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IS DHARMAKĪRTI A PRAGMATIST?

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In this essay, I would like to explore Dharmakīrti's theory of truth and knowledge, focusing on the diversity of Dharmakīrti's accounts and its philosophical underpinnings. Throughout his early *Commentary* and his later *Ascertainment*, Dharmakīrti (seventh century) presents seemingly contradictory definitions of valid cognition (*pramāṇa, thsad ma*). This diversity has puzzled traditional and modern scholars. Rather than explore the diversity of their opinions, I follow the explanations given by the eight century Indian scholar Dharmottara's and the Tibetan Sa-gya (*sa ksya*) scholar Śākya Chok-den (*śākya mchog ldan,* 1428-1507). Their interpretations are quite helpful in that they offer a unitary explanation of Dharmakīrti's separate accounts. They also expose the philosophical agenda behind Dharmakīrti's accounts, providing us with an opportunity to locate his view in relation to pragmatism.

Dharmottara's and Śākya Chok-den's accounts hinge on a pragmatic understanding of the concept of non-deceptiveness (*avisaṃvādi, mi slu ba*). For them, contrary to other commentators, cognitions are non-deceptive inasmuch as they are pragmatically successful. Hence, among commentators, they provide an account of truth and knowledge which comes closest to a pragmatist view. As they show, however, a purely pragmatic account will not do, for it leads to include among valid cognitions cases of successful mistakes. These cases, which present interesting similarities with what is known in contemporary philosophy as Gettier-type cases, lead us to conclude that valid cognition is a complex notion that cannot be understood in purely pragmatic terms. A normative dimension must be introduced as well. Thus, if we follow Dharmottara and Śākya Chok-den, we are lead to conclude that, contrary to what many students of comparative philosophy have argued, Dharmakīrti's theory of truth and knowledge is not pragmatic (in the strict sense of the term). Although Dharmakīrti emphasizes the practical, he must at the end recognize that his account of truth cannot avoid introducing a normative dimension.

Defining *Pramāṇa*

Our starting point will be Dharmakīrti's well known characterization of valid cognition as non-deceptive cognition (*avisaṃvādi-jñāna*):

> Valid cognition is that cognition [which is] non-deceptive (*avisaṃvādi, mi bslu ba*).
> Non-deceptiveness [consists] in the readiness [for the object] to perform a function.[1]

This statement emphasizes the fact that *pramāṇa* is not the instrument that a knowing self uses to know things. There is no separate knowing subject but just knowledge, which is *pramāṇa*. According to this account a cognition is valid if, and only if, it is non-deceptive. But, what does "non-deceptive" mean?

Dharmakīrti responds that non-deceptiveness (*avisaṃvādanam, mi slu ba*) consists of an object's readiness to perform a function that relates to the way it is cognized. One may wonder why Dharmakīrti speaks of the non-deceptiveness of the object when he should be describing that of the consciousness. Śākya Chok-den explains that non-deceptiveness is of the object but can be extended to the consciousness. The subject's non-deceptiveness consists of its apprehension of the object in accordance with the latter's practical dispositions.[2] For example, the non-deceptiveness of a fire is its disposition to burn. The non-deceptiveness of the perception of the fire is its apprehension of the latter as burning, which is non-deceptive since it corresponds to the object's own dispositions. By contrast, the apprehension of the fire as cold is deceptive because it grasps the object in an inadequate way. Notice the practical and even behavioral emphasis in Dharmakīrti's account. Appropriateness and adequacy or lack thereof are here functions of the cognition's success or failure in appropriating the object in ways that correspond to the objects' own disposition to behave in certain ways. By

1 *pramāṇam avisaṃvādi jñānam arthakriyāsthitiḥ / avisaṃvādanaṃ śābde 'py abhiprāyanivedanād // (tshad ma bslu med can shes pa / don byed nus par gnas pa ni / mi slu sgra las byung ba yang / mngon par 'dod pa ston phyir ro //)* Dharmakīrti, *Commentary on Valid Cognition,* Y. Miyasaka ed., *Pramāṇavārttika-kārikā* (Sanskrit-Tibetan), *Acta Indologica* 2, 1971-2,, II: 1.

2 Śākya Chok-den, (*śākya mchog ldan*). *The Ocean of Music* [*of*] *the Speech of the Seven Treatises, an Explanation of the Science of Valid Cognition* (*tshad ma rigs pa'i rnam bshad sde bdun ngag gi rol mtsho*). Collected Works XIX. Thimphu [Bhutan]: Kunzang Tobgey, 1975, 604.4-.7.

saying that validity in cognitions is a practical matter, Dharmakīrti implies that mental life is composed of representations standing in the appropriate causal relation with their objects. To know an object is less an intentional or normative relation than a pragmatic one in which successful or unsuccessful outcomes decide the epistemological status of cognitions.

This is not, however, the only account of *pramāṇa* given by Dharmakīrti. Shortly after, Dharmakīrti characterizes valid cognition quite differently:

> Or, [i.e., another explanation is that *pramāṇa*] is the revealing of a [yet] unknown thing.[3]

Here a cognition is valid if, and only if, it reveals some hitherto unknown aspect of reality and makes us understand something which is first true and second new. According to this account, these two aspects, truth and novelty, are necessary and sufficient conditions for a cognition to be valid.

In this second account, Dharmakīrti appeals to a normative notion of truth which is not reducible to a pragmatic one. He depicts valid cognition not as bringing about the right result in dependence on an appropriate causal relation with its object, but as intentional, that is, as being directed toward an object. To be valid, a cognition must reveal an object (*artha, don*) that really exists. That is, a valid cognition must be directed towards its object in accordance with the nature of the object. It is the agreement between the cognition's intentionality and the nature of the object that constitutes the truth necessary to the validity of the cognition. This does not necessarily mean, as we will see later, that this second account is committed to a so-called correspondence theory of truth. It does entail, however, a commitment to a normative dimension.

Though necessary, truth is not sufficient for validity. The content revealed by a cognition must be also new. A mental episode that just repeats previously known information can be useful. It also can be true, but it is not valid in the technical sense of the term, for it does not bring anything new to the cognitive process. Hence, it is cognitively irrelevant. For example, memory (*smṛti, dran pa*) is not valid for Dharmakīrti and for most Indian philosophers.[4] It is excluded from being valid on the ground that it is a mere

3 *ajñātārthaprakāśo vā* / (*ma shes don gyi gsal bye kyang* /) Miyasaka ed., *Pramāṇa*, II:5.c.

4 A *Pramāṇa* is characterized by the Naiyāyikas as the presentational apprehension (*anubhava, myong ba*) which is factual (*yathārtha, don mthun*), which refers to an

conceptual repetition of previous knowledge without any demonstrable link to reality to ensure its validity.[5]

Dharmakīrti's second account is well known in Indian philosophy. For example, the Nyāya defines cognition (*jñāna, she pa*) as the revealing of an object.[6] Nevertheless, these two accounts seem to be in tension. This difficulty is not just the result of Dharmakīrti's having two accounts but reflects the tension that exists between several of our intuitions. On the one hand we hold the common sense view of cognition, particularly in its perceptual form, as an awareness directed to an immediately present object. On the other hand, we also assume that such a cognition is the result of a contact with external reality. In this case, however, cognition could not be in contact with the object it apprehends since this object would cease to exist when the cognitive act occurs since it is its cause. Systematic epistemology is an attempt to sort out these intuitions, which pull apart, and come up with a coherent and complete account of epistemic practices.

Indian and Tibetan commentators have struggled at great length with these two apparently conflicting accounts, arguing how to reconcile them.

awareness of an object presented to the consciousness either directly or indirectly (by reasoning, language, or example). Presentational apprehension characterizes all four means of knowledge accepted in Nyāya (perception, inference, verbal testimony, comparison) and distinguishes them from memory, which is re-presentational and, therefore, not valid. Similarly, the Mīmāṃsā asserts that memory is not valid. Kumārila states the orthodox Mīmāṃsā opinion when he defines *Pramāṇa* as the apprehension of an object not yet known to the knowing self. (Although the Mīmāṃsā view seems similar to Dharmakīrti's position, there is a difference in that for the former *Pramāṇa* has an instrumental connotation. See: J.V. trans. BHATTACHARYA, *Jayanta Bhatta's Nyāya Mañjari*) Delhi: Motilal, 1978), 33-39.

5 Jain, Vedānta and Prāsaṅgika seem to be the only schools to assert the validity of memory. At least in the case of the latter two, this difference seems to come from their view of validity. Instead of seeing validity as the determination or obtention of an object, these two schools understand it in terms of non-contradiction. Accordingly, memory is valid because it is not contradicted by any other items of knowledge. The Jain view is that memory is valid because it realizes something new, namely, the pastness of its object. Udayana convincingly shows, however, that this is a confusion since the pastness of the object is not remembered but experienced in the present. See: B.K. MATILAL, *Logic, Language and Reality* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1985), 208.

6 *arthaprakāśo buddhiḥ*. C. SHARMA, *A Crical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal 1960, 1991), 192.

Devendrabuddhi, for example, argues that Dharmakīrti offers a choice. Either definition will do.[7] My explanation will be quite different. Following Dharmottara and Śākya Chok-den, I combine Dharmakīrti's two explanations to provide a unified account, which, I argue, is found in his later *Ascertainment.* There, he combines his two previous statements, characterizing valid cognition in both practical and intentional terms. Speaking of the two types of valid cognition, he says:

> [Perception and inference are valid cognitions] because they are non-deceptive with respect to the purpose [of the action] in the application [towards an object] after having determined it.[8]

This account gives a double characterization of valid cognition. The first is practical: a cognition is valid inasmuch as it helps us to fulfill a purpose. Here a cognition is correct because we can rely on it in order to accomplish a practical goal. The second introduces a more explicitly intentional or normative element: a cognition is valid if, and only if, the object we are seeking is determined (*bcad pa*) correctly. According to the *Ascertainment,* a valid cognition combines these two independent elements (practical value and cognitive capacity to reveal an object) to characterize all valid cognitions. Each one taken in isolation is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for knowledge.

Intentional and Pragmatic Explanations of Non-deceptiveness

We may wonder: why does Dharmakīrti think that both practical and intentional elements are required? To understand this, let us examine Dharmottara's commentary on this passage. Dharmottara starts by explaining the notion of non-deceptiveness, which lies at the core of Dharmakīrti's understanding of valid cognition:

7 See: DREYFUS, "Dharmakīrti's Definition of Knowledge and its Interpreters". in *Studies in the Buddhist Epistemological Tradition* (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1991), 19-38, 26.

8 *de dag gis don yongs su bcad nas 'jug pa na don bya ba la slu ba med pa'i phyir* / Dharmakīrti, *Ascertainment of Valid Cognition* (*Pramāṇa-viniścaya, tshad ma rnam par nges pa*) D: 4211, *Ce,* 152.b.3-.4 (P: *Ce,* 251.a.1-2).

> We should understand that just as in the world where non-deceptiveness consists in putting us in touch with the promised object, non-deceptiveness for a cognition consists in its ability to put us in touch with the indicated object.[9]

In this passage, Dharmottara interprets Dharmakīrti's account as focusing on the practical aspect of mental events. It is the possibility of practical results brought about by a given cognition that primarily determines its status as non-deceptive. Dharmottara gives even more weight to pragmatic concerns when he further explains the preceding passage:

> The meaning of this [preceding passage] is this: it is not apprehending the object that [makes a cognition] a right cognition but only obtaining a thing.[10]

For Dharmottara, the non-deceptiveness of a mental episode is practical, not cognitive.[11] A cognition is non-deceptive inasmuch as it has the ability to bring about the appropriate possible practical results. For example, a perception of fire is non-deceptive inasmuch as it enables us to deal with the fire in the appropriate way (appropriateness being here a contextual notion). This non-deceptiveness is understood in a causal way: it is the result of the mental episode's causal connection with reality and in turn leads to the appropriate causal results. Thus, this account of non-deceptiveness does not involve any explicit normative element.

Among Tibetan commentators, Śākya Chok-den presents a similarly pragmatic interpretation of non-deceptiveness. He opposes the accounts of non-deceptiveness given by Tibetan realists, particularly Cha-ba (*phwya pa chos kyi seng ge,* 1182-1251), the "father" of the Tibetan logico-epistemological tradition, his direct followers, and the Ga-den (*dga' ldan*) tradition, which was later to be called Ge-luk (*dge lugs*). Śākya Chok-den contrasts

9 *ji ltar 'jig rten na khas blangs pa'i don dang phrad par byed pa mi slu ba yin pa de bzhin du shes pa yang bstan pa'i don dang phrad par byed pas mi slu bar blta bar bya ba'o* / Dharmottara, *Explanation on* [*Dharmakīrti's*] *Ascertainment of Valid Cognition* (*Pramāṇa-viniścaya-ṭīkā, tshad ma rnam par nges pa'i 'grel bshad.* D: 4229, *Dze,* 8.a.6.

10 *de'i don 'di yin te / dngos po 'dzin par byed pas ni yang dag pa'i shes pa nyid ma yin kyi 'on kyang dngos po thob par byed pa nyid yin no / Pramāṇa-viniścaya-ṭīkā, tshad ma rnam par nges pa'i 'grel bshad*) Dharmottara, *Explanation,* D: *Dze,* 8.a-6-.7.

11 Here, Dharmottara seems to oppose Śāntarakṣita, who explains valid cognitions in terms of congruence with reality (*vastusaṃvādaḥ*). D. Shastri ed., *Tattvasaṃgraha of Ācārya Śāntarakṣita with the Commentary "Pāñjikā" of Shrī Kamalaśīla* (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati Series, 1968), 2958.

his pragmatic understandings of non-deceptiveness from Cha-ba's intentional interpretations. For the latter and his followers a cognition is non-deceptive if, and only if, it provides some new cognitive content. This view, which is shared by Gyel-tsap (*rgyal tshap dar ma rin chen,* 1364-1432), Ge-dün-drup (*dge 'dun grub,* 1391-1474) and most Ge-luk thinkers,[12] can be traced back to Cha-ba. Śākya Chok-den describes the latter's views:

> The former party [Cha-ba] holds that the object of application is only that which is a true object. The meaning of truth is taken to be the absence of contradiction towards the object accordingly determined. Such [an object] can be either capable or incapable of performing a function. In order for [something] to be the object of application of a valid cognition, this [cognition] must eliminate the opposed super-imposition.[13]

For a cognition to be non-deceptive it must newly realize things, i.e., correctly identify things. Cha-ba expresses this in negative terms: a valid cognition must eliminate false super-impositions (*sgro 'dogs gcod pa*).

This view, which emphasizes the cognitive, normative and intentional aspect of the mental, goes together with the realism concerning universals asserted by these thinkers. Valid cognition identifies objects by way of their properties. For example, I see and identify a jar as a jar. For Cha-ba and his tradition, this is what being non-deceptive means. Even perception identifies its object in this way. It is non-deceptive inasmuch as it identifies the jar as a jar, that is, as instantiating the property of being a jar. Cognitions are determined to be non-deceptive when the identification of their objects as subsumed under a universal is correct. Hence, for these thinkers, intentionality entails realism concerning universals.

Śākya Chok-den opposes this account, emphasizing a pragmatic understanding of non-deceptiveness. For Śākya Chok-den,

12 Although Gyel-tsap suggests that non-deceptiveness can also be interpreted in pragmatic terms, he has been understood by his followers to characterize non-deceptiveness in intentional terms. This assumption is even stronger in some of the later Ge-luk textbooks which take for granted that for a cognition to be non-deceptive it must realize its object.

13 *phyogs snga mas / 'jug yul ni don bden pa dang ldan pa kho na yin la / bden pa'i don kyang / ji ltar yongs su bcad pa'i don la gnod pa med la byed cing / de la don byed nus pa dang mi nus pa gnyis ka yod cing / tshad ma de'i 'jug yul du 'gro ba la des de la log phyogs kyi sgro 'dogs bsal ba zhig dgos par bzhed* / Śākya Chok-den, *Music,* 462.5-.7.

> The meaning of being a valid cognition with respect to an object is not the elimination of super-imposition or the realization [of that object]. Rather, it is taken to be the non-deceptiveness with respect to this [object of application]. The meaning of this [non-deceptiveness] is the capacity to obtain this [object].[14]

A cognition is non-deceptive because it stands in appropriate pragmatic relation with reality. For example, the inference that the Vedic language is impermanent does not realize that a sound is impermanent. It only understands the concept of impermanence in relation to the Vedic language. Nevertheless, this inference is non-deceptive and, hence, valid. How can it be non-deceptive towards a reality which it does not apprehend?

An inference is based on evidence perceived by the person who makes the inference. In our example, we study the Vedic language and realize that it has been produced. In this way, we are able to infer the impermanence of the Vedic language. This inference is non-deceptive because it is brought about by a perception that relates to reality. Since this inference helps me to deal with these words in the appropriate way, it is non-deceptive. The inference's non-deceptiveness rests on a causal relation with reality through perception and consists of the inference's causal ability to bring about the right outcome. Śākya Chok-den triumphantly summarizes his point:

> There is no scriptural [basis] for the explanation of non-deceptiveness [in terms of] realization of an object [for the following reason:] when arguments establishing that this [cognition] is non-deceptive with respect to that [object] are explained in the texts of the Knower of Reasoning (Dignāga or Dharmakīrti), equivalents such as] obtaining that (*de thob pa*), indirectly relating to that (*de la rgyud nas 'brel ba*), relying upon that (*de la brten pa*), etc., are mentioned. Explanations such as "[this is non-deceptive with respect to that] because this realizes that" are not observed.[15]

14 *de la tshad mar song ba'i don kyang / sgro 'dogs bcad dang rtogs pa la bya ba ma yin gyi / de la mi slu ba la byed cing / de'i don kyang de thob nus pa la bya /* Śākya Chok-den, *Music,* 462.7-463.1.

15 *mi slu ba'i don rtogs pa la 'chad pa la ni lung yod pa ma yin te / rigs pa mkhyen pa'i gzhung du de de la mi slu ba'i sgrub byed 'chad pa na de thob pa dang / de la rgyud nas 'brel ba dang / de la brten pa dang / de'i mthar thug pa zhes bya ba rnams bshad pa yod kyi / de rtogs pa'i phyir zhes bshad pa ni ma dmigs pa'i phyir /* Śākya Chok-den, (*śākya mchog ldan*). *Defeater of Bad Systems through the Wheel of Reasoning, an Ornament to the Thought of* [*Sa-paṇ's*] *Treasure on the Science of Valid Cognition* (*tshad ma rigs gter gyi dgongs rgyan rigs pa'i 'khor los lugs ngan pham byed,* in Collected Works IX & X. Thimphu, [Bhutan]: Kunzang Tobgey, 1975, II.288.4-6.

For Śākya Chok-den, Cha-ba's interpretation, which is also supported by the Ge-luk tradition, that a cognition's non-deceptiveness consists of its ability to correctly apprehend the object does not correspond to the meaning of Dharmakīrti's texts. He and Dignāga explained non-deceptiveness in pragmatic terms, not in intentional terms. Moreover, argues Śākya Chok-den, Cha-ba's interpretation is unable to explain other difficulties in Dharmakīrti's system. For example, Cha-ba cannot explain how is it that conceptions do not apprehend real objects, and yet are valid. A solution is possible only if we think about non-deceptiveness in pragmatic terms. This, in turn, allows the inclusion of inferences, which do not apprehend reality, among valid cognitions.

The Difficulties of A Pragmatic Explanation

This pragmatic explanation of non-deceptiveness faces an obvious difficulty. Important as they might be, practical considerations are not sufficient to determine knowledge. To illustrate this point, let us following Dharmottara analyze this example: imagine that we are seeking water on a hot day. We suddenly see water, or so we think. In fact, we are not seeing water but a mirage, but when we reach the spot, we are lucky and find water right there. Can we say that our assumption that there is water is a form of genuine knowledge? The answer seems to be negative, for we did not obtain the object we were looking for. Thus, practical success is clearly not enough. We need a normative element as well. This is why, says Dharmottara,

> [Dharmakīrti] speaks of [cognitions engaging] "having determined their objects," for [cognitions] apply [to their objects] in dependence upon previous realization.[16]

In our example, our mental event concerning water is not valid because its success does not correspond to our previous determination of the seen object. We thought it was water when it was only a mirage. If practical concerns were enough for validity, this case would have had to count as genuine knowledge!

The example used by Dharmottara is interesting in more than one respect. It is quite similar to the cases used by the contemporary philosopher Edmund GETTIER in his attacks against the classical Western definition of

16 *don yongs su bcad nas zhes gsungs te / 'dis sngar yongs su bcad pa la ltos nas 'jug pa'i phyir* / Dharmottara, *Explanation,* D: *Dze,* 9.a.2-3.

knowledge. Since the turn of the century, analytic philosophers have defined knowledge as justified true belief. In an important essay, GETTIER has suggested examples which undermine this standard definition.[17] These examples are situations in which the three criteria offered by the definition are satisfied but our intuitions tell us that there is no knowledge. Dharmottara's example is quite similar and hence can be appropriately described as Gettier-like in that it takes a putative definition of knowledge and brings a counter-example in which the criteria implied by the definition are met but our intuitions tell us that there is no knowledge.[18]

The conclusion that Dharmottara draws from this Gettier-type example is that we need both criteria (practical value and normative truth) to define validity. Each criterion is necessary but not sufficient. Valid cognition is to be defined in practical terms with a normative *addendum*. For, notice that when we described the practical value on the basis of a causal connection, we always had to add a normative element. We talked, for example, about "appropriate causal results". But what does "appropriate" mean? In our example, the result we obtained was practically appropriate, but cognitively inappropriate, since it did not agree with the cognitive determination of the situation. This shows that a causal account of knowledge can be made complete only by at least tacitly appealing to a normative element determined in intentional terms. This is, according to Dharmottara, what Dharmakīrti intends to capture in his account of valid cognition in the *Ascertainment*.

Let us pause to notice the problems raised by Dharmottara's answer. The Gettier-type example does the job that Dharmottara intends it to do, proving that practical value is not sufficient for validity. But it goes further than that and threatens Dharmottara's own account that a cognition is valid if the practical value of the object is determined truthfully. For, what is Dharmottara's account? Does he hold that validity = practical value + factuality? Presumably not, for that would include our example among valid

17 E. GETTIER, "Is Knowledge Justified True Belief", in M. Roth & L. Galis, eds., *Knowing: Essays in the Analysis of Knowing* (New York: Random, 1970).

18 GETTIER's own example is strikingly similar to Dharmottara's. Imagine we see a clock which indicates two. It is in fact two, but unbeknown to us, the clock has been stucked at that time for one day. GETTIER argues that we do not have knowledge, and yet the criteria implied by the sandard definition of knowledge in the analytic tradition (justified true belief) are met.

cognitions, since the assumption that there is water is factual. Hence, it would satisfy both criteria (practical value and truth understood as factuality), and yet, it is clearly not valid. Thus, if Dharmottara wants his account to exclude Gettier-type cases, he must hold that here truth does not mean just factuality, but something stronger, what we could call normative truth, i.e., truth in accordance with the proper standards of evaluation. The assumption that there is water is factually correct, but relies on a faulty cognitive background. It infers from the vision of what looks like water the presence of water, neglecting the special conditions that could have allowed to doubt the presence of water. Hence, such assumption does not conform to the standards of evaluation and, hence, does not satisfy the second criterion.

Śākya Chok-den similarly argues that practical success is necessary but not sufficient for determining the validity of a cognition. A normative element is required. We cannot judge a mental episode valid just because it produces the adequate pragmatic result. We have to evaluate its truth normatively, comparing its intentional determination with the standards of evaluation appropriate to the situation. In our case, this test failed, for the person's determination ("this is water") did not pass the test. Hence, the apprehension of the mirage and the assumption that there is water are non-deceptive but not valid.

Based on Dharmakīrti's words in the *Ascertainment,* Śākya Chok-den defines valid cognition as "that cognition which is both non-deceptive and newly determines [its object]".[19] A cognition needs to meet three criteria to be valid: a) non-deceptiveness understood in a practical way, b) a normative idea of truth relying on the idea of intentionality, and c) novelty. The first criterion is the most important and represents Dharmakīrti's understanding of non-deceptiveness as explained in *Commentary* II:1. The second is necessary to avoid Gettier-type cases being included among valid cognitions. The third prevents memory from being included, for memory satisfies the first two criteria.

How does Śākya Chok-den's account compare with other views? I believe that his explanation is, for the most part, quite persuasive. It corresponds quite well to several important elements in Dharmakīrti's own explanation, especially as stated in the later *Ascertainment.* There Dharmakīrti gives an account that clearly parallels criteria a) and b) as given by

19 *gsar du bcad pa dang mi slu ba gnyis tshogs kyi rig pa* / Śākya Chok-den, *Defeater,* II.294.7.

Śākya Chok-den. We could quibble on the third criterion of novelty, which is not mentioned by Dharmakīrti in his *Ascertainment.* Does he assume it? Or is it the case that that the requirement of novelty is already implied by the concept of non-deceptiveness, as argued by Go-ram-ba (*go rams pa bsod nams sen ge,* 1429-1489)?[20] Whatever the answer to this question, the fact remains that Śākya Chok-den's account seems to be close enough to Dharmakīrti's more thoughtful explanations.

A Pragmatic Theory of Truth?

Does this account also correspond to what Dharmakīrti had in mind in his earlier *Commentary*? I would argue that it corresponds to Dharmakīrti's pragmatic explanations of non-deceptiveness as stated in *Commentary* II:1. I would also argue that given this pragmatic account of non-deceptiveness, Devendrabuddhi's suggestion that we should take Dharmakīrti's two statements in *Commentary* as providing two alternative definitions is philosophically unsound, despite its literal plausibility. For, as we saw, the Gettier-type examples show that practical non-deceptiveness is neither sufficient nor equivalent to intentional normativity. Did Dharmakīrti misspeak when in *Commentary* II:5 he used the word "or", thereby suggesting that he is offering an alternative account of valid cognition? Or did he realize only later the problems involved in his earlier statements?[21]

As is often the cases in determining authorial intentions, there is room for ample disagreement among commentators. Whatever the commentarial details, the most important conclusion seems to be the following. A coherent explanation of the validity of cognition must involve both pragmatic and normative dimensions. Either criterion is a necessary but not a sufficient

20 Go-ram-ba (*go rams pa bsod nams sen ge*), *The Explanation of the Difficult Points of* [*Sa-paṇ's*] *Treasure on the Science of Valid Cognition that completly Clarifies the Seven Texts* (*tshad ma'i rigs gter gyi dka' gnas rnam par bshad pa sde bdun rab gsal*), in the Complete Works of the Great Masters of the Sa sKya Sect (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 1968), XII. 1.1.1-167.3.3, *Ga,* 1.a-334.a, 116.a.3. For Go-ram-ba, non-deceptiveness is understood in a special sense, as implying three charactersitics: a cognition is non-decepttive if, and only if, a) the agent, i.e., the cognition itself, b) its object, and c) its mode of cognition are non-decepttive. In the case of the memory of a previous cognition, the agent is not reliable. Hence, for Go-ram-ba, novelty is implied by the definition of valid cognition but is not explictly part of it.

21 I am assuming here that Dharmottara's idea that the definition of valid cognition in *Ascertainment* is an attempt to combine the two statements found in *Commentary.*

condition of validity. This is the unanimous opinion of Sa-gya Paṇḍita (*sa skya paṇḍita,* 1182-1251, henceforth abridged as Sa-paṇ) and his followers.[22] They all agree that a coherent Dharmakīrtian account cannot avoid the normative, a point missed by those who described Dharmakīrti as a pragmatist. This is important, for it prevents a possible misunderstanding. Śākya Chok-den's pragmatic description of non-deceptiveness does not imply a pragmatic theory of truth. Śākya Chok-den defends a *pragmatic interpretation of non-deceptiveness, not a pragmatic theory of truth.*

In general, there is a tendency among modern Buddhist scholars to use fashionable philosophical descriptions to interpret the difficult ideas they encounter. I myself am not entirely innocent of such a misdeed. The description of Buddhist views as a form of pragmatism is, however, more than a fashion. It is a long-lasting confusion which needs to be clarified. Even classical scholars such as LA VALLÉE POUSSIN and Mrs. RHYS DAVIDS have asserted that Buddhism is pragmatic in its theory of truth. In recent years, KALUPAHANA has emphasized the empirical and pragmatic aspect of Buddhism and undervalued the importance of tradition as a source of truth.[23] This description is also often applied to Buddhist epistemologists. POTTER is ready to apply this description to most Indian philosophers when he asserts that they understand validity (*pramānya*) in terms of workability.[24] MOHANTY responds that this is only true of Dignāga, Dharmakīrti

22 There are disagreements among Sa-gyas on how to explain non-deceptiveness. Should it be understood *à la* Śākya Chok-den in purely pragmatic terms, or should it be understood as including both pragmatic and normative dimensions? Most other Sa-gya commentators have opted for the latter. Go-ram-ba criticizes his rival Śākya Chok-den for explaining non-deceptiveness in purely pragmatic terms. *Explanation,* 15.b.3. Sa-paṇ seems to share Go-ram-ba's understanding of non-deceptiveness, which he explains as the appropriation of an object. "Appropriation" does not refer to the brute obtainment of an object, but to the capacity to obtain the object upon cognitively determining its nature. *Auto-Commentary*, 116.a.3-.4. For these thinkers, valid cognitions are always non-deceptive with respect to a real object of application (*'jug yul*), but this does not imply that every object with respect to which a cognition is non-deceptive must be real. Therefore, the non-deceptiveness of a cognition and its objective referent, the object of application, cannot be understood in exclusively pragmatic terms. Non-deceptiveness requires an intentional connotation as well.

23 D. KALUPAHANA, *Nagarjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way* (Albany: Suny, 1986).

24 See: K.H. POTTER, "Does Indian Epistemology Concern Justified True Belief?", *Journal of Indian Philosophy,* 12 (1984).

and their followers.[25] I believe that a little care in the use of philosophical vocabulary would clarify the confusion.

It is certainly true that there is a great emphasis on practical concerns in the Buddhist tradition. If the label "pragmatism" is meant to capture this emphasis, this is correct but not very significant. If this label is used with a greater precision as referring to the positions defended by thinkers such as JAMES, PIERCE or DEWEY, I think it does not fit Dharmakīrti and his tradition.

One may object that my use of the label "pragmatism" is too restrictive. For example, in recent years RORTY has proposed a form of pragmatism which is less based on a theory of truth than a rejection of the relevance of such a theory. RORTY holds that the very idea of providing an account of truth and knowledge is an expression of the "Cartesian neurotic quest for certainty".[26] Truth and knowledge do not have any essence and hence rather than attempt to define them we should pay attention to the cultural and political consequences of the accounts that we commit ourselves to. As RORTY puts it, "no wholesale constraints derived from the nature of the objects, or of the mind, or of language, but only those retail constraints provided by the remarks of our fellow-inquirers."[27]

RORTY's emphasis on the conventional nature of truth and knowledge raises serious philosophical questions: can we reject an account of truth as easily as RORTY assumes? Are we not committed by the nature of our conceptual practices to certain accounts of truth? RORTY's view also raises interesting comparative questions. We could wonder, for example, whether such an account is compatible with certain forms of Madhyamaka thought? All this is outside of the purview of this essay. It is clear, however, that RORTY's new pragmatism is not applicable to Dharmakīrti, for our author takes ontology and the commitments it implies much more seriously than RORTY. Like QUINE, Dharmakīrti believes that holding a certain view commits oneself to asserting the existence of certain types of entities. This does not mean that there is no flexibility in our choice of ontological frameworks. There are, however, limits to this flexibility. Abstract pseudo-entities such as universals is where Dharmakīrti, like QUINE, draws the line.[28] These

25 J.N. MOHANTY, *Gaṅgeśa's Theory of Truth* (Delhi: Motilal,1966, 1989), 220.

26 R. RORTY, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982), 161.

27 RORTY, *Consequences,* 165.

28 W.V. QUINE, *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Mass, 1953), 14.

pseudo-entities cannot be accepted, for they do not have any identity conditions. Hence, for Dharmakīrti, RORTY's pragmatic pragmatic trivialization of the issue of truth and knowledge would not be acceptable.

I believe that we, as modern Buddhist scholars, must be careful in our use of labels such as "pragmatist", "empiricist", etc. These descriptions are not without problem for our comparative work, for they refer less to eternal sides in the philosophical conversations of humankind than to historically connected thinkers who share a tradition of inquiry, common references, concerns, etc. For example, it makes sense to describe PIERCE, JAMES, DEWEY and RORTY as pragmatists because of their common background and concerns, despite the differences in their views. A term such as "pragmatist" is most useful not as a doxographical description based on a precise definition, but as referring to a historically embedded tradition of inquiry.

This creates an obvious problem for us whose task is to bridge thinkers who do not share such a continuity. This does not mean that we cannot apply terms such as "pragmatist", "empiricist", etc., to compare thinkers such as JAMES and Dharmakīrti, but that we will not have the benefit of a historical continuity to apply these terms. Hence, our usage will have to be doxographical and will require a precise definition. For example, I have used elsewhere the term "realist" to refer to certain views about universals.[29] Such a doxographical use is possibly useful, but requires precision and clarity. Similarly, "pragmatism" can be used meaningfully to refer to a certain view of truth. This view is opposed to a correspondence theory of truth, which asserts that truth is the adequacy of knowledge (or proposition) to reality, and to a coherence theory, which asserts that truth consists in the internal coherence of knowledge. A pragmatist rejects these views to assert that knowledge is true only inasmuch as it leads to adequate pragmatic results. A *locus classicus* of such a view is JAMES' assertion that "the true is only the expedient in our way of thinking, just as the right is only the convenient in our way of behaving".[30]

If pragmatism is defined as a particular philosophical position rather than as a historically embedded tradition of inquiry, it appears that Dharmakīrti, as understood by Dharmottara and Śākya Chok-den, is not a pragmatist. He does not hold that "the rational purport of a word or other

29 G. DREYFUS, *Reality and Knowledge* (forthcoming).

30 W. JAMES, *The Meaning of Truth* (New York: 1907), vii.

expression, lies exclusively in its conceivable bearing upon the conduct of life"[31], the definition that PIERCE gives of pragmatism. Though Dharmakīrti insists on the practical bearings of knowledge and language, he does not insist that their meanings come exclusively from practical concerns. Knowledge functions in relation to practical concerns, but its criteria are not exclusively pragmatic. Non-deceptiveness may be purely pragmatically understood, but in this case it cannot by itself constitute validity. Dharmakīrti's point is quite straight-forward: statements or cognitions that are true are useful and, therefore, non-deceptive. They are not, however, valid simply because they are useful. JAYATILLEKE makes a similar distinction in the context of early Buddhism:

> We may conclude from this that the truths of Buddhism were also considered to be useful (*atthasaṃhitaṃ*) for each person until one attains salvation ... We may sum this up by saying that the truths of Buddhism were considered to be pragmatic in the Buddhist sense of the term, but it does not mean that Early Buddhism believes in a pragmatic theory of truth.[32]

To put JAYATILLEKE's point in a slightly different way, the depiction of Buddhism as pragmatic comes from a confusion between practical and pragmatic. Buddhism certainly insists on the practical consequences of knowledge, but a similar insistence is found in the Nyāya and other Indian traditions. This practical emphasis is different from a pragmatic theory of truth, according to which the expression "this is true" is interpreted as meaning "this leads to the appropriate results". In such a theory, the obtention of appropriate pragmatic results is not only a necessary but a sufficient condition of truth. I would argue that this pragmatic view differs from Dharmakīrti's, as presented by Dharmottara and Śākya Chok-den. I believe that Sa-gya commentators are quite right to emphasize that a cogent account of truth in Dharmakīrti's tradition requires both pragmatic and normative elements. Does this mean that they are committed to a so-called correspondence theory of truth?

To answer such a question would require that we clarify the meaning of such a theory. There is considerable disagreement about the meaning of such a theory, or even whether there is such a theory! This is obviously not

31 C. PIERCE, "The Essentials of Pragmatism" in J. Buchler, ed., *Philosophical Writings of Pierce* (New York: Dover, 1955), 255.

32 K.N. JAYATILLEKE, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1963, 1980), 358.

the place to enter into such a discussion. Suffice it to say that if one understands such a theory to posit truth as a metaphysical correspondence between concepts and a reality determinable in abstraction from any conceptual scheme, then Dharmakīrti is not committed to such a theory. This is so because it does not make any sense in Dharmakīrti's system to discuss reality in abstraction of any conceptual framework. Although such a reality exists, our concepts cannot capture it. Perception has access to such a reality, but it does not provide any cognitive content. Hence, Dharmakīrtians are not committed to a correspondence theory of truth, at least as understood in the metaphysical sense, despite their acceptance of a normative theory of truth.

Reductionism and Intentionality

This explanation of valid cognition presents a plausible and coherent account of valid cognition. It does raise, however, a question. If Dharmakīrti wants to introduce a normative element, why does he insist on the practical element when explaining non-deceptiveness? Why does he not just present a normative account? This is what Cha-ba and most Ge-luk authors argue. For example, Gyel-tsap and Ge-dün-drub define valid cognition as "that cognition which is newly non-deceptive" (*gsar du mi bslu ba'i shes pa*).[33] They further describe non-deceptiveness in purely cognitive terms without any reference to a pragmatic dimension. Why can't Dharmakīrti accept such a simple and elegant account?

The answer has to do with one of the central issues in Dharmakīrti's philosophy, the problem of universals. Dharmakīrti is a conceptualist. He denies the reality of universals, holding them to be conceptual constructs. As an anti-realist, he finds it difficult to account for the normative element that this theory requires. To illustrate this problem, the example of W. QUINE, whose views are similar to Dharmakīrti in several respects, may be

33 Gyel-tsap, (*rgyal tshap*). *Complete Explanation of the Stanzas of theCommentary on Valid Cognition, the Faultless Revealing of the Path to Liberation, (tshad ma rnam 'grel gyi tshig le'ur byas pa'i rnam bshad thar lam phyin ci ma log par gsal bar byed pa).* Varanasi: Ge-luk-ba Press, 1974-5, I.229.15 and Ge-dün-drub, (dge 'dun grub), *Ornament of Reasoning, a Great Treatise on Valid Cognition (tshad ma'i bstan bcos chen po rigs pa'i rgyan,* Mundgod (India): Loling Press, 1985), 18.10. Kay-drup presents a slightly different account which I have analyzed elsewhere. DREYFUS, "Dharmakīrti's Definition, 33-37".

useful. In recent years, QUINE has proposed an explanation of knowledge called "naturalized epistemology".[34] Instead of speaking of knowledge in normative terms, QUINE proposes that knowledge consists of appropriate stimuli-responses. An object gives rise to a representation to which I assent in the appropriate way. A belief is not true because it is rationally warranted or justified, but because it has the appropriate causal relation with its object. For a belief to be true has nothing to do with any intentional notion such the right mental content, etc., but is entirely a function of the causal chain in which this belief stands.

For QUINE, this program has several goals. On the one side, QUINE is a materialist who wants to eliminate our confused mental terminology (sometimes called folk psychology) and substitute for it well-established scientific notions. In this, QUINE has little in common with Dharmakīrti, who is certainly no materialist. QUINE is also, however, a nominalist who is suspicious of any intentional account, which introduces a normative dimension that is difficult to account for in an anti-realist philosophy.[35] To illustrate this difficulty, let us consider the following example (more familiar to Dharmakīrti than to QUINE): we see a cow and think "this is a cow". Inasmuch as this belief refers to an individual, it can can be thought to stand in a causal relation to that individual. But the truth of this belief is not reducible to this causal relation. I see the same individual and think "this is a horse". The causal connection, which existed in the first case, is still there. Why is this second belief not true then? Because it does not stand in the appropriate causal relation with its object.

This is where QUINE's program of naturalized epistemology gets in trouble, as PUTNAM has convincingly argued. For, the introduction of a factor of "appropriateness" smuggles back the intentional element that QUINE's program was meant to eliminate in the first place. What does it mean for a belief to stand in the appropriate causal relation with its object? In our example, the first belief stands in an appropriate relation with its object because there is an intentional "fit" between reality and what we

34 W.V. QUINE, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York, 1969), 69-91.

35 Quine is an anti-realist only in reference to the problem of universals. Quine has depicted himself as a solid realist inasmuch as he accepts the truths of established science. He is, however, suspicious of abstract entities such as universals, mental content, meaning, etc.

think. There are many ways to spell out this "fitness" between mind and reality: I can say that my mental content corresponds to the real situation, or that my mental state captured a property. I can also speak of a warranted belief or having the right concept, etc. These descriptions are not equivalent, but they come to the same point: it is not possible to explain the difference between beliefs a) and b) without introducing a normative element.[36]

Dharmakīrti understands the necessity of positing such a normative dimension. As a thinker who is steeped in the study of the meaningfulness of language, he realizes that we cannot give an account of language in terms of individuals. We need a normative time-neutral element, without which we would be reduced to what PUTNAM calls "the sollipsism of the present moment".[37] Without such a normative dimension, our statements would be reduced to being mere noises and our cognitive states would be no more than acceptance or rejection of such noises in the present moment. And yet, such normative dimension is difficult to account for. It cannot be reduced to individual realities. Nor can it be found in real universals, i.e., real properties existing over and above their instances, for how would such entities exist? For Dharmakīrti, no entity can be real (that is, a specifically characterized phenomenon, *svalakṣaṇa, rang mtshan*) if it does not satisfy spatio-temporal identity conditions. For example, individual cows[38] are real since they have definite spatio-temporal locations, but cowness is not since it cannot be determined in such terms. How can then Dharmakīrti introduce the necessary normative dimension if he rejects universals and reduce reality to individuals?

His "solution" is to argue that though universals are less than real, they are more than completely non-existent. They are, to speak his technical language, specifically characterized phenomena (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa, spyi mtshan*), that is, quasi-entities whose existence is presupposed by thought but which do not exist independently of conceptual activities. To be consistent with his anti-realist ontology of individuals, Dharmakīrti ought to give an *à la* QUINE account of thought and language based on causal relations with individuals, but he knows that this will not work. He sees that this is a

36 H. PUTNAM, "Why Reason Can't be Naturalized?", in *Realism and Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 229-247.

37 PUTNAM, "Why Reason", 246.

38 Or, to put it more rigorously, individual atoms composing the cows are real.

self-refuting enterprise, if there ever was one! In short, he cannot do without universals! Hence, he reintroduces them as generally characterized phenomena. Thus he accounts for thought and language through an element of normativity.

This normative element is, however, limited to the conceptual domain. For, normativity derives from unreal universals. Hence, normativity is the domain of thought only, and has no direct relation to reality. Real things are apprehended by the other type of valid cognition, perception. This latter type of cognition cannot, however, be appraised in normative terms in isolation from conception. Perception does not have any cognitive content, but just puts us in contact with bare reality. This is a necessary consequence of Dharmakīrti's anti-realism combined with his view that perception is undistorted. Since it accurately reflects reality and since reality is reducible to bare particulars, perception cannot provide any cognitive articulation. It cannot bring any cognitive content and boils down to a passive encounter with things in their individual momentariness.

Dharmakīrti's theory of valid cognition is meant to account for the validity of both types of cognition. It must account for perception, which is the foundation of knowledge. Perception's validity is hard to account for, however, in cognitive terms, since this cognition is contentless. Hence, it is better appraised in pragmatic terms. Perception is valid in that it leads to appropriate results. Hence, Dharmakīrti introduces his first and main criterion for valid cognition. This pragmatic criterion is not, however, sufficient since it would include Gettier-type cases among valid cognitions. To exclude them, Dharmakīrti needs a normative dimension introduced by his second cognitive criterion. Pragmatically successful cognitions can be valid only if their object are determined in accordance with the proper standards of evaluation. This cognitive criterion cannot be met, however, by perception itself, but only by conceptual judgments induced by perception. Perception passively holds an object which is categorized by conceptions. It is only this latter type of cognition which can provides the normative element we discussed. This is why Dharmakīrti says:

> [Perception and inference are valid cognitions] because they are non-deceptive with respect to the purpose [of the action] in the application [towards an object] after having determined it.[39]

39 Dharmakīrti, *Ascertainment,* D: 4211, *Ce,* 152.b.3-.4.

I take this to be Dharmakīrti's final statement about the nature of valid cognition, as explained by Dharmottara and Śākya Chok-den. A cognition is valid if, and only if, it brings about some possible practical results in accordance with the intentional determination of the appropriated object. This determination is normative in that it refers to standards that allow us to decide whether this cognition is correct or not. This normative element, however, is not part of the fabric of reality. It comes from our conceptual frameworks which arise as the result of our experiences. Hence, the normative element is not arbitrary or purely *a priori.* Nevertheless, it is not dictated by reality itself.