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To the Heart of Truth

Felicitation Volume for Eli Franco on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday

Part II

ARBEITSKREIS FÜR TIBETISCHE UND BUDDHISTISCHE STUDIEN UNIVERSITÄT WIEN

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TO THE HEART OF TRUTH

FELICITATION VOLUME FOR ELI FRANCO
ON THE OCCASION OF HIS SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY

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Meditation and Knowledge in Indian Buddhist Epistemology*

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1. Introduction

Eli Franco's scholarship has expanded in different directions, but for me Eli Franco has always been the author of *Dharmakīrti on Compassion and Rebirth*, a study on a section of the Pramāṇasiddhi chapter, the second chapter of Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* with Prajñākaragupta's commentary on it. This book has shaped and inspired my work on Dharmakīrti for years. In Eli's honour and as a token of gratitude, I shall discuss how Dharmakīrti's discourse on knowledge and liberation—which is prominent in the Pramāṇasiddhi chapter of the *Pramāṇavārttika*—relates to Buddhist notions of meditation practice and its consequences.

The issue of how Buddhist philosophical thinking relates to insights deriving from meditation and other types of spiritual practices has been more recently debated by Lambert Schmithausen and Eli Franco,[1] who, with regard to "the arising of philosophical theories from spiritual practice" has stated:

> In the final analysis, one cannot avoid the conclusion that certain philosophical theories arose from meditative experiences and certain others did not, and that the origin of still others cannot be determined, in which case it seems preferable to suspend judgment.[2]

As shown by the debate on this issue, the discussion on the relationship between philosophy and meditation in South Asian Buddhism is quite

* Research for this paper was generously funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), Project Number P 30710-G24, "The Nobles' Truths in Indian Buddhist Epistemology."

[1] Schmithausen 2014, Franco 2009 and 2018.

[2] Franco 2009: 126 and Franco 2018: 125.

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complex and needs an equally nuanced approach. Martin Adam has addressed this relationship with regard to Kamalaśīla (8th century),[3] looking in particular at his account of meditation in the three *Bhāvanākrama*s. Kamalaśīla composed the *Bhāvanākrama*s after the Tibetan king Khri srong lde btsan asked him to explain his position against the view of the Chan master Heshang Mohoyen.[4] The two opposing views, as well known, formed the matter of a crucial debate held at bSam yas towards the end of the 8th century. Adam has shown that, in the *Bhāvanākrama*s (where *bhāvanā*, 'mental cultivation' or 'meditation,' is the key concept to be explained), Kamalaśīla aims to demonstrate that meditation contributes to knowledge[5] and has "a key role in the discovery of truth."[6] Adam's discussion is a reply to Tom Tillemans' presentation of the bSam yas debate[7] "as one based upon an opposition between analysis and meditation," which suggests "a dichotomy that Kamalaśīla himself did not accept."[8] According to Adam, the main issue debated by Kamalaśīla and Heshang Mohoyen was "explaining how it is that the practices they endorsed could actually function to produce the sought after state,"[9] which is non-conceptual. In this regard, the point made by Kamalaśīla is that some types of conceptual activities help the mind to gradually achieve a non-conceptual gnosis; therefore, philosophical analysis and non-conceptual gnosis (namely, the result of meditation and not meditation itself) can be continuous. The transition between the two is explained by using two traditional ways of framing *bhāvanā*, namely the division of *bhāvanā* in two types of meditation, *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, and the attainment of three types of knowledge, namely the insights that result from learning, reflection, and mental cultivation, respectively (*śrutamayī prajñā*, *cintāmayī prajñā*, and *bhāvanāmayī prajñā*).[10]

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[3] See BEB, vol. Two, *sub voce*, and McClintock 2022.

[4] See Keira 2004: 7.

[5] Adam 2016: 352.

[6] Adam 2016: 354.

[7] Tillemans 2013, reprinted with a few revisions as chapter 10 in Tillemans 2016.

[8] Adam 2016: 351.

[9] Adam 2016: 355.

[10] Adam 2016: 356–357. See below, sections 3.1 to 3.2.

Since, according to Tillemans, Kamalaśīla's philosophy on meditation and yogic knowledge was largely dependent on Dharmakīrti's thought, at least some of Tillemans's observations on Kamalaśīla's position can be extended to Dharmakīrti. Although Adam's general line of argumentation may apply to Dharmakīrti, it cannot help with the details of Dharmakīrti's view because it is specifically based on the *Bhāvanākrama*s. So, we still need to examine Dharmakīrti's texts and see what they say about the relationship between philosophy and meditation. This paper discusses two related aspects: the role of philosophy and meditation in the acquisition of soteriologically valuable knowledge and the primacy of the one over the other. In particular, I am motivated by two claims of Tillemans, namely that meditative understanding depends upon philosophical thinking and, thus, cannot contribute to achieve a kind of knowledge that is "*distinct from or over and above* the contributions of philosophical thinking";[11] and that "all the epistemic weight is once again on philosophical thinking and yogic perception adds no new discoveries of truths."[12]

Since the notion of meditation is key here, I begin with a few remarks on this subject, in the conviction that discussions concerning meditation might not always be guaranteed to start from shared understanding of its nature, function, and results. The aim here is to show how different the idea of what meditation is and does can be, and, nevertheless, how persistent certain features are across various Buddhist environments.

2. On the notion of meditation, a polyvalent term

Nowadays, 'meditation' not only means contemplation and reflection, but also stands for an umbrella term used to describe *a variety of practices that concern the cultivation of the mind* and that in one way or another derive from Asian traditions. Meditation has become a firmly established subject of study in the humanities as well as in psychology and biomedical research. Although it is by no means a Buddhist specialty, it is often associated with Buddhism and practices that are characterized by keywords such as 'insight meditation' and 'mindfulness,' and derive from Theravāda traditions as well

[11] Tillemans 2013: 298.

[12] Tillemans 2013: 299.

as East Asian Chan schools and the Tibetan Dzogchen tradition.[13] More recently Karen O'Brien-Kop and Suzanne Newcombe have aptly discussed the challenges of defining meditation and yoga.[14] With reference to yoga they have pointed out "the need to engage in a constant critical reflection on the meaning of the terms that we employ as scholars," also observing that,

> contemporary definitions often eclipse historical definitions and can lead to anachronistic, misinformed or simply skewed understandings of the past discussions of yoga as recorded in textual sources.[15]

The same can be stated with regard to meditation, with the additional problem that, unlike yoga, this is a purely English (and thus Western) term that translates a variety of words and related concepts in different Asian languages. For example, the Sanskrit terms *dhyāna*, *samādhi*, and *bhāvanā* or their cognate words in Pali are often translated as 'meditation,' but each of them has specific technical meanings.[16] A unitary meaning of 'meditation' within the Buddhist realm should account for the diversity of regions, cultural contexts and historical periods covered by the term 'Buddhism'—which is indeed impossible. Meditation has thus become an extremely polyvalent word that denotes a wide variety of practices.

In the case of historical Buddhist traditions from Asia, meditation can be said to indicate methods for the cultivation of the mind that are linked to a Buddhist soteriological discourse, and not, as several forms of meditation in the modern West, to health or wellness issues. Although it is quite difficult to pinpoint what was practised where, when and by whom, as noted by Florin Deleanu, "What remains sure is that scripture upon scripture, treatise after treatise extols meditation as the quintessential method for attaining *nirvāṇa*."[17] The centrality of meditation is reiterated across early Buddhist texts, where, as more recently argued by Giuliano Giustarini, "form and contents are combined not only to preserve and transmit but also to enact the teachings of the Buddha, viz., to develop the contemplative factors illustrated

[13] Cousins 1996, Gethin 2011 and 2015, Husgafvel 2020.

[14] O'Brien-Kop and Newcombe 2020.

[15] O'Brien-Kop and Newcombe 2020: 5.

[16] For some details, see Gethin 2004: 201f. and Deleanu 2020: 81f.

[17] Deleanu 2020: 80.

in the texts."[18] The important role of meditative practices is evidenced by various sources from Central Asia, from the meditation manual found by Dieter Schlingloff in Kizil (one of the sites of the kingdom of Kuča, which flourished from early centuries of the Common Era to circa 650),[19] to the ubiquitous presence of meditation caves in the Kuča monasteries—which according to Angela Howard and Giuseppe Vignato also suggests the development of a "visual language of meditation" that alludes to or records meditative states.[20] The paintings from some caves in Toyuq display Mahāyāna methods of visualization and pre-Mahāyāna meditations on bodily impurity (or *aśubhābhāvanā*), showing, as argued by Nobuyoshi Yamabe, a process of continuity between the two types of practices and paths to liberation.[21] Early Chinese texts present accounts of meditative visions linked to past karma and the meditator's degree of purity, which results from rituals of repentance.[22] In their writings on meditation, Zhiyi (538–597) and his Tiantai School focus on the two practices of calmness (Sanskrit *śamatha*, Chinese *zhi* 止) and insight (Sanskrit *vipaśyanā*, Chinese *guan* 觀), namely meditative methods widely mentioned in the Nikāyas as well as in Mahāyāna sources[23] and explained in Chinese doctrinal treatises from South Asia, too.[24] Zhiyi considers the two methods complementary to the point that he calls meditation *zhiguan* 止觀, which is formed by the Chinese terms for *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*,[25] rather than *chan* 禪, the standard Chinese translation of *jhāna/dhyāna*. However, Zhiyi's approach was reshaped in the later Chan movement, resulting in the disappearance of both meditative practices in Chinese Buddhism.[26]

Turning to present-day Tibetan monasteries, in her biobehavioural model for the study of monastic debate, Marieke van Vugt considers formal debate

[18] Giustarini 2023: 255.

[19] Schlingloff 2006.

[20] Howard and Vignato 2014, Howard 2007, and Howard 2015.

[21] Yamabe 2009.

[22] Greene 2021: 124f.

[23] See n. 30 below.

[24] Greene 2021: 124.

[25] Poceski 2020: 10–13. The subject of Zhiyi's first work, however, is *dhyāna pāramitā* (see Bianchi 2022).

[26] See Poceski 2020.

"an embodied and social form of analytical meditation," whose "practice is thought to result in new insights into the nature of reality."[27] Assuming that the monks are informed of the fact that their debates are studied as a form of meditation, van Vugt's understanding of monastic debate appears to both fit the emic perspective and be a useful heuristic tool. However, in view of George Dreyfus's explanation of monastic debate as 'dialectical practice,'[28] van Vugt's understanding can hardly be applied to Tibetan monastic debate in general. It may rather apply only to specific traditions or time periods and selectively correspond to the semantics of Tibetan terms such as *sgom*, which typically indicates meditative practices.

Van Vugt's study also describes individual analytic meditation as a reasoning-based form of sitting meditation in which "the practitioner contemplates a passage of text or an idea in their minds." This form of meditation is "sometimes alternated with resting meditation without any particular object of focus."[29] In this connection, the two methods of *vipaśyanā* and *śamatha* (or *vipassanā* and *samatha* in Pali) respectively come to mind. However, South Asian formal meditation practices attested in traditional Pali and Sanskrit sources are hardly based on reasoning and eventually serve the purpose of training the mind to perceive things in a non-conceptual and non-discursive way (which corresponds to the way through which Gautama became awakened and, thus, liberated from suffering).[30] As remarked by Rupert Gethin, exegetical literature explains *vipassanā*, in particular, as a method for developing insight by directing "the perfect mindfulness, stillness, and lucidity that has been cultivated in the *jhānas*—especially the fourth *jhāna*—to the contemplation … of 'reality'—reality in the sense of the ways things are, or, perhaps better, the way things work."[31] The analytical dimension that characterizes *vipassanā* is thus different from conceptual analysis. Kamalaśīla explains *vipaśyanā* along these lines as he equates *vipaśyanā* with *bhūtapratyavekṣā*, "discernment of reality," which is

[27] Van Vugt et al. 2019: 238f.

[28] Dreyfus 2008: 45; see also Dreyfus 2003 and Samuels 2021.

[29] Van Vugt et al. 2019: 238.

[30] See, for example, Cousins 1984, Seyfort Ruegg 1989: 182–192, 200, and Gethin 2004.

[31] Gethin 2004: 215.

not a kind of correct analysis, but discerning "the selflessness of persons and *dharma*s."[32]

3. The philosopher Dharmakīrti and the Buddhist meditative tradition

The Buddhist monastic institutions where meditative practices were performed and taught were also home to philosophical studies and debates. As shown by the use of the Sanskrit terms *ācārya* and *yogācāra*,[33] there was a clear division of labour between philosophers and specialists of meditation in Buddhist South Asia. Such a division of labour is also confirmed by the fact that, in pre-400 CE China, the names of foreign *chan* masters differed from those of the foreign translators of Indian texts.[34] It might thus be considered a truism that the authors of Buddhist philosophical writings from South Asia were not meditation practitioners. In fact, so far, we cannot prove if this was the case or not, but the implication in either case need not be that the epistemic consequences of meditative practices were not part of philosophical views. So, the question remains whether and how South Asian Buddhist philosophical texts refer to such practices and what role they ascribe to philosophy vis-à-vis the cultivation of the mind through meditation.

3.1. The yogin's perception and how to attain it

In the case of Dharmakīrti, it is easy to identify parts of his oeuvre that show his consideration of meditation and its results. The most evident topic is perhaps the yogin's perception, *yogipratyakṣa*, namely the special perception that characterizes those whose life is devoted to practices that change one's mental state and eventually lead to liberation. Precisely because of meditation practices, the yogin's cognitive faculties differ from those of ordinary beings and have to be distinguished from other modes of direct perception. So, four modes of perception are accounted for in the logico-epistemological tradition: perceptual awareness depending on external sense faculties (*indriyapratyakṣa*), that depending on the mind—which includes

[32] Adam 2016: 359.

[33] On *ācārya* see for example Kane 1942; on *yogācāra* see Silk 2000.

[34] Greene 2021: 29–33.

mental perception (*mānasapratyakṣa*) and self-awareness (*svasaṃvedana*)—and perceptual awareness as perception of the *yogin* (*yogipratyakṣa*).[35]

A typical example of yogic perception is the Buddha's knowledge of the four Truths. Precisely because this was a central point in the wider philosophical debate, it is unlikely—as I have observed elsewhere—that Dharmakīrti's few remarks on yogic perception in his *Pramāṇavārttika*, *Pramāṇaviniścaya* or *Nyāyabindu* (or Dignāga's few words in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, for that matter) betray only a superficial interest in the matter.[36] In fact, the verses of *Pramāṇavārttika* III.281–286 are partially rearranged in *Pramāṇaviniścaya* I, 27.7–28.8, where they are accompanied by a description of the yogin's perception as the result of an epistemic process.[37] Adopting Abhidharma and Yogācāra concepts, Dharmakīrti explains this process as the subsequent attainment of three types of knowledge, namely the insights resulting from learning, reflection, and mental cultivation (*śrutamayī prajñā*, *cintāmayī prajñā*, and *bhāvanāmayī prajñā*). These represent a temporal progression on the soteriological path as they are linked to the realization of the four Truths.[38] In commenting on *Pramāṇavārttika* II.208, where Dharmakīrti speaks of the natural luminosity of the mind and the arising of mental defilements only in connection with false views, Prajñākaragupta and Manorathanandin observe that mental defilements do not appear again once the mind has attained the insights from learning and reflection, and even more so when the mind has radically transformed and the path, as viewing selflessness, has become natural for the mind (which refers to Dharmakīrti's statements in *Pramāṇavārttika* II.205).[39] Moreover, Dharmakīrti explains in *Pramāṇavārttika* II.199–201 that the path to liberation is ultimately concerned with and leads to the abandonment of a belief in a self (*satkāyadṛṣṭi*). This is a complex belief

[35] See *Pramāṇasamuccaya* I.4ab and 6, and for references to some points of discussion Pecchia 2020: 775–777.

[36] Pecchia 2020: 773f. and 777.

[37] *Pramāṇaviniścaya* I, 27.9–12; see Pecchia 2020: 778f. and 791f. with references therein.

[38] *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 334.13–335.6 (on *Abhidharmakośa* VI.5) explains in detail the three insights referred to by Dharmakīrti especially at *Pramāṇaviniścaya* I, 27.9–12. For remarks and further references, see Dunne 2006: 507–510, Eltschinger 2009: 176ff. and 198f., Eltschinger 2014: 318–324, and Pecchia 2015: 236f.

[39] Pecchia 2015: 148f. and 236–238.

that is innate (*sahajā*) as well as conceptually produced (*ābhisaṃskārikā*);[40] therefore, its eradication requires two types of paths, or spiritual trainings, namely the *darśanamārga*, 'path of insight,' and the *bhāvanāmārga*, 'path of mental cultivation.'[41]

3.2. Three different insights (*prajñā*s) and their different functions

Dharmakīrti's remarks concerning the yogin's vision of the Truths and how to attain it are anything but original and closely follow the Abhidharma tradition concerning the Bodhisattva's path. Each of the three insights, *prajñā*s, mentioned by Dharmakīrti and the tradition he draws upon has a specific function and is associated to a different practice that applies to a different type of object. The first two insights concern texts and concepts; they require intellectual activity and result in the acquisition of two distinct, though related, kinds of knowledge that respectively help the practitioner come to be acquainted with the Buddhist discourse on liberation and rationally understand its points, which can be logically proved. The third insight is instead linked to *bhāvanā*, which typically indicates mental cultivation through meditative practices. Its contents correspond to any of the objects of such practices—from the breath and bodily parts to feelings—and are not intellectual contents.[42] Therefore, they require a kind of activity that is mental and yet radically different from the intellectual one. *Bhāvanā* serves the purpose of developing an ability that addresses the distorted views of the ordinary mind (rather than the abilities of learning doctrinal notions and reasoning on them) and has the fundamental function of enabling the yogin to eventually attain liberation, namely a mental state free from the mistaken views that characterize the ordinary mind.

Although cultivation of all three insights is crucial for attaining liberation, one would somehow expect from Dharmakīrti special attention to the insight

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[40] Pecchia 2015: 140–143 and 207f. As explained at p. 208, fn. 100, my understanding of *ābhisaṃskārikā* draws upon Schmithausen's remark on the different meanings of *abhisaṃskāra* as being all related to *saṃskāra* and expressing endeavour or deliberate goal-oriented action (please note that the reference there to Schmithausen *Ālaya*: 156 should be changed to Schmithausen 1987: 156).

[41] Pecchia 2020: 779f. and references therein.

[42] In connection with Yogācāra sources on the *prajñā*s, Eltschinger (2014: 319) instead

deriving from reflection. Indeed, at the end of *Pramāṇaviniścaya* I, Dharmakīrti mentions separately this type of knowledge in connection with the valid means of cognition and vis-à-vis the achievement of the ultimate knowledge that characterizes the liberated ones. He says:

> And this nature of the conventional means of valid cognition has been explained. Even in this regard others who are confused make the world go astray. But those who practice the insight resulting from reflection realize the ultimate cognition, which is devoid of error and immaculate, which does not vanish.'[43]

These remarks show how Dharmakīrti—as observed by Vincent Eltschinger—takes up the task of refuting misconceptions regarding the conventional means of valid cognition because such misconceptions cause people to fail in their pursuit of liberation—which makes epistemology "a necessary science."[44] This specific role makes epistemology, as a theoretical enterprise, the presupposition for engaging in the right path. The insight from reflection may be considered as including the results of epistemology, namely the application of the valid means of cognition in reasoning on matters of mental defilements and their antidotes. However, in view of the passages considered above, this insight is not considered by Dharmakīrti the ultimate type of knowledge that enables the Buddhist practitioner to achieve liberation.[45] Rather, it is a necessary step towards the mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*) for achieving another insight, which is the ultimate one.

3.3. A training in thinking 'out of one's own box'

Dharmakīrti repeatedly explains that the distortions of the ordinary mind are generated by the view of a self. One cannot simply abandon such distortions

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speaks of the "*yogin*'s intensive cultivation of salvific intellectual contents."

[43] *Pramāṇaviniścaya* I, 44.2–5: *sāṃvyavahārikasya caitat pramāṇasya rūpam uktam, atrāpi pare mūḍhā visaṃvādayanti lokam iti. cintāmayīm eva tu prajñām anuśīlayanto vibhramavivekanirmalam anapāyi pāramārthikapramāṇam abhimukhīkurvanti*. See Krasser 2004: 142f., Eltschinger 2014: 170f. and 317, n. 247; for the second part only, Pecchia 2015: 237, n. 241.

[44] Eltschinger 2014: 171.

[45] This does not seem to be Eltschinger's view since he writes that the traditional

by convincing oneself of something else because, no matter how 'good' or 'right' another conviction is, its conceptual nature makes it a distorted way of cognizing things that is based on one's conceptual representations of them. Dharmakīrti formulates this idea highlighting different related aspects. In *Pramāṇavārttika* II.174cd, for example, he states:

> And since the objects [of attachment and so on] are conceptually represented, the objects are not the restricting factors.[46]

So, the burden of forming a judgement in relation to an object of perception rests only with the subject. In *Pramāṇavārttika* I, 32.3–12 (on I.58) Dharmakīrti focuses on conceptual habit and describes how an object is conceptualized in the mind of an agent of cognition.[47] He refers to the concepts of a corpse, a beloved woman, and food (*kuṇapakāminībhakṣyavikalpāḥ*), which correspond to how an ascetic, a man, and a dog, respectively conceptualize the same visible form of the dead body of a woman. The mention of the ascetic together with the dog is not accidental; in fact, it indicates a meditation setting where an ascetic contemplates the loathsome in a cemetery (*aśubhābhāvanā*), to which dogs are associated as necrophagous animals. Dharmakīrti uses this example to illustrate not only the subjectivity of conceptual representations and their loose relation to the object, but also the role of individual habits in the process of conceptualization. He states:

> Experience [of an object] generates ascertaining cognitions according to [one's] conceptual habit, … sharpness of mind, the habit (*abhyāsa*) due to the mental impressions left by a [previous ascertainment], context, and so forth are the causes that contribute to the arising of the ascertainment of a distinct feature from an experience.[48]

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sequence of insights is regarded by Dharmakīrti "as a self-sufficient means for securing enlightenment once the wrong notions spread and argued for by the outsiders have been discarded." (Eltschinger 2014: 172).

[46] *Pramāṇavārttika* II.174cd: *vikalpyaviṣayatvāc ca viṣayā na niyāmakāḥ* ‖.

[47] The passage is translated in Pecchia 2020: 790f. and discussed at pp. 782–788, which I summarize in the present paragraph.

[48] *Pramāṇavārttika* I, 32.5–8: *anubhavo hi yathāvikalpābhyāsaṃ niścayapratyayān janayati* | … *buddhipāṭavaṃ tadvāsanābhyāsaḥ prakaraṇam ityādayo 'nubhavād bhedaniścayotpattisahakāriṇaḥ*.

If the subjectivity of conceptualization entails diversity in the concepts generated by different agents who react to a specific event, the agent's different conditions may generate different individuals' conceptual reactions to a similar event. In mentioning an ascetic and a man, Dharmakīrti's example also alludes to two sides of the coin: the mind of a man who views the corpse of a woman as a beloved woman for whom he feels attachment and the mind of a man who is an ascetic and views the corpse of a woman as a corpse, and thus something loathsome. While the man repeats previous representations determined by his attachment to the woman, the ascetic who practices the contemplations in the cemetery has trained the mind to see the corpse of a woman as such, going beyond his previous ways of conceptualizing the perception of a woman. So, the example of a corpse, a beloved woman, and food also shows that concepts *need not* flow from conceptual streams that have stabilised through repetition of the same conceptual response to similar events, and the contemplations on the loathsome, as other meditative practices, are indeed a training in thinking 'out of one's own box.'

3.4. From concepts to non-conceptual cognition through mental cultivation

Since concepts do not correspond naturally to objects of cognition, but in fact, have a quite tenuous relationship with their referents, it is not banal that an ascetic in front of a corpse is able to cognize it as a corpse. Nevertheless, the ascetic's concept, as a concept, is in principle not superior to other concepts. Therefore, the final focus of meditative training is the conceptualizing habit itself. Since this reinforces the conceptually produced belief in a self and innate belief in a self (which are forms of conceptualization underlining any other type of concept), liberation cannot be attained by deconstructing the two types of beliefs, but (as we have seen above, at p. 674) by eradicating them through the *darśana-* and *bhāvanā-mārga*. The special training provided by meditative practices serves not only the purpose of changing habitual conceptual processes and reducing the conceptual activity itself, but, in the final stage, it also makes the conceptual activity cease completely. Now, although a training in thinking out of one's box is needed, non-conceptual insights cannot eventually be generated by what they are not, namely concepts. Meditative practices will then consist in training the mind to stop

imposing subject-based ideas, enabling the mind to function cognitively at a non-conceptual level.

This more general goal is articulated by Dharmakīrti in different ways and with reference to different aspects and modes of meditation, as indicated by the term *abhyāsa*. For example, in illustrating the features of the Buddha as a teacher, Dharmakīrti says: 'For the one who repeatedly practices the means in their manifold aspects and for a long time, the virtues and faults become very clear.'[49] In his long explanation of the Buddha as one who seeks the benefit of the world, he states: 'That [i.e., compassion] arises from repeated practice;'[50] and, 'compassion etc. arise from repeated practice and continue to grow spontaneously.'[51] Furthermore, with regard to the path, he says that 'through the practice of it the basis is transmuted,' and becomes of the nature of the path.[52] Especially the latter statement makes it clear that the function of meditation is to radically transform how the mind works—where its radical transformation concerns its very operative mode and results in meditative states becoming the normal condition of the mind. The point is that the mind can become of the same nature as the qualities that have been cultivated, which include specific mental qualities such as compassion and sound ways of seeing things, which finally correspond to the Truths.

It is thus not only worthy but also necessary to engage in mental cultivation for the follower of the Buddhist *dharma* who wants the results of philosophical analysis to be meaningful. What the yogin knows at the end of the path, when his cognitive abilities have been radically transformed, may or may not be different from what he knew during the path. The difference is that he now knows it with a different mind—a mind that does not obscure the objects of its cognition with its own concepts. Meditative practice is then a training for the mind to think out of its box and, in the long term,

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[49] *Pramāṇavārttika* II.136: *bahuśo bahudhopāyaṃ kālena bahunāsya ca | gacchanty abhyasyatas tatra guṇadoṣāḥ prakāśatām ||*. See Eltschinger 2005: 404f.

[50] *Pramāṇavārttika* II.34ab': *abhyāsāt sā ||*. See Franco 1997: 95 and 159.

[51] *Pramāṇavārttika* II.124cd: *abhyāsajāḥ pravartante svarasena kṛpādayaḥ ||*.

[52] *Pramāṇavārttika* II.205'ab: *tadabhyāsād āśrayaḥ parivartate*. The next verse says: *sātmye 'pi doṣabhāvaś cen mārgavan nāvibhutvataḥ*. "But you may say that faults arise in the same way as the path does, even though the latter is the natural state. No! [—we reply—] owing to the absence of power [to do so]." See Pecchia 2015: 170f. and 219–226.

to become autonomous from thinking itself, from any kind of belief, even from the "right" ones.

Both philosophical thinking and yogic cognition lead to knowledge that the tradition calls *prajñā*, but the two resulting *prajñā*s are certainly not of the same nature and do not work in the same way. The former is relevant to the final aim of the path because it corresponds to the ordinary function of the mind, through which we can discern, distinguish, and make decisions concerning the path. But if the results of this mode of the mind were more important than those of the meditation-based mode, why should one engage in the latter at all? And why should a Buddhist philosopher like Dharmakīrti refer to it in his crucial explanations of how the ordinary mind works? Especially as a philosopher, he could have framed the matter to the advantage of a philosophical understanding and explain yogic epistemic attainments as a "vivid presentation" of what philosophers already know.[53] But Dharmakīrti does not offer any statement to this effect. Quite on the contrary, based on the doctrinal schema of Abhidharmic tradition, he explains how the ordinary mind functions and shows what the results of meditation are, indeed providing a rational motivation, and not a faith-based one, for the adoption of the Buddhist Yogācāra path. Philosophy does not discover, but proves the Truths, as Dharmakīrti does in the Pramāṇasiddhi chapter of his *Pramāṇavārttika*. A philosophical understanding of the nature of our problem, namely suffering, and its solution serves the purpose of helping anyone who wants to find a solution to the problem of suffering to do so in an efficacious way by addressing the right issues and with the appropriate means.

If this makes philosophy a worthy enterprise, it does not exempt the follower of the Buddhist *dharma* from going through the *bhāvanāmārga*, the path based on the cultivation of the mind by means of meditative practices—a path that neither consists in philosophical understanding nor aims at such an understanding, but is rather made for attaining the special type

[53] This interpretation is given as a possibility in Tillemans 2013: 299: "One could of course just bite the bullet and agree that the yogic perception promoted by Kamalaśīla and Dharmakīrti is nothing more than a vivid presentation of conclusions reached by prior correct rational analysis."

of knowledge that characterizes the yogin.[54] The yogin's achievement is measured by its being non-conceptual. If this were not the case, no matter how vivid or correct his understanding could be, his mind would keep acting according to its conceptual box. The continuity between philosophical analysis and non-conceptual cognition (namely, the result of meditation and not meditation itself) suggested by the progression of the three *prajñā*s does not entail that their epistemic achievement is of the same nature, but that they all cooperate toward the final achievement, the *pāramārthikapramāṇa*, the ultimate knowledge.[55] As observed by Franco,

> Like nature and nurture, spiritual practice and philosophical theory are never found to exist in separation. ... Even the purest meditative experience is culturally and linguistically bound, and is engrossed in a tradition.[56]

If the importance of meditation in Asian Buddhist traditions is today widely acknowledged, the discussion of its role vis-à-vis philosophy involves a variety of aspects that makes it highly complex. The diverse ways of understanding the term meditation in ancient times as well as today add complexity to the discussion, especially insofar as one downplays the distinction between the conceptual and the non-conceptual (as is the case of considering Tibetan philosophical debate a kind of meditation). Yet, considering that the Buddhist *dharma* has its foundations in an ascetic tradition, one would rather agree, *mutatis mutandis*, with Augustine's saying: *Si enim comprehendis non est Deus*—'If you comprehend, it is not God' (*Sermo* 117). And Dharmakīrti would agree as well.

[54] If and how yogic perception adds new discoveries of truths is a matter that I will explore in a future paper.

[55] See n. 43 above.

[56] Franco 2018: 125f.

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