Presenting Dharmakīrti in about 30 pages is quite a challenge. As I am not a philosopher, to select a few issues and develop them in a comparative and/or systematic philosophical way is, then, necessarily doomed to failure. Nevertheless, I am a historian of philosophy, and therefore I have tried to provide an overview of Dharmakīrti’s philosophical thought, taking the historical, epistemological, logical and religious aspects into consideration. Needless to say, other specialists would have organized the matter quite differently, remaining silent on points I deem important while emphasizing other, in my opinion less significant issues. The topics of debate, relations and solipsism are but marginally dealt with here. Note should be made that, although Dharmakīrtian studies are comparatively well developed, important parts of this philosopher’s works have not yet received the critical attention they deserve. Any attempt at presenting their contents must remain tentative. Introductions to Dharmakīrti’s philosophy include Stcherbatsky 1930–1932, Mookerjee 1935, Vetter 1964, Steinkellner 1971, Katsura 1984, Dreyfus 1997, Dunne 2004. And the present attempt has been made more adequate than it initially was thanks to the comments of my friends and colleagues Helmut Krasser, Horst Lasic and Ernst Steinkellner. Birgit Kellner deserves special thanks for her extremely careful reading of my text and the many improvements she has suggested. Thanks are also due to Cynthia Peck-Kubaczek, who kindly corrected my English.

§1. Dharmakīrti is one of the most brilliant figures Indian philosophy ever produced. He authored seven extremely elliptical treatises mainly dedicated to logic and theory of knowledge: the Commentary on the Means of Valid Cognition (Pramāṇavārttika = PV, in four chapters dealing with private inferential judgement, buddhology, perception and proof formulation; the first chapter, the only one to have been provided by Dharmakīrti with a prose commentary [PVSV], is likely to have originally formed an independent work), the Ascertainment of the Means of Valid Cognition (Pramāṇaviniścaya = PVin, in three chapters dealing with perception, private inferential judgement and proof formulation), the Drop of Reasoning (Nyāyabindu = NB, same chapters), the Drop of Logical Reasons

(Hetubindu = HB), the Examination of Relations (Sambandhaparīkṣā = SP), the Proof of (the Existence of) Other Psychic Streams (Santānāntarasiddhi = SAS, against solipsism) and the Rules of Debate (Vādanyāya = VN). With the exception of the SP and the SAS, which must be read in their Tibetan translations, since only fragments of the original Sanskrit text survive, all of these works are extant in their Sanskrit originals and have been edited or are being edited on the basis of newly accessible Sanskrit manuscripts.

§2a. Dharmakīrti is usually dated 600–660 C.E. Although the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (629–645 in India) does not mention him, Yijing (who stayed 675–685 in the great monastic centre of Nālandā, near modern Patna) writes that Dharmakīrti had achieved renown in recent times. This has been challenged by Ch. Lindtner and T. Kimura, who, on the basis of rather shaky arguments, push these dates back two to three generations (530–600 and 550–620 respectively). Moreover, as a forthcoming study by H. Krasser will demonstrate, Dharmakīrti is very likely to have been known to Bhāviveka and Sthiramati, two philosophers clearly belonging to the 6th century (both around 500–570). Dharmakīrti’s location is unknown. Tibetan historians place his birthplace in southern India (like the Mīmāṃsaka philosopher Kumārila, his contemporary and favourite adversary), from where he moved to Nālandā (also the location of the idealist philosopher Dharmapāla, 530–561?). Considering H. Krasser’s proposed new chronology and T. Tillemans’ emphasis on the doctrinal affinities between Dharmapāla and Dharmakīrti, Tibetan historians may be right in suggesting that Dharmakīrti was ordained by Dharmapāla. The first reliable source regarding the later use of Dharmakīrti’s thought is Yijing’s remark that his works were taught by Jñānacandra in Telāḍhaka (close to Nālandā) around 665–670. The gap between Dharmakīrti’s floruit and this late date need not surprise us: according to the Chinese pilgrims, well into the 7th century it was Dignāga’s logic that was predominantly studied in Nālandā. Note should be made, however, that Śākyabuddhi, a late 7th century (?) commentator of Dharmakīrti, already points to several alternative explanations of a particular difficult passage (PVS 21.6–9), thus testifying to Dharmakīrti’s increasing audience. Dharmakīrti’s dates seem to coincide with the final collapse of the Gupta Empire (320–550), a time of growing Brahmanic hostility towards Buddhism and other heterodox denominations. This period is very likely to have introduced deep transformations within Buddhism: The gradual collapse of the monetary economy and of trade and guilds, as well as a rapid deurbanization (note that Buddhism had long flour-

ished in towns and along trade routes under the patronage of state officials and merchants) and political instability seem to have resulted in a rising tendency to monastic concentration in the few institutions still (or newly) supported by the political powers, the income from landholdings or the ownership of villages. Among these northern centres of ritual and scholarly activity were Nālandā in modern Bihar (founded around 475 in obscure circumstances) and Valabhi in modern Gujarat (founded by the Maitrakas in the first years of the 6th century).

§2b. Two features characterize the Buddhist intellectual life of the time. First, a decline in Abhidharmic creativity and intersectarian debate. Second, the nearly contemporary rise of two currents that were to dominate the Buddhist intellectual landscape until the demise of Buddhism in India around the 13th century, viz. the so-called epistemological school (based on Dharmakīrti’s interpretation of Dignāga’s philosophy) and Tantric esotericism (traditionally held to have arisen, as a soteriological synthesis, in the second half of the 7th century, but whose chronology at least partly depends on Dharmakīrti’s dates). Both movements share one feature distinguishing them from traditional scholasticism: they exhibit strong supersectarian tendencies and are committed to struggle, at least on a symbolic and intellectual level, against non-Buddhists (as, e.g., the myth of the Buddha’s victory over Śiva in Tantric teachings can testify). As a statistical analysis shows, it was the Buddhist epistemologists who introduced into philosophical literature such super sectarian denominations as **buddha**, **śākya** and **saugata** (all of them meaning “Buddhist”). These terms helped them to formulate a new identity aimed at defending Buddhism as a whole against Brahmanical hostility, and to develop a less sectarian but no less uncompromising version of Buddhism. Indeed, tradition came to associate the two movements by holding leading epistemologists to have authored Tantric treatises. Moreover, the authors of some esoteric works did not hesitate to “masquerade” by using epistemological rhetoric and methods. Though philosophical denominations such as Madhyamaka and Yogācāra (and maybe Vaibhāṣika) went on fighting each other for a while, they very early borrowed epistemological discourse and techniques in order to defend their doctrinal positions.

§3. Buddhist epistemology is often portrayed as the mature philosophical outcome of the so-called Buddhist dialectical tradition. However, strictly logical and epistemological issues play a comparatively minor role in most of these Buddhist treatises, and the term “tradition” is somewhat misleading, insofar as

very few doctrinal sequences and interrelations can be safely identified. Most of
these treatises (the apologetic beginning of the *Upāyahrdaya is an exception)
lack any statements as to the purpose of dialectics. Such statements can be found
scattered in early (proto-)idealistic (yogācāra) works such as the Bodhisattvabhūmi
and the Mahāyānasūtraśāstra. According to them, “logic” (hetuvidyā, some-
times equated to dialectics) aims to defeat non-Buddhist opponents, preserve
Buddhism, convert those who lack faith in Buddhism and strengthen the faith of
Buddhists. In other words, logic/dialectics pursues heresiological, proselytical
and apologetic, i.e., religious aims. The extent to which the intellectuals responsi-
ble for the dialectical treatises fulfilled this programme or even assented to
it is unclear. At any rate, Dignāga (480–540?) is to be credited with a shift in
emphasis from dialectics to epistemology and logic, something like a “logico-
epistemological turn”. The latter’s final work, the Compendium on the Means of
Valid Cognition (Pramāṇasamuccaya = PS) is the perfect embodiment of these
heresiological concerns. As for its apologetic counterpart, it is here of a nega-
tive or, rather, indirect character: Dignāga defends and promotes Buddhism by
defeating (mostly) non-Buddhist opponents at the level of their epistemological
tenets. Dharmakīrti stands out as the intellectual who provided epistemology
(i.e., Dignāga’s philosophical programme) with a full-fledged positive/direct
apologetic commitment. To do so, Dharmakīrti did not rely on the dialectical
tradition, but rather on those proto-idealistic works that laid strong emphasis on
the “insight born of (rational) reflection” (cintāmayī prajñā), the second of three
stages on the Buddhist path to liberation. According to them, reasoning (yukti)
on scriptural tenets, carried out on the basis of three means of valid cognition
(pramāṇa, i.e., perception, inference and scriptural authority), is instrumental
in, and indeed necessary for, achieving final liberation through mental cultiva-
tion or “meditation”. Unlike those in the dialectical tradition, the intellectuals
responsible for these developments shaped the models of rationality which
Dharmakīrti’s apologetic endeavour is directly indebted to: first, reasoning as an
independent means of assessing the reliability of scriptures; second, reasoning
as demonstrating the possibility of the Buddhist path to liberation. At the time
Dharmakīrti composed his works, these two kinds of concern with the means
of valid cognition seem to have merged into one another, thus clearly linking,
within a single apologetic concern, theoretical elaborations on logic/dialectics
to a soteriological enterprise.

§4. This is not to downplay Dharmakīrti’s overwhelming concern with logic
and the theory of human knowledge as they were developed by Dignāga, whose
philosophical programme he endorses almost in its entirety. Doctrinal shifts and
new emphases, however, are significant: (1) A strong commitment to establish the conditions (mainly cognitive and ontological) allowing logical validity, certainty and, in one sense at least, deductivity (§10c); (2) the development of three kinds of valid logical reasons (§§10c/e); (3) a strong commitment to ground psychology, gnoseology and epistemology on causal processes by resorting to the idea of causal efficacy and to Sautrāntika ontology (§5); (4) a growing interest in issues of truth, validity and reliability (§8), as well as in human practices of both workaday and religious character (§6); (5) a much stronger insistence on religious – apologetic as well as Buddhological – issues (§§11–13); and (6) a clearcut limitation of the scope of epistemological theory to unenlightened human cognition. Moreover, it should be emphasised that, much more than Dignāga, Dharmakīrti endeavoured to develop his epistemology in strict consonance with basic Buddhist ideas and dogmas. His system of human knowledge depends on such key ideas as nescience and the two truths, but also on traditional theories of causality, momentariness and selflessness, and on Buddhist accounts of the structure of the path to liberation. But, important as this new emphasis on religious issues may be, the sequence of Dharmakīrti’s writings suggests that this concern gradually receded into the background. Did Dharmakīrti grow ever more sceptical regarding apologetics? Does the nature of his later (i.e., post-PV) treatises, by turning to more specialized (HB), more didactically oriented (PVin, NB) and thematically circumscribed (SAS, SP, VN) works, still presuppose the religious framework(s) delineated in the PV? Or did some of his most provocative doctrines (e.g., the denial of any independent authority to scriptures, or his rejection of an alleged natural efficacy of mantras, §11) arouse disapproval in his institutional environment?

§5a.\textsuperscript{5} One of Dharmakīrti’s most significant achievements lies in the way he reinterpreted both the Buddhist doctrine of the two realities and Dignāga’s epistemology, so that they coalesce into a single philosophical system. In brief, every Buddhist account of the two realities (satyadvaya, or “two truths”) draws a sharp metaphysical distinction between two levels of reality: on the one side, ultimate reality (paramārtha), the fundamental structure and nature of reality as it is reflected in the Buddhist Law; on the other, conventional, superficial reality, or “concealment” (samvṛti), which is the level of “profane” everyday experience and accounts of reality. A constant feature of these doctrines is their emphasis on the non- or prelinguistic, non- or preconceptual nature of the ultimately real (paramārthasat); conventionally real entities (samvṛtisat) are

generally accounted for as mirroring purely linguistic categories and intellectual constructs, erroneous and misleading superimpositions (samañopā) on the ineffable reality. Though Dignāga had touched upon the issue of the different levels of (non)reality (most conspicuously in his Hastavālaprakaraṇa), he seems to have linked it only very marginally to the mature epistemological programme reflected in the PS. But both in his Hetumukha (now lost) and in the fifth chapter of the PS, Dignāga had devised a theory of language and conceptuality (the apoha or “exclusion” theory) aimed at solving the problem of how multiple properties can be ascribed in an inference, to an undivided (but multi-faceted) particular. Dharmakīrti’s reinterpretation of this theory provides a full account of the way human beings access ultimate reality perceptually but misinterpret it intellectually. Like that of Dignāga, Dharmakīrti’s theory is nominalist in the sense that only self-identical and mutually distinct individuals exist. But unlike that of Dignāga, Dharmakīrti’s theory provides a causal account of how ultimately erroneous conceptual schemes are linked to the existing world. In other words, Dharmakīrti devised a theory aimed at bridging the gap between a conceptual scheme and the world without being in any way committed to real universals. This theory yields the structure underlying his epistemological system as a whole.

§5b. According to Dharmakīrti, ultimate reality is reducible to non-interpreted particulars (svalakṣaṇa). These particulars are momentary (kṣaṇika, see §12b) and owe their transient existence to causal complexes (hetusāmagrī) that entail no relations at all, the mere co-presence of the different factors being enough to account for the rise of an effect. Causal efficacy (arthakriyā) is the hallmark and only definition of what is real: to exist only consists in being endowed with arthakriyā, a term whose meaning ranges from “causal efficacy” to “fulfilment of a (human) purpose” (see §6), and for which “telic function” or “functionality” may provide working equivalents. Provided they enter causal complexes, entities are conceived as causes (of perceptual cognitions, of other entities, etc.), but also as instrumental in the fulfilment of practical human aims (carrying water, building a house, kindling fire, etc.). These causally efficient particulars are undivided, have neither parts (but see §14a) nor properties (at least in the realist sense of universals inhering in re). Every particular is, moreover, irreducibly distinct from all others, identical with itself only (and in one and the same spatio-temporal phase, kṣaṇa). Among the many causal efficacies of these particulars, one is of particular importance for the theory of knowledge: provided that the necessary conditions (light, attention, sense faculty, etc.) are present, a real entity gives rise to a direct perceptual awareness of it, thus projecting an
image of itself into cognition. This cognition reflects the undivided particular in its entirety, in all its aspects (sarbātmanā, sarvākāreṇa). The image it displays provides a vivid and isomorphic perceptual counterpart of the (causally efficient phase of the) real entity which it takes as its object. As we can see, perception provides direct, unbiased and non-conceptual access to ultimate reality (see §9).

§5c. How is it, then, that ordinary people come to distort this immediate image of an entity by superimposing alien conceptual schemes onto the latter? In addition to their direct capacity to bring about a perceptual awareness, real entities possess the capacity of indirectly generating what Dharmakīrti calls a “unitary judgement” (ekapratyavamarṣa), a “recognition” (pratyabhijñāna) and, more frequently, a “determinate cognition” (niścaya, also rendered as “perceptual ascertainment/judgement”), viz. an identification. What does “indirectly” mean in the present context? Provided the conditions (conceptual habitus, context, interest, etc.; see §8b) for the rise of this identification are present and there is no cause for error (see §9b), the direct perceptual awareness “awakens” or actualizes (prabodha) a latent tendency (vāsanā) imprinted in the mind by former successful applications of this conceptual cognition in functionally similar contexts. The actualization of the tendency coincides with the rise of an intellectually constructed representation of the object. This intellectual construct with no counterpart in reality is nothing but a conventionally existent object, and its cognition is a pseudo-perception (pratyakṣābhāsa), an erroneous cognition (mithyopalabdhi), i.e., nescience (avidyā). The causal chain linking ultimately real things to conventionally real constructs is best described in the following passage (PV 1.68–70): “On the basis of entities that are [totally] distinct [from one another], a cognition arises which, displaying a unitary object, conceals (samvṛti) with its own [unitary] form the form of the others [i.e., the radically distinct entities; the latter’s ultimate] diversity being [thus] concealed (samvṛta) by this [cognition, i.e., by] concealment (samvṛti), [these] entities, [though] in themselves distinct [from one another], appear as indistinct under a certain form [i.e., as universals constructed by their contrast with entities dissimilar in respect of the effects they produce]. The universal is [only] reported to be real with reference to this [superimposing cognition, but] in the way in which this cognition imagines it, it is ultimately unreal.” What is the origin of these conceptual representations? How do universals, commonalities (sāmānyā, jātī) arise? Although irreducibly distinct from each other, some real entities perform roughly similar functions, possess roughly similar causal efficacies, just as entirely different plants can have a roughly similar antipyretic capacity. What the intellectual recognition actually reflects are shared functional distinctive
features, so that what it really is or displays is a mere exclusion (vyāvṛtti, apoha), i.e., a pseudo-object distinct from all that which does not perform the same function (atatkārin). Thus the intellectual representation of a pot does not refer to any real pot (which can only be the object of direct sense perception), let alone to a real universal that would inhere in all things named “pot”, but only to the fact that pots, irrespective of their singular features, share the distinctive function of holding liquids. Thought thus ascribes unreal commonalities to the real particulars by taking them to possess these common features as real universals. But superimposing commonalities on irreducibly distinct particulars is by no means the only falsification to be ascribed to conceptualization. Just as every particular is distinct from all others, every particular is unitary, partless (though functionally multi-faceted). And just as several self-identical particulars perform a roughly similar function, one undivided particular may perform several functions. Taking these various functionalities as mirroring real properties belonging to the individual, conceptual thought divides the undivided entity. This explains why linguistic “co-reference” (sāmānādhikaranya) and inference (anumāna) are indeed possible. Such a division of the undivided provides the justification for expressions such as “a blue lotus”, in which the subject and the property normally have the same grammatical case, gender and number. But it also explains the possibility of inferences such as: “Sound is impermanent, because it is produced” (or: “Socrates is mortal, because he is a human”), where two properties are said to characterize a single property-bearer or subject (see §10a).

§5d. As we can see, unifying the many and dividing the indivisible are the two main intellectual operations and, indeed, falsifications that are to be ascribed to conceptual construction. This conceptual cognition positively (vidhīnā) displays a non-vivid representation of the object, in fact a pseudo-object hypostasizing a distinctive functionality. But thought mistakenly determines (adhyavyavāso) its own image of the object to be a real object (artha), to be functional (arthakriyākārin) and to be external (bāhya). In other words, it takes non-x to be x (atasmiṃs tadgrahah), which is the hallmark of error (bhrānti). According to Dharmakīrti, this also explains the way ordinary persons act: they somehow unify (ekī√kṛ), at the moment of interacting with their environment, conceptual/internal and perceptual/external objects. But as we shall see, this cognition, though erroneous and without any counterpart in reality, proves to be practically reliable owing to its indirect relation to a real entity and its functionality. Such is, in outline, Dharmakīrti’s causal interpretation of the apoha theory.
§6.6 As even a cursory glance at this theory suggests, Dharmakīrti’s philosophy exhibits a strong concern with human goal-oriented practice (pravṛtti) and practical rationality (prekṣāpūrvavakāritva). All human undertakings aim at results, resultless undertakings being simply worthless. A result can be defined as obtaining what is desirable (iṣṭa) and avoiding what is undesirable. In order to engage in or refrain from action, human beings need to know what is instrumental (sādhana) and detrimental to their expectations. In other words, they can only achieve practical success by correctly identifying things that are capable of accomplishing their practical intentions. Now as we shall see (§8), a cognition’s compliance with causal efficacies provides the criterion for its reliability, i.e., for its being a means of valid cognition. Practically rational are those persons who make use of reason (yukti) instead of blind faith or blind habit (vyasana), i.e., who engage in or refrain from a practice by assessing the probability of practical success on the basis of reliable means of valid cognition. Practical rationality pertains to the whole range of human undertakings: can a harvest be expected from ploughing and sowing? Which (currently imperceptible) results are connected to such and such a deed? Can existential improvement (i.e., elevation in eschatological terms, abhyudaya) or even liberation from suffering (i.e., release from samsara, niḥśreyasa) be achieved? As Dharmakīrti insists at the beginning of several treatises (PVSV, PVin, NB), “to attain what is profitable (hita) and avoid what is unprofitable,” or to “discriminate between profit (artha) and disprofit” necessarily presupposes correct knowledge (samyagjñāna), and especially inference. And in Dharmakīrti’s view, although ordinary human beings may well be cognitively limited (arvāgdarśin), still they naturally make use of means of valid cognition when engaging in action. This is reminiscent of the emphasis in several (proto-) idealist treatises on a Bodhisattva’s naturally resorting to a means of valid cognition when rationally reflecting on what is relevant to salvation. However, (Buddhist as well as) non-Buddhist schools provide erroneous accounts of the means of valid cognition by misunderstanding their nature, function and legitimate scope. Considering that valid cognition is instrumental in successful human practice of any kind, these rival epistemological theories are not only false, but practically and existentially dangerous. As Dharmakīrti says (echoing, once again, proto-idealist works), one could content oneself with private rational reflection of soteriological import, were it not for the non-Buddhist challengers’ leading the world astray by propounding misleading epistemologies. The main task of Buddhist epistemology lies, then,

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in the refutation of these outsiders’ theories and the establishment of an unbiased account of human cognition.

§7. The general framework of Dharmakīrti’s epistemology is formed by this theory of āpoha and its account of the Buddhist two truths. This can be seen from the following excerpt (PV 3.1ac\textsuperscript{1} and 2–3): “The means of valid cognition are [only] two [in number, viz. perception and inference], because the [kinds of] objects are [only] two [in number, and this for the following four reasons: first,] because [objects can be either] capable or incapable of causal efficacy; [second,] because [objects can be either] common [to many] or [absolutely] singular; [third,] because [objects can be] referred to by words or not; [fourth,] because the cognition [we have of them] occurs or does not occur when [causal] factors other [than themselves] are present. In the [present system], that which is capable of causal efficacy, [singular, not the object of words and whose cognition does not occur when it itself is lacking] is ultimately real; [as for] the other, [we] declare [it] to be [only] conventionally real. These are [respectively] the particular and the universal.” To wit: perception (see §9) alone provides reliable and vivid cognitions regarding individuals, i.e., self-identical and ineffable real entities endowed with functionalities; inference (see §10) is a reliable source of information concerning universals, i.e., pseudo-entities that are causally inefficacious, (apparently) shared by others and verbally expressible. But as Dharmakīrti insists, although these two reliable sources of information may well display two different intentional objects (ālambanaviṣaya), still they bear only upon the real entity (vastuviṣaya) that is their “functional object” (vyāpāraviṣaya), inasmuch as only the real entity is capable of performing a function and hence is of interest to human beings (see §6).

§8a.7 Before we turn to a more detailed account of the two means of valid cognition, a few words on the central issue of the validity of a cognition (prāmāṇya). Dharmakīrti must be credited with the first Buddhist attempt at defining the criteria a cognition should meet in order to be called a “means of valid cognition” (pramāṇa), i.e., the criteria for its being a means of valid cognition, its “(epistemic) validity”, “instrumentality” or “epistemicity”. Provisionally leaving PV 2.1–7 out of consideration, let me summarize Dharmakīrti’s earliest and most basic ideas as follows. In the PVSV, cognitions said to be pramāṇas, or to possess prāmāṇya, are described as reliable (avisamvāda, etc.) with regard to entities (but the reverse might not be true). These cognitions owe their reliability to the fact

that, since they are produced either directly (perception) or indirectly (inference) by real entities, they do not deviate from or err (avyabhicāra) with regard to the latter. In other words, these cognitions are means of valid cognition only inasmuch as they are genetically related (<sambandha, pratibandha, nāntarīyakatā) to real entities. Cognitions, however, need not display an isomorphic picture of an entity in order to be reliable and hence to be a means of valid cognition. An inferential cognition is at the same time reliable (because it originates from the object to be inferred and thus, as we shall see, allows a successful practical interaction with real entities) and erroneous (because it originates from it only indirectly). In other words, a cognition’s reliability is not due to the quality of its image of the object, but to its being genetically connected to it.

§8b. In order to be termed a pramāṇa, a cognition must originate from the object that it is a cognition of, and this genetic relation in turn ensures that this cognition is true to the object’s functionality, i.e., does not betray one’s practical expectations with regard to this object. In order to understand this, we have to turn back to the issue of the conditions necessary for a determinate conceptual cognition to arise. Being directly produced by the causal efficacy of its object, perception yields a total but unconceptualized, prelinguistic image of this object: perception does not determine or ascertain anything, but gives rise to an awakening of the latent tendency of a conceptual construct which identifies the object (see §5c). Now, this identification only occurs provided certain factors are present, such as a conceptual habitus (abhyāsa), but also context (prakaraṇa) or interest (arthitva), in order to select which aspects of the per se undivided object will be brought to conceptual light, and in which order. Remember that thought classifies things according to shared functional specificities. In other words, thought selects the contextually most relevant and useful features of an object. And since the selected functionality is indeed present in the entity that has given rise to the initial perceptual awareness, this cognition will not betray one’s practical expectations. This is why Dharmakīrti can say that, though perception and inference have distinct objects (grāhya, ālambanaviśaya) inasmuch as their modes of appearance are different, both relate to or bear upon the same functional object, the ultimately real entity capable of performing functions instrumental in fulfilling human expectations. As Dharmakīrti says (PVS 51.3–4), “until the final transformation of the basis[-of-existence, i.e., until liberation (see §13a)], the distinction between pramāṇa and pseudo-pramāṇa is due to [the cognition’s] being reliable with regard to the [objects] which are expected to be able to perform a function.” This is indeed exactly what Dharmakīrti declares in PV 2.1ac1: “A pramāṇa is a reliable cognition. [As for] reliability, it consists
in [this cognition’s] compliance with [the object’s capacity to] perform a function.” In other words, the validity of a cognition is a function of practical activity (vyavahāra), “for someone acting after having determined an object through these two [means of valid cognition] is not deceived regarding [its] functionality (PV in 1.1,10).” As G. Dreyfus (1995) and especially T. Tillemans (1999: 6–12) have argued, this does not amount to a pragmatic theory of truth. Dharmakīrti’s doctrine has to do neither with the idea that a belief is true “if it is in the long run most useful to accept it” (William James), nor with the notion of an “ideal consensus” (Charles S. Pierce). According to Tillemans, Dharmakīrti’s theory is best seen not as a theory of truth, but as a “justification theory” providing a “procedure for truth testing” (Tillemans 1999: 7). Were we to look for a theory of truth, however, this would amount to “weaker and stronger forms of correspondence” (Tillemans 1999: 8): “correspondence as congruence” (implying a “structural isomorphism... between the truth-bearer and a fact” Tillemans 1999: 9) in the case of perception, and “correspondence as correlation” (where “it suffices that the fact exists for the statement or understanding to be true” ibid.) in the case of inference. But according to Tillemans, the only type of correspondence common to both perception and inference, and hence likely to characterize Dharmakīrti’s views on epistemic validity, is correspondence as correlation.

§8c. A lot of ink has been spilled over the fact that in PV 2.5c Dharmakīrti introduces a second, seemingly alternative, definition of validity: “Or [a cognition is a pramāṇa by virtue of] revealing a [hitherto] unknown object” (ajñātārthaprakāśo vā). This definition is nowhere to be found in Dharmakīrti’s earlier work, the PVSV. As H. Krasser (2001) has shown, this definition is not genuinely Buddhist, i.e., not Dharmakīrti’s theory, but the definition elaborated by Kumārila in his Brhaṭṭikā. However, as Dharmakīrti makes clear, this originally Mīmāṃsaka definition can only be accepted provided one qualifies it with the clause: “with regard to a [previously] uncognized particular”. In other words, this second characterization of a means of valid cognition is aimed at showing that only the first, preconceptual moment of perception is a means of valid cognition, and thus rules out the determinate conceptual cognitions arising subsequently from the realm of pramāṇa.8 This means that both definitions,

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8. The adoption of the Mīmāṃsaka definition in its revised form allowed Dharmakīrti to solve a problem left open in the PVSV (where his ideas with regard to epistemic validity remained unsystematic). There, he indeed regularly termed “(practically) reliable” at least some of the conceptual cognitions occurring after perception itself. As PV 2.3ab1 (grhītāgraṇān nēṣṭām sāmyṛtām) already makes clear, the introduction of the second characteristic enabled him to rule them out of the realm of pramāṇa on the grounds that they reveal something whose causal efficacy has already been accessed through perception.
though not conceptually identical, “are equivalent in the sense that exactly the same ranges of objects are subsumable under them” (Krasser 2001: 190–191). As Krasser (2001) and Kataoka (2003) suggest, Dharmakīrti is very likely to have borrowed this characterization of a pramāṇa (which the Mīmāṃsā originally held to pertain primarily to the Veda and Vedic injunctions) in order to establish the authority of the Buddha according to the standard of epistemic validity propounded by the most uncompromising adversary of Buddhism.

§9a.9 The above has already familiarized us with the main features of the first means of valid cognition, pratyakṣa. This term is generally rendered by the somewhat misleading word “(direct) perception.” But since pratyakṣa is pre-/non-conceptual and hence pre-/non-linguistic in character, it is not identification, thus more closely resembling bare sensation which, provided the necessary conditions are instantiated, leads to conceptual identification (see §5c; in so-called trained or habitual perception – abhyāsavatpratyakṣa – however, sensation and identification are nearly simultaneous). Dignāga had defined perception as a cognition that is free from conceptual construction (kalpanāpoḍha). This definition presupposed a specific account of pseudo-perception (pratyaksābhāṣa), according to which perceptual error (bhrānti) can only be due to the cognitive or mental operation(s) occurring subsequently to perception. Dharmakīrti, however, admits that at least some perceptual errors can be caused by impairments of the sense-faculties, and hence be as non-conceptual and vivid (spaṣṭa, ṣphuṭa) as the non-erroneous cognitions. In order to rule out cases of sensory illusion, viz. error due to impaired sense-faculties, Dharmakīrti adds (from the PVin, and in consonance with older proto-idealist doctrines) “non-erroneous” to Dignāga’s definition: “Perception is [a cognition which is] free from conceptual construction and is nonerroneous” (pratyakṣaṁ kalpanāpoḍham abhrāntam, PVin 1.4, NB 1.4ab1). Being caused by the entities’ projecting their own aspect onto cognition, sense perception grasps entities in their functional multi-facetedness and unlike mental constructs and memory displays a vivid image of them. Conceptual construction (kalpanā) is defined as a cognition which can be associated with verbal designations (abhilāpasamsargayogya); perception, which is free of it, is as non-linguistic as the real entities themselves are inexpressible.

According to Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, four types of cognitions meet the criteria for being termed perceptual: sense perception (indriyapratyakṣa), mental perception (mānasapratyakṣa), the perception of yogins (yogipratyakṣa, see §13c) and self-awareness (svasamvedana, see §14). Sense perception, the
paradigmatic type of direct awareness, does not need to be explained further. Mental perception’s nature and function in the Buddhist epistemological school remain obscure, but it is quite often presented (at least from Dharmottara on) as an acknowledgement of scriptural statements. Mādhyamikas argue, however, that mental perception, by perceiving a subsequent phase of a real entity on the basis of the immediately preceding sensory perception, bridges the gap between perception and conception. By including the cognition of yogins in their general picture of perception, Dignāga and Dharmakīrti (if their intention was the same, which is far from certain) attempted to prove that the cognition born from a Buddhist mystic’s uninterrupted mental cultivation could be considered reliable. The identity of the yogins under discussion is, however, unclear: do Dharmakīrti’s terse accounts concern the cognition of advanced Buddhist mystics (such as Bodhisattvas of a higher rank), or of Buddhas alone? Whatever be the case, Dharmakīrti held the modalities of mystics’ perception, as well as omniscience, to be inconceivable (acintya), and did not venture upon a more detailed, and highly risky, account of them. As for self-awareness, it plays a crucial role in Dharmakīrti’s epistemology and in his “idealistic” account of the Buddhist path. As we shall see, all mental events (cognitions as well as concomitant psychological events such as feelings) are reflexive, i.e., self-aware or self-cognizing. This is indeed the only way to account for the fact that we are immediately conscious both of these mental events and, in the case of cognitions proper, of the world of which they are cognitions.

§9b.10 As far as Dharmakīrti’s externalist account of cognition (see §14) is concerned, perception remains outside the realm of nescience (avidyā), defined as conceptuality, pseudo-perception and superimposition (see §5c). The property of a real entity is to generate a perception according to its true nature, and the property of perception is to exhibit a true image of the real entity, which amounts to grasping it in its essential features, including momentariness, selflessness, painlessness and emptiness (see §12a). Since it grasps the true features of real entities, perception can be described (according to an old Buddhist canonical topos) as naturally radiant (prabhāsvāra) and only adventitiously, i.e., not essentially, beset with defilements. In other words, the mind has the intuition of true reality (tattvadarśana) as its nature. This, however, is tantamount to identifying perception with “knowledge” (vidyā), but also to the much more provocative view that as far as perception is concerned, there is no difference between an ordinary mind and one that is liberated. Perception is “knowledge”, a type

of cognition opposing nescience. Knowledge and nescience display contrary objects and aspects, viparítālambanākāra. But, as we have seen and shall see again, the vivid holistic image supplied by perception is obliterated by internal as well as external causes of error (bhrāntinimitta, such as nescience and the rise of a new momentary phase immediately after the preceding one), with the consequence that real aspects such as momentariness are misinterpreted and substituted by erroneous aspects such as duration. This provides the basis of Dharmakīrti’s notion of the path towards liberation (see §13). By first resorting to correcting inferences (such as that of momentariness, see §12b) and then subjecting true (i.e., inferentially validated) intellectual contents to intensive and uninterrupted mental cultivation, a yogin gradually increases his conceptual familiarity with the true features of reality (which correspond to the Buddhist Four Noble Truths); his cognitive sharpness progresses up to the point at which he finally perceives the said features in an immediate and non-conceptual way. At this point, the yogin – now a perfectly enlightened Buddha – has rid himself of nescience and conceptuality, and rests with his immaculate (but, according to Dharmakīrti, inconceivable) perception of true reality. That is so unless he finds himself in a teaching situation, for then he has to resort to language and conceptuality.

§10a.11 As we have seen while considering epistemic validity and perception, something does not cause something else to be known in a reliable or “non-deviating” manner unless the former is related to the latter. This criterion holds true of inference (anumāna). Unlike perception, inference operates on a purely conceptual (hence erroneous) level insofar as its various elements only mediately refer to real entities. But an inference (i.e., the knowledge that one p is S, see below) is not a conceptual exclusion simply because its various elements are themselves conceptual, but because its function is to exclude (vyavaccheda) error and dispel doubt (saṃśaya). Perception indeed grasps an entity in its entirety, but internal as well as external causes of error and/or the lack of conceptual habitus impede the rise of a determinate cognition. This is of central importance in Dharmakīrti’s account of the Buddhist path towards liberation (see §§9b and 12a). In order to roughly characterize the elements involved in an inference, before proceeding any further a few words are in place. An inferential judgement consists of: (1) a thesis or proposition (pratijñā, such as: “sound is impermanent”), itself divided into a subject or property bearer (p; dharmin: “sound”) and a property to be proven or probandum (S; sādhyadharma:

“being impermanent”); (2) a logical reason (H; *hetu*, *liṅga*, such as: “because it is produced”), also termed a probans or probative property (sādhana[dharma]). To put it briefly, the logical form most commonly met with is: p is S because H. A concomitance must obtain between the two properties S and H. This logical relation is variously known as a “(necessary) connection” (*niyama*, *avinābhāva*, *nāntartiyakata*), “nexus,” “concomitance” or “pervasion” (*vyāpti*, an expression indicating a relation of inclusion: H [the included – *vyāpya*, *vyāpta*] implies [is included by] S [the includer – *vyāpaka*, *vyāpin*] because S is either co-extensive with or more extensive than H). Moreover, the property to be proven S entails similar cases (*sapakṣa*), i.e., all that over which S ranges or which possesses S, including the subject p. These similar cases form, so to say, the extension domain or the scope of S. But the property S also entails dissimilar cases (~S; *vipakṣa*, *asapakṣa*), i.e., anything that possesses the contradictory or a contrary property (here: “being permanent”). Now, Indian dialecticians had long tried to determine the necessary (and probably also sufficient) conditions for a logical reason to be valid or conclusive. From the *Tarkaśāstra* (4th century?) on, Buddhist dialecticians evolved a set of three metalogical rules known as the three characteristics (*trirūpa*, *trairūpya*) of the logical reason, which were supposed to warrant that H indeed establishes that p is S. A logical reason can be declared valid (disregarding the cognitive elements involved in the Buddhist notion of validity) provided it is triply characterized, i.e., instantiates the following three conditions: (1) It must be a property of the subject (*pakṣadharma*); (2) it must be present in similar cases only (*sapakṣa eva sattvam*; this characteristic is known as positive concomitance, *anvayavyāpti*); (3) it must be necessarily absent in dissimilar cases (*asapakṣe ‘sattvam eva*; this characteristic is known as negative concomitance, *vyatirekavyāpti*). In short: (1) H qualifies p; (2) whatever is H is also S; (3) no ~S is H (or: all ~S are also ~H). Should the logical reason fail to instantiate conditions (1), (2) or (3), it will be respectively declared “unestablished” (*asiddha*: H does not qualify p), “contradictory” (*viruddha*: no H is S) or “uncertain/inconclusive” (*anaikāntika*: some/all ~S are/[might be] H [or: not ~H]). These are the three basic types of pseudo-reasons (*hetvābhāsa*).

§10b.12 Contrary to perception, which, though fourfold, admits of a unitary definition, inference is twofold, but cannot be (or rather: is best not) provided

with a single definition. Dharmakīrti distinguishes between two types of inference, “inference-for-oneself” (svārtha-numāna) and “inference-for-others” (parārtha-numāna). An inference-for-oneself consists in a private inferential judgement and can be defined as follows: “An [inference]-for-oneself is the cognition of something through a triply characterized logical reason” (PVin 2.1a,b = PS 2.1a,b). As we can see, this first type of inference is only concerned with the knowledge of an inferendum (anumeya, i.e., that p is S). On the contrary, an inference-for-others mainly consists of a verbal statement (abhidhāna, ākhyāna), i.e., formulating the three characteristics of the logical reason (and not the inferendum in the form of a conclusion or a thesis-statement). As Dharmakīrti puts it, “an inference-for-others is the statement of the triply characterized logical reason” (NB 1.3) that the proponent himself has understood (svadrśta). A standard example of such a statement would be: “Whatever is produced is impermanent, like a vase. Now, sound is produced.” The first part of the statement formulates the concomitance (in this case the positive concomitance; the statement of the negative concomitance would run: “Whatever is permanent is not produced, like space”), whereas the second part makes it explicit that the logical reason is instantiated in the subject. But as Dīgāga and Dharmakīrti insist, an inference-for-others is concerned with the statement of only those logical elements that possess a proof value, i.e., the concomitance and the instantiation of the proving property in the subject. The thesis-statement (pakṣavacana, here comparable to a conclusion) is in itself of no probative relevance, and (at least in Dharmakīrti’s later works, HB and VN) ought not to be stated along with the former two elements. In other words, this type of inference is not a deductive argument, i.e., does not aim to derive a conclusion, but aims to demonstrate the sound/binding character of the set of relations involved between the members of the proof. In this regard, the inference-for-others cannot be compared with an Aristotelian syllogism (even with an enthymeme lacking a conclusion), which necessarily involves a conclusion. Moreover, and again in contrast to the purely formal nature of Western logic, an inference-for-others (like an inference-for-oneself) entails a strong cognitive or epistemic component. First, the three characteristics of the logical reason must have been previously ascertained (niścita) in the proponent’s mind (which is the sense of “has understood

13. It should be noted, however, that Dharmakīrti tacitly accepts the possibility of a unitary definition of inference owing to the fact that, beyond its verbal character, an inference-for-others also indirectly aims at causing the inferendum to be known by someone else. This unitary definition would, then, run as follows: “An x that [has been] observed at a [locus] z [and] possesses a relation to y, causes y to be known [as existing] at z for the [person] who [already] knows this [relation between x and y]” (PVin 2.45,5–6).
himself,“ svadṛṣṭa) by means of valid cognition; second, both protagonists of
the debate must accept all three characteristics. In this regard, the two statements
of the concomitance and the qualification of the subject cannot be regarded as
premises, nor can an inference-for-others be said to entail the same sort of
(strictly formal, objective or structural) validity as classical logic.

§10c.14 During the period between Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, questions were
raised regarding the conditions on which the three metalogical characteristics
might guarantee the conclusivity of the logical reason (a problem that modern
scholarship has often described as the Indian Buddhist version of the riddle of
induction). In other words, how can it be ascertained that the logical reason
possesses positive and negative concomitance with the property to be proven?
Dharmakīrti’s own teacher, Īśvarasena, had shaped a strategy that resorted to
mere observation (of the occurrence of the reason in similar cases) and non-
observation (of the reason in dissimilar cases). Dharmakīrti began a life-long
polemic against his teacher’s method by pointing out that mere non-observation
(adarśanamātra) of counter-examples does not provide an indubitable cogni-
tive basis for proving that all (or at least some) S are H and no ¬S is H. In brief,
Dharmakīrti sought to solve the problem by providing the logical concomitance
with an ontological foundation supposed to guarantee the necessity of H ➔ S and
the incompatibility of H and ¬S. According to him, both can be expected provided
the concomitance relies on a “relation by/(in) nature” (svabhāvapratiibandha, or
simply: “natural relation”), i.e., if that which is referred to by the two concepts is
indeed naturally related. Now, this condition obtains in two cases only. Should
S and H refer to two different things, the natural relation obtaining between
them can only be one of causality (tadutpatti), and this provides the ontological
foundation of effect as a logical reason (kāryahetu). Should S and H refer to
two properties of one and the same thing, the natural relation linking them will
be one of identity (tādātmya), and this provides the ontological foundation of
essential property as a logical reason (svabhāvaheṭu). The first case is rather
simple: Whenever something can be ascertained to be the effect (kārya) of some-
thing else (its cause, kārana, or more precisely, its causal complex), this effect
provides evidence for inferring its cause, as in: “There is fire on the hill because
there is smoke.” The ontological foundation of a concomitance involving two
properties of one and the same thing is real or factual identity. In this case, an
essential property H is a logical reason for an essential property S, provided S is
given (anvayin, bhāvin, anurodhin) by the simple fact that H is given (bhāva°,

sattāmātra), viz. for an essential property arisen from the same cause as H and requiring no further factor in order to occur. Note should be made that, contrary to the criterion of causality (where the effect is always pervaded by the cause), the criterion of factual identity does not, per se, indicate the respective extensions of the two properties. Two cases of essential property as a reason should be distinguished in accordance with an extensional distinction. If the property H is an essential property (or the essence) of S (and vice versa), both properties are coextensive: H instantiates all similar cases of S, and the two properties are commutable. This is the case in inferences such as “Sound is impermanent, because it is produced”, or “This is solid, because it offers resistance”. On the contrary, if the property S is an essential property (or the essence) of H (but not vice versa), H is of lesser extension than S: H instantiates only some among the similar cases of S, and the two properties are not commutable. This is the case in inferences such as: “Sound is impermanent, because it is produced by human effort” (there are impermanent things, such as lightning, which are not produced by human effort), or “This is a tree, because it is a birch” (not all trees are birches).

§10d. Let me adduce two remarks. Contrary to most of his Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist predecessors, but in accordance with recent elaborations within the Sāṃkhya school, Dharmakīrti does not allow a cause to be a valid logical reason (kāraṇahetu, i.e., cause as logical reason) in the inference of the rise of an effect (kāryānumāna). In other words, one is justified in inferring the cause from the effect, but not the effect from the cause. The rise of an effect (say, a sprout) from its complete causal complex (say, a seed, earth, water, warmth, etc.) presupposes a process of gradual transformation (parināma) in the capacities of the assembled causes; now (and this is the reason for Dharmakīrti’s rejection), an impediment (pratibandha) might obstruct the process and prevent the effect from arising. However, instead of inferring the effect from the cause, one is justified in inferring the complete cause’s capacity (yogyatā) to bring about its result or, equivalently, the possibility (sambhava) for the effect to arise. This capacity is given by the mere presence of the causal complex, and necessitates no additional event in order to be instantiated. In other words, it is an essential property of the complete or sufficient causal complex. What does this amount to? Dharmakīrti reduces the per se illegitimate cause as a logical reason to a case of essential property as a logical reason (see §10c). According to E. Steinkellner, the reduction (and thus acceptability) of cause as a logical reason to essential

property as a logical reason is likely to have been dictated by Dharmakīrti’s wish to safeguard the rationality of a kind of “progressive,” “entelechial” or “proleptic” causality especially useful for inferring the possibility of liberation from soteriological means (see §13b).

16. The causality-mode of a natural relation yields an ontological foundation for linguistic communication. Like conceptual constructs, words are nothing but exclusions of all else and as such only refer to real entities in a mediate manner. Linguistic designations are purely arbitrary (< icchā, abhiprāya) and conventional (sāṅketika, sāmayika). No matter how arbitrary they are, linguistic conventions are shared by the speakers of a certain language (through education, linguistic habit, inherited latent tendencies, etc.). This common experience, in turn, explains why one can understand another person’s utterances at all. They are born of their speakers’ intentions (vivakṣā), and those intentions or intentional contents are generally shared among the speakers, so that from another person’s utterance (as an effect) one can infer his/her intention, i.e., the intended meaning (as the cause). Dharmakīrti’s language theory denies any ontological consistency to sentences, words or even phonemes (at least as they were conceived by the Grammarians or the Mīmāṃsā). Meaningful linguistic units merely consist of ever-changing sounds produced by the articulatory organs (but are, in much the same conceptual way as real entities in the apoha theory, conceptually identifiable as the unchanging atomic constituents of language). Both this and Dharmakīrti’s denial of real (vāstava) semantic relations (sambandha) form the basis of the latter’s lengthy criticism of the Mīmāṃsākas and Grammarians, both of whom attempted to base the absolute authority (prāmāṇya) of the Vedic revelation on linguistic assumptions such as the authorlessness (apauruṣeyatā) and hence eternity of semantic relations, phonemes (varṇa) or “transphonetic” meaningful units (sphoṭa); words and relations being authorless, and the Veda consisting of words with their relations, the Veda cannot have been created by (morally corrupt and gnoseologically limited) human beings (see §11b).

§10e.17 Besides effect and essential property as logical reasons, Dharmakīrti grants validity to yet a third type of logical reason, viz. non-perception as a logical reason (anupalabdhihetu). Whereas the first two logical reasons are positive in nature, the third is of a negative character and serves as the reason for a negation (pratiṣedhahetu). As demonstrated by B. Kellner, the gradual integration of negative cognition (asajjñāna, asammiścaya) into the framework of epistemological theory appears to have been a life-long concern of Dharmakīrti.

From the outset, a fundamental distinction should be drawn between two general types of non-perception (*anupalabdhi*), i.e., non-perception of (situationally) perceptible entities (*drśyānupalabdhi*) and non-perception of (at least situationally) imperceptible entities (*adṛśyānupalabdhi*). In order to be conclusively established (and cognitively, linguistically and practically treated) as non-existent, an entity must be potentially perceptible, i.e., within a certain person’s direct perceptual reach in terms of spatiotemporal location and intrinsic nature. Moreover, all the causal conditions for its perception must be instantiated. In other words, both non-perception as an epistemic event and inferences based on a reason consisting of the non-perception of something perceptible “target a spatio-temporally specific non-occurrence of certain objects for specific cognizers – a ‘situational’ non-occurrence” (Kellner 1999: 194). Provided an object fulfills these requirements (it is then termed *upalabdhilaksanaaprāpta*, “for which the [causal] characteristics for a perception have been attained”), its non-perception amounts to its non-existence (*asattā, abhāva*). The underlying assumption is that such an object would only be perceived if it were present and a set of additional causes were instantiated.

According to Dharmakīrti, the ascertainment of non-perception (as an epistemic and “preinferential” event) results from a complex cognitive process. Basically, the non-perception of an entity *a* is nothing but the perception of another entity *b*. Every perceptual awareness is self-cognizing (see §§9a and 14), and this self-cognizing character is responsible for the differentiation between cognitions. In other words, the self-cognizing cognition of *b* establishes its difference from the perception of *a* (and, indirectly, the difference between the entities *a* and *b*). The fact that the perception of *b* is strictly restricted to *b* “leads to the ascertainment that ‘only this exists’ …, [and] this indirectly leads to the ascertainment that the perception of [*a*] itself is absent, and further to the ascertainment that [*a*] itself is absent” (Kellner 2003: 143). Non-perception, then, does not consist in the non-perception of something absent, but in the perception of an [entity] that is different from it. The self-cognizing perception of *b* causes the negative conceptual cognition (i.e., a determinate cognition): “I do not perceive this (≡ *a*),” or “results in the ascertaining cognition that a perceptible entity is absent” (Kellner 2003: 135). This negative conceptual cognition serves
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in turn as a logical reason enabling one to infer the (situational) nonexistence/absence of something.\footnote{This provides the rationale behind Dharmakīrti’s reduction of non-perception as a logical reason to a case of essential property as a logical reason, a reduction allowing him to stick to his twofold account of natural/essential relations (causality and identity) and the corresponding types of logical reasons (effect and essential property, see §10c). His reduction of cause as a logical reason to essential property as a logical reason (see §10d) serves as the model for the present reduction (see Iwata 1991: 87–89, Kellner 2003: 139–141). Non-perception as a complete causal complex has the capacity to bring about the cognitive, linguistic and practical treatment of something as non-existent: “no further events other than the instantiation of non-perception are necessary for the instantiation of its capacity to produce an ascertainment as absent” (Kellner 2003: 141). This capacity for a treatment as absent (asadvyavahārayogya) thus fulfills the criterion of an essential property.}

Both in his HB and in his VN, Dharmakīrti distinguishes between three basic types of non-perception as a logical reason: non-perception of a thing (svabhāvānupalabdhi = svabhāvāsiddhi), as in: “Here is no smoke, because it is not perceived”; 2. non-perception of the cause (kāraṇānupalabdhi = hetvasiddhi), as in: “Here there is no smoke, because there is no fire”; 3. non-perception of the pervader (vyāpakānupalabdhi = vyāpakasvabhāvāsiddhi), as in: “Here is no birch, because there is no tree.” But as Dharmakīrti insists, negation may proceed either by the negation (niṣedha) of something or by the affirmation (vidhi) of something incompatible (vīruddha, i.e., contradictory stricto sensu, as permanent and impermanent, or contrary, as cold and hot) with that which is to be negated, thus providing a fourth basic kind of non-perception, the establishment or perception of something incompatible (vīruddhānapaṭalabdhi = vīruddhāsiddhi), as in: “Here there is no cold temperature, because there is fire.” Other than the non-perception of a thing, all these types of non-perception consist in the negation of one thing through the negation of another.\footnote{Yet another basic kind of non-perception (the validity of which Dharmakīrti had initially denied) appears in the PV in, i.e., non-perception of the effect (kāraṇānupalabdhi). Its validity is subject to the same kind of restrictions as the above-mentioned cause as a logical reason (see §10d). Note also that derived sub-types of non-perception as a logical reason lead to a total number of eight in the PV, ten in PV in 2, eleven in the NB and HB, and later on, fifteen to sixteen.}

What about the non-perception of something that does not fulfil the conditions of perceptibility, i.e., of super-sensible (atindriya) or transempirical (adṛṣṭa) things? Insofar as a means of valid cognition results in a determinate cognition, this form of non-perception is not a genuine pramāṇa since it does not allow one to establish and treat something as non-existent. This is tantamount to saying that this type of non-perception leads to a doubtful cognition, is a doubtful reason. Should human beings act out of certainty only, they would refrain from action because of their doubt regarding the non-existence of such things. However,
human beings do act in doubt also, a model of action which finds a paradigmatic application in scripturally-based religious practice.

§11a. Dharmakīrti’s two elaborations on the epistemic status of scripture (āgama) and religious authority present themselves as lengthy digressions in his treatment of the non-perception of something imperceptible. Could the silence of a supposedly all-inclusive scripture lead to the denial of transempirical things? Obviously not. First, because scripture does not bear on every possible object, but only on human goals and what is instrumental in their accomplishment. Second, and more importantly, because Dharmakīrti does not hold scripture (including Buddhist scripture) to be a genuine and independent (third) means of valid cognition. Just like the above-mentioned non-perception of something imperceptible, scripture can only result in a doubtful cognition. So how is Dignāga’s statement to the effect that scripture is an inference (and as such, a means of valid cognition) to be understood? Dharmakīrti’s answer is both of an anthropological and of an epistemological nature. Ordinary persons cannot live without resorting to scripture, because scripture is the only way for them to learn about transempirical things, i.e., what they can expect from their deeds and what to do in order to realize their ethical and soteriological expectations. But which scriptural tradition should one resort to in the crowded ancient Indian religious “market”? In other words, how can rational (i.e., not acting out of blind faith) but cognitively limited persons assess the reliability of scripture? According to Dharmakīrti, rationality requires that one first makes sure that a given scripture coherently (<sambaddha) teaches a human goal (puruṣārtha, like eschatological “elevation” or soteriological summum bonum) together with a practically realizable means (anugūṇopāya, such as the Buddhist cultivation of selflessness). If it does, one can then assess the reliability of that scripture by two alternative methods – though in Dharmakīrti’s practice, the first one is of heresiological nature, while the second one is apologetically oriented. Either (like Vasubandhu in his Vyākhyāyukti) one can establish that everything which the scripture purports to be perceptible and inferable is indeed perceptible (unlike the constituents of Sāṅkhya or some of the categories of Vaiśeṣika) and resists inferential analysis (unlike the non-Buddhists’ Self or creator God), and that no internal contradictions (pūrvaparavirodha) obtain (unlike in the Hindus’ prescription of physical ablutions to rid one of psychic impurity). Or (like Dharmapāla) one can establish that the principal point (pradhānārtha) taught in the scripture (in the case of Buddhism, the Four Noble Truths) stands critical analysis through the

two means of valid cognition. Should the empirically ascertainable (verifiable/falsifiable) teachings or the principal matter of a treatise stand rational analysis, one is justified in inferring that this scripture is no less reliable with regard to transempirical matters such as cosmology or eschatology (the “master’s” compassion and hence lack of interest in abusing others being presupposed). But as Dharmakīrti insists, this inference (or inferential transfer of authority) is as anthropologically necessary as it is (epistemo)logically unsatisfactory, for this inference is inconclusive (i.e., “with a remainder,” śeṣavat). No ordinary person can make sure that a scripture’s teaching on transempirical matters is indeed reliable. In other words, scripture can only be termed an inference in consideration of human practice (human beings having no other possibility), but is not a real (bhāvika) means of valid cognition at all. Not to speak of the Mīmāṃśaka doctrine of the authorlessness of the Veda, Dharmakīrti’s position differs significantly from the Jaina and Brahanical (Nyāya) one, in that it holds (together with Kumārila) the psychological and moral qualities (perception of super-sensible things, compassion, etc.) of the trustworthy person (āpta) to be out of cognitive reach for ordinary persons (though contrary to Kumārila and the Mīmāṃsā, Dharmakīrti holds that trustworthy persons like the Buddha exist). In other words, these ordinary persons cannot derive the reliability of scripture from the alleged trustworthiness of the speaker, but only assess it on a textual basis. In so doing, Dharmakīrti establishes on sound philosophical arguments the old Buddhist exegetical maxim according to which a monk and/or a Bodhisattva in the process of reflecting upon scriptural tenets should resort to reason (yukti) rather than to the person (pudgala), i.e., to human authority.

§11b. Ancient Indian religio-philosophical denominations can be divided into two groups according to whether they trace the reliability of their scriptures to the trustworthiness of their authors (Nyāya, Sāṅkhya, Vaiśeṣika, Jainism, Buddhism, etc.), or on the other hand explain the reliability of their scriptures by holding them not to have been authored at all (Mīmāṃsā, and Grammar to some extent). Representatives of the first group account for the trustworthiness of their “masters” by ascribing three properties to them: first, they are endowed with the capacity to perceive (mostly eschatologically or soteriologically relevant) things otherwise imperceptible to ordinary persons; second, they are compassionate; third, they are willing to teach things as they really are (or as they have experienced them). By contrast, representatives of the second group (above all Kumārila) hold human beings to be morally

corrupt and incapable of going beyond naturally, generically given cognitive faculties. Like the Nyāya, Dharmakīrti advocated mantras and their efficacy in order to demonstrate, against the Mīmāṃsā, that the perception of suprasensible things (atīndriyārthadarśana) was indeed possible. But unlike the Nyāya, Dharmakīrti drew a clear line between this kind of extraordinary ability (including omniscience in the sense of one’s positively knowing everything) and religious authority (prāmāṇya) in soteriological matters. According to him, the Mīmāṃsā (I should rather say: Tantrism in statu nascendi) explains mantras as possessing a natural efficacy (bhāvaśakti). After having criticised this theory (mostly on the grounds that such a natural efficacy would mean that the efficacy of Vedic mantras could not be restricted to the twice-born, as his Brahmin opponents averred), Dharmakīrti demonstrates that no ordinary human being would ever be capable of discriminating, given two phonetic sequences, which was mantra (i.e., efficacious) and which was not. Now, since human beings make regular use of mantras (for instance, against snakebites), there must exist persons capable of making this discrimination. According to him, mantras work because certain superior human persons arbitrarily decide to provide with specific results those people who recite such and such phonetic sequences under such and such ritual, devotional, psychological or even social conditions. In other words, those superior persons empower (adhivṛṣṭhā) phonetic sequences and promise (pratījnā) results, in a contractual way (< samaya), to those who conform to the prescriptions (vidhi, vidhāna, etc.) which they lay down in ritual books (mantrakalpa, tantra, etc.). One should be careful, however, not to confuse extraordinary perceptual abilities (which, according to Dharmakīrti, are pretty evenly distributed among Indian denominations down to barbarians, and can be due to tradition-specific means of generating them) with religious authority. As Dharmakīrti spells out in a celebrated passage of PV 2, persons longing for liberation should not look for someone who, like vultures, perceives distant or even all things (sarvasya vedakah, up to the total number of insects, kīṭasamkhya), but rather search for that person who knows, by dint of his personal practice, what ought to be cultivated and what ought to be rejected. In other and slightly anachronistic terms, persons searching for religious authority are advised to look for someone who is omniscient regarding that which is soteriologically useful (upayuktasarvajña) and not for someone omniscient regarding everything (sarvasarvajñata, McClintock’s “full-blown omniscience”). However, this advice might be primarily of a rhetorical and/or tactical nature, since explicit as well as implicit allusions to full-blown omniscience can easily be located in Dharmakīrti’s writings.
§12a.22 As we have seen, inferences have a corrective function, aimed as they are at uncovering those basic features of reality that, though perceived, have escaped conceptual ascertainment. This function of inferences has a direct bearing on the yogic (i.e., Buddhist) path towards liberation and plays a prominent role in that stage of the religious career traditionally known as the “insight born of (rational) reflection” (cintāmānī prajñā). Dharmakīrti associates this stage with the yogin’s resorting to reasoning (yukti, i.e., to the two means of valid cognition, although primarily to inference) in order to work out the rationally validated intellectual contents that he will subject to a nearly endless mental cultivation (bhāvanā), or to repeated practice (abhyāsa) aimed at creating and strengthening an (ultimately salvific) conceptual mind-set. Now, what the mystic (here most likely a Bodhisattva) “meditates” upon are precisely those real features of reality (the so-called vastudharmas) which inferences are required to bring out, and which coincide with the various aspects of the Four Noble Truths (āryasatya): impermanence or momentariness (anityatā, kṣaṇikatva), selflessness (nairātmya), painfulness (duḥkhatā) and emptiness (śūnyatā) in the case of the First Noble Truth. Just as these aspects are grasped by perception but, due to various causes of error and the absence of an appropriate mind-set, fail to be determined, inferences ascertain them on a conceptual level. The whole epistemological system is thus founded on basic Buddhist assumptions regarding the structure of reality. To this set of proofs belong the inference of momentariness (kṣaṇikatvānumāna) and selflessness (though the latter is by no means prominent in Dharmakīrti’s writings, and has escaped scholarly attention so far; according to post-Dharmakīrtian scholars, however, to prove momentariness ipso facto amounts to demonstrating selflessness). Considered in the framework of the insight born of rational reflection, however, inferences do not only aim at paving the way to yogic cultivation, but also serve to demonstrate, in an apologetic way, the very possibility (sambhava) and rationality of the Buddhist liberation system. This proves to be especially true in Dharmakīrti’s endeavours against the Materialists (lokāyata, cārvāka) and the representatives of the most uncompromising Brahmanical orthodoxy, the Mīmāṃsakas. By denying rebirth (punarbhava), the Materialists threaten the possibility of liberation by depriving Buddhist mystics of the time span necessary for achieving liberation or enlightenment, which is said to amount to myriads of successive lifetimes. By denying human beings the possibility of improving their ordinary abilities beyond what is naturally fixed, the Mīmāṃsā deprives the Buddhist

yogins of the capacity to eventually “naturalize” qualities such as compassion (karuṇā) and insight/discernment (prajñā, vipaśyanā), i.e., to bring them to their maximum and salvific degree of development. To this set of inferences belong Dharmakīrti’s proofs of rebirth (paralokasiddhi) as well as his demonstration that compassion (and, analogically, insight) can indeed be brought to their maximal intensity. This category may also include Dharmakīrti’s refutation of the existence of God, a doctrine that, like the Mīmāṃsaka assumption that the Veda is authorless, may lead to unsuccessful religious expectations and practice. As space is limited, I shall focus here on the most developed of these inferences, the proof of momentariness.

§12b. Dharmakīrti dedicated five lengthy passages to the inference of momentariness (kṣaṇikatvānumāna). This proof exhibits two main forms: first, an inference of perishability (vināśitvānumāna); second, an inference of momentariness from existence (sattvānumāna). Though Dharmakīrti is generally regarded as the first propounder of the sattvānumāna (from PVin 2 onwards), both inferences can be traced back, directly or indirectly, to inferences already drawn by Vasubandhu. In both cases, Dharmakīrti attempts to prove that entities are intrinsically transient, i.e., do not exist beyond one infinitesimal phase or moment (kṣaṇa). Dharmakīrti takes this intrinsic transience to be a fact that rival theories (Mīmāṃsā, Nyāya) fail to account for in a satisfactory way.

The inference of transience can be summarized as follows. Dharmakīrti wants to establish the concomitance between the two properties involved in the following argument: “All that which is produced is momentary.” Entities owe their transient (naśvara) nature to their own causes. In other words, transience belongs to their intrinsic nature, because the intervention of an external, specific cause of destruction (vināśahetu) cannot account for annihilation. Destruction cannot depend on a cause of destruction, for destruction would either not necessarily occur or not occur at all (for want of any impingement of the cause on the entity). First, destruction would be contingent (which it is not), because a cause does not necessarily bring about its effect. In the second step of his argument, Dharmakīrti denies that a cause can even have the capacity to bring about the destruction of an entity, for whatever perspective is adopted, this cause can only be of no consequence to, or ineffective with regard to the entity itself. This cause cannot produce the transient nature of the entity, for this entity has already (and exhaustively) come into existence through its own causes, and thus cannot be affected any longer. Should, then, this cause bring about something other than

the nature of the entity, the entity would remain unaffected. Something ineffective cannot be depended upon.

There might, however, be things (such as mountains) that are both produced and not found to be momentary, thus threatening Dharmakīrti’s logical reason (“being produced”) with being inconclusive (anaikāntika, i.e., present in cases dissimilar to the property to be proved). Considered in a systematic perspective, this is the kind of objection that prompted Dharmakīrti to shape a new proof, the proof of momentariness from existence, according to which all that exists is momentary. Here Dharmakīrti establishes the concomitance between the two properties (“to exist” and “to be momentary”) by resorting to a valid cognition (i.e., an inference) excluding the occurrence of the logical reason in cases contrary to the property to be proven (sādhyaviparyayābādhakapramāṇa), i.e., by establishing the argument in its contraposed form: “All that which is non-momentary is non-existent”. As we have seen, “existent” is to be defined as “causally efficient”. Now, that which is non-momentary (and hence cannot depend on purely occasional cooperating factors) can produce an effect neither gradually (kramena) nor at one time, simultaneously (yaugapadyena). Because of its non-momentariness and the completeness of its unimpeded causal efficacy, this entity would produce its entire effect in the first phase, thus leaving nothing unproduced for the subsequent phases, and this prevents it from producing anything gradually; and because of its non-momentariness, this entity could not stop bringing about its effect after the first phase, and this prevents it from producing at one time only. Since this hypothetical non-momentary entity can produce an effect neither gradually nor simultaneously, it is devoid of any causal efficacy, and thus does not meet the defining conditions of existence.

§13a.24 These kinds of inferences can be interpreted as exemplifying those which, still as an ordinary person (prthagjana), a reflecting Buddhist yogin resorts to in order to uncover the true nature of reality. But what is a Buddhist mystic intent upon according to Dharmakīrti? In order to understand what the path consists of, one should examine Dharmakīrti’s account of suffering (duḥkha), which he defines as the constituents of (pseudo-)personality undergoing transmigration (samsārināḥ skandhāḥ) or, in short, rebirth (punarbhava). According to Dharmakīrti, the ultimate cause of suffering is nescience, of which we already know that it basically consists of inconceptuality or erroneous cognition. But conceptuality as such cannot be held responsible for rebirth. Entanglement in samsāra results from one’s deeds (karman), which in turn follow from

defilements (kleśa) such as craving (tṛṣṇā, rāga) and hostility (dveṣa). Now, the cause of defilements (and hence of deeds) can be seen in the specialized form of nescience that Dharmaśānti (indebted to doctrinal traditions possibly based on the canonical Śālistamba Sūtra and, more surely, on the Pratītyasamutpādaśāstra) calls the “false view of self” (ātmadṛṣṭi) or “personalistic false view/belief” (satkāyadṛṣṭi). In its innate/spontaneous form, this belief consists in one’s erroneously taking the constituents of (pseudo-)personality (corporality, affective sensation, identification, conditioning factors, perception) to be a self or belong to that self. Such is, then, the basic structure of Dharmaśānti’s account of dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda). To believe in a self and what belongs to the self, as all ordinary beings (including animals) do, leads one to become attached to self and one’s own, to desire (and rush towards) what is thought to benefit the self, and to be hostile towards what is felt as opposing appropriation. All defilements (envy, jealousy, avarice, self-conceit, etc.), the actions they give rise to as well as entanglement in samsāra, can be derived from this basic sequence. In order to put an end to suffering (which is the aim of Buddhism), one should, as the Buddha did, eradicate the cause of suffering (duḥkhahetu, nescience qua personalistic belief) by identifying and cultivating its antidote (pratipakṣa). The antidote consists in the cognition whose object and aspect are contrary to the false view of self, i.e., selflessness. The whole path towards liberation amounts, then, to a counteracting path through which the yogin (in the present case, the Bodhisattva) gradually uproots the false view of self and its attendant defilements by “naturalizing” (sāmtbhāva) or “realizing” (sāksātkaraṇa) the intuition of selflessness (nairātmyadarśana). Put in epistemological terms, the path endows the yogin with an ever-increasing cognitive sharpness (buddhipāṭava), i.e., enables him to ascertain momentariness or selflessness upon perceiving real entities. Through diverse phases (“path of vision” eradicating the “speculative” form of the personalistic belief; “automatization” of long-trained mental qualities such as compassion and insight), the cultivation process culminates in what is called the transformation of the basis of existence (āśrayaparīvrftti), a pivotal moment equivalent to the acquisition of liberation. Of this transformation Dharmaśānti provides two alternative accounts. According to the first or “realist” account (which coincides with Vasubandhu’s treatment of the āśrayaparīvrftti in the Abhidharmakośa), the defilements are now eradicated together with their latent tendencies (savāsana). According to the second or “idealist” account (see §14c), all polarity/duality between object and subject (grāhyagṛāhaka) has now been uprooted (most probably together with the latent tendency of duality, dvayavāsanā). Whichever model one considers, the trans-
formation of the basis entails two eliminations: first, of the obstacle consisting in defilements together with their traces or after-effects (sāvāsanakleśāvaraṇa); second, of the obstacle to the knowable (jñeyāvaraṇa), an elimination traditionally held to coincide with omniscience (sarvajñatā, see §11b) and/or the elimination of undefiled nescience (akliśtāvidyā, that factor which prevents all those who are not perfectly enlightened Buddhas from teaching authoritatively). The yogin is now an omniscient Buddha endowed with a specific kind of cognition (yogipratyakṣa, see §13c), a cognition that Dharmakīrti deems inconceivable (acintya) for ordinary human beings like himself.

§13b.25 Dharmakīrti’s aim while elaborating on Buddhology (= PV 2) is to demonstrate, mainly against Mīmāṃsā (but also Nyāya and Materialism), that the Buddha has become and is like a means of valid cognition (pramāṇabhūta), i.e., teaches in an authoritative manner what is soteriologically relevant. Dharmakīrti’s outline purports to be a commentary on the benedictory stanza of Dignāga’s PS. In this famous stanza, Dignāga ascribes five properties (or epithets) to the Buddha: He has become/is (like?) a means of valid cognition, seeks the benefit of all living creatures (jagaddhitaiṣin), is a teacher (śāstra), a Sugata (lit. “well gone”, a perfectly enlightened Buddha), and a protector (tāyin) of living beings. According to Dignāga, the last four properties coincide respectively with the Buddha’s perfections (sampad) regarding his intention (āśaya), his practice (prayoga), his own benefit (svārtha) and the benefit of others (parārtha). Let us now try to map this fourfold description (which Dignāga left empty of any doctrinal content) onto the path structure outlined above. (1) While still an ordinary person, the future Buddha vows to alleviate the suffering of human beings by teaching them the means to salvation; as such, he seeks the benefit of all living beings, and is fully compassionate (according to Devendrabuddhi, Śākyabuddhi and Kamalaśīla, on account of his gotra or “spiritual lineage”). (2) In order to teach, the future Buddha must first put an end to his own suffering by identifying and practising a path to salvation, for one can only teach what one has experienced; the Bodhisattva discovers the path by rationally analyzing suffering (does it have a cause or not? if yes, is this cause permanent or impermanent?), determining its cause (craving caused by the false view of self) and, through reflection on the properties of this cause, by identifying its antidote (the intuition of selflessness). This is the Bodhisattva’s rational reflection (cintā), which endows him both with a path and with the Four Noble Truths. Salvific practice consists in cultivating this antidote without interruption for an intermi-
nable period. This is the developmental process (bhāvanā) ultimately leading to the insight born of mental cultivation (bhāvanāmayī prajñā). Thus the future Buddha is the teacher, in the sense that he identifies and practises the method that will enable him to teach. (3) Through this process, the cause of suffering is eliminated together with its after-effects (vāsanā); and thanks to his cognitive sharpness, the yogin sees the qualities of the antidote and the drawbacks of the cause of suffering with such clarity that he is now in a position to teach them. This is the final transformation of the basis, which makes the Bodhisattva a Sugata whose all-encompassing cognition distinguishes him from other categories of Buddhist saints (Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas). This is firstly because he has rid himself of the after-effects of defilements, unlike Arhats, who still have physically, verbally or intellectually to experience traces of past proclivities (cf. the stories of the Arhats Mahāmaudgalyāyana and Pilindavatsa); and secondly because he has shed any clumsiness in teaching the path. (4) Endowed with the perfection of teaching, distinguished by his “miraculous teaching”, the Buddha is a fully compassionate authority, a protector, in that he teaches the path he has experienced, or the Four Noble Truths. Let me here make four remarks pertaining to epistemological issues. First, both the path and the Noble Truths are things hitherto unknown to human beings, which makes the Buddha a means of valid cognition according to the second, “Mīmāṃsaka” definition (see §8c). Second, the elaboration on the Buddha as a protector provides Dharmakīrti with the opportunity to demonstrate the reliability of each of the Four Noble Truths and thus to prove that, the principal point of the Buddhist scriptures being reliable, all other points (i.e., teachings on super-sensible matters) must be so too, because the Buddha has no interest in lying to human beings (see §11a). In this sense, both the Buddhist scriptures and the Buddha are authoritative (but by no means genuine means of valid cognition) according to the first, “Buddhist” definition (see §8b). Third, Dharmakīrti interprets Dignāga’s stanza as underlying a proof that the Buddha has become like a means of valid cognition: considered in its progressive or “biographical” order, each property provides the cause or necessary condition (Franco’s causa fiendi) for the following one; but taken in reverse order, they supply logical reasons (effects as logical reasons, Franco’s causa cognoscendi) from which the authority of the Buddha can be inferred. Fourth, besides this logical interpretation of the reverse sequence as an inference based on effects as logical reasons, one cannot entirely rule out a logical interpretation of the progressive sequence as entailing causes as logical reasons, and hence of essential properties as logical reasons (see §10c/d). Provided each epithet reflects a complete and unimpeded causal complex, it can validly prove
this cause’s fitness for producing its effect or, equivalently, the possibility that this effect will arise.

§13c.26 According to Dharmakīrti, four types of cognition meet the two necessary criteria for being called “perception”, viz. being non-conceptual and non-erroneous (see §9a). As we have seen, the third type is known as the perception of yogins. Though Dharmakīrti never makes clear whom he has in mind, we can take for granted that his yogins are mystics who are travelling on or have traversed a Buddhist-like path. This path consists of three stages characterized by three types of insight: insight born of learning scriptures, insight born of rational reflection upon scriptural tenets, and insight born of mental cultivation. As we have seen, the second stage is characterized by the yogin’s identifying, on the basis of inferences, the essential features of reality. As for the third stage, it consists of the yogin’s intensifying his conceptual mind-set and so developing his cognitive sharpness that he identifies these features conceptually whenever he perceives the real entities. Now according to Dharmakīrti, any cognition that is intensively cultivated ends up by displaying a vivid image (spaṣṭābhāsa) of its object. This holds true of a longing lover’s image of the beloved, of someone dreaming of robbers, and of Buddhist practitioners engaged in preliminary visualisation exercises such as contemplating the loathsome (aśubha). In the same way, a yogin’s uninterrupted cultivation of aspects such as impermanence, selflessness or painfulness ends up in an absolutely vivid cognition of them. There is, however, a crucial difference between the lover’s and the mystic’s cognitions. Whereas the first bears on an unreal (abhūta) object (the absent beloved, non-existent thieves, an imaginary corpse), the second has an utterly real (bhūta) object, an object that agrees with the means of valid cognition, due to the inferential identification of these aspects during the stage of rational reflection. As we can see, the cognition of a mystic who has thoroughly cultivated conceptual counterparts of the true aspects of reality is at the same time vivid and reliable (avisamvādin). This, however, is not unproblematic regarding both the definition of perception and the identity of the yogin. First, “vivid” is by no means interchangeable with “non-conceptual”; an advanced yogin’s cognition may well display a vivid image, but is still of a conceptual nature. In other words, it is like the cognition of someone dreaming of, say, selflessness, which Dharmakīrti would certainly not accept as perception. Dharmakīrti, however, explicitly describes his yogin’s cognition as being not only vivid, but also non-conceptual (a[vi]jalpaka), which seems to imply an unmediated encounter

with the momentary and selfless reality itself. Now as we have seen, ordinary perception grasps the momentary and selfless reality, but ordinary persons afflicted by nescience fail to identify its aspects, or do so only on the conceptual level of inference. And this holds true even of an advanced but not yet liberated yogin, for nescience, i.e., conceptuality, is only eradicated at the transformation of the basis of existence. Second, Dharmakīrti always links the perception of yogins to the kind of cognition that arises at the completion of the cultivation (bhāvanānispatti), i.e., at the very end of the path, which is very likely to coincide with the transformation of the basis of existence (see §13a), i.e., in the case of Buddhas, with enlightenment. At any rate, this seems to rule out most if not all non-liberated mystics. Third, at the very end of his PVin 1, Dharmakīrti alludes to the ultimate (means of) valid cognition (pāramārthikapramāṇa) which, he says, he has only very briefly hinted at earlier. This ultimate (means of) valid cognition, which is very likely to be equated with the yogin’s perception, is most certainly the one that characterizes enlightened Buddhas. These arguments lead me to conjecture that the yogins Dharmakīrti has in mind are enlightened Buddhas who have ridden themselves of nescience and have a non-conceptual, hence non-erroneous access to ultimate reality. The problem is, however, far from settled.

§14a.27 All the theories examined so far are committed to externalist assumptions regarding the world and the object of cognition. Notwithstanding varying degrees of conceptual sophistication and counterintuitive character, all of them presuppose the factual existence of middle-sized entities situated outside cognition (though, it is true, all mental events are also objects of self-cognition, i.e., are self-cognizing). For many centuries, several Buddhist (Sarvāstivādin, Sautrāntika) as well as non-Buddhist (Vaiśekika) schools had advocated atomistic doctrines in order to account for the reality (and perceptibility) of external objects (bāhyārtha); Dharmakīrti was, at least provisionally, no exception. From the time of Vasubandhu, however, Buddhist idealists had set about criticizing these atomistic explanations of extra-mental reality. In his Viṃśatikā, Vasubandhu refuted Vaiśekika, Sarvāstivādin-Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika theories on the basis of their internal inconsistencies. One century later, Dignāga’s Examination of the Object (of Cognition) (Ālambanaparīkṣā) had demonstrated that in none of the available Buddhist atomistic theories did the supposed (external) object of cognition instantiate the two necessary conditions for truly being an (external) object of cognition (ālambana): first, that it be real, viz. the cause

of the cognition; second, that its form correspond to its image in the cognition. The atoms (anu, paramātu) of the Sarvāstivādin, which assemble “without touching each other” (Hattori), are certainly real, but fail to appear in the cognition; as for the tightly aggregated atoms of the Sautrāntika, which assemble “without gaps between them” (Hattori), they are isomorphic with the content of cognition, but the very fact that they constitute a collection dooms them to unreality and causal inefficacy. From the deficiencies in these accounts of external reality, Vasubandhu and Dignāga concluded that external objects of perception did not exist, and advocated “mind-only” or “representation-only” (vijñānavāda, vijñaptimātratā). Once again, Dharmakīrti was no exception, though he provisionally developed the Sautrāntika model further so as to have it instantiate Dignāga’s two conditions. According to Dharmakīrti, an isolated atom is incapable of generating a cognition, but once it finds itself associated with others in a complex, it gets endowed (as are the others) with the capacity of generating a cognition (i.e., with a supplementary, new or specific property – višeṣa, atiśaya – just as a single palanquin bearer is incapable of performing what is required of four). The aggregated atoms, then both are causally efficacious and correspond to the image in the cognition.

§14b. This position, however, does not fit Dharmakīrti’s usual model of perception, according to which the object of perceptual awareness is as undivided as the cognition that it gives rise to (see §5b). Now, according to this revised Sautrāntika theory, the object is multiple (aneka, i.e., consists of many atoms, comparable to a heap of sesame grains, or of many colours themselves composed of many coloured atoms, like a variegated butterfly), but the cognition is one, a fact that Dharmakīrti deems contradictory. His Vaiśeṣika opponent tries to have him admit that the cognition of something multiple proceeds through a succession of extremely rapid perceptions of the component parts, this finally being synthesized by conceptual construction, or that the many elements form a single whole (avayavin, distinct from the parts) which can be held responsible for a single act of perception. Dharmakīrti discards both hypotheses. Facts seem to resist rational explanation by leading to self-contradictory statements. As Dharmakīrti says (PV 3.209cd), “the more one analyses things/objects, the more they collapse/dissolve”. According to him, the problem is not to be solved unless one renounces externalist and dualistic accounts of cognition. The object is best explained as situated not outside cognition, but within or as a part (bhāga, amśa) of cognition. In this perspective, human cognition is to be explained exclusively with reference to the mind.
Dharmakīrti’s task will be to demonstrate, first, that the object of cognition can be reduced to cognition itself, i.e., that the object already belongs, as a part or modality, to the cognition (this is generally referred to as a cognition’s “two-formedness”, dvairūpya); second, that the awareness is not due to a second, subsequent cognition grasping the first one and bringing it to consciousness, but is due to the cognition’s self-awareness or self-cognizing character. This twofold reduction of the object and the awareness to the cognition itself is an important philosophical concern in the two chapters Dharmakīrti dedicated to perception (PV 3 and PV in 1).

Dharmakīrti devotes several arguments to the demonstration that the object of cognition must belong to the cognition itself (some of them still presupposing the provisional existence of an external object based on the Sautrāntika model). Let us consider the way in which recollection (smṛti) grasps a past object (atītārthagraha). Recollection cannot be born directly of an external object, for three reasons: first, because it displays a non-vivid image; second, because the recollected object has already perished; third, because if its object were externally present, persons located in its vicinity would cognize it too. Cognition through memory conforms to mere wishes and arises from a former perceptual cognition. Now, were this previous cognition to lack an object within it, how could the recollection display, even in a non-vivid way, an image of the object? The cognition through memory takes the two aspects (the “object” and “subject” aspects, grāhyagrāhakākāra) of the initial cognition as its object and displays a uniform image of the object. More famous is the argument traditionally known as the sahopalambhaniyama (or sahasaṃvittiniyama), “the necessary co-perception (of the object and the cognition)”. One can pretty well demonstrate that two colours, say blue and yellow, are distinct, because they are not necessarily perceived simultaneously. But what about object and cognition? Or, as Dharmakīrti himself asks (PV 3.387): “How can it be proven that the object is distinct from the [cognition, if it is] necessarily experienced simultaneously with the cognition [itself]?” In other words, there is no object without or outside a cognition, and there is no cognition without an object. Therefore, “it can hardly be avoided that the object, which [always] appears at the [same] time as the cognition, is not distinct from the cognition [itself]” (PV 3.390). According to Dharmakīrti, the (erroneous) distinction between object and cognition is due to nescience, which is also responsible for the fact that the object, which is intrinsic to the cognition, is conceived as external (āropaviplava).

How are we to account for the fact that we are doubtlessly aware of our cognitions? Is this to be explained by hypothesizing that a subsequent cognition (a
perception according to Nyāya, an inference according to Mīmāṃsā) cognizes the cognition preceding it and thus makes one conscious of it? Or is this awareness rather to be accounted for by supposing that each cognition is naturally self-cognizing? As already argued by Dignāga, the first hypothesis entails an infinite regress (anavasthā), for the second cognition would have to be made conscious by another, third cognition, etc. The second hypothesis alone provides a satisfactory explanation of our being conscious of our cognitions (and other associated mental events).

§14c. Moreover, to posit a duality (dvaya) between an object (grāhya) and a subject (grāhaka, i.e., the cognition itself) is nothing but an error (bhrānti) resulting from nescience (avidyā). This provides us with Dharmakīrti’s “idealistic” version of nescience. As in his more usual account, nescience basically consists in conceptuality, but conceptuality has now shifted to mean that deluded people systematically posit a duality between subject and object and constitute the world in terms of this dichotomy. In this perspective, the Buddhist path towards enlightenment, i.e., to the uprooting of (undefined) nescience, amounts to the mental cultivation of non-duality (as idealist dogmatics already claimed), and culminates (at the “transformation of the basis of existence,” see §13a) in the final resorption of duality by realizing the true nature of cognition.

§15. Dharmakīrti’s philosophy can be regarded neither as the systematized outcome of something like a Buddhist dialectical tradition, nor as a highly sophisticated answer to challenges of a purely philosophical order. In other words, Dharmakīrti’s system cannot be satisfactorily accounted for either in terms of intellectual continuity in a history of tackling certain philosophical problems, or on the basis of methodological assumptions which disregard non-philosophical, socio-historical factors. Buddhist intellectuals of different sects and/or schools had long systematized their doctrines and challenged each other without taking non-Buddhist philosophical schools into consideration. The same can safely be said of Brahmanical schools such as Nyāya or Mīmāṃsā. In many respects, the period between 475 and 550 A.D., which coincides with the gradual collapse of the Gupta dynasty, can be considered a turning point. Brahmanical orthodoxy (notably in Mīmāṃsā and works such as the Viṣṇupurāṇa) now explicitly resorts to apocalyptic rhetoric and interpretations in order to account for the rise and spread of heretical movements such as Buddhism. Kumārila’s Tantravārttika clearly shows how philosophical interaction mirrors nonphilosophical and social as well as religious interests. The most prominent Buddhist intellectuals of the time (Dignāga, Dharmapāla, Dharmakīrti, Bhāviveka) no less suddenly start addressing non-Buddhist philosophies and religious doctrines in a systematic
way. This heresiological turn develops against the background of the political, economic and social insecurity brought by the decline and fall of the Gupta empire. As Xuanzang and archaeological studies testify, Buddhist monks abandoned former strongholds and concentrated in new institutions, few but nevertheless prosperous centres of ritual and learning such as Nālandā. The Buddhist answer to these new challenges takes two main forms. First, the epistemological school aims at responding to outward criticism, defeating non-Buddhist schools and developing new forms of Buddhist apologetics and strategies of supersectarian self-assertion. Second, the esoteric synthesis, likely indebted to Śaivism, provides Buddhism with a new ritual, symbolic and soteriological identity modelled on and designed for political power. All these factors seem to coalesce in Dharmakīrti’s works (especially in his PV). In addition to developing Dignāga’s epistemology further and defending it against Brahmanical criticism, Dharmakīrti endeavoured to have it fit key Buddhist metaphysical assumptions and to organize it in such a way that it might supply Buddhism with philosophically grounded apologetics. Dharmakīrti relentlessly criticised those non-Buddhist doctrines that threatened Buddhism as a whole (Kumārila’s version of the authorlessness of scriptures, etc.) or undermined the rationality of the Buddhist path to salvation (Materialism, Mīmāṃsā). Moreover, he did not hesitate to refute some of his coreligionists’ doctrines that he found guilty of betraying basic Buddhist dogmas such as impermanence (in the case of the prototantric natural efficiency of mantras), selflessness (in the case of the Vātsīputrīyas’ “person”) and nominalism (in the case of Vaibhāṣika linguistic theory). Whether or not he succeeded in his aims – and we recall that it took quite a long time for his doctrine to become firmly established – Dharmakīrti did become one of the most influential of ancient Indian philosophers. Many theoretical elaborations within Mīmāṃsā, Nyāya, Jainism or Śaivism are strongly indebted to Dharmakīrti. His work provided the basic theoretical instruments that made reformulations of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra possible. Last but not least, Dharmakīrti’s thought has remained to this day a central component of Tibetan philosophical education and monastic culture. In all these respects, his work must be considered one of the most decisive contributions to the universal history of philosophy.

ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

ATBS = Arbeitskreis für tibetische und buddhistische Studien Universität Wien – Balcerowicz 2010 = Piotr Balcerowicz (ed): Logic and Belief in Indian Philosophy, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass – Vittorio van Blijert 1989 = Episte-
DHARMAKĪRTI


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