# Realizing the unreal: Dharmakīrti's theory of yogic perception<sup>1</sup>

John D. Dunne

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**Abstract** The Buddhist epistemologist Dharmakīrti (fl. ca. 7th century C.E.) developed a theory of vogic perception that achieved much influence among Buddhist thinkers in India and Tibet. His theory includes an odd problem: on Dharmakīrti's view, many of the paradigmatic objects of the adept's meditations do not really exist. How can one cultivate a meditative perception of the nonexistent? This ontological difficulty stems from Dharmakīrti's decision to construe the Four Noble Truths as the paradigmatic objects of yogic perception. For him, this ontological problem manifests in an epistemological corollary: "impermanence" (anityatā) and other features of the Noble Truths are conceptual, but the adept's meditative perception of them must be nonconceptual. How can a nonconceptual cognition apprehend a conceptual object? A key aspect of Dharmakīrti's theory of concepts provides a solution to this problem. Specifically, Dharmakīrti maintains that a concept, when taken as a mental event, can be considered a particular and thus an object of nonconceptual cognition. Taking this approach, Dharmakīrti downplays the notion that yogic perception is an encounter with real things in the world, in part because it is phenomenally akin to hallucination. Instead, what counts for Dharmakīrti—and what differentiates the adept's realization from the madman's hallucination—are the salvific effects induced by the meditative experience.

J. D. Dunne (⋈)
Department of Religion, Emory University
537 Kilgo Circle,
Atlanta, GA 30322, USA
e-mail: jdunne@emory.edu



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**Keywords** Buddhist philosophy · Dharmaktrti · Perception · Yogipratyaksa · Contemplative epistemology · Contemplative theory

#### **Abbrevations**

PS Pramāṇasamuccaya of Dignāga (2005). PV Pramāṇayārttika of Dharmakīrti (1938–40).

PVSV Pramāņavārttikasvopajñavrtti of Dharmakīrti (1960).

PVin *Pramāṇaviniścaya* of Dharmakīrti (1966). AK *Abhidharmakośa* of Vasubandhu (1970).

AKBh Abhidharmakośabhāsya of Vasubandhu (1970).

According to an early and widespread Buddhist metaphor, the Buddha is the doctor; suffering beings are patients; and the *dharma*—the teachings and their realization—is the medicine.<sup>2</sup> In accord with this model, Buddhist accounts of the path often discuss the various cognitive and emotional defects that must be "abandoned" (*heya*) through the proper application of an "antidote" (*pratipakṣa*); for example, fixation on the self (*ātmagrāha*) is abandoned through selflessness (*anātman*, *nairātmya*). The antidote, moreover, must actually be ingested—that is, one must use contemplative techniques to infuse the mind with the antidote to the point where it is completely "inculcated" (*sātmibhūta*) in one's mental continuum.<sup>3</sup>

While elegant, this medical model of Buddhist soteriology raises a number of problems that Buddhist thinkers repeatedly address. One problem is simply the question of proper diagnosis—have we correctly identified suffering and its cause? Another concerns prognosis—can suffering be eliminated? Yet another is proper medication—what antidote will eliminate suffering's cause? And finally come the many issues associated with "delivery"—what contemplative techniques enable one to inculcate that antidote completely into one's mental continuum?

The Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti (fl. ca. 7th century C.E.) was concerned with all of these issues, and they form a large part of his *Pramāṇavārttika* (PV). His epistemological bent, however, led him to develop a unique and highly influential contribution in this regard, namely, a theory of "yogic perception" (*yogipratyakṣa*), a feature of his philosophy that has received comparatively little attention.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> It is significant that even contemporary discussions of Dharmakīrti's theory of yogic perception still refer to two Master's theses, those by Prévèreau (1994) and Pemweiser (1991). While these are fine works, their continued citation in what is usually a short list of sources is one marker of the relative paucity of scholarship on this important topic. Other works that address specifically Dharmakīrti's theory of yogic perception include an older (1967) and a more recent (1999) article by Steinkellner, and works by Woo (2003), Hayes (1997) and McDermott (1978).



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See Gethin (1998, pp. 63-64 and n.8) for typical references.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The issue of the "antidote" (*pratipakṣa*) and the practices that lead to "inculcation" (*sātmibhāva*) is a central theme in Buddhism, but also one that appears frequently in Dharmakīrti's work. Secondary sources that touch on this theme include Franco (1997), Vetter (1990), and Steinkellner (1999). In Dharmakīrti's work, an important early consideration of many of the theoretical issues at stake is found at PV1.220–223 and PVSV *ad cit.*, translated in Dunne (2004, pp. 369–373).

This article examines a peculiar problem that the aforementioned soteriological model creates for Dharmakīrti. It is also a problem that Mādhyamika philosophers share, and after Dharmakīrti many Mādhyamika thinkers in India and Tibet will gladly adopt Dharmakīrti's theory. The confluence of concerns here springs from this oddity: namely, that according to Dharmakīrti's ontology, many—if not all—of the antidotes do not really exist. How can one cultivate a meditative experience of something nonexistent such that it eventually becomes inculcated into one's mind?

As we will see, Dharmakīrti's response relies heavily on his theory of concept formation, and our main focus will be to show how that theory solves the problem of inculcating the unreal. To do so, however, it is best to begin with a summary of Dharmakīrti's account of yogic perception.

# Dharmakīrti on yogic perception: a summary

Dharmakīrti first presents his theory of yogic perception in the third chapter of the *Pramāṇavārttika* (PV), the chapter on perception (PV3). In a later text, the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (PVin), Dharmakīrti gives largely the same account of yogic perception, although he makes some important clarifications. Finally, in the *Nyāyabindu*, he gives a short definition of yogic perception that does not add significantly to the accounts in either PV or PVin. All of these passages are translated in the appendix to this article.

Dharmakīrti's theory of yogic perception as articulated in PV3 (vv.281–286) and PVin (1.28–32) presents the following salient features:

- 1. A yogic perception is a cognition induced by a meditative practice ( $bh\bar{a}$ - $van\bar{a}$ ) (PV3.281; PVin1.28). The types of practice in question are ones that build to a "culmination" (parinispatti) (PV3.285  $\approx$  PVin1.31). Specifically, these practices begin with learning about some object or idea, then contemplating it in a manner that involves reasoning; finally, one engages in the meditative practice itself, and when that practice reaches its culmination, a yogic perception will result (PVin ad 1.28).
- 2. The cognition that results from this type of process is vivid or clear (PV3.281 and 285; PVin1.28 and 31); that is, the object appears with the same degree of vividness that accompanies cognitions involving sensory contact, as when an object is directly in front of one (PV3.282 = PVin1.29). This is indicated by the fact that, when persons have this type of cognition, they react in an alert or excited manner that is absent when they believe themselves to be simply inferring or thinking of something that they do not take to be directly present (PVin1.30).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> It is clear that Dharmakīrti's theory is the basis for the approach to meditation found in, for example, the *Bhāvanākrama* of Kamalaśīla (for recent work on this text, see the dissertation by Martin Adam); see also Kajiyama (1978). And as McClintock (2000) shows, Dharmakīrti's theory of yogic perception plays a key role in the account of the Buddha's omniscience given by Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla. Dharmakīrti's theory is also crucial for Dge lugs Mādhyamika theory. For a highly relevant discussion in terms of Tsongkhapa's work, see Jinpa (2002, pp. 176–183).



3. A yogic perception is similar to cognitions that occur when, for example, a person overtaken by grief repeatedly thinks of the departed person and eventually hallucinates that person's presence, or when an adept visualizes a colored disc and eventually sees it with complete vividness (PV3.282 = PVin1.29).

- 4. All cognitions of this kind—whether induced by meditation or by states such as grief—appear vividly; therefore, they are not conceptual, since a conceptual cognition cannot present its content vividly (PV3.283ab = PVin1.32ab).
- 5. Although a yogic perception is induced by a process similar to hallucination, it is distinct from hallucinatory cognitions because the object of yogic perception is "true" or "real" (*bhūta/sadbhūta*), whereas hallucinations have "false" or "unreal" objects (*abhūta/asadbhūta*). The only specific yogic objects mentioned are the Noble Truths (as is strongly implied by PV3.281 and 285, and as is explicitly stated in PVin *ad* 1.28).
- 6. A yogic perception is trustworthy (*saṃvādi*), and it is a reliable cognition (*pramāṇa*) (PV3.286).

Perhaps the most startling feature of Dharmakīrti's account is the comparison of yogic perception to hallucinations induced by states such as grief and fear. The analogy is striking, but it stems from a subtler issue: namely, that Dharmakīrti does not choose to present yogic perception as a mystical gnosis that encounters or uncovers real things in the world; instead, he presents it as a process that is designed to inculcate transformative concepts into the mind through an intense, vivid and *nonconceptual* experience that arises from learning, contemplating and meditating on those concepts. It is precisely this approach to yogic perception—i.e., as one that requires the movement from the conceptual to the nonconceptual—that leads Dharmakīrti to compare it to hallucinatory experiences.

To explain how a perception or realization of a concept requires a movement from the conceptual to the nonconceptual, I will now turn to a brief review of Dharmakīrti's ontology and theory of concepts. I will then argue that Dharmakīrti's paradigmatic case of yogic perception is the realization of the Noble Truths, which involve conceptual objects such as impermanence. With these issues in place, I will conclude with the question of hallucination and the way that Dharmakīrti resolves the conundrum of the conceptual and the nonconceptual in yogic perception.

# Dharmakīrti's ontology and theory of concepts

The relevant features of Dharmakīrti's ontology are relatively straightforward, and we do not need to consider many of the more difficult details. In brief, Dharmakīrti follows the basic Buddhist rubric of the "two realities" (satyadvaya), the ultimate (paramārthasat) and the conventional (saṃvṛtisat). For Dharmakīrti, only causally efficient things are ultimately real. This claim



rests largely on the notion that, to be known as real, a thing (or its effects) must impinge on the senses, for it is on the basis of sensory experience that we can assert the ultimate reality of a thing. Thus, in a paradigmatic sense, the causal efficacy of an ultimately real thing consists in its ability to causally interact with the senses in such a way that an "image" ( $\bar{a}k\bar{a}ra$ ) of the thing is created in the next moment of consciousness. Indeed, it is this production of an image through contact with a sensory object that comprises what Dharmakīrti calls "perception" (pratyaksa). Hence, this also means that any object of perception must be ultimately real because only a causally efficient thing can participate in the causal process that leads to the creation of a perceptual image.

By limiting ultimate reality to things that have the capacity to participate in a causal process, Dharmakīrti can deny ultimacy to a whole category of seemingly real entities: namely, universals (sāmānya, jāti, and so on). His denial of ultimacy to universals is directed at a large range of non-Buddhist thinkers who take real, extra-mental universals to be the objects of (or at least required for) conceptual thought and language.8 Dharmakīrti's denial of universals rests on two claims: that causal efficiency requires change, and that change is incompatible with universals. If, for example, the universal "cowness" (gotva) were to change, then it would be something other than cowness, since to change is to become other. Thus, to change, "cowness" must become "non-cowness," and this would mean that all the individuals qualified by cowness would suddenly become non-cows. If, however, cowness does not change, then it cannot be causally efficient because it could not move from a state of not producing a specific effect (for example, a perceptual image of itself) to a state of producing that effect. Hence, since universals cannot be causally efficient, they can only be considered real in a conventional

In denying ultimacy to universals, Dharmakīrti must nevertheless account for our ability to successfully use concepts: why is it that the conceptual cognition of a "cow" refers only to certain specific individuals that we consider to be the same? Or, to put it another way, if the sameness of all cow individuals is not constituted by some type of relation to a real universal "cowness," then what accounts for the fact that, in pragmatic terms, we can apply a single term such as "cow" to various individuals in such a way that we

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> For an extensive treatment of momentariness and the varieties of arguments in its favor, see Oetke (1993). A relevant list of passages in PV and PVSV is given in Dunne (2004, p. 97, n. 68). For the question of permanence as applied to universals, a representative passage is found in PVSV *ad* PV1.144a (Gnoli, 21ff), translated in Dunne (2004, p. 92, n. 61).



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> The crux of the matter is stated in perhaps its most succinct form by Dharmakīrti when he says, "To be is to be perceived" (PVSV *ad* PV1.3, G 4.2: *sattvam uplabdhir eva*). The corollary is that, minimally, a real thing must have the capacity for the "projection" (*arpana*) of its own image into awareness. See PVSV *ad* PV1.282 (Gnoli, 149.21ff), translated in Dunne (2004, p. 86, n. 53).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> For a more detailed account, see Dunne (2004, pp. 84–89).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> For the general contours of this debate and its principal players, see Siderits (1991). Dravid (1972) also sketches the margins of the debate in a still useful way.

can achieve our goals? Such questions led Dharmakīrti to build on Dignāga's work and elaborate an approach to concepts known as the *apoha* or "exclusion" theory.

Dharmakīrti's *apoha*-theory is best explained in relation to concepts that successfully guide one to entities that can perform the causal functions associated with the concept in question. Here, the cognitive event known as recognition (*pratyabhijñā*na) serves as a straightforward case. In typically dense lines of verse, Dharmakīrti says,

Having seen that things, although different, accomplish this or that telic function ( $arthakriy\bar{a}$ ) such as the [production of a] cognition, one conjoins those things with expressions that take as their object the difference from things that are other than those [that accomplish the aforementioned telos]. Having done so, then when one sees another thing [with that telic capacity], one has a recognition of it [as being the same as the aforementioned things]. [PV1.98–99ab]. 10

And in his own commentary, Dharmakīrti explains:

It has already been said [at PV1.75] that even though [some] things, such as the eye and so on, are distinct, they accomplish the same telic function. [A person] sees that among [things], some accomplish that same telic function, such as the [production of] a cognition; as such those things are [conceptually] distinguished from the others [that do not perform that function]. Those things thus produce, by their very nature as real things (vastudharmatayā), a false awareness in [that person]; that awareness is associated with expressions that have as their object the exclusion [of those things] from [the others] that do not perform that [aforementioned function]. This false awareness is [the recognition], "This is that." It arises because the imprint [placed in the mind by that person's previous experience] has been activated [by what s/he is presently seeing]. [In this cognitive act of recognition] the difference [among those unique things] is glossed over (samsṛṣṭabheda).<sup>11</sup>

This passage is only one of many in which Dharmakīrti deploys his *apoha*-theory, and in terms of the basic contours of that theory, the passage is not unusual. The main goal of the theory is to explain how, in the absence of real universals, a word such as "cow" can be applied non-randomly to only some individuals. For Dharmakīrti, the explanation is that one constructs a sameness for a class of individuals on the basis of their difference from other individuals. The warrant for that construction is that every individual is in fact completely unique in its causal capacities or "telic function" (*arthakriyā*). In

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Gnoli (49.19ff): uktam etat bhede 'pi bhāvās tulyārthakriyākāriņaś cakṣurādivad iti/tām ekām jñānādikām arthakriyām teṣu paśyato vastudharmatayaivānyebhyo bhidyamānā bhāvās tad-vyāvṛttiviṣayadhvanisaṃsṛṣṭam tad evedam iti svānubhavavāsanāprabodhena saṃsṛṣtabhedam mithyāpratyayam janayanti/.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Gnoli (49.16ff): jñānādyarthakriyām tām tām drṣṭvā bhede 'pi kurvatah/arthāms tadanyaviśles-aviṣayair dhvanibhiḥ saha/samyojya pratyabhijñānam kuryād apy anyadarśane/.

the construction of a sameness that applies to certain individuals, however, one focuses on a subset of causal capacities that are relevant to one's telos or goal (artha), and one thus ignores other capacities that distinguish even the individuals we call "cows" from each other. The sameness that applies to all cows is thus, strictly speaking, a negation: it is the exclusion (vyāvṛtti) of all other things that do not accomplish the desired telic function. Since all cow individuals are actually unique, the conceptual awareness formed through exclusion is "false" (mithyā) or "erroneous" (bhrānta) in that it presents those individuals as the same. Nevertheless, since it is rooted in their actual causal characteristics, that "erroneous" awareness can successfully guide one to objects that will accomplish one's goals.

While not unusual in terms of the broad scope of the apoha-theory, the above passage is helpful for its suggestion of a particular causal chain that leads to a conceptual cognition such as recognition. As noted above, on Dharmakīrti's model the act of perception consists of an image being generated in consciousness by the interaction of the senses with an object, provided that other cognitive requirements are in place. More specifically, an image is actually consciousness itself appearing in the form of the image. Each moment of consciousness, moreover, arises from its own previous moment and contributes causally to the production of the next moment in the same mental continuum. On this model, when an act of recognition is to occur, a perceptual image arises through sensory contact; at this point, the image has not yet been interpreted conceptually. But that image contributes in a particular way to the causal production of the next moment of consciousness: specifically, it activates an "imprint" (vāsanā) such that in a subsequent moment of consciousness, the image is now construed in terms of an exclusion that forms a class of entities. The image is thus conceptualized in an act of recognition whose linguistic form would be, "This is that."

The relevant point here is that, for Dharmakīrti, an uninterpreted, nonconceptual image is part of the causal process that is the flow of mind itself. In the case of recognition, that causal process is such that one moment of consciousness with a nonconceptual image leads to another moment with a conceptual image by way of the *apoha* or exclusion process. This implies that a movement from conceptual to nonconceptual may also be possible.

As we shall see, the potential for moving from a conceptual to a nonconceptual cognition is highly relevant to Dharmakīrti's theory of yogic perception. Recall that, in relation to his ontology, Dharmakīrti maintains that (1) perception is a causal process; (2) only ultimately real things are causally efficient; and (3) universals are not causally efficient. Hence, if yogic perception is indeed an actual case of perception, then its object must be a causally efficient, ultimately real thing. It would seem, therefore, that Dharmakīrti should take a position whereby yogic perception consists in adepts' extraordinary sensory abilities that enable them to see, for example, individual atoms or objects at great distances. But surprisingly, Dharmakīrti does not construct his theory in relation to such sensory events. Instead, for him yogic



perception paradigmatically amounts to the perception of *universals* such as "impermanence" ( $anityat\bar{a}$ ) and "emptiness" ( $s\bar{u}nyat\bar{a}$ ). To appreciate this crucial point, we will now turn to the way that Dharmakīrti's soteriology relates to the primary scope of yogic perception. We will then address the obvious question here: if universals are causally inert and ultimately unreal, how can adepts perceive them? How, in other words, can a conceptual cognition become nonconceptual?

### The scope of yogic perception

Many Indic contemplative traditions maintain that adepts (vogins) can attain extraordinary sensory abilities that, for example, enable them to see objects that ordinary persons cannot see. These abilities occasionally become relevant in philosophical arguments. For instance, Vyomaśiva (fl. ca. 750 c.E.) argues that an "ultimate individuator" (atyantaviśesa) must exist; otherwise, one could not explain how an adept could identify the same particular atom on two different occasions. 12 Buddhist theories about the effects of meditative practice also recognize many such abilities. 13 Given the frequent allusion to extraordinary abilities within Buddhism, one might therefore expect that when Dharmakīrti discusses vogic perception, he would readily acknowledge the existence of extraordinary sensory abilities and seek to account for them. But it appears that Dharmakīrti deliberately chooses to downplay the notion that, through spiritual exercises, an adept gains extraordinary sensory abilities. Instead, he presents vogic perception in a way that strongly emphasizes the adept's realization of a set of concepts that form the soteriological core of Buddhism: the Four Noble Truths.

To be clear, however, it is critical to note that Dharmakīrti does not entirely exclude other extraordinary perceptual abilities that arise as a result of yogic practice. For him, yogic perception must have a "true object" (*bhūtārtha*), and when he specifies what would constitute a true object, the only examples that he explicitly mentions are the Noble Truths. In mentioning the Truths, however, the locution he uses clearly implies that other objects can be included. Indeed, the adept's "awareness of others' minds" (*paracittajñāna*) in particular surfaces as a thorny issue that Dharmakīrti is obliged to address, if only briefly. Nevertheless, despite some allusions to other abilities elsewhere in Dharmakīrti's works, his account of the process that leads to a yogic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> See, for example, PV3.454–457 and PV3.530.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Vyomavatī (692–693).

 $<sup>^{13}</sup>$  Beyond numerous examples of extraordinary powers depicted in Buddhist narrative literature, even systematic Buddhist texts refer to such abilities. See, for example, the list of the ten cognitions ( $j\tilde{n}\tilde{a}na$ ) and their features as found in the seventh chapter of AK. One of the most frequently cited such power is "knowledge of others' minds" ( $paracittaj\tilde{n}\tilde{a}na$ ), which is included in the ten cognitions.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> The ending here is -vat, which occurs in both PV3.286 (nirnātavastuvat) and PVin ad PVin 1.28 (āryasatyadarśanavat).

perception and his explicit mention of only the Noble Truths as an example of a "true object" together indicate that the direct realization of the Noble Truths is for him the paradigmatic case of yogic perception.

The notion that the Noble Truths are the paradigmatic objects of vogic perception is also implicit in the context formed by Dignāga's Pramānasamuccaya (PS), and it is well known that Dharmakīrti's first major work, the Pramānavārttika (PV), deliberately unpacks PS. 16 The introductory praise of PS forms the structure of the Pramānavārttika's Pramānasiddhipariccheda (PV2, the "Chapter on the Proof of Authority"), and as the early commentator Devendrabuddhi (fl. ca. 675 c.E.) shows, the Pratyaksapariccheda (PV3, the "Chapter on Perception") is likewise structured by the order of topics addressed in Dignāga's chapter on perception (PS1).<sup>17</sup> Although the most straightforward reading of Dignāga's text might not suggest any typology of perception, Dharmakīrti holds that Dignāga explicitly enumerates four different types of perception, and one type is vogic perception. 18 Hence, as the early commentator Devendrabuddhi remarks, when Dharmakīrti gives an account of vogic perception at PV3.281-286, he means to unpack this statement by Dignāga: "On the part of adepts, there is the seeing of the mere thing (arthamātra) unmixed with the guru's instructions."

In the summary of Dharmakīrti's theory given above, we have seen that in unpacking Dignāga's statement, Dharmakīrti maintains that yogic perception is a "clear" (spaṣṭa), "nonconceptual" (akalpa) awareness that occurs when a meditative practice (bhāvanā) reaches its culmination (pariniṣpatti). Dignāga's notion that the state is "unmixed" with any previously received instructions amounts, for Dharmakīrti, to the assertion that the state is nonconceptual. However, Dharmakīrti does not explain what Dignāga means by the "guru's instructions." Instead, he simply remarks (PV3.281) that the "yogis' awareness has been stated previously." Probably alluding to Dharmakīrti's own comments in the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*, Devendrabuddhi and all subsequent commentators understand Dharmakīrti to be referring to the extensive apology for the Four Noble Truths that he gave in PV2. And while Dharmakīrti may be alluding to a number of passages in PV2, one set of verses seems especially relevant:<sup>21</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Hayes (1997, pp. 106–107) discusses these verses and translates PV2.132 and PV2.135cd-137. Prévèreau (1994) also refers briefly to these verses.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> The most useful analysis of the structure of PV2 in relation to PS is given by Franco (1997).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> When Dharmakīrti moves from one topic to the next in PV3, Devendrabuddhi cites a corresponding verse in the first chapter of PS to demonstrate how Dharmakīrti is unpacking Dignāga's work by going through each verse in sequence.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Franco (1993, 2005) argues convincingly against the notion that Dignāga's text necessarily proposes a typology of perception, whether it be threefold, fourfold, or anything else.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> PS1.6cd: yoginām gurunirdeśāvyavakīrnārthamātradṛk. Cited by Devendrabuddhi (212a) ad PV3.281.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> See Devendrabuddhi (212a). The relevant passage from PVin is cited below. In that context, commenting on Dharmakīrti's explicit mention of PV, Dharmottara (118a) makes it quite clear that the portion of the PV in question is indeed PV2.

So as to eliminate [his own] suffering, the compassionate one strives to apply [to himself] the methods [for doing so] because teaching the goal and its causes is extremely difficult for one to whom the goal and its causes are epistemically remote. [PV2.132]

Examining it through reasoning and trusted discourse (\$\bar{a}gama\$), s/he analyzes the cause of suffering; and through the particular characteristics of suffering, s/he also analyzes that cause's nature of being impermanent and so on. S/he does so because, if the cause were to remain that way, then one would observe no cessation of the effect. [PV2.133–134ab]

In order to eliminate the effect's cause, one looks into its opposite (*vipakṣa*). The opposite of the effect's cause is established by understanding the nature of that cause. [PV2.134cd–135ab]

The cause is the [self-]love that, taking conditioned things as its objects, is created by grasping onto "I" and "mine." Seeing selflessness, which is the opposite of that cause, stops that cause. [PV2.135cd-136ab]

In that [adept] who frequently cultivates that [antidote] for a long time through many methods, the good qualities and flaws [of the cause of suffering and its antidote] become clear. Through that [cultivation] and through acuity of the mind (buddhi), the imprint ( $v\bar{a}san\bar{a}$ ) of the cause [of suffering] is eliminated. [PV2.136cd–137].<sup>22</sup>

These verses suggest a sequence of contemplative practice. One begins with  $\bar{a}gama$ —i.e., instructions from the guru, who is a trusted source. One applies reason to those instructions so as to thoroughly learn and then cultivate the antidote that will eliminate suffering by eliminating its cause. Dharmakīrti emphasizes that one repeatedly and variously engages in a type of practice or cultivation ( $abhy\bar{a}sa$ ) that will eventually lead one to clarity about the objects cultivated while also developing an acuity of mind. Through that clarity and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> I understand the term  $\bar{a}gama$  here to be coterminous with  $\bar{a}ptavacana$ , largely based on Dharmakīrti's own discussion of  $\bar{a}gamapram\bar{a}na$  in PVSV (ad PV1.214–223; translated in Dunne, 2004, pp. 363–373). Also, in this context,  $\bar{a}gama$  need not be considered buddhavacana, but rather any oral or written text that properly instructs one in meditation on the Noble Truths. If we take one's study of  $\bar{a}gama$  to result in what Dharmakīrti calls a śrutamaya cognition in PVin (ad 1.28), then Dharmottara's gloss (117b) for śrutamaya is relevant here: "that which is caused by study (mnyan pa) of treatises that are conducive to meditation" (bsgoms pa dang rjes su mthun pa'i bstan bcos mnyan pa'i rgyu can).



PV2.132–137: dayāvān duḥkhahānārtham upāyeşv abhiyujyate/parokṣopeyataddhetos tadākhyānam hi duṣkaram//yuktyāgamābhyām vimṛśan duḥkhahetum parīkṣate/tasyānityādirūpam ca duḥkhasyaiva viśeṣanaih//yatas tathā sthite hetau nivṛttir neti paśyati/phalasya hetor hānārtham tadvipakṣam parīkṣate//sādhyate tadvipakṣo 'pi heto rūpāvabodhataḥ/ātmātmīyagrahakṛtaḥ snehaḥ samskāragocaraḥ//hetur virodhī nairātmyadarśanam tasya bādhakam/bahuśo bahudhā upāyam kālena bahunā asya ca//gacchanty abhyasyatas tatra guṇadoṣāh prakāśatām/buddheś ca pāṭavād hetor vāṣanātaḥ prahīyate//.

acuity, one is able to eliminate suffering's cause even at the level of its subtle imprint.  $^{24}$ 

The process described here is certainly compatible with the account of yogic perception in PV3, but it is more clearly elicited by Dharmakīrti's account of yogic perception in PVin. There, he begins with a verse:

A trustworthy awareness that appears vividly by the force of meditation—similar to cases such as the fear [induced by something seen in a dream]—is a perception; it is nonconceptual. [PVin 1.28]<sup>25</sup>

#### He then offers these comments:

[Some] adepts, having apprehended objects (artha) through a cognition ( $j\bar{n}\bar{a}na$ ) born of learning, and having established those objects through reason and a cognition born of contemplation, then meditatively cultivate [a realization of] those objects. When that meditation reaches its culmination, those adepts have a cognition with a vivid appearance, as in the case of fear [induced by a dream]. The adepts' cognition is a perception that is a reliable awareness ( $pram\bar{a}na$ ); it is nonconceptual and has a non-erroneous object. That reliable perception is, for example, the seeing of the Noble Truths ( $\bar{a}ryasatyadarśana$ ), as I explained in the  $Pram\bar{a}nav\bar{a}rttika$ .

In the verse (PVin 1.28), Dharmakīrti restates the account given at PV3, where he also notes the same features, such as the meditatively induced cognition's vividness, nonconceptuality, and trustworthiness. But in his comments in PVin, Dharmakīrti briefly but explicitly recounts the process that precedes the meditation. It involves, in short, the sequence of cognitions induced first by learning, then by contemplating, and finally by meditating (śrutamaya-, cintāmaya-, and bhāvanāmayajñāna).

As occasionally occurs in Dharmakīrti's works,<sup>27</sup> his choice of words in the passages from both PV2 and PVin apparently allude to—or at least bring to mind—Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* and its *Bhāṣya*. There, in the context of these three types of discernment or "wisdom" (*jñāna*), Vasubandhu's verse (6.4cd) reads, "Of good ethical conduct (*vṛttastha*), as one who has learned and contemplated [the truths], one applies oneself to the meditative cultivation [of their realization]."<sup>28</sup> Vasubandhu comments on his own verse:



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> See also Woo (2003, p. 440), who discusses the remarks made by Dharmottara and Prajñākaragupta in regard to the meditative process involved here.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> PVin 1.28: bhāvanābalataḥ spaṣṭaṃ bhayādāv iva bhāsate/yaj jñānam avisaṃvādi tat pratyakṣam akalpakam//.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> PVin ad 1.28: yoginām api śrutamayena jñānenārthān grhītvā yukticintāmayena vyavasthāpya bhāvayatām tannispattau yat spaṣṭāvabhāsi bhayādāv iva/tad avikalpakam avitathaviṣayam pramāṇam pratyakṣam/āryasatyadarśanavad yathā nirṇītam asmābhiḥ pramāṇavārttike//Reconstruction provided from an unpublished work in progress by Ernst Steinkellner based on previously known fragments and new materials.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> See, for example, his allusion (at PV3.194) to Vasubandhu's notion of perception in AKBh ad AK1.10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> AK6.4cd: vṛttasthaḥ śrutacintavān bhāvanāyāṃ prayujyate.

One who wishes to see the Truths from the very beginning guards his ethical conduct. He then studies the teachings (*śruta*) that are conducive to seeing the Truths (*satyadarśana*), or he listens to [teachings about their] meaning. Having studied or listened, he contemplates. And having correctly contemplated, he applies himself to meditative cultivation. In a state of meditative concentration (*samādhi*), in him arises the contemplation-born discernment on the basis of his study-born discernment. And on the basis of his contemplation-born discernment arises in him.<sup>29</sup>

It seems likely that this passage, with its mention of the sequence of three discernments for the purpose of "seeing the Truths" (satyadarśana), is a source for—or shares a common source with—the above comments from PVin. Significantly, Vasubandhu goes on to note that the "study-born" discernment is an understanding of the teachings in their linguistic form, i.e., as "names" (nāman) or "symbolic expressions" (vyañjana); the "contemplation-born" discernment may also be at this level, but it may move to an understanding of the "meaning" (artha). The "cultivation-born" form of discernment, however, is distinct from the other two in that takes "only the meaning as its object" (arthālambanaiva); that is, it applies to "the meaning without depending on its symbolic expression" (vyañjananirapekṣā arthe pravartate). And clarifying further the distinction especially between the study-born and the contemplation-born, Vasubandhu notes,

The study-born [discernment] is a definitive determination (niścaya) that arises from the reliability of a trusted person's statements ( $\bar{a}ptavaca-napr\bar{a}m\bar{a}nyaj\bar{a}ta$ ). The contemplation-born arises from rational examination ( $yuktinidhy\bar{a}na$ ); and the cultivation-born arises from meditative concentration ( $sam\bar{a}dhija$ )....<sup>31</sup>

If, following Dharmakīrti's own interpretation elsewhere, <sup>32</sup> we construe the term *āptavacana* ("a trusted person's statements") as equivalent to *āgama*, then Dharmakīrti's reference to "reasoning and trusted discourse" (*yuktyāgamābhyām*) in the abovementioned passage from PV2 also connects to Vasubandhu's comments. In short, it seems likely that the PV2 verses are indirectly referring to the cultivation of the three forms of discernment, which are explicitly cited in PVin.

It is helpful to connect Dharmakīrti's remarks in both PV2 and PVin to Vasubandhu's comments because in doing so we locate a Buddhist precedent

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> See, for example, Dharmakīrti's preliminary remarks in PVSV (Gnoli, 108.1ff) on PV1.214, where Dignāga's use of the term *āptavāda* is clearly glossed as *āgama*.



AKBh ad AK6.5ab (891): satyāni ha drastukāma ādita eva śīlam pālayati/tatah satyadarśan-asyānulomam śrutam udgṛhṇāti, artham vā śṛṇoti/śrutvā cintayati/aviparītam cintayitvā bhāvanāyām prayujyate/samādhau tasya śrutamayīm prajñām niśritya cintāmayī jāyate/cintāmayīm niśritya bhāvanāmayī jāyate/. Prévèreau (p. 76) briefly notes the relevance of this passage.

<sup>30</sup> AKBh ad AK6.5cd (891).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> AKBh ad AK6.5cd (892): āptavacanaprāmāṇyajātaniścayā śrutamayī, yuktinidhyānajā cintāmayī, samādhijā bhāvanāmayī...

for the notion that the progression of the three discernments requires a movement from a linguistic expression of a teaching to some other form of understanding that no longer relies on linguistic expression. For Dharmakīrti, the linguistic expression is conceptual—it involves unreal universals constructed through *apoha*. And in his system, only one other form of knowing is possible, namely, perception itself. In short, for Dharmakīrti the progression in the three forms of discernment is one that moves from (1) a linguistically derived conceptual understanding; to (2) a rationally derived conceptual understanding, so as to eventually culminate in (3) a meditatively induced nonconceptual state. That latter state is, of course, yogic perception.

It thus seems clear that, in formulating his theory of yogic perception, Dharmakīrti focuses on the movement from a conceptual understanding of the Noble Truths to a nonconceptual realization of them. Nevertheless, one additional specification must be made, and to do so, it is helpful to consider a tempting error: namely, that the movement from conceptual to nonconceptual amounts to ostention. For example, in the case of a cow, some conceptual intervention might be necessary in order for one to have a perception of it—a friend might need to point and say, "Look, there is a cow." This conceptual, ostensive guidance could be abandoned once one has brought one's senses to bear on the object in the appropriate way; in short, one begins with conceptual ostention, and one ends with nonconceptual perception. In a parallel sense, one might therefore think that "trusted discourse" on the Noble Truths serves to direct one's awareness to the real things in the world that are the Truths themselves, which one will know directly after being aided by this ostention. But this is not the case.

Consider, for example, the Truth of Suffering. In practice, the Buddhist adept is meant to realize all four aspects of that truth, and one such aspect is impermanence, especially as applied to the psychophysical aggregates (*skandha*).<sup>33</sup> Certainly, on Dharmakīrti's system the constituents that make up the aggregates can be considered causally efficient, ultimately real particulars. Nevertheless, the impermanence of those particulars is not ultimately real. Instead, as with any quality applied to that which possesses it, impermanence is formed through a process of abstraction and exclusion. That is, a quality such as impermanence is conceptually abstracted from the particulars it qualifies, but in ontological terms, that quality is reducible to the particulars themselves.<sup>34</sup> As Dharmakīrti puts it, "... there is no impermanence whatsoever other than the fluctuating thing itself."<sup>35</sup> Impermanence, in short, is not a real thing in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> PVSV ad PV1.75d (Gnoli, 43.9) ... nānityatvam nāma kimcid anyac calād vastunaḥ/. Dharmakīrti makes this statement so as to affirm that one can correctly speak of impermanence as qualifying fluctuating things, but he does so in the context of denying that any such universal actually exists in the world. For a translation of the complete passage, see Dunne (2004, pp. 339–352).



 $<sup>^{33}</sup>$  See, for example, the discussion of the focus ( $\bar{a}lambana$ ) for realizing the truth of suffering in AKBh ad AK6.2cd and the section on realizing the aspects in AKBh ad AK7.13ff.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Dharmakīrti makes this point in various places, including his discussion of "predicate-" and "subject-expressions" (*dharmavāciśabda*, *dharmivāciśabda*) and the relationship between *vyāvṛtta* and *vyāvṛtti* in PVSV *ad* 1.61ff (Gnoli, 33.5ff). But perhaps his clearest comments in this regard are found in the long passage in PVSV *ad* PV1.75d.

world; it is an ultimately unreal universal. Thus, in the case of the Noble Truths, the role of learning, reasoning and contemplating cannot be ostention for the simple reason that there is nothing here to ostend: impermanence, selflessness, emptiness and the like do not exist as real things in the world.<sup>36</sup>

Here, one might object that the ultimately real particulars qualified by impermanence and the like do exist, and those particulars can be ostended. Thus, if the concept "impermanence" is construed as referring to a specific sensation, that concept can be ostensive, in that one might then focus upon and perceive the sensation. But in the yogic perception of the Four Noble Truths, a perception of a sensation in itself is not liberative; instead, one requires a perception of the sensation's impermanence. Thus, rather than ostending real things in the world, the practices of learning, reasoning and contemplating, as conceptual preparation for meditative practice, apparently serve to render the concepts in question especially stable such that meditation on the concept can lead to a nonconceptual awareness. There again, one can ask, given Dharmakīrti's anti-realism in regard to universals, how could such a meditation succeed?

# The conundrum of yogic perception

At this point, it may be worthwhile to restate the basic problem faced by Dharmakīrti's theory of yogic perception. On the model of the sequential development of three types of discernment  $(praj\tilde{n}\bar{a})$ , one begins with the study of some authoritative discourse on the Noble Truths. Interpreting that discourse through rational analysis, one focuses on the concepts that constitute the Noble Truths. Finally, one's rational contemplation of those concepts enables one at some point to move to the practice of meditation  $(bh\bar{a}van\bar{a})$ , and when that practice reaches its culmination, one will have a nonconceptual, vivid, perceptual cognition of those concepts.

Here, the problem is that universals are ultimately unreal because they are causally inefficacious. Or, to put it another way, universals are incapable of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> A comment made by Prajñākaragupta when discussing the compound *yutkyāgamābhyām* (PV2.134) is suggestive here: *tato yuktyā tasya* [i.e., *āgamasya*] *arthasya sthirīkṛtya bhāvayataḥ sākṣātkaraṇam ity anukramaḥ*/["Therefore, the sequence is that one makes firm through reason the meaning of that [*āgama*], and then meditating upon it, one has a direct realization of that meaning"].



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Directly addressing the problematic nature of terms such as "impermanence" and "emptiness," Dharmakīrti says: "In the case of expressions such as *empty* and *impermanent*, expressions perform their semantic function (*vyapadeśa*) by [first] imposing in cognition an image that is intended in accord with [the interlocutor's] concepts and then excluding that image. Expressions work this way because all the objects (*artha*) of expressions have a distinctive aspect that is projected by cognitive intent. Poor thinkers' bombasts which raise problems such as the assertion that there is no [real] contrary (*pratipakṣa*) [for terms such as *empty*] should be ignored" (PVSV *ad* PV1.137–142, Gnoli, 69.5ff: śūnyānityādiśabdeṣu yathākalpanam samīhitākāram buddhāv āropya tadvyavacchedena vyapadeśah kriyate/buddhisamīhāsandarśitavibhāgatvāt sarvasya śabdārthasya/apratipakṣadoṣopakṣepādayo durmativispanditānīty upekṣanīyāh/). The larger passage in which these statements occur is translated in Dunne (2004, pp. 353–360).

causal activity required to produce a perceptual image; hence, they are ultimately unreal. Thus, how could one have a perception of, for example, impermanence? It would seem that one could not, since impermanence is a universal.

In his presentation of vogic perception in both PV3 and PVin (as summarized above). Dharmakīrti's response rests on two important premises. The first is that a vivid cognition cannot be conceptual. In this way, he formulates a main criterion for distinguishing the conceptual from the nonconceptual that is essentially phenomenal or first-person. In effect, to distinguish between these types of cognitions, one need only ask, "Was it vivid?" In PVin, to justify this claim, he adduces behavioral evidence. Specifically, he notes that when persons have a phenomenally vivid experience, they behave in a manner that involves a degree of "excitation" (āvega) that is absent when the cognition in question is not vivid; this is so because they believe themselves to be knowing something indirectly—something that is not actually present. In short, vividness correlates with an observable behavioral reaction such as horripilation that is absent in cognitions that lack vividness.<sup>38</sup> Along with this argument, Dharmakīrti is apparently suggesting that yogic perception effects just such a behavioral or visceral response, and for that reason, it must also involve a kind of vividness that is absent when, for example, one understands impermanence in a merely conceptual way.

To make this point, Dharmakīrti employs a striking set of examples:

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. [PV3.282 = PVin 1.29]<sup>39</sup>

It may seem odd to compare these clearly deranged or deluded cases with the adept's highest level of perception—the level that would render the adept a "saint"  $(\bar{a}rya)$ . But Dharmakīrti makes this provocative comparison probably to drive home an important point: the adept's perception is not exalted because of its content's ontological status; rather, what counts is that, when the content is brought into the mind in an intense, visceral fashion, it induces salvific effects.

To clarify the notion that the content's ontological status is not at stake, it is important to reiterate that the concern here is with a phenomenal effect. Dharmakīrti is not drawing a distinction between a mystical state that directly contacts a thing in the world and some other cognition that fails to achieve direct contact with a real thing in the world. This distinction does not apply because impermanence and the like are not real things in the world such that one could come into direct contact with them. Instead, Dharmakīrti is focusing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Inasmuch as yogic perception concerns primarily the direct realization of the Noble Truths, it is therefore the criterion for the "path of seeing" (*darśanamārga*), the obtainment of which is indicated by the term *ārya*. For an overview of this path structure, see Apple (2003).



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> The example of horripilation comes from Dharmottara (118b).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> PV3.282 = PVin 1.29: kāmaśokabhayonmādacaurasvapnādyupaplutāḥ/abhūtān api paśyanti purato 'vasthitān iva//.

on the phenomenal features of a state that initiates the kind of response that flows from the feeling that something is directly in front of one's eyes. Such a state is similar to other states that involve sensory contact in a more robust fashion. But the fact that the state invokes a similarly robust response is independent of its relation to objects that are actually in contact with the senses.

This "sensory independence"—the fact that the cognition need not involve direct sensory contact with a real thing in the world—is thus a crucial feature of yogic perception, but another prominent feature is its phenomenal vividness. The examples that Dharmakīrti suggests—we might imagine a lover pining for his beloved, or a parent grieving for her child—clearly indicate the general trajectory from the conceptual (a memory) to the nonconceptual (an hallucination). And these examples emphasize that it is not at all necessary for the remembered object (the face of one's deceased child or absent beloved) to be directly in contact with the senses in order for the vivid experience (a vision of that face) to occur.

Still, on Dharmakīrti's theory of concepts, how is it possible to move from a conceptual cognition to a vivid, nonconceptual one? Following Dignāga's lead, <sup>41</sup> Dharmakīrti alludes to the explanation of such events in the verse that closes the yogic perception section:

A cognition that apprehends a linguistic object (*artha*) is a conceptual cognition of that [object] which it is cognizing. The actual nature [of any cognition *qua* mental event] is not a linguistic object; therefore, any [awareness of awareness itself] is direct [and hence non-conceptual]. [PV3.287]<sup>42</sup>

Previously we noted that in the formation of a concept through the apoha or exclusion process, a cognitive image  $(\bar{a}k\bar{a}ra)$  is being manipulated. Again, the case of recognition is perhaps most obvious: first, through sensory contact, an image arises in cognition, and then with other factors in place, that image leads to a perceptual judgment, which is itself a new cognition with its own image. The judgment, being conceptual, has a vague—not vivid—image that results in part from the apoha process; in short, the image is vague in that it is not a phenomenally clear depiction of the object that it represents. Nevertheless, even though the judgment's image is vague as a representation, it is nevertheless an image. In other words, the judgment does contain some type of phenomenal content. And as a mental event, that phenomenal content is a real mental particular that can be known in its nature as a mental event

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> PV3.287: śabdārthagrāhi yad yatra taj jñānam tatra kalpanā/svarūpam ca na śabdārthas tatrādhyakṣam ato 'khilam//. See also the remarks by Woo (2003, pp. 441–444).



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> See PS 1.7ab: *kalpanāpi svasaṃvittāv iṣṭā nārthe vikalpanāt/*. It is important to note that in PS, Dignāga deliberately refers to *svasaṃvitti* both immediately before and immediately after his statement of yogic perception. Although PS1.7ab (and PV3.287) can also be construed with the topic of error that immediately follows, it is clear that *svasaṃvitti* provides Dharmakīrti, at least, with a means to explain the nonconceptual cognition of a concept *qua* mental event. For this reason, I include it in the verses on yogic perception.

through reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvitti*). In relation to that reflexive awareness, however, the content no longer appears to stand for something else; that is, it is no longer conceptual. In other words, as that which is known through reflexive awareness, every cognition—even every conceptual cognition—is a mental particular.

In this way, Dharmakīrti proposes what might be called a "Janus-faced" theory of concepts, which he explains most succinctly at PV3.9cd-10. There, an objector says,

"If [a universal] is also a real object (*artha*) in terms of having the nature of awareness, then you would have to conclude [that it is a particular]."[PV3.9cd]<sup>43</sup>

In other words, if the phenomenal content of a conceptual cognition can be known reflexively as a mental event, then it would seem that universals, the objects of conceptual cognitions, must be ultimately real, since they would be known through perception, albeit the unusual form of perception that is reflexive awareness. Dharmakīrti responds,

Since we do indeed assert [that a universal is a particular], your statement poses no problem for us. But it is a universal because it [is imagined to have] the same form for all [the objects that it seems to qualify. It has that same form] because it is based upon their exclusion [from other objects that do not have the expected causal characteristics]. [PV3. 10]<sup>44</sup>

Thus, when identified with some nature  $(r\bar{u}pa)$  distributed over a class of particulars, a concept is a universal; but considered as a mental event, the concept is a particular. In this way, inasmuch as it is distributed over a class of things, a universal strictly speaking is a negation, since on Dharmakīrti's view, only a negation formed through exclusion can be distributed in this way. <sup>45</sup> But inasmuch as the negation is not ontologically distinct from the mental image that occurs in the conceptual cognition, that cognition is a particular *qua* mental event. The one proviso that must be added is that, when considered as a mental event, the conceptual cognition loses its distribution, and when it loses its distribution, it no longer can represent something; in other words, it is no longer a concept.

The Janus-faced aspect of concepts gives us a means to explain yogic perception in a way that is consistent with its comparison to the hallucinations of the deranged. That is, we can explain the lovesick man's hallucination as follows: when he focuses intently and repeatedly on the memory (a concept) of his beloved, he is in part focusing on a mental event which is a particular.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> I am here referring to the notion of the three forms of *apoha*, especially as first developed by Śākyabuddhi (200bff; Inami, Jb2ff). For a detailed discussion and translation of the relevant passage, see Dunne (2004, pp. 131–144).



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> PV3.9cd: *jñānarūpatayā arthatve sāmānye cet prasajyate//*. Note that the parenthetical glosses in this and the following passage are based on Devendrabuddhi's comments (127a–b).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> PV3.10: tathaiṣṭatvād adoṣo, 'rtharūpatvena samānatā/sarvatra samarūpatvāt tadvyāvṛtti-samāśrayāt//.

With sufficient and intense repetition, he will have a clear experience—a perception—of that event itself. The adept follows the same type of process, and her efforts also result in a nonconceptual knowledge of a concept *qua* image. Hence, Dharmakīrti says:

Therefore, that to which one meditatively conditions oneself, whether it be real or unreal, will result in a clear, non-conceptual cognition when the meditation is perfected. [PV3.285]<sup>46</sup>

Now, as is evident from this verse, this approach leads to a problem: namely, justification. In effect, on this model repeated and intense familiarization with *any* concept can lead to this type of state. One cannot distinguish between states by virtue of the fact that one is an hallucination of an unreal object, while the other is a yogic perception of a real object. One cannot do so because, when considered as a universal distributed over discrete particulars, *all* concepts are equally unreal, whether the concept be the memory of one's beloved or the impermanence of all conditioned things. And when reduced to the mental image in terms of which it has been constructed, each concept is equally real, for in these terms they are no longer concepts; rather, they are mental particulars. And a deranged lover's mental particulars are just as real as an adept's.

The problem, then, is this: if the mental particulars of a madman and an adept are equally real, we must somehow be able to claim that the madman's concept is false or  $abh\bar{u}ta$ , while the adept's concept is true or  $bh\bar{u}ta$ . Otherwise, adepts would face the same fate as madmen, but the tradition would generally have us believe that the adepts' fate is nirvāṇa. Hence, the meditations of the adept must involve "true" ( $bh\bar{u}ta$ ) objects, whereas the madman's hallucinations are "false" ( $abh\bar{u}ta$ ). But if "true" and "false" perceptual objects cannot be distinguished at the level of phenomenological appearance, then how are they to be distinguished?

One tempting solution is to claim that a true concept is rooted in real things—that is, it is a case of an exclusion based upon a real thing ( $bh\bar{a}$ - $v\bar{a}sray\bar{a}poha$ )—whereas a false concept is not so rooted. <sup>47</sup> But this tempting solution is not satisfactory. One can easily conjure any number of predicates that (1) are formed through an exclusion based on real things ( $bh\bar{a}$ - $v\bar{a}sray\bar{a}poha$ ); (2) apply to all conditioned things; and yet (3) would presumably not be a candidate for a true ( $bh\bar{u}ta$ ) object of yogic perception. One example would be: "not located thirty meters to the left of where it is currently located." It is not difficult to multiply such concepts endlessly and more outlandishly. One might, for example, contemplate, "The magnificence of Ernst Prets's beard." Certainly, anyone who knows Dr. Prets would agree that his beard is magnificent, though not to rival his scholarship or hospitality. Still, it seems unlikely that the concept of his beard's magnificence, once realized

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> See PVSV ad PV1.191 (Gnoli, 95.19ff).



 $<sup>^{46}</sup>$  PV3.285: tasmād bhūtam abhūtaṃ vā yad vad evābhibhāvyate/bhāvanāpariniṣpattau tat sphuṭākalpadhīphalam//.

directly through arduous contemplative practice, would entail salvific effects commensurate with the Noble Truths.

What then is a true object? It is one that, when meditatively cultivated, leads to a reliable cognition; in other words, the meditative realization of it is a *pramāṇa*. Dharmakīrti says:

Among these, the meditatively induced perceptions that are trustworthy are considered to be reliable ( $pram\bar{a}na$ ), as is the case with [direct awareness of the Noble Truths'] realities that were previously examined. The remaining [cognitions of this type] are mistaken. [PV3.286]<sup>48</sup>

But why are such cognitions trustworthy (samvādi)? This points, of course, to the central criterion of reliability (prāmānya), 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.<sup>49</sup> Clearly, the teleological context of vogic perception is liberation (moksa) itself. Hence, if the direct experience of a concept is to be an instance of vogic 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 vogic 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.<sup>51</sup> Granted, the concepts in question are ultimately unreal, but it seems that, if one's goal is achieved, their irreality is irrelevant.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> This is a somewhat less dim interpretation than the one expressed by Hayes (1997), who poses the question, "Whose experience validates what for Dharmakīrti?" Hayes answers, "... the experience of the person whose interpretation of his experience is consistent with the basic doctrines of Buddhism validates exactly those doctrines. Thus, insofar as one's experiences confirm one's confidence in the Four Noble Truths, the doctrine of *anātman*, and the doctrines of *karman* and rebirth, one is, by Dharmakīrti's standard, coming closer to the truth." In this way, Hayes appears to be answering the problem raised here, namely, what constitutes the reliability of yogic perception? But if Hayes understands that reliability to be dependent in part on the cognition's efficacy in achieving a goal, it seems that for Hayes the goal must be simply the defense of Buddhist doctrine. While we may assume that such dogmatism informs Dharmakīrti's theory in some fashion, we cannot ignore the other goals that are for him more explicit. Thus, yogic perception's reliability might indeed be evaluated in terms of dogmatic aims, but it might better be measured against its efficacy in transforming the person. Here, the critical spirit of Hayes' interpretation could fruitfully resurface in the question, "What kind of person is one to become?"



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> PV3.286: tatra pramāṇaṃ saṃvādi yat prān nirṇītavastuvat/tad bhāvanājaṃ pratyakṣam iṣṭaṃ śeṣā upaplavāḥ//.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> For a more complete account, see Dunne (2004, pp. 252–318).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> This raises, of course, an odd question, namely, what would it look like for a concept such as "impermanence" to appear vividly in cognition? In other words, what does impermanence look like? These types of questions may point to a fundamental problem in Dharmakīrti's theory, namely, the way that phenomenal content becomes ever more dependent upon conceptual construction.

# **Appendix of Translations**

Yogic perception in the *Pramānavārttika* (PV3.281–287)<sup>52</sup>

The adepts' awareness has already been stated [in the context of presenting the Noble Truths in the previous chapter].<sup>53</sup> That awareness arises through meditative conditioning, and it appears clearly, [for in it] the conceptual web is rent. [PV3.281]

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. [PV3.282]

An [awareness] which is connected to concepts does not have the appearance of a clear object. Even in a dream it is recalled that something is remembered, and that which is remembered does not have that kind of [clear] object. [PV3.283]

Even though unreal, [the objects in meditation such as] ugliness [and meditation on] the earth-totality<sup>54</sup> are said to be clear and non-conceptual, [for] they are constructed through the power of meditative conditioning. [PV3.284]

Therefore, that to which one meditatively conditions oneself, whether it be real or unreal, will result in a clear, non-conceptual cognition when the meditation is perfected. [PV3.285]

Among these a meditatively induced perception that is trustworthy is considered to be reliable (*pramāṇa*), as is the case with [direct awareness of the Noble Truths'] realities that were previously examined. The remaining [cognitions of this type] are mistaken. [PV3.286]

A cognition of an [object] that apprehends a linguistic object (*artha*) is a conceptual cognition of that [object]. The actual nature [of any cognition *qua* mental event] is not a linguistic object; therefore, any [awareness of awareness itself] is direct [and hence non-conceptual]. [PV3.287]<sup>55</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Devendrabuddhi (212a) notes that this verse is commenting on PS1.7ab.



 $<sup>^{52}</sup>$  My interpretation of these verses relies on the comments of both Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Indicating that Dharmakīrti is following the order of topics in PS, Devendrabuddhi (210b) introduces this verse by quoting PS1.6cd.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> It is not clear what source Dharmakīrti would have used to describe the "earth-totality" mediation (*pṛthivīkṛtsna*), but the detailed description found in the *Visuddhimagga* (126ff) is probably not far from the practice that Dharmakīrti had in mind.

Yogic perception in the Pramānaviniścaya (PVin1.28-32)<sup>56</sup>

A trustworthy awareness that appears clearly by the force of meditation—similar to cases such as the fear [induced by something seen in a dream]—is a perception; it is nonconceptual. [PVin 1.28]

In the case of adepts as well there is a perception that is nonconceptual and that has a non-erroneous object; that perception is a reliable awareness (pramāṇa). It occurs in the case of adepts who, having apprehended objects (artha) through a cognition induced by learning, and having established those objects through reason and a cognition that comes of contemplation, then cultivate [a realization of] those objects. That reliable perception is, for example, the seeing of the Noble Truths, as I explained in the Pramāṇavārttika.

Those deranged by desire, grief or fear and those confused by dreams of thieves, and so on, see things, although unreal, as if they were in front of them. [PVin 1.29 = PV3.282]

[It is the case that they are seeing such things as if those things were actually present] because they exhibit excited activity in accord with the way that they are confused, and because when they have the attitude that they are knowing something remote, they do not act that way. [PVin 1.30]

Therefore, when one's meditation reaches its culmination, one will have a clear non-conceptual cognition of that which one meditatively cultivates, whether it be real or unreal. [PVin  $1.31 \approx PV3.285$ ]

In this way it is asserted that, even though [meditative cognitions] such as the contemplation of ugliness and the earth element (*pṛthivīkṛtsna*) have unreal objects, they nevertheless appear clearly and are non-conceptual; [such cognitions] are produced through the force of meditation.

"Let us grant that [such a cognition] has a clear appearance due to the force of meditation. Still, how is it nonconceptual?"

Because:

[A cognition] connected to conceptuality [necessarily] does not have a clearly appearing object. [PVin 1.32ab]

This is so because, even in the case of a distorted mental state, any cognition that is mixed with language (saṃṣṛṣṭābhilāpa) is one in which the vividness of the object is diminished (pratyastamitārthavaiśadya). That is,

Even in a dream it is recalled that something is remembered, and that which is remembered does not have that kind of [clear] object. [PVin 1.32cd]

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> I have benefited tremendously from a highly reliable but as yet unpublished edition and reconstruction of the Sanskrit that was kindly provided by Prof. Ernst Steinkellner. My translation draws on the comments of Dharmottara in his *Pramānaviniścayatīkā*.



Even those confused by sleep have conceptual cognitions whose images are memories have what was [previously] experienced. And those cognitions are not remembered to appear like that [i.e., clearly]. Therefore, neither a confused [cognition] nor any other makes a concept appear clearly. A cognition that appears clearly is only nonconceptual.

Yogic perception in Nyāyabindu (1.11)

"And the adept's cognition that arises from the culmination of the development of meditation ( $bh\bar{a}van\bar{a}$ ) on a true object [is also a form of perception]." <sup>57</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> (NB 1.11; Malvania edition, 67): bhūtārthabhāvanāprakarṣaparyantajaṃ yogijñānaṃ ceti//.



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