Introduction (1): Phya pa's theory of mind in the context of Western philosophy

1. Introduction

Epistemology, the science that investigates the nature and scope of knowledge, has a long history within Indian intellectual culture. In the first millennium of the Common Era Buddhist philosophers in India debated extensively among themselves, and clashed repeatedly with thinkers from other philosophical traditions in India, about the nature of logical reasoning and knowledge.[1] The most central topic in these debates was an investigation of the various means or instruments by which knowledge can be obtained (Skt. *pramāṇa*, Tib. *tshad ma*). Although Buddhist intellectuals in the first half of the first millennium CE were familiar with the study of epistemology, it is the sixth-century Buddhist scholar Dignāga (c. 480–540) who is traditionally regarded as the father of Buddhist epistemology. The seven core works on logic and epistemology composed by Dignāga's successor, Dharmakīrti (c. 600–660), formed the foundation for centuries and centuries of further developments by Buddhist philosophers in both India and Tibet.[2]

The author of the text translated herein, Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge ("cha pa chö kyi seng gé," 1109–1169, hereafter: "Phya pa"), writing about five hundred years after Dharmakīrti, provides us with an important snapshot of early Tibetan Buddhist epistemology. Though Phya pa is clearly indebted to the views of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, there are a great many ways in which Phya pa's theories subtly (or not) depart from what is attested in the works of those two Indian authors. Phya pa's epistemological program shows evidence of being influenced by later Indian and Tibetan exegeses on Dharmakīrti's works. In particular, there is ample evidence of Phya pa's familiarity with the epistemological contributions

---

[1] Among the principal opponents of the Buddhists, one finds both thinkers associated with the Nyāya School and those from the Mīmāṃsā School, who embodied the Brahmanical orthodoxy of the time. On the historical, social and religious background of these disputes and the resulting developments in logic and epistemology, see Eltschinger 2014.

[2] Among the most important texts here are Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and its *vṛtti* (PS and PSV) and Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* (PV) and *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (PVin).

by his Tibetan predecessor, rNgog Blo ldan shes rab ("ngok lo den shé rap," 1059–1109, hereafter: "rNgog Lo"). rNgog Lo is famed in Tibet both for translating numerous Indian epistemological treatises and for composing his own exegeses on those Indian treatises. In particular, his exegesis of Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniścaya*—which was the most influential work by Dharmakīrti in twelfth-century Tibet, and the most influential on Phya pa—provides evidence of the influence that Indian commentators subsequent to Dharmakīrti had on rNgog Lo's philosophical thought. Among those commentators, one of the greatest influences comes from the eighth-century Buddhist scholar Dharmottara (c. 740–800), whose commentary on Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniścaya* rNgog Lo also translated. Although Phya pa frequently disagrees with the positions taken by (and definitions given by) Dharmottara, he nevertheless makes regular use of a number of theoretical distinctions that were drawn by Dharmottara back in the eighth century. Additional Indian interpreters of Dharmakīrti whose works were translated and commented upon by rNgog Lo likewise appear to have been influential on Phya pa's interpretation of Dharmakīrti and on the constitution of his epistemological program.

While the largest portion of Phya pa's most important text, the *Tshad ma yid kyi mun sel* (hereafter: *Mun sel*), is dedicated to detailing the nature of knowledge episodes (*pramāṇa*, *tshad ma*)[3], the first chapter of his text aims to provide a general introduction to, and elucidation of, the nature of cognition and the objects of cognition.[4] In this way, though the text is,

---

[3] Readers should note that on the preceding page the Sanskrit term *pramāṇa* was translated as "means or instruments by which knowledge can be obtained." Within the Buddhist tradition of epistemology, however, the term *pramāṇa* is regularly used to refer to the episodes of cognition that result from these means (Skt. *pramāṇaphala*). We have chosen to follow B.K. Matilal (see, in particular, Matilal 1986: 100–106) in speaking of these particular episodes of cognition as "knowledge episodes." (These mental episodes are also frequently called "valid cognitions.") Though knowledge is widely represented as a *dispositional state* within Western philosophical contexts, and this stands in contrast to the emphasis on *episodic cognitions* within Indian and Tibetan epistemological contexts, this difference alone should not prevent us from extending the term "knowledge" to those instances of cognition that are *pramāṇa*/*pramāṇaphala*. On the other hand, all readers must be attentive to the fact that how these two traditions theorize about knowledge and frame their claims about knowledge are undoubtedly distinct. For more on this, see §4.2 below.

[4] For more on the structure of the *Mun sel*, see III, 5 (topical outline).

overall, certainly a work in epistemology, the first chapter is best under-
stood as offering a cursory account of Phya pa's *philosophy of mind*. The
reader is provided with a classificatory breakdown (two different ones in
fact) of cognitive episodes; an account is provided of the different opera-
tions or activities that occur within particular episodes of cognition; and
most importantly, Phya pa devotes great attention to elucidating the vari-
ous ways in which these episodes of cognition are related to objects—to
external objects, but also to anything else that could be deemed the object
of a cognitive episode. This attention to matters such as the constituent
elements of perceptual experience, irrespective of whether those experi-
ences are sufficient for knowledge—let alone his attention to the elements
of *erroneous* cognitions—shows that Phya pa was interested in formulat-
ing a general account of the nature of cognition, and was not merely
providing this information for instrumental purposes (such as for the pur-
pose of supporting his subsequent theory of knowledge).[5]

Phya pa's theory of cognition is constructed upon the basic premise
that all episodes of cognition involve a relation between a cognitive sub-
ject (*yul can*) or awareness (*blo*) and a cognitive object (*yul*). His first
chapter contains two distinct presentations of the kinds of items that can
be regarded as cognitive objects. First, Phya pa describes the objects of
cognition from the perspective of appearing, by appealing to *apprehended
objects* (*gzung yul*). With respect to apprehended objects there are three
main forms of awareness, one for each of the three types of apprehended
objects.[6] The second half of the first chapter articulates a seven-fold divi-
sion of awareness that is founded upon an appeal not just to apprehended
objects, but also to *intentional objects* (*zhen yul*) and *engaged objects*
(*'jug yul*).[7] Throughout both of these presentations, the consistent idea is
that a cognitive subject (*yul can*) bears some relation to a cognitive object
(*yul*), and that the different features of this relation (and features of the
cognitive object) determine how to classify the form of awareness. In this
way, the cognitive object is viewed as, explanatorily, more primitive than
the episode of awareness to which it is related.

---

[5] For a brief background on Buddhist theories of the mind, see Dreyfus&Thomp-
son 2007.

[6] See *Mun sel* 11 and the corresponding Table A in VI.

[7] See *Mun sel* 12 and following.

Much of Phya pa's first chapter, and especially the portions translated in this volume, relate to explicating the nature and structure of these cognitive episodes and their objects. Though he does occasionally take up what might be called "excursions" on other topics—most of which have not been translated as a part of this present work[8]—roughly one-third of the translation pertains to Phya pa's presentation of cognition insofar as it is related to apprehended objects, and two-thirds is connected to his more elaborate account of cognition that brings together the roles played by apprehended objects, intentional objects, and engaged objects.

In the pages that follow, my central goal is to highlight a number of the most pertinent features of Phya pa's account of cognition—features that are hard at work in the portions of the text translated here—and then to draw out the specifically philosophical implications that flow from Phya pa's account. The aim is to put Phya pa's views in conversation with contemporary philosophical discussions of perceptual experience, conception, and knowledge. In doing this, the reader will see not just how rigorous and sophisticated Phya pa's philosophical perspective is, but also that the philosophical themes with which he is engaging in this text, the *Mun sel*, are of deep and lasting relevance. Within this introduction, the aim is not to demonstrate how Phya pa's account informs or is informed by (let alone in opposition to) that of his philosophical predecessors and successors in India and Tibet. Those historical connections will be emphasized in the second part of the introduction (see I.2).

2. Perceptual experience

2.1 Non-conceptual non-erroneous cognition and the definition of perception

After his introductory verses, the very first topic addressed by Phya pa is a three-fold division of awareness—a division based on the objects apprehended by those episodes of awareness. Those three types of awareness are:[9]

---

[8] Many of these "excursions" have been, or will be separately addressed in other recent or future publications. See VII, Appendix 1.

[9] These three forms of awareness are briefly described in *Mun sel* 11(b), and then delineated more fully in sections 112.1, 112.2, and 112.3, respectively.

- conceptual cognition
- non-conceptual non-erroneous cognition[10]
- non-conceptual erroneous cognition

The second of these three categories of awareness is comprised of, as will be explained below, all episodes of perception (*mngon sum*). The most fundamental feature of non-conceptual non-erroneous cognitions is that they take real particulars (*don rang gi mtshan nyid*) as their apprehended objects. As Phya pa tells us, "That which takes as its apprehended object a real particular…these are perceptions, which are non-conceptual" (*Mun sel* 11).

Phya pa goes on, in his third chapter, to define perception as "being non-erroneous with respect to the apprehended state of affairs" (*Mun sel* 231.12) and reminds the reader that in such cases what appears to awareness are real entities (*dngos po*). Notably, although Phya pa believes that perceptual awareness must be non-conceptual, this feature is not an explicit part of his preferred definition of perception. Rather, he contends that its being non-conceptual is something that is implicitly entailed by his definition.

There are, it is important to point out, non-conceptual episodes of awareness that are *not* instances of perception, and these are the instances of non-conceptual erroneous cognition. Speaking loosely, these non-conceptual erroneous cognitions are ones that contemporary philosophers

---

[10] The expression "non-erroneous" (*ma 'khrul (ba)*) is used frequently by Phya pa and others in the Tibetan epistemological tradition. Though there are various applications of the expression, with respect to non-conceptual cognitions, to say that a cognition is non-erroneous can be roughly approximated to contemporary philosophical uses of the term "veridical," as when distinguishing *veridical experiences* from *non-veridical* (or falsidical) *experiences*. See, for example, Siegel 2010: 35–42. In particular, note that the category of non-conceptual non-erroneous cognition roughly aligns with what Siegel would term *strongly veridical* perceptual experiences.

Having said this, it is important to point out that our use of the term "veridical" in this translation—for which, one should read n. 5 in the translation (II)—carries a sense and extension quite different from how the term is described above, and different from how it is standardly employed in contemporary analytic philosophy of mind.

of mind would label as instances of *illusion* or *hallucination*.[11] In one respect, these sorts of cognitions are held to be erroneous inasmuch as there is no correspondence with the state of affairs to be cognized.[12] More specifically, however, Phya pa contends that non-conceptual erroneous cognitions are episodes of awareness in which the apprehended object is not a real entity, but is instead something that is superimposed (*sgro btags pa*) by the mind.[13]

Bringing the above items together, Phya pa takes there to be a very fundamental difference between perception, on the one hand, and illusion/hallucination on the other. In episodes of perception one has an awareness of a real entity—i.e., a real particular is the apprehended object

---

[11] It is now standard in contemporary analytic philosophy of mind to distinguish three forms of "perceptual experience": (veridical) perception, illusion, and hallucination. In this way, illusion and hallucination stand in contrast to veridical perception, as the former are both experiences that are in some way defective (see Fish 2009 and Siegel 2010: 34–36). On this contemporary model, "perceptual experience" is seen as broader than Phya pa's notion of perception (*mngon sum*), which, by assumption, must be veridical. (All of this sets aside questions of possible 'veridical illusions,' for which see Siegel 2010: 39).

While contemporary philosophers clearly distinguish instances of illusion (wherein one's sense faculties receive input from an external stimulus, but are somehow or other misled by that stimulus) from instances of hallucination (where there is no external sense stimulus at all), it is not entirely clear that any such careful distinction is made by Phya pa. The examples that are given for non-conceptual erroneous cognitions include both those that would be classified by contemporary analytic philosophers as illusions and those classified as hallucinations. Phya pa does mention, however, non-conceptual erroneous cognitions that are (a) sense cognitions and those that are (b) mental cognitions (see *Mun sel* 11(b)iii)—a distinction that loosely maps onto the contrast between illusions and hallucinations. In the former case, (a), a frequently cited example is that of a (white) shell appearing as yellow. For the latter, (b), Phya pa typically appeals to experiences within a dream (e.g., *Mun sel* 11(a)iii).

Additionally, while the erroneous cognitions that Phya pa is concerned with here are one and all non-conceptual, no such explicit restriction is found in contemporary philosophical discussions of perceptual experience. As such, were we to be precise, instead of speaking of illusion and hallucination, Phya pa's category of non-conceptual erroneous cognition includes only *non-conceptual* episodes of illusion and hallucination.

[12] See *Mun sel* 112.111.2.

[13] See, in particular, *Mun sel* 112.3 and 123.411.

of perception. In episodes of non-conceptual erroneous cognition, on the other hand, the subject does not experience a real entity at all. Phya pa states, "it takes as its object something that is merely superimposed" (*Mun sel* 112.3). As will be explained more fully below, this is a critically important point of contrast between these two forms of non-conceptual awareness.

One final introductory point needs to be made about Phya pa's basic understanding of perception. On his account, apprehended objects are experienced directly. In the particular case of perception, this means that what appears is a real entity itself, and not a mere "representation" or "aspect" (*rnam pa*). As Phya pa puts the point, "We assert that external states of affairs are cognized without representations."[14] In this way, Phya pa's account departs from the more commonly espoused representationalist portrayals of perceptual experience among his Indian Buddhist predecessors. Be that as it may, it is important to emphasize the point that, in perception, real entities are apprehended directly—on Phya pa's view, it is the real, external particulars themselves that appear in episodes of perception.

2.2 Philosophical implications

Phya pa's portrayal of non-conceptual experience—including both instances of perception and instances of illusion/hallucination—is remarkable in a number of ways. First and foremost, there is no question that Phya pa is endorsing a direct realist account of perception. In fact, so as to distinguish it from the contemporary *intentionalist* (or representationalist) theory of perception (to be discussed below), which is held by some of its proponents to be a direct realist theory as well, it would be more appropriate to classify Phya pa's theory of perception as a version of *naïve realism*.[15] The term "naïve" may sound disparaging, but Phya

---

[14] *Mun sel* 8a7: *kho bo cag rnam pa med par phyi rol gyi don rig par smra bas.*

[15] Contemporary uses of the terms "direct realism" and "representationalism" in the analytic tradition of philosophy may seem a bit incongruent with earlier uses of those terms within the empiricist tradition of philosophy. In fact, readers whose primary understanding of direct realism and representationalism derives from traditional uses of these terms might find the claim that a theory (of perception) can be both direct realist and representationalist to be inherently contradictory.

The most widely accepted version of perception within contemporary philosophy of mind is intentionalism. That theory claims that the *objects* of (veridical)

pa's philosophical account, at least with respect to the nature of apprehended objects and the cognitions apprehending them, is indeed intended to match up with our ordinary, conventional understanding of reality. Of apprehended objects, he tells us that, "Conventionally, these objects exist in a way that accords with worldly consensus" (*Mun sel* 111.D).

Part and parcel with Phya pa's naïve realism is his contention that, in perception, real (and paradigmatically external) entities appear directly, without the presence of representations. This is of particular relevance, because, by explicitly rejecting a representational theory of perception, he is running counter to the positions most commonly held by his Buddhist philosophical predecessors in India. In fact, Phya pa's account has some affinities with the accounts of perceptual experience typically associated with the Indian Buddhist school of the Vaibhāṣika, which is rather dissimilar from what we find endorsed by Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, and later Indian Buddhist epistemologists—let alone many other Tibetan thinkers.[16] Merely noting that Phya pa's theory of perception runs counter to Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, however, does not go far enough in exposing just how profoundly distinctive Phya pa's views of perception actually were.

In addition to denying that, in perception, objects are experienced by way of representations, Phya pa also contends, as described above, that perception—i.e., non-conceptual non-erroneous cognition—is to be characterized as any cognition that "takes as its apprehended object a real

---

perception are ordinary, mind-independent objects, and that those objects are indeed perceived directly, i.e., without any intermediary entities. (This stands in contrast to traditional sense-datum theories, in which external objects are only perceived indirectly by way of sense-data or sense impressions, etc.) Yet, intentionalist theories of perception additionally maintain that perceptual experience essentially involves a process of representation, wherein something is *represented as F* (for one (or many) feature(s) *F*). These representations are associated with the (representational/intentional) *contents* of perceptual experience. The intentionalist theory of perception maintains that the phenomenology of a perceptual experience is determined by its representational content. Yet, at the same time, this theory of perception can affirm that the *object* experienced (in veridical perception) is an ordinary, mind-independent object. For this reason, intentionalism can still be considered a direct realist theory of perception.

For a fuller account of contemporary intentionalism, see Crane 2001a or (the more abbreviated) Crane 2009.

[16] For more on this, see Hugon 2016c and forthcoming (1).

particular." This, again, is in contrast to episodes of non-conceptual erroneous cognition—illusions and hallucinations—which apprehend mere superimpositions. This may seem like an obvious difference between perception and (for example) hallucination, but it carries with it incredibly rich consequences.

By characterizing perception as any experience that takes as its apprehended object a real particular, Phya pa is committed to the view that perceptual cognition is, in part, *constituted by* the particular entity that appears. To say that it is constituted by the particular entity that appears implies each of the following:

a)   In episodes of perception, the mind (or awareness) stands in a specific *relation* to the real entity that is its apprehended object.

b)   As such, had the perceived entity been different, it necessarily would have been a different episode of awareness. For example, since perception is constituted by the particular entity that appears, the perception of a particular fire on the top of a mountain pass and the perception of a particular fire at the base of a mountain pass would have to be distinct episodes of awareness, as they are perceptions of materially distinct entities.

c)   Likewise, with respect to a perception of a real fire and a hallucination as of a fire, even if those experiences were phenomenally identical—that is, identical in terms of how they appear—they would still, by definition, be fundamentally different kinds of experience. The former would be classified as an episode of perception and the latter as an episode of non-conceptual erroneous cognition. Though they might appear as identical, and thus could be introspectively indistinguishable, that would not make them the same episode of experience, for they are constituted by fundamentally different apprehended objects.

This claim that non-conceptual experiences are, in part, constituted by their appearing objects—where, importantly, the appearing objects of perception are real (often external) particulars—is far from the standard view in contemporary philosophy. The most widely supported theories of perception in analytic philosophy, at present, are various versions of *intentionalism*.[17] Intentionalism, like Phya pa's view, is compatible with a

---

[17] Excellent resources for learning more about intentionalism are Siegel 2010, Byrne 2001, and Pautz 2010.

direct realist theory of perception, but intentionalism is fundamentally at odds with Phya pa's account of perceptual experience in many other respects. While contemporary intentionalists could agree that what is actually perceived is the (external) object itself, and so it could be a direct realist theory of perception, they would explicitly deny that the experience is "constituted by" the perceived object. Rather, intentionalists maintain that episodes of perception possess some sort of *intentional content*—or representational content—and that it is these contents that are principally determinative of what kind of experience a person is having. On this view, the mind (or, to modernize the theory, the visual sense organs together with the brain) represents the perceived object in a certain way. When the representational content of two experiences is the same, we could say, according to the intentionalist, that the experiences themselves are the same. This is the case not just for two token perceptions, but also for instances of illusion or hallucination. As long as the mind, in an occurrence of illusion, represents things just as it would in a case of perception, it would be essentially the same experience as one of perception. To summarize, the intentionalist will maintain:

a*) Perception does not entail a constitutive relation between the mind and the *object* perceived.

b*) Two different perceived objects—for example, objects that are spatially discrete—could, nonetheless, give rise to exactly the same perceptual experience. This is due to the fact that the mind could represent those two (numerically distinct) objects in exactly the same ways.

c*) Likewise, the perception of a real fire and the hallucination as of a fire, could, if they are phenomenally indistinguishable, be treated as one and the same experience. Provided that the representational content is the same in the two cases, they would essentially be one and the same experience.

There are, no doubt, additional differences between Phya pa's theory of perception and contemporary intentionalist versions of perception, but these three differences suffice to show that Phya pa does not endorse an intentionalist version of direct realism. Nor, as was mentioned earlier, does Phya pa support a traditional, representationalist version of indirect realism. Rather, he defends a naïve realist theory of perception, and, in

particular, his account of perceptual experience is one that in current philosophical parlance would be labeled a version of *disjunctivism*.[18]

Though there are several different versions of disjunctivism that are adopted by contemporary philosophers of mind, one core, shared thesis of disjunctivism is the claim that perception and hallucination are two different kinds of experience. They are claimed to share neither the same object nor have any other factor in common.[19] When things appear to be a certain way—such as when there appears to be a fire—the disjunctivist will maintain that this appearance is consistent with it *either* being a perception of a fire *or* being a hallucination of a fire. Even if the two experiences were indistinguishable, they would still be, according to the disjunctivist, fundamentally different in kind.

This is precisely the kind of account we find endorsed by Phya pa. Perception (i.e., non-conceptual *non-erroneous* cognition) and illusion/hallucination (i.e., non-conceptual *erroneous* cognition) are, according to Phya pa, two entirely different types of awareness. Moreover, they are different insofar as two very different kinds of objects appear to the mind and are apprehended in these two types of non-conceptual cognition—real entities are apprehended in perception whereas superimposed items are apprehended in illusion/hallucination.

2.3 Manifest and non-manifest features

Given that Phya pa's theory is in accord with the approach of present-day disjunctivists, and is not in conformity with intentionalist theories of perceptual experience, one might ask whether there is anything about the nature of experience that Phya pa would have a difficult time accounting for in his framework. Indeed, there are numerous debates playing out between contemporary philosophers of mind where it appears that intentionalism has the upper hand over naïve realism.[20] Take, for example, the question of what properties of an object are represented in a given experience. Because intentionalists maintain that perception is accompanied by representational content, proponents of this view can and do argue

---

[18] For more information on disjunctivism, see, e.g., Brewer 2011, Haddock&Macpherson 2008, and Fish 2005.

[19] This is what is called the "no common factor" portrayal of disjunctivism, or a rejection of the "highest common factor" conception of experience. For this view, see Hinton 1973.

[20] For illustrations of these debates see, e.g., Byrne 2001, Tye 2007 and Smith 2010.

that when an object is perceived some of the object's properties are represented and others are not. For example, when I visually perceive a cow (at close distance, under good lighting conditions, etc.), its color and shape may very well be represented to me, but perhaps more abstract properties such as the age of the cow are not represented. Though the cow might, let us assume, be black and white and twelve years old, my mind could represent the cow as black and white without representing it as twelve years old. As such, the intentionalist can maintain that, from perception alone, I can gain knowledge of the cow's color without gaining knowledge of its age.

Since Phya pa does not accept the idea that perception involves the representation of an object's properties or features, he must make sense of examples similar to the above in a different manner. Perception is not, for Phya pa, a matter of the mind possessing intentional or representational content. Instead, as was explained above, it is simply the mind bearing a constitutive relation with a real particular. So how is Phya pa to accommodate the common-sense intuition that, in perception, a person could be aware of a cow's color without being aware of the cow's age? Phya pa does not, in this context, speak of cows or their colors. He does, however, specifically address this sort of concern, and does so by discussing the (visual) perception of blue (or a blue object). He contends that a person can have perceptual knowledge of blue and yet not have perceptual knowledge of the blue entity's impermanence, even though the object is both blue and impermanent (see, in particular, *Mun sel* 112.2).[21]

Let us look into Phya pa's claims more fully. As mentioned, Phya pa proclaims that, in perception, a real (and paradigmatically external) entity itself is apprehended by the mind—and this object is apprehended directly,

---

[21] The notion of "impermanence" is particularly significant within the Buddhist context. It is a standard principle of Buddhist thought that all real entities are impermanent—that is, that they do not endure for more than a single moment. Instead, what ordinary humans experience as enduring entities are actually just continua of impermanent entities that are, moment by moment, destroyed and (re)created. Nevertheless, though real entities have the property of impermanence, ordinary humans do not have perceptual knowledge of this impermanence; we experience real entities as though they endure through time. Given this framework, Phya pa maintains that the property of 'impermanence' is not perceptually known (or even perceptually knowable) by ordinary human beings. Instead, knowledge of impermanence is established through inferential cognition. For more on this, see VII, Appendix 2.7[b].

without the presence of representations. Moreover, Phya pa endorses Dharmakīrti's traditional view that when an object appears, *all* the properties or features of the object appear (*Mun sel* 112.22 and VII, Appendix 1 (EX4)). As such, when I perceive something blue, not only does the blue appear, so too, all the other properties of the object must appear—including what might be considered "higher level" properties such as the properties of 'being impermanent' and 'being produced.' Yet, Phya pa upholds the view that I can have perceptual knowledge of blue without having perceptual knowledge of impermanence.[22] But since he rejects the intentionalist's avenue of proclaiming some properties to be represented while others are not represented, Phya pa must provide an alternative explanation for how this difference with respect to knowledge is possible.

The explanation that Phya pa gives is to affirm that some features of the perceived object are "manifest" (*rnam ldan*) and others "non-manifest" (*rnam med*). The color and shape of a given object are examples of manifest features, whereas the property of impermanence is a non-manifest feature.[23] Though the Tibetan terms that Phya pa applies here—*rnam ldan* and *rnam med*—are linked to the term used for a representation (*rnam pa*), the context suggests that they are being used quite differently. Whereas representations are understood as subjective features that apply to one's cognitive awareness itself, the categories "manifest feature" and "non-manifest feature" apply to the *object* that is perceived. Phya pa's view is that, in perception, all the properties or features of an object appear, but only some of those features of the object are manifest ones.

In light of this distinction between manifest and non-manifest features, Phya pa contends that an ordinary person can gain *perceptual knowledge* of only the manifest features of an object. The non-manifest features still *appear*, and they are, in fact, still *perceived*, but the perception of these non-manifest features necessarily falls short of what is required for perceptual knowledge. Instead, with respect to these non-manifest features, a person is said to have an episode of *non-ascertaining perception* (on which more will be said below).

---

[22] Phya pa's position here stands in contrast to what is maintained by his Sakya critic, Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan ("sa kya pandita kün ga gyel tsen," 1182–1251). For more on this, see I.2, 4.1 and 4.4.

[23] See *Mun sel* 112.22 and 112.23.

Phya pa has, thus, fashioned an account of perceptual experience that is able to accommodate the idea that a person can have perceptual knowledge of some features of a perceived object, without having knowledge of other features of the same object, even though it is the real entity itself that is directly perceived, and even though all the features of the object are said to appear to awareness in an episode of perceptual experience. As just mentioned, he accomplishes this by appealing to the distinction between the manifest and non-manifest features of an object—the former of which can be perceptually known, but the latter of which cannot (they are only known through inferential cognition). Yet, Phya pa's explanation importantly does not appeal to the idea of representational content, the existence of which he explicitly rejects.

2.4 Three types of perception

Now that these philosophical comparisons have been articulated, let us return to describing a few other notable features of Phya pa's account of perceptual experience. As mentioned above, Phya pa maintains that not all episodes of perception are instances of perceptual *knowledge*. Though perception is, by definition, a non-erroneous form of experience, Phya pa still believes that some of these perceptual experiences fall short of what is required for knowledge. In particular, as was noted above, when a person perceives a blue object, all the properties of the object are said to appear, and all the properties are perceived, but non-manifest features such as the object's impermanence are not known (or even knowable) via perception. Instead, the perceptual experience one has of the object's impermanence is, according to Phya pa, classified as an instance of non-ascertaining perception.

In general, Phya pa affirms that there are three different forms of perception. There is perceptual knowledge itself (*mngon sum tshad ma*), non-ascertaining perception (*snang la ma nges pa*), and post-knowledge cognition (*bcad pa'i yul can*).[24] Again, all three of these are forms of perception, and are thus non-erroneous, but only the first kind is an instance of knowledge. It is notable that Phya pa affirms the view that these three forms of perception exist not just for the paradigmatic cases of perceiving external objects (which include all the episodes we have termed "transitive perception") but also for instances of reflexive awareness

---

[24] As will be explained below, post-knowledge cognition actually comes in several different forms, only one subtype of which is perceptual. See *Mun sel* 123.2.

(*rang rig*) (*Mun sel* 122.31). Episodes of non-ascertaining perception are not cases of knowledge because, Phya pa tells us, those episodes are compatible with the presence of superimpositions (*sgro 'dogs*)—whereas perceptual knowledge is incompatible with the presence of superimpositions. Episodes of post-knowledge cognition, by contrast, are incompatible with superimpositions, but these episodes fall short of knowledge because, by definition, they do not provide novel information.[25] That is, the object that is perceived in an episode of perceptual post-knowledge cognition is one that has already been known. As such, it is maintained that the post-knowledge cognition is not an instance of knowledge.

Phya pa states that there are two subtypes of non-ascertaining perception. One subtype involves the presence of non-manifest features, like that of impermanence, described above. Because a real particular is apprehended by awareness, all the properties of the object are said to appear to awareness. Yet, Phya pa contends, with respect to non-manifest features such as the object's impermanence, the perceiver merely has an episode of non-ascertaining perception. The other subtype of non-ascertaining perception explicitly mentioned by Phya pa involves the presence of manifest features, such as an object's shape or color. Just because these features are manifest does not necessarily guarantee that a person perceiving an object will have perceptual knowledge with respect to all the manifest features. In particular, there can be cases where manifest features appear to awareness, but they fail to be "ascertained" due to a lack of attention or focus.[26] Phya pa describes this subtype of non-ascertaining perceptions as those in which there is "an appearance but no ascertainment due to not focusing one's mind on the object" (*Mun sel* 123.11). As an

---

[25] Though Phya pa often identifies instances of post-knowledge cognition as cases where the "object is already known" (see *Mun sel* 122.122.22 and 123.21), we must note the importance of Phya pa's account in *Mun sel* 212.22. There he argues that post-knowledge cognition fails to be an episode of knowledge *not* because its object is already known, but for reasons having to do with its incapacity to eliminate superimpositions. This matter is taken up in much more detail in I.2, 3.2.2.

[26] The existence of such cases provides us with further evidence that the labels "manifest" (*rnam ldan*) and "non-manifest" (*rnam med*), as applied by Phya pa, are used to identify an *objective* difference in the properties/features in question. Whether a feature is manifest or not is determined by what kind of feature it is, and does not depend on subjective matters such as the cognizer's attention, the quality of one's vision, etc.

example, he briefly describes a case where blue appears but is not ascertained due to the perceiver in question being fully absorbed in his own thoughts.[27]

In addition to the possibility of non-ascertaining perception, a cognitive agent can have a perceptual experience and yet fail to have knowledge due to the cognitive episode not being novel with regard to the object that is cognized. These are cases of post-knowledge cognition. Phya pa speaks of three different kinds of post-knowledge cognition, two of which are conceptual and one of which is non-conceptual. It is only this last, non-conceptual variety that is a species of perception. This kind of post-knowledge cognition is given the specific designation *perceptual post-knowledge cognition* (*bcad pa'i yul can gyi mngon sum*). This form of perception includes, for instance, an episode of awareness apprehending blue that follows immediately after a cognitive agent has just gained perceptual knowledge of blue. In such a case, since the cognizer already possesses perceptual knowledge of blue, the non-conceptual experience that follows this instance of knowledge is one for which superimpositions have already been eliminated. To see more clearly why this episode of awareness should not be considered an episode of knowledge, we must examine Phya pa's account of what it is to be an instance of knowledge. Before turning to the question of knowledge, however, let us first clarify Phya pa's understanding of conceptual cognitions.

3. Conceptual cognition

3.1 The features of conceptual cognition

In contrast to perceptual cognitions, which apprehend real particulars, conceptual cognitions have as their apprehended objects mere concepts (*don spyi*).[28] Though Phya pa does not explicitly define the term "conceptual cognition" (*rtog pa*) within his *Mun sel*, it is clear that he understands

---

[27] An additional note in the manuscript points to a third subcategory of non-ascertaining perception—one that is explicitly addressed in numerous later texts by Phya pa's successors. For more on this, see n. 51 within the translation (II) as well as IV, 1(b).

[28] The role of concepts (Tib. *don spyi*) in the Tibetan epistemological tradition, especially in the century following Phya pa—including a defense of the translation "concepts" for the term *don spyi*—is taken up in Stoltz 2006.

that class of cognitive episodes to be precisely those that have concepts as their apprehended objects.[29] A much more extensive discussion of the definition of conceptual cognition is provided within Phya pa's commentary on Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (hereafter: *'Od zer*). There, he seeks to harmonize two ostensibly different ways of characterizing conceptual cognition. On the one hand, one could formalize the connection between conceptual cognition and concepts by defining this form of cognition in such a way that it explicitly references the appearance of concepts. Phya pa does this when he defines conceptual cognition as "that for which concepts appear" (*'Od zer* 46b5). This way of understanding conceptuality, however, may appear not to match up so perfectly with the standard portrayals of conception offered by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. Dharmakīrti's primary definition of conceptual cognition within his *Pramāṇaviniścaya* is expressed in a manner that highlights the connection between conceptuality and language. Understood in that way, a conceptual cognition is one that is "capable of being mixed with speech."[30] Though Phya pa discusses both of these ways of understanding conceptuality in his *'Od zer*, and argues that they are mutually inclusive, it is evident that he is inclined to promote the first characterization that

---

[29] Though not explicitly put forward as a definition of conceptual cognition, Phya pa does describe conceptual cognition in terms of apprehending concepts in the midst of his discussion of the definition of perception within the *Mun sel* (42a1 ff). There he states (42a3): *tha snyad pa'i shes pa la grags pa'i don spyi 'dzin pa rtog pa yin la /.* "Apprehending a concept" is also the definition of conceptual cognition ascribed to Phya pa by later scholars such as Chu mig pa Seng ge dpal ("chu mik pa seng gé pel," c. 1200–1270) (*rNam rgyal* A7a7; B9a2).

[30] PVin$_{Skt}$ 1 7,7: *abhilāpasaṃsargayogyapratibhāsā pratītiḥ kalpanā*; PVin$_{Tib}$ 1 40,8: *rtog pa ni brjod pa dang 'drer rung ba snang ba'i shes pa.* In his *'Od zer*, Phya pa cites Dharmakīrti's definition as: *rjod pa dang 'dres su rung pa snang pa'i shes pa* (46a5), whereas the citation in rNgog Lo's *dKa' gnas* (98,7) attests that rNgog Lo's translation read "*dang 'drer rung*." This difference of phrasing, however, does not entail any difference of understanding. Phya pa also uses the phrasing "*'drer rung*," for instance in *'Od zer* 46b6 (*rjod pa dang 'drer rung snang pa rtog pa'i mtshan nyid yin du chug kyang*). An extensive discussion of the linguistic difficulties associated with interpreting these definitions, including the possibility or likelihood that Tibetan philosophers misinterpreted the original Dharmakīrtian definitions, can be found in Tillemans 1999: 238–240, n. 22.

focuses on the link between conceptual cognition and its apprehended objects—namely, concepts.[31]

Let us call this Phya pa's *mentalistic depiction* of conceptual cognition; and let us label the various definitions by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti instances of a *linguistic depiction* of conceptual cognition. To be clear, when properly understood, Phya pa believes these two depictions coincide with one another. Yet, within his *Mun sel*, and especially within the opening chapter of that text, Phya pa favors the mentalistic depiction of conceptual cognition: the essential feature of conceptual awareness is that it entertains concepts as its apprehended object. The presence or absence of concepts is not, however, the only difference between conceptual and non-conceptual cognition. Phya pa maintains that these two forms of cognition differ in the kinds of operations or activities that occur within these episodes. Non-conceptual cognitions consist in just a single operation—the operation of appearing. Conceptual episodes of cognition, on the other hand, standardly involve not just the operation of appearing, but also the additional operations of directing and of excluding others.[32] Phya pa does not, unfortunately, provide within his *Mun sel* a full descriptive or explanatory account of exactly how these three mental operations function. His focus, instead, is on how these operations can be used as a means for providing nuanced assessments of whether specific forms of cognition are or are not to be considered mistaken cognitions (*log shes*).[33]

Even without full descriptions, however, it is possible to offer some partial clarification about what Phya pa believes is involved in each of these three operations. For starters, the operation of appearing consists in, not surprisingly, there being an appearance of something to awareness. This operation is present in all episodes of cognition, and this carries with it the implication that all cognitive episodes possess an appearing object—which is precisely what Phya pa calls the *apprehended object* (*gzung yul*).

---

[31] A basis for Phya pa's characterization of conceptual cognition in terms of apprehending concepts can indeed be found within Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* (PV$_{Skt}$ 3.287ab). There Dharmakīrti links conceptuality to the apprehension of a verbal object (Skt. *śabdārtha*, Tib. *sgra don*), which, for Phya pa, is effectively the same as a concept (*don spyi*). See Tillemans 1999: 280, n. 27.

[32] See *Mun sel* 112.111.111 and following.

[33] Cf. IV, 4 and VI, Table D.

The operation of directing (one's mind), by contrast, can only occur within conceptual cognitions because this operation, Phya pa makes it clear to his readers, necessarily involves the use of concepts. When concepts arise in one's mind, we ordinarily take those concepts to *represent* things in the external world. Expressed in one way, we might say that when, in conceptual cognition, a concept appears to one's mind, there is a *directing of the mind toward* something external. Expressed differently, we could say that in these cases a concept is *conceived as* having the nature of something external. So, for example, when a person infers that there is fire on a mountain pass because there is smoke, what appears to one's mind is the concept of fire. But at the same time, that inferential cognition is directed upon, or about, a real, external fire. This happens "When the arising concept of 'fire' is conceived to have the nature of an external fire…" (*Mun sel* 112.111.111.2). Now, of course, though the concept of 'fire' is taken to represent a real fire on a mountain pass, the concept of 'fire' is not a real fire. And so, in this respect, conceptual cognitions of this sort are said to be instances of mistaken cognition (*log shes*), for such cognitions conflate items (viz., the concept and the real thing) that are distinct.

Not all episodes of conceptual cognition operate in the above manner, however, for some instances of conceptual cognition involve the directing of the mind toward concepts themselves. That is, Phya pa believes that we can and do reflect on, and draw inferences about, the nature of concepts themselves.[34] When this occurs, concepts are conceived to have the nature of concepts, and so this operation of directing is not mistaken at all.[35]

That said, Phya pa does *not* actually support the view that the operation of directing (one's mind) is an *essential* feature of conceptual cognition, for he briefly mentions the possibility of conceptual cognitions that "are limited to the appearing of concepts" without the operation of directing one's mind or the operation of excluding others (see *Mun sel* 112.12). Examples of this sort involve certain meditational states, wherein one could entertain concepts, but not have those concepts be taken as being about, or representing, anything at all. Admittedly, Phya

---

[34] Note, for example, inference of form [f] in VII, Appendix 2, 7.

[35] One can note, however, that within the surrounding discussion Phya pa does not carefully distinguish "directing one's mind" from "directing one's mind externally."

pa spends little time discussing this kind of case, and he mentions it only once in the *Mun sel*.[36]

The final cognitive operation, the operation of excluding others, is dependent on the parallel operation of directing the mind. When a conceptual cognition is directed upon some content, the cognition simultaneously excludes one from directing the mind upon some other content. For example, were I to conceive of something as 'blue,' such a cognition would exclude my conceiving of it as 'non-blue.' The operation of excluding others is important for Phya pa because this operation plays a critical role in determining which conceptual cognitions are instances of knowledge (*tshad ma*). The other two operations—the operations of appearing and of directing the mind—by contrast, do not play a definitive role in establishing specific cognitions as being or not being episodes of knowledge. Cognitions—including conceptual cognitions—can be "mistaken" with respect to the operation of appearing and the operation of directing and yet still be instances of knowledge. But this is not so in the case of the operation of excluding others. If, with respect to this last operation, the cognition is "mistaken," then the cognitive episode cannot be an instance of knowledge. Instead, it would be a case of a mistaken determination (*log par nges pa*).

That said, being unmistaken with respect to the operation of excluding others is not a sufficient condition for being an instance of knowledge. According to Phya pa, there are conceptual cognitions that not only have veridical objects, but also involve directing of the mind toward 'that which is the case' and excluding 'that which is not the case' (*Mun sel* 121.12), but which are not episodes of knowledge. For example, Phya pa maintains that some forms of cognition "have the criterion of countering superimpositions, in general" but do not counter superimpositions in a way that suffices for the definitional criterion for knowledge (*Mun sel* 212.22). That is due to the fact that they do not meet knowledge criterion K3 that will be described more fully in §4 below.

3.2 Philosophical implications

Taking a step back, let us think about some of the more important philosophical consequences of Phya pa's theory of conception. First and foremost, we cannot overstate the significance of Phya pa's invocation of

---

[36] This form of cognition is part of the ten-fold typology that Phya pa offers within his *'Od zer* (28b2–3), see VI, Table G.

a *mentalistic* account of conceptual cognition. Again, by this, what is meant is that, in his *Mun sel*, Phya pa explicitly links conceptual cognition (*rtog pa*) to the manifestation of concepts (*don spyi*), in contrast to a *linguistic* portrayal of conception that sees conceptual cognitions as any that are capable of being mixed with speech/language. While not denying that there are critical links between these two ways of portraying conceptual cognition, there is little question that Phya pa's mentalistic account offers a simple way by which to account for the difference between conceptual and non-conceptual cognition. In Phya pa's view, conceptual and non-conceptual cognitions can be distinguished simply by way of the kinds of objects that directly appear to awareness. Any cognition having a concept as its apprehended object is a conceptual cognition, and any cognition not encountering concepts is a non-conceptual cognition. There is, therefore, no need to appeal to more complex matters such as language or intentionality in order to distinguish these two forms of mentation.

This is not to say, of course, that there are no other differences between conceptual and non-conceptual cognitions. As shown above, it is only in conceptual cognition that there can be the operation of directing the mind and the operation of excluding others. Yet, while each of these two operations is merely a sufficient condition for conceptuality, neither is, properly speaking, a necessary condition for conceptual cognition. This is shown by the fact that Phya pa affirms the existence of conceptual mental episodes in which there is the appearance of concepts (as part of the operation of appearing) but neither the operation of directing nor the operation of excluding others. Admittedly, this special class of conceptual cognitions that possess only the operation of appearing plays little direct role in Phya pa's larger epistemological theory. (Within his *'Od zer*, for example, Phya pa classifies these non-directing conceptual cognitions as being entirely distinct from the more familiar forms of conceptual cognition: inferential cognition, factive assessment, conceptual post-knowledge cognition, conceptual mistaken cognition, or doubt.[37]) Nevertheless, the inclusion of this category of conceptual cognitions shows quite clearly that the true mark of conceptuality, according to Phya pa, is rooted in the appearance of concepts and not in other operations or capacities such as intentionality.

---

[37] These forms of cognition are taken up in §5 below. For more detail on these types of awareness, see also *Mun sel* 122 and following, as well as IV.

This brings us to another important observation about Phya pa's theory of conceptual cognition. On his account, it is important to distinguish conception from items such as 'reasoning' and 'intentionality.' It is true that reasoning requires conceptuality, but not all conceptual cognitions involve the use of reasoning. Here, by 'reasoning' what is meant is any activity whereby a cognizer appeals to reasons or evidence as a means for affirming some state of affairs. Reasoning of this sort occurs in cases of inferential knowledge, but (as will be discussed below) it could also take place in episodes of factive assessment and even (conceptual) mistaken cognition. In each of these forms of cognition, concepts are apprehended and the operations of directing and excluding others occur. Importantly, however, these sorts of activities are not deemed by Phya pa to be essential to conceptual cognition.

Likewise, conceptual cognition does not necessarily entail, on Phya pa's account, the presence of intentionality. Here, by intentionality, what is meant is the 'aboutness' or 'directedness' of cognitions. In the context of Western philosophy, what is now commonly termed "Brentano's thesis" is the assertion that intentionality is the mark of the mental.[38] In the Buddhist context, we might re-express Brentano's thesis as the claim that all (and only) cognitions have intentionality. If we understand intentionality to be wed to the presence of the operation of directing, then it straightforwardly follows that Phya pa must reject Brentano's thesis.

There are good reasons to think that all cognitions having the operation of directing also possess intentionality. The operation of directing is the process whereby one's awareness is directed upon some content. In doing so, the person conceives of things as being a certain way. For example, when inferring the existence of a fire on a mountain pass, a person conceives of the aggregate of 'mountain pass' and 'fire,' and in so doing one's cognition is directed toward (or 'about') the nature of a real fire. In this regard, it is beyond question that, for Phya pa, all cognitive episodes for which there is the operation of directing (and, *a fortiori*, the operation of excluding others) possess intentionality.[39]

---

[38] See Brentano 1874 and its English translation, Brentano 1973.

[39] The object that a person's cognition is directed toward is, for Phya pa, the cognition's *intentional object* (Tib. *zhen yul*). To call this the intentional object is, for Phya pa, simply to say that it is "what the mind is directed toward" (*Mun sel* 121.12). To be clear, as employed by Phya pa, the Tibetan expression *zhen yul* does not pick out any specific kind of entity from an ontological perspective. (Specifically, intentional objects need not be any sort of ontologically shadowy

But while, in Phya pa's system, the presence of the operation of directing is certainly a *sufficient* condition for intentionality, it is far from obvious whether it is a *necessary* condition. Brentano's thesis would have us affirm that even non-conceptual cognitions—for which there is merely the operation of appearing—have intentionality. To be sure, on Phya pa's model of awareness each and every non-conceptual cognition apprehends an object, and this might be taken as grounds for asserting that these non-conceptual cognitions are directed upon or about something—their apprehended objects. Is this relationship between a cognitive episode and its apprehended object indicative of intentionality?

The totality of the evidence, I believe, points away from the conclusion that non-conceptual cognitions possess intentionality on Phya pa's account. As we saw above in the section on perceptual experience, Phya pa's position is that perception does not involve the presence of representations or aspects (*rnam pa*). Far from possessing the operation of directing, perceptual cognitions are non-representational. Such a view is different from what is observed in many of Phya pa's Buddhist epistemological predecessors. Dharmakīrti, for example, maintains that in perception it is representations of real particulars (which are imprinted on the mind) that

mental entities.) In this way, Phya pa's use of the term *zhen yul* parallels his use of the term *gzung yul* (apprehended object). There is nothing ontologically distinct that makes something an apprehended object. What makes something an apprehended object is just that it is the object that appears to the mind and that is associated with what Phya pa calls the "operation of appearing" (*Mun sel* 112.111.111.1). Likewise, what is called an "intentional object" is simply whatever the mind is directed toward by virtue of the operation of directing.

In this regard, the view is similar to that endorsed by numerous contemporary philosophers. See, for instance, Searle 1983, chapter 1 and Crane 2001a, chapter 1. For more on the translation of *zhen yul* as "intentional object" see Stoltz 2013 and forthcoming. The latter work takes up these matters in much further detail, including an examination of the relationship between intentionality and "accuracy conditions."

This account carries the consequence that, for Phya pa, there can be cases where the intentional object of a given cognition does not exist. When a person, in an episode of mistaken determination, wrongly believes, for example, that there is a fire on the mountain pass, the intentional object simply does not exist, since there is no fire on the mountain pass. (In this case, technically, the intentional object would be the aggregate of 'mountain pass' and 'fire,' but given that this is a mistaken cognition there is no such aggregate in the external world.)

are apprehended.[40] Matters are understood differently in Phya pa's theory, for he contends that real particulars are directly experienced. Moreover, as was expressed earlier, perceptual cognitions are, in part, *constituted by* the objects that are apprehended. As such, on Phya pa's naïve realist theory of perception, it is possible to regard these non-conceptual mental states as being devoid of intentionality. A similar position is adopted by proponents of disjunctivism within the contemporary analytic tradition of philosophy. Bill Brewer, for example, proposes that defenders of disjunctivism reject the (widely-supported) 'content view' of experience, and instead support what he calls an 'object view.'[41] The object view dispenses with the intentionality of perception by maintaining, in its place, that perceptions are constituted by the real, external objects that are perceived. A similar position appears to be adopted here by Phya pa. On his account, perceptual experiences are constituted by their appearing objects, but have no representational content. In turn, there is little support for the conclusion that non-conceptual cognitions possess intentionality at all within Phya pa's theory. Instead, intentionality is to be restricted to cognitive episodes for which there is the operation of directing.

4. Knowledge

4.1 The defining characteristics of episodes of knowledge

Phya pa defines perception as "being non-erroneous with respect to the apprehended state of affairs" (*Mun sel* 231.11). This carries the implication that whether some cognitive episode qualifies as an instance of perception is a function of the cognition's apprehended object (*gzung yul*). Being an episode of knowledge, on the other hand, is not determined by the cognition's apprehended object. It is, rather, linked to a cognition's engaged object (*'jug yul*). Establishing this very point is a main goal of

---

[40] See Dreyfus 1997a, chapter 19 and Dreyfus&Thompson 2007: 102–103. This description pertains to the (Sautrāntika) representational external realism that Dharmakīrti ordinarily endorses. In some cases, however, Dharmakīrti shifts to a version of (Yogācāra) representational idealism, wherein he dispenses with the claim that the aspects or representations are caused by real particulars in the external world. On the representational idealist model, the representations are generated instead by 'traces' within one's own mental continuum.

[41] Brewer 2008 and Brewer 2011.

the series of passages contained within section 121 of Phya pa's *Mun sel*. Engaged objects are cognitive objects for which superimpositions have been excluded (*Mun sel* 121.13). This is in contrast to apprehended objects, which are identified as simply what appears for a given cognition (*Mun sel* 121.11).

What this shows is that, although Phya pa's first chapter begins with a long categorization of cognitions as related to apprehended objects, that categorization cannot possibly yield an adequate philosophical account of knowledge itself. One necessary condition for some episode of awareness to be an instance of knowledge is that the cognition excludes/eliminates superimpositions. As such, accounting for knowledge requires an appeal to engaged objects, which is precisely what Phya pa undertakes in the second half of his first chapter of the *Mun sel*.

Phya pa's stated definition for an episode of knowledge (*tshad ma*) is (*Mun sel* 212.14):

> that which counters the capacity to produce superimpositions that are incompatible with the way things are, through aspects of awareness that are non-erroneous with regard to a positively discerned state of affairs.

This definition is often abbreviated, by Phya pa, to the much simpler form "understanding something veridical" (*bden pa rtogs pa*), a phrasing that derives from the Kashmiri thinker Śaṅkaranandana (c. 9th–10th century).

In his *'Od zer,* Phya pa expresses the definition of a knowledge episode a bit differently from how it is phrased in the *Mun sel*. His definition in the *'Od zer* is:[42]

> that which, for a veridical state of affairs not previously known, is incompatible with opposite superimpositions, by a mode of apprehension that is non-erroneous with regard to its state of affairs.

Though the wordings of these definitions are different, and though there may be subtle changes in Phya pa's thinking between the compositions of these two texts regarding how best to capture the necessary conditions for knowledge, I shall proceed under the assumption that Phya pa's definitions are to be viewed as *equivalent* (i.e., that the two definitions are

---

[42] *'Od zer* 23b1: *des na tshad ma'i mtshan nyid ni sngar ma rtogs pa'i don bden pa la don la myi 'khrul ba'i 'dzin stangs kyis bzlog pa'i sgro 'dogs dang 'gal ba yin no //.* See VII, Appendix 3, 1 for other formulations of the definition of knowledge episodes in Phya pa's works.

meant to pick out identical classes of cognitive episodes as satisfying the definition of knowledge).[43]

The three core elements of the latter definition (from the *'Od zer*) can be found within the *Mun sel* in a number of places. They are found together, for example, within Phya pa's elucidation of engaged objects. There, he notes that both perceptual and inferential knowledge episodes are capable of excluding superimpositions, and then he points out that these two forms of cognition share three features in common (*Mun sel* 121.13):

> (K1) The elimination of superimpositions
> (K2) With regard to a state of affairs not previously known
> (K3) By an apprehension that requires an invariable relation to the state of affairs

Phya pa appeals to the first criterion (K1) to show why episodes of non-ascertaining perception (*snang la ma nges pa*) and doubt (*the tshom*) are not instances of knowledge (*Mun sel* 212.22). He appeals to a version of the second criterion so as to distinguish post-knowledge cognition (*bcad pa'i yul can*) from other types of awareness (*Mun sel* 123.321), and to show why it is not a kind of knowledge (*Mun sel* 212.14, reply to second objection). And he appeals to the third criterion to show why mistaken cognition (*log shes*) and factive assessment (*yid dpyod*) are not instances of knowledge (*Mun sel* 212.22).

Using the above account as a model, we can thus characterize Phya pa's definition of knowledge episodes as consisting of three necessary conditions which, when jointly satisfied, are sufficient for knowledge. K1 can be called "the superimpositions criterion," K2 can be thought of as "the novelty criterion," and K3 can be called the "mode of apprehension criterion."[44]

---

[43] For more on the differences in Phya pa's formulations of the definition of a knowledge episode between the *Mun sel* and *'Od zer*, see I.2, 3.1 and (especially) 3.2.

[44] Subsequent authors within the Tibetan epistemological tradition call these three characteristics (K1) the essence (*ngo bo*), (K2) the characteristic of the object (*yul gyi khyad par*), and (K3) the characteristic of the mode of apprehension (*'dzin stangs kyi khyad par*). See Hugon 2011a: 15–16 and, in this volume, I.2, 3.3.

4.2 Philosophical implications

With this framework in mind, let us now examine how Phya pa's criteria for knowledge compare with contemporary philosophical discussions of the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge. Of the three criteria, the one requiring novelty, K2, is certainly the furthest from any requirement adopted by contemporary analytic philosophers. The idea that one does not possess knowledge unless the proposition believed is not already known is something that makes little sense within contemporary Western theories of knowledge. On these Western accounts, knowledge is viewed as founded upon beliefs, which are generally treated as dispositional states of an individual. A person may have knowledge of some proposition, where that knowledge persists continuously from, let's say, age five until age eighty. In the Buddhist epistemological tradition within which Phya pa is situated, by contrast, what are at issue are occurrent episodes of cognition. Knowledge is treated as a kind of momentary mental episode, where successive mental episodes form an ever-changing stream of awareness.[45] Given this very different understanding of the basis of cognition, it makes much more sense on the Buddhist model to restrict knowledge just to those cognitive episodes in which some new information is gained.

4.2.1 The mode of apprehension criterion

Much more relevant to contemporary philosophical accounts of knowledge are the other two criteria to which Phya pa appeals. Let us first consider the criterion requiring the right mode of apprehension (K3). This requirement restricts episodes of knowledge to just those cases in which a person's cognition bears an "invariable relation to the state of affairs" cognized.[46] Here, what is specifically meant by an "invariable relation" is that the cognition would not have occurred if the state of affairs had not been veridical. In order for a cognition to be an instance of knowledge it must not merely be the case that one's episode of cognition is "correct" (i.e., in accord with the state of affairs), it must also be the case that, counterfactually, had the relevant state of affairs not been the case, then no such cognition of that state of affairs would have occurred.

---

[45] For more on this, see Stoltz 2007.

[46] See *Mun sel* 121.13 and 212.22.

In contemporary parlance, this amounts to a *sensitivity* criterion for knowledge.[47] It is argued by some philosophers that, over and above having a true belief, knowledge requires that one's beliefs "track" the truth, where one way by which to understand truth-tracking is in terms of a sensitivity condition on knowledge. Standardly, this means that the following counterfactual must be true in order for S to know that *p*:

(SENS) If *p* were not true, S would not believe that *p*.

Phya pa's mode of apprehension criterion plays a role analogous to the sensitivity criterion above. In order for a cognitive episode to be an instance of knowledge, the cognition must not only be correct, it must also track its state of affairs in such a way that had the state of affairs not existed, the cognition would not have arisen.[48]

As noted in the preceding section, Phya pa states that both factive assessment and mistaken cognition fail criterion K3. The case of mistaken cognition is quite clear. Episodes of mistaken cognition cannot have an invariable relation to the actual state of affairs—that is, they are not sensitive to the truth—for the trivial reason that such episodes of cognition are *mistaken*. Stated in propositional terms (as could be appropriate for instances of conceptual mistaken cognition), they are cognitions that determine something that is incorrect. Non-conceptual mistaken cognitions, on the other hand, have as their apprehended objects items that are superimposed, and thus those cognitions do arise without a state of affairs to be apprehended being existent. Expressed differently, all episodes of mistaken cognition fail SENS simply because they are cases where the antecedent of SENS is true but its consequent false.

The case of factive assessment is less straightforward. All episodes of factive assessment involve a conceptual determination that "corresponds with the object to be cognized" (*Mun sel* 123.31), and, as such, they are cognitions that *in fact* affirm a veridical state of affairs. Yet, Phya pa contends that this type of cognition, though determining a true state of affairs,

[47] For more on the sensitivity restriction on knowledge, see Nozick 1981, Comesaña 2007, and Pritchard 2008. In Nozick's original 1981 publication, he contends that sensitivity requires not just that 'if *p* were not true, S would not believe that *p*' (called SENS below), but also that 'if *p* were true, S would believe that *p*.' In more recent philosophical literature, however, sensitivity is generally linked just to the truth of this first conditional, SENS.

[48] For more on this criterion, and its relation to sensitivity constraints on knowledge, see Stoltz forthcoming, chapter 11.

does not have an invariable relation to the state of affairs. Thus, the contention is that though an episode of factive assessment affirms something true, it is such that *(even) if the state of affairs had not been veridical, the cognition (of that state of affairs) would still have occurred*.

On the face of it, this seems correct. To take a standard example of factive assessment, let us suppose that there is water in an old well, and that someone believes there to be water in that old well despite not having any evidence to support this belief (*Mun sel* 112.11.12). In such a case, though the person's belief happens to be correct—they have made a determination that corresponds with the actual state of affairs—it is intuitively not an instance of knowledge. Phya pa maintains that it fails to be an instance of knowledge precisely because it fails criterion K3, for, *even if there had been no water in the old well*, the person still would have believed that there was. (After all, the assessment was made without any reliance on evidence whatsoever.) Applied directly to the sensitivity criterion of knowledge, it is clear that even if a person, without evidence, correctly believes that there is water in an old well, that belief would nonetheless fail the counterfactual conditional in SENS.

The fact that Phya pa endorses something like a sensitivity criterion in order to account for why certain cognitions fail to yield knowledge—including cognitions that make correct determinations (i.e., cognitions that are 'true beliefs')—is remarkable in its own right. Yet, in recent years, contemporary analytic philosophy has not been kind to the sensitivity criterion. It is now widely rejected by contemporary epistemologists. Among the criticisms of sensitivity is the worry that we can construct scenarios involving true beliefs satisfying SENS in which there is still the strong intuition that knowledge is absent. In fact, I believe that a parallel problem may exist for Phya pa in connection with his contention that the inclusion of K3 (as a necessary condition for knowledge) suffices to exclude factive assessment. This, however, is a matter that is beyond the purview of this essay.[49]

---

[49] This concern is taken up in much greater detail in Stoltz forthcoming. To lay out the basic line of reasoning, we need to consider the third subtype of factive assessment described by Phya pa, called "Factive assessment with an uncertified reason" (*Mun sel* 123.31). In a genuine instance of inferential knowledge, a person knows that S is P by virtue of knowing both that

(A) S is R (i.e., that the logical reason, R, is a property of the subject, S) and that

(B) R entails P.

(These conditions are spelled out in VII, Appendix 2, 7.4 and 7.5. (A) is what Phya pa calls the *phyogs chos* [Skt. *pakṣadharmatā*] and (B) is called the *khyab pa* [Skt. *vyāpti*].) We might represent this logically with the following argument:

1.   K(S is R)
2.   K(R entails P)
3.   ∴ K(S is P)

In the third subtype of factive assessment, however, one of the above two characteristics—(A) or (B) or both—are not known, but are instead only themselves determined via an episode of factive assessment. In other words, for this third kind of factive assessment, conditions (A) and (B) are both *true*, but they are not both *known* to be true.

Now, consider a case like this where a person knows (A) but only determines (B) through factive assessment. For example, let us suppose that the person knows that 'there is smoke on the mountain pass' but only factively assesses that 'wherever there is smoke there is fire' (Re: VII, Appendix 2, 7[a]). In such a case, Phya is committed to the view (correct, in my estimation) that the person's determination that 'there is fire on the mountain pass' is itself thus only an instance of factive assessment. In short:

1*.   K(S is R)
2*.   FA(R entails P)
3*.   ∴ FA(S is P)

Given the status of (2*), the cognizer's determination that 'there is fire on the mountain pass' can, itself, only be an instance of factive assessment. Thus far, Phya pa's analysis seems quite reasonable.

Yet, in a case like this, the person's belief/determination that 'there is fire on the mountain pass' would in fact have an 'invariable relation' to that state of affairs. This is because, if 'S is P' were not the case, the person would not have formed the cognition (would not have made the determination) that 'S is P.'

Why is that? In one respect it is because (1*) and (2*) are logically incompatible with the falsity of 'S is P.' Consider: if (2*) were true and 'S is P' were false, this would logically imply that 'S is not R,' and so (1*) could not be true. More intuitively, the idea is as follows: if 'there is fire on the mountain pass' were *not* the case, then this counterfactual assumption combined with the person's factive assessment that 'wherever there is smoke there is fire' would entail that there could be no smoke on the mountain pass. But if that had been the case, then the person simply would not have formed the determinate judgment in (3*), i.e., the determination that there is fire on the mountain pass. After all, in this kind of case, the person only made that determination, (3*), *because they knew* that there was smoke on the mountain pass—i.e., because (1*) was true. Thus, in this kind of case (viz., instances of factive assessment with an uncertified reason), the person's cognitive episode is indeed sensitive to the state of affairs in question. Yet, it is also not supposed to be an instance of knowledge.

4.2.2 The superimpositions criterion

The final criterion for a knowledge episode, K1, the superimpositions criterion, is the one that is the most distinctive to Phya pa's theory of knowledge, and also, perhaps, the one that sounds the most obscure when compared to contemporary philosophical accounts of knowledge. The idea that one's cognitions should exclude (or should be incompatible with) false superimpositions is something that one does not explicitly encounter in contemporary Western formulations of knowledge. So too, within the Buddhist epistemological tradition, appealing to the notion of superimpositions in one's definition of knowledge is something that sets Phya pa's theory apart from his predecessors. In particular, Buddhist philosophers prior to Phya pa would have had a difficult time accepting the idea that *non-conceptual* cognitions could exclude or eliminate superimpositions. Yet, Phya pa insists that this elimination of superimpositions can and does happen in perceptual cognitions, and that this criterion serves to distinguish perceptual knowledge (*mngon sum tshad ma*) from non-ascertaining perception (*snang la ma nges pa*).

Perhaps the closest parallel to the superimpositions criterion in contemporary analytic epistemology is the appeal to a condition involving "relevant alternatives." It is now commonly thought that in order for a person to know that something is, for example, a canary, one must know that it is not a goldfinch, not a yellow grosbeak, etc. Similarly, in order to know that something is made of silver, it seems that one must be able to distinguish silver from, for example, mother-of-pearl. More generally, it is appealing to maintain that one necessary condition for knowledge is that the agent is able to rule out relevant alternatives. The inability to distinguish one kind of object or state of affairs from others that are relevantly associated with it suggests that one doesn't actually know that the object or state of affairs in question is the one that actually obtains. Phya pa's invocation of the superimpositions criterion as a necessary condition for knowledge can be seen as an early version of the relevant alternatives requirement found in contemporary formulations of knowledge.

In many respects, Phya pa's account of how K1 works is more detailed and nuanced than what we find in contemporary epistemological appeals to relevant alternatives. As documented in the second part of the introduction (I.2, 3.1.4), Phya pa provides a step-by-step explanation of how superimpositions are eliminated within certain episodes of perception. By contrast, many contemporary epistemologists make only vague appeals

to the idea that having knowledge requires being able to discriminate the true state of affairs from incompatible, alternative states of affairs; and little emphasis is placed on how that power of discrimination is supposed to work. Nevertheless, the shared intuition that a person cannot have knowledge unless he or she is able to discriminate the actual state of affairs from incompatible alternatives is an incredibly interesting one.

Phya pa's claim that superimpositions need to be eliminated in order for a cognition to be an instance of knowledge is different from "relevant alternatives" formulations in one important respect, however. The very idea of relevant alternatives in contemporary analytic epistemology is employed specifically so as to call attention to the contrast between alternative states of affairs that are relevant to the actual state of affairs and those alternative states of affairs that are not relevant. Knowledge only requires the ability to rule out *relevant* alternatives, not the irrelevant ones. For instance, it could be argued that in order to know that something is a dog, one must be able to rule out relevant alternatives such as its being a wolf or a fox, but one need not rule out irrelevant, skeptical scenarios such as the possibility that one is just a brain in a vat receiving electrochemical stimulations that make one have the hallucinatory experience as of seeing a dog.[50]

The criterion of excluding superimpositions, as described by Phya pa, however, does not distinguish between relevant versus irrelevant contrary qualities. Instead, the idea is that, in order to know x, all superimpositions that are directly incompatible with feature x must be eliminated.[51] In most contexts, however, Phya pa speaks of eliminating the opposite superimposition. For instance, in order to have perceptual knowledge of blue, one must eliminate the superimposition non-blue.

Summarizing Phya pa's general theory of knowledge, he articulates an account in which episodes of awareness qualify as instances of knowledge provided that (K3) they sensitively track a veridical state of

---

[50] One important feature of these 'skeptical scenarios' is precisely that they are cases that cannot easily be evidentially distinguished from the actual state of affairs. By hypothesis, if a person were a brain in a vat receiving electro-chemical stimulations as of being a normal human being on Earth, one would not be in the epistemic position to recognize that fact. Thus, distinguishing between 'relevant alternatives' and these more exotic 'skeptical scenarios' is important. The claim by contemporary philosophers is that knowledge only requires ruling out—or 'excluding'—relevant alternatives, not exotic skeptical hypotheses.

[51] For more on this see I.2, 3.1.3.iii.

affairs, (K2) they provide novel information, and (K1) they eliminate contrary superimpositions. The portions of Phya pa's text that have been translated in this book are not principally focused on this definition of an episode of knowledge (which is the topic of the second chapter of the *Mun sel*), but that understanding of a knowledge episode is consistently lurking in the background, especially in the seven-fold account of cognitive episodes that Phya pa develops in sections 122 and following.

5. The seven-fold typology of awareness

Following the standard Indian Buddhist model, Phya pa endorses the position that there are two types of awareness that are episodes of knowledge (*pramāṇa*, *tshad ma*): perceptual knowledge (*mngon sum tshad ma*) and inferential knowledge (*rjes dpag tshad ma*). Perceptual knowledge is inherently non-conceptual, whereas inferential knowledge essentially involves conceptuality. Yet, there are numerous other forms of cognition that fall short of being episodes of knowledge for one or more reasons. In particular, each of the three criteria for knowledge that Phya pa endorses—K1, K2, and K3—can fail to be satisfied in some given episode of awareness. Phya pa devotes the last portion of the first chapter of the *Mun sel* to an elucidation of the five forms of awareness that fail to meet one or more of the three criteria for being an episode of knowledge (*Mun sel* 123 and following). These five types of awareness that are not episodes of knowledge are:[52]

1. Non-ascertaining perception (*Mun sel* 123.1)
2. Post-knowledge cognition (123.2)
3. Factive assessment (123.3)
4. Mistaken cognition (123.4)
5. Doubt (123.5)

Two forms of awareness, doubt and mistaken cognition, fail basic requirements for knowledge. In the case of doubt, such episodes fall short of being instances of knowledge due to their not being partial to a unique state of affairs. They positively discern a state of affairs, but not in a way that delimits the awareness to one state of affairs set apart from that which is directly incompatible with it. For example, Phya pa tells us that one

---

[52] A detailed discussion of the origins, meanings, and English translations for these five types of cognition can be found in IV.

might entertain the thought, "Is this permanent or impermanent?"[53] Intuitively, the idea seems to be that some episodes of cognition fall short of knowledge because—far from satisfying conditions K1, K2, and K3—they do not even engage a unique state of affairs. This sort of case could be likened to, in the contemporary analytic tradition of epistemology, instances of cognition that fail even to meet the threshold of being a *belief* (where beliefs are understood as cognitive states that affirm the truth of a statement or proposition).

Likewise, mistaken cognition falls short of being an instance of knowledge due to the fact that this form of awareness, while it does positively discern a unique state of affairs, does so incorrectly. In particular, it discerns a state of affairs without being in accord with its object to be cognized. With respect to the three criteria for knowledge, these are cases where the awareness falls short of knowledge because the truth-tracking criterion, K3, is not met—for the trivial reason that the awareness is not even veridical with respect to its object to be cognized. Importantly, Phya pa defends the view that there are two different types of mistaken cognitions. Some cognitions are mistaken with respect to their apprehended objects, and some are mistaken with respect to their intentional objects. As has been mentioned above (§4.1), whether some episode of awareness is an instance of knowledge is not determined by the status of the cognition's apprehended object. So, for example, Phya pa endorses the position that all conceptual cognitions are mistaken with regard to their apprehended objects. Yet, conceptual cognitions can still be instances of knowledge. In the case of conceptual cognitions, the relevant necessary condition for knowledge is that the cognition be unmistaken with respect to its engaged object, which in conceptual episodes is the same as the cognition's intentional object. (Conceptual cognitions that are mistaken with regard to their intentional objects would automatically fail condition K3. This is because they do not track a veridical state of affairs and, as such, could not have veridical engaged objects.) On the other hand, in the case of non-conceptual awareness, being unmistaken with respect to its apprehended object is a necessary condition for knowledge, and it is a sufficient condition for being an episode of *perception*, but it is not a sufficient condition for being an episode of *perceptual knowledge*. (Such perceptions must additionally satisfy conditions K1 and K2 in order to be instances of knowledge.) This marks a major departure from the earlier

---

[53] See *Mun sel* 123.51.

views of earlier thinkers like Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, for whom percep-
tion *simpliciter* is an episode of knowledge.

    More philosophically interesting are the other three types of aware-
ness that are not instances of knowledge. These forms of mentation—
non-ascertaining perception, post-knowledge cognition, and factive
assessment—share two key features in common: they all positively dis-
cern a unique state of affairs (unlike doubt) and they are all veridical
cognitions (unlike mistaken cognition). Nevertheless, each of these fails
to be an instance of knowledge because of failing one of the three criteria
discussed in §4 above. Non-ascertaining perception fails criterion K1;
post-knowledge cognition fails criterion K2; and factive assessment fails
criterion K3. These three types of cognition are important historically for
they are largely without precedent in the Indian Buddhist tradition of epis-
temology (see IV, 1–3 for further details). That is, they are not categorized
as distinct forms of awareness in the Indian tradition. This is so despite
the fact that many of the illustrations Phya pa uses to exemplify these
three forms of cognition are ones that appear in Indian texts, where they
are used to exemplify episodes of awareness failing to qualify as
knowledge. While there is evidence that Phya pa was not himself the orig-
inator of these three categories of cognition, it is of note that his three
preferred criteria for knowledge episodes are explicitly articulated in a
way that exposes precisely why non-ascertaining perception, post-
knowledge cognition, and factive assessment should be seen as distinct
and fundamental types of awareness.

Table 1: The typology of awareness in relation to the criteria of knowledge

(K1) "The superimpositions criterion" (K2) "The novelty criterion" (K3) "The mode of apprehension criterion"	
K1, K2, K3 all fulfilled	K1, K2, K3 not all fulfilled
• Perceptual knowledge • Inferential cognition	• **~K1** – Doubt • **~K1** – Non-ascertaining perception • **~K2(/~K1)** – Post-knowledge cognition • **~K3** – Mistaken cognition • **~K3** – Factive assessment

Non-ascertaining perception is a non-conceptual form of cognition that
apprehends (indeed, perceives) a veridical object, but falls short of being
an instance of knowledge because it is not incompatible with the presence

of opposite superimpositions. That is, in episodes of non-ascertaining perception, a person has a genuine perception of an object—and, in such cases, all the properties of the object are said to appear—but subjective or objective conditions make it impossible for the person to prevent superimpositions from arising. An example of a subjective condition (that prevents the elimination of superimpositions) would be a case of inattentive perception. Perhaps a person, with eyes wide open, glimpses a blue statue while deeply absorbed in one's own thoughts. Phya pa's view is that blue is perceived, but due to a lack of attentiveness the person would be unable to eliminate the opposite superimposition of the object being non-blue. An example of an objective condition (that prevents the elimination of superimpositions) is the perception of non-manifest properties, such as impermanence (see §2.3). In such a case, nothing goes wrong with the perceptual cognition—impermanence is indeed apprehended by the cognizer—but knowledge of impermanence is deemed to be possible only through a subsequent act of inferential cognition, not from a mere perception alone.

Post-knowledge cognitions fail criterion K2. They can be non-conceptual—as is the case in an episode of perceiving blue that follows immediately after an episode of perceptual knowledge of blue—or they could be conceptual—as when a person forms the determinate thought "(This is) blue" after correctly perceiving blue. In both cases, the cognition of blue is correct, and in both cases the awareness is incompatible with opposite superimpositions, but the episodes of awareness are not providing novel information.[54]

Factive assessment is a type of conceptual cognition that is likened to inferential knowledge, but in which the sensitivity criterion for knowledge, K3, is not satisfied. These are cases where a person forms a correct, conceptual judgment—either with or without an appeal to a logical reason—but in which the cognition, though veridical, fails to be invariably concomitant with the true state of affairs. More loosely, and in the terminology of contemporary analytic philosophy, we could say that these cases are ones where a person forms a true belief, but where the belief in question does not sensitively track the truth. So, for example, if a person, through bad evidence (e.g., from *falsely* believing that there is smoke on a mountain pass, when there is in fact just a cloud of billowing dust) forms

---

[54] On the status of post-knowledge cognition and its relation to criteria K2 and K1, see n. 25 and the related discussion in I.2, 3.2.2.

the *true* belief that there is a fire on said mountain pass, the person still has a belief that is true. But the belief does not sensitively track the truth because, counterfactually, had there been no fire on the mountain pass, the person would still have believed that there was a fire (because of their reliance on the bad evidence). Intuitively, it makes sense to say that, in such a case, the person does not possess knowledge even though they have a true belief.[55]

6. Conclusion

There are many other items of philosophical relevance that are addressed by Phya pa in the opening chapter of his *Mun sel*, but which cannot be adequately discussed here. Some of these items, such as Phya pa's specific account of how superimpositions are eliminated in instances of perceptual awareness (discussed at length in the second part of the introduction, see I.2, 3.1.4), are of both philosophical and historical relevance. Other items, such as Phya pa's detailed discussion of the compatibility and incompatibility between various types of cognition (*Mun sel* 122.3), are of slightly less historical interest—and appear not to have had a large impact on later epistemological literature—but demonstrate Phya pa's keen sense of intellectual curiosity, and his willingness to explore the philosophical consequences of his epistemological classifications.

It is my hope that, in time, many more philosophical themes developed within Phya pa's *Mun sel* will be addressed in detail by scholars. The translation provided here is an effort to provide others with a point of entry into the philosophical acuity of early Tibetan epistemology as contained within Phya pa's elucidation of cognition and cognitive objects in twelfth-century Tibetan philosophy.

---

[55] Illustrations of this form of cognition no doubt bear a resemblance to "Gettier scenarios" in contemporary analytic epistemology. For more on the relationship between episodes of factive assessment and the Gettier problem, see Stoltz 2007.

Introduction (2): Phya pa's theory of mind in the context of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist intellectual history

The innovative views of the twelfth-century thinker Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge ("cha pa chö kyi seng gé,"[1] 1109–1169, hereafter: Phya pa) had a profound impact on the developments of Buddhist philosophy in Tibet, especially in the fields of epistemology, logic, and Madhyamaka philosophy.[2] Through the centuries, Phya pa remained a prominent figure of reference in the Tibetan tradition both for his supporters and detractors, even those who had not studied his works on a first-hand basis. It is not known to what extent Phya pa's works were circulating in Tibet outside the monastery of gSang phu Ne'u thog ("sang pu neu tok"), of which Phya pa occupied the abbatial seat for 18 years. However, his epistemological works might have traveled all the way to the Tangut kingdom of Mi nyag ("mi nyak," Xixia in Chinese) between the 12th and the 14th century, as did some works of his predecessor rNgog Blo ldan shes rab ("ngok lo den shé rap," 1059–1109).[3] In the field of epistemology, Phya pa's first-generation students already composed their own works on the subject, and

---

[1] A simplified phonemic transcription is provided in quotation marks for Tibetan personal names, as well as names of places and schools, upon their first occurrence in the body of the text and in the footnotes. The transcription follows the standards of the Tibetan & Himalayan Library (THL).

[2] On Phya pa's life and works and for bibliographical references, see van der Kuijp 1978, 1983, Tauscher 1999 (ed.): vii–ix, and the information compiled in Hugon 2015–2018.

[3] On the spread of the gSang phu tradition to Mi nyag, see Solonin 2015: 854 and Kano 2016: 208. While a Tangut version of a work by rNgog Blo ldan shes rab entitled *The Exposition of the Two Truths According to rNgog lo tsā ba* has been located in Khara Khoto (Solonin 2015: 854) and a copy of his topical outline on the *Ratnagotravibhāga* (in Tibetan) was also unearthed there (Kano 2008), the possible existence of a Tangut translation of a topical outline of one of Phya pa's works on epistemology, the *Mun sel*, remains to be confirmed. Kano's mention of such a work is indeed based on the Chinese translation of the Tangut title in the catalogue by Tatsuo Nishida for a text found in Khara Khoto (the *Shengli yia chu zhi nen lue shi*), but the contents of this work have not yet been examined. This Tangut translation could be dated "to the time between the 1130s (the period in which the work was possibly composed) and 1374 (the destruction of Khara Khoto)." (Kano 2016: 208).

presumably used those rather than Phya pa's works when teaching epistemology in their own monastic colleges. Whether later-generation scholars still had access to Phya pa's works is questionable. Their mention of Phya pa's views are usually paraphrases rather than literal citations. However, Phya pa's works were preserved in gSang phu Ne'u thog at least up to the 15th century. It is probably in gSang phu that the rNying ma ("nying ma") scholar Klong chen Rab 'byams pa Dri med 'od zer ("long chen rap jam pa dri mé ö zer," 1308–1363) had access to them during his studies as a young man.[4] He notably subsequently re-used (silently) substantial portions from Phya pa's doxographical work, the *gZhung lugs rnam 'byed*, and from Phya pa's Madhyamaka work, the *sNying po*, in his own doxography, the *Grub mtha' mdzod*.[5] 'Gos lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal ("gö lo tsa ba zhön nu pel," 1392–1481) also mentions in his historical work, the *Deb sngon*, that he had first-hand access to some of the works of Phya pa.[6] Phya pa's works were still preserved in gSang phu around 1440, at the time gSer mdog paṇ chen Śākya mchog ldan ("ser dok panchen shakya chok den," 1428–1507) was studying there. The biography of Śākya mchog ldan by Kun dga' grol mchog ("kün ga dröl chok," b. 1507) informs us that Śākya mchog ldan studied the '*phya*

---

[4] Klong chen studied at gSang phu beginning at age nineteen (i.e., from 1326). His teachers in the field of epistemology included the fifteenth abbot Slob dpon bTsan dgon ("lop pön tsen gön") and the sixteenth abbot of the Upper College Chos dpal rgyal mtshan ("chö pel gyel tsen"). See van der Kuijp 2003: 403 and Mathes 2008: 455, n. 479.

[5] See Werner 2014: 37–40 and Hugon forthcoming (2).

[6] In the *Deb sngon* (405), gZhon nu dpal gives a list of works of Phya pa including: commentaries and summaries on the five works of Maitreya, the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*, the *Satyadvayavibhaṅga*, the *Madhyamakālaṅkāra*, the *Madhyamakāloka*, and the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, as well as an epistemological summary called *Yid kyi mun sel* in verses and with auto-commentary, a short and a long Madhyamaka summary, and a number of unspecified other compositions (*rtsom pa mang po mdzad pa 'dra*). He then remarks that he himself just saw (*kho bos mthong ba*) "those" (*de dag*)—it is unclear whether this refers only to the Madhyamaka and epistemological summaries, or to the commentaries as well—as well as a doxographical summary and an explanation on the "five bases of objects of cognition" (*kho bos mthong ba ni de dag dang / phyi nang gi grub mtha' bsdus pa dang shes bya gzhi lnga'i bshad pa tsam zhig go*). It is not known where he was able to see these texts. Vetturini (2007: 13–14) mentions that gZhon nu dpal studied in gSang phu but does not provide the source of this information.

bsdus,' i.e., Phya pa's epistemological summary, in great detail during the summer teaching session in gSang phu in 1439 with Grags pa bkra shis ("drak pa tra shi"). But it does not seem to have been part of the regular curriculum at this time. Apart from this event, Śākya mchog ldan's studies of epistemology during his first stay in gSang phu focused on Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* and the *Rigs gter* of Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan ("sa kya pandita kün ga gyel tsen," hereafter: Sa paṇ, 1182–1251). Śākya mchog ldan is also reported to have later taught one of Phya pa's epistemological treatises, confronting it with another tradition of interpretation following Sa paṇ's *Rigs gter*.[7] Numerous literal citations from Phya pa's works in the writings of Śākya mchog ldan confirm his first-hand access to these sources.[8]

It is only in the 1970s that the contribution of Phya pa was brought forward in Western scholarship. The first article published on this inventive medieval scholar by Leonard van der Kuijp (van der Kuijp 1978) already highlighted philosophy of mind as a characteristic part of Phya pa's system and as an important contribution in the history of Tibetan philosophy. In the absence of first-hand sources, the pioneering studies of Phya pa's thought relied on accounts of his views by fifteenth-century Tibetan authors, in particular Śākya mchog ldan and Go rams pa bSod nams seng ge ("go ram pa sö nam seng gé," 1429–1489).[9] The rediscovery of eighteen texts by Phya pa that were published in 2006 in a collection of works of the bKa' gdams ("ka dam") school (the *bKa'*

---

[7] See Caumanns 2015: 62–64, 81, 186 and 307.

[8] See V, 1.5 in the present volume for some examples of citations in the epistemological domain on the topic of the typology of awareness. Śākya mchog ldan also seems to have had access to Phya pa's Madhyamaka work, the *sNying po*. He paraphrases Phya pa's arguments against Candrakīrti found in *sNying po* 125.112 in his *dBu ma rgya mtsho*. See Hugon forthcoming (2).

[9] In his 1978 paper, van der Kuijp relies on the account of Phya pa's typology of awareness by Go rams pa in his *Rigs gter rab gsal*. See also the short account of Phya pa's view, based on the same source, in Dreyfus 1997a: 373. Go rams pa's account (see V, 1.6), turns out not to correspond exactly to Phya pa's typology, in particular regarding the terminology being adopted for some of the types of awareness. Phya pa's life and ideas were further discussed in van der Kuijp 1983: chapter 2.

gdams gsung 'bum) has opened a new path for further research on this fascinating influential scholar.[10]

While the first part of the introduction by Jonathan Stoltz (I.1) focused on the philosophical import of Phya pa's ideas, this part aims at situating more precisely the author and his philosophy of mind in the intellectual history of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. It highlights the originality of his views against the background of both the Indian founding treatises in the domain of epistemology and previous Tibetan contributions, and draws out the key issues that became the basis for further debate in the Tibetan tradition.

1. Phya pa's place in the general context of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist intellectual history

The translation of the Indian corpus from Sanskrit into Tibetan and its transmission to Tibet began in the 7th–9th centuries at the time known as the "Earlier Diffusion" (*snga dar*) of Buddhist teachings. It began anew from the 10th century onward during the "Later Diffusion" (*phyi dar*), whose start is marked, notably, by the visit to Tibet of the Indian Buddhist master Atiśa (c. 982–1054) and the endeavors of the Great Translator Rin chen bzang po ("rin chen zang po," 958–1055). While the status of founding father for the field of epistemology and logic is usually ascribed to the

---

[10] The *bKa' gdams gsung 'bum* regroups rare works by bKa' gdams pa scholars (or scholars that were considered to belong to the bKa' gdams pa tradition by the editors) ranging from the 10th to the 15th century. These manuscripts had been preserved notably in 'Bras spungs ("dré pung"), Se ra ("sé ra"), Zha lu, and rGyal rtse dpal 'khor chos sde ("gyan tsé pel khor chö dé") monasteries, as well as in the private collections of Tibetan scholars and at TBRC/BDRC (Karma bde legs [ed.] 2006: 7–10). The texts from 'Bras spungs are part of the private manuscript collection of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang Blo bzang rgya mtsho ("ngak wang lo zang gya tso," 1617–1682), a fabulous collection comprising c. 3,000 bundles of texts (more than 20,000 works) that was housed in the gNas bcu lha khang ("né chu lha khang") and was rediscovered around the year 2000. The texts were catalogued between 2002 and 2003, together with those from 'Bras spungs's Mi dbang lha khang ("mi wang lha khang") (cf. *'Bras spungs dkar chag*). At present, the *bKa' gdams gsung 'bum* comprises 120 volumes, published between 2006 and 2015. Phya pa's works are contained in the first set of 30 volumes (specifically, vol. 6–9).

Indian philosopher Dignāga (c. 480–540), it is rather the works of Dharmakīrti (c. 600–660 or earlier)[11] that were initially instrumental for Tibetan thinkers.[12] Dignāga's epistemological works do not appear to have been investigated independently before the 13th century and did not play any significant role in the formative period of Tibetan epistemology.[13]

Dharmakīrti's works are commonly referred to by Tibetan scholars as "the seven-fold collection" (*sde bdun*). Early Tibetan epistemologists divided Dharmakīrti's seven works into three major treatises—the *Pramāṇavārttika* (Dharmakīrti's commentary on Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya*), the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*, and the *Nyāyabindu*—and four minor ones—the *Hetubindu*, *Sambandhaparīkṣā*, *Vādanyāya*, and *Santānāntarasiddhi*.[14] Only the three major treatises played a significant role in Tibet. The *Nyāyabindu* (respectively smaller than the other two major treatises)

---

[11] Krasser (2012) reopened the debate on the date of Dharmakīrti, arguing that Bhāviveka (490/500–570) had knowledge of the views of the Mīmāṃsā scholar Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and of Dharmakīrti, and suggested to situate their time of activity in the middle of the 6th century.

[12] For a systematic overview of this corpus, see Steinkellner&Much (eds.) 1985.

[13] Several of Dignāga's works were never translated into Tibetan. Dignāga's *Hetucakraḍamaru* (a short work distinguishing valid and invalid logical reasons in inferential reasoning) was already translated at the time of the Earlier Diffusion, but his major work, the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* cum *vṛtti*, was only translated (twice) at the end of the 11th century, and a third time around 1100 (see Steinkellner&Much [eds.] 1985: 5 and 8, van der Kuijp&McKeown 2013: lxxiv–lxxv). Citations of Dignāga in early epistemological treatises are usually limited to verses of Dignāga's works that are cited in Dharmakīrti's works. An exception is Sa skya Paṇḍita, who takes into account specific portions of Dignāga's works on themes not developed by Dharmakīrti (see Hugon 2015b: 471, n. 47). The first exegesis of Dignāga *Pramāṇasamuccaya* written in Tibet was the one by Dar ma rgyal mtshan bCom ldan Ral gri ("dar ma gyel tsen chom den rel dri," 1227–1305) (van der Kuijp&McKeown 2013: lxxxvi–xcv). There was a new interest in Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya* starting in the 15th century: at least ten scholars wrote full commentaries on this work, seven to nine of which were written in the 15th century (van der Kuijp&McKeown 2013: lcv–cv).

[14] This division is made, for instance, by Phya pa's student gTsang nag pa brTson 'grus seng ge ("tsang nak pa tsön drü seng gé," ?–after 1195) and by mTshur ston gZhon nu seng ge ("tsur tön zhön nu seng gé," c. 1150–1210) (see Hugon 2008b: 64), and it is found also in the *Tshad bsdus* (2,14–3,17).

received a considerable amount of attention at the time of the Earlier Diffusion and was broadly distributed across the Tibetan empire, an attention that lasted up to the beginning of the Later Diffusion.[15]

As the periodization of Tibetan epistemology proposed by van der Kuijp (1989) highlights, the early centuries of the Later Diffusion, which constitute the "pre-classical period," are marked by the predominance of the study of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* and its commentary (the *Pramāṇaviniścayaṭīkā*) by the Indian scholar Dharmottara (8th century). [16] A shift of predominance in favor of the *Pramāṇavārttika* takes place with and after Sa paṇ in the 13th century, marking the beginning of the "classical period." The "post-classical" period starts in the 15th century and is characterized by a reappraisal of ideas developed in the pre-classical period and criticism as well as defense of Sa paṇ's views.

In the pre-classical period to which Phya pa belongs, the most significant contributions to the field of epistemology appear to have been achieved by scholars affiliated or associated with the monastery of gSang phu Ne'u thog in Central Tibet. gSang phu was founded in 1073 by rNgog Legs pa'i shes rab ("ngog lek pé shé rap," 11th century) as a center for upholding the teachings of Atiśa, and as such qualifies as a proto-bKa' gdams pa institution.[17] But this monastery soon became an important scholastic center emphasizing the study of Buddhist philosophy. This specialization was at odds not only with the orientation of other proto-bKa' gdams pa seats, such as Rwa sgreng ("ra dreng"), but also with Atiśa's own position regarding topics such as logic and epistemology, which he deemed useless in the Madhyamaka pursuit of realizing emptiness.[18]

---

[15] See Hugon 2014: 203–205.

[16] Van der Kuijp distinguishes in the "pre-classical period" an "early phase" marked by the translation of the source texts and the first commentarial writings, and a "later phase" characterized by in-depth studies and exegeses of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*, the priority of the former over the *Pramāṇavārttika*, and the emergence of an indigenous type of writing, the "Summaries" (*bsdus pa*).

[17] The "bKa' gdams pa" was first considered a distinct school with the chief students of 'Brom ston rGyal ba'i 'byung gnas ("drom tön gyelwé jung né," 1005–1064), the disciple of Atiśa who founded Rwa sgreng ("ra dreng").

[18] See Hugon 2016a: 306 for references to sources relevant to the question whether scholars affiliated with the monastery of gSang phu should be considered to be bKa' gdams pa. On Atiśa's position regarding logic and epistemology, see Apple 2016: 628.

gSang phu's second abbot, rNgog Blo ldan shes rab (hereafter: rNgog Lo), paved the way for scholastic developments through his translations (or revisions of existing translations) of Indian treatises, to which he also provided outlines, concise guides, and more extensive commentaries.[19] Together with Indian pandits, with whom he collaborated during his stay in Kashmir, he was in particular responsible for the Tibetan translation of Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniścaya* and its commentary by Dharmottara, the most influential works in the pre-classical period of Tibetan epistemology.

The only epistemological writings of rNgog Lo that have been recovered so far are the *dKa' gnas*—a commentarial work on the difficult points of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*—and the *Rigs thigs 'grel ṭi ka*—a concise guide to the *Nyāyabinduṭīkā*, Dharmottara's commentary on Dharmakīrti's *Nyāyabindu*.[20] In my opinion, rNgog Lo's composition of the second work is not so much a sign of an enduring interest in the *Nyāyabindu* at the time of the Later Diffusion as it is a testimony of rNgog Lo's attention to the views of Dharmottara. Other Indian commentators of Dharmakīrti—notably Prajñākaragupta (c. 800) and Śaṅkaranandana (c. 9th–10th century)—were also influential. rNgog Lo's contributions include translations as well as concise guides and exegeses on several individual treatises and commentaries on Dharmakīrti's works by these thinkers. In the extant works of rNgog Lo, one sees him confront their diverging interpretations on difficult topics. It appears that the views of these Indian scholars were essentially known to subsequent Tibetan epistemologists through rNgog Lo's syntheses rather than from the Indian scholars' own works.

Phya pa was schooled in a lineage issuing from rNgog Lo. His initial training in the field of epistemology took place in sTod lung ("tö lung"), where Phya pa studied with rGya dmar ba Byang chub grags ("gya mar ba jang chup drak," fl. c. 1095–1135), who had himself been a pupil of Gangs pa she'u ("gang pa sheu") and Khyung Rin chen grags ("khyung rin chen drak"), two of rNgog Lo's students.[21] Phya pa became directly

---

[19] On rNgog Lo's life and works, see Kramer 2007 and Kano 2016: 191–210.

[20] On these works, see Hugon 2014: 196–203.

[21] On rGya dmar ba, see van der Kuijp 1983: 60 and Sørensen&Hazod 2017: 420, n. 25. The latter lists the relevant sources and enumerates the available information on rGya dmar ba's life and works.

linked with gSang phu monastery later in his life, and became its sixth abbot.[22]

Phya pa represents what I would like to call a second-generation model of scholarship that one can contrast to the first-generation model represented by rNgog Lo.[23] A pure product of the Tibetan monastic and scholastic education, Phya pa relied on a Tibetan translation for his interpretations of Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniścaya*, which was his main Indian source in the field of epistemology.[24] His acquaintance with Dharmakīrti's other works and the views of other exegetes of Dharmakīrti appears to be fragmentary and indirect, derived from Tibetan accounts, part of which was probably orally transmitted.

To this linguistic separation comes also a formal one. In his works that were later referred to as "*bsdus pa*," Phya pa adopts a structure of presentation that does not strictly follow the order of the Indian texts he relies upon. He also does not directly refer to those Indian texts.

The English term "summary" is a widespread rendering of the term *bsdus pa* in Western scholarship. I adopt it here for the sake of readers who are familiar with this rendering, although it is not completely satisfactory. Indeed, works entitled as such or referred to as being instances of this genre are not necessarily summaries in the sense of abridged presentations. In fact, they are often not brief at all. Apart from some exceptions (such as the *Tshad ma'i spyi skad*, which properly qualifies as a "summary"), most of the presently extant early texts entitled *bsdus pa* better fit the profile of a comprehensive survey of the subject matter than that of a digest. For these, the expression *bsdus pa* would thus better be understood as conveying the idea of "gathering together" the topics addressed in the source texts (or at least claiming to do so, since some topics of the Indian treatises are simply left out while typically Tibetan elaborations are included). Such an idea is conveyed, for instance, in the long title of the epistemological work of another abbot of gSang phu, Chu mig pa Seng ge dpal ("chu mik pa seng gé pel," c. 1200–1270), *Tshad ma sde bdun gyi*

---

[22] On gSang phu's abbatial succession, see van der Kuijp 1987.

[23] See Hugon 2009a: 72–74 and Hugon 2014: 226. Note that the term "generation" is not used here in the strict sense of teacher-disciple chronology. I call Phya pa a "second-generation scholar" although he was not rNgog Lo's direct disciple.

[24] In the case of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*, Phya pa relied on the translation by rNgog Lo, with slight but discernable revisions (see Hugon 2013a for examples of such changes).

don phyogs cig du bsdus pa gzhan gyi phyogs thams cad las rnam par rgyal ba (in short, *rNam rgyal*), which speaks of "assembling in one place (*phyogs cig du bsdus pa*) the meaning of the collection of the seven treatises." One can understand in this sense "*bsdus pa*" in the expression "*de kho na nyid bsdus pa*," which is found in the title of several epistemological works.[25] On the other hand, mTshur ston gZhon nu seng ge ("tsur tön zhön nu seng gé," c. 1150–1210) presents his *sGron ma* (a work of the same genre as Chu mig pa's *rNam rgyal*, which however does not use the expression *bsdus pa* in its title) as an "elucidation of the meaning (of Dharmakīrti's works) in few words" (*sGron ma* 1b8: *'dir tshig nyung pas don gsal bar bstan par bya'o*), i.e., as properly speaking "summarizing" the whole of Dharmakīrti's (and Dignāga's) thought. Van der Kuijp (2003: 385) proposed the rendering "epitome" for *bsdus pa*, and related this genre to the form of commentarial writing by this name in medieval European learning. For comprehensive treatises called *bsdus pa*, however, an analogy with *summæ* might be more pertinent.[26]

   Despite the difficulties circumscribing this genre, which for the time being I shall term "summary," a relevant distinction must be made between these summaries and commentaries (including various types of commentarial works such as concise guides and explanations of the difficult points of a treatise). Unlike commentaries, summaries present topics without directly referring to a given source text, and they organize them into a structure which is also independent from a particular source text.

---

[25] The expression *de kho na nyid bsdus pa* might be a reflex of the Sanskrit *Tattvasaṃgraha* (cf. van der Kuijp 2003: 381). Epistemological works including this expression in their title are, for instance: *Tshad ma'i de kho na nyid bsdus pa* (abbreviated here as *Tshad bsdus*); *Tshad ma'i de kho na nyid bsdus pa'i nye bar bsdus pa* (abbreviated here as *Tshad nye bsdus*), a work that is itself based on a treatise entitled *Tshad ma sde bdun gyi de kho na nyid bsdus pa* (see n. 48); *Rigs pa'i snying po de kho na nyid bsdus pa gsal byed nyi ma'i 'od*, a work by the Tibetan monk Jñānaśrī (*bKa' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol. 44, 217–247); *Tshad ma'i mdo dang gzhungs lugs sde bdun gyi de kho na nyid bsdus pa rtog ge'i snying po*, a work by Śākya mchog ldan (in *gSer mdog gsung 'bum*, vol. 18).

[26] In this regard, see Sweeney 2017. She characterizes the aspiration of *summæ* as "first, to completely emancipate the subject matter, whether logical, theological, or philosophical, from the structure dictated either by scripture or authoritative sources; and second, to cover completely an entire discipline, often but not always, in summary form" and highlights its role as "a form for the systematic organization of an entire area of study."

Summaries opened the way for the composition of autochthonous manuals that, in the long run, became the primary material for teaching in the introductory course of monastic study,[27] although the composition of commentaries (or hybrid commentaries that include numerus excursuses) was not abandoned. The pair summary/commentary is common for scholars in Phya pa's time and continues to be found in the following centuries. In the field of epistemology, Phya pa himself composed a work belonging to the genre of summary, the *Yid kyi mun sel* (hereafter: *Mun sel*), as well as a commentary on Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (the *'Od zer*). The former is typically referred to in the later tradition as "Phya pa's summary" (*phya bsdus*). However, this expression also refers, in a loose way, to epistemological summaries by Phya pa's successors that are representative of Phya pa's system.

In comparison with first-generation Tibetan scholars, one can yet add in Phya pa's case to the linguistic and formal separation also a distancing from the Indian sources that is both philosophical—in terms of innovating ideas and original interpretations—and exegetical—as these sources are not systematically posited as an ultimate authority on the subject. Both led to strong criticism from the more conservative scholar Sa paṇ in the 13th century. Sa paṇ joined the input from his epistemological studies on the one hand with scholars in the lineage of Phya pa's tradition and on the other with the Indian pandit Śākyaśrībhadra (1140s–1225) (who stayed in Tibet from 1204 to 1214) and junior pandits of his entourage, initiating a competing lineage to the "rNgog lineage" (*rngog lugs*) which became known as the "Sa [skya pa/skya Paṇḍita] lineage" (*sa lugs*).

The 12th century appears to have been an extremely active intellectual period. In his works, Phya pa addresses the views of his predecessors and of contemporaneous scholars, in the majority of cases without giving their names. The identification of some of these can be achieved through other texts that cite the same views and give the names of their proponents. A precious source of information in this regard is the *Tshad bsdus*, an epistemological summary which, albeit ascribed to the fourteenth-century scholar Klong chen Rab 'byams pa, appears to have been composed in Phya pa's time or soon after. The so far unidentified author reports the

---

[27] See Dreyfus 1997b for an overview of Tibetan monastic education and the role of root-texts, commentaries, and indigenous textbooks, focusing on dGe lugs pa ("gé luk pa") and rNying ma pa ("nying ma pa") institutions.

conflicting views of various individuals on many topics, testifying to on-going debates involving Phya pa and other scholars whose works are not extant (or who possibly did not author any written works).[28] Phya pa's legacy was continued in the works of his students—in particular the members of the group of students known as the "Eight Great Lions" (*seng chen brgyad*)[29]—and the successive generations of scholars inspired by his epistemological system. As for the contributions of the Eight Great Lions, some of which reportedly authored works of epistemology and founded exegetical traditions of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*,[30] a single treatise of epistemology by one of them, gTsang nag pa brTson 'grus seng ge ("tsang nak pa tsön drü seng gé," ?–after 1195), is currently available: an extensive commentary on the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (*bsDus pa*). Another scholar with "Lion" (*seng ge*) at the end of his name and the author of an extant epistemological summary (*sGron ma*) is mTshur ston gZhon nu seng ge. His name appears in the list of the Eight Great Lions in Śākya mchog ldan's *rNgog lo rol mo* (5a3, p. 451) instead of gNyal (/gNyal ma) Yon tan seng ge ("nyel yön ten seng gé"). Based on this passage, Jackson (1987: 106) reports that mTshur ston had been a student of Phya pa. But mTshur ston's inclusion in this list is to my knowledge an exception and may be counted as a mistake prompted by mTshur ston's name ending with "seng ge." (Śākya mchog ldan criticizes in the same text the anachronistic inclusion of 'U yug pa bSod nams seng ge ["u yuk pa sö nam seng gé," ?–1253] in this list, an inclusion that might likewise have been due to his name ending with "seng ge.") mTshur ston nonetheless was at

---

[28] On the *Tshad bsdus*, see van der Kuijp 2003. The tentative dating proposed here relies on the observation that the author of the *Tshad bsdus* had an extensive and precise knowledge of the various views held by Phya pa, his contemporaries, and his predecessors, but is completely silent on the innovations brought by Phya pa's direct student gTsang nag pa. Also, the work is also extremely close in structure and contents to Phya pa's *Mun sel* and does not display developments commonly attested in other later twelfth-century and thirteenth-century summaries (see §2.3 below for some examples with regard to the topic of the typology of awareness).

[29] See van der Kuijp 1978: 356 for the standard list of the Eight Great Lions.

[30] Śākya mchog ldan reports that Bru sha bSod nams seng ge ("dru sha sö nam seng gé") founded an exegetical tradition in sNar thang ("nar tang") (van der Kuijp 1983: 23 and n. 62). A "summary of epistemology" (*tshad ma'i bsdus pa*) is ascribed to Dan bag pa (also spelled Dan 'bag pa) sMra ba'i seng ge ("den bak pa mawé seng gé") in the *Tho yig* (No. 11811) (van der Kuijp 1983: 69–70).

least indirectly linked to Phya pa, as he had been a direct student of gTsang nag pa according to lHo pa kun mkhyen Rin chen dpal ("lho pa kün khyen rin chen pel"), a student and biographer of Sa paṇ (see Jackson 1987: 115, n. 10). According to the *Ngor chos 'byung* (57a3–4, p. 315), he was a student of gTsang nag pa and of rMa bya Byang chub brtson 'grus ("ma ja jang chup tsön drü"), who might be identical with rMa bya rTsod pa'i seng ge ("ma ja tsö pé seng gé"), another member of the Eight Great Lions.[31]

Beside the treatises of gTsang nag pa and mTshur ston, numerous other works have now fortunately become available.[32] The observable family resemblance between them allows one to speak of a mainstream "rNgog lineage" or "gSang phu tradition" of epistemology. One should not, however, succumb to the illusion of a monolithic entity over the manifold individual contributions of the various authors, the in-depth study of which will occupy researchers for many decades.

2. Tibetan typologies of awareness (*blo rigs*)

In Indian Buddhist literature, discussions pertaining to mind (Skt. *citta*, Tib. *sems*) and mental factors (Skt. *caitta*, Tib. *sems byung*) and lists of the latter are typically part of the Abhidharma corpus.[33] The leading figures of the epistemological school, Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, as well as their Indian commentators and successors, do not display a particular interest in discussing awareness in general. Indian epistemological treatises focus instead on the specific types of awareness that qualify as "knowledge," in Sanskrit *pramāṇa* (Tib. *tshad ma*).[34] Arguing against

---

[31] On rMa bya, see Seyfort Ruegg 2000: Section I §4.2.

[32] The *bKa' gdams gsung 'bum* contains 38 entries for epistemological works. They represent 36 distinct manuscripts (two of which are reproduced twice) of 34 different works (for two of the works there are two different manuscripts).

[33] A list of mental factors is found, for instance, in the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* of Asaṅga and in the *Pañcaskandhaprakaraṇa*, a summary of Abhidharma by Vasubandhu, both of which date from c. 4th–5th century.

[34] In English-speaking scholarship, the term *pramāṇa* is also frequently translated as "valid cognition." Other translations such as "reliable cognition" and "instrument of knowledge" are also found. On the choice of translation in this publication, see I.1, 1, n. 3.

other (non-Buddhist) philosophical traditions, Dharmakīrti limits the at-tribution of this status to two types of awareness: perceptual knowledge (Skt. *pratyakṣa*, Tib. *mngon sum*) and inferential knowledge (Skt. *anumā-na*, Tib. *rjes su dpag pa*). The definition of knowledge and the identification of instances of knowledge are the key issues in his main treatises. Cases that do not qualify as knowledge are discussed—especially when there is some debate about their status—and some of them are re-ferred to by a specific term (for instance, "doubt"), but there is no attempt at establishing a systematic typology of "non-knowledge episodes" beyond the categories of pseudo-perception and pseudo-inferential cognition. For instance, conceptual cognitions that are derived from improper logical ev-idence and thus fail to qualify as inferential knowledge are discussed in reference to the faults pertaining to the putative logical evidence—one thus finds in Dharmakīrti's works a typology of improper logical evidence (see VII, Appendix 2.6)—and all fall within the general category of pseudo-inferential cognition. They are thus presented as cases that fail to qualify as proper inferential cognition rather than as cases that fail to qual-ify as knowledge. The same is true of the instances of pseudo-perception.

Tibetan epistemologists preserved in their works the pre-eminence of the investigation of episodes of knowledge, but one also witnesses novel-ties. Tibetan authors expand the scope of the discussion to a general investigation of awareness in relation with different kinds of objects. Fur-ther, they engage in a detailed discussion of episodes of awareness that do not qualify as knowledge, leading to a typology consisting of a closed

Modern scholars frequently use the expression *pramāṇavādin* to refer to Buddhist thinkers writing on epistemology, and *pramāṇavāda* to refer to the sub-ject matter of the works. This use is not grounded in the Indian tradition. However, my colleague Alessandro Graheli informed me that the related term *prāmāṇyavādin* is used in the *Nyāyamañjarī* of Jayanta Bhaṭṭa (c. 9th century), a Kashmiri philosopher of the Nyāya school, to refer to Buddhist opponents. But according to Graheli, the term does not seem to be a general epithet denoting Buddhist epistemologists. Rather, Jayanta's usage seems dictated in the two rel-evant passages by the immediate context.

In Tibetan, *tshad ma* (the term that translates the Sanskrit *pramāṇa*) refers (among other things) to "knowledge" and, metaphorically, to the epistemological school founded by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti (see Jackson 1994: 88). The twelfth-century scholar rGya dmar ba also reports the figurative use of the term *tshad ma* to refer to an epistemological treatise (*dBu ma de kho na nyid* 2a4: *tshad ma'i bstan chos la tshad ma zhes pa*).

set. The definition of knowledge, the very legitimacy of the types being distinguished as instances of awareness that do not qualify as knowledge, as well as their respective definitions, become the subject of subsequent debates.

These innovative aspects in the Tibetan treatment of the topic are well represented in the first chapter of Phya pa's *Mun sel*, entitled "The elucidation of the divisions of awareness" (*blo'i dbye ba nges pa*), which deals with awareness in general. A parallel discussion is located in Phya pa's commentary on Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (*'Od zer*), in an extensive excursus induced by the exegesis of the beginning of the first chapter of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (see V, 2).

While the formal classification of episodes of awareness that do not qualify as knowledge appears to be of Tibetan origin, it does not begin with Phya pa himself. Phya pa is building on a typology and definitions of the respective types that predate him, and he is involved in dialogue (or one might say, in debate) with other contemporaneous scholars who adopt alternative definitions.

2.1 rNgog Lo's typology of awareness

The earliest occurrence attested so far in Tibetan literature of a typology of awareness is found in the two available epistemological treatises of rNgog Lo (*dKa' gnas* and *Rigs thigs 'grel ṭi ka*). rNgog Lo lists five types of awareness that are not knowledge (*tshad ma ma yin pa'i blo lnga*):[35]

- non-ascertaining perception (*snang la ma nges pa*)
- post-knowledge cognition (*bcad pa'i yul can*)
- mistaken cognition (*log shes*)
- factive assessment (*yid dpyod*)
- doubt (*the tshom*)

rNgog Lo also subsumes these five types within three categories: non-ascertaining perception and post-knowledge cognition within the category of non-understanding (*ma rtogs*); mistaken cognition and factive

---

[35] The mention of a five-fold typology of episodes of awareness that are not knowledge in rNgog Lo's *dKa' gnas* was first noted in van der Kuijp 2003: 398. The corresponding passage is discussed in van der Kuijp 2009: 219. The relevant portions of both of rNgog Lo's works are investigated in detail in Hugon 2014. On these five categories, see the relevant portions of Phya pa's work edited in III, 2 and translated in II. Additional information is provided in IV.

assessment within the category of mistaken understanding (*log par rtog*[*s*] *pa*);[36] and doubt as a third category.

I argue in my study of the relevant passages of rNgog Lo's two works (Hugon 2014) that the five-fold typology is a by-product of rNgog Lo's work of translation-*cum*-exegesis. More precisely, it was inspired by passages located in the *Nyāyabinduṭīkā* and the *Pramāṇaviniścayaṭīkā*, two commentaries by Dharmottara on, respectively, the *Nyāyabindu* and the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* by Dharmakīrti. rNgog Lo contributed to translating these works of Dharmakīrti and Dharmottara into Tibetan (he revised an existing translation in the case of the *Nyāyabindu*). He also composed a concise guide to the *Nyāyabinduṭīkā* (the *Rigs thigs 'grel ṭi ka*) and included Dharmottara's interpretation in his explanation of the difficult points of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (the *dKa' gnas*). rNgog Lo identifies the situations discussed by Dharmottara as instances of distinct types of awareness that are not episodes of knowledge, and coins a new technical term for some of these types of awareness.[37] In my opinion, rNgog Lo is not applying, in his analysis of Dharmottara's works, a typology that was pre-established independently. Rather, such a typology is generated in the process of analyzing and translating Dharmottara's works and is then applied to comment on these works. rNgog Lo discusses Dharmottara's position with respect to this typology as if it was a typology used by Dharmottara himself. He presents his own view using the same framework, pointing out his disagreement with Dharmottara regarding the relation between some of the types.

A similar process is at play for other concepts in rNgog Lo's discussion on knowledge, concepts that become key elements in the Tibetan epistemological tradition. It is worth mentioning here the distinction of various types of objects and the analysis leading to the identification of the object of knowledge, which are instrumental in Phya pa's typology of awareness (see *Mun sel* 12 and VI, Tables A, B, and C). The distinction between the apprehended object (*gzung yul*) and the engaged object (*'jug yul*) and the analysis of their partial overlap is already found in rNgog Lo's *dKa' gnas* (30,13–20). It occurs there as part of the presentation of

---

[36] On the orthography *log rtogs* found in rNgog lo's works for this category, see Hugon 2014: 215, n. 63 and 234, n. 84.

[37] In particular, one witnesses the unprecedented use of the Tibetan technical terms *yid dpyod*, *bcad pa'i yul can*, and *snang la ma nges pa*.

Dharmottara's position.[38] In the *'Od zer*, Phya pa similarly includes this analysis in the presentation of Dharmottara's position (*'Od zer* 111.221.1.A2, 20b8–21b7). Like in the case of the five-fold typology of episodes of awareness that are not knowledge, rNgog Lo explains Dharmottara's position by using concepts that are derived from Dharmottara's texts, via the lens of his (rNgog Lo's) interpretation of these texts. That this is not properly speaking Dharmottara's position in Dharmottara's own terms is patent: One does find in Dharmottara's writings (in particular, the *Pramāṇaviniścayaṭīkā* and the *Laghuprāmāṇyaparīkṣā*) a concern regarding the identification of the object of knowledge among different kinds of objects. But Dharmottara limits this distinction to the objects associated with episodes of knowledge, and he focuses on the difference between the apprehended object (*gzung yul*) and the intentional object (*zhen pa'i yul*) (which, according to Dharmottara, perceptual knowledge also has), rather than the apprehended object and the engaged object (*'jug yul*).[39]

In view of the connection between rNgog Lo's work of translation and analysis and the delineating of the types of episodes of awareness that are not knowledge, there is ground to assume that the five-fold typology of such episodes originated with rNgog Lo. A possible influence of the Kashmiri environment in which he studied and translated the relevant texts should not be neglected, but unfortunately this is presently undocumented. These categories and the associated terminology took on a life of their own in Tibetan epistemology and became used as conceptual tools quasi-independently of the Indian background from which they emerged.

2.2 The definitional criteria of knowledge and the types of awareness that are not knowledge

When presenting his own view and his interpretation of Dharmottara, rNgog Lo essentially discusses the types of awareness that are not knowledge in terms of the features involved in the definition of knowledge that they fail to illustrate. In Phya pa's works and later works, their definition also reflects the criteria applied to distinguish from one

---

[38] The long section on Dharmottara's position is located in *dKa' gnas* 17–33. rNgog Lo's account is reported by Śākya mchog ldan in *Pham byed* 2 149a3–6 (p. 297).

[39] See Krasser 1995: 253–255 for a synthesis of Dharmottara's position on this topic in the *Laghuprāmāṇyaparīkṣā*. See also Hugon 2008b: 141–142.

another the various types of awareness being classified via successive dichotomy (see VI, Tables D, E, and G).

There is a clear correlation between the identification of the definitional criteria of knowledge and the classification of individual cases within the seven-fold typology, which includes two types of knowledge and five types that are not knowledge (VI, Table E). Established definitional criteria allow for the characterization of any given case as being an instance of knowledge or not. On the other hand, there are a number of cases that are predetermined (unanimously in the Buddhist tradition, or for individual authors) as counting or not counting as instances of knowledge. The chosen definitional criteria must be such that they apply to the former and not to the latter.

rNgog Lo bases his identification of the definitional criteria of knowledge on his interpretation of Dharmakīrti's statement on knowledge at the beginning of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*:

Dhk1   "Indeed, someone who proceeds, having positively ascertained an object through these two, is not deceived with regard to (its) causal efficacy."

(PVin$_{Skt}$ 1 1,10: *na hy ābhyām arthaṃ paricchidya pravartamāno 'rthakriyāyāṃ visaṃvādyate*; PVin$_{Tib}$ 1 30,17–18: *'di dag gis don yongs su bcad nas 'jug pa na don bya ba la bslu ba med pa'i phyir ro //*)

Other Tibetan scholars (see §4.1 for an example) draw instead from the *Pramāṇavārttika*:

Dhk2   "Knowledge is a cognition that is non-deceiving"

(PV$_{Skt}$ 2.1a: *pramāṇam avisaṃvādi jñānam*; Tib.: *tshad ma bslu med can shes pa /*)

Dhk3   "Or the revealing of an unknown object"

(PV$_{Skt}$ 2.5c: *ajñātaprakāśo vā*; Tib.: *ma shes[40] don gyi gsal byed kyang /*)

Yet others, as in Phya pa's case (see below §3), arrive at their definitional criteria in more unconventional ways.

Tibetan scholars identify different criteria for knowledge and occasionally disagree on the nature of some predetermined cases. This leads to the adoption of alternate definitions for the various types of awareness

---

[40] See III, 2, n. 27 for the alternative Tibetan rendering of *ajñāta* as *ma rtogs*.

being distinguished. In the *Mun sel*, Phya pa only points out different po-
sitions pertaining to some of them—non-ascertaining perception, factive
assessment, and doubt (these are discussed in IV). As the *Tshad bsdus*
and the works of Phya pa's students bear witness, other types of aware-
ness were certainly not exempt from ongoing debates in Phya pa's time.

2.3 Typologies of awareness in the Tibetan epistemological tradition postdating Phya pa

rNgog Lo's categorization of episodes of awareness was systematized by
subsequent scholars. Phya pa's works provide the earliest available in-
stance of an extensive account on this theme. The topic became an
integral part of Tibetan epistemological treatises. Although the material
extant today still allows only a fragmentary view on the developments of
the Tibetan tradition up to the classical period and into the post-classical
period, the available works I have consulted so far all include a chapter
or section dealing with awareness in general and establish a typology (or
several typologies) of awareness in connection with a typology of objects.
They all include in this framework a discussion of episodes of awareness
that are not knowledge, which are also examined in relation to the defini-
tion of knowledge. The latter is commonly dealt with in a subsequent
chapter or section, which first deals extensively with the general theory
of definition.[41]

The account that is the closest to Phya pa's presentation in its structure
and contents is found in the *Tshad bsdus* (on which cf. n. 28). Its author,
however, also mentions alternative definitions to Phya pa's, and adopts
them in some cases.[42] Similar discussions are also found in the commentary
on the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* by Phya pa's student gTsang nag pa, in an epis-
temological summary by the latter's student mTshur ston,[43] and in the

---

[41] On the Tibetan theory of definition, see Hugon 2009b.

[42] See section 1 (*spyir blo tsam gyi rab tu dbye ba*) (*Tshad bsdus* 3–62) and in
particular section 123.3 (*Tshad bsdus* 54–62) on the five-fold typology of epi-
sodes of awareness that are not knowledge. Why these five do not qualify as
knowledge is discussed in the section on the definition of knowledge (*Tshad
bsdus* 118–119, *khyab ches pa spang ba*).

[43] On these two scholars, see above §1 and n. 29. In his extensive commentary
on the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*, gTsang nag pa includes an excursus on the nature of
the episodes of awareness that are not knowledge within his discussion on the
definition of knowledge (see *bsDus pa* 22b6–24a5). mTshur ston's discussion of

later work of the same genre by Chu mig pa.[44]

Other works that became available in the *bKa' gdams gsung 'bum* collection are more difficult to date precisely, but they commonly feature similar discussions on the types of awareness. Among these works, the epistemological summary by gTsang drug pa rDo rje 'od zer ("tsang druk pa dor jé ö zer," 12th century, hereafter: gTsang drug rdo rje)—the *gSal byed*—postdates the compositions of Phya pa's direct disciples gTsang nag pa and Dan bag pa, whose views are often quoted.[45] Its author might be identical with the figure named gTsang drug ("tsang druk") or gTsang pa gru gu ("tsang pa dru gu"), one of the nine spiritual sons of gNyal zhig 'Jam pa'i rdo rje ("nyel zhik jam pé dor jé," ?–1207?), who was himself an abbot of the upper college of gSang phu.[46] Since gNyal zhig was a student of Dan bag pa, this could explain why the latter is frequently quoted in the *gSal byed*.[47] The similarities between the *gSal byed* and Chu mig pa's *rNam rgyal* could result from their being the product of the same

---

awareness follows the broad lines of Phya pa's discussion in the *Mun sel* in terms of its structure but is closer to gTsang nag pa's account in terms of content. The five-fold typology of episodes of awareness that are not knowledge is discussed within the last of the three pairs of opposite characterizations by which episodes of awareness are classified: engaging positively or via the exclusion of what is other; being conceptual or non-conceptual; being or not being an episode of knowledge (*sGron ma* 5b2–6a9). They are further discussed in relation to the definition of knowledge in *sGron ma* 20a8–20b2.

[44] See the first chapter of *rNam rgyal* (A1b1–20b6; B1b1–24b5) on awareness in general, and section 123 (*blo'i dbye ba*, A8a8–10a7; B10a9–12b6) on the seven-fold typology.

[45] The section on awareness in general includes a three-fold division of awareness based on the apprehended object and a seven-fold division based on the trio of the apprehended, the intentional, and the engaged object (*gSal byed* 9a1–11 [folio 11 is missing]). The five types that are not knowledge are discussed in relation to the definition of knowledge in *gSal byed* 28b6–7.

[46] On gNyal zhig, see Sparham 1996.

[47] On the *gSal byed* and its author see Hugon 2013b: 674, n. 17. The colophon of the manuscript mentions, along with the identification of the author's *bla ma* as gNyal pa zhang tshes ("nyel pa zhang tsé"), the yet unidentified dPal ldan rtsang pa 'bre ("penden tsang pa dré"). gTsang drug pa might also correspond to the gTsang pa drug po who was a teacher of bCom ldan ral gri in 1239. If gTsang pa gru gu and gTsang drug po are one and the same person, this would place his time of activity in the late 12th century and up to the first half of the 13th century.

teaching lineage going back to gNyal zhig—indeed, Chu mig pa was a second-generation student in the teaching lineage of gNyal zhig via sKyel nag Grags pa seng ge ("kyel nak drak pa seng gé")—and even back to Dan bag pa.

Yet another work of interest is the *Tshad nye bsdus* by Chos kyi bzhad pa ("chö kyi zhé pa"), which, according to its colophon, builds on another work, the *Tshad ma sde bdun kyi de kho na nyid bsdus pa* by the author's *bla ma* rDo rje dbang grags ("dor jé wang drak").[48] Its structure is similar to the epistemological summaries of gTsang drug rdo rje and Chu mig pa, and the three authors often cite the same sources. It also has features, however, that are not found in these two works but are found in mTshur ston's *sGron ma*.[49]

---

[48] The colophon specifies that rDo rje dbang grags's work was composed in a fire-female-ox year of the seventh of the 500-year cycles of the Buddha's teaching (*Tshad nye bsdus* 21a1–2: *tshad ma sde bdun kyi de kho na nyid bsdus pa / zhes bya / bde bar gshegs pa'i bstan pa lnga brgya' bdun pa la* [21a2] *bab pa'i tshe / me mo glang gi lo la / gte' ra bkra shis dbu mang g(i) dgon par / brul zhugs kyi khur 'dzin cing / sde snod rab 'byams la mang du thos pa'i shag kya'i dge slong / bla ma mkhas pa chen po rdo rje dbang grags kyis sbyar pa las /*). The seventh 500-year cycle following the passing of the Buddha corresponds to the years 863 to 1363 according to the calculation of Atiśa, who (unlike modern scholars) placed the Buddha's passing in 2137 B.C. (Seyfort Ruegg 1992: 265–266). The same date was calculated by Phya pa, and an approaching one (2133 B.C.) by bSod nams rtse mo ("sö nam tsé mo," 1142–1182), his nephew Sa paṇ, and the latter's nephew 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan ("pak pa lo drö gyel tsen," 1235–1280) (see Seyfort Ruegg 1992: 272–273 and van der Kuijp 2011: 88 for the calculation of Phya pa and other scholars). Relevant candidates for a fire-ox year in this time span would be the years 1157, 1217 and 1277. Chos kyi bzhad pa's work postdates the work of gTsang nag pa (d. after 1195), whom the author mentions nominally on fol. 9a5. A forthcoming study by Matthew Kapstein will provide more detail on the identity of the author of the *Tshad nye bsdus*. It may be worth noting that the name rDo rje dbang grags—more precisely, "the well-learned monk rDo rje dbang grags" (*mang du thos pa'i dge slong rdo rje dbang grags*)—appears as that of the donor in a manuscript of Phya pa's synoptic table of the *Pramāṇaviniściaya* (*bKa' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol. 8, 3–23; see also Hugon 2009a). Whether it is the same rDo rje dbang grags as the author of the *Tshad nye bsdus* remains an open question.

[49] Unlike gTsang drug rdo rje and Chu mig pa, but like mTshur ston (see n. 43), the author indeed discusses the episodes of awareness that are not knowledge as

The abovementioned works, which range from the 12th to the 13th cen-
tury, are representative of what can be called the mainstream gSang phu
tradition, characterized, among other things, by the very admittance of a
five-fold typology of episodes of awareness that are not knowledge.[50]
Their authors subdivide and group the five types in slightly different ways,
but they do not add new instances to the five-fold set. However, none of
the respective authors repeat exactly Phya pa's typology, the definitions
of the respective types, and the instances of the various episodes of aware-
ness. Some differences are minor—terminological changes,[51] changes in
phrasing, examples, and the author's focus—or reflect the need to refine
the definitions to include or exclude problematic cases. Other differences
testify to a more profound disagreement on core issues. One can also ob-
serve a large degree of disagreement regarding the explanation for why
each of the five types fails to qualify as knowledge (on the definition of
which the authors however roughly agree).[52] In view of these manifold
subsequent developments, we have been especially careful in our transla-
tion of the *Mun sel* to avoid contaminating the understanding of Phya pa's
system by retroactively ascribing to him views attested in later works that,
even if plausibly matching his own, are not explicit in his works.

---

part of one of three pairs of opposite characterizations of awareness (concep-
tual/non-conceptual; engaging positively/via the exclusion of what is other;
knowledge/not knowledge) (*Tshad nye bsdus* 8b1–9a8).

[50] In the *Rigs gter* (composed in 1219, cf. van der Kuijp 1983: 101 and 303,
n. 293), Sa paṇ reports the five-fold typology as being the view of "most Tibetans"
(*Rigs gter* II 58,22: *bod phal cher blo lngar sdud de*). This view is also ascribed
in a general way to "logicians nowadays" by the author of a short epistemological
work (8 folios) of uncertain dating, the *Tshad ma'i spyi skad*, who himself adopts
a quite different position on the topic (3a8–9: *gcad bya sgro 'dogs kyi blo la deng*
[em. *deng* : Ms *de*] *sang dus kyi rtog ge ba rnams* [3a9] *tshad ma ma yin pa'i blo
lnga zhes grags ste*). See below and n. 62 for more details.

[51] Some variations (such as *yid spyod* for *yid dpyod*) qualify as orthographical
variations rather than terminological differences. The main terminological
change concerns the type translated here as "post-knowledge cognition": initially
designated by the Tibetan term *bcad pa'i yul can* (rNgog Lo, Phya pa, gTsang
nag pa), the term *bcad shes* or its homonym *dpyad shes* (and the orthographical
variant *spyad shes*) become the standard in works of the classical period (see IV,
2[a]).

[52] See §3.3 and n. 109.

In the classical period of Tibetan epistemology, the investigation and categorization of episodes of awareness becomes a distinctive area of study known as *blo rigs* and an integral part of the monastic curriculum in the dGe lugs ("gé luk") order. The study of *blo rigs* is based on eponymous autochthonous manuals that echo to a large extent the mainstream system of gSang phu scholars. Well-known instances are the *blo rigs* by Yongs 'dzin Phur bu lcog Blo bzang tshul khrims byams pa rgya mtsho ("yong dzin pur bu chok lo zang tsül trim jam pa gya tso," 1825–1901), the *Yongs 'dzin blo rigs*, which is part of the *Rigs lam 'phrul gyi lde mig* (also known as *Yongs 'dzin bsdus grwa*), or that by 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa Ngag dbang brtson 'grus ("jam yang zhé pa ngak wang tsön drü," 1648–1721), the *'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i blo rigs*.

Such works continue to be composed nowadays in the dGe lugs and bKa' brgyud ("ka gyü") traditions,[53] and they were popular as well among Sa skya ("sa kya") scholars.[54]

Blo rigs literally means "the kinds (*rigs*) of awareness (*blo*),"[55] in other words, a typology of episodes of awareness. This term was not used

---

[53] A *blo rigs* by dGe bshes 'Jam dpal bsam 'phal ("gé shé jam pel sam pel," d. 1975), which is used as a teaching manual at the Blo gsal gling ("lo sel ling") college of 'Bras spungs monastery in southern India, together with an oral commentary by Lati Rinbochay, is translated into English in Rinpochay&Napper 1980. The also recent *Blo rtags kyi rnam gzhag rigs gzhung rgya mtsho'i snying po* by mKhan Rin po che Tshul khrims rgya mtsho ("khen rin po ché tsül trim gya tso," b. c. 1934) is a *blo rigs* of the bKa' brgyud tradition (see Tshul khrims rgya mtsho 1997 in the bibliography).

[54] See Onoda 1996: 195.

[55] The spelling "*blo rigs*" is to be preferred to "*blo rig*," which is also found frequently (notably in the eponymous work by Yongs 'dzin Phur bu lcog) and is listed as an alternate spelling for the former in the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (1925). *Blo rig(s)* in the sense of "typology of awareness" is to be distinguished from *blo rig*, which is defined in the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* as "a cognition having an object" (*yul can gyi shes pa*). See van der Kuijp 1985: 36–37 for grounds to reject the rendering "awareness and knowledge" adopted for *blo rig(s)* in Rinpochay&Napper 1980.

In the classes of *bsdus grwa*, *blo rigs* stands as a parallel expression to *rtags rigs* (literally "the kinds of logical reason"), the third class of *bsdus grwa* in the broad sense of the term. The expression *rtags rigs* finds a precedent in the phrasing "*rtags kyi rigs*" attested in Phya pa's *Mun sel* (77a2) when dealing with the typology of logical reasons. Here also, Rinpochay&Napper's translation as "signs and reasoning" must be rejected.

by rNgog Lo or Phya pa—the latter speaks, rather, of "divisions of awareness" (*blo'i dbye ba*)—but it is found in the *Tshad bsdus* and in the work of Phya pa's second-generation student mTshur ston.[56]

In dGe lugs pa monastic education, *blo rigs* is part of the three classes that constitute the study of *bsdus grwa* in the broad sense of the term (often translated "Collected Topics"), the corresponding manuals for which started to be composed at least from the 15th century onward.[57] Relevant discussions on mind also take place in some manuals of *bsdus grwa* (in the restricted sense of the term) in the lesson entitled "subject and object" (*yul yul can*).[58]

The attribution of a *bsdus grwa* work to Phya pa is frequently found in modern secondary literature. But as I argued at length elsewhere, that attribution is unsubstantiated.[59] Phya pa's *Mun sel* might well have played

---

[56] See *Tshad bsdus* 51,20–21: *gzung yul dang 'jug yul gnyis ka la ltos nas blo rigs bdun du dbye ba* and *sGron ma* 3a9, which lists the sections entitled "the division into three kinds of awareness based on the apprehended object" (*gzung yul la ltos te blo rigs gsum du dbye' ba*) and "the division into ten kinds of awareness based on the object in general" (*yul tsam la ltos te blo rigs bcur dbye' ba*). The term *blo rigs* is also found in Sa paṇ's *Rigs gter* (II 68,17), where the author criticizes one of the types of awareness "posited as a distinct type of awareness" (*blo rigs tha dad du 'jog na*) by his predecessors.

[57] See Dreyfus 2003 (and in particular 98–110 and 111–148) for a complete presentation of the Tibetan monastic curriculum. On *bsdus grwa* literature, see Onoda 1996. In the restricted sense of the term, *bsdus grwa* refers to just the first of the three classes. The third class is entitled *rtags rigs* and is concerned with the various types of logical reasons in inferential reasoning.

[58] This is, for instance, the seventh lesson of the third part of the *Rwa stod bsdus grwa* composed by 'Jam dbyangs mChog lha 'od zer ("jam yang chok lha ö zer," 1429–1500), who was abbot of the Rwa ba stod ("ra ba tö") college of gSang phu's lower monastery (*gling smad*), and it also appears as the title of the twentieth lesson of the (non-extant) *bTsan po bsdus grwa* composed by gSer khang pa Dam chos rnam rgyal ("ser khang pa dam chö nam gyel," 17th century), who was abbot of the same college fourteen abbots after mChog lha 'od zer. It is also the fifth lesson of the *bsdus grwa* texts composed by 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa and his disciple Ngag dbang bkra shis ("ngak wang tra shi," 1678–1738). This topic is absent, by contrast, from the *bsdus grwa* by Yongs 'dzin Phur bu lcog. See Onoda 1992: 61–65.

[59] See Hugon 2008b: 74–90, and in particular 77–80. The source of this mistaken attribution (which was made before Phya pa's works became available) lies in the interpretation of a statement by Klong rdol bla ma Ngag dbang blo bzang

the role of precursor for compositions of the *bsdus grwa* genre, but it does not constitute an ancestor of *bsdus grwa* compositions in terms of structure and contents. In particular, while later *blo rigs* compositions are undoubtedly inspired by Phya pa's discussion of the topic, they are the product of manifold successive developments and modifications. Evident differences are, notably, the very definition of knowledge, the introduction of types of objects not distinguished by Phya pa, and the addition of elements absent in Phya pa's discussion of the topic, in particular a section on mind and mental factors.

While the five-fold set was broadly (if not unanimously) adopted during the pre-classical period, the beginning of the classical period was marked by Sa paṇ's rejection of this typology in favor of an alternative system distinguishing only three sorts of awareness that are not knowledge, akin to the division already proposed by rNgog Lo (see above §2.1):

- non-understanding (*ma rtogs*)
- mistaken conception cognition (*log rtog*)
- doubt (*the tshom*)[60]

However, contrary to rNgog Lo, Sa paṇ does not accept that five distinct types are subsumed in these three. He rejects, in particular, the legitimacy of factive assessment, non-ascertaining cognition, and post-knowledge cognition as distinct types.

In the classical and post-classical periods, there is a general dichotomy between scholars who embraced the five-fold set—typically, scholars associated with the dGe lugs pa school—and scholars who, following Sa paṇ, radically rejected it. The whole picture, however, is not limited to these two options. One also finds alternative models that testify to their specific author's original approach and possibly also to the impact of Sa paṇ's arguments against the five-fold typology.

("long döl la ma ngak wang lo zang," 1719–1794/95) describing a work in eighteen lessons, which was understood to constitute a description of the contents of Phya pa's *Mun sel*.

[60] *Rigs gter* I 69,8–27. See van der Kuijp 2009: 220–222 for a translation of this passage. According to Sa paṇ, these three do not to differ in terms of their essence (*ngo bo*), but only in terms of the way they apply (*'jug tshul*).

For instance, the author of the *Tshad ma'i spyi skad*,[61] a short (8 folios) as yet undated epistemological summary, rejects his contemporaries' view that all elements of the five-fold set have the same status in opposition to the status of knowledge—in his terms, that they are "episodes of awareness consisting in superimposition, which are what is to be eliminated" (*gcad bya sgro 'dogs kyi blo*), whereas the two "episodes of awareness consisting in knowledge are what eliminates [the superimpositions]" (*gcod byed tshad ma'i blo*). The author holds in contrast that post-knowledge cognition and factive assessment are actually episodes of awareness that amount to knowledge (*tshad ma'i blo khongs su gtogs pa*) in that they eliminate superimpositions.[62]

Another more renowned example is Dar ma rgyal mtshan bCom ldan ral gri ("dar ma gyel tsen chom den rel dri," 1227–1305), a scholar who studied in both the gSang phu tradition and the Sa skya tradition.[63] He proposes an idiosyncratic six-fold typology of episodes of awareness that are not knowledge. It includes Sa paṇ's three categories—characterized as being "unlike knowledge" (*tshad ma dang mi 'dra ba*)—and three types that are "like knowledge" (*tshad ma dang 'dra ba*), among which one finds post-knowledge cognition. Non-ascertaining perception is discussed as an instance of the category of non-understanding, but the author does not accept factive assessment as a distinct type.

Another such hybrid system is found in the work of mKhas grub rje dGe legs dpal bzang ("khé drup jé gé lek pel zang," 1385–1438), who rejects the distinction between perception and perceptual knowledge, and therefore does not adopt the categories of non-ascertaining perception and perceptual post-knowledge cognition (although he includes conceptual post-knowledge cognition in his typology). mKhas grub also does not accept factive assessment as a distinct type. He and his followers represent one of the two main trends within the dGe lugs pa tradition, the other

---

[61] The name of the author is given as "gNyag" ("nyak") in the manuscript, but is reported as "gNyags" in the catalogue of the *bKa' gdams gsung 'bum*. Given the reference to Atiśa at the end of the treatise, its author was presumably affiliated with the bKa' gdams pa school.

[62] See *Tshad ma'i spyi skad* 3a8–4a4.

[63] On Ral gri's *Tshad ma rgyan gyi me tog*, see van der Kuijp 1994 and 2003. Ral gri is institutionally affiliated with the bKa' gdams pa. He was a student of the Indian junior pandit Dānaśīla, Sa skya Paṇḍita, and Skyel nag Grags pa seng ge (who had been one of Chu mig pa's teachers).

being associated with *bsdus grwa* compositions. Their divergence when it comes to the typology of mind is tied to their different approach regarding the definitional criteria of knowledge.[64]

The various typologies adopted by authors postdating Phya pa, even the similar ones involving a five-fold set, are undoubtedly worth a separate investigation. A detailed discussion of them, however, has not been included in the present study in order to keep the amount of material manageable. Some of these later typologies and related definitions, in particular those tied to the ones addressed by Phya pa in the *Mun sel*, are discussed in greater detail in IV, and alternative definitions for the respective types are listed in IV, 6 for the sake of comparison and as evidence for the ongoing evolution in the tradition. In addition, such lists might be helpful in ascertaining the date of composition of other epistemological works, at least in terms of a relative chronology. A brief overview of subsequent developments related to the definition of knowledge can be found below in §3.6. Phya pa's definitions and the definitions of some of his successors are listed in VII, Appendix 3.

3. Phya pa's definition of knowledge

Phya pa's contribution to the development of Tibetan epistemology stands out by its originality and unconventionality, but it is also highly dependent on and influenced by the Indian and Tibetan background on which Phya pa elaborates his ideas. When it comes to defining knowledge, Phya pa is aware of the interpretations of several Indian exegetes of Dharmakīrti on the topic: Prajñākaragupta, Devendrabuddhi, Dharmottara, and Śaṅkaranandana. He criticizes the first three and endorses the definition of the fourth, which becomes his "short definition" of knowledge in terms of "understanding something veridical" (see *Mun sel* 212.14).[65] The

---

[64] See Dreyfus 1997a: 374–378 and below §3.6.

[65] I discuss this short definition and Phya pa's digression pertaining to the meaning of "veridical" in this context in Hugon 2011a. On the source of this phrasing in Śaṅkaranandana's works, see the discussion in §5.1.1. See §5.2 for a precedent in rNgog Lo's works. The short definition in terms of *bden pa'i don rtogs pa* is mentioned by Jayānanda in his *Tarkamudgara*—a text that this Kashmiri scholar composed in Tibet and translated himself together with Khu mdo sde 'bar ("khu do dé bar")—(verse 2), along with Dharmottara's definition (*bcad don thob byed pa*) and the criterion from PV 2.5c (*ma rtogs don gsal*). Jayānanda refutes it in

views of Phya pa's Tibetan predecessors and contemporaneous scholars—among whom are rNgog Lo and Phya pa's teacher rGya dmar ba—also play a constitutive role, both via influence and reaction.

Against this background, one can identify two points regarding which Phya pa's contribution rightly qualifies as "revolutionary": the scope of knowledge and the nature of knowledge, in particular, for perceptual knowledge. The first point does not stand out prominently in the passages of the *Mun sel* translated in this publication, although it is linked with Phya pa's "short definition" in terms of "understanding a veridical object" and his interpretation of "veridical" in the sense of "being unopposed" (*gnod pa med pa*) and "existing according to the natural disposition of the objects to be cognized" (*shes bya'i gshis su gnas*). I will return to this briefly in the conclusion. My focus will here be on the second point, which is tied to Phya pa's extended version of the definition of knowledge.

The defining characteristics of episodes of knowledge adopted by Phya pa and their philosophical implications were discussed in the first part of the introduction, which also examines the ways in which the five types of awareness that are not episodes of knowledge fail to satisfy these conditions (see I.1, 4). The defining characteristics that Phya pa singles out were referred to in terms of the following three criteria for knowledge:

(K1)   The "superimpositions criterion"
(K2)   The "novelty criterion"
(K3)   The "mode of apprehension criterion"

As for the definition properly speaking, Phya pa states in *Mun sel* 212.14:

> Here, our position is this. The meaning of "Revealing an unknown state of affairs" (PV 2.5c) is: that which counters the capacity to produce superimpositions that are incompatible with the way things are (K1), through aspects of awareness that are non-erroneous with regard to a positively discerned state of affairs (K3). Here, this is what is called "understanding something veridical" (cf. BPP 22).

In what follows, I will first focus on the "superimpositions criterion" (K1), examining the wording adopted by Phya pa, its meaning, and its relation

---

verses 11b–19. These definitions are refuted in a similar way by rMa bya Byang chub brtson 'grus, who was a student of Jayānanda and reportedly authored a commentary on the *Tarkamudgara*, in his *De nyid snang ba* 432.111.21 (769–771), verses 12d–14a.

with other parts of his system. Then, in connection to this, I will examine whether there is a significant difference between Phya pa's definition of knowledge in the *Mun sel* and in the *'Od zer*. Criterion K1 is indeed formulated differently in the respective texts. The omission of a distinct mention of K2 in the statement of the extended definition cited above and the role ascribed in this text to K1 for excluding types that do not qualify as knowledge could suggest that K1 in the *Mun sel* represents a stronger criterion than in the *'Od zer*.

3.1 The "superimpositions criterion" (K1) in the *Mun sel*

3.1.1 Various formulations of K1 in the Mun sel

In the passages translated in this publication, one finds a variety of formulations for K1 (which are also attested elsewhere in the *Mun sel*):

(1)   Countering the capacity to produce superimpositions
         sgro 'dogs skyed pa'i nus pa bzlog pa

(2)   Eliminating superimpositions
         sgro 'dogs bsal/sel pa
         sgro 'dogs bcad/gcad pa
         sgro 'dogs gcod byed
         sgro 'dogs chod

(3)   Countering superimpositions
         sgro 'dogs bzlog pa

(4)   Potentially opposing superimpositions
         sgro 'dogs la gnod du rung

(5)   Actually rendering superimpositions powerless/ Rendering actual superimpositions powerless
         sgro 'dogs dngos su nus med du byed pa
         sgro 'dogs dngos su yod pa nus med du byed pa

(6)   Opposing superimpositions
         sgro 'dogs la gnod pa

Since (1) is the formulation that Phya pa chooses when stating his own definition of knowledge in the *Mun sel*, I take it to be Phya pa's final

formulation of K1 in this text.[66] It is, let us note, the only formulation that speaks of the "capacity to produce superimpositions" rather than just "superimpositions." A subsequent discussion (*Mun sel* 212.14 [b]) reveals that this specification is meant to ensure that the criterion applies in the case of inferential cognition (see below §3.1.4). The same discussion indicates that K1 must account for two options: "potentially opposing superimpositions" (4) and "actually rendering superimpositions powerless" (5) (see §3.1.4.ii).

The more profusely used expressions for K1 simply connote, without specification, the "elimination of superimpositions" (2)[67] and the "countering of superimpositions" (3).[68] Of similar meaning, the expression "opposing superimpositions" (6) is not strictly speaking used for criterion K1; it is part of the formulation of the distinguishing characteristic pertaining to the last three types of awareness in the seven-fold typology: perceptual knowledge, inferential cognition, and factive assessment.

Anticipating the comparison of the definition of knowledge in the *Mun sel* and in the *'Od zer*, it is worth noting that the expression "incompatible with opposite superimpositions" (*sgro 'dogs dang 'gal ba*) is *not* used for criterion K1 in the *Mun sel*. However, "incompatibility with opposite superimpositions" is given as characterizing the nature of episodes of

---

[66] This formulation finds an echo in the phrasing "eliminating the capacity to produce superimpositions" used to express the definition of knowledge in *Mun sel* 35b2: *mtshan nyid ni don la mi 'khrul pa'i rnam pas gshis dang mi mthun pa'i sgro 'dogs skyed nus sel pa.*

[67] *Sgro 'dogs sel pa* and *sgro 'dogs gcad pa* (and their alternative forms) are used in a fluctuating way (see, for instance, *Mun sel* 121.2). They stand for K1 in particular in the definition of the engaged object (*Mun sel* 121.13) and in the explanation of the way in which perceptual awareness comes to be an episode of knowledge (*Mun sel* 112.23). The related expression with the verb *chod* occurs in the phrase "(with regard to an object) for which superimpositions have already been eliminated" (*sgro 'dogs chod zin pa*) in the definition of post-knowledge cognition. It expresses an idea equivalent to the notion of "(with regard to an object) previously known" (*sngar rtogs pa*) used to single out post-knowledge cognition in the establishment of the seven-fold typology (see VI, Table E).

[68] This expression is only used as a reformulation of K1 in *Mun sel* 212.14 (a), a paragraph in which the role of K3 in the definition is explained as a necessary specification to be attached to K1. The expression also stands for K1 in *Mun sel* 212.22, where Phya pa implies that factive assessment and mistaken cognition satisfy K1 but not K3.

transitive and reflexive awareness that qualify as perceptual knowledge (*Mun sel* 234.1).[69] Conversely, "compatibility with opposite superimpositions" is the definitional characteristic of non-ascertaining perception that sets it apart from perceptual knowledge (*Mun sel* 123.12), as well as the feature invoked for its being excluded from knowledge episodes (*Mun sel* 212.22).

3.1.2 What are superimpositions?

The first question one may ask with regard to criterion K1 is "what are superimpositions"? The Tibetan term *sgro 'dogs*, which is also used to translate the Sanskrit terms *samāropa*, *adhyāropa*, and *āropa*, connotes a mistaken imputation. This notion has a narrower scope than the terminologically related notion "superimposed" (*sgro btags*), which denotes a characteristic that applies to all apprehended objects that are not real entities. The mistaken imputations relevant to K1 are exclusively of a conceptual nature.[70] The mistake that is involved in the context under consideration is not the basic lack of correspondence between reality and its conceptual representation via superimpositions of universals and properties (the type of mistaken cognition noted $MC_{1.1}$ in IV, 4).[71] It is, rather,

---

[69] In the passage that follows, Phya pa affirms that "incompatibility with superimpositions" prevents the application of these characteristics to non-ascertaining perception and to perceptual post-knowledge cognition (*Mun sel* 43a6: *rang myong pa dang gzhan 'dzin pa snang la ma nges pa dang bcad pa'i yul can la khyab ches pa 'ang ma yin te / sgro 'dogs dang 'gal bas khyad par du byas pas de gzhan la mi 'jug pa'i phyir ro //*). The argument is problematic with regard to the latter, because, assuming that "incompatible with directing one's mind in the opposite way" (which is part of the definition of post-knowledge cognition) is coextensive with "incompatible with superimpositions," the latter feature does apply to post-knowledge cognition.

[70] This feature stands out clearly in the controversy in *Mun sel* 212.14 (b). The opponent points out the fact that inferential cognition cannot coexist with superimpositions, because this would imply the simultaneous existence of two conceptual cognitions in the same mental continuum. Phya pa accepts this fact, and concedes that superimpositions are not actually present at the time of an inferential cognition.

[71] See *Mun sel* 111 (b) and *Mun sel* 112.111.112.2. As Phya pa points out in these passages, all conceptual characterizations of entities are actually mistaken in that they represent entities in a way that does not correspond to their nature of being unique and undivided.

akin to a mistake pertaining to the intentional object, in other words, a mistaken identification of the object (the type noted $MC_{2/3}$ in IV, 4). For instance, the superimposing of the property "permanent" to sound, which is in reality impermanent, is likened to superimposing the category "snake" to a rope. This notion of "superimposition" is thus akin to that of "mistaken determinate awareness" (*log par nges pa*) (MC_2). Phya pa seems to assimilate this phenomenon with the operation of "directing" (*zhen pa*),[72] a directing that is, in all the examples discussed in the text, towards a feature that does not correspond with the nature of the object. In brief: superimpositions are always mistaken.[73] This is made explicit in several formulations of K1 in which superimpositions are qualified as "opposite" (*bzlog pa*), "incompatible with the way things are" (*gnas lugs dang 'gal ba*), and as being "in disagreement with the natural disposition (of things)" (*gshis dang mi mthun pa*).

3.1.3 Which superimpositions can be eliminated?

In the *Mun sel*, Phya pa does not provide information as to which superimpositions can be eliminated by an episode of knowledge. His input on this issue is limited to specifying conditions for their elimination to take

---

[72] See in this regard the expression "compatible/incompatible with directing one's mind in the opposite way" (*bzlog pa'i zhen pa dang mi 'gal ba/'gal ba*) used as a distinguishing criterion in the seven-fold typology. Non-ascertaining perception, which is classified as "compatible with directing one's mind in the opposite way," is later defined as "compatible with opposite superimpositions" (*bzlog pa'i sgro 'dogs dang mi 'gal ba*), and this "compatibility" is said to be established by observing the engaging in the directing of one's mind towards the opposite (e.g., *rtag pa lasogs par zhen pa 'jug pa*) (see *Mun sel* 123.12 and 123.13).

[73] Examples of superimpositions include the superimposition "non-blue" in the case of a blue particular, "blue" in the case of a particular that is not blue, "permanent" in the case of a momentary object such as sound, "not being conventionally true" in the case of a concept, and "non-existence" in the case of existing objects. Regarding the second example (*Mun sel* 212.22), the elimination of the superimposition "blue" occurs in the context of a mistaken cognition that determines a white shell to be yellow. What is here *eliminated* (the mistaken superimposition "blue") is thus to be distinguished from what is *excluded* via the operation of exclusion (cf. *Mun sel* 112.111.2), which would, in this case, be the correct identification as "white" or "non-yellow." See also in *Mun sel* 212.14 (b) the example of the mistaken determination "singular" that eliminates the superimposition "multiple," a superimposition which is mistaken as well.

place; and even these are specified indirectly by spelling out two grounds
for the absence of elimination of superimpositions in the case of non-
ascertaining perception: lack of focus and a feature being non-manifest
(*rnam pa dang mi ldan pa/rnam pa med pa/rnam med*) or not evident
(*rnam pa ma gsal ba*).[74] Phya pa only provides few examples of such fea-
tures, the principal one being the feature of impermanence (*mi rtag pa*)
or momentariness (*skad cig ma*), which cannot be perceptually ascer-
tained by ordinary persons.[75] The characterization of "impermanence" as
non-manifest appears to be exclusively objective; impermanence is a non-
manifest feature even though it can be ascertained by more skilled cog-
nizers (i.e., Noble Beings). However, Phya pa possibly also accepts cases
where the characterization as non-manifest is circumstantial. For instance
the perception of mother-of-pearl may fail to ascertain this feature due to
the distant location of the object, but this feature can be ascertained
subsequently by getting closer to the object.[76]

In the *'Od zer* (111.221.221), by contrast, Phya pa extensively dis-
cusses which superimpositions can be eliminated, doing so by spelling
out three restrictions:

---

[74] On the origin of this notion, see Hugon 2011a: 169, n. 44.

[75] In the *'Od zer*, Phya pa also mentions the "efficacy" (*nus pa*), i.e., the causal
efficacy, of an object. See *'Od zer* 118a5: *rnam myed kyi rgyu nus pa thogs myed*
"Being a capable unobstructed cause, which is non-manifest." The idea is that
one recognizes that an object is "capable of fulfilling an action" by observing the
result at the subsequent moment. But the efficacy itself is non-manifest. "Imper-
manence" and "efficacy" are two properties already described as "non-manifest"
(*rnam pa dang myed pa*) by rNgog Lo (*dKa' gnas* 138, see Hugon 2011a: 169,
n. 44). The idea that "absence or presence of a self" is not manifest (*rnam pa
dang ldan pa ma yin*) also comes in an opponent's argument (*dKa' gnas* 271).
In Phya pa's works, other features labeled "non-manifest" are that of "being er-
roneous" or "being non-erroneous" (cf. *Mun sel* 63b3, *'Od zer* 126b8: *'khrul
ma 'khrul rnam med yin pas*). In the *'Od zer*, Phya pa also mentions the features
of "being alone" or "not being alone" of a cognition (*'Od zer* 110a1: *zla bcas zla
myed rnam myed yin pas myong yang myi nges pa'i phyir*), and the feature of
"being void of a pot that is not potentially visible" (*'Od zer* 110b2: *snang du myi
rung pa'i bum pas dben pa ni rnam myed yin pas yongs su gcod myi nus pa'i
phyir*).

[76] See the discussion in I.1, 2.3 and IV, 1(b).

i. Subjective restriction

The mental continuum in which the superimpositions are eliminated is the same as the mental continuum in which knowledge takes place. In other words, someone's knowledge does not eliminate the mistaken cognitions that other cognizers have.

ii. Temporal restriction

Superimpositions can only be eliminated between the time the episode of knowledge is generated and the time the compositional factors of memory are impaired.[77]

iii. Objective restriction

The superimpositions that can be eliminated are only those that are directly incompatible with the positively discerned object, or those characterized by something directly incompatible with it. The incompatibility referred to in this discussion is "conceptual incompatibility" (*phan tshun spangs 'gal*, literally "incompatibility in such a way that there is mutual rejection").[78]

The former case is illustrated by the superimposition "non-blue" being eliminated when something blue appears to perception and by the superimposition "non-momentary" being eliminated when something is inferred

---

[77] See IV, 2(b) on the use of this notion by Phya pa's successors for redefining post-knowledge cognition.

[78] Conceptual incompatibility is dealt with later in the *'Od zer* (114b2ff.). This section of the *'Od zer* is quasi identical to *Mun sel* 242.324.322.2 (71a7ff.). What is termed here "characterized by something directly incompatible" is a specific instance of what is, in this later section, described in terms of "indirectly incompatible" (*brgyud 'gal*). "Indirect incompatibility" is defined as the incompatibility between *x* and *y* pervaded by non-*x*, for instance between "permanent" and "produced" ('produced' being pervaded by 'impermanent') (see *'Od zer* 114b7, *Mun sel* 71b2–3). When dealing with the ascertainment of incompatibility, Phya pa specifies that the ascertainment of *x* by an episode of knowledge *does not* entail the negation of *y* pervaded by non-*x* as such (for instance, the perceptual knowledge of 'blue' does not entail the negation of 'permanent,' even though 'permanent' is pervaded by 'non-blue'). It only entails the negation of the indirectly incompatible *y* that is characterized by non-*x* (it entails the negation of 'permanent non-blue') (see *'Od zer* 115a4–115a6, *Mun sel* 71b8–72a1). See Hugon 2016b: 891 for a summary of Phya pa's views on incompatibility.

to be momentary. In brief, for an object that has a feature x, an episode of knowledge eliminates the superimposition "non-x."

A simple case of a superimposition "characterized by something directly incompatible" is a superimposition of the form "y aggregated with non-x" when something that has a feature x is perceived or this feature is inferred. For instance, the superimposition "permanent aggregated with non-blue" (or one could say "permanent [and] non-blue") is eliminated when perceiving something blue.

Further refinements are provided regarding this second category, leading to the distinction between "direct understanding" (*dngos su rtogs pa*) and "indirect understanding" (*shugs la rtogs pa*).[79]

One can see clearly in this context how the notion of "elimination (of superimpositions)" (*sel ba*) is linked to the notion of "negation" (*khegs pa*), and the latter to the notion of "understanding" (*rtogs pa*).[80]

3.1.4 How are superimpositions eliminated?

The expressions used for K1 (see §3.1.1) refer to superimpositions (or the capacity to generate them) being made powerless, opposed, countered, or eliminated. A reader with a Dharmakīrtian background is likely to link

---

[79] For example (*'Od zer* 22b1), an inferential cognition that ascertains that an object (one that is the object of a given awareness) is veridical eliminates the superimposition "non-veridical" pertaining to this object. But it also indirectly eliminates the superimposition "having a non-veridical object" with regard to the awareness of the given object. This is possible insofar as "an awareness having a non-veridical object" is characterized by "the object being non-veridical." The inferential cognition thus directly understands that the object is veridical, and indirectly understands that the awareness has a veridical object. The former understanding pertains to an epistemic object (the object) whose concept appears in the inferential cognition, whereas the second pertains to an epistemic object (the awareness) whose concept does not appear in the inferential cognition. The distinction between direct and indirect understanding plays an important role in subsequent developments of Tibetan epistemology. On this topic, see Schwabland 1995.

[80] In later epistemological works that define knowledge in terms of "understanding a veridical object" and assimilate "understanding" (*rtogs pa*) to the elimination of superimpositions, the examination of "understanding" is typically carried out through the examination of its object—affirmation and negation (*sgrub pa*/*dgag pa*)—and of the methods of understanding involved—direct or indirect. See, for instance, *gSal byed* 24b5–28b6, *Tshad nye bsdus* 11b8–13b5, and *rNam rgyal* A23b6; B27b8ff.

this idea with Dharmakīrti's theory of "exclusion" (*apoha*) in general, and more precisely with Dharmakīrti's association of the notions of "determining" (*niścaya*), "having for object the exclusion of what is other" (*anyāpohaviṣaya*), and especially "eliminating superimpositions" (*samāropavyavaccheda*). Indeed, a core idea of Dharmakīrti's theory of exclusion (*apoha*) is that conceptual cognition does not understand (and language does not refer to) its object "positively" (*vidhinā*), but via a process of exclusion of what is other. For instance, the word "cow" does not denote either a real particular cow or a generic property "cowness," but only the "exclusion of non-cow." In the same way, the determination of an object as "blue," although it appears to consist in a positive characterization, actually amounts to the "exclusion of non-blue."[81]

Dharmakīrti's theory of exclusion, however, only pertains to conceptual cognitions. It is thus not surprising that Phya pa has to address upfront the objection that perceptual knowledge cannot eliminate superimpositions given that it is non-conceptual (*Mun sel* 212.21 [a]).[82] In his answer, Phya pa presents a three-step causal process through which perceptual knowledge brings about the annihilation of superimpositions:

t_1: Perceptual awareness and superimpositions come into contact.

t_2: Perceptual awareness and powerless superimpositions both exist.

t_3: Perceptual awareness exists, but there are no superimpositions.

Superimpositions are powerless in t_2, because while their direct causes are superimpositions in t_1, perceptual awareness in t_1 acts as a condition. And since superimpositions are powerless in t_2, they do not cause a next moment of superimpositions in t_3. Superimpositions have thus been annihilated (i.e., made non-existent). This process does not require perceptual awareness to perform any conceptual operation; it eliminates superimpositions by its mere presence.

---

[81] For more information on the theory of *apoha*, see Siderits et al. (eds.) 2011. Dreyfus already noted this possible background and observed that it is remarkable that this important feature of knowledge is actually formulated in negative terms, via the expression "elimination of superimpositions" (Dreyfus 1997a: 367). I return to the question of a possible Dharmakīrtian background for this idea in §5.1. One may note that the negative formulation may also be a resonance of the Three-Nature model, in which the "perfected nature" is defined as the 'dependent nature void of an imagined nature' (see VI, Table A).

[82] For such an objection by Sa paṇ (postdating Phya pa's works) see n. 115.

Phya pa does not deal in detail with the process involved in the case of inferential knowledge. Since inferential cognition is readily associated with "excluding what is other," the process of eliminating superimpositions is less likely to be found objectionable. The argument in *Mun sel* 212.14 (b) indicates that Phya also considers the "elimination of superimpositions" by inferential cognition along the lines of a causal process leading to the annihilation of superimpositions. Indeed, this argument is about the situation at t_1: there cannot be contact between inferential cognition and superimpositions, because inferential cognition cannot coexist with superimpositions (this is because two conceptual cognitions cannot take place simultaneously in the same mental continuum)[83], but there can be contact between inferential cognition and the "capacity to generate superimpositions." It is this capacity that is made powerless, thus ensuring that superimpositions can no longer be generated. What happens at t_1 in the case of inferential cognition explains the need for the more specific formulation of K1 as "countering the capacity to generate superimpositions" in the definition of knowledge.

i. Elimination and factual incompatibility

As demonstrated elsewhere (Hugon 2011a), the three-step process presented by Phya pa for the elimination of superimpositions by perceptual knowledge stands out as an application of the model that Phya pa proposes in a later part of the *Mun sel* (68a9–72a5) for "factual incompatibility" (Tib. *lhan cig mi gnas 'gal*, Skt. *sahānavasthānalakṣaṇavirodha*, literally "incompatibility consisting in not remaining

---

[83] According to a parallel discussion in the *Tshad bsdus* (116,7–8), this tenet is supported by Dharmakīrti's statement in PV 3.178. In this verse, Dharmakīrti does not strictly speaking refute the possibility of two simultaneous conceptual cognitions, but he points out that they are not observed in a particular situation: "When there is the experience (of a form) by this very (awareness of a form), one does not observe two simultaneous conceptual cognitions (namely, 'form' and 'experience of form'). By this (rejection of two simultaneous conceptual cognitions), (the awareness of form) is understood to be experienced by another simultaneous cognition (i.e., a non-conceptual one)." (*tayaivānubhave dṛṣṭaṃ na vikalpadvayaṃ sakṛt / etena tulyakālānyavijñānānubhavo gataḥ //*). The information supplied in the parentheses in the translation are from the eleventh-century commentary on this verse by Manorathanandin.

together"). [84] This type of incompatibility refers to a situation in which two phenomena are such that they cannot coexist (but it can be the case that they are both non-existent). More precisely, in Phya pa's view, the phenomenon with the greater power eliminates the weaker one, i.e., brings about the cessation of its continuum (*rgyun zlog par byed pa*). Borrowing a model found in Dharmottara's writings, Phya pa explains that this elimination takes place (in standard cases) through a three-step causal process involving successive moments of the respective continua of two states of affairs X and Y (for instance a powerful fire and cold):

t_1: X and Y come into contact.

t_2: X and a powerless Y both exist.

t_3: X exists but not Y.

When discussing K1 in the *Mun sel*, Phya pa neither explicitly refers to his theory of factual incompatibility nor, as pointed out at the end of §3.1.1, does he define knowledge in terms of being incompatible with superimpositions. [85] On the contrary, the notion of "incompatibility" and "elimination" are clearly associated in the discussion on factual incompatibility, as the incompatible phenomenon is described in terms that connote "opposition" (*gnod*) and "elimination" (*sel*). [86] And the definiens of "factually incompatible" is also phrased in terms of "rendering powerless the cause for generating (the next moment of) one's own sort for what is being opposed, via contact with the counteragent," [87] which is not without recalling the specific formulation of K1 as "countering the capacity to produce superimpositions."

A specific feature of Phya pa's model of factual incompatibility (spelled out both in the *'Od zer* and the *Mun sel*) is that a phenomenon X can qualify as "counteragent of Y" and as "incompatible with Y" even when it does not actually come into contact with Y, provided that it *would*

---

[84] For an outline of Phya pa's theory of incompatibility, see Hugon 2016b: 890–891.

[85] That the notion of "eliminating superimpositions" (*sgro 'dogs sel ba*) is to be understood along the model of "factual incompatibility" is pointed out explicitly by gTsang nag pa (see *bsDus pa* 17a5–6).

[86] In particular, when a phenomenon X is incompatibly with Y, X is termed the *gnod byed*, and Y the *gnod bya*.

[87] *Mun sel* 68b5–6 = *'Od zer* 68b5–6: *gnyen po dang phrad pas gnod bya la rang rigs skyed pa'i rgyu nus med du byed pa mtshan nyid du brjod kyi.*

cause the annihilation of Y *if* the two came in contact. Phya pa illustrates this option with the example of a powerful fire (X). It qualifies as a "counteragent of cold (Y)" (and thus as "factually incompatible with cold" and "what eliminates cold") even in a case where there is no cold, for instance, when cold has already been eliminated by sunrays in this particular place. Indeed, this powerful fire would eliminate cold if it came in contact with it.[88]

In the *'Od zer* (see below §3.2.1, iv), Phya pa explicitly points to this feature of incompatibility to establish that the meaning of K1 includes "potential elimination" of superimpositions. He does not carry out this association in the *Mun sel*, even though the potential elimination of superimpositions is similarly taken into account.

ii. Potential elimination

Phya pa specifies the meaning of K1 in *Mun sel* 212.14 (b) in reply to an opponent who implies that the meaning of K1 should either be restricted to "rendering powerless of actually present superimpositions" or restricted to "potential opposition" and points out absurd consequences for each option. Phya pa's reply to this dilemma is to escape between the horns and maintain that both options should be integrated in the meaning of K1. This disjunctive interpretation of K1 enables the criterion to include cases where the process of elimination actually takes place (actual superimpositions, or the actual capacity to generate superimpositions are annihilated) as well as cases where this process is merely potential. In the *Mun sel*, Phya pa does not specify which cases might be representative of the latter option. In a parallel discussion in the *'Od zer*, the wisdom of omniscient beings is pointed out as being an instance of knowledge in spite of there being no contact with an actual capacity to generate superimpositions (see §3.2.1, iv and n. 100). The definition of knowledge can

---

[88] The case of the powerful fire is adduced as a parallel example to establish that "light" (*snang ba*) itself can be called a counteragent of "darkness" (*mun pa*). *Mun sel* 68b7–8 = *'Od zer* 112a3–4: *de lta na'ang snang pa gnyen por ma gyur pa'ang ma yin te nyi ma'i 'od kyis grang reg bsal pa'i sa phyogs na mye stobs ldan yod pa nyi mas grang reg bsal pas grang reg dang ma phrad kyang phrad do she na rgyun 'joms pa'i nus pa dang ldan pas grang reg gi gnyen por brjod* (Mun sel *brjod*, 'Od zer *rjod*) *pa ltar / snang pa la'ang mun pa phrad na* ('Od zer *mun pa phrad na* : Mun sel *mun pa dang phrad nas*) *sel pa'i nus pa yod pas bsal ba myed kyang snang pa mun pa'i gnyen po yin no /*

only apply to such a case if "potential opposition" of superimpositions is considered.

3.1.5 "Eliminating superimpositions," "determination," and "excluding what is other"

It should be emphasized that by allowing perceptual knowledge to eliminate superimpositions Phya pa is not implying that perceptual knowledge involves any conceptual operation. In particular, it neither conceptually determines its object, nor does it perform the associated operation of excluding what is other.

Regarding the first point, perceptual knowledge itself does not "determine" (*nges pa*) its object in the sense of a conceptual determination,[89] but it may bring about the arising of a conceptual determination that immediately follows. Such a conceptual determination is a determinate awareness specifically termed "determining cognition" (*nges shes*).[90] Such a two-step model of determination is broadly shared among Buddhist epistemologists. It allows one to account for determination taking place in the context of an episode of perception, without running against the very idea of perceptual awareness being "free of conceptualization" (Skt. *kalpaṇāpoḍha*, Tib. *rtog pa dang bral ba*), which is advocated by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. On account of this model, stating that "perceptual knowledge determines its object" is a metaphorical way of saying that the determining cognition that follows perceptual knowledge determines the object. Being conceptual, this subsequent determining

---

[89] This is not to be confused with the use of the term *nges pa* by subsequent Tibetan scholars to refer to the elimination of superimpositions (see n. 123).

[90] I suspect that the Tibetan term *nges shes* is a reflex of the Sanskrit *niścayajñāna*. For the Sanskrit term, see, for instance, PVSV 28,8 ad PV 1.48: *yad rūpādidarśanānantaram aliṅgaṃ niścayajñānaṃ* (Tib. *nges pa'i shes pa*) *bhavati.* On this notion and the key passages referring to it in Dharmakīrti's writings, see Katsura 1993 (the author refers to this determination in terms of "perceptual judgement"). See also Dreyfus 1996 for Dharmakīrti's position and that of some of his interpreters on this point. Note that the term is used differently by other Tibetan authors. For instance, mKhas grub rje uses the term *nges shes* in a broader sense that covers both inferential cognition and conceptual post-knowledge cognition (*rGyan mun sel* 58a5–6: *nges shes kyi mtshan nyid / tshad ma yin pa'ang tshad ma'i stobs kyis drangs ba'i blo gang zhig / rang yul nges pa'i sgo nas 'dzin pa / dbye na / rjes dpag* [58a6] *tshad ma dang / bcad shes gnyis*).

cognition can perform the operation of excluding others, which perception cannot.

When discussing the three "operations" (*byed pa*) of episodes of awareness—appearing, directing, and excluding others (cf. *Mun sel* 112.111.111, 112.111.12, 112.112, 112.111.2)—Phya pa clearly associates the operation of "exclusion" (*sel pa*) or "exclusion of others" (*gzhan sel pa*)—which is dependent upon the operation of "directing one's mind" (*zhen pa*)—with conceptual cognitions only. His principal concern in discussing this operation is with the way certain types of awareness in which there is a given directing of one's mind prevent engaging in a different type of directing or engaging in a different type of awareness. Non-conceptual cognitions, on the other hand, only have the operation of appearing (*snang pa*) (see VI, Table D). While the operation of excluding others is tied with conceptual cognition and the operation of directing, it is not coextensive with the criterion of being determinate (*nges pa*). Indeed, doubt is held to perform both the operation of directing and excluding, but it is not a determinate cognition. Having the operation of excluding does not in itself guarantee that there is an elimination of superimpositions that are opposite to the way things are.[91] The operation of excluding others coincides with the elimination of opposite superimpositions in the case of inferential cognition, but it is the latter that is crucial for this type of awareness being an episode of knowledge.[92]

---

[91] Doubt (whether something is *x* or non-*x*) excludes what is other (insofar as it prevents directing one's mind toward either option being impossible), but it does not eliminate the option that is a mistaken superimposition (for instance, "permanent" when doubting whether sound is permanent or impermanent). As for mistaken cognition consisting in an incorrect determination "*x*," it excludes the correct determination "non-*x*," but it does not eliminate the mistaken superimposition "*x*." See the example in n. 73.

[92] One must thus be careful to distinguish the mention of *sel ba* as an "operation" (*byed pa*) (translated throughout as "exclusion [of what is other]"), and *sel ba* as the causal process annihilating superimpositions (translated throughout as "elimination"). In the *'Od zer*, Phya pa opposes the "incompatibility with superimpositions," which is about an episode of knowledge being the counteragent of the superimposition *non-x*, and the operation of "excluding others," which consists in being devoid of a present superimposition (*'Od zer* 28b4: *sgro 'dogs dang 'gal ba ni sgro 'dogs da ltar ba dang bral ba'i gzhan sel ba ni ma yin gyi sgro 'dogs kyi gnyen po byed pa yin la* ¦).

3.2 The "superimpositions criterion" (K1) and the "novelty criterion" (K2)

At the beginning of §3, three criteria were listed as defining characteristics of knowledge. However, the status of the "novelty criterion" (K2) in the *Mun sel* deserves closer examination. While there is no doubt that K2 is a necessary condition for knowledge, the question is whether it is a defining criterion in the sense of a characteristic that needs to be explicit in the definition in order to avoid an unwanted overextension of the category of knowledge. Indeed, no such distinct characteristic is stated in the definition of knowledge in *Mun sel* 212.13. Because the relevant passages in the *Mun sel* are somewhat ambiguous and leave open the possibility of an alternative reading, I will first present here the more straightforward account found in Phya pa's *'Od zer* for the sake of an ensuing comparison and maybe contrast.

3.2.1 The definition of knowledge in the *'Od zer*

(i) The extended version of Phya pa's definition of knowledge in the *'Od zer* makes four criteria—K1, K2, K3, and K4—explicit:

> Thus the definition of knowledge is: That which, for a veridical state of affairs (K4) not previously known (K2), is incompatible with opposite superimpositions (K1), in accordance with a mode of apprehension that is non-erroneous with regard to its state of affairs (K3).[93]

K4 echoes the definition in terms of "understanding a veridical object," which in *Mun sel* was used as the "short definition" and associated with Śaṅkaranandana. In the *'Od zer*, Phya pa does not mention Śaṅkaranandana's definition, but the phrasing *bden pa rtogs pa* frequently comes up in

---

[93] *'Od zer* 111.221.2, 23b1: *sngar ma rtogs pa'i don bden pa la don la myi 'khrul ba'i 'dzin stangs kyis bzlog pa'i sgro 'dogs dang 'gal ba tshad ma'i mtshan nyid yin no /*₁

Another formulation with four criteria is found in *'Od zer* 172b7–8: *mngon suM la yod pa'i tshad ma tsam du 'jog pa'i rgyu mtshan ni 'dzin stangs kyi rnam pa* [172b8] *don myed na mi 'byung bas* (K3) *sngar ma rtogs pa'i don* (K2) *gnod myed du bden pa la* (K4) *sgro 'dogs gcod pa* (K1) *yin la /*

A definition mentioning only K1 is also found (for instance *'Od zer* 67b2: *tshad mar mtshon pa'i mtshan nyid sgro 'dogs gcod byed yin*). In such cases, K1 must be understood to include the implicit specifications K2 and K3.

discussions involving the definition of knowledge (including the main excursus on the topic).

(ii) The four criteria are said to ensure that the definition is not overextensive. Namely, they exclude eight types of awareness of the ten-fold typology (see VI, Table G) as follows:

- K1 excludes non-ascertaining perception, non-conceptual erroneous cognition, non-directing conceptual cognition, and doubt.
- K2 excludes post-knowledge cognition.
- K3 excludes factive assessment and mistaken cognitions (that satisfy K1).
- K4 excludes mistaken cognition consisting in mistaken determinate awareness, etc. (for instance, determining sound to be permanent).[94]

The disjunction between mistaken cognitions eliminated by K3 and those eliminated by K4 highlights the fact that mistaken cognitions can be incompatible with wrong superimpositions, which emphasizes the similarity of factive assessment and mistaken cognition. For a mistaken cognition eliminated by K3, Phya pa gives the example of the mistaken cognition of "a single essence," which is incompatible with the likewise mistaken notion of "a multiple essence." It thus satisfies K1. However, the lack of an invariable connection with reality obtains as well for the mistaken cognition "sound is permanent" (which is not as obviously incompatible with wrong superimpositions). And, *vice versa*, the lack of a veridical, unopposed object is also the case for the mistaken cognition "a single nature." Thus, the explicit mention of K4 is redundant, as all conceptual mistaken cognitions are eliminated from the range of knowledge by K3.

The presence of K4 in the definition can be explained by looking at how Phya pa's discussion on the topic unfolds in the *'Od zer*. He starts the account of his own position (*'Od zer* 111.221.2, 21b7) by stating a definition with three criteria (K1, K2, K4). In the discussion that follows, he emphasizes K4 (the characteristic pertaining to the object) and K1 (the characteristic pertaining to the apprehending cognition). K2 is, however, not forgotten. It is aggregated to K4 in a brief statement after the meaning of "veridical" in K4 has been defined,[95] and comes up again as a "characteristic of the object" (*yul gyi khyad par*) that enables to exclude post-

---

[94] See *'Od zer* 111.222.3, 29a8–b1.

[95] *'Od zer* 22a5: *de ltar gnod myed du bden pa de'ang tshad mas sngar ma rtogs pa ni tshad ma'i yul yin no //*

knowledge cognition (which K1 cannot).[96] The discussion pertaining to K1 reveals the need for the specification pertaining to the mode of apprehension, i.e., K3 (which was not explicit in the initial definition), in order to exclude factive assessment and mistaken cognition (which K1 as such cannot). Although, as pointed out above, the explicit mention of K3 makes K4 redundant, in conclusion to this discussion Phya pa just adds K3 to the preceding definition and rephrases the definition of knowledge in a statement featuring the four criteria K1–K4.

(iii) The "superimpositions criterion" (K1) is formulated in the definition cited above in terms of "being incompatible with opposite superimpositions" (*bzlog pa'i sgro 'dogs dang 'gal ba*). But alternative phrasings are also used as synonyms in the *'Od zer* (among which the ones found for K1 in the *Mun sel*): "eliminating superimpositions" (*sgro 'dogs gcod pa*),[97] "opposing superimpositions" (*sgro 'dogs la gnod pa*),[98] "being a counteragent of superimpositions" (*sgro 'dogs gyi gnyen por gnas pa*). In addition, when discussing K1, Phya pa deals with the notion of "incompatibility" through an analysis of "what is to be eliminated" (*gcad bya*) and the "counteragent that eliminates" (*gcod byed gnyen po*).

Thus the equivalence between the notion of "incompatibility" and that of "elimination," which stands out in the later section in incompatibility, is made explicit with regard to the meaning of K1.

(iv) Like in the *Mun sel*, the three-step model of factual incompatibility is applied to explain how perceptual knowledge satisfies K1 (*'Od zer* 111.222.2 [a]).[99]

---

[96] *'Od zer* 23b1: *yul gyi khyad par sngar ma rtogs pa la'ang 'jug pas bcad pa'i yul can bsal pa'i phyir ro //*

[97] For instance in the four-criterion definition cited in n. 93.

[98] See *'Od zer* 111.221.222, where factive assessment and mistaken cognition are said to satisfy the feature of "opposing superimpositions in general" (*sgro 'dogs la gnod pa tsam*). In *'Od zer* 111.222.3 (29a9–b1), the same types of awareness are characterized as "incompatible with opposite superimpositions" (*bzlog pa'i sgro 'dogs dang 'gal ba*).

[99] Perceptual knowledge accordingly qualifies as "incompatible with superimpositions" (*sgro 'dogs dang 'gal ba*), as "counteragent of superimpositions" (*sgro 'dogs gyi gnyen po*), and as "what renders superimpositions powerless" (*sgro 'dogs nus myed du skyed 'khan*).

Another feature of the model of factual incompatibility noted above (§3.1.4.i), namely, that potential elimination of Y by X is sufficient for X to qualify as "incompatible with Y" or "counteragent of Y," is explicitly brought into the discussion of the meaning of K1 in *'Od zer* 111.221.223 (see V, 2 for the Tibetan text of *'Od zer* 23a8–9):

> Whether superimpositions are present or not in a given mental continuum, an awareness has the status of a counteragent of superimpositions insofar as it has the capacity to definitely render superimpositions powerless if it were to come in contact with them. This is just like a powerful fire is said to be "incompatible with cold" whether it is in contact with cold or not—as when it is located in a place bathed by the hot rays of the sun—insofar as it has the capacity to render cold powerless if it were to come in contact with it. Having such a status of counteragent of superimpositions is what "being an eliminator of superimpositions" means.

An episode of awareness can thus satisfy K1 even when there are no actual superimpositions, including when superimpositions have already been eliminated.

The "potential" understanding of incompatibility allows for the wisdom of omniscient beings (who never have superimpositions) to satisfy K1 and qualify as knowledge.[100] On the other hand, this implies that postknowledge cognition also satisfies K1: it is incompatible with superimpositions, even though superimpositions have already been eliminated (in the same way a powerful fire is incompatible with cold, even when cold has already been annihilated by sunrays). To exclude post-knowledge cognition, it is thus necessary to list K2 as a distinct defining criterion of knowledge, or as a specification to be attached to K1.

---

[100] The wisdom of omniscient beings (*thams cad mkhyen pa'i ye shes*) is a type of awareness that comes into contact neither with actual superimpositions at t_1 of the three-step causal process of elimination (as in standard cases of perceptual knowledge) nor with the capacity to generate superimpositions (as in the case of inferential cognition). This is because omniscient beings have eliminated the very seed of mental obscuration, which would be responsible for the occurrence of superimpositions. See *'Od zer* 111.221.223, 23a7–8 (Tibetan text in V, 2). The way in which the wisdom of omniscient beings, on the other hand, satisfies the criterion of novelty (K2) is an issue which is not addressed in the section under consideration, and this will be left to further inquiry.

3.2.2 K1, K2, and the status of post-knowledge cognition in the Mun sel

(a) The extended definition of knowledge in *Mun sel* 212.14 (cited at the beginning of §3) only makes explicit K1 ("countering the capacity to produce superimpositions that are incompatible with the way things are") and K3 ("through aspects of awareness that are non-erroneous with regard to a positively discerned state of affairs"). The criterion of novelty (K2) is not featured; it is part, however, of the citation of PV 2.5c that the definition claims to explain. As for the criterion of the object being veridical (K4), it appears in the attached statement of the short definition "understanding something veridical." While the absence of K4 in the extended definition is unproblematic (it is actually redundant), the case of K2 is more puzzling.

(b) In the *'Od zer*, K2 is invoked to explain why the definition of knowledge does not overextend to post-knowledge cognition (§3.2.1, [ii]) and in particular why post-knowledge cognition does not qualify as knowledge although it satisfies K1 in the sense of "potentially eliminating superimpositions" (§3.2.1, [iv]).

(b1) The passage that corresponds to the latter discussion in the *Mun sel* is found in the reply to the second objection following *Mun sel* 212.14. There, Phya pa similarly applies K2 to exclude post-knowledge cognition, saying:

> It is not the case that the criterion would be too broad, applying to post-knowledge cognition, because we said "incompatible with superimpositions with regard to something not previously known."

What is curious about this passage is that Phya pa references a statement not found in the *Mun sel*. Instead, the reference is similar to the wording found in the initial definition in the *'Od zer* (21b7), which is expressed in terms of "incompatible with opposite superimpositions with regard to a veridical object not previously known." In contrast, in the *Mun sel*, (i) Phya pa does not refer to K1 in terms of "incompatibility with superimpositions" and (ii) does not specify "with regard to something not previously known" in his definition.[101] The closest he gets to the given

---

[101] Should one choose to disregard the correction of *sngar rtogs pa* to *sngar ma rtogs pa* in the manuscript, one could understand the statement being referred to as a reformulation of the definition of post-knowledge cognition. (The latter is defined in the same way in the *Mun sel* and the *'Od zer* as "Engaging in an awareness that is incompatible (*'Od zer*: engaging via [an awareness] that is

phrasing is when listing criteria K1, K2, and K3 in the definition of the engaged object, where he talks of the two types of knowledge "eliminating superimpositions with regard to a state of affairs not previously known" (*Mun sel* 121.13).

A charitable solution to these issues would be to understand that (i) Phya pa holds, like in the *'Od zer*, the notion of "incompatibility" to be fully coextensive with "elimination" (see §3.2.1, [iii]) and that (ii) in his definition he meant to have said "… with regard to something not previously known" (like when defining the engaged object); or maybe he thought he did say something similar in his definition insofar as he cited PV 2.5c ("Revealing an unknown state of affairs"). In other words, K2 is meant to be included in the definition, even if it is not explicit (in the same way as, in the *'Od zer*, K3 was meant to be included, even if it was not explicit in the initial phrasing of the definition).

(b2) To complicate the matter, one can observe that in *Mun sel* 212.22 (which is parallel to the passage of the *'Od zer* discussed above in §3.2.1 [ii]) Phya pa does not invoke K2 to exclude post-knowledge cognition from the scope of knowledge—which fares well with its not being included in the definition. In the *Mun sel*, post-knowledge cognition is excluded from being knowledge by the following argument:

> For post-knowledge cognition, there is no contact with a capacity that could produce superimpositions, which is what would have to be eliminated. Thus, it would be contradictory for post-knowledge cognition to be something that counters this capacity.

"Countering the capacity to produce superimposition" is how K1 is phrased in the extended definition in the *Mun sel* (cf. §3.1.1). Thus the argument is that post-knowledge cognition is excluded by its failure to fulfill K1, and this failure is due to the absence of the capacity to produce superimpositions (this capacity having been annihilated by a previous episode of knowledge). One could rephrase the argument, in a simplified way, as: "There is no elimination of superimpositions because there are no superimpositions to be eliminated."

While this is a seductive (and quite intuitive) argument, it threatens the internal coherence of the *Mun sel*. Phya pa accepts in the *Mun sel* (as

---

incompatible) with directing one's mind in the opposite way with regard to a state of affairs for which superimpositions have already been eliminated." See IV, 2). But even taken in such a way, the argument is about the object having been known already.

he does in the *'Od zer*) that the notion of "elimination" covers the case of "potential elimination" (i.e., the case where there is not actual superimposition) (see §3.1.4.ii). This means that, strictly speaking, "absence of contact with the capacity to produce superimpositions" or "absence of contact with superimpositions" is not, as such, a reason for K1 not to obtain.

A possible reading that would enable one to make sense of the argument without implying internal contradiction is to understand K1 to implicitly include the specification that the object must not have been previously known. In such a case, the argument would be about "superimpositions having been previously eliminated" (they are hence no longer "to be eliminated"). The argument dealt with in (b1) could then be understood along this line as well, not as implying the need for a distinct criterion (K2), but as revealing that the requirement of novelty is implicitly included in the meaning of K1. This would imply that K1, in the definition of the *Mun sel*, is not equivalent to "incompatibility with superimpositions" (a feature that post-knowledge cognition satisfies) but a stronger criterion which itself prevents post-knowledge cognition from qualifying as knowledge. This would explain why K2 does not need to be stated separately in the definition of knowledge, and why K1 is not referred to in terms of "incompatibility with superimpositions" in the *Mun sel*. In turn, this would not fare well with K2 being listed as a distinct criterion when defining the engaged object.

Given the brevity of the passages considered and the absence of corroborating discussions elsewhere in the text, it is difficult to assess whether one is dealing with an isolated problematic passage or if there is indeed an attempt, in the *Mun sel*, to restrict the defining criteria of knowledge to a strong version of K1 combined with K3. While it is possible that Phya pa was tempted by the idea that "elimination of superimpositions" does not apply when superimpositions have already been eliminated,[102] I would however be in favor of dismissing the argument considered in (b2) as a careless mistake—principally because it is in such flagrant opposition to the position Phya pa supports in the section on factual incompatibility—and to treat Phya pa's accounts in the *Mun*

---

[102] In connection to this, see Phya pa's explanation as to why perceptual post-knowledge cognition does not have an engaged object, which is that "there is no elimination of superimpositions by those episodes of awareness." See n. 36 to the translation of *Mun sel* 121.2 in II.

sel and the *'Od zer* as being fundamentally equivalent in spite of varia-
tions pertaining to the formulation.[103] As far I know, none of Phya pa's
disciples and successors mentioned a difference of approach in Phya pa's
various works.[104] They themselves favor a three-criterion definition (see
below) in which K1 is alternatively referred to in terms of "elimination of
superimpositions" or "incompatibility with superimpositions," and K2
stands as a distinct criterion, the role of which is commonly identified as
the exclusion of post-knowledge cognition.[105]

3.3 Phya pa's successors on the definition of knowledge

In the works of Phya pa's successors who adopt the definition of
knowledge in terms of "understanding a veridical object," the three crite-
ria K1, K2, and K3 become "specifications" (*khyad par*) or "properties"
(*chos*) of "understanding" (*rtogs pa*):

---

[103] Apart from the four-criterion definition of the *'Od zer* and the two-criterion
definition of the *Mun sel*, a three-criterion definition is found in *sNying po* 68,18–
20: *mngon sum dang rjes dpag la'ang tshad ma tsam gyi spyi'i mtshan nyid don
la mi 'khrul ba'i blos* (K3) *sngar ma rtogs pa'i don la* (K2) *sgro 'dogs dang 'gal
ba* (K1) *yod pas tshad ma ma yin par mi 'thad do //*

[104] The *Tshad bsdus* features a discussion on the meaning of *rtogs pa* (in *bden pa
rtogs pa*) as *sgro 'dogs chod pa* which is quite similar to the passages of the *Mun
sel* and the *'Od zer* considered above. The author concludes that "eliminating of
superimpositions" (*sgro 'dogs chod pa*) is to be understood in the sense of "in-
compatibility with superimpositions" (*sgro 'dogs dang 'gal tsam*) but that, in
order to avoid over-application of the definition of knowledge to post-knowledge
cognition (and to factive assessment), the "elimination of superimpositions"
should be combined with the specifications corresponding to K2 (and K3). See
Tshad bsdus 115–116.

[105] The only exception known to me is reported by mTshur ston, who mentions
in his *sGron ma* (20a9–b2) a position (different from his own), according to
which perceptual post-knowledge cognition is excluded by K1 (along with fac-
tive assessment and non-ascertaining perception) and conceptual post-
knowledge cognition by K2 or K3. One may also remember that, according to
rNgog Lo, both post-knowledge cognition and non-ascertaining perception were
instances of "non-understanding" (*ma rtogs*); they lack the very nature of *rtogs
pa* (see §2.1).

- K1 (usually formulated in terms of "eliminating superimpositions," sometimes as "being incompatible with superimpositions") is the specification of the nature (*ngo bo*).
- K2 is the specification of the object (*yul*).
- K3 is that of the mode of apprehension (*'dzin stangs*).[106]

The definition of knowledge in terms of "understanding a veridical object, satisfying three properties" (*bden pa'i don rtogs chos gsum tshang pa* and analogue phrasings) is found in all the works of the pre-classical and classical period which were mentioned in §2.3 as being representative of the "mainstream gSang phu tradition" regarding the typology of awareness.[107] A similar version is adopted as well at the beginning of the classical period by bCom ldan ral gri.[108]

While, as mentioned above, these works concord in excluding post-knowledge cognition by invoking its failure to satisfy K2, there are discrepancies regarding the role of K1 and K3 in excluding types of awareness that are not knowledge.[109]

Discussions on knowledge in works postdating Phya pa (with the exception of the *Tshad bsdus*, which is closer to Phya pa's presentation) become organized around the notion of "what is to be understood'" (*rtogs bya*)—i.e., the veridical object—and "what makes it understood" (*rtogs byed*)—i.e., the episode of knowledge. They go into the details of the three specifications of the understanding listed above as well as of the relation between knowledge and superimpositions (debating whether they have the same object, are of the same nature, and are simultaneously present). While the idea of knowledge "eliminating superimpositions" still

---

[106] See Hugon 2011a: 15–16 and the discussion of these three specifications in Schwabland 1995: 806.

[107] See *Tshad bsdus* 116; *bsDus pa* 16b8 and 17a2–7; *sGron ma* 15b8–9; *gSal byed* 23a7; *rNam rgyal* 26b4; *Tshad nye bsdus* 11a3; and the position cited in *Rigs gter* VIII 203,22–204,15. The author of the *Tshad ma'i spyi skad* defines knowledge in terms of "what eliminates superimpositions" (*sgro 'dogs gcod byed*) but does not mention the three specifications.

[108] *rGyan gyi me tog* 5.

[109] For instance, gTsang nag pa (*bsDus pa* 24a3) and mTshur ston (*sGron ma* 20a8–9) hold that K1 excludes mistaken cognition, doubt, and non-ascertaining perception, and K3 excludes factive assessment. The authors of the *gSal byed* (28b6) and of the *Tshad nye bsdus* (15b5) consider instead that K1 excludes factive assessment and K3 excludes mistaken cognition.

figures as a key concept, one can witness changes in the understanding of
the elimination process. In particular, in the case of perceptual knowledge,
the elimination of superimpositions is no longer explained as resulting
from a three-step causal process involving perception itself at t_1, but as a
process involving the immediate cause of perception.[110] Further, the focus
of the discussion shifts from the idea of an episode of knowledge that
itself eliminates preexisting or coexisting superimpositions to that of an
episode of knowledge taking place in the absence of superimpositions and
preventing further superimpositions.

While Phya pa linked his short definition to Śaṅkaranandana,[111] with
a few early exceptions, subsequent scholars obviously felt more com-
fortable referring to Dharmakīrti. Most authors postdating Phya pa thus
strive to ground the three specifications of "understanding" by citing pas-
sages from Dharmakīrti's works.[112] Also, over time, a definition repeating
the terms of Dharmakīrti's definition—"non-deceiving" or "newly non-

---

[110] The *Tshad bsdus* is the only work postdating Phya pa I am aware of in which
the three-step causal process is still explicitly invoked to account for the elimi-
nation of superimpositions by perception itself (*Tshad bsdus* 39,10 [the
beginning of the relevant passage is missing in the edition] and 117,17–20).
gTsang nag pa can also be held to support such a view, given that he acknowl-
edges that perceptual knowledge and superimpositions coexist. But he does not
go into the details of the elimination process (*bsDus pa* 18a5–6). mTshur ston,
in contrast to gTsang nag pa, does not accept that they coexist. He does mention
a three-step process but holds it to involve the immediate cause of knowledge
rather than knowledge itself (*sGron ma* 17a6–7). This view is also put forward
by gTsang drug rdo rje (*gSal byed* 24b2–3), Chu mig pa (*rNam rgyal* B27b6–7),
and Chos kyi bzhad pa (*Tshad nye bsdus* 11b6–7).

[111] The author of the *Tshad bsdus* also affirms that he accepts the definition of
knowledge to be *bden pa'i don rtogs*, "like Śaṅkaranandana" (*slob dpon bram ze
chen po bzhin du*). See *Tshad bsdus* 114,17–19. Sa paṇ also calls "followers of
Śaṅkaranandana" those who take as the definition of knowledge the "understand-
ing of a veridical object with three properties" (see *Rigs gter* VIII 203,22–23:
*bram ze'i rjes su 'brang ba rnams ni bden pa'i don rtogs chos gsum ldan te /
sngar ma rtogs pa'i don la 'dzin stangs mi 'khrul pas sgro 'dogs sel ba zhes bya
ba'o //*). This echoes the account of mTshur ston's own position (see *sGron ma*
15b6ff.). Śākya mchog ldan identifies the "followers of Śaṅkaranandana" as
"Phya pa, etc." (see *Rol mtsho* 77b3–4, cited in V, 1.5, R51.13).

[112] The *gSal byed* (23b4–8), *rNam rgyal* (A22b2–3), and the *Tshad nye bsdus*
(11a3–4) all cite the same passages (with variants), namely: PV 1.49 for K1,
PVin 1 Tib. 60,17–18 (Skt. 20,1) for K2, and PVin 1.3 for K3.

deceiving" (*gsar du mi bslu ba*)—was preferred to "understanding a veridical object." Chu mig pa already mentions the definition "understanding a veridical object fulfilling three specifications" as being synonymous with the definition "non-deceiving with regard to the state of affairs that is the epistemic object" (*gzhal bya'i don la mi slu ba*) (*rNam rgyal* A22b1; B26b4).

Developments later in the 13th century and the influence of Sa paṇ's criticism of the gSang phu mainstream tradition still remain to be investigated in detail. Various models and definitions of knowledge were adopted in the classical and post-classical period, the examination of which falls outside the scope of this introduction.[113] A definitive shift appears to take place in the 14th century with the disciples of Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa ("tsong kha pa lo zang drak pa," 1357–1419) and the fifteenth-century *bsdus grwa* work of mChog lha 'od zer. Regarding the definition of knowledge adopted in the later Tibetan tradition, two interpretations are predominant: that following mKhas grub rje, according to whom knowledge is "that which is non-deceiving and which ascertains its object by its own power," and that following rGyal tshab rje Dar ma rin chen ("gyel tsap jé dar ma rin chen," 1364–1432), who defines knowledge as being "newly non-deceiving"—a definition also given by dGe 'dun grub pa ("gendün drup pa") (1391–1474/5) and found in dGe lugs pa textbooks.[114]

---

[113] See *Pham byed* 2 156b4–6 (p. 312) for a list of the definitions of knowledge which, according to Śākya mchog ldan, marked the course of the development of Tibetan epistemology from the 11th to the 15th century.

[114] Dreyfus (1991: 20) writes of mKhas grub rje: "In short, for mKhas grub, a cognition is valid if, and only if, the experience of the object turns out to bring certainty through its own power and to be uncontradicted by any other items of knowledge that we might acquire." With respect to rGyal tshab rje, Dreyfus (1991: 21) states: "rGyal tshab, who is often considered by later dGe lugs pa scholars as the main authority in logical and epistemological matters, defines valid cognition as "that cognition which is newly reliable" (*gsar du mi bslu ba'i shes pa, Thar lam gsal byed* 229,15). This definition, which is also given by dGe 'dun grub, has been accepted as standard by the later authors of the textbooks (*yig cha*) of the important dGe lugs pa monasteries. In opposition to mKhas grub's requirement of epistemical independence, these thinkers insist on a stronger requirement for validity, that of novelty."

4. Phya pa's directly active model of perceptual knowledge

If making the "elimination of superimpositions" the central criterion of knowledge was a significant change from Phya pa's Indian and Tibetan predecessors, positing that this feature applies to perceptual knowledge, and moreover that perceptual knowledge eliminates superimposition *itself* (see §3.1.4), was a radical innovation. Just how revolutionary this idea was can be apprehended by considering the scandalized reaction of Sa paṇ, who points out that the "exclusion of superimpositions" cannot take place anywhere else than in the conceptual domain, as part of the global "theory of exclusion" developed by Dharmakīrti.[115] The originality of Phya pa's model can be better apprehended by comparing it with two alternative models attested in the Tibetan tradition: a passive model and an indirectly active model of perceptual knowledge.[116]

4.1 Active vs. passive models of perceptual knowledge

In an earlier study (Hugon 2011a), I have articulated the difference between Phya pa's model of perceptual knowledge and the one advocated by Sa paṇ in terms of an "active model" vs. a "passive model." In Sa paṇ's passive model, perceptual awareness does not have to *do* anything in order to qualify as knowledge. It only has to *be* non-deceiving (Tib. *mi bslu ba*, Skt. *avisaṃvādi*) and the revealing of something unknown (Tib. *mi*

---

[115] See *Rigs gter* IV 212.233.322.21 (Hugon 2008b: 410–411), VIII 205,7–9 (*ngo bo'i khyad par sgro 'dogs gcod pas ma khyab ste / mngon sum rtog bral yin pas sgro 'dogs gcod pa med pa'i phyir ro //*) and IX.1a (*myong bas sgro 'dogs gcod pa 'khrul*). One could say that Sa paṇ's refutation misses the point, because he does not take into consideration any other way of excluding superimpositions than via a conceptual operation. However, his reaction is quite natural for a conservative interpreter of Dharmakīrti.

[116] Note that the trio of models examined below is not exhaustive of the options found in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist epistemological works and that the issues that these models address are not new. Indian interpreters of Dharmakīrti already struggled with the questions whether perception performed any ascertainment of its object and whether this was a requirement for it to qualify as knowledge. In particular, Dharmottara (see Krasser 1995) and Jñānaśrīmitra (see McCrea&Patil 2006) stand, each in their own way, as proponents of an active model of perception.

shes don gsal, Skt. ajñātaprakāśa). Sa paṇ relies here on the criteria provided by Dharmakīrti in his *Pramāṇavārttika* (see Dhk2 and Dhk3 in §2.2). Being an episode of knowledge does not require that any kind of ascertainment of the object is achieved. Sa paṇ does state that a conceptual determination is required for transactional usage,[117] but this determination requirement is about one being able to act upon an episode of perception (i.e., to engage in some activity or avoid some activity involving the object being known), not about the episode of perception qualifying as knowledge. In addition, such conceptual determination cannot be the deed of the perceptual awareness itself, because perception cannot perform a conceptual determination and cannot exclude what is other, for these operations are restricted to conceptual cognitions. They must thus be performed by a subsequent conceptual cognition along the lines of a two-step model.

4.2 Directly active vs. indirectly active models of perceptual knowledge

Phya pa's model can further be understood as a "directly active model" in opposition to an "indirectly active model." This opposition is historically relevant given that an indirectly active model was adopted by Phya pa's forerunner rNgog Lo. rNgog Lo's views on the criteria of knowledge can be gathered from his commentary on the relevant passage of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*:

Dhk1 Indeed, someone who proceeds, having positively ascertained an object through these two, is not deceived with regard to (its) causal efficacy.[118]

The background of rNgog Lo's position lies in his interpretation of the expression "having positively ascertained the object" (Skt. *arthaṃ paricchidya*, Tib. *don yongs su bcad nas*) in this passage. According to rNgog Lo, "ascertainment" can be of two sorts: ultimate or conventional. The former consists in the mere vivid appearance of the object; the latter involves the directing of one's mind (*zhen par byed pa*) and a determination (*nges pa*), i.e., a conceptual determination. He argues that the latter

---

[117] See *Rigs gter* VIII 207,16 (ad VIII.46ab): *kun tu tha snyad pa'i tshad ma'i stobs kyis 'jug ldog byed pa na nges shes 'dran dgos te /*), followed by the citation of PV 1.200ab (see also the discussion regarding the interpretation of this verse in *Rigs gter* IV, Hugon 2008b: 409).

[118] See §2.2 for the Sanskrit and the Tibetan.

is meant in this passage.[119] rNgog Lo (who claims to follow Dharmottara's interpretation) thus adopts an active model of perceptual knowledge, in which being active means "conceptually determining the object."[120] Because rNgog Lo concedes that directing one's mind is not an operation of perception, he appeals to a two-step model, wherein a mental episode of directing and determining is induced by the perceptual awareness. Perceptual knowledge is thus *indirectly* active.

rNgog Lo's position is reflected in the opponent's position cited by Phya pa in *Mun sel* 112.23: "Some say that what makes a perception an episode of knowledge is merely its 'bringing about a determinate awareness.'"[121]

4.3 In what way is perceptual knowledge "active"?

It is quite possible that Phya pa adopts the criterion of "eliminating superimpositions" for the definition of knowledge in order to provide a model of knowledge that preserves rNgog Lo's idea of an *active* perceptual awareness, but without running into the pitfall he sees involved in a model in which being active is about conceptually determining the object, and hence, in the case of perception, about being indirectly active. According to Phya pa, such a model could not account for the two following cases of perception which he recognizes as knowledge but that lack the arising of a subsequent determining cognition (see *Mun sel* 112.23):

- the perception of omniscient beings (because omniscient beings do not have any conceptual cognitions, *a fortiori* no subsequent determining cognition)
- reflexive awareness experiencing the last moment of a determinate awareness (because no conceptual cognition arises from this point onward)

---

[119] One may note, in contrast, Śākyabuddhi's understanding of *paricchidya* in this passage in the sense of the mere appearance of an aspect of the object (Nishizawa 2013: 118).

[120] See *dKa' gnas* 31–32.

[121] Phya pa may refer to the position of rNgog Lo himself or his followers. The analogue view that being an episode of knowledge is about directing one's mind is ascribed to "ancient Tibetans" (*bod bgres po*) in the *Tshad bsdus* (39,12–13: *bod bsgres po ltar zhen pa la tshad mar 'gro ba ni*). This view is correlated with the definition of non-ascertaining perception in terms of failing to bring about a determinate awareness. See the opposite view discussed in *Mun sel* 123.1 (a).

The case involving the perception of omniscient beings provides us an interesting insight into the particularities of Phya pa's religio-philosophical project, which means to include such cases in its framework. The argument might not be seen relevant by rNgog Lo himself, because he could reply that the perception of omniscient beings does not involve a conventional ascertainment, but only an ultimate one (the mere vivid appearance of the object)—hence no determining cognition is needed for it to qualify as an episode of knowledge. However, I suspect that the distinction between ultimate and conventional ascertainment is precisely one of the things that Phya pa finds dissatisfying in rNgog Lo's model. One can also note a lack of unanimity among Tibetan scholars regarding the second case qualifying as knowledge or not.[122] Nonetheless, these are two cases that Phya pa wants to account for as being genuine episodes of perceptual knowledge in spite of the lack of a subsequent determining cognition.

Phya pa relinquishes the idea that being active is about conceptual determination. Being active is, rather, about eliminating superimpositions. This feature can still be associated with the notion of "ascertainment of the object," but an ascertainment that, in the case of perception, does not amount to a conceptual determination of the object, even if it comes to be referred to by the same term "*nges pa*" by some subsequent Tibetan scholars.[123]

Further, in contrast to rNgog Lo's model, episodes of knowledge, and in particular perceptual knowledge, are *directly* active, because they eliminate superimpositions *themselves*.

Phya pa's move is clearly reflected in the *'Od zer* in his gloss on the statement of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* on which rNgog Lo grounded his indirectly active model (Dhk1). In particular, the expression "having positively ascertained," which rNgog Lo interpreted in the sense of a conventional positive ascertainment involving a conceptual determination, is

---

[122] Notably, Chu mig pa admits that the second case is not an episode of knowledge, but a non-ascertaining perception (*rNam rgyal* A9a4; B11a8).

[123] This use of *nges pa* is suggested by mTshur ston in *sGron ma* 5a1 (*nges pa zhes bya ba ni de ma yin gyi sgro 'dogs chod pa la brjod pa na*). It is also known to Sa paṇ (*Rigs gter* IV 212.233.322.21, Hugon 2008b: 410–411: *kha cig na re nges pa la gnyis las rtog pas nges pa med kyang rtog med kyis nges pa yod de mngon sum gyis sgro 'dogs gcod pa'i phyir ro zhe na*), who rejects this use as "destroying logical conventions."

glossed by Phya pa as: "having eliminated superimpositions that are directly incompatible or characterized by what is directly incompatible with regard to its own epistemic object."[124]

4.4 Similarities and differences between the respective models

The similarities and differences between the models considered above are especially visible with respect to two notions: determining cognition (*nges shes*) and non-ascertaining perception (*snang la ma nges pa*).

The respective supporters of all three models agree that perception is free of conceptualization and that in the event of a perceptual awareness, an ascertainment of the object in the form of a conceptual determination would have to be carried out by a subsequent determining cognition (i.e., a two-step model is involved). They also agree that a subsequent determining cognition does not always arise immediately. All these points are well-grounded in Dharmakīrti's works. In particular, the last point, which includes what one might call the idea of "partial ascertainment"—a subsequent determination may arise immediately for some features, but not for others—is grounded in Dharmakīrti's discussion, in the *Pramāṇa-vārttika* (in particular PV 1.44–45 [see §5.1.2], as well as in PV 1.58 *cum* PVSV), of cases in which there is no determination (*niścaya*) of some feature that immediately arises following the episode of perception due to the presence of a superimposition (*samāropa*). Another episode of knowledge (typically, an inferential cognition) is thus required to achieve determination. Dharmakīrti mentions that the features determined are those for which there is both the presence of factors of determination (*niścayapratyaya*) and the absence of causes of errors (*bhrāntikāraṇa*). In

---

[124] *'Od zer* 6a7: *don yongs su bcad nas zhes bya ba ni rang gi gzhal bya la dngos 'gal dang des khyad par du byas pa'i sgro 'dogs bcad nas so /.* Phya pa's gloss on the other key expressions in this passage is also representative of his new definition of knowledge. Notably, "engaging" is glossed as "engaging in conceiving its own epistemic object as veridical"(*'jug pa na zhes bya ba ni rang gi gzhal bya la bden pa'i* [6a8] *zhen pa 'jug pa'o /*), "causal activity" is glossed as "the natural disposition of the epistemic object" (*don bya ba la zhes pa ni gzhal bya de shes bya'i gshis yin pa la'o*), and "non-deceiving" is glossed as "not opposed by another episode of knowledge" (*slu ba myed pa ni tshad ma gzhan gyi gnod pa myed pa*). All the notions involved in these glosses are characteristic of Phya pa's "short definition" of knowledge inspired by Śaṅkaranandana and of Phya pa's interpretation of the term "veridical."

the first category, he refers exclusively to subjective and contextual crite-
ria, namely, sharpness of mind (*buddhipāṭava*), habitual tendency
(*tadvāsanābhyāsa*), and context (*prakaraṇa*).[125] Conversely, in presence
of causes of errors or absence of the factors of determination, there arises
a superimposition and there is no determination. For instance, when ordi-
nary beings perceive an object, the feature "impermanence" is not
determined, and there arises the superimposition "permanent" because
similar moments of the object appear without interruption.[126]

The two-step model and the possibility of partial ascertainment are
articulated with the notion of knowledge in quite different ways in the
three Tibetan models considered.

For rNgog Lo, the arising of a determining cognition is a necessary
condition for the previous moment of perceptual awareness to qualify as
knowledge. Cases where it does not arise still qualify as perception but
not as knowledge. This implies a difference between "perception"
(*mngon sum*) and "perceptual knowledge" (*mngon sum tshad ma*) as well
as a special category of perception, termed *snang la ma nges pa*, the in-
stances of which do not qualify as knowledge because they fail to induce
a determining cognition. For rNgog Lo, "*ma nges pa*" in this expression
means that no subsequent determining cognition is induced. A typical in-
stance is the perceptual awareness of something impermanent that does
not induce the conceptual determination "impermanent."

---

[125] See Hugon 2008b: 528, n. 41.

[126] Dharmakīrti thereby acknowledges the phenomenon of "partial determina-
tion." But he does not suggest that there is a "partial knowledge" with regard to
the object (note that the expression "*na pratīyate*" ["is not understood"] in PV
1.58 is explained in terms of "absence of determination" in the PVSV [*na…
niścayo bhavati*]). Some of his commentators—namely, Śākyabuddhi (see Hu-
gon 2011a: 170, n. 54)—however will go down this road, thus offering an Indian
precedent to the idea of an episode of perception being knowledge with regard
to some features of the object and not being knowledge with regard to others.
One may ask whether this precedent was known to rNgog Lo and his followers
and to what extent it may have influenced them. Note in this regard that rNgog
Lo discusses at some length Śākyabuddhi's commentary on a passage that is not
directly related to this discussion, but deals with the reason for the absence of the
determination "impermanent" (PVin$_{Tib}$ 2 38,20–26, citing PVSV 21,6–22) (*dKa'
gnas* 352–357). See also the parallel excursus in *'Od zer* 136a3–b2.

In Phya pa's and Sa paṇ's models, in contrast, perceptual awareness qualifies as knowledge independently of the determining cognition that may follow.

For Phya pa, whether a subsequent determination arises or not is irrelevant to whether or not the perceptual episode qualifies as knowledge. Perceptual knowledge being active is entirely a matter of perception itself eliminating superimpositions; and, should a subsequent determination arise, since the object has already been known, the status of that subsequent determining cognition is that of a post-knowledge cognition. The latter is not an episode of knowledge because it does not satisfy the requirement of novelty.

The cases in the other two models (the passive model and the indirectly active model) that are pointed out as instances where there was a failure of a subsequent determining cognition to arise are discussed by Phya pa in terms of cases in which perception itself fails to eliminate superimpositions. The possibility of such failure grounds the distinction between "perception" and "perceptual knowledge." Phya pa retains the term *snang la ma nges pa* for such cases. But "*ma nges pa*" now connotes the absence of elimination of superimpositions by perception itself.[127] This would, *a fortiori*, imply the absence of a subsequent determining cognition—but this is not pointed out by Phya pa, for whom this feature is not relevant in characterizing such cases in opposition to genuine cases of perceptual knowledge.

For Sa paṇ, the immediate arising of a determining cognition or the absence thereof does not distinguish cases of perception that are knowledge and cases that are not knowledge. Perception is always an episode of knowledge. But when a determining cognition arises, the episode of perception is "intrinsically determined (*rang las nges*) to be an episode of knowledge," whereas when no determining cognition arise this must be "extrinsically determined" (*gzhan las nges*).[128] Against his predecessors, who invoked "non-manifest features" to account for some of the

---

[127] In connection to this, non-ascertaining perception is defined as being "compatible with opposite superimpositions" (*Mun sel* 123.12).

[128] For instance, the perception of something blue and the perception of something impermanent thus both qualify as knowledge. This is determined, for the first, via the arising of the determination "this is blue" that immediately follows the perception; and for the second, its being knowledge with regard to impermanence must be determined by a subsequent inferential cognition that ascertains

cases when no determining cognition arises (such as the perception of something impermanent), Sa paṇ argues that "all features are manifest" and that determination or its absence is only a consequence of the context, namely, the presence or absence of causes of errors. For Sa paṇ, *snang la ma nges pa* does not have a *raison d'être* as a distinct category of awareness. All perceptions are episodes of knowledge, whether or not a subsequent determination is immediately induced. And if "determination" should be about perception itself ascertaining its object, then Sa paṇ is ready to accept that all episodes of perception are *snang la ma nges pa*, because all episodes of perception are non-ascertaining in this sense.[129]

---

that the object perceived is impermanent. On the difference between Phya pa's views on the ascertainment of validity and Sa paṇ's views, see Hugon 2011a: 171.

[129] See *Rigs gter* VIII 220,19–20: *'o na mngon sum thams cad snang la ma nges par 'gyur ro zhe na / 'dod pa yin no zhes bshad zin no //*

Table 2: Summary of the models of perceptual knowledge

	Indirectly active rNgog Lo	Directly active Phya pa	Passive Sa paṇ
Definition of knowledge	Conventionally positively ascertaining the object = directing and determining	Eliminating superimpositions (together with novelty and invariable relation with the object)	Non-deceiving and revealing something unknown
Perceptual knowledge	• Must ascertain its object • Ascertainment is a conceptual determination • Ascertainment carried out by a subsequently arising conceptual cognition • Failure to induce ascertainment implies failure to qualify as knowledge	• Must ascertain its object • Ascertainment consists in eliminating superimpositions • Ascertainment carried out by perception itself • Failure to eliminate superimpositions implies failure to qualify as knowledge	• Must not ascertain its object (and cannot do so itself) • Every perception is an episode of knowledge
Non-ascertaining perception (*snang la ma nges pa*)	Is a perception that fails to induce a determining cognition	Is a perception that fails to eliminate superimpositions	Is not a legitimate, distinct type of awareness
Perception of something impermanent (and suchlike cases)	Is a non-ascertaining perception	Is a non-ascertaining perception	Is an episode of knowledge that is extrinsically determined
Determining cognition (*nges shes*)—A conceptual cognition arising after the episode of perception	• Is required in order for a perception to qualify as knowledge • Is not itself an episode of knowledge • Is a post-knowledge cognition and a non-understanding (*ma rtogs*)	• Is not required in order for a perception to qualify as knowledge • Is not itself an episode of knowledge • Is a post-knowledge cognition	• Is not required in order for a perception to qualify as knowledge • Is required for transactional usage • Is not itself an episode of knowledge • Is (in general) a non-understanding (*ma rtogs*)

4.5 On Phya pa's use of the term "*nges pa*"

The previous discussion has highlighted the meaning of the Tibetan term "*nges pa*" in the sense of a determination that can only be performed by a conceptual cognition. In Phya pa's writings, while this is one of the senses in which the term is used, there are other uses that need to be distinguished, and for which we adopted a different equivalent in the English translation (see II).

Determinate awareness, determination

The most specific use of the term is in Phya pa's three-fold typology of awareness (see VI, Table D). There, *nges pa* is presented as a criterion to distinguish conceptual cognitions (*rtog pa*), provided that these cognitions involve the directing of one's mind (*zhen pa*). We refer to the episodes that fulfill this criterion as "determinate awareness" and to the criterion as "being determinate." It does not corresponds to the criterion of "partiality" used in the seven-fold typology to set doubt apart (see VI, Table E, criterion [1]), because the latter has a broader scope—it can apply both to conceptual and non-conceptual cognitions, whereas "being determinate" is exclusively a property of conceptual cognitions.

This use of "*nges pa*" excludes doubt, which involves directing one's mind but is not *nges pa*.[130] Yet, in some discussions where the category of doubt is not an essential element, *nges pa* is used alternatively to *zhen pa* (for instance *Mun sel* 112.111.111.3).

We also use the term "determination" for *nges pa* when determinate awareness is further distinguished with regard to its correspondence, or absence thereof, with the object to be cognized. For Phya pa, a "determination" can thus be correct (in the case of inference, factive assessment, and conceptual post-knowledge cognition) or incorrect (in the case of some types of mistaken cognition).[131]

---

[130] *Nges pa* itself is opposed to *the tshom*, for instance, in *Mun sel* 9b5 (*nges pa the tshom ma yin pa*), 9b7 (*the tshom nges pa ma yin pas*), and 10a7 (*the tsom ma yin te nges pa yin*).

[131] Note that Sa paṇ acknowledges these two uses of *nges pa* (which he terms *yang dag pa'i nges pa* and *log shes kyi nges pa*), but considers that the latter is just a metaphorical usage of the term (*Rigs gter* VIII 207,19–21: … *de tshad ma skyes pa na 'jig pas nges pa btags pa yin pa'i phyir / bshad par bya ba ma yin no //*).

A particular type of "determinate awareness" is the one that occurs directly following perception. It is sometimes referred to by Phya pa simply as a "determinate awareness," and occasionally with the more specific term *nges shes* (or the expression *rjes su skyes pa'i nges shes*), which we translated as "determining cognition" (respectively, "subsequently arising determining cognition").[132]

Determination/ascertainment

A somewhat ambiguous use of *nges pa* is found in various expressions in which the agent of the verb is knowledge (i.e., *tshad mas nges pa*), a type of knowledge, or a type of determinate awareness that is not knowledge (in particular factive assessment). Here, *nges pa* conveys the same idea as the verb *'grub pa*, "to establish," which is also used (e.g., *tshad mas grub pa*).

When the agent is a conceptual cognition, the translation "determined by…" is unproblematic (e.g., *rjes dpag gis nges pa* "determined by an inferential cognition," *yid dpyod kyis nges pa* "determined by an episode of factive assessment"). Questions can be raised, on the other hand, when the agent is a non-conceptual cognition, such as reflexive awareness (e.g., *rang rig gis nges pa*, *rang rig pas nges pa*).[133] In cases where such expressions are used in relation to the establishment that defining criteria or characteristics of a logical reason, etc., are established, we have adopted the translation "determined by…." But it is evident that this expression should be understood figuratively and not in the strict sense of a direct conceptual determination. It is not completely clear whether the figurative

---

[132] Phya pa does not direct much attention to this notion in the *Mun sel*, except when debating with proponents of the indirectly active model of perceptual knowledge.

[133] The ambiguity of such expressions echoes to some extent Dharmakīrti's use of the term *niścaya/niścita* in connection with knowledge (and in particular, perceptual knowledge), which leaves the door open to a literal interpretation of the term (implying, in particular, that perceptual knowledge itself determines its object) or to a metaphorical interpretation along the line of a two-step model. Indian and Tibetan interpreters exploit this ambiguity to adduce these passages in support of their own position. For some examples, see Nishizawa 2013 for an investigation of the positions of Śākyabuddhi and Arcaṭa. Note, however, that Nishizawa posits in this paper the debatable premise that the divergences between the various interpreters is justified by Dharmakīrti being inconsistent in his writings.

use is to be understood in reference to an indirect determination, i.e., a conceptual determinate awareness induced by the agent, or in reference to the elimination of superimpositions by the non-conceptual episode of awareness (such a use of *nges pa* is found in the works of Phya pa's successors, cf. n. 123). In other cases, when the establishment pertains to the nature or some feature of the object, we have kept the less specific translation "ascertained."

Elucidation

Finally, one can note a less 'technical' use of *nges pa* in numerous section titles that state the points that the author wants to establish. We have translated in such contexts *nges par bya ba* as "to be elucidated."

5. Notes on Phya pa's background

5.1 The Indian background

I have until now intentionally refrained from extensively referring to Dharmakīrti's own theory of knowledge and (with a few exceptions) from linking the terms and notions in Phya pa's theory with equivalent Sanskrit terms. One reason for that is that Dharmakīrti's explanation of knowledge gave rise to many conflicting interpretations both in the Indo-Tibetan tradition and among modern scholars.[134] Another reason is that even when Phya pa uses a terminology that clearly echoes key Sanskrit terms found in Dharmakīrti's writings, he may use the Tibetan reflex-terms in a way that is quite different from their use in Indian sources. It is thus important to gain a firm understanding of Phya pa's theory on its own terms before looking at its background. This section does not purport to solve the issue of Dharmakīrti's final intent or to establish whether Phya pa 'got Dharmakīrti right.' Rather, the idea is to assess the Indian sources that may have had a direct or indirect influence on the elaboration of his own position and to reflect on Phya pa's treatment of these sources. One must also bear in mind that Phya pa might be accessing these Indian sources through the lens of his Tibetan forerunners. A connected issue in this regard is whether Phya pa was the first to put forward the definition

---

[134] See Dreyfus 1991 for an outline of various Indian and Tibetan interpretations. Regarding the interpretation of modern scholars, see, for instance, Katsura 1984 and Dunne 2004.

of knowledge examined above, or whether he was building on the presentation of one or some of his predecessors (see §5.2).

In the exegetical tradition Phya pa is part of, it is customary for scholars to ground their own position by citing or referring to Dharmakīrti's words and offering an interpretation of these words supporting their own position, which they do more or less subtly and convincingly. They may exploit the ambiguity of the phrasing of the source text for their own agenda or resort to more extreme exegetical practices to justify the adoption of a position that is at odds with a straightforward and broadly accepted reading of the source text.[135] Debates between supporters of conflicting positions are thus often framed as debates about the interpretation of some passage of the source text. Typically, for instance, Sa paṇ, when discussing the issue of perception in relation to determination and the elimination of superimpositions, provides numerous citations from Dharmakīrti's works which he considers to support a passive model of perception and discusses the interpretation of other passages which a hypothetical opponent adduces as evidence against this model.[136]

In contrast, throughout the *Mun sel*, Phya pa hardly refers to Dharmakīrti's source text explicitly. In the passages pertaining to the definition of knowledge, the only explicit references are to Dharmakīrti's two verses of the *Pramāṇavārttika* (Dhk2 and Dhk3, see §2.2). In this regard, Phya pa can hardly be considered to offer a subtle exegetical strategy. He simply presents his own theory as representing the meaning of these passages, but does not engage in any detailed attempt at justifying in what way his own theory might represent a viable interpretation of the source text, rather than just his own position.[137]

5.1.1 Phya pa's reference to Śaṅkaranandana

Phya pa's appeal to Śaṅkaranandana when stating his definition of knowledge (which, one may note, he makes only in the *Mun sel* but not in the *'Od zer*) might be taken as an attempt of indirect justification,

---

[135] For instance, Jñānaśrīmitra characterizes some of Dharmakīrti's well-known statements as "white lies," which enables him both to legitimate these statements and adopt an opposite position (McCrea&Patil 2006).

[136] See Hugon 2008b: 407–409.

[137] In the same way, when commenting on the PVin (Dhk1) in the *'Od zer* (see n. 124), Phya pa just glosses the key expressions by referring to his own system, without going into a justification of this explanation.

which, for traditionally oriented readers, would have had the merit of at least invoking an Indian foundation for the position being presented. But this reference is in itself peculiar, in particular given that the work of Śaṅkaranandana in which the passage that is the probable source of the short definition "understanding a veridical object" can be located, the *Bṛhatprāmāṇyaparīkṣā*, was not translated into Tibetan. This work is also not mentioned among the Indian works on which rNgog Lo authored an exegesis. This raises the question of how Phya pa became aware of Śaṅkaranandana's position on this point—oral transmission via rNgog Lo's pupils being the most likely option. Another question is the extent of Phya pa's awareness of Śaṅkaranandana's position. Is Phya pa's reference to Śaṅkaranandana in this context merely opportunistic (destined to the traditionally oriented reader likely to raise the objection that there is no Indian source supporting this definition)? Or is his position more profoundly inspired by Śaṅkaranandana, and by Śaṅkaranandana's *Bṛhatprāmāṇyaparīkṣā* in particular? Does one also find support in Śaṅkaranandana's work for Phya pa's interpretation of the short definition—"understanding a veridical object"—(in particular his interpretation of the term 'veridical'), and for Phya pa's extended definition involving criteria K1 and K3 in the *Mun sel* and criteria K1–K4 in the *'Od zer*?[138] This is not impossible, given that Śaṅkaranandana's position is mentioned several times by Phya pa, and that Śaṅkaranandana's works are definitely identifiable as the (direct or indirect) source for other key notions in Phya pa's philosophy of mind, such as the three "operations" (*byed pa*) associated with conceptual cognitions (see *Mun sel* 112.111.111 and VI, Table D), whose source can be traced in the *Apohasiddhi*.[139] The profuse use of

---

[138] The reference to Śaṅkaranandana as a source in this regard was criticized by mKhas grub rje as being unfounded. Cf. *rGyan mun sel* 60b1–3: *snga rabs pa dag bram ze chen po // bden pa'i don rtogs chos gsum ldan tshad ma'i mtshan* [60b2] *nyid du bzhed* (em. *bzhed* : rGyan mun sel *bzhad*) *la / da yang chos* (em. *chos* : rGyan mun sel *chas*) *gsum ni yul gyi khyad par sngar ma rtogs pa* ¦ *'dzin stangs kyi khyad par ma 'khrul ba / byed las kyi khyad par sgro 'dogs sel ba'o zhes zer ba ni / tshig gi sgra sgrog pa tsam zhig snying por zad de / bram ze chen po'i gzhung bod du 'gyur* [60b3] *ba gang na yang zur tsam yang med pa'i phyir dang / gzhan yang bram ze de ltar bzhed pa'i khungs gang yang mi snang ba'i phyir ro //.* Note that mKhas grub rje is not referring here to Phya pa's definition properly speaking, but to the later version in which criteria K1–K3 are specificities of the "understanding of a veridical object."

[139] See Hugon 2008b: 178–179, n. 131 and 132.

the notion of "eliminating superimpositions" in this very work could make it a plausible source of inspiration for Phya pa, although one can note at the outset that Śaṅkaranandana does not vouch for the elimination of superimpositions by perception.[140] An answer to the exact influence of Śaṅkaranandana on Phya pa's definition of knowledge will have to await further studies of the manuscript of the *Bṛhatprāmāṇyaparīkṣā*.[141]

5.1.2 The Dharmakīrtian background for the definitional criterion "eliminating superimpositions" (K1)

In his criticism of Phya pa's position, Śākya mchog ldan notes that the idea that knowledge requires eliminating superimpositions does not find any support in Dharmakīrti's writings.[142] While it is true that Dharmakīrti does not properly speaking define knowledge in such a way, Dharmakīrti does relate these two notions in his works. The fact that the expression *sgro 'dogs gcod pa* would remind readers with a Dharmakīrtian background of the theory of exclusion (*apoha*) was already evoked above (§3.1.4). More specifically, one may think of passages in which Dharmakīrti links the notion of *samāropavyavaccheda,* (Tib. *sgro 'dogs pa rnam par bcad pa/rnam par gcod par byed*) with that of *apohaviṣaya* (Tib. *sel ba'i yul can*, "having for its object an exclusion").

A key passage in this regard is PV 1.43–51 *cum* PVSV in the context of the larger discussion on *apoha*.[143] Dharmakīrti focuses on the cases of inferential cognition (k. 46–47) and of the non-inferential determining cognition that arises after a perception (k. 48–49). The discussion of the latter, in particular, involves the idea that "determination" (*niścaya*) and "superimpositions" (*samāropa*) stand in a relation of "opposition" (Skt. *bādhya/bādhaka*, Tib. *gnod bya/gnod byed*).

In this discussion, the attention seems to be on the absence or presence of a superimposition "non-x" as a phenomenon rather than on the content of this superimposition (i.e., "non-x") being negated. The discussion is not so much about the determination "x" excluding non-x, but about the

---

[140] Cf. AAS ad k. 10 (D286a2): *mngon sum ni sgro 'dogs sel ba'i byed pa can ma yin no //*

[141] See Eltschinger 2006: 93 for preliminary information.

[142] See *Pham byed* 2 158a4 (p. 315): *de yang tshad ma yin na sgro 'dogs gcod pas khyab pa la ni lung yod pa min te / sde bdun nas ma bshad pa'i phyir ro //*

[143] See also the conclusion in PV 1.56 *cum* PVSV. There is no similar discussion in the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*.

occurrence of the determination "*x*" eliminating an existing phenomenon of superimposition as "non-*x*" (in the case of inferential cognition),[144] or taking place in the absence of the phenomenon of superimposition (in the case of post-perception determination).

One can note that this passage is precisely the one referred to in epistemological treatises postdating Phya pa who cite Dharmakīrti in support of the specification K1 (cf. n. 112). Could it be that Phya pa indeed built his model on the background of this passage? As a matter of fact, a detailed reading of this passage reveals an understanding of when and how superimpositions arise and are eliminated that is radically different from Phya pa's. Let us consider, for example, the case of the perception of something blue. In Phya pa's understanding, at moment t_1, there is a contact between perceptual awareness and the superimposition "non-blue." The latter comes to be annihilated, so that perception can be said to have eliminated the superimposition "non-blue." But the situation presented by Dharmakīrti is that the superimposition "non-blue" simply does not arise when perceiving the blue object, because there are no causes of error. A determination ("this is blue") can thus take place immediately after the perception, and its arising in the absence of the superimposition "non-blue" is the reason it is said to "eliminate the superimposition non-blue."

Bearing in mind, in addition, that Dharmakīrti limits in this discussion the features of "elimination of superimpositions" and "exclusion of what is other" to conceptual cognitions, such a passage could be considered to have been a source of *inspiration*, but not of *influence* properly speaking.

Further, one should keep in mind that Phya pa might have been acquainted with this passage in an indirect way, through the lens of a commentary or an account of this discussion by his Tibetan forerunners. A possible medium could well have been the exegesis on this passage by Śaṅkaranandana in his incomplete commentary on the *Pramāṇavārttika*, whose Tibetan translation is ascribed to rNgog Lo, and part of which rNgog Lo discusses in some detail in his *dKa' gnas*. This is to be left for future investigation.[145]

---

[144] Dharmakīrti argues against the possibility of an inferential cognition that would not be preceded by a mistaken cognition (i.e., a superimposition). For instance, inferring "fire" from the perception of smoke always presupposes the mistaken cognition "there is no fire."

[145] Several key terms of Phya pa's discussion are indeed found in this commentary. Notably, Śaṅkaranandana speaks of determination being "incompatible" (*'gal ba*) with superimpositions (PVṬ 174b4: *de med pa la nges par 'jug pa ni*

5.2 The Tibetan background

5.2.1 Tibetan background for the definitional criterion "eliminating superimpositions" (K1)

While the source of criterion K1 might ultimately be found in Indian literature, Phya pa's adoption of this criterion might actually have been influenced by the Tibetan milieu in which he studied and was active. Indeed, a discussion in a Madhyamaka treatise by rGya dmar ba, who had been Phya pa's teacher, reveals that rGya dmar ba already knew of (and, it seems, himself subscribed to) a definition of "understanding" (*rtogs pa*) in terms of "eliminating opposite superimpositions" (*sgro 'dogs gcod pa*).[146] rGya dmar ba even indirectly associates this notion with the idea that "knowledge has for its object the exclusion of others."[147] Phya pa did not accept the latter for all types of knowledge ("exclusion of others" [*gzhan sel*] amounts to the operation of excluding others, which inferential cognition has, but perceptual knowledge does not have). But once he defines "knowledge" in terms of "understanding of something veridical" it is easy to see how the elimination criterion (associated with "understanding" by rGya dmar ba) would have become part of the definition of knowledge.

    What one finds in rGya dmar ba's treatise nicely corroborates the definition of non-ascertaining perception ascribed to "rGya" in the *Tshad bsdus* (see IV, 1(b) and IV, 6.1 [vii]), which involves the notion of "compatibility with superimpositions," thus suggesting that "rGya" (which I

---

de dang 'gal bar rtogs pa'i phyir de zlog par nges par byed pa'i phyir ro //); he mentions the idea that a fire is held to be capable of opposing cold even in the absence of cold (PVṬ 174a4: *gzhan nyid kyis bzlog zin pas med pa na ni 'di de zlog par byed pa ma yin par mi 'gyur te / grang ba med me la grang ba zlog pa'i nus pa med pa ma yin pa'i phyir ro //*); and he uses the term *gnyen po* ("counteragent") to refer to the state of affairs that counters superimpositions (PVṬ 175b4). One should also consider the relation between this passage of the PVṬ and Śaṅkaranandana's AAS. rNgog Lo presents Śaṅkaranandana's interpretation of the reason why there is no determination of "impermanence" and confronts it with other explanations by Śākyabuddhi and Dharmottara in *dKa' gnas* 353–358.

[146] See *dBu ma de kho na nyid* 6a3: *gang las bzlog pa'i sgro 'dogs chod pa nyid de rtogs pa'i mtshan nyid yin te / sngon po las bzlog pa'i sgro 'dogs chod pa nyid sngon po rtogs pa bzhin no //*

[147] *dBu ma de kho na nyid* 6a3: *des na tshad ma ni gzhan sel ba'i yul can yin la /*

hence surmise to be rGya dmar ba) held "incompatibility with superim-positions" to be part of the definition of knowledge.

5.2.2 Tibetan background for the short definition of knowledge

Phya pa connects the definition of knowledge in terms of "understanding of something veridical" with Śaṅkaranandana. However, Phya pa's adoption of the latter as a short definition might have been prompted by rNgog Lo's discussion on the topic. Indeed, in the *dKa' gnas*, rNgog Lo presents his own position as follows:

> What establishes a veridical object is knowledge. And, in relation to a convention, it is defined by "non-deceiving."[148]

rNgog Lo seems to differentiate here knowledge as a state of affairs—(an awareness) that establishes a veridical object—and the characteristic that defines it as being knowledge, i.e. "being non-deceiving."[149] In other words, "non-deceiving" is the definiens of knowledge, and episodes of awareness that establish a veridical object are definitional instances of knowledge.[150]

---

[148] *dKa' gnas* 44,13–15: *bden pa'i don gtan la 'bebs pa ni tshad ma yin la / de yang tha snyad la ltos te myi slu bas nye bar mtshon pa'o //*. See also *dKa' gnas* 37,15: *myi slu bas nye bar mtshon pa'i bden pa'i don rtogs pa tshad ma'i mtshan nyid yin pa ltar na yang.*

[149] The author of the *Tshad bsdus* ascribes to rNgog Lo the view that: "Being non-deceiving is the witness of understanding a veridical object, because when someone proceeds, i.e., goes forward, having determined, for instance, blue, he or she is not deceived because he or she obtains it (i.e., blue)" (*Tshad bsdus* 116,19–21: *lo tsa ba na re mi slu ba ni bden pa'i don rtogs kyi dpang po yin te sngon po lta bu bcad nas zhugs te phyin pa na de thob pas ma bslus pa'i phyir ro zhes zer ro //*).

[150] Śākya mchog ldan reports rNgog Lo's definition of knowledge to be "just being an awareness that is non-deceiving" (*mi bslu ba'i rig pa tsam*) (*Pham byed* 2 156b6–7, p. 312). The mention "just" (*tsam*) implies a contrast with Dharmottara's definition, phrased as "an awareness that is non-deceiving, with three specifications" (*mi bslu ba khyad par gsum ldan gyi rig pa*) (idem, 156b6). See also *Rol mtsho* 78b1–4 for an account of Dharmottara's position and the statement that "rNgog Lo also appears to have asserted this very meaning" (*lo tsa ba chen po yang don de nyid bzhed par snang ngo*).

6. Conclusion

Phya pa's definition of knowledge aims at providing a unified and unify-ing criterion with regard to all types of knowledge, perceptual and inferential, conventional and ultimate, from the knowledge of ordinary people to that of the omniscient. As hinted at the beginning of §3, Phya pa's novel definition of knowledge also impacts on the scope ascribed to episodes of knowledge. The short definition of knowledge as "under-standing a veridical object" (referred to as being Śaṅkaranandana's, but possibly influenced already by rNgog Lo's discussion of the topic), to-gether with the interpretation of the term "veridical" as "being unopposed" and "existing according to its natural disposition," is a key move in expanding the scope of knowledge to include non-entities and what be-longs, in the Madhyamaka framework of the Two Truths, to the realm of ultimate reality. Phya pa's objections against alternative definitions of knowledge by Indian commentators indirectly highlight this concern as well: these alternative definitions are criticized for not enabling one to account for the full range of the epistemic objects that Phya pa wants to take into consideration. Phya pa thus makes a clear move away from a conception of knowledge focusing on worldly interactions with objects capable or not of fulfilling an expected function towards a conception of knowledge that has to do with the awareness of things as they really are, whether it means being able to fulfill a given function, being a hallucina-tion, or being empty.[151] Indeed, Phya pa's system accounts for "emptiness" being an object of knowledge. Dharmakīrti's model has thus be reframed to function in a Madhyamaka framework and to apply at all its levels.

Phya pa's endeavor to classify the various types of awareness that are not knowledge provides important insights into the understanding of the criteria that are constitutive of knowledge. But Phya pa's analysis has fur-ther applications beyond his philosophy of mind, in particular in his

---

[151] See Hugon 2011a: 161–164 for a previous discussion on Phya pa's short def-inition and the meaning of the term "veridical," and Hugon 2011b for a re-evaluation of a 'practicalist' interpretation of Dharmakīrti's idea of knowledge in view of passages that support the inclusion of non-entities within the range of epistemic objects. Dreyfus (1997a: 301–302) notes that most dGe lugs pa think-ers adopt this interpretation of the criterion of knowledge "in intentional terms" rather than "in pragmatic terms."

theory of argumentation.[152] Indeed, Phya pa considers it essential, when presenting an argumentative statement in a debate, to take into account the mental state of one's opponent. The proponent could, for instance, opt for an argument by consequence (*thal 'gyur*) when the opponent has a mistaken cognition about the thesis (for instance, he mistakenly holds sound to be permanent), but he would be better advised stating a direct proof (*rang rgyud*) if the opponent is in doubt about the thesis or has ascertained it through factive assessment. Further, when stating a direct proof (or a consequence), the proponent should be aware of the mental state of the opponent regarding the characteristics of the logical reason that the statement intends to present. The opponent may already have a vivid knowledge of the respective characteristics, he might have once had an episode of knowledge but subsequently forgotten about it, or he might never have achieved an episode of knowledge. What is to be stated or not by the proponent, and in which way (in order to avoid a redundant or an incomplete statement, which would be occasions for defeat), is thus dependent on a precise identification of the opponent's mental state.[153]

Further research into Phya pa's multifaceted compositions will enable us to understand better how Phya pa combines, in his overall philosophical agenda, epistemological concerns inherited from the Indian Dharmakīrtian tradition, specific issues related to the Madhyamaka enterprise, and other questions related to the general Buddhist framework in which the figures of the Buddha and various beings on the path to enlightenment have to be accounted for when it comes to knowing reality.

---

[152] On this topic, see Hugon 2011c and Hugon 2013b.

[153] On the problem or achieving such an identification when the proponent does not benefit from an insight above the ordinary, see Hugon 2011c: 120–121.