

Symposium Abstracts

1. Allison Aitken

“Vasubandhu on intentional action: From mind-body to mind-only”

Abstract: What, metaphysically speaking, qualifies an action as intentional? In other words, what in the nature of things entitles us to distinguish between two seemingly identical bodily movements, one intentional and the other involuntary? In this talk, I examine Vasubandhu's response to this question and show how his account of the nature and causal mechanics of intentional action exposes a tension between (i) a mereological nihilistic form of exdurantism and (ii) moral realism—namely, the difficulty of reconciling anti-realism about spatiotemporal composites with realism about moral facts concerning persons and their actions. Vasubandhu's solution is to reduce intentional bodily action to mental action, specifically the momentary mental act of intending a bodily movement. I show how this theory delivers notable payoffs, including its straightforward handling of cases involving causal deviance and negative actions. Yet even if all morally significant action is, strictly speaking, mental action, explanatory difficulties remain concerning mental causation, that is, how precisely the mind causes the body to move and precipitate change in the world. I show how Vasubandhu ultimately leverages this puzzle to argue for metaphysical idealism. Eliminating matter sidesteps worries about mind→body causal interaction, but raises new questions about mind→mind interaction: how do our intentional actions affect other minds in the absence of a shared material world? I conclude with an analysis of Vasubandhu's account of this process, which commits him to a surprisingly opaque picture of the mind for an idealist, characterized by qualified symmetrical access to mental states together with a form of externalism about mental content.

2. Amit Chaturvedi

“Reflexive perceptual awareness and the phenomenal unity of consciousness”

Abstract: Yogācāra Buddhist philosophers, particularly in the wake of Dharmakīrti (7th cent.), held that conscious mental events reflexively perceive themselves in addition to cognizing some intentional object. In this presentation, I examine how the Yogācāra commitment to intrinsic reflexive awareness was taken by the followers of Dharmakīrti's commentator Prajñākara Gupta (8th cent.) – specifically, Jñānaśrīmitra and Ratnakīrti (10th-11th cent.) – to entail that phenomenal consciousness is unitary, or unanalyzable into more fundamental parts, in spite of evidently manifesting a diverse array of sensory, cognitive, and affective forms (*ākāra*) within any single moment of experience. I focus especially on Ratnakīrti's articulation of arguments for the “manifold” (*citra*) and yet “non-dual” (*advaita*) nature of phenomenal consciousness (*prakāśa*), and trace how these arguments are grounded upon the premise that every awareness-event directly reveals its own essential nature. In short, it is because an awareness-event intrinsically manifests itself that awareness can never manifest anything outside of itself; that being so, any moment of multi-modal experience cannot be decomposed into distinct awareness-events, given that each awareness would remain “in the dark” about the others' existence. I conclude with some reflection on the implications of Ratnakīrti's account for contemporary discussions of phenomenal holism and panpsychism.

3. Nilanjan Das

“Jñānaśrīmitra on intentionality”

Abstract: In the first half of *Advaitabinduprakaraṇa* (“An Essay on the Gist of Non-Duality”), the Yogācāra Buddhist philosopher Jñānaśrīmitra (980-1040) offers a refutation of a realist argument. The argument in question seeks to establish that objects of our awareness-events (*jñāna*) are distinct from—i.e., constitutively independent of—those awareness-events. It involves two premises. (1) Whatever appears to be a certain way, it is established—and should be treated—as being that way. (2) Objects such as a pot appear as distinct from awareness. Therefore: objects such as a pot are established—and should be treated—as distinct from awareness. Jñānaśrī’s response to this argument proceeds in two steps. First, he ascribes to his realist opponent a *kāraka*-theoretic conception of awareness—a conception on which the term “awareness” in the opponent’s argument refers either to the instrument (*karana*) or to the state (*bhāva*) through which there is awareness of an object that exists independently of it. In either case, there must be some kind of causal connection between the awareness and its object. But then, he argues that such a causal conception of intentionality cannot satisfactorily capture what it is for an awareness-event to be *of* or *about* an object that is distinct from it. In doing so, Jñānaśrī entertains a number of conceptions of intentionality derived from his Sautrāntika, Mīmāṃsā and Nyāya interlocutors, explaining why each of them fails. From this, Jñānaśrī concludes that, even though his realist opponent seeks to establish the distinctness of objects of awareness such as the pot from awareness, they cannot properly fix what kind of entity this awareness is. This makes their argument defective: both the reason (*hetu*) and the target (*sādhya*) suffer from the fault of having an unestablished qualifier (*aprasiddhaviśeṣaṇatā*), making the reason unestablished by nature (*svarūpāsiddha*) and the target useless for the purpose at hand. In this paper, I reconstruct Jñānaśrī’s critique of these realist conceptions of intentionality, and whether it can withstand the objections raised by later realist opponents, especially Udayana.

4. Elisa Freschi

“Kumārila and the limits of perception”

Abstract: According to Kumārila, much can be sense-perceived. It goes without saying that sensible qualities can be sense-perceived, but Kumārila thinks that we can also sense-perceive the substance behind the sense-qualities (that is, the substrate of the sense-qualities). He also thinks that we can sense-perceive the universal inhering in the particular. Thus, when we look at a brownish cow, we are sense-perceiving its colour, the substance-cow and the universal-cow.

However, this rather generous account of perception comes with some serious and specific boundaries. Perception, to begin with, is only about the present. It cannot grasp the past nor the future. There is no yogic super-sensuous perception that would be able to grasp such features of reality.

Kumārila also denies that cognitions are self-aware (this self-awareness, or *svasaṃvedana* is considered to be a form of perception by Buddhist epistemologists) and rather claims that we become aware that a cognition has taken place only retrospectively, through *arthāpatti*. Thus, besides denying self-awareness he also denies the Naiyāyika *anuvyavasāya* or ‘apprehension of a previous cognition’, through which one becomes aware of a previous mental event. Why is *anuvyavasāya* not acceptable for Kumārila? Presumably

because it is about something no longer present (this might be the main reason for his general denial of *mānasapratyakṣa* if it is about prior thoughts).

The only seeming exception is *ahampratyaya* ‘cognition of ourselves qua-I’, which grasps something other than an ‘external’ object. Kumāṛila still thinks that the I is not a construct, but something objectively real, but he claims that in that specific case we have direct access to it. How exactly is still under investigation, but my current understanding is that *ahampratyaya* is a form of *mānasapratyakṣa* that grasps the I-as-knower while it is knowing something. It cannot grasp a previous I, otherwise it would violate the boundaries of sense-perception discussed above.

Thus, as much as Kumāṛila is generous with regard to regular sense-perception, he is strict in denying any sort of perception beyond it. This presentation will discuss Kumāṛila’s understanding of perception and pause in particular on the case of *mānasapratyakṣa* and on the role of manas in perception.

5. Pascale Hugon

“Old arguments and new arguments in the realist vs. idealist debate in 11th-12th-century Tibetan scholarship”

Abstract: The section on conventional truth in the *Analysis of the Essence of Madhyamaka* by Gyamarwa Jangchubdrak (late 11th–12th c.) allows one to navigate multifold positions held by early Tibetan regarding the question whether what is perceived is internal or external to the mind, and how to distinguish correct appearances from incorrect ones – all this, understood, on the conventional level. The main thinkers whose views are reported by Gyamarwa, all part of the Madhyamaka lineage stemming from Ngok Lodensherap (1059–1109), each offer a very different answer to these questions, adopting distinct tenet systems with regard to the conventional (systems that are not set forth along an ascending scale of analysis on this level) and agreeing only that, ultimately, everything is empty. Gyamarwa’s student Chapa Chökyisenge (1109–1169) reiterates the discussion along the same lines in his Madhyamaka works and, *mutatis mutandis*, in his epistemological works when it comes to determine the nature of the apprehended objects of cognition. Building on earlier examinations of this discussion in Gyamarwa’s and Chapa’s works (Hugon 2016&2020), my talk will clarify the sources for the arguments at play in these two authors’ establishment of their own shared position – direct realism *à la* Vaibhāṣika on the conventional level – and rejection of idealist views and arguments against external realism. Chapa re-uses in great part Gyamarwa’s arguments and Gyamarwa ‘recycles’ a number of his predecessors’ arguments, although refuting those that would threaten his own position. How much of these arguments can be traced to Indian sources? While explicit references to Indian Buddhist sources related to these questions are rare in the works of these two scholars, the discussion recognizably involves assessment of the classical ‘awareness’-inference and ‘certitude of co-apprehension’-inference. Consideration of ‘neither-one-nor-many’-arguments is also at the core of the discussion, in the form of Tibetan-style arguments by parallels that expose the conundrum related to the absence of a criterion for determining the scope of application (conventional or ultimate) of arguments refuting existence – a conundrum to which Gyamarwa and Chapa offer distinct solutions. In addition to mapping explicit references to Dharmakīrti, Jñānagarbha, and Śāntarakṣita, I will investigate the implicit background, attempting in particular to assess a potential influence stemming from Bhāviveka or Śubhagupta. On a side note, I will comment on Gyamarwa and Chapa’s tactics for countering the reproach of contradicting Dharmakīrti’s treatises, and on Gyamarwa’s defensive strategy regarding his disagreement with the head of his Madhyamaka teaching lineage.

6. Birgit Kellner

“Perception and non-existents: a Buddhist epistemological perspective”

Abstract: The Buddhist epistemologist Dharmakīrti (mid-6th to mid-7th century) grounds existence in causal efficacy—a criterion he restricts to momentary particulars. Within his framework, only perception has a direct causal link to reality, as it arises as a momentary event from an immediately preceding causal complex that includes the object itself. Non-existents, lacking causal capacity, cannot be objects of direct perception.

Yet this seemingly straightforward limitation of perception’s function with regard to non-existents becomes complicated once we consider Dharmakīrti’s account for the knowledge of non-existence through inference. The foundational pattern of inferences proving non-existence is defined through perception: not perceiving an object can prove that object’s non-existence if, and only if, a second object is actually perceived. As Dharmakīrti puts it, non-perception (*anupalabdhi*) is another perception. This theory spawns divergent interpretations among later Buddhist epistemologists regarding perception’s precise role in the process. It is these competing accounts that this paper examines.

7. Patrick McAllister

“From perception to word and inference: A Buddhist solution to perceptual knowledge”

Abstract: This talk presents a solution devised by Buddhist philosophers to a problem they share with many other thinkers: how can perception, a non-conceptual awareness episode that merely manifests unique particulars, yield any conceptual awareness like knowledge? The first argument aims to show that Dignāga, a Buddhist author from around the latter half of the fifth century CE, applied this solution within his theory of universals (*apoha*). By treating the linguistic elements that appear in particular utterances as equivalent to the general properties that one can use as logical reasons, Dignāga analyses our understanding of words as a form of inference. Dignāga’s solution, or at least its pattern, I will then claim, can be identified also several centuries later in the writings of the Buddhist author Prajñākaragupta. He employs that pattern, in a generalised form, to explain how perfectly non-conceptual perceptual awareness episodes can support or lead to activity that relies on concepts. Both authors present solutions that rely on the same set of basic epistemological and ontological assumptions. They both subscribe to particular theories about habitual behaviour and fundamental nescience on the one hand, and on the radical individuality of real things on the other. Their reliance on these presuppositions makes their solution possible and also characterises it as a “Buddhist” one.

8. Serena Saccone

“Is the Seen Out of Reach? On the relationship between causality, phenomenology, and perceptibility in Buddhist Externalism”

Abstract: Externalism (*bahirarthavāda*) is often advocated—albeit provisionally—by some Buddhist thinkers within the Dignāga-Dharmakīrtian tradition, primarily to counter Brahmanical positions that affirm the true reality of material objects of cognition. These thinkers propose theories concerning the existence of atoms and the manner in which such entities give rise to awareness. However, their views diverge on whether and how these

external entities, despite being their cause, are accessible to sense cognitions. In particular, they differ on whether phenomenal appearance is a necessary condition for something to qualify as the object of sense cognitions, and on how such appearance should be understood.

Externalist doctrines are subsequently superseded by “idealist” standpoints, which are presented as offering a more logical account of sense cognitions. I will analyze the relationship between phenomenology and perceptibility, with particular attention to the underlying tenets of causal efficacy in perception and the production of phenomenal appearance. The authors examined will include Vasubandhu, Dharmakīrti, Śubhagupta, Śāntarakṣita, and Kamalaśīla.

9. Akane Saito

Title: From perception to action: Parallel structures and their relation to arthakriyāsaṃvāditva

Abstract: I take this opportunity to present the hypothesis I have long been developing that, as long as we confine our scope to the theory of error, or more broadly to the philosophy of direct perception within the classical Mīmāṃsā system, it exhibits a structure similar to, if not identical with, their theory of action; or, put differently, that Maṇḍana Miśra at least seeks a coherent explanation linking the two, and that his arguments on both erroneous cognition and direct perception are grounded in his theory of action and injunction.

The focus is on the process in which direct perception gives rise to activity driven by the perceptual cognition that emerges from it. Within this framework, one of the criteria for determining a particular cognition to be valid is whether the purposeful activity (*arthakriyā*) arising from that cognition is successful and unfailing. When the purposeful activity fails to fulfill its purpose, the cognition is sublated by a subsequent cognition.

When we define erroneous cognition, for example, simply as the cognition of taking X to be non-X / Y, we do not take into account a subsequent activity and the definition remains neutral with respect to any consequences that may arise thereafter. Nonetheless, for a person to judge its validity, subsequent activity or “something” is required, because even if sublation is the essential factor by which a cognition comes to be regarded as erroneous, sublation does not occur naturally on its own.

Non-erroneousness, understood as the consistency of purposeful activity (*arthakriyāsthiti*), was adopted by Dharmakīrti as a defining characteristic of a valid means of cognition; therefore, this idea is not limited to the Mīmāṃsā or broader Brahmanical tradition. My presentation will likely not reach the point of asking why Dharmakīrti, within the Buddhist tradition, adopted (or felt compelled to adopt) this concept in the first place. However, this will remain a question to be addressed after my presentation.

10. Marcus Schmücker

“To perceive is to differentiate: The concept of bheda and the structure of cognition in Vedānta”

Abstract: This paper addresses the epistemological question of what is perceived by examining the role of difference (*bheda*) within a Vedāntic tradition. It advances the thesis that cognition is fundamentally an act of differentiation at the level of perceptual experience. On this view, perception does not present an uninterpreted given, but rather a world that is already structured: objects are not first apprehended and only subsequently distinguished; instead, they appear as always already differentiated.

In Advaita Vedānta, especially in its later developments, the indispensability of

difference at the level of cognition becomes a key motivation for denying its ultimate reality: differentiation is treated as a feature of empirical, but not absolute, reality. By contrast, in the tradition of Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, Rāmānuja and his followers up to Veṅkaṭanātha regard difference (*bheda*) as genuine and irreducible within knowledge. An object is apprehended because it stands in relations of differentiation. The School of Madhva, i.e., the tradition of Dvaita Vedānta, radicalizes this position by affirming difference as intrinsic (*svarūpa*) to the very nature of reality. Yet, despite their broad agreement that, at the level of cognition, perception is always of what is differentiated, these traditions struggle to provide a clear account of what difference itself consists in.

Against this background, the paper focuses on Veṅkaṭanātha's detailed analysis of *bheda*, and shows how he engages critically with later representatives of Advaita Vedānta while developing a constructive account. Drawing on his polemical arguments—especially in the *Śatadūṣaṇī* (vāda 13, *bhedadūṣaṇanistāravāda*)—as well as on the exposition of his own position in the *Tattvamuktākalāpa* (chapter 5, verse 13, *bhedadūṣaṇanistāra*), and above all in his auto-commentary on this text, Veṅkaṭanātha rejects attempts to reduce difference either to an object's intrinsic nature (*svarūpa*) or to a separable property (*dharma*), showing that such reductions lead to logical difficulties, including circularity. At the same time, he resists treating difference as an independently existing third entity. Instead, his account defines difference as a real but non-separable aspect of objects: it is not externally added to them, yet neither is it reducible to them.

Veṅkaṭanātha thus refines the thesis that to perceive is to differentiate by showing how difference can be both irreducible and inseparable. His account not only challenges epistemological assumptions of Advaita Vedānta but also marks a significant step toward the more robust ontological commitments of Dvaita Vedānta.

11. John Taber

“Kumārila's dialectical strategy”

Abstract: What, exactly, is Kumārila's positive argument for direct realism? I would maintain that he doesn't have one. His strategy for demonstrating the truth of direct realism, rather, is to show that the two strongest proofs he knew of for the claim that we are *not* directly aware of external objects are seriously flawed: first, in the *Nirālambanavāda* chapter of his *Ślokavārttika*, the argument that “the cognition of a pillar, etc., is false (*mithyā*), because it is a cognition, like a dream,” and, second, in the *Sūnyavāda* chapter, the attempt to demonstrate that the form or aspect (*ākāra*) one is aware of in sense perception belongs to one's cognition, not to an external object. Kumārila's strategy for defending direct realism, indeed, seems to be based on the idea that refutation of all proofs for not-P establishes the truth of P, without necessarily having to provide, additionally, positive proof for P.

In this talk I shall focus on Kumārila's refutation of the first proof, the so-called Dreaming Argument. His main criticism (there are many) is that, even if one accepts that it is a correct inference according to the norms of Indian logic, it is self-refuting. If the thesis of the inference is true, then one's cognitions of the terms of the inference are all mistaken: there is nothing corresponding to one's idea of the subject, the predicate to be proved, the reason, or the example. In fact, if the thesis of the inference were true, all demonstration and discourse would be undermined, to say nothing of the various beliefs and teachings of those who put forward and defend the inference, namely, the Buddhists. Nor could one evade these difficulties by appealing to a distinction between conventional and ultimate truth.

My aim in my talk is to determine whether this sort of strategy for defending direct realism can work and, in particular, whether the self-refutation objection, in tandem with a

rejection of the two-truths doctrine, can be successfully applied to the more sophisticated arguments for idealism of later Buddhist thinkers such as Prajñākaragupta, Jitāri, and Jñānaśrīmitra, or even, for that matter, to any attempt to prove anti-realism.

12. Davey Tomlinson

“Jñānaśrīmitra’s proof of idealism”

Jñānaśrīmitra (ca. 980–1040) begins his *Sākārasiddhiśāstra* by saying that there are two arguments Yogācāras use to establish *vijñaptimātratā*. One, the restriction that awareness and its object are always apprehended together (*sahopalambhaniyama*), has received a good deal of attention in recent scholarship. The other, the property of being manifest (*prakāśamānatva*), is the focus of this paper. Jñānaśrī develops this proof in his *Advaitabīnduprakaraṇa*. At the start of the final, verse-portion of the work, he writes: “Whatever manifests, that is awareness, like what is seen in dreams. And blue and the like manifest” (*yad yat prakāśate tat tad vijñānaṃ svapnadṛṣṭavat | prakāśate ca nīlādīḥ*). In this paper, I attempt to reconstruct Jñānaśrī’s defense of this inference in the terse verses that follow. First, I will examine the way he establishes the pervasion between the reason (*hetu*), being manifest, and the target (*sādhya*), being awareness. He does this by pointing to two qualifiers he argues awareness has—manifesting itself (*svaprakāśa*) and being private or unique (*asādhāraṇa*)—and then arguing that these pervade manifestation, too. Next, I will consider objections Jñānaśrī entertains from fellow Buddhists (very likely Mādhyamikas, but possibly also his Yogācāra opponent Ratnākaraśānti) who argue that the reason is unestablished (*asiddha*). This is so, his opponents claim, either because the site (appearances like blue) does not ultimately exist, or is without intrinsic nature (*niḥsvabhāva*), because blue and the like are neither one nor many; or else because manifestation itself does not ultimately exist, either because it cannot bear analysis or because it is dependently arisen. I will unpack Jñānaśrī’s responses to these objections with the help of passages from the *Sākārasiddhiśāstra*, where he develops some of these arguments at greater length. Finally, I will offer some hypotheses on the sort of idealism Jñānaśrī means to establish by means of this argument.

13. Alex Watson

“Do we perceive our selves?”

Abstract: Part I will consist of a close reading and philosophical evaluation of the first extended and sophisticated argument in Indian philosophy for the thesis that each of us can perceive our own self – that of the Mīmāṃsaka thinker, Kumāṛila (c. 550–650). Kumāṛila points to an experience that he claims we all have, termed ‘I-cognition’ (*ahampratya*), and argues, against Cārvākas and Buddhists, that what we encounter in that experience is the self. Neither the Cārvākas nor the Buddhists deny that we have this kind of cognition, but they dispute that its object is the self. We will observe Kumāṛila’s arguments against the Cārvāka view that its object is the body, and then turn to his extended argument against the Buddhists. We can divide that argument into three, each presupposing a different explanation of I-cognition: that its object is a momentary perceiver, that it lacks any object at all, and that its object is the five skandhas.

Part II will give an account of some of the subsequent developments in the history of this particular issue. We will note that Kumāṛila’s Mīmāṃsaka view came under pressure from two sides. On the one hand, there were responses from Buddhist philosophers, who

argued that Kumāṛila's view naively accorded perceptual status, and hence reliability, to object reidentification (*pratyabhijñā*), a kind of cognition that for the Buddhists is not perceptual but conceptual, superimposing persistence on to what is momentary. On the other hand, there was an unease among Mīmāṃsakas themselves, fuelled by pressure from a tradition that was in other respects an ally – Nyāya – an unease over how one thing (the self) could be both agent and object of one and the same cognition. The tension within Mīmāṃsā was real, for they themselves argued against Yogācāra Buddhist idealism on the grounds that it is impossible for one thing (consciousness) to be both agent and object of cognition. We will observe how the attempt to address this tension led to three significant modifications of Kumāṛila's view.

14. Jan Westerhoff

“Dharmakīrti and Ratnakīrti on our knowledge of other minds”

Abstract: The present paper will assume that Yogācāra denies the existence of external material objects. This raises an immediate question regarding the status of other minds. On the one hand, many of the famous Yogācāra arguments against the existence of external objects (such as the *sahopalambhaniyama* argument) are perfectly general and apply to external material as well as to external mental objects. On the other hand, denying the existence of other minds raises considerable problems for Buddhist soteriology.

The status of other minds was discussed extensively in Dharmakīrti's *Santānāntarasiddhi* and Ratnakīrti's *Santānāntarasiddhidūṣaṇa*. The relation between these two texts is far from straightforward: Ratnakīrti locates himself in the continuation of Dharmakīrti's Yogācāra tradition, while also apparently presenting a 'refutation' of one of Dharmakīrti's treatises. This talk will consider various Yogācāra arguments for and against the existence of other minds, discuss the dialectical relation between the two works of Dharmakīrti and Ratnakīrti, and offer some thoughts on the systematic prospects of 'Buddhist solipsism.'