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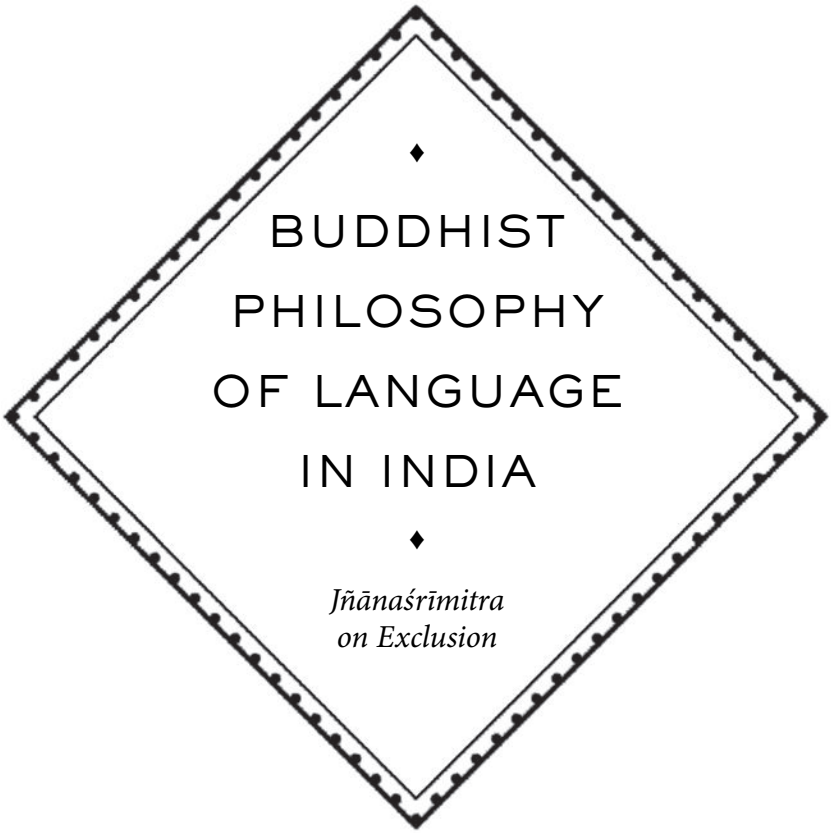

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language works and to what words refer. The debate between them centers on whether words refer only to "universals" (*jāti*), as the Mīmāṃsakas claim, or to "particulars" (*vyakti*) as well, as the Naiyāyikas maintain. While the Mīmāṃsā position seems to have remained quite consistent over time, the Nyāya position shifted significantly with the (tenth-century) philosopher Vācaspatimiśra (and his teacher, Trilocana). The early Naiyāyikas maintained that the same word can refer, in different contexts, to a universal, a particular, or a characteristic structure (*ākṛti*).[33] Vācaspati's position, however, is that words, at least typically, refer to an individual qualified by a universal (*jātimat-vyakti*).[34] This position became the standard Nyāya position after Vācaspati and, as we shall see, was the latter position to which Jñānaśrīmitra responded.[35]

2. THE BUDDHIST EPISTEMOLOGICAL TRADITION: DIGNĀGA AND DHARMAKĪRTI

It is against the broader background of epistemological, ontological, and linguistic debate in early Sanskrit philosophy that we must view Dignāga's intellectual contributions. Dignāga's most important and radical philosophical move was to present questions of epistemology and ontology as mutually constitutive. For him, each source of knowledge has its own distinct kind of object, and there are only two sources of knowledge: perception and inference. Dignāga defined perceptual awareness as "that which is free from conceptualization (*kalpanā*)."[36] According to him, perception apprehends only bare particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*), without associating them with any label, concept, or class. That is, when we *perceive* a cow, we do not perceive it as a "cow," "brown," "four-legged," or anything of that sort.[37] Any awareness that associates an object with a label, concept, or class is conceptual and, by definition, is excluded from the domain of perception. Even though we typically think of ourselves as perceiving a "cow," our awareness of it as a cow or as possessing specific properties such as "being brown" is "pseudoperceptual" (*pratyakṣābha*), since it depends on conceptualization, the mental construction of elements that are not directly presented to us in visual awareness.[38]

These elements—concepts, labels, and class categories—are artifacts of our own mental processes and do not directly correspond to any mind-independent "objects." Dignāga therefore considered our awareness

of such things as "cows" and "being brown" as being of "conventionally existent" (*samvṛtisat*) things.[39] Our awarenesses of such mentally constructed objects are sometimes accepted as correct, whereas other such awareness events are said to be a form of "error" (*bhrānti*).[40] Both are alike, however, in that they do not match up with any unconstructed object—that is, a unique particular—and thus are excluded from the domain of perception. As Dignāga says,

> Among these things, an erroneous awareness is pseudoperceptual because it operates by conceptually constructing things such as water in the case of a mirage. Awareness of conventionally existing objects is pseudoperceptual because it operates by conceptually constructing their forms by superimposing them onto other objects. Inference and the awareness that results from it are pseudoperceptual because they operate by conceptually constructing that which was previously experienced.[41]

For Dignāga, inference, unlike perception, has conceptually constructed objects but is nevertheless considered to be valid because it enables us to act successfully. For example, when we see smoke rising above a mountain, we may infer that there is fire on that mountain. The fire that we infer, however, is not an actual fire but a conceptual construction. Having previously noticed that wherever there is smoke, there is fire, we conceptually construct the fire that we infer from the smoke that we in fact see. Thus for Dignāga, there is always a gap between the conceptually constructed object that appears to us in inferential awareness and the real particular(s) that it leads us to act on. The conceptually constructed object of our inferential awareness is not any particular fire but, rather, one that is generic. Dignāga refers to such "generic" entities as universals (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*).[42] Any awareness that is not of a particular fire must be of a constructed universal and, if valid, must be inferential.

For Dignāga, then, each of the two accredited sources of knowledge has its own distinct sort of object. Perception has only unique, unconstructed particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*) as its object, while inference has only constructed universals (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*). The position that each source of knowledge has its own distinct sort of object, which appears to be original to Dignāga, came to be known as the thesis of the "differential application of the sources of knowledge" (*pramāṇa-vyavasthā*).

This contrasts with the more widely held thesis of the "convergence of the sources of knowledge" (*pramāṇa-samplava*). Naiyāyikas[43] and Mīmāṃsakas, among others, believe that it is possible to have valid awareness of one and the same object through multiple sources of knowledge. For example, one may hear from a reliable person that there is a fire on a mountain and conclude on the basis of verbal testimony that this is the case; if one approaches and sees smoke rising up from the mountain, one can conclude inferentially that the fire is there; and arriving on the top of the mountain, one can perceive it directly.[44] But according to Dignāga, it is impossible for the sources of knowledge to converge in this way because there is nothing that can be the object of both perception and inference. What we perceive when we see fire is a bare particular, not associated with any concepts, labels, or universals such as "fire." But what we infer from seeing smoke rising up from a mountain (or from hearing a reliable person tell us there is fire there)[45] is an altogether different kind of thing. It is a generic "fire" that is conceptually constructed on the basis of previously experienced particulars.

It is as a way of explaining the basis for the proper application of labels, concepts, and class categories that Dignāga introduces the theory of exclusion (*apoha*). As we already have seen, for him the only real objects are unique particulars. Labels, concepts, and class categories, which pick out classes of such objects, are for him always conceptually constructed. This means that members of a "class" do not share any single, real, element. The only thing that they do have in common is a shared exclusion. That is, despite being utterly distinct from one another, they are alike in being excluded from the domain of things outside this class. A generic concept such as "cow," for example, can refer to particular cows, not because it designates some real property that all cows share, but because by excluding all non-cows, it negatively defines a domain whose members can be reliably picked out by the concept "cow." Some of Dignāga's opponents saw this as viciously circular: you could know what cows are only by first knowing what non-cows are, but to do this you must already know what cows are.[46] Dignāga's successors responded to this charge in a variety of ways, as we shall see.

From Dignāga's time onward, the theory of exclusion became one of the central pillars of Buddhist epistemology. It formed the centerpiece of its argument against the reality of universals (as upheld by, e.g., the Naiyāyikas and Mīmāṃsakas) and its account of conceptual

content. But this theory also created many exegetical and philosophical problems, and there was significant intra-Buddhist controversy over its nature and significance to the Buddhist account of validity.

Curiously, Dignāga does not appear to have been particularly interested in providing a general account of the conditions for validity or of the sense in which awareness events such as inference—which do not have a "real" object—can still be valid. But his successor, Dharmakīrti, building on his system, sought to construct just such an account. Dharmakīrti presented two conditions for validity, which he regarded as applicable to both (nonconceptual) perceptual awareness events and (conceptual) inferential/verbal ones. An awareness event that is "non-misleading" (*avisamvādi*) and "reveals an object not previously known" (*ajñātārthaprakāśa*) is, by definition, valid.[47]

Dharmakīrti explained "nonmisleading" in terms of "pragmatic effectiveness" (*arthakrīyā*).[48] A state of awareness is "valid" (*pramāṇa*) only if any activity that we undertake on the basis of it could, in principle, lead us to results consistent with the expectations we form on the basis of it.[49] This does not mean that our expectations will be met in every case, but only that the objects toward which we are prompted to act will function within the parameters of these expectations. For example, suppose that upon seeing a pool of water in the distance, we walk toward it with the expectation of quenching our thirst. In such a case, owing to some obstacle, we may not succeed in reaching the pool. This lack of success does not invalidate our awareness of the pool. However, if we reach the place where we saw the pool of water and discover only sand, our initial awareness of "the pool" (which we now conclude to have been a mirage) was actually invalid. Valid states of awareness thus must *direct us toward* objects capable of meeting our expectations, that is, toward objects capable of being pragmatically effective, regardless of whether our expectations are actually met in any specific case. For Dharmakīrti, since only particulars are capable of being pragmatically effective, it follows that in order to be valid, states of awareness must direct us toward particulars.[50]

In order to satisfy the condition of being non-misleading, inferential/verbal awareness, too, must direct us toward particulars that can produce pragmatic effects that conform to our expectations. For example, when we see smoke rising over a mountain and infer the presence of fire there, the "fire" presented to us in this state of awareness is not a

real, pragmatically effective, particular fire but a conceptual construct. But this conceptually constructed fire leads us to expect that if we go to that mountain, we will see a fire that we can actually use, for example, to cook. Because it is the real particular fire and not the conceptually constructed one that we can use to cook, the action that we undertake based on our awareness of the conceptually constructed fire can lead to effects that conform to the expectations that we form on the basis of it. As a result, this conceptual awareness is considered to be "non-misleading."

The second condition of validity—that a valid awareness event must reveal an object that was not previously known—was introduced in order to support Dignāga's claim that when we perceive an object, only our initial, nonconceptual awareness of it is valid. As we stated earlier, for Dignāga, all awareness events that associate perceived objects with concepts, classes, and labels are conceptual and therefore excluded from the realm of perception. Dharmakīrti accounts for this through his second condition. When we see an object, we initially have a nonconceptual awareness of it, which is typically followed by a conceptual awareness in which the object that we have perceived is associated with one or more generic labels or classes. But the conceptual awareness events that are formed on the basis of the initial nonconceptual awareness—for example, the (conceptual) awareness of a cow as "a cow"—are invalid not because they are misleading but because they are redundant.

The conceptual awareness of a cow as "a cow" attaches a label to the initially perceived object but, according to Dharmakīrti, does not present to us any additional feature of the object, which we have already perceived in its entirety. Inferential awareness, in contrast, has as its object something that we have not perceived at all, for example, the fire on the mountain that we infer but do not see. Even though inferential awareness is conceptual, in that it attaches the label "fire" to its putative object, it is nevertheless considered to be valid, since the object that it conceptually presents to us is a new object; that is, one that was not apprehended by a prior awareness. The process through which we move from conceptually constructed objects—which are not pragmatically effective—to real, pragmatically effective particulars is what Dharmakīrti calls "determination" (*adhyavasāya*). We have shown elsewhere that for Dharmakīrti, the process of "determination" occurs only in inferential/verbal awareness and not in perception.[51] It is determination that bridges the gap between the conceptually

constructed objects that appear to us in inferential/verbal awareness and the real particulars that it leads us to act on.[52] In perception, the real, unconceptualized particulars themselves appear to us directly, and therefore there is no gap to be bridged.

As we will see, determination comes to play a crucial role in later Buddhist epistemology and particularly in the work of Jñānaśrīmitra. Later Buddhist epistemologists broke with Dharmakīrti by identifying in perception an analogous gap between the objects that appear to us and the objects that we act on. As a result, they further expanded the scope of determination, making it a necessary feature of all valid awareness.

Objects and Their Status

As is clear from the preceding discussion, Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's views on the sources of knowledge rely on a distinction between "real" particular objects and "constructed" universal objects. Yet the nature and ontological status of these particulars has been the subject of great debate among contemporary interpreters of their thought. They generally acknowledge that both Dignāga and Dharmakīrti sometimes argue from a "realist" position—that there are mind-independent objects—and sometimes from an "idealist" one—that there are no mind-independent objects.[53] Contemporary interpreters do not, however, agree on their reasons for doing so. They generally agree that both Dignāga and Dharmakīrti are in fact idealists and that the "realist" positions that they adopt in various places in their works are simply instrumental; they are positions strategically adopted to help people overcome certain false views or to lead them through a series of successively superior views so as to arrive at their own idealist position.[54]

Our own understanding of Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's reasons for arguing as they do is rather different. Although some of Dignāga's earlier philosophical works, particularly his *Investigation of the Basis of Awareness* (*Ālambanaparīkṣā*), make clear that he himself held idealist views, in his magnum opus, the *Compendium on the Sources of Knowledge* (*Pramāṇasamuccaya*), he largely avoids the question of the reality of mind-independent objects and, whenever necessary, presents parallel arguments that support both the realist and idealist positions.[55] In his *Compendium* there is no indication that he wants to support an

idealist position at the expense of the realist one. Rather, he seems to be trying to create an epistemological framework that can be shared by both realist and idealist Buddhists.[56] Whenever possible, he presents arguments that are compatible with both positions and, when necessary, provides parallel arguments in support of each, without indicating any preference for one set of arguments over the other. The same strategy is evident in Dharmakīrti's major works, where the majority of his arguments are such that they could be accepted by either realist or idealist Buddhist philosophers. And on the rare occasions where he treats the two positions separately, Dharmakīrti provides parallel arguments in support of each.[57] It is worth noting that among the later authors in the Dharmakīrtian text tradition, there were both realists and idealists.[58]

The Elements of Inferential Reasoning

Because the Buddhist epistemologists maintain that perception and inference are the only two sources of knowledge and that the first of these, perception, bears upon only unconceptualized particulars, it should be clear that in general, philosophical claims can be defended only inferentially. Consequently, their approach in constructing, defending, and evaluating philosophical arguments is based on their theory of inference.

In early Indian philosophy, the theory of inference and the principles for evaluating arguments in the context of a debate were treated as separate topics, both textually and conceptually.[59] Dignāga incorporated certain elements of debate theory in his discussion of inference.[60] In his *Vādanyāya*, Dharmakīrti, building on Dignāga's work, effectively collapses the theory of debate into the theory of inference. He shows that most, if not all, of the grounds for defeat in a debate (*nigrahasthāna*) recognized by his predecessors can be reduced to defects in the inferential reason (*hetvābhāsa*) given in a particular argument. In addition, he excludes from the realm of legitimate argument those modes of sophistic or specious argumentation recognized by his predecessors as legitimate techniques for securing victory in debate.[61] The principal method for analyzing and evaluating philosophical arguments in post-Dharmakīrtian Buddhist epistemology relies on the conceptual vocabulary of inferential reasoning.

In an inference, one seeks to establish the presence of a property to be proven (*sādhya*) in a particular locus (*pakṣa*), on the basis of the

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

exclusion, but in fact, it incorporates Jñānaśrīmitra's views on almost all the topics just discussed. As Jñānaśrīmitra understands it, it is impossible to treat the topic of exclusion in isolation from broader questions of epistemology and ontology.

Even though Jñānaśrīmitra is often portrayed as a rival of Dharmottara, and he does criticize him on several key points,[75] his basic understanding of epistemology is closely modeled on Dharmottara's. Like Dharmottara, Jñānaśrīmitra repeatedly claims that each mode of valid awareness must have two objects, one grasped and one determined. In his *Analysis of Pervasion* (*Vyāpticarcā*), in a debate over the nature of the object of perception, Jñānaśrīmitra says:

> Now for us, both modes of valid awareness have both objects [a universal and a particular], because of the division between what is grasped and what is determined. For that which appears in an episode of awareness is what is grasped, but that [object] with respect to which this [episode of awareness] operates is what is determined. Now for perception, what is grasped is a particular and what is determined is a universal. But for inference, it is the reverse.[76]

Here, Jñānaśrīmitra basically recapitulates Dharmottara's model and differs in only one significant respect: He makes it explicit that the continuum that Dharmottara identified as the determined object of perception must be regarded as a universal, since it is not a real particular.[77]

The most significant difference between Jnānaśrīmitra and Dharmottara, however, is their attitude toward the ontological status of these objects. For Dharmottara, the grasped object of perception is a real external particular, while in inference there is neither the grasping nor the determining of such a particular. For Jnānaśrīmitra, however, there are no external, mind-independent particulars. Throughout his works, he consistently maintains that no mind-independent particulars can exist and that, as he says, "this entire triple-world is established to be nothing but consciousness (*vijñaptimātra*)."[78] Thus Jñānaśrīmitra cannot, like Dharmottara, appeal to the distinction between real and conceptually constructed objects in order to distinguish perception from inference.

For Dharmottara, the difference between the two modes of valid awareness hinges on an asymmetrical mapping of two different sets

of paired concepts. In the passages discussed earlier, Dharmottara classifies the objects of awareness as those that are grasped (*grāhya*) and those that are determined, and also as those that are free from conceptual construction (*nirvikalpaka*)—and therefore real (*vastu/paramārtha*)—and those that are conceptually constructed (*kalpita/anyavyāvṇtta/āropita*)—and therefore unreal (*anartha/avastu*).[79] While all determined objects are, for him, conceptually constructed, not all grasped objects are real: The grasped object of inference is a conceptual construct, and unlike the grasped object of perception, it is not a real thing (it is a nonentity, *avastu*). Jñānaśrimitra, however, alters this conceptual map by indexing these two pairs of concepts to each other. For him, all grasped objects are free from conceptual construction, and all determined objects are the products of conceptual construction. In fact, Jñānaśrīmitra regards determination and conceptual construction as essentially the same: "The terms 'conceptualization' and 'determination' refer to the same thing. It's just that [the use of] the word 'conceptualization' is occasioned by connection with words and the like, while 'determination' is occasioned by suitability for activity, even with respect to [an object] that is not grasped [by awareness]."[80]

Thus, whatever is determined is conceptual and whatever is not determined is nonconceptual. It follows from this that the grasped (and, by definition, not determined) object of inference is, contrary to Dharmottara's claim, nonconceptual. For Jñānaśrīmitra, then, the objects of awareness fall into two neatly defined and mutually exclusive categories: those that are grasped and therefore free from conceptualization, and those that are determined and therefore conceptualized. Dharmottara's two ways of classifying objects are thus reduced to one.

This position seems to put Jñānaśrīmitra at odds with his predecessors in the Buddhist epistemological tradition. Beginning with Dignāga, this tradition relied on an ontological distinction between real particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*) and constructed universals (*sāmānya*), which were, respectively, taken to be the objects of perception and inference. Jñānaśrīmitra's reconceptualization of the objects of valid awareness effectively obliterates, however, any ontological distinction between them by relativizing the concepts of "particular" (*svalakṣaṇa*) and "universal" (*sāmānya*). For Jñānaśrīmitra, the objects that appear to us are neither particulars nor universals in and of themselves. It is only in relation to subsequent acts of determination that they can be properly clas-

sified as one or the other.[81] In his explanation of the nature of universals, for example, he says:

> From the word "cow" in the sentence "There are cows grazing on the far bank of the river," dewlap, horn, tail, and the like appear—accompanied by the form of the letters [which make up the word "cow"]—in effect, "lumped together" because of inattention to differences between things belonging to the same class. But that [conglomeration of dewlap, horn, etc.] is not itself a universal.[82]

Again, with reference to the "universal" fire, he says:

> For one and the same bare image—blazing and radiant—although it is utterly distinct from every particular when it is being made one with a particular [through conceptualization], is called a "universal." But that [image] is not itself a universal belonging to those particulars because it [the bare image] recurs elsewhere as a mental image.[83]

What we call a "universal" is for Jñānaśrīmitra simply an image that appears in awareness (just as, e.g., the image "blue" appears). Our calling it a "universal" is occasioned not by its ontological status but by the fact that we subsequently relate it to one or more putative particulars, whether real or unreal. But this subsequent relating of the image to particulars need not occur at all. When we reflect on this mental image as a mental image, for example, we are perceiving it. And relative to this act of perception, the image is not a universal but a particular (in that it is a grasped object of perception). When we reflect on a mental image, becoming aware of it *as* a mental image, we do so by assigning it to a class. For example, when we think, "The mental image 'fire' just appeared in my awareness," we are taking the unique, momentary image that appeared to us to be a member of the class "mental images of fire." This is exactly like the more familiar example of perception in which a cow appears in awareness and is subsequently conceptualized as "a cow." From this it follows that the very same image could become either a particular or a universal, depending on the kind of mental operation that follows it. If we relate the image to one or more putative particulars, it becomes a universal in relation to those particulars. But if by

reflecting on the image as an image, we relate it to a class of which it is a member, it then becomes a particular in relation to that class.

Thus in claiming that "for perception, what is grasped is a particular and what is determined is a universal, but for inference, it is the reverse," Jñānaśrīmitra is making a statement that is, for him, true by definition. The image that appears in the first stage of the perceptual process is not a "grasped object of perception" because it is a particular. On the contrary, it is a "particular" because it is the grasped object of perception. In the same way, the image that appears in the first stage of the inferential process is not a "grasped object of inference" because it is a universal but is a "universal" because it is the grasped object of inference. Images are labeled as "particulars" or "universals" only in relation to a subsequent determination. Thus, for Jñānaśrīmitra, "particular" and "universal" are not really ontological categories at all. Instead, he defines them contextually. Images are categorized as either one or the other, depending on the role that they are made to play by subsequent acts of conceptualization.

Relativization of Internal and External

A similar relativization of the basic conceptual categories in the Buddhist epistemological tradition can be seen in Jñānaśrīmitra's treatment of "internal" and "external." For him, "internal" and "external" are not ontological categories but are defined relative to the activity (*pravṛtti*) of an agent.

An important element in Jñānaśrīmitra's discussion of activity is the familiar threefold division into bodily, verbal, and mental.[84] According to him, activity is not limited to physical activity involving putatively extra-mental objects but also includes verbal and mental activity that can be directed toward mental images, as well as toward putatively extra-mental objects. Even though mental images cannot be acted on physically, they can be the objects of verbal and mental activity, since we do talk and think about them. And in Jñānaśrīmitra's account, insofar as such mental objects become the objects of activity, they are "external."

That this is Jñānaśrīmitra's position is evident from his discussion of semantic value, that is, what it is that we are talking about when we use language. In his discussion, Jñānaśrīmitra makes use of the familiar distinction between what is "ultimately true" (descriptions that can

withstand the most rigorous philosophical analysis) and what is "conventionally true" (convenient fictions that can help us function successfully in the world but cannot withstand the most rigorous philosophical analysis).[85] Jñānaśrīmitra argues that ultimately, given the most rigorous philosophical analysis, our statements cannot refer to anything at all. He argues further that even conventionally, when we make positive or negative statements, what we are affirming or denying the existence of is always some *external* thing. As he says,

> There is no way of *really* affirming either the mental image or the external object. Conventionally [there is affirmation] only of externals, whereas even conventionally there is no [affirmation] of the mental image.[86]
>
> For this mental image, which is indubitable and an object of reflexive awareness, cannot be what is affirmed or denied by means of words, and so forth, since this would be useless [in the case of affirmation] and impossible [in the case of denial].[87]

When one affirms the existence of a tree by saying "There is a tree here" or denies it by saying "There is no tree here," the word "tree" cannot be taken to refer to the mental image "tree." Since the mental image "tree" is present whenever one hears and understands the word "tree," it would be redundant, and therefore useless, to affirm its existence. Conversely, it would be contradictory, and therefore impossible, to deny its existence. Jñānaśrīmitra continues: "Neither can the external object, which does not appear in conceptual awareness, [really be affirmed or denied]. Since this object is not cognized, what could be affirmed or denied?"[88]

Since the external object itself does not appear in awareness (given that what appears in awareness is only a mental image), it too cannot *really* be affirmed or denied. After all, one cannot affirm or deny what one is not even aware of. Jñānaśrīmitra now concludes:

> Therefore, just as, on the basis of determination, an external tree is conditionally adopted [*vyavasthāpita*] as what is denoted by the word "tree," in the same way, it is only on the basis of determination that one talks about affirming or denying [any] external object. *Even when due to certain circumstances, one examines*

> *a mental image, having brought it to mind by means of another conceptualization, then too there is affirmation and denial of what is external to this conceptualization.*[89]

Jñānaśrīmitra's position is that even conventionally, one can affirm or deny only *external* objects, although one can affirm or deny mental images, as Jñānaśrīmitra clearly recognizes. Thus, mental images, insofar as we affirm or deny them, must be, for Jñānaśrīmitra, external. The application of the label "external," like the labels "particular" and "universal," does not depend on an object's ontological status but on the way that our awareness relates us to it. Objects are considered to be external if, and only if, they are determined, that is, not directly presented by the awareness that puts us in touch with them.

Conditionally Adopted Positions

In the passage just quoted, Jñānaśrīmitra uses the concept of a "conditionally adopted position" (*vyavasthā*), which proves to be central to his own account of what it is that words do (and do not) refer to and, as we shall see, to his understanding of traditional Buddhist claims about exclusion (*apoha*). What follows is an analysis of Jñānaśrīmitra's use of this concept, specifically in relation to his discussion of exclusion.

Jñānaśrīmitra begins his *Monograph on Exclusion* with a powerful attack on the generally accepted view of the Buddhist epistemologists, that words do not refer to real objects but express the exclusion of what is other (*anyāpoha)*. Speaking in the voice of a hypothetical opponent, Jñānaśrīmitra raises two objections to the traditional understanding of exclusion. The first is phenomenological: The claim that what we understand from words, or from an inference, is merely the exclusion of others, namely, a type of negation, is directly contradicted by our experience. In both language and inference we become aware of what seem to us to be positive entities (*vidhi*), and it is argued that this would not be possible if the actual content of our awareness were simply a negation (*niṣedha*).[90] The second objection is exegetical: Dharmakīrti divides inferences into three categories, those based on identity (*svabhāva*) and those based on effect-cause relations (*kārya-kāraṇa-bhāva*), both of which establish the existence of positive entities, and those based on nonapprehension (*anupalabdhi*), which establish the absence of some-