately instrumental, because neither of these cognitions tracks what it is supposed to be “about” with absolute fidelity. Therefore, from such a rarefied perspective, neither of these can finally count as “knowledge.”

This point comes out most vividly and poignantly in what amounts to the thematic conclusion of the *Pramāṇavārttika*. In PV 3.367-539 *ad* PS 1.11-12, Dharmakīrti takes up Dinnāga’s infinite regress argument for reflexive awareness, and discusses the nature of memory, in an extended defense of the Buddhist position against (primarily Mīmāṃsā) critique; but these topics, while interesting and worthy of study, are mostly absent from the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*, which

in effect ends with the elaboration of PS 1.10. Thus, at least from the standpoint of the motivations that drive the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*—which, it should be recalled, contains the only explicit mention of the “ultimate epistemic instrument” (*pāramārthikapramāṇa*)—Dharmakīrti’s primary argumentation in the Perception Chapter essentially ends with PV 3.353-366 *ad* PS 1.10. By way of conclusion, then, let us examine this passage, beginning with Diñnāga:

Again: that of which [cognition has] the appearance is the epistemic object (*prameya*); the apprehending aspect and the awareness [respectively] have the property of being the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) and the resulting knowledge (*phala*). Hence, the three are not separable. || 10 ||²

Notably, unlike nearly every other root verse of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, Diñnāga declines to provide any additional commentary. Jinendrabuddhi is similarly (and, for him, rather uncharacteristically) laconic and formulaic in his comments, only providing the barest of glosses.³ But perhaps this is understandable. Perhaps there is little to say in this regard. Perhaps, in other words, having reached the limits of rational analysis, it is time to set philosophical discourse to the side, and begin the regimen of contemplative practice that is both prescribed and described as the fullest expression of the Buddhist intellectual tradition.

Nevertheless, should one wish for a more detailed explanation, there is of course always more that could be said. And Dharmakīrti does indeed provide something like an explanation of how Diñnāga’s meaning here might be cashed out in rational analytic terms. To return, then, at long last, to verses first introduced in Chapter 1:⁴

² Steinkellner (2005a, 4): **yadābhāsaṃ prameyaṃ tat pramāṇaphalate punaḥ | grāhakākārasaṃvittyoḥ trayaṃ nātaḥ pṛthak kṛtam || 10 ||**

Translated slightly differently in Kellner (2010, 224).

³ See Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.10](#).

⁴ See Chapter 1, Section III.C.1: [Phenomenological Duality as Cognitive Error](#).

Even though the nature of awareness is undifferentiated, those with distorted vision (*viparyāsītadarśana*) characterize it as though it were differentiated into object, subject, and awareness. || 353 ||

[This characterization is distorted] because, even though, for those whose eyes are impaired by magic spells (*mantra*), shards of clay appear in some other manner [such as elephants],⁵ despite lacking that nature, those [clay shards] are not seen in that way by those whose eyes are not garbled. Or [this is] like how, in the desert, something small is seen as large from afar. || 354-355 ||

Although this structure of the apprehended, apprehender, and awareness as epistemic object, instrument, and result does not [really] exist; it is constructed (*kriyate*) in accord with [distorted] experience. || 356 ||⁶

Devendrabuddhi comments:

Question: “When there are no external objects, how can there be any structure of epistemic instrument and so on?”

The answer is that, according to this account, there is no ultimate structure. “Then what is it?” [This structure is presented] just as it appears. Therefore, in this context, there is no apprehending part nor apprehended part because, in terms of the nature of awareness, they are one. However, even though the nature of awareness is partless, “those whose vision is distorted”—i.e., those beings who are deluded by ignorance—characterize [cognition] as though it were differentiated by the differing experiences of subject and object. Ultimately, however, there is nothing at all like this.⁷

⁵ Devendrabuddhi (PVP 546.18-19) comments: “Although not having that nature, it appears in the form of something else, such as an elephant” (*de'i bdag nyid du med na yang | rnam pa gzhan du glang po che la sogs pa'i bdag tu snang bar 'gyur ro*). This is a reference to a well-known stock example, one *locus classicus* for which is the *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* attributed to Vasubandhu. For an analysis of the example of the magical illusion of an elephant as used in this particular text, see Gold (2006).

⁶ Tosaki (1985, 41–43): *avibhāgo 'pi buddhyātmā viparyāsītadarśanaiḥ | grāhyagrāhakaśaṃvittibhedavān iva lakṣyate || 353 || mantrādyupaplutākṣāṇām yathā mṛcchakalādayaḥ | anyathaivāvabhāsante tadrūparahitā api || 354 || tathāivādarśanāt teṣām anupaplutacakṣuṣām | dūre yathā vā maruṣu mahān alpo 'pi drśyate || 355 || yathānudarśanaṃ ceyam meyamānaphalasthitih | kriyate 'vidyamānā 'pi grāhyagrāhakaśaṃvidām || 356 ||*

⁷ PVP (546.7-15): *phyi rol gyi don med pa la tshad ma la sogs ji ltar rnam par gzhag pa yin zhes 'dri ba la | bshad pa 'di la [P/N: om. la] yang don dam pa'i rnam par gzhag pa ni yod pa ma yin no || 'o na ci yin zhe na | ji ltar snang ba bzhin du 'o || de'i phyir 'di la gzung ba dang 'dzin pa'i cha yod pa ma yin te | blo'i bdag nyid du gcig pa nyid kyi phyir ro || 'on kyang 'di ltar blo'i bdag nyid cha med par phyin ci log tu mthong ba yis | ma rig pas [D: pa'i] 'khrul pa'i skeyes bu dag gis | gzung ba'am 'dzin pa'i myong ba dag | tha dad pa rnam kyis [D: kyi] tha dad pa bzhin du mtshon par 'gyur gyi don dam par de lta bur gyur pa yang ma yin no ||*

Thus, as Devendrabuddhi explains the key summarizing verse 356: “The epistemic object is the object-appearance. The epistemic instrument is the subject-appearance. And the experiential nature is the result. Thus, it is explained according to how things appear. [That is to say,] this is how things appear; but, in ultimate terms, it is not so. That is the condensed summary.”⁸

This dialectic should be quite familiar to students of Buddhist philosophy and contemplative practice. Things appear in a certain way, and may be described—up to a point, within certain hard limits, even *accurately* described—as appearing in that way. But there is no function which maps the way phenomena appear onto the way reality truly is. The solution is not to search for a better function, a better description, a better mode of rational analysis; because, fundamentally, the problem is not with the description, but with us. As long as we are mired in the ignorance of conceptuality—and conceptuality is, axiomatically, a necessary precondition for rational analysis—we are fundamentally out of touch with reality. Reality itself radically escapes any attempt at classification, whether as a manifold or as a monad:

Otherwise,⁹ how could there truly exist multiple cognitive images on the part of a single thing ¹⁰ having appearances with multiple diverse forms (*nānārūpāvabhāsināḥ*)¹¹? [A truly singular cognition cannot truly possess multiple images] because the singularity of [the cognition] would be lost (*hānita*); and [if cognition were truly singular], the [mutual] difference of different [appearances] would be violated. [Cognition] is not undifferentiated, because its nature is not

⁸ PVP (547.9-13): *gzung ba nyid snang ba gang yin pa de ni gzhal bya yin zhing 'dzin pa'i rnam pa nyid du snang ba ni tshad ma yin la bdag nyid myong ba ni 'bras bu yin no zhes bya ba gang yin pa rjes su snang ba bzhin 'di bshad do || ji ltar snang ba bzhin du yin gyi don dam par ni ma yin no zhes bya ba ni mjug bsdu ba yin no ||*

⁹ That is, if cognition truly possessed multiple variegated appearances (both in terms of subject-object duality, and in terms of phenomenological variegation such as blue and yellow or pleasure and pain). PVP (547.14-15): *de ltar min na | tha dad pa 'di 'byung ba nyid kyi snang ba yin par 'dod na.*

¹⁰ “Something” or “an entity” (*bhāva*): that is, a moment of cognition.

¹¹ *Rūpa* here could also mean “color,” referring to phenomenal variegation in terms of ‘blue’ and ‘yellow’ and so on.

observed [to be undifferentiated]. For one who sees cognition as having an undifferentiated nature determines it to be undifferentiated. || 357-358 ||¹²

On the one hand, it is impossible for an ontologically singular cognition to truly possess two ontologically-discrete aspects. On the other hand, how is it that a truly ontologically singular could possess these two aspects, or indeed any real variegation at all?

We are presented with a phenomenal world that is variegated both in terms of the dualistic mode of its presentation, as well as in terms of its endless variety of content. There is no point in denying this, or in attempting to impose conceptual unity from above by philosophical fiat. So what would it mean, in absolute terms, for cognition to possess a truly singular nature? To begin with, something with a truly, ultimately, absolutely singular nature should not be able to demonstrate variegation. On the contrary: to be truly and absolutely singular means precisely to be truly and absolutely structureless and undifferentiated. Yet we are ceaselessly barraged by phenomenal variegation, blue here, yellow there, now pleasure, then pain, all of it apparently structured into subject and object. A description of cognition as comprised of real component parts—a blue part and a yellow part, or a subjective part and an objective part—fails for all the reasons we have outlined above. But any attempt at a thorough and rigorous description of cognition as ontologically simple and singular ultimately fails to account for the brute fact of phenomenal variegation. Cognition, in other words, cannot ultimately be described as either properly monadic, or properly manifold, with absolute rigor:

¹² Tosaki (1985, 44–45): *anyathaikasya bhāvasya nānārūpāvabhāsinaḥ | satyaṃ kathaṃ syur ākārās tadekatvasya hānitaḥ || 357 || anyasyānyatvahāneś ca nābhedo 'rūpadarśanāt | rūpābhedaṃ hi paśyanti dhīr abhedaṃ vyavasyati || 358 ||*

In reality, the nature which phenomena (*bhāvāḥ*) are perceived (*nirūpyante*) to have does not exist, since they do not have either a singular or a manifold nature.

|| 359 ||¹³

What then?

One of Dharmakīrti's primary points is that the mechanics of cognition are better-understood, which is to say, *more accurately described*, under a theoretical paradigm wherein a cognition is held to be an ontologically simple, singular, and internally structureless unity. This makes much more sense than positing, for example, that the phenomenological duality of subject and object is ontologically salient: that, in other words, the part of cognition which seems to be its “for-me-ness,” and the part of cognition which seems to represent an external world, are real component parts of a cognition.

However, it would be a mistake to conclude from this merely *more accurate* description that we have hit upon some kind of *absolutely accurate* description. Indeed, even if we were able to successfully posit and defend against all philosophical challengers some theoretically *most accurate* description of reality—say, for example, a description of reality under which its component elementary simples are held to not be “material” at all, in the sense of being something that exists apart from mind and mental processes (*cittacaitta*), but on the contrary that these simples are just mental, and that all that exists is therefore in some sense accurately describable as “mind only” (*cittamātra*)—even in this case, it would have to be understood that this theoretically *most accurate* description of reality is not an *absolutely accurate* description of reality.

¹³ Tosaki (1985, 46): *bhāvā yena nirūpyante tadrūpaṃ nāsti tattvataḥ | yasmād ekam anekaṃ vā rūpaṃ teṣāṃ na vidyate || 359 ||*

Put slightly differently, perhaps the “answer” is to see the problem of description, not as one of mapping the world as it appears to us onto reality as it truly is, but rather of accounting for the origins of the disconnect between what we see and what there truly is:

In common parlance (*loke*), from seeing some similarity, a mistake supposedly (*nāma*) arises by attributing some nature to that which does not have that nature. Here, this is not [what we are talking about] because not even a single thing having that nature¹⁴ has ever been observed in this universe. However, there is also this kind of error, namely, one that arises from an internal distortion; it arises naturally from a flaw, and it has a false appearance (*vitathapratibhāsinī*), without depending on seeing any similarity, as in the condition of seeing floaters (*timirādivat*).

|| 360-362 ||¹⁵

Within the *pramāṇa* discourse, error (*bhrānti*) is typically understood as a matter of mistaking one thing for another thing.¹⁶ But phenomenological duality cannot be this kind of “mistake,” because it has never mapped onto anything real, and could never map onto anything real.

We are able to mistake a rope for a snake, that is to say, because both ropes and snakes exist. The distortion of duality, by contrast, cannot be based on improperly construing present experience in terms of a previous experience of some real duality, because the apparent difference between the apprehending subject and the apprehended object has never been real. Nor can a cognition which exhibits variegation, and thereby fails to be either a proper manifold or a proper monad, be ultimately real. Indeed, in the final analysis, it is only the internally undifferentiated nature of cognition—its reflexively-experienced nature—that could possibly be ultimately real:

¹⁴ Manorathanandin (Sāṅkṛtyāyana ed., 227) adds: “That is, [the nature] of having real cognitive images” (*tadātmano bhūtākārasya*).

¹⁵ Tosaki (1985, 46–47): *sādharmyadarśanāl loke bhrāntir nāmopajāyate | atadātmani tādātmyavyavasāyena neha tat || 360 || adarśanāj jagaty asminn ekasyāpi tadātmanah | astīyam api yā tv antarupaplavasamudbhavā || 361 || doṣodbhavā prakṛtyā sā vitathapratibhāsinī | anapekṣitasādharmyadrgādis taimirādivat || 362 ||*

¹⁶ See the Introduction, Section III.A: [Correct Awareness](#).

In this [Epistemic Idealist (*vijñaptimātratā*)] context, the determinative feature (*pariccheda*) of cognition is considered to be the subject-image, because it has reflexive awareness as its nature. Therefore, the [subject-image] is the instrument of [reflexive awareness]. || 363 ||¹⁷

In the highest, Epistemic Idealist context, the subjective aspect of cognition is considered to be the epistemic instrument, “because it has reflexive awareness as its nature” (*tādātmyād ātmavit*).

Once more, the extremely close and “slippery” relationship between subjectivity and reflexivity is on display.¹⁸ As Devendrabuddhi explains, in this context, wherein it has been understood that there is no real difference between subject and object, and the distinction between subjectivity and reflexivity has accordingly collapsed, the subjective aspect of cognition may nevertheless be placed into the “slot” for the instrument. “The subjective aspect, because it has that nature—because it has the nature of being the determinative feature [of cognition]—is reflexive awareness; it is the nature of experience, i.e., luminosity.”¹⁹

The key point here is that it is only by attending to cognition, just as cognition, that we are able to experience cognition as it truly is—which is to say, as pure luminosity (*prakāśamātra*), devoid of duality. This form of attention is structurally similar to introspective attention to the affective features of experience, the subjective aspect of experience turned in a sense (“reflexively”) back on itself:

Just as in a [particular] case where the knowledge-instrument (*māna*) is its own object (*ātmaviṣaye*), such as the sensation of desire, this [reflexive] structure of result, object, and means of knowledge should be applied to all cases. || 364 ||

¹⁷ Tosaki (1985, 49): *tatra buddheḥ paricchedo grāhakākārasammataḥ | tādātmyād ātmavit tasya sa tasyāḥ sādhanam tataḥ* || 363 ||

¹⁸ See Chapter 5, Section I.D: [Cognitively-Natured-Ness \(*jñānarūpatva*\) and Subjectivity](#).

¹⁹ PVP (550.12-14): *'dzin pa'i rnam pa de ni de bdag nyid phyir yongs su gcod pa'i rang bzhin nyid yin pa'i phyir bdag rig yin te nyams su myong ba'i bdag nyid de gsal ba yin no* ||

In that [particular] case, too, those [affective states such as desire] are to be yoked (*yogya*) to reflexive awareness, because they have the nature of an experience. Thus, this yokedness (*yogyatā*)²⁰ is the knowledge-instrument, [the cognition with the affective state] itself is the object, and reflexive awareness is the result. || 365 ||

That which has the nature of the determinative feature, which is considered to be the subject-image, is that fact of being yoked to [awareness of] itself; and so, reflexive awareness is called the “*pramāṇa*.” || 366 ||²¹

We are able to “use” the subjective aspect of cognition, as an “instrument,” in order to know the affective features of the subjective aspect, itself. For example, the “instrument” for knowing that we are currently experiencing desire, is the actual desire that is currently being experienced. In this way, when attending to desire in this reflexive manner, desire is “its own object” (*ātmaviṣaya*). In just the same way, we can “use” the reflexive nature of awareness, as an “epistemic instrument,” to attend to just this reflexively-aware nature of awareness.

This, indeed, is the essence of advanced nondual contemplative practices, such as Mahāmudrā, or the “thorough cut” (*khregs chod*) of rDzogs chen. Yet over time, in Tibet, it eventually became commonplace to assert that “reflexive awareness” (*rang rig*) as described in the contemplative literature is somehow different from “reflexive awareness” (*svasaṃvitti*) as discussed in Dharmakīrti’s epistemological texts and their commentaries.²² But, as mentioned in

²⁰ While the above translation reflects a more concrete and literal sense of the term, *yogyatā* may also be understood as “suitability” or “availability.” In this context, that would mean that the affective states are being described as inherently “suitable for” or “available to” reflexive awareness. This is doubtless part of Dharmakīrti’s point.

²¹ Tosaki (1985, 50–51): *tatrātmaviṣaye māne yathā rāgādivedanam | iyaṃ sarvatra saṃyojyā mānameyaphalasthitiḥ || 364 || tatrāpy anubhavātmatvāt te yogyāḥ svātmasaṃvidi | iti sā yogyatā mānam ātmā meyaḥ phalaṃ svavit || 365 || grāhakākārasaṃkhyātā paricchedātmatātmani | sā yogyateti ca proktaṃ pramāṇaṃ svātmavedanam || 366 ||*

²² Brunnhölzl (2014, 1186) is a classic case in point: “Certain Indian and Tibetan masters, such as Jñānaśrīmitra (one of Maitrīpa’s teachers), the Seventh Karmapa, and the Eighth Karmapa, use self-awareness and personally experienced awareness/wisdom [i.e., *pratyātmavedanīyajñāna*, *so so rang rig pa’i ye shes*] as equivalents in the sense of this wisdom’s representing the most sublime expression of the principle that mind is able to be aware of itself in a nondual way, that is, free from any aspects of subject and object... Obviously, this kind of self-awareness [should] be clearly distinguished from the ordinary notion of self-awareness, which basically means that all beings are aware of their own direct experiences, such as being happy or sad.”

the Introduction, this is not how the early Indian Mahāmudrā tradition understood Dharmakīrti.²³ Nor is this how the enormously influential Third Karmapa, Rang ’byung rDo rje (1284-1339), seems to understand the nature of reflexive awareness and the subjective aspect of cognition. In his renowned *Aspiration of Mahāmudrā*, he writes:

Subjective appearance [*rang snang* = *svābhāsa*], which is not experienced how it exists, is mistaken for an object.²⁴

Under the power of ignorance, reflexive awareness is mistaken for a self.²⁵

Under the power of subject-object duality, we wander in the expanse of saṃsāra.

May we cut the root of ignorance and delusion.²⁶

But a precise accounting of the relationship between Buddhist epistemology and Buddhist praxeology remains to be written. Indeed, having now completed the foundational work of providing a structurally solid platform for further study of the *Pramāṇavārttika* and *Pramāṇaviniścaya*, it should be possible (or, at least, much easier and more fruitful) to engage in this type of more sophisticated, interdisciplinary project. Likewise, now that Dharmakīrti’s position according to his earliest commentators has been clarified, it should be possible (or, at

However, it is by no means “obviously” the case that one’s ability to be directly aware of one’s own affective state, such as being happy or sad, is actually different from the ultimate transcendent gnosis discussed here. Indeed, while ultimate and conventional reflexive awareness should certainly be “distinguished” in certain ways, it is a major contention of this study that, in ontological terms, these two must in some sense refer to the same entity (*vastu*). As an aside, it should furthermore be noted that Ratnākaraśānti was also one of Maitrīpa’s teachers at Vikramaśīla.

²³ See the Introduction, Section II.D: [Yogācāra Idealism](#).

²⁴ In other words, the true nature of the subjective aspect (*grāhakākāra*) or “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) of cognition just is its reflexively-aware nature. This is “how it exists.” But this subjective aspect of cognition is ordinarily reified, and thereby experienced as a kind of object: specifically, as a phenomenological “self,” a zero-point structuring or orienting all experience about itself.

²⁵ Recall the “slippery” relationship between subjectivity and reflexivity.

²⁶ *yod ma myong ba’i rang snang yul du ’khrul || ma rig dbang gis rang rig bdag tu ’khrul || gnyis ’dzin dbang gis srid pa’i klong du ’khyams || ma rig ’khrul pa’i rtsod dar chod par shog ||*

least, much easier and more fruitful) to compare their perspective to that of his later commentators, most especially Prajñākaragupta and his own subcommentators.

If I may, however, make one final suggestion for future research, ideally including my own, it is to bring the Buddhist epistemological discourse more fully into dialogue with the discourse of particle physics.²⁷ Without here being able to substantiate any arguments, or indeed do much at all besides make a few rhetorical gestures, let us stipulate the following. First, physicists and philosophers of physics still have yet to adequately grapple with the picture of reality that emerges from quantum theory.²⁸ The situation has not changed all that much since 1982, when the extremely important and influential physicist Richard Feynman noted:

[We] always have had a great deal of difficulty in understanding the world view that quantum mechanics represents. At least I do, because I'm an old enough man that I haven't got to the point that this stuff is obvious to me. Okay, I still get nervous with it. And therefore, some of the younger students... you know how it always is, every new idea, it takes a generation or two until it becomes obvious that

²⁷ For example: while a thorough accounting of Dharmakīrti's interrelated explanation of memory, reflexive awareness, and personal identity must unfortunately await a future study, it may nevertheless be noted in passing that Wojciech Zurek's account of quantum decoherence is likely to be of value to this accounting. This is because Zurek (2003, 719) provides an account of memory and identity, in relation to causality, that also recognizes the ontological nonduality of observer and observed (i.e., *grāhaka* and *grāhya*):

What the observer knows is inseparable from what the observer is: the physical state of his memory implies his information about the universe. The reliability of this information depends on the stability of its correlation with external observables... Memory is simultaneously a description of the recorded information and part of an "identity tag," defining the observer as a physical system. It is as inconsistent to imagine the observer perceiving something other than what is implied by the stable [environmentally-derived] records in his possession as it is impossible to imagine the same person with a different DNA. Both cases involve information encoded in a state of a system inextricably linked with the physical identity of an individual... In this manner, the distinction between ontology and epistemology—between what is and what is known to be—is dissolved.

Or, as Zurek (*ibid.*, 762) summarizes the point here: "There is, however, one feature distinguishing observers from the rest of the universe: They are aware of the content of their memory."

²⁸ Barad (2007) is a noteworthy attempt at such a grappling.

there's no real problem. It has not yet become obvious to me that there's no real problem.²⁹

The essence of the problem identified by Feynman is that definite knowledge, of the type aimed at by “scientific” discourse, is difficult to square with the strictly probabilistic picture of reality that emerges from the empirical results of quantum-mechanical experimentation. Wilfrid Sellars, writing in the 1960s, could still plausibly claim that the “theory-contaminated observation” of an electron’s visible trail through a gas cloud is the literal, direct perception of the actual individual electron itself.³⁰ This claim is, of course, ludicrous from a Dharmakīrtian perspective; but let us set this argument to the side for a moment. The more fundamental issue here is: what could it really mean to “know”—i.e., to measure (*mā* or *pra + √mā*)—an electron?

On the contemporary scientific account, no less than on the Buddhist account, reality must ultimately be comprised of ontologically irreducible, substructure-less simples. We call these “fundamental particles,” of which the electron is one example. But, on the contemporary scientific account, fundamental particles are strictly defined as having a radius of zero. They may be *measured* as *probabilistically* more or less likely to exert their causal influence—that is, their force, such as their electric charge—within a certain volume of space. But what sense does it really make to speak of the “location” of an entity that, strictly speaking, occupies zero volume?³¹ At what point is it time to re-evaluate what “knowledge,” scientific or otherwise, can even mean under these circumstances?

²⁹ Feynman (1982, 471).

³⁰ See the Introduction, note [63](#).

³¹ Vasubandhu’s thoughts on the matter are highly relevant. See Kapstein (2001). See also Chapter 4, note [27](#), concerning the fact that quarks—the most fundamental building blocks of hadrons, such as the protons and neutrons that comprise ordinary matter—can never, even in theoretical principle, be individually isolated. What sense does it really make to speak of “a fundamental particle,” in the singular, which can never appear by itself as a single entity?

In my opinion, any trustworthy answer to these questions will inevitably involve a return to the Copenhagen Interpretation: most saliently, to Niels Bohr's central emphasis on the inseparability of the instrument and the object of measurement, which is to say, the *pramāṇa* and the *prameya*.³² In the highest Epistemic Idealist analysis, as we have seen, the *pramāṇa* and

³² Bohr (2010, 99–100) writes:

We are here faced with an epistemological problem quite new in natural philosophy, where all description of experiences has so far been based upon the assumption, already inherent in ordinary conventions of language, that it is possible to distinguish sharply between the behavior of objects and the means of observation. This assumption is not only fully justified by all everyday experience but even constitutes the whole basis of classical physics, which, just through the theory of relativity, has received such a wonderful completion. As soon as we are dealing, however, with phenomena like individual atomic processes which, due to their very nature, are essentially determined by the interaction between the objects in question and the measuring instruments necessary for the definition of the experimental arrangements, we are, therefore, forced to examine more closely the question of what kind of knowledge can be obtained concerning the objects."

Along these lines, John von Neumann (1955, 418–21), the father of computer science and an extremely important theoretician of quantum mechanics in his own right, famously argued that, even speaking strictly in terms of the mathematical physics of measurement, the "extra-observational nature" of "subjective perception" necessarily entails that the "boundary" between the measured "observed system" and the "observer" is "arbitrary to a very large extent," and therefore, that the observation or conscious experience of the observer is irreducible (colloquially known among physicists as "consciousness causes collapse"):

First, it is inherently entirely correct that the measurement or the related process of the subjective perception is a new entity relative to the physical environment and is not reducible to the latter. Indeed, subjective perception leads us into the intellectual inner life of the individual, which is extra-observational by its very nature (since it must be taken for granted by any conceivable observation or experiment). (Cf. the discussion above.) Nevertheless, it is a fundamental requirement of the scientific viewpoint—the so-called principle of the psycho-physical parallelism—that it must be possible so to describe the extra-physical process of the subjective perception as if it were in reality in the physical world—i.e., to assign to its parts equivalent physical processes in the objective environment, in ordinary space. (Of course, in this correlating procedure there arises the frequent necessity of localizing some of these processes at points which lie within the portion of space occupied by our own bodies. But this does not alter the fact of their belonging to the "world about us," the objective environment referred to above.)

In a simple example, these concepts might be applied about as follows: We wish to measure a temperature. If we want, we can pursue this process numerically until we have the temperature of the environment of the mercury container of the thermometer, and then say: this temperature is measured by the thermometer. But we can carry the calculation further, and from the properties of the mercury, which can be explained in kinetic and molecular terms, we can calculate its heating, expansion, and the resultant length of the mercury column, and then say: this length is seen by the observer. Going still further, and taking the light source into consideration, we could find out the reflection of the light quanta on the opaque mercury column, and the path of the remaining light quanta into the eye of the observer, their refraction in the eye lens, and the formation of an image on the retina, and then we would say: this image is registered by the retina of the observer. And were our physiological knowledge more precise than it is today [in 1932], we could go still further, tracing

prameya refer to the phenomenal subject and the phenomenal object, respectively, which—for all the reasons outlined above—should be understood as ontologically inseparable. Furthermore, without here even coming close to any ability to substantiate this point, it is my suggestion that our attempts at understanding the nature of reality will continue to flounder until we come more fully to grips with the idealistic ontology that this inseparability of the means and the object of measurement, at the most fundamental level of reality (i.e., the level of its most fundamental constituent elements), entails.

the chemical reactions which produce the impression of this image on the retina, in the optic nerve tract and in the brain, and then in the end say: these chemical changes of his brain cells are perceived by the observer. But in any case, no matter how far we calculate—to the mercury vessel, to the scale of the thermometer, to the retina, or into the brain, at some time we must say: and this is perceived by the observer.

That is, we must always divide the world into two parts, the one being the observed system, the other the observer. In the former, we can follow up all physical processes (in principle at least) arbitrarily precisely. In the latter, this is meaningless. The boundary between the two is arbitrary to a very large extent. In particular we saw in the four different possibilities in the example above, that the observer in this sense needs not to become identified with the body of the actual observer: In one instance in the above example, we included even the thermometer in it, while in another instance, even the eyes and optic nerve tract were not included. That this boundary can be pushed arbitrarily deeply into the interior of the body of the actual observer is the content of the principle of the psycho-physical parallelism—but this does not change the fact that in each method of description the boundary must be put somewhere, if the method is not to proceed vacuously, i.e., if a comparison with experiment is to be possible. Indeed experience only makes statements of this type: an observer has made a certain (subjective) observation; and never any like this: a physical quantity has a certain value...

In order to discuss this, let us divide the world into three parts: I, II, III. Let I be the system actually observed, II the measuring instrument, and III the actual observer. It is to be shown that the boundary can just as well be drawn between I and II + III [i.e., between the observer plus the instrument on the one hand, and the observed on the other] as between I + II and III [i.e., between the observer on the one hand, and the instrument plus the observed on the other].”

Von Neumann concludes his seminal treatise (*ibid.*, 440) on this point, by noting that, if it can be mathematically established that “it suffices ‘to look at’ [the instrument of measurement] II” in order to conclude that some given quantity “A is measured in I... then the measuring process so far as it occurs in [the instrument] II, is ‘explained’ theoretically, i.e., the division of I | II + III discussed [above] is shifted to I + II | III,” which is to say, the observed system and the instrument of measurement considered as a single unified entity properly constitutes the epistemological ‘object.’ This is, in formal terms, precisely what it means to say that the *pramāṇa* is the *prameya*.

Naturally, any project along these lines will have to overcome extremely stiff resistance from numerous quarters. The genesis of this very study lies in my own subjective experience, as an undergraduate Physics major, who was perhaps overly curious about the meaning behind the mathematical formalism. At that time, I was told the extremely common refrain, well-known by students of physics all across the world: “Shut up and calculate!”³³ In a jocular spirit of cooperation, taking all of the preceding analysis into consideration, perhaps at this juncture it would be fair to respond with even better advice for all of us to take: “Shut up and meditate!”

³³ Though often attributed to Richard Feynman, this phrase appears to have originated with another luminary of the discipline, N. David Mermin. Of this phrase, Mermin (2004, 11) writes: “I’m not proud of having said it. It’s not a beautiful phrase. It’s not very clever. It’s snide and mindlessly dismissive. But, damn it, if I’m the one who said it first, then that means I did not, even unconsciously, appropriate the words of Richard Feynman and pass them off as my own. So I have nothing to be ashamed of other than having characterized the Copenhagen interpretation in such foolish terms.”

Appendices of Translations

Both the in-line and the appended translations should be understood to have John Dunne as a co-author. The in-line translations, in the main text above, have all been reviewed for accuracy. Due to time constraints, however, John was only able to review the appended selections from PV 3 (Appendix C). The appended selections from Dinnāga's PS(V) in Appendix A, and from Jinendrabuddhi's PST in Appendix B, are supplied as a courtesy to the reader, in the spirit of collaborative and open scholarship, in an effort to make this dense and challenging material more accessible. Along these lines, however, they should be regarded as a tentative provisional draft.

Any errors in translation are of course strictly my own.

Appendix A: PS(V) 1.2-16

The two epistemic instruments (*pramāṇas*) are perception and inference.

|| 2ab1 ||

These two are the only two, because

The object of knowledge is [one of] two characteristics. || 2b2c1 ||

For it is not the case that there exists another object of knowledge, apart from the particular and the general characteristic (*svasāmānyalakṣaṇa*). And we will assert that the object of perception is a particular characteristic, [while] the object of inference is a general characteristic.

Well now, what about [a cognition] that apprehends colors (or whatever), in terms of their aspects of impermanence and so on, or [apprehends the same object] repeatedly (*asakṛt*)? This is mentioned, however,

There is no other instrument for a combination of the [two characteristics].

|| 2c2d1 ||

For, having apprehended color or whatever in terms of both its inexpressible [particular color-nature] and its [universal] color-ness (i.e., in terms of both the particular and the general characteristic [of color]), the mind combines [these] with the [color's] quality of impermanence: "Color (or whatever) is impermanent." Therefore, there is no other instrument.

Nor is there [another instrument] with regard to the recognition [of the same object] again and again, || 2d2-3a ||

Although there is repeated recognition concerning the same (*eva*) object, nevertheless it is not another epistemic instrument. What is the reason?

Due to the endless series, || 3b1 ||

If every cognition were asserted to be instrumental, there would be an endless series of instruments,

Such as memory and so on. || 3b2 ||

Memory (*smṛti*) is just recollection (*smṛta*). That is to say: memory, attraction, aversion, and so on are not another [type of] instrument in regard to a previously-known object.

With regard to [perception],

Perception is devoid of conceptuality, || 3c ||

A cognition which does not possess conceptuality is a perception. But what indeed is conceptuality?

That which is conjoined with a name, a category (*jāti*), and so on. || 3d ||

In the case of proper nouns (*yadṛcchāśabda*), a name expresses a particular thing: [like someone named] “Dīṭha.” In the case of words for a category, a category [expresses the thing, as in]: “cow.” In the case of words for a quality, the quality [expresses the thing, as in]: “white.” In the case of words for an action, the action [expresses the thing, as in]: “cooking.” In the case of words for a substance, the substance [expresses the thing, as in]: “batsman” (*daṇḍin*) or “horned animal” (*viṣāṇin*).

On this point, some say that “[words express a real thing which is] distinguished in terms of a relationship.”¹ Others say that “words which are in fact (*eva*) empty of a [real] referent (*artha*) express a particular thing.” [Either way], perception is that [cognition] in which conceptuality does not exist.

Now: why, if it arises in dependence upon both [the faculty and the object-field], is [perception (*pratyakṣa*)] called ‘at-the-faculty’ (*prati + akṣa*) and not ‘at-the-object-field’ (*prativiṣaya*)?

**Because it is the un-shared cause, [perception] is named for the faculties...
|| 4ab ||**

...but not for the object-fields such as visible form. That is to say: the object-fields are common to cognitions in other beings (*anyasantānika*) and in the [conceptual] mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*). And it is seen that appellations are made by way of what is uncommon, as in ‘the sound of a drum’ or ‘a sprout of barley.’ Therefore, it is correct [to call perception], which is nonconceptual, ‘at-the-faculty’ (*pratyakṣa*).

It is also stated in the Abhidharma: “One for whom visual consciousness is complete (*samaṅgin*) knows blue, but does not [know that he is seeing] ‘blue.’” [And:] “In regard to the object, one perceives (*sañjñī*) the object, but one does not perceive the category (*dharma*).” In what way, then,

¹ Cf. Hattori (1968, 85n28).

do the five [sensory] cognitions have agglomerated object-supports,² if they do not conceptualize [their objects] as unitary?”

Well, as [Vasubandhu writes at AKBh *ad* AK1.10], “They [are asserted]³ to have particulars as their object-fields in regard to a sense-sphere particular (*āyatanasvalakṣaṇa*), not a substance-particular (*dravyasvalakṣaṇa*).”

In that [Abhidharma] context, because it arises from a multiplicity of things (*anekārtha*), with respect to its own object (*svārtha*), [sensory cognition is said to have] a universal as the [sensory] field (*gocara*). || 4cd ||

Because it does not arise from a single substance, with respect to its own sense-sphere, [sensory cognition] is said to have a universal as its object-field; but not due to conceptualizing non-difference in relation to things which are different.

And we say:

A property-possessor (*dharmīn*) of which the nature (*rūpa*) is manifold is not cognized in its entirety through the sense-faculty, because the sensory field (*indriyagocara*) is an inexpressible, individually-experienced (*svasaṃvedya*) nature. || 5 ||

Thus, first of all (*tāvat*), a perceptual cognition that has arisen from the five sense-faculties is nonconceptual.

And here, [other types of perception are] distinguished, in response to the opinions of others; but all [perception] is strictly nonconceptual.

² *sañcitālabhanāḥ pañca vijñānakāyāḥ*. Dinnāga does not mark off this phrase with the quotation marker *iti*, but it is likely a citation of AKBh *ad* AK1.44b (Pradhan 1975, 34.1-2): “Neither a single fundamental particle of the sense-faculty, nor a single fundamental particle of the object-field, produces cognition, because the five types of sensory cognition have aggregated object-supports” (*na caika indriyaparamāṇur viṣayaparamāṇur vā vijñānam janayati | sañcitāśrayālabhanatvāt pañcānām vijñānakāyānām*).

³ Unlike the prior reference (see note 2 above), Dinnāga’s citation here (*āyatanasvalakṣaṇam praty ete svalakṣaṇaviṣayā na dravyasvalakṣaṇam iti*) is marked off with the quotation marker *iti*, and indeed with one tiny exception is identical to the AKBh *ad* AK 1.10d:

Opponent: “But then the five types of sensory cognition would take universals as their object-fields—they would not take particulars as their object-fields—because their object-support (*ālambana*) is an aggregate.”

Vasubandhu: This is not so, because they are asserted to have particulars as their object-fields in regard to a sense-sphere particular, not in regard to a substance-particular; thus, there is no fault.

Pradhan (1975, 7.20-21): *nanu caivaṃ samastālabhanatvāt sāmānyaviṣayāḥ pañca vijñānakāyāḥ prāpnuvanti na svalakṣaṇaviṣayāḥ | āyatanasvalakṣaṇam praty ete svalakṣaṇaviṣayā iṣyante na dravyasvalakṣaṇam ity adoṣaḥ*

Note that there is no direct correlate for this *iṣyante* in the Tibetan translation of the PSV, nor in the translation of this phrase embedded in Devendrabuddhi’s PVP (see below, note 48). Nor is this word found in the received Sanskrit manuscript of Jinendrabuddhi’s PST. Most likely, then, this *iṣyante* was dropped from Dinnāga’s citation of the AKBh.

The nonconceptual reflexive awareness of [affective states] such as desire, and [the nonconceptual mental cognition] of an object, are also mental [as opposed to sensory perception]. || 6ab ||

Additionally, because they do not depend upon the senses, both a nonconceptual mental cognition which is engaged with the cognitive image (*ākāra*) of an experience, taking an object-field such as visible matter as its object-support, as well as reflexive awareness in regard to desire and so on, are mental [as opposed to sensory] perception. Similarly,

The vision (*drk*) of the object [of meditation] only—not mixed with the instructions of the guru—on the part of yogins [is a perception]. || 6cd ||

Additionally, the vision (*darśana*) of the object [of meditation], only, not mixed with concepts about scripture, on the part of yogins, is perception.

[Opponent:] “If the reflexive awareness of desire and so on is perceptual, [then the reflexive awareness of] conceptual cognition is indeed also [perceptual].” That is true!

Even a conceptual cognition is asserted to be [perceptual] in terms of reflexive awareness, [though] not with respect to the object, on account of the conceptualization. || 7ab ||

Just like desire and so on, although [conceptual cognition] is not perceptual with respect to [its] object, there is no fault [in considering conceptual cognition to be perceptual] insofar as it cognizes itself. Thus, first of all (*tāvat*), perception [has been discussed].

Pseudo-perception is erroneous [cognition], the cognition of the conventionally-existent, and [cognitions involving the conceptualization of prior experience, such as] inference and inferential [cognition, as well as cognition] which is mnemonic or desiderative; together with the myodesopic. || 7cd-8ab ||

Here, erroneous cognition (*bhrāntijñānam*) is a pseudo-perception, because it involves (for example) the conceptualization of water in the case of a mirage and so on. [Cognition] with respect to conventionally-existent things [is a pseudo-perception] due to the superimposition of another object [i.e., the superimposition of a universal, that is,] because it occurs due to a conceptualization in relation to the [particles of] visible form. Cognitions such as inference, its result, and so on conceptualize prior experience; therefore, they are not perceptions. And in this context,

Because it is cognized as having an intermediary function (*vyāpāra*), the resulting cognition (*phala*) just is the instrumental cognition (*pramāṇa*). || 8cd ||

For, in this context, it is not the case that the resulting cognition is something different from the instrumental cognition, as [asserted] on the part of outsiders [i.e., non-Buddhists]. Rather, the awareness (*pratīti*) of just that cognition which is the result (*phala*) [appears] as having an intermediary function (*savyāpāra*), by virtue of the fact that it arises with the image (*ākāra*) of the

object-field. In dependence on that, epistemic instrumentality (*pramāṇatva*) is metaphorically ascribed to it, even though it is without intermediary functioning (*nirvyāpāra*). For example, it is said that an effect (*phala*) arising in conformity with a cause (*hetvanurūpa*) “obtains the form of the cause (*heturūpa*),” even though there is no intermediary function [of obtaining this form]. Just so in this case as well.

And so, in this context,

Alternatively, reflexive awareness is the result (*phala*), || 9a ||

For cognition arises with a double appearance, its own appearance (*svābhāsa*) and the appearance of the object (*viṣayābhāsa*). The result is the reflexive awareness of both appearances.⁴

⁴ Against Hattori (1968, 28), Chu (2008, 239), Kataoka (2009), Kellner (2010, 220), and Miyo (2011, 178), Arnold (2010, 349n62); (2012, 171–72) has repeatedly suggested that the *tasya* of *tasyobhayābhāsasya* should be understood as a “subjective genitive.” Thus, on Arnold’s interpretation, *tasyobhayābhāsasya yat svasamvedanam tat phalam* is to be rendered (emphasis added), “It is its [i.e., cognition’s] self-awareness as **having either appearance** which is the result.” According to Arnold (ibid., emphasis original), “The point, that is, is not that *svasamvitti* is of both these aspects (in the way, e.g. that perceptions can be of trees), but rather that cognition *has* the quality of self-awareness... Cognition has the property of self-awareness, in other words, *however* the content of that be characterized—whether, as Dignāga says, cognition be finally understood as *svābhāsam* or *viṣayābhāsam*.”

Beyond the intractable theoretical problems that such an account introduces, however, this is (more importantly) an untenable reading of the Sanskrit. To begin with, *ubhaya* does not mean “either.” On the contrary, it strictly means “both.” The Sanskrit term for “either [of two]” is *anyatara*; cf. Monier-Williams (2005, 45) and Apte (2012, 90). While Arnold (2010, 349n62) acknowledges Kellner’s (2010, 220n54) correction of his earlier (2005, 35) mistranslation of this same passage, he does not respond to the essential point of her correction, to the effect that “even if the nominal phrase *tasyobhayābhāsasya* could be syntactically [or, we might add, lexicographically] construed as referring to a group of appearances from which one is selected, the emphatic pronoun ‘both’ (*ubhaya*) rules this out.” In reply, Arnold (2010, 349n62) claims that the “subjective genitive” reading of *tasya* is warranted by the commentary of Jinendrabuddhi, “who clearly reads *ubhayābhāsa* thus as a *bahuvrīhi*.” But the grammatical status of *ubhayābhāsa* as a *bahuvrīhi* compound adjectivally modifying *tasya* [*jñānasya*] is not in question, and furthermore is not relevant to the philological or philosophical issue here, which specifically concerns how reflexive awareness is to be understood in relation to the “double appearance” (*ubhayābhāsa*) of subject and object. Dinnāga’s point, in other words, is just that reflexive awareness simultaneously presents both aspects of cognition, and in this way, it is “of” them, in the normal genitive sense (i.e., not as the grammatical subject). In no way does Jinendrabuddhi’s commentary support a “subjective genitive” gloss; see Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.9a](#).

One root problem here is a category error, consisting in Arnold’s (2010, 349) gloss of the distinction between *svābhāsa* and *viṣayābhāsa* (i.e., the two *ābhāsas* comprising the *ubhayābhāsa*) in terms of the manner in which the contents of cognition are to be characterized. On Arnold’s reading, the *svābhāsa* refers to the contents of cognition characterized as an internal mental object, while the *viṣayābhāsa* refers to these contents characterized as an extramental object. However, at no point does Dinnāga, Dharmakīrti, nor (to my knowledge) any of their commentators refer to the distinction between *svābhāsa* and *viṣayābhāsa* as concerning whether the object of cognition is to be understood as internal or external. Rather, *svābhāsa* is simply a synonym for the *grāhakākāra*, and *viṣayābhāsa* is simply a synonym for the *grāhyākāra* (see Chapter 5 and Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.9a](#)). The proper “Dharmakīrtian” term for cognition characterized as the awareness of internal mental contents is *jñānasamvit*. *Jñānasamvit* is paradigmatically opposed to *arthasamvit*, the term which refers to cognition characterized as the awareness of an extramental object; for more on this distinction, see below, Section I.B.3: [Arthasamvit and Jñānasamvit](#).

But Arnold’s insistence on this point is all the more puzzling, given his (2008, 6) agreement with Dreyfus and Lindtner (1989, 27) that the works of Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti represent the “products of a unified intention.” Surely it is relevant, then, that at the corresponding juncture of Dharmakīrti’s own work (PV 3.337), Dharmakīrti specifies that

Why?

Because the determination of the object has [reflexive awareness] as its nature.

|| 9b ||

For, when the object (*artha*) is a cognition, inclusive of the object-field (*saviṣaya*),⁵ at that time, one cognizes the object in conformity with how it is reflexively experienced, i.e., as either desirable or undesirable. But when the epistemic object (*prameya*) is strictly an external object, then,

The epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) is the property of having the appearance of the object-field, on the part of that [cognition]. || 9cd₁ ||

For, in this case, even though the nature [of the cognition] is [still] reflexively-known by the cognition, nevertheless, the epistemic instrument is just the [cognition's] property of possessing

“the result is the awareness **of both aspects** of [the cognition]” (*ubhayākārasyāsya saṃvedanaṃ phalam*). And this is, indeed, precisely how Arnold himself translates this very verse! That is to say, Arnold (2008, 18) himself translates Manorathanandin's commentary *ad cit* (emphasis added): “This is because cognition is experienced in this way (as being **of two aspects**) by self-awareness” (*yat yasmāḥ jñānam evaṃ dvayākāratayānubhūyate svavedanena*). Similarly, Arnold correctly notes later on (2008, 19), in a brief discussion of PS 1.10 (emphasis added): “As Dharmakīrti and Manorathanandin have now stressed, Dignāga's last point—that these three factors [i.e., *viṣayābhāsa*, *grahakākāra*, and *svasamvitti*], separable for heuristic purposes, are not finally distinct—follows from the fact that all of them are comprised in *svasamvitti*; ‘awareness **of both aspects**,’ they say, ‘is the result.’ It is, then, finally only because ‘cognition is experienced in this way (as being **of two aspects**) by self-awareness’ that we know anything at all.”

⁵ As Kellner (2010, 222n58) notes, Jinendrabuddhi (Steinkellner 2005b, 71.12) glosses *saviṣayam jñānam* as an indeclinable compound in the mode of totality (*sākalye 'vyayibhāvaḥ*). For the complete translation of this passage of the PST, centered around the “purpose” (*prayojanam*) of *saviṣayam*, see Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.9b](#); see also Moriyama (2008, 210). Kellner translates this phrase as “when the object is [everything,] cognition right down to the object (*saviṣayam*).” But it is not entirely clear how this translation would differ in meaning from the more standard and straightforward interpretation of *saviṣayam* as *saha viṣayena*, “cognition together with [its] object-field.” Rather, as Kataoka (2016, 234–35) explains, on Jinendrabuddhi's account, this phrase should be interpreted to mean “‘not only when cognition is the object but also when an external object is the object.’ Not only in the case when cognition is the object to be cognized, but also in the case when an external object (such as blue) is the object to be cognized, one experiences it in accordance with self-awareness.” Jinendrabuddhi's comments here thus dovetail with Kellner's argumentation to the effect that Diñnāga's point in PSV *ad* PS 1.9b is not strictly idealistic, but rather should be understood as arguing that reflexive awareness may be construed as the result in all cases, irrespective of whether the object-field (*viṣaya*) is construed as internal or external with respect to the mind.

That said, Kataoka regards Jinendrabuddhi's interpretation of *saviṣayam* to be “distorted” and “forced.” According to Kataoka, PS 1.9ab should be regarded as the articulation of an exclusively Yogācāra perspective, while PS 1.9cd should be regarded as the articulation of an exclusively Sautrāntika perspective, owing to the contrast in emphasis between *yadā hi* and *yadā tu* in PS(V) 1.9bc. Furthermore, Kataoka essentially agrees with Kumāriḷa's charge that, on Diñnāga's idealistic account, the *pramāṇa* and the *phala* would have “different objects” (*bhinnārtha*); for a discussion of this issue, see Chapter 5, Section III.C: [Difference in Object \(*visayabheda*\)](#). In any case, like the question of the number of types of pseudo-perception asserted by Diñnāga, short of attaining the *siddhi* of perfect knowledge of other minds, there is no way to ascertain Diñnāga's intent with absolute certainty. For our part, what matters the most is how Dharmakīrti and his commentators interpreted Diñnāga, and on this point, Kellner and Kataoka are in agreement. The above translation reflects this “Dharmakīrtian” interpretation, to the effect that PS(V) 1.9b articulates a comprehensive perspective, encompassing both Sautrāntika and Yogācāra accounts.

the appearance of the object, without regard to that [reflexively-known nature]. This is because the object is

Known by means of that [appearance]. || 9d₂ ||

For, in whichever way the image of the object appears to cognition, as attractive or unattractive or whatever, the object-field is cognized in just that form. Thus, in reliance upon the reflexive awareness of a cognition [that is presented as having] multiple⁶ images, the property of being an epistemic instrument and the property of being an epistemic object are metaphorically assigned (*upacaryate*) like this and that. But all phenomena are devoid of causal activity (*nirvyāpāra*).

And he says:

Again: that of which [cognition has] the appearance is the epistemic object (*prameya*). The apprehending aspect and the awareness [respectively] have the property of being the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) and the resulting knowledge (*phala*). Hence, the three are not separable. || 10 ||

Now, how is it known that cognition has a bifurcated form?

But the double-formedness [of cognition is established] due to the difference between the cognition of the object-field, and the cognition of that [cognition]. || 11ab ||

For the cognition of an object-field such as visible matter indeed has the appearance both of itself and of the object (*arthasvābhāsam*). But a [subsequent] cognition of that cognition of the object-field [also] has both a self-appearance, as well as an appearance of the [prior] cognition which conforms to the object-field. Otherwise, if the [prior] cognition of the object-field only had the form of the object-field (or the form of itself), exclusively, then the [subsequent] cognition of that cognition could not be qualified by the [prior] cognition of the object-field.⁷

Nor can subsequent and subsequent cognitions possess the appearance of a prior object, which is remote [at the time of those cognitions], because they do not have [the prior object itself] as their object-field.⁸ And thus, the double-formedness of cognition is proven,

Also due to recollection at a later time || 11c ||

⁶ That is, two images (the image of the apprehender and the image of the apprehended). See Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.9d](#).

⁷ For an explanation of Dīnāga's argument here, see Kellner (2010, 211–12). See also Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.11ab](#).

⁸ Cf. Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.11ab](#).

This refers back to “double-formedness” (*dvirūpatā*) [in PS 1.11b].⁹ Because memory also arises in regard to a cognition [of the object], just like [memory arises] in regard to the object [itself], at a later time than the experience [of the object or of the cognition of the object], therefore, cognition possesses a bifurcated form, and is reflexively-experienced.

For what reason?

Because there is no [memory] in regard to that which has not been experienced. || 11d ||

For there is no memory of an object-cognition that has not been experienced, just as [there is no] memory of visible matter and so on [that has not been experienced].

[Someone] could [say] this: “Just like visible matter and so on, a cognition is experienced by means of another cognition.” This does not make sense, because:

If [cognition] is experienced by means of another cognition, there is an infinite regress || 12a₁ ||

“An infinite regress,” if that cognition is experienced by means of another cognition. Why?

Because there is memory in regard to that [second-order cognition] as well. || 12a₂ ||

For, in regard to that cognition which is experienced by means of another cognition, as well, it makes sense for there to be the observation of a memory which occurs at a later time. Therefore, if the experience of that [memory] also occurred by means of another cognition, there would be an infinite regress.

Then there could never be a shift to another object; but it is accepted [that cognition can shift to different objects]. || 12cd ||

Therefore, cognition’s property of being reflexively-experienced must certainly be accepted. And this [property of being reflexively-experienced] itself is the result. Thus, it is established that perception is devoid of conceptuality.

Immediately afterwards, [theories of] perception as proposed by others are examined.

It is certain that the *Vādaśāstra* is not by the Ācārya [Vasubandhu], or else that it is not [of his] essence, because portions [of his system] are explained differently [in other texts]. Because of this, we should investigate. || 13 ||

⁹ In his hypothetical reconstruction of the Sanskrit, marked in italics due to the lack of attestation, Steinkellner (2005a, 5.2) reconstructs this sentence as *dvairūpyam iti sambandhaḥ*. However, the text of PS 1.11ab—attested in Sanskrit—has *dvirūpatā*, rather than *dvairūpyam* (from the PSV *ad cit*). It is therefore more likely that the text of the PSV here should read: *dvirūpateti sambandhaḥ*. Many thanks to John Dunne for suggesting this emendation.

For it is certain that the *Vādavidhi* is not of the Ācārya Vasubandhu, or else that there is no essence of the Ācārya in it. Why? Because portions [of his system] are explained differently [in other texts]. Therefore, we must examine [the *Vādavidhi*] somewhat, as well, in regard to epistemic instruments and so on. [The *Vādavidhi* definition of perception is]: “a perception is a cognition that comes about due to that object [of which it is the perception].” In this regard,

If ‘due to that object’ means ‘[due to the condition (*pratyaya*) which applies to] all [cognitions, i.e., the object-support condition (*ālambanapratyaya*)]’: the [cognition] does not exclusively come about due to that [object-support] of which [it is the cognition]. || 14ab ||

If, with ‘due to that,’ the condition [that applies to] all [cognitions] (*sarvaḥ pratyaya*)¹⁰ is expressed: the cognition of the object-field for which that [cognition] is named does not come about due to the [object-support condition], exclusively. [The cognition of an object] does not arise due to the object-support condition *exclusively*, because in [Sautrāntika] philosophy [it is said]: “For mind and mental factors [arise] due to the four [types of condition].”

If [‘due to that object’ means ‘due to the] object-support’: mnemonic cognitions and so on do not depend upon another [object-support]. || 14cd ||

If, with ‘due to that object,’ only the object-field [is intended, this is unacceptable because conceptual cognitions] such as mnemonic, inferential, and desiderative cognitions do not depend upon some other object-support, either. For it is not the case that an [inferential] cognition of fire (for example) arises having taken smoke (or whatever) [instead of fire] as its object-support.

But the meaning of ‘object-support,’ with respect to visible matter (*rūpa*) and so on, should be discussed. Does cognition arise in regard to those [fundamental particles] of which it has the *appearance*, which [particles] are thereby stated to be the object-support? Or are [fundamental particles], existing in whatever way, the *cause* of the cognition, even though [the cognition] has the appearance of something other than [those fundamental particles]?

Opponent: “Why does it matter?”¹¹

If cognition arises in regard to those [fundamental particles] of which it has the *appearance*, then, because the object-support is an agglomeration, the object-support of the five types of [sensory] cognition is strictly conventionally-existent. [But] it is granted (*kāmam*) [by you] that, in the case of cognitions with the appearance of ‘blue’ and so on, a cognition which arises “due to that object” (*tato ’rthāt*) should be a perception. To clarify: [your argument here is that] even though the agglomeration of these [fundamental particles] in the case of those [cognitions] is nominally-existent (*prajñaptisat*), a substantially-existent (*dravyasat*) image is apprehended. However, this

¹⁰ Or “the all-condition.” See Appendix B, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.14ab](#).

¹¹ Literally, “What [follows] from that?” (*tataḥ kim iti cet*).

would obtain even in the case of ‘substance,’ ‘number,’ and so forth.¹² For it is those very [fundamental particles] which appear as ‘substance’ and so on.

On the other hand, [if the explanation is that fundamental particles] are existing in such a way that they are the *cause* [of the cognition], in such a case, there is no fault of an unacceptable consequence in relation to substance and so on, because they do not exist in that way. In that case, however, it would no longer hold that [the cognition] is named for that of which [it is the cognition]. For it is not the case that the cognition is of each [fundamental particle] individually. And, having been agglomerated (*samūdita*), they are each individually the cause [of the cognition]; the agglomeration (*samudāya*) is not [the cause of the cognition], because it is nominally-existent. This [verse] says as much:

A [cognition] is not due to that of which it has the appearance; for [in that case] the five [types of sensory cognition] would have an object-support that is an agglomeration. Ultimately, [cognition] is not named for that due to which [it arises]. || 15 ||

This is an interpolated verse (*antaraśloka*).

Furthermore, it absurdly follows [from the second argument above] that the visual faculty and so on would also be object-supports. For they, too, ultimately existing otherwise [than how the cognition appears], are the cause of a cognition with a [non-erroneous] appearance of ‘blue’ and so on, as well as an [erroneous] appearance of two moons and so on.¹³

But [cognition] is not named separately from the nature of its object. || 16a ||

¹² That is, the Nyāya “categories” (*padārthas*).

¹³ In the second possibility considered above, i.e., the gloss of object-support (*ālambana*) as the cause (*kāraṇa*) of cognition, Diñnāga asked: “Or are [fundamental particles], existing in whatever way, the cause of the cognition, even though [the cognition] has the appearance of something other than [those fundamental particles]?” (*atha yathāvidyamānā anyābhāsasyāpi vijñānasya kāraṇam bhavanti*). Here, in structurally similar syntax, he points out that, in ultimate terms, the sense-faculties also exist otherwise than how cognition appears—in other words, that cognition has the appearance of something other than the sense-faculties—but that the sense-faculties are nevertheless a cause of the cognition (*te 'pi hi paramarthato 'nyathā vidyamānā nīlādyābhāsasya dvicandrādyābhāsasya ca jñānasya kāraṇībhavanti*). Compare to ĀP(V) 1 (Duckworth et al. 2016, 41):

Even if sensory cognition were caused by fundamental particles, it would not have particles as its object because they do not appear to cognition, any more than the sense faculties do. || 1 ||

An ‘object’ is defined as something whose identity is ascertained by a cognition because a cognition arises with its representation. Minute particles may be the cause of this cognition, but it does not have their appearance; this is also true of the sense faculties. Thus, first of all, minute particles are not the [object-support (*ālambana*)].

dbang po rnam par rig pa'i rgyu || phra rab rdul dag yin mod kyi || der mi snang phyir de yul ni || rul phran ma yin dbang po bzhin || 1 || yul zhes bya ba ni shes pas gang gis rang gi ngo bo nged par 'dzin pa yin te de 'i rnam par skye ba 'i phyir ro || rul phra mo dag gi ni de 'i rgyu nyid yin du zin kyang de lta ma yin te dbang po bzhin no || de ltar na re zhig rdul phra mo dag dmigs pa ma yin no ||

It is not possible to name any cognition, separately from the nature of its object.

And the object-field of [sensory cognition] has been demonstrated to have the nature (*rūpa*) of a universal; therefore, [sensory cognition] cannot be named [on the *Vādaividhi* definition of perception]. || 16bcd ||

The object-field of the five [sensory] cognitions is named with reference to the nature (*rūpa*) of a universal;¹⁴ it is not named by virtue of its own nature. It should be named with reference to the nature (*rūpa*) of a universal, such as color (*rūpatva*). Therefore, it is not possible to name the object-field of the five [sensory] cognitions, according to the *Vādaividhi*.

¹⁴ That is, the “sense-sphere particular (*āyatanasvalakṣaṇa*), which is a peculiar type of universal (*sāmānya*). See Chapter 3, Section I.B: [The Agglomerated Object of Sensory Cognition](#).

Appendix B: PST ad PS(V) 1.4cd-16

PST ad PS(V) 1.4cd

[43.9] The lack of conceptuality [on the part of perception] is not exclusively established by means of perception only, but also by means of scripture (*āgama*). Demonstrating this, [Dīnāga] says: **“It is also stated in the Abhidharma,”** and so on. **Complete** (*samaṅga*) means “completed” (*samaṅgana*), which is to say, “having come together (*saṅgati*).” He who possesses completion in terms of visual consciousness is **one for whom visual consciousness is complete**: to be specific, complete in terms of the visual consciousness. **“Knows blue,”** i.e., cognizes blue in terms of the nature of the object (*arthasvarūpa*), **“but does not [know that he is seeing] ‘blue,’”** i.e., he does not cognize in terms of the label (*nāma*), “This is ‘blue.’” This exact [point] is clarified by the following two statements [from the Abhidharma]: **“In regard to the object, one perceives (*sañjñī*) the object,”** meaning that one perceives the nature (*svarūpa*); **“But, in relation to the object, one does not perceive the category (*dharma*),”** which is to say that there is no perception of the label in regard to the object.

“In what way, then,” and so on: how does this philosophical position (*siddhānta*), that **“the five [sensory] cognitions have agglomerated object-supports,”** make sense, if they do not conceptualize the object-support as being singular? [44] It is to be understood as follows. The word **“agglomerated”** (*sañcita*) expresses a conglomerate (*samudāya*). For “agglomeration” (*sañciti*), “that which has been agglomerated” (*sañcita*), “conglomeration” (*sañcaya*), and “conglomerate” (*samudāya*), are synonyms, because [the suffix *-ya* expresses] a state [and not an action].¹⁵ And it is a conglomeration (*sañcaya*), not just of one fundamental particle by itself, but rather of many, in terms of their common quality (*sādhāraṇa dharma*). If sensory cognition engaged with that [conglomerate] as a universal (*sāmānya*), then it would be conceptual. For the cognition of a universal is known to be conceptual by rule (*niyatam*); for the [Abhidharma] philosophical tradition (*siddhānta*) does not accept a universal as truly real (*vastusat*). Therefore, that very [cognition] conceptualizes this [universal *qua* conglomerate]. Having considered this [objection], [Dīnāga says] **“Well, as [Vasubandhu writes...],”** and so on.

The sense sphere-particular (*āyatanaśvalakṣaṇa*) is that which is apprehended by the visual consciousness and so on; it in this regard that the five [sensory] cognitions **[are asserted to] have particulars as their object-fields, [though] not substance-particulars,** i.e., distinct particulars (*bhedāḥ*) which are substantially blue (or whatever). By negating the property of being an object-field on the part of substance-particulars such as blue, what is stated by implication is that the object-field [of sensory cognition] is a non-difference, i.e., a universal (*sāmānyam abhinnaṃ*) in relation to those [substance-particulars]. But then the fact [that perception is] devoid of conceptuality is contradicted. So how is it possible to interpret the [Abhidharma] treatise in another way? That is the idea here.

¹⁵ Cf. Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, III.3.113.

[Diñnāga] states one refutation for both of these [problems]: **“In that [Abhidharma] context, because it arises from a multiplicity of things,”** and so on. **“In that [Abhidharma] context,”** i.e., in the context of the [*Abhidharmakośa*] treatise. **“Because it arises from a multiplicity of things”** means “because it arises from a manifold of fundamental particles.” Those fundamental particles, which arise from their own causes and conditions, just existing in a state of having attained mutual proximity to one another, individually possessing the capacity to produce cognitions, are what is expressed with the word “agglomerated” (*sañcita*). They are “arisen together” (*sañjāta*) in a “pile” (*cita*), which is a synonym for an “assemblage” (*caya*) [45], hence they are **“agglomerated”** (*sañcita*); this is a *bahuvrīhi* compound of which the last word, the root *ja* [of *sam* + √*ja* in *sañjāta*], has been elided from the prefix, as in the example [of how *prapatitam parṇam asya* becomes] *praparṇa* [“a tree of which the leaves have fallen”].¹⁶ Nor is it the case here that the suffix *-kta* has been applied to the verbal noun (*bhāva*), rather only to the object. For they have been **agglomerated** (*sañcita*), i.e., brought into close contact, by [their] mutually intertwined conditions. Non-identical particles of this type generate [sensory cognitions] with their own appearance; thus, it is stated that **“[the five sensory cognitions have] agglomerated object-supports (*sañcitālambanāḥ*).”** For this reason, [the five sensory cognitions] take all those [fundamental particles together], designated as an ‘agglomeration,’ without distinguishing [them individually], as their object-supports—not only a single substance.

So it is said: **“They [are asserted to have particulars as their object-fields] in regard to a sense-sphere particular (*āyatanasvalakṣaṇa*),”** and so on. In this case, too, those fundamental particles produce visual cognitions and so on in the manner described, i.e., only in concert—not individually. Therefore, **because it arises from a multiplicity of things, with respect to its own object, [sensory cognition] is said to have a universal as the [sensory] field (*sāmānyagocara*).** To break it down (*vigraha*): it is that of which the object-domain is a universal.

Opponent: “A universal is conceptualized as being non-different, and the object-field of sensory cognition is a real entity called a fundamental particle, which is not the same (*aneka*) [as other particulars]. So how could it serve as a universal object-domain?”

There is no such fault. Just this unique real entity *qua* fundamental particle, expressed [both] with the word **“agglomerated”** and with the word **“sense sphere-particular”** (*āyatanasvalakṣaṇa*), is the same as [those other proximate fundamental particles with which it exists in a relationship of] mutual dependence, in terms of the similarity consisting in its own individually-restricted (*pratiniyata*) capacity to produce cognition. **“Universal”** (*sāmānya*) just [means] “the same” (*samāna*), because the nominal derivative process (*taddhita*) is applied to its own meaning, like how “that which relates to the four castes” (*cāturvarṇya*) [can have the same meaning as “four castes” (*caturvarṇa*)].

Thus [Diñnāga] has spoken. He furthermore states that the sensory field (*gocara*) is an agglomerated object-field or sense sphere-particular. **“But not due to conceptualizing non-difference in relation to things that are different,”** and so on; this statement is connected with **“[sensory cognition is said to have] a universal as the [sensory] field.”** [46] This means that it

¹⁶ Cf. Vārttika 14 of Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, II.2.24.

is not due to a conceptualization of non-difference, in relation to things that are [actually] different, that [sensory cognition] is said to have an agglomerated object-field, i.e., an object-field which is a sense sphere-particular. It should be seen that this treatise has been composed with [the phrase] **“not a substance-particular,”** as well, which is a denial [in the case of sensory cognition] of a restriction to a single fundamental particle-substance; [in other words,] there is no implication (*sāmarthyākṣipta*) that there is a [real] universal which is the object-field. Thus, there is no contradiction.

They say: “Even though a substance-particular which is not the same (*aneka*) [as any other particular] is included in a single sense-sphere of visible matter (or whatever) by virtue of having the single effect of a sensory cognition, it is not simultaneously apprehended [with other particles]; on the contrary, [it is] only [apprehended] sequentially.”¹⁷

To those [who say this], it should be said: if there is no simultaneous apprehension of many substance-particulars, how then is there the simultaneous apprehension of sesame seeds and lentils and so on which are located in different places? For it is not the case that they make another, single substance of which there would be the apprehension, due to the fact that they are not conjoined, and due to the fact that they are [legumes] of different types.

Opponent: “By virtue of an error, due to the fact that the seeing occurs extremely quickly, in that case, there is a determination of non-sequentiality, even though [the seeing] is sequential.”

Well then, when they are falling quickly in sequence, there should also be the determination that “I apprehend [them] all at once,” because the quickness is the same! And since the observation of syllables (*varṇa*) such as *ra-* and *sa-* occurs quickly, shouldn’t there be a determination of non-sequential apprehension? And therefore, due to the difference in sequence, there would be no distinction in what is heard, as in the case of words such as *rasa* and *sara* and so on.¹⁸ And with regard to falling drops of water which are traveling quickly, there could be no determination of [their] apprehension—when there is the thought, “I am apprehending [the drops] sequentially”—due to the rapidity of [successive] visual cognition. Therefore, to the extent that something is an element of the sensory field (*gocara*), it should only be cognized simultaneously [with everything else in the sensory field].

PST *ad* PS(V) 1.5

“And we say,” and so on: refuting misunderstandings about the object-field, [Dinnāga] asserts this very nonconceptuality: **“A property-possessor (*dharmin*) of which the nature is manifold.”**

[47] **“Of which the nature is manifold”** is stated in regard to those different types of properties with the nature of being universals, such as ‘the property of being known’ (*jñeyatva*), that are conceptualized on the basis of the exclusion of other things. But the ‘property-possessor’

¹⁷ See Chapter 3, Section II.A.2: [Simultaneous and Sequential Cognition, Again](#).

¹⁸ See Chapter 1, Section II.E.2: [The Example of the Firebrand](#).

(*dharmin*)—defined as visible matter or whatever—does not actually possess parts. Demonstrating that those different [properties] which are conceptualized on the part of that [property-possessor] are strictly the object-fields of a conceptual cognition, not [the object-field] of the other [type of cognition, i.e., nonconceptual perceptual cognition], he says: “**Not cognized in its entirety through the sense-faculty.**” “Through the sense-faculty” (*indriyāt*) is an ablative in the sense of a reason, or alternatively an elided gerundive (*lyap lopa*): the meaning here is that there is no apprehension in every regard (i.e., in terms of both the universal and the particular characteristic), either “due to the sense-faculty (*indriyāt*)” as a cause, or [from] “having reached (*prāpya*)¹⁹ the sense-faculty.”²⁰

Well then, what kind of an object-support does [perception] have? He says: “**individually-experienced**” (*svasamvedya*) and so on: individually-experienced, i.e., not known by everyone (*anāgamika*).²¹ “**Inexpressible,**” i.e., ineffable. Alternatively, when “individually-experienced” is stated, it is [in the sense of a question] to be addressed: “What is its nature?”. He says: “**inexpressible.**” But this inexpressibility should be understood as being due to the difference in nature between the two [types of] cognition. That is to say: sensory and linguistic cognition have two different [types of] appearances, because they are [respectively] vivid and non-vivid. For it is not the case that, with regard to a linguistic [cognition], the form of the object appears with a vivid image, as it does in the case of a sensory cognition, wherein the senses are engaged. If, on the other hand, the sensory field (*indriyagocara*) were itself expressible, it would itself also appear in that way in a linguistic [cognition]; but this is not so. [48] And that which does not appear in a linguistic [cognition] is not a linguistic referent (*śabdārtha*).

Therefore, since it is to be apprehended by a cognition with a different [i.e., nonconceptual] nature, a sensory object-field is not expressible in terms of [conceptualized abstract properties] such as ‘whiteness.’ That which is to be apprehended by a cognition of a different nature from this [cognition] is not [to be apprehended] by that [cognition]. For example, a buffalo is to be apprehended by a cognition which is different from [the cognition of] a horse. And ‘whiteness’ (or whatever)—i.e., a linguistic object-field—is to be apprehended by a cognition which has a nature that is different from [a cognition which has] a sensory object-field. [This is a proof by] the pervasion of a contradictory quality (*vyāpakaviruddha*).

[Someone] could [say] this: “The basis (*āśraya*) of a sensory cognition is the eye-faculty and so on, but the basis of linguistic [cognition] is the mind (*manas*). Therefore, since the basis is different, even though the object-field is the same, the two have a different appearance.”

¹⁹ This is the elided gerundive (*lyap*) form in question.

²⁰ In other words, the cognition that arises “due to the sense faculty” does not cognize the object with respect to all of its qualities.

²¹ The prefix *ā* can mean “for all,” as in *ālokitaḥ*, of which the *ā-* is also rendered by Tibetan *kun tu*. The Tibetan translation here renders *āgamika* as *kun tu gro ba*, which is normally the translation of *sarvatraga*. But this is most likely just an overly literal rendering of $\sqrt{\text{gam}}$ as “move, go” (Tib. *'gro*) where here it means “to know.” In other words, the idea here is that what is individually known or experienced by oneself (*sva-samvedya*) is not (*an-*) known ($\sqrt{\text{gam}}$) by everyone (*ā-*); thus, it is *anāgamika*.

If this were so, then how could there be a determination to the effect that visual cognitions [and auditory cognitions] and so on have different [types of] objects? For in that case, as well, it would be possible to say that [the five types of sensory cognition all] have exactly the same object, but that there is a difference in the appearance, due to the difference in the basis.²²

Opponent: “Due to conformity (*anukāra*) with some aspect (*ākāra*) of the object (*artha*), linguistic [cognition] has the exact same object-field [as sensory cognition], [but] for example visual cognition does not [have the exact same object-field as auditory cognition]. For it is not the case that those [sensory cognitions all] mutually conform to some aspect of the object.”

No; because in this case, as well, there is still conformity in terms of the property of being known (*jñeyatva*) and so on. Moreover, this idea:

If sensory and linguistic cognition do not have the same object-field, [then], having understood [the concept] ‘cow’ from the ostension (*upadeśa*), “That which possesses a dewlap and so on is a ‘cow,’” seeing later a particular individual [cow], how could one thus determine: “This is that thing I heard about”? And when it is said, “Bring a cow,” how could one engage with the actual (*eva*) sensory object-field? For it is not the case that, on the part of someone who has had an apprehension of one thing, there is the cognition “This is exactly that” in regard to something else. Nor is it reasonable that, having been commanded in regard to one thing, there is activity with regard to something else. But there is such cognition, and one does engage with sensory object-fields through language. [49] Therefore, there is just one object-field for both [conceptual and nonconceptual cognition].

That is not an [acceptable] idea; for, only those explicators who are engaged in an analysis of the nature of reality (*tattva*)—not those participating in convention—make this kind of a distinction between the [sensory and conceptual] object-field. But, by virtue of the imaginative determination that [the sensory object] is just that (*tattva*) [conceptual object], coalescing the two objects (i.e., the seen and the conceptualized) into one, they participate in conventional reality (*vyavaharanti*). So much for the *reductio*! And thus, conceptuality does not engage that kind of individually-experienced inexpressible form (*rūpa*), the object-field of perception. Because the [conceptualization] has the same object-field as the linguistic statement, the ostension of the object-field also establishes the nonconceptuality of perception.²³

²² It is understood in Buddhist epistemology that visual cognition takes visible matter (*rūpa*) as its object, auditory cognition takes sound as its object, and so on. The opponent’s argument is that the object of conceptual and nonconceptual cognition is the same, but the cognitions appear differently because their sensory basis is different. Jinendrabuddhi’s response is that, in this case, it would be impossible to maintain that the differing appearances of the cognitions of the five sensory modalities are different on account of a difference in their object, because the difference in appearance has been attributed to the sensory faculty. In other words, if visual and auditory cognition only appear differently by virtue of the fact that they arise due to different sense-faculties, then sound and visible matter would have to be “the same thing” in some sense. This is obviously unacceptable.

²³ In other words, when someone points out “That is a ‘cow,’” the fact that it has to be pointed out—i.e., the fact that the mere visual perception of the cow does not in and of itself result in the identification of the cow as a ‘cow’—

[Opponent:] “Well then, in that case, how can there be conventional action by means of a perception that does not have the nature of being a [conceptual] determination? For one who is having the determination of something as being that thing, acts in order to obtain, or avoid, instrumental means for attaining pleasure or pain [respectively].”

There is no problem. For even in regard to a perception which is a ‘mere seeing’ of the object (*arthālocanamātra*), there is still conventional activity due to desire and its opposite [i.e., aversion], which are preceded by the recollection of the [object’s] causal capacity that has been induced (*āhita*) by the experience. For this is the way things really are (*vastudharmo hy eṣa*): an exceptionally salient experience plants the seed of memory, and due to seeing [again] that kind of instrumental means for attaining pleasure or instrumental means for attaining pain which has [already] been experienced—i.e., when this [seed] is activated—there is the memory: “This is that very thing [that brought pleasure or pain].” Due to this [memory], there is one of the two, desire or its opposite [i.e., aversion]. Due to that [desire or aversion], as well, a person engages in activity, [obtaining or avoiding] as appropriate.²⁴

“**Thus, first of all**” and so on is the conclusion. Here, in the phrase “**Thus, first of all, [a perceptual cognition] that has arisen from the five sense-faculties,**” the word ‘first of all’ (*tāvat*) indicates that there are also other [perceptual] cognitions which are not arisen from the five sense faculties, and their particular defining characteristics are to be explained separately. But every [perceptual cognition] is nonconceptual. This is contained in the *Nyāyamukha*.

PSṬ ad PS(V) 1.6ab

[50] Next, [Dinnāga considers] an issue that is raised on the part of someone with great intellect. Here is the issue: “All the different [types of] perception are strictly nonconceptual. And they are indeed brought together with ‘**perception is devoid of conceptuality.**’ That is to say, the defining characteristics of these [different types of perception] were laid out separately in the *Nyāyamukha*. So, what is the point of [redundantly] stating the different defining characteristics [of the different types of perception] separately here [in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*]?”

Hence, in order to eliminate this [objection], he says: “[**And here, other types of perception are distinguished, in response to the opinions of others.**” ‘Distinguished’ (*viśeṣaṇa*), ‘characterized,’ (*viśeṣa*), [and] ‘differentiated’ (*bheda*) are synonyms. And so, it should be understood that [“distinguished” refers to] the defining characteristics of [the different types of] perception, because that is the topic. “**Here,**” i.e., in this text; this distinction between the separate

proves that the visual cognition itself is not conceptual, because the mere visual cognition does not in and of itself categorize the visual object as a ‘cow.’

²⁴ In other words, first there is nonconceptual ‘mere seeing’ of the object, then there is a recollection of the causal capacities of what has been seen, then desire or aversion arises in relation to those causal capacities, and finally one engages in conventional activity to acquire or avoid them.

defining characteristics [of the different types of perception is made] in response to the mistaken opinion of others concerning those defining characteristics.

Some have a misunderstanding about mental-cognitive perception (*manovijñāna pratyakṣa*), to the effect that it only apprehends an object which has been experienced by sensory cognition: specifically (*eva*), that an affective sensation (*saṃvedana*) such as desire is not [perceptual], nor is the cognition of yogis. Since there is this kind of misunderstanding on the part of others, thus, in response to that, the different defining characteristics are stated separately for [each of the other three types of] perception that is not arisen from the five senses, even though they are brought together with **“perception is devoid of conceptuality.”** The point here is that [this is stated] in order to eliminate the wrong opinions of others.

However, other [interpreters of Diñnāga] claim that **“in response to the opinions of others”** [refers to the opinion]: “Isn’t there also conceptual sensory [cognition], such that there is a distinction [between conceptual and nonconceptual sensory perception]?” Others [who are not Buddhist] have the opinion that some sensory cognitions (on the part of those who are engaged in conventional activity) are conceptual, while some (on the part of those engaged in the opposite [of conventional activity]) are nonconceptual. So, [these other interpreters of Diñnāga] explain that this distinction concerns [the statement at PS 1.3c, that] **“perception is devoid of conceptuality,”** i.e., [that this distinction is made] for the sake of distinguishing [nonconceptual sensory cognition] from the conceptual sensory cognition that the others theorize.²⁵

[51] If, according to those [who interpret the PS in this way], this ‘distinction’ is stated in response to the opinion of others [who assert the existence of conceptual sense-perception], in that case, given that the [initial] characterization [of perception as nonconceptual by definition] is *not* being made in response to the opinion of anyone else, the definition [of perception] would not itself be expressed as [Diñnāga’s] own view.²⁶ And then, what would be the defining characteristic of perception? Furthermore, this critique would be incoherent. Thus, it is incorrect.

“But all [perception] is strictly nonconceptual”: the word ‘but’ (*tu*) expresses that this separate specific definition [for each type of perception] is not in response to our own [Buddhist] position

²⁵ In other words, rather than reading *paramatāpekṣaṃ cātra viśeṣaṇam* as “And here, [the three different types of non-sensory perception, namely mental, yogic, and reflexive-awareness perception are] distinguished, in response to the [mistaken] opinions of others [concerning the characterization of these other types of nonconceptual cognition as perceptual],” they read: “And here, [perceptual cognition] is distinguished [from conceptual cognition,] in response to the opinions of others [who believe that there is such a thing as conceptual sense-perception].”

²⁶ Jinendrabuddhi’s meaning is somewhat unclear, but he seems to be arguing that, on the opponent’s explanation, perception is here “distinguished” or “specified” (*viśeṣaṇa*) as exclusively nonconceptual only “in response to the opinion of others” (*paramatāpekṣa*) that there exists conceptual sensory perception. But, since the initial definition of perception as devoid of conceptuality in PS 1.3c (*pratyakṣaṃ kalpanāpoḍham*) is not similarly stated to be “in response to the opinions of others,” that definition of perception must be someone else’s, other than Diñnāga’s, because the opponent has indicated that Diñnāga only makes this specification in the introduction to PS(V) 1.6 in response to such opponents. This would leave the PS without a statement of Diñnāga’s own definition of perception.

In other words, according to Jinendrabuddhi, at PS 1.3c Diñnāga has already specified that perception is by definition devoid of conceptuality, in response to the view that sensory perception is (or may be) conceptual. There is, therefore, no purpose in stating the exact same point, in response to the exact same mistaken view, at this juncture.

[that perception is nonconceptual]; hence, it clarifies the meaning [of the preceding phrase], because there is no misunderstanding [among Buddhists as to the fact that sense-perception is nonconceptual]. Everything to be defined [as perception] is included with that very specification: **“perception is devoid of conceptuality.”**

“And there is mental [perception],” and so on: the word ‘and’ is in the sense of a conjunction. The word **“object”** (*artha*) is a synonym for the epistemic object (*jñeya*). [Rather than being a part of *svasaṃvitti*, the prefix *sva* construes with *rāgadi*, hence] **“one’s own desire and so on”** (*rāgādisvam*) refers to one’s own desires and so on (*rāgādīnām svam*). The word ‘one’s own’ (*sva*) is an expression for ‘self’ (*ātman*). [Thus,] **“the awareness of the object and one’s own desire and so on”** (*artharāgādisvasaṃvittiḥ*) means the awareness (*saṃvitti*) both of the object as well as of one’s own desire and so on. Awareness (*saṃvitti*) is that by means of which something is known (*saṃvedyate*) or cognized (*jñāyate*), i.e., individually bound to awareness. The nonconceptual [awareness of those objects and affective states] is mental perception.

There are two theories (*kalpanā*) in this regard: [perceptual] mental cognition apprehends exactly the same (*eva*) object which has been apprehended by the senses, or [it apprehends] something else. If it is the former, then [mental perception] would not have instrumentality, because it would apprehend that which has already been apprehended, like memory and so on. On the other hand, in the second case, then the blind would also apprehend objects. For if [perceptual] mental cognition, not depending upon sensory cognition, engaged with an external object, then even one lacking eyes and so on would obtain sight. [52] So it should be explained what kind of thing this is; he says, **“Additionally, [because it does not depend upon the senses, a nonconceptual] mental cognition,”** and so on. **“An object-field such as visible matter”** is a *karmadhāraya* compound: object-fields which are visible matter or whatever.

Opponent: “But if the visible matter and so on are themselves the object-fields, what is the point of mentioning (*grahaṇam*) the object-field [separately]?”

It is for the sake of excluding visible matter (and so on) that is not being taken as an object-support (*ālambana*). For it is not the case that things which are not being cognized are object-fields.²⁷ Metaphorically, however, by virtue of belonging to that general category (*jāti*), it may be designated the object-field, even though it is not the object-field *per se* (*viśayatva*).

Well then, of what is that [visible matter and so on] the object-field? The immediately-preceding sensory cognition, because just this is the topic of discussion. Thus it is stated that [mental perception] has as its object-support a transformation (*vikāra*) of the object-field [of sensory cognition] such as visible matter, [which is an acceptable interpretation of the compound *rūpādiviśayālambana*] because it is said that “[A *bahuvrīhi*] compound may be formed after eliding the second member with a word in the sixth case denoting ‘collection or modification,’”²⁸

²⁷ Emending MSS *na hy *avijñāyamānaviśayā bhavanti* to *na hy avijñāyamānā viśayā bhavanti*, on the basis of PST_T (60.12-13): *rnam par shes par bya bzhin pa ma yin pa rnam yul du 'gyur ba ma yin no* ||

Thanks to John Dunne for suggesting this emendation.

²⁸ Cf. Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, II.2.24.

and the latter member of the compound [*rūpādiviṣayāḷambana*] is elided, as for example “he who has ornaments made of gold” (*suvarṇāḷaṅkāra*).²⁹

In that case, what is the transformation of the object-field? It is a transformation of that [object-field], which is produced by that [object-field]; specifically, [its] subsequent moment. This is the convention. However, it is not the case that, while the property-possessor (*dharmin*) stays the same, one property ceases [and] another property manifests, since [the Sāṅkhya theory of] evolution (*pariṇāma*) has already been refuted. So it is said that “the object-support [of mental perception] is an instant of visible matter and so on, which is subsequent to, and produced by, the object-field of the sensory cognition.” This eliminates the fault of lacking instrumentality (*aprāmāṇyadoṣa*).

Opponent: “But then on what account is there a restriction as to the object-field?”

[There is a restriction] since a specific immediately-preceding cognition (*samanantarapratyaya*) produces the [mental-perceptual cognition], which has as a supporting condition the immediately-prior instant of visible matter (or whatever) from which [the mental perception’s] own object-field

²⁹ Jinendrabuddhi’s grammatical argument here is that, just as a golden ornament (*alaṅkāra*) is a modification or transformation (*vikāra*) of gold (*suvarṇa*), the object-support (*āḷambana*) for a mental perception is a modification or transformation of sensory cognition’s object-field (*viṣaya*). Specifically, the object-support of a mental perception is a “transformation” of the sensory object-field, in the sense that it is the t_1 causal derivative of that t_0 object-field.

This argument turns on the distinction between the object-support (*āḷambana*) and the object-field (*viṣaya*), which only applies in certain circumstances. In the case of sensory cognition, for example, there is no difference between these two; the causally efficacious external object (*artha*) is both the object-support (*āḷambana*) and the object-field (*viṣaya*) of sensory perception, because sensory perception both directly “apprehends” ($\sqrt{\text{grah}}$) and conventionally “engages with” or “bears upon” (*pra + \sqrt{\text{vrt}}*) its object. Unlike sensory perception, however, but similar to inference, the *object-support* of mental perception is usually distinct from the *object-field* of mental perception; see the discussion in [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.14cd](#) concerning how fire is the *object-support* of inference, even though the *object-field* is smoke.

The overarching issue here concerns the instrumentality of perception; see the discussion in Chapter 1, Section II.C.2: [The Instrumentality of Mental Perception](#). In brief, due to the momentariness (*kṣaṇikatva*) of all phenomena, the t_0 object as it existed when it caused the sensory cognition no longer exists. What *does* exist is the subsequent causal descendant of the object as it existed at that earlier time, i.e., the t_{1+} “transformation” (*vikriyā*) of the t_0 object. And it is this causal descendant which possesses the causal functionality (*arthakriyā*) in which we are interested.

With regard to mental perception, then, there is a divergence between the object-field (*viṣaya*) as that which is directly “apprehended” (*grāhya*), and the object-support (*āḷambana*) as the entity possessing the causal functionality in which we are interested (i.e., the *pravṛtṭiviṣaya*). Specifically, the *object-field* (*viṣaya*) of mental perception, its primary cause (*upādānahetu*) or that which it directly “apprehends,” is the t_1 cognitive image (*ākāra*) or sensory cognition (*indriyajñāna*) produced by the causal interaction between the t_0 external object and the t_0 sense-faculty. By contrast, the *object-support* (*āḷambana*) of mental perception, that which mental perception “bears upon” or “engages with” insofar as it possesses the causal functionality in which we are interested, is the t_1 causal derivative of the t_0 external object. And this t_1 causal derivative of the t_0 object, the *object-support* of mental perception, exists simultaneously with (but is distinct from) the *object-field* of mental perception, i.e., the cognitive image existing at t_1 .

Put slightly differently, the idea here is that the object-support of the mental perception is *not* typically the immediately-preceding sensory cognition which constitutes the object-field of mental perception, because typically we are interested in or desire to act upon the external object that is presented to cognition, rather than upon the mere cognition itself. The major exception here would be instances of *jñānasamvit*, where we are specifically interested in the contents of cognition just as the contents of cognition; see Chapter 4, Section I.B.3: [Arthasamvit and Jñānasamvit](#).

[i.e., the sensory cognition] is produced. Thus, [the external object] is an object-field, in just the manner explained.³⁰ Understand this!

[53] **“Which is engaged with the image of an experience (*anubhavākārapravṛtta*)”**: that by means of which something is experienced (*anubhūyate 'nena*), is an experience (*anubhava*). An ‘image’ (*ākāra*) is an appearance (*ābhāsa*). But memory and so on also have a non-experiential³¹ nature (*rūpa*); so, in order to eliminate them, ‘experience’ is mentioned. Thus, [mental perception] is stated to be that which has an experience as its image. But what is that [experience]? By virtue of the previously-stated reasoning, it is just the sensory cognition, itself. That which engages with (i.e., is produced by) the image of an experience is **engaged with the image of an experience**. So it is said: “[Mental perception] is arisen from the immediately-preceding condition, i.e., from the sensory cognition.” This refutes [the objection] which was stated, that “There would also be the apprehension of objects on the part of those who are blind and so on,” since [mental perception] does not independently (*svatantram*) engage with external objects, but rather, [does so] in dependence upon sensory cognition (*indriyapratyaya*); and there is no sensory cognition on the part of the blind and so on. Therefore, that [fault] does not exist.

“And reflexive awareness with regard to desire and so on”: awareness of [awareness] itself is reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvedana*); awareness is that by means of which [something] is experienced (*saṃvedyate*). This is construed as the aspect of the apprehender (*grāhakākāra*), [cognition’s] property of having the nature of experience. For, precisely due to the fact that they have an experiential nature, desire and so on—being illuminated by virtue of this fact of having the nature of experience—make themselves known. And this is referred to as “reflexive experience” (*ātmasaṃvedanā*). Hence, this property of having an experiential nature is the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) for those [affective states such as desire], while the awareness, which actually (*bhāvarūpam*) has the nature of knowing itself, should be understood as the result (*phala*). But the nature of those [affective states such as desire] is the epistemic object (*prameya*).

The mention of desire and so on is for the purpose of pointing out (*darśana*) a vivid experience, [54] because the reflexive awareness (*ātmasaṃvedana*) of all cognitions is perceptual. But it is nonconceptual, because it is unsuitable for convention.³² For it is possible to apply a convention (*samaya*) in regard to something which has been made into an object-field; but it is not [possible for] awareness to make a desire (or whatever) which has not arisen into an object-field, because the [awareness] has also not arisen with the nature of desire or whatever. Even if it has arisen [with that nature], awareness does not apply a linguistic expression onto the nature of desire and so on. That is to say: having brought to mind (*ā + √dā*) a linguistic expression, one [subsequently] applies it [to the preceding awareness]. But, when the expression is apprehended, the [awareness] is not [apprehended], because it is momentary; nor is the desire or whatever [apprehended], either. So

³⁰ In other words, the t_0 external object is the object-field of the t_1 sensory perception, and the t_1 sensory perception is the object-field of the t_2 mental perception. In this way, mental perception is “restricted” (*niyata*) as to its contents, insofar as those contents must be causally derived from the object-field of sensory perception (i.e., from the external object). See Chapter 1, Section II.C: [Mental Perception](#).

³¹ That is to say, “non-experiential” because conceptual.

³² See Chapter 5, Section II.A.1: [Individual Experience as “Unshared” \(*asādhāraṇa*\) and Inexpressible](#).

what is applied? How? Thus, because it is incapable of [being expressed with a] convention, the sensation (*saṃvitti*) of desire and so on is not invested with linguistic expression. One who has not apprehended the convention of a word for something does not apprehend that with which the word has been associated. For example, [one does not apprehend] scent [by means of] visual consciousness. And it is not the case that a linguistic convention regarding the nature of desire (or whatever) is apprehended by that sensation [of desire or whatever]; because there is no cause (*kāraṇābhāva*) [for its apprehension].

In this regard, some claim: “The basis [i.e., the subject or *dharmin* under discussion] is not established. To be specific: that which is to be proven (*sādhyā*) is the nonconceptuality of reflexive awareness. But, first of all, that [reflexive awareness of pleasure or whatever] does not even occur with the cognition. How much more so could it occur with pleasure and so on, which do not have a cognitive nature? For those [sensations such as pleasure, are apprehended as inhering in the same thing (*artha*), due to their (*samavāya*) in a single soul (*ātman*) along with cognition [which is also inhering in that soul]. Hence, they themselves only have the nature of being epistemic objects (*prameyas*). [55] That is to say, they are not experiencers of anything else; how, then, could they be experiencers of themselves?”

Those [who argue like this] must necessarily accept that a cognition has the image (*ākāra*) of pleasure and so on. Otherwise, [pleasure and so on] simply would not be knowable (*vedya*) for that [cognition]. For it is not logical that the mere presence of a cognition constitutes the awareness of an object, because since that [mere existence of awareness] is undifferentiated with respect to everything, one would come to the absurd conclusion that [otherwise] all objects would be apprehended.³³ A cognition which is devoid of the image of something is not a knower (*vedaka*) of that thing, like how the cognition of a cow is [not the knower] of a horse. And [on the opponent’s account] the cognition of pleasure and so on is devoid of the image of pleasure and so on. [This is a proof by] the pervasion of a contrary quality (*vyāpakaviruddha*).³⁴

Opponent: “Let us stipulate that the cognition has the image of that [affective state such as pleasure]. So what?”

So this: pleasure or whatever *just is* a [cognition] that is accompanied by an image of delight or torment or whatever; hence, pleasure etc. is established as having a cognitive nature (*jñānarūpa*). For it is established for those [Vaiśeṣikas and so on] as well that a real entity (*vastu*) with a cognitive nature (*bodharūpa*) has a form which is satisfying or whatever (*sātādirūpa*). In this regard, let one make designations (*sañjñā*) as desired, such as, “a cognition is pleasant or unpleasant” and so on. There is nothing objectionable here. The manner in which an image that is cognized as delightful (or whatever), has not been fashioned by a pleasure (or whatever) that has a non-cognitive nature, is explained elsewhere; but here, for fear of [writing] too much text, [the present discussion] is not extended.

³³ See Chapter 2, Section II.C: [The “Determiner” \(*niyāmaka*\)](#).

³⁴ See Chapter 5, note [86](#).

Even for one who claims, “Pleasure and so on are not mental, nor are mental (*cetana*);³⁵ on the contrary, they are strictly epistemic objects (*prameyas*), with natures that are the opposites [of things which are internal and mental]”: for one [who says this], as well, it is established that [pleasure] is a real entity, with a cognitive nature, possessed of an image of delight and so on, by virtue of the approach discussed [above]. [56] And it is the reflexive awareness of just that [cognitively-natured entity with the image of delight or whatever] which is said to be the perception [of pleasure and so on]—not [the awareness] of a pleasure (or whatever) which is devoid of that [cognitive nature and image of delight], theorized by others. And that reflexive awareness will be established [in PS 1.9-12]; so it is not the case that the basis is not established.

Opponent: “Since it is said [in AKBh I.44d]³⁶ that ‘the five [sensory] cognitions have two faculties as their basis,’³⁷ and also that ‘every sense-generated cognition indeed also has the mind as its basis,’ why then is only this [sixth type of consciousness] said to be mental (*mānasam*)?”

[Dīnāga] says, “**Because they do not depend upon the senses,**” meaning: because they do not rely upon a physical (*rūpin*) sense-faculty. It is agreed-upon that ‘the mental’ is that which only has the mind—not a physical sense-faculty—as its basis. In that case, how could [both] the reflexive awareness of those five sensory cognitions, as well as the desire (and so on) connected with them, be [the same type of] mental perception?³⁸ Because they have that [i.e., reflexive awareness] as their type, by virtue of the general applicability (*sāmānya*) of reflexive awareness [to all of them]. But how can the word ‘perception’ be appropriate for something that does not depend upon the senses? Insofar as the warrant (*nimitta*) for the designation ‘perception’ (*pratyakṣa*) is the faculty (*akṣa*), which was stated [at PSV *ad* PS 1.4ab], this designation [“perception”] is an explanatory term (*paribhāṣikī*) for a particular type of cognition. Alternatively, on another account, there is no fault, either, because the mind (*manas*) is also a faculty (*akṣa*).

PST *ad* PS(V) 1.6cd

“**Similarly, [the vision of the object of meditation] on the part of yogins**”: Just as a nonconceptual mental [cognition] is a perception, so too the [nonconceptual mental cognition] of yogins [is a perception]. Yoga [in this context means] meditative equipoise (*samādhi*); those who have this [equipoise] are yogins. “**Not mixed with the teaching of the guru**”: in this context, the phrase “**teaching of the guru**” expresses a conceptual [understanding] of the scriptures, because

³⁵ This is a direct citation of PVin 1.22, Steinkellner (2007, 22.13): *nāntarāḥ sukhādayo nāpi cetanāḥ*. This precise formulation is not found in the PS or PV, though the opponent’s argument here closely resembles the Sāṅkhya interlocutor’s position in PV 3.268. It should also be noted that the opponent’s usage of *cetana* as an adjective here does not track the Buddhist technical term *cetanā* in the sense of “volition” or “intention.”

³⁶ Pradhan (1975, 34.9): *atītaḥ punar eṣām āśrayo mana ity ucyete pañca vijñānakāyā indriyadvayāśrayāḥ |*

³⁷ That is, the mental faculty and one of the five physical sensory faculties.

³⁸ The terminology here might be somewhat confusing. The interlocutor’s question concerns the warrant for designating both the reflexive awareness of the five types of sensory cognition, as well as the reflexive awareness of desire and so on, as “reflexive awareness,” i.e., as one of the two mental types of perception, the other being “mental perception” in the technical sense.

the subject-matter is taught by means of a [conceptual] object.³⁹ “**Not mixed with**” means “devoid of.” By virtue of this [lack of conceptuality], [such cognitions] also obtain vividness of appearance, because a nonconceptual [cognition] is invariably vivid. The word “**only**” (*mātra*) is [present] in order to eliminate a superimposed object (*artha*). [57] Therefore, only that [yogic cognition] which has a real thing (*bhūtārtha*) as its object-field—such as the vision of the [Fourfold] Noble Truth—is an epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*); a distorted (*viplava*) [cognition] with an unreal object, [like the meditation on] making everything into the earth-element and so on, is not [a *pramāṇa*].

Opponent: “But since this point [that perception must have a real object, in addition to being definitionally nonconceptual and vivid] is gleaned from that very exception which will be explained [in the discussion of the pseudo-perception of unreal objects at PS 1.7cd-8ab], what is the use of mentioning [the word] “**only**” (*mātra*)?”

This is true; nevertheless, for the sake of emphasizing (*jñāpanārtham*) the primary importance [of yogic perception], this very point⁴⁰ is elucidated in the statement of its definition; but this primary importance is due to the fact that [yogic perception] is the cause of liberation (*mokṣa*). Meanwhile, the fact that it is nonconceptual and the fact that it has a vivid appearance is due to the fact that [yogic perception] is the result of perfected meditation (*bhāvanāniṣpattiphala*). That cognition, which is the result of perfected meditation, is nonconceptual and has a vivid appearance. For example, on the part of those deranged (*upapluta*) by lust or grief and so on, there is a [vivid] cognition which has the beloved as its object-field; just so [for] yogic perception as well. [This has been a proof by means of the] nature [as the evidence, i.e., *svabhāvahetu*].

PSṬ *ad* PS(V) 1.7ab

“**Conceptual cognition is indeed [also perceptual].**” The meaning of this is: that which is reflexively known is a perception in regard to the knowledge about itself (*svādhigama*), such as a cognition of desire and so on. With “**That is true!**” and so on, [Diñnāga] is demonstrating that the [point which is to be] proven has already been accepted. He maintains as follows: that cognition which apprehends a word or convention concerning some object-field, since it apprehends the object-field by dint of the word, is conceptual in regard to that [object-field]. But the nature [of cognition] is incapable of [being expressed with a] convention (*aśakyasamaya*), as stated previously. Hence, in the context of [this inexpressible nature being] that which is to be known, every cognition is, precisely, perceptual.

³⁹ The meaning of Jinendrabuddhi’s gloss here is somewhat obscure. Compare:

Steinkellner (2005, 56.13-14): *atra viṣayeṇa viṣayino nirdeśād āgamavikalpo gurunirdeśaśabdenoktaḥ |*

PSṬ_T (65.9-10): *’dir yul gyis yul can bstan pa la | lung gi rnam par rtog pa ni bla mas bstan pa ’i sgras brjod do ||*

⁴⁰ That is, the point that genuine yogic perception only concerns real objects, such as the Four Nobles’ Truths.

“Thus, first of all, perception [has been discussed].” The word “first of all” (*tāvat*) is in the sense of a sequence. Having discussed perception, there is the discourse concerning its spurious simulacrum (*tadābhāsa*) [i.e., pseudo-perception (*pratyakṣābhāsa*)]; that is the sequence.

PSṬ ad PS(V) 1.7cd-8ab

[58] Someone objects: “By saying that ‘perception is devoid of conceptuality,’ it has been stated that a conceptual (*savikalpam*) [cognition] is a pseudo-perception. And this was already addressed [at PS 1.3c]: “that which is conjoined with a name, a category, and so on.” So what is the point of bringing this up again?”

We will elucidate the purpose later.

“Erroneous [cognition], the cognition of the conventionally-existent,” and so on: this explains the four types of pseudo-perception. To begin with, “erroneous cognition” (*bhrāntijñānam*) here refers to one [type], a cognition which conceptualizes an object as something else—that is to say, a conceptualization (*kalpanā*) that arises, superimposing a different object (such as water), even though [that superimposed object] does not exist, onto (for example) a mirage, in reliance upon a convention (*saṅketa*). The second [type], concerning conventionally-existent entities, occurs due to a conceptualization that is superimposed based upon a convention (*saṅketa*). But why is a cognition about conventionally-existent entities a pseudo-perception? “Due to the superimposition of another object.” For this [pseudo-perception] superimposes the state of being another object—such as a ‘pot’—onto [fundamental particles of] matter and so on, i.e., onto the really-existing things [which are the basis] for designating [something a ‘pot’] (*prajñāptivastu*); the mere basis of designation (*prajñāptivastu*) is not cognized. But why is this [‘pot’] cognized? [Dīnnāga] says: “Because it occurs due to a conceptualization in relation to the [particles of] visible form.” In other words, [this second type of pseudo-perceptual cognition] arises when one conceptualizes those conventionally-existent things as being something else [i.e., as being ultimately or substantially-existent]. Because it occurs as a conceptualization with the phenomenal form (*ākāra*) of the superimposed object, the cognition of conventionally-existent [entities] superimposes ‘pots’ and so on, but it does not cognize the mere entities [i.e., the fundamental particles] which are the basis for designating it [a ‘pot’].

Regarding that [conventionally-existent object], there is first of all a linguistic convention (*śabdasaṅketa*) on the part of the world, for the purpose of simultaneously connecting the [elementary particles of] matter and so on—which are gathered together [as being] different from things other than them, by virtue of having a single effect [in common]—to their own effects, such as holding water. Having made that [linguistic convention] as a basis, [59] a conceptualization (‘pot,’ ‘garment,’ and so on) occurs, which is the superimposing of another object onto those really-existing [fundamental particles of] matter and so on, even though they are devoid of ‘pot’ or whatever. In this way, there is the application of ‘singularity’ (*ekatva*), for example, on the basis of the application of the word for an excluded effect, such as [being part of] a collection. Likewise,

with respect to (1) things arising in another place;⁴¹ (2) things that exist in some way; (3) collections that are manifold [but have] a single effect; (4) things that are collocated without interstice; for each, respectively, a conceptualization arises, that superimposes (1) causal activity; (2) existence; (3) ‘pot’-ness and so on; and (4) conjunction (*samyoga*). In this way, in terms of each individual distinction, linguistic conceptualizations (*śabdakalpanā*) are based exclusively on conventions. That is the second type of [pseudo-perceptual] conceptual cognition.

The conceptualization of water in regard to a mirage, and so on, does not occur based merely upon a convention that was made in regard to water for the purpose of excluding non-water, such that, since it should just be included among those that rely upon a convention [i.e., conceptual pseudo-perceptions of conventionally-existent entities], there ought not be a separate mention of it. Rather, based on a convention of what has been previously seen, [a concept of] something else entirely—*nonexistent* water—arises, superimposed onto that collocation of elements. Therefore, he says: **“Because it involves (for example) the conceptualization of water,”** and so on. ‘Pots’ and so on, however, do not exist separately from the matter that composes them. The superimposing conceptualization has as its warrant (*nimitta*) just the convention, alone.⁴² Thus it is stated separately from the previous [type of conceptual pseudo-perception].

“Cognitions such as inference, its result, and so on.” Inference is that evidence (*liṅga*) by means of which something is inferred. It is a cognition that is activated by the conceptualization of something which was experienced at the time of the connection [between the evidence and the predicate to be proven,] as in: “This smoke [that I see presently] is exactly [the same kind of thing as] that [smoke which I have previously seen].” There is also the conceptualization of that which has previously been experienced in the result of that [inference], i.e., in the cognition of the proposition to be proven (*liṅgī*) —“There is indeed fire here”— because an inference is in terms of a universal. [60] In the case of mnemonic [cognitions], too, there is a concept with the phenomenal form (*ākāra*) of that which has been previously experienced: “I have experienced just this kind of thing.” Nor does desiderative (*ābhilāṣika*) [cognition], either, transcend [the status of being] a conceptualization of what has been previously experienced, since in the absence of that [conceptualization] there is no desire [for it]. The phrase **“and so on”** refers to dubious cognitions; in this case as well, the conceptualization of what has been previously experienced arises, in a form like this: “What is this? Is it this? Or is it something else?”. This is the third [type of conceptual pseudo-perception], a cognition that is the conceptualization of something that has been previously experienced.

Finally, **“together with the myodesopsic”** [designates a cognition] that has arisen due to a defect in the sense-faculties, such as a myodesopsic cognition. This is the fourth pseudo-perception that is discussed.

⁴¹ The idea here is a sequence: A ‘causes’ B, thus B ‘arises in another place’ than A. Thanks to John Dunne for clarifying this point.

⁴² That is to say, the conceptualization of a ‘pot’ operates strictly due to the convention of ‘pot,’ and does not involve the mistaken application of a different concept (such as ‘water’ in the case of a mirage).

On this point, the first two conceptual cognitions are stated in order to demonstrate that they are “**not perceptions.**” But why is there a doubt about these two being perceptual, such that an effort is made to remove them? Because these two immediately follow a perception (*pratyakṣa*).⁴³ Therefore, someone might think: “These two are perceptions,” since it is difficult for someone who is not paying attention (*anupalakṣayataḥ*) to discern the subtle separation in the time of arising [between the perception and the immediately subsequent cognition]. And it is seen that some people do have this misunderstanding, like [thinking] that the cognition of ‘pots’ and so on (i.e., [the cognition] of conventionally-existent entities), or the cognition of ‘water’ when there is a mirage, is indeed a perception.

Opponent: “In other words, in order to exclude that very cognition of ‘water’ when there is a mirage (and so on), an additional qualification is employed in the [Nyāya] definition of perception, namely that it is undeceiving (*avyabhicāri*). [61] Isn’t this [additional qualification necessary] for the purpose of excluding cognitions that arise from defective sense-faculties?”⁴⁴

No. Precisely due to the mention of ‘proximity to the object’ (*arthasannikarṣa*) [in the Nyāya definition of perception], [a cognition] that has not arisen from a real object, such as the cognition of two moons, is excluded. [Therefore, the additional qualification of non-deceptiveness is superfluous]. Otherwise, [the Nyāya definition of perception] should only state [that perception is] “generated by the senses” [as opposed to “arisen from the proximity of sense-faculty and object” (*indriyārthasannikarṣotpannam*)].⁴⁵

Inferential cognitions [of evidence] and so on, which occur due to the recollection of a previously-experienced convention, have already been established as non-perceptual. Therefore, even though its lack of perceptuality has been established, its mention here is for the sake of establishing that

⁴³ Emending MSS. *pratyakṣasya samvṛttinī to *pratyakṣāsannavṛttinī*, in line with PV 3.290cd. Thanks to John Dunne for suggesting this emendation.

⁴⁴ The Nyāya opponent here is attempting to justify the inclusion of “non-deceptiveness” (*avyabhicāritva*) in the Nyāya definition of perceptual cognition. Dīnāga removed this qualification from his definition of perception, for reasons elaborated upon in PS 1.17ab (see Chapter 1, note 10). Jinendrabuddhi is thus attempting to defend Dīnāga’s definition of perception, which does not specifically mention “non-deceptiveness,” from Nyāya critique. It should be noted however that in both the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* and *Nyāyabindu* Dharmakīrti adds the qualification “non-erroneous” (*abhrāntam*), which is essentially synonymous with *avyabhicāri*, to his definition of perception (*pratyakṣam kalpanāpoḍham abhrāntam*).

⁴⁵ This is an extremely compressed rendition of Jinendrabuddhi’s critique of the Nyāya definition of perception in PST ad PS 1.17ab, discussed in Chapter 1, note 10.

It should be noted however that there is a minor linguistic discrepancy between these two statements. Here, in the context of PS 1.7cd-8ab, the Sanskrit manuscript (Steinkellner ed. 61.2-3) reads: “Otherwise, [the Nyāya definition of perception] should **only** (*eva*) state that perception is ‘arisen from the senses’” (*anyathendriyajam ity eva vācyaṃ syāt*). In the context of PS 1.17ab, however, the Sanskrit manuscript (Steinkellner ed. 100.14) reads: “Otherwise, [the Nyāya definition of perception] should state **thus** (*evam*): ‘arisen from the senses’...”. This discrepancy is reflected in the canonical Tibetan translation. Compare PST_T 69.21-70.1: *gzhan du na dbang po las skyes pa shes pa nyid brjod par bya bar ’gyur ro*, and PST_T 112.5: *gzhan du na dbang po las skyes pa zhes pa ’di ltar brjod par bya bar ’gyur gyi*.

It is unclear whether this discrepancy between *eva* and *evam* was intended by Jinendrabuddhi, or is the product of a manuscript error introduced prior to the Tibetan translation. Rather than emending in either direction, the above translations reflect the received manuscripts.

the previous two conceptual cognitions are not perceptions. A cognition which arises due to the recollection of a previously-experienced convention is not a perception, as in the inferential cognition [of evidence]. Such is also the case with respect to the previous two [conceptual] cognitions. [This is a proof by means of the] pervasion of a contrary quality (*vyāpakaviruddha*). In this way, these three types of conceptual cognition are rejected [as candidates for *pratyakṣas*] by extension, through the statement of [their] definitions.

But the fourth pseudo-perception should be seen as an exception (*apavāda*) to this; it is not an instance of something that has been rejected [as a candidate for *pratyakṣa*] by extension, through the statement of its definition. Otherwise, there would be an inconsistent (*vyabhicāra*) definition. Therefore, by mentioning it as an exception, a sensory cognition that is defective on account of either internally or externally impairing conditions is said to be a pseudo-perception, even though it is devoid of conceptualization. So here, when [Dīnnāga says] “together with the myodesopsic” (*sataimiram*), myodesopsia (*timira*) ought to be seen merely as a metonym (*upalakṣaṇa*) for all the conditions which impair the sense-faculties—really! (*kila*)

To someone who says: “The cognition of two moons and so on does not in any way arise from the senses; it is, rather, purely mental,” it should be replied: what is the definition of ‘being arisen from the senses’?

Opponent: “It is what is concomitant with the presence or absence of the senses.”

[62] Well, that is the same in this case!

Opponent: “It is what possesses warped-ness (*vikāritva*), on account of some warping in the [sense-faculty].”⁴⁶

In this case, as well, the answer is just that.

Moreover, [if the two-moon cognition were purely mental,] it could be removed at will, like the erroneous cognition of [a rope as] a snake and so on. For it is possible for conceptualizations to be eliminated by dint of analytical reflection (*pratisaṅkhyāna*). And, even for someone who is conceptualizing [erroneously], when the warping of the warped sense-faculty ceases, is it the case that [the cognition of two moons and so on] does not cease? No, it is not so. Therefore, on the contrary, this [cognition of two moons and so on] is nothing other than (*eva*) sensory. Furthermore, the Ācārya [Dīnnāga] said: “**For they, too, ultimately existing otherwise [than how the cognition appears], are the cause of a cognition with a [non-erroneous] appearance of ‘blue’ and so on, as well as an [erroneous] appearance of two moons and so on.**”⁴⁷ There is nothing to be fancied (*abhiniveṣṭavyam*) here, due to which [a cognition that is] arisen from the senses would thus [made] defective. For this very reason, the Ācārya [Dīnnāga] stated that there is nonconceptual pseudo-perception [by saying] “**together with the myodesopsic,**” separate from

⁴⁶ See Chapter 1, note [122](#).

⁴⁷ Cf. [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.15](#).

the group of conceptual [pseudo-perceptions]—that is, apart from the statement of “**erroneous cognition**” and so on, which are split off because of the *iti*.⁴⁸

Here it may be noted: in this context, an undeceiving (*avisamvādi*) hortatory (*pravartaka*) cognition is considered to be an instrument of correct awareness, because [Dharmakīrti] states: ‘Having determined the object by means of these two [*pramāṇas*], one who is being enjoined to act [upon the object] is not misled with respect to the intended effect (*arthakriyā*) [of that action].’⁴⁹ And some cognitions, despite arising from impaired sense-faculties, are nevertheless (*eva*) undeceiving and hortatory with respect to some desire. Thus, [consider] for example a myodesopic cognition, which has the appearance of hairs. [Such a cognition] is not reliable (*samvādi*) with regard to a desire for really-existing hair; let it be understood that this [cognition] has no instrumentality.

However, [consider a cognition] about a white conch, on the part of someone whose eyes are impaired by jaundice, [such that the cognition has] the appearance of a yellow conch; [63] or [a cognition] about a clear blue-patch, with the phenomenal form (*ākāra*) of an unclear blue-patch, due to the eyes being covered for a long time with myodesopsia, or due to being remote; or [a cognition] that is misleading on account of being placed on a moving boat, in which it appears that trees (*pādapa*)⁵⁰ are possessed of the action of moving, even though the trees are standing still; on the part of such [cognitions] of this kind—and others as well—even though they are misleading because they apprehend what is not-that as being that (*atasmimstadgrahāt*), nevertheless, due to the connection (*pratibandha*) with a real thing, those [cognitions] are not unreliable in regard to the desired goal; instrumentality of some sort is ‘in bounds’ (*nyāya*).

That is to say, someone acting on account of such [a cognition], in the absence of [any] obstruction, necessarily meets with the desired thing, which has a capacity for causal functioning (*arthakriyā*) that comes on account of merely being a real thing (such as a conch). On the other hand, if on account of having an incorrect appearance, their instrumentality is not accepted—despite their accuracy—then [the instrumentality of] inference, too, cannot be accepted, for the exact same reason. And it is not the case that [the instrumentality of inference] is not accepted! Therefore, we observe uncontradicted instrumentality on the part of those [kinds of cognitions] as well, regarding the mere real entity such as a conch—i.e., in terms of having the capacity for the causal functioning that is desired—in which respect they are accurate. And it is possible to say the following: a cognition, due to which someone who has acted, provided there is no obstacle, necessarily accomplishes the goal (*artha*) that is desired—that [cognition], on the part of that [person], in regard to that [goal], is an epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*). For example, [this applies to] perception and inference, which are already understood to be [*pramāṇas*]; and, as has already been stated, a person who has acted due to the cognition, in the absence of obstruction, by necessity attains the mere entity (such as the conch) that is desired. Thus [it is proven, by means of an inference with the] nature (*svabhāva*) [as the evidence, i.e., *svabhāvahetu*]. But this [cognition] is

⁴⁸ Cf. PS 1.8ab: **smārtābhilāṣikam ceti pratyakṣabhaṃ sataimiram |**

⁴⁹ PVin 1 ad PVin 1.1a (Steinkellner ed., 1.10): *na hy ābhām arthaṃ paricchidya pravartamāno ’rthakriyāyām visamvādyate |*

⁵⁰ Literally, “foot-drinkers,” a Sanskrit poetic term for trees.

not an inference, because it does not arise from evidence, and because it is not conceptual. And no third [type of] epistemic instrument is accepted; for this reason, it ought to be accepted that [the cognition of a yellow conch] just is a perceptual [instrument of correct awareness]. That [cognition], which is devoid of conceptuality [and] not inaccurate with regard to the object which is desired, is a perception (*pratyakṣa*): such as [those cognitions which are] already understood to be perception. Likewise, the cognition [of a yellow conch] under discussion. [Thus it is proven, by means of an inference with the] nature (*svabhāva*) [as the evidence, i.e., *svabhāvahetu*].

[64] [Someone] could [say] this:⁵¹ “[Opponent:]⁵² ‘The perceptuality of that [cognition] is accepted precisely because it is reliable with respect to the desired entity, the mere conch or whatever. But in terms of a particular quality, such as the phenomenal form (*ākāra*) of yellow and so on, it is not accepted [as a *pramāṇa*], because it is unreliable. Thus, the phrase ‘together with the myodesopsic’ (*sataimiram*), which is an exception, expresses that a sensory cognition which is defective on account of externally or internally impairing conditions, is a pseudo-perception, even though it is devoid of conceptuality.’

However, it should not be explained in this way: [namely, that] by stating ‘together with the myodesopsic,’ myodesopsia (*timira*) is exclusively (*eva*) a metonym for *all* the conditions that impair the sense-faculties, because *some* defective sensory cognitions are perceptual. Nor should the specification of being ‘non-misleading’ be made [in the definition of perception], since it is asserted that even some misleading cognitions are perceptual [*pramāṇas*] in certain respects.⁵³ Therefore, this term that is an exception, *sataimiram*, ought to be interpreted in another way. Here, the word *timira* is an expression for not knowing (*ajñāna*), like in the sentence [from the *Śatapañcaśatka* of Māṛceta, VII.78] that begins, ‘The destroyer of the blindness (*timira*) of the stupid.’ “The endarkened” (*taimira*) is “that which stays in darkness” (*timire bhavaḥ*).⁵⁴ Because

⁵¹ The Sanskrit does not clearly mark where the objection introduced with *syād etat* reaches its conclusion. The Tibetan marks the end of the objection here, as indicated in Steinkellner’s (2005b, 64) typesetting and understood by Chu (2004, 130). But the Tibetan translation also re-located the negation (*na*) in this passage from *na tarhi* (PST_T 73.7: *de lta na*) to **evam na vyākhyeyam* (PST_T 73.12: *'di ltar bshad par bya ba ma yin te*). Although it is possible to construe the initial *na* as governing everything between *tarhi* and *vyākhyeyam*, it is also possible that this might indicate some manuscript problems with the passage, possibly related to the fact that the meaning here is somewhat obscure (*taimirika*, so to speak). Considering that (1) Jinendrabuddhi clearly maintains both above and below this passage that *timira* is indeed a metonym for strictly nonconceptual error that arises from defective sense-faculties; that (2) the objector is explicitly arguing that *sataimiram* should not be explained as such a metonym; that (3) it is in this context syntactically odd to respond to this objection with “therefore” (*tasmāt*), particularly since (4) this “therefore” is followed by an assertion that *sataimiram* “ought to be interpreted in another way” (*anyathā vyākhyāyate*); and, finally, that (5) the “other way” in which it is asserted that *timira* ought to be interpreted is precisely *not* as a metonym for sensory impairment, but as a synonym for ignorance (*ajñānavacana*); considering these points all together, I believe it is preferable to read the end of the objection as the grammatical explanation of *taimira*’s meaning as a nominal derivative (*taddhita*). Jinendrabuddhi then responds beginning with: “But what is the disagreement?” (*kaḥ punar asau viśamvādah*).

⁵² Again, while it is unclear whom Jinendrabuddhi is citing here, and where the objection (if indeed it is an objection) begins or ends, it seems as though this portion of the citation lays out the position against which the objector is responding.

⁵³ Such as the cognition of a yellow conch, which is “instrumental” in terms of the mere conch.

⁵⁴ Cf. Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī* IV.3.53.

a sentence results in specification (*vyavaccheda*),⁵⁵ all sentences include a delimitation (*avadhāraṇa*). Thus, [*taimira*] is a nominal derivative (*taddhita*) [of *timira*], when the meaning of the sentence includes the delimitation: “[*Taimira*] is just that which is in darkness (*timira*).”

What, then, is the deception (*visaṃvāda*)? For, if there is [*timira*], it is just in terms of a non-cognition (*ajñāne*),⁵⁶ not in terms of a cognition (*jñāne*), because [a myodesopsic cognition] is accurate in one respect.⁵⁷ This is what is accepted in the world. *Sataimiram* denotes “that which is occurring with *taimira*”—to put it plainly, that which is deceptive. And since the word “erroneous” (*bhrānti*) picks out inaccurate *conceptual* [cognitions], this [“myodesopsic”] one is known to be *nonconceptual*.

“And [cognition] which is mnemonic or desiderative”: The word “and” (*ca*) is in the sense of a conjunction (*samuccaya*), [65] and it is out of order. [The conclusion of this passage] should thus be seen as: **“and together with the myodesopsic”** (*sataimiram ca*).⁵⁸ Therefore, this is the [summarized] meaning: “And a deceptive cognition is a pseudo-perception.”

In this way, a nonconceptual cognition is perceptual, even though it is misleading, in regard to that for which it is accurate; but in regard to that for which it is inaccurate, it is a spurious simulacrum (*tadābhāsa*) [of a perceptual *pramāṇa*]. This is established. That being the case, there is no contradiction at all, just like the case of conceptual cognitions. That is to say, it is not contradictory for a conceptual cognition, in relation to reflexive awareness (*svādhigama*), to be perceptual, [but] in relation to an external object, to be the spurious simulacrum [of a perceptual *pramāṇa*]. Likewise, the cognition [of a yellow conch] which has been discussed is also both, in relation to different aspects of the object-field.

PSṬ *ad* PS(V) 1.8cd

And in this context, i.e., in our system of thought. **Because it is cognized as having intermediary function:** this means, “because the cognition occurs together with the intermediate functioning.” This is the metaphorical ‘warrant’ (*upacāranibandhana*) for [a cognition’s] instrumentality (*pramāṇatva*). **“The resulting cognition (*phala*) just is the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*)”:** that is to say, the result is the awareness of the instrument. And that [result] itself has the exact same nature [as the instrument]; hence, the [result] is not different from the [instrument].

For it is not the case here [in our system], as on the part of non-Buddhists, that the result is something different from the instrument. So let there not be this kind of mistake. The meaning indicated by **“[Rather, the awareness] of just that [cognition]”** (*tasyaiva*) and so on is that there

⁵⁵ Cf. PV 4.192a.

⁵⁶ See Chapter 1, Section III.B.2: [Myodesopsia \(*timira*\)](#).

⁵⁷ That is to say, a myodesopsic cognition is non-deceptive with regard to the mere fact that the myodesopsic hairs are appearing.

⁵⁸ In other words, in the proper order, the verse should read: *smārtābhilāṣikam iti pratyakṣābhaṃ sataimiram ca*.

is simply nothing at all with the inherent nature of being arranged (*vyavasthita*) as the instrument (*sādhana*) or as the instrumental object (*sādhya*), because in all cases the convention of instrument and instrumental object does not escape having the nature of cognition.⁵⁹ And that is the case here as well; since the cognition has the nature of being knowledge (*adhigama*), it is understood (*pratīti*) as the instrumental object. Thus, it is metaphorically designated as the result (*phala*). And because that very [cognition] contains the image (*ākāra*) of the object-field, “it is cognized as having an intermediate function;” hence, [66] it is metaphorically designated as the *pramāṇa*; that is to say, it is conventionally called that. In other words, that cognition which is bearing the property of having an image of the object-field (*viśayākāratā*), even though it exists without any intermediate function, *appears* [as though] with an intermediate function (in the form of knowledge about its object-field), [and] not otherwise. Therefore, this very property of having an image of the object-field, which constitutes the nature of the [cognition], is the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*).

Furthermore, this is logical. That is to say: just [by referring to] “the instrumental means (*sādhana*) of an activity (*kriyā*),” it is not the case that every instrument is [the instrument] of [every] action, nor that every activity is [the activity] to be accomplished (*sādhya*) by [every] instrument, due to the resulting fallacy of infinite regress. Rather, that due to which the activity unmediatedly (*avyavadhānena*) attains accomplishment is the instrument of the action. And only this [activity] is the activity to be accomplished on the part of that [instrument]. So, with respect to a patient such as visible form, there must be some essential property (*svabhāva*) of the cognition—which is similar in nature [to all to other cognitions] in terms of having the nature of being an experience—that constitutes the instrument, due to which the arrangement (*vyavasthā*) by means of a distinction is made, as in, “This is a cognition of blue; that is a cognition of yellow.” Otherwise, every cognition would be [the cognition] of everything, or else no [cognition] whatsoever [would be the cognition] of anything at all, because there would be no difference [between cognitions, which are identical in terms of having the nature of merely being an experience].

Opponent: “The restricting factor (*niyāmaka*) is a difference, such as the lack of clarity, in the sense faculties (and so on).”

No, because [the faculty] has a non-cognitive nature, [67] and because it is the cause of every [sensory] cognition. Nor is [the restricting factor] the contact (*sannikarṣa*) [between object and faculty], for the same exact reason (*ata eva*). Nor is [the restricting factor] the [mere] seeing of the object (*arthālocana*), either, because seeing of the object is not established by itself (*eva*) when there is no conformity to the object-field (*viśayasārūpya*)—[nor is] the qualifying cognition (*viśeṣanajñāna*) [the restricting factor], either, for the same reason.⁶⁰

Therefore, this restriction—“this is just the awareness (*adhigati*) of blue, and [that is] just [the awareness] of yellow,” and so on—is not established on account of [anything] other than conformity to the object (*arthasārūpya*). Therefore, that [conformity] itself is the instrumental means (*sādhana*) for the awareness of the object. This is so because, even though there is a causal

⁵⁹ This follows the Tibetan translation (PVT_T): *rtogs pa 'i ngo bo las ma 'das pa nyid kyi phir* (~ *pratītirūpānatītatvāt*), rather than MSS *pratītirūpānupātitvāt* (?).

⁶⁰ Cf. PV 3.312-313.

contribution (*upayoga*) on the part of all the constituents of an activity (*kāraṅgas*), the essential connection (*sambandha*) “this awareness is of that object” is only established *without mediation* on account of that [conformity]. And this is [what constitutes] its property of being an instrumental means (*sādhana*), in terms of its property of being the basis for the structure (*vyavasthā*) [of instrument and action], [though] *not* in terms of being a producer (*nirvartaka*), because [the instrumental means and the awareness *qua* activity or result] are not different.

[Someone] could [say] this: “Because they are not distinct entities, if the [resulting] cognition and the aspect (*aṃśa*) [of the object] are the same, the activity (*kriyā*) is itself a contributing factor (*kāraṅga*). So this [idea] is demolished.”

This is not true, since even though the entity is not differentiated, the qualitative distinction (*dharmabheda*)— “the property of having the form of the object to be known (*prameyārūpatā*), and the awareness of the object”—is accepted, on account of the conceptualization of the difference in terms of exclusions. And [this is the case] because the structure (*vyavasthā*) of establisher and established is observed in terms of a difference between the [self-appearance/*svābhāsa* of] cognition and the appearance [of the object, i.e., the *viṣayābhāsa*], even though the thing itself [i.e., the cognition] is not differentiated. [68] For example, [one can say], “wine, being imbibed, intoxicates,”⁶¹ “one holds oneself,” or “[the mind] apprehends by means of the mind”; [in these cases], this convention of establisher and established is not based on anything real. So this objection should not be made.

How can [cognition] appear as if it has that [intermediate functioning], even though it is without such intermediate functioning? Dinnāga says: “**For example...**” and so on. In this context, only a single image (*ākāra*)—such as the image of ‘blue’—is experienced. This [image] must necessarily be accepted as being of the nature of cognition. Otherwise, the [cognition] could not have any connection with the object. And therefore, an external entity distinct [from cognition], whether or not [the entity] has that form, is not observed. Moreover, [such an external entity] does not constitute the object-support (*ālambana*). Why does it not constitute [the *ālambana*]? He will explain the way in which it does not constitute [the *ālambana*] in the analysis of the *Vādaividhi* [PS(V) 1.13-16].

PSṬ *ad* PS(V) 1.9a

[Someone] postulates this: “Even when other causes are present, the non-arising of a cognition *qua* effect indicates [the presence of] another cause; this should be the external object. Therefore, the external object is proven through negative concomitance (*vyatireka*).”

This is also wrong, because it is also possible that the non-arising of a cognition *qua* effect is due to a deficiency in the ripening of an imprint (*vāsanā*) for the cognition. Therefore, it is not possible

⁶¹ “Wine” (*madhu*) here is both the passive object of *nīpīyamānam* (“being imbibed”), and the active agent of *madaḥ* (“intoxicates”).

for there to be any awareness of [anything] apart from consciousness. And consciousness only arises as reflexively-cognized (*svasaṃviditam*); therefore, reflexive awareness just is the result.

Suppose there is an external object. Nevertheless, the object-field is only ascertained (*niścīyate*) in accord with the manner in which it is experienced (*yathāsaṃvedanam*). Hence, it makes sense for just this [experience] to be the result. For it is not the case that the experience (*anubhava*) of the object is [strictly] in accord with the nature (*yathāsvabhāva*) [of the object], such that it would be possible to ascertain it [just] in the way that its nature is established (*vyavasthita*), because of the unacceptable conclusion that every cognition [of the same object] would have the same form (*ākāra*).⁶² Mental representations (*vijñapti*), on the other hand, have many forms (*anekākāra*). [69] That is to say, it is observed that [different] cognitions of the exact same thing possess images [of that thing] which are dull or sharp or whatever, on account of differences in the cognizer. But a singular entity does not have many forms (*anekākāra*), because of the unacceptable conclusion that [a single entity] would be manifold (*aneka*).

Thus, it is not possible to make a determination (*niścaya*) of the object in accord with its nature. With this in mind, [Dinnāga] said—as someone who desired to make a presentation (*vyavasthā*) of the particular resulting cognition (*phala*), by means of a single text (*sūtra*), for both the position that external objects exist and the other [Yogācāra] position—“**Alternatively, reflexive awareness is the result.**” Previously, he had stated that the result was the awareness (*saṃvitti*) of the object-field (*viśaya*). Hence, the word “**alternatively**” (*vā*) has the meaning of an option (*vikalpa*). “**In this context**” (*atra*) [means] in the context of perception, [as] previously discussed.

“**Self-appearance (*svābhāsa*) and object-appearance (*viśayābhāsa*)**”: self-appearance is that which contains an appearance of itself, which is to say, an appearance of its own form (*svarūpa*). This means the aspect of the apprehender (*grāhakākāra*). The appearance is just the form (*svarūpa*) of the cognition itself, i.e., it is the cognitively-natured-ness (*jñānarūpatva*) of cognition, which appears just by virtue of its own nature. Having considered this, “**object-appearance**”: when an external object-field is relied upon, the breakdown (*viśraha*) is, “That which has the appearance of this very [external] object-field.” But when [an external object] is *not* relied upon, it is: “That which has an appearance for its object-field.” The object-field is still (*punar*) the apprehended aspect (*grāhyāṃśa*), in that [latter] case, because there is conventional interaction with the object-field. “**Of [both]**” (*tasya*) and so on: whether an external object exists or does not exist, cognition is experienced (*saṃvedyate*) with both appearances. The reflexive awareness—i.e., the self-experiencing—of [both appearances] should be [understood as] the result.

⁶² In other words, if the experience of the object strictly conformed to the nature of the object, without any subjective variation in the quality of that experience, then every object-cognition would be strictly identical (because the nature of the object itself is the same for all observers).

PSṬ ad PS(V) 1.9b

Why? For what reason? Because [someone might think that], “It is not reasonable to consider [reflexive awareness] as the result, simply because reflexive awareness occurs. Indeed, on an External Realist account (*bāhyārthapakṣe*), this just is not possible! For the eye-faculty and so on function in order for there to be knowledge (*adhigamāya*) of the object, but not [in order for there to be knowledge] of a cognition. And it is not the case that the apprehension of the object is only the apprehension of a cognition, [70] because the object is distinct from the cognition. Thus, it is not acceptable for reflexive awareness to be the result”—this is the question, for one who is thinking [like this].

Because the determination of the object has [reflexive awareness] as its nature. “For” (*hi*) is in the sense of “because.” Because, **when the object (*artha*) is a cognition, inclusive of the object-field (*saviṣaya*), at that time, one cognizes the object in conformity with how it is reflexively-experienced, i.e., as either desirable or undesirable.** Therefore, it is logical for reflexive awareness to be the result. “**Together with the object-field**”: that which is together with the object-field is “together with the object-field.” In this context, in terms of the Epistemic Idealist position (*antarjñeyapakṣe*), “together with the object-field” means together with an object-field that is defined as the apprehended aspect (*grāhyāmśa*), because it is only in regard to that [apprehended aspect] that an object-field is established (*vyavasthāna*). In the context of the External Realist position, though, [the object-field is defined] as external. Here, in the context of Mental Representations Only, since there is no real entity that exists separately from cognition, when it is just awareness that experiences its own image (*svam ākāram*) as desirable, the object is determined to be desirable, *mutatis mutandis* [for what is undesirable].

Opponent: “But how does a cognition experience itself, just by itself? For an agent-patient relationship on the part of just that [self-same cognition] does not make sense.”

It is as follows: ultimately, there is no relation of patient, etc., on the part of that [cognition]. Nevertheless, because of having that as its nature, that kind of convention [i.e., of being called “self-illuminating”,] is not contradicted in this case, as with light. For light is an illuminator of itself, [and] does not rely upon another source of light [in order to be illuminated]. Nor does it actually (*bhāvataḥ*), cast light (*prakāśayati*) itself. Rather: arising with the nature of luminosity, it is *said to be* an illuminator (*prakāśaka*) of itself. In the same way, awareness, arising with the nature of experience, is conventionally designated “an illuminator (*prakāśika*) of itself.” Even in the context of the External Realist perspective, the object is only determined in accord with experience; but that experience is not in accord with the object, as has been previously explained.

[71] Now, why wasn’t only this much said [by Dinnāga]: “The object is cognized, in conformity with the experience, as desirable or undesirable”? What is the point of, “For, when the object is a cognition, inclusive of the object-field”?

There is a purpose [for this phrase], since previously [at PS 1.6ab] it was stated that reflexive awareness is an epistemic instrument, and that the nature (*svarūpa*) of a cognition is known by means of [reflexive awareness]; hence, it is clearly determined that reflexive awareness is the result

of that very [cognition]. And therefore, if it is exclusively said⁶³ that the object is cognized as being desirable or undesirable, in conformity with reflexive awareness, for some there might be a doubt as to whether this presentation (*vyavasthāna*) of [reflexive awareness as] the result is exclusively made when reflexive awareness is the perceptual [*pramāna*].

But (*ca*) [reflexive awareness] is the result (*phala*) for every epistemic instrument. Thus, for the purpose of eliminating that doubt, [Dīnāga] said: “For, when the object is a cognition, inclusive of the object-field.” The word “object” (*artha*) expresses the epistemic object (*prameya*).⁶⁴ And “together with the object” is an indeclinable compound in the mode of totality (*sākalye ’vyayībhāvaḥ*).⁶⁵ Hence, it is stated that it is not exclusively when one expects (*apekṣate*) the epistemic object of the epistemic instrument to be a cognition, that the object is cognized in conformity with reflexive awareness, [and] thus reflexive awareness is the result. Rather, even when [one expects] an [external] object-field (*viśaya*) [to be the epistemic object], in that case as well, [reflexive awareness is the result].

Therefore, for the purpose of eliminating that doubt, he said: “**When the object (*artha*) is a cognition, inclusive of the object-field.**” The word “object” (*artha*) expresses the epistemic patient (*prameya*). Furthermore, “**inclusive of the object-field**” is an indeclinable compound in the mode of totality (*sākalye ’vyayībhāvaḥ*).⁶⁶ Hence, the following is said: it is not exclusively when one regards (*apekṣate*) cognition as the epistemic object of the epistemic instrument, that the object is cognized in conformity with reflexive awareness, [and] thus, that reflexive awareness is the result. Rather, even when [one regards] an [external] object-field (*viśaya*) [as the epistemic object], in that case as well [reflexive awareness is the result].

PST_T ad PS(V) 1.9c

In this regard, in the context of a presentation (*vyavasthā*) wherein reflexive awareness is the result, and an external object does not exist, [Dīnāga] will say that the apprehending aspect possesses instrumentality (*prāmāṇya*). Therefore, one might have a doubt⁶⁷ about the following: when there does not exist an external object which is the epistemic object (*prameya*), the apprehending aspect

⁶³ PST_T (80.16-17) has ‘*dod pa’am mi ’dod pa’i don rtogs par byed do zhes pa ’di tsaṃ brjod pa na* | for MSS *iṣṭam aniṣṭam *vetīyatyucyamāne* (emended, on the basis of this Tibetan translation, to *vety evocyamāne*).

⁶⁴ It should be noted that this gloss cuts somewhat against Jinendrabuddhi’s argument. That is, what distinguishes External Realist ontology as such is the assertion that the epistemic object (*prameya*) is an external object, even if this external epistemic object is only ever known by means of its cognitive representation or image. But Jinendrabuddhi is trying to argue that Dīnāga’s position at PS 1.9b is meant to apply in all ontological contexts, i.e., both when the epistemic object is internal and when the epistemic object is external.

⁶⁵ Cf. Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, II.1.6 (15): “The whole, not leaving even a scrap.” See the discussion of this point in Appendix A, note 5.

⁶⁶ Cf. Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, II.1.7 (15): “The whole, not leaving even a scrap.”

⁶⁷ The reference to a “doubt” (*āśāṅkā*) here concerns Jinendrabuddhi’s explanation of the purpose (*prayojana*) for the compound *saviśayam* in PSV ad PS 1.9b; see above, note 18. This passage is the direct continuation of that earlier discussion, translated in Chapter 5, Section III.B.1: [Dharmakīrti and Jinendrabuddhi on PS 1.9b](#).

is asserted to be the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*); likewise, even when there *does* exist an external object which is the epistemic object, the apprehending aspect is still (*eva*) the epistemic instrument. To eliminate that [doubt], he says: **“But when [the epistemic object is strictly an external object,”** and so on.⁶⁸ Even when reflexive awareness is presented as the result, however, when there is an external epistemic object, [72] **the epistemic instrument is the cognition’s property of having the appearance of the object-field,** but [the instrument is] *not* the apprehending aspect, as in the context of Mental Representations Only (*vijñaptimātratā*).

When the opposing position is that the epistemic patient (*prameya*) is an external object, in that case, as well, the apprehending aspect is still (*eva*) considered [to be the *pramāṇa*], because the [object] is reflexively-experienced. Why is this [an issue] (*tat kim iti*)? In that [External Realist] context, [the apprehending aspect] is not established as the instrument (*pramāṇa*)! Thus, he says: **“For, in this case, even though [the nature (*svarūpa*) of the cognition is still] reflexively known by the cognition,”** and so on. To break down (*vi-graha*) [the compound “reflexively known by awareness” (*jñānasvasaṃvedyam*)]: the reflexive awareness of the cognition. Even though the fact (*svarūpa*) [of cognition] is always reflexively known, nevertheless—without reference to that [fact]—the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) of cognition, in the context of an external epistemic object (*prameya*), is **the [cognition’s] property of possessing the appearance of the object (*viśayābhāsātā*),** not the property of possessing its own appearance (*svābhāsātā*); this is because, in a context wherein an external object [is accepted], it is inappropriate for [cognition’s property of self-appearance, i.e., the apprehending aspect] to be the establishing instrument (*sādhanatva*). And this is inappropriate, because [the epistemic patient of the apprehending aspect] is not something else [other than the cognition itself]. Since the apprehending aspect has itself as a reflexive object (*ātmaviśaya*), how could it be the epistemic instrument with regard to an external object? For it is not appropriate that [an epistemic instrument] which has one thing as its object-field should be instrumental with regard to something else.

PSṬ *ad* PS(V) 1.9d

He states the reason for its instrumentality with **“because”** (*yasmāt*) and so on. **“Known”** (*mīyate*) means ascertained (*niścīyate*). **“In whichever way”** and so on: this means that an external object is ascertained by virtue of the cognition’s image of the knowledge-object (*jñeyākāra*). And it is in this regard that [Dharmakīrti] says, [at PV 3.392, that the object’s lack of differentiation from awareness can be inferred] “like fire is inferred by means of smoke.”⁶⁹ But [fire] is not directly inferred by means of [smoke]; rather, [it is inferred] *by means of a cognition of smoke* as having been caused by that [fire]. Likewise, although it is said that the object is known (*mīyate*) by means of the [object-appearance], nevertheless it should be understood that [the object-appearance is known] by means of reflexive awareness, which is the establishing instrument). That is to say, in whichever way (*yathā yathā*) the image of the object presents itself (*sanniviśate*) within cognition,

⁶⁸ That is, the last sentence of PSV *ad* PS 1.9b, *yadā tu bāhya evārthaḥ prameyaḥ tadā*: “But when the epistemic object is strictly an external object, then...”

⁶⁹ See Chapter 4, Section III: [Inference and External Objects](#).

as attractive or unattractive or whatever, reflexive awareness manifests (*prathate*) in that exact way. And in whichever way [reflexive awareness] appears, the object is ascertained in that exact way, as having a form (and so on) that is attractive or unattractive or whatever. For if [73] [cognition] arises with that image, then there must be the awareness of [the cognition] itself as being like that [i.e., attractive or unattractive or whatever]. And it must therefore be the case that the ascertainment of the object [occurs] by dint of that [awareness]—not otherwise. Therefore, the [cognition’s] property of having the appearance of the object-field (*viṣayābhāsātā*) is the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*).

Opponent: “But does not⁷⁰ one wish to demonstrate here that, with regard to the awareness, the isomorphism with the object-field is the instrument? Thus, since it should be said⁷¹ that [reflexive awareness] appears [in whichever way it does] by dint of that [conformity with the object-field], what is the point [of positing reflexive awareness as the *pramāṇa*]—since the object is said to be **‘known by means of that’** [property of possessing the appearance of the object-field (*viṣayābhāsātā*)]?”

There is a purpose. For reflexive awareness does (*karoti*) that which is to be done (*kārya*) on the part of object-awareness (*arthasaṃvit*): i.e., the ascertainment of the object. It has been stated thus in order to indicate this point: that one should just see the object-awareness as the result, *metaphorically*. Hence, there is in this way no difference in the object-field (*viṣayabheda*) between the epistemic instrument [i.e., the object-appearance] and the resulting cognitive activity [i.e., reflexive awareness], inasmuch as (*iti kṛtvā*) there is awareness just about that —namely, the external [object]—in relation to which there is an instrument. Why, then, is reflexive awareness said to be the result? Because, ultimately, due to having that [reflexive awareness] as the [cognition’s] nature, reflexive awareness is said to be the result. Metaphorically, however, that [reflexive awareness] should be seen as awareness of the object from the standpoint of the effect; this is not contradictory. Here, in the context of Mental Representations Only, [Dīnāga] explains that the epistemic instrument is the apprehending aspect, and the epistemic object is the apprehended aspect.

But one might doubt [by way of having] an objection concerning this point. The objection on this point is: how exactly does cognition, which has an undifferentiated nature, possess divisions (*vibhāga*) such as the apprehending aspect, such that, although there is no external object, there can be a [part of it which is the] epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) and so on?

Hence, in order to eliminate that [objection], [Dīnāga] says: “**Thus**” (*evam*) and so forth. Here is a summary of that [section, i.e., PSV *ad* 1.9d starting with *evam jñānasamvedanam...*]. In reality, there is no division of [cognition]. [Cognition] is only characterized as though it had divisions, consisting of the apprehending aspect and so on, by those who are defiled with ignorance. Hence, “this arrangement (*vyavasthā*) of epistemic instrument and epistemic object is made in accordance

⁷⁰ PST_T (82.20) ends with what appears to be a question (*ma yin nam*).

⁷¹ This is a reference to the immediately-preceding discussion, to the effect that “in whichever way [reflexive awareness] appears, the object is ascertained in that exact way, as having a form (for example) that is attractive or unattractive or whatever” (*yathā yathā ca sā [svasaṃvittiḥ] khyāti, tathā tathārtho niścīyate śubhāśubhādirūpādīḥ*). See [PST *ad* PS\(V\) 1.9d](#).

with how things seem to be (*yathā darśanam*), as opposed to how things truly are (*yathā tattvam*).” [74] How, then, does something which is not divided, appear in such a way [i.e., as divided]? Just as, on the part of those whose eyes are impaired by mantras and so on, mud and sticks and so on appear in the form of elephants and so on, despite being devoid of the form of elephants and so on; and just as, in the desert, when something far away appears large, even though it is small; just so, for those who are blinded by ignorance, the cognition appears that way [i.e., dualistic] even though it is not like that. And it is not possible to believe that it is *exclusively* due to the influence of the mantras and so on that those [cognitions] have arisen that way, since it is not seen in that way by those, who are located in the [same] place, whose vision is not impaired.

“Thus,” as it is said, “**cognition arises with a double appearance.**” “**The reflexive awareness of a cognition**” is the awareness—i.e., the observation (*darśana*)—of the cognition [itself], which is the patient (*karman*). What kind of thing (*kimbhūta*) is this [cognition]? **Manifold-imaged**, i.e., that of which there are multiple (*anekāḥ*) images (*ākārāḥ*). So it is said. To repeat: those images which are observed due to error—the apprehending aspect and so on—are [what Dinnāga] intends to discuss. “**In reliance upon [reflexive awareness],**” i.e., taking [reflexive awareness] as its warrant for being an epistemic instrument. “**Like this and that**”: first of all, with respect to nonconceptual [cognition], the apprehending aspect is the perceptual instrument (*pratyakṣam pramāṇam*) that is devoid of conceptuality. The vividly-appearing apprehended aspect is the particular (*svalakṣaṇa*) which is the epistemic object (*prameya*). With regard to a [cognition that] arises from an inferential sign (*liṅga*), as well, the apprehending aspect is the inferential instrument (*anumānaṃ pramāṇam*).⁷² The non-vividly-appearing apprehended aspect is the epistemic object, a universal (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*) [which seems] as though distributed across distinct individuals. “**Metaphorically assigned (upacaryate),**” i.e., conventionalized (*vyavahriyate*). [75] This is indicated by the fact (*svarūpa*) that the convention of epistemic instrument and epistemic object is spoken about, for the sake of eliminating the delusion of those who are mistaken. However, only the transcendent, ultimate instrument is imperishable, devoid of error, and stainless;⁷³ and only its field (*gocara*)⁷⁴ is the true *prameya*.

“**But all phenomena are devoid of causal activity (nirvyāpāra)**”: this points out that an awareness of cognition (*jñānaśamvedana*) is distorted. For, in reality (*tattvataḥ*), it is impossible to have a conventional interaction, which is by nature an experience with a non-singular image,⁷⁵ with any phenomenon, because images are not truly established. Although this is just error, those who are blinded by ignorance nevertheless “see” cognition, which⁷⁶ is [in reality] without the images of knower and known. Well, if every cognition on the part of those who do not know reality is just distorted, then how can there be a presentation of *pramāṇa* and what is other [i.e., what is

⁷² This appears to be in reference to [Inference in the Context of Epistemic Idealism](#).

⁷³ *vibhramavivekanirmalam anupāyi pāramāthikam pramāṇam*. Compare to PVin 1.58 (Steinkellner ed., 44.4-5): *vibhramavivekanirmalam anupāyi pāramāthikapramāṇam*.

⁷⁴ Compare to the discussion of the *buddhagocara* in *Viṃśikā* 21 (see Chapter 5, note 35).

⁷⁵ That is to say, conventional interaction with ordinary phenomena requires that cognition appear bifurcated into the subject-image and the object-image (“multiple images”).

⁷⁶ The Sanskrit manuscript has an extra *tat* (see Chapter 5, note 167), which has no correlate in the Tibetan translation, serves no identifiable purpose, and makes no sense.

non-*pramāṇa*]?) Due to the presence of a specific imprint for error.⁷⁷ Since cognitions of touching [water], slaking [thirst], refreshment, and so on can occur, due to a cognition in which there is the appearance of water (or whatever)—which [cognition of water], due to not belying conventional reality, is a *pramāṇa*—[while] the other [type of cognition], because it is devoid of that specific kind of imprint, is not a *pramāṇa*; there is, therefore, no problem.

[Opponent:] “So, [in an idealistic context,] how could there be an inference of a cause from an effect?”

Why wouldn’t there be?

[Opponent:] “Because a cognition with the appearance of smoke strictly manifests earlier; the cognition with the appearance of fire manifests afterward. For that [inferential cognition of fire] is not experienced, prior to the cognition in which there is an appearance of smoke. Therefore, the smoke would not be a product of fire: so how could there be an inference of fire by means of that [smoke]?”

[76] This is not a problem. For a mind-stream (*cittasantāna*), containing a specific disposition (*vāsanā*) for the production of a cognition with the image of fire, causes a cognition with the appearance of smoke—not just anything at all—to arise. Hence, the cognition of smoke that is making that [fire] known is making known [or indicating] the cognizer’s future cognition—whose disposition is ready for activation—in which there will be the image of fire.

PST ad PS(V) 1.10

He explains the presentation of the epistemic object and so forth with, “**And he says,**” and so on. To break it down (*vigraha*): “That of which [cognition has] the appearance” (*yadābhāsam*) is “that of which there is the appearance” (*ya ābhāso ’sya*). The object-appearance is mentioned (*grhyate*), in this context, due to the construal of that part [of the cognition] which is its self-[appearance] as the epistemic instrument (*māṇa*): “**That [of which cognition has the appearance] is the epistemic object.**” In other words, the appearance of the object-field is the epistemic object (*prameya*).

“**The apprehending aspect and the awareness [respectively] have the property of being the epistemic instrument and the resulting knowledge,**” which is to say, the apprehending aspect has the property of being the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇatā*), while [reflexive] awareness (*saṃvitti*) has the property of being the result (*phalatā*). And here, even though [the rule about] being the shorter [member of a *dvandva* compound] (*alpāctara*) [applies] to the word “apprehending aspect,” nevertheless, because the apprehending aspect is the epistemic instrument, and because [it is] being discussed as that which is to be explained, it is honored [with the first

⁷⁷ *upaplavavāsanāviśeṣasadbhāvāt*. Compare to PVin1.58: *upaplavavāsanāvisandhidoṣād*.

position].⁷⁸ Thus the word “apprehending aspect” is placed before it. **“Hence, the three are not separable”**: because, in reality, the triad is not truly established, it is not separable from cognition.

PST ad PS(V) 1.11ab

[77] In this context, having accepted the fact that [cognition has a] bifurcated form (*dvirūpatā*), reflexive awareness is stated to be the result. But this bifurcated form of cognition does not make sense, because there is no good argument (*upapatti*) in favor of it. Considering this, one inquires: **“Now, [how is it known that cognition has] a bifurcated form?”**, and so on. In other words, if [cognition] is analyzed as having a tripartite form, why is bifurcation the point at stake? Because the intention is that, if the dualistic form is established, reflexive awareness⁷⁹ is also established. For, if [cognition] is established as having two forms, [it is established by extension that] the conformity to the object, which has the nature of the cognition itself, is experienced. Hence, it is established by definition (*arthāt*) that [cognition] is reflexively-experienced.

“But [the double-formedness of cognition is established] due to the difference between the cognition of the object-field, and the cognition of that [cognition]”: the cognition of the object-field (*viṣayajñāna*) is that which apprehends visible matter (*rūpa*) and so forth, i.e., the visual consciousness and so on. **The cognition of the object-field and the cognition of that [cognition]**: the cognition of that [cognition], i.e., [a subsequent cognition] regarding the [prior] cognition of the object-field. In this [verse], if the word **‘that’** (*tat*) referred to the object-cognition (*viṣayajñāna*),⁸⁰ then the mention of it would be superfluous, because even without this [mention], it is understood that [the topic under discussion] is a cognition (*jñāna*) which has the object-cognition (*viṣayajñāna*) as its object-support (*ālambana*). Therefore, even though it is derivative (*guṇabhūta*),⁸¹ the object-field is referred to through the force of the mention of the word ‘that,’ because nothing else is under discussion here.

Hence, it is stated that, with respect to a cognition of the object-field, the cognition has the image of the object-field (*viṣayākāra*). This itself is what qualifies (*viśeṣa*) [the subsequent cognition of this prior cognition]. In other words, [the subsequent cognition of the prior cognition] is qualified

⁷⁸ By the strict letter of Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (II.2.34), the member of a *dvandva* compound with fewer vowels must come first. The problem is that, in PS 1.10c, the *dvandva* compound *grāhakākārasaṃvittyoḥ* features *grāhakākāra* (five vowels) prior to *saṃvitti* (three vowels). Jinendrabuddhi solves the problem by noting, with reference to the fourth note from the *Kāśīkāvṛtti*, that “the more honored [member of the compound] ought to be placed in the prior position” (*abhyārhitam ca pūrvam nipatatīti vaktavyam*).

⁷⁹ That is, the third term in the triad of the apprehending aspect, apprehended aspect, and reflexive awareness.

⁸⁰ In other words, if *tajjñāna* referred to the *viṣayajñāna* by itself, rather than to the *viṣayajñānajñāna*.

⁸¹ In other words, the object-field is still present, in a “derivative” (*guṇabhūta*) sense, in the “cognition of the cognition of the object-field” (*viṣayajñānajñāna*). That is to say: even though the “cognition of that [cognition]” (*tajjñāna*) is a cognition of the object-cognition (*viṣayajñāna*), as opposed to a cognition of the object-field itself, the object-field is still “derivatively” present in the “cognition of that [cognition].” See also note 29, above.

by the image of an object-field which exceeds [that of] the [original] cognition of the object-field.⁸² This is only stated with [reference to] the opinions of others, since others⁸³ assert that it is [only] the [initial] cognition of the object-field, exclusively, which possesses the image of the experience (*anubhavākāra*).⁸⁴ But there is also an image of the experience of the [subsequent] cognition of that [prior cognition].⁸⁵ And in this regard, because the awareness (*buddhi*) is established to have the image of an experience, that [fact that cognition is cognitive] does not need to be proven. For there is no philosopher who [78] does not assert the cognitive nature (*jñānarūpa*) of cognition.⁸⁶ But the image of the object⁸⁷ is not accepted by others; for this reason, the bifurcated form [of cognition] is proven.

“For [the cognition] of an object-field”: the word ‘for’ (*hi*) is in the sense of a specification (*avadhāraṇa*), and it is out of order (*bhinnakrama*). **“[Cognition] indeed has the appearance both of itself and of the object,”** which are [respectively] the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*) and the result (*phala*). In this regard, there is an appearance of the object (*artha*), due to the image of the object-field (*viṣayākāra*), [and] there is self-appearance, due to the image of the experience (*anubhavākāra*). **“An appearance of the [prior] cognition which conforms to the object-field”:** the object-cognition is just that cognition which conforms to an object-field such as visible form. **The appearance of that (*tadābhāsa*) [prior cognition]** means the image of the [prior] object-cognition, which [in turn] possesses the image of the object-field.⁸⁸ This states the evidence to the

⁸² The idea here is that the object-field pertaining to the t_1 object-cognition is just the object (*viṣaya* or *artha*), which exists in the moment immediately prior to its cognition (t_0). The object-field of the subsequent t_2 cognition of that prior t_1 cognition is just the t_1 object-cognition, which “exceeds” (*adhika*) the original object-field by virtue of including the self-appearance (*svābhāsa*) of cognition within itself. The original object-field does not contain this “self-appearance,” because the original object-field is not a cognition. Schematically, then: the t_0 object is just an object. The t_1 cognition of the t_0 object contains the appearance of this object (i.e., the *viṣayābhāsa*), as well as the appearance of the t_1 cognition itself (i.e., the *svābhāsa*). The t_2 cognition of the t_1 cognition contains, as its object-appearance, the appearance of the t_1 cognition; included within this object-appearance (i.e., the appearance of the t_1 cognition), though only “derivatively” (*guṇabhūta*), is the appearance of the t_0 object. But, just by virtue of the fact that it is a cognition, the t_2 cognition *also* contains its own, new, unique, self-appearance.

⁸³ The precise identity of these “others” is as yet unclear.

⁸⁴ Jinendrabuddhi’s usage of “image of the experience” (*anubhavākāra*) here is different from Dinnāga’s usage at PSV ad PS 1.6ab, where this term in effect means the image of a prior cognition. Here, on the other hand, Jinendrabuddhi is using this term as a synonym for the “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) or “apprehending aspect” (*grāhakākāra*) of cognition.

⁸⁵ In other words, the t_1 cognition has an “image of the [fact that it is an] experience,” which is to say, a self-appearance or apprehending aspect. But the t_2 cognition of *that* t_1 cognition also possesses its own, new, unique “image of the experience” or self-appearance.

⁸⁶ So much for the eliminativists!

⁸⁷ That is to say, the view that cognition is representational or possesses images (*sākāravāda*). While there is no space here to develop the thought, it should be noted in this regard that Jinendrabuddhi appears to be primarily concerned with establishing that cognition possesses the image of the object-field, as opposed to somehow apprehending the object directly, and basically takes it for granted that everyone accepts cognition to possess the “image of the experience” (*anubhavākāra*) or “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*) of being a cognition. Dinnāga’s argumentation at PS 1.11, however, seems much more directly concerned with establishing that cognition possesses just this cognitive form (i.e., what Jinendrabuddhi elsewhere refers to as *jñānarūpatva*). Thanks to John Dunne for this observation.

⁸⁸ See notes [81](#) and [82](#), above.

effect that an object-cognition—which has the image of the object-field—is taken as an object-support (*ālambana*) by its own cognition (*svajñāna*).⁸⁹

For it makes sense that an entity (*vastu*) which appears in a cognition with that [entity] as its image, is taken as an object-support by the [cognition] with that very image. For example: a cow, which appears in its own cognition with the image of a dewlap and so on, is taken as the object-support by a [cognition] with just that [cow] as its image. And, in the case of the cognition of an object-cognition [such as the cognition of the cognition of a cow], the image of the object-cognition (*viṣayajñānākāra*)—colored (*anurakta*) by the [original] image of the object-field (*viṣayākāra*) [such as the cow]—is perceived; but there is no image [of a cow or whatever] at all which is separate from that. And it is impossible for that which does not appear to be the object of a [cognition], due to the fallacy of infinite extension that would unacceptably result. Therefore, the object-cognition, which has the image of the object-field, is taken as an object-support by its own [subsequent] cognition (*svajñānena*); this is the meaning of the evidence obtained.

“**[Cognition has] the appearance both of itself [and of the object]**” means that, even though the [prior cognition of the object-field] has the appearance of an object-cognition as its object-image, it also appears with the form of itself (*svarūpena*).⁹⁰ **Otherwise**, if [the prior cognition] did not have a bifurcated form, i.e., **if the [prior] cognition of the object-field only had the form of the object-field, exclusively**, it would not have the form of the experience (*anubhavarūpa*). But no one asserts that cognition only has the single (*eka*) form of the object. So what is the purpose of stating this? When it is being established that cognition has the image of the object, there might be a doubt [79] to the effect that the cognition, known to have the image of the object-field, is only known [to have the image of the object-field], to the exclusion of its own form (*svarūpa*). Thus it is said, for the sake of seeing this, in order to refute that [position], that the [cognition] conforms to the image of the object-field, just without losing its own form.

“**Or [if the prior cognition of the object-field only possessed] the form of itself,**” i.e., or [if there was] only the image of the experience (*anubhavākāra*), but not the image of the object-field. **“The [subsequent] cognition of that cognition could not be qualified by the [prior] cognition of the object-field.”** The cognition of a cognition (*jñānajñāna*) is a cognition that has an object-cognition as its object-support; a [cognition] that is unqualified by the object-cognition, could not be qualified [by the object-field]. In other words, [the cognition of cognition] would not have been caused to arise in such a way that it is qualified by the qualifier, i.e., the image of the object-cognition, [which in turn is] colored by the image of the object-field.⁹¹ For if it is the case that the object-support (*ālambana*) causes [the object-cognition] to arise in such a way that it contains the image of itself (*ātmiyākārānugatam*), i.e., its own cognition (*svajñāna*), then a cognition which arises due to that object-cognition should [also] be qualified with an image [of itself], as has already been stated. If this were not the case, however, then just as the object-field would not qualify its own cognition—that is, [just as the object-cognition] is not caused to arise in such a

⁸⁹ That is to say, its “own cognition” (*svajñāna*) in the sense of another, subsequent cognition, which takes that earlier cognition of the object-field (i.e., the *viṣayajñāna*) as its object-support (*ālambana*).

⁹⁰ Again, in other words, the t_2 cognition also possesses its own self-appearance.

⁹¹ See note 29, above.

way that it is qualified by the qualifier which is its conformity to itself (*svasārūpya*)—in just that way, the object-cognition could not qualify its own cognition, either. But [the object-cognition] does qualify [its own cognition, i.e., the subsequent cognition of the prior object-cognition]. Therefore, the object-cognition also has an object-image [in addition to its self-image].

A [cognition] has the image (*ākāra*) of whatever form (*ākāra*) is taken as an object-support (*ālambyate*) by its own cognition. For example, a cow with the form (*ākāra*) of something possessing a dewlap and so on, is taken as an object-support by its own cognition, which [cognition thereby] has the image (*ākāra*) of something possessing a dewlap and so on. And a cognition of an object-field, having the form (*ākāra*) of the object-field, is taken as an object-support by its own cognition, which [secondary cognition thereby] has the image (*ākāra*) of that [object-field]. “That [form of the object-field] is taken as an object-support,” because this model (*vyavasthā*) [of how cognition works] is based upon the form of the object-field. When this [possession of the form of the object-field on the part of the cognition of that cognition] is to be established (*sādhya*), the [evidence (*hetu*) is the] effect (*kārya*).⁹² But when the [primary object-cognition’s] possession of the image [of the object-field is to be established, the evidence is its] nature (*svabhāva*).⁹³

Moreover, in this context, ‘a cognition which is the experience of the object-field’ is only a metonym. The cognition of a thought (*cintājñāna*), too, is perceived by means of its own cognition (*svajñānena*), which has both the image of the cognition [itself,] as well as the image of the content (*artha*) in the manner that it is thought about. That is to say, [80] just as the [subsequent] cognition of the cognition of the object-field does not exclusively know either the form of the object, or the form of the experience, on the part of that [initial] cognition which is the experience of the object field, but rather apprehends both images—“There was the cognition of that [object], which had such and such kind of object (*artha*),” and so on—[a cognition of thinking] is, likewise, apprehended by means of its own cognition: “There was a thought, which had the image of such and such kind of content (*artha*),” and so on.

[Someone] could [say] this: “The cognition of the object arises strictly without an image (*nirākāram*). In regard to that [cognition], however, because it is the effect of an object (*artha*), there is the recollection: ‘This cognition is the effect of that object.’ When there is this [recollection], the cause of the experiential cognition (*anubhavajñāna*)—i.e., the object—is also recollected. Then, afterwards, having conflated the experiential cognition with the object due to error (*bhrāntyā*), one determines [the experiential cognition] to have the image of the object.”

But it does not make sense that, to whatever extent the [experiential cognition] might be determined in some way by a cognizer who is in error, to that extent the cognition in fact (*eva*) has

⁹² In other words, the fact that the secondary (t_2) cognition of cognition possesses the form of the original (t_0) object-field can be established on the basis of the fact that this original object-field causes the initial (t_1) object-cognition to possess the image of the object-field, combined with the fact that the initial (t_1) object-cognition causes the secondary (t_2) cognition of that initial object-cognition to possess the image of that object-cognition. That is to say, the secondary cognition of cognition is the effect of the primary object-cognition, and the primary object-cognition is the effect of the original object-field.

⁹³ In other words, the fact that an object-cognition possesses the form or image (*ākāra*) of its object-field is established just by virtue of the nature of the object-cognition itself, because by definition it possesses this image.

that image.⁹⁴ Hence, [Dinnāga] says: “**Nor can subsequent and subsequent cognitions [possess the appearance of a prior object],**” and so on. The word “and” (*ca*) here is in the sense of a specification. This means: these **subsequent and subsequent cognitions**, such as the cognition of the cognition of the object-field, and so on, simply (*eva*) could not possess the appearance of the object of the previous experiential cognition, which [object] would be epistemically remote (*viprakṛṣṭa*) in relation to those subsequent cognitions, because it is mediated by [the initial sensory] cognition; [hence,] these [cognitions] do not reach [the earlier object]. Why? **Because they do not have [the past, and therefore epistemically remote, prior object] as their object-field**, in other words, because the aforementioned object (*artha*) could not be the object-field (*viśaya*) of those later and later cognitions.

If, however, the [original] object-field [of the initial experiential cognition] were [the object-field] of those [later mnemonic cognitions], then, in regard to those [later mnemonic cognitions] which would have arisen [directly from the same original object], the memory of those [object-fields] would be [like this]: “These cognitions are the effect of that object (*artha*), by virtue of being the effect of that object.” Therefore, their cause—the object—would also be remembered. Then, too, having conflated (*saṅkalayya*) this [memory of the object] with the object, [81] the cognizer would erroneously apprehend [the memory] as having the appearance of that [original object]. But this [original object] is not the object-field (*viśaya*) of those [later and later mnemonic cognitions]. On the contrary: it is exclusively [the object-field] of the very first cognition.⁹⁵

Therefore, only that [first cognition], which arises from the causal capacity of the object, by virtue of being causally conjoined (*saṃyojya*) with the object, is apprehended as having the image (*ākāra*) of the [object-field itself]—not the later and later ones, because they do not have [the original object] as their object-field. They are, however, apprehended as having the image of *the image* of the object. That is to say, for each of the subsequent and subsequent cognitions, an additional image (*ākāra*) is perceived. For it is by means of the [mnemonic] cognition of a [sensory] cognition of a jug, [in other words a cognition] taking the cognition with the image of the jug as its object-support, which [mnemonic cognition thereby] includes the image of the jug, that one knows: “There was a cognition with the image of a jug.” But it is by means of the cognition of that [second-order cognition of the cognition of the jug], taking the cognition of the cognition of the jug as its object-support, that [one has a third-order cognition which knows] the cognition

⁹⁴ In other words, if the original cognition of the object lacks the image or form of the object, then, no matter how much the memory of this cognition is erroneously conflated with the object itself (which is the opponent’s position laid out above), the memory will never have the image or form of the object.

⁹⁵ In other words, if the cause of the memory of an object were the object itself, rather than a prior *cognition* of the object, then the memory would present itself just as a cognition of the object, rather than as a cognition of the cognition of the object. Therefore, there would be no way to distinguish between the initial experiential cognition of the object, and the subsequent mnemonic recollection of the object, because both would be caused directly by the object itself (which is, in any case, impossible for the mnemonic cognition, since as noted above the object is past and therefore epistemically remote with respect to the memory).

of the cognition of the jug, [which occurs] together with the image of the cognition of the jug: “There was the cognition of the cognition of a jug.”⁹⁶

It should be understood [that this process applies] in the same way regarding subsequent [fourth-order cognitions of cognitions of cognitions of cognitions, and so on]. It is in this way that later and later cognitions are apprehended as having the images of objects which are prior [and thus] epistemically remote [at the time of the recollection]. And it is not the case that [these epistemically remote, prior objects] are the object-fields of those [later and later cognitions], such that they would be apprehended in the manner that you [the opponent] have stated. Therefore, it must be accepted that those [later and later cognitions] have images of these [earlier and earlier cognitions] by their very nature. **Nor**, if the first cognition were devoid of the image of the object-field, **can [subsequent and subsequent cognitions] possess the appearance of a prior object, which is remote [at the time of those cognitions]**, as has been claimed. Therefore, it must also be accepted that [the initial cognition] possesses the appearance of the object. **And thus, the double-formedness [of cognition] is proven.**

Opponent: “Why is this [said]: ‘But a [subsequent] cognition of that cognition of the object-field [also] has both a self-appearance, as well as an appearance of the [prior] cognition which conforms to the object-field’; since, by virtue of [being a cognition of the object-field], the [first-order] cognition of the object-field should [already be understood to] possess conformity (*sārūpya*) to the object-field?”

[This is said] because [in the case of a second-order cognition] there is both an image of the object-field and an image of the experience—[both of which are] connected to the [first-order] cognition of the object-field, [and both of which have] come through that [first-order cognition]—as well as a third image, [82] which is the characteristic self-appearance [of the second-order cognition]; thus, these three images are taken as an object-field by their own cognition (*svajñāna*).⁹⁷ And so, it is stated right at the appropriate juncture (*sampraty eva*) that “for each of the later and later cognitions, respectively, an additional image (*ākāra*) is perceived.” Why has this been forgotten? Therefore, in this case as well, when [the cognition of cognition] is to be proven as having the image of the [original] cognition which conforms to the object-field, it is to be understood that the

⁹⁶ Schematically, in other words, first there is the sensory cognition of the jug. Then there is the first-order mnemonic cognition of the sensory cognition of the jug, i.e., the memory of having seen the jug (“At that time, I saw a jug”). Then there is the second-order memory *of* the first-order memory of having seen the jug (“At that time, I remembered having seen a jug”). This process may be repeated arbitrarily many times. Each additional mnemonic “layer” adds another image, because in each case what is remembered is not the actual jug, but the previous *cognition* of (the cognition of... and so on) the jug.

⁹⁷ That is, the “own cognition” (*svajñāna*) of the second-order cognition, which is to say, a third-order cognition, in the manner that the “own cognition” of a cow has the image of a cow, and the “own cognition” *of the cognition* of the cow has the image *of the cognition* of the cow, as discussed above.

Schematically: at t_0 , there is the object-field and the faculty. At t_1 , there is the first-order cognition of the object-field. This cognition, like all cognitions, has both an “object-appearance” (*viśayābhāsa*) and a “self-appearance” (*svābhāsa*). At t_2 , there is then a second-order “cognition of cognition,” which takes the first-order cognition of the object-field (i.e., the t_1 cognition) as its object-field. This cognition at t_2 also includes its own, separate, self-appearance. Hence, the second-order cognition at t_2 includes three images: the self-appearance of the t_2 cognition; the self-appearance of the t_1 cognition; and the object-appearance from t_1 as mediated by all those subsequent cognitions.

proof (*sādhana*) is [the earlier demonstration] that “a [cognition] has the image (*ākāra*) of whatever form (*ākāra*) is taken as an object-support (*ālambyate*) by its own cognition,” and so on.

Opponent: “But then wouldn’t there be an infinite regress, to the effect that an establishing means [would need] to be stated in relation to the cognition of that [cognition of cognition], and so on, as well?”

This is not the case. For a doubt may arise in regard to the cognition of a proximate object-field: “Does the blue form (*nīlākāra*) belong to the object, but the cognition is without an image (*nirākāra*) [of blue]? Or does cognition possess [the image of blue]?” At the time of the cognition of an epistemically-remote [i.e., past] object-field, however, [the object] does not exist; this is certain. [That is to say, in this case] there is no doubt at all in regard to the fact that [cognition] possesses the image of the object-field (*viṣayākāratā*). Hence, there is no infinite regress.⁹⁸

PSṬ *ad* PS(V) 1.11cd

“**Also due to recollection at a later time,**” and so on: above, the double-formedness (*dvairūpya*) of a single object-cognition was established, by virtue of the qualification consisting in [that cognition’s] conformity to the object-field. Now, it is established through the recollection of multiple cognitions as being mutually distinct. For, just as recollection exists in regard to mutually-distinct particulars (*parasparavilakṣaṇeṣu*), such as visible forms and so on, which have been experienced as being different from each other, likewise, [recollection exists] in regard to [mutually-distinct] cognitions [which have been experienced as being different from each other]. **Therefore, cognition possesses a bifurcated form.** Otherwise, [83] there could be no recollection of any cognition—which, as a mere experience, is not experienced as being different [from any other cognition], [because the nature of cognition just as mere experience is] undifferentiated with respect to each object—as distinct [from any other cognition]: “I had a cognition of visible form, not a cognition of sound,” or “[I had] a cognition of sound, not a cognition of visible form.”⁹⁹

[Someone] could [say] this: “Just as [every cognition] is identical in terms of its experiential nature, [but] there is a difference in terms of pleasure and so on, due to a difference in the causal complex (*sāmagrī*) [that produces it]; in this way, there is a subtle difference, made by this and that (*aparāpara*) causal complex, in regard to each object. Hence, there can be the memory [of different cognitions] as being distinct.”

⁹⁸ In other words, it is impossible by definition for the memory of ‘seeing blue’ to have the actual blue itself as its object-field, because the blue as it was seen no longer exists. Rather, the fact that one can remember ‘seeing blue,’ even though the blue that was seen by definition no longer exists, proves that the memory of ‘seeing blue’ takes the visual cognition of blue—rather than the blue object itself—as its object-field.

⁹⁹ In other words, because every cognition is identical in terms of its merely experiential cognitive nature (see Chapter 2), cognitions with different sensory modalities could not be remembered as qualitatively different, if the cognition itself did not include the form of the object.

Not so. For a vivid distinction (*bheda*) is the causal basis (*nibandhana*) of memory. For example: a cognition regarding some object which is being regarded neutrally (*upekṣāsthānīya*), being carried along by the flow (*dhārāvāhi*), has a causal complex comprised of this or that sense-faculty and so on. Nevertheless, there is no recollection [of that cognition] as distinct [from previous cognitions], such as: “This many mental moments have passed.” Likewise, although twins possess similarity in one regard (*ākārasāmye*), in reality, they are different; nevertheless, due to the lack of vividness [on the part of the difference between them], there is no recognition [of the twins] as being different. On the contrary: there is an imputation of both onto each other. Therefore, there can be no recollection distinguishing one object [from another] where the distinction [between the two] is not vivid. Now, the experience does possess some kind of difference that is caused by the object (*arthakṛta*), due to which there is a memory [of the object] as being distinct [from other things]. Hence, the [fact that cognition possesses] conformity to the object must be accepted by one who accepts [the preceding argument]. And therefore, it is established that cognition has a bifurcated form.

“And [cognition] is reflexively-experienced”: this expresses that the same argument discussed [above also demonstrates] something else that is to be proven. It is not exclusively the case that the bifurcated form of cognition, exclusively, is established through recollection at a later time; rather, reflexive awareness—that which is asserted to be both the epistemic instrument and the resultant cognitive activity (*pramāṇaphala*)—is also [established by this argument]. First of all, there is the experience of a cognition due to something. Then, there can be a memory [of this cognition] as well. [84] Thinking, “But why is it ‘reflexively known’ by extension (*tāvatā*)?”, one asks: **“For what reason?”**. It makes sense for the experience of a cognition to occur just by means of itself, rather than by means of something else. Determining this, he says: **“For there is no [memory of an object-cognition that has not been experienced],”** and so on. What this means is that there is the memory of that [object] which has been experienced, such as visible matter; and there is [separately also] the memory [of the cognition of that object]. This is [proof by means of evidence from the] effect (*kārya*[*hetu*]).

PSṬ ad PS(V) 1.12

With **“[Someone] could [say] this”** and so on, it is asserted that [a first-order cognition] is only experienced by means of another [second-order] cognition, [and] thus, that what is to be proven has [already] been proven. Hence, [Dinnāga] reveals the opponent’s opinion. With **“by means of another cognition”** and so on, [Dinnāga] eliminates [the opponent’s objection] that what is to be proven has [already] been proven. For a recollection may be observed, at a later time, regarding also that [second-order] cognition by means of which [a first-order] cognition is experienced. And it does not make sense for there to be memory in regard to that which has not been experienced. Therefore, there must be [a third-order] cognition, which takes that [second-order cognition] as its object-support, and a memory about that [second-order cognition of cognition]. Therefore, there must be another [fourth-order cognition] about that [third-order cognition], as well. In this way, if the experience [of a given cognition] were to occur by means of a different cognition, there would be an infinite regress of cognitions. In other words, it absurdly follows, when there is a sequence of cognitions that is drawn out of a single cognition, that later and later cognitions endlessly take earlier and earlier cognitions as their object-support.

Opponent: “Even if this were so, what is the problem?”

[Dinnāga] says: “[**There could never be a] shift to another object-field,**” and so on—i.e., that cognition could not engage with any other object-field. **But it is accepted [that cognition can shift to different objects].** In this regard, there must be the reflexive awareness of that [cognition] away from which there has been a shift.

[85] [Someone] could [say] this: “The final cognition need not possess the quality of being a separate, reflexively-known cognition, nor need it be a memory; that [final cognition] can stand alone, unexperienced and unremembered. So there could still be a shift to another object-field.”

That does not make sense. That is to say, if the final cognition were not experienced, then none of the cognitions which occurred at a previous time could be experienced, because the observation of that [final cognition] would be epistemically remote (*parokṣa*); the observation [of something] which is epistemically remote with respect to someone, is not experienced by that [person]. For example, Devadatta’s cognition, which is experienced by Devadatta, [is not experienced] by Yajñadatta. And the observation of a cognition which has occurred at a previous time, [even a cognition] that is connected to oneself, is remote for ordinary beings (*prāṇin*). [This is a proof by] incompatibility on the part of the pervaded (*viruddhavyāpta*). Alternatively: the observation of something imperceptible (*apratyakṣopalambha*)—for example, that which is epistemically remote—is not a perceptual [cognition] (*pratyakṣa*). And a cognition which is the observation of something that has not been experienced would be [non-perceptual] in that way. [This is a separate proof by] incompatibility on the part of the pervaded.

[Someone] could [say] this: “Only that cognition, which is experienced by itself (*ātmanānubhūta*), is a perceptual [cognition]; therefore, a [cognition] which is experienced by other [cognitions] is not perceptual.”

But how is it established that this self-experience (*ātmānubhava*) exists? For, if an experience is established, there must be a distinction [such that it must be one of two things]: either an experience of itself, or [an experience] of something else. But [by the opponent’s logic] this very [distinction] cannot be established. If this [distinction] is not established, then in both cases—because there is no distinction in terms of being epistemically remote—it is impossible to know that “this is the experience [of the experience] itself, not of something else,” by means of the observation of something that is epistemically remote.¹⁰⁰ How, then, could there be self-experience? For if, even though the observation of the apprehended (*grāhya*) is not established, [86] it were to be accepted that a real entity is perceived (*pratyakṣa*), the whole world would be perceived, because there would be no difference between the observation of what is [perceptible and the observation of

¹⁰⁰ Steinkellner (2005b, 85.11-13): *tasyāsiddhāv ubhayatrāpi parokṣatvenāviśeṣād ātmany ayam anubhavo nānyatrey etat parokṣopalambhena durjñānam* |

This passage, in particular, is somewhat obscure. Further study of the corresponding passage in PV 3.538-539 and PVP/PVṬ *ad cit* will likely help shed light on Jinendrabuddhi’s argument here.

what is] imperceptible. But this is not the case. Therefore, it must be accepted that cognition is reflexively-experienced (*svasaṃvedyatā*).

PSṬ ad PS(V) 1.13

Now, there is a rumor in the world that the *Vādaśāstra* is by the Ācārya Vasubandhu. But this author, [Dinnāga], having seen the flawlessness of the other treatises composed by [Vasubandhu]—it being impossible for the *Vādaśāstra*, which is flawed, to have been written by [Vasubandhu]—says that **“The *Vādaśāstra* is not by the Ācārya [Vasubandhu].”**

Opponent: “But the author of treatises whose authors are unseen is only determined on the basis of rumor. This is also the case here; so why is the *Vādaśāstra* not attributed to Vasubandhu?”

[Dinnāga says]: **“Or else it is certain that [the *Vādaśāstra*] is not [of his] essence.”** Because [the *Vādaśāstra*] is the topic under discussion, it should be understood that [the essence] of the Ācārya [is not] **in it**. What this means is that, first of all, there is no definitive knowledge of something (*artha*) merely by means of general opinion, because it is possible for this [opinion to exist] even without the thing [being true]. Furthermore, even if it were composed by [Vasubandhu], it would nevertheless [have been composed] by a neophyte in whom superior wisdom had not [yet] arisen. In any event, **it is certain** that there is, in this [text], nothing of the essence of the later [Vasubandhu], whose mind had been purified.

Well then, how is this certainty, as to the absence of his essence in this [text], ascertained? [Dinnāga] says: **“Because portions [of his system] are explained differently [in other texts],”** meaning: because there is a portion of the presentation which is faultless. And the Ācārya explained portions [of his system] differently in the *Vādaśāstrānanda*, due to the determination of a lack of essence in the *Vādaśāstra*, on account of seeing faults—precisely those faults which we will illuminate. Demonstrating [this, Dinnāga] says: **“Therefore,”** and so on. **“Therefore (*tena*),”** i.e., due to having faults (*doṣavattvena*). [87] That is to say, the faultiness of the *Vādaśāstra* is pointed out with **“Because portions [of his system] are explained differently.”** **“In regard to epistemic instruments and so on”** [refers to] the portion concerning epistemic instruments, pseudo-perception (*tadābhāsa*), a dispute (*jāti*), and the responses to that [dispute].

PSṬ ad PS(V) 1.14ab

“A perception is a cognition that comes about due to that object [of which it is the perception].” That cognition which arises only on account of the object-field (*viśaya*) after which it has been named, and not through anything else, nor through [both] that object and something else—this cognition is direct perception: such as “cognition of visible form,” etc., or “cognition of pleasure,” etc. In this way, [1] erroneous cognitions (*bhrāntijñāna*) are rejected, such as the cognition of mother-of-pearl as silver. For that “silver-cognition” is designated as “silver,” but it does not arise on account of silver, but rather through mother-of-pearl. [2] Cognition of the conventionally-existent is also rejected by this [definition]. For example, the “cognition of a jug,” [and again, on another occasion] the “cognition of [another] jug,” are designated in this way, as

‘jugs’ or whatever; however, those [cognitions of a jug] do not arise due to them [i.e., jugs]—because they are not a cause, as they [only] exist conventionally—for they only arise on account of [particles of] visible matter and so on that are in proximity [to each other].¹⁰¹ [3] Inferential cognition is also rejected by this [definition], because it arises due to the cognition of smoke and the memory of its relation with fire, as well, not due to fire exclusively.

The intended meaning here is also that [the perception of a given object] just comes from that [object], and does not *not* [come from that object].

The [definition of perception] having been constructed in this way, it is to be investigated: is this restriction (*niyama*) [made] in terms of one causal condition (*pratyaya*)? Or in terms of the object-support (*ālambana*)?¹⁰² It doesn’t matter (*kiṃ cātaḥ*)! In both cases, there is still a fault.

In the first case, the former restriction, [Dinnāga] says: **“If ‘due to that object’ means ‘[due to the condition (*pratyaya*) which applies to] all [cognitions, i.e., the object-support condition (*ālambanapratyaya*)].”** If [the phrase] **“due to that”** and so on strictly refers to [one of the four *pratyayas*]: [88] well, since the object-field (*viśaya*), which is the warrant (*hetu*) for the designation of the cognition [as the cognition of that particular object-field] is under discussion, [then,] by virtue of addressing the topic under discussion with [the phrase] **“due to that,”** the [object-support condition], exclusively, must be understood [as the *pratyaya* in question]. So, there is no uncertainty. Why, then, is there a doubt? If all four¹⁰³ types of condition are expressed with [the phrase] **“due to that,”** then the meaning which you have imagined is not present here; because, in this context, inasmuch as every phenomenon has the nature [of being an object-support], only the object-support condition (*ālambanapratyaya*) is expressed by the word **“all.”**¹⁰⁴

But how is it that every phenomenon has this nature [of being an object-support]? Because of the definition [in AK 2.62c]: “Every phenomenon is an object-support.”¹⁰⁵ And [apart from the object-support condition] there is no other condition (*pratyaya*) for cognition—i.e., [no other] warrant (*hetu*) for designating [some cognition as the cognition of some object]—of which every

¹⁰¹ See Chapter 3, Section I.B: [The Agglomerated Object of Sensory Cognition](#).

¹⁰² In other words, the question here is: does “the object” (*artha*) in the *Vādaśāstra* definition of perception (“due to that object,” *tato ’rthāt*) refer to the object-support condition (i.e., the *ālambanapratyaya*), or to the object-support (i.e., the *ālambana*)? As we will see, in the former case, the problem is that the sensory-perceptual cognition does not arise only from the object-support condition, exclusively; because, as is taught in the *Abhidharma*, a sensory cognition arises from four conditions (*pratyayas*). In the latter case, the problem is that conceptual cognitions such as inferences also arise due to their “object-support,” after which they are named; for example, “the inference of fire” has fire as its object-support (*ālambana*), even though it has smoke as its object-field (*viśaya*). See below, [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.14cd](#). Concerning the distinction between *viśaya* and *ālambana*, see also above, note [29](#).

¹⁰³ See Chapter 4, Section III.A.2: [Immediately-Preceding Condition and Immediately-Preceding Cognition](#).

¹⁰⁴ That is to say, the word “all” (*sarva*) in the verse here refers to “the all-condition,” which is another name for the “object-support condition” (*ālambanapratyaya*), rather than to “all four types” (*sarvaścaturvidha*) of conditions. It would indeed be difficult to understand “due to that object” (*tato ’rthāt*) as meaning “due to all four conditions.”

¹⁰⁵ The idea here is that every *dharma* is (or, at least, can be) an *ālambana*. See, in this regard, Chapter 2, Section II.D: [Omniscience and the Nature of Awareness](#).

phenomenon has the nature, that is expressed with **“due to that [condition].”**¹⁰⁶ Therefore, it should be understood that only the object-support condition is expressed with the word **“all.”** And so, this [passage] means: “If the condition expressed [with **‘due to that’**] is the [condition that is] the nature of every phenomenon,” which is to say, “if the object-support condition is expressed [with **‘due to that’**].” Hence, this [explanation] is not to be critiqued: a cognition, which is designated [as the cognition of some object] by virtue of its relation to its object-support condition, **does not come about due to [its object-support condition], exclusively.** On the contrary, it comes about due to other conditions, as well; because, as it is said [at AK 2.64]: **“For mind and mental factors [arise] due to the four [types of condition].”** In this way, a contradiction arises with [Sautrāntika] **philosophy** (*siddhānta*), concerning the position that the restriction [in the definition of perception as being “due to the object” is made] in terms of a causal condition.

PSṬ ad PS(V) 1.14cd

Discussing [the second option, that] the restriction [in the *Vādaśāstra* definition of perception is to be construed in terms] of the object-support, [Dinnāga] says: **“If [‘due to that object’ means ‘due to the] object-support,”** and so on. On this point, it is stated that the definition is over-extended (*ativyāpin*).¹⁰⁷ **“Only the object-field,”** here, is the particular entity that is manifest at that time, such as visible matter (*rūpa*), which is described with the word **“object-field”** by virtue of being the object-support of the cognition. The word **“only”** (*mātra*) excludes some other object-support. However, mnemonic cognition (etc.) is also designated with reference to a visible form and so on: [89] “the recollection of visible matter” (*rūpasmṛti*), “the desire for tamarind (*āmlābhilāṣa*),” and “the inference of fire (*agnyanumāna*)” do not depend upon some other object-support. Therefore, [under this definition] these [kinds of conceptual cognition] would also be perceptual.

[Someone] could [say] this: “A cognition with an object-field that is to be inferred [such as fire] does not arise from fire only; on the contrary, [it also arises] due to the cognition of the essential concomitance (*sambandha*) [between subject and predicate] and from the presence of the evidence in the subject (*pakṣadharmatva*), as well.”¹⁰⁸ So, why is this an unacceptable consequence?”

[Dinnāga] says: **“For it is not the case that an [inferential] cognition of fire (for example) ...”** and so on. Even though [the inferential cognition of fire] arises due to something other than the [fire],¹⁰⁹ nevertheless it does not take anything other than that [fire] *as its object-support*. And

¹⁰⁶ In other words, every phenomenon (*dharma*) is an object-support condition (*ālambanapratyaya*), but not every phenomenon is an immediately-preceding condition (*samanantarapratyaya*) and so on.

¹⁰⁷ That is to say, as Dinnāga will argue, the definition of perception as “a cognition which comes about *due to that object-support* [of which it is the cognition]” also captures cognitions which are not perceptual, such as inferences.

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter 4, Section III: [Inference and External Objects](#).

¹⁰⁹ That is, the perceptual cognition of smoke, the mnemonic recollection of the essential concomitance between smoke and fire, and so on.

therefore, because it does not arise in dependence upon some other object-support, on what grounds would [the inference of fire] not be a perception?

Opponent: “Regardless, the restriction that is intended in this context is: [a cognition is the perception of an object] if ‘that cognition is named [as the cognition of a particular object-field] by virtue of the object-field due to which it arises, and does not *not* arise [from that object-field].’ And it is not the case that memory and so on arise due to the object-support for which they are named, because [that object-support] does not exist [at the time it is remembered].”

This is not so, because [inferential and mnemonic cognition and so on] is considered to arise due to the [object-support], albeit indirectly. Otherwise, how could it make sense, as stated in the *Vādaśāstra*, that “Inferential cognition is also rejected by this [definition], because it arises due to the cognition of smoke and the memory of its relation with fire, as well, not due to fire exclusively.” For this expresses that [the inference of fire] arises due to the cognition of smoke and the memory of its relation with fire, *as well*; because of the word “as well” (*api*), [it is understood that the inference of fire is] also due to fire. How could this make sense, unless [fire] is considered to be a generator (*janaka*) [of the inference], albeit indirectly, on account of being the reason why it is named [“the inference of fire”]? Otherwise, if [the object-support of memory] is not a generator of memory and so on, because the object-field which is the reason for designating [those cognitions] does not exist at that time, then this status of not being a generator (*ajanakatva*) would equally be the case for an inference, as well; hence, this statement would not make sense.¹¹⁰

[90] [Opponent:] “Well, the object-field of recollection and so on—i.e., the warrant for designating [them to be the memory of a particular object]—is a conceptualization (*kalpita*), which is to say, a universal (*sāmānya*). And so, because it is conventionally-existent, it is not a generator (*janaka*) [of perceptual cognition]. Therefore, they are not properly considered (*matam*) to be perceptual.”

In this case, as well, that itself is the answer: namely, the object-support of an inferential cognition is also only conventionally-existent. And hence, that which has been stated—“Because it arises due to the cognition of smoke and the memory of its relation with fire, as well, not due to fire exclusively”—would not make sense. Therefore, the fault of over-extension still remains.

On this point, there are two views: the view that the epistemic object is internal (*antarjñeyavāda*), and the view that objects are external (*bāhyārthavāda*). For the Epistemic Idealists, in the state of not seeing the nature of reality (*tattva*), there is an epistemic instrument and an epistemic object, but (*ca*) they are just not ultimately established. Rather, the experience (*darśana*) of a presentation with an object and an instrument of epistemic measurement (*meyamānavyavasthita*) accords with the experience of those who are in error. And this was explained previously.¹¹¹ On the other hand, the External Realists maintain that the epistemic object (*prameya*) is external in ultimate terms, and that this [external object] is the object-field of the epistemic instrument (*pramāṇa*). And now, in order to demonstrate how this does not make sense—i.e., in order to undertake an analysis on

¹¹⁰ In other words, if the object-support of memory (i.e., the remembered object) is not considered to be the “generator” of the memory, because it does not exist at the time that it is remembered, then the object-support of inference (i.e., the inferred object) cannot be considered the “generator” of the inference, either.

¹¹¹ Cf. [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.9d](#).

the topic of the object-support (*ālambana*)—[Dinnāga] says: **“But the meaning of ‘object-support,’ with respect to visible matter and so on, should be discussed.”** And this must certainly be understood as follows.

For those who think, “This undertaking only concerns a refutation of the *Vādaśāstra*,” the meaning of ‘field’ (*gocara*) in the context of [PS 1.5] **“Because¹¹² the sensory field (*indriyagocara*) is an inexpressible, individually-experienced nature”** should be discussed. [91] **“Does cognition arise in regard to those [fundamental particles] of which it has the appearance, which are thereby stated to be the sensory field?”**,¹¹³ and so on: this is the same objection [addressed earlier at PS 1.5]! Hence, it must be examined. Therefore, it should be understood that the current undertaking is about demonstrating that the structure of the epistemic instrument and [epistemic patient and] so on—based upon an external object which is strictly a universal—is not well-formed (*na ghaṭata*). But among the External Realists, the strongest are our own [Buddhist] flock; having refuted them, other [traditions] are indeed refuted, like how beating the biggest boss (*jyeṣṭhamalla iva nihate*) [defeats] the other bosses. Thus, it is only with those [Buddhist External Realists in mind] that [Dinnāga] conducts the analysis.

“The meaning of ‘object-support,’” i.e., the meaning of the word ‘object-support’ (*ālambana*). With **“Does [cognition arise in regard to those fundamental particles] of which it has the appearance,”** [Dinnāga] demonstrates that, because the fundamental particles of matter and so on by their very nature do not appear individually, but (*ca*) [on the contrary] a cognition of them appears in the form (*ākāra*) of an agglomeration, the meaning of ‘object-support’ is in the sense of ‘appearance’ (*ābhāsa*). **“Or [are fundamental particles, existing] in whatever way,”** and so on means the reason. **“Existing in whatever way,”** i.e., as a ‘blue’ particular (*svalakṣaṇa*) or whatever. **“Even though [the cognition] has the appearance of something other than [those fundamental particles],”** which is to say, even though [the cognition has the appearance] of an agglomeration. The sense of the word **“even”** (*api*) is: **even if (*yady api*)** they do not produce a cognition with their own appearance, **nevertheless (*tathāpi*)** [they are the object-support].

“Because the object-support is an agglomeration”: i.e., because the object-support is a collection (*samūha*); an agglomeration (*sañcita*) is a gathering (*sañcaya*). But the object-support is agglomerated, because those [five types of sensory cognition all] have the appearance of a collection [of fundamental particles]. Alternatively, **“because the object-support is an agglomeration”** means “because that which appears is a collection.” The appearance (*ābhāsa*)—the causal factor (*kāraṇa*) which is the instrument (*kaṛaṇa*),¹¹⁴ i.e., that by means of which [the collection of fundamental particles] is taken as an object-support—is expressed with the word ‘object-support’ (*ālambana*). **“The object-support [of the five types of sensory cognition] is strictly conventionally-existent,”** entailing (*iti śeṣaḥ*) [that the cognition of such an object-

¹¹² Steinkellner (2005b, 90.13) notes that the Sanskrit manuscript of the PST has *svasamvedyam tv* here, rather than the *svasamvedyam hi* generally attested for PS 1.5a (Steinkellner 2005a, 3n1).

¹¹³ This is nearly a direct citation of PSV *ad* PS 1.14cd, *kiṃ yadābhāsam teṣu jñānam utpadyate tathā ta ālambanam*, only with *tadgocara* instead of *ta ālambanam*. In other words, Jinendrabuddhi has substituted *gocara* for *ālambana*, and is explaining the point here by way of reference to the argument in PS 1.5.

¹¹⁴ See Chapter 2, Section I: [The Kāraṇa System and Cognition](#).

support is] not perceptual. But the fact that the object-support is conventionally-existent is due to the fact that a collection is not substantially-existent (*adravyasat*). [92] With this, [Dinnāga] states a *reductio* in the mode of the possession of a contradictory quality on the part of the pervader (*vyāpakaviruddham prasaṅgam*): that [cognition] which has a conventionally-existent object-support is not a perception, such as memory; and sensory cognition is like that.¹¹⁵

Opponent: “But the [appearance] is an image (*ākāra*) of fundamental particles, which are precisely substantially-existent! For those very ones who maintain that the object is an image of a manifold [of fundamental particles] (*anekākārārthavādin*)¹¹⁶ would hold that [fundamental particles] appear thus, i.e., as mutually supporting each other, [and hence that] in some cases it is not established [that the contradictory quality, i.e., being merely conventionally-existent, applies to the pervader, i.e., sensory cognition].”

With this doubt in mind, [Dinnāga] says: “**It is granted (*kāmam*) [by you],**” and so on. [The word] *kāmam* [which normally means “desire,” here instead] means ‘accepted’ (*abhyupagame*). According to you, there should be perceptuality **in the case of cognitions with the appearance of ‘blue’ and so on**, due to the definition [of perception as a cognition which is] “due to the object” (*tato ’rthāt*). Why? [Dinnāga] says: “**To clarify,**” and so on. “**In the case of those [cognitions],**” i.e., in the case of cognitions with the appearance of blue and so on. “**Even though the agglomeration of these [fundamental particles in the case of those cognitions] is nominally-existent**” is [stated] in relation to a collection of fundamental particles which are blue or whatever. For even though the [agglomeration] is nominally-existent (*prajñaptisat*), nevertheless, by your own postulated reasoning, in the case of cognitions of blue or yellow or whatever, **a substantially-existent image is apprehended**. Alternatively, [rather than “*in the case of those cognitions,*” the word] “**those**” (*teṣu*) refers to the fundamental particles of ‘blue’ or whatever: [**“Even though this agglomeration of those fundamental particles is nominally-existent,**] **a substantially-existent image is apprehended.**”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ To review, Dinnāga earlier identifies two possible meanings of “object” (*artha*) in the *Vādaśāstra* definition of perception, either the “object-support condition” (*ālambanapratyaya*) or the “object-support” itself. Dinnāga dispenses with the first possibility at PS 1.14ab. The overarching question here thus concerns the meaning of “object-support,” in the context of the question of what precisely it is that causes a perceptual cognition to arise in the form or manner (i.e., with the *ākāra*) that it does. It is commonly agreed by both Dinnāga and his Sautrāntika interlocutor (i.e., the author of the *Vādaśāstra*) that the object-support of a perceptual cognition is an agglomeration of fundamental particles, because individual fundamental particles are imperceptible; see Chapter 3, Section I.B: [The Agglomerated Object of Sensory Cognition](#). The problem is that, because this object-support is an agglomeration, it must be conventionally-existent (*saṃvṛtisat*), because only individual indivisible particulars are substantially-existent (*dravyasat*). Therefore, according to the Sautrāntika interlocutor, perceptual cognition would have a merely conventionally-existent entity as its object-support. This is unacceptable within a Buddhist framework, particularly because, as Dinnāga will highlight later on, this raises the possibility that conventionally-existent universals such as “number” (*sāṅkhya*) could be the objects of direct sensory perception.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Chu (2008, 218–26).

¹¹⁷ In other words, *teṣu tatsamudāye prajñaptisaty api dravyasadākāro labhyate* has first been understood as, “Even though the agglomeration of these [fundamental particles] in the case of those [cognitions] is nominally-existent (*prajñaptisat*), a substantially-existent image is apprehended.” Here, Jinendrabuddhi provides an alternate gloss, reading *tatsamudāya* as “this agglomeration” rather than “the agglomeration of these [fundamental particles].”

“However, this would obtain even in the case of ‘substance,’ ‘number,’ and so on.” If the image of an agglomeration [of fundamental particles] is ultimately-existent (*paramārthasat*) because it is an image of fundamental particles, [then an image of] ‘substance’ and ‘number’ and so on would also be ultimately-existent, because it is an image of fundamental particles. And therefore, a cognition with [‘substance’ or ‘number’ or whatever] as its image, which is understood to be a pseudo-perception, would be a perception. In that case, as well, it is possible to articulate the same reasoning. So [Dinnāga] says: “**For it is those very [fundamental particles which appear as ‘substance’]**” and so on.

“On the other hand,” and so forth, is the consideration of another position. “In such a case,” and so on: this means that there is no absurd consequence (*prasaṅga*) of perceptuality on the part of a cognition about ‘substance’ and so forth. Why? [Dinnāga] says: “**[Because] they [do not exist] in that way,**” and so on: [93] “**in that way,**” which is to say, with the nature (*rūpa*) of a ‘jug’ or whatever. “**They,**” i.e., ‘substance’ and so on. For they do not exist ultimately, like fundamental particles which are blue or whatever. And the cognition is named with reference to them, as in: “the cognition of a ‘jug,’” or “the cognition of ‘the number two.’” But the [cognition] does not arise *due to* those things, because they do not ultimately exist. Hence, there is no unacceptable consequence to the effect that a cognition of them would be perceptual. Nor is it established that the object-support is conventionally-existent; for, if fundamental particles by nature possess the property of being an object-support, then it is not the case that sensory cognition has a conventionally-existent object-support.¹¹⁸

What, then, is the problem? [Dinnāga] says: “In such a case,” and so forth. “**For it is not the case [that the cognition is of each fundamental particle individually]**” and so on states the exact reason for this. If cognition were to occur with respect to each fundamental particle individually, **in such a case,** [the cognition] would have to be named with reference to each fundamental particle, individually. And therefore, each individual [fundamental particle] would both be the cause of the cognition, and would also individually name the cognition; hence, a cognition which has [each particle individually] as its object-support would attain the status of being perceptual. But this is not so! Therefore, it does not hold that [cognition] is named for its [cause]. Now, the idea is that [cognition] is named due to the appearance of an agglomeration: that the fundamental particles, just being in a collective state (*samudāyāvasthā*), mutually supporting each other, are the causes of the cognition. Therefore, [the definition from above, “a cognition] is named for that [object-field] due to which it arises” establishes that cognitions of blue and so on are perceptions. [In response to this idea, Dinnāga] says: “**And, [having been agglomerated, they are] each individually [the cause of the cognition],**” and so on. This means: even in the state of being a collection, each and every individual [fundamental particle] is a cause; the collection is not [the cause]. Therefore, by way of [the definition] that ‘[A cognition] is named for that due to which it arises,’ there is indeed a *reductio*; this [position] does not hold.

¹¹⁸ In other words, the opponent here adopts another position, to the effect that fundamental particles are the “object-support” (*ālambana*) of sensory cognition, in the sense that they are the cause (*kāraṇa*) of the cognition. Unlike the first option, where the object-support was designated as such because cognition has its *appearance* (i.e., the appearance of an agglomeration of fundamental particles), this has the benefit of avoiding the unacceptable consequences pointed out above. But this view comes with its own problems, which Jinendrabuddhi explains below.

PST ad PS(V) 1.15

[94] “A [cognition] is not due to that of which it has the appearance,” which is to say, the appearance of a collection. Why not? [Diñnāga] says: “For [in that case] the five [types of sensory cognition] would have an object-support that is an agglomeration,” meaning, an appearance which is an agglomeration. This was expressed [earlier] with the phrase, “To be specific, the appearance (*ābhāsa*)—the causal factor (*kāraṇa*) which is the instrument (*karāṇa*)—is taken as the object-support.”¹¹⁹ “Ultimately, [cognition] is not named for that,” i.e., those fundamental particles, “due to which [it arises]”: because it does not ascertain [those fundamental particles], by virtue of the fact that it does not have their appearance.

PST ad PS(V) 1.16

“Separately from the nature of its object” and so on: for it is observed that every cognition is named with reference to the object-field, as in: “the cognition of visible matter,” or “the cognition of sound.” But it is not possible to name the [cognition] without reference to the nature of the object-field.

Opponent: “It is observed that a cognition (*jñāna*) may be designated an ‘awareness’ (*buddhi*), even in the absence of an object-field.”

This is not the case, because there has been a misunderstanding of the intent. What, then, is the intent here? The intent is that it is not possible to claim that what is devoid of the nature of the object, is inherently related to the object-field. That is to say, the topic is precisely a consideration of the object-field [as per the *Vādaividhi* definition of perception]: “[A perception is] that cognition which arises only on account of the object-field after which it has been named.”¹²⁰ Otherwise, how exactly could one speak in this way of designating it a “cognition”? Thus, a [cognition] ought to be named with reference to the nature of the object-field; so [Diñnāga] says, “[And] the object-field [of sensory cognition has been demonstrated to have the nature of a universal],” which is to say that [on the opponent’s account, a cognition] would have to be named with reference to the nature of a universal, such as ‘color’ (*rūpatva*). But a universal is only a conceptual construction (*kalpita*) that is presented in the mind; it does not exist as that which is considered to be the object-field of the senses. So how could a [cognition], being named for that [universal], be named for the [object-field]? Demonstrating that it is thus not possible for the [object-field] to be that by virtue of which [the cognition] is named, [Diñnāga] says: “Therefore, [sensory cognition] cannot be named [on the Vādaividhi definition of perception].”¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Cf. [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.14cd](#).

¹²⁰ Cf. [PST ad PS\(V\) 1.14ab](#).

¹²¹ In other words, on the second option from above (see note [118](#)), that the “object-support” (*ālambana*) designates the cause (*kāraṇa*) of the sensory cognition, there is an additional unacceptable consequence (*prasaṅga*): since this cause is only a conventionally-existent agglomeration of fundamental particles, and the opponent has stated that “a

[95] Opponent: “Even though a real entity (*vastu*) is inexpressible, it is named by those who are engaged in practical action in the world, who conflate both the visual and the conceptual object into one single thing, by imagining that [the visual object] has a [conceptualized property] as its nature (*tadbhāva*).¹²² This certainly must be accepted by you, as well; otherwise, practical action would not be possible.”

This might be so, if some type of external object could be observed. But no [external object] exists, because [an external object] is unsuitable for definition as an object-support. Thus, there is no such objection.

Opponent: “This point (*artha*) has already been stated. What is the use of stating it again?”

There is a purpose. For this point was only stated earlier concerning the completely subtle, particulate nature of fundamental particles. But now, [this point] is stated in relation to something spatially extended (*sthūla*), i.e., the cognitive image (*ākāra*) of an agglomeration of those very [fundamental particles]. Previously, while disputing the opinion of those who maintain that the object is the image of a manifold [of fundamental particles] (*anekākārārthavādin*),¹²³ i.e., that [the image] has the form of those very substantially-existent [fundamental particles], provisionally accepting the visibility (*dr̥śyatā*) and designatability (*abhidheyatā*) [of that image], out of the desire to expose a different flaw [in their system], the perceptibility [of fundamental particles] was allowed. At this juncture, however, even if an [external fundamental particle] were to exist, since even so it is unnameable on account of being invisible, how could it be perceptible? Hence, [the point in question] is stated in order to demonstrate this.

But why is it invisible, even so? It is to be understood as follows: being that which is apprehended [by cognition] (*grāhyatva*) must mean being the producer of a cognition with its own image (*svākāra*), either entirely, or else in terms of some aspect. If it is the first option, then because it happens that the cognition would possess the nature of the object in its entirety, it absurdly follows that [the cognition] is not a cognition.¹²⁴ Alternatively, in the second case, the immediately preceding cognition would be that which is apprehended by cognition, even if [the cognition] has something else as its object-field, because [the immediately-preceding cognition] just is the producer of a cognition with its own appearance in terms of some aspect (such as the fact of its being a cognition). Therefore, this definition of ‘apprehended’ (*grāhya*) does not make sense. [96] And so it is established that a presentation of the epistemic instrument and so on which is based upon external objects does not make sense.

perception is that cognition which arises only on account of the object-field after which it has been named,” it would absurdly follow that perceptual cognition is named according to a universal. By definition, however, perception must take a particular—not a universal—as its object. Therefore, the opponent’s position is self-contradictory.

¹²² Cf. PVSV *ad* PV 1.68-70.

¹²³ See above, [PST *ad* PS\(V\) 1.14cd](#).

¹²⁴ In other words, the external object is not mental, so if the cognition has the nature of the object *in its entirety*, then the cognition would not be mental. Compare to Dharmakīrti’s argument in PV 3.434ab (Tosaki 1985, 115): *sarvātmanā hi sārūpye jñānam ajñānatām vrajet* (“For, if it conformed to the nature [of the object] in its entirety, cognition would become insentient”).

Appendix C: Selections from PV 3

PV 3.239-248 *ad* PS(V) 1.6a₁

[Opponent:] “If it apprehends what has previously been experienced, mental [perception] lacks the quality of being an epistemic instrument (*apramāṇatā*). If [mental perception] apprehends what has not been seen, then even the blind would have vision of objects.” || 239 ||¹²⁵

Due to the momentariness [of a sensory object], the observation of a past [sensory object] is not possible.¹²⁶ [But] if [the sensory object] is not momentary, the definition [of mental perception as a *pramāṇa*] should be stated with a qualification. || 240 ||¹²⁷

Why would a sensory [cognition] or something else that does not introduce any difference (*viśeṣa*) into a patient (*karmaṇi*) in which an action (*kriyā*) has already been accomplished be asserted to be an instrument? || 241 ||¹²⁸

Furthermore, all the cognitions which are generated from those [permanent] entities [would] arise simultaneously, because it is contradictory for [an object] which has not been altered by other things to depend upon those [other things in order to produce a cognition as an effect].¹²⁹ || 242 ||¹³⁰

Therefore, a mental [perception], which arises from the sensory cognition that is its immediately preceding condition, strictly apprehends something else [other than the object of the sensory cognition]. Thus, there is no sight on the part of the blind. || 243 ||¹³¹

¹²⁵ Tosaki (1979, 340): *pūrvānubhūtagrahaṇe mānasasyāpramāṇatā | adṛṣtagrahaṇe ’ndhāder api syād arthadarśanam* || 239 ||

¹²⁶ Reading *darśanasya* over Tosaki (1979, 341n11) **darśane ca*.

¹²⁷ Tosaki (1979, 341): *kṣaṇikatvād atītasya darśanasya na sambhavaḥ | vācyam akṣaṇikatve syāl lakṣaṇam saviśeṣanam* || 240 ||

¹²⁸ Tosaki (1979, 341): *niṣpāditakriye kañcid viśeṣam asamādadhāt | karmaṇy aindriyam anyad vā sādhanam kim itīṣyate* || 241 ||

¹²⁹ That is to say, a “stable” (*sthira*) or non-momentary object would have to produce all the cognitions for which it is causally responsible simultaneously, because it does not change; if the object is not responsive to changes in its causal conditions, then the object-cognition cannot be responsive to changes in those causal conditions, either.

¹³⁰ Tosaki (1979, 342): *sakṛdbhāvaś ca sarvāsāṃ dhiyāṃ tadbhāvañmanām | anyair akāryabhedasya tadapekṣāvirodhataḥ* || 242 ||

¹³¹ Tosaki (1979, 342): *tasmād indriyavijñānāntarapratyayodbhavam | mano ’nyam eva grhṇāti viṣayam nāndhadṛk tataḥ* || 243 ||

The cause [of a mental perception] is a sensory cognition that is exclusively (*eva*) reliant upon an object which has continuity (*anvaya*) with its own object. Therefore, although [strictly speaking] something else [apart from the object-field of sensory cognition] is apprehended, that [mental perception] is considered to have a restriction in terms of what is apprehended. || 244 ||¹³²

Opponent: “How can the object, which does not exist at the same time as the instrumental activity (*kriyā*), [but] does exist at the time [that it] itself is cognized, be an auxiliary cause (*sahakārī*) of sensory cognition?” || 245 ||¹³³

Because that which does not exist prior [to the effect] has no causal power [to produce that effect], and¹³⁴ because that which exists after [the effect has arisen] is useless, all causes exist prior [to their effects]. Thus, there is no object which exists together with its own cognition. || 246 ||¹³⁵

Opponent: “How can that which is apprehended exist at a time that is different [from its apprehension]?”

Those who understand reason (*yuktijñā*) know that ‘being that which is apprehended’ (*grāhyatā*) is just being a cause which is capable of projecting its form into a cognition. || 247 ||¹³⁶

For although an effect may have many causes, that [cause] in conformity with which [the cognition] has arisen, and into which the [object] has projected its form, is said to be ‘apprehended’ by the [cognition]. || 248 ||¹³⁷

PV 3.288-300 *ad* PS(V) 1.7cd-8ab

There are four kinds of pseudo-perception. Three kinds are conceptual, and one is nonconceptual, arisen from impairments (*upaplava*) in the basis (*āśraya*). || 288 ||¹³⁸

Two [types of conceptual pseudo-perception] are discussed in order to establish that they do not arise from the sense-faculties, on account of the mistakes that have been observed [in other

¹³² Tosaki (1979, 343): *svārthānvayārthāpekṣaiva hetur indriyajā matiḥ | tato 'nyagrahaṇe 'py asya niyatagrāhyatā matā* || 244 ||

¹³³ Tosaki (1979, 344): *tadatulyakriyākālaḥ katham svajñānakālikāḥ | sahakārī bhaved artha iti cedakṣacetasaḥ* || 245 ||

¹³⁴ Reading *cānupayogataḥ* (PV_T *dang*) over **vānupayogataḥ*. Cf. Tosaki (1979, 344n19).

¹³⁵ Tosaki (1979, 344): *asataḥ prāg asāmarthyāt paścād cānupayogataḥ | prāgbhāvaḥ sarvahetūnām nāto 'rthaḥ svadhīyā saha* || 246 ||

¹³⁶ Tosaki (1979, 346): *bhinnakālam katham grāhyam iti ced grāhyatām viduḥ | hetutvam eva yuktijñā jñānākārpaṇakṣamam* || 247 ||

¹³⁷ Tosaki (1979, 347): *kāryam hy anekahetutve 'py anukurvad udeti yat | tat tenārpitadrūpaṃ grhītam iti cocyate* || 248 ||

¹³⁸ Tosaki (1979, 383): *trividham kalpanājñānam āśrayopaplavodbhavam | avikalpakam ekañ ca pratyakṣābhañ caturvidham* || 288 ||

philosophers' theories]. The mention of inference and so on, [which has already been] established [to be conceptual], is just for proving that the previous two [are also conceptual]. || 289 ||¹³⁹

Two [types of] conceptual cognition—the one based upon a convention (*saṃketa*), and the one that superimposes another object—sometimes cause error, because they immediately follow a perception. || 290 ||¹⁴⁰

Just as the conceptual cognition of a remote object (such as a recollection), which is dependent upon convention (*samaya*), does not apprehend a perceptual object, likewise, without the recollection of what has been experienced, there is no cognition with respect to “pots” and so on; and [a cognition] following that [recollection] is excluded from consideration as a perception. || 291-292 ||¹⁴¹

The fourth [type of error] is an exception [to the general rule that nonconceptual cognitions are perceptual]. Concerning this, he states that [nonconceptual error] arises from impairment (*upaghāta*). In this context, myodesopsia (*timira*) is merely a metonym (*upalakṣaṇa*) for impairment [in general]. || 293 ||¹⁴²

Some say that even this [fourth type] is mental. For them, that text [i.e., the PSV *ad PS 1.15*] is contradicted: “The sensory faculties are the cause of [erroneous] cognitions such as ‘blue’¹⁴³ or the double-moon [illusion].” || 294 ||¹⁴⁴

Opponent: “[The sensory faculty is] the cause [of the two-moon error, but only] indirectly [because the mind is the direct cause of the two-moon error].”

When the object of sensory cognition is being examined, what kind of opportunity (*prastāva*) is there for the mental in this [discussion]? What, indeed, is the sensory (*aindriya*)?

Opponent: “That which is invariably concomitant with the presence or absence of the sensory faculties.”

¹³⁹ Tosaki (1979, 385): *anakṣajavatvasiddhyartham ukte dve bhrāntidarśanāt | siddhānumādivacanam sādhanāyaiva pūrvayoh* || 289 ||

¹⁴⁰ Tosaki (1979, 386): *saṃketasaṃśrayānyārthasamāropavikalpane | pratyakṣāsannavṛttitvāt kadācid bhrāntikāraṇam* || 290 ||

¹⁴¹ Tosaki (1979, 386–87): *yathaveyam parokṣārthakalpanā smaraṇādikā | samayāpekṣiṇī nārtham pratyakṣam adhyavasyati* || 291 || *tathā 'nubhūtasmarāṇam antareṇa ghaṭādiṣu | na pratyayo 'nuyams tac ca pratyakṣāt parihīyate* || 292 ||

¹⁴² Tosaki (1979, 387): *apavādaś caturtho 'tra tenoktam upaghātajam | kevalam tatra timiram upaghātopalakṣaṇam* || 293 ||

¹⁴³ That is, the false appearance of snow-mountains as being blue, instead of white.

¹⁴⁴ Tosaki (1979, 389): *mānasam tad apīty eke teṣāṃ grantho virudhyate | nīladvicandrādidihiyām hetur akṣāny apīty ayam* || 294 ||

This [concomitance with the faculties] is common [to both correct sensory cognition and sensory errors such as the appearance of two moons].

Opponent: “[Sensory error such as the appearance of two moons is] constituted by a warping (*vikriyā*)¹⁴⁵ [in the sensory faculty].”

This is exactly that! Why would it be refuted? || 295-296 ||¹⁴⁶

If [the two moon illusion and so on] were [conceptual], like the error (*bhrānti*) of [mistaking a rope for] a snake and so on, there could be the cessation of that [two moon illusion] even while there is still impairment of the faculty; and [the illusion] would not cease even when the impairment in the faculty had ceased. || 297 ||¹⁴⁷

[If a nonconceptual error such as the two-moon illusion were conceptual,] it could sometimes be placed in the minds of others with words [in the same way that the snake illusion can be induced by shouting “Snake!”]. It would require the recollection of what has been seen [which is impossible in the case of the two moons, because a second moon has never been seen]. And it would not appear vividly. || 298 ||¹⁴⁸

Whether on the part of one who is asleep, or on the part of one who is awake, an awareness with a vivid appearance is nonconceptual. An [awareness that appears] otherwise [than vividly] is strictly conceptual, either way. || 299 ||¹⁴⁹

Therefore, the instrumentality (*prāmāṇya*) of that [cognition] is denied, even though it is nonconceptual, because it is wrong (*visaṃvādāt*). For this reason, pseudo-perception is said to be of two kinds. || 300 ||¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ This is something of a play on words (*śleṣa*); *vikriyā* can mean “change” in a relatively innocuous sense, which is how the term is used by the Sāṅkhyas, to whom this argument is primarily responding. However, it can also mean a “change” in the sense of a change *for the worse*, which is how Dharmakīrti is deploying the term here. It is difficult to capture this nuance, but hopefully the valences of the English term “warping” are at least structurally similar.

¹⁴⁶ Tosaki (1979, 390): *pāramparyeṇa hetuś ced indriyajñānagocare | vicāryamāṇe prastāvo mānasasyeḥa kīdrśaḥ*
|| 295 || *kiṃ vāindriyaṃ yad akṣānām bhāvābhāvānurodhi cet | tat tulyaṃ vikriyāvac cet saiveyaṃ kiṃ niṣidhyate*
|| 296 ||

¹⁴⁷ Tosaki (1979, 391): *sarpādibhrāntivac cāsyāḥ syād akṣavikṛtāv api | nivṛttir na nivartteta nivṛtte 'py akṣaviplave*
|| 297 ||

¹⁴⁸ Tosaki (1979, 391): *kadācid anyasantāne tathaivārpyeta vācakaiḥ | drṣṭasmṛtim apekṣeta na bhāseta*
parisphuṭam || 298 ||

¹⁴⁹ Tosaki (1979, 393): *suptasya jāgrato vā 'pi yaiva dhīḥ sphuṭabhāsinī | sā nirvikalpobhayathā 'py anyathaiva*
vikalpikā || 299 ||

¹⁵⁰ Tosaki (1979, 393): *tasmāt tasyāvikalpe 'pi prāmāṇyaṃ pratiṣidhyate | visaṃvādāt tadarthañ ca pratyakṣābhaṃ*
dvidhoditam || 300 ||

PV 3.301-319 ad PS(V) 1.8cd

As for the “instrument of the action” (*kriyāsādhana*), it is indeed not the case that every [cause] is the instrument for every patient; rather, that [cause], due to which there is the action, is the instrument of that¹⁵¹ [action]. || 301 ||¹⁵²

In this context, [every] awareness, which has a similar nature by virtue of merely being an experience, must have a nature such that it is distinguished in regard to each patient (*karman*). || 302 ||¹⁵³

While there may be a difference among the causes of that [cognition], that difference, not being of [that cognition’s] nature, is not what (through differentiation) restricts that [otherwise] undifferentiated [cognition] to a distinct patient. || 303 ||¹⁵⁴

Therefore, this [action (*kriyā*)] is established to have as its instrument an intrinsic difference (*ātmabheda*) on the part of the [cognition], due to which there is a restriction of the action to the [specific] patient, [as when one determines,] “This is the awareness of that.” || 304 ||¹⁵⁵

For even if, apart from the property of having the form of the object (*artharūpatā*), there is another differentiating factor (*bhedaka*) of cognition [such as a difference in the sense-faculties, which causes a difference in the cognition] through its own difference, [this other difference] does not in any way correlate the [cognition] with the object. || 305 ||¹⁵⁶

Therefore, the instrument (*sādhana*) for the knowledge (*adhigati*) of that which is to be known (*prameya*) is the property of having the form of that which is to be known (*meyarūpatā*). In the case of any other [alleged] instrument, the relation (*sambandha*) [of the cognition] to its patient is not established. || 306 ||¹⁵⁷

¹⁵¹ Reading *tasyāḥ* [*kriyāyāḥ*] rather than *tasya* [*karmaṇaḥ*]. Cf. Tosaki (1979, 396n4).

¹⁵² Tosaki (1979, 396): *kriyāsādhanam ity eva sarvaṃ sarvasya karmaṇaḥ | sādhanam na hi tat tasyāḥ sādhanam yā kriyā yataḥ* || 301 ||

¹⁵³ Tosaki (1979, 397): *tatrānubhavamātreṇa jñānasya sadṛśātmanaḥ | bhāvyaṃ tenātmanā yena pratikarma vibhajyate* || 302 ||

¹⁵⁴ Tosaki (1979, 303): *anātmabhūto bhedo 'sya vidyamāno 'pi hetuṣu | bhinne karmaṇy abhinnasya na bhedenā niyāmakaḥ* || 303 ||

¹⁵⁵ Tosaki (1979, 398): *tasmād yato 'syātmabhedād asyādhigatir ity ayam | kriyāyāḥ karmaniyamaḥ siddhā sā tatprasādhanā* || 304 ||

¹⁵⁶ Tosaki (1979, 399): *arthena ghaṭayaty enām na hi muktivā 'rtharūpatām | anyāḥ svabhedāj jñānasya bhedako 'pi kathaṅcana* || 305 ||

¹⁵⁷ Tosaki (1979, 399): *tasmāt prameyādihigateḥ sādhanam meyarūpatā | sādhanē 'nyatra tatkarmasambandho na prasidhyati* || 306 ||

And this [form of the object] is of the very nature of that [cognition]. By virtue of this, the resulting cognition (*phala*) is not something other [than the instrument]. And, bearing that [form of the object] within itself (*ātmani*), by virtue of having the nature of being an awareness of the object (*arthādhigamanātmanā*), the cognition appears as though it has intermediary functioning (*savyāpāra*), by virtue of functioning with respect to an intrinsic patient (*svakarmani*), because, due to that [form of the object], there is the establishment of that [cognition as instrumental], even though [the cognition] itself does not act (*akārakam api svayam*). For example, in common parlance (*loke*), [an effect] is [sometimes] said to have assumed the form of its cause, even without having [performed] any activity (*akriyāvattvepi*), because an effect arises with a similarity in nature to its causes. || 307-309 ||¹⁵⁸

Therefore, the instrumentality (*prāmānya*) of [mere] seeing (*ālocana*),¹⁵⁹ the connection between the sense faculty [and the sense-object], and qualifying cognitions, is not accepted, because these are mediated with regard to the activity. || 310 ||¹⁶⁰

Even though every causal factor (*kāraka*) is a contributor to the action, that which finally differentiates (*antyaṃ bhedakam*) [it from some other action] is considered to be the most efficient cause (*sādhakatamam*) of the [action]. || 311 ||¹⁶¹

The sense-faculties are not endowed with this quality [of being the most efficient cause], since they are causes common to all [perceptual cognitions]. For, even when there exists some difference between them, on what account [could one say] “This is the [cognition] of that,” in the absence of the [cognition’s possession of the] form of the [object]? || 312 ||¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Tosaki (1979, 400–401): *sā ca tasyātmabhūtaiva tena nārthāntaram phalam | dadhānaṃ tac ca tām ātmany arthādhigamanātmanā* || 307 || *savyāpāram ivābhāti vyāpāreṇa svakarmani | tadvaśāt tadvyavasthānād akārakam api svayam* || 308 || *yathā phalasya hetūnām sadṛśātmatayodbhavād | heturūpagraho loke 'kriyāvattve 'pi kathyate* || 309 ||

¹⁵⁹ The reference here is to *ālocanamātra* (“mere seeing”), an originally Sāṅkhya theory of the relationship between the senses and the mind that amounts to the claim that the initial indeterminate “seeing” (*ālocana*) does not yet constitute cognition of the object. As counterintuitive as this might sound, as Taber (2005, 165n33) notes, “It should be kept in mind that in Sāṅkhya a function of the sense faculty as such is not conscious. Consciousness of an object arises only in the self [*puruṣa*], which witnesses changes brought about in the senses [*indriya*], mind [*manas*], and intellect [*buddhi*].” The strong distinction that the Sāṅkhya draw between the strictly causal (which is to say, on their account, non-cognitive and therefore non-epistemic) operation of *buddhi* and *manas* as a function of Nature (*prakṛti*) on the one hand, and the passive observation of these causal operations by *puruṣa* on the other hand, was one of the defining features of the Sāṅkhya system, and one of Dharmakīrti’s primary objects of critique. See for example PV 3.268–280, wherein Dharmakīrti refutes the Sāṅkhya position that affective states such as pleasure are “non-cognitive” or “unilluminated” (*apracetana*) features of *buddhi*, and as such (according to the Sāṅkhya) pleasure and so on are not reflexively known (i.e., “self-illuminated” or *svaparakāśa*, which is Dharmakīrti’s position).

¹⁶⁰ Tosaki (1979, 401): *ālocanākṣasambandhaviśeṣañadhiyām atah | neṣṭam prāmānyam eteṣām vyavadhānāt kriyām prati* || 310 ||

¹⁶¹ Tosaki (1979, 404): *sarveṣām upayoge 'pi kārakāṇām kriyām prati | yad antyaṃ bhedakam tasyās tat sādhakatamaṃ matam* || 311 ||

¹⁶² Tosaki (1979, 404): *sarvasāmānyahetutvād akṣāṇām asti nedṛśam | tadbhede 'pi hy atadrūpasyāsyedam iti tat kutah* || 312 ||

This explains the rest. Moreover, if the form of the [qualifying object] is absent from the qualifying cognition, there is no difference [between the qualifying cognition and the qualified cognition], nor likewise for any other cognition, either. || 313 ||¹⁶³

No difference in the object-field between the instrument and the action is accepted. If there is a single object, two [cognitions] are pointless, and there could be no sequential arising. If they occur simultaneously,, there would be no [relation of] the instrument and what it establishes. [Rather than a real relation,] since [an image conforming to the object] is the basis for defining the [cognition of that object], there is a structure (*saṁsthiti*) of establishing and established. || 314-315 ||¹⁶⁴

Although there is contact with the entire nature [of the sensory object], it is cognized in terms of only some of its qualities. This [contact] cannot be the determining factor (*niyama*), because contact is not differentiated [such that it would account for the fact that only some qualities are apprehended]. || 316 ||¹⁶⁵

The property of being a *pramāṇa* (*pramāṇatā*) on the part of a [cognition] is that due to which there is a difference [in the determination (*niścaya*)], even when there is no difference in the [sensory contact and so on].

Opponent: “[That difference is] due to psychophysical conditioning (*saṁskāra*).”

No; because, if [that cognition also] does not have the form of the object (*atadrūpye*), it is not established, either. || 317 ||¹⁶⁶

Opponent: “It is contradictory for action (*kriyā*) and instrument (*karāṇa*) to be identical.”

This is not true, because a [conceptually constructed] difference between [the subjective and objective] qualities [of cognition] is provisionally accepted (*abhyupagama*); [however,] it is asserted that a real thing (*vastu*) is undifferentiated. || 318 ||¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Tosaki (1979, 404–6): *etena śeṣaṁ vyākhyātaṁ viśeṣañadhiyām punaḥ | atādrūpye na bhedo 'pi tadvad anyadhiyo 'pi vā* || 313 ||

¹⁶⁴ Tosaki (1979, 404): *neṣṭo viśayabhedo 'pi kriyāsādhanayor dvayoḥ | ekārthatve dvayaṁ vyartham na ca syāt kramabhāvitā* || 314 || *sādhyasādhanatābhāvaḥ sakṛdbhāve dhiyo 'mśayoḥ | tadvyavasthāśrayatvena sādhyasādhanasamsthitiḥ* || 315 ||

¹⁶⁵ Tosaki (1979, 409): *sarvātmanāpi sambaddhaṁ kaiścīd evāvagamyaṭe | dharmaiḥ sa niyamo na syāt sambandhasyāviśeṣataḥ* || 316 ||

¹⁶⁶ Tosaki (1979, 409–10): *tadabhede 'pi bhedo 'yaṁ yasmāt tasya pramāṇatā | saṁskārāc ced atādrūpye na tasyāpy avyavasthiteḥ* || 317 ||

¹⁶⁷ Tosaki (1979, 411): *kriyākaraṇayor aikyavirodha iti ced asat | dharmabhedābhyupagamād vastv abhinnaṁ itīṣyate* || 318 ||

Such is exactly the case for any structure (*saṁsthiti*) of action (*kriyā*) and causal factors (*kāraṅka*), because even in the case of [causal factors] that are thought to be different, the relation (*bhava*) [of action and causal factors] occurs through imputation. || 319 ||¹⁶⁸

PV 3.320-337 ad PS(V) 1.9a

What is the awareness of an object (*arthasaṁvit*)?

[Opponent:] “The experience of an object (*arthavedana*) is just that perceptual cognition (*pratyakṣam*) which is an experience that is restricted to a specific individual (*prativedana*).”

Why?

[Opponent:] “Because it has the form of that [object].”

But that [definition] is insufficient. || 320 ||¹⁶⁹

Opponent: “So then in regard to what is there this experience, on the part of that [cognition]?”

This is precisely what is under investigation. And how are these particles conforming to that extended appearance? || 321 ||¹⁷⁰

That [cognition] does not possess the form of the object. Or, if it did, it would be insufficient (*vyabhicāri*) [to define that cognition as the awareness of the object]; it would not be able to establish [that the cognition] has the nature of being an experience of that [object]. || 322 ||¹⁷¹

If the definition of ‘that which is experienced’ (*saṁvedya*) is ‘that due to which [the sensation] arises, with which [the sensation] conforms’: an immediately-preceding cognition with the same object would be ‘that which is experienced.’ || 323 ||¹⁷²

[Opponent:] “The experience is of that [object], in regard to which there is a determination—‘this has been seen’ or ‘this has been heard.’”

¹⁶⁸ Tosaki (1979, 411): *evaṁprakārā sarvaiva kriyākāraṅkaṣaṁsthiṭiḥ | bhāveṣu bhinnābhimateṣv apy āropena vṛttitah* || 319 ||

¹⁶⁹ Tosaki (1985, 4): *kārthasaṁvid yad evedaṁ pratyakṣam prativedanam | tad arthavedanam kena tādrūpyād vyabhicāri tat* || 320 ||

¹⁷⁰ Tosaki (1985, 5–6): *atha so 'nubhavaḥ kvāsyā tad evedaṁ vicāryate | sarūpayanti tat kena sthūlābhāsaṅ ca te 'navaḥ* || 321 ||

¹⁷¹ Tosaki (1985, 6): *tan nārtharūpatā tasya satyāṁ vā vyabhicāriṅ | tatsaṁvedanabhāvasya na samarthā prasādhane* || 322 ||

¹⁷² (Tosaki 1985, 7): *tatsārūpyatadutpattī yadi saṁvedyalakṣaṇam | saṁvedyaṁ syāt samānārthaṁ vijñānaṁ samanantaram* || 323 ||

What is under investigation is precisely this intimate relationship (*pratyāsatti*) between the ‘seeing’ [of the object] and the ‘seen’ [object], by virtue of which¹⁷³ that [cognition in question] is considered to be the experience (*darśana*) of this [object]. This determinate judgment (*viniścaya*), on the part of the one who sees [the object], [occurs] on the basis of the connection between the two. || 324-325 ||¹⁷⁴

The experience is of that [moment of awareness, and] it is of the nature of that [moment of awareness]; it is not [the experience of; or, of the nature] of anything else at all.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, the fact that the [moment of awareness] is the nature of that [experience] constitutes the property of [that moment of awareness] being directly (*pratyakṣa*), individually-known (*prativedya*). || 326 ||¹⁷⁶

There is not something else to be experienced by the [cognition]. There is not something else that is the experience of that. [This is so] because there would be the same problem on the part of a [second-order experience], as well.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, the [cognition] illuminates itself.¹⁷⁸ || 327 ||¹⁷⁹

[Opponent: “If there is no external object, what accounts for the experience of ‘blue’ and so on?”]

That color (*rūpa*) such as ‘blue’ is [a property] of the [cognition], and it is also the experience. [As such], it is commonly called the experience of ‘blue,’ even though it is an experience of its own nature. || 328 ||¹⁸⁰

¹⁷³ Emending *yena, which lacks a clear referent and makes little sense, to yayā [*pratyāsattiḥ*]. Thanks to John Dunne for this suggestion.

¹⁷⁴ Tosaki (1985, 8): *idaṃ dr̥ṣṭaṃ śrutam vedam iti yatrāvasāyadhīḥ | sa tasyānubhavaḥ saiva pratyāsattir vicāryate* || 324 || *dr̥śyadarśanayor yayā* [em. MSS *yena] *tasya tad darśanam matam | tayoh sambandham āśritya draṣṭur eṣa viniścayah* || 325 ||

¹⁷⁵ Dharmakīrti’s Sanskrit here is quite dense and difficult to translate. There is also something of a play on words (*śleṣa*). The point is that *tasya* construes with both *anubhava* and *ātmā*. In other words, the experience is “of that” cognition, but it is also “of the nature of that” cognition. The sentence can be grammatically construed in either way, and has both meanings. Put slightly differently, the point here is that the experience is ontologically identical to the cognition of which it is the experience. Thanks to John Dunne for this clarification.

¹⁷⁶ Tosaki (1985, 10): *ātmā sa tasyānubhavaḥ sa ca nānyasya kasyacit | pratyakṣaprativedyatvam api tasya tadātmā* || 326 ||

¹⁷⁷ That is to say, it is not the case that experienced is experienced by a second-order “experience₂ of experience₁”; any experience is the immediate, reflexive experience of that very experience. This is the infinite regress argument for the reflexivity of awareness: if cognition were *not* reflexively self-knowing in this way, in other words if a second cognition were necessary in order to know the contents of the first cognition, then a third cognition would be necessary in order to know the contents of the second cognition, and so on *ad infinitum*. See Kellner (2011).

¹⁷⁸ This translation corresponds to the reading in Tosaki’s (1985, 10n31) footnote, rather than the body text. For a discussion of the variants of PV 3.327, and why the reading adopted here is preferable, cf. Kellner (2009, 196–97).

¹⁷⁹ Tosaki (1985, 10): *nānyo ’nubhāvyas tenāsti tasya nānubhavo ’paraḥ | tasyāpi tulyacodyatvāt tat svayaṃ tat prakāśate* || 327 ||

¹⁸⁰ Tosaki (1985, 12): *nīlādirūpas tasyāsau svabhāvo ’nubhavaś ca saḥ | nīlādyanubhavaḥ khyātaḥ svarūpānubhavo ’pi san* || 328 ||

Just as an illuminating light is considered to be the illuminator of itself (*svarūpa*), because of having that nature (*tādātmyāt*), just so, awareness is aware of itself (*ātmavedinī*).¹⁸¹ || 329 ||¹⁸²

And so, if what is ‘known’ is an object that is something else [apart from awareness], it is impossible to establish a knower and a known on the part of that [awareness].

This structure (*vyavasthā*)—i.e., the distortion of separately-characterized apprehender and apprehended, like the [apparent] difference between [myodesopic] hair and the cognition [of that hair]—is constructed in accordance with the manner in which those who are in error observe (*nir + √īkṣ*)¹⁸³ [an awareness] that is [in fact]¹⁸⁴ devoid of the images of knower and known.¹⁸⁵ || 330-331 ||¹⁸⁶

When [that structure is constructed in that way], then the characterization of [cognition as having] an apprehended and an apprehender [in accordance with ordinary distorted experience] is not objectionable [in conventional terms]; [even] then, because there is no awareness of anything else, reflexive awareness is asserted to be the result (*phala*). || 332 ||¹⁸⁷

¹⁸¹ Devendrabuddhi comments (PVP 534.18-535.1): “Furthermore, a light does not rely upon another light in order to illuminate itself; nor is it, in ultimate terms, an agent of illumination (*gsal bar byed pa = *prakāśaka*) with regard to itself. Rather, because it arises with the nature of being an illuminator, it is said to be ‘self-illuminating’ (*bdag nyid gsal bar byed pa*). Just so, in terms of perceptual experience, awareness is self-illuminating, because it illuminates by nature.”

sgron ma yang bdag nyid gsal bar byed pa la sgron ma gzhan la stos pa med cing bdag la don dam par gsal bar byed pa ma yin no | 'on kyang gsal bar byed pa'i bdag nyid du skyes par gyur pa na bdag nyid gsal bar byed pa zhes brjod de de bzhin du mngon sum gyi myong bar rang bzhin gyis gsal bar byed pa yin pa 'i phyir blo bdag nyid gsal bar byed pa yin no ||

¹⁸² Tosaki (1985, 13): *prakāśamānas tādātmyāt svarūpasya prakāśakaḥ | yathā prakāśo 'bhimatas tathā dhīr ātmavedinī* || 329 ||

¹⁸³ Or, perhaps somewhat more interpretively, “give an honest report on.” Thanks to John Dunne for this gloss.

¹⁸⁴ Devendrabuddhi (PVP 535.21) inserts *don dam par*. Compare to Manorathanandin’s (Sāṅkṛtyāyana ed., 218) *vastutaḥ*.

¹⁸⁵ There are several different possible ways to construe the various elements of this sequence. Tosaki, for example, in essence following Manorathanandin, places *avedyavedakākārā* with *tasyās cārthāntare vedye durghaṭau vedyavadakau* (“And so, if what is known is an object that is something else, it is impossible to establish a knower and a known on the part of that [awareness], which is devoid of the images of knower and known”), leaving the passive construction *bhrāntair nirīkṣyate* without a nominative object. The translation above reflects Devendrabuddhi’s commentary (PVP 535.2-536.2).

¹⁸⁶ Tosaki (1985, 14–15): *tasyās cārthāntare vedye durghaṭau vedyavedakau | avedyavedakākārā yathā bhrāntair nirīkṣyate* || 330 || *vibhaktalakṣaṇagrāhyagrāhakākāraviplavā | tathā kṛtavavyavastheyam keśādijñānabhedavat* || 331 ||

¹⁸⁷ Tosaki (1985, 15–16): *yadā tadā na saṃcodyagrāhyagrāhakalakṣaṇā | tadā 'nyasaṃvido 'bhāvāt svasaṃvit phalam iṣyate* || 332 ||

Opponent: “What fault is there, if an external [object] were to be experienced?”

There is none at all. [But] what, precisely, would be expressed [by this statement] that ‘an external object is experienced’? || 333 ||¹⁸⁸

If a cognition has the image of an [object], the [cognition] is qualified (*viśeṣiṇī*) by the image. [So] it is worth investigating, whether this [cognition as qualified] due to something external, or something else. || 334 ||¹⁸⁹

The appearance of ‘blue’ is the seeing [of ‘blue’], because that which is devoid of any additional qualification (*upādhi*) by ‘seeing’ is not apprehended; [and because,] when that [which is qualified by seeing] is apprehended, that [object] is apprehended. There is no isolated (*kevalaḥ*)¹⁹⁰ external object. || 335 ||¹⁹¹

The restricting factor (*vinīyama*) for cognitions is only some particular activator (*prabodhaka*) of the internal imprint for some particular [cognition] at a particular time and place (*atra*); hence, [cognition] does not depend upon an external object [for this restriction]. || 336 ||¹⁹²

Therefore, a single [cognition] has a dual form (*dvirūpa*), since it is experienced and remembered in that way; the result (*phala*) is the awareness of both aspects of [cognition]. || 337 ||¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Tosaki (1985, 17): *yadi bāhyo ’nubhūyeta ko doṣo naiva kaścana | idam eva kim uktaṃ syāt bāhyo ’rtho ’nubhūyate* || 333 ||

¹⁸⁹ Tosaki (1985, 18): *yadi buddhis tadākārā sā ’sty ākāraviśeṣiṇī | sā bāhyād anyato veti vicāram idam arhati* || 334 ||

¹⁹⁰ Tosaki (1985, 19n56), against **kevalam*. See also PV 3.507.

¹⁹¹ Tosaki (1985, 19): *darśanopādhirahitasyāgrahāt tadgrahe grahāt | darśanaṃ nīlanirbhāsaṃ nārtho bāhyo ’sti kevalaḥ* || 335 ||

¹⁹² Tosaki (1985, 20): *kasyacit kiñcid evātra vāsanāyāḥ prabodhakam | tato dhiyāṃ vinīyamo na bāhyārthavyapekṣayā* || 336 ||

¹⁹³ Tosaki (1985, 21): *tasmād dvirūpam asty ekaṃ yad evam anubhūyate | smaryate cobhayākārasyāsya saṃvedanaṃ phalam* || 337 ||

PV 3.338-345 ad PS(V) 1.9b

When something other [than the mind]¹⁹⁴ is [considered to be] the object-field—i.e., the cause of the mental representation (*vijñapti*)—[that extramental object] is not¹⁹⁵ established as something desirable or undesirable in and of itself (*tadbhāva*); and the experience of that [mental representation] is accordingly [desirable or undesirable]. || 338 ||¹⁹⁶

When the cognition [is understood to] include the object-field, then, because the object is construed as an aspect of cognition, the determination of the object is just an experience of [the determining cognition] itself. || 339 ||¹⁹⁷

Whether the nature of the [cognition] is experienced as a desirable image (*iṣṭākāra*), or otherwise, the object is sensed (*pravedita*) as being desirable or undesirable by virtue of this [image]. || 340 ||¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Devendrabuddhi (PVP 540.4) glosses: “Something else, i.e., an external object” (*gzhan te phyi rol gyi don*).

¹⁹⁵ This verse presents a philological challenge. Dharmakīrti’s argument in this passage closely tracks Dinnāga’s PSV ad PS 1.9b, of which this verse and the next are a paraphrase: “For when the object is [construed as] a cognition that includes the object-field, then the object is a reflexively-experienced form that is cognized as either desirable or undesirable. But when the object of knowledge (*prameya*) is [construed as] an object that is just external, then **the means for knowing** [the external object] **is the property of having the appearance of the object-field, on the part of that** [cognition]” (*yadā hi saviṣayaṃ jñānam arthaḥ tadā svasaṃvedanānurūpam arthaṃ pratipadyata iṣṭam aniṣṭam vā | yadā tu bāhya evārthaḥ prameyaḥ tadā [PS 1.9c] viṣayābhāsataivāsya pramāṇam*). The point, in other words, as Dharmakīrti develops immediately below (PV 3.340-341), and also at length elsewhere (PV 3.249-280, PV 3.346-352), is that even in the External Realist context, desirability or undesirability is not an inherent or objective feature of the external object itself, but rather is an affective feature of the cognition of the object (specifically, a feature of that cognition’s subjective aspect). Against Tosaki’s (1985, 22) reading, and Sāṅkṛtyāyana’s editorial work, then, *yadāniṣpanna* must therefore be understood as *yadā* plus *aniṣpanna* (“when it is **not** established”), becoming *yadāniṣpanna* via sandhi. And indeed, Sa skya Paṇḍita’s canonical translation (556.7) has *yadā* plus *aniṣpanna* (*de yi dngos por ma grub pa*).

The philological question here is complicated somewhat by the fact that PVP_T does not explicitly include this negation. However, the fragment of the verse from its embedded pre-canonical translation of PV 3.338a is missing a syllable: *gang tshe grub pa de dngos* must be rendering *yadāniṣpannatadbhāva*, and the fact that this translation renders each element of the *pada* sequentially necessitates that it should have an extra, seventh syllable, in order to be rendering the whole *pada*. The Tibetan translation of Śākyabuddhi’s commentary to this verse (552.3) does include a seventh syllable, an essentially superfluous *gi* (*gang gi tshe grub pa de’i dngos*), which is also found in the Peking and sNar thang recensions of this embedded *pada* in the PVP_T. But given Dharmakīrti’s clearly intended meaning, and Sa skya Paṇḍita’s translation, one of two things must be the case. Either the original manuscript of the PVP_T and PV_T originally included this negation in its embedded pre-canonical translation of PV 3.338a (viz., *gang tshe *ma grub pa de’i dngos*); or the Tibetan translators of the PVP/PV_T made a slight error in their translation.

¹⁹⁶ Tosaki (1985, 22): *yadāniṣpannatadbhāva iṣṭo ’niṣṭo ’pi vā paraḥ | vijñaptihetur viṣayas tasyāś cānubhavas tathā* || 338 ||

¹⁹⁷ Tosaki (1985, 24): *yadā saviṣayaṃ jñānam jñānāṃśe ’rthavyavasthiteḥ | tadā ya ātmānubhavaḥ sa evārthaviniścayaḥ* || 339 ||

¹⁹⁸ Tosaki (1985, 25): *yadīṣṭākāra ātmā ’syā anyathā vā ’nubhūyate | iṣṭo ’niṣṭo ’pi vā tena bhavaty arthaḥ praveditaḥ* || 340 ||

Even if an external object were to exist, the nature [of that object] can only be ascertained [as desirable or undesirable] in accord with how it was experienced—it could not be [ascertained as desirable or undesirable] by virtue of its own nature (*svarūpa*), since there would be the fault of a non-singular nature.¹⁹⁹ || 341 ||²⁰⁰

Even if it is accepted [that an entity is desirable or undesirable by virtue of its inherent essential nature], there could be no experience [of an inherently desirable or undesirable object] as different [in terms of desirability and undesirability] on the part of two [different people].

Opponent: “There could be²⁰¹ [differing experiences], because of the obscuration by the Unseen.”²⁰²

[In that case,] the cognition would not really (*nāma*) arise by force of the object. || 342 ||²⁰³

This Unseen that is disclosing (*darśayat*) an entity which has a manifold nature as having a singular nature—how could it truly (*nāma*) be a discloser (*darśakam*) of the object? || 343 ||²⁰⁴

If [it is asserted that] conceptualizations, not sensory cognitions, are what have the appearances that are desirable or undesirable, then [this is refuted because] it is observed that, also in the case [of sensory cognition], there is non-continuity (*asandhāna*) of cognitions in the case of a severe illness. || 344 ||²⁰⁵

Therefore, even if the epistemic object (*prameya*) is external, it is correct that reflexive experience (*svānubhava*) is the result (*phala*), because the object is determined precisely in accord with the manner in which its nature [is reflexively experienced]. || 345 ||²⁰⁶

¹⁹⁹ That is, a single entity would have the nature of simultaneously being both desirable and undesirable.

²⁰⁰ Tosaki (1985, 26–27): *vidyamāne 'pi bāhye 'rthe yathānubhavam eva saḥ | niścītātmā svarūpeṇa nānekātmavadoṣataḥ* || 341 ||

²⁰¹ Reading *adr̥ṣṭāvaraṇāt syāt* (Tosaki 1985, 28n97), against Tosaki's **adr̥ṣṭāvaraṇān no*.

²⁰² In other words, the karma of each individual who experiences the object prevents them from experiencing it simultaneously as both desirable and undesirable.

²⁰³ Tosaki (1985, 27–28): *abhyupāye 'pi bhedena na syād anubhavo dvayoḥ | adr̥ṣṭāvaraṇāt syāt cen na nāmārthavaśā gatiḥ* || 342 ||

²⁰⁴ Tosaki (1985, 28): *tam anekātmakaṃ bhāvam ekātmatvena darśayat | tad adr̥ṣṭaṃ kathaṃ nāma bhaved arthasya darśakam* || 343 ||

²⁰⁵ Tosaki (1985, 29): *iṣṭāniṣṭāvabhāsinyah kalpanā nākṣadhīr yadi | ariṣṭādāv asandhānaṃ dr̥ṣṭaṃ tatrāpi cetasām* || 344 ||

²⁰⁶ Tosaki (1985, 30): *tasmāt prameye bāhye 'pi yuktaṃ svānubhavaḥ phalam | yataḥ svabhāvo 'sya yathā tathāivārthaviniścayaḥ* || 345 ||

PV 3.346-352 *ad* PS(V) 1.9cd

In this case, when there are external objects, one simply relies upon the [cognition's] property of having the appearance of the object, as the epistemic instrument for that [object]. But [in this case, one does] not [rely upon] the subjective nature [of the cognition as the *pramāṇa*], even though it is present, because its object is not separate [from cognition]. || 346 ||²⁰⁷

Since the nature of the object is presented (*niviṣṭa*) in cognition as [desirable or undesirable], it is determined as [desirable or undesirable]—“This [object] is presented thusly”—through reflexive awareness (*ātmasaṃvit*). || 347 ||²⁰⁸

Hence, the nature of the object is not observed apart from that very [reflexive awareness of the object-appearance], which is asserted to be the awareness of the object (*arthasaṃvit*).²⁰⁹ The object as presented in cognition is the instrument (*sādhana*) of the²¹⁰ [awareness]; the [awareness] pertaining to that [instrument] is the [resultant] activity (*kriyā*). || 348 ||²¹¹

Since the [awareness] appears in the manner in which the object presents, because the cognition (*sthiti*)²¹² of the object has that [awareness] as its nature, even though it is [in fact] an awareness of itself (*svavit*), it is considered to be the awareness of the object (*arthavit*). || 349 ||²¹³

²⁰⁷ Tosaki (1985, 31): *tadārthābhāsataivāsya pramāṇaṃ na tu sann api | grāhakātmā 'parārthatvād bāhyeṣv artheṣv apekṣyate* || 346 ||

²⁰⁸ Tosaki (1985, 32): *yasmād yathā niviṣṭo 'sāv arthātmā pratyaye tathā | niścīyate niviṣṭo 'sāv evam ity ātmasaṃvidah* || 347 ||

²⁰⁹ This translation follows the sense of Devendrabuddhi's (543.20-21) comments, which appear to read *yataḥ* as a relative pronoun with the ablative sense of “apart from” (*ma gtogs pa gzhan*). However, it is also possible to translate the first two *padas* as “Hence, this very [reflexive awareness] is asserted to be the awareness of the object, because (*yataḥ*) the nature of the object is not observed [directly, i.e., without first entering into awareness, which is by nature reflexively-aware].” This appears to be how Manorathanandin (Sāṅkṛtyāyana ed., 223) interprets this verse, and is also how Moriyama (2008, 209) translates it. Since both interpretations are grammatically possible, and both meanings are philosophically possible, this may be another instance of Dharmakīrti playing on words (*śleṣa*).

²¹⁰ There are multiple variants of this verse, but the basic meaning is the same. Manorathanandin (Sāṅkṛtyāyana ed., 223) has *tasmād* instead of *tasyā*. Tosaki (1985, 33n124) also records *buddhiniveśyārthaḥ* as a possibility instead of *buddhiniveśyarthaḥ*.

²¹¹ Tosaki (1985, 32–33): *ity arthasaṃvit saiveṣṭā yato 'rthātmā na dṛṣyate | tasyā buddhiniveśyarthaḥ sādhanam tasya sā kriyā* || 348 ||

PV 3.347-350a are also translated in Moriyama (2008, 209).

²¹² Devendrabuddhi (PVP 544.8) glosses *sthiti* as *adhigati* (*gnas skabs rtogs pa 'i ngo bo*), as does Manorathanandin (Sāṅkṛtyāyana ed., 223).

²¹³ Tosaki (1985, 34–35): *yathā niviṣate so 'rtho yataḥ sā prathate tathā | arthasthites tadātmatvāt svavid apy arthavin matā* || 349 ||

Therefore, there is also no difference in object (*viṣayabheda*)²¹⁴ [between object-awareness and reflexive awareness]. When one examines the nature [of object-awareness], the result is said to be reflexive awareness, because object-awareness has [reflexive awareness] as its nature. || 350 ||²¹⁵

The object, whether of one type or another,²¹⁶ is the cause of the cognition which appears in that way. Thus, the [external] object (*artha*) is considered to have the property of being the epistemic object (*prameya*). || 351 ||²¹⁷

[Opponent]: “Having set aside the form of the object (*artharūpa*), how could there be an apprehension of the object, on the part of that [cognition] which [ostensibly] has the appearance [of the object]?”²¹⁸

Honestly, I don’t understand such a thing, either. || 352 ||²¹⁹

²¹⁴ Compare to Kumāriḷa’s *bhinnārtha* (*ŚV Pratyakṣapariccheda* 79; see above, note 182).

²¹⁵ Tosaki (1985, 35): *tasmād viṣayabhedo ’pi na svasaṃvedanaṃ phalam | uktaṃ svabhāvacintāyāṃ tādātmyād arthasaṃvidah || 350 ||*

²¹⁶ Devendrabuddhi (PVP 545.6) notes: “In whichever way [the object] appears, i.e., as desirable or undesirable” (*’dod pa dang mi ’dod pa nyid la sogs pa ’i rnam pa ci ’dra ba*). But as John Dunne (personal communication) has noted, both the argument and the underlying Sanskrit apply equally well to phenomenal characteristics, such as appearing blue or yellow. That is to say, an object cannot be determined as ‘blue’ or ‘yellow,’ without first appearing in a manner that is blue or yellow.

²¹⁷ Tosaki (1985, 36): *tathā ’vabhāsamānasya tādṛśo ’nyādṛśo ’pi vā | jñānasya hetur artho ’pīty arthasyeṣṭā prameyatā || 351 ||*

²¹⁸ Devendrabuddhi (PVP 545.14-16) explains the opponent’s question: “If the cognition, which has the appearance of the object, does not really have its nature—[the nature of] a real object which is desirable or undesirable, in whichever way its image [appears]—then how is that [cognition] the apprehension of the object?”

ji ltar rnam pa ’ga’ zhig ltar | ’dod pa mi ’dod pa la sogs pa don dngos te dngos rang bzhin med par don snang can | shes pa de ji ltar don ’dzin zhe na |

²¹⁹ Tosaki (1985, 37–38): *yathā kathañcit tasyārtharūpaṃ muktāvabhāsinah | arthagrahaḥ katham satyaṃ na jāne ’ham apīdrśam || 352 ||*

PV 3.353-366 ad PS(V) 1.10

Even though the nature of awareness is undifferentiated, those with distorted vision (*viparyāsītadarśana*) characterize it as though it were differentiated into object, subject, and awareness. || 353 ||²²⁰

[This characterization is distorted] because, even though, for those whose eyes are impaired by magic spells (*mantra*), shards of clay appear in some other manner [such as elephants], despite lacking that nature, those [clay shards] are not seen in that way by those whose eyes are not garbled. Or [this is] like how, in the desert, something small is seen as large from afar. || 354-355 ||²²¹

Although this structure of the apprehended, apprehender, and awareness as epistemic object, instrument, and result does not [really] exist, it is constructed (*kriyate*) in accord with [distorted] experience. || 356 ||²²²

Otherwise,²²³ how could there truly exist multiple cognitive images on the part of a single thing²²⁴ having appearances with multiple diverse forms (*nānārūpāvabhāsinah*)²²⁵? [A truly singular cognition cannot truly possess multiple images] because the singularity of [the cognition] would be lost (*hānita*); and [if cognition were truly singular], the [mutual] difference of different [appearances] would be violated. [Cognition] is not undifferentiated, because its nature is not observed [to be undifferentiated]. For one who sees cognition as having an undifferentiated nature determines it to be undifferentiated. || 357-358 ||²²⁶

In reality, the nature which phenomena (*bhāvāḥ*) are perceived (*nirūpyante*) to have does not exist, since they do not have either a singular or a manifold nature. || 359 ||²²⁷

²²⁰ Tosaki (1985, 41): *avibhāgo 'pi buddhyātmā viparyāsītadarśanaiḥ | grāhyagrāhakasaṃvittibhedavān iva lakṣyate* || 353 ||

²²¹ Tosaki (1985, 42): *mantrādyupaplutākṣāṇāṃ yathā mṛcchakalādayaḥ | anyathaiivāvabhāsante tadrūparahitā api* || 354 || *tathaiivādarśanāt teṣāṃ anupaplutacakṣuṣāṃ | dūre yathā vā maruṣu mahān alpo 'pi drśyate* || 355 ||

²²² Tosaki (1985, 43): *yathānudarśanaṃ ceyam meyamānaphalasthitiḥ | kriyate 'vidyamānā 'pi* *grāhyagrāhakasaṃvidām* || 356 ||

²²³ That is, if cognition truly possessed multiple variegated appearances (both in terms of subject-object duality, and in terms of phenomenological variegation such as blue and yellow or pleasure and pain). PVP (547.14-15): *de ltar min na | tha dad pa 'di 'byung ba nyid kyi snang ba yin par 'dod na.*

²²⁴ “Something” or “an entity” (*bhāva*): that is, a moment of cognition.

²²⁵ *Rūpa* here could also mean “color,” referring to phenomenal variegation in terms of ‘blue’ and ‘yellow’ and so on.

²²⁶ Tosaki (1985, 44–45): *anyathaikasya bhāvāsya nānārūpāvabhāsinah | satyaṃ katham syur ākārās tadekatvasya hānitaḥ* || 357 || *anyasyānyatvahāneś ca nābhedo 'rūpadarśanāt | rūpābhedaṃ hi paśyantī dhīr abhedaṃ vyavasyati* || 358 ||

²²⁷ Tosaki (1985, 46): *bhāvā yena nirūpyante tadrūpaṃ nāsti tattvataḥ | yasmād ekam anekaṃ vā rūpaṃ teṣāṃ na vidyate* || 359 ||

In common parlance (*loke*), from seeing some similarity, a mistake supposedly (*nāma*) arises by attributing some nature to that which does not have that nature. Here, this is not [what we are talking about] because not even a single thing having that nature²²⁸ has ever been observed in this universe. However, there is also this kind of error, namely, one that arises from an internal distortion; it arises naturally from a flaw, and it has a false appearance (*vitathapratibhāsini*), without depending on seeing any similarity, as in the condition of seeing floaters (*timirādivat*).
|| 360-362 ||²²⁹

In this [Epistemic Idealist (*vijñaptimātratā*)] context, the determinative feature (*pariccheda*) of cognition is considered to be the subject-image, because it has reflexive awareness as its nature. Therefore, the [subject-image] is the instrument of [reflexive awareness]. || 363 ||²³⁰

Just as in a [particular] case where the knowledge-instrument (*māna*) is its own object (*ātmaviṣaye*), such as the sensation of desire, this [reflexive] structure of result, object, and means of knowledge should be applied to all cases. || 364 ||²³¹

In that [particular] case, too, those [affective states such as desire] are to be yoked (*yogyā*) to reflexive awareness, because they have the nature of an experience. Thus, this yokedness (*yogyatā*)²³² is the knowledge-instrument, [the cognition with the affective state] itself is the object, and reflexive awareness is the result. || 365 ||²³³

That which has the nature of the determinative feature, which is considered to be the subject-image, is that fact of being yoked to [awareness of] itself; and so, reflexive awareness is called the “*pramāṇa*.” || 366 ||²³⁴

²²⁸ Manorathanandin (Sāṅkṛtyāyana ed., 227) adds: “That is, [the nature] of having real cognitive images” (*tadātmano bhūtākārasya*).

²²⁹ Tosaki (1985, 46–47): *sādharmyadarśanāl loke bhrāntir nāmapajāyate | atadātmani tādātmyavyavasāyena neha tat || 360 || adarśanāj jagaty asmīn ekasyāpi tadātmanaḥ | astīyam api yā tv antarupaplavasamudbhavā || 361 || doṣodbhavā prakṛtyā sāvītathapratibhāsini | anapekṣitasādharmyadṛgādis taimirādivat || 362 ||*

²³⁰ Tosaki (1985, 49): *tatra buddheḥ paricchedo grāhakākārasammataḥ | tādātmyād ātmavit tasya sa tasyāḥ sādhanam tataḥ || 363 ||*

²³¹ Tosaki (1985, 50): *tatrātmaviṣaye māne yathā rāgādivedanam | iyaṁ sarvatra saṃyojyā mānameyaphalasthitiḥ || 364 ||*

²³² While the above translation reflects a more concrete and literal sense of the term, *yogyatā* may also be understood as “suitability” or “availability.” In this context, that would mean that the affective states are being described as inherently “suitable for” or “available to” reflexive awareness. This is doubtless part of Dharmakīrti’s point.

²³³ Tosaki (1985, 50): *anubhavātmatvāt te yogyāḥ svātmasaṃvidi | iti sāvogyatā mānam ātmā meyaḥ phalaṁ svavit || 365 ||*

²³⁴ Tosaki (1985, 51): *grāhakākārasaṃkhyātā paricchedātmatātmani | sāvogyateti ca proktaṁ pramāṇam svātmaivedanam || 366 ||*

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