

Experiencing Experiencing:
An Explanation of Dharmakīrti's Stepwise Philosophy
as Guidance Toward, but not to, Buddhist Enlightenment

Dharmakīrti was a prolific 7th century Indian Buddhist philosopher whose unique theories and complete metaphysics helped shape an entire sect of Buddhism, yet his work is often overlooked in Western academia. Because he was taught from a young age in a strict, monastic tradition, much of his philosophy is inherited from previous Indian Buddhist scholars, such as Dignāga. But what makes Dharmakīrti one of the greatest Buddhist philosophers is his ability to tweak and connect many disparate theories into one, all-inclusive system of belief. The ultimate goal of his teachings is to slowly bring his students from the lowest, common understanding of the world to the highest realm of knowledge and belief: Buddhist enlightenment. Despite his impressive abilities, Dharmakīrti knew that it is ultimately impossible to bring someone to full enlightenment through philosophy alone, and thus he ends his system of explanation right on the brink of an intellectual understanding of enlightenment. In this essay, I will explain Dharmakīrti's philosophical climb from common understanding to his highest metaphysics, then take the next step to a purely theoretical conception of enlightenment based on Dharmakīrti's philosophical tools and in doing so illustrate why Dharmakīrti did not take this step himself.

Before I dive in, I would like to briefly outline the direction of this essay, which will be in five sections. In section one, I will explain the basic framework of Dharmakīrti's philosophical system, giving a brief overview of each of his four levels of understanding reality. In the second section, I will explain Dharmakīrti's theory of inferential reasoning (a central component of his epistemology) and in doing so explain his second level of analysis. Next, in the third section, I will explain both his third level of understanding and his theory of exclusion through an examination of a short quotation from one of his successors, Jñānaśrīmitra. In section four, I will explain the

highest level of Buddhist thought within Dharmakīrti's system, the level that is meant to propel his students into their own enlightenment, through a detailed exposition of one of Dharmakīrti's dialogues, the *Santānāntarasiddhi*. Finally, in the fifth and last section, I will give my own interpretation of what Dharmakīrti's philosophical explanation of enlightenment would be, though I do not expect to bring myself or you, the reader, to any form of Buddhist enlightenment.

Part One

Dharmakīrti's entire philosophical system utilizes multiple levels of analyzing reality. This is not an uncommon technique in Buddhist philosophy, as the Buddha is said to have adapted and framed the dharma differently for each student to best suit his or her needs and abilities.

Dharmakīrti understood that presenting a lay person with the highest realm of understanding would be pointless; the student would gain no knowledge from such unfamiliar ideas and the teachings would be of no benefit (Dunne 53). However, by assessing the understanding of each student, Dharmakīrti would present only the next philosophical step in order to bring the student one step closer to enlightenment. In this way, his system can slowly deepen and expand his students' understanding of reality until they are able to make the final leap to enlightenment on their own. It is for this reason that Dharmakīrti appears to characterize reality in conflicting ways, but in fact he is merely presenting a gradation of understanding to help his students as best he can.

Dharmakīrti's steps to enlightenment are generally split up into four groups. The first level of explanation is characterized by the common understandings of everyday people, most notably that the world consists of objects that are wholes such as this table, that person, my family, etc. The second level is distinguished by the recognition that there are no mereological wholes in the world, rather we simply apply names to bundles of repeatable elements that make up the idea of the whole. The third level shows that there are actually no such things as repeatable elements or traits, but rather everything is made up of entirely unique and momentary particles that we arbitrarily

group together in our minds and overlay with a false mental image. The fourth and highest level is an almost unexplainable understanding that the entirety of the universe exists within the mind (Dunne 56).

While it is the ultimate goal of Dharmakīrti to bring his readers to the fourth level, this explanation of reality is rarely discussed. Essentially the only levels of analysis that Dharmakīrti examines at length are the middle two. The first level is never described by Dharmakīrti as true or accurate, because it is his goal to bring his students out of this basic understanding and into the second, third, then fourth level. However, he will argue that the second level description of the world is true, but only to convince his audience that the first level is false. This relation holds through all four levels, and in section five I will argue that Dharmakīrti intends us to reach a higher understanding beyond even the fourth level of comprehension.

Part Two

Dharmakīrti makes the important jump from the fallaciously simple perspective found in level one to a theoretical exposition of how a person necessarily interprets reality in level two. To help students make this introspective leap, he examines the mechanism by which a person's thoughts can develop from perception and previous knowledge via a mental inference. In order to infer something, a person must believe that knowledge of a prior event can be applied in a separate time and/or place. While this is impossible if there are no similar instances, it becomes possible when considering elements of things to be real and repeatable. In Dharmakīrti's second level of analysis, each object has certain traits such that they are recognized as the same as other objects through a similarity of elements. For example, this dirt is the same as that dirt because they both have elements such as brown, crumbly, and coming from the earth (Dunne 57). Here, on the second level, this dirt and that dirt truly are the same type of thing because they truly do have the same elements, while on the third level they are understood as being falsely considered the same. It is

this crucial nature of repeatability that makes mental inferences possible. Dharmakīrti acknowledges that inferences operate on a lower ontological level by saying that an inference can only deal with universals and language, and not with particulars, which he repeatedly describes as more real (trans. Dunne 145).

The basic idea of Dharmakīrti's theory of inferential reasoning is that a certain object or property of an object can be inferred while not being perceived only if its presence pervades another object or property of an object that is perceived. This idea is formalized into five parts: the locus, which is the object or place in regard to which we are hoping to make some sort of inference; the target property, which is the property we do not perceive but wish to attribute to the locus; the reason property, which is the property we necessarily perceive in the locus and somehow indicates the presence of the target property; the similarity class, which consists of every individual instance in which the target property was known to be present, some of which must have the presence of the reason property; and the dissimilarity class, which includes every instance that does not have the target property, none of which may have the reason property (trans. Hayes, *Pramāṇavārttikasvavṛtti* 1-2). If a mental inference meets all of these requirements, then the resulting knowledge is always true, and if it does not meet all of these requirements, then it is unreliable and may generate false knowledge. This inferential system is then divided into 3 types of inferences and many pseudo-inferences are discussed, but for our purposes the basic framework of the theory is enough. From the necessity of repeatable properties that are identified as present in the locus and the similarity class, and absent from the dissimilarity class, it is clear that this type of inference must happen in the second level of analysis.

For Dharmakīrti, an inference can only create knowledge of a universal. While the locus is particular, and the examples in the similarity and dissimilarity classes are particulars, the resulting knowledge is not of a particular, but rather of the universal to which the target property relates. For example, while we can make the inference that there is a fire on that hill because there is smoke

there and because we can only think of examples of fire that also had smoke and examples of non-fire that did not have smoke, the resulting knowledge of the presence of fire is not knowledge of a particular fire, but rather knowledge of something that fits the universal “fire.” This classic example of an inference can be diagramed as so:

Locus: That hill

Reason property: Presence of smoke

Target property: Presence of fire

Similarity class: Every instance of fire (e.g. a recent wildfire, fire on a gas stovetop, etc.)

Dissimilarity Class: Every instance without fire (e.g. a pond, a tree that isn't on fire, etc.)

This is a favorite example of not just Dharmakīrti's but many of his predecessors who created the theory of inferential reasoning that he then inherited. For centuries, Buddhist scholars had been developing a formalized system of logic, and Dharmakīrti's predecessor, Dignāga, devoted much of his life to creating this theory of inference that Dharmakīrti then refined further. However, Dharmakīrti does not always utilize this system of logic to prove the validity of ideas because it is only fully valid on the second level of analysis. While he may utilize it to help explain to someone residing at a lower ontological level why their understanding is false, it loses this power for affirmative proof beyond the second level but retains some use as a means of checking what ontological level can be attributed to an understanding.

Part 3

Dharmakīrti most often wrote about the world from the perspective of his third level of analysis because it strikes a balance between comprehensibility and accuracy, though it is not ultimately true. The defining characteristic of this ontological level is the understanding that the world can be reduced to completely unique, external particles that we then mentally group into wholes for the sake of convenience, but these wholes do not truly exist, nor do the traits

attributed to the wholes. Dharmakīrti explains the process by which these unique particulars are formed into wholes, and in doing so carves out a description of how language is involved in the creation of universals, which he calls the theory of exclusion. Many of his followers, including Jñānaśrīmitra, have commented on the nature by which Dharmakīrti's theory accounts for the interaction between the universals we speak of and the individual objects that we perceive. In this section, I will explain one specific passage in which Jñānaśrīmitra skillfully elucidates Dharmakīrti's insight that our use of language is necessarily referring to nonexistent universal objects that are separate from the external objects we directly perceive, and that ultimately both objects are types of fictional universals that we create in our minds. It should be noted that Jñānaśrīmitra was an innovative philosopher in his own right, but his philosophy is beyond the scope of this paper, thus quotations from his writing are used to clarify Dharmakīrti's ideas, not the ideas of Jñānaśrīmitra himself.

Before I delve into Jñānaśrīmitra's compact summary of the practical application of the theory of exclusion, I will first need to show how Dharmakīrti accounts for universals and particulars in the third level of analysis, and then explain the theory itself. For Dharmakīrti at this level, a particular is an indivisible, momentary, completely unique entity. It is an atom or particle, which is the smallest unit of physical thing in the universe and is never the same from one moment to the next. Particulars are the only things that can have causal function in the world and are the totality and expression of all of the past causes that lead to their momentary existence. It is impossible for an average human to perceive particulars because they are so small and fleeting. We can only see them when they are conglomerated into larger objects that we perceive. Dharmakīrti explains:

That which is aggregated is a conglomerate, and in that sense, it is a universal... Due to a relation with other things [i.e. other particles], infinitesimal particles that are different than their own previous moments arise [from their own previous moments such that they can

produce an awareness]. In that sense, they are said to be ‘aggregated,’ and as such, they are said to be a condition for the production of awareness. (Pramāṇavārttika¹ 3.194-195)

By understanding this quotation, it is clear that particulars can only be perceived when they act together to produce an awareness. Because we are not perceiving distinct, individual particulars and are instead perceiving an aggregation, we are actually only perceiving a universal. This is how universals are necessary for our perception of the outside world, however it is not how the theory of exclusion works.

The theory of exclusion is about a different type of universals, though both are aggregates of particulars. This theory works on a lower ontological level within the third level of analysis, taking the universals that we perceive and considering them particular objects. These objects are then mentally and linguistically grouped into universal concepts that we use to understand the world. A standard view of this type of conceptual universal, and a view that Dharmakīrti does *not* take, is that we see many things that appear the same and provide the same functions to us and call them all “cows” (for example), though they are in fact distinct objects from each other. This theory of universals acts on similarities that we perceive between different objects and could reside in Dharmakīrti’s second level of analysis. However, Dharmakīrti notes that each perception is itself distinct because every single object is made up of entirely unique particulars, so we can never perceive similarities; we can only perceive differences. What we interpret as similar between different cows is that they are not things that do not give milk, moo, and so on. Dharmakīrti explains the theory of exclusion by stating, “A conceptual awareness arises in dependence on things which are excluded from what is other than those [that have the same cause or effect]” (PV 1.70). To put it another way, different objects can fall under the same universal because they are not excluded from that universal by not meeting the criteria of functions necessary to be included in said universal. If we simplify the universal Cow (which I capitalize to indicate it as a universal concept) into having

¹ All citations of the Pramāṇavārttika, trans. Dunne, will hereafter be denoted as PV.

the effects of producing milk from udders and mooing, then we can exclude a particular tree from being a cow because it produces neither of these effects. We can also exclude any goats because, while they are not excluded from having milk-producing udders, they are excluded from mooing. However, if we have one animal with a white head and one with a brown head, yet neither of them do not produce milk from udders nor moo, then we can call both of them “cows.” Dharmakīrti explains this example by saying, “The essence of a Hereford is not a Jersey’s essence, but the exclusion from that which does not have the effect of a cow exists in both of them” (PV 1.139). Via the theory of exclusion, we are able to ignore certain non-similar aspects of different objects, such as the colors of cows, and place them under useful universals that simply exclude all the things that do not produce the desired effects. Words are then assigned to these conceptual universals for the purpose of simplicity. Dharmakīrti notes, “the ancient ones assigned the same expression to those things which, although different, perform the same function; the semantic cause of that expression is the exclusion from that which does not have that effect” (PV 1.137-138). So words are simply a way of expressing conceptual universals.

While it is clear that particular objects and universals are separate to those who are actively differentiating between the two, in daily life, people often act as though the universal is the real entity. In the passage that is being examined in this section, Jñānaśrīmitra succinctly explains how this process of acting on particulars as if they are universals works. In the first half of the passage, he states, “First of all, it is an external object that is primarily expressed by words. This being the case, exclusion is understood as an element of that [external object]” (trans. McCrea 27). Here, he is saying that words are most of all referring to an individual object that is external to the speaker. We are referring to *that* cow over there named Bessie (if, in this example, we are two people standing near Bessie). Exclusion, then, is only relevant to Bessie in its relation to our understanding of her as a cow. When we say “that cow,” we are using the exclusions that make up the universal Cow to understand Bessie as having certain functions. But the word “cow” when we say, “Go get me some

milk from the cow” is primarily referring to the individual object Bessie, not the universal Cow, because we cannot get any milk from the concept Cow. However, a problem becomes clear when we consider how we are able to make the leap from the universal Cow down to the object Bessie.

Our words do not refer to individuals (save perhaps for names) but rather to universals, so how is it that we are able to understand a word as indicating a particular object? Jñānaśrīmitra goes on to say, “One object is adopted as expressed on the basis of determination, another, on the basis of appearance” (trans. McCrea 27). Here, he is explaining that one object that we are referring to when we say “cow” is Bessie, the cow that we see in front of us, the particular object that has the functions that make it a cow (or rather isn’t that which does not have Cow functions). This first object is the one that we can act on, the object of determination. However, another object we are referring to is the universal Cow, which we have understood conceptually through the observation of particular objects that we now call cows. This universal is not something that we can act on or see directly because it exists only as an exclusion in our minds, and it only refers to the situation in that it is what appears to us as a type of overlying conceptuality, a mental image, on the (relatively) real object in front of us. So when we say “cow”, we are talking about Bessie, but we are seeing Bessie as the mental image Cow, which is a false overlay of the universal onto the particular. Dharmakīrti mentions that, while it is not ultimately correct, we do see individual objects as if we were seeing their corresponding universals, and thus see a mental image:

[Real things appear as if nondifferent] in that their differentiation is obscured by an obscuritive cognition that obscures the form of something else [—i.e. those distinct real things—] with its own form of something else [i.e., the form of a single image]... Due to the intention of that cognition, a universal is commonly said to exist. But it does not ultimately exist in the way that it is conceptualized by that cognition. (PV 1.68-70)

Here, Dharmakīrti is explaining that the universals we use to understand the world often obscure our perception so that we see individual objects as mental images of their universals. Even though

this is commonly understood as the universals existing within the object, they do not exist in the object, but are rather just projected onto the object by our cognition of it. In relating this to Jñānaśrīmitra's comments, we can say that the word "cow" refers most of all to the object in front of us that we can act upon (Bessie), but we see the mental image of a Cow instead of the distinct object itself, and this is how the universal word "Cow" is understood to refer to the object that we see. Because our perception is obscured to see the mental image Cow instead of the individual object that could be classified in that universal, we understand the word "cow" to primarily refer to that object, though it is only through the un-actionable, secondary referral to the mental image, and therefore also to the universal, Cow that we can form this primary understanding.

Jñānaśrīmitra explains in this short passage that although words are formed via exclusion, they are used to refer both to individual objects that fall into those exclusions and the mental images of the exclusion universals themselves. However, he ends the passage by saying, "But really nothing at all is expressed by words" (trans. McCrea 27). If we evaluate this statement via the second object of expression, the mental image, then it is clear that words in this way express nothing. They refer to concepts that are arbitrarily created by humans and do not exist in the real world, what exist are the objects that the words are used to understand. However, if this statement is applied to the first object of expression, the discrete, external object, then how is it that nothing is expressed by words? While it may appear that real things are expressed by words, i.e. individual cows, we should recall the first understanding of particulars and universals outlined in this section. Even an individual object is actually just a conglomerate of its particulars that we form in our perception into one thing to perceive. Ultimately, Bessie does not exist, she is just a type of universal formed in our minds by much more real particulars. In this way, even the primary object that a word refers to does not exist, and thus words express nothing real at all. Because we cannot perceive the infinitesimal, momentary particles that create objects, we do not express them with words, so whatever we do express with words does not truly exist.

Jñānaśrīmitra clarified Dharmakīrti's understanding of how words and universals created by the theory of exclusion interact with the objects around us. Dharmakīrti, on the other hand, focused on the theory itself, showing how exclusion is necessary in the creation of universals and thus the creation of words. We only understand objects as similar in that they are not excluded from having certain effects, and we then assign words to these conceptual similarities. However, when we use these words we are mostly referring to objects (which are conglomerations of particles) that are external to ourselves, but only understand the word to refer to such an object by seeing the object as the universal, which is the second expression of the word. This complex understanding of how words are formed by objects then expressed back onto other objects only deals with simpler concepts of reality and is used as a sort of conceptual bridge between the second and third levels of analysis. On the third level, words only refer to conceptually created universals or mentally perceived objects that are both not real in comparison to the imperceptible particles that make up the objects. However, once this understanding of the world is reached, Dharmakīrti again refutes himself in an effort to bring us to the fourth and final level of existence within his systematic metaphysics.

Part Four

Dharmakīrti finally pulls back the curtain of illusion to reveal his ultimate, highest conception of reality in the *Santānāntarasiddhi*, translated by Thomas E. Wood. However, this truth is not immediately obvious upon the first reading of this work because the text takes place in the second and third levels of understanding due to the fact that Dharmakīrti is debating a non-Buddhist. Though Dharmakīrti spends much of his time arguing for the existence of other minds within his own metaphysics, he ultimately arrives at the conclusion that there are other minds only in a conventional sense, but in actuality there're only impressions created by and for one's own mind. By arguing against a formal, five-part inference put forth by a Realist opponent, Dharmakīrti

first explains why the Realist's reasoning is a pseudo-reason and shows that his own reasoning for the existence of other minds is better, though it too is actually a pseudo-reason. He then momentarily dives further into the nature of external reality and explains that it does not touch the true nature of thought, the highest level conception of reality.

The Realist opponent kicks off the discussion by putting forth a logical inference that supposedly proves that other minds must exist through an effect reasoning (one of the three types of inferences). While this is an accurate view of the Realist position, it is important to remember that Dharmakīrti himself is writing on behalf of the Realist, which perhaps aids his ability for counterargument. The opening statement by the Realist, which contains the entirety of the five-part inference, is as follows:

We infer the existence of other minds by first noting in ourselves that our bodily actions and speech are preceded by a movement in our own minds, and then inferring the existence of other minds by observing the bodily and actions of speech [sic] of another person. Hence if mind only were true, bodily actions or speech would not exist, and we would have no basis for inferring the existence of other minds (trans. Wood 207).

When structured into a logical, five-part inference, the argument looks like this:

Locus: Another person

Reason property: Presence of bodily action or speech

Target property: Preceded by a movement of the mind

Similarity class: Ourselves

(Unspecified) Dissimilarity Class: Things without minds (e.g. pots, rocks, etc.)

Here, if the target property is true then it is assumed that a mind necessarily exists because the existence of a mind is by definition the same as a movement (or effect) of the mind (remember that something having an effect is the same as that thing existing). This inference is completely correct from a realist perspective. It checks all of the right boxes and does not commit any violations that

would make it a pseudo-reason. In fact, Dharmakīrti himself would even abide by this reasoning in his second level metaphysics, however, in his third or fourth level, this Realist inference would not hold up.

Dharmakīrti's essential issue with this inference is that it assumes the existence of external objects. The Realist's theory states that the mind is aware of impressions (also called representations or mental images), and that these impressions are created through the perception of external objects. The Realist then infers the existence of other minds from the actions of these external objects. Dharmakīrti believes this view to be an unnecessary over-complication of reality, though often times a useful convenience. He argues that we need not assume some sort of outside thing over and above the mental images themselves and call this external thing a physical reality (trans. Wood 209). When we are only ever aware of impressions on our minds, why would we posit that these impressions are actually just caused by some sort of physical thing that we never have a direct awareness of and yet is somehow more real? It seems it would then be possible to say that these external objects are caused by yet another level of imperceptible, higher reality and continue down this path ad infinitum. Though we need not and should not assume that there is a physical object that causes an impression on our minds, we still become aware of things (such as the actions of others) without our own minds being the cause of said awareness. If we analyze the Realist's inference from this Idealist standpoint, then it becomes far less convincing.

In particular, the Realist inference for the existence of other minds is a pseudo-reason on two accounts. First, it violates the first condition of an inference, that the locus has the certain presence of the reason property. Because it is now understood that bodily action or speech as an external, physical entity is non-existent and only our mental representation of that action exists, the locus, other people, does not contain the reason property, the (physical) presence of bodily action or speech. This inference is then a pseudo-reason by being unestablished (H_1) (Nowakowski 15). For similar reasons, this inference is shown to be a pseudo-reason by inconclusive uncommonness

(H_{3a}) as well (Nowakowski 21). Because there is no such thing as external bodily action or speech, the reason property is present in neither the similarity class nor in the dissimilarity class, and therefore is simply unproven. Through a subtle tweaking of the locus and reason property, Dharmakīrti is able to make essentially the same inference pass the two previously mentioned conditions, but makes it commit a different inferential violation.

The Idealist can claim that we are made aware of things outside of our own mind stream, such as the mental images of bodily actions or speech of another person, through the direct action of another mind (Wood 207). This assertion, Dharmakīrti argues, is exactly the same as the realist assertion that other minds cause external objects to cause impressions on our own minds, but it just leaves out the false intermediary step of the external object. Dharmakīrti explains this by saying, “We both [i.e. the Idealist and the Realist] believe that speech and bodily action in every case have a movement of mind as their efficient cause, and hence will not occur when there is no movement of mind. There is therefore no difference between us, except that you make two inferences in each case where we make only one” (trans. Wood 209). Dharmakīrti agrees that there are many impressions that must be caused by other minds because we can clearly differentiate between the impressions that we ourselves cause and those that seem to happen to us. However, he sees no reason to believe there are two inferences at play (other mind to physical object, then physical object to mental image) instead of one (other mind to mental image). The Idealist’s five-part inference for the existence of other minds would then look like this:

Locus: Impressions of another person

Reason property: Impressions of bodily action or speech

Target property: Being preceded by a movement of mind

Similarity class: Ourselves

Dissimilarity class: None

While Dharmakīrti does not outline this inference to the extent that he outlines the Realist’s

inference, it can still be understood from his assertion that the Idealist simply takes the impressions of things to be reality. Interestingly, because he does not believe physical objects to be real, he has no dissimilarity class. This means that he himself has created a pseudo-reason by commonality (H_{3a}) because the target property is present everywhere, even in dreams (Nowakowski 21). Even though Dharmakīrti never acknowledges his own inference for other minds, its H_{3a} violation is what ultimately reveals his highest level of analysis and collapses all dualities into the only reality: thought.

While thus far Dharmakīrti's logical steps have been clearly differentiated within the *Santānāntarasiddhi*, his next move to the existence of only one's own mind (and to the fourth level of analysis) is far less clear. In order to clarify the Realist's new understanding, he first makes a distinction between the impressions made by others and one's own impressions and claims that they are both labeled as impressions (or representations) for convenience's sake. He states that the impressions that are caused by one's own mind are of a material cause, and the impressions on one's mind that are caused by another mind are a superordinate cause. Dharmakīrti says, "As a matter of convenience we are prepared to follow ordinary linguistic usage and call all those representations which are caused by some cause or other (i.e. either one's own mind cause or another person's mind-cause) a representation... There is no harm in doing this as long as we remain clear about what is actually going on" (Wood 213). Here, Dharmakīrti is explaining that while there is no reality beyond cognition, there are still other minds outside of our own to a certain extent. This is something that the Idealist and the Realist can agree on, but for Dharmakīrti even this is only a false convenience.

Dharmakīrti claims that the distinction between other mind-causes and one's own is only the result of "subconscious residue" or *vāsanās*, which lead us to believe that we can have mental images caused by other minds when in fact we only have mental images from our own minds. *Vāsanās* are other causal factors within our cognition that typically help us to decipher current

impressions through the memories of past impressions, but they also lead us to believe that there are outside forces creating impressions when really it is just a combination of our own impressions and our own *vāsanās*. This process is similar to two people with the same eye disease agreeing that there are two moons in the sky (trans. Wood 214). Immediately following the previous quotation, Dharmakīrti explains that we are fooled into believing that there are external impressions when we really only ever encounter our own, “What *actually* happens is that everyone directly experiences only his or her own mental representations. However, through the force of subconscious impulses (*vāsanās*), people tend to misinterpret the situation and to think that they are seeing the *same* thing, i.e. something which is in fact external to their own minds” (trans. Wood 213). Though this passage is placed within sections that explain that, in a more conventional sense, the impressions of other minds are causes distinct from those of our own minds, Dharmakīrti is clarifying that the impressions from other minds are the same as those from our own minds not just in their nature (both being representations) but in their origin (both being of one’s own mind). It is *not* the case that the impression of an action of another person is caused by another mind through the same type of process as an impression of my own action is caused by my own mind, but rather it *is* the case that both the impression of an action of another person and the impression of my own action are caused by my own mind. Everything is caused by my own mind (or one’s own mind, but for me as the writer it is *my* mind). Right when Dharmakīrti is about to state outright the existence of only one’s own mind, the conversation changes its topic to the nature of inference. However, I will delve a bit further into what I believe are the implications of understanding that everything is simply an effect of my own mind, which amounts to a theoretical explanation of enlightenment.

Part Five

Before I begin to build on Dharmakīrti’s explanation of Buddhist understanding, I must first acknowledge that this is a doomed effort. There is a very good reason that Dharmakīrti stopped just

shy of explaining enlightenment itself, and that is because true enlightenment is inexplicable. Ultimately, what I will show is that there is no level of theoretical understanding that can bring a person to nirvana because it is only attainable through true Buddhist effort and belief. If the wisdom of those who understand the essence of existence is not only known but believed, then one may have a chance at reaching full Buddhahood. While a philosophy of enlightenment is of little spiritual benefit, it certainly holds academic value, and it is for this reason that I will now pursue an explanation of enlightened reality based on the tools and direction created by Dharmakīrti.

First, I must investigate what is meant by “my own mind.” If there is only my mind, then there is no need for the “my” as there is no “your” mind from which to distinguish “my” mind, there is just mind. I arbitrarily group certain thoughts into my and your mind on the basis of their supposed origin through the obscurative nature of *vāsanās*, but if I am the true origin of all impressions then really there is only the one mind. Even this term “mind” is a false grouping of impressions. Though I do not directly perceive past or future impressions, only the present ones, I still group them all together into one entity that includes impressions and *vāsanās* and call it “mind”. This is a fabricated universal that is simply the remnant of a traditional idea of many minds that are distinguished from each other and from the outside world through the exclusion of those things which do not have the function of being “my mind” or “your mind”. In actuality, there is only each impression itself that is entirely alone, and only through memory (as *vāsanās*) can I have more than a singular impression. Even a memory of an impression is only a new impression of a previous impression. There is only one impression of everything happening at any moment, and this impression is certainly not of external things. My impression of that rock and of that tree are not separate, for I either perceive them at once or I must be comparing one of them to a *vāsanā* of the other. Therefore I do not have impressions *of* things, but only impressions devoid of true spacial separation.

Just as impressions of minds and objects are not spacially separated, they are also not

temporally separated in reality. The entirety of existence is the momentary experience of the present, though the present is not distinguishable from the past or future because I do not have and have never had an experience of the past or future, only impressions that were falsely thought to contain true impressions of another time when in actuality this is impossible, for even an impression in another time would still be in the present. In this way, existence is experiencing impressions without time or space. Furthermore, everything in existence is indistinguishable from myself because I am a false exclusion from those things which are not me, but in truth there is only impressions that happen to/of/by no one at no time in no space. This explanation itself cannot be thought about without obscuring existence into my own thought for obvious reasons, most notably because it is in English on a physical object and negates ideas such as time and space where the negations of said ideas necessarily posit their lower level existence, so thinking that spacetime does *not* exist is just as false as thinking such a thing *does* exist. Upon further examination, my idea of “enlightened reality” seems to require a separation from my own thoughts of false reality, thus creating enlightened reality through the exclusion of those things which are not enlightened reality, when really even unenlightened reality contains enlightened experience. This point further proves why it is truly impossible to discuss or conceptualize the truth of enlightenment, for such actions necessitate being unenlightened. Experience is the only manner with which one can reach enlightenment, which would then be the experience of pure experience. Though this explanation of enlightenment does not apply to actual, Buddhist enlightenment, it can be said that my entire philosophical explanation of enlightenment boils down to the single concept *experience*, which in this case is indistinguishable from the concept *existence*. Clearly, Dharmakīrti was wise to not attempt to bring his students any closer to enlightenment on conceptual grounds alone, as this practice only allows one to orbit enlightenment, but never penetrate it. Instead, Dharmakīrti chose to project his students in the direction of enlightenment and leave it up to them to enter Buddhahood.

Though understanding Buddhist enlightenment is impossible, understanding Dharmakīrti's system of philosophy is a useful start to experiencing enlightenment first hand. Dharmakīrti attempts to bring his followers as close to the light of truth as possible without blinding them, hoping they will find their way to the light's source with their eyes closed. He is even able to guide students who are as far away from enlightenment as a person can be by utilizing a stepwise system of understanding reality, which meets each person at his or her own ability and slowly brings him or her closer to the enlightened experience. The tools and techniques learned along the path, such as the theories of inferential reasoning and exclusion, are proven useful as a means to check one's own progress and ensure that ideas from previous concepts of reality are not seeping into higher levels of understanding. While it is ultimately impossible to philosophize your way to enlightenment, it is beneficial to understand why this is an impossibility. Still, Dharmakīrti has produced an incredibly complex and effective system of teaching that clearly proves his deservedness at the forefront of Buddhist philosophy and philosophy at large.

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