



Perception and Apperception

Dharmakīrti on the Self-Presencing of Mental States

Dharmakīrti's representationalism centers on the concept of the aspect through which objects are perceived. Objects are apprehended through the imprints that their contact with the senses leave on consciousness. Thus, when perceiving external objects, consciousness is actually cognizing itself. Reflexivity is the condition for any cognitive activity. This is a basic tenet of Dharmakīrti's system first propounded by Dignāga. Both thinkers take great pains to prove this point, on which their theories of perception and their idealist metaphysics rest.¹

This view that cognition is self-revelatory (*svaprakāśa, rang gsal ba*) or self-presenting is shared by the Prābhākara Mīmāṃsakas and the Advaita Vedāntins. According to their view, knowers know that they are aware of a cognized object because a cognition reveals itself to the knowing self. The reflexive nature of cognition is not accepted by the Naiyāyikas and the Baṭṭha Mīmāṃsakas, who maintain that cognition of an object does not necessitate awareness of that cognition. The Nyāya holds that perception is usually followed by an awareness of that perception. Thus, knowers usually are informed of their own mental processes by apperceptions that apprehend perceptions. However, this inner recognition may not arise due to a change in the knower's interest and expectation.²

Several arguments are presented by Dharmakīrti to establish the reflexive nature of consciousness.³ One of his main arguments concerns the nature of suffering and happiness as it reveals the deeper nature of mental states. For Dharmakīrti, suffering and happiness are not external to consciousness, but integral to our awareness of external objects. For example, we do not get burned and afterward feel pain. Rather, our perceptions are colored from the very start by our sensations. Our perceptions arise with a certain tone feeling, be it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.⁴ Thus, suffering and happiness are feelings experienced through the same mental states that apprehend external objects. They are not experienced separately from the objects we see, although they are different from them. How is a single mental state able to apprehend an external object and experience a sensation?

Dharmakīrti answers that this points to the dual nature of mental states. A mental episode apprehends an object, for example, food, which we find pleasant.

In doing so, the mental state is associated with a pleasant feeling.⁵ In perceiving the external object, the food, we immediately know “how it feels” to taste this object. In this single mental state, two aspects can be distinguished. The first is the external object or, rather, its representation, revealing itself. This aspect is described as the objective aspect (*grāhyākāra*, *gzung rnam*). The second aspect is the apprehension of this appearance. This is the subjective aspect (literally, “holding aspect”; *grāhakākāra*, *'dzin rnam*), which Dharmakīrti describes as self-cognition. Dharmakīrti says: “Therefore, happiness, etc., is commonly understood as [an experience of objects] because it has the appearance of objects being transferred onto itself and is experienced. [Happiness] does not, however, directly cognize the external object [but] cognizes itself through being merely produced from an [external] object.”⁶ Objects are not cognized directly but by an indirect process in which they produce their perceptions. These directly apprehend the representations of the objects. The term *apprehension of external objects* refers to this causal process in which an external object induces a mental state to experience itself under a certain aspect. Hence, when we are aware of something, we are at the same time cognizant of this awareness. This self-awareness is not objectified, so we are not aware of ourselves in quite the same way as we are aware of external objects. Nevertheless, our own experiences are integrated into the continuity of our mental life without any necessary mediation. We do not have to think that we experience, for we are unthematically and immediately aware of this fact.

For Dharmakīrti, a mental state thus has two functions. It apprehends an external object (*ālambana*, *dmigs pa*). This process is not, however, direct, but results from the causal influence of the object, which induces cognition to experience (*anubhava*, *myong*) its representation. The mind does not experience an external object but beholds an internal representation that stands for an external object. Hence, Dharmakīrti says: “Therefore, for all cognition, observation and experience are different.”⁷ Cognition cannot be reduced to a process of direct observation but involves holding an inner representation. This beholding is not, however, an apprehension in the usual sense of the word, for the two aspects of a single mental episode are not separate. It is an “intimate” contact, a direct acquaintance of the mental state by itself through which we experience our mental states at the same time as we perceive things.

Among Western philosophers, Sartre provides a somewhat similar account of consciousness. Like Dharmakīrti, and unlike Kant or Husserl, Sartre offers a nonegological (i.e., selfless) model of consciousness that explains reflexivity without presupposing the existence of a unitary self. He argues that reflexivity does not require the existence of a transcendental ego,⁸ which would organize the variety of perceptions and thoughts as if it existed behind each mental episode. The unity of mental life can be explained by the reflexivity of an impersonal or prepersonal field of consciousness. The various thoughts and perceptions we have are organized as ours on the basis of the reflexive awareness we have of them. Recollection is made possible because our mind is also cognizant of its own seeing. Sartre explains: “Indeed, the existence of consciousness is an absolute because con-

sciousness is conscious of itself. That is, the type of existence of consciousness is to be conscious of itself. And consciousness is aware of itself *inasmuch as it is conscious of a transcendent object.*⁹ Hence, everything is clear and lucid in consciousness. The object with its characteristic opacity is before consciousness. Consciousness is purely and simply conscious to be conscious of that object; such is the law of its existence. We must add that this consciousness—except in cases of reflective consciousness which we will insist on later—is not *positional*, that is, that consciousness is not its own object.”¹⁰ For Sartre, the unity of mental life is the result of consciousness’s awareness of itself. The mind is aware of other objects and, in the process, reveals its presence. This self-presencing is not, however, thematic. That is, we are not aware, except in cases in which we reflect on ourselves, of our awareness. Nevertheless, we are cognizant of our mental states. This is what Sartre describes as nonpositional self-consciousness; that is, the reflexivity of a mental state that does not set itself up as an object but rather becomes aware of itself through being aware of an object.

A similar view is embraced by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti with their doctrine of self-cognition or apperception, whose importance must be clear by now.¹¹ A number of questions, however, are left unanswered in their view: Is apperception a cognition, and if so, does it have an object? What is the nature of the relation between the two aspects of consciousness? And last, if consciousness’s awareness of objects is a cognition of itself, how can we speak of the perception of external objects? These questions are not explicitly addressed by Dharmakīrti. To explore them, let us involve Tibetan commentators, starting with a discussion of whether self-cognition is a subject or not.

Does Self-Cognition Have an Object?

Self-cognition or apperception makes us aware of our mental states without thematizing them. As such it is certainly not a subject in the usual sense of the term. Can we then say that apperception is really an apprehending subject, that is, that it has an object? And if apperception is not a subject, how can we say that it is a cognition?

On this difficult point, Tibetan epistemologists have given contradictory answers, which reflect intra- as well as intersectarian differences. Most of Sa-paṇ’s followers argue that apperception has no object. It does not observe anything but rather is the experience of an inner representation. It is an awareness not because it observes an object but because it is the self-presencing of a mental state. To put it in Dharmakīrtian terms, self-cognition is the luminosity of consciousness itself. Yak-dön, the fourteenth century reviver of Sa-paṇ’s antirealism, seems to have been the first to clearly state this view in Tibet. He explains: “As for self-cognition, it is not the type of self-cognition in which cognizer and cognized [could be] distinguished, but it is the very [nature of consciousness] being merely produced as cognition that is different from matter. Therefore, self-cognition has no

object."¹² Mental states apprehend their objects only through the intermediary of aspects, which are internal representations of the object apprehended indirectly by the cognition. For Yak-dön, apperception is the reflexive or subjective aspect of mental episode that is aware of the representations produced within consciousness by external objects. The ability of mental states to cognize their objects is what separates them from material objects. Mental states are intentional, they are directed toward objects, which they apprehend. For Yak-dön, this intentionality is not a direct contact between cognition and the external world but results from the ability of mental states to become aware of the representations produced within themselves by external objects. This ability to behold representations is due to apperception, the reflexive apprehension of representations internal to the cognition. Since apperception is not a separate mental state, it does not have an object distinct from itself; it is just the reflexive aspect of a mental state.

This view is quite similar to Sa-paṇ's brief comments in his *Auto-Commentary*. There, he rejects "that which cognizes an object" as the definition of *mental state* (*blo, buddhi*) on the grounds that it is both circular and does not include self-cognition, which is mental without having an object. For Sa-paṇ, self-cognition does not take itself as its object:

Question: Is not self-cognition the object?

Answer: It is contradictory for something to be [both] subject and object. Therefore, explanations of self-cognition as having an object [as in the example of the self-revealing of the lamp] are metaphorical.¹³

A subject-object relation requires that object and cognition be distinct. If self-cognition were its own object, it would have to be distinct from itself. However, we become cognizant of our mental states without the conscious realization that we are aware, as is illustrated by the example of the lamp that self-reveals while revealing other objects. The lamp does not light itself like it does external objects. It merely reveals its presence in the act of making objects clear. Similarly, consciousness does not take itself as an object, but merely self-cognizes while being aware of other objects.¹⁴

This view is not shared, however, by all followers of Sa-paṇ. Despite his representationalism, Go-ram-ba disagrees with this view on the following grounds. Take the example of the recollection of an experience. Since this recollection is a subsequent cognition, its object (the experience) must have been realized by a previous cognition, which cannot be but apperception itself. Therefore, apperception must have an object. Moreover, argues Go-ram-ba, as self-cognition is a valid cognition it must be intentional. It must be directed toward something and, hence, must have an object. To cover his differences with Sa-paṇ's clear assertion that self-cognition has no object, Go-ram-ba engages in an exegetical exercise typical of scholastic commentarial traditions. He interprets Sa-paṇ's comments not as denying that apperception has an object, but as rejecting the idea that a thought qua thought (and not qua cognition) can be the object of its own apperception. The

object of the apperception of a conceptual cognition is not the latter's identity as a conception, but its identity as a mental state; that is, its clarity.

Kay-drup defends a similar point, although his view of perception and apperception radically differ from Go-ram-ba's. Kay-drup argues that if apperception had no object it could not be nondeceptive (*mi slu ba, avisamvādi*) with respect to a real thing. Moreover, the rejection of apperception's object contradicts the example given by Dharmakīrti. For if a lamp does not reveal itself, how is it that we see it? And if does reveal itself, does it not light itself? Similarly, apperception reveals itself in the process of revealing other objects. In the process, it must cognize itself and, hence, must take itself as its own object.

The view that apperception has an object is not surprising in Kay-drup, who, as we will see shortly, is a direct realist and argues for a reflective view of apperception. It is more surprising in an author such as Go-ram-ba, who argues for representationalism and a nonreflective view of apperception. How can apperception have an object in such a view since it does not apprehend anything, not even itself? Is not apperception an experiencing of an inner mental state, a process to which the subject-object distinction simply does not apply? Although the assertion that apperception has an object is difficult to sustain in Go-ram-ba's perspective, it corresponds to his particular approach, which is to show that representationalism is compatible with a phenomenological respect for the commonsense view of mental processes.

This difference among Sa-paṇ's orthodox commentators should also remind us not to overemphasize the inter-sectarian differences among Tibetan epistemologists. My description of the conflict between Sa-paṇ's followers and their realist contemporaries should not mask that there are important intrasectarian differences as well. Although, in Book I, I insisted on the former type of difference (since there seems to be relative unanimity among thinkers of each group about the issue of universals), here I have tried to correct that impression by bringing to our attention the intrasectarian differences as well.

The similarities between Kay-drup and Go-ram-ba are quite real. They should not hide, however, the deeper differences over the analysis of perception and apperception. This is no surprise, given their different theories of perception. Whereas Go-ram-ba holds the representationalist view sketched previously, Kay-drup holds a direct realist view. This difference is brought out next in our discussion, on the nature of and relation between the two aspects, objective and subjective. I ask the reader to bear with me through this exceedingly technical discussion, for it reveals often unnoticed but important differences between the Sa-gya and Ge-luk theories of perception.

Go-ram-ba's Representationalism

Go-ram-ba defines *self-cognition* as "that subjective aspect which apprehends the nature of [the cognition] itself."¹⁵ This characterization is accepted by

most of his contemporaries.¹⁶ This unanimity, however, hides deep differences concerning the nature of aspects and apperception that often remain buried under the common definition and the exegetical details. These differences surface on the rather obscure question of whether every cognition is a self-cognition with respect to its own nature (*shes pa yin na rang gi ngo bo la rang rig yin pas khyab*). To explain this rather involved issue, which reveals important differences between Sapan's followers (*sa lugs*) and Cha-ba's followers (*cha lugs*), including the Ge-luk tradition, let us first examine Go-ram-ba's remarkably clear explanation before examining the Ge-luk objections.

As explained earlier, Go-ram-ba's theory of perception is representationalist. Perception only indirectly apprehends an external object through the direct apprehension of its aspect. The directly seen "object" is not the external object, contrary to what the direct realists assert, but the objective aspect of the perception. We perceive real things only inasmuch as we perceive their representations, which are similar to them. Go-ram-ba says: "That which appears to the sense consciousness as [existing] simultaneously [with the consciousness and as being] external, as if separate [from it], is labeled an external object by ordinary people. This is in reality the objective aspect, which is accepted by Sautrāntikas as being cast [on consciousness] by the external object. Proponents of Mind-Only hold that, in the absence of an external object, consciousness itself appears as the held [thing] under the power of latencies that cast [an aspect on consciousness]."¹⁷ Instead of analyzing perception as a direct contact with an external object, Go-ram-ba describes perception as an immediate contact with an internal representation through which the external object is indirectly perceived.

This view, I would argue, is not unlike Dharmakīrti's own view. It provides an analysis based on the idea of internal objects that does not presume the status of external objects. Such analysis can be understood in representational terms and is then compatible with the Sautrāntika acceptance of an external world, or it can be interpreted as phenomenalist in accordance with the Mind-Only rejection of such a world. Both philosophies hold that consciousness cognizes itself as having a certain aspect, which is part of itself, but disagree on the causal process that gives rise to the cognitive process. Whereas Sautrāntikas assert that the objective aspect is a copy as well as an effect of an external object, proponents of Mind-Only reject this object, which is not observable independent of the aspect, as an unobservable metaphysical pseudo-entity (to use a fashionable language) and assert that perception is the product of internal tendencies.¹⁸

The consequence of Go-ram-ba's analysis is that perception is nothing but the apprehension of this objective aspect. It is perception apprehending itself. Go-ram-ba explains: "The subjective aspect is the appearance [of the cognition] as apprehending the object's aspect and the internal experience [of this appearance] as pleasant or unpleasant. This [aspect] is reified by common folks as the self that uses [external objects]. It is not reified as the used held [thing]."¹⁹ Apprehension of real objects is an apprehension of their representations by the internal aspect of the cognition. In the final analysis, perception of objects boils down to

apperception, the subjective aspect apprehending the representation (objective aspect). Consequently, every cognition is an apperception with respect to the representation of its object. Hence, it is an apperception with respect to its own form since the representation is nothing else than the form taken by the perception itself. Even a conceptual cognition is an apperception with respect to its own form. The distortion that affects a conception does not affect its cognizing nature (*svarūpa* or *svabhāva*, *rang gi ngo bo* or *rang bzhin*), but only its mode of apprehension. Its fundamental purity, which is manifested in its presence to itself, is not affected by the distortions that it imposes on external objects. As such it is a mode of perceiving, not conceiving.

Finally, before concluding Go-ram-ba's presentation, a last technical point must be made. Although Go-ram-ba appears to be saying that all cognitions are self-cognitions, in reality he is not. For him, that all cognitions are self-cognizing with respect to their representations does not entail that all cognitions are self-cognition. This rather technical distinction is made to ward off the following unwanted consequence: If an inference were a self-cognition it would be a form of perception and hence nonconceptual. Since it is conceptual, it cannot be a self-cognition, although it plays an apperceptive role toward its own cognizing nature.

The explanation of cognition as a self-cognition with respect to its own cognizing nature is only alluded to by Sa-paṇ, who defines *self-cognition* as "the nonmistakeness of consciousness with respect to its [cognizing] nature."²⁰ This view is more clearly articulated by Go-ram-ba and Śākyā Chok-den, who see it as a major issue that opposes them to the Ge-luk revisionist interpretations. Both Go-ram-ba and Śākyā Chok-den refute Gyel-tsap extensively on this issue, designating him "the [author of] the *Extensive Explanation*," a rather unusual occurrence in Tibetan scholarship, where usually positions rather than people are criticized.²¹ Why did they find this issue so important?

As with the problem of universals, this issue became a focus for polemical activities. By delineating the differences that separate them from Dzong-ka-ba's followers on this question, Go-ram-ba and Śākyā Chok-den stressed the particularity of their own tradition, which they probably perceived as threatened by syncretic tendencies found in the dubious interpretations of Sa-paṇ's thought. They considerably reinforced the distinction between the epistemological views of the Sa-gya tradition, as interpreted by Yak-dön and Rong-dön, and the Ga-den-ba interpretations of Dzong-ka-ba, Gyel-tsap, and Kay-drup. In doing so, they also contributed to the institutional separation of the two traditions. Henceforth, the demarcation was clear, and the two schools were set on the separate courses they have followed until the present day.

This conflict over apperception has, however, a more properly philosophical significance. Ge-luk and Sa-gya thinkers are separated in their understandings of the notion of aspect and their theories of perception. Sa-gya thinkers are representationalists, whereas Ge-luk-bas hold a form of direct realism, as they do not think that the direct object of perception, the objective aspect, is an internal representation. To explore this difference, let us first examine Gyel-tsap's sharp and

influential attack against the position taken by Sa-paṇi's followers. Then we will analyze Kay-drup's comments, which reveal the implications of the differences between his (and Gyel-tsap's) position and that of Go-ram-ba.

A Ge-luk Understanding of Dharmakīrti's Aspects

Throughout their works, both Gyel-tsap and Kay-drup denounce the view according to which every mental episode is a self-cognition toward its own cognizing nature. Gyel-tsap rejects this view in the form of an extremely technical discussion, which is a classic of the Tibetan scholastic literature. His objection can be summarized as follows.

Let us take the example of an inference. If this inference were a self-cognition of its [cognizing] nature, it would be a perception of either its subjective aspect, the self-cognition of that inference, or its objective aspect, which is the inference itself. In both cases, the inference would be a perception and, therefore, free from conception. This is so for the following reason: If an inference were a self-cognition toward its own objective aspect, it would have to be a self-cognition simpliciter, because it would have to perceive internally a cognition (itself, that is, the cognition qua objective aspect). This, according to Gyel-tsap and Kay-drup, is the very definition of *self-cognition*. Gyel-tsap further pursues the argument, stating that if the adversary answers that an inference is an inference of its objective aspect and a self-cognition of its subjective aspect, the same fault (that an inference becomes nonconceptual) follows, for objective and subjective aspects are indiscernibly substantially identical.²² Hence, when one appears to a perception, the other must also appear to that perception, for this is the meaning of being indiscernibly substantially identical.²³ Therefore, the unwanted consequence that an inference is nonconceptual still follows.

As we notice, this argument is highly technical and the issue is far from clear. We may wonder what the disagreement is about. Are Gyel-tsap and his opponents locked in a semantic debate over different ways of describing the same thing or are they involved in a substantive debate? The strong reactions that Gyel-tsap's criticisms provoked point to the second alternative. It is not easy, however, to see exactly what the real difference between Gyel-tsap and his opponents is. Let us unpack his statement by explicating his presuppositions. Here again, Kay-drup will prove an invaluable resource, for, as often, his remarks clarify what Gyel-tsap assumes.

The key difference between the Sa-gya and Ge-luk views of perception concerns the way they understand the objective aspect; that is, the appearance of the object to the perception. We ordinarily identify this appearance with the external object itself, that which is "in front of our eyes." This identification is, however, problematic in view of the time-gap problem. Since the object is the cause of the perception and since cause and effect cannot coexist, the external object cannot exist when the perception is produced. How can it then be said to be perceived?

For Go-ram-ba, the solution to the time-gap problem is that perception does not directly cognize the external object but only its representation. The direct object of perception is the appearance of the object. This appearance is the objective aspect, which is usually confused with the real external object. This identification is, however, mistaken, for the appearance is just a representation of the external object. It is internal to the awareness, being nothing but the form that the awareness takes under the influence of the external object.²⁴ The part of the awareness that witnesses this taking such a form, that is, the cognition qua apprehender of the objective aspect, is the subjective aspect. According to Go-ram-ba's representationalism, awareness of an object must be analyzed as the interaction of three elements: the subjective aspect, the objective aspect and the external object. Perceiving an external object is for a mental episode to be aware of its arising under the form of a representation, the objective aspect, which stands for the external object by which it is produced. The act of awareness consists of the grasping of the objective aspect by the subjective aspect. In this process, the external object is not directly perceived. Its contribution to the epistemic process is only causal, the production of an internal representation that stands for the external object.

Gyel-tsap disagrees with this analysis of perception, which separates the appearance of the object from the object itself. For Gyel-tsap, the appearance of an object to a perception is not a representation. The appearance is the transparent revealing of the external object itself. The act of being aware of an object is not a three-term relation but a two-term relation. It involves a cognition and an external object. There is no intermediary, no appearance or internal object whose direct presence allows us to cognize indirectly an external object.

This realist analysis seems, however, to raise the following question: If consciousness perceives the external object itself, what is the role of the objective aspect? Kay-drup answers: "As [I] have already established through reasoning, the objective aspect of this or that cognition is only this or that cognition."²⁵ According to his view, the objective aspect is not a representation but is just the cognition qua awareness of an external object. The subjective aspect is the cognition qua awareness of itself as perceiving subject.

According to the Ge-luk analysis, each cognition has two parts, an external factor (*kha phyir lta'i cha*), the objective aspect, which perceives the external object, and an internal factor (*kha nang lta'i cha*), the subjective aspect, which perceives the objective aspect. In the case of a sense perception, the perception itself is the objective aspect since the outward looking part of the mental state cognizes an external object. The objective aspect is in turn apprehended by the second part of the perception, the subjective aspect. This subjective aspect is apperceptive and keeps track of the experiences of the cognizing person. But notice that here the meaning of *apperception* has shifted. Whereas for Sa-gya representationalism apperception is reflexive, it is now reflective or at least thematic. It is an inner awareness of a mental state and as such implies a double intentionality: external apprehension of an external object and internal apprehension of the mental state.

A classical objection against such a view is that it opens the door to an infinite regress. If the objective aspect needs a subjective one, this latter one will in turn require another aspect apprehending it. To avoid this objection, Ge-luk thinkers go back to Dharmakīrti's explanation, emphasizing that apperception is not a separate cognition. In doing so, however, they do not seem to realize that they are using Dharmakīrti's terms in a rather different way. Instead of presenting apperception as a necessary consequence of a representationalist analysis of cognition, they are forced into a more artificial position, arguing that the two aspects, the cognition *qua* external perception and the cognition *qua* internal apperception, are two aspects of the same mental state, which can be distinguished only on the basis of their functions. Since these functions are exclusive of each other, external and internal cognitions are distinct, although they do not exist separately. It is clear, however, that this explanation is not completely persuasive. It seems to hide the problem rather than solve it. Ge-luk thinkers themselves do not find it convincing and, hence, have no qualm leaving out the idea of apperception when they move to Candrakīrti's *Madhyamaka* philosophy.

Before proceeding, let us briefly reflect on the original debate: Is cognition a self-cognition with respect to its own cognizing nature? For Go-ram-ba, the answer is bound to be positive, because every cognition is in final analysis the subjective aspect. External objects cannot appear directly to consciousness without the intermediary of a representation, the objective aspect. The act of awareness consists in the apperception of this representation by the subjective aspect.

For Gyel-tsap and Kay-drup, this answer will not do. In accordance with their direct realism, Gyel-tsap and Kay-drup hold that perception is not the sensing of an internal representation, but the apprehension of an external object. Hence, in final analysis, perception boils down to the objective aspect. Since it apprehends an external object, perception is foremost the externally oriented factor of a perceptual episode. It is called *objective aspect* because it is the aspect of a perceptual state that apprehends the object. And, although it does not exist apart from its own apperception, it is not identical with it either. Each cognition has two functions, an external orientation and an internal apprehension of itself. Only the latter is apperceptive.²⁶ Moreover, among these two functions, the external one is primary.

This explanation faces several problems. If consciousness is aware of the external object itself, why should we bother to introduce the notion of aspect into the analysis? Why should we discuss the likeness of the mind and the object if this likeness is not an intermediary between the mind and the external world? Moreover, why do Ge-luk thinkers insist on keeping the doctrine of self-cognition, which does not seem necessary to explain the nature of perception? Why introduce self-cognition in an analysis of the direct relation between perception and the world?

In considering Ge-luk views, we must keep in mind the double nature of their project, which is philosophical as well as commentarial. These views are

not independent philosophical elaborations, but interpretations of Dharmakīrti's thought. Hence, one obvious answer to our questions is that the notions of aspect and self-cognition are introduced by Ge-luk thinkers to explain Dharmakīrti's ideas. As such, however, the Ge-luk analyses do not fare very well. It is quite clear from the passages we examined that Dharmakīrti's view is better captured by the Sa-gya analysis than by Gyel-tsap's and Kay-drup's philosophically astute, but textually unlikely, interpretations.

However, these interpretations are not purely exegetical but are philosophical as well. In a tradition in which truth is found through commentaries, interpretation plays a larger role. Interpreting Dharmakīrti's text is the means through which truth, in our case, epistemological truth, is appropriated. Hence, a commentary on Dharmakīrti's theory of perception must satisfy two demands: It must reflect Dharmakīrti's ideas, but more important, it must be true, at least within the limits of Dharmakīrti's doxographical commitments. Let us examine Kay-drup's insightful comments in the light of these two conflicting demands.

Representationalism, Realism, and Causal Theories

Kay-drup objects to the Sa-gya interpretation of Dharmakīrti's theory of perception not on exegetical but on philosophical grounds. For him, the Sa-gya analysis is not receivable because it leads to the complete separation between cognition and object. According to this analysis, the aspect is a representation through which an external object is mediately perceived and stands between the world and awareness, like a curtain (to use Kay-drup's word) or (to use a classical expression in Western philosophy) a veil.²⁷ Kay-drup says: "Accordingly, the cognition held by a self-cognition is called an objective aspect, which is, after all, nothing but the cognition itself. It has already been well established that the appearance of an aspect does not refer to an aspect that would, like a curtain, [stand] between the cognition and the object, but to the very [cognition] produced as having the aspect. This is the view of both Sautrāntikas and Cittamātrins."²⁸ If the appearance of an object in a perception were a representation that stood for an external object, the cognition would not apprehend this object. It would be walled off from the external world by the curtain of representations which would stand between perception and reality. Hence, the Sa-gya interpretation of perception as being the apprehension of an internal representation cannot be true. It is philosophically unsound and cannot correspond to Dharmakīrti's own view, which is normative for Buddhist epistemology.

For Kay-drup, the aspect, which Sa-gya thinkers take to be an opaque representation, must be at least partly transparent. In the case of a conception, this transparency is limited, but in the case of a perception, it is complete. The object appears as it is to perception, which apprehends this object directly without any intermediary. This is direct realism, the view that mind is directly in contact with

the real world. It differs, however, from the usual forms of direct realism in that it involves the notion of aspect, which in turn implies a notion of similarity. The aspect is similar to the external object, which is apprehended by the cognition. In that, Ge-luk thinkers differ from the views of the *Vaibhāṣika*. This school holds that there is no likeness between mental states and objects. Cognition apprehends its object nakedly (*jen par*), without the presence of any aspect. Awareness holds the object in a direct contact with reality without bearing in itself the mark of its apprehension of the object.

Direct realism is often posited to avoid the problem of the time gap raised by causal theories. If objects cause perception, how can the latter apprehend the former when the former have already disappeared? Direct realism's usual answer is that awareness and object coexist. In the Buddhist context, the *Vaibhāṣika* defends this view. Though this school does not deny that objects cause perception, they understand this causal relation in a rather loose way. Accordingly, object and subject coexist despite being cause and effect.

Ge-luk realism is different from these usual forms of direct realism, which it judges to be naive. Ge-luk thinkers take the time-gap problem seriously and dismiss the *Vaibhāṣika* view as reflecting an incoherent view of causality. They take Dharmakīrti's view of causality very seriously, holding that causes and effects never coexist,²⁹ and attempt to present a theory of perception in which the apprehension of the external world is made compatible with the time gap necessarily implied by a strictly causal account of the relation that exists between the object, the cause, and the perception, its result. To accomplish this, Ge-luk thinkers use Dharmakīrti's notion of aspect. Here the commentarial ingenuity and philosophical creativity of the Ge-luk tradition come together. Although no bona fide commentary of Dharmakīrti can ignore this notion, the Ge-luk adopt it because they find it useful to respond to the time-gap problem. Hence, even when explaining their theory of perception in the context of the study of *Madhyamaka*, that is, outside of Dharmakīrti's system, Ge-luk thinkers still use the notion of aspect, despite the very limited use of this term by their sources, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti.

To explain how perception can apprehend an external object that does not exist any more at the time when perception comes to be, Ge-luk thinkers use the notion of aspect. A perception is caused by an external object that is not apprehended nakedly. In the process, the perception comes to bear the marks of the object that it perceives. In this way, the perception is allowed to cognize its objects, which have already disappeared. To perceive an object is to be affected causally by this object. Cognition bears a form similar to that of external objects, but the likeness of the appearance is not representational. Rather, it is the likeness of the cognition to the external world. A cognition is like an external object in that it bears the impression of the external object.³⁰

The causal connection between the external object and its perception does not entail a form of representationalism, which in the views of these theorists

entails the acceptance of the existence of a veil between consciousness and the external world. As Kay-drup argues, the veil theory is not a necessary consequence of a causal theory of perception, although, in his view, it is entailed by representationalism. The likeness of the mind to the external world is not some kind of veil standing between mind and the world. Rather, it is the perceptual experience itself produced in us by our confrontation with the external world. It is the form that the mind takes in its encounter with external reality.

But notice that apperception plays little role in this analysis. It is posited on the basis of further commentarial considerations but is not implied by the analysis of perception. Whereas for Dharmakīrti and Go-ram-ba, apperception is implied by the representational analysis of perception, for Ge-luk thinkers apperception does not seem to be required by their realist analysis of perception. It is merely added as a supplementary factor to an analysis of mind that does not seem to require it. Ge-luk thinkers realize that this apperception cannot be a separate cognition. Hence, they argue that it is the second, subjective, part of a mental episode. But this second aspect is not entailed by their analysis of perception. Rather it seems to be required for commentarial purposes only and seems to lead to the unwanted consequence of a double intentionality.

Hence, contrary to the notion of aspect, which plays an important role in the Ge-luk tradition where it is kept even while investigating perception, in *Madhyamaka*, the notion of apperception is much more artificial. It is posited on a mostly commentarial basis, to account for Dharmakīrti's theory of the four types of perception. Ge-luk thinkers make only limited use of the notion of apperception. For example, Gyel-tsap describes apperception as the basis of denomination of the person as subject. Our mental life is more than a causal succession of mental events. It seems to have a coherence, which allows us to act as subjects in a world of objects. This ability is not based on the existence of a substantial self, but on the ability of the mind to cognize itself. Apperception enables us to apprehend things, thinking "I cognize this and that."³¹ Nevertheless, these arguments, which are important for Dharmakīrti, are not taken very seriously by Ge-luk thinkers, who quickly forget them when the topic moves to *Madhyamaka* philosophy. Ge-luk thinkers are not really committed to the idea of apperception, which they consider to be a reflection of Dharmakīrti's lingering foundationalism and hence a limitation to his usually impeccable authority, which is to be overcome by the study of Candrakīrti's *Madhyamaka*.³²

Sa-paṇ's followers hold quite different views. They hold that apperception is not reflective, but reflexive. It is not a supplementary factor but is entailed by the analysis of perception itself. Since perception apprehends an internal representation, it apprehends itself. Unsurprisingly, Sa-gya thinkers hold to the idea of apperception when explaining a *Madhyamaka* view of perception. Like their Ge-luk adversaries, they use Dharmakīrti's analysis, although their understanding is quite different. Hence, for them, apperception is not the expression of a lingering foundationalism, but the irrefutable consequence of a representationalist analysis of perception.

The Soteriological Implications of Apperception

For some Sa-gya epistemologists, apperception has an important soteriological role in explaining the nature of yogic perception (*yogipratyakṣa, rnal 'byor mngon sum*). This is a difficult topic within Dharmakīrti's tradition. Given the receptive and nonpropositional nature of perception, the notion of a yogic perception seems to be a contradiction in terms. For if perceptions are passive and entirely lack cognitive content, how can there be yogic perceptions, which eliminate all obscurations? If perception cannot eliminate wrong views, how can yogic perception root out delusions, since this constitutes an elimination of superimpositions?³³ How can yogic perception merely hold its object, while at the same time realizing the topics central to Buddhist soteriology such as suffering, impermanence, and no-self?

Dharmakīrti provides only partial and brief answers,³⁴ and they seem to be in tension with his general theory of perception. He takes yogic perception to be an extension of the inferential understanding we can gain through reasoning on topics such as suffering, impermanence, and no-self. When conceptual understanding of these topics is deepened and intensified through the practice of tranquility (*śamatha, zhi gnas*) and insight (*vipaśyanā, lhag mthong*), it gradually becomes clearer until it is completely vivid. At this stage, the insight thus gained is so clear as to be nonconceptual. Since such an insight is correct as well as non-conceptual, it must be perceptual. Dharmakīrti does not discuss the obvious problems that arises from this explanation, which seem to contradict his description of concepts as mistaken. How can conceptual cognitions, which are mistaken, become directly grounded in reality and hence undistorted, merely by becoming vivid?

Tibetan commentators have dealt with this issue, and their discussions lay out possible solutions. According to Śākyā Chok-den, their views fall into two groups.³⁵ Cha-ba, and their followers have emphasized the cognitive nature of yogic perception. For them, yogic perception actively identifies an object such as impermanence, suffering, or no-self. Dharmakīrti's descriptions of yogic perception as an extension and enhancement of inference support their view that perception is not merely passively holding its object. Like other valid perceptions, yogic perception identifies its object by eliminating false superimpositions (*sgro 'dogs gcod pa*). Hence, for these realists, there is no difficulty in positing a transformation of conceptions, which already cognize reality albeit in a distorted way, into yogic perceptions through the practice of tranquility and insight.

Antirealists present a different view. In accordance with their view that perception is passive, they tend to emphasize the receptive character of yogic perception. Yogic perception is less an active cognizing than a heightened state of receptivity reached through the elimination of obscurations. This state of receptivity, which is explained as being objectless, is sometimes related to apperception. This idea seems to have originated with the first patriarch of the Dri-gung-ba ('bri gung pa) branch of the Ga-gyü school, Dri-gung Jik-den-gong-bo ('bri gung 'jig rten mgong po, 1143–1217). For him, the pure nondual awareness that con-

stitutes the path, the wisdom of the Great Seal (*phyag chen, mahāmudrā*), is apperceptive.³⁶ It is a state in which the mind of the yogi does not apprehend any object but merely abides in its luminosity. From this comes the idea of relating such abiding in clarity to the concept of apperception. Yogic perception, then, is a state of pure apperception in which all conceptualization has been eliminated and in which the nonconceptual state of the mind is clearly revealed. Similarly, Śākyā Chok-den explains yogic perception as apperceptive. For Śākyā Chok-den, this is the Sa-gya view, the only way to make sense of the notion of yogic perception. Although yogic perception is sometimes described as having an object, this is a metaphorical description of the purely apperceptive state that is reached by the elimination of self-grasping.³⁷

Śākyā Chok-den is rather brief in his explanation of how apperception fits into the framework of Buddhist practice. His words suggest, however, the following picture. Through the practice of tranquility the mind is calmed. The conceptual network that usually agitates the mind ceases and the clear nature of the mind, that is, its apperceptive character, is more in evidence. Such a state of clarity, however, is only provisional. To have long lasting soteriological effects it must be conjoined with insight, so that wrong conceptions can be eliminated. In the process the yogi attains a state of extreme clarity and sharpness in which the mind becomes fully transparent to itself.³⁸ Such a state is not a mere blankness of mind or a momentary withdrawal from conceptualization obtained through concentration, but a heightened state of clarity and sharpness that has cognitive implications. Such a state is cognitively meaningful in that it is reached by the understanding of no-self and brings about the uprooting of illusions concerning the nature of the self. It is not, however, in and of itself cognitive. Hence, it is best described as a purely apperceptive state in which the clear nature of the mind is fully revealed.

This explanation, which gives a plausible account of yogic perception, does not seem to originate with Dharmakīrti. He explains yogic perception in relation to inference, without establishing a connection between apperception and yogic perception. Moreover, Dharmakīrti speaks of the clear nature of the mind in a soteriological context but does not seem to connect this clarity with apperception. Hence, the notion that yogic perception is apperceptive probably originates in sources other than Dharmakīrti's writings. A connection between wisdom and self-cognition appears in several Indian texts, which speak of self-cognizing wisdom (*rang rig pa'i ye shes*). This does not seem, however, to be a direct reference to the type of self-cognition posited by Dharmakīrti. All this suggests that the connection between yogic perception and apperception was made later. Nevertheless, this connection does not fall outside of Dharmakīrtian ideas, as we will see in Chapter 27, where we examine the soteriological implications of Dharmakīrti's system.

Before entering into this discussion, however, we need to deepen our understanding of the differences between Ge-luk direct realism and Sa-gya representationalism by examining the question of whether or not external objects are per-

ceptible. If objects are not directly observable but just represented, should we then say that objects are not really perceived? Tibetan thinkers have argued at length about this problem. They have also debated on the related but distinct issue of whether or not external objects are hidden. Working through their analyses on these questions will allow us to dispell the confusion that often surrounds this difficult issue in Dharmakīrti's thought.