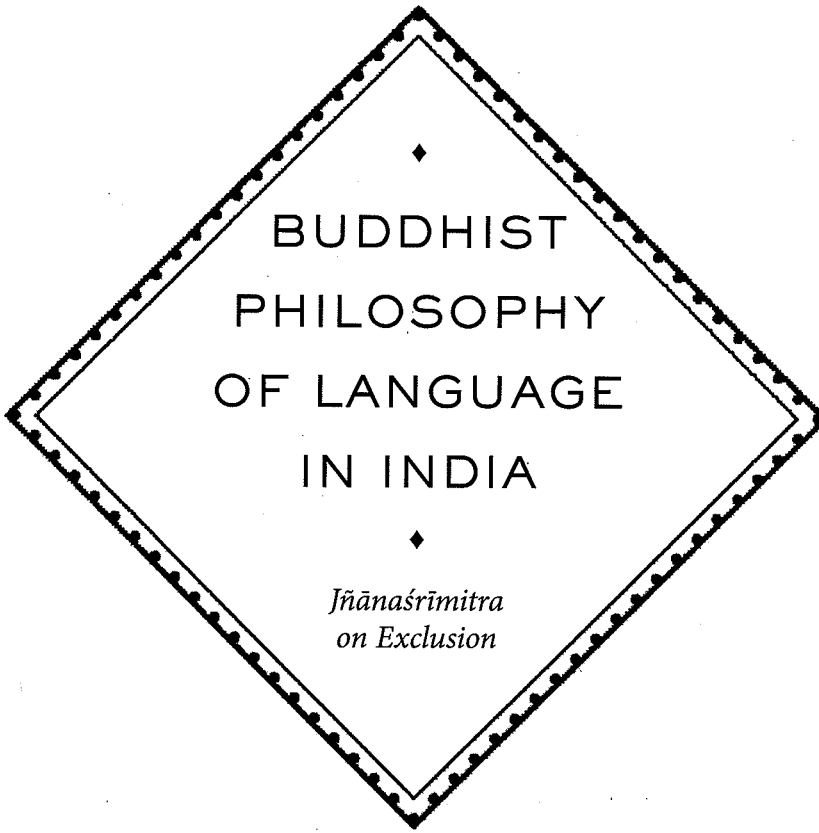

BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Jñānaśrīmitra on Exclusion

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presence in that locus of an inferential reason (*hetu*) invariably associated with the property to be proven. In the standard example of inference, when one sees smoke rising up from a particular mountain and infers the presence of fire there, the smoke is the inferential reason; the fire is what is to be proven; and the mountain is the locus. A necessary condition for a proper inference is a relation of pervasion (*vyāpti*) between the inferential reason and the property to be proven, such that whenever the inferential reason is present in a locus, the property to be proven also is present in that locus; for example, wherever there is smoke, there is fire. Dignāga identifies three conditions that must be satisfied by any proper inferential reason: (1) It must be present in the locus in question (e.g., the mountain); (2) it must be present in at least one similar case (*sapakṣa*)—that is, a locus other than the locus in question in which what is to be proven is also known to be present, for example, a wood-burning stove in a kitchen; and (3) it must not be present in any dissimilar case (*vipakṣa*), for example, a lake.[62] Putative inferential reasons that fail to satisfy any of these conditions are said to be pseudoinferential reasons (*hetu-ābhāsa*). These pseudoinferential reasons are generally divided into three categories: (1) those that are unestablished (*asiddha*), because either the locus in which they are to be established does not exist or the pseudoinferential reason is not present there; (2) those that are obstructed (*viruddha*) in that they are present in dissimilar cases but not in similar cases; and (3) those that are inconclusive (*anaikāntika*), because either the property to be proven is present in both similar and dissimilar cases or it is present in neither similar nor dissimilar cases.[63] Given this framework, most philosophical arguments in the later Buddhist epistemological tradition are designed to demonstrate that one's reasons satisfy these conditions and are therefore not pseudoinferential and, furthermore, that those of one's opponents fail to satisfy one or more of these conditions and hence are pseudoinferential.

3. DHARMOTTARA'S EPISTEMOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

The eighth-century Buddhist epistemologist Dharmottara proved to be one of Dharmakīrti's most influential interpreters and transformed the way in which Dharmakīrti's work was understood by most Sanskrit philosophers, both inside and outside the Buddhist epistemological

tradition. Understanding his innovations is therefore essential for making sense of Jñānaśrīmitra's work. While Dharmottara presents himself as a faithful follower and interpreter of Dharmakīrti's works, his account of the two sources of knowledge, and of validity in general, is strikingly different from Dharmakīrti's.[64] Dharmottara's understanding of the two modes of valid awareness is succinctly presented in his commentary on Dharmakīrti's *Drop of Reason* (*Nyāyabindu*) 1.12, in which Dharmakīrti describes the object of perception as follows: "The object of this [i.e., perception] is a particular (*svalakṣaṇa*)." Dharmottara comments:

> The *object* of this . . . perception—that is, the thing that is cognized—is a particular. A *particular* (*sva-lakṣaṇa*) is a property (*lakṣaṇa*)—that is, a character—which is its own (*sva*)—that is, unique. For a thing has both a unique character and a general character. And of these, that which is unique is what is *grasped* (*grāhya*) by perception. For the object of valid awareness is twofold: a grasped object whose image is produced and an attainable object that one determines. For the grasped object is one thing and the determined is something else, since for perception, what is grasped is a single moment, but what is determined—through a judgment that arises by the force of perception—can only be a continuum. And only a continuum can be the attainable object of perception because a moment cannot be attained.[65]
>
> The same is true for inference: it *grasps* a nonentity because even though its own appearance is not a [real] object, there is activity through the determination of an object.[66] But since this imposed thing [i.e., the nonentity], which is grasped, is *determined to be a particular* in inference, a determined particular is the object of activity. But what is grasped is a nonentity. So here, showing the *grasped object* of this mode of valid awareness, he says that a particular is the object of perception.[67]

An episode of valid awareness, whether perceptual or inferential, is, for Dharmottara, not a single event but a process made up of two stages. In the first stage, an object is grasped; that is, its image is directly presented to awareness. In the second stage, we determine a second and distinct object that can be attained, that is, an object on which we may act.

It is clear that what Dharmottara says about inference in this passage is based on Dharmakīrti's account, as explained previously. Both Dharmakīrti and Dharmottara consider what is directly presented to inferential awareness to be not a real particular on which we can act but a generalized mental image.[68] Through determination, we treat this generalized mental image as if it were a real particular. What is most striking about this passage, however, is that Dharmottara, unlike Dharmakīrti, recognizes a parallel process at work in perception. For Dharmottara, the gap between the object that is presented to awareness and the object that we act on is equally present in both perception and inference. This is a dramatic departure from both Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, for whom the gap between the presented object and the object acted on is just what distinguishes inference from perception.

In his discussion of perception, Dharmottara raises a problem having to do with Dharmakīrti's acceptance of the widely held Buddhist theory that all existing things are momentary. According to Dharmakīrti, real, pragmatically effective objects cannot exist for more than an instant.[69] What appear to us as temporally extended objects are, in fact, continua of discrete but causally related moments. These continua are not, however, "ultimately real" (*paramārtha-sat*). Rather, they are conceptually constructed. Only the individual moments are pragmatically effective and therefore ultimately real. And herein lies the problem for Dharmottara: What directly appears to us in perception must be a real particular—that is, a single moment—but this is not the object toward which our activity is directed. For example, suppose that we see water in front of us. If we are thirsty, we will walk toward it. Assuming that it is not a mirage, we will eventually be able to take a drink and satisfy our thirst. Yet the water that we seek to obtain cannot be the single moment that initially appeared to us, since our action presupposes that the water will remain there long enough for us to reach and drink it. Thus, the object toward which we direct our activity is not a single moment but a continuum: the determined object (*adhyavaseya-viṣaya*) of perception. While the water that ultimately satisfies our thirst *is* a pragmatically effective particular, it is not *the same* pragmatically effective particular that appeared to us in our initial moment of perception. According to Dharmottara, then, in perception, just as in inference, there is a disjunction between the object that initially appears to us and the object toward which we direct our activity (and, similarly, the object that we ultimately

obtain). For him, the process by which this gap is bridged is exactly the same as the process that Dharmakīrti saw at work only in inference, namely, determination.[70]

For Dharmottara, then, there is a close parallelism between the processes of perception and inference. In both cases, an object is "grasped," that is, directly presented to our awareness. But in both cases, too, this object is not something that we can either act on or even intend to act on. "Grasping" can lead to successful activity (which is the test of validity) only when, on the basis of this grasping, we construct a second object toward which we can direct our activity. In perception, this second object is a continuum, while in inference, it is a (determined) particular. According to Dharmottara, it is precisely through determination that we construct this second object: In both perception and inference, the object that appears to us is taken to be something other than what it is.

Thus, although his work builds on and attempts to harmonize Dharma-kīrti's epistemological and ontological principles, Dharmottara offers an account of validity that seems to be at odds with that of both Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. They draw a radical distinction between perception and inferential/verbal awareness, while Dharmottara sees them as essentially the same. Correspondingly, Dharmottara stresses the essential role of conceptual awareness in the perceptual process, while his predecessors dismissed it as being redundant and having a fictitious object.

Because Dharmottara's account of valid awareness takes the processes of perception and inference to be nearly identical, the question naturally arises as to how they are, nevertheless, to be differentiated. For Dharmakīrti, there is a clear difference in the kinds of mental processes that constitute perception and those that constitute inference. In inference, but not in perception, determination (*adhyavasāya*) is necessary to bridge the gap between the conceptually constructed object that we infer and the real, pragmatically effective particular that we subsequently act on. For Dharmottara, however, the difference does not pertain to mental processes (which are the same for both) but to the ontological status of the objects on which they bear.

Both perception and inference consist of two stages: One first grasps an object that is directly present to one's awareness and then determines a second object toward which one acts. In perception, what one grasps is an ultimately real, external particular, and what one determines is a continuum, which is conceptually constructed and therefore not

ultimately real.[71] In inference, however, what is grasped is not a real particular but a "nonentity" (*avastu*). The determined object that one acts on is what Dharmottara calls a "determined particular" (*adhyavasitam svalakṣaṇam*). At first glance, this appears to be a simple inversion of the two objects of perception: The grasped object of one becomes the determined object of the other, and vice versa. Yet the inversion is not quite so simple as it appears from the passage just quoted. In his commentary on the *Nyāyabindu*, Dharmottara does not discuss further the nature of this "determined particular," but he does describe it in more detail in his own *Monograph on Exclusion* (*Apohaprakaraṇa*).[72] There, in explaining the objects of verbal (and by implication, inferential) awareness, Dharmottara remarks, "That which is grasped and that which is determined are *both* exclusions-of-what-is-other (*anyavyāvṛtti*) and not real things (*vastu*)."[73] Thus, the "particular" that we determine in inferential and verbal awareness is not a *real* particular at all, but an exclusion, which is nothing other than a conceptual construct. As the tenth-century Nyāya philosopher Vācaspatimiśra says in explaining Dharmottara's position: "Even the particular that is being determined is not ultimately real. Instead, it too is conceptually constructed."[74] So, for Dharmottara, of all the objects of perception and inference, only the grasped object of perception is ultimately real. What really differentiates perception from inference is that perception begins with the appearance of a real particular in awareness, while inference has no real particular as its object, through either grasping or determination.

Dharmottara thus introduces a radical change to Dharmakīrti's system through his four-object model and the parallel role that he assigns to determination in both perception and inference, even though Dharmottara presents himself, and is presented by his commentators, as if he is merely explaining what Dharmakīrti said. Yet despite its radically innovative character, Dharmottara's new picture of valid awareness and its objects quickly became the standard account for Buddhist epistemologists, including Jñānaśrīmitra.

4. JÑĀNAŚRĪMITRA'S REWORKING OF THE THEORY OF EXCLUSION

Jñānaśrīmitra's *Monograph on Exclusion* (*Apohaprakaraṇa*) is programmatically concerned with elaborating and defending the theory of