
Dignāga and the Evolution of the Particular in the Buddhist Epistemological Tradition

Martin Adam
McGill University

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, it attempts to provide a clear and accurate interpretation of the views of Dignāga (ca. 480–540 C.E.) on perception (*pratyakṣa*) and its object, the extreme particular (*svalakṣaṇa*). This can be accomplished only if one recognizes that much of what Dignāga has to say in this area responds to a fundamental tension implicit in the two-*pramāṇa* epistemological framework he wished to establish. Whether Dignāga successfully resolves this tension may be debatable; all I wish to show here is that he was aware of it and that a plausible response within the terms of this framework was open to him—even though it may have been left to his successors to actually connect the dots.

The second objective is to show how this same tension carries over into post-Dignāgian elaborations of the two-*pramāṇa* system of the Buddhist epistemological school. In this light I will adumbrate a certain trend in the historical development of the notions of *pratyakṣa* and *svalakṣaṇa* with reference to the views of Dharmakīrti (ca. 600–660 C.E.) and Mokṣākaragupta (ca. 1050–1292 C.E.). This choice of figures is meant to be illustrative of the historical trend I wish to explore; it is not, of course, exhaustive.

What then, is this tension? Fundamental to the Buddhist epistemological project was a broad distinction made between the only two accepted kinds of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*): *pratyakṣa* (perception) and

anumāna (inference). The distinguishing feature of all *pramāṇa* is that on each occasion of their functioning the cognition arising is both new and non-deceptive (see Matilal 1986, 107–112). *Pratyakṣa* is understood as that form of cognition which “is connected with the sense organs,” which is to say, “direct perception.”¹ The object (*prameya*) of *pratyakṣa* is the momentary particular, or *svalakṣaṇa* (“self-characterized”). *Anumāna*, by contrast, cognizes the relationships obtaining between universals, or *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* (“generally characterized”). The problem facing Dignāga was to establish the validity of both kinds of *pramāṇa* without allowing their respective objects to cross over into the other’s domain of operation, and undermine the very distinction between them. In arguing for this mutual exclusivity Dignāga seeks to establish a watertight epistemological foundation for the fundamental ontological principles of the Buddhism—the impermanence and non-substantiality of entities. But in establishing the conditions for these conclusions to follow, Dignāga must take care not to undermine the very foundations of valid reasoning, and hence his own arguments! How he avoids this danger will become apparent once we have examined his views in more detail.

Interpreting Dignāga on *Svalakṣaṇa*

Dignāga’s account of *pratyakṣa* and its correlate *svalakṣaṇa* is minimalist in the extreme and largely negative in nature. The primary signification of *pratyakṣa* is given by him in the first section of the *Pratyakṣapariccheda* of his *Pramāṇasamuccaya*: “The cognition in which there is no conceptual construction is perception” (Hattori 1968, 25). Conceptual construction (*kalpanā*) is understood as the application of a name to that which is given through perception, *svalakṣaṇa*.

Dignāga classifies names into five basic categories. A “thing” (*artha*) may be named with a proper noun (*yadṛccha-śabda*), common nouns (*jāti-śabda*), adjectives (*guṇa-śabda*), verbal nouns (*kriyā-śabda*), and lastly substance-words (*dravya-śabda*). For Dignāga all such name-giving is considered *kalpanā*. It is therefore post-perception (Hattori 1968, 83 n. 1.27).

It follows from this account that *svalakṣaṇa* is fundamentally pri-

vate and can never be adequately described. It is cognized before the application of language and since all descriptions necessarily involve the application of universals, such descriptions must be understood as distortions of the particular that is given in its purity only in perception.

One particular example of the manner in which the application of a name distorts the ineffable “given” may be of critical importance at this point. What has been largely overlooked by translators of Dignāga, is that the word “thing” is a common noun! Although this point could not have been missed by Dignāga himself, it lies at the root of interpreters’ failure to correctly assess Dignāga’s views. “Things” are universals and therefore cannot be “given” in perception. We shall return to this point shortly.

We have seen that Dignāga sets forth a radical dichotomy between the two *pramāṇas* as well as between their objects. *Pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* are mutually exclusive, as are *svalakṣaṇa* and *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*.² This exclusivity is logical, not merely matter of fact. (A if and only if not B, where B is defined as not-A!) In order to understand why Dignāga holds this position we must understand its implications.

There are two major repercussions that resonate from the Dignāgian system. 1) The nature of the ultimately existent reality is momentary, impermanent, without substance. 2) Since language cannot (logically) capture this reality in propositional form, it follows that *svalakṣaṇa* is indubitable and *pratyakṣa* is incapable of being false!³ Given the above discussion we can see how these two are connected, but what should be noted here is that the non-substantiality of entities is basic doctrine to most schools of Buddhism (see Matilal 1986, 241), while the indubitability of valid cognition constitutes one of the fundamental tenets of the Buddhist epistemological school.

We can now clearly see the basic tension in the Dignāgian account of *svalakṣaṇa*. On the one hand it must be entirely non-conceptual and therefore devoid of substance; on the other hand if *svalakṣaṇa* is not in some sense a conceptual object, to what do our inferences refer? If the answer is that they do not refer to real entities, i.e., that universals are completely fictitious, then there can be no valid inference. We can, therefore, understand Dignāga as attempting to navigate a course be-

tween the reifications of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas on the one hand and the nihilism of the Carvakas on the other. In the end Dignāga holds fast to the view of *svalakṣaṇa* as fundamentally non-conceptual, but rejects the notion that the non-perceived nature of universals entails their complete lack of validity. As we shall see he does this by establishing a causal link between perception and inference.

Elaborating the Dignāgian Account of *Svalakṣaṇa*

In spite of its fundamental ineffability Dignāga must give some minimal verbal account of the nature of *svalakṣaṇa*. We have seen that *pratyakṣa* is “free from conceptual construction”; its directly known “object” *svalakṣaṇa* is likewise free. But it is at this point that care is in order. The notion of an “object” is ambiguous and two alternate interpretations of it are possible: 1) Object as logical correlate of subject; (i.e., percept as correlate of perception). I shall refer to this as the “logical object”; 2) Object as entity, thing. This I will call the “ontological object” or “conceptual object.”

It is important to recognize that not all logical objects are ontological objects, since the former category admits the possibility of non-intentional representations, i.e., those which do not refer to anything beyond themselves. Sensations of pleasure and pain are examples of objects which some philosophers have argued to be fundamentally non-referential. Some would wish to put all sensations into this category. I believe Dignāga also subscribes to this view.⁴

A sampling of the literature describing the theories of Dignāga reveals a lack a clarity on this point, a failure to distinguish between these two very different conceptions. *Svalakṣaṇa* can be taken to refer to a non-intentional sensory core of experience, which is initially perceived and only afterwards constructed through inference into the image of an object understood as a thing. This is how Matilal and Stcherbatsky, among others, understand the Dignāgian conception of *svalakṣaṇa*: “The given, which the Buddhist would call *svalakṣaṇa*, has no structure...The Buddhist datum seems to be an undifferentiated whole, which is only self-characterized (*svalakṣaṇa*), which can probably be characterized by ‘X’ or ‘X is Y’ or ‘X has X’” (Matilal 1986, 322).

Or again, “[T]he salient feature of sense-perception is that it is not constructive. It is followed by the construction of the image, but it is itself non-constructive. It is sense-perception shorn of all its mnemonic elements. It is pure sense-perception. We would not call it sense-perception at all. It is sensation and even pure sensation, the sensational core of perception...” (Stcherbatsky 1962, 149).

But the problem with the ineffable is that it is necessarily ambiguous. Stcherbatsky goes on to add that the function of *svalakṣaṇa* “is to point out the presence of the object” (Stcherbatsky 1962, 149). This demonstrates the basic ambiguity of the notion. On the one hand *svalakṣaṇa* must somehow “point out” the object that is to be conceptualized; on the other hand it cannot itself *be* a conceptual object! In order to clarify the possibilities here let us distinguish the following logical alternate characterizations of that which is perceived, *svalakṣaṇa*.⁵

Non-intentional possibilities:

- a) the point-instant. A homogeneous dot, or phenomenal atom, of colour (or sound, smell, touch and mental perceptibles);
- b) the sphere-instant. Admits the possibility of both a homogeneous field⁶ or a heterogenous multiplicity; i.e., many colours at one time, but no distinguished objects; i.e., no “things.”

Intentional possibilities:

- c) the differentiated sphere-instant. Includes “unnamed things” (ontological objects);
- d) the differentiated object. Recognized things; i.e., the “I see a jug” school of thought (see below, on Mokṣākaragupta);
- e) the differentiated object-continuum. Recognized things through time; i.e., no longer momentary.

Positions d) and e) cannot plausibly be attributed to Dignāga.⁷

Let us turn to the words of Dignāga himself (as translated by Hattori). Dignāga quotes the following passages from the *Abidharmaśāstra* of Yaśomitra:⁸ “One who has the ability to perceive perceives something blue (*nīlaṃ vijānāti*), but does not conceive that ‘this is blue’ (*nīlaṃ iti vijānāti*)”; “In respect to an object, he has the sense of

the object itself (*artha-saṃjīn*), but does not possess and notion of its name (*dharma-saṃjīn*).”

Dignāga goes on to admit that this Abidharma treatise states that aggregates of atoms are cognized through perception and that this suggests an incongruity with the notion that only the particular is thus cognized. The treatise further states that: “these [sense-cognitions] take a particular (*svalakṣaṇa*) as their object insofar as it is the particular in the form of a cognizable sphere (*āyatana-svalakṣaṇa*) and not in the form of a component substance [viz., an atom] (*dravya-svalakṣaṇa*).”

“How,” Dignāga asks, “is this to be understood?”

“k. 4cd. there [in the above-cited Abidharma passages], that [perception] being caused by [the sense-organ through its contact with] many objects [in aggregation], takes the whole (*sāmānya*) as its sphere of operation in respect to its own object.” Therefore, while it is true that perception takes its whole sphere of operation as its logical object it is not the case that it operates “by conceptually constructing a unity within that which is many and separate.”

Such passages would seem to place Dignāga squarely in camp B above. The implausibility of the extreme atomic particular represented by position A is avoided by the admission of *sense-spheres* presenting a variegated whole at each instant, while the notion of a conceptual object or thing as contained in C is ruled out by his rejection of a constructed unity from amongst the diversity.

The temptation to attribute some form of the A thesis to Dignāga arises, I believe, for two reasons. The first is that the notion of “construction” may be taken to imply a “putting together” of the smallest imaginable bits of experience those which we may arrive at through an analytic process; i.e., shapeless, featureless, atomic points of sensation, which in themselves refer to nothing outside of themselves.⁹ This is the most extreme version of the particular conceivable and it is tempting to attribute it to Dignāga for no other reason than the farther the particular is conceptually from the universal, the stronger Dignāga’s rejection of the latter as part of the real world would appear to be.

This interpretation is further helped along by the fact that many of the examples given in the epistemological literature utilize simple col-

ours such as blue or white. It is tempting to infer that the epistemologist believed homogenous momentary “flashes” of unnamed colour to constitute *svalakṣaṇa*, the initially given.

But this cannot be what Dignāga had in mind, as is apparent from the passage quoted above. Furthermore, Dignāga explicitly wishes to maintain that although they cannot be verbalized, perceptions of *svalakṣaṇa* are cognized, which is to say that they involve self-awareness (*svasamvedana*).¹⁰ It is difficult to see how the point-instant theory can be made coherent with this. Quite simply, experience belies this possibility—a point-flash of sensation is simply not something we are ever perceptually or mnemonically aware of. If such do occur, they must be unconscious physiological responses, and hence not candidates for the role of *svalakṣaṇa*. The argument from introspection given here will be reinforced by a Dharmakīrtian account of an introspection experiment below.

That the homogenous point-instant is not that which Dignāga believed to be the object of *pratyakṣa* is also suggested when one considers passages where he categorically states that “form” is given in perception: “Dac. Further we hold: k.5. a thing possessing many properties cannot be cognized in all its aspects by the sense. The object of the sense is the form which is to be cognized [simply] as it is and which is inexpressible” (Hattori 1968, 27). If we read “form” as “shape” in this passage and take it together with the preceding, it seems plausible to suggest that Dignāga holds to that which is initially perceived as an un-referred to heterogeneous manifold. Heterogeneity may in a sense imply shape, but only in a manner roughly analogous to a Rorschach blot—a preconceptual field, the individual elements of which have not yet been discerned. The entire field is a single, mere presence.

There is a problem with this interpretation however. The view that the sense-given is free from all construction would seem to imply that an extended image cannot be given in pure perception. Many traditional interpreters, on the other hand, understood Dignāga to have held that *svalakṣaṇa* are, in fact, extended.¹¹ But if the latter is accepted we are again faced with the problem of a distinguished “thing” appearing to perception (position C above). If the former view is correct we are faced with the dilemma of reconciling the notion of a given “form”

with that of a non-extended object. Does “shape” not presuppose “extention”?

I believe there is a way out of this conundrum within the epistemological framework provided by Dignāga.¹² If it could be established that the cognition of spatial qualities (e.g., extention, depth) is impossible without an experience of time, then it would follow that at any one instant of time spatial properties, even of a variegated manifold, could not be referred to. The “perception” of extention may require at least two consecutive sphere-moments, or rather at least two acts of reference to the contents of at least two consecutive sphere-moments, which must be related to each other through a comparison and identification, in order to generate a “perception” of an extended thing. Such a “perception” would no longer be a mere sense-perception, but the result of an inference. On this view “extention” is a concept applied to phenomenologically similar aspects of temporally discrete moments. A thing is recognized by its continuity through time; it is never given in just one moment. It is obvious that short-term memory would play a major role in this process, and that this process itself would have to be unconscious, since we do not remember doing it. The net result of this process would be that two or more sequentially given sphere-instants would have been related together in order to generate a conceptualized image of an extended thing or object: “this,” or, if objects are always conceptualized as qualified in some way, “this blue patch” (see position D above).

That some such process may be what Dignāga had in mind is reflected in a passage of Stcherbatsky: “The point-instant of reality receives in such a (synthetical) judgement its place in a corresponding temporal series of point instants, it becomes installed in concrete time and becomes part of an object having duration. Owing to a special synthesis of consecutive point-instants it becomes an extended body...” (Stcherbatsky 1962, 213).

If we understand Dignāga to have held that sphere-instants constitute *svalakṣaṇa* (as opposed to Stcherbatsky’s point-instants), this passage may make some sense. Whether it constitutes Dignāga’s own view of the matter is difficult to determine, but it is in any case consistent with his position. For Dignāga cannot allow a breach in the strict logi-

cal division between the realms of the particular and the universal; what he requires is a *link* between them. If extended conceptual objects have past particular sphere-instants as their efficient cause along with a causally connected present sphere-instant as a material cause, the realm of inference will have been saved from the charge of baselessness. The fact that inference does not deal directly with particulars but only with their constructed images, would allow Dignāga to maintain that universals are never perceived and that valid inference is possible.

Such a picture of the referential process assumes that *svalakṣaṇa* can be cognized both in its purity as well as “conceptualized” in the present moment. Hattori attributes this view to Dharmakīrti: “That there are two sorts of *prameya* implies that *svalakṣaṇa* is apprehended in two ways, as it is (*sva-rūpeṇa*) and as something other than itself (*para-rūpeṇa*), but not that there is real *sāmānya* apart from *svalakṣaṇa*” (Hattori 1968, 80 n. 1.14). This also presupposes that the net result which is definitely a constructed *image*, as a copy of numerous *svalakṣaṇa*, is in some sense apprehended by the mind in a kind of “mental perception.” That this is possible within Dignāga’s conceptual framework has already been mentioned (see note 1; also Tillemans 1990, 286, n. 428).

Dignāga on Self-cognition

A possible objection to this view may arise at this point. It may seem we have removed a problem only to find it emerge in new guise at another level of the cognitive process. For if it is true that point-instants are never given, it seems equally true that unconceptualized sphere-instants are similarly implausible. When are they ever given in experience? They too, it might be argued, can be nothing more than physiological responses if they exist at all. As Matilal puts it, “A non-cognitive sensory reaction would not deserve to be called a perception; it has to be *infected* with awareness” (Matilal 1986, 333). It truly seems that we perceive “things,” minimally conceived as extended objects, maximally as jugs, cows, houses, and so forth. How would the epistemologist account for this?

The answer to this question has two parts. The first is to show that non-referential perceptual consciousness is possible, and that it *is* con-

sciousness. The second is to explain why we make the mistake of believing that we actually perceive “things,” as opposed to inferring them.

The present discussion has given us an account of perception which has the initial moment of perception devoid of objective reference and yet a cognition. The particular, comprising one moment of a sense-sphere, is re-cognized as a conceptual object only after its initial perception; memory allows us to recall that we had perceived the sensual element even though at the time we did not make reference to it. An example would be any of the familiar background phenomena which form the perceptual context for an activity we are concentrating on: e.g., as I wrote the preceding lines there was the sound of a clock ticking, and the colour and form of an ashtray in the corner of my eye. They were “nothing to me” as I wrote, but I can in good faith say that I perceived them all along, as I can recall that I did so. Hence we can say that the initial perception is differentiated in the sense that we can recall its multifarious elements afterwards, but undifferentiated in the more germane sense that no conceptual object is discriminated *at the time*.

This interpretation is consistent with what Dignāga himself states: “Some time after [we have perceived a certain object], there occurs [to our mind] the recollection of our cognition as well as the recollection of the object. So it stands that cognition is of two forms” (Hattori 1968, 30). The “two forms” here are the “undifferentiated” sense-sphere and the conceptualized image of it. The former, Dignāga goes on to say, is “self-cognized,” which means that it was *not conceptualized at the time of its occurrence*. “Self-cognition is also [thus established]. Why? k.11d. because it [viz., recollection] is never of that which has not been [previously] experienced” (30). Hence the possibility of a non-conceptual perception is not only established by Dignāga, but also shown to be necessary to any explanation of the common experience of remembering that to which we did not make conscious reference at the time.

Why, then, do we believe that we actually perceive “things”? Matilal provides a Buddhistic response: “[W]hy does a mental construction appear to us as a perceptual experience? Although it is a mental awareness it plays down or conceals its own imaginative quality and being

being born of a direct (perceptual experience), it shows its experience-hood directly. As a result of this, the cognizer takes (mistakes) it to be a perceptual experience” (Matilal 1986, 317).

Post-Dignāgian Developments

It becomes necessary at this point to bring Dignāga’s greatest commentator, Dharmakīrti, into our discussion. For the most part Dharmakīrti remains faithful to the Dignāgian account of perception. He does, however, elaborate some of Dignāga’s claims.

The first point that should be noted is that he would appear to support the “sense-sphere” interpretation of *svalakṣaṇa*, given above. The manner in which he does so is illuminating; it is a kind of thought-experiment (or rather, a lack-of-thought-experiment!):

That sensation is something quite different from productive imagination—can be proved just by introspection. Indeed everyone knows that an image is something utterable (capable of coalescing with a name). Now, if we begin to stare at a patch of colour and withdraw all our thoughts on whatsoever other (objects), if we thus reduce our consciousness to a condition of rigidity, (and become as though unconscious), this will be the condition of pure sensation. If we then, (awakening from that condition), begin to think, we notice a feeling (of remembering) that we had an image (of a patch of colour before us), but we did not notice it whilst we were in the foregoing condition, (we could not name it) because it was pure sensation. (Stcherbatsky 1962, 150–51; see also Hattori 1968, 88 n. 1.34)

That this passage supports the view of sensation given above is plain,¹³ but it also illustrates another point that marks a Dharmakīrtian departure from the position held by Dignāga. According to Dharmakīrti, “an image is something utterable (capable of coalescing with a name)”; for Dignāga an image is *necessarily* endowed with a name. Hence we see that Dharmakīrti has changed the notion of the constructive process, allowing for the possibility of unnamed conceptual images that follow the initial perceptions and precede the application of a name. The philosophical reasons for this manoeuvre are given by Hattori: “Dharmakīrti is more cautious than Dignāga in defining *kalpanā* as ‘a cognition of representation which is capable of being as-

sociated with a verbal designation’—which definition also includes the conceptual construction of infants and dumb persons who have the potentiality of verbal expression although they do not utter an actual word...” (Hattori 1968, 85 n. 1.27).

While Dharmakīrti has thus sharpened the Dignāgīan account of conceptualization, the question I will now turn to relates to his elaboration of the notion of the particular itself. According to Dharmakīrti, *svalakṣaṇa* is distinguishable from *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* on four accounts: “a) they have practical and causal efficacy (*arthakriyā*); b) they are unique (*asadṛśa*); c) they are not objects of words (*śabdasyāviṣaya*); d) their cognitions do not rely on any other causes (*anyanimitta*) but them” (Tillemans 1990, 273 n. 366; see also Hattori 1968, 80 n. 1.14).

All four of these points are either implicit or explicit in the Dignāgīan account given above (although Hattori [1968, 80 n. 1.14] maintains that the notion of *arthakriyā* is new). We have seen that the image of a conceptual object is, for Dignāga, the effect of the preceding perception. As for its “uniqueness” I take this to refer to the Dignāgīan notion of a momentary unrepeatable perception. Points (c) and (d) have already been shown as constituting Dignāga’s view.

Dignāga Undermined

Dharmakīrti’s most significant departure from Dignāga lies in his notion that defects of the sense-organ may occasionally cause mistaken perceptions to occur. He does not, however, consider such cases as genuine perception, and for this reason refers to them as a kind of pseudo-perception or *pratyakṣābhāsa* (Hattori 1968 95–97 n. 1.53). *Pratyakṣa* proper, he qualifies by the word “*abhrānta*” (unmistaken) (Tillemans 1990, 274 n. 367). For example, a person may mistakenly perceive a white conch shell as yellow, or perhaps see two moons. Dharmakīrti attributes such mistakes to the faulty sense-organ and hence to the act of perception (even though he claims it is not a case of *true* perception), whereas Dignāga would have to call them cases of *mis-interpretation* of that which is indubitably given in sense perception, i.e., a case of mistaken conceptualization. While Dharmakīrti may have considered himself to have sound reasons for making this manoeuver,

it marks a significant shift away from Dignāga's views. It is of critical importance for, by allowing for the logical possibility of error in non-conceptual awareness, Dharmakīrti commits himself to a conception of the perceptible object which is no longer merely non-intentional, but one which already has "objective" properties capable of corresponding or not corresponding to perceptions of them.¹⁴

Whether it was his intention or not, Dharmakīrti may have opened a Pandora's Box of philosophical confusion by attempting to fine-tune the Dignāgian account of perception in this manner. Later commentators, taking Dharmakīrti as their reference point, could operate with a notion of the perceptual object as some "thing," capable of being correctly judged or not, *within the perception itself*. Perception itself comes to be considered as if it were for all intents and purposes something very much like a constructive process that may or may not accord with reality. This constitutes an opening through which the objective existence of universals may enter. It is a far cry from Dignāga's view that perception is necessarily valid, and *svalakṣaṇa* reality itself.

Mokṣākaragupta and the Vertical Universal

What we see in Dharmakīrti then are the beginnings of a migration of the notion of the particular from the realm of the non-intentional to that of the intentional object. While Dharmakīrti appears to wish to maintain the Dignāgian view that the particular is a non-intentional object as in position B above, his attempt to deal with cases of faulty sense-organs commits him to some version of position D. Whether it is attributable to Dharmakīrti or not, by the time of Mokṣākaragupta the drift in this direction is almost complete; Dignāga's strict logical division between the realms of perception and inference has been breached. There is a loosening of rigour: universals become perceivable; and, particulars become qualities of universals.

We see this most clearly in the *Tarkabhāṣa*, chapter one, where Mokṣākaragupta responds to the objector's charge that if universals are not perceived, there could be no foundation for valid inference based on *vyāpti* (pervasion). Reinterpreting Dharmakīrti, Mokṣākaragupta claims that it is not the particular alone that can be perceived, but that

universals may also be the object of perception (Kajiyama 1966, 56–58). Mokṣākaragupta classifies universals into two kinds, those of a class (horizontal universals = *tiryaglākṣaṇam*) and those of an individual (vertical universals = *ūrdhvatālākṣaṇam*). The latter he says, “is constructed through the accumulation of a series of moments of an individual object, say a jar, which is distinguished from the others of the same class...” (58–59).

If this sounds familiar it is because it is the very process already described with regard to the construction of an extended object in the context of Dignāga’s thought. But the difference in Mokṣākaragupta’s account becomes apparent when he adds, “the universal is the object of the perception ascertaining [an object]” (Kajiyama 1966, 59).

For Mokṣākaragupta the cognition which grasps “this jug” is a perception; for Dignāga, as we have seen, it can only be an inference. The difference between the two positions lies exactly at this point. Do we infer a jug from our sense data, or do we actually “see a jug”? Both agree that the jug is a construction—where they differ is how to categorize its cognition.

The differences are further underlined by the fact that Mokṣākaragupta goes on to state that class (horizontal) universals are also the objects of a kind of perception viz. “the perception grasping pervasion” (Kajiyama 1966, 59). In taking this position the author is attempting to provide a perceptual foundation for the *vyāpti* relation, upon which valid inference is based.

The notion of *svalākṣaṇa* has also evolved. As a particular characteristic of a jug, Mokṣākaragupta gives the example, “it is capable of containing water”! To be sure, he immediately goes on to reiterate the old line that it is “determined in space, time and form (and) free from ideas” (Kajiyama 1966, 56). That he does not see any incompatibility between these descriptions is quite amazing, but is perhaps understandable if we recognize that this same underlying dilemma, which faced Dignāga some five to six hundred years earlier had not yet been resolved. Through his followers’ attempts to grapple with it, Dignāga’s two-*pramāṇa* epistemological framework had been transformed to a point where universals could be perceived, and particulars viewed as qualities of universals such as the capacity to hold water. If Dignāga

himself were to have seen what had become of his system, I suspect he would have strongly disapproved; had such a version of the particular been proposed to him, there can be little doubt he would have argued that it could not hold water.

Notes

¹ See Tillemans 1990, 273 note 365. Dignāga also accepts the notions of mental and yogic perception. Mental perception is of two kinds: a) awareness of a mental object immediately derived from the object of a preceding sense-perception and b) self-awareness of subordinate mental activities such as desire, anger, ignorance, pleasure and pain. Yogic perception is understood as “the yogin’s intuition of a thing in itself unassociated with the teacher’s instruction” (Hattori 1968, 27).

² That the forms of valid cognition and their respective objects should logically mirror each other in this regard is necessary and unsurprising if one understands that for the Yogācāriṅs ultimately there is no such distinction. The cognition and its object are two ways of viewing the same phenomenon. See Stcherbatsky 1930, 238.

³ See Matilal 1986, 134. The Nyāya response to this position is notable. *Pratyakṣa* on this account is also incapable of being *true*.

⁴ For an excellent discussion of this distinction as it pertains to the interpretations of Kant’s epistemology, see “Kant’s Sensationism” by Rolf George (1981).

⁵ I am assuming here that the Sanskrit term *svalakṣaṇa*, taken as coextensive with “that which is perceived,” can be legitimately applied to the following possibilities.

⁶ The notion of a homogenous “sphere” of colour, it should be noted, is indistinguishable from that of the point-instant described in (a). Such would only be given if, as a matter of empirical fact, one’s entire field of vision was taken up by a uniform colour; e.g., by standing very close to a wall.

⁷ They are mentioned because they represent historically later developments of the Buddhist conception of that which is perceived, *svalakṣaṇa*, and because taken together with the preceding three, they may represent the last two stages of the actual psychological process of construction (inference) beginning with

A, B or C. That this historical development may actually mirror the process of construction itself is curious and worth noting. Two other points should be noted here. The first is that while position C sometimes appears either as the implicit or explicit view of Dignāga's translators and commentators, it is unclear whether Dignāga held to it as a possibility at all, even as a conceptualization. That is, it may have been his view that in order for an entity to be inferred at all, it must be qualified in some way, e.g., as blue, round, pleasant, et cetera. Position D, as we shall see, is for Dignāga a case of inference which follows upon B (via C?).

⁸ All of the following quotations are from Hattori's translation (1968, 26–27).

⁹ This problem may also reflect an unconscious conflation of two logically distinct issues; namely, whether “external objects” are composed of atoms and whether the cognitive process begins with sensory atoms (cf. Stcherbatsky 1962, 174–75). The two sets of atoms need not be the same. That they are analyzable does not entail that they are ever “given” as such. Also see Matilal 1986, 360–68.

¹⁰ “A follower of the Dinnāga school would argue that unless a sensation is also a cognition we would not be able to grasp it (or its image) by remembrance”; “Dinnāga's notion of sensation (or sensory awareness) is cognitive, because it involves self-awareness (*sva-samvedana*)” (Matilal 1986, 110–11).

¹¹ This is particularly the case for the dGe lugs pa tradition for whom *svalakṣaṇa* signifies a gross object, one extended in space *and* continuous through time (position E above).

¹² I owe the inspiration for the following speculation to Stcherbatsky. See following quote.

¹³ Dharmakīrti elaborates on Dignāga's conception of *svalakṣaṇa* as a variegated un-referred-to sense-sphere in PV III, 194–230. See Hattori 1968, 90 n. 1.40.

¹⁴ The implications of this for the truth theories of post-Dharmakīrtian epistemologists may have been quite serious. Could it be that some, following Dharmakīrti's lead here, began to operate with a theory more closely resembling a correspondence theory of truth, as opposed to what was originally the more coherentist, or pragmatic, theory of Dignāga? Did this result in a tendency towards a Realist ontology in any of the later schools? These questions remain the subject of future research.

Works Cited

- George, R. 1981. Kant's Sensationism. *Synthese* 47: 229–55.
- Hattori, M. 1968. *Dignāga on Perception: Bring the Pratyakṣapariccheda of Dignāga's Pramāṇasamuccaya*. Harvard Oriental Series 47. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kajiyama, Y. 1965. *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy—An Annotated Translation of the Tarkabhāṣa of Mokṣākaragupta*. Kyoto: Memoirs of the Faculty of Kyoto University.
- . 1973. Three Kinds of Affirmation and Two Kinds of Negation in Buddhist Philosophy. In *Studies in Buddhist Philosophy*.
- Matilal, B. K. 1986. *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Stcherbatsky, T. 1930. *Buddhist Logic*. Vol. 1. Leningrad: Bibliotheca Buddhica. Reprinted New York: Dover, 1962.
- Tillemans, T. 1990. *Materials for the Study of Āryadeva, Dharmapāla and Candrakīrti*. The Catuṣṭaka of Āryadeva, chapters XII and XIII, with the commentaries of Dharmapāla and Candrakīrti: introduction, translation, Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese texts, notes. 2 vols, WSTB 24, 1 and 24, 2. Vienna.
- . 1995. On the So-called Difficult Point in the Apoha Theory. *Asiatische Studien Etudes Asiatiques* 49 (4).