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ABSTRACT
There's a common line of reasoning which supposes that the phenomenal unity of conscious experience is grounded in a mind-like simple subject. To the contrary, Mādhyamika Buddhist philosophers beginning with Śrīgupta (seventh–eighth century) argue that any kind of mental simple is incoherent and thus metaphysically impossible. Lacking any unifying principle, the phenomenal unity of conscious experience is instead an unfounded illusion. In this paper, I present an analysis of Śrīgupta's 'neither-one-nor-many argument' against mental simples and show how his line of reasoning is driven by a set of implicit questions concerning the nature of and relation between consciousness and its intentional object. These questions not only set the agenda for centuries of intra-Buddhist debate on the topic, but they are also questions to which any defender of unified consciousness or a simple subject of experience arguably owes responses.

1. Introduction

There are plenty of sceptics about material simples, ranging from anti-atomist dualists to subjective idealists to physicalist gunk-theorists. But one is hard-pressed to find a community of sceptics about the simplicity of the mind—at least synchronically. There's a common intuition that says we're entitled to infer the metaphysical unity of the mind from the phenomenal unity of our conscious experience. Throughout the history of Western philosophy, figures as different as Plotinus, Descartes, and William James have defended versions of the line of reasoning now commonly known as the 'Achilles argument,'[1] according to which the phenomenal unity of our conscious experience presupposes the existence of a simple subject—perhaps a mind or soul—which serves as a principle of unity.[2] And the intuition that a conscious being must be simple has played a central role in shaping the domain of discourse

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[1] To this, we could add many from Early Modern Europe, including More, Cudworth, Leibniz, and Clarke. Following Kant, this line of thought is often referred to as the 'Achilles Argument' (1999: A351).

[2] This paraphrase is a crude over-simplification, and the arguments grouped under this name are diverse. Some versions of the Achilles argument take as their starting point the unity of a single mental state while others focus on the unification of a plurality of mental states within a single subject. For analyses of such arguments throughout the history of Western philosophy, see Lennon and Stainton 2008, which includes a taxonomy of versions of the Achilles Argument (3–8).

in contemporary philosophy of mind as well.[3] To the contrary, Mādhyamika Indian Buddhist philosophers beginning with Śrīgupta (seventh–eighth century) argue that the existence of any kind of mental simple—whether that be a mind or even a momentary mental state—is incoherent and is thus, metaphysically impossible. In the absence of any metaphysical unity, the phenomenal unity of consciousness is, therefore, an unfounded illusion.

It's no exaggeration to say that the Madhyamaka rejection of the unity of even a momentary mental state represents one of the most extreme positions on the unity of consciousness in the history of philosophy. While many have cast doubts on whether or not consciousness is necessarily and/or always unified,[4] and others have questioned whether a number of conscious states are unified with other conscious states,[5] scepticism about *any* unified consciousness is an uncommonly argued position indeed.[6] Yet, even among their fellow Buddhists, Mādhyamikas like Śrīgupta carve out a minority position. Buddhist philosophers uniformly reject the existence of a self as the simple subject of conscious experience and generally regard the mind to be nothing over and above a bundle of momentary mental states (*vijñānaskandha*), which is a unity only by convention, much like a heap of grain or a flock of sheep. But non-Mādhyamika Buddhist philosophers as different as dualist Ābhidhārmikas[7] and idealist Yogācārins[8] concur that there is *some* mental entity that synchronically counts as an indivisible and fundamental unity. After all, unlike a mental continuum, which is plausibly conceptually divisible into temporal parts, a single moment of consciousness certainly *seems* to be indisputably simple. Yet Śrīgupta challenges just that with his case against mental simples, which takes as its principal target Yogācāra idealist theories of the mind and mental content.

In this paper, I will present an analysis of Śrīgupta's 'neither-one-nor-many argument' (*ekānekaviyogahetu*) against the true unity of *any* mental entity as formulated

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[3] Barnett (2008: 334) argues that the 'simplicity intuition', which he describes as the 'naïve commitment to the principle that conscious beings must be simple', is the 'source' of a host of other intuitions that have determined the debate space in contemporary philosophy of mind.

[4] Some, for example, maintain that consciousness sometimes fails to be phenomenally unified when there is a failure of access unity or subjective unity; see, e.g., Hurley 1998.

[5] See, for example, Nagel (1971), Davidson (1980), Dennett (1991, 1992), O'Brien and Opie (1998); and Rosenthal (2003).

[6] Hume is often singled out as one of the few sceptics of *any* unified consciousness, though many commentators are quick to point out that he seems to have back-pedalled on this point in the conclusion of his *Treatise*; Garfield (2019a: ch. 12) represents an exception. And in contemporary philosophy of mind, unified consciousness is largely taken for granted, with debates centring instead on how best to characterize or account for its unity. For more radical sceptical stances on the unity of consciousness, see, for example, Rosenthal 1986, 2002; Hill 2014; Garfield 2019b; and Masrour 2020.

[7] Certain Ābhidhārmikas, such as Vasubandhu in his AKB, might be understood as dualists of a sort, in so far as they accept the substantial reality (*dravyasat*) of fundamental, momentary physical and mental constituents to which all nominally real (*prajñaptisat*) composites, such as bodies and minds, are reducible. This picture, of course, differs from a kind of Cartesian substance dualism.

[8] The classification of Yogācāra/Vijñānavāda as a form of idealism is not uncontested. For example, the implications of Vasubandhu's attack on atomism in his VŚ 11-15 are variously interpreted: according to Oetke (1992), for instance, the argument applies only to objects of experience, leaving open the possibility that material objects exist; Arnold (2008) contends that this sub-argument is intended to establish 'metaphysical idealism'; Kellner (2017b) instead argues that this section must be understood within the argumentative context of the entire text, which represents an *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, and that VŚ 11-15 falls under the section in which scriptural testimony (*āgama*) is precluded from serving as a means by which we can reliably gain knowledge of the existence of external objects. On this argument of Vasubandhu's, see also Kapstein 2001: 181–204; Kellner and Taber 2014; and Kellner 2017a.

in his *Introduction to Reality* (*Tattvāvatāra*),[9] and I will show how this line of reasoning is driven by a set of implicit questions concerning the nature of and relation between consciousness and its intentional object. These questions not only shaped the debate space for the succeeding centuries of dispute among Buddhist philosophers on the topic,[10] but they are also questions to which any defender of unified consciousness or a simple subject of experience, arguably owes responses. Finally, I conclude with a sketch of Śrīgupta's positive picture of the mind and highlight ways in which his argument challenges widespread assumptions in the philosophy of mind more broadly.

2. Simplicity and Well-foundedness

As a Mādhyamika, Śrīgupta's central commitment is that nothing has an intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), or ontologically independent being. We might characterize *svabhāva* as a kind of essential independence, that is, a form of ontological self-sufficiency that belongs to something by its very nature. In denying that anything lays claim to this kind of ontological status, Śrīgupta denies the possibility of a metaphysical foundationalist structure of reality. That's because on foundationalism, all ontological dependence chains must be well-founded, meaning that they terminate in something fundamental —something which is itself ontologically independent. Śrīgupta thus defends a

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[9] The original Sanskrit of Śrīgupta's *Tattvāvatāra* (TA) and autocommentary, the *Tattvāvatāravṛtti* (TAV), are lost, and the root text survives only as embedded in the autocommentary, which is extant only in Tibetan. See Ejima 1980 for a Japanese translation of the root verses of the TA; Kobayashi (1992, 1994) offers a Japanese translation of the TAV, and see Aitken (forthcoming) for an annotated English translation and critical edition of the TAV. All citations of the text refer by page number to the Bstan 'gyur Dpe bsdur ma edition (PD), and verse numbering follows my forthcoming critical edition of TAV. Śrīgupta's Madhyamaka iteration of the neither-one-nor-many argument is prefigured in the writings of Nāgārjuna (c. second century), the progenitor of the Madhyamaka philosophical tradition; see, for example, Nāgārjuna's RĀ 1.71 and ŚS 32ab; see also Āryadeva's (third century) CŚ 14.19. Śāntarakṣita (eighth century) popularized the argument in his MA/MAV after which it came to be known as one of the so-called four or sometimes five great arguments for the emptiness of intrinsic nature (*niḥsvabhāvatā*), yet it appears to be an expansion of Śrīgupta's formulation of the argument as presented in the TA/TAV (on Śāntarakṣita's neither-one-nor-many argument, see Ichigō 1989; Blumenthal 2004; Aitken 2022). Indeed, Śrīgupta is taken by the Tibetan tradition to be the teacher of Śāntarakṣita's teacher, Jñānagarbha (early eighth century). Śrīgupta's application of the neither-one-nor-many argument to the mind and mental content is prefigured in Dharmakīrti's (sixth–seventh century) influential iteration of argument in PV 3.194–224; see Dunne 2004: 396–411 for an English translation of this section together with commentary from Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi, and see Inami 2011 for a partial English translation with Prajñākaragupta's commentary; on this passage, see also Prueitt 2019 and Tomlinson 2022b. While Dharmakīrti's considered view is commonly accepted to be some form of Yogācāra idealism, some later interpreters, including Jitāri (c. 940–1000), have read Dharmakīrti as a Mādhyamika based on this very argument. Jitāri cites PV 3.4, 208, 209, 210, 219, and 359 as evidence that Dharmakīrti is, in the final analysis, a Mādhyamika; see Shirasaki 1986 and Steinkellner 1990. Yet Śrīgupta takes the analysis farther than Dharmakīrti, ultimately targeting the true unity of non-dual awareness (*advayajñāna*). Prajñākaragupta's (c. mid-eighth to early ninth century) treatment of nondual awareness in his commentary on Dharmakīrti's version of this argument merits more careful consideration vis-à-vis Śrīgupta's treatment of nondual awareness. Such analysis may even prove helpful for more decisively determining Śrīgupta's relative chronology; see PVA *ad* kk. 3.197–207. For a discussion of this section of the PVA, see Inami 2011.

[10] Not only did subsequent Indian Mādhyamikas—most notably Śāntarakṣita, Kamalaśīla, and Jitāri (late tenth century; see SVB *ad* k. 7)—pick up and elaborate on this line of reasoning, but of equal intellectual historical significance is the range of Yogācāra authors who felt compelled to respond to this argument in competing ways, catalysing them to refine their theories of the ontological status of representations and the mind, develop subtler accounts of the relation between the mind and mental content, and clarify the criteria for existence itself (see, e.g., Tomlinson 2022b). As gestured to below, Jñānaśrīmitra and Ratnākaraśānti represent two of the central figures advancing these debates at Vikramaśīla in the eleventh century.

thoroughgoing anti-foundationalism on which everything depends for its existence on yet something else, *ad indefinitum*.

Śrīgupta's case against mental simples is a sub-argument in a larger argument that sets out to show that all things lack ontological independence because they are neither one nor many. The central inference of his neither-one-nor-many argument reads:

> In reality, [*subject*] everything that exists externally and internally,
>
> [*predicate*] lacks an intrinsic nature,
>
> [*reason*] due to being neither one nor many,
>
> [*example*] like a reflection. [TA 1][11]

Formulated in the standard three-part inference of classical Buddhist logic, the argument runs as follows:

1. Thesis (*pratijñā*): All things lack independent being.
2. Major premise, statement of the entailment relation between the reason property and the predicate (*vyāpti*): Whatever is neither one nor many does not have independent being.
3. Minor premise, predication of the reason property of the subject (*pakṣadharmatā*): All things are neither one nor many.

We can rephrase the argument as a destructive dilemma which says:

One-or-many Dilemma

> If anything has ontological independence, then it is either one or many.

In effect, Śrīgupta argues that nothing can satisfy either disjunct of the consequent and, thus, by *modus tollens*, that nothing can satisfy the antecedent.

To begin to unpack Śrīgupta's argument, let's start by formulating the dilemma as a principle:

Ontological Independence Principle

> Whatever has ontological independence is either one or many. (=the contrapositive of the major premise)

This argument hinges on a few of important features of this one-or-many disjunctive predicate pair. First, ‹one› and ‹many› are taken to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive. The Sanskrit terms translated as 'one' and 'many' here—*eka* and *aneka*—are perhaps more precisely translated as 'unitary' and 'non-unitary' in so far as this pair of terms conforms to the grammatical, logical, and conceptual structure '*F* and not-*F*' (the *an-* in *aneka* being a negating prefix). Thus, if there exists anything that has ontological independence, then on pain of violating the law of excluded middle, it must either be a unity or a non-unity. As Śrīgupta notes, 'Since [unity and non-unity] are contradictory, existing [with ontologically independent being] in any other manner is surely untenable' (TA 2cd).[12] Moreover, in the context of this

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[11] TA 1: *phyi rol nang na gnas 'di kun // yang dag tu ni rang bzhin med // gcig dang du ma'i rang bzhin nyid // bral ba'i phyir na gzugs brnyan bzhin //* (PD 3121, 101). Cf. Śāntarakṣita's MA 1.

[12] *'gal ba'i phyir ni rnam pa gzhan // yod par yang ni mi 'thad do //* (PD 3121, 101). Cf. MA 62.

argument, 'one' and 'many' should be understood as a 'true unity' and 'true multiplicity' to reflect the fact that Śrīgupta's formulation of the inference includes the qualifier, 'in reality' (*tattvatas, yang dag tu*), signalling that this argument involves analysis of the subject's ultimate nature and does not bear on its status as a merely conventional unity/multiplicity. He thus provisionally accepts his foundationalist opponents' definitions of true unity and true non-unity/multiplicity only to argue that they can never be satisfied.

But what precisely are the conditions for being a true unity and a true multiplicity? Śrīgupta takes his foundationalist opponents to be committed to the following:

Definition of True Unity

To be a true unity is to lack proper parts,[13] viz. to be a mereological simple.[14]

Definition of True Multiplicity

To be a true multiplicity is to have proper parts, the most basic of which are true unities.

Thus, 'true unity' and 'true multiplicity' refer respectively to something that lacks proper parts and something that has proper parts, the most basic of which are simple.[15] And 'true multiplicity' picks out any non-unity that terminates in simples, whether that be a collection (like a flock of pigeons) or a composite (like a single pigeon). With these definitions, Śrīgupta stipulates a foundationalist structure which bottoms out in simples.

Substituting these definitions of true unity and true multiplicity into the Ontological Independence Principle yields the following revised principle:

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[13] In commenting on Śāntarakṣita's iteration of the neither-one-nor-many argument, Kamalaśīla (c. 740-795) makes this definition explicit: '"Unity" refers to something's being partless. The alternative member of [this disjunctive predicate pair] is non-unity (*anekatva*), which is synonymous with "consisting in discrete parts" (*bhedatva*).' MAP *ad* k. 1: *cig pa zhes bya ba ni cha med pa nyid do // cig shos zhes bya ba ni du ma nyid de tha dad pa nyid ces bya ba'i tha tshig go //* (Ichigō 1985, 23). This conception of true unity as being mereologically simple together with its relation to independent being is also reflected in Abhidharma accounts on which to be a fundamental constituent of the world (*dharma*) is to exist substantially (*dravyasat*) rather than just nominally (*prajñaptisat*), and to exist substantially is to both possess independent being/an intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) and to be an indivisible, partless unity; in other words, to be both an ontological foundation and a substance is to be a partless unity, viz. a mereological simple (see AKB *ad* 6.4).

[14] Simplicity may strike many as a high bar for true unity. Still, there's something rather intuitive about the thought that whatever is a mind-independent, per se unity is not constituted by or divisible into more basic units. As Hume puts the thought, 'The whole globe of the earth, nay the whole universe may be consider'd as an unite. That term of unity is merely a fictitious denomination, which the mind may apply to any quantity of objects it collects together; nor can such unity any more exist alone than number can, as being in reality a true number. But the unity, which can exist alone, and whose existence is necessary to that of all number, is of another kind, and must be perfectly indivisible, and incapable of being resolved into any lesser unity' (*Treatise* 1.2.2).

[15] While Śrīgupta presumes that, for the foundationalist, true unity and true multiplicity/non-unity as defined here are mutually exclusive and exhaustive, an advocate of the possibility of infinitely divisible gunk would, of course, deny their exhaustiveness. In fact, as we'll see, Śrīgupta himself looks committed to an account on which things are indefinitely divisible. But that sort of picture is impermissible for his foundationalist opponents, with all the external world realists in his intellectual milieu being atomists of one kind or another. And the fact that his argument is 'opponent-relative' (in so far as he deduces unwanted consequences from his opponents' positions) helps explain why he does not bother to entertain any sort of priority monism or existence monism on which the whole world is a true unity. Even so, he would likely find the claim that a composite is ontologically independent and prior to its parts and nonetheless constituted by them, to be an incomprehensible foundationalist position.

Ontological Independence Principle*

> Whatever has ontological independence is either one simple or many simples.

Now, as these definitions of true unity/multiplicity make evident, this one-many predicate pair shares not only a conceptual priority relation but also a metaphysical priority relation: the existence of *many* presupposes the existence of some *ones*. As Śrīgupta notes, 'Given that [a multiplicity] consists of many unities, if one [viz. a unity] does not exist, the other [viz. a multiplicity] is also impossible'[16] (TAV *ad* k. 2b). But if a multiplicity depends for its existence on some unities as its building blocks, like a forest depends for its existence on some trees, then a true multiplicity is not a proper candidate for ontological independence after all. Thus, all Śrīgupta needs to do to rule out the existence of any ontologically independent beings is to rule out true unities. So, the argument reduces to an attack on mereological simples. Śrīgupta thus looks to be committed to the following:

Ontological Independence Principle**

> Whatever has ontological independence is simple.

While philosophers ranging from Aristotle to Leibniz and Ābhidhārmika to Mādhyamika Buddhists agree that any ontologically independent substances would have to be unitary in a strong sense,[17] this Ontological Independence Principle** will likely strike many as decidedly *too* strong. For instance, one might think that a composite can count as an ontologically independent being, and that a human organism is one such example of an ontologically self-sufficient but complex substance. A defender of composite substances may suggest that so long as a composite is grounded in a principle of unity that is intrinsic to it, then it may count as ontologically independent in the relevant sense. The intrinsically grounded unity of this kind of composite substance might then be contrasted with the accidental unity of a mere aggregate, such as a bag of groceries or a coin collection, whose principle of unity (a bag and a designating mind, respectively) is extrinsic to the constituents that are aggregated.

Śrīgupta would no doubt challenge the coherence of an ontologically independent composite. Nevertheless, his argument doesn't require his opponent to agree with him that ontological independence entails simplicity—only that they accept that any ontologically independent being either (i) has *some* intrinsic simple unifying principle or else (ii) bottoms out in simple fundamentalia, one of which a proponent of composite substances plausibly requires. Thus, all Śrīgupta needs for his argument to go through is the following:

Ontological Independence Principle***

> If *anything* is ontologically independent, then there exists *some* simple.

Working from this principle, once again the rejection of ontological independence reduces to a rejection of simples.

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[16] TAV *ad* k. 2b: *gcig mang po'i ngo bo yin pas de med na 'di yang mi srid pa . . .* (PD 3121, 102). Cf. CŚ 14.19 and MA 61.
[17] As Leibniz puts it, 'I hold this identical proposition, differentiated only by the emphasis, to be an axiom, namely, that what is not truly *one* being is not truly one *being* either. It has always been thought that "one" and "being" are reciprocal' (Letter to Arnauld, 30 April 1687, GP II 97/ PM 121). For a treatment of Leibniz in dialogue with Śrīgupta on unity and being, see Aitken and McDonough 2020.

Yet if there *are* no simples, and thus no ontologically independent entities, then all unity is extrinsically determined, accidental unity, and all being is dependent, derivative being. But if that's right, then there is nothing to ground a metaphysical foundationalist structure of reality. For surely, a metaphysical foundation, on which the existence of other things ultimately rests, must itself be ontologically self-sufficient and stand on its own two feet, so to speak. Let's get one more principle on the table to make perspicuous the implications of Śrīgupta's argument against simples for the structure of reality.

Fundamentality Principle

Ontological independence is a necessary condition for fundamentality (viz., for being a metaphysical foundation).

The Fundamentality Principle taken together with the Ontological Independence Principle*** (which said, *if anything is* ontologically independent, then there exists some simple) jointly entail that the existence of some simple is a necessary condition for the existence of any metaphysical foundation. Thus, if Śrīgupta's rejection of simples is successful, he not only precludes the possibility of any ontologically independent entities, but also the possibility of any metaphysical foundationalist structure of reality. The question of the existence of mental simples, then, is tied up with the question of the well-foundedness of our conscious experience. Now, in seeking to provide an account of the well-foundedness of conscious experience, one might think that its principle of unity lives in the material world. But Śrīgupta rules this out from the start, beginning his argument by rejecting material simples—and thus material foundations—by means of an attack on atomism inspired by a long history of such arguments in both the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra traditions. Śrīgupta agrees with Yogācārins that whatever is material is necessarily extended, whatever is extended is divisible, and whatever is divisible has proper parts. Since matter is indefinitely divisible, there are no material simples, and with this, Śrīgupta rules out a *material* principle of unity or a *material* foundation that could ground the phenomenal unity of our conscious experience.

At this point, we might think of someone like Leibniz who rejects material simples only to appeal to mind-like simple substances to ground the multitude of our perceptions.[18] Similarly, various Yogācārins argue that there is some fundamental mental entity to which the neither-one-nor-many argument does *not* apply. For instance, according to Ratnākaraśānti (c. 970–1030), that mental foundation is consciousness itself, or mere luminosity (*prakāśamātra*), while for Jñānaśrīmitra (c. 980–1050), it is a variegated representation that is non-distinct from consciousness (*citrādvaitākāra*).[19] Though, of course, Śrīgupta well predates these figures, it is views similar to

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[18] Where accepting the infinite dividedness of matter together with the simplicity of the mind drove Leibniz to argue for a form of immaterialist foundationalism, a similar pair of commitments motivated Descartes to endorse mind-body dualism, since whatever is simple cannot be the same in kind as whatever is infinitely divisible. As Descartes states, 'the body is by its very nature always divisible, while the mind is utterly indivisible. For when I consider the mind, or myself in so far as I am merely a thinking thing, I am unable to distinguish any parts within myself; I understand myself to be something quite single and complete' (CSM 59, AT VII 85–86).

[19] See, for instance, Tomlinson 2019 for an in-depth study of the debate between Jñānaśrīmitra and Ratnākaraśānti on the status of *ākāras*.

these that are targeted by Śrīgupta's attack on mental simples, and it is his argument to which these later philosophers will owe a response.

3. Four Questions about Consciousness and its Object

Śrīgupta's case against the well-foundedness of our conscious experience is motivated by a series of implicit questions about the nature of consciousness and its object. The picture of conscious experience that is taken up here is comprised of consciousness/ awareness (*jñāna*) and a mental representation (*ākāra*),[20] which are taken to jointly constitute a mental state. We can understand *jñāna* here to refer to the cognitive act of conscious awareness, which is functionally the agent and subject of all varieties of cognition and perception, since on most Buddhist theories of the mind the agent-act distinction is merely conceptual. *Ākāra* here refers to the intentional object of consciousness, and although I translate *ākāra* here as 'representation,' this does not imply the existence of any corresponding mind-independent object that is *represented*. Having already rejected real matter, the views that Śrīgupta targets at this point in the dialectic are idealist theories, all of which agree in rejecting mind-independent material objects.

Before attacking the possibility of any mental simples on this picture, it is first necessary to clarify the nature of representations and their relationship with consciousness. To this end, we can discern two implicit questions that structure the argument by delineating the range of possible views on consciousness and its object:

1. Ontological Question: *What is the ontological status of representations—real or unreal?*

This question motivates a dilemma on which representations are either real in the same way that consciousness is supposed to be or else they are unreal figments. With this, the field of Śrīgupta's opponents is divided into realists and anti-realists about mental representations. Next:

2. Identity Question: *What is the relation between consciousness and representations—are they distinct or non-distinct?*

This question fuels a further dilemma on which consciousness and its representation are either identical or distinct, that is, consciousness and its representation taken together are a single entity or else they are two distinct entities.

The dilemmas posed by the Ontological and Identity Questions yield four possible views on the relation between consciousness and representations:

Representational Realist Views

  i.   Consciousness is non-distinct from real representations.
 ii.   Consciousness is distinct from real representations.

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[20] *Ākāra* is a multivalent term in the history of Buddhist epistemology and philosophy of mind. See articles in Kellner and McClintock 2014 for recent scholarship on the variety of meanings of *ākāra* in different Indian Buddhist historical and philosophical contexts.

Representational Anti-realist Views

   iii. Consciousness is non-distinct from unreal representations.
   iv. Consciousness is distinct from unreal representations.

With this range of views on the mind and mental content in place, Śrīgupta is now in a position to run his One-or-many Dilemma on consciousness, which acts as the third implicit question driving the argument:

   3. Mereological Question: What is the mereological structure of consciousness—simple or complex?

One might think, in the spirit of Achilles-style arguments, that if the phenomenal unity of consciousness is to be well-founded, then it must have some principle of unity, and that principle of unity must be simple. After all, if a principle of unity were itself comprised of proper parts, then it would require a further principle of unity to unify its own parts. On the other hand, even if our conscious experience *were* a mere plurality of mental constituents, for it to be a well-founded multitude it must nonetheless bottom out in determinate, simple mental elements of one kind or another. So, a well-founded conscious experience might conform to two possible structures, both of which require the existence of *some* simple mental element. Given these two possibilities, we can reconstruct Śrīgupta's case against the well-foundedness of conscious experience as follows:

P1. If conscious experience is well-founded, consciousness is either simple or a composite of simples.

P2. Consciousness is not simple.

P3. Consciousness is not a composite of simples.

C. Therefore, conscious experience is not well-founded.

Śrīgupta's argument is thus a multitiered dilemma, the structure of which is depicted in Figure 1.
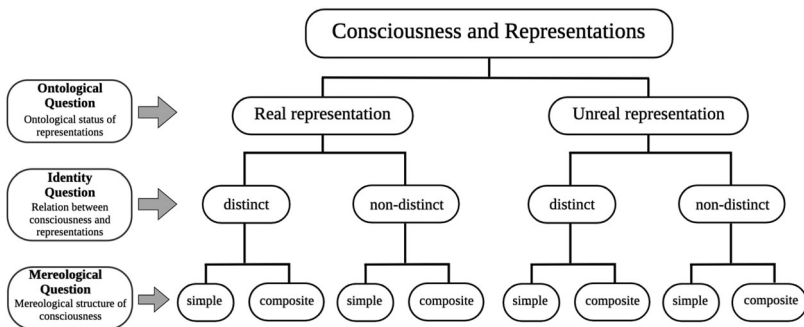
Figure 1: Range of views on consciousness and representations derived from the Ontological, Identity, and Mereological Questions

Śrīgupta rejects each alternative in the above flowchart, which is intended to exhaust the possibilities for how conscious experience could be well-founded. In a final move, Śrīgupta takes a step back and asks:

4. Intentionality Question: *Is an intentional structure compatible with simplicity?*

In other words, is it coherent for anything that has an intentional structure— whether that be consciousness, a mind, a subject, etc.—to be simple?

Unsurprisingly, Śrīgupta replies in the negative, arguing that an intentional structure entails complexity. As it turns out, then, an expression like 'simple subject' is a contradiction in terms.

4. Representational Realism vs. Anti-realism

The Ontological Question, which asks whether representations are real (*satya*) or unreal (*alīka*),[21] can be used to differentiate between two families of Yogācāra views, which I will refer to as representational realism and representational anti-realism. According to realists, since a representation is not a distinct entity from consciousness, it may lay claim to the same degree of reality as consciousness, while according to anti-realists, representations are unreal figments that are by-products of an erroneous cognitive process (*abhūtaparikalpa*).[22] These two accounts are historically associated with another pair of views on the status of representations: representational realism is frequently associated with the view that consciousness *necessarily* has a representation (*sākāra*), while representational anti-realism is commonly associated with the view that consciousness does *not* necessarily have a representation (*nirākāra*).[23] For instance, representational realists, such as Jñānaśrīmitra in his *Sākārasiddhiśāstra* and Ratnakīrti (eleventh century) in his *Citrādvaitaprakāśavāda,* maintain that the mental states of both ordinary and enlightened epistemic agents necessarily have intentional content in the form of (some kind of) representation. By contrast, representational anti-realists, such as Ratnākaraśānti, claim that, although ordinary mental states have representations as their objects, the enlightened mental state (*dharmakāya*)—whose cognition is necessarily veridical—*cannot*.[24]

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[21] There are two dichotomies that can be derived here from *satya* and *alīka* (which I've translated thus far as 'real' and 'unreal') as applied to representations, one epistemological and the other ontological: (i) the epistemological dichotomy concerns the veridicality of the representational content of a cognition, and (ii) the ontological dichotomy concerns whether or not a representation *itself* is real. These two sets of dichotomies are not unrelated. In explaining the representational anti-realist position, Śāntarakṣita (MA 52/MAV *ad* 52) comments that, on this view, representations appear due to an error caused by the ripening of karmic latencies (and are thus non-veridical in an epistemological sense), but in actual fact, they do not exist (and are thus unreal in an ontological sense), likened to the illusion conjured by a magician. For the present purposes, however, I will bracket the epistemological dichotomy, since it is the ontological dichotomy that drives Śrīgupta's argument.

[22] For helpful summaries of this positions see, for example, Seitetsu Moriyama 1984: 10–11 and Shinya Moriyama 2014: 340.

[23] In the context of realists about external objects, this same pair of terms, *sākāra* and *nirākāra*, signify respectively representationalist and direct realist/non-representationalist theories of perception. This same set of terms, however, is also used to refer to divisions of Yogācāra idealist theories on the status of representations, which is the topic of the present discussion. On the sākāra-nirākāra dispute in Yogācāra, see, for instance, Kajiyama 1965/1989.

[24] Tibetan doxographers commonly classified Yogācāra Sākāravādins position as 'proponents of real representations' (*Satyākāravādins, rnam pa bden par smra ba*) and Yogācāra Nirākāravādins as 'proponents

4.1 Rejecting of Representational Realists

Recall the range of realist and anti-realist views yielded by the Ontological and Identity Questions:

Representational Realist Views

i. Consciousness is non-distinct from real representations.
ii. Consciousness is distinct from real representations.

Representational Anti-realist Views

iii. Consciousness is non-distinct from unreal representations.
iv. Consciousness is distinct from unreal representations.

Since, as mentioned above, Śrīgupta takes the representational realists to be committed to the non-distinctness of consciousness and representations, view (ii)—that consciousness is *distinct* from real representations—is ruled out from the start, finding no known defenders in Śrīgupta's intellectual milieu. Śrīgupta thus begins by addressing view (i), the representational realist view on which consciousness is non-distinct from real representations.

Whoever maintains that consciousness is non-distinct from real representations, that is, that consciousness and representations jointly constitute one thing, will owe some account of how they comprise a strictly unified mental state, or conscious experience. It's easy to take for granted the simplicity of the *subject* of a conscious experience, which, phenomenologically speaking, certainly doesn't *seem* divisible into parts. This motivates other intuitions like the thought that a swarm of bees could not itself be conscious, nor could a collection of scattered neurons.[25] On the other hand, the *content* of our ordinary conscious experience seems obviously complex. In any given moment, I am presented with a diverse array of sensory stimuli of various modalities. This would seem to threaten the simplicity of my conscious experience when taken as a necessary constituent of it. How, then, is a representational realist to provide an account of a truly unified conscious experience?

As outlined above, the Mereological Question inquires into the mereological structure of consciousness, yielding two possible representational realist views:

i.a Consciousness, which is non-distinct from a real representation, is simple.

i.b Consciousness, which is non-distinct from a real representation, is complex.

The first alternative, that consciousness is simple, is exemplified by the so-called 'variegated nonduality' view (*citrādvaita*, *sna tshogs gnyis med pa*), while the second alternative, that consciousness is complex, is commonly referred to as the 'numerical

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of unreal representations' (*Alīkākāravādins, rnam pa brdzun par smra ba*), despite the fact that these latter labels are unattested in Indian Buddhist writings. These Tibetan doxographical categories can be understood as deriving from the Ontological Question, though this pair of labels is not attested in extant Indic doxographies, where we instead find the Sākāravāda-Nirākāravāda distinction. See Almogi 2010 for a helpful survey of these categorizations in late Indian Buddhist and early Tibetan doxographical writings.
[25] See Putnam 1967 on the swarm of bees intuition and Unger 1990 on the brain separation intuition. As noted above, Barnett (2008: 334) argues that the 'simplicity intuition,' which he describes as the 'naïve commitment to the principle that conscious beings must be simple,' is the 'source' of a host of other intuitions including these two, which have determined the debate space in contemporary philosophy of mind.

parity of consciousness and representations' view (*rnam shes grangs mnyam pa* or *bzung 'dzin grangs mnyam pa*).[26]

These two views map onto the two possible ways in which, according to Śrīgupta, the phenomenal unity of consciousness could be well-founded, namely: either consciousness itself is simple, serving as a principle of unity; or else conscious experience is a true multiplicity, a composite that bottoms out in simple mental elements, or parts. These two views, on which consciousness either has proper parts or does not, loosely track two prevailing families of views on how unified consciousness is structured in contemporary philosophy of mind: the 'experiential parts view' and the 'no experiential parts view'.[27] On the experiential parts view, unified consciousness is a composite that includes simpler experiences as its parts, while on the no experiential parts view, unified consciousness consists of a single, non-partite experience. Advocates of the experiential parts view will owe some explanation for how those parts are both individuated and at the same time 'tied together' into a genuine unity. Proponents of the no experiential part view, on the other hand, must explain just how a conscious experience might be simple and nonetheless include a simultaneous manifold of experiential objects.

4.1.1 Consciousness is not simple: Argument from the law of non-contradiction

Śrīgupta first addresses the variegated nonduality view—a version of the no experiential parts view—with an argument to which figures like Jñānaśrīmitra and Ratnakīrti will later owe a response.[28] This alternative that consciousness is simple despite the fact that its representational content is manifold is a rather intuitive view. Śrīgupta, however, argues that this picture is internally contradictory:

> Since representations that are non-distinct [from consciousness] are variegated,
> 　　the mind cannot be unitary. [TA 4ab]

> Consciousness could not be unitary because [on your view] it is non-distinct from its non-unitary representations. Otherwise, on account of having contradictory properties, [consciousness and its representation] would arise in two distinct loci.[29]

Śrīgupta's strategy here is to drive a wedge between consciousness and representations relying on a version of the law of non-contradiction, according to which contradictory properties cannot be predicated of the same subject (*viruddhadharmādhyāsa*). In this argument, he takes the property, variegated (*citra, sna tshogs*), to entail complexity. If consciousness and representations are indeed non-distinct—that is, strictly identical —then a pair of contradictory properties like simple and complex (that is, unitary and non-unitary) cannot coherently be predicable of this one mental entity.

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[26] The name 'numerical parity of awareness and representations view' is taken from Tibetan doxographies, and although it is not an attested doxographical label in Indic writings to my knowledge, the view it signifies is.

[27] Proponents of the experiential parts view include Lockwood 1989, 1994, Shoemaker 1996, 2003, Bayne and Chalmers 2003, Dainton 2005, and Bayne 2010, while advocates of the no experiential parts view include Searle 2000 and Tye 2003. For a helpful overview of this debate, see Brook and Raymont 2017. For a helpful overview of this debate, see Brook and Raymont 2017.

[28] For a treatment of Jñānaśrīmitra's response in his *Sākārasiddhiśāstra* to Śāntarakṣita's iteration of this argument, see Tomlinson 2022b.

[29] TA 4ab and TAV *ad* k. 4ab: *rnam pa tha dad ma yin rnams // sna tshogs phyir na sems gcig min // shes pa gcig pu ma yin te // rnam pa du ma dang tha mi dad pa'i phyir ro // gzhan du na chos 'gal bar gnas pa gnyis tha dad par 'gyur te /* (PD 3121, 102-3).

The defender of this view on which conscious experience might be understood as a variegated simple may object that a representation's being variegated does *not* entail that it is a partite composite; something might have multiple aspects despite lacking parts in the mereological sense. On this line of thinking, applying mereological analysis to matter may be all well and good, but predicating properties like divisibility and part-hood of immaterial, mental objects is not only unintuitive but perhaps also a kind of category mistake. Yet Śrīgupta would insist that the composite-part relation is 'topic-neutral,' meaning it applies to all kinds of things.[30] And anything that can be physically or even *conceptually* divided is partite.[31] So, we can say that x is conceptually divisible in the mereological sense just in case there are conceptually isolatable proper parts ys that compose x, such that x is the sum of the ys. And this claim that conceptual divisibility entails that something is partite should not seem so strange. After all, just because we might not be capable of *physically* dividing some minute bit of matter doesn't prevent us from identifying its parts (for example, its top, bottom, etc.). So too, Śrīgupta would argue, the proper parts of a mental representation of this page, for instance, may include a represented black mark here and a represented white patch there, etc.[32] And even a representation of something that may not seem *qualitatively* complex, like a uniform patch of blue, is nonetheless *phenomenally* extended, and is thus a composite in so far as it is conceptually divisible into phenomenal parts, for example, a left side, a right side, and so on.

So, if neither a representation nor the consciousness from which it is non-distinct can be simple, then that suggests that conscious experience is a composite, as claimed by the 'numerical parity of consciousness and representations' view, identified earlier as a version of the 'experiential parts view.'

4.1.2 Conscious experience is not a composite of simples: Argument against mental atomism

Śrīgupta argues that it is no more coherent to claim that conscious experience is a well-founded composite than it is to claim that consciousness is simple. According to the 'numerical parity of consciousness and representations' view, we have a picture on which each individual part of any variegated representation together with a corresponding part of consciousness comprise a single entity, and these units are the building blocks of our conscious experience. It seems right to say that my representation of the whistling kettle to which I may be attending and the simultaneous representation of my refrigerator in the periphery are distinct representational parts, and that different aspects of my consciousness may be indexed to these different constituents of my experience such that I am simultaneously in multiple conscious states. Nevertheless, this view owes an account of how these simultaneous manifold experiential parts

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[30] On issues concerning topic-neutrality in mereology, see Johnston 2005; Varzi 2010; Donnelly 2011; and Johansson 2015.

[31] It's important to keep in mind here that conceptual divisibility is not equivalent to conceptual distinction. Nor is conceptual divisibility inclusive of the conceptual distinguishability of a formal aspect, as in, for instance, the distinguishability of a mouth from its smile. Someone like Descartes would, of course, maintain that the mind and thought are conceptually distinct, but not conceptually divisible, in so far as thought is the principal attribute, or essence, of the mind. Neither Śrīgupta nor his primary interlocutors would agree with this account of the relation between the mind and thought. A common account of the defining characteristic of mind in Śrīgupta's intellectual milieu would instead be reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvedana*/*svasaṃvitti*).

[32] See, for instance, Leech 2016 on taking seriously (rather than just metaphorically) the mereological structure of Kantian representations.

are fused or subsumed into a unified whole. And before that can be addressed, Śrīgupta presses a more fundamental question that must be settled: if the parts of complex consciousness exist in a one-to-one relation with representational parts, then how do we individuate those parts to determine their precise number? What counts as *one* part—my kitchen? My kitchen counter? The smallest visible unit of my kitchen counter? And does my tactile experience of the kettle and my simultaneous visual experience of the kettle count as one or two representational parts?

Of course, Śrīgupta will say that if this complex consciousness view is to be well-founded, then there must be *simple* representational parts that serve as the basic building blocks of experience. His strategy in addressing this view parallels his argument against material simples, and it might be described as an argument against mental atomism:

> If, however, one contends that the mind is also [non-unitary], corresponding in number with its [manifold] representation, this is not the case:
>
> > Since consciousness that is a composite of many parts is untenable,
> >   it is impossible that this is correct. [TA 4cd]
>
> Were one to accept a simultaneous plurality of consciousnesses, then represented aspects—just like fundamental particles—could not constitute a composite, as has been repeatedly established.[33]

Śrīgupta does not spell out the application of his anti-atomist argument to the case of representations, but it might go something like this:[34] If a visual representation, for example, were constituted by simple representational parts—let's call them 'experiential particles'—then those particles would either be phenomenally extended or phenomenally unextended. Starting with the first horn of the dilemma, one might plausibly think that experiential particles must be phenomenally extended if they are to be perceptible at all. But whatever is extended—whether that be phenomenally or physically—is at least conceptually divisible into proper parts and therefore not simple.[35] Even a blue speck, the thought goes, has a right side and a left side. On the other hand, if experiential particles were phenomenally unextended, then they could never constitute an extended representation. Since unextended experiential particles could not have phenomenally discrete sides at which to conjoin with

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[33] TA 4cd and TAV *ad* k. 4cd: *gal te 'o na sems kyang rnam pa'i grangs bzhin no zhe na / ma yin te // shes pa du ma'i phyogs bsags pa // mi rung phyir na 'thad par dka' // cig car du shes pa du ma khas len na / rnam pa rnams rdul phran bzhin du bsags par mi 'gyur te / ji ltar rtag tu bsgrubs pa bzhin no /* (PD 3121, 103). Cf. MA 49 and PV 3.212.

[34] This is based on Śrīgupta's argument against material simples which he summarizes as follows: 'A fundamental particle could not be a [true] unity because an [extended] composite [of unextended particles] is impossible. This is because if they were unitary in nature, then adjoining [particles] would [absurdly] occupy a single location. Nor is it the case that fundamental particles possessed of some other kind of [extended] nature could adjoin, since in that case it would absurdly follow that [each fundamental particle] would be a manifold.' TAV *ad* k. 3ab: *de ltar rtsom byed med pa'i phyir // rdzas la sogs pa thams cad bsal // de lta bur rdul phran rang bzhin med pa nyid yin pas na de mngon sum dang / gzhan du brtsams pa yan lag can gyi rdzas dang de la brten pa dang / yon tan dang / las dang / spyi la sogs pa'ang ring du spangs pa kho na'o //* (PD 3121, 102).

[35] While Śrīgupta entertains the idea of an extended simple, he only does so for the purpose of demonstrating that it is incoherent. By his own lights, so long as there are conceptually isolatable subregions of x, no one of those subregions is identical with x, and thus x has distinct parts and is not simple. For contemporary arguments defending the coherence of extended simples, see Markosian 1998, 2004a, 2004b and McDaniel 2007. See McDaniel 2003 for an argument against extended simples.

neighbouring particles, phenomenal extension could never get up and going. There-fore, visual representations cannot be constituted by simple experiential particles. While this reconstruction turns on phenomenal *spatial* extension in visual represen-tations, we might suppose that an analogous analysis could be applied to represen-tations corresponding to the other sense modalities using phenomenal *temporal* extension.[36]

Given the metaphysical priority of true unities to a true multitude, if there are no simple experiential parts, neither can there be a true multitude of them. The parts of consciousness, then, cannot exist in numerical parity with representational parts, since there can be no determinate number of them to which consciousness might cor-respond.[37] Śrīgupta thus concludes that on representational realism, consciousness can neither be simple itself nor can it be a composite of simples, and therefore no viable account of a well-founded conscious experience is on offer.

4.2 Rejecting Representational Anti-realists

Śrīgupta next moves to the other horn of the dilemma posed by the Ontological Ques-tion, giving voice to a representational anti-realist opponent who suggests that if rep-resentations are *unreal*, then the mereological status of representations should not bear on that of *real* consciousness.[38] In other words, the fact that some figment appearing to consciousness is neither truly one nor truly many should not undermine the unity of consciousness itself.

Śrīgupta uses the dilemma posed by the Identity Question to argue that represen-tational anti-realists cannot even get a coherent account of their view up and running in order to apply the Mereological Question. As he sees it, the problem lies in the very fact that if one component of a mental state (as a single subject) does not exist at all, then that threatens the reality of the entire mental state. Representational anti-realists like Ratnākaraśānti try to get around this problem by proposing that consciousness and representations are distinct in one sense and non-distinct in another.

On Śrīgupta's dilemma, consciousness and its representation are either distinct or non-distinct in the strictest sense; that is, they are either *numerically* identical—viz. one and the same entity—or they are not numerically identical. Śrīgupta argues that neither the distinct nor the non-distinct lemma is available to the representational anti-realist by deducing unwanted consequences that follow from both alternatives. Śrīgupta and representational anti-realists agree that consciousness and representations could not be both distinct and non-distinct in precisely the same sense, for this would violate the law of non-contradiction. The question, then, is that of whether or not a

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[36] With respect to a representation that belonged purely to some other, non-visual modality—perhaps a sound, or a thought of an abstract object—then the argument could be run from a temporal perspective: there is not a temporally partless representation, since any moment of mind necessarily has a beginning, middle, and end, each of which themselves have a beginning, middle, and end, and so on *ad indefinitum*. See RĀ 1.68–70 and Prajñākaramati's BCAP ad k. 9.101 for arguments to this effect.

[37] If one insists that, like Berkeley (*Principles* in *Works* vol. 2, 98) and Hume (*Treatise* 1.2.4), there is a *minima sensibilia*, i.e., that our perceptual content *is* reducible to indivisible, unextended simple phenomenal parts, the Intentionality Question leads to a further argument that might be levelled against representational realism, which we will turn to in Section 4.

[38] "If it is accepted that these images are in fact unreal, then is it not the case that all this is well theorized?" TAV ad k. 5: *gal te 'di rnams bden pa ma yin pa nyid khas blangs na 'di thams cad legs par smras pa ma yin nam zhe na /* (PD 3121, 103); Cf. MA 52.

representational anti-realist can differentiate between *kinds* of identity in a way that renders their story coherent.

4.2.1 Consciousness and representations are not identical: Reductio ad absurdum from the law of non-contradiction

Addressing the first alternative, that consciousness and its unreal representation are identical, Śrīgupta says,

> If representations were simply unreal, then absurd consequences would follow.[39] [TA 5ab1]

> When there is an experience, then not only would these [representations] be simply unreal, but it follows that cognition too would have [this same unreal] nature . . .[40]

In other words, if consciousness and unreal representations were non-distinct, comprising one and the same entity, then since a single subject cannot instantiate contradictory properties, it follows that consciousness too would be unreal. This is, of course, an unwanted consequence for representational anti-realists.

But do representational anti-realists really endorse the numerical identity of consciousness and representations? As an exemplar of the representational anti-realist view, Ratnākaraśānti maintains that consciousness and unreal representations are non-distinct in so far as they both have the nature of luminosity,[41] that is, the 'lights on' feature that is the mark of conscious experience. But someone like Ratnā-karaśānti could only accept that consciousness and representations stand in a kind of contingent identity relation, like mud and the brick into which it has been baked. The mud and the brick can be said to share the same nature, despite the fact that the mud may persist (in a crumbled pile) once the brick has ceased. Likewise, if consciousness and its representation are contingently identical, they may share the same nature of luminosity, despite the fact that consciousness will persist at the state of enlightenment once representations have ceased. If this is indeed the picture that a representational anti-realist endorses, then Śrīgupta's sub-argument against this lemma goes through: so long as consciousness and a representation are purported to be numerically identical in some ordinary mental state at t_1, then a claim about the reality of a representation at t_1 will necessarily bear on the reality of consciousness at t_1.

But surely representational anti-realists have a weaker identity claim in mind. Ratnākaraśānti, for instance, argues that, despite their identical nature, consciousness and representations are distinct in so far as the existence of representations is successfully refuted by the neither-one-nor-many argument while that of consciousness is not. Whoever claims that consciousness and representations are distinct in one sense and non-distinct in another sense cannot coherently endorse their strict numerical identity, which demands sameness of all properties.

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[39] TA 5ab1: *rnam rnams mi bden nyid yin na / ha cang thal 'gyur /* (PD 3121, 103). Peking, Nar thang, and Gser bris ma editions read: *ha cang thal bar 'gyur*; Sde dge and Co ne editions read: *ha cang thal 'gyur ba.* TA 5 is not preserved unified or in consistent meter in any edition of the Tengyur. I emend the text in accordance with 'Gos lo tsā ba's *Rgyud bla ma'i 'grel bshad de kho na nyid rab tu gsal ba'i me long,* which cites the stanza as unified and in consistent meter (Mathes 2003: 181).
[40] TAV *ad* k. 5ab1: *gal te nyams su myong na 'di dag kyang mi bden pa nyid yin te / rtogs pa'i ngo bo yang der thal bar 'gyur te /* (PD 3121, 103). Cf. MA 53.
[41] On Ratnākaraśānti's line of reasoning on this point, see Shinya Moriyama 2011, 2014 and Tomlinson 2019, 2022a.

Perhaps, then, the representational anti-realist should say that representations and consciousness are not strictly numerically identical, but instead (partially) qualitatively identical, that is, the same type but not the same token. For instance, an existence claim about a candle flame in the kitchen need not bear on the existence of a bonfire on the beach, despite the fact that both fires share the same nature. Still, even if consciousness and representations share the feature of luminosity, they don't strictly look like the same kind of thing. Perhaps instead the representational anti-realist ought to appeal to identical material constitution, like a co-located statue and clay, claiming simply that consciousness and representations are composed of the same 'stuff,' namely, luminosity. Representational anti-realists might then distinguish consciousness and representations based on their relative identity, claiming that they are two distinct kinds of things that happen to be 'co-located' and constituted by the same stuff, each possessing different identity and persistence conditions. Still, the overlapping-objects view looks highly implausible in the case of consciousness and its representation.

To sum up, if a representational anti-realist implausibly claims that consciousness and representations are strictly numerically identical, then they are vulnerable to Śrī-gupta's argument from the law of non-contradiction. But if they instead endorse *any* account on which consciousness and representations are not numerically identical, such as those just discussed, this move will place them squarely in the distinct lemma camp, to which Śrīgupta next turns.

4.2.2 Consciousness and representations are not distinct: Reductio ad absurdum

If consciousness were distinct from its figment-like representations, Śrīgupta argues, then that would leave the representational anti-realist unable to explain why things appear to consciousness with the spatiotemporal determinacy and consistency that is the default of our ordinary experience. To provide such an explanation, he reasons, representations and consciousness—as two distinct things—must stand in some kind of relation with one another (the Relation Requirement), which will most plausibly be a causal relation. But only real things can stand in bona fide relations with other real things (the Real Relatum Requirement). A dragon can't cause a real forest fire, nor can it be partially qualitatively identical with some real winged animal.[42] A dragon can't claim identical material constitution with any real hunk of matter, nor can it stand in a subject-property relation with a real counterpart. Likewise, if representations are unreal, then suggesting that consciousness stands in *any* kind of relation with them is akin to proposing a bridge to nowhere. As Śrīgupta puts it:

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[42] One might worry that a hallucination of a dragon, for instance, can have very real effects (engendering fear, motivating us to act, etc.), despite the fact that it misrepresents reality to us, and thus an unreal thing *can* stand in a causal relation. But the proposed relatum in that case would be the hallucination *qua* a real mental event, as opposed to the content represented in the hallucination, which does not correspond to any real referent. Likewise, the subject of this argument is the representation *itself*—not the represented content. So just as a non-existent hallucination could not cause any fear or motivate any action, the thought goes, neither could any nonexistent representation stand in any relation with awareness. To borrow Descartes' formal reality vs. objective reality distinction, Śrīgupta takes the unreal representation view to mean that representations don't even have formal reality as ideas/thoughts, and so any discussion of objective reality is baseless.

> Furthermore, since unreal [representations] could not be related to [real] consciousness, appearances could not have [spatiotemporal] determinacy.[43]

If, on the other hand, the defender of the distinct lemma insists that representations *do* satisfy the Relation Requirement and stand in some kind of relation with consciousness, then given the Real Relatum Requirement, they will be forced to contradict their original claim that representations are unreal.[44] Śrīgupta thus concludes with a proof by contradiction as follows:

> Were one to accept [representations] as related [to consciousness] in virtue of their appearing determinately, then [representations] would in fact be real, since otherwise it would be impossible [for them] to stand in either an identity relation (*tādātmya*) or a causal relation (*tadutpatti*) [with consciousness].[45]

In sum, the representational anti-realist must either accept that unreal representations are unable to bear any relation to consciousness and thus cannot explain our experience or else they are forced to admit that representations are real and contradict their own position.

With this, Śrīgupta concludes that neither the representational realist nor the anti-realist is equipped to provide a coherent account on which our conscious experience is well-founded.

5. The Intentionality Question: Rejecting of Non-dual Awareness

At this point, Śrīgupta supposes that an opponent may object that this whole exercise of analysing the relation between consciousness and its content as subjective and objective aspects (*grāhakākāra* and *grāhyākāra*) of a mental state is entirely misguided since the apparent subject-object dualism of consciousness and its intentional object is merely an error; in actual fact, the mind is just one simple entity: *nondual awareness* (*advayajñāna*).[46] In response to this line of thought, he takes up the subject of nondual awareness as the final possible candidate for a mental simple.

Śrīgupta argues that the very concept of nondual awareness is internally contradictory. In brief, if nondual awareness were truly *nondual*, then it could not meet the definition of awareness, and if it were truly *aware*, then it could not meet the definition of nonduality. This line of reasoning presupposes that awareness, or consciousness, is intentional by its very nature. To be *aware* is necessarily and by definition to be aware *of* something—let's call this the 'Intentionality Demand on Awareness.' Moreover, he

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[43] TAV *ad* k. 5b2c: *gzhan yang brdzun pa rnams dang shes par ma 'brel ba'i phyir snang ba nges pa dang ldan par mi 'gyur ro //* (PD 3121, 103).

[44] Notice that the unwanted consequence in the second phase of the argument against the distinct lemma—that representations would be real—is in fact view (ii) from our list of four possible Yogācāra views on the mind and mental, which was dismissed at the outset as implausible.

[45] TAV *ad* k. 5d: *nges par snang ba'i dbang gis 'brel par khas len na ni bden pa kho nar 'gyur te / gzhan du na de'i bdag nyid dang de las byung ba mi srid pa'i phyir ro //* (PD 3121, 103). Cf. MA 57–58 and MA 60cd.

[46] As Kamalaśīla puts the objection: 'Well, although in the impure state, consciousness simply consists in unreal variegated appearance, in the completely pure state, there is simply the unitary nature [of consciousness] that has a nondual character. Thus, your reason [that consciousness is neither-one-nor-many] is unestablished due to being doubtful (*saṃdigdhāsiddha*).' MAP *ad* k. 60: *'o na yongs su ma dag pa'i gnas skabs na shes pa na tshogs su snang ba brdzun pa kho na yin du chug kyang yongs su dag pa'i gnas skabs na ni rang bzhin gcig pa gnyis su med pa'i ngo bo kho nar 'gyur te /* (Ichigō 1985: 159); =AAA (Wogihara, 1932–1935: 633.24-6): *tarhi apariśuddhāvasthāyāṃ citrāvabhāsam alīkam eva jñānam, pariśuddhāvasthāyāṃ bhrāntivigamād advayarūpam evaikasvabhāvaṃ bhaviṣyatīti.*

takes nonduality to necessitate simplicity—let's call this the 'Simplicity Demand on Nonduality.'

Śrīgupta begins by asking rhetorically, 'But if [awareness] were free from duality, then how could it be *aware*?'[47] That is, if a mental state were simple, and thus were not conceptually divisible into subjective and objective parts, or aspects, then how could it meet the Intentionality Demand on Awareness? Awareness would have nothing to be aware *of*. As Śrīgupta sees it, awareness in the absence of an object of awareness is nonsensical, much like knowing in the absence of an object of knowledge. Suppose I claim, 'I know.' And you then ask me, 'You know what?' And I reply, 'Nothing.' You'd surely think I've lost the plot. Knowing nothing cannot rightly be called 'knowing' at all. The same goes for awareness, according to Śrīgupta.[48] Yet if a mental state necessarily includes both subjective consciousness and an intentional object (or subjective and objective parts), then, failing the Simplicity Demand, it could not count as 'nondual' after all. In short, since the Intentionality Demand on Awareness is incompatible with the Simplicity Demand on Nonduality, 'nondual awareness' turns out to be a contradiction in terms.

One response to this argument would be to take issue with the definition of consciousness as necessarily intentional. In this case, one would want an account of just what contentless, or objectless consciousness looks like and by virtue of what standards it can still be counted as conscious. Another route is to maintain that nondual awareness does meet the Intentionality Demand because, owing to its intrinsic property of reflexivity, it effectively takes *itself* as its intentional object. But Śrīgupta points out that recourse to the reflexivity of consciousness merely shifts the problem. If consciousness takes itself as an object, then having smuggled in objective and subjective features, it would once again fail the Simplicity Demand. Śrīgupta summarizes his argument against the coherence of non-dual awareness, saying,

> Due to lacking a cognitive object, [nondual awareness] could not cognize anything else.
> Due to being nondual, [awareness] could not cognize itself.
> Upon examination, it cannot be correct [that awareness is nondual].
> Tell me, what other option is there?[49]

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[47] TAV *ad* k. 6ab1: *'on te gnyis las nges par grol ba yin na / de ni ji ltar na shes pa yin /* (PD 3121, 104). Cf. MA 55 and 59.

[48] In fact, verbs commonly translated as 'to be aware', 'to be conscious', 'to cognize', and 'to know' all derive from the same Sanskrit verbal root, *jñā*. And with his insistence on the Intentionality Demand, Śrīgupta appeals to a long tradition of textbook definitions of consciousness among a diversity of Buddhist schools of thought. Vasubandhu defines *vijñāna*, which Śrīgupta uses interchangeably with *jñāna*, as follows: 'What is consciousness? It is the cognition of an object' PSk: *vijñānaṃ katamat / ālambanaṃ vijñaptiḥ //* 112 //. In his PSkV, Sthiramati explains that here, '"Object" refers to [any] object of the mind or of a mental activity, including any of the six kinds, from matter to mental objects. The "cognition" of that [object] refers to apprehending, being aware of, and understanding'; *ālambanaṃ cittacaittaviṣayaḥ / sa punaḥ ṣaḍ-prakāraḥ / rūpaṃ yāvad dharmāḥ / tasya vijñaptir grahaṇam avabodhaḥ pratipattir ity arthaḥ /; de yang rnam par rig pa ni 'dzin pa dang / rtog pa dang khong du chud pa zhes bya ba'i tha tshig go /'* (Kramer 2013: 89). Similarly, Vasubandhu defines the *vijñānaskandha* as follows: '"Consciousness is individual cognition" [AKK 1.16c]. It is said here that the consciousness aggregate is the understanding that consists in the cognition of individual objects' AKB *ad* 1.16a: *vijñānam prativijñaptiḥ / [1.16a] viṣayaṃ viṣayaṃ prati vijñaptir upalabdhir vijñānaskandha ity ucyate /* (Pradhan 1967: 11.6-7).

[49] TAV AŚ 3: *rig bya med phyir gzhan mi rig // gnyis su med phyir bdag nyid min // brtags na yang dag nyid mi 'gyur // rnam pa gzhan gang yin pa smros //* (PD 3121, 104); I follow the alternate, preferable Tibetan translation of TAV AŚ 3abc as cited in *Vipaśyanotpādanopāya*, a work of unknown authorship: *shes bya med phyir gzhan rig min // gnyis su med phyir bdag rig min // gal te brtags na yang dag min //* (PD 3611, 1462).

With the rejection of the coherence, and thus the fundamental reality, of nondual awareness, Śrīgupta takes himself to have ruled out the final prospect for a mental simple. There is, then, no simple subject of experience, and the phenomenal unity of our conscious experience is an unfounded illusion.

6. A Preliminary Sketch of the Positive Account of the Mind

As we've seen, Śrīgupta, in effect, runs a reductio on his foundationalist opponents, provisionally accepting their own definitions of *true* unity and *true* non-unity/multiplicity—as a simple and something that bottoms out in simples—but argues that nothing can satisfy them, and, therefore, that nothing has independent being. Given that he takes simplicity to be convertible with fundamentality, we might also loosely paraphrase the central destructive dilemma as saying: *if something belongs to a foundationalist structure of reality, then it either is a foundation itself or it terminates in some foundation(s).* Having argued that nothing satisfies either disjunct in the consequent, he concludes that a foundationalist structure of reality is not possible.

But if the mind is not a well-founded true unity, then what *is* its mereological structure? After all, Śrīgupta doesn't set out to prove that the mind does not exist at all, but rather to show that it lacks any truly unitary and ontologically independent foundation. So, given that Buddhist philosophers like Śrīgupta understand mereological dependence to be a species of ontological dependence, we might rephrase this question to ask: with metaphysical foundationalism off the table, what kind of metaphysical dependence structure *does* the mind conform to?[50]

The positive account begins to take shape from Śrīgupta's influential threefold criterion for conventional reality (*saṃvṛtisatya*),[51] according to which whatever there is—whether material or immaterial—exists 'conventionally', and whatever exists conventionally (1) is satisfactory only when not analysed (*avicāraramaṇīya* or *avicāramanohara*), (2) is interdependently originated (*pratītyasamutpanna*), and (3) has the capacity for causal, or pragmatic efficacy (*arthakriyāśakti* or *arthakriyāsamartha*).[52] In other words, (1) any object—including the mind—satisfies our ordinary

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[50] One may think that if Śrīgupta accepts that any dependent being exists *at all*, then, given his neither-one-nor-many argument, he violates the law of excluded middle himself. After all, surely the following also holds [Dependent Being One-or-Many Dilemma]: *If anything has dependent being, then it is either a unity or a non-unity.* But he would deny that, in affirming dependent beings while insisting that nothing is truly one or many, he violates the law of excluded middle. That's because, so long as we understand unity and non-unity/multiplicity according to the foundationalist definitions outlined above, Śrīgupta would likely regard the Dependent Being One-or-Many dilemma as involving a kind of category mistake, akin to saying, 'if *x* is a unit of time, then it is either blue or non-blue.' In other words, he may understand this dilemma as equivalent to the ill-formed proposition: 'if *x* does *not* belong to a foundationalist structure of reality, then it is either a foundation or it terminates in some foundation(s).' So, rather than denying that unity and non-unity/multiplicity as defined by the foundationalist are jointly exhaustive, he would instead take issue with the framework to which the definitions belong. It is also important to note in this regard that Mādhyamikas recognize two different notions of dependent being, one that belongs to the foundationalist framework and which they reject, and one that qualifies conventionally real things and which they affirm: the first is a kind of extrinsic being (*parabhāva*) that is founded in some thing(s) that has intrinsic being (*svabhāva*), or ontological independence (see, e.g., MMK 15.3), whereas the second is something that is merely dependently originated (*pratītyasamutpanna*) and which is not well-founded.

[51] Subsequent endorsements of this threefold criterion include, for instance, Jñānagarbha's SDV 8, 12, 21; Śāntarakṣita's MA 64; Kamalaśīla's MAP *ad* 64; Haribhadra's AAA (Wogihara 1932–1935: 594.18–25); the c. eighth century Bhāviveka's MAS 9–11 and MRP 1.4; and Atiśa's SDA 3.

[52] '[1] Satisfactory only when not analysed, [2] [things] arise from [causes] similar to themselves. [3] Those things enact their respective forms of causal efficacy.' TA 11: *ma brtags gcig pu nyams dga' ste // de 'dra las*

notions of independent existence and unity only when not subjected to analysis of its final nature, like that involved in the neither-one-nor-many argument. Instead, (2) the ⟨unity⟩ and ⟨being⟩ of any object we pick out is designated/conceived in dependence (*prajñaptir upādāya*) upon some proper parts, with each of those parts existing in precisely the same manner, and so on, ad indefinitum. The picture is, then, one of non-well-founded aggregates—or conventional unities and beings—all the way down. Nevertheless (3) anything that earns its keep as a conventionally real unity must be able to carry out its function in accordance with our pragmatic expectations.

So, we've said that on this picture, mental entities are conventional unities and beings designated in dependence upon their parts. But in what sense could the unity of the mind itself be *mentally* designated without falling into a vicious regress or vicious circularity? Take, for instance, one moment of mind m_1 at t_1. Is the unity of m_1 at t_1 self-designated by a reflexive act of consciousness or is it designated by a subsequent moment of mind, m_2 at t_2? The self-designation alternative looks to be viciously circular, and what's more, a reflexive dependence relation would be tantamount to a kind of ontological independence. Yet, retrospective designation would seem to result in a vicious regress, compounded by the problem that the present moment of mind could never claim conventional unity in the present but must somehow 'wait in the wings' until the subsequent moment of mind comes along. But lurking in this line of questioning is the presupposition of the kind of determinacy that belongs to the very foundationalist framework that Śrīgupta aims to reject. On his view, we can't speak of one moment of mind prior to its designated unity *at all*. Instead, whatever we attend to earns its conventional unity in the very moment and by virtue of its designation as such.

This account of aggregates all the way down is not an unfamiliar position when it comes to the material world, but what would a 'gunky mind' look like? In Śrīgupta's argument against mental atomism, we find the suggestion that a representation is indefinitely divisible into 'experiential parts' and that the same would follow for the consciousness with which it is connected. But importantly, each mental entity is not actually infinitely divided. In other words, the dependence structure is not mind-independently infinite. Rather, the claim is simply that were one to analyse any given mental entity into parts, one would never arrive at a limit. Nor is this a strictly unidirectional, or asymmetrical, dependence structure. This story is complicated by the fact that consciousness and its content also share a symmetrical, or mutual, ontological dependence relation of a sort. Not only is a representation dependent on consciousness for its mentally designated, conventional unity and

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byung de bzhin no // dngos po de dag de lta bu'i // don bya de dang de byed do // (PD 3121, 105). The TAV continues: 'Thus, regarding these things that appear both externally and internally, which cannot withstand the pressure of analysis and which are produced from causes similar to themselves, based on which conventions (**vyavahāra*) then come into being—if one has not examined their causal efficacy, one will approach satisfaction here and there.' *de lta bas na phyi rol dang nang na snang ba'i dngos po brtag pa'i spungs mi bzod pa rang dang mthun pa'i rgyus bskyed pa 'di dag ni gang las tha snyad 'dir 'gyur ba don bya ba ma brtags na nyams dga' ba nyid de dang der nye bar byed do //* (PD 3121, 105-6). As Eckel (2008: 25) points out, Śrīgupta's TAV appears to be the earliest extant text in which we find this threefold characterization of conventional reality, with the first criterion as listed above possibly adapted from Candrakīrti (e.g., MAv 6.35), the second inherited from Nāgārjuna, and the third a repurposing of Dharmakīrti's criterion for being ultimately real in PV 3.3. On these three criteria, see also Eckel 1987: 137-38 n. 104. On the relation between Śrīgupta's and Śāntarakṣita's accounts of conventional reality, see Aitken 2021b and 2022.

being, but, as Śrīgupta insists, consciousness itself cannot be *what it is* in the absence of something to be conscious *of*. This anti-foundationalist metaphysical dependence structure, then, conforms neither to a straightforward infinitist structure on which things stand only in asymmetrical, unending dependence chains, nor to a kind of coherentism, on which everything is dependent upon everything else. Instead, any object we take up for analysis—including the mind and mental content—can be found to stand in both symmetrical dependence loops as well as dependence chains of indefinite length.[53]

Concluding Questions

Śrīgupta's case against mental simples taken together with this positive picture of a non-standard metaphysical dependence structure of consciousness raise several questions with which all theorists of the mind must wrestle. For instance, precisely what kind of relation *should* we think that the mind and mental content share?[54] What kind of ontological status does mental content enjoy relative to the mind? And what of the mind itself?[55] And what of the mind itself? Why shouldn't we think that the complexity of mental content bears on the mereological status of the mind itself? Would the reflexivity of consciousness really entail complexity? Would the intentional structure of consciousness undermine its unity, and if not, why not?

But perhaps the most important question that Śrīgupta's argument raises is: why *do* we so commonly take the unity of consciousness for granted, and are we justified in doing so? As Śrīgupta's argument aims to show, the intuition that the mind is an indivisible unity is closely related to the metaphysical foundationalist intuition. When it comes to that intuition too, much more ink has been spilled describing *how* foundationalism might be true than arguing *that* it must be true. Śrīgupta's neither-one-nor-many argument cautions that one ought not to take either of these intuitions for granted.

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

AAA *Abhisamayālaṃkārāloka* (Haribhadra). Wogihara (1932–1935).

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[53] For a detailed account of the metaphysical dependence structure to which I argue that Mādhyamikas like Śrīgupta are committed, see Aitken 2021a.

[54] This question might be cast as inquiring into the relationship between the formal reality and the objective reality of thought for Descartes, as a prime example in the Western philosophical tradition. Indeed, it is on this very question that the well-known Arnauld-Malebranche debate on Cartesian ideas centred. For an overview of this debate, see Moreau 2000.

[55] One may look to Hume's *Treatise* (1.4.5–6) for a prime example in the Western philosophical tradition of an inquiry into this line of questioning.

AKB *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (Vasubandhu). Pradhan (1967).

AKK *Abhidharmakośa* (Vasubandhu). Pradhan (1967).

AŚ *antaraśloka* (transitional stanza).

AT *Oeuvres de Descartes* (Descartes). Adam and Tannery (1964–1974).

BCAP *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā* (Prajñākaramati). Vaidya (1960).

CŚ *Catuḥśatakaśāstra* (Āryadeva). Lang (1986).

CSM *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, Descartes (1641/1984).

GP *Die Philosophische Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*. Leibniz (1960). (Reference is to volume and page.)

JNĀ *Jñānaśrīmitranibandhāvali* (Jñānaśrīmitra). Thakur (1959).

MA *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* (Śāntarakṣita). Ichigō (1989).

MAP *Madhyamakālaṃkārapañjikā* (Kamalaśīla). Ichigō (1985).

MAS *Madhyamakārthasaṃgraha* (the eighth century Bhāviveka). PD 3084, vol. 58, 851–53.

Mav *Madhyamakāvatāra* (Candrakīrti). Chapter 6 in Li (2015).

MAV *Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti* (Śāntarakṣita). Ichigō (1985).

MMK *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Nāgārjuna). Ye (2011).

MRP *Madhyamakaratnapradīpa* (the eighth century Bhāviveka). PD 3081, vol. 57, 1487–1567.

MU *Madhyamakopadeśa* (Atiśa). PD 3148, vol. 64, 283–86.

PD Bstan 'gyur Dpe bsdur ma. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008. (Reference is to text number and page number.)

PM *Leibniz: Philosophical Writings*. Leibniz (1973).

PSk *Pañcaskandhaka* (Vasubandhu). Li and Steinkellner (2008).

PSkV *Pañcaskandhakavibhāṣā* (Sthiramati). Kramer (2013).

PV *Pramāṇavārttika* (Dharmakīrti). Miyasaka (1971/1972).

PVA *Pramāṇavārttikālaṃkāra* (Prajñākaragupta). Sāṅkṛtyāyana (1953).

RĀ *Ratnāvalī* (Nāgārjuna). Hahn (1982).

ŚS *Śūnyatāsaptati* (Nāgārjuna). Lindtner (1982, 34–69).

SDA *Satyadvayāvatāra* (Atiśa). Lindtner (1981).

SDV *Satyadvayavibhaṅga* (Jñānagarbha). Eckel (1987).

SSŚ *Sākārasiddhiśāstra* (Jñānaśrīmitra). Thakur (1959).

SVB *Sugatamatavibhaṅgabhāṣya* (Jitāri). PD 3129, vol. 63, 887–1034.

TA *Tattvāvatāra* (Śrīgupta). See TAV.

TAV *Tattvāvatāravṛtti* (Śrīgupta). PD 3121, vol. 63, 101–12; Aitken (Forthcoming).

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