



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Head Office: Università degli Studi di Padova

Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology

Ph.D. COURSE IN PHILOSOPHY

SERIES XXX

SELF-AWARENESS IN TIBETAN BUDDHISM

A Study of the Philosophical Relevance of *Rang rig*

and Its Contribution to the Contemporary Debates on the Nature of Consciousness

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Abstract

This research examines the concept of self-awareness (*svasaṃvedana: rang rig*) as it was developed in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Self-cognition—that is, the mind’s knowing of itself—is a highly technical concept in Buddhist philosophy and, since it targets fundamental issues relating to the nature of consciousness, represents a crucial subject of debate among various scholars of the tradition. However, modern scholarship has not yet fully examined this field despite the most recent reflections upon self-awareness in the ongoing philosophical debates on subjective experience calling for a deeper study of the insights the Buddhist contemplative tradition might offer in helping to unravel the conundrum that the nature of consciousness presents. Dwelling upon the different understandings of the Buddhist notion of *svasaṃvedana/rang rig*, this dissertation mainly examines its Tibetan developments, in light of the Indian philosophical legacy, and the contribution they may offer to a universal discourse on self-awareness, mainly through dialogue with the potentials and tendencies of contemporary philosophy of mind.

After a few introductory remarks, the first part of the research examines the Indian origins and main developments related to the concept of *svasaṃvedana*. I start by exploring the initial emergence of the idea of self-awareness in some pre-Dignāga Buddhist sources before taking a closer look at Dignāga’s epistemological formulation of the concept and, finally, considering the main post-Dignāga Indian developments. As such, the first part of the research is intended as an overview of the Indian Buddhist history of the idea of self-awareness that precedes its Tibetan assimilation, an important background that must be considered for a proper understanding of the Tibetan debates.

The second part of the research focuses on the multidimensional relevance that the idea of *rang rig* acquires in the Tibetan arena. Selecting a few representative Tibetan accounts, I analyze their most relevant philosophical implications. To begin with, I discuss some aspects of the main categories that have been adopted in modern scholarship for the classification of the various understandings of self-awareness. Then, I investigate how the two main features of the intentionality and luminosity of consciousness are questioned and problematized by Tibetan scholars, analyzing the epistemological issues self-awareness entails, such as memory and the validity of cognition, and examining the role of ontology in interpreting self-awareness, especially in relation to the two truths. Moreover, I investigate the soteriological implications of *rang rig* in relation to spiritual breakthrough, with special reference to the rDzogs-chen view.

The final section of the thesis attempts to create a dialogue between the Tibetan tradition and contemporary studies on self-awareness. These days, self-awareness is still a hot topic tightly linked to the problem of the nature of subjective experience as well as other issues such as the hard problem of consciousness, the differences between same-order and higher-order theories, the relationship between intentionality and phenomenality, and the controversial role of subjectivity. I proceed by identifying aspects and dimensions of the discourse on self-cognition where the Tibetan understandings of this concept can fruitfully meet with the problems and strands of the ongoing debates in philosophy of mind. By putting them in dialogue I analyze the resonances and differences between the legacy of the Indo-Tibetan tradition and the modern controversies that arise.

What ensues from this research is an overall examination of the main accounts of the Buddhist notion of *svasaṃvedana/rang rig*, with a specific focus on the Tibetan assimilation and developments of the topic in light of the previous Indian thought upon it. These philosophical positions are unpacked, intertwined, interpreted and considered against a wider reflection upon the universal problems of self-awareness by assuming a methodological approach that allows the categorization and analysis of the challenges and nuances of the cross-cultural *praxis* itself. With this work I intend to follow the suggestion—recently made by a few recent scholars—to deepen and broaden our understanding of *svasaṃvedana* by putting it in relation to the contemporary sensitivity to the topic and in dialogue with comparable ongoing reflections upon the nature of consciousness. Even just scratching the surface of such a delicate, vast and complicated philosophical project, I hope to be able to tap into the mutually transformative potentials of such a cross-cultural philosophical enterprise, whose challenges now more than ever are becoming urgent, demanding but also promising.

Introductory Remarks

1. Reasons for Attempting a Philosophical Overview of *Svasaṃvedana* or *Rang rig*

This work aims to be a philosophical overview of the main aspects and relevance of the concept of self-awareness (*svasaṃvedana: rang rig*) in the Buddhist tradition, with a central focus on the Tibetan assimilation of this notion as part of its Indian heritage. As a philosophical reflection upon self-awareness, this survey will intersect the traditional accounts with the universal problems that underlie this topic and in doing so will open up any possible resonances and fruitful interactions between the ongoing philosophical debate on self-consciousness.

The typical understanding of *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig* sees it as the mind's knowing of itself, the awareness that awareness has of itself. Thus, this work attempts to shed light on a term around which various issues concerning consciousness—its nature, features, functioning and development—significantly converge. Although specific and technical, through its different interpretations the concept of self-awareness reveals its relevance, turning out to be a key-term in the overall account of consciousness by acting as a prism that is able to disperse the light of this vast topic, differentiating its components and levels. As such, even though it often appears to be a minor concept, it has the ability to reveal the ontological, epistemological and in some cases soteriological facets of the consciousness debates that converge on it.

Specific conceptions of *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig* have been studied by a number of scholars over the years. Only a few of them, though, have attempted to examine the overall concept. Several researchers have remarked that this issue still requires much further study in its Buddhist formulations (Kellner 2010, 204; Kapstein 1993, 171n39) and the importance of this research has often been indicated in relation to contemporary epistemology and philosophy of mind (MacKenzie 2007; Yao 2005; Garfield 2006; Williams 1998). As such, this study aims to convey an overview on *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig* that is able to reflect its various interpretations—at least the main ones—and approach the universal issue of self-awareness from multiple angles; this will conclude, then, with an attempt to create a dialogue between some Buddhist stances and those of the contemporary philosophy of mind on this subject, by enacting a cross-cultural *praxis* of thought.

The relevance of this issue has been remarked by several Western contemporary scholars of the Buddhist tradition and many attempts have been made at identifying the various dimensions related to this topic. What sparked my interest in this concept is the multifaceted relevance it plays in the Indo-Tibetan tradition. Such a seemingly minor notion turns out to be an important point

around which several issues of the philosophical discourse revolve and this study aims to provide a preliminary spectrum of at least some of them.

In fact, the way this concept is understood seems to be deeply affected by one's own philosophical tenet, tapping into its most fundamental coordinates. One's epistemological perspective is also affected, self-awareness playing a decisive role in the foundation of our subjective experiences. As such, in deepening the controversy about *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig*, it is interesting to examine the hermeneutical strategies that each Indian or Tibetan author applies to texts of the tradition. With regard to that, it is important to remember the close link between philosophical inquiry and commentarial methodology exhibited in Buddhist thought. The varying analytical approaches to the same questions found in this tradition are firmly anchored in scriptural exegesis and doctrinal elaboration; nevertheless, they continuously react and respond to concerns arising in their contemporaneous intellectual milieus.¹ In addition to the ontological, epistemological, and hermeneutical implications of the *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig* issue, it is important to bear in mind that it cannot be disconnected or isolated from the overall soteriological project² of the Buddhist tradition and in some understandings of this concept it is clear how relevant it can turn out to be for reaching the goal of liberation (Dreyfus 1997, 438–442).

From the very outset, I shall present the general methodological guidelines this work aims to endorse. In this regard, inspiration can be gained from the way Coseru (2012, 2–3) expresses his specific commitment to philosophical practice:

I am committed to the view that both the specific style of these broadly Sanskritic argumentative strategies and the universality of the metaphysical and epistemological theses under dispute are better showcased (and understood) if made continuous with contemporary philosophical concerns. The principal methodological reason for emphasizing continuity over comparison reflects a specific intuition about the scope of philosophical inquiry: one which says that its problems, though often couched in historically and culturally contingent

1. Dreyfus (1997, 4) states it clearly: “In the great diversity of methods, considerations and arguments used by Indian and Tibetan philosophers, only one fact clearly emerges: all philosophical activities rely on and are intended to validate the framework given by the tradition. Philosophical problems are not discussed only on the basis of their philosophical merits but in relation to and under the form of commentaries to some basic text formative of the tradition.” See *ibid.*, 3–6 for the complete passage on this issue.

2. For a discussion on the relevance of soteriology in the Buddhist tradition and a comment on its definition as a “doctrine of salvation” by Stcherbatsky and La Vallée Poussin, see Wangchuk (2007, 30–40); for references, see *ibid.*, 31n38.

terms, are nonetheless grounded in all aspects of conscious experience for a person at any given time.

Using a philosophical approach, some relevant passages of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition will be read and contextualized, endeavoring to articulate them as parts of a wider reflection upon the universal philosophical problems of self-awareness. By considering them as sources that, despite running through different historical and cultural settings, can enrich and expand such reflections, they can be incorporated into a global history of philosophy of which contemporary philosophy of mind is just the last and most recent piece. A cross-traditional or cross-cultural perspective allows the use of a methodology that puts together, in a fruitful dialogue, accounts and models that presuppose quite different commitments and assumptions, and that originate from different sorts of needs and experiences.³ The richness of the interactions among the several stances is guaranteed by retaining the diversity of their contexts and settings as different ways of sharpening questions about self-awareness.

What is here called the “cross-cultural philosophy” model, that is, a way of articulating an inquiry among texts belonging to different traditions and cultures, has had a few proponents so far. In order to better identify its aims and methodologies, it is useful to adopt Mills’ (2009, 124) understanding of it: “I define cross-cultural philosophy as the incorporation of philosophical traditions from multiple cultures into one’s philosophical practice.” Note that the label “cross-cultural philosophy,” which first originated with other scholars,⁴ has been widely used in the last three decades. As attested to in a few studies (Garfield 2015, 3; Mills 2009; Siderits 2003, xi–xiv), within the context of philosophical practice this is a growing tendency whose dawn is simultaneous with the sunset of “comparative philosophy,” the approach initiated by the late nineteenth-century Indian philosopher Seal.⁵ Among those who welcome and reflect upon new and up-to-date methods for studying various cultures and traditions, scholars such as Mills and Garfield endorse the “cross-cultural” philosophical perspective, whereas Siderits, on the other hand, practices the “fusion

3. For some encouraging statements about this approach see, among others, Coseru (2012) and MacKenzie (2017).

4. For their references, see Mills (2009, 275n15). Note that a similar approach is the one adopted and endorsed by Ganeri (2012).

5. It is Seal who first applies the comparative method to philosophy, comparing Vaishnavism and Christianity, in 1899. Masson-Oursel, one of the main proponents of the comparative method, endorses a specific version of comparative philosophy: one that is inspired by positivism, aiming at an objective, neutral point of view from which to look for any possible similarities between different thoughts. See Mills (2009) for a description of the conditions that have brought about the shift from comparative philosophy to the cross-cultural method (seen by Mills as a transformation of the first into the second one).

philosophy,” a stance oriented towards a problem-solving that uses elements from one tradition to solve problems in others.⁶ Compared to the fusion approach, cross-cultural philosophy turns out to be wider and methodologically different, in that it allows engagement in lively philosophical *conversations* (and not merely *comparisons* or *combinations*) between traditions, including not only a “problem-centered” method but also an “historical/interpretative” attention to sources considered in their own contexts (Mills 2009, 125). Here it is useful to recall Seyfort Ruegg’s (2016) description of the modern philosophers who are engaged in a “global ‘world philosophy’” (*ibid.*, 232): those who want to consider whether an old tradition has valuable thoughts to share with today’s world proceed from the present back to the past, attempting at integrating it into a new philosophical context. Thus, the work of the contemporary hermeneut might be seen as intersecting with that of the translator-interpreter, who moves in the opposite direction: proceeding “forwards starting from the past—the source-text being translated—and ending in the present—the translation being newly produced by him” (*ibid.*, 233).

In such a cross-cultural conversation any philosophical stands might turn out to be opportunities for self-transforming (philosophical) practices, that is, for dynamic relationships between at least *three* interdependent variables: the questioning thinker, and the two major elements of each cross-cultural inquiry, in such a way that *each* of the three is affected by those mutual interactions.⁷ Such a methodological approach would prevent any research from ending up as a mere list of resonances and differences between cultures or from using their thoughts in a (supposed) functional combination in service of a universal, global, and abstract philosophy. The very act of questioning affects and changes each element involved in the quest—the researcher *in primis*. And this is exactly what happens (or should happen) any time a philosophical engagement takes place, given the relational nature of this activity, whether it involves just one or more cultures: in reflecting *upon* something, the thinker engages in a mutually transformative process with the topic and with the reflections of those who have already approached it. Thus, it can be said that the very movement and breath that keep the philosophical task alive should unfold not only *inside* each culture—in a, so to speak, *intra*-cultural philosophy—but also, for the same reasons and with the same accuracy, *across* different ones—as a cross-cultural philosophy. The outcome of such a dynamic cross-cultural *praxis* could never be a synthesis of the diverse accounts or the choice of one among them as *the* favored perspective. All that can be set out is an ever-changing

6. For Garfield’s reasons for not adopting Siderits’ fusion philosophy, see Garfield (2015, 3).

7. See Pasqualotto (2005) and Ghilardi (2012).

philosophical landscape: an open and infinite horizon where numberless mutual transformations can be enacted.

Given the wealth of material on *svasamvedana* or *rang rig*, the diversity of concepts related to those and the linguistic difficulties they bring about, this study will barely scratch the surface and in effect will attempt a preliminary overview. These topics proved to be more complex than I initially thought and, given the amount of textual material that can still be found on it, this study cannot claim to have done full justice to the topic. With respect to the ongoing debate on consciousness, the contemporary philosophy of mind has been producing a very rich literature on the topic and this process shows no sign of decreasing; on the contrary, even during my time researching I noticed a remarkable increase in interest on the topic. Today there is one more layer of difficulties to this already delicate matter, concerning the challenge to fully inhabit the era of cross-cultural thinking where the boundaries of one's own reflections must expand to an immense degree. Thus, if my research comes to an end it is not because materials have been exhausted and everything that needs to be said on the subject has been said, but rather because a time limit has been imposed.

Nevertheless, I hope that the present work will be a small contribution to point out the multifaceted philosophical relevance of the concept of self-awareness. Further research should cover not only the multidimensional Tibetan approach to the topic (far from being fully encompassed in this study) but also the vast Indian literature, especially considering the complex relationship between the initial stages of the Buddhist history of the idea of self-awareness and its non-Buddhist counterpart. Moreover, since interest in the complicated issue of self-awareness is rapidly increasing among contemporary philosophers of mind, it is important to keep an eye on and bridge the gap—supposing the image of a gap accurately depicts the intellectual scenery we are dealing with—between the Indo-Tibetan tradition and the lively concerns of the ongoing debate. The richness of such a detailed and deep inquiry inevitably exceeds the scope of the present research and is, for the moment, an encouraging incentive for further studies.

2. Self-Awareness in a Broader Sense and Self-Awareness as *Svasamvedana* or *Rang rig*

The general notion of self-awareness is notoriously ambiguous due to the various definitions that neuroscience, philosophy and psychology have so far provided. As a means of providing an introductory sketch on this topic, in its broader sense, a brief examination of some of these is as follows.⁸

Stemming from the field of psychology, it is mostly related to the notion of a *self*. In social psychology, self-awareness is constituted by adopting the perspective of the other toward oneself (Mead 1962). In developmental psychology the mirror-recognition task has occasionally been indicated as the decisive sign for self-awareness: it arises in children when they are able to recognize themselves in the mirror (Lewis 2003, 281–282; Gallup 1970; Gallup, Anderson, and Platek 2011; Gallup, Platek, and Spaulding 2014).

From the philosophical point of view, most tend to link the “self” of self-awareness, or self-consciousness (widely considered a synonym of self-awareness), to the *subject* of experiences. It is mainly seen as the ability to think “I”-thoughts, to conceive of oneself as oneself.⁹ Similarly, it is also understood as thinking of self-ascribed experiences as belonging to one and the same self, the bearer of various experiences (Cassam 1997, 117–119). Moreover, together with self-consciousness in *thought* there is also the philosophical move of looking for self-consciousness in *experiences*, referring to the non-conceptual sphere of our experiential dimension as opposed to the activity of thinking.¹⁰ Along these lines, self-consciousness revolves around the non-conceptual element or factor that corresponds to first-person concepts.

The claim that there is a form of self-consciousness in experience, one which arguably grounds the capacity to entertain first-personal thought, can be understood in a number of ways. According to one view there is a perceptual, or quasi-perceptual, consciousness of the

8. For a list of the main definitions of self-awareness, with references to some of their proponents, see Zahavi (2005, 13–17). For now this preliminary sketch aims only to convey the complexity and ambiguity of the general concept of self-awareness. This being said, in order to understand the various interpretations it would be necessary to attempt some kind of classification and to do that Rosenthal’s (1986) distinction between *creature* consciousness and *state* consciousness is a useful starting point. Perhaps utilizing a two-fold formulation of self-awareness along these lines into the awareness a person or organism has of itself as a subject and the awareness that an inner mental state has of itself.

9. See, among others, Baker (2000, 67–68). See also Block’s (1997, 389) definition of self-awareness (in his translation, *self-consciousness*): “By this term, I mean the possession of the concept of the self and the ability to use this concept in thinking about oneself.”

10. See *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. “Self-Consciousness” (accessed July 15, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-consciousness/>).

self as an object of experience. On another, there is a “pre-reflective” form of self-consciousness that does not involve the awareness of the self as an object. A third claims that various forms of experience involve a distinctive “sense of ownership” in which each of us is aware of our own states as *our own*. (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. “Self-Consciousness” [accessed July 15, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-consciousness/>]; italics in original)

These are the three main philosophical accounts of self-awareness in experience, consisting, respectively, in: (i) attempts to identify it in subject-object forms of self-perception, (ii) accounts that see self-awareness as the pre-reflective continuous awareness of oneself as the subject of one’s stream of experience, and (iii) the tendency to define this issue as the awareness not only of one’s mental states, but also of them as one’s own. Self-awareness, in any of the three formulations, revolves around the subject and owner of the experiences.

The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (*ibid.*) s.v. “Self-Consciousness” devotes a chapter to the relation between self-consciousness and consciousness, reflecting on whether the former is a necessary condition of the latter. This specific aspect of the issue deepens the topic and suggests three types of theories—Higher-Order Thought theories, Higher-Order Perception theories, and Self-representational views—as means of understanding the relation between consciousness and self-consciousness, where the latter is actually seen as its necessary condition. It is interesting to note that the *Stanford Encyclopedia* suggests that we read these three types of theories as involving “a form of self-awareness,” intended as awareness of oneself as oneself. Thus, being aware that a mental state is occurring is insufficient to render that state *conscious*: self-consciousness has to be there, one has to be conscious that *one* is in the (first-order) state in question and aware of *oneself* as being in that state. Thus, this overview in the *Stanford Encyclopedia* on self-awareness interprets the three perspectives mentioned above in a way that stresses the *belonging* of a mental state to its owner. In other words, here the “self” of “self-awareness” refers—sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly—only to the subject, the person as the bearer of mental states. In the final chapter of the present research the three accounts will be assessed in more detail. As will be discussed, it is clear that the three—Higher-Order Thought theories, Higher-Order Perception theories, and Self-representational views—can perhaps be read from a different perspective, without necessarily bringing the person, the subject, into the main focus. Arguably, each *mental event* could be read as able to know *itself*, entailing talk about the *subjectivity* of experience more than its *subject*. For the moment, it is interesting to note that the general and standard presentation of the issue of self-consciousness (or self-awareness) tends to revolve around the self, the subject, the bearer of experiences: that is the “self” of “self-consciousness.”

Another constellation of meaning related to self-awareness comes under the label of “self-knowledge,” that is, the knowledge of one’s own sensations, thoughts, beliefs, and other mental states.¹¹ Here, self-knowledge has some distinctive epistemic features and acquisition of such knowledge is arrived at differently according to differing accounts, for example via acquaintance with one’s mental state, an inner sense, transparency, or thanks to one’s rationality. As for this perspective in general, the focus seems to be on the cognitive relation between the subject and its mental states and the way one gains cognitive access to them.

Nevertheless, among the various ways self-awareness has been understood and inquired in contemporary philosophy, the one that assumes it as a feature of mental events, as the mind’s knowing of itself, is the most relevant here as this is the understanding of self-awareness that most of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition holds. Thus, this research will focus on some of the Indian and Tibetan accounts of such concept of self-awareness and then attempt a dialogue with some resonating concepts in contemporary philosophy of mind.

The specific philosophical idea of *svasaṃvedana* (or *svasaṃvitti*; “self-awareness” is the most used English translation for this term) is a concept that *officially* entered the Buddhist discourse as part of the epistemological project of Dignāga (ca. 480–540 CE); subsequent to that formulation, it has been asserted, negated or held in different ways by various Indian authors. It was later assimilated as *rang rig (pa)* by Tibetans scholars.¹² In short, it could be indicated as the mind’s, that is, a mental event’s, awareness of itself.

Note that within the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition any acceptance of self-awareness—being the *mind’s* knowing of itself—is far from being the awareness of a self or a *person* and it ultimately has to be so in order to be compatible with the philosophical tenet of selflessness. Duckworth (2015, 207–208) expresses this point and stresses it with reference to the Mādhyamika stance:

11. See *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. “Self-Knowledge” (accessed July 15, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-knowledge/>).

12. For the equivalence in translation between the Sanskrit word *svasaṃvedana* (or *svasaṃvitti*) and the Tibetan word *rang rig pa* (or *rang rig*), see: Fukuda and Ishihama (1989, no. 4500) s.v. “*svasaṃvedanam*”; Sakaki ([1916] 1987, no. 4514) s.v. “*svasaṃvedanam*”; Negi et al. (1993–2005) s.v. “*rang rig pa*”; Chandra ([1959–1961] 1976) s.vv. “*rang rig pa*” and “*rang rig*.” For a definition of the Tibetan word *rang rig* (or *rang rig pa*), see: Krang-dbyi-sun et al. (1993) s.v. “*rang rig*”: “*’dzin rnam gyi shes pa ste | blo rang gis rang myong ba’am gsal bar mthong ba | dper na bum ’dzin mig shes kyi steng gi rang gis rang myong ba’i yul yul can gnyis su med pa’am rang yul gyi rnam pa med pa’i shes pa’o |.*” No specific lemma for *rang rig (pa)* is found in Jäschke ([1881] 1987), or in bTsan-lha Ngag-dbang-tshul-khrims (1997). As for the Sanskrit word *svasaṃvitti* (or *svasaṃvedana*), neither Monier-Williams ([1899] 1986) nor Edgerton ([1953] 1985) records any lemma.

The English term *self-awareness* also plays an important role in modern phenomenology, and has come to carry a number of different connotations, including the awareness of a self, the quality of subjective consciousness in an awareness of an object, and the structure of intentionality. The awareness of a self (at least a self that is understood as an object) is of course denied by Buddhists across India and Tibet. ...

... Certainly the first type, an egological view (self-awareness as awareness of self), is something Mādhyamikas explicitly negate. ... Yet the meaning of self-awareness is complex, and theorists in India and Tibet have come down on a range of views on this key topic.

Yao (2005, 1) makes this crucial point even more explicit when, from the very outset of his work on the concept of *rang rig*, he clarifies his view of the relation between the notion of a self and that of *rang rig* (in his translation, “self-cognition”) in the Buddhist doctrinal system: “This concept [of self-cognition] may sound strange to those who are familiar with the Buddhist doctrine of no-self, but the concept does not contradict this basic tenet of Buddhism. Self-cognition is not a cognition of unchangeable self but, rather, a cognition of cognition itself, or the reflexive nature of consciousness.” The same argument is claimed by Williams, at the beginning of his well-known work on *rang rig*.¹³ At closer look, this point is not as straightforward and unproblematic as Yao (and others) claims: there are valid reasons to argue that the topics of self-consciousness, subjectivity and self are not utterly unrelated, even in the Buddhist tradition (MacKenzie 2011, 271 ff.), but for the time being this general perspective is useful to assume. In this regard, Matilal (1986, 142) is also fairly explicit in bringing to the fore one point that, though seemingly easy and straightforward, puts the focus on the Buddhist declination of the issue of self-awareness: “The Buddhist does not recognize the category of soul-substance and hence ‘the subject is aware that he is aware’ means simply that an *awareness* is aware of itself” (italics mine). However, there are other problematic issues to deal with:

The Buddhist dissolved the fiction of a self, but replaced it by a series of discrete cognitive occurrences either running parallel to a series of non-cognitive (physical? phenomenal?) factors or surmounting such a series. There is admittedly a sort of correlation between the

13. “... I have chosen at this stage to translate *svasamvedana/rang rig* by the reasonably literal ‘self-awareness,’ understood here as consciousness aware *in some sense* of itself rather than consciousness aware of *a Self*, an *ātman*, which would of course be unacceptable to a Buddhist” (Williams 1998, 3). Moreover, Yao (2005, 157) draws a similar conclusion from his inquiry into the history of the idea of self-cognition, remarking: “Compared with its Western counterpart, the Buddhist theory of self-cognition enjoys the advantage of not being confused with a consciousness of the self.” For further considerations on this topic, see MacKenzie (2008; 2015a) and MacKenzie and Bradley (forthcoming).

object-series and the awareness-series or sensations-series, but what sort of correlation it would be is not easily settled” (*ibid.*, 111–112).

As such, it is important to highlight a remarkable shift in paradigm from a *subject*-centered view, the one most familiar in Western philosophy, to a *consciousness*-centered view, the one suggested by the Buddhist accounts—always bearing in mind the Abhidharma legacy on the one hand and the Madhyamaka contribution on the other. This is a shift towards talking about discrete cognitive events, unfolding one after the other, and not about consciousness in terms of a monolithic, substantial entity.

3. On Translating the Term *Svasaṃvedana* or *Rang rig*

“The word *svasaṃvitti* (like the semantically equivalent *svasaṃvedana*) is formed from the reflexive pronominal prefix ‘*sva-*’, and a nominal form of the verbal root *sam-√vid* (‘to be aware’). I will generally leave it untranslated, allowing my engagement with the considered passages to do the work of showing its significance” Arnold (2008, 7n11). While Arnold prefers to leave it untranslated and allow the context and passages where it occurs to reveal its meaning, other scholars and translators have advanced a few translations of the technical term *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig*. “Self-awareness” is the one most used, followed by other similar renderings, such as “self-cognition” (Suganuma 1963; Dreyfus 1997; Yao 2005; Almogi 2009; Komarovski 2011), “self-knower” (Hopkins 2011), “self-knowing” (Klein 1986; Hopkins 2011), “self-consciousness” (Yao 2005), “self-cognizing consciousness” (Hopkins 2011), as well as “autocognition” (Cabezón 1992). A few attempts have been made to convey a perhaps more phenomenologically-oriented nuance of this term, rendering it into expressions like “self-intimation” (Seager 2007; Ryle 1949; Ganeri 1999) and “self-presentation” (Kapstein 1993). Another quite technical rendering is “self-referential awareness” (van Schaik 2008; Davidson 2004), while “apperception” (Arnold 2005; 2008) explicitly brings to mind Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception. It is also worth mentioning a specific but perhaps misleading¹⁴ translation of the term as “introspection” (Germano 1992; Stcherbatsky [1932] 1962; Wayman 1991).

Concerning the challenges of translating this word, it is worth mentioning that there are some instances where an explicit choice has been made to alternate between various renderings in dependence on the philosophical contexts and significances the term assumes. One example is Williams’ (1998, 3) well-known choice to utilize two main renderings of *rang rig*: on the one hand, the “reasonably literal ‘self-awareness’,” and on the other hand, “reflexive awareness” or “the reflexive nature of awareness.”¹⁵ There also exist a few quite unusual translations; see, for instance, Guenther’s (1984, 24, 222n37) rendering of *rang rig* as “self-excitatoriness,” in the philosophical context of the Great Perfection (rDzogs-chen). In order to show how different the nuances and meanings of this term can be—and in general, what the main problems of translation are—consider

14. It could be misleading because the English translation “introspection” could easily refer to another concept, namely that of *shes bzhin* (*samprajanya*), which is often translated as “introspection.” In this regards, it is important to bear in mind what Lati Rinbochay (1980, 62) and Hopkins (1983, 377) say about the difference between *rang rig* and introspection: the latter being watching oneself, an essential ingredient for an effective meditation, a dualistic cognition that is not simultaneous with its object.

15. For a better understanding of the two different translations of *rang rig* adopted by Williams, see id. 1998, 6–7n8.

the methodological approach that Germano (1992, 812–813), at the beginning of his “Mini-Encyclopedia of Great Perfection Terminology,” suggests:

... [I]n each context those terms’ *gestalt* of meaning varies, and thus inordinate devotion to one’s lexicon inevitably entails obscuration of the overall passage. Thus we need not only an extremely sensitive reading of the original ... , as well as an extremely sensitive translation The end result is the necessity for a difficult balancing act between sensitivity to contextual variance of terms’ significance and an awareness of the remarkable continuity and interlinkage between individual syllables and terms throughout

Interestingly, in these general notes Germano (*ibid.*, 814) mentions, among a few concrete examples of difficulties in the translator’s task, the specific case of the word *rang rig*:

Apart from the numerous English terms we may be inclined to render it [*rang*] with (“natural,” “intrinsic,” “auto-,” “inherent,” “self-,” etc.), the grammatical relation of *rang* to the following term in a compound is often unclear (*rang rig* can connote “aware *as* self,” “aware *of* self,” “aware *by* self,” “aware *via* self,” etc.), and/or the precise reference of *rang* as “self” can be ambiguous (*rang rig* as “awareness inherent to the Universe itself” or “our own intrinsic awareness”).

Coming to the lemma “Awareness, aware-ing (*rig pa; vidyā*)” within Germano’s “Mini-Encyclopedia” (*ibid.*, 829–830), there is a specific paragraph on *rang rig* where a concrete application of the aforementioned delicate balancing act that translation seems to consist in can be seen:

Along these lines we must interpret the term *rang rig*, literally “self-awareness,” and often used in the sense of “introspection” (i.e., aware of ourselves as the thinker). In the context of Great Perfection literature, it signifies the “inherent (*rang*) intelligence” of the Universe itself, i.e., the aware-ing that is intrinsic to cosmos from its primordial beginnings, as well as our own “awareness-as-self”: in our primordial encounter with the luminosity that presences to us as if external, we must recognize it as self-presencing, and thus be “aware of the presence *as* self” (*rang rig*), whereby we tune into the pure intensity of awareness within us (*rang rig*), and realize the hidden unity of all that is.

Having seen Germano’s considerations on the lack of clarity of the grammatical relation of the term *rang* to *rig* (“self” to “awareness”) in the compound of the Tibetan philosophical word

rang rig (that the original Sanskrit term, *sva-saṃvedana*, does not help to clarify), in Negi (Negi *et al.* 1993–2005, s.v. “*rang rig*”) we find an attempt to make the grammatical link between the two words explicit. Thereby, under “*rang rig*” we have the following indication: “*rang rig* = *rang rig pa*.” Under “*rang rig pa*” is found the Sanskrit equivalent and the explanation of the lemma, while more information about the term *rang rig pa* is to be found in *ibid.*, under “*rang gis rig pa*,” which reads: “*rang gis rig pa* = *rang rig pa*.” Thus, one can infer that *rang rig* is equal to *rang rig pa*, which is equal to *rang gis rig pa* (“to be aware *by* self”). Nevertheless, several occurrences of the technical term *rang rig* can be found expressed as *rang gi rig pa*, thus linking the two components of the compound with the genitive particle (“to be aware *of* self”); moreover, to my knowledge, most Western contemporary scholars expand the compound *rang rig* by providing the phrase *rang gi rig pa*.¹⁶

16. Among the scholars who provide *rang gi rig pa* as the expansion of the compound *rang rig*, see for instance: Williams (1998, 1); Davidson (2004, 237); van Schaik (2008, 15); Higgins (2013, 90).

4. Previous Studies on *Svasaṃvedana* or *Rang rig*

In this section, I will briefly mention the main studies relating to *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig* previously undertaken by contemporary scholars. However, my survey will not be comprehensive: some specific studies that have been carried out by Japanese and Chinese scholars will not be discussed because of the language barrier. In spite of this restraint, I hope to provide a synthetic and general presentation of the previous studies. These will be encountered again in subsequent chapters of this study, for it is intentionally intertwined with secondary sources that reflect the primary ones, always in an open and mutually transformative dialogue with them.

Although no scholar seems to have ever attempted to examine the overall Buddhist concept of *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig*,¹⁷ there are at least two different surveys that aim to enlarge the scope of the study of this concept to more than one specific author or primary source. There are two monographs I am aware of: *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness: A Tibetan Madhyamaka Defense*, by Williams, published in 1998, and *The Buddhist Theory of Self-Cognition*, by Yao, published in 2005.¹⁸ The former is a philosophical inquiry which mainly focuses on part of the Tibetan Madhyamaka discourse on the issue, whereas the latter is an attempt to find possible precursors and sources in earlier Indian Buddhist thought for Dignāga's notion of *svasaṃvedana*.

Over the years, some specific conceptions of *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig* have been studied and deepened by a number of scholars. One point has to be mentioned as the subject of particularly intense discussion among scholars: many have debated whether Dignāga includes *svasaṃvedana* in mental perception or regards it as a separate type. The former view has been mainly advocated by Hattori (1968), Nagatomi (1980), and Franco (1986; 1993; 2005); the latter by Wayman (1977–1978; 1991) and Yao (2004; 2005). It is also worth mentioning the recent panel entitled “Buddhist Theories of Self-Awareness (*svasaṃvedana*): Reception and Critique,” held at the 15th Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies in Atlanta (June 23–28, 2008), where several contributions were presented and then collected into a special issue of the *Journal of Indian Philosophy* (Kellner *et al.* 2010). Those studies, gathered in the special issue, take into account

17. For similar considerations on the attention Western scholarship devotes to this topic, see Yiannopoulos (2012, 145–146).

18. Besides Williams' book, Yao (2005, 2) also takes into consideration a second work on this topic: *Yuishiki no kenkyū: Sanshō to shibun*, by Shōshin Fukihara (1988). Yao reports that a substantial part of this book is devoted to the issue of self-awareness as conceived by Dharmapāla (530–561 CE), therefore considering self-cognition and the cognition of self-cognition. Unfortunately the language of this book prevents me from accessing the material. Yao (2005, 2) reviews it as follows: “Fukihara's book is sophisticated and detailed. However, his discussion is dominated by the later commentaries and relies too heavily on East Asian sources; and does not attempt to make use of the Sanskrit and Tibetan materials, which makes his book a bit outdated.”

some Indian perspectives about *svasaṃvedana*, whereas the Tibetan contribution to the controversy is not included. Moreover, various books, articles and papers have dealt with diverse Indo-Tibetan Buddhist issues that deal with this topic in passing, such as the theory of perception (*pratyakṣa: mngon sum*), the relation between perception and its objects, the theory of memory or awareness (*smṛti: dran pa*) in Buddhist practice, luminosity in relation to the mind (*prakāśa* and *prabhāsvarā: gsal ba* and *'od gsal ba*), and the concept of *rig pa* in the Great Perfection (rDzogs-chen) tradition. Therefore, this last category of secondary literature will also be considered despite not dealing with self-awareness directly. One more category of secondary literature is relevant to the present study: that gathering the initial attempts at dialogue between the Indo-Tibetan stances on self-awareness and those of the Western contemporary debate on the issue. The relevance of these works will be examined in the final part of this inquiry.

After this brief consideration of the available secondary sources, a quick overview of Williams' and Yao's aforementioned monographs, being two special landmarks in the secondary literature on this topic, is in order.

Williams' reflections on the topic of *rang rig* started in the eighties. He authored a small article entitled "On *Rang rig*," given as a conference paper in Austria in 1981 and published, soon afterwards, in *Contributions on Tibetan and Buddhist Religion and Philosophy* (Steinkellner and Tauscher, 1983). The monograph, *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness*, seems to phrase matters differently and with a method of inquiry that is much more detailed. Still, the previous article is useful as an introduction to the monograph since it treats several of the issues that are taken up at greater length in the monograph as well as addressing some points that Williams does not analyze further in the monograph. Note that Williams' philosophical approach emerges with particular efficacy towards the end of the article (Williams 1983, 245), where he proposes a few considerations in relation to the nature of experience, including some thoughts advanced by contemporary philosophers. As for the monograph itself, the research and most of the writing has been completed by Williams during his tenure of the Numata Chair of Buddhist Studies at the University of Calgary (1994). Even though it cannot be considered *the* final word on the topic, so far it has the unquestioned merit of having drawn the attention of several other scholars on the issue, laying the foundations for further studies. In fact most of them, in one way or another, relate to Williams' well-known distinction between "self-awareness (i)," a result of the subjective aspect of consciousness taking the objective aspect as its object, and "self-awareness (ii)," or "reflexive awareness," the inherent self-knowing of awareness, the proper reflexivity of mind. The philosophical approach Williams adopts forges the way in dealing with the textual materials; in fact,

among others, Kapstein (2000, 106) appreciates Williams’ “determination to unpack philosophical arguments thoroughly and with great care,” and his ability to guide the reader “through the maze of conceptual and dialectical difficulties the material presents.”

First, Williams depicts the treatment of self-awareness in Tibetan thought by introducing the above-mentioned distinction of the two types of *rang rig* he individuates within the ambiguity of the tradition. Then, devoting an entire chapter to Śāntarakṣita (725–788 CE), Williams explains how the eighth-century Indian scholar develops the concept of “self-awareness (ii),” that is, reflexiveness of consciousness. In the following chapter, Williams focuses on a passage from Prajñākaramati’s (950–1030 CE) *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā*, namely, its lines commenting on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.21 (9.20 in Vaidya’s numbering), where Prajñākaramati takes Śāntarakṣita to illustrate the view Śāntideva (685–763 CE) refutes. Williams then presents a detailed and vast survey of the Indo-Tibetan commentarial tradition on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.26, the passage where Śāntideva ends his critique of *svasaṃvedana*. In this way, Williams brings into focus the degree of innovation found in Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa (1357–1419, founder of the dGe-lugs school of Tibetan Buddhism) and his followers’ interpretations of Śāntideva’s refutation of *svasaṃvedana*. Williams’ research shows that the commentarial tradition unanimously reads Śāntideva’s critique as applicable to the *ultimate* reality (*paramārthasatya: don dam bden pa*) of self-awareness and it is only with Tsong-kha-pa’s interpretation, together with that of his followers, that we witness a new understanding of Śāntideva’s denial of *svasaṃvedana* as also pertaining to *conventional* reality (*saṃvṛtisatya: kun rdzob bden pa*). Williams then devotes many pages to the way the rNying-ma master Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho (1846–1912) treats the topic, arguing that—*pace* Tsong-kha-pa and his followers—the denial of self-awareness in conventional reality leads to absurd conclusions and ends up undermining our everyday knowledge of referents/objects. By leading us through the main points of the dialogue the rNying-ma scholar has with one of his dGe-lugs critics, Tre-bo-brag-dkar-sprul-sku Blo-bzang dPal-ldan-bstan-’dzin (1866–1927), Williams brings to light the essence of Mi-pham’s interpretation and development of the issue. The final chapter of the monograph provides some possible reasons why the conventional reality of *svasaṃvedana* became such a debated issue between Mi-pham and the dGe-lugs interlocutors. Notwithstanding a few reservations expressed by a few scholars on some specific issues (Kapstein 2000; Tatz 2001; Wangchuk 2004, 175–176n14), the volume represents a landmark in the studies on self-awareness in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

Concerning Yao’s monograph, it can safely be stated that it is unique in its kind, for such an attempt to make an inquiry into the history of the Indian Buddhist idea of *svasaṃvedana* has never been made. Originally submitted as his PhD dissertation in 2002 (Yao 2002), it was published (Yao

2005) after two years of revisions. The book devotes one chapter to each of the main steps in the development of the idea of self-awareness among four Buddhist schools: Mahāsāṃghika, Sarvāstivāda, Sautrāntika and Yogācāra—and part of the last chapter first appeared in the *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32, under the title “Dignāga and Four Types of Perception” (Yao 2004). Making use of primary sources in Chinese, Pāli, Sanskrit and Tibetan, Yao illustrates a thesis according to which the idea of *svasaṃvedana* originated within the soteriological topic of omniscience as discussed in the Mahāsāṃghika school and which later evolved into an epistemological issue for the Yogācāra school. Moreover, towards the end, Yao partakes in the intensely debated controversy regarding whether Dignāga includes self-awareness in mental perception or regards it as a separate type, arguing for the latter stance. The book ends with a few pages encouraging a reading of (mainly) Dignāga’s *svasaṃvedana* in light of terms and categories used in contemporary philosophy, thus linking the investigation on Buddhist sources to contemporary debates on the topic.¹⁹ As it makes available important resources for the study of the Buddhist philosophy of mind, this volume represents an invaluable contribution to the field.

19. As Yao (2005, 5) states from the beginning, the book is also to be conceived as a contribution to the study of the human mind, since the Buddhist tradition can play a significant role whenever it is put in dialogue with the contemporary analysis of consciousness.

5. Technical Note

As for the Indian primary sources, I will make use of existing translations of the Sanskrit passages I cite. With regard to the Tibetan sources, I will provide my own translations. Nevertheless, I consult existing critical editions, versions, translations, or studies of texts that I cite; whenever relevant for the understanding of the sources, I will compare different translations of the same passage. As for Western languages such as English, French and German, whenever the quotations are long I report them in the English translation, to help the reader; I will keep the original language only for some short (and therefore easier) expressions.

PART ONE: INDIA

I. The Buddhist Historical and Doctrinal Background of *Svasaṃvedana* and its Pre-Dignāga Developments

1. Introduction

This analysis relies on Yao's (2005) monograph, retracing his line of reasoning, which unfolds through the use of primary sources in Chinese, Pāli, Sanskrit and Tibetan. The points most relevant to the present inquiry will be identified and commented upon. This aims to briefly detect some of the early issues related to the emergence of the idea of self-awareness.¹ As will be demonstrated, some of these issues continue to play a relevant role in the development of the history of this concept and some are still debated in the field of contemporary philosophy of mind.

What, then, is the origin of the idea that the mind knows itself in Buddhism? Following May (1959, 113–114n284), “L'origine de la thèse, que la pensée se connaît elle-même, est rapportée aux Sautrāntika ... ou aux Mahāsāṃghika” May's position is particularly meaningful in that it brings together two references: La Vallée Poussin² for the former option (which is also confirmed by the Tibetan doxographical schemas) and Bareau³ for the latter. These two scholars have often been cited as the oldest and main references in Buddhist scholarship for tracking the history of the concept of mind's knowing itself. Actually, elsewhere, La Vallée Poussin (1928, 129) also claims

1. Before starting this survey, two quick notes on terminology have to be made. The first one concerns the term *awareness*: in the present work, terms like self-awareness, self-cognition, self-knowledge and self-consciousness will be used synonymously. Nevertheless, please note that in the following pages, whenever quoting Yao's translations the term *awareness* technically translates or specifically refers to *jñāna*. The second note concerns some linguistic limits of the present work that have already been pointed out but could be useful reiterate: whenever Yao translates quotations from Chinese, I will not be able to discuss his terminological choices because of the language barrier. Being aware of this restraint and in spite of it, I will continue to make use of his translations in order to get an overall overview of the first and earliest emergences of the issues involved in the main topic.

Before starting, a general structure that will always accompany the present inquiry should also be borne in mind. According to the doxography that was first formulated by later Indian philosophers and then adopted, with a few changes in its further subdivisions, by Tibetan scholars, (i) Vaibhāṣika, (ii) Sautrāntika, (iii) Yogācāra, and (iv) Madhyamaka make up the four major Buddhist philosophical tenets or schools (*siddhānta: grub mtha'*). In order to follow the structure of Yao's monograph, the reader should have this schema in mind. The last indication concerns the more technical issue of dating: Yao's own dating system (Yao 2005, 161–164) will be adopted here in relation to the scholars Yao writes about.

2. See La Vallée Poussin (1909, 181–183). In particular, for the references to Candrakīrti's (ca. 600–650 CE) discourse about awareness knowing itself, see *ibid.*, 182n2; for the correction of La Vallée Poussin's reference page, see May (1959, 114n284).

3. See Bareau (1955, 64), who deals with this issue in thesis no. 29 of his list of Mahāsāṃghika thesis.

that discussions about this topic originate in the **Mahāvibhāṣā*, in the context of refuting the Mahāsāṃghika theory of self-awareness.

As for modern Eastern scholarship, thanks to Yao's indications it is possible to outline the main opinions regarding the origin of the concept of *svasaṃvedana*.⁴ The studies by Lü (1991) and Katsura (1969) mainly base themselves around La Vallée Poussin's statements related to the issue of *svasaṃvedana*; Yamaguchi (1951) arrives at analogous conclusions by himself, with no mention of any other contemporary study, while Kajiyama (1983) refers to Yamaguchi's claims. In any case, the article Koyanagi published in 1916 has been identified by Yao as the best summary of the traditional East Asian Buddhist view on the issue.

Yao's thought encompasses both possibilities: in his opinion, the idea of self-awareness originates in Mahāsāṃghika, the earliest Buddhist school established after the first schism, and was further developed in the Sautrāntika school as a more technical category. As such, while Dignāga is the first to use the term in a technical sense, the concept originated long before his time.

4. Since, as stated above, the language barrier prevents me from accessing the sources in Japanese and Chinese, I refer to Yao's overview of them.

2. Mahāsāṃghika

The **Mahāvibhāṣā*, an encyclopedic Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma work that provides information about Mahāsāṃghika through refuting its stances, has become the best-known source for the origin of self-awareness in the Mahāsāṃghika context. In this work, the issue of self-cognition arises within the larger context of a discourse on Buddha’s omniscience. First, the composers of the **Mahāvibhāṣā* question whether an awareness can know all *dharma*s and thereafter they express the Mahāsāṃghika view of self-cognition in terms of “mind (*citta*) and mental activities⁵ (*caitta*)” being able to “apprehend themselves (*svabhāva*)” (**Mahāvibhāṣā* T 1545: 42c; transl. Yao 2005, 15). This is followed by a discussion about the reflexive nature of awareness (*jñāna*): “it is the nature (*svabhāva*) of awareness (*jñāna*) and so forth to apprehend, thus awareness can apprehend itself as well as others. This is like a lamp that can illuminate itself and others owing to its nature (*svabhāva*) of luminosity” (*ibid.*).

The relation between self-awareness and omniscience becomes clear when it is acknowledged that, for the Mahāsāṃghika doctrine, the latter implies the cognition of all *dharma*s in a single moment. Thus, this school holds a view in direct contrast with the much more widely held Buddhist position in which the possibility of knowing all *dharma*s in one instant is to be denied because the perceiving mind cannot know itself together with its co-emerging mental activities/factors and the sense organs correlated to it. This point indicates that self-awareness, in this case, is linked to *gnoseological* controversies related to *gnosis*’ (*jñāna: ye shes*) potentials, limits, and time of engagement on its objects, with *gnosis*, here, indicating the high-level mind at the stage of a Buddha or at other stages of the path towards enlightenment. To further clarify this term and its implications, Wangchuk (2007, 43) explains:

Gnoseology, here primarily in the sense of a theory of meditative insight or *gnosis* (*jñāna: ye shes*) within the Buddhist context, may simply be understood as a kind of “higher epistemology.” In a certain way, if one were to make a distinction between mind (*citta: sems; manas: yid; vijñāna: rnam par shes pa*) and *gnosis* (*jñāna: ye shes*), as is done, for example, in some Mahāyāna and rDzogs-chen sources, epistemology may be said to encompass the theory of knowledge mediated by the mind, and *gnoseology* a theory of transcendental knowledge, or *gnosis*. Soteriologically, as the concept of the four types of reliance (*pratisaraṇa: rton pa*) suggests, *gnosis* is clearly ranked higher than the mind.

5. Note that Yao translates *caitta* (*sems byung*) as “mental activity”; I prefer “mental factor,” following the rendering that is chosen, among others, by Hopkins (1983) and Napper (Lati Rinbochay 1980).

The context of the first emergence of debates related to self-awareness, thus, revolves around the issue of omniscience, understood as the possibility to know all *dharmas* in a single moment, which requires that awareness is also able to know itself.

This might lead to the question of why the topic of omniscience is formulated in these terms in the Mahāsāṃghika discourse. In order to shed light on the underlying need for such a view of omniscience, as held by the Mahāsāṃghikas, and to understand the theoretical context in which this doctrine originated, it is important to acknowledge the overall attempt, made right after the death of the historical Buddha, at processing the loss of such a relevant figure. Schmithausen (2000, 12–15) lists six approaches that, at that time, are taken to restore the presence of the Buddha, such as the worship of the Buddha’s relics, the introduction of portraits of the Buddha for the purpose of paying respect and as a basis for training in visualization and meditation, the belief in more than one *buddha* simultaneously existing in a cosmos of countless world systems, and so forth. Moreover, there is the tendency to “... transpose the dignity the teachings were treated with onto the teacher, thereby destining the Buddha to become an object of reverence in his own right [and it is] this tendency [that], in the course of time, led to ever increasing supramundane qualities being ascribed to the Buddha, particularly in the school of the Mahāsāṃghikas, where he is extricated from the earthly domain and divinized into a transcendent realm” (Wangchuk 2007, 209). Because of this process, his powers and knowledge are radically reinterpreted:

Originally, his knowledge was considered superior to that of others only because he had won his liberating insight (into the wholesome and unwholesome) by dint of personal capacity. Now his knowledge was elevated to total omniscience. While other non-Mahāyāna schools saw in the Buddha’s omniscience merely the ability to cognise any desired object at any time, just as a fire has the ability to bum all kinds of fuel without having to bum perpetually, the Mahāsāṃghikas went so far as to postulate that every moment the Buddha is cognisant of each individual phenomenon. (*ibid.*)

This helps contextualize the urge underlying the specific and unusual Mahāsāṃghika doctrine of omniscience in which the idea of self-awareness locates itself.

Yao also takes into consideration another relevant text, the *Samayabhedoparacanacakra*, composed by the Sarvāstivāda scholar Vasumitra (dated to either the first century BC or the second or fourth century CE), a work (extant in one Tibetan and three Chinese translations) where the doctrine of self-awareness is stated in relation to Mahāsāṃghika. Here, however, the point is made in relation to the soteriological category of *srota-āpanna*—stream-winner, the first of four stages leading towards the attainment of Arhatship. Yao (2005, 16) compares his translations of that

specific passage with the four extant versions of the text,⁶ but the context and ambiguity of the referent of the key-term corresponding to the Sanskrit *svabhāva* creates a difficulty in translating the relevant statements about self-awareness.⁷ Therefore, that passage is perhaps too vague to be of any actual help. In fact, especially in the light of the Chinese extant versions, it is open to two main readings: one, more soteriologically oriented, sees the self-awareness possessed by mind and mental factors as a tool stream-winners acquire in their practice to see *their own* identity (*svabhāva*) as stream-winners; the second and more epistemologically oriented reading sees self-awareness as a general characteristic of all minds and mental factors to apprehend *their own* nature (*svabhāva*), thus bracketing the specific situation/identity of stream-winners.⁸

Yao, looking for the connections between the Mahāsāṃghika theory of self-awareness and its later developments, concludes that although Dignāga, Dharmakīrti and their commentators never explicitly acknowledged their Mahāsāṃghika sources, their use seems highly likely:

The Mahāsāṃghika doctrine of self-cognition can be summarized as a general assertion about the mind and mental activities being self-cognizant and its illustration through the simile of the lamp. This has been verified by the limited sources of Mahāsāṃghika However, in some later Yogācāra texts, we also come across similar expressions. I see them as the Mahāsāṃghika influence on the Yogācāra doctrine of self-cognition (*ibid.*, 19–20)

A strong indication of this Mahāsāṃghika influence is Dharmakīrti's brief statement in the *Nyāyabindu* (1.10; transl. Yao 2005, 20), "All mind and mental activities are self-cognizant."⁹ When compared with the aforementioned passage from the **Mahāvibhāṣā*¹⁰ their similarity becomes evident. While the simile of the lamp is not mentioned here by Dharmakīrti, we find it in

6. For Yao's translations and all the references, see Yao (2005, 16).

7. Here it might be mentioned the Tibetan version: "gyun tu zhugs pa'i sems dang sems las byung ba rnams kyi ngo bo nyid shes so ||" (D 4238: 143a), that could be rendered (though in quite a roundabout way) as: "apprehend[ing] the *svabhāva* of mind and mental factors of the stream-winners."

8. One more text that could be mentioned is the *Samayabhedoparacanacakra nikāyabhedopadeśanasamgraha*, by the Yogācāra scholar Vinītadeva (645–715 CE), which extensively comments upon the works of Vasubandhu (400–480 CE) and Dharmakīrti (600–660 CE). The text is only extant in its Tibetan translation. There, Vinītadeva uses the technical term *rang rig* with reference to Mahāsāṃghika, but the rendering of the relevant passage in translation is the subject of long debates among interpreters. For a summary on the various versions held by modern scholars, see Yao (2005, 18–19).

9. *Nyāyabindu* 1.10: "sarvacittacaittānām ātmasamvedanam ||."

10. **Mahāvibhāṣā* T 1545: 42c.

Vinītadeva's *Nyāyabinduṭīkā*, an early commentary on the *Nyāyabindu*, where the author explains self-awareness in the Mahāsāṃghika style, by way of the lamp simile:

Whatever illuminates the own entity of those [mind and mental factors] is [their] self-awareness. In this way, all mind and mental factors arise while they make known their own entity, because they have the nature of cognition, just as a lamp arises while it illuminates itself, because it has the nature of illumination, and in order to illuminate its own entity it does not depend on another lamp. Likewise, also mind and mental factors do not depend on another cognition to make their own entity known; therefore, things that are established in their own right are direct *pramāṇas* for themselves. (compare my translation with Yao's one, in 2005, 20–21)¹¹

Moreover, Yao considers the possibility that not only Dharmakīrti but also Dignāga shares this Mahāsāṃghika legacy. In arguing for this, Yao finds some possible traces of this heritage in Dignāga's thought, particularly in one line of reasoning that is ascribed to his *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and quoted in the **Buddhabhūmyupadeśa*, a work attributed to Bandhuprabha (fl. sixth cent. CE). The passage (**Buddhabhūmyupadeśa* T 1530: 303a) confirms the two key features of the Mahāsāṃghika theory of self-awareness—namely, that mind and mental factors know themselves and simile of the lamp—and locates the theory within the wider context of the memory argument, typical of Dignāga's doctrine of self-awareness.¹² However, as Yao (2005, 22) states, the first part of the quotation, the one referring to mind and mental factors knowing themselves, “is not found in

11. *Nyāyabinduṭīkā*, Tib. (D 4230: 6b):

[*sems dang sems las byung ba'i thams cad*] *de dag gis rang gi ngo bo rab tu gsal ba gang yin pa de ni rang gi rig pa yin no || 'di ltar sems dang sems las byung ba thams cad ni rtogs par bya ba'i rang bzhin can yin pa'i phyir rang gi ngo bo rig par byed bzhin du skye ste | dper na mar me ni rab tu gsal ba'i rang bzhin can yin pa'i phyir bdag nyid rab tu gsal bar byed pa bzhin du skye 'i | rang gi ngo bo rab tu gsal bar bya ba la mar me gzhan la mi ltos so || de bzhin du sems dang sems las byung ba rnams kyang rang gi ngo bo rtogs par bya ba la shes pa gzhan la mi ltos pa yin te | de'i phyir rang grub pa'i ngo bo rnams ni bdag nyid la mngon sum gyi tsad ma yin no ||.*

Compare the Sanskrit reconstruction by Gangopadhyaya (1971, 107):

[*sarvacittacaittānām*] *teṣāṃ ca yat svarūpaprakāśanam tadātmasamvedanam | sarve hi cittacaittāḥ pratītisvabhāvatvāt svarūpajñāpakā bhavanti | yathā pradīpaḥ prakāśasvabhāvatvād ātmano 'pi prakāśako bhavati | svarūpaprakāśe ca pradīpāntaram nāpekṣate | tathā cittacaittā api svarūpāvabodhe jñānāntaram nāpekṣante | tataśca svasiddhabhāvāḥ svayaṃ pratyakṣapramāṇam bhavanti ||.*

12. For Yao's translation see Yao (2005, 21); for other translations of this passage see Keenan (1980, 569) and La Vallée Poussin (1928–1929, 130).

the extant Tibetan versions of *Pramāṇasamuccaya* or in any of its Sanskrit fragments. Nor can it be found in any of the extant works of Dignāga. ... So we are left with a mystery whether Dignāga himself had expressed or cited a Mahāsāṃghika-like notion of self-cognition.” Despite this lack of certainty, the hypothesis that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti’s theory of self-awareness was influenced by the Mahāsāṃghika legacy should be taken into account.

Among the forerunners of the idea of self-awareness we also find the Andhaka school, a sub-school of the Mahāsāṃghikas that played an important role in the later development of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The main references in relation to its doctrine of self-awareness are the *Kathāvatthu*, an Abhidharma work of the Pāli tradition ascribed to Tissa Moggaliputta (327–247 BC), and the *Kathāvatthupparakāraṇa-aṭṭhakathā*, Buddhaghosa’s (fl. fifth cent. CE) commentary on the *Kathāvatthu*.¹³ One significant difference between the Andhaka view on self-cognition and the aforementioned position of the Mahāsāṃghikas is that the former denies the self-cognition of *caittas*.¹⁴ Moreover, whereas the Mahāsāṃghikas (**Mahāvibhāṣā* T 1545: 47b) say that two minds function simultaneously, this position is probably refuted by the Andhakas (Buddhaghosa, *Kathāvatthupparakāraṇa-aṭṭhakathā* 5.9). Consequently, the former hold that omniscience occurs in a single moment,¹⁵ while the latter assert that, in successive moments, awareness (A₂) is aware of the preceding awareness (A₁), and awareness (A₃) of (A₂).¹⁶ Yao (2005, 28) remarks upon the importance of this last point: “... we cannot find any reference to it in the extant Indian texts. Now, as we have seen, this Pāli passage is probably the earliest source that has discussed the issue of the awareness of self-awareness.” Thus, among the points related to the Andhakas’ contribution to the discourse on self-awareness, it is worth mentioning the delicate and (later) debated issue of awareness taking itself as an *object* (*ārammaṇa*); the Andhakas admit the possibility of awareness being both subject and object, albeit in successive moments: awareness must become an object in order to be known by itself in the subsequent moment.¹⁷

13. The *Kathāvatthu* passages that Yao identifies as relevant to the topic of self-awareness are the following: *ibid.* 5.9 (on awareness of the present), *ibid.* 13.7 (on enjoying meditation), and *ibid.* 16.4 (on self-awareness itself).

14. See Moggaliputta (ascribed, *Kathāvatthu* 5.9). See Yao’s (2005, 28) translation of the passage and its original text in Pāli in *ibid.*, 40n113.

15. For all the references to the texts, see Yao (2005, 11).

16. See Moggaliputta (ascribed, *Kathāvatthu* 5.9). See Yao’s (2005, 25) translation of the passage and see the original text in Pāli (*ibid.*, 40n99).

Moreover, in the *Kathāvatthu* there are occurrences of other similes that find common use in Sarvāstivāda and Madhyamaka refutations of self-cognition. A proponent of the Sakavāda school, debating with an Andhaka opponent, questions the latter’s position by using various images that will often recur in the later developments of the debate: “Does one cut a sword with that sword, an axe with that axe, a knife with that knife, an adze with that adze? Does one sew a needle with that needle, handle the tip of a finger with that finger, kiss the top of the nose with that nose, handle the head with that head ... ?” (*Kathāvatthu* 5.9; transl. Yao 2005, 29).¹⁸

Unfortunately, given the limited sources available on the Andhaka theories of self-cognition, it is impossible to delineate a precise and detailed account. However, it is noteworthy that the way they approach this issue is found often in the issue’s later doctrinal developments within the Indo-Tibetan tradition. These include: *citta* and *caitta* in relation to self-cognition; the simile of the lamp and other images; the simultaneous functioning of one or many minds; awareness (*ñāṇa*) of self-awareness; cognition (*citta*) of self-cognition; awareness as both subject and object; self-awareness in the contexts of omniscience, epistemology, and soteriology.

17. See Yao’s (2005, 25) translation and see the original text in Pāli (ibid., 40n99). Note that, in this passage, “awareness” is a translation of *ñāṇa*; nevertheless, Yao continues the analysis taking into consideration a philosophical debate where *ñāṇa* is replaced by *citta*, “consciousness” (ibid., 31).

18. For the original text, see Yao (2005, 40n115).

3. Sarvāstivāda

“On my view, the general name Sarvāstivāda can embrace the Vaibhāṣika, the Mūlasarvāstivādins, and to some extent the Dārṣṭāntikas, but not those who were separated from the Sarvāstivāda and established themselves as independent schools such as the Sautrāntikas, the Dharmaguptakas or the Mahīśāsakas” (Yao 2005, 44). As far as the issue of self-cognition is concerned, scholars from the aforementioned Sarvāstivāda sub-groups share a common agenda of refuting self-awareness, albeit from different perspectives, while the difference from the Sautrāntikas, who take self-cognition as one of their major doctrines, is quite striking.

The Sarvāstivāda and the Mahāsāṃghikas mainly debate this issue on soteriological grounds, in terms of the Buddha’s omniscience. As explained previously, whereas the Mahāsāṃghikas hold that it is possible to know all *dharmas* in a single moment, other schools, including Sarvāstivāda, reject such a possibility of instantaneous omniscience. From the Sarvāstivāda point of view, one cannot know all *dharmas* if this cognitive activity occurs within a single moment: self-awareness does not mean a mind simultaneously knowing itself but rather the mind knowing previous moments of its own continuum. While Sarvāstivāda wish to reject self-awareness, they must find a way to explain how omniscience can know all *dharmas*, which would also include itself as that to be known. They get around this by maintaining that omniscient awareness knows all *dharmas* apart from itself, its associates, and its co-existed, while these are known by subsequent moments in the same continuum of that omniscient consciousness. In fact, as stated by Vasubandhu: “We [the proponents of the Sarvāstivāda view] do not say that the Buddha is omniscient in the sense that he knows all in a single moment” (Yao 2005, 45).¹⁹ Kātyāyaniputra’s (fl. first century BC) *Jñānaprasthāna* (T 1544: 919b), one of the seven Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma works, discusses this topic in the form of a dialogue, answering an opponent who expresses the Vaibhāṣika point of view. One passage is particularly relevant here, where this opponent points out that, in holding the view that all *dharmas* are no-self, one’s awareness (*jñāna*) must know all *dharmas*. The Sarvāstivāda reply maintains that an omniscient awareness knows all *dharmas* apart from itself, its associates (*saṃprayukta*, mental factors that share the same object with the mind, e.g. feelings), and its co-existed (*sahabhū*, its accompanying material elements and accompanying *dharmas* that are not part of the mind itself, e.g. the sense-organs). Each moment of awareness, together with its associates and co-existed, is known by the subsequent moment of awareness.

Here, Yao makes an important point:

19. Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 9.935: “*naiva ca vyaṃ sarvatra jñānasammukhībhāvād buddhaṃ sarvajñam ācakṣmahe* |.”

In other words, [in the Sarvāstivāda view] the mind knows itself through a *reflection* of the past mind. In contrast, the Mahāsāṃghikas hold that the mind can know itself at the same time that it knows other objects because the mind is endowed with a *reflexive* nature. These two views represent two different models of self-cognition: one is *reflective*, while the other is *reflexive*.” (Yao 2005, 47; italics mine)

Yao’s distinction between the reflective and reflexive models echoes a differentiation found, for instance, in Matilal (1986a, 148–149), who includes it within the topic of knowing that one knows,²⁰ and later also in Williams (1998), who adopts it as the main structure in his monograph on *rang rig* for articulating and organizing the way the philosophy of the Indo-Tibetan tradition targets this issue.²¹ Since this is a structural distinction that is still widely used to approach such a complicated issue, also in contemporary philosophy of mind, then it will be examined in more detail when dealing with Williams’ major contribution to the topic of self-awareness. For the moment, this distinction should be understood as a useful method to highlight the differences between the Sarvāstivāda and Mahāsāṃghika doctrines. That is, that despite the high level of complexity of the textual sources available for these schools, what Yao seems to be saying (by making use of those two extant interpretative categories or models) is that for the Mahāsāṃghikas self-cognition is the mind’s cognition of itself *qua* that which knows (that is, not as an object), whereas from the Sarvāstivāda perspective the mind is known *qua* object.

In order to fully appreciate this difference, focusing on awareness’ (*jñāna*) or consciousness’ (*viññāna*) being self-aware, it is necessary to first investigate the way this mental feature or ability is conceived of. For Sarvāstivāda proponents, the present awareness can take the previous awareness as its *object* and still consider it as *itself*. How is it possible, however, to argue that a preceding cognitive event is still the present one? To answer this question, one must look at their conception of the three times: past, present, and future. For Sarvāstivāda proponents, the three times are equal in terms of reality,²² therefore, when one thing falls into the past it does not perish but rather changes its status.²³ Consequently, each previous moment of awareness can easily be argued as belonging to the same mind continuum of the present cognitive event, since present and past minds

20. Actually, Matilal (1986a) suggests a broader (three-fold) presentation of the ways Indian philosophers deal with the awareness of the awareness. This will be introduced when discussing the two categories Williams outlines.

21. Yao explicitly refers to those two Authors in 2005, 90n15.

22. With regard to that, note that Yao (2005, 158) uses the effective expression “pan-realism.”

23. Although, with respect to how the three times differ from each other, there are differing opinions held by various Sarvāstivāda authors, it is most commonly expressed in terms of a difference of *state* (*avasthānyathātva*).

are part of the same mental continuum. The Sarvāstivāda school suggests, then, a gradual model of omniscience consisting of a mind continuum that is capable of knowing everything, just as fire is capable of burning everything through continuous burning. In a passage from Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (9.935; transl. Yao 2005, 48) it is stated: "The Omniscient One is like a fire that burns everything through a process (*santāna*) [of burning]. He does not know everything all at once."²⁴ Here, the notion of the identity of any present awareness seems to be dramatically shifting towards the identity of its continuum, thus extending the notion of identity from the identity of one moment to that of a continuum of moments.

The next step in the argument involves the sophisticated theory of causality elaborated by the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma in arguing that awareness cannot know itself in a single moment. The important element in this argument is the fact that no *dharma* can observe or know itself: a *dharma* can only act as a condition for others. This notion of causality is also at the center of the Vaibhāṣika literature, where the argument for why mind cannot know itself is particularly strong. In their argument, nothing can (in a broad sense) act on itself. If the awareness is to know itself, then it has to be in a causal relation with itself. However, since there must be a difference between cause and effect, and nothing can be different from itself, it is impossible for any awareness (and anything in general) to be in any type of causal relation with itself. This excludes any possibility of an awareness being the knower of itself.

The Vaibhāṣika also utilize a variety of similes to reject self-awareness, such as those found in the **Mahāvibhāṣā* (T 1545: 43a; transl. Yao 2005, 52): "What we see in the world is the following: the finger-tip cannot touch itself; the knife-blade cannot cut itself; the pupil cannot see itself; a strong man cannot carry himself. Thus [awareness] in itself cannot know itself." However, unlike the Mahāsāṃghikas, who rely exclusively on supportive examples in arguing for self-cognition, the Vaibhāṣika think that "... one should not dispute the teachings of the Sage [i.e., the Buddha] with worldly similes" (**Mahāvibhāṣā* T 1545: 43c; transl. Yao 2005, 53). Similes are therefore only a secondary tool to support their main argument, which is causality.

In terms of these similes, two (those of the finger and the knife) have already been mentioned in the previous chapter of the present section of this thesis, listed among numerous examples used in a debate between a Sakavāda and an Andhaka (Moggaliputta [ascribed], *Kathāvatthu* 5.9). The general view of the Vaibhāṣika is that the lamp simile is not suitable as an illustration of self-awareness based on their understanding of the nature of the lamp's illumination: that it is made of material particles, has no senses, cannot take anything as its object, and is not a

24. Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 9.935: "*santānena samarthatvād yathā 'griḥ sarvabhug mataḥ | tathā sarvavid eṣṭavyo 'sakṛt sarvasya vedanāt ||*."

faculty of a sentient being. For example, Saṃghabhadra's (fl. forth-fifth century CE) **Nyāyānusāra* (T 1562: 742b), representative of an orthodox Vaibhāṣika position, raises a strong objection to the efficacy of the lamp simile as a suitable image to represent and then prove self-cognition. Saṃghabhadra argues that an independent thing, such as illumination, cannot be found: when something gets illuminated, that is the result of bringing together various factors, such as an object, a lamp, eyes, and light. Therefore, since the lamp does not have the nature of illumination, how can it illumine itself? Even assuming that the lamp has the nature of illumination, the lamp could not illumine both itself and others. In fact, this would mean that fire can burn both itself and others, owing to its burning nature, and that darkness can prevent one from seeing darkness itself as well as other things. However, since this is not the case for fire or darkness, the lamp cannot act this way either. Saṃghabhadra's line of reasoning echoes the one expressed by Nāgārjuna (150–250 CE), which will be clarified later when discussing his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (7.8–12).

Despite those considerations, defenders of the simile of a lamp illuminating itself in relation to self-awareness do not hesitate to use it. Among them, Bandhuprabha (Bandhuprabha et al., **Buddhabhūmyupadeśa* T 1530: 303b; transl. Yao 2005, 55) defends the suitability of the image of the lamp: “One can directly perceive the absence of darkness and the apparent luminosity [in lamps]. If they did not illumine themselves, they would be enveloped in darkness, and would not be directly perceptible. Therefore, I know that lamps illumine themselves.” His straightforward position proceeds as follows:

Things like a jar or clothes are not darkness in their essence, but when they are not illumined by lamps their edges (*anta*) are enveloped in darkness and are not directly perceptible. When lamps illumine them, those lamps expel the darkness on their edges and cause them to be directly perceived. And so we say that they are illumined. It is just the same with lamps. When their nature [of being luminous] arises, the darkness on their edges is expelled, and they become directly perceptible. Thus we say that they illumine themselves. (Bandhuprabha et al., **Buddhabhūmyupadeśa* T 1530: 303; transl. Yao 2005, 55)

Yao (*ibid.*) comments upon this line of thought by stating: “This argument is interesting in the sense that it admits a border between light and darkness, which is the edge of an object.” However, it is perhaps difficult to get to a definitive conclusion regarding Bandhuprabha's argument; to be sure, it presents an empirical approach to the issue and weaves luminosity and darkness together so that their border corresponds to the edges of the objects. Luminosity is there when the edges of something are directly perceptible and darkness is there when they are not; as such, there is a criterion to locate them both. Still, it does not seem clear how to transpose the efficacy of this simile

into self-awareness itself: should we apply the same empirical perspective to the self-cognition of mind? What would be the outcome of such an approach? As it will be shown (ch. I.6), the crucial point concerning the possibility of having any contact between darkness and light is radically questioned by Nāgārjuna’s logical analysis.²⁵

Another relevant contribution can be found in the work of the Sarvāstivāda scholar Vasumitra from Gandhāra, where the orthodox Vaibhāṣika was geographically established; Vasumitra was regarded highly by other Vaibhāṣikas and most of his views carried favor and were adopted by them. Vasumitra attempted to systematize the Sarvāstivāda doctrines as well as to formulate new arguments against self-awareness. Yao (2005, 56) divides these arguments into two helpful categories: “The first group is epistemologically oriented, while the second deals with relevant soteriological issues.”

In order to appreciate the epistemological arguments, first of all it should be remembered the Vaibhāṣika view of the relation between awareness or cognition, broadly intended as an object-possessor, and its objects: “Awareness and the knowable are established as a pair. So there is no awareness that does not know the knowable, and there is no knowable that is not known by awareness. If there is no awareness, there is no knowable, and if there is no knowable, there is no awareness” (**Mahāvibhāṣā* T 1545: 558b; transl. Yao 2005, 56). This tight-knit relation of—let us say—reciprocal foundation between the two poles of the dichotomy is a very important point in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism in general and the importance of this dichotomy is confirmed by Vasumitra’s considerations against self-awareness: “If [awareness] in itself (*svabhāva*) knows itself (*svabhāva*), the following cannot be established: grasper and the grasped, knower and the known, the one who is aware and what it is aware of, object and that which possesses object, image and object of cognition, senses and object of senses, and so forth” (**Mahāvibhāṣā* T 1545: 43b; transl. Yao 2005, 56). Given how crucial the reciprocal foundation between the two poles of the pair is, Vasumitra’s statements resonate with similar reasonings that can be found in the later tradition. In the present research, this very argument will be taken into consideration in the context of talking about the Tibetan dGe-lugs criticism to the notion of *rang rig*.

Within the same subject-object framework, Vasumitra raises another objection to self-awareness by stating that awareness is not an object: “Why does [awareness] in itself (*svabhāva*)

25. See *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (38–39).

not know itself (*svabhāva*)? Because it is not of the objective realm” (**Mahāvibhāṣā* T 1545: 43a; transl. Yao 2005, 57).²⁶ Yao (*ibid.*) finds this objection particularly effective but not unproblematic:

On my view, this is the most clear and effective refutation of self-awareness in terms of epistemology. It reflects Vasumitra’s style of clear definition, his conceptual coherence and his fondness for systematization. Examining **Mahāvibhāṣā* carefully, though, I find that Vasumitra contradicts the Vaibhāṣikas on this point. When discussing which have a greater number, awarenesses or objects, the Vaibhāṣikas explicitly say: “Awareness can also be an object. ... Because the associates and co-existents of the awareness and the awareness itself can all be an object” [**Mahāvibhāṣā* T 1545: 228b–c]. For this reason, we always have a greater number of objects than awarenesses. This contradiction may indicate a difference between Sarvāstivāda masters in Kaśmīra and Gāndhāra.

This crucial point of whether awareness is a possible object or not is a highly debated one, especially in relation to the issue of self-awareness. Vasubandhu, another Gāndhārī Sarvāstivāda scholar, follows Vasumitra regarding this point. In his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (7.18), Vasubandhu refutes self-awareness with a single statement: “There must be a difference between the object and that which possesses the object” (Yao 2005, 58). The object-possessor (*viṣayin*), i.e., the subject or awareness, is radically different from the object and as such cannot be an object.

For Vasumitra, self-awareness is problematic for one more epistemological reason: subject and object are two independent entities and only when the two come together is cognition possible, neither can bring it about independently of the other. On the other hand, in the case of in self-awareness, cognition would arise from only one cause: the awareness itself. Since this goes against the Buddhist tenet of dependent origination (*pratīyasamutpāda: rten ’brel*), this option must be refuted. The relevance of this argument can also be found in other phases of the ebb and flow of the debates around this issue—in the following pages (ch. III and ch. IV), it will be seen again in the context of the dGe-lugs analysis.

In addition to the epistemological concerns expressed by Vasumitra, he also voices a few soteriological issues that pertain to specific topics such as wrong views, negative mental attitudes, the four mindfulnesses, awareness of the four truths, memories of previous lives, and awareness of others’ minds. Since not all of these arguments are relevant to the present discourse, only the first one will be considered, for it triggers reflections that are still part of the ongoing debates in

26. Note that Yao explains that the phrase “objective realm” (*jing jie*) does not frequently occur in the text. It appears only within the context of the interdependence between the subject and the objective realm, where “objective realm” and “object” are used interchangeably.

philosophy of mind. “If [awareness] in itself knows itself, the World Honored One would not admit the existence of wrong views. If a wrong view can know itself as wrong, then it becomes a right view. This is to say that if the wrong view can observe itself as wrong, then it should be called a right view rather than a wrong view” (**Mahāvibhāṣā* T 1545: 43b; transl. Yao 59–60). That is, since the Buddha does not deny the existence of wrong views it is unreasonable to accept self-awareness. Actually, this is a stance that reveals a few problematic topics. One issue—that is only implicitly present here—concerns the way one can access the mental state one is in. In this case, how does one’s view “observe itself”? Does it do that in a conceptual way or in a non-conceptual/direct way? Moreover, the line of reasoning included in the quotation above stems from the tacit assumption that whenever one’s view observes itself it also observes its own status *as right/wrong*. This statement seems quite problematic because, here, under the label “observation”, there seems to be quite an articulated and complex operation of judgement, involving an evaluation of the content of one’s view in terms of truth or falsity. On the other hand, one basic and almost universally accepted notion regarding self-awareness is that, no matter how much (if any) falsity is involved in one’s own belief or mental state, one is aware of having that belief or being in that mental state, whereas knowing its (potential) falsity is not usually considered a feature of bare self-awareness. However, this is a point that is still able to raise questions and foster debates in the contemporary philosophy of mind concerning first-person experience.

Before continuing this overview of the Sarvāstivāda soteriological perspective on self-awareness, it is important to mention again the connection between self-awareness and omniscience as it is treated in the dialogue included in Kātyāyaniputra’s *Jñānaprasthāna*, a passage referred to at the beginning of the present section while discussing the Vaibhāṣika point of view expressed in that work. In that dialogue, the cognition of all *dharmas* is examined as an ability of *awareness* (*jñāna*). On the other hand, other sources, such as the **Mahāvibhāṣā*, where a question addresses exactly the same topic of the cognition of all *dharmas*, refer to this as being an ability of *consciousness* (*viññāna*). As such, it might be wondered how are awareness and consciousness related to each other and, consequently, do the Vaibhāṣikas refute self-*consciousness* the same way they reject self-*awareness*?

Some Sarvāstivāda scholars distinguish *jñāna* from *viññāna* in the following way: “The word ‘awareness’ refers to all mental activities; the word ‘consciousness’ refers to the mind” (**Mahāvibhāṣā* T 1545: 44c; transl. Yao 2005, 69). Thus, mind (*citta*) and *viññāna* are synonyms. The Vaibhāṣikas also admit another difference between awareness and consciousness: the former is fundamentally an undefiled *dharma*, while the latter is a defiled *dharma*; “Awareness is the foundation of all undefiled things, and consciousness is the foundation of all defiled things”

(**Mahāvibhāṣā* T 1545: 44c; transl. Yao 2005, 69). Even though their natures are different, awareness and consciousness have the same function and can have all *dharmas* as their objects. Nevertheless, talking about the omniscience of consciousness, there are a few items which are excluded from its omniscience: consciousness itself and *dharmas* that are associated and co-exist with it—the same items that were listed previously. Even though it does not know itself, its associates or co-existents, consciousness is still considered to be omniscient because it knows the majority of *dharmas*. Therefore, for the Vaibhāṣikas it is not contradictory to talk about the omniscience of consciousness while rejecting self-consciousness, and the model of omniscience that arises as a result is one in which what is known is not necessarily the totality of all *dharmas* but rather their majority. By comparing the Sarvāstivāda rejection of self-awareness with the Mahāsāṃghika stance, one more issue is at stake: the simultaneity of multiple minds. Whereas the basic reason for the Mahāsāṃghikas to admit two minds functioning simultaneously is that they observe that seeing, hearing and so forth can take place at the same time, according to the Sarvāstivāda point of view “[these consciousnesses] come and go rapidly and only appear to be simultaneous, but actually are not” (**Mahāvibhāṣā* T 1545: 719c; transl. Yao 2005, 74). Two minds cannot be simultaneous; identical types of mental factors cannot function at the same time, either, but different types of mental factors can function at one and the same time. Thus, the difference from the Mahāsāṃghika account is also striking in terms of the soteriological point of view.

4. Sautrāntika

In terms of the Sautrāntika view of self-awareness, Harivarman's (310–390 CE) *Satyasiddhiśāstra* is identified as a work that provides access to Sautrāntika doctrines in their formative period and thus provides information on how the Sautrāntikas developed their theory of self-awareness by synthesizing the Mahāsāṃghika and Sarvāstivāda views.

In this text, Harivarman's discourse around self-awareness proposes some arguments against the Mahāsāṃghika theory, doing so within an *epistemological* context in relation to the main question of whether the mind is one or many. On the other hand, as demonstrated, the Mahāsāṃghika and Sarvāstivāda inquiries on self-awareness approach the issue from a *soteriological* point of view, that is, debating the topic of omniscience. Harivarman endorses the Sautrāntika position, that minds arise successively and self-awareness is only possible in successive moments of cognition, and argues against the Mahāsāṃghika view. Harivarman criticizes what, for him, is the Mahāsāṃghika account of mind: a view that posits one substantial mind. Rather, he argues for the multiplicity of minds by denying the existence of mental factors or, better, elevating them to the same status as that of the mind, and thus positing multiple minds. "There are multiple minds. Why? Consciousness refers to the mind. The consciousness of visual objects is a different [mind], and the consciousness of odors is another different [mind], hence there are multiple minds" (Harivarman, *Satyasiddhiśāstra* T 1646: 278b; transl. Yao 2005, 101). Yao's (*ibid.*) comment to this citation is particularly effective in order to fully appreciate the perspective Harivarman is suggesting:

Harivarman is saying that there exist multiple minds because of the multiplicity of their objects. To a certain extent, every particular object requires a different mind to perceive it. These multiple minds have no chance to arise simultaneously because each of them possesses an independent substance. These minds arise and cease successively the same way as their objects arise and cease successively.

The main elements entailed in this line of reasoning are the following: different objects require different minds, different minds have different substances and occur in different moments. All these are key-factors that will always play an important role in the discourse around self-awareness, since they build up the basic inner structure of the cognitive process itself.

When discussing whether the mind is one or many, that is, whether it arises as one continuous mind or as multiple successive minds, Harivarman argues against the Mahāsāṃghika view: "The grasper differs on account of the difference of the grasped. For instance, a certain person

knows his own mind sometimes. How does [the mind] in itself (*svabhāva*) know itself? Eyes do not see themselves; a sword does not cut itself; a finger does not touch its own tip. Hence the mind is not one” (Harivarman, *Satyasiddhiśāstra* T 1646: 278b–c; transl. Yao 2005, 102). Note carefully the elements that are present in this perhaps confusing passage. The two similes (the finger and the sword), as encountered in the context of the Andhakas and the Vaibhāṣikas, could lead to the passage being interpreted as a rejection of the doctrine of self-awareness. However, at a closer look, it is possible to see that the issue here is the singularity or multiplicity of minds and the related question, as Yao (2005, 103) remarks, is not “*whether* the mind can know itself” but rather “*how* it knows itself.” Whereas the Mahāsāṃghikas hold the view that one mind knows both itself and other objects, Harivarman maintains that one mind cannot have two objects and that different objects (for instance, one external object and the mind knowing it) require different minds. This is a claim that returns many times in the history of Buddhist philosophy, but it also plays a crucial role, for instance, in the phenomenological discourse of the Western tradition, from its Brentanian origins onwards.

How, then, does Harivarman explain the cognitive phenomenon of self-awareness? He uses the well-known simile of the lamp, though in a way that so far, in the present overview, has not emerged yet: “When a lamp expels darkness, eye-consciousness arises. The eye-consciousness, after arising, can see the lamp as well as things like a jar” (Harivarman, *Satyasiddhiśāstra* T 1646: 279c; transl. Yao 2005, 103). In this image, the mind that illuminates other objects corresponds to the lamp and the mind that knows itself corresponds to eye-consciousness. These are two clearly different minds and this consideration reflects the “different objects – different minds” line Harivarman follows. This leaves the problem of their different times of occurrence: the fact that the eye-consciousness arises after the lighting of the lamp “seems to suggest that self-cognition arises after the cognition of other object” (Yao 2005, 103). According to the Sautrāntika view, in a sequence of cognition, mental consciousness (third moment) arises after the arising of sense organ and sensory object (first moment) and after the successive arising of sense consciousness (second moment). When mental consciousness arises (third moment), it can never directly access the sensory object (first moment) because this already belongs to the past and the Sautrāntikas do not share the Sarvāstivāda view of the three times mentioned above. Therefore, a past (or future) *dharma* cannot act as an object of cognition. It is for this reason that, for the Sautrāntikas, the image or aspect (*ākāra*) plays an important role, together with the function of memory. Memory arises from the grasping of the cognitive image of an object (Harivarman, *Satyasiddhiśāstra* T 1646: 288b); in the particular case of mental consciousness, memory is what makes the conceptualization of this consciousness possible and according to Yao (2005, 109), “since both memory and mental

consciousness take what have been experienced as object, they are very much identical.” It is memory itself—being so important—that serves as the basic argument for the existence of both self-awareness and the external object.

Harivarman limits the function of self-awareness to mental consciousness only. As a consequence, a further question arises: is self-awareness conceptual, given that mental consciousness conceptualizes? The temptation is to answer affirmatively, also because Harivarman does not explicitly state that self-awareness is devoid of conceptual construction, but Yao (2005, 105) explains that, according to Harivarman, “once the awareness is directed toward itself, it knows its own particular characteristic and becomes knowledge of particular characteristic. So self-cognition is not necessarily categorized as knowledge of universal characteristic, or ‘conceptual knowledge’.” As will become clearer in the following chapters, self-awareness’ conceptual or non-conceptual feature will be further debated by numerous scholars of the tradition (and is still at stake in the contemporary philosophical discourse) and it is on the very issue of the apprehension of universal or particular characteristics, linked to the progress along the yogic path towards liberation, that the main problem of Dharmakīrti’s complex epistemological system rests. Curiously enough, it will be shown (ch. II.2.a) that one possible solution to the problematic aspect of Dharmakīrti’s account has been located by later interpreters (Dunne 2006, 510–511) in the (alleged) ability of self-awareness to perceive mental states as particular phenomena, in line with Yao’s above reflections upon Harivarman’s system.

Harivarman addresses one more important philosophical point: “Here is a saying that mental [consciousness] is self-cognizant. In other words, a yogi, by following his mind, observes that there is no mind in the past or the future, so he knows that the present mind takes this very present mind as object” (Harivarman, *Satyasiddhiśāstra* T 1646: 364b; transl. Yao 2005, 106). Self-awareness is realized, it seems, through yogic experience, and Yao (*ibid.*) observes that “This reveals a possible relationship between self-cognition as a strictly epistemological concept and self-realization (*pratyātmasamvedya*), a soteriologically oriented term that is frequently used in Buddhist, especially Yogācāra, literature.” The point Yao makes deserves attention, since he connects self-realization to self-awareness and reads Harivarman’s words as suggesting that, for the scholar, the notion/actuality of self-awareness originates from the soteriological *praxis* of a yogi and not out of an epistemological theory. This meditative practice consists in the yogi’s mind observing itself and in finding out that there is only the present mind as its object: this seems to be the way the yogi establishes self-awareness. Actually, the central thesis of Yao’s entire monograph is that self-awareness evolves from a soteriological issue to an epistemological concern. The pages (Yao 2005, 123–127) where Yao deepens this point will be taken into consideration again in the following

chapters, in the context of discussing more accurately the link between self-realization and self-awareness, especially in relation to what has become a subject of debate in most recent years (Kapstein 2000; Williams 1998).

Even though Harivarman, as just seen, affirms the existence of self-awareness, in a specific passage (Harivarman, *Satyasiddhiśāstra* T 1646: 331b) he explicitly states that mental consciousness cannot know itself. This is not a contradiction: on the contrary, here the Author introduces an important filter that enriches the analysis of self-awareness, that is, the two truths, namely, *saṃvṛti-satya* and *paramārtha-satya*. Conventional and ultimate represent two different levels; for Harivarman, self-awareness is denied on the ultimate level, whereas it still exists on the conventional level. Self-awareness is a provisional construct over and above ultimate reality, while ultimate reality consists in the fact that it does not exist. In the various phases of the history of the idea of *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig*, the two truths represent a sort of lens through which to examine the ontological status of self-awareness itself; the later Mādhyamikas, in particular, debate on whether self-awareness exists on the conventional level (Williams 1998) as will be clarified in later chapters, when considering a specific Tibetan controversy on this very issue involving Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa and Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho.

The main elements of Harivarman's philosophical view of self-cognition, collected in this short overview, depict the way in which the Sautrāntika position on this issue began to be shaped and formulated. Yao identifies Harivarman as the earliest Sautrāntika scholar—although generally considered a divergent one—who developed his theory of self-awareness in contrast with and on the basis of controversies with the Mahāsāṃghika and Sarvāstivāda. Harivarman's early project has to be distinguished, therefore, from the more recent and mature systematization of the Sautrāntika doctrine of self-awareness that is found in Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*. Here, while refuting the Yogācāra doctrine, Candrakīrti presents some arguments for self-awareness that are attributed to both Sautrāntika and Yogācāra, thus showing the result of a few centuries of further philosophical discussions. For the moment, a brief sketch will suffice in order to appreciate the mature arguments suggested by the Sautrāntika proponents of self-awareness and as a useful introductory presentation of the main lines of reasoning that will be encountered in the subsequent Indo-Tibetan discourse on the issue.

The view of the proponents of self-awareness, as reported by Candrakīrti (*Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.73 ff.), provides us with three proofs: one refers to appropriate similes, one is the memory argument, and one denounces the problem of infinite regress. The first simply reflects the Mahāsāṃghika style of adopting similes as means for making sense of self-awareness: here, the image of a flame that illuminates both itself and other things returns. The second proof

uses the memory argument, one of the most recurrent, effective and well-known arguments the tradition elaborates in relation to self-awareness. The central point is that memory is of objects that have been experienced and we could not have memories of objects and memories of experiences of objects without self-awareness. That is, it is thanks to self-awareness that awareness can know its own experience. The role memory plays for the Sautrāntikas has already been mentioned; in the following chapters (ch. II.1.b and ch. II.2.a) it will be shown how the structure of this argument was also used (differently) by Dharmakīrti and Dignāga. The third proof reported by Candrakīrti involves the infinite regress problem, an argument that will return in almost every occurrence of the debate on this topic, both in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition and in the Western stances. If a consciousness (that sees an object) is not perceived by itself but has to be known by another consciousness, the latter, too, would need to be known by another consciousness, *ad infinitum*. This regress would undermine consciousness of the object in the first place.

Yao (2005, 118) presents Harivarman's view as representative of a perspective, the Sautrāntika one, that synthesizes the Mahāsāṃghika and Sarvāstivāda ones. As for the context in which Harivarman treats the issue, there is a shift from soteriology (where the Mahāsāṃghika and Sarvāstivāda positions on self-awareness develop from) to epistemology, being a controversy of one mind *versus* many minds as well as related concerns regarding the time of occurrence, the object, and the substance of consciousness, along with the mental function of memory. Soteriology, nevertheless, is brought back to the fore when Harivarman seems to suggest that yogic practice is the field in which one experiences self-awareness (and establishes it), thus perhaps moderating the role of epistemological concerns by grounding the topic in the sphere of meditative self-realization. Finally, one more dimension Harivarman touches upon is the ontological one, introducing the filter of the two truths as a decisive criterion for ascribing a certain degree of reality to self-awareness.

5. Yogācāra

Yogācāra's various accounts of self-awareness intersect the doxographical distinction between Sākāravāda and Nirākāravāda, a differentiation based on the former school positing cognition through an image or aspect (*ākāra: rnam pa*) while the latter do not. In the next few pages, the Yogācāra doxographical distinction will be briefly presented. The term *ākāra* literally means 'form' or 'shape,' with a secondary meaning of 'aspect,' 'appearance,' or 'image.' Indian philosophers, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, have long debated the role *ākāra* plays in cognition²⁷ but the most questioned point is perhaps the ontological status of *ākāras*: do the images we have as the objects of cognition belong to awareness itself or are they evidence of an external world?

The meaning of the technical term *ākāra* has had a long history and touches not only ontological issues but also soteriological and doxographical ones. Behind this one term a rich history of development has unfolded, such that its meaning in the logic-epistemological tradition of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti differs, for instance, from its use in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (Kellner 2014), where it indicates a mode of functioning that applies to all minds (*citta*) and mental factors (*caitta*). From the soteriological point of view, the term refers to the sixteen aspects (*ākāra*) of the four noble truths (Eltschinger 2014) and can also refer to *buddha*'s cognition (Matsuoka 2014), a cognition that from some philosophical perspectives is ultimately free of the duality of an objective aspect (*grāhyākāra*) and a subjective aspect (*grāhakākāra*). As for the Buddhist accounts of ordinary epistemic acts, subsequent to

27. On the issue of *ākāra*, see Dreyfus (1996; 1997; 2006) and Coseru (2012, 102 ff.). For Śākya-mchog-ldan's (1428–1507) view on the topic, see Komarovski (2011). For the Sākāravāda and Nirākāravāda positions as they are described by Klong-chen-pa (1308–1364), see Almogi (2009). The *Journal of Indian Philosophy* has devoted a special issue (Kellner and McClintock 2014) to the topic of *ākāra*, useful for further references on the matter. This special issue gathers a few articles that originated from a panel on the concept of *ākāra* in Buddhist soteriological and philosophical analysis (and two additional papers from other sessions) at the 16th Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies in Taiwan (20–25 June, 2011).

Note that Kellner and McClintock (2014, 432), who co-author the introduction to the special issue, chose these inspiring words to indicate what the spirit of researching this topic must be:

... earlier studies often left us with implicit assumptions on the philosophical significance of particular viewpoints and positions even while they pretended to merely propose historical analyses; bringing a philosophical mind to the study of this universe that is able to detect and question such assumptions is vital to progress in this field. To find one's path in this universe is a daunting task, infinitely more challenging than the simple orientating grid of our cherished doxographical labels. But it is a necessary task if we are to understand Buddhist thought, and Indian philosophy, in ways that are attuned to its own sophistication.

Philosophical inquiry has to support our use of the sources by—first of all—questioning the implicit mental outlook we adopt when reading them.

Dharmakīrti's epistemological project, the notion of *ākāra* is questioned with respect to its ability to represent the true nature of mind or with respect to its being ultimately false.

As for the philosophical-doxographical concerns, the Sākāravāda account maintains that external reality leaves an impression of its likeness on consciousness, while the Nirākāravāda account claims that consciousness is clear and pure even when it knows external reality, being a substance that does not change even while revealing shape and features of the apprehended objects. Relying on Katsura (1969), Yao (2005, 122) reconstructs a genealogy of these two branches. Among the main proponents of the Sākāravāda, there are Dignāga (the founder), Dharmapāla (530–561 CE), and Dharmakīrti; for the Nirākāravāda, first there is Asaṅga (395–470 CE), then Vasubandhu, and then Sthiramati (475–555 CE). However, tracing the genealogy of the division between these two sub-schools is quite problematic (Funamaya 2007).²⁸ Funayama (*ibid.*) traces the history of previous studies relating to the difference between *sākāra*- and *nirākāravāda* in the Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda school and points out some problems underlying those studies, mostly undertaken in the context of Tibetan Buddhism. For example, in the 1960s Kajiyama (1965; 1966, 154–158) shed light on the final stage of Indian Mahāyāna philosophy, looking into the controversy between Jñānaśrīmitra (980–1030 CE), a *sākāravādin*, and Ratnākaraśānti (ca. eleventh-twelfth century CE), a *nirākāravādin*. Other studies also tended to apply the definitions of *sākāra*- and *nirākāravāda* to earlier Indian texts, dating back to the time of Śāntarakṣita, Dharmakīrti, or even Sthiramati and Dharmapāla, even though, as Funayama points out, it is not evident whether the same controversy can be found in such earlier texts. In fact, "... neither Śāntarakṣita nor his commentator Kamalaśīla explicitly uses labels like *sākāra* or *nirākāra* with regard to the Yogācāra school" (Funamaya 2007, 190). The same could be said about Dharmakīrti: even though he is taken by Tibetan scholars to have been both a *sākāra*- and *nirākāravādin* (an idea that makes sense in Tibetan hermeneutics but is a contradiction in the Indian context), a closer look at his *Pramāṇavārttika* would lead—according to Funayama—to the assumption that Dharmakīrti was simply not aware of this distinction between the two Yogācāra sub-schools. Thus, Funamaya warns contemporary scholars against the dangers of projecting later views onto earlier sources.²⁹

28. In order to compare Funamaya's perspective on this genealogy with the account provided by Kajiyama and Frauwallner, see Kajiyama (1965, 32–34).

29. In the rich literature on this topic, Kajiyama's (1965) study, specifically devoted to the controversy between Jñānaśrīmitra and Ratnākaraśānti, is worth mentioning here since it addresses the link between self-cognition and the luminosity of mind. In fact, following Ratnākaraśānti's view, all things are mere mind, mere knowledge, and mere illumination; pure illumination alone is real, while the images (*ākāra*) (of cognition) are false. Ratnākaraśānti offers a full-fledged interpretation of the non-dual nature of self-awareness, that is, the luminosity (*prakāśa: gsal ba*) of mind, tapping into the ontological theory of the two truths and arguing for the soteriological goal of the realization of

The epistemological role of *ākāra* with respect to self-awareness will be picked up again when considering Dignāga’s and Dharmakīrti’s accounts of self-awareness, in consideration of the main proponents/references of the Sākāravāda branch. For his contribution to the development of the history of the idea of self-awareness, one more remarkable thinker Katsura and Yao insert into the genealogy of the Sākāravāda is Dharmapāla. Yao remarks upon his importance in connecting the two sub-schools of Yogācāra, the Sākāravāda and Nirākāravāda, by working on the texts of both Dignāga and Vasubandhu. In terms of self-awareness, Dharmapāla analyzes it from the epistemological dimension and weaves it into the Yogācāra doctrine, developing it into an important part of this tenet. Moreover, Dharmapāla is well-known for having added another layer onto the concept of self-awareness: the cognition of self-cognition. Dharmapāla follows Dignāga closely in his conception of self-awareness but nevertheless adds some distinctive features to it according to his own view.³⁰ Self-cognition is, for him, a substance: namely, a substantial basis for the subjective and objective aspects of cognition. Within a mental event we have, then, four main elements: the subjective and objective aspects, self-cognition, and cognition of self-cognition.³¹ Another relevant element introduced by Dharmapāla is a substantial view of self-awareness as a prerequisite for memory, by using the memory argument with a different nuance when compared with the usual Sautrāntika argument of inferring self-cognition from the mental phenomenon of memory.

luminous reflexive awareness, stripped of differentiated phenomenal appearances and the dualistic distortion they entail (Yiannopoulos 2017, 190 ff.). In Kajiyama’s (1965, 157) translation of Ratnākaraśānti’s *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* (extant in Tibetan, *Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa’i man ngag*), it is stated: “However, the consciousness of illumination (*prakāśa*) itself is directly intuited as free from falsity, and accordingly is established as real. For illumination has as its inborn nature illuminating function, and cannot be approached by confusion (*viplavopanīta*)” The Tibetan (D 5579, vol. 114: 167b8–168a3) goes: “*yang gsal ba de rigs pa ni ’khrul pa dang bral bas mngon sum yin pa’i phyir dngos po nyid du grub pa yin te | gang gi phyir gsal ba ni gsal ba nyid kyis gnyug ma’i rang bzhin yin te | gang gi myong ba ’di ’khrul par ’jog pa’i bslad pas bzhag pa med pa’i phyir ro |.*” Kajiyama’s translation of the phrase “*gsal ba de rigs pa*” as “consciousness of illumination,” and of the phrase “*myong ba ’di*” as “consciousness of it” (italics mine), renders them as objective genitives, although not explicit in Tibetan, and thus suggests the presence of a link between self-awareness and luminosity of mind. For a wider discussion on the topic of reflexive awareness as luminosity in Ratnākaraśānti, see Yiannopoulos (2012, 171 ff.). Moreover, the 18th Congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies has recently devoted a panel to *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa*: “A New Study of Ratnākaraśānti’s *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa*” (August 25, 2017). Within it, in line with the topic just mentioned, it is worth noting the contribution by Hong Luo (2017): “Ratnākaraśānti’s Sketch of Self-awareness in the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa*” but, unfortunately, I have not managed to access the paper yet.

30. See also Williams (2009, 100 ff).

31. For specific references to Dharmapāla, see Yao (2005, 143–147).

Before moving on to Dignāga’s account, a brief mention of how self-awareness was conceived of in early Yogācāra, in the view of the (alleged) founding figures of the Nirākāravāda. To that end, among Yao’s indications and references, two relevant and representative *sūtra* sources that are taken as authoritative by this school will be taken into account. A typical Nirākāravāda position on the idea of self-cognition, is cited by Yao (2005, 124) from *Saddharmalaṅkāvatārasūtram* (10.567–10.568; transl. Suzuki 1932, 268): “When it is said that there is something resembling body, property, and abode produced in a dream-like manner, a mind, indeed, is seen under the aspect of duality; but Mind itself is not dualistic. As a sword cannot cut itself, or as a finger cannot touch its own tip, Mind cannot see itself.”³² Once again we find the images of the sword and the finger in a passage that pertains to the Yogācāra doctrine of mind-only. Here self-cognition is explicitly denied. The second *sūtra* source Yao picks is the following passage from the *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*:

“Bhagavan, if the image that is the sphere of action of *samādhi* is not different from the mind, how does the mind itself observe the mind itself?”

The Bhagavan replied: “Maitreya, although no phenomenon observes any phenomenon, nevertheless, any mind that is generated in that way appears in that way. Maitreya, for instance: given a form, in a perfectly clear round mirror one sees the *form* itself, but one thinks, ‘I see an *image*’. The form and the appearance of its image appear as different things. Likewise, the mind that is generated in that way and the sphere of action of *samādhi*, that is, the ‘image,’ also appear as different things.” (translation from Tibetan and italics mine)³³

32. *Saddharmalaṅkāvatārasūtram* 10.567–10.568: “*dehabhogapraṭiṣṭhābhaṃ svapnavajjāyate yadi | dvicittatā prasajyeta na ca cittaṃ dvilakṣaṇam || svadhāraṃ hi y athā khadgaṃ svāgraṃ vai aṅguliryathā | na chindate na sprśate tathā cittaṃ svadarśane ||.*”

33. The Tibetan (Lamotte 1935, 90–91; for textual references see *ibid.*, 9 ff.) goes:

bcom ldan 'das ting nge 'dzin gyi spyod yul gzugs brnyan de gal te gzugs sems de las tha dad pa ma lags na | sems de nyid kyis sems de nyid la ji ltar rtog par bgyid lags | bka' stsal pa | byams pa de la chos gang yang chos gang la 'ang rtog par mi byed mod kyi | 'on kyang de ltar skyes pa'i sems gang yin pa de ni de ltar snang ngo || byams pa 'di lta ste dper na | gzugs la brten nas me long gi dkyil 'khor shin tu yongs su dag pa la gzugs nyid mthong yang gzugs brnyan mthong ngo snyam du sems te | de la gzugs de dang | gzugs brnyan snang ba de don tha dad par snang ngo || de bzhin du de ltar skyes pa'i sems de dang | ting nge 'dzin gyi spyod yul gzugs brnyan zhes bya ba gang yin pa de 'ang de las don gzhan yin pa lta bur snang ngo |.

As for the reading of *gzugs* in the passage: “*gal te gzugs sems de las tha dad pa ma lags na*”, Powers’ (1995, 155) translation is the only one that differs from the translations provided by Lamotte (1935, 211), Yao (2005, 125), and myself. I find it difficult to make sense of the expression (a quasi-oxymoron?) “physical mind,” with which Powers links *gzugs* and *sems* together.

Yao shows that this passage is not as straightforward as it perhaps seems to be: it is not certain whether the Bhagavan’s answer can be connected to *svasaṃvedana* as the technical notion Dignāga formulates. As for the point of view expressed by the question, there seems to be the implicit difficulty in accepting that the mind sees—actually, *observes*, or *understands* (*rtog par bgyid pa*)—itself. From the perspective of idealism, it still faces the issue of the mind knowing itself: “Maitreya’s question challenges the fundamental thesis of Yogācāra idealism: the object of the mind is not different from the mind itself. On his view, this thesis faces the same difficulty as the mind seeing itself” (*ibid.*, 125). Early Yogācāra followers, despite holding an idealistic perspective, found it difficult to conceive of the mind as observing itself.³⁴ Yao (*ibid.*, 123) comments upon his overview of the early Yogācāra sources by considering that “Their theory of self-cognition features an emphasis on the soteriologically oriented self-realization due to yogic practice”; it is then Dignāga who was the first thinker to transform this soteriological issue into an epistemological one.

As for the understanding of the passage: “... *gzugs nyid mthong yang gzugs brnyan mthong ngo snyam du sems te ...*”, compare, on the one hand, my translation and Powers’ version (1995, 155: “... form itself is seen ... but one thinks, ‘I see an image.’”), which entirely corresponds with Yao’s translation (2005, 124), with Lamotte’s rendering (1935, 212: “... on s’imagine voir la matière et voir le reflet.”), on the other. Here, whereas Powers, Yao and I share the same reading, Lamotte seems to be conveying a different nuance. For a review of Power’s translation of *Samdhinirmocanasūtra* against Lamotte’s, see Tillemans (1997).

34. Yao (2005, 127 ff.) takes into account the figure of the (alleged) late Vasubandhu referring to his **Buddhadhātu-sāstra*, a work preserved only in its Chinese recension. Yao shows the proximity that his view about self-cognition has with Harivarman’s, namely, in terms of arguing for self-awareness but rejecting the image of the lamp as inappropriate, while positing only mental consciousness as self-cognizant. The author of **Buddhadhātu-sāstra*, according to Yao, bears the influence of the Sautrāntika point of view, but also seems to be oriented towards the Yogācāra position, at least in terms of arguing for a mental consciousness that always accompanies the five sense consciousnesses. However, with the help of Yao’s (2005, 127–130) access to and comments on the text, no significant innovation to the present discourse was found in relation to the implications of self-cognition.

6. Concluding Remarks

Before coming to a close, a few further remarks considering Yao's (2005) survey deserve attention, leading to two important considerations: the first refers to a specific figure that does not receive appropriate attention in Yao's treatment of pre-Dignāga sources on *svasaṃvedana* and the second, after a review of what has been covered so far, sheds light on one specific aspect of Yao's general thesis concerning the (supposedly) tight link between soteriology and epistemology with respect to this topic. Finally, in closing this preliminary part of the thesis, Yao's suggestions about a possible dialogue between the Buddhist tradition and the contemporary conversation around the nature of consciousness and its reflexivity will be taken into account.

To begin with, a mention must be made of an important voice that is missing from Yao's survey: Nāgārjuna's contribution to the issue of self-awareness. Actually, it might be surprising that Yao limits himself to sporadically mentioning Nāgārjuna's name without discussing him directly. As such, it will be useful to look at Nāgārjuna's approach to self-awareness, which revolves around the image of the burning light (or fire), in the context of the establishment of *pramāṇas* by themselves. This is the most common example to illustrate self-cognition in the Indian tradition: like a lamp illuminates itself at the same time as it illuminates a room, so too does consciousness become conscious of itself as it is conscious of other objects. The line of reasoning that Nāgārjuna follows is similar in the two main sources where the topic is addressed: in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (33–39)³⁵ and the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (7.8–12). The view Nāgārjuna (*Vigrahavyāvartanī* 33; transl. Bhattacharya, in Johnston and Kunst 1978, 116) argues against is that “Fire illuminates itself as well as other things. Likewise, the *pramāṇas* establish themselves as well as other things” (for indications on its sources and references see Johnston and Kunst 1978, 26n2). The philosophical point that is at stake here is the possibility of *pramāṇas* being established by themselves, whereby various arguments for this hypothesis are raised and answered by Nāgārjuna.

To begin with, it is not possible to claim that fire initially exists in darkness, without being illuminated, and is then illuminated; as such, it is not possible to say that it illuminates itself (*Vigrahavyāvartanī* 34). If that were the case, then fire would also burn itself (and here we find the fundamental philosophical point: that the subject cannot be the object of its own act) (*ibid.*, 35). Moreover, “If, as you say, fire illuminates both other things and itself, then darkness will cover both other things and itself,” which is absurd: it is not the case that darkness conceals both itself and others (*ibid.*, 36; transl. Bhattacharya, in Johnston and Kunst 1978, 118; see also

35. For a useful guide through the passages of the Author's reasoning, see Westerhoff (2010, 71–80).

Mūlamadhyamakakārikā 7.12). Then, since illumination is destruction of darkness, but “... there is no darkness in fire nor in something else in which fire stands,” how can it possibly illuminate (*Vigrahavyāvartanī* 37; transl. Bhattacharya, in Johnston and Kunst 1978, 118)? There is no light before the fire exists, since there is only darkness, and there is no darkness after fire exists because darkness and light cannot coexist (*Vigrahavyāvartanī* 38). One may argue that fire can expel darkness even without reaching it, but then Nāgārjuna would reply: “... if fire destroyed darkness even without coming in contact with it, then this fire, standing here, would destroy darkness in all the worlds,” and this is absurd (*Vigrahavyāvartanī* 39; transl. Bhattacharya, in Johnston and Kunst 1978, 29; see also *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 7.11). So fire cannot illuminate itself. Nāgārjuna’s equivalent assertion that “The *pramāṇas* are not established by themselves” (*Vigrahavyāvartanī* 51; transl. Bhattacharya, in Johnston and Kunst 1978, 34) will be often quoted and “... taken to mean that there is no self-consciousness” (Cozort 1998, 159) by the subsequent tradition. Nāgārjuna’s reasoning is a hallmark in the Mādhyamika refutation of self-awareness (together with, among others, Candrakīrti’s), and it is one of the main reference points for the dGe-lugs philosophical battle against *rang rig*.

Next, it will be useful to review what has been covered thus far. Making use of the labels applied by Yao to the various philosophical phases of the history of the idea of self-awareness, its main pre- and post-Dignāga phases could be sketched and summarized as follows (see my chart below):

Mahāsāṃghika: origin of self-cognition	
Sarvāstivāda	refutation
Sautrāntika	synthesis
Yogācāra	systematization
(Dignāga: epistemological formulation of self-cognition)	
Madhyamaka	refutation
Yogācāra-Madhyamaka	synthesis
Sākāravāda Yogācāra	systematization

There are two cycles of refutation, synthesis and systematization: the first stems from the origin of the notion of self-cognition; the second starts after its Yogācāra systematization, mainly thanks to Dignāga’s contributions to it. Understandably, whereas the first refutation targets the Mahāsāṃghika doctrine, the second has the Yogācāra position as its sights. Since this summary is

based on such doxographical distinctions between schools and sub-schools, it cannot express much precision regarding these phases; nevertheless, this schema will be helpful in getting an idea of the ebb and flow of the history of the idea of self-awareness.

Bhāvaviveka (490–570 CE), Candrakīrti, and Śāntideva are the three figures Yao mentions in relation to the Madhyamaka refutation of the Yogācāra systematization of the idea of *svasaṃvedana*. Within the broad category of Madhyamaka, while these three thinkers share this common agenda, the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka branch assumes a different approach—the one Yao refers to as “synthesis.” Here the two main scholars are Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla (740–795 CE); they do not follow their predecessors’ arguments against self-cognition, nor do they simply accept the Yogācāra systematization that Dignāga provides. “By rejecting the articulated epistemological formulations, they have returned to a Mahāsāṃghika-like position, according to which self-cognition is more simple, fundamental and soteriologically oriented” (Yao 2005, 149). The last phase of the Indian history of the idea of self-cognition consists in the Sākāravāda position, initiated by Dignāga, Dharmapāla, and Dharmakīrti. Prajñākaragupta (ca. 750–810 CE) and Jñānaśrīmitra, the two main voices in this strand, manifest a Sautrāntika-like tendency to understand self-awareness within an epistemological context.

Recalling Yao’s general thesis, that the issue of *svasaṃvedana* evolves from a soteriological issue to an epistemological concern (first elaborated by Dignāga), a specific point of his reasoning deserves a deeper examination. Yao (2005, 123 ff.) makes the point that in the Yogācāra view an emphasis on the soteriological aspect of self-cognition fully emerges through its link to self-realization (in Kapstein [2000, 110] references, *pratyātma-vid: so so rang rig*; this corresponds to Yao’s [2005, 126] equivalence, *pratyātmasaṃvedya: so so rang gis rig pa*) as part of yogic practice. With respect to that, two things must be considered.

The first relates to the way Yao introduces this topic in the context of the Yogācāra view, by specifically referring to a short list of possible understandings of *rang rig* taken from the Tibetan scholar Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa’s *dBu ma la ’jug pa’i rang ’grel dang rnam bshad dgongs pa rab gsal* (2009, 347). Yao (2005, 127; with my adjustments for the transliterations from Tibetan) justifies his use of a Tibetan quotation in that context as follows: “Following Tsong-kha-pa, I see self-realization as a part of the broader sense of self-cognition in the context of early Yogācāra.” Thus, Tsong-kha-pa’s quotation is conveniently used by Yao to stress (or even bring legitimacy to) the inclusion of the soteriological topic of self-realization within the wider topic of self-awareness. However, by taking a closer look at this quotation, it will be clear that Yao’s use of it is not fully grounded. The Tibetan (Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa 2009, 347) goes: “*de’i*

phyir de 'dra ba'i rang rig bkag pas rnal 'byor pa so so rang rang gis de kho na nyid rig pa'i rang rig bkag pa dang | 'jig rten pas ngas nga rang rig ces pa'i tha snyad kyi don gyi rang rig bkag zer ba ni blun po'i gtam mo ||." Translating as: "Therefore, it is foolish to say that, by refuting such a self-cognition, one refutes the self-cognition in the sense of the yogi's individual realization of suchness and one refutes the self-cognition in the conventional sense of ordinary people saying: 'I understand by myself'."³⁶ This contains three mentions of the term *rang rig*, with three different glosses:

- i) *Rang rig* in its technical sense (which is clear from the context);
- ii) *Rang rig* as the yogi's individual realization of suchness (*rnal 'byor pa so so rang rang gis de kho na nyid rig pa'i rang rig*); and
- iii) *Rang rig* as a conventional expression: "I understand by myself" (*ngas nga rang rig*).

While refuting the first, Tsong-kha-pa does not refute the last two meanings. Yao (2005, 124) considers Tsong-kha-pa to be making two points. First, Yao states: "It is interesting that Tsong-kha-pa here understands self-realization as part of the broader sense of self-cognition ...", and right after saying that Yao adds: "... and [Tsong-kha-pa] links it [self-realization] especially to the yogis (*rnal 'byor pa*). By 'yogi' he does not necessarily mean the Yogācāra (*rnal 'byor spyod pa*) because the yogi can refer to any yogic practitioner in various tradition of Buddhism. But it is also true that the Yogācāra tradition has a strong link to the practice of yogis" While this is an attempt to tighten up the link between yogic practice in general and the Yogācāra one, in the first quote Yao speaks of a "broader sense of self-cognition." However, in the lines of the text that precede the ones cited, Tsong-kha-pa does not mention anything specific or explicit about a possible category or classification of *rang rig*. The above quotation should be read, rather, in line with the common tendency, within the Tibetan philosophical literature, to provide terminological divisions (*sgras brjod rigs kyi sgo nas dbye ba*) of a concept, meaning that in the list of its subdivisions some of them are not necessarily that concept and are only called as such. This being the case, here, *rang rig* would implicitly represent a concept of which not necessarily all the subdivisions are actually *rang rig*. Therefore, the second and third glosses mentioned above can be labelled as *rang rig* without bearing that meaning. Thus, while the concept of *rang rig* emerges as a combination of reflexivity (*rang*) and cognition (*rig*), that is, some sort of cognition of oneself, the latter two do not refer to a *reflexive* cognition, but rather to a type of cognition that occurs within a person, *by* and *for* herself. While in this quotation Yao perhaps wishes to tighten up the (arguably loose) link between the epistemological and soteriological needs (relating to the first and second glosses, respectively) for

36. Compare with Yao's (2005, 123–124) translation.

positing self-cognition, the present inquiry will avoid conflating these two, which arises from a misunderstanding of the nature of the syntactic connection between the words *rang* and *rig* in different contexts, and will primarily focus on the technical usage of the term.

A second consideration regarding Yao's claim of the link between yogic self-realization and self-awareness is that, generally speaking, there is a complex relationship between the epistemological and the soteriological implications of self-cognition, which will be examined in its various contexts in subsequent chapters. In his thoughtful review, Kapstein (2000, 112) writes of Williams' (1998) monograph on self-cognition that "... there is very good reason to hold that *pratyātma-vid* has no special relationship in Indian Buddhism with Cittāmatra and that the concept in question belongs even to very early Buddhism." This concept refers to the adept's intuitive realization that one "... must make by and for [oneself]" (*ibid.*, 113) and certainly, in its original meaning, has "... nothing whatsoever to do with epistemological theories of reflexive self-awareness ..." (*id.*).³⁷ Thus, technical terms should be correctly distinguished. Yao is fully aware of Kapstein's point (which is focused on Sanskrit and Tibetan texts), but argues for a comparatively more nuanced and problematic approach to the issue of the link between those two notions in light of the ambiguity of Chinese sources (that Kapstein does not take into consideration), where the term *zi zheng* could refer either to *pratyātmasaṃvedya* or to *svasaṃvedana*. For Yao (2005, 126), "This ambiguity reflects a more complicated relationship, rather than a clear-cut distinction between the two concepts." Ultimately, it could be said that textual sources and technical terminology should be considered with all due attention but it is nevertheless difficult to come to a definite claim about the nature of this link, mostly because of the huge variety of contexts and the specificities of the accounts in which the occurrences of this connection emerges.

The Indian discourse on this topic reaches its end in the twelfth century. However, questions surrounding this issue continued in Tibet and it still unfolds on a global scale through conversations with contemplative traditions and attempts to face the contemporary challenges related to the nature of consciousness. Yao's inquiry, for its part, also does not end within the limits of the tradition; on the contrary, towards the end of his work Yao considers a few Western approaches to the topic. He identifies some relevant stances in the phenomenological approach to consciousness as well as in the field of cognitive science, where consciousness studies suggest a representational nature of consciousness. In particular, Yao recalls the phenomenological defense of the immediate nature of

37. On the distinction between the concept of *svasaṃvedana* (*rang rig*) and the general Mahāyāna Buddhist idea of *pratyātmavedya/vedanīya* (*so so rang [gi/gis] rig [par bya ba]*), that is, a sort of interiorized awareness, one's intuitive realization that one must make by and for oneself, see Yao (2002, 124 and 126–127), Kapstein (2002, 109–118), and Seyfort Ruegg (2002, 221–222n120).

self-cognition, prior to any other secondary and subsequent form of reflection or retrospection; he also mentions the more recent Heidelberg School (with Henrich, Cramer, and Pothast as its most prominent voices) that thinks along this line, holding that self-awareness is an intrinsic feature of the primary experience. Thus, the Heidelberg School is in contrast with the higher-order accounts of consciousness that consider consciousness as an extrinsic property of mental states. Within this last account there are, in fact, two different theories, namely, the higher-order thought (HOT) and the higher-order perception (HOP) theories. Both hold that self-consciousness consists in a (higher-order) consciousness that has an inner mental state as its object. Nevertheless, whereas HOT theories (Rosenthal 1986; *id.* 1993; Carruthers 1996; *id.* 2000; Dennett 1991)³⁸ claim that this consciousness is of the nature of *thought*, HOP theories (Armstrong 1968; *id.* 1984; Lycan 1987; *id.* 1996) consider it a *perception* of a mental state. On the other hand, as Yao remarks, first-order representational theories (Dretske 1995; Tye 1995) argue for a type of reflexiveness that is implicit in the first-order consciousness itself, without needing any higher-order structure. However, it must be said that, in opening up to the contemporary philosophical scene, Yao tends to adopt a comparative method, merely stressing similarities and dissimilarities between Buddhist stances and Western ones. For instance, he suggests the Heidelberg School as the counterpart of the Sarvāstivāda school and the first-order representational theories as akin to the Mahāsāṃghika school and Śāntaraksita. One more instance of Yao’s comparative approach revolves around the figure of Dignāga: even though he acknowledges that Dignāga gets close to the phenomenological position, he finally states that “we can *safely* assume that Dignāga would support the HOT theory” (Yao 2005, 159; italics mine). For Yao, given that Dignāga posits a three-fold cognition (with self-cognition itself, self-appearance as subject, and object-appearance as object), it follows that he holds a HOT perspective: self-consciousness, being a *perception*, is a non-conceptual kind of cognition, but being *mental* is “of the nature of mental” (*ibid.*) and not dependent upon sensory organs. However, in the next chapter (ch. II.1.d) the legitimacy of Yao’s statement will be further analyzed.

In closing the chapter devoted to the doctrinal background of the concept of *svasamvedana* prior to its formulation in Buddhist epistemology, the philosophical elements and controversies exposed thus far, with the help of the precious survey conducted by Yao, should be borne in mind as pieces of the philosophical puzzle surrounding the notion of self-awareness. In the next chapters, this will function as the foundation for the subsequent unfolding of the Indo-Tibetan tradition and,

38. These, like the following ones, are references Yao himself makes.

in the final part of the thesis, for considering on the relationships between the Buddhist views and the contemporary Western studies on consciousness.

II. Dignāga and Later Developments

1. Dignāga on *Svasaṃvedana*: A Hotly Debated Issue

In Buddhism, the concept of self-awareness (*svasaṃvedana*) enters the epistemological discourse with Dignāga, the main protagonist of the epistemological turn Buddhism takes in the fifth and sixth centuries CE. In order to better appreciate this Indian scholar's pivotal philosophical contribution, his writings will also be approached through the lenses of the different modern philologists and philosophers who have contributed to this field, with the aim of integrating it into the contemporary philosophical debates. As will become apparent, the main tool used by modern scholarship for understanding and unraveling the implications of Dignāga's philosophy has been the comparative method.

There are two main texts in which Dignāga deals with this topic in details, both of which have been lost in their original language (Sanskrit): the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and its *-vṛtti* (autocommentary). The first chapters of these texts, dealing with perception, form the main passages devoted to the issue and will be analyzed in order to see how different their interpretation can be. A thorough analysis of Dignāga's account of self-cognition and its interpretations in terms of these two texts would demand a vast inquiry, far beyond the scope of the present research; therefore, only the most debated points related to the concept of *svasaṃvedana* will be commented upon.

The main difficulties stem from the textual sources. In the last decades, modern scholars have often debated on Dignāga's account of self-awareness, but only in the last few years have some philological studies been able to provide additional textual materials. As such, not only are some Sanskrit fragments (Hattori 1968) and the two (often problematic and divergent) Tibetan versions of Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccayavṛtti*—one by Kanakavarman and one by Vasudhararakṣita—available, but so is a recent hypothetical reconstruction of Dignāga's Sanskrit text, attempted by Steinkellner (2005; 2014). Steinkellner has reproduced this text on the basis of Jinendrabuddhi's (ca. eighth century CE) commentary (Steinkellner, Krasser, and Lasic 2005) on Dignāga's work, which often incorporates material from Dignāga's text. It must be noted that by relying on this commentary one risks superimposing Dharmakīrti's (later and probably different) ideas related to Dignāga's thought, since Jinendrabuddhi's commentary runs along very similar lines to Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika*. In light of these newly available—so to speak—materials, Kellner (2010), in particular, has tried to reconsider the issue of Dignāga's account of self-awareness, thus rebooting the contemporary debate on it and suggesting a new interpretation.

Moreover, Yao (2004; 2005) invites the contemporary community of scholars to also consider what Dignāga's *Nyāyamukha* has to say about this topic and disapproves of the inadequate attention this earlier text has thus far received. There is also a very recent tendency in scholarship, for instance in Steinkellner (2005) and Kellner (2010, 207), to read *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and *-vṛtti* together as a single composition, where stanzas and prose are linked to form one unified composition instead of two independent works. The resultant philological issues, as one would expect, are endless.

1.a Is Self-awareness Included in Mental Perception or is it a Separate Type of Perception?

Moving on to the philosophical inquiry: what are the distinctive features of self-awareness according to Dignāga? *Svasaṃvedana* is a *pramāṇa*—an epistemically valid cognition—that is free from conceptual construction¹ and included within perceptions that are independent of the senses (*indriya*); this category encompasses mental perceptions of external objects, as well as self-awareness of desire and other mental factors.² Among the objects of self-awareness there are not only mental factors but also conceptual cognitions.³ Before going into the details of Dignāga's account of self-cognition, however, it is important to first locate this specific type of cognition within the system of perception as a whole, as outlined by Dignāga and with respect to which modern scholarship has no consensus.⁴

1. Dignāga. *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.3c: “**pratyakṣaṃ kalpanāpoḍhaṃ.**”

Please note that here and in the following quotations the Sanskrit text of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and *-vṛtti* is taken from Steinkellner's (2005; 2014) hypothetical reconstruction (revised). Fully reconstructed words without attested Sanskrit fragments are in roman typeface; bold script is used for the *ślokas* of *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (and for the words of the *ślokas* used in the prose of the *-vṛtti*).

2. Dignāga. *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.6ab: “**mānasam cārtharāgādisvasaṃvittir akalpikā |.**”

The related autocommentary (id., *Pramāṇasamuccayavṛtti*) states: “*mānasam api rūpādviṣayāḷambanam avikalpakam anubhavākārapravṛtṭam rāgādiṣu ca svasaṃvedanam indriyānapekṣatvān mānasam pratyakṣam.*” Note that both of the extant Tibetan versions (Hattori 1968, 180–181) are identical in adding more instances of mental factors: “*'dod chags dang zhe sdang dang gti mug dang bde ba dang sdug bsngal la sogs pa ni.*”

3. Dignāga. *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.7ab: “**kalpanāpi svasaṃvittāv iṣṭānārthe vikalpanūt |.**” In Hattori's (1968, 27) translation: “7ab. even conceptual construction, when it is brought to internal awareness, is admitted [as a type of perception]. However, with regard to the [external] object, [the conceptual construction is] not [admissible as perception], because it conceptualizes [the object].”

4. For a brief summary of the controversy, see Kellner (2010, 207n11) and Coseru (2012, 254n69).

Some scholars argue that Dignāga subsumes self-awareness within mental perception,⁵ while others claim that he considers it as a separate type of perception. The former group includes Hattori (1968), Nagatomi (1980), Franco (1993; 2005), and Kellner (2010); the latter is composed of Wayman (1977–1978; 1991) and Yao (2004; 2005). In briefly examining the main arguments each side advances, many questions will arise regarding what self-cognition is and how it relates to other forms of cognition.

The earliest position on this issue has been advocated by Hattori (1968, 27): “6ab. there is also mental [perception, *which is of two kinds:*] awareness of an [external] object and self-awareness of [such subordinate mental activities as] desire and the like, [both of which are] free from conceptual construction” (italics mine). Nagatomi (1980, 245) suggests instead a different interpretation of Dignāga’s *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.6ab: according to his understanding, Dignāga would refer “... not [to] two different kinds of *mānasa-pratyakṣa*, but ‘object-cognizing’ and ‘self-cognizing’ aspects of it.” Nagatomi’s claim is advanced in terms of two main reasons. First, were we to read two types of perception in *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.6ab, the passage would provide “... no hint whatsoever as to why *mānasa-pratyakṣa* has to be admitted or how it differs from *indriya-pratyakṣa*” (*ibid.*). Second, it would turn out to be incongruous with his *sva-saṃvedana* theory, according to which self-awareness is considered a *pratyakṣa* and applies to every mental event, indicating that a given cognition does not need another cognition to be cognized because of its self-luminous nature. These two difficulties, Nagatomi (*id.*) explains, “... can be removed if we understood the passage as Dignāga’s explication of the first aspect, viz. the ‘awareness of an object’ or the object-cognizing aspect, of *mānasa-pratyakṣa* whose second *aspect* is its ‘self-awareness’ in the form of passion, etc.” Thus, in the former aspect *mānasa-pratyakṣa* manifests in an object-form, while in the latter aspect it cognizes it. Nagatomi finds further support for his interpretation in Dignāga’s reference (*Pramāṇasamuccaya* and *-vṛtti* 1.11–12) to the two-fold appearance of every mental event, namely, the appearance of an object and that of itself.

Franco (1986) is perhaps the most devoted to this issue, taking active part in the controversy by intentionally putting his own position in fruitful relation with the others. He presents his own stance against both Hattori’s and Wayman’s mutually opposing views, proposing a third interpretation that includes elements taken from both Wayman and Hattori, aiming at a compromise between the two. Franco (1986, 82) states about Dignāga: “... he did not accept *svasaṃvedana* as a

5. For a detailed study on the role of *mānasa-pratyakṣa* within the whole cognizing process, in its Indian and Tibetan understandings, see Tillemans (1989).

fourth type of perception. The point becomes quite clear when we look at *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.6ab and the *Vṛtti* thereupon: in a manner which leaves no place for ambiguity Dignāga subsumes the self-apprehension of desire etc., under mental perception!”⁶

In 1993 Franco came back to this issue, responding to Wayman’s provocative footnote (Wayman 1991, 423n17) which directly expressed his criticism towards Franco’s reading of the passage. In the first pages of his article, Franco reflects on his understanding of the aforementioned passage, 1.6ab, against Wayman’s interpretation, for whom “... Dignāga has four kinds [of perception]: *indriya*, *mānasa*, *svasaṃvedana*, and *yogi* ...” (Wayman 1977–1978, 393). Then, addressing the issue of the Sanskrit rendering and its interpretation and making a strong case for reading only three types of perception in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, Franco demonstrates that the assumption of a four-fold perception in Dignāga’s view is highly doubtful and not supported by Dignāga’s own words, but rather “only by Dharmakīrti’s reshuffle of them” (Franco 1993, 295).

Of utmost importance here is that Franco (*ibid.*, 298) concludes by making a crucial point:

However, even by arguing for three against four types of perception, we are already caught in Dharmakīrti’s web. For by doing so we already presuppose that Dignāga was typologizing different types of perception. A less biased reading of Dignāga does not seem to warrant such a presupposition. Reading the text independently of Dharmakīrti, one should probably maintain that for Dignāga there is only one type of perception, that is, a cognition which is free from conceptual construction. Or better still, that Dignāga was not at all concerned with types of perception.

This is also seen as an invaluable insight by other contributors to the debate. In fact, Dunne (2006, 505) follows Franco, and also Kellner’s (2010, 207n11) specific contribution to the issue of a three- or a four-fold perception stems from Franco’s abovementioned consideration:

The *Pramāṇasamuccayavṛtti* distinguishes mental perception and self-awareness in terms of its object—the former applies to external objects, the latter to mental associates—but also points out a common feature: their independence of the external sense-faculties. Agreeing with Franco’s suggestion that Dignāga did not intend to provide a typology of perception in

6. The main debate Franco recalls and relaunches revolves around the following passage of Dignāga’s *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (1.7cd–8ab): “*bhrāntisaṃvṛtisajjñānam anumānānumānikam || smārtābhilāṣikam ceti pratyakṣābhaṃ sataimiram |.*” For all the references related to this philological and philosophical debate, revolving around the meaning of the word *sataimira* in this context, see Hattori (1968, 95–97n53), Wayman (1977–1978), and Franco (1986).

the first place, I am referring to self-awareness simply as *a form of* (mental) perception.
(Italics mine)

Later, Franco (2005, 632) again calls attention to the topic by claiming that Dignāga refers to *svasaṃvedana* as a “subspecies” of *mānasa-pratyakṣa*. This time he targets the interpretation Yao gives of *Pramāṇasamuccayavṛtti* 1.6ab. The conundrum is about the word *manasam*, which is found in a Sanskrit fragment but not in the Tibetan versions, and occurs towards the end of the passage (“*mānasam api rūpādiviṣayāḷambanam avikalpakam anubhavākārapravṛttaṃ rāgādiṣu ca svasaṃvedanam indriyānapekṣatvān mānasam pratyakṣam*”). Franco (2005, 632) uses a philological argument to support his claim against Yao: “It seems obvious to me, as was already to Hattori, that the Sanskrit fragment represents the *lectio difficilior* and should, as such, be preferred.”

Moving on to another prominent voice involved in this controversy on Dignāga’s *pratyakṣa*, Yao’s (2004; 2005) contribution will be now examined. The first criticism Yao expresses (2005, 132) to Franco and those who share the same position as him is a methodological consideration, accusing these scholars of not having considered the early works of Dignāga extant in Chinese as well as the commentarial tradition of Dharmapāla and his Chinese counterparts. This is a sizeable omission because in the *Nyāyamukha* (a work, as mentioned before, extant only in Chinese) Dignāga clearly describes not a three- but a four-fold type of perception—listing self-cognition separately. Thus, Yao (2005, 132) claims:

... most contemporary scholars follow [Prajñākaragupta] to interpret Dignāga’s position on the typology of perception. This reflects a general tendency among scholars of Indian Buddhism, who give Sanskrit texts a higher preference despite the fact that the Sanskrit manuscripts we have today are usually dated quite late. ... When these Sanskrit fragments do not agree with the Tibetan or Chinese translations, they would disregard or emend the translations accordingly without hesitation.

Against Franco and other scholars, Yao (2005, 141) claims that mental perception can only be directed towards external objects and that self-awareness is the internal awareness only of mental consciousness—sense perception would not be, by itself, self-cognizant. This last claim in particular is openly rejected by Franco (2005, 632). Moreover, Yao (2005, 141) throws one more criticism towards those who deny self-cognition as a separate type of perception: that they misunderstand the relationship between self-awareness and cognition’s two appearances (*ābhāsa*). With respect to that, the first scholar Yao criticizes is Nagatomi, for—as seen before—he

understands self-cognition as the subjective aspect or the self-appearance of cognition. Yao's (2005, 142) point is straightforward: "The way Dignāga understands the relationship between self-cognition and the self-appearance of cognition, in brief, is that the former possesses the latter but not *vice versa*."

Thus, it has been shown that some scholars claim that in *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.6ab Dignāga considers self-awareness as a separate type of perception, while others hold that he subsumes it within mental perception. Although no agreement is reached by modern scholars, this is an important point to contemplate in order to attempt locating this cognition within Dignāga's system of perception as a whole.

1.b Self-awareness and the Two Forms of Cognition

In order to fully unravel the implications of all the various standpoints of a debate that is still ongoing, a further step is required in this sketch of the distinctive features of Dignāga's *svasaṃvedana*. In fact, the main scholars mentioned so far have raised those issues for different reasons: some strictly philological (meaning, related to the availability and selection of textual materials, as well as the meaning of specific expressions), some involving the role of the commentarial tradition (implying the influence of subsequent scholars and commentators on Dignāga's initial account), and others concerning the inner structure of *svasaṃvedana* (its objects, its functions, its components and its two aspectual features). As such, in order to unpack all these controversies, it is worthwhile investigating the crucial philological points, using the most recent textual sources available, to see whether and how they could shed light on the issue itself, that is, the nature and structure of self-awareness. Linguistic tools will be used, here, to deepen the philosophical inquiry into what self-cognition represents with its inner constituents and features. Starting from how Dignāga proves the necessity of the two aspects of self-cognition and the need for self-awareness, the present survey will focus on the most dense and intricate points concerning the implications of Dignāga's view of *svasaṃvedana* as *pramāṇaphala*.

According to Dignāga, self-cognition is a *pramāṇa* free from conceptual construction, a perception that is independent of the senses (*indriya*) and that holds mental factors as well as conceptual cognitions as its objects. The nature of the relationship between self-awareness and the subjective and objective aspects of cognition is set forth in *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (and *-vṛtti*) 1.11, where Dignāga explains that cognition has two forms (*rūpā*) or appearances (*ābhāsa*), namely, the

object-appearance and its own appearance. Three arguments are jointly used to prove that.⁷ The first argument is that in order for the object-cognition and the cognition of the object-cognition to be different from each other, as they actually are, two forms are needed. Concerning the second argument, the object-appearance has to be posited in order for memory to connect with objects that have been cognized previously. Finally, the third argument for positing the two forms of cognition is that there is memory of both the object and of its cognition. These three reasonings do not imply any specific indication about the ontological status (as external objects or not) of the objects of cognition and are adequately able to model the inner structure of cognition—no matter what its object may be⁸—and explain both the intentionality (its being about something, representing something, cognizing something) and phenomenal feature (referring to the way something appears to us) of cognition itself.

Concerning the third line of reasoning just mentioned, Dignāga (*Vṛtti* 1.11c) states that, since there is memory of both the object and its cognition, “cognition has two forms, and it is also brought to awareness by itself [*svasaṃvedya*]” (transl. Kellner 2010, 210)⁹. Hattori’s (1968, 30) translation reports: “Some time after [we have perceived a certain object], there occurs [to our mind] the recollection of our cognition as well as the recollection of the object. So it stands that cognition is of two forms. Self-cognition is also [thus established].”¹⁰ Memory, therefore, not only proves the two forms of cognition but also self-awareness.

7. *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (and *-vṛtti*) 1.11a–c:

atha dvirūpaṃ jñānam iti kathaṃ pratipādyam.

(1.11ab) *viśayajñānatajjñānaviśeṣāt tu dvirūpatā |*

viśaye hi rūpādau yaj jñānam tad arthasvābhāsam eva. viśayajñāne tu yaj jñānam tad viśayānurūpajñānābhāsam svābhāsam ca. anyathā yadi viśayānurūpam eva viśayajñānam syāt svarūpaṃ vā, jñānajñānam api viśayajñānenāviśiṣṭam syāt.

na cottarottarāṇi jñānāni pūrvaviprakṛṣṭaviśayābhāsāni syuḥ, tasyāviśayatvāt. ataś ca siddham dvairūpyam jñānasya.

(1.11c) *smṛter uttarakālaṃ ca*

dvairūpyam iti sambandhaḥ yasmāc cānubhavottarakālaṃ viśaya iva jñāne 'pi smṛtir utpadyate, tasmād asti dvirūpatā jñānasya svasaṃvedyatā ca.

8. Kellner (2010, 216) makes this point explicit and clear: “If Dignāga borrowed the idea of two appearances from Yogācāra, then his argumentation does not indicate this was because of its relationship to the non-existence (or non-cognizability) of external objects.”

9. Note that here, in Sanskrit, we have *svasaṃvedya*, that is a passive form (meaning that cognition is brought to awareness by itself), corresponding to the active *svasaṃvedana* (meaning that cognition cognizes itself).

10. As Kellner (2010, 213n31) observes, this is a delicate passage that has often led scholars (modern ones, such as Arnold, and Tibetan ones, mainly dGe-lugs) to the identification of self-awareness with the subject-aspect.

In order to see how this memory argument for self-cognition further unfolds, let's proceed to *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (and *-vṛtti*) 1.11–12.¹¹ There is a precondition for memory, which is a previous experience (of objects or of cognitions of objects): there is no memory of an object (or its cognition) which has not been previously experienced. In other words, in *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (and *-vṛtti*) 1.11d it is stated: “Whatsoever is recollected has been experienced before” (transl. Hattori 1968, 110n75). Therefore, either cognitions are experienced by cognitions that are different from them, just like objects, or cognitions are self-experiencing. If cognitions are experienced through other cognitions there would be no end (*regressus ad infinitum*);¹² therefore, following Dignāga's reasoning, self-cognition is established.

However, despite the whole argument advanced by Dignāga, a crucial problem does not seem to have easy solutions; Kellner (2010, 215) raises it as follows:

If, however, Dignāga intends to establish self-awareness as an intrinsic feature of *all mental states* and thereby as a part of their nature, then his argument based on memory is problematic, for strictly speaking it proves self-awareness *only of cognitions that are or can be remembered*. ... To my knowledge, it is by no means clear from his works whether Dignāga would limit subsequent memory to certain classes of mental states, or to states that occur only under specific conditions, like wakefulness. ... [That Dignāga did not intend to establish self-awareness as an intrinsic feature of all mental states] is contextually improbable because *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and *-vṛtti* 1.8cd–10, as we shall see, refers to a self-awareness of a mental state that is not made dependent on whether or not the state is later remembered. (Italics mine)

11. *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (and *-vṛtti*) 1.11d–12b:

kiṃ kāraṇam.

(1.11d) *na hy asāv avibhāvite* ||

na hy ananubhūtārthavedanasmr̥tī rūpādismr̥tivat.

syād etat – rūpādivaj jñānasyāpi jñānāntareṇānubhavaḥ. tad apy ayuktam, yasmāj

(1.12ab1) *jñānāntareṇānubhave 'niṣṭhā*

anavasthāiti tajjñāne jñānāntareṇa+anubhūyamāne. kasmāt.

(1.12b2) *tatrāpi hi smr̥tiḥ* |

yena hi jñānena taj jñānam anubhūyate, tatrāpy uttarakālaṃ smr̥tir dṛṣṭā. tatas tatrāpy anyena jñānena-anubhava 'navasthā syāt.

12. For a thorough analysis on this argument in Dignāga (and in Dharmakīrti), see Kellner (2011b). Kellner (2010, 215) is particularly incisive in her considerations on this point: “Self-awareness is neither *reflective* (a subsequent act of reflection directed at an earlier mental state) nor *introspective* (a look “inside” at one's own mental realm), since both of these approaches would involve stipulating a separate higher-order mental state.”

This partial weakness of Dignāga's argument will be brought up again later in the inquiry, when Dharmakīrti's line of reasoning will be taken into account and a comparison between the two arguments will be made. For the moment, this is sufficient to reveal that the (supposed) possibility to establish self-awareness stems, for Dignāga, from epistemological issues concerning the mnemonic cognitive function. And, since it is not fully clear what else could actually lie behind this proof of self-awareness, another step in the inquiry must be taken.

1.c Self-awareness as *Pramāṇaphala*

Another intricate and profound aspect of Dignāga's position on *svasaṃvedana* is its role as the result of a *pramāṇa* (*pramāṇaphala*). The background of such a technical issue in Asian epistemology is vast and complicated; it mainly refers to perception, with a strong link between the way it is analyzed and the structure of language—and, in particular, the grammatical element of the instrumental case.¹³ Dignāga deals with this topic in *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and -*vṛtti* 1.8cd–10.¹⁴ In 1.8cd he says that cognition (of external objects) is a result of *pramāṇa*; in 1.9a he claims that self-awareness is a result of *pramāṇa*. The link between these two statements is *vā*, a particle

13. For references, see Kellner (2010, 216n37).

14. *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and -*vṛtti* 1.8cd–10:

(1.8cd) *savyāpārapratītatvāt pramāṇam phalam eva sat* ||

na hy atra bāhyakānām iva pramāṇād arhāntaram phalam. tasyaiva tu phalabhūtasya jñānasya viṣayākāratayā utpattiyā savyāpārapratītiḥ. tām upādāya pramāṇatvam upacaryate nirvyāpāram api sat. tad yathā phalam hetvanurūpam utpadyamānam heturūpam grhṇāti kathyate nirvyāpāram api, tadvad atrāpi.

(1.9a) *svasaṃvittiḥ phalam vātra*

dvyābhāsam hi jñānam utpadyate svābhāsam viṣayābhāsam ca. tasyobhayābhāsasya yat svasaṃvedanam tat phalam. kiṃ kāraṇam.

(1.9b) *tadrūpo hy arthaniścayaḥ* |

yadā hi saviṣayam jñānam arthaḥ, tadā svasaṃvedanānurūpam artham pratipadyata iṣtam aniṣtam vā. yadā tu bāhya evārthaḥ prameyaḥ, tadā

(1.9c) *viṣayābhāsataivāsya pramāṇam*

tadā hi jñānasvasaṃvedyam api svarūpam anapeksyārthābhāsataivāsya pramāṇam. yasmāt so 'rthaḥ

(1.9d) *tena mīyate* ||

yathā yathā hy arthākāro jñāne pratibhāti śubhāśubhāditvena, tattadrūpaḥ sa viṣayaḥ pramīyate. evam jñānasamvedanam anekākāram upādāya tathā tathā pramāṇaprameyatvam upacaryate. nirvyāpārās tu sarvadharmāḥ.

āha ca

(1.10ab) *yadābhāsam prameyam tat pramāṇaphalate punaḥ* |

(1.10cd) *grāhakākārasaṃvittiyos trayam nātaḥ pṛthak kṛtam* ||.

indicating an alternative; therefore all this could be rephrased as follows: *pramāṇaphala* is the cognition of external objects, or “self-awareness is the result here” (“*svasaṃvittiḥ phalaṃ vātra,*” *ibid.*). Moreover, in the passage of the *Vṛtti* commenting on 1.9a, Dignāga specifies that the result is self-awareness *with both appearances* (as the *bahuvrīhi* compound *tasyobhayābhāsasya* seems to indicate). The implications of such a *bahuvrīhi* compound are not unambiguous, as Kellner (2010, 221) considers:

... this could be taken in a narrower and a wider sense: either cognition is just aware of itself as having both appearances—it is aware of itself as somehow encompassing both aspects—or it also has access to both these appearances. In other words, is the *existence of* both appearances within the scope of self-awareness, or are the appearances themselves within its scope?

Thus, when getting at the internal articulation of *svasaṃvedana*, no clear indications can be found in Dignāga. The relevance of that *bahuvrīhi* is still a mystery and the variety of the subsequent traditional developments of the notion of self-awareness is evidence of this ambiguity.

However, going back to the main line of reasoning of the text, that is, to the alternatives of having, as *pramāṇaphala*, either a cognition of external objects or self-cognition, the *Vṛtti* comments on 1.9b using an explanatory link *hi*—a particle available in Steinkellner’s reconstruction of the Sanskrit version but ignored by Hattori and other scholars who have mainly relied on the Tibetan translations where the link is not made clear. This is how the latter of the two alternatives is thereby described: self-awareness is the result *because* “... when a cognition possessing [the form of] an object (*saviṣayaṃ jñānam*) is itself the object to be cognized ...” (Hattori 1968, 29; italics mine), “... then one cognizes the object as desirable or undesirable in conformity with self-awareness” (Kellner 2010, 222). The text then seems to go back to the former alternative, which is depicted as “when, on the other hand, *only an external thing* is [considered to be] the object ...” (*ibid.*; italics mine).

Thus, for Hattori and most scholars, the Sanskrit particle *vā* introduces two alternatives of *pramāṇaphala* in which the object is considered to be, respectively, either an external object (when the result is its cognition) or a cognition possessing the form of an object (when the result is self-awareness). In modern scholarship there has been notable research around these alternatives and it has been unanimously assumed that Dignāga’s reason for specifying them rests in the difference between objects of cognition (whether internal or external to the mind). As one might expect, these two instances have been interpreted as a means for Dignāga to put and keep together the Sautrāntika and Yogācāra views—the former positing external objects from which cognition arises and the

latter advocating an epistemic idealism—bridging their two tenets with the notion of self-awareness.¹⁵

Interestingly, it is once again Kellner’s (2010, 225) thoughtful paper that advances a fully innovative interpretation of this passage. Her article provides a philological remark and, on the basis of that, a revealing interpretation of the compound *saviṣayam* in the phrase “*saviṣayam jñānam arthaḥ*” (*Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.9b), included in the description of the second alternative that the particle *vā* introduces. Kellner (2010, 222n58) explains (according to Jinendrabuddhi) that this compound is “an indeclinable compound signifying completeness.” Thus, the phrase should not be understood, here, as saying “when a cognition *possessing* [the form of] an object is the object ...,” as Hattori (1968, 29; adjustments and italics mine) translates on the basis of the Tibetan rendering of the compound as “*yul dang bcas pa*” (*ibid.*, 182–183). This utilizes “a phrase suggestive of internalism” (Kellner 2010, 225), that is, of the perspective holding that objects are internal to the mind, whereas the whole clause should be translated as “when [*everything*,] cognition *right down to* the object, is the object ...” (*ibid.*, 222; adjustments and italics mine). The complete sentence would then be: “when [*everything*,] cognition right down to the object, is the object, then one cognizes the object as desirable or undesirable in conformity with self-awareness” (*id.*). Actually, far from being a mere philological issue, this rendering dramatically changes the contents of Dignāga’s discourse on self-awareness and the philosophical implications of such a difference will be clarified below.¹⁶

In the chart below, the two exemplary situations most scholars have inferred on the basis of their reading of Dignāga’s *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and *-vṛtti* 1.8cd–10 are displayed:

When the object to be validly cognized is just an internal object , namely, the object-appearance:		
<i>object:</i>	<i>means:</i>	<i>result:</i>
object-appearance	apprehending aspect	self-awareness

15. Hattori (1968, 102n61), for instance, offers this interpretation; for some considerations referring to the Sautrāntika and Yogācāra views, also see Yao (2005, 143) and Kataoka (2016). For a radically different account, also see Kellner (2011a).

16. For a useful summary on the issue, also see Arnold (2010, 348–350).

When the object to be validly cognized is just an external object :		
<i>object:</i>	<i>means:</i>	<i>result:</i>
external object	object-appearance	cognition of the external object

In other words, for most scholars the two paradigms of “internalism” and “externalism”¹⁷ are all that is at stake here. “Hattori and Iwata, among others, have interpreted *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and *-vṛtti* 1.8cd-10 on the assumption that the status of intentional objects is the main underlying issue—is the object of valid cognition something external, or internal to the mind?” (Kellner 2010, 226). Therefore, they read the particle *vā* in 1.9a as presenting the two alternatives of externalism (in the first case) and internalism (in the second) and the passage in 1.9c as a shift back to the externalist case. From their perspective, self-awareness would bridge externalism and internalism, that is, the Sautrāntika and Yogācāra doctrines, and it would perform this function as an “intentional self-awareness,” that is, “the awareness that the subjective aspect of a mental state has of its objective counterpart” (Kellner 2010, 218). It must be said, however, that in Dignāga there are no explicit and unequivocal supports to such an understanding of self-awareness. With respect to that, there is one more thing to consider: since Dignāga chooses to establish self-awareness *via* the memory argument, where consciousness cognizes its own *apprehending* aspect, he gives more relevance to an aspect of consciousness’ reflexivity which is far from the awareness of the apprehended aspect held by the apprehending one.

Kellner’s innovative reading of Steinkellner’s impressive reconstruction (based on Jinendrabuddhi)¹⁸ shows us a different possibility: instead of externalism and internalism, that *vā* particle marks a shift from the *particular* case of having just external objects of cognition to the *general* case of having all kind of objects, internal (object-appearances) and external to the mind, and it follows that in 1.9c we go back to the particular (that is the former) case. In terms of the means of valid cognition, Kellner agrees that the difference depends on the type of intentional object the mental event deals with (see my chart above). Nevertheless, for her this is not what is at

17. Kellner (2011a, 294): “The externalist theory assumes that some extra-mental, material object causes a perception that has its form. By contrast, the internalist theory assumes that perception, as well as all other cognitive activity, takes place solely within the mind, and that nothing else is to be experienced by cognition.”

18. For Jinendrabuddhi’s commentary on 1.8cd-10 of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and *-vṛtti* see, in particular, Steinkellner, Krasser, and Lasic (2005, 58–77).

stake in 1.8cd–10 and not what this passage is meant to reveal. For Kellner, the actual underlying problem is the following: “Self-awareness is the result because, owing to its providing access to how objects of valid cognition appear subjectively, it allows for a comprehensive conception of the result, applicable to intentional objects as well as mental associates, and also applicable regardless of whether externalism or internalism are advocated” (*ibid.*, 226).¹⁹

Thus, the main point that Dignāga seems to be making in this passage is crucial, in that it might actually suggest an account of self-awareness as non-conceptual access to how *all* kind of things appear to the mind, relegating the issue of internalism or externalism to secondary importance. In addition to the differences possible in terms of the inner structure of self-cognition, in terms of its various internal articulations concerning cognitive means and objects, what emerges is an account of *svasaṃvedana* that is universally applicable to any kind of cognition. The issue at stake, then, is that of a model of self-awareness that could fit all sorts of experiences. In fact, recalling *Vṛtti* 1.9b, with the compound *saviṣayam* (suggesting completeness), Dignāga is understood as addressing the totality of objects: self-awareness is the result with respect to every kind of object, external and internal to our mind, and Dignāga then explains that it is so because determining objects as desirable or unattractive conforms to the self-awareness that pertains to them. In other words, Kellner (2010, 222–223; italics in original) states:

... Dignāga’s argument can be explicated as claiming that intentional objects (as well as mental associates) are determined as desirable or undesirable depending on how they appear in the mind, and it is this *how* of appearing that is accessed through self-awareness. From this perspective, the feature of self-awareness that grants it its status as the result is its access to the way things subjectively present themselves in the mind.

In its universal applicability, then, self-awareness boils down to our immediate access to how things subjectively and experientially manifest to us, being either external or mental. If Dignāga borrowed the notion of the two appearances from the Yogācāra discourse on cognition, that might have been in order to introduce an internal and phenomenal structure that could fit *any* mental state (Kellner 2010, 216). Moreover, coming back to the mysterious *bahuvrīhi* compound in 1.9a, *tasyobhayābhāsasya*, stating that self-awareness is the awareness a mental state has of both its

19. As for Dignāga’s commitment to either internalism or externalism, Kellner (2016, 226) points out that in the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* “... the existence of two alternative accounts, externalism and internalism, is presupposed without any further elaboration; no commitment is made to one or the other as superior. This is, as is well known, different in the *Ālambanaparīkṣā*, where Dignāga points out fundamental problems of externalism and presents internalism as the superior account of what counts as the ‘object support’ (*ālambana*) of a mental state.”

appearances, it is important to bear in mind that this model of self-cognition is a form of access to both the apprehending aspect and the object-appearance of cognition, even though the nature of this access is not further explained in Dignāga’s work. Therefore, on the basis of that, one could argue for some variants of just the inner articulation of self-awareness—which in any case, as a *pramāṇaphala*, is the access we always have to experience—including the possibility for a cognition to access the subjective aspect (such as in the memory function) and the objective aspect.

This leads to consideration of another remarkable aspect of Dignāga’s thought on *prameya*, *pramāṇa*, and *phala*: that these three aspects of a mental event are not separate from one another, despite the tendency to distinguish them metaphorically (*Pramāṇasamuccaya* and *-vṛtti* 1.10). On the basis of this statement, Dunne (2004, 276–277n93) stresses the absence of a causal structure in Dignāga’s account of self-awareness:

That reflexive awareness is noncausal follows from its simultaneity with its object, namely, the awareness that is reflexively perceived itself. Indeed, what can be most confusing about reflexive awareness is the notion that it is a cognition distinct from its object. This distinction is clearly the case for all forms of perception, including mental perception (*mānasa-pratyakṣa*), for in all cases the object (*grāhya*) of perception is its cause In contrast, what Dignāga first identifies as the three aspects of an awareness—namely, reflexive awareness, the objective aspect (*grāhyākāra*), and the subjective aspect (*grāhakākāra*)—are all ultimately identical and hence simultaneous. The notion that reflexive awareness is cognizing the subjective- and objective-aspects is merely a way of conceptualizing the process of knowing (see the *locus classicus* in *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.10 . . .).

One more piece needs to be added to the overall picture of what Dignāga’s account of *svasaṃvedana* might be. Despite the common belief that a cognition performs the activity of apprehending its object, for Dignāga—following a Sautrāntika position—it does not perform *any* action at all (*Pramāṇasamuccaya* and *-vṛtti* 1.8cd); rather, it is a result, an effect that is similar to its cause, resembling the apprehended object by bearing its aspect/image. Along this line, it is interesting to quote the important paradigm shift Matilal (1986a, 112–113) suggests, from mental *acts* to mental *episodes*: whatever happens in one’s mind is something that takes place *within* oneself and is not something that one enacts. This would actually shape a model whose “demands are minimal” (*ibid.*, 113): there is no need for any actors/agents and mental episodes may be treated as effects brought about by certain conditions.

Thus, as has been shown, in *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and *-vṛtti* 1.8cd–10 Dignāga presents *svasaṃvedana* as *pramāṇaphala*, while various scholars’ interpretations of this passage attempt to

reveal the nature and function of epistemological self-awareness. For decades it has been thought that its main role (conveyed by this passage) was that of bridging the gap between externalism and internalism, and its nature that of being the intentional cognizance of the objective aspect by the subjective one. However, in the last years it has been argued that its role as *pramāṇaphala* is rather that of providing access to any experience whatsoever, to the *how* of appearing of any possible object. Thus, perhaps it does bridge the gap between externalism and internalism but in a totally different way from those suggested previously, that is, indicating self-cognition as what allows access to the subjective cognition of any object, regardless of whether they are conceived as internal or external to cognition, and encompassing mental factors.

1.d Some Readings of Dignāga's *Svasaṃvedana*

The problematic nature of the textual materials and their exegesis are a contributing factor to the fact that modern scholars have suggested varying interpretations. Now that the main elements have been questioned, it will be possible to access some of the main modern readings of Dignāga's standpoint so as to appreciate the way researchers attempt to decipher and assimilate the Indian Buddhist tradition's contribution to a dialogue with modern and contemporary Western thoughts and concepts.

It has been shown that Kellner (2010, 215), commenting on *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and *-vṛtti* 1.12 and on the basis of the infinite regress argument, refutes any understanding of Dignāga's *svasaṃvedana* as either “*reflective* (a subsequent act of reflection directed at an earlier mental state)” or “*introspective* (a look ‘inside’ at one’s own mental realm).”²⁰ Assuming that self-awareness is made possible by any separate higher-order mental state would simply go against the abovementioned argument in Dignāga's text.

Nevertheless, there are a few interpreters of Dignāga's account of self-cognition who suggest a reading of it that implies a second-order mental event. Matilal (1986a, 152) seems to read self-awareness along these lines and Yao (2005, 159) assumes that Dignāga would support the higher-order theory perspective. Other scholars label Dignāga's self-awareness as *introspection*. Stcherbatsky ([1932] 1962, 12) uses this translation for *svasaṃvedana* in general, Hattori (1968, 95n50) refers to “becom[ing] aware of one's own cognition” as *introspection*, and Wayman (1991, 429) uses the same label for indicating what *svasaṃvedana* is for both Dignāga and Dharmakīrti: it

20. Actually, in the same paper Kellner (2010, 211n21) introduces this point in footnote annotations.

is depicted like a mirror, "... the only faculty of the system that can be credited with the role of figuring out the system as given." One more instance of a recent reading that frames Dignāga's self-awareness in terms of introspection is Ganeri's (1999, 470–471): "This is perhaps the rationale behind Dignāga's claim that, when one is introspectively thinking about one of one's own thoughts, the subjective aspect of the latter becomes the objectual aspect of the former. That is, the objectual aspect of a second order thought = the subjective aspect of its first order thought."

Kellner's (2010, 227; italics in original) precise understanding of Dignāga's self-awareness as a "*mode* of awareness" that provides access to how things present themselves to us represents quite an exception and is a thoughtful insight on the issue. It seems that Kellner wants to highlight the structure/function self-awareness has in opening the phenomenality of experience to our own immediate knowledge of it, being a constitutive disclosing part of our cognitions but in such a way that thinking of the quality of subjective experience as separate from our own access to it would be deeply misleading. Could self-awareness be thought of in terms of the immediate and lively *transparency* of the quality of experience, whatever this might be? In light of the same textual and philological work shared with Kellner, Arnold (2010, 349) ends up interpreting self-awareness not as a *mode* but rather as a *quality* of the mental, a feature or nuance that is there regardless of what the cognition's content might be. Compared to Kellner's stance, Arnold's possibly ends up locating Dignāga's standpoint on a different level of the philosophical discourse, targeting not the access to experience (as Kellner does) but the features of experience itself. Kellner's insight on Dignāga's contribution appears as a way to conceive self-awareness as a *modality* that is constitutive of our experience and that is there as an experience-disclosing factor, an access to it, no matter what the actual *qualities* of the accessed experience turn out to be. Reflecting upon Kellner's reading reveals an epistemological formulation of self-awareness that ultimately seems to indicate that the universal model of self-cognition, the one applicable to all kinds of cognitive experiences, is the way or manner *through which* experience reveals itself to the person, providing her the only possibility of acquaintance with it. On the other hand, in terms of Arnold's understanding, it could be said that he reads Dignāga's contribution as addressing the status of awareness/cognition in its qualitative dimension; targeting the qualitative tone of experience, the fact that there is always *a way* in which experience turns out to be for someone, rather than our access to it. Since in doing so he clearly adopts a phenomenological view, it is useful to examine the implications of claiming that *svasaṃvedana* is the result from such an angle:

... [It] amounts, on my reading, to the point that it is only as first personally cognized that anything is epistemically accessible to us at all. I take it that Dignāga advances, in this way,

a case for thinking that *epistemic* idealism (the view that we are only immediately acquainted with mental items) represents the only reasonable epistemological position, even for those reluctant to give up reference to external objects. (*ibid.*)²¹

Arnold identifies the role of *svasaṃvedana* as being the epistemological basis or the basic model of any cognition we could ever have; in fact, “... the only indubitably immediate cognition concerns the occurrence of our own mental states” (Arnold 2005a, 35). Arnold argues that cognition is characteristically contentful, and this for Dignāga, as read by Arnold, is “... just to make a phenomenological point (not an ontological or metaphysical one): that cognition seems to be *of* things” (Arnold 2010, 353). “To the extent, then, that cognition’s being contentful is thus constitutively known by the subject thereof, *svasaṃvitti* turns out to be ineliminably basic ...” (*ibid.*). This can function as a common ground for both Sautrāntika and Yogācāra tenets: “... regardless of what we think cognition is finally *of*, it is only as first-personally known, only as internally related to an act of cognition, that that is accessible” (*ibid.*). Arnold (2009, 141; italics in original) further insists on this unique feature of self-awareness: “... the ‘object’ of the awareness, in this case—what it is an awareness *of*—just is how the cognition seems to us.” The identity of the *intentional* content and the *phenomenological* quality of self-awareness is therefore its most relevant feature, to the extent that this minimal cognitive disclosure has often been chosen as what guarantees and establishes knowledge itself.²²

The possibility of reading self-cognition in terms of a phenomenological view can also be found in Coseru’s (2012) remarkable contribution. For him, Dignāga’s account comes “... significantly close to something like Husserl’s notion of noematic content (the ‘perceived as such’), which the method of phenomenological reduction is supposed ultimately to reveal” (*ibid.*, 237). Nevertheless, whereas Coseru stresses the intentionality aspect of Dignāga’s *svasaṃvedana*, MacKenzie’s (2015b), in dialogue with Coseru and inspired by readings of Dharmakīrti and his commentator Śākyabuddhi, offers a different perspective. Since talking about its intentionality can become problematic, instead he opts for a view of self-awareness as a form of “unmediated *acquaintance* of consciousness with its own subjective and objective contents” (*ibid.*, 42; italics

21. “Epistemic Idealism” is used by Arnold to refer to Dunne’s understanding, that is, to the view that “All Entities are Mental” (Dunne 2004, 59), meaning “idealism ... only with regard to what we know” (Arnold 2008, 15). This is also compatible with an ontological or metaphysical commitment to existent external objects. Thus, the difference between Sautrāntika and Yogācāra would lie only in their metaphysical stances and not in their epistemological perspective, since both hold that one is immediately acquainted only with mental things, with the contents of one’s own awareness.

22. Also see Arnold (2009, 141); for the equivalence of intentionality and phenomenality in the Yogācāra view, see Ram-Prasad (2007, 70).

mine). For MacKenzie (2017), Dignāga's self-awareness is not a distinct higher-order cognition but rather an intrinsic feature of the first-order consciousness itself: a "primitive" and "direct acquaintance" one has with one's own experiences. This means that, according to MacKenzie (*ibid.*), this leads to a same-order model of self-awareness.²³

This brief overview of the main interpretations of Dignāga's account of *svasaṃvedana*, while reaching no determinate conclusions, ends with a further question, adding one more piece to the puzzle or, perhaps, providing a way to reformulate some of the main issues just mentioned. Could self-awareness be understood as a *presupposition* of our experience or is it a philosophical *explanation* of (at least some aspects of) it? By addressing this question, one targets the ontological status of self-awareness and the role it plays in a wider philosophical tenet or view. Actually, this is a question that runs through all the studies on the different traditional accounts of self-awareness. Williams (1983, 329) introduces it in terms of "the problem for the philosopher" and some years later Kellner (2010, 227) advances her thoughts on it referring to the specific case of Dignāga's view, where *svasaṃvedana* seems to be there to explain certain features of consciousness, a view shared by Cozort (1998, 157). The bottom line is the alleged experiential base of experience, meaning the threat of *subjectivity*, deeply linked to that *mineness*.²⁴ Commenting on Dignāga's account of self-awareness, Ganeri (2012, 167) argues along this line of thought by recalling Nāgārjuna's view and saying: "... as soon as one allows the idea that experience has a base at all, the game is lost. That stronger claim leads immediately to the Mādhyamika View, that there is neither base nor place." Dignāga's stance on the subjectivity of experience is, for Ganeri (*id.*; italics in original), deeply aware of this risk:

Dignāga goes to the philosophical heart of the matter. As soon as one postulates a base for experience distinct from the experience itself, whatever it may be, nothing can block its subsequent identification with self, its identification, in other words, with the *place* of experience, a site of experiential ownership. The only way to defend a No Place View,

23. With respect to phenomenality and intentionality, Ganeri (1999, 471–472) argues against the claim that Dignāga's subjective aspect refers to the phenomenological quality of experience, to *how it feels* to the experiencer: while the phenomenological quality of an experience does not give any information as to what its intentional content is, Dignāga's subjective aspect involves also the specific intentional content of experience. Thus, for Ganeri (2012, 171), the apprehending aspect "... is better described with the help of the idea of a mode of presentation as a constituent of intentional content: the subject-aspect is an intentional mental state's mode of presentation of its own object-directed intentionality."

24. For a lucid and brief description of the "whole" of one's own experience and its difference from any other person's in relation to the Buddhist notion of self-awareness, see Mookerjee (1935, 328–330).

therefore, is to base each item within the stream of experience *in itself*. That is the fundamental point of transition from an Abhidharma to a Yogācāra View.

As such, Dignāga's few lines about *svasaṃvitti*, its first formulation within the Indian Buddhist epistemological context, raise a huge range of issues and readings that the Indo-Tibetan tradition is still struggling with.

2. Later Developments in the Issue of *Svasaṃvedana*

The scope of this research has been confined to dealing mainly with the Tibetan contribution to the global philosophical discourse on self-awareness; nevertheless, an overview of the main Indian Buddhist developments of this idea is inevitable. After presenting the initial steps of this discourse in the pre-Dignāga period, the challenging exposition of Dignāga's theory has been carefully read: Dignāga's doctrine is where the main difficulties on the subject are found. Next, it will be shown how this legacy was transmitted to Tibet together with all the problematic aspects it carries. In accordance with the scope of the present research, it will be useful to provide an outline of the essential aspects of the Indian Buddhist reflections in the post-Dignāga phase, since similar ideas will return in the Tibetan phase and resonate with the contemporary discourses on the matter.

2.a Dharmakīrti and the Continuation of Dignāga's Epistemological Project

After Dignāga, Dharmakīrti (*Nyāyabindu* 1.10 and *Pramāṇavārttika* 3.485–503) continues the epistemological discourse started on *svasaṃvedana*. His *Pramāṇavārttika* is ostensibly promoted as a commentary on Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, but it would be misleading to take these thinkers as exemplifying a unified thought. Here the main philosophical aspects of Dharmakīrti's account of self-awareness will be presented, trying to catch its unique features while also linking them to some of their interpretations in modern scholarship.

Dignāga's only argument for self-awareness is that from memory, which implies the infinite regress; in Dharmakīrti, on the other hand, the discourse on self-awareness (in the *Pramāṇavārttika*) is much wider in scope, but the sections in which he provides many of these arguments have not yet been carefully studied. However, in order to appreciate the different philosophical implications of Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's arguments for self-awareness from memory, one should first recall the elements of Dignāga's line of reasoning (in *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and *-vṛtti* 1.11d–12). To begin with, memory requires past experience²⁵ and we can remember either objects or their cognitions.²⁶

25. Dignāga does not explain why and how experience (of objects or object-cognitions) is a precondition for memory; on the other hand, Dharmakīrti (*Pramāṇavārttika* 3.179) for his part makes it clear: if there were memories of cognitions without any previous experience of them, it would follow that cognizing one's own past cognitions would be the same as cognizing others' cognitions.

26. Interestingly, Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa (1970, 26–27) presents the memory argument in a different way: subsequent memory establishes that the earlier cognition *includes* self-awareness. On this point see Kellner (2011b, 419).

The argument, then, is that cognitions must also have been experienced prior to their subsequent recollection; either they have been experienced by a separate cognition or by the same cognition, and since the previous would lead to an infinite regress, the latter is asserted and self-awareness is thus established.

Is the infinite regress convincing in Dignāga's argument? Kellner argues (2011b, 417; 2010, 215) it is not: an infinite regress, in order to be so, must entail that *every* single cognition that cognizes a cognition is remembered. This would imply that "... all cognitions are remembered—which, however, is wildly implausible as a factual claim" (*id.*, 2011b, 417). Alternatively, we could take this as implying just a *possibility* of memory: every cognition might possibly be remembered; but in so doing we would arbitrarily be claiming, as a matter of principle, that some cognitions cannot be remembered, with all the problems that such a statement would raise.

Now, concerning Dharmakīrti's argument for self-awareness from memory, in the *Pramāṇavārttika* it is only briefly mentioned in Dharmakīrti's (*ibid.*, 3.485a–b1; transl. Kellner 2011b, 419) statement that "from memory, too, self-awareness is established." The closest argument to that of Dignāga's infinite regress is, instead, in *Pramāṇaviścaya* 1 (40.11–41.13 and 54cd). Unpacking *Pramāṇaviścaya* 1.54cd,²⁷ these are the main passages:

(1) we perceive objects not because they exist, but because their perception exists. In other words, the existence of an object's perception is a precondition for the object's being perceived. (2) If the existence of the perception of the object is unknown, it cannot serve as the basis for subsequent forms of behaviour that presupposes existence The two claims (1) and (2) are the premises from which Dharmakīrti concludes in (3) that if perception is unestablished, the perceived object is also unestablished. (Kellner 2011b, 420–421)

The main problem or weakness of this argument, as Kellner (*ibid.*, 421) notes, resides in a slight but crucial shift in the reasoning: from saying, with premise (1), that perception needs to *exist* in order for its object to be cognized, to stating, in premise (2), that perception needs to be *known* in order to exercise its function. Interestingly, for Dharmakīrti the regress would turn out to be as follows: when the object-cognition is perceived by another cognition, that second-order perception is not established and therefore it needs another perception to follow and establish it. A person then needs to wait for the end of this chain of perceptions without perceiving anything because so long as one

27. For the Sanskrit passage and the translation, see Kellner (2011b, 420).

member of the chain is not established, none are established; since there is no end to the sequence of perceptions one would therefore be unable to perceive any objects.

The similarities between Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's arguments are linked to the requisite that cognitions are cognized, while a cognition can be experienced either by a further cognition or by self-awareness. Since the former leads to a vicious infinite regress, the latter is (allegedly) established. Nevertheless, talking about just *one general* regress argument within the Indian epistemological project would mean ignoring the striking difference between the two arguments, found in the premises of the infinite regress—those very premises that have been identified as weak. For Dignāga, the *subsequent memory* of the cognition of an object is what is at stake and the memory of all the higher-order cognitions leads to infinite regress; Dharmakīrti, on the other hand, talks about the *cognition of an object* and, since a cognition has to be cognized, this is what actually leads to infinite regress.

Since Dharmakīrti, as opposed to Dignāga, also provides other arguments for self-awareness,²⁸ it is useful to also consider the so-called *sahopalambhaniyama* argument, widely regarded by subsequent philosophers as the definitive argument for *svasaṃvedana* (Taber 2010). It consists of "... the argument that the most salient fact about objects of awareness is the constraint (*niyama*) that they be known only together with the apprehension thereof (*sahopalambha*)" (Arnold 2010, 327). While Taber (2010, 292–293) suggests to read it as a specific instance of the Western principle of the "identity of indiscernibles," Arnold suggests to think about it in terms of Mark Sacks's (2005, 444) notion of "situated thoughts," an idea that refers to the distinctive kind of necessity involved in transcendental arguments. Dharmakīrti's point, in these terms, will turn out to be that anything one might say about what an experience is of will involve some form of *it-is-like* for its subject. One's thoughts about experience are always already phenomenologically embedded in the very thing one is trying to explain: awareness has an ineradicable first-person character. However, leaving aside this particularly Western take on the *sahopalambhaniyama* argument, we can say that according to this argument there is no awareness of a cognition without awareness of an object-form: in apprehending itself it must apprehend itself as possessing a form (*ākāra*), as

28. It is worth mentioning another argument Dharmakīrti (*Pramāṇavārttika* 3.448–459) offers, a reasoning that leads us to see that self-awareness is important for establishing subjectivity and privacy, and for avoiding another person's access (that is, a yogi's direct access) to one's own mental state. In Moriyama's (2010, 261) words: "... when we compare it to Dignāga's argument, we notice an interesting change of focus from the temporal sequence of cognitions in a single mind-stream to the co-occurrence of cognitions in the same moment in multiple mindstreams—what Dharmakīrti tries to avoid with self-awareness is ... the absurdity that one person can experience another's mental states."

having some content.²⁹ We have “... the two parts of the equivalence which is the *sahopalambhaniyama* of cognition and object—no perception of an object without perception of awareness and no perception of awareness without perception of an object-form ...” (Taber 2010, 293). “Dharmakīrti presents the decisive point in *Pramāṇavārttika* [3.]335: Whenever an object is apprehended as having some form, awareness will be apprehended as well; but conversely, whenever awareness of a particular form is apprehended, an object having that form is apprehended. From this we can confidently conclude that the form of the object and awareness are actually in some sense the same ...” (Taber 2010, 292).³⁰ In the *Pramāṇaviścaya* (1.54ab; transl. Kellner 2011b, 419), Dharmakīrti states: “Blue and its cognition are not different because they are necessarily perceived together.”

In examining at the main philosophical implications of such an argument, Arnold (2010, 357) recalls the “governing disjunction” formulated by Bilgrami (2006, 28), that is, the claim that only one of two possible models of self-awareness must be right: either the *perceptual* or the *constitutive*. According to the former, self-cognition of intentional states is characterized as direct or immediate; such an understanding of *svasaṃvedana* would see it as a distinctive kind of ordinary perceptual awareness, only with a specific object or content (that is, a mental state). According to the latter, self-knowledge would instead be constitutive of intentional states themselves, in such a way that intentional states would crucially depend on the self-awareness one holds of them: “... our very notion of a mental state requires that mental states lack an independence from our capacity for knowing that we have them” (*ibid.*, 17). Concerning Dharmakīrti’s and Dignāga’s accounts, Arnold (2010, 357) argues for a *constitutive* model in which self-awareness is nevertheless *perceptual* in nature. This is just one instance of Buddhist idealism, where perceptual knowledge and self-awareness would turn out not to be different.³¹ “Perhaps, then, it is to the extent that they are idealists that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti can think there is no disjunction between the perceptual and constitutive understandings of self-awareness” (*ibid.*, 328). More specifically, however, what is often remarked among the philosophical implications of Dharmakīrti’s account is the phenomenological nuance of self-awareness:

29. See also Matilal (1986b).

30. For other occurrences of the same argument in Dharmakīrti’s works, see Taber (*id.*).

31. Thus, as Arnold (2010, 356) and Yiannopoulos (2012, 156–157) note, Bilgrami’s theory of the “governing disjunction” seems to be problematic: it begs the question by asserting *a priori* that perception is the cognition of an objectively-existing external world.

Dharmakīrti ... seems to conflate two distinct concepts in his use of the term *svasaṃvedana*: following Dignāga, as a primitive non-objectual source of a sense of ownership (i.e. the implicit *de se*); but also as a cognition's immediate presentation to itself of its intentional content (i.e. the transparency of content). The second concept is in reference to the grounds of one's access to the contents of one's own mental states. (Ganeri 2012, 169n8)

In this way, two sides of the account of self-awareness emerge: a sense of minimal ownership upon the experience itself,³² on the one hand, and an aspect of intentionality on the other, via an immediate presentation of consciousness to itself. With respect to that, the Yogācāra theory is particularly suitable for articulating a phenomenological description of consciousness without any necessity for metaphysical commitments: the immediate acquaintance of consciousness with its unfolding cognitive events does not necessarily imply any belief that these states might belong to a self, on the one hand, and this immediate access to experience does not necessarily imply any specific ontological position about the existence of external objects, on the other.

In his study on Dharmakīrti's view of intentionality, Dreyfus (2007) attempts to link the two aspects of consciousness, the phenomenal and the intentional. To begin with, Dreyfus notes that in Dharmakīrti's epistemological project the reflexive nature of cognition is linked to the nature of the cognitive process. The aspects (*ākāra*) of consciousness, representative of the objects, play a crucial role as the intermediaries between the external world and the mind, while being endowed with a double nature, that is, partaking of both domains—being the forms of the objects cognized by the consciousness and the “aspected consciousness itself” (*ibid.*, 201). The *ākāra* is the mark of the object in the mind, such that “[t]o be aware of an object means to have a mental state that has the form of this object and is cognizant of this form. The aspect is the form or epistemic factor that allows us to distinguish mental episodes” (Dreyfus 1997, 336). It is with respect to this that Dreyfus describes Dharmakīrti as a “representationalist” (*id.*),³³ but this is just a small piece of a much more complicated issue: taking into account his metaphysical stance, we have to deal with and make sense of Dharmakīrti's ability to shift from the Sautrāntika to the Yogācāra ontology, while there is

32. This account of self-awareness implies that all we know is something that *seems* or *appears* to us; thus, the resemblance with Kant's transcendental unity of apperception is made clear by many scholars (Arnold 2005b; Dreyfus 1997, 398 ff.), since both stances address the point that one never has immediate cognitive acquaintance with things-in-themselves but only with things-as-they-appear-to-us and this way of appearing has a necessary structure, entailing a perspectival unity of experience *in primis*.

33. Also see MacKenzie (2007, 47).

still much debate regarding the value and implications of such a shift in perspective.³⁴ If subjective and objective aspects do not exist separately, and a mental state encompasses them both in such a way that the subjective aspect *beholds* the objective one, “self cognition is nothing over and above this beholding” (Dreyfus 2007, 202; see also Dreyfus and Thompson 2007, 103–104). There is no subject-object duality between the two, they are not separate and there is an intimate contact between them: a mental state directly experiences itself, has an immediate access to itself, and self-cognition is nothing but the self-revealing feature of a mental event.

Nevertheless, fully-fledged intentionality arises only when conceptions are there to discriminate and determine what objects are; perception itself, lacking this ability, might then be called “*phenomenal intentionality*” (*ibid.*, 109; italics in original), to be distinguished from *cognitive* (conceptual) intentionality. With respect to that, Dreyfus points out a problem that Dharmakīrti raises and leaves unsolved—a problematic legacy for the later tradition to deal with. Valid cognition boils down, for Dharmakīrti, to perception and inference, and they are distinguished both by their modes of apprehension and by their objects: (real) specifically characterized phenomena (*svalakṣaṇa: rang mtshan*), or particulars, are the only possible objects for perceptions, and (unreal) generally characterized phenomena (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa: spyi mtshan*), universals or conceptual constructs, are the only ones for inferences. Since they necessarily hold different objects, they lack any epistemological point of contact; nevertheless, in order to have a fully-fledged intentionality we need to have both perception *and* conceptuality. This very problem will trigger at least two separate attempts at solving it, one by Dharmottara (ca. eighth century CE) in India and another by Sa-skya Paṇḍita Kun-dga’-rgyal-mtshan (1182–1251), where the key-element to finally bring together those two epistemic modes of cognition is self-awareness itself.

Moreover, it is this very problem, albeit from a different angle, that also resides at the heart of the soteriological level of Dharmakīrti’s account of *svasaṃvedana*: eventually, the teleological dimension of his discourse intersects with the very core of his vast epistemological project.³⁵ One crucial aspect of the whole issue of self-awareness lies, in fact, in its ultimate function or role, both epistemologically and soteriologically speaking. In Wayman’s (1997) reading, the need for a separate and specific type of *pratyakṣa* that is *svasaṃvedana*—a need shared, according to him, by

34. See Dunne (2004), Dreyfus (2007), and Kellner (2011a).

35. For valuable contributions to the soteriological aspect of Dharmakīrti’s thought, see Dreyfus (1997), Steinkellner (1999), Wayman (1991), and Dunne (2004; 2006). As for Dignāga’s and Dharmakīrti’s accounts of self-awareness, see Yiannopoulos’ (2017, 156 ff.) insistence upon the fact that dualistically structured cognitions are not epistemically reliable, whereas non-dual self-awareness is.

both Dignāga (though this is debatable) and Dharmakīrti—is linked to the fundamental necessity of a faculty that can play the role of figuring out the whole system:

... Inference (*anumāna*) could not do it, because associated with ‘delusion’ (*bhrānti*), even though being the best of the faculties so tainted. ‘Perception of the yogin’ (*yogi-pratyakṣa*) cannot do it, because it was acknowledged to be unmixed³⁶ with the guru’s precepts. But ‘introspection’ [*svasaṃvedana*] can entertain as object disparate features or images, as though in a mirror; therefore, could feasibly have the entire system as its object (the *svalakṣaṇa*). (*ibid.*, 429)

How is it possible that self-awareness has the whole system of cognition (as formulated by Dharmakīrti) as its object, that is, as a *svalakṣaṇa*? Dunne (2006) provides a detailed explanation of this point on the basis of Dharmakīrti’s theory of self-awareness and yogic perception (as it is articulated, for instance, in *Pramāṇaviścaya* 1.28–31), which is the type of knowing that should lead the practitioner through the teleological framework of liberation. Through the sequential development of the three types of insights (*śrutamaya*-, *cintāmaya*-, and *bhāvanāmayajñāna*), one should start studying the concepts and discourse of the Noble Truths and deepen one’s meditation on them; at some point, thanks to the third insight, one finally has a non-conceptual, vivid, perceptual cognition of those concepts. However, at this point a question immediately arises: how is it possible to shift from a conceptual cognition to a non-conceptual one (*Pramāṇaviścaya* 1.7ab and *Pramāṇavārttika* 3.287)? Another closely-related problem, here, is the following: how can one *perceive* something that, being a conceptual construct (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*), is unreal? In fact, concepts are “... ultimately unreal because they are causally inefficacious. Or, to put it another way, universals are incapable of the causal activity required to produce a perceptual image [*ākāra*] ...” (Dunne 2006, 510–511). It is here that *svasaṃvedana* intervenes as the solution for both difficulties: as far as it is known *through self-awareness* as a mental event, *any* cognition—even conceptual ones—is a *particular* and thus a real element. Self-awareness would then be the solution in Dunne’s interpretation of the crucial passages of Dharmakīrti’s text: the crucial element of the whole system of cognition, both epistemologically and soteriologically speaking.³⁷ Following his interpretation,

36. Wayman (*ibid.*, 424) explains that the expression refers to the yogin who has gone beyond the insight/cognition induced by hearing and thinking and has reached the insight induced by contemplating/meditating (the three insights being *śrutamaya*-, *cintāmaya*-, and *bhāvanāmayajñāna*). For a better understanding of the way Dharmakīrti unpacks Dignāga’s expression (*Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.6cd), see Dunne (2006, 505 ff.).

37. Just to give an example of Dunne’s (id. 2006, 512n41) interesting argument:

since the *apoha* (that is, the process of exclusion that forms the concept) is not ontologically distinct from the *ākāra* in the conceptual cognition, that cognition, which is a concept, *qua* mental event is actually a particular. Dunne (2006, 512–513; italics mine) provides the details of this explanation as follows:

... in the formation of a concept through the *apoha* or exclusion process, a cognitive image (*ākāra*) is being manipulated. ... The judgment, being conceptual, has a vague—not vivid—image that results in part from the *apoha* process; in short, the image is vague in that it is not a phenomenally clear depiction of the object that it represents. Nevertheless, even though the judgment’s image is vague as a representation, it is nevertheless an image. In other words, the judgment does contain some type of phenomenal content. And as a mental event, that phenomenal content is a real mental particular that can be known in its nature as a mental event *through reflexive awareness (svasaṃvitti)*. In relation to that reflexive awareness, however, the content no longer appears to stand for something else; that is, it is no longer conceptual.³⁸

This is the role of *svasaṃvedana* that seems to be claimed and argued for by Dharmakīrti, according to Wayman’s and Dunne’s interpretations.³⁹ The centrality of self-awareness in Dharmakīrti’s

It is important to note that in *Pramāṇasamuccaya* [1.7ab] Dignāga deliberately refers to *svasaṃvitti* both immediately before and immediately after his statement of yogic perception. Although *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.7ab (and *Pramāṇavārttika* 3.287) can also be construed with the topic of error that immediately follows, it is clear that *svasaṃvitti* provides Dharmakīrti, at least, with a means to explain the nonconceptual cognition of a concept *qua* mental event.

Nevertheless, being a fundamental point of Dharmakīrti’s entire project, here one would expect some more cogent arguments to support Dunne’s reading of *Pramāṇavārttika* 3.287, arguments that his study does not provide.

38. *Pramāṇavārttika* 3.287 (transl. Dunne 2006, 512): “A cognition that apprehends a linguistic object (*artha*) is a conceptual cognition of that [object] which it is cognizing. The actual nature [of any cognition *qua* mental event] is not a linguistic object; therefore, any [awareness of awareness itself] is direct [and hence non-conceptual].”

39. Dreyfus (1997, 413) instead, although acknowledging the link between soteriology and epistemology, is very much cautious—as opposed to Dunne—when talking about the problem of how conceptual understanding could be deepened and intensified and thus gradually made clearer until it is so vivid as to be non-conceptual: “Dharmakīrti does not discuss this How can conceptual cognitions, which are mistaken, become ... undistorted, merely by becoming vivid?” On the soteriological issue, Dreyfus (1997, 414) continues:

[Dharmakīrti] explains yogic perception in relation to inference, without establishing a connection between apperception and yogic perception. Moreover, Dharmakīrti speaks of the clear nature of the mind in a soteriological context but does not seem to connect this clarity with apperception. Hence, the notion that yogic perception is apperceptive probably originates in sources other than Dharmakīrti’s writings. A connection between wisdom and self-cognition ... does not seem, however, to be a direct reference to the type of self-cognition posited by Dharmakīrti. All this suggests that the

soteriological and epistemological framework ends up being stressed by some subsequent strands of the tradition itself. On the basis of Śākyabuddhi's (ca. 660–720) reflections upon Dharmakīrti's project, for instance, conventional perceptions and inferences are considered as instruments of knowledge and action in life, but are left behind once one has reached the ultimate instrument of knowledge, that is, the non-dual self-awareness. The line of reasoning underlying this stance is a thread running through the whole philosophical discourse on *svasaṃvedana*. When commenting upon *Pramāṇavārttika* 3.212–213, where it is said that awareness is not differentiated but its appearances are dualistic, this being confusion, Śākyabuddhi (*Pramāṇavārttikaṭīkā* nye 203a; transl. Dunne 2004, 406) states: "... even if external objects do not exist, awareness nevertheless arises with that cognitive image [i.e., with an image that appears to be external]. ... However, dualistic awareness is not real"40 The pair of non-dualism and non-ignorance, as will be shown (ch. V.3), will also return in the Tibetan tradition; for now, it is important to note the delicate convergence between the soteriological and the epistemological aspects of the whole issue of self-awareness.⁴¹

Dharmakīrti's continuation of Dignāga's epistemological project adds precious elements to the formulation of the notion of *svasaṃvedana*. By reflecting upon the implications of the *sahopalambhaniyama* argument and on the crucial role of *ākāras* it has been shown how the two issues of phenomenality and intentionality of consciousness turn out to be the fundamental features of his view of cognition. Nevertheless, Dharmakīrti's whole system hinges upon a problematic point that intersects both the epistemological and the soteriological dimensions, with self-awareness possibly forming the crucial factor leading towards a possible solution.

2.b Candrakīrti and Śāntideva: A Sharp Criticism of *Svasaṃvedana*

The notion of self-awareness has been the object of sharp criticism from numerous Indian Mādhyamikas commonly associated with the Prāsaṅgika school, such as Candrakīrti and Śāntideva, commenting right after the epistemological enterprise of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. It is important

connection between yogic perception and apperception was made later. Nevertheless, this connection does not fall outside of Dharmakīrtian ideas

40. See also Yiannopoulos 2017, 157 ff.

41. It must be remembered here that the Tibetan tradition is divided on this issue, between those who support epistemology as meaningful to the soteriological discourse and those who do not (Dreyfus 1997, 439–440). For a lucid consideration on the tight relationship between the Buddhist epistemological project and its philosophy of liberation, and on its biased interpretation by modern scholarship, see Steinkellner (1982).

to mention their contributions to the entire discourse, also forming the main landmarks for the subsequent criticisms that the dGe-lugs school developed in Tibet. The present research will return to them when considering Tsong-kha-pa's and Mi-pham's views on the topic and their convenient use of the textual sources. The dGe-lugs school, following Tsong-kha-pa, claims that the arguments made by both Candrakīrti and Śāntideva are concerned with rejecting self-awareness outright, whereas Mi-pham, assimilating Śāntarakṣita's legacy, claims that their criticism is only a negation of the ultimate existence of self-awareness.

For now, let's return to the contributions of Candrakīrti and Śāntideva. Candrakīrti, in *Prasannapadā* 7.8–12, follows and retraces Nāgārjuna's work, but it is in *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.72–77 that, analyzing and criticizing the notion of self-awareness, Candrakīrti (*Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.75 [Tib. 6.76]) poses a crucial question that threatens the very foundations of Yogācāra metaphysics. In this passage he questions the knowability, and therefore also the existence, of the other-dependent (*gzhan dbang*), whose nature consists in being not-different from mind. Thus, his whole criticism ultimately addresses the existence and knowability of the mental, which is the foundation of Yogācāra metaphysics.⁴² Even before that criticism, in Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*, three more attacks are found on the doctrine of self-awareness: the first targets the memory argument for self-awareness, showing that it begs the question (*ibid.* 6.73 [Tib. 6.74]),⁴³ the second rejects self-cognizing cognition from the conventional perspective of everyday experience (*ibid.* 6.74 [Tib. 6.75]), and the third points out its incoherence due to entailing an identity of agent, action and object (*ibid.*, 6.75c [Tib. 6.76c]).⁴⁴

Śāntideva (*Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* 9.17–26), for his part, gathers together various elements that have previously been used in arguments for and against *svasaṃvedana*. In criticizing a

42. *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.75c [Tib. 6.76c]: “*de'i phyir rang rig yod pa ma yin na | khyod kyi gzhan dbang gang gis 'dzin par 'gyur | byed po las dang bya ba gcig min pas | de nyid kyis de 'dzin par rigs ma yin ||.*” This critique is framed against the Yogācāra doctrine of the three natures (*trisvabhāva*), which holds that only the *paratantra-svabhāva* (*gzhan dbang*) is really existent. Candrakīrti wants to know: if the *paratantra-svabhāva* exists as empty of both subject and object, then who is aware of its existence? For the whole argument's implicit passages, see Garfield (2006, 205).

43. The point, as formulated by Cozort (1998, 163), is as follows: “Candrakīrti argues that self-consciousness is not necessary for the function it is imputed to serve—facilitating later memory of the subjective aspect of experience—because the memory of a previous consciousness and that previous consciousness are not inherently different.” As Arnold (2005b, 106n46) points out, “The main thing that Candrakīrti's critique in *Madhyamakāvatāra* adds that is not in the *Prasannapadā* is a refutation of the memory argument for *svasaṃvitti*”

44. On this point, see Arnold (2005b, 91–92): “It is important to note, though, the extent to which Candrakīrti's version of that argument is informed particularly by Sanskritic grammatical analyses; . . . Candrakīrti takes Dignāga's *svasaṃvitti* as an action—that is, as some kind or episode of cognition that will admit of the sort of agent-instrument-object analysis that can necessarily be given for anything involving a verb.” This is precisely the point that Śāntarakṣita denies.

Yogācāra opponent, he recalls the blade of a sword that cannot cut itself (*ibid.*, 9.17) and criticizes the metaphor of the lamp (*ibid.*, 9.18–22), before attacking the memory argument (*ibid.*, 9.23 [Tib. 24]) by stating that memory can be established by virtue of a *connection* to having experienced something else (“*gzhan myong ba dang ’brel ba las*”). The arguments used by Śāntideva are rather obscure and, particularly with respect to the example he makes for explaining memory without *svasaṃvedana*, modern scholars do not always agree in their interpretations of the main point being made by Śāntideva (*ibid.*, 9.23 [Tib. 24]). The example offered concerns a hibernating bear that is bitten by a rodent but does not awaken from its slumber. When it awakens in the springtime, it feels the pain of the infection from the bite and thanks to that it remembers the experience of the bite. The bite was not experienced at the time it occurred, only later. Just to mention a few interpretations of this reasoning, Cozort (1998, 169; italics mine) writes:

According to Śāntideva, self-consciousness is unnecessary because the earlier object and the consciousness that experienced it are relatedly remembered. For instance, when one remembers having seen a patch of blue, one does so by first of all remembering the patch of blue and then remembering the eye consciousness that saw the patch of blue. It seems that this is *not* a case of merely inferring that an eye consciousness must have been present, since that would not actually be a memory of a previous awareness, but of experiencing newly what was previously experienced, if it was at all, only in a subliminal way.

While for Cozort it is not a matter of inference, inference itself is what is at stake for Williams (1998, 153; italics mine), who comments on the example as follows:

In the case of the poisoning the person is not remembering that something experienced occurred. Rather he is *inferring* the occurrence of something not actually experienced at the time, something which, nevertheless, accompanied an experience of being bitten. What Śāntideva appears to want to say, therefore, is that in a memory of seeing blue I remember blue but *infer* seeing blue, although at the time there was only the experience of blue, not a concurrent experience of seeing blue (i.e., self-awareness as well). In remembering seeing blue I remember blue but *infer* (if I wish) seeing blue.

Garfield (2006, 210; italics mine), using the Tibetan commentary written by rGyal-tshab Dar-ma-rin-chen’s (1973), explains the point as follows: “... one can develop *a cognitive state directed at a past perceptual episode even if one was not also aware that one was perceiving at the time of that perceptual episode ...*.” The diversity of interpretations is evidence of the obscurity of the

example,⁴⁵ while the nature of the specific link between experience and memory turns out to be a recurring point of debate for the subsequent Madhyamaka tradition, both in India and Tibet.⁴⁶

2.c Śāntarakṣita's Contribution

In the eighth century Śāntarakṣita, together with his disciple Kamalaśīla, developed what Williams (1998) defines as a theory of “reflexive” self-awareness, a “more simple, fundamental” (Yao 2005, 149) version of self-cognition, of which Mi-pham will be the main Tibetan heir. Although according to the Tibetan tradition Śāntarakṣita is considered a Yogācāra Sākāravāda, Ichigo (1989, 177–179) indicates that this classification could be misleading, or at least inaccurate, since Śāntarakṣita shares only some aspects of his philosophy with the Sākāravāda position, while other aspects resemble the Alīkāravāda position, and therefore should simply be classified as a member of the Yogācāra school.⁴⁷ Some of Śāntarakṣita's relevant verses will be taken into account and will later serve as a reference point for the elaboration of Mi-pham's contribution, when dealing with the Tibetan reception of the notion of self-cognition.⁴⁸

Śāntarakṣita takes as a given that there is a clear distinction between two classes of entities, the sentient and the non-sentient, and that this distinction pertains only to the ordinary level of discourse. The relevant criterion for this differentiation is self-awareness itself, the absence of which renders something non-sentient. Śāntarakṣita's position, as found in his *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* (16–18), is as follows:

(16) Consciousness is produced in the opposite way from that which is of an inanimate nature. That which is not the nature of being inanimate is the self-knowledge of this [consciousness]. (transl. Blumenthal 2004, 83)

45. For critical readings about this point, see Thompson (2011) and Jinpa (2002, 128).

46. See Kellner (2010, 215n35).

47. Funayama (2007) provides a detailed study on the difficulty of classifying Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla in relation to the satyākāravāda/sākārajñānavāda and alīkāravāda/nirākārajñānavāda categories (see id. for more references to the secondary literature on the topic).

48. For further studies, see Ichigo (1985; 1989) and Blumenthal (2004), the latter explaining in detail how Śāntarakṣita's stance is in dialogue with Dharmakīrti's.

Self-aware cognition is the very quality which defines sentience. That which is conscious must be self-aware, by definition.⁴⁹

Next, Śāntarakṣita denies any identity of agent, object, and act in terms of reflexive awareness, since these three components are not present in it; it has a unitary nature. He is thereby denying that consciousness should be understood as an action: reflexivity, in his view, is a primitive, simple intrinsic fact about sentience that amounts to its not having the same structure of action as other phenomena. In fact: “(17) Self-cognizing cognition is not an entity which [exists as] agent and action [with its object] because it would be incorrect for consciousness, which is of a single, partless nature, to be three (i.e., knower, knowing, and known)” (transl. Blumenthal 2004, 86). Before moving on to the next stanza, Śāntarakṣita’s autocommentary argues that since consciousness does not rely on anything outside of itself to be illuminated it must have a nature which is self-illuminating. Leading into the next major point: “(18) Therefore, this [consciousness] is capable of self-consciousness (*bdag shes*) since this is the nature of consciousness. How [though] could that cognize the nature of objects from which it is distinct?” (transl. Blumenthal 2004, 88).

Since consciousness is by nature the opposite of non-sentience, it is not possible for consciousness to contact it. Thus, in knowing an object, consciousness must be apprehending itself in the form of an object, that is, it must be cognizing an aspect of itself. Arnold (2005b, 96) reads this point in terms of “ontological parsimony ... [meaning that] insofar as cognition is constitutively distinct from putatively material objects, it makes more sense for the direct objects of cognition to be of the same nature.” However, the distinction between the sentient and non-sentient having been made, representationalism—described by Garfield (2006, 212) as “curiously Cartesian in character”—emerges as its direct consequence.⁵⁰ Since a state of consciousness is immaterial and cognizant by nature, so must be its content. This epistemological theory is close to the Yogācāra position, the difference being that for Śāntarakṣita (for whom the mind is not ultimately existent) it is only accepted conventionally, while that limitation is not placed in the Yogācāra account.⁵¹ Suganuma (1963, 69–70; with my adjustments for the transliterations from Tibetan) offers a short but useful summary of the view Śāntarakṣita holds of self-awareness:

49. For a speculation on the reasons why Śāntarakṣita takes this position, see Arnold (2005, 95).

50. For thoughtful considerations on the reasons why the “given” embraced by Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla differs from the “given” that is rejected by the dGe-lugs scholars, see McClintock (2003).

51. For a parallel analysis of the exposition of this theory as it appears in Śāntarakṣita’s *Tattvasaṃgraha*, see Ichigo (1989, 173–177). For a reading of Śāntarakṣita by adopting the point of view of naturalism, see MacKenzie (forthcoming).

Briefly speaking, cognition is defined as ‘the no-unconscious’ (*ajada*), not as the unconscious (*jaḍa*), only because the cognition is ‘self -cognisability,’ in the concrete, ‘self-revelation’ (*ātmaprakāśa*). Śāntarakṣita explains it more concretely. A cognition does not depend upon any other cogniser (*anyadvedaka: shes byed gzhan*) for cognition of its own form; and yet this all is not uncognised; this is what is meant by ‘self-cognition’ (*svasaṃvid: ran rig pa*). According to him, cognition is the illumination of its own by its nature. In order to illuminate itself, cognition never needs any other things than itself.

For Śāntarakṣita, cognition is devoid of the cognised and the cogniser, is one and impartite. According to Arnold (2005b, 78, italics in original), Śāntarakṣita’s account of self-awareness is similar to Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception:

... Candrakīrti’s arguments fail to undermine the understanding of *svasaṃvitti* that can be developed following Śāntarakṣita—with the invulnerability of Śāntarakṣita’s view now expressed as a function of its being a basically *transcendental* idea. More precisely, while Candrakīrti’s critique targets the view on which *svasaṃvitti* is considered a particular kind of *intentional* cognition (considered, that is, to *display* intentionality), Śāntarakṣita’s is more like the view that *svasaṃvitti* is *itself* ‘intentionality.’

Svasaṃvitti would then denote the intentional and constitutive structure that characterizes any cognition⁵² and would be able to defend itself against Candrakīrti’s criticism that agent, action and object would become identical. The whole issue will return in the context of the Tibetan philosophical framework (ch. IV.2), where the way Śāntarakṣita’s landmark assertions influenced the subsequent tradition will be made clear. In conclusion, the view Śāntarakṣita holds of self-awareness presents it as a *presupposition* of experience, as opposed to a philosophical *explanation* of some cognitive functions (as in Dignāga’s case, for instance, in relation to memory). It is *obvious*, for Śāntarakṣita, that there are sentient and non-sentient entities and that self-awareness is what makes the former sentient. This kind of reasoning, forwarded by Śāntarakṣita, is a completely different approach from the one where self-awareness exists only to allow specific mental activities, which is the main reason why its ontological implications will be the main point of disagreement within different proponents of the Tibetan tradition. In this way, the rich variety of Indian Buddhist reflections on the topic of self-awareness during the post-Dignāga phase of its development

52. See MacKenzie’s (2017) useful identification of the *transcendental* role of *svasaṃvedana* (as the distinguishing feature or nature of consciousness), and the *epistemic* one (as the most basic and secure means of knowledge).

prepared the ground for the later Tibetan discourse, where different standpoints intertwined and carried forward the philosophical conversation on the reflexivity of mind.

PART TWO: TIBET

III. A Difficult Heritage: Reflectiveness and Reflexiveness in the Tibetan Assimilation of *Svasaṃvedana*

1. Reflectiveness and Reflexiveness: A Closer Look at Williams' Contribution

The Tibetan assimilation of *svasaṃvedana*, that is, *rang rig*, is by no means uniform: its complicated Indian heritage encouraged further elaborations also within the Tibetan intellectual scene. The challenges that Tibetan scholars had to face in the process of inheriting and fostering this philosophical concept are tightly linked with and conditioned by the exegetical praxis that the commentarial tradition involves. The concept's philosophical merit invited extensive reflection, leading to compelling implications related to Indian and Tibetan Buddhist doxography. Here, the focus will be on the philosophical and doxographical relevance the various aspects of the *rang rig* discourse acquired in Tibet.

Williams' (1998) monograph on the notion of self-awareness in the Tibetan tradition has become a milestone in the field. Since its publication, it has been widely assumed that the two categories of self-awareness explained therein are representative of the way the topic has been dealt with by the tradition. A decade prior to Williams' publication of his work, Matilal outlined the three main Indian views regarding self-awareness (including both Buddhist and non-Buddhist accounts), the three being:

- i) ... an awareness is *reflexively* aware of itself ... if it is self-aware or it reveals itself.
- ii) ... [for being] *introspectively* aware ... we need a separate perceptual awareness to apprehend the immediately preceding awareness. I concede this is not the usual meaning of "introspection" but I recommend its use in this connection
- iii) Lastly, ... [for being] *reflectively* aware ... one needs an inference Here too, I recommend the use of the word "reflection" in this special sense (Matilal 1986a, 148–149)

Thus, there are three types of self-awareness, namely, reflexive, introspective, and reflective. This means that prior to Williams' identification of the categories of *svasaṃvedana* within the Buddhist tradition, there had been at least one major classificatory attempt made by Matilal in his study on perception (1986), another important work in the field of Indian and Buddhist studies. Note, however, that these labels do not exactly correspond with Williams'. In particular, while the two authors share the same understanding of the "reflexive" type, Williams seems to be using the label "reflective" to designate something different from both the first and second types Matilal lists. In

fact, with this label Williams (1998, 7) refers to an awareness that takes “... a simultaneous consciousness in the same person’s mental continuum” as its object. Therefore, what Williams seems to be targeting as “reflective” is a self-awareness that has a dualistic structure of subject and object within the same mental event. However, further considerations on this point will be made below.

The first challenge here is to examine how and why Williams identifies and delineates two types of *rang rig* within the Tibetan tradition.

Williams (*ibid.*, 2–18) derives these two categories from his reading and understanding of an explanation on *rang rig* by the dGe-lugs scholar Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa (Mi-nyag Kun-bzang-bsod-nams, 1823–1905) in his *sPyod ’jug shes rab le’u’i spyi don rim par phye ba zab mo rten ’byung gi de kho na nyid yang gsal sgron me*. There, in his outline of the ninth chapter of Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa takes inspiration from the *sTong thun chen mo* (that is, *Zab mo stong pa nyid kyi de kho na nyid rab tu gsal bar byed pa’i bstan bcos skal bzang mig ’byed*), the encyclopedic work by mKhas-grub-rje (mKhas-grub dGe-legs-dpal-bzang, 1385–1438). It must be kept in mind, along this inquiry, that both texts mentioned express the fully-fledged dGe-lugs perspective: together with rGyal-tshab Dar-ma-rin-chen (1364–1432), who was Tsong-kha-pa’s first successor to the throne of dGa’-ldan, mKhas-grub-rje was one of Tsong-kha-pa’s two main disciples.¹ Drawing inspiration from mKhas-grub-rje (1972, 418),² Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa’s passage first quotes the *Tarkajvālā* (attributed by the tradition to Bhāvaviveka)³ and then proceeds with an explanation of self-awareness. Here follows the whole excerpt by Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa that Williams chooses:

1. For further information on the scholar and his works, see Lessing and Wayman (1968 [reprint: 1998], 11–16) and Cabezón (1992, 13–22). For an introduction to *sTong thun chen mo*, a work that attempts to synthesize the main Mahāyāna strands around the topic of emptiness, see *ibid.* (1–11).

2. For its translation, see Cabezón (1992, 345–346).

3. This is in *Tarkajvālā*, the commentary on *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā*, and it is part of the introduction to *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā* 5.20; see Hoornaert (2000, 84 for the Tibetan text; *ibid.*, 101–102 for the English translation). Moreover, for speculations on the possible textual sources of the position presented in the *Tarkajvālā*, see Yamaguchi’s and Hoornaert’s thoughts as reported in Hoornaert (2000, 102n1).

One more helpful annotation Hoornaert (*id.*) provides is about the Yogācāra doctrine of consciousness appearing as subject and object. Actually:

... at least prior to Dignāga, the doctrine of duality was taught as a purely *soteriological* doctrine and was not concerned with epistemological issues. The purpose of the doctrine was not to explain how perceptual cognitions originate, what their object is, how their object is cognized, and so forth. The

rtog ge 'bar ba las | sems tsam pas rnam shes ni gnyis su snang ste | rang snang ba dang yul du snang ba'o || yul du snang ba'i rnam shes ni phyi rol gyi yul gyi rnam par gyur nas rang snang ba'i rnam shes kyi yul du 'gyur ro zhes phyogs snga'i 'dod pa bkod pa ste | [i] rang snang ba zhes pa 'dzin rnam dang | yul du snang ba zhes pa gzung rnam dang | yul gyi rnam par gyur pa'i gzung rnam de nyid 'dzin rnam gyi yul du bshad pas 'dzin rnam gyis gzung rnam myong ba rang rig gi don du bshad do || des na rang rig ces pa ni 'dzin rnam yan gar ba ste [ii] gzhan rig gi shes pa thams cad kyi steng na rang nyid gsal tsam dang rig tsam pa phyi rol gyi yul la ltos med du kha nang kho nar phyogs shing yul yul can gyi gnyis snang thams cad log pa zhig la 'jog go ||. (Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa 1990, 752; numbers mine, in order to mark the two types of *rang rig* of Williams' reading)

As it is said in *Tarkajvālā*: “According to the *Cittamātrin*, consciousness appears as two: namely, *its own appearance* and its *appearance as the object*. The consciousness that is the appearance as the object, having taken on the aspect of an external object, turns out to be the object for the consciousness that is its own appearance.” Thus is set forth the opponent’s stance. (i) Its “own appearance” is the apprehending aspect. Its “appearance as the object” is the apprehended aspect. That very apprehended aspect which has taken on the aspect of the object is explained to be the object of the apprehending aspect. Therefore, the experience of the apprehended aspect by the apprehending aspect is explained to be the meaning of self-awareness. Thus, “self-awareness” is an independent apprehending aspect: (ii) accompanying every consciousness that is an other-cognition there is a mere self-luminosity, a mere self-awareness, turned solely inwards, without dependence on the external objects,

purpose was to explain what defilement (*saṃkleśa*) is, how it originates and how it can be eliminated. (Italics mine)

Along these lines, Kellner (2010, 209) further comments on two different meanings of “appearance”:

The soteriological purpose of the doctrine of duality yields a specific connotation for the idea that there is an appearance (*ābhāsa*) of duality: duality is an appearance, but it is not real; it can and should be overcome on the path to liberation. This amounts to using the predicate “appear” as it is used in sentences of the kind “it appears to be the case that *p* (but it is not),” where appearance *connotes falsehood*. However, a second usage of “appearance” is also generally present in Yogācāra literature, when for instance texts speak of a “subject-appearance” or an “object-appearance.” This usage of “appearance” corresponds to ... a descriptive phenomenological usage, where the verb “to appear” *simply informs how things present themselves* to a cognizing subject. (Italics mine)

Concerning in particular Dignāga’s usage of the term, see Kellner (*ibid.*, 209), where she suggests that in *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.10 Dignāga conveys a certain degree of falsehood in the separation of the three aspects of cognition, whereas in *ibid.* 1.11 the two distinct appearances are mentioned in a non-soteriological, descriptive way.

and [here] all the dual(istic) appearances of object and subject are posited as a mistake.
(Italics mine)⁴

The point Williams (1998, 4) seems to be making on the basis of this text is as follows. To begin with, by hinting at “... an ambiguity (or at least a systematic lack of clarity) in the use of the concept of *svasaṃvedana* in Buddhist writings,” he acknowledges that, even though the term *rang rig* is one, its understandings are various. Among them, Williams intends to make a fundamental and fully explicit distinction into two types, in order to somehow *fix* the above-mentioned ambiguity in the Buddhist literature. One of them, for him, refers to the use of the term *rang rig* in the Yogācāra (and Sautrāntika) tradition, from Dignāga and Dharmakīrti onwards, while the other is linked to its usage in Mi-pham, who inherits a particular meaning of it from Śāntarakṣita. It is in order to show the lack of clarity in the textual sources, and the need for a clear-cut distinction, that Williams (*id.*; italics mine) picks up the Tibetan passage cited above as a kind of manifesto: “This ambiguity can be seen reflected in a *convenient* explanation given by the dGe-lugs lama Thub bstan chos kyi grags pa”

Now, a question arises about the reason why the passage just quoted and translated is considered to be a “convenient” explanation, with no forthcoming answer in Williams’ work. It seems convenient in so far that, from Williams’ point of view, Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa provides a description of the notion of *rang rig* that encompasses both its types. Does Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa have at least some awareness of (the need for) such a distinction between these two meanings of *rang rig*? Or is Williams’ identification of two different types of *rang rig*, here, his own extrinsic distinction, based on a passage that lacks any degree of awareness about such a differentiation? As will be shown below, a careful reading of the Tibetan source makes the former possibility highly questionable. Therefore, the most probable hypothesis will turn out to be that Williams chooses a passage he considers convenient in allowing him to tease out these two categories of *rang rig*, despite such a division not being acknowledged by Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa. If this is actually the case, then it must be acknowledged that Williams’ is an extrinsic intervention on the text: his distinction becomes representative of the two main tendencies *he* identifies within the exegesis of the notion of *rang rig* in the Tibetan tradition, without any conscious complicity—so to speak—from the side of the author of the passage. In picking this

4. Compare my translation with Williams’ (1998, 4–5). In particular, note Williams’ (*id.*) choices of translation for the following key-words: (i) *rang snang ba* is, for him, “appearing *to* itself” (note that in the *Tarkajvālā* the phrase is found as *rang du snang ba*; I would rather read it in pair with *yul du snang ba*, understanding the former as “appearing *as* itself” and the latter as “appearing *as* the object”); (ii) the pair *'dzin rnam* and *gzung rnam* is rendered as “subjective aspect” and “objective aspect”—(*grāhakākāra*: *'dzin rnam*; *grāhyākāra*: *gzung rnam*).

quote as representative of this ambiguity, Williams aims to identify those two broad categories as actually present in the text, though still merged into one general account,⁵ and make them distinct and evident.

1.a Reflective and Reflexive Self-awareness

Williams (1998, 6–7n8) labels the two types of *rang rig* as respectively “self-awareness (i),” and “self-awareness (ii)” or “reflexive awareness” or “the reflexive nature of awareness.” I shall refer to the first one as a specific case of “*reflective* self-awareness,” and to the second one in terms of “*reflexive* self-awareness.”⁶ To begin with, let’s try to understand how Williams identifies each of them, starting from the former type.

The former model implies that the apprehended aspect (or objective aspect) becomes the *object (yul)* of the apprehending aspect (or subjective aspect), and self-awareness is the experience of the former by the latter. These two aspects of consciousness are linked by a subject-object relationship; this means that the other-cognition (*gzhan rig*) model, that is, the pattern involved in our cognition of things that are outside one’s mental continuum, is applied also here, even though the object is a *simultaneous* consciousness in our mental continuum.

This model, as Williams explains, stems from Dignāga and, in general, Yogācāra epistemology and it is also deeply linked to this ontological view, being the argument for self-awareness intimately involved in proving non-dual consciousness-only. In fact, what is at stake in “...the argument for self-awareness (i) is an epistemological theory showing that the one *dravya* [that is, substance] which serves as a substratum for conceptual construction in Cittamātra is, as a matter of fact, nondual self-aware consciousness ...” (*ibid.*, 15). In this scenario, consciousness is the main element, the fundamental and inherently existing factor, the backbone of the entire ontological structure. Following “the Abhidharma claim that there must be a real substance (*dravya*) in order for there to be conceptual constructs (*prajñapti*),” and against the *prajñaptimātra* stance of Madhyamaka, where everything is simply a conceptual construction, “... Cittamātra ha[s] to involve a *dravya*, and this mean[s] the inherent existence of something” (*ibid.*, 11). Cittamātra identifies that substance (*dravya: rdzas*) in an inherently-existing nondual consciousness. In

5. Most importantly, note that in the corresponding passage in *sTong thun chen mo* (Cabezón 1992, 345–346) there is no clear thematization of this distinction.

6. Williams (1998, 6–7n8) labels them as, respectively: “self-awareness (i),” and “self-awareness (ii)” or “reflexive awareness” or “the reflexive nature of awareness.”

absence of external objects, subject and object are both consciousness and therefore there is self-awareness; in other words, such a consciousness is self-aware because subject and object are both consciousness:

... there is no other thing for it to be aware of, and therefore [it is] self-aware in that a subjective aspect of consciousness takes an objective aspect of consciousness as its object. The argument for *svasaṃvedana* in this Cittamātra context is intimately involved with the argument for non dual consciousness-only, and combines with the need for a *dravya* to give what seems to me to be the characteristically Cittamātra perspective of an inherently-existing nondual consciousness continuum ...” (*ibid.*, 12).

Self-awareness, together with its underlying ontological program,⁷ is therefore the target of the critiques Candrakīrti and Śāntideva make: the criticism of a situation where there is a subject-object relationship and both subject and object are consciousness.

This reflective structure is included in both Sautrāntika and Yogācāra tenets, notwithstanding their different views about external objects. From the Sautrāntika viewpoint, objects, that are assumed to be existent outside the mind, are the causes for their cognitions; one’s mind apprehends objects by way of taking on their aspects. In the Yogācāra doctrine, on the contrary, the seeds (*bīja: sa bon*) deposited in the store-consciousness (*ālayavijñāna: kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*) act as the causes of mental events, comprehensive of both the subjective and the objective aspects of consciousness, two parts of the same cognitive event that arise simultaneously. Thus, from a Yogācāra perspective, there is no external object: objects are all of the nature of mind and, at least for the Sākāravāda subschool, the consciousness with the aspect of the object is all there is.

One more point has to be clarified in order to clearly understand Williams’ presentation of the reflective model via Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa’s text. The passage that deserves more attention is the following (in my above translation of Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa 1990, 752): “... the experience of the apprehended aspect by the apprehending aspect is explained as the meaning of self-awareness.” In this passage, the Tibetan does not clearly indicate whether reflective self-awareness is identical with the subjective aspect *itself*, or it is rather *the result* of the cognition

7. Were one to mention also the soteriological dimension of this Cittamātra scenery, it should be remembered that such a consciousness “... is the substratum for that polarization into postulated inherently separate subjects and objects, a polarization which forms the root delusion, the illusion of duality” (Williams 1998, 15).

by the subjective aspect, that is, the experience of the objective aspect by the subjective one.⁸ Williams (1998, 4n5) is aware of that ambiguity, and comments this part of the text by remarking a “lack of clarity” in this regard and takes this passage to be implicitly possibly including both the readings, since different strands of the Indo-Tibetan tradition have offered both the interpretations. In fact Williams, on the one hand, by recalling Dignāga’s claim about self-awareness as the *phala* of cognition, states that it has been taken as the result of the (intentional) cognition that the subjective aspect has of the objective aspect—in the present inquiry, however, the legitimacy of this reading has already been deeply questioned on the basis of Kellner’s close reading of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and *-vṛtti*. On the other hand, Williams also claims that by some Tibetan thinkers, especially dGe-lugs ones, self-awareness is instead understood as the subjective aspect itself. However, it has to be said that here, if Williams’ reference is the dGe-lugs exegesis, the subjective aspect is not to be understood as the counterpart of the objective aspect of a cognition, but rather as self-awareness as the perceiver of the cognition. In order to clarify this Tibetan interpretation, Newland (1992, 203) presents it on the basis of the dGe-lugs scholar Phur-bu-lcog Byams-pa-rgya-mtsho’s (1825–1901) definition of *rang rig* in Sautrāntika system as the apprehending aspect itself (*’dzin rnam rang rig gi mtshan nyid*) (Phur-bu-lcog Byams-pa-rgya-mtsho 1965, 7). Newland (1992, 203–204) further explains:

Self-consciousnesses are one entity, indivisible and simultaneous, with the apprehending consciousness that they observe. ... That is, a self-consciousness accompanying an eye consciousness apprehending blue must apprehend not only the eye consciousness, but itself as well. Since they are apprehenders, and since they are generated in the aspect of the apprehending, or subjective, side of an experiential moment, they necessarily apprehend themselves. ... They directly and non-mistakenly perceive themselves in a non-dualistic manner, that is, without any appearance of subject and object as different.

This is an attempt Newland makes to describe, step by step, how *rang rig* is broken up into its different—let’s say—parts, analyzed and then considered by the dGe-lugs Prāsaṅgika point of view, that is, as absurd: in it, agent (*rang rig*) and object (consciousness) turn out to be identical, which is

8. In this regard, see also Kellner (2010, 214n31). The same problem seems to be spreading among some modern interpreters of the tradition: see, for instance, the debate between Coseru (2012, 259 and 265) and MacKenzie (2015b, 40–41). Yiannopoulos’s straightforward criticism towards most contemporary accounts of the reflexive nature of awareness in Buddhism points out two main misunderstandings of it, and the latter resonates with one of the aforementioned readings of self-awareness: “Reflexive awareness has been systematically misrepresented as a particular kind of consciousness that takes itself as an object, or even as being strictly identical with the ‘subjective aspect’ of ordinary cognition” (Yiannopoulos 2012, 154).

something impossible. Klein (1985, 73–77),⁹ in an article devoted to the later dGe-lugs reception of the Buddhist doctrine of perception, makes a similar point by describing how *rang rig* is explained and analyzed in the dGe-lugs monastic curriculum in recent times: “In relation to the self-knower, all other consciousnesses are objective apprehension aspects (*gzung rnam*); a self-knower is the only type of consciousness that is never an appearing object of any other non conceptual consciousness in the same continuum. The consciousness which a self-knower apprehends never apprehends that self-knower” (*ibid.*, 74). Thus, the apprehending subject is the factor of experience, *rang rig*, whereas the apprehended object is considered the object, together with the consciousness that apprehends it. This is how the functioning of a mental event, in which *rang rig* is posited, is generally analyzed in the dGe-lugs understanding of it. From positing (such a type of) *rang rig*, however, some problems arise: “In any case, because the self-knower is a factor of experience that is one entity [*ngo bo gcig*] with the perceiving consciousness, the difficulty remains of explaining more fully how the two factors of a single directly perceiving consciousness relate to one another” (*ibid.*, 75).¹⁰

This is how Williams seems to intend the first model of *rang rig* that he identifies in the (Indo-)Tibetan Buddhist thought, a typology that encompasses the two possible interpretations the tradition offers of reflective self-consciousness, namely, as identical with the subjective aspect, and as the result of the cognition that the subjective aspect has of the objective aspect.

As for the second type of self-awareness, the reflexive one, Williams presents it in terms of inherent self-knowing, proper reflexivity of consciousness as such. This model, for him, targets the defining characteristics of mind, its quiddity, its distinctive feature. It represents a different perspective from that of the Yogācāra ontological and epistemological project, and turns out to be an alternative model “... which is initially and usually mixed with self-awareness (i) but comes into its own in certain innovations in the theory of *svasaṃvedana* which were stressed by and probably originated with Śāntarakṣita” (Williams 1998, 18). Actually, as Williams (*ibid.*, 28n12) notices, a well-formulated reflexive account is already present before Śāntarakṣita, in Vinītadeva’s *Nyāyabinduṭīkā* (Tib. D 4230: 6b)—as it has been shown at the beginning of this inquiry (ch. I.2), while considering the lamp image in the Mahāsāṃghika school. The peculiarity of this model is expressed by Williams (*ibid.*, 28) in the following terms:

9. For a synthesis of Klein’s (1985, 73–77) paragraph on the perceiving consciousness as both subject and object, that is, on *rang rig*, see Klein 1986 (110–114).

10. See also Cozort (1998, 154–157), and Dreyfus (1997, 408–409). For a discussion on the differences between the Sa-skya and the dGe-lugs views on *rang rig*, see Cozort (1998).

Thus the character of self-awareness here has nothing to do with taking itself as an object in a way which might lead to an infinite regress. Rather, self-awareness means reflexivity, where there is no sense of referring to an actual subject/object relationship and, therefore, no stage of validation beyond the consciousness itself. ... In other words, the epistemological model based on act and agent where an agent acts on itself is inappropriate

The reflexivity of consciousness does not involve any intentional subject-object structure and therefore, unlike the reflective model, it avoids the difficulty of an infinite regress. For Williams' model of reflexive awareness, consciousness is self-validating in its own occurrence, and does not require a further validator.

Thus, according to Williams (*ibid.*, 20), two different understandings of *rang rig*, one revolving around a certain dualism, and one around the account of mere non-dual luminosity, can be identified in the tradition:

The subjective aspect in experiencing the objective aspect is involved in a situation of *at least some sort of duality*, and inasmuch as it depends on an objective aspect which depends upon an "external" object, it can itself be said to be dependent upon the external object insofar as there is one. But here the mere luminosity is said to be without any dependence on an external object, and *completely uninvolved in any dualistic appearances of subject/object*. (*id.*; italics mine)

These two categories represent the fundamental structure of his exegetic interpretation of the concept of self-awareness in the Tibetan tradition, and have become an important reference for the subsequent scholarship.

1.b A Critique of Williams' Manifesto on the Two Models

Now that the main elements of the two broad categories of self-awareness Williams outlines have been provided, in order to trace their source let's go back to his manifesto for a few considerations on how Williams reads the Tibetan source he chooses for their justification.

Dividing the Tibetan passage cited above (Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa 1990, 752) into two paragraphs, one for each type of *rang rig*, is not wholly convincing. As will be argued below, the excerpt seems to express just one description of *rang rig* while the division into two different accounts seems to be unwarranted.

First, Williams identifies a clear-cut division between the two accounts in one particular point of the passage and this is a first problematic aspect: if indeed there was some ambiguity regarding these two types of *rang rig* then one would expect to find them conflated with each other, rather than clearly juxtaposed. Moreover, linguistically speaking, the point where Williams locates the shift from one paragraph to the other is right after the following phrase: “*des na rang rig ces pa ni 'dzin rnam yan gar ba ste ...*” (“Thus ‘self-awareness’ is a separate apprehending aspect ...”). The semi-final particle *ste*¹¹ is rendered by Williams with a period, marking where the paragraph on the second type of *rang rig* begins. He might have wished to render the same particle as a very loose coordinating particle, but it is hard to see a coordinating function there. It seems, therefore, that Williams uses it to mark a strong end of the Tibetan sentence.¹² This is the first problematic point, being either a weakness of his reading or an intentional intervention in the meaning of the text.

The second issue concerns the phrase *'dzin rnam yan gar ba* and Williams’ interpretation of it, being the last section of the paragraph related to the reflective model. He (1998, 7–8) explains it quite clearly: in the subject-object reflective model, “... the subjective aspect and the objective aspect are not literally and in all respects the same, nor are they experienced as the same, even if they occur in the same consciousness continuum. This point is made quite strongly in referring to a separate (*yan gar ba*) subjective aspect.” Soon after that, he remarks that we have: “... a subject(ive aspect) aware of a conceptually (and also phenomenologically?) different object(ive aspect)” (*ibid.*, 9). To shed more light on the phrase *yan gar ba* in this passage, the textual source Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa draws inspiration from could be useful to look at. Commenting on the same quote from the *Tarkajvālā* that Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa writes about, the *sTong thun chen mo* (mKhas-grub dGe-legs-dpal-bzang 1972, 418–419) holds some relevant clues regarding this occurrence of the expression *yan gar ba*, since the two passages are strikingly similar. Right after the quotation from the *Tarkajvālā*, mKhas-grub-je comments as follows (mKhas-grub dGe-legs-dpal-bzang 1972, 418–419; the phrase *yan gar ba* highlighted in non-italics):

11. For a detailed explanation of the range of applications of this particle, see Hahn (2002, 104–107). To summarize, this particle mainly has the following functions: introductive (to provide an explanation of the preceding sentence); temporal (to indicate that the next verbal action follows it in time—but only when the particle is used after a verbal stem); causal (to indicate that the preceding sentence is a cause for the following one); adversative/restrictive (with a contrasting function or a restrictive one); modal (to qualify the manner in which the following verbal action is carried out); coordinating (to express the type of connection a semi-colon punctuation mark might convey); finalizing (only when it is not followed by any other clause).

12. Reading the particle *ste* as having an adversative/restrictive function might have been at the basis of Williams’ choice; however, the text as a whole does not seem to corroborate this option.

rang snang ba zhes pa 'dzin rnam dang | yul du snang ba zhes pa gzung rnam dang | yul gyi rnam par gyur pa'i gzung rnam de nyid 'dzin rnam gyi yul du bshad pas 'dzin rnam gyis gzung rnam myong ba rang rig gi don du bshad pa yin no || des na mdo sems gnyis kyi lugs la shes pa yin na kho rang gi ngo bor gyur pa'i 'dzin rnam de kha nang kho na la ltas pa gnyis snang thams cad dang bral zhing | kho rang gis kho rang rig pa yin la | des kho rang rig pa dang gzung rnam rig pa gnyi ga yang yul gang gi'ang rnam pa 'char ba la gtan nas mi ltos pa'i 'dzin rnam yan gar bar 'dod pa yin te |.

Translating the above quote, the following picture—very similar to the one in Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa's text—emerges:¹³

Its “own appearance” is the apprehending aspect, the “appearance as the object” is the apprehended aspect, and that very apprehended aspect which has taken on the aspect of the object is explained to be the object of the apprehending aspect. Therefore, the experience of the apprehended aspect by the apprehending aspect is explained to be the meaning of self-awareness. In the Sautrāntika and Cittamātra systems it is asserted that every consciousness has an apprehending aspect which turns out to be of [that consciousness'] own nature. It is turned solely inwards, it is devoid of all dual(istic) appearances and, given that it cognizes itself, it cognizes both itself and the apprehended aspect and it is an independent (*yan gar ba*) apprehending aspect that is without dependence on the appearance of the aspect of any object whatsoever.

mKhas-grub dGe-legs-dpal-bzang does not mention any self-luminosity (*rang gsal*) but, apart from this omission, all the other elements that occur in Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa are also present here, albeit in a different order. In mKhas-grub-rje's passage the phrase *yan gar ba* occurs together with and next to the elements that, according to Williams' reading, would refer to the second type of *rang rig*. However, Williams—as noted above, in relation to Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa's text—assumes that the phrase *yan gar ba* still belongs to the first type, being a description of the subjective aspect (*rang rig*) as “different” from its objective counterpart (the cognition), thus implying a dualistic account of *ran rig*. On the other hand, in mKhas-grub-rje it is clear that the term *yan gar ba* should be read as “independent,” since it is “without dependence on the appearance of the aspect of any object,” (and therefore without dependence on any object, in so far as there is one) resulting a different point: it seems that the qualifications of the apprehending aspect as

13. Compare my translation with Cabezón's (1992, 346).

“independent,” “turned solely inwards,”¹⁴ and “cogniz[ing] itself” all address the self-referential/independent character of cognition itself, and do not imply any ontological separation between self-cognition and cognition itself. Simply put, any cognition, *qua* self-cognizant, does not have to depend on its specific object(-appearance) and is not effected by the way the object(-appearance) is. After all, every cognition has a self-luminosity that does not *care* about which object the cognition is of. Thus, in mKhas-grub-rje’s excerpt, what seems to be at stake is the *independent* or self-referential character of cognition itself, rather than the *difference* between *rang rig* and its *gzung rnam* (as Williams claims).¹⁵ This sheds light also on the passage by Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa quoted by Williams. In other words, in those passages both scholars’ distinction between the two aspects (the subjective and the objective one) is not meant to convey any sort of subject-object dualism between them: it rather seems to be just a way to analytically describe the reflexive and non-dual nature of cognition. Therefore, it is not fully obvious how and why Williams is able to find the reflective model into Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa’s passage.

Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa’s (1990, 752) passage forms a single coherent description of the notion of *rang rig*, including various expressions all pointing to a single reflexive account. mKhas-grub-rje (*ibid.*, 421), a few pages after the excerpt quoted above, expresses the main point of the general dGe-lugs criticism against *rang rig*: “No matter how much thought one gives to the independent (*yan gar ba*) apprehending aspect that is turned inwardly, it is impossible to get an image of any difference between what is cognized (*rig bya*) and what cognizes (*rig byed*).” And “... it would follow the fault that the objects of the actions and their doers (*bya byed*) would become the same” (*ibid.*, 422). For the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas, the reasons for refuting *rang rig* are self-referentiality, a non-dependence on the object the cognition is of, a lack of proper duality, and a lack of dependence-on-other. This refutation provides further evidence that the model of *rang rig* refuted by them is reflexive.

As such, it is difficult to see the legitimacy of Williams using this passage to launch this major topic of his book, the two different categories for understanding self-awareness. However, it must be said that, although Williams distinguishes these two models, he also affirms that one can

14. For some specific expressions that appear in Tibetan accounts of self-awareness, like those in consideration, and their relation with classical Indian *pramāṇa* theory, see Yiannopoulos’ (2012, 155), who comments: “‘Mere awareness’ and ‘mere luminosity’ are more or less accurate glosses, but ‘turned solely inwards’ (*nang kho nar phyogs*) is a fatal mischaracterization.” This comment hints at the fact that talking about an inward direction implies an outer direction and therefore dualism, whereas dualism is not present in the *pramāṇa* theory. Yiannopoulos’ reflection would perhaps support, if applied to the two passages at stake in these pages, the idea that the expression *nang kho nar phyogs* retains a dualistic substratum.

15. See the description of *ran rig* offered for instance by Tshong-kha-pa (2009, 363.4–5): “... *rang rig ni shes pa thams cad kha nang lta la rig bya dang rig byed tha dad par snang ba nub pa’i ’dzin rnam yan gar ba yin ...* .”

collapse into the other, thus breaking the rigidity of the distinction. Here follows what Williams (1998, 32–34) claims about the relationship between the two models and the possibility for either one to be reduced into the other:

It should also be clear, however, that although I am arguing self-awareness (i) is different from self-awareness (ii), I do not wish to maintain that the one cannot be reduced to the other through a combination of (sometimes debatable) presuppositions and inference. Quite the reverse. It might be argued, for example, that in the case of self-awareness (i), since for Cittamātra there is no external reality causing the aspect of blue when the eye-consciousness takes on the aspect of blue, it follows that in reality the eye-consciousness cannot take on the aspect of blue. Thus when the subjective aspect experiences the objective aspect, pure awareness experiences pure awareness. If this is the case, there is no longer any differentiation into subjective and objective aspects. Therefore, if we have consciousness at all we must be left simply with self-reflective consciousness with absolutely no differentiation into subject and object—that is, it would seem, self-awareness (ii).

One could also argue for the reverse Śāntarakṣita wants to argue that . . . it is not possible in reality for consciousness to contact insentient objects. Thus in knowing an object, consciousness must really be apprehending itself in the form of the object. Therefore, from the reflexive nature of consciousness as its uniquely defining quality one moves to an epistemology where consciousness apprehends itself in the form of the object. That is, one moves from self-awareness (ii) to self-awareness (i).

Ram-Prasad (2007, 69n31) remarks, even more strongly, what Williams points out in the above quote:

I am indebted to Paul Williams here for his acute remark that there are two types of self-awareness here: one is the cognition of the object which turns out actually to be part of cognition itself; and the other is the constitutive cognition of its own occurrence. But, as he points out, the former collapses into the latter, regardless of whether that is what Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla intended or not. Since the objectual aspect of a cognition is itself part of consciousness, to be aware of that aspect is to be aware of the fact of consciousness itself.

Taking a step back to make a general consideration on the nature of the issue, it must be noted that the idea of *rang rig* locates itself on the boundary between dualism and its negation. It is the cognition that a cognition has of itself, and a cognition is always cognition *of* something;

therefore, on the one hand there is—as was said—the non-dualistic self-referential awareness, while on the other, that awareness is in contact with the *other* that the cognitive function faces, but never in a way that makes it dependent on this *other*. Returning to the term *ambiguity* that Williams (*ibid.*, 4) uses: referring to the ambiguity in the tradition between two models of understanding of *rang rig*, one could speculate that the ambiguity might reside just within the different structural aspects of *rang rig* itself. An ambiguity in the fact that it is non-dualistic but nevertheless often described as a cognition’s being aware of itself while open to *other*, being the self-awareness of a cognition which in turn is a cognition of something. It is not exactly an ambiguity, though: rather it is a subtle point to be aware of. Since self-awareness is actually non-dual, despite being conceptually described by the tradition as composed of two aspects, no *bya/byed* relationship can be distinguished and this is what also causes difficulties for the dGe-lugs interpreters.¹⁶

In conclusion, regarding the classificatory attempt made by Williams in his manifesto, a doubt might arise as to whether it is actually possible to detect the reflective model of self-awareness as explicitly and evidently endorsed within the tradition. Williams does not seem to share the same worry: he affirms that this model stems mostly from Dignāga and the Yogācāra tradition. However, as has been shown (ch. II.1), such an intentional model is not clearly mapped out in Dignāga’s account and therefore such a claim is not legitimate.

One point at the possible origin of the misunderstanding of conceiving the Cittamātra’s *rang rig* as reflective, that is, with a simultaneous intentional dualism within the two aspects of any cognition, is related to a thesis presented in the *Tarkajvālā*. Although this *Tarkajvālā* passage claims to represent the Cittamātra view, it does not present it faithfully,¹⁷ being the formulation of a position that holds the two appearances of cognition as simultaneously arising and as having different entities. There is no agreement among scholars regarding what the actual source of the theory presented in this *Tarkajvālā* passage is; it is clear, however, that it does not correspond to Dignāga’s view or to the general Cittamātra view. Since the sources of this position expressed in this *Tarkajvālā* passage are not clear, it is doubtful whether it actually represents any coherently endorsed tenet system. Interestingly, the quote that both Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa and mKhas-

16. The usual way the later dGe-lugs exegesis describes the relation between mind and its *svasaṃvedana* is in terms of *ngo bo gcig ldog pa tha dad*, and that means: one nature, different isolates. As they are the same entity, whatever is the one is necessarily the other, and we cannot find one which is not the other. They are not different consciousnesses. However, being different isolates, they are different for and separable by thought. For a detailed analysis on isolates as they are seen by Phur-bu-lcog Byams-pa-rgya-mtsho, see Perdue (1992, 411–480). See how Williams (1998, 8n9) understands this exegesis in light of what he identifies as the reflective model of *rang rig*.

17. See Hoornaert (2000, 84 for the Tibetan text; *ibid.*, 101–102 for the English translation).

grub-rje take from the *Tarkajvālā* is only a small part of that thesis, a part that is compatible with (and taken by them as) the common presentation of Cittamātra *rang rig*, where the two aspects of cognition are not held as having different entities.

Thus, it seems that Williams' reflective model, rather than representing a tenet or a proper standpoint on the issue, instead gives voice to the possible (and perhaps frequent, in the subsequent tradition) risk of wrongly interpreting it, by positing a non-dual mental phenomenon in a dualistic framework or by adapting it to a linguistic structure. Alternatively, it might also be understood as an attempt to think through the logical and conceptual relationship between the inner components of Dignāga's non-dual account of self-awareness (and this would seem to be the case of, for instance, the dGe-lugs criticism of *rang rig*). Seen from this perspective, the richness of Williams' survey finds great value and increased appreciation.

1.c Further Considerations on the Two Models

The global impact and echo of Williams' identification of the two categories of interpretation of *svasaṃvedana* in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition is attested to in the more recent literature of Buddhist studies. The two models Williams outlines, which (allegedly) arise from the complexity of the tradition, become the main categories of interpretation of self-awareness for most later studies on the topic.¹⁸

Among the classificatory studies on the topic, it is also worth mentioning Duckworth's (2015, 207 ff.), which lists three types without including the reflective one: (i) awareness of a self, denied by Buddhists in both India and Tibet; (ii) first-personal access to experience, being aware as an experiential subject when aware of something; (iii) self-awareness that also includes the structure of reality. This last account follows Dignāga and Dharmakīrti; it is "the way that the mind presents itself in the phenomenal features (*ākāra*) of an object and a subject" (*ibid.*). Here "... everything, subjects and objects, arise in and as awareness. In this interpretation, experiential reality is nothing but awareness; the world is irreducibly singular (or rather, nondual) even though it presents itself as a duality of subjects and objects." For clarity, Duckworth (*ibid.*, 208) provides a chart:

18. In Arnold's (2010, 324) words, for instance: "It has ... been widely noted, at least since Paul Williams's 1998 *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness*, that there are basically two main ways to understand this doctrine"

Reflective self-awareness (object-directed; ontological):

- SA-1: Awareness of self.
- SA-2: Awareness of subject.

Prereflective (reflexive) self-awareness (phenomenological):

- SA-2: Awareness as subject (apprehender-aspect); subjective feel of a cognition.
- SA-3: Awareness as structure of experience (apprehender-apprehended).

Notice that SA-2 pivots between egological (SA-1) and ecological (SA-3).

The second meaning—self-awareness as the subjective feel of a cognition—can be considered to be a self, a subtle self or minimal self as the bare sense of being a subject of experience. “Such a view of self-awareness, as part in parcel with awareness itself, is represented in the phenomenological tradition of Edmund Husserl, and in the works of Jean-Paul Sartre It is also a view shared by Buddhists like Śāntarakṣita and Śākya-mchog-ldan” (*ibid.*, 209; with my adjustments for the transliterations from Tibetan). As for the third meaning of self-awareness, Duckworth explains that it “... can be identified with the self, too, albeit a cosmic self, in the sense of the self as universe or a boundless, ecological self. Of course this is not a self among others, but is an all-embracing unity, the source and substance of everything” (*ibid.*, 208). This third type, in Yogācāra:

... is not only prereflective, but also resembles the substance of Spinoza’s dual-aspect monism. Like Spinoza, who used thought and extension as examples of *attributes* of substance, Dignāga ... and Dharmakīrti ... outlined subjective and objective features of self-awareness. ... Self-awareness in this case is thus both the means and content of knowledge, similar to Spinoza’s notion of substance, which he defined as: “... that which is in itself and is conceived through itself ...” (Spinoza 2002, 217). Spinoza also supported the case that subjects and objects only appear to be distinct but in fact are not by following the principle that unlike things cannot be causally related,¹⁹ like Dharmakīrti (Duckworth 2015, 209; italics in original)

MacKenzie (2007, 40 ff.) for his part, in a very detailed paper, distinguishes another three issues related to self-awareness:

- (i) The Self-Awareness Thesis: if a subject is aware of an object, then the subject is also aware of being aware of that object;

19. Here the reference is Spinoza’s *Ethics* (Scholium to Proposition 10; Spinoza 2002, 221).

- (ii) The Reflection Thesis: self-awareness is the product of a second-order awareness taking a distinct, first-order awareness as its intentional object;
- (iii) The Reflexivity Thesis: conscious states simultaneously disclose both the object of consciousness and (aspects of) the conscious state itself.

Note that the second introduces the reflective element and that the two orders of awareness are explicitly and clearly mentioned.

In contemporary scholarship, in many cases the reflective model (variously intended, but mostly referring to two different orders of consciousnesses) has been considered as an important and autonomous type of self-awareness. It is found, for instance, in Watson's (2010, 315) classification, where he outlines the Buddhist epistemologists' model of *svasaṃvedana* as three-fold: (i) "the subject-pole of a cognition perceiving the object-pole", (ii) "the subject-pole perceiving itself" or "cognition perceiving its subject-pole," and (iii) "cognition's perception of both the subject-pole and the object-pole." The first might be derived from Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.10, the second from *ibid.*, 1.11–12 (related to the memory argument and therefore the context of memory in which consciousness cognizes its own apprehending aspect), and the third from *ibid.*, 1.9a (well examined by Kellner 2010).

Among the scholars working on this specific area of Buddhist studies, Kellner (2010, 226) makes a particularly relevant point in stressing that the structure of reflective *svasaṃvedana*—that is, using her labels, intentional self-awareness (as was previously mentioned)—is identified by Williams from a Tibetan comment upon of the view of the two appearances in the *Tarkajvālā*, and thus it is derived from a *post*-Dignāga text. "One should note ... that Dignāga's exposition of means and result does not unequivocally indicate that self-awareness here is nothing but intentional self-awareness—in fact, if one reads it unrelated to any subsequent tradition, one finds little in terms of explicit statements that point to intentional self-awareness" (*ibid.*, 227). Thus, Kellner (*ibid.*, 228) draws her conclusions: "Clearly, Williams' two kinds of self-awareness cannot be neatly mapped onto the different areas or contexts of Dignāga's presentation ..."; in fact, the intentional structure does not seem to do justice to the disclosure of one's own experiences to oneself, that is, what *svasaṃvedana* consists of, and we cannot trace this model as clearly present in Dignāga. The same point about Williams' self-awareness (i) is also made clear by Yiannopoulos (2012, 154) in relation to the Indian Buddhist tradition: "this [self-awareness (i)] is simply false with respect to the views of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, and is similarly incorrect with respect to Śāntarakṣita, Kamalaśīla"; in other words, "Williams' 'self-awareness (i)' was never posited by any of the theorists of self- or reflexive awareness, including Dignāga" (*ibid.*, 155). These disagreements and various

considerations all serve to indicate how much research and attention this field still deserves, the issue being promisingly deep and rich in terms of philosophical implications.

2. Reflexivity and Luminosity of Mind: Photism in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism

The issue of the reflexivity of awareness discussed thus far leads on to the topic of the luminosity of mind, since the reflexivity of mind “... is for all intents and purposes no different from the property of ‘luminosity’ [of mind]” (Kapstein 2000, 106).²⁰ Since mind’s luminosity is a notion that is omnipervasive in the Indo-Tibetan tradition, while not at all homogeneous, the aim here is to sketch an overview of its main meanings and the main steps of its development, linking it with the notion of reflexivity.

In Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophy there has always been a great importance attached to light, in all its various manifestations, metaphorical understandings and phenomenological forms. Thus, what might be called *photism* is a fundamental trait running through the tradition, encompassing many different philosophical understandings of light or luminosity in relation to the mind.

To begin with, within the broad dimension of photism, a fundamental linguistic or semantic distinction must be made. In terms of the importance and role of light, the first notion to be identified is that of luminosity as *prabhāsvara(tā)* (*’od gsal [ba]*), representing the underlying idea behind the notion of the purity of mind, a concept with many various shades and nuances—soteriological, epistemological, ontological, and physiological. On the other hand, the concept of luminosity utilized when talking about self-awareness is conveyed by a different term, namely, *prakāśa(tā)* (*gsal [ba]*). This notion of luminosity is exemplified by the metaphor of the lamp that, in Indian Buddhism, originated from the Mahāsāṃghika philosophical discourse and illustrating the fact that, just as light illuminates itself while illuminating other objects, so does the mind. Casey (2016) observes: “Within Yogācāra and Madhyamaka views, luminosity is increasingly associated with emptiness, ultimate reality, and the illumination (*prakāśatā*) of the mind that *makes apparent objects of awareness*” (italics mine). *Prakāśatā*, therefore, is the feature/function of the mind that makes objects of awareness apparent and is the concept involved in reflexive self-awareness, where consciousness presents itself, makes itself apparent to itself, in the process of presenting/making apparent its object. Thus, we have the two terms *paraprakāśa* and *svaprakāśa*, meaning other- and self-luminosity. Despite the different philosophical ideas they

20. It is worth noting that Williams (1998), for his part, is fully aware of the dimension of luminosity of mind and when talking about Mi-pham he (1998, 26–27n10) introduces luminosity as the nature of mind. Thereby Williams—perhaps wishing to bring Mi-pham’s and the dGe-lugs’ views a bit closer—mentions the pair of luminosity and awareness/cognizance (*gsal zhing rig pa*), regarded as the defining characteristics of mind in the common dGe-lugs exegesis. Williams ends up identifying luminosity (*gsal ba*) with the reflexive nature of consciousness and awareness/cognizance (*rig pa*) with its intentionality, a feature consisting in being contentful.

convey, the two share semantic similarities and thus have both been rendered by multiple scholars as “luminous,” in English, leading readers to mistake them for interchangeable concepts.

Having made this distinction, a few specifications within the concept of *prabhāsvaratā* will be made in order to unpack the multiple aspects and versions of such a rich and vast notion; towards the final part of this section, the two concepts of *prakāśatā* and *prabhāsvaratā* will be brought together again to look for possible deeper links between these two understandings of the luminosity of mind.

2.a The Doctrinal Developments of the Notion of Mind’s Luminosity (*prabhāsvaratā*: ’od gsal ba)

While the concept of the luminosity of mind as *prabhāsvaratā* is pervasive in the Śrāvakayāna, Pāramitāyāna, and Vajrayāna, it is by no means homogeneous. Thus, the intention here is to briefly sketch the main steps of its development within these three main branches of the tradition.²¹ From

21. Concerning the secondary literature on the topic, it must be said that, despite the centrality of the concept of luminosity in Buddhist thought and practice, relatively few academic studies have been carried out on the topic. There is still no systematic study that focuses on this term as it appears throughout all major Buddhist traditions. Informative references are mostly hidden within footnotes of academic studies that are not primarily devoted to this subject. The majority of references available on luminosity in Buddhism are from the perspective of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. Casey (2016) introduces the topic as follows:

In the context of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, the term is commonly translated as “clear light” or “radiant light,” both of which are literal renderings from the Tibetan [*’od gsal*], while in the context of East Asian Buddhism it is commonly translated simply as ‘purity’. Other common English translations include “radiance,” “inner radiance,” “brightness,” and “luminous clarity.” Although luminosity is interpreted differently according to the various Buddhist traditions, it is most often employed to describe the mind’s inherent characteristic of purity that lacks defilements such as afflictive emotions (*kleśa*).

A remarkable inquiry on the luminosity of mind is the chapter “La luminosité naturelle de la Pensée” in Seyfort Rugg (1969, 409–454). Many further references are included there, among them it is worth mentioning those referring to Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. Skorupski (2012) offers a complete overview of the notion of luminosity among the Early Buddhist, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions, covering the most popular quotations from primary sources that describe the notion of luminosity in the Indo-Tibetan tradition. Jackson (1990), primarily focusing on Dharmakīrti’s interpretation of the notion of a naturally luminous mind, provides one among the few studies solely dedicated to an overview of the notion of luminosity in Buddhism. Another useful source is Harvey (1995 [reprint: 2004], 166–179). Lamotte ([1976] 2011, lxxii–lxxx) briefly describes the luminosity of mind when presenting the concept of mind in Buddhist philosophy. Wangchuk (2007, 206–210) devotes a few pages of his monograph to the question of how the luminosity of mind comes to be regarded as *bodhicitta* and thereby offers a useful summary of the historical development of the concept of the luminous mind. For further information on the pre-Mahāyāna development of the concept, see Takasaki (1966, 34n57) and Rahder (1966, 420). Buswell and Lopez (2014, 653–654) have authored two short entries that give an accurate and concise introduction to the notion of luminosity in Buddhism.

early to later doctrines, such an overall picture can help develop a better understanding of what *prabhāsvara*[*tā*] actually is and what its implications are, as well as allowing a comparison of its feature and meaning with those of the notion of luminosity as *prakāśatā*.

Originally, the concept of the luminosity of mind (*prabhāsvara*[*tā*]: 'od gsal [*ba*])²² refers to the purity of mind. Thanks to Franco (2000), who analyzed the few extant fragments of what is considered the earliest philosophical manuscript in Sanskrit, the so-called Spitzer Manuscript, there is evidence of some intricate arguments for and against the concept of natural luminosity of mind among pre-Mahāyāna schools. The issue must have been quite significant for them, given that an entire chapter is devoted to the controversy revolving around the luminosity of mind and its relation to defilements (*kleśa*). Among the pre-Mahāyāna schools that make reference to a luminous *citta*, the Vibhajyavāda school, close to the Theravāda school, holds that the root or fundamental nature (*mūla-bhāva*) of mind is *prabhāsvara*, that is, “brightly shining” in Harvey’s (1995 [reprint: 2004], 144) translation or “pure” in Bareau’s (1955, 175 th. 28).²³ The Mahāsāṃghikas assert that the own-nature (*svabhāva*) of mind is *prabhāsvara* (*ibid.*, 67–68 th. 44), while the Dharmaguptaka school says it is its nature (*bhāva*) (*ibid.*, 194 th. 6). The Vaibhāṣika school totally disagrees: the mind is not naturally luminous but rather originally contaminated by defilements, needing to be purified by abandoning those (*ibid.*, 147 th. 80). Thus, the above-mentioned schools at least agree that the purified mind is luminous, whereas there is some controversy as to whether the mind is primordially luminous and subsequently becomes defiled and purified or whether it is initially defiled and then becomes purified. In general, the early Buddhist doctrines use the term *prabhāsvara* to convey the idea that, since defilements can potentially be completely removed from the mind, enlightenment is possible, thus safeguarding the entire Buddhist soteriology. Among the various Pāli sources on the topic, the well-known *Aṅguttaranikāya* 1.6 (Seyfort Ruegg 1969, 27; transl. Seyfort Ruegg) states:

As for the importance of luminosity according to the general Tibetan understandings, Tucci (1980, 63–67), Kalu Rinpoche (1997, 15–25), and Kapstein (2004) should be mentioned. Moreover, Casey (2013) devotes a paper to ignorance and luminosity in early bKa’-brgyud bsRe-ba literature, where she explains the nonduality of the two on the basis of their true state, that is, the true nature of mind which is luminosity.

22. Nevertheless, the Sanskrit does not always correspond to this Tibetan rendering: sometimes *prabhāsvara* is, problematically, translated as *gsal ba*, creating another source of confusion between it and *prakāśa*. See, for instance, Fukuda and Ishihama (1989, no. 450) s.v. “*prabhāsvarā*.”

23. Note that Bareau (1955, 175 th. 28) translates *prabhāsvara* as “pure,” “fondamentalement pure,” or “originellement pure.”

O *Bhikṣu*, cette Pensée est lumineuse (*pabhassaram*). Tantôt elle est affectée par les Affects adventices, et le profane qui l'ignore ne la connaît pas telle qu'elle est; par conséquent, je dis que le profane qui l'ignore n'a pas la cultivation de la Pensée. Et tantôt elle est libre des Affects adventices, et l'Auditeur Saint qui en a eu communication la connaît telle qu'elle est; par conséquent, je dis que l'Auditeur Saint qui en a eu communication a la cultivation de la Pensée.²⁴

It seems that the fundamental understanding of the statement that mind is by nature luminous is that consciousness is fundamentally *unpolluted* or, at least, *unpollutable*. In the *Samyuttanikāya* there are important statements (quoted in the *Ratnagoṭṭravibhāga*) referring to the relation between the defilement or purification of the mind and the current state of beings, in terms of their defilement or purification (Lamotte [1976] 2011, lxxiv).

In this regard, it is worth noting Shih's (2009) examination of the concept of mind being pure in nature and how this elicited many discussions in the Abhidharma literature, since in some cases it was seen as contradicting the Buddhist fundamental law of impermanence (of mind).²⁵ If mind possesses a changeless nature, whether pure or impure, this seems to violate that law. Moreover, such a concept can also be seen as contradicting to another fundamental law in Buddhism, namely, selflessness of phenomena, since it can be construed as asserting a self. Shih shows how, in the Abhidharma literature, insightful answers are formulated to these objections and by exploring the context of some important statements in Pāli literature on the primordial luminosity of mind and the adventitious nature of its defilements, Shih makes it clear that they mostly represent ways to encourage the monks to train their minds. By acknowledging that the original nature of mind is pure, the practitioner is moved to eliminate the defilements from their mind and restore its luminosity. Shih concludes (*ibid.*, 168) that:

24. *Aṅguttaranikāya* 1.6 (Morris and Hardy, [1885–1900] 1999–2013, vol. 1, 10): “*pabhassaram idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ | taṃ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ | taṃ assutavā puthujjano yathābhūtaṃ nappajānāti | tasmā assutavato puthujjanassa cittabhāvanā natthi ti vadāmī ti | pabhassaram idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ | taṃ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi vippamuttaṃ | taṃ sutvā ariyasāvako yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti | tasmā sutavato ariyasāvakassa cittabhāvanā atthi ti vadāmī ti |*”

25. This very point is also briefly mentioned by Almogi (2009, 140n4). Schmithausen (1987, vol.1, 160–162, 232–233, and 240–241) explores the works of the Yogācāra master Paramārtha (499–569 CE) in order to focus on those understandings of the purity of mind that do not imply any unconditionedness or eternality, and therefore are different from the *tathāgatagarbha* tradition or the teachings of the *amalavijñāna* (that is, a pure mind that has always been present).

Unlike the Mahāyāna theory of *tathāgatagarbha*, which claims that the innately pure mind possesses all the virtues of the Buddha and that the revelation of this mind is the attainment of the Buddhahood, statements in the Pāli texts only emphasize the knowledge of the innate purity of the mind as *a prerequisite step* in the cultivation of the mind and the restoration of the purity of the mind is not the end of religious practice. ... the tranquil, luminous, and pliable mind is only the basis for further religious practices. (Italics mine)²⁶

Moreover, Skorupski (2012, 51), comparing Abhidharma sources to the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, sheds light on another important aspect of the pre-Mahāyāna approach to the luminosity of mind:

While the Abhidharma sources largely analyzed the character of consciousness in terms of its *ethical qualities*, the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna pay more attention to the *innate propensities* of consciousness. In its innermost condition, the consciousness is understood as being pure or luminous irrespective of the ethical qualities that it may acquire. Considered in its innate condition, it is said to abide in a state of non-duality, but when it is defiled, it arises and functions in the form of duality. Its appearance in a dual form is attributed to ignorance (*avidyā*) as the main source of defiled or erroneous misconceptions. The ultimate goal is not just the purification of consciousness from discursive misconceptions, but also the attainment of omniscience by awakening its pristine potentialities. (Italics mine)

In the Pāramitāyāna tradition, several scriptures describe the nature of mind as luminously pure, including the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, a text from around the first centuries BC or CE, in which it is stated: "... *citta* is no *citta*, since it is by nature brightly shining" (Seyfort Ruegg 1969, 413; transl. Seyfort Ruegg).²⁷ The uncovered luminous *citta* turns out to be "... the ideal springboard from which to attain awakening, such that it can be seen as a kind of enlightenment-potential. Appropriately, one strand of Mahāyāna thought identifies the brightly shining *citta* with the *tathāgata-garbha* ..." (Harvey 1995 [reprint: 2004], 175). A precious contribution to an overall

26. One more understanding of the luminosity of mind in early Buddhism is suggested by Tan (2004), who takes inspiration from Harvey's above-mentioned work for listing various key references to the luminosity of mind in the early canon. He (*ibid.*, 45) concludes his inquiry by stating that: "In early Buddhism, the 'radiant mind' (*pabhassara citta*) refers neither to an absolutely pure state of mind nor to spiritual liberation, but is the dhyanic mind that is radiant on account of not being disturbed or influenced by external stimuli."

27. *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* 1 (Mitra 1887–1888, 19): "... *tac cittam acittam prakṛtiś cittasya prabhāsvāra ||*." For references and further studies on this passage, see Seyfort Ruegg (1969, 413) and Harvey (1995 [reprint: 2004], 175).

understanding of the Buddhist view of the luminosity of mind is found in Almogi (2009, 140–141n4), which discusses a doctrine of a momentary luminosity of mind, as opposed to non-momentary luminosity:

... [Luminosity of mind] has been conceived by most schools of conservative Buddhism and by later Mahāyāna traditions, such as Yogācāra, simply as referring to one ‘moment’ of a pure mind (which is momentary by nature)—one replacing a previous ‘moment’ of a defiled mind after the latter has ceased. Therefore, ‘pure mind’ in such systems has no connotations of unconditionedness or eternality, unlike the term *prakṛtiprabhāsvaracitta* of the *Tathāgatagarbha* tradition” (*id.*)

In order to explain the later presence of two separate doctrines, that of a momentary luminosity of mind and that of the a non-momentary one, Wangchuk (2007, 208) suggests that the notion of luminosity developed so as to also encompass the unconditioned and non-momentary luminosity:

It will thus perhaps be necessary to classify the luminosity of the mind under two types, namely, one that is conditioned (or momentary) and one that is unconditioned (or not momentary). ... I hypothesise that the extension of the idea of [conditioned] luminosity ... to that of [unconditioned] luminosity ... is connected with the development of the notion of the historical Buddha or of any *buddha*.

Thus, the development of this notion in the Pāramitāyāna implies that becoming a *buddha* involves a clearing up of the defilements, with a pristine immaculate mind as the result. Therefore, in synthesis, since the Mahāyāna *prajñāpāramitā* and *tathāgatagarbha* literature focus on the mind as being naturally luminous and inherently pure,²⁸ the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna recognize the need to eradicate defilements and ignorance but otherwise essentially focus on the arousal and maturation of the pristine features of consciousness in the form of enlightenment. Moreover, in Mahāyāna sources it is not simply the nature of mind which is described as luminously pure, but the nature of all phenomena (Wangchuk 2007, 208). Thus the philosophical background that supports the luminous nature of all phenomena is the ontological discourse on their ultimate nature, which is

28. For references on the topic of *tathāgatagarbha* in relation to luminosity of mind, see for instance Skorupski’s (2012, 52–53) considerations on *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*.

devoid of inherent existence; a major strand of Madhyamaka focuses on this ultimate aspect as that which allows the mind to be purified and, in this sense, luminous.²⁹

In the Vajrayāna tradition, the concept of a naturally luminous mind seems to have become even more prominent.³⁰ Luminosity plays a decisive role for reaching enlightenment and, from the point of view of Tantric practice, luminosity enters the field of experience, accompanied by the wisdom that enables the practitioner to recognize and understand it. Tantric teachings emphasize the luminosity as *an experience of consciousness* rather than simply a characteristic of mind's potentiality. Such an experience can naturally arise once the grosser levels of consciousness dissolve, such as at the time of falling asleep and at the moment of death. Thus, a Buddhist tantric practitioner aims to train in meditation in order to be able to recognize the appearance of luminosity in the death process. Thus, in the Tantric context, the experience of light becomes a means for attaining enlightenment.

In Tibet, the explanation of consciousness as luminosity and emptiness has been adopted to elucidate the death process.³¹ In the Tibetan traditions of rDzogs-chen and Phyag-rgya-chen-po (Mahāmūdra), Casey (2016) remarks, "... luminosity is emphasized as synonymous with the *dharmakāya*, the *dharmadhātu*, and the fundamental nature of all phenomena and reality. It also becomes central for the other-emptiness (*gzhan stong*) views as maintained by some Tibetan traditions" For instance, among the rDzogs-chen pivotal esoteric instructions there exist the pair of *thod rgal* and *khregs chod* (the two sets of practices are translated by Dudjom Rinpoche [1991, vol. 2, 334–335] as, respectively, "all-surpassing realisation" and "cutting through resistance"). In *thod rgal*, luminosity plays a crucial role in "... clarif[ing] the apparitional aspect or corporeal

29. One important contribution to the topic is Jackson's (1990) essay on the doctrine of the luminosity of mind in Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. As Jackson (*ibid.*, 96) states, "... the common theme among these various contextualizations of the concept of luminous mind seems to be that it is understood as referring to the mind's ultimate nature and/or its liberated state. The context, thus, is primarily ontological and soteriological, and few or no implications are drawn for 'conventional' epistemology" Interestingly, "for Dharmakīrti the mind's luminosity has not only soteriological importance, but importance also for our understanding of the conventional operations of the mind, i.e., for precisely that epistemological enterprise to which Dharmakīrti devoted the bulk of his labors" (*ibid.*, 97). Dharmakīrti's perspective is particularly meaningful in that it provides an epistemological analysis, at the conventional level, of luminosity in terms of the correct apprehension of objects and the adventitiousness of defilements in terms of the incapacity of error to persist in a correctly cognizing mind, in so far as an error lacks a support in how things actually exist. This analysis ends up having relevant consequences in the soteriological dimension: precisely because mind's nature is such, an ultimate correct cognition cannot be replaced by its false contrary, and thus a liberated state is irreversible.

30. As, for instance, in Nāropa's *Sekoddeśatīkā* (Seyfort Ruegg 1971, 466n82).

31. For a brief overview of this topic, see Skorupski's (2012, 54–64) description and analysis of this process.

objects into inner radiance in a spontaneously present manner, and so caus[ing] the cessation of apparitional reality” (*id.*). In particular, through this practice the apparitional aspects of objects and consciousness of the three realms is said to dissolve in the inner radiance of five-colored light, which Dudjom Rinpoche (*ibid.*, 337) calls the “natural tone of awareness.” Four so-called *lamps* (*sgron ma bzhi*) are involved in the practice and the trainee is called to follow detailed procedures of visionary steps and complex visualizations. The core of the practice is experience through inner light: “Within the expanse of emptiness . . . , the essence abides through its spontaneous presence in the manner of the light which is radiant within a crystal but not externally manifest” (*ibid.*, 342).

One insightful contribution to this topic is an essay by Kapstein (2004), where he describes his inquiry concerning the realization of the rainbow body (*'ja' lus*) within a framework of thoughtful reflections upon luminosity in Buddhist and Tibetan religious thought, in particular in relation to death and spiritual realizations. Kapstein’s thesis is that in Indian Buddhism there is some sort of ambivalence about light imagery, sometimes hinting at a real *physiological* experience while at other times being used *metaphorically*. This legacy then nurtured two strands in Tibet: on the one hand, the emphasis of Tibetan Tantric Buddhism on techniques of visualization and experiences of light reinforced the *cataphatic* use of light imagery (proper of later Indian Buddhism), while the Tibetan Madhyamaka view could be seen as a continuation of the other strand, the *apophatic* one. As for Tantric experiences, “. . . whether we are referring to visualized or to visionary experience, ‘light’ is being used to characterize those experiences phenomenologically” (*ibid.*, 128). Interestingly, many differing modes of light—“dim, radiant, or effulgent; diffused, refracted or sparkling, monotonal or multicolored; internal or external; holographic or unidimensional; and so on” (*ibid.*, 130)—pervade the Tibetan literature. “There is a broad experiential sphere requiring a fuller phenomenology to disclose its varied modalities” (*ibid.*, 136).

As has been shown, there is no homogeneity in the various applications of the notion of the luminosity of mind and through the various phases of the Indo-Tibetan tradition different understandings or utilizations of it have arisen. In outlining the main points of its history, this survey highlighted its related issue of purity, the soteriological goal of awakening, the application of luminosity to the practitioner’s experience, the discourse on the ultimate nature of phenomena which are devoid of inherent existence, and the controversy between the momentariness and non-momentariness of the luminous mind. The literature of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism is replete with apophatic and cataphatic uses of what light and luminosity might represent in various contexts, sometimes being metaphorical indications and sometimes intending to indicate a concrete

experience of the practitioner. As such, luminosity is found throughout the multiple dimensions of the tradition, from the highest theoretical issues to the most refined meditative practices.

2.b The convergence of *Gsal ba* and *'Od gsal ba*

Having examined the rich notion of *prabhāsvara*, some recent interpretative readings of the notion of the luminosity of mind in Buddhism will help show how *prakāśatā* and *prabhāsvaratā* come closer and intertwine in a more global account of the notion of mind's luminosity. As will be shown, these intersections reveal and disclose other important aspects of consciousness, such as those of the phenomenality, subjectivity, and the unity of experience.

Let's begin by considering that *prakāśatā* seems to be the acceptance of luminosity as it is intended in the definition of the nature of mind, as *gsal zhing rig pa*, that is, as clear/luminous/illuminating and cognizant. This definition is very common in dGe-lugs texts and it is along this line that a contemporary dGe-lugs scholar (Geshe Kelsang Gyatso 1993, 16), in fact, claims: "The definition of mind is that which is clarity and cognizes. In this definition, 'clarity' refers to the nature of mind, and 'cognizes' to the function of mind. Mind is clarity because it always lacks form and because it possesses the actual power to perceive objects. Mind cognizes because its function is to know or perceive objects." Thus, there are two claims being made in terms of *clarity (gsal ba)*: the feature of being different from matter and that of being able to perceive whatever appears to it. Moreover, in order to deepen the understanding of the definition of mind as *gsal zhing rig pa*, in a recent compendium on consciousness and other related topics, a convenient passage on this issue claims as follows:

*gsal zhing rig pa shes pa'i ngo bor 'jog cing | 'di' gsal ba ni shes pa'i ngo bo dang rig pa ni
shes pa'i byed las so | de yang gsal ba zhes pa la (i) thogs reg can gyi bem po'i rang bzhin
las 'das pas ngo bo gsal ba | (ii) me long du gzugs brnyan 'char ba bzhin shes pa la'ang yul
bzang ngan dang bde sdug sogs phyi nang gi yul ci yang 'char du rung bas yul gsal ba dang
| (iii) yang rang gi ngo bo la chags sogs nyon mongs pa'i dri mas bslad pa ma zhugs pas
rang bzhin gsal ba'am 'od gsal ba ste go don du ma gsungs | (Kuntue Committee 2014, 4.8–
14)*

Here, three meanings of *gsal ba* are listed. The first is linked to the *entity/essence (ngo bo gsal ba)* of mind and is crucial when considering how to differentiate matter from consciousness, the latter

being free from obstructive contact; this first understanding of the term recalls Śāntarakṣita's view on the distinctive features of consciousness. The second meaning is related to the *object* (*yul gsal ba*) of mind. Here, clarity is conceived of as what makes consciousness suitable to let internal or external objects appear to it. The third meaning of clarity is related to the *nature* (*rang bzhin gsal ba* or *'od gsal ba*) of mind, which is undefiled by contaminations. Thus, in this explanation of the various understandings of *gsal ba* within the definition of mind, the meaning related to the undefiled nature of mind, which corresponds to *'od gsal ba* (*prabhāsvāra*), is also included next to that of *gsal ba* (*prakāśa*).³² Therefore, this is a presentation of the luminosity of consciousness that encompasses most of the meanings seen thus far, gathering the main aspects and dimensions where the issue of consciousness and luminosity meet.

One inspiring account of the subject of photism in Buddhism provided by Tucci (1980, 63–67) can help further the present discourse in terms of the proximity of the two main notions of luminosity of mind. First, Tucci clearly states (*ibid.*, 64) that *'od gsal ba*, “light,” has to be distinguished from *gsal ba*, “luminosity,” “the capacity to emit light from the mind.”³³ An evocative passage (*id.*) on this point is as follows: “The luminous cognitive states ... do not only illuminate what is cognizable inside and outside us, they also illuminate themselves in the cognitive process (*shes pa*) luminosity and cognition belong essentially to each other. ... When the light (*'od gsal*) is not ... affected by defilements, and emerges in its natural purity, it is not a characteristic sign but an essential quality of the *sems*.” Here, Tucci seems to be suggesting two dimensions: one is the cognitive process, where luminosity is involved with an other- and self-cognizing activity; the second is the natural purity of an undefiled mind, where the light of mind can shine forth. It seems that Tucci reveals a link between these two kinds of luminosity (*gsal ba* and *'od gsal ba*, and therefore *prakāśatā* and *prabhāsvāratā*) or, in other words, between epistemology and soteriology,

32. One could distinguish between reflexivity (*svasamvedana*) and luminosity understood as the illuminating ability of mind because, as Williams (1998, 26n10) points out, “... as a conventional truth, in order for its [the mind's] nature to be luminosity it would seem that it should conventionally be reflexive, i.e. there should be *svasamvedana* conventionally On the other hand it would not be incoherent for a dGe-lugs-pa to reply that he grants the conventional existence of luminosity but denies that this is *svasamvedana*, since one cannot speak of self-awareness where there is no subject-object relationship”

33. Tucci remarks that, as for the Sa-skyā view on the topic, luminosity is the “characteristic sign” (*mtshan nyid*) of the mind, voidness is the “essence of mind,” and these two aspects coincide in “transcendent consciousness” (*ye shes*) and “flow together” (*zung 'jug*) (*ibid.*, 65). On the other hand, in the dGe-lugs view, luminosity is “the actual essence of *sems*,” and a “characteristic sign of the cognitive faculty” (*shes pa*) (*ibid.*, 66). Since Tucci's presentation is extremely concise, there is not sufficient material to understand why Tucci strongly distinguishes *sems*, defined by him as “an energy of thought” (*ibid.*, 63) and “mental energy but also light” (*ibid.*, 64), from *shes pa*, “the cognitive faculty” (*ibid.*, 66).

that is, between the cognitive processes on the one hand, and the non-defilement or purity of the mind together with its emptiness on the other.

Once again, it is evident that the various aspects of photism that have arisen in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism are not at all uniform in the way they are understood and linked together, from early Buddhism in India to its later developments in Tibet, and yet the various philosophical understandings of consciousness' luminosity are connected to one another. Not only that, in light of such indications provided above, even *prakāśatā* and *prabhāsvaratā* could be seen as converging. In fact, purity of mind is its being devoid of defilements and stains, that is, of that which blocks, obstructs or twists the nature or activity of consciousness; once cleansed, the mind is pure, clean, and therefore its cognizant nature gains unimpeded and proper access to its objects. Thus, being pure, it is free to let its other- and self-cognizant activities fully unfold as an unrestrained cognizant luminosity. From this perspective, the two notions of the luminosity of mind reveal their link.

Next, it will be examined how consciousness and its luminosity, understood as reflexivity, might reveal other aspects of experience. Ram-Prasad (2007) comments on the deep link between knowledge and liberation in Buddhism, and thereby between consciousness, its nature and functions on the one hand, and the soteriological goal on the other: "Given that knowledge is located in particular (veridical) cognitions, and cognitions are simply individual states of consciousness, it is clear that there is a close connection between the nature of knowledge and the nature of consciousness in Indian thought; and understanding the nature of consciousness is important for understanding knowledge and its soteriological consequences" (Ram-Prasad 2007, 52). This being said, Ram-Prasad, in examining how consciousness is considered in Indian philosophy, introduces its luminosity (*prakāśatā*) in terms of the "phenomenal feel of consciousness" (*ibid.*, 53). He (*ibid.*, 54) proceeds by offering further elements of luminosity from the Indian perspective:

Luminosity is the rendering of an event as *subjective*. It is that by which there is an occurrence, which it is like something to undergo. The subjective is *the having of experience* (*anubhava*). Luminosity is the Indian metaphor for phenomenality, the undergoing by the subject of something else (its object). The philosophers are agreed on all sides that consciousness is *phenomenological*; it is luminous. The debate is over the constitution of the phenomenality of consciousness. The debate is about what it is for there to be subjectivity. (Italics mine)

Ram-Prasad stresses an understanding of *prakāśatā* in terms of the phenomenal experience that a *subject* undergoes but, as MacKenzie (2017; MacKenzie and Bradley, forthcoming) points

out by shedding light on the *transcendental* role of reflexivity, not all Indian philosophers would link phenomenality to subject(ivity). In fact, from the Buddhist viewpoint, experiences present themselves to a subject but that subject is just consciousness itself. Therefore, the necessary condition of any phenomenal appearance is the luminosity of mind—that is, for those strands of Buddhism that assert reflexive awareness, *svasamvedana*—since it is the condition for any object-directed intentionality and any phenomenal appearance. Conscious states only exist in so far as they are experienced, so they presuppose a subjective point of view within which they take place. This basic and minimal first-person point of view is luminosity and it is in this sense that luminosity comes to be seen as transcendental (MacKenzie 2017; MacKenzie and Bradley, forthcoming). In other words, the mental event is itself the subject of experience, the minimal unit of what *we perceive as* the space and time of our experiential events, that is, the insubstantial, luminous and transparent scenery or horizon of their manifestation.³⁴

The deep link between mind and its luminosity (and, therefore, also reflexivity) reveals an account of consciousness that is quite dynamic and multi-faceted. Just to recall some of its aspects, the epistemological process that is the cognition’s capacity of letting appearances arise, and of illuminating other objects as well as itself, creates the phenomenal and reflexive horizon of our subjective experiences. This self- and other-illuminating process is also at the basis of one’s ability to understand and penetrate reality and, hence, of one’s ability to reach the soteriological goal. The luminosity of mind in terms of its purity converges with the soteriological dimension of Buddhist practice. Luminosity also shows a deep link with emptiness, since in many strands of the tradition the luminous nature of all phenomena is considered to be the ontological discourse on their ultimate nature, which is devoid of inherent existence. In sum, the Buddhist framework of the reflexivity of mind together with the concept of *prabhāsvaratā* as purity of mind has many deep implications; together, these two notions of luminosity create what has been called the entire and broad dimension of photism that marks Indo-Tibetan Buddhism.

34. For further thoughts on the spatial and temporal dimensions of consciousness, see the “Abhidharmic Problematic” in Waldron (2003, 54–57) and the considerations made by MacKenzie and Bradley (forthcoming). Here, a few words might be important, just to summarize the tension Waldron identifies and MacKenzie then comments upon in relation to self-awareness. In Buddhist accounts of consciousness, the *synchronic* analysis of discrete and momentary mental processes could be seen as undermining its overall soteriological framework, that is, the *diachronic* dimension of continuity in time and the path towards liberation. In relation to those two dimensions, *svasamvedana* could be seen as both part of the internal structure of a mental event and as a crucial element in making the diachronic function of memory possible—at least for some strands within Buddhism.

IV. Tsong-kha-pa and Mi-pham: A Multidimensional Controversy

1. Tsong-kha-pa and His Disciples: Negating Self-awareness Even Conventionally

This chapter will give a detailed examination of and reflection upon Tsong-kha-pa's and Mi-pham's views on self-awareness. Inquiring into this debate is particularly important due to its impact on the Tibetan philosophical discourse on self-awareness, since the controversy between their positions involves both the epistemological and ontological dimension of *rang rig*.

Mi-pham, an important figure in the Ris-med (non-sectarian) movement active in Tibet in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is a prominent scholar belonging to the rNying-ma tradition but who also received a thorough dGe-lugs education. On the issue of *rang rig*, he argues against Tsong-kha-pa's rejection of the conventional existence of reflexive awareness—a refutation that for Tsong-kha-pa is supported by (his readings of) Candrakīrti and Śāntideva.¹ Mi-pham argues that it is simply obvious that consciousness is conventionally reflexive. The implications of the ensuing debate are deep and complicated; here the main elements of the discussion will be outlined in order to enrich the range of ontological and epistemological reflections on self-awareness as they developed in Tibet.

Śāntideva's *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* has been the focus of many commentaries by various Indian and Tibetan scholars. Williams provides a quick overview of them in order to demonstrate how verse 9.26,² where Śāntideva ends his critique of *svasaṃvedana* (9.17–9.26), seems to have

1. For textual references, see Moriyama (1995).

2. Śāntideva, *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* 9.26 (Bhattacharya 1960, 191); here follows the Sanskrit text, the Tibetan text, and my translation from Tibetan:

yathā dṛṣṭaṃ śrutaṃ jñātaṃ naiveha pratiśidhyate |
satyataḥ kalpanā tvatra duḥkhaheturnivāryate ||.

ji ltar mthong thos shes pa dag |
'dir ni dgag pa bya min te |
'dir ni sdug bsngal rgyur gyur pa |
bden par rtogs pa bzlog bya yin ||.

The seen, the heard, and the known
are not what has to be negated here.
Here what has to be reversed is the thought [of them] as tru[ly existent],

elicited a specific and innovative reaction only for its dGe-lugs interpreters. For Tsong-kha-pa and his followers, Śāntideva (in 9.26) is taken to be negating self-awareness both ultimately *and* relatively/conventionally, whereas the pre-dGe-lugs commentators unanimously saw Śāntideva’s refutation as pertaining only to ultimate reality and *not* the relative one.³

In fact, the main point that the various pre-Tsong-kha-pa commentaries set forth is that the Mādhyamikas do not negate the conventional: they hold whatever is well renowned in the world to be as it is, being unconcerned with mere conventional reality. On the other hand, the innovative dGe-lugs interpretation of Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika on this point requires careful attention. Williams (1998, 70n16) points out that with “... Tsong-kha-pa and his disciples everything changes. It is here that we find the nonexistence even conventionally of *svasaṃvedana* consciously understood and articulated, and made into a doxographical strategy.”⁴ In contrast to all the other commentaries, Tsong-kha-pa comments on 9.26 by changing the point at stake: he modifies the line of the argument that the alleged opponent follows—namely, that without reflexivity there could be no cognition of objects (*mtshong ba, thos pa*, etc.)⁵—and interprets the passage as if the opponent was saying that without self-awareness there could be no *memory*, and *therefore* no experience of objects (*rang rig med na dran pa med pas yul myong ba dang mthong thos sogs med par ’gyur ro*).

which has turned out to be the cause of suffering.

Here it is interesting to see how La Vallée Poussin (1907, 116–117) translates “... *drṣṭam śrutam jñātam ...*”: “... la connaissance sensible, la connaissance par témoignage, la connaissance produite par le raisonnement ...”

3. For a long list of Indian and Tibetan commentaries, all unanimously concluding that Śāntideva does not refute self-awareness on the conventional level, see Williams (ibid., 61–73). For instance, just to mention the contribution of one commentator Williams considers, Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub (1290–1364) comments as follows: “*rang rgyu las bem po las ldog par skyes pa’i phyir ro || zhe na | rgyu rkyen las skyes na | de kho nar rang bzhin med pas khyab pas rang rig grub par ’gal zhing | nged la bem po ma grub pas de las ldog par grub pa ’gal lo ||*” (Bu-ston Rin-chen-grub 1971, 516). Then, he proceeds by saying: “*shes pa rang ma rig na | shes pa chos can | gzugs sgra mthong thos kyi tha snyad mi ’thad par thal | rang ma rig pa’i phyir zhe na | don dam par med par thal ba la bsal ba med |*” (ibid., 518). Bu-ston concludes by pointing out that the conventional is not refuted, only the thought of true existence: “*dngos po bden pa ma yin pa la don dam pa’i bden par rtog pa de | bzlog par bya ba yin te ...*” and therefore there is not even the slightest self-awareness ultimately: “*des na don dam par rang rig cung zad kyang med ...*” (id.).

4. Tsong-kha-pa (1956, folio 8b): “*des na rang rig la khyad par ma sbyar bar tha snyad du rang rig grub pa’ang slob dpon ’di mi bzhed par gsal te | rang rig [mi] bzhed na rnam shes dran par ji ltar ’gyur | zhes pa’i lan du gzhan myong ba dang ’brel pa las zhes sogs smas mi dgos kyi | rang rig pa’i rgyu mtshan gyis yin no zhes smos pas chog pas so || ci ste rang rig med na dran pa med pas yul myong ba dang mthong thos sogs med par ’gyur ro zhe na | ji ltar sogs rkang pa bzhi ste |.*” I keep here the changes that Williams (1998, 74n20) suggests, since Tsong-kha-pa “... must be alluding to *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.24 which reads: ‘*gal te rang rig yod min na | rnam shes dran par ji ltar ’gyur |.*’ The alternative in this context makes no sense.”

5. In La Vallée Poussin’s (1907, 116) annotated translation, the opponent’s argument in 9.26 would be the following: “Mais si la pensée ne se connaît pas elle-même, l’objet non plus n’est pas connu, et il faut nier toute l’expérience.”

And this a strategic move, because by doing so—as will be shown below—Candrakīrti turns out to be *the* main support, arguing against the necessity of self-awareness in order to have memory. In other words, commenting on 9.26 Tsong-kha-pa is the only interpreter who brings back the memory argument the opponent used previously—and which Śāntideva has rejected—in 9.24,⁶ only in a slightly modified version. In Śāntideva’s text there are no indications that could support such a reading and there is no apparent reason why Tsong-kha-pa should claim as such. Williams, delving into the possible reasons for such a reading, finally shows that it is quite a clever and refined commentarial strategy that serves to state that Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas, like Śāntideva, do not accept self-awareness even conventionally.

A crucial clue to solve the puzzle of Tsong-kha-pa’s unusual reading of 9.26 consists in the fact that dGe-lugs scholars support their position on *rang rig* by always giving the same quotation in support of their position.⁷ It comes from Candrakīrti’s *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.73, where it is stated, within the context of the memory argument: “... appealing to worldly conventions, even on such a basis, it is impossible for there to be memory which has *svasaṃvedana* as a cause.”⁸ The link between this passage, where Candrakīrti negates self-awareness, and Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.26 is created by inserting the memory argument into the end of Śāntideva’s treatment of *svasaṃvedana*. Thus, the dGe-lugs exegesis ends up finding no difference between Candrakīrti’s and Śāntideva’s discourses on this issue and this is seen to be of utmost importance since both thinkers are identified as members of the same philosophical school, Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka. Thus, the refutation of self-awareness even conventionally becomes one of the eight great difficult points, a list of topics that, if correctly interpreted, marks the true identity of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka school.⁹ rGyal-tshab Dar-ma-rin-chen’s *dKa’ gnas brgyad kyi zin bris rje’i gsung bzhin brjed byang du bkod pa*¹⁰ is the text where the refutation of *rang rig* conventionally represents one of those eight points, explained in terms of the possibility of memory without *rang rig* and the

6. For the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts of Śāntideva’s *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* 9.24, see Bhattacharya (1960, 191); for an annotated translation see La Vallée Poussin (1907, 116).

7. This reference is quoted, for instance, by Tsong-kha-pa (1973, 175; see Thurman 1984, 318), mKhas-grub-rje (1972, 422; see Cabézon 1992, 349), and Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa (1990, 756).

8. My translation of the Tibetan from La Vallée Poussin (1970, 169): “... ’jig rten gyi tha snyad kyi dbang du yin te | de lta na yang rang rig pa’i rgyu can gyi dran pa mi srid pa nyid do |.”

9. It must be said that, generally, a positive or negative attitude towards self-awareness is used by Tsong-kha-pa and his followers as a doxographical criterion to distinguish among Indian schools.

10. Concerning the authorship of the text, the contents are stated to go back to Tsong-kha-pa himself but nevertheless rGyal-tshab Dar-ma-rin-chen has been considered its author (Seyfort Ruegg 2002, 153–154).

argument that one can establish one's previous cognition of an object through one's recollection of the object itself.

The impact of the dGe-lugs doxographical move is evident when, by the time of rGyal-tshab Dar-ma-rin-chen, the whole claim that self-awareness does not exist conventionally has become thoroughly blended with the refutation of the memory argument. Concluding his comment on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.24, rGyal-tshab Dar-ma-rin-chen (1973, 222) straightforwardly states regarding Śāntideva's intentions: “*spyod 'jug gi dgongs pa ni tha snyad du rang rig 'gog pa min zhes pa ni rgyal sras chen po'i bzhed pa gtan min zhes gsung ngo ||*.”¹¹ Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa also adopts a—let's say—dGe-lugs style (and intention) in commenting on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.26, though changing the order of the elements involved in Tsong-kha-pa's interpretation of the opponent's argument. In fact, Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa (1990, 608) claims that the opponent's reasoning is the following: “If self-awareness does not exist, then there is no experiencing the object by seeing, hearing, etc. If that does not exist, then there is no memory and therefore even the conventions of [something] seen and heard and so on, expressed by saying ‘I saw’ or ‘I heard,’ do not exist.”¹²

Considering this strategic gGe-lugs move in reading *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.26 and looking for the way it can contribute to a global reflection upon the notion of self-awareness, the first point that can safely be made is, once again, on the key role of memory in arguing for or against the need of self-cognition. From the beginning, this research examined different uses of this argument, showing that the two concepts are deeply connected; here, however, there is a specific nuance that can be gained from the dGe-lugs strategy just mentioned. In fact, it seems to consist in a conscious and intentional shift aimed at not facing the challenge of the actual argument the text suggests through the viewpoint of the opponent, that is, that without self-awareness there could be no consciousness of objects, seeing, hearing, knowing, and so on. This is what Williams (1998, 74) defines as “an argument concerning the nature of consciousness as such (the ‘Śāntarakṣita’ argument),” that is, a Śāntarakṣita-like argument that self-awareness is necessary for ordinary experience. Does the fact that the dGe-lugs exegesis explicitly avoids the debate on this point betray a philosophical weakness? Why is Tsong-kha-pa so deeply concerned about the non-existence of conventional self-awareness? It will be seen that, from Mi-pham's point of view, to negate the conventional existence of *rang rig* would amount to miss the obvious reflexivity of mind.

11. Compare with a very similar passage in Tsong-kha-pa (2009, 357).

12. Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa (1990, 608): “*rang rig med na mthong thos sogs kyis yul myong ba med la de med na dran pa med pas ngas mthong ngas thos zhes pa'i mthong thos sogs kyi tha snyad kyang med par thal lo ...*”

Going through the implications and the reasons for such a negation, according to Garfield (2006, 220) there is a specific passage where Tsong-kha-pa actually *does* “... consider the claim that if there is no reflexivity to awareness, we would never be aware at all... .” Since this topic resonates with the claim of the opponent in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.26, so much so that it could be read as a sort of reply by Tsong-kha-pa, it is a passage worth considering. The excerpt from Tsong-kha-pa’s *dBu ma la ’jug pa’i rang ’grel dang rnam bshad dgongs pa rab gsal* (2009, 363) that Garfield translates is included here, together with the sentence immediately preceding and following it, with three parts being typographically marked:

*’di yang yid shes kyi dbang du byas kyi dbang shes kyi tshor ba gsum gyis gzugs sgra sogs
yongs su gcod de | de’i grub tshul ni sngar bshad pa bzhin no ||*
*’o na yid shes kyi tshor bas bde sdug sogs mngon gyur du gcod na rang rig tu mi ’gyur ram
snyam na |*
*skyon med de bkag pa’i rang rig ni shes pa thams cad kha nang lta la rig bya dang rig byed
tha dad par snang ba nub pa’i ’dzin rnam yan gar ba yin zhing | ’dir ni nyams su myong ba
khyad par can tshor ba’i mtshan nyid du mdo sder gsungs la | ’jig rten gyi tha snyad las
kyang bde ba dang sdug bsngal nyams su myong ngo zhes brjod pa’i phyir ro | myong bya
dang myong byed tha dad pa nyid du snang ba’i phyir na phyogs snga ma’i rang rig dang mi
gcig go || de’i phyir bde ba sogs nyams su myong bas grub pa nyid kyis tshor ba grub bo ||.*

Moreover, by the three feelings of the sense consciousnesses, that are subjected to the mental consciousness, forms, sounds and so on are determined: as for the way in which that is established, it is as previously said.¹³

Suppose one thinks as follows: Well then, if pleasant, unpleasant, and so on are directly/manifestly determined by the feeling of the mental consciousness, then doesn’t this turn out to be self-awareness? There is no such a fault because: concerning the self-awareness that we have denied, as for the inward orientation of all the consciousnesses, it is a separate apprehending aspect for which the appearing of the cognized and the cognizer as different has vanished; as for [what we are saying] here, distinct experience is taught to be the definition of feeling in the *sūtras*, and also in worldly conventions it is said: “I experience happiness/pleasure or suffering/pain.” Since what is experienced and the experiencer do indeed appear as different, it is not the same as the self-awareness of the previous part [of the argument]. Therefore,

13. This probably refers to a few lines above in the Tibetan text (Tsong-kha-pa 2009, 362), where three ways of understanding the word *feeling* (*tshor ba*) are listed, following the usual three-fold division (*’khor gsum*) into *byed pa po*, *byed pa*, and *las*: respectively, as the feeler (the person who feels), the feeling (the valid cognition, feeling as the mental factor itself), and what is felt (an object knowledge, that is, happiness/pleasant, suffering/unpleasant, or neutral feelings).

since there is experience of happiness/pleasure and so on, by this very proof feeling is proven.

Note that, unusually, Garfield (2006, 220–221) translates “... *yid shes kyi tshor bas ... gcod ...*” as “... one experiences ... through the introspective consciousness ...”; moreover, the central part of this passage is so shortened and edited by his translation that in the end his rendering looks more like a paraphrase.¹⁴ In the final part Garfield (*id.*), moving away from the textual source, states “... there is no need to posit reflexive awareness ...” whereas the Tibetan is as follows: “... *rang rig dang mi gcig go.*” Therefore, Garfield does not always stick to the Tibetan text and this does not help the reader to get oriented within the complex and precise epistemological dimension typical of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition. What is worse, such a translation enhances the feeling that we are getting to the actual core of the solution Tsong-kha-pa provides in refuting *rang rig* conventionally while saving awareness as such, whereas, at a closer look, this passage is not targeting this issue.

In fact, sticking to the Tibetan text, the opponent’s claim is as follows: if by the feelings of the mental consciousness pleasant/unpleasant are directly determined, isn’t this a case of self-awareness? And the point Tsong-kha-pa is making in his answer is that when talking about feelings in relation to the mental consciousness (*yid shes kyi tshor ba*), this situation is not the same as self-awareness. The reason is that what is experienced and the experiencer do indeed appear as different, whereas for the proponents of self-awareness the cognized and the cognizer are not different. The mental consciousness’s feeling of pain does not turn out to be self-awareness (where no subject-object distinction is present); holding that one’s mental consciousness feels one’s pain is not equivalent to holding *rang rig*. Moreover, since even without *rang rig* there is experience of pain/pleasure in a way that corresponds to the definition of feeling in the *sūtras* and wordily conventions, feeling is proved.

Although this is all the text seems to show, Garfield uses it in a slightly different way. He reads it as a passage that considers the opponent’s claim to be that if there is no *rang rig*, there is no awareness “*at all*” (*ibid.*, 220, italics mine). Thus, Garfield seems to be considering the opponent’s claim as targeting the possibility of *awareness as such* (instead of the possibility of *feeling*, in the way the question of the opponent and the very end of the passage clearly state), which is a much wider target than what is actually said—since it is related to just *yid shes kyi tshor ba* and not to the

14. Garfield (2006, 220–221): “We commit no such error, because the denial of reflexive awareness is consistent with the distinction between subject and object with respect to all cognitive states that are directed inwards According to mundane nominal convention as well, the experience of pleasure and pain occurs in this way.”

broader and more general category of *awareness itself*. For Garfield, then, Tsong-kha-pa answers by saying that even without self-awareness, the structure of *introspective consciousness* alone is able to guarantee awareness, since the introspective consciousness' structure maintains subject (the perceiver) and object (the perceived) as different, and this is exactly the way experience of pain or pleasure is conceived by mundane conventions; therefore, *rang rig* is not needed.

In shifting the target of the debate from mental feelings to awareness in general, Garfield's rendering of the whole Tibetan passage gives the reader the impression that this is the point where Tsong-kha-pa explains why and how conventional awareness *as such* is guaranteed even without *rang rig*, whereas an accurate reading of the Tibetan rather seems to show that Tsong-kha-pa is stating that our mental feelings of happiness and so forth are not the same as *rang rig*, simply because the experiencer and experienced are different. It is difficult to see more than that in Tshong-kha-pa's words.

For Garfield (2006, 221), this passage replies to the opponent's claim that *rang rig* is necessary in order to be aware of anything whatsoever: "Tsong-kha-pa anticipates that behind the view that awareness must be reflexive is the intuition that if it were not, there would be no awareness at all: how could I be said to be aware of a strawberry if I am not at the same time aware that I am aware of the strawberry?"¹⁵ And Tsong-kha-pa's alleged argument, according to Garfield (*id.*; italics mine), would be that "I certainly can be aware of the pleasure of a strawberry ... without being aware that I am aware of it." Garfield seems to be using this passage for making a wide and bold claim on awareness in *general*, despite Tsong-kha-pa's words referring to a *specific* case, namely, that of mental feelings. The use of the label *introspective consciousness* seems to be a convenient move to inflate the impact of the claim of this passage.

The claim Garfield makes on the basis of the above-mentioned passage also touches upon another important issue: the infinite regress of meta-awarenesses. Garfield maintains that, for Tsong-kha-pa, we can be aware of mental feelings without being aware that we are aware, while if we want to see if we are aware that we are aware we can do that by "... a further cognitive state, distinct from the first, and directed upon it. I can keep climbing the hierarchy of meta-awareness as long as I like, but that is only a *potential* regress, and hence is not vicious. I will get bored at some point with the endless contemplation of my own cognitive states and reach for another strawberry ..." (*id.*). Once again, if these considerations (although perhaps legitimate) are being made on the basis of this quoted passage, then the textual evidence is insufficient.

15. Curiously, the experience of strawberries is also the example Williams (1998, 135–136n17) chooses when commenting on the fact that, according to Mi-pham, "... there is a real problem in maintaining that the mind which is the subject is a separate substance from the happiness and so on which are its experiential objects when experiencing happiness etc., and that the happiness and so on which are the objects are separate from that mind" (*ibid.*, 135).

However, recalling the challenge of the opponent in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.26, the passage Garfield explicitly selects and offers as a possible point where Tsong-kha-pa does indeed consider this very question, does not exactly hit the point of proving that even without *rang rig* there is still ordinary awareness (*mthong, thos, shes*). Where Garfield suggests one can find Tsong-kha-pa's point on this issue, the point is not directly addressed and therefore further inquiry is required to form a complete view on Tsong-kha-pa's refutation of conventional *rang rig*.

Thus, in terms of the dGe-lugs refutation of *rang rig*, the refutation of the memory argument should be recalled once again. Tsong-kha-pa replies to the objection that without *rang rig* memory cannot occur can be found, for instance, in the pages devoted to *rang rig* in the *Drang nges legs bshad snying po* (Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa 1973, 170–179); in Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa/rGyal-tshab Dar-ma-rin-chen's *dKa' gnas brgyad kyi zin bris rje'i gsung bzhin brjed byang du bkod pa* (199?), where this topic is dealt with as part of the eight difficult points; and in the *dBu ma la 'jug pa'i rang 'grel dang rnam bshad dgongs pa rab gsal* (2009).¹⁶ For Tsong-kha-pa, as shown above, memory is to be conceived simply as a causal process while there is no conventional evidence of self-awareness: we can establish a previous cognition of an object through our recollection of the object itself. In other words, self-consciousness is considered to be unnecessary for memory because a previous consciousness that has experienced an object and the later recollection of that object have *the same* object. However, there have been intense reflections on the mechanism of memory, with different positions found even among dGe-lugs scholars.¹⁷

16. To see an excerpt of Tsong-kha-pa's way of reasoning and have a taste of how it goes, let's consider the following steps (2009, 352):

dran pas rang rig dpog pa min gyi | sngar bshad pa ltar dran pas sngar gyi shes pa la myong ba yod par dpog la | de la rang gis dang gzhan gyis myong ba gnyis su bcad nas bkag pa na | rang gis rang myong ba 'grub bo zhes smra mod kyang shes pas rig pa la mdo sde pa dang sems tsam pas bzhag pa de gnyis su kha tshon ma chod pa'i phyir te | mar mes rang gis rang gsal bar mi byed kyang | de la gsal ba mi ldog pa bzhin du | shes pas phyogs snga mas 'dod pa ltar du rang gis rang myong bar mi byed kyang de la myong ba tsam mi ldog pa'i phyir ro ||.

It is not that self-awareness is assessed by means of memory, rather, as previously said, by means of memory the existence of experience with respect to a previous consciousness is assessed. And as for that, if one refutes by distinguishing the two, experiencing by oneself and [experiencing] by other, then although it is said "It is proven that one experiences oneself," with respect to the fact that consciousness cognizes, the positions of Sautrāntika and Cittamātra, being of the same opinion, are not cut off into two. In fact, even though the butter lamp does not act to illuminate itself, the illumination is not refuted; similarly, even though a consciousness, as it is considered in the first part [of the argument], does not act to experience itself, the mere experience is not refuted.

17. See Cozort (1998, 160–169).

Since memory has always been deeply connected to the idea of self-awareness, Tsong-kha-pa's contribution is worth focusing on. For Jinpa (2002, 129), Tsong-kha-pa is concerned with a first-person perspective: "... whenever someone remembers an experience, that person always does so from a first-person perspective." Moreover, Jinpa (*ibid.*, 127–128) stresses the "rather pragmatic" approach of Tsong-kha-pa's account of memory, which for him is aimed at explaining *how* it occurs and not *why*, avoiding any attempt to speculate "beyond the phenomenal facts of the actual experience of memory," attempts that would lead to hypostatizing the phenomenon.

One more aspect of the dGe-lugs Prāsaṅgika view against self-awareness brings the discourse back to the luminosity of mind, a useful tool to shed light on their explanation of the function of memory (Cozort 1998, 160 ff.). Mind is luminous but it is not self-aware in a reflective or reflexive way. Rather, since consciousness is knowledge and luminosity by nature, it is self-certifying just by way of its functioning but does not know itself as an agent acting on itself—this point will be analyzed in below. Therefore, consciousness needs to be known no more than a lamp needs to be illuminated¹⁸ and, in what follows, it will be shown how this nature of mind becomes a reason for explaining memory. In Cozort's (*ibid.*, 173) words:

Consciousness shines forth as it knows its objects, and that shining forth is why it needs no further knower in order to be seen clearly at a later time. This, it seems, is finally how these explanations of memory without self-consciousness are justified; we can easily remember even that of which we were not specifically aware earlier simply because awareness shines forth just as does a previously experienced object. To engage in recollection, whether of the previously experienced object or of the consciousness that knew the object, is simple because one was illuminated and the other was simply luminous.

Jinpa's contribution to the discussion raises one more issue from the dGe-lugs argument against *rang rig*: the risk that consciousness, validating its own nature, would be independent and thus inherently existent. As Garfield (2006, 218) protests, "Though I do not agree that there is any evidence that Tsong-kha-pa ever offers it, this is indeed an argument that crops up in discussion with dGe-lugs scholars with disturbing regularity." While Jinpa (2002, 127) identifies in Tsong-kha-pa's main objection against *rang rig* the worry that "... positing such a faculty is tantamount to resurrecting the ghost of *svabhāva*, i.e., intrinsic being, which he has vehemently argued against." Williams (1998, 186–187) reports the same dGe-lugs argument, while Blumenthal (2004, 85)

18. For textual references, see Cozort (1998, 170–173).

mentions it, ascribing it to Tsong-kha-pa, albeit without quoting any textual evidence. The point here pertains to the following reasoning: if awareness is self-aware it would validate its own nature and thus be independent and inherently existent. Since nothing is inherently existent, there can be no self-awareness. Williams (1998, 187–188) and Garfield (2006, 219) agree on the fact that this is not a good argument, since self-validation is a different issue from causation: one cannot be mistaken in wondering whether one is having a certain mental event or not; nevertheless, from this it does not follow that our conscious episodes do not exist depending on their causes and conditions.¹⁹ Moreover, if it is commonplace that objects are validated as existing by consciousnesses, is it not reasonable, then, to assume that also awarenesses themselves have to be validated by some awareness? Candrakīrti's²⁰ reply is that we do not need self-awareness to certify or register the previous consciousness in the same way that an eye-consciousness is the certifier of a visual object: consciousnesses are certified simply by their activity of knowing an object, without the need to posit a two-fold movement of awareness, one towards itself (to certify itself) and the other towards the object (to certify the object).

Williams (1998, 206 ff.) attributes to the dGe-lugs system one more important argument against the conventional existence of *rang rig*, which Garfield (2006, 219) sums up as follows: “A nondual awareness by a Buddha of its own consciousness would be an ultimate truth, but would be a positive phenomenon.” The only ultimate truth is emptiness, which according to the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka view is a negative phenomenon. If self-awareness existed, the cognitions of a Buddha would be ultimate but would also cognize positive phenomena. Here we're faced with the limit-case of omniscience, an issue with which the discourse on self-awareness has dealt with since the beginning of its pre-Dignāga developments. Garfield (*ibid.*, 220) immediately refutes this argument Williams attributes to the dGe-lugs scholars, stating that it is not found in the texts of that school

19. Nevertheless, there seems to be a link between the validation by valid cognition and the discourse on causation; for a passage concerning validation by valid cognition, see Tsong-kha-pa (2009, 359–360): “*tshad ma 'grub pa la gzhal bya grub pa tsam gyis mi chog par tshad ma rang las tshad ma 'grub pa gzhan dag 'dod pa ltar yin na | gzhal bya la ma ltos par tshad ma 'grub par 'gyur || de 'dod na dngos po rnams rgyu rkyen gzhan la ma ltos par rab tu grub pa 'gyur ro || zhes bkag pas gzhal bya grub pa tsam gyis tshad ma grub par shugs kyis bstan no ||.*” Translating: “If it was as others [Yogācāras and Sautrāntikas] claim, that is, that *pramāṇa* is established by *pramāṇa* itself because it is insufficient for it to be established only by the *prameya*'s having been established, then *pramāṇa* would turn out to be established without dependence on *prameya*. If one claimed something like that, all objects would turn out to be established without depending on other, namely, causes and conditions. By negating what was just said, it is implicitly shown that a *pramāṇa* is established merely by the *prameya*'s having been established.” It is on the basis of this point, showing the mutual dependence of *pramāṇa* and *prameya*, that Moriyama (1995, 641), for instance, explains how and why Tsong-kha-pa does not admit self-awareness.

20. For textual references, see Cozort (1998, 165n27).

and, anyway, is a very bad argument. Its weakness is easy to show: a Buddha is aware not only of the ultimate but also of the conventional, thus the argument falls apart.

Nevertheless, it is worth dwelling a bit longer on this point in order to see just how problematic this issue can become. To begin with, the dGe-lugs presentation of omniscience needs to be examined, since it claims to be devoid of reflexivity. For Tsong-kha-pa, an omniscient consciousness knows an object in a manner appropriate to that object: conventional truths are known by way of dualistic appearances, whereas ultimate truths by way of the vanishing of dualistic appearances. Since the mind of a Buddha is a positive, conventional phenomenon, it has to be known by way of the appearance of subject and object as dual, that is, as different. However, here, the subject and the object are the same omniscient mind. How can a perfect omniscient mind know itself as different from itself, given that everything is the same as itself? Tsong-kha-pa—perhaps strategically—does not address the problem of how omniscience would know itself (Newland 1992, 201).

Among his disciples, rGyal-tshab-rje (1973, 211) suggests that a Buddha’s mind would know itself implicitly (*zhugs rtogs*), without appearing to itself, and he states (trying not to contradict Tsong-kha-pa’s statement that a Buddha does not have any implicit knowledge) that it would know itself *implicitly* in the sense that, despite being an *implicit* cognition, it would never be *secondary* (or implicit) to other explicit realizations.²¹ Thus, rGyal-tshab-rje faces the problem by claiming that omniscience knows itself implicitly, that is to say, without any appearance of itself. On the other hand, for mKhas-grub-rje a Buddha’s mind must know itself *explicitly* (following Tsong-kha-pa) and in order for it to be a non-mistaken consciousness there is no alternative: Buddha’s mind must know itself explicitly and non-dualistically. This said, however, it does not seem to be a proper solution: one of the problems is that, if that was the case, then there would be something like *rang rig*, which is refuted by the Prāsaṅgika. The later dGe-lugs scholar ’Jam-dbyangs-bzhad-pa (1648–1721) holds a position that is even more tricky and dangerous since, by its account, it seems—at least, following Newland’s (1992, 206–208, and 298–299n55) reading—that a Prāsaṅgika can assert the existence of *rang rig* conventionally.

The overall considerations Newland suggests, at the end of his inquiry on the topic of omniscience from the dGe-lugs perspective, revolve around the need to find a reasonable explanation for the general difficulties the dGe-lugs system encounters when talking about the Buddha ground. For Newland (*ibid.*, 214), the predominant dGe-lugs approach is “... to speak in

21. Just to make this point clearer, Newland (1992, 200) gives the following example of a cognition that is implicit or secondary to another one: the realization of the ability to hold water, which is secondary to the realization of a pot.

terms that make sense in relation to where we are now.” They adopt a philosophically and pedagogically appropriate strategy (allegedly) of giving teachings that are “... geared to be grasped by, and therefore to benefit, minds enmeshed in conceptuality and a world of conventional distinctions” (*ibid.*, 216). However, the question of how dGe-lugs explain the knowledge that a Buddha’s mind has of itself without positing *rang rig* seems to remain unanswered.

There is a clear thread running through the entire dGe-lugs Prāsaṅgika position in its refutation of *rang rig*, that is, the distinction into two realities: the conventional and the ultimate. Its reasoning stems from the fundamental rejection of inherent existence even conventionally and their approach consists in reflecting the conventions of the world while avoiding the assumption of conventional metaphysical entities, the establishment of which would require ultimate analysis. Self-consciousness is, for them, in opposition to worldly conventions and not necessary for memory. Searching for a means of establishing a consciousness (be it through self-experiencing or as the object experienced by another consciousness) is searching for an imputed object which is not posited by worldly conventions, not obvious, and requiring ultimate analysis. If self-awareness can be established at all, it must be proved by ultimate analysis and not merely through conventional reasoning, a reasoning that investigates conventional phenomena. If it exists at all, it must exist ultimately.²²

Why, then, is Tsong-kha-pa so concerned about the conventional status of *rang rig*? Mi-pham’s considerations on Tsong-kha-pa’s view help bring this point into focus. Actually, the doctrine of self-awareness enters Indian Buddhist thought through the Cittamātra school, in order to provide an account of the mental as intentional, despite the absence of external objects. Therefore, the refutation presented by Candrakīrti and Śāntideva is framed within the general criticism of this philosophical system. However, at the time of Tsong-kha-pa’s formulation of Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka, the cultural and philosophical target and its challenges change, as Garfield (2006, 222) remarks:

22. For inspiring considerations on how Tsong-kha-pa deals with the two philosophical dimensions of *pramāṇa* and Madhyamaka, see Duckworth (2015). Dreyfus (1997, 335 ff.) expresses quite a harsh opinion on the combination of these two elements in the dGe-lugs view. However, he provides a useful overview of the different stances of Tibetan scholarship on various issue connected to *rang rig*: its possible objects, the role of the aspect (*rnam pa*), and so on. For further thoughts on the dGe-lugs synthesis of *pramāṇa* and Madhyamaka, see Hopkins (1983), Newland (1992), Dreyfus (1997), Jinpa (2002), and Dreyfus (2003). It is worth mentioning also the more recent tendency, within Western contemporary scholarship, to read the dGe-lugs ontological framework by reducing it to a mere linguistic or epistemological project, thus missing its rather radical ontological orientation about the nature of phenomena. In such semantic interpretation of Madhyamaka we include mainly Siderits (1988), and Priest and Garfield (2002), for whom the Madhyamaka philosophy would merely be a view concerning the limits of thought and language in getting reality accessed, known and expressed.

... when we take Śāntarakṣita's discussion into account, the doxographic landscape changes, and we see that while for Cittamātra it is the ultimate status of reflexivity that matters, for Svātantrika reflexivity is posited conventionally as the mark of the mental. Given that the refutation of this position is central to Tsong-kha-pa's original formulation of the distinctiveness of Prāsaṅgika-madhyamaka, attention to the conventional status of reflexivity makes more sense.

On the other hand, it can also be said, according to Blumenthal (2004, 226; with my adjustments for the transliterations from Tibetan), that “dGe-lugs criticism of self-cognizing cognition seems for the most part to be aimed at the position as held by Yogācāras such as Dignāga. That view was the target for Candrakīrti's criticisms, which they follow. Almost no reference is found in dGe-lugs writings relating to the manner in which Śāntarakṣita defines the term.” Regardless, the ontological project of the dGe-lugs Prāsaṅgika builds up a sophisticated synthesis of the epistemology derived from the works of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti and the anti-essentialist dialectic of Candrakīrti; within it, the ontology of the two truths forms the very core.²³

Thus far, many arguments against self-awareness, even as a conventional entity, have been examined; documenting the recurrence of the memory argument as well as the intricacies regarding explanations of the omniscient mind's knowledge of itself. The doxographical use of self-awareness has been shown as a criterion for making distinctions among the various philosophical tenets as well as examining the issue of the luminosity of mind as it is conceived in the absence of self-awareness. Moreover, the dGe-lugs line of thought on self-awareness has been considered within the frame of the dGe-lugs anti-essentialist ontological project, which revolves around their understanding of the two truths and is the key element in their attack on the notion of *rang rig*.

23. For a list of the main sources (such as passages from the *Ratnacūḍapariṣchāsūtra*, Candrakīrti's and Nāgārjuna's works) the Prāsaṅgika refutation of self-consciousness is traced back to by the dGe-lugs exegesis, see Cozort (1998, 158–160).

2. Mi-pham: Positing Reflexive Self-awareness Conventionally

After examining Tsong-kha-pa's position on *rang rig* and his rejection of its conventional existence, let's contrast this with Mi-pham's standpoint to unravel the implications of this debate. In his commentary to Śāntideva's *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* 9, *sPyod 'jug shes rab kyi le'u'i tshig don go sla bar rnam par bshad pa nor bu ke ta ka* (Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho n.d.c), Mi-pham²⁴ attempts to explain why Śāntideva (and thus Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka) should not be read as negating the conventional existence of *svasaṃvedana*, by using references and theories that dGe-lugs scholars could understand. Mi-pham also does so by replying to his dGe-lugs Mādhyamika critics in two texts: the *brGal lan nyin byed snang ba* (Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho n.d.b), replying to Tre-bo-brag-dkar-sprul-sku Blo-bzang dPal-ldan-bstan-'dzin, and the *gZhan gyis brtsad pa'i lan mdor bsdu pa rigs lam rab gsal de nyid snang byed* (Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho 1984–1993), replying to dPa'-ri Blo-bzang-rab-gsal.²⁵ Mi-pham argues that from the Prāsaṅgika point of view (and thus from the perspective of Candrakīrti and Śāntideva) self-awareness exists conventionally but does not exist on the ultimate level.

Mi-pham's theory of self-awareness very much resembles Śāntarakṣita's. Mi-pham presents consciousness as that which is luminosity and awareness, and as characterizing what is not insentient/matter. Moreover, for him, consciousness is partless and unitary (always following Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamakālamkāra* 16–17, discussed when talking about his view). Here follows a crucial quote from Mi-pham (n.d.a, 142):

'di ltar gzhal bya sna tshogs pa snang ba'i yul dang | de 'dzin pa'i yul can so sor yod pa lta bu'i snang tshul gyi dbang du byas te gzung mam dang 'dzin rnam zhes bzhag kyang don la rnam par shes pa gang zhig shing rta dang rtsig pa la sogs pa bem po'i rang bzhin gsal rig dang bral ba dag las bzlog pa gsal zhing rig pa'i mtshan nyid can du rab tu skye ba ste | de ltar bem po min pa'i rang bzhin gang yin pa de lta bu 'di ni bdag rang nyid shes pa'am rang rig rang gsal zhes pa yin no ||.

Thus, we have posited an “apprehended aspect” and an “apprehending aspect,” for they concern the mode of appearance that consists in having, as separate, an object—namely, the appearances of many various objects of knowledge—and a subject which apprehends it. Nevertheless, actually, any consciousness occurs as possessing the feature of luminosity and

24. For an introduction to Mi-pham and his philosophical view, see Duckworth (2008; 2010; 2011; 2015), Kapstein (2000), Garfield (2006), Pettit (1999), Phuntsho (2005), and Wangchuk (2012).

25. For the debate between Mi-pham and dPa'-ri Blo-bzang-rab-gsal, see Viehbeck (2014).

awareness, and as the opposite of those things which have the nature of matter and are devoid of luminosity and awareness—such as a chariot, a wall and so on. Thus what is by nature not matter is “cognition of its very own self,” or “self-awareness,” “self-luminosity.”

Consciousness has a unitary and partless nature, where the three-fold structure of action, doer, and object is not admissible.²⁶ Reflexivity, which is constitutive of consciousness, is what makes experience *experience*, and one cannot doubt (“*rang la mngon du gsal zhing the tshom med pa*”)²⁷ that an experience is happening when it is happening; one knows that one knows in the very act of knowing.

As a proponent of the conventional existence of *rang rig*, by considering the common example of the sword which is unable to cut itself, Mi-pham claims that if we took it to mean that there is no *rang rig* even conventionally then some absurd consequences would follow.²⁸ Thus, while Mi-pham holds that the Prāsaṅgikas do not refute the conventional existence of self-awareness, he also wants to argue the positive counterpart: that, on the conventional level, consciousness is indeed characterized by reflexivity and that incorporating it into Prāsaṅgika’s philosophical tenet would be like medicine.²⁹ Among the various lines of thought that Mi-pham adopts to convince (dGe-lugs) Prāsaṅgikas to accept *rang rig* conventionally, one is his insistence on the definition of consciousness as luminosity and awareness, in opposition to insentience. The issue, for Mi-pham, is not whether or not consciousness is conscious of an object but rather what this means and how it is possible. Mi-pham’s dGe-lugs critics share the same definition of consciousness as luminosity and awareness; however, since this is what distinguishes mind from matter, *inter alia*, consciousness makes itself known in making objects known. According to Mi-pham, what else could luminosity and awareness mean here? Consciousness as consciousness must be reflexive (as Śāntarakṣita claims, too). Note, therefore, that the definition of consciousness as luminous and aware is the bridge Mi-pham uses in order to move from (what he sees as) the

26. Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho (n.d.a, 142–143): “*gcig pu cha med rang bzhin la | gsum gyi rang bzhin mi 'thad phyir | de yi rang gis rig pa ni | bya dang byed pa 'i dngos por min ||.*”

27. Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho (n.d.b, 207).

28. Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho (n.d.b., 210): “*de 'i phyir ral gri 'i dpe la sogs pa la bsams na ral gri rang gis rang tha snyad du gcod pa med mod kyi | de tsam gyis dpe can tha snyad du yang med mi dgos te bum sogs skye med kyi dper mo gsham bu sogs bkod pa bzhin no || de lta min na rang blo rang gis mngon sum shes pa tha snyad du yang med par 'gyur te 'og tu yang 'chad par 'gyur ro ||.*”

29. Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho (n.d.b., 210): “*... thal 'gyur ba 'i lugs la gnod pa med par ma zad phan byed kyi sman ltar 'gyur ro ||.*”

Prāsaṅgikas *not denying* the conventional existence of *svasaṃvedana* to his wish to make them *positively affirm* it (Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho, n.d.c, 143–144).

In commenting on *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* 9.26, Mi-pham observes that “In brief, as for the refutation of *svasaṃvedana*, it is a refutation ultimately but it is not a refutation of conceiving *svasaṃvedana* conventionally, as the mere reverse of matter/insentience.”³⁰ Here there is a direct reference to Śāntarakṣita’s stance, thus Mi-pham’s claim supports a view that is explicitly detached from the Cittamātra philosophical tenet, which posits the ultimate existence of self-awareness. He reads Candrakīrti’s *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.73, which is the strategic support (as was previously shown) for all the dGe-lugs arguments against the conventional existence of *rang rig*, in such a way as to provide an interpretation that fits his view (Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho n.d.b, 201 ff.). Moreover, one methodological or logical criticism Mi-pham poses to the dGe-lugs scholars is that it is not correct to hold with such certitude that *svasaṃvedana* does not exist conventionally just through the mere absence, in Prāsaṅgika texts, of its affirmation on the conventional level. Especially because Prāsaṅgika are well-known for not *caring* about conventional reality, being solely concerned with liberation from grasping to the true existence of phenomena. As Pettit (1999, 497–498) remarks, one of Mi-pham’s arguments claims that things that are harmed by conventional valid cognition should not be posited conventionally; however, if everything that is negated ultimately is likewise not posited conventionally, then the *skandhas* and *dhātus*, for instance, would also have to be accepted as completely non-existent. Another crucial methodological critique that Mi-pham expresses is that, if the reflexivity of awareness was refuted even conventionally, then it would be like a permanent sound or the Creator God of the theists, which would also be harmed by a valid cognizer examining the conventional. However, that is not possible for *svasaṃvedana*: it cannot be refuted by any valid cognition analyzing the conventional³¹ and, actually, has many compelling supporting arguments.

In his commentary to Śāntideva’s *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* 9, Mi-pham offers four arguments—each, following the Prāsaṅgika style of debate, the *reductio*—in favor of the conventional existence of self-awareness. It is important to go through them, for they target relevant philosophical issues. They are listed and addressed by Williams (1998, 92 ff.) as follows:

30. Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho (n.d.c, 21–22): “*mdor na rang rig pa 'gog pa ni don dam par 'gog pa yin gyi bem po las log tsam la tha snyad du rang rig par 'dogs pa 'i tshul de 'gog pa ma yin te |.*”

31. Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho (n.d.b, 201): “*... rtag pa 'i sgra dang dbang phyug byed pa po la sogs pa bzhin du tha snyad dpyod byed kyi tshad mas gnod pa dngos su yod pa dgos na 'di la de mi srid pa 'i phyir ro ||.*”

- i) “To negate *svasaṃvedana* understood in this sense would necessarily be to hold that one’s mind is a hidden object for oneself (*de bkag na rang blo rang la lkog tu gyur par khas len dgos pas*). ... It would mean that experience lack validation” (Williams 1998, 92–93).
- ii) “Because of (i) it would follow that there would be no distinction in the manner of determination by consciousness of the minds of oneself and another (*rang gzhan gyi blo shes pas gcod tshul la khyad med du thal ba*)” (*ibid.*, 94–95). One should have privileged access to one’s own mind, but if consciousness lacks reflexivity and becomes a hidden object for oneself one would know one’s own mind in the same way as one knows of the minds of others.
- iii) “Moreover, proving that there exists a mind in one’s own continuum would be unreasonable (*dang rang rgyud la blo yod pa’i sgrub byed mi rigs pa*)” (*ibid.*, 95). How would it be possible to ever prove to oneself that one has a mind, if it is a hidden object for oneself? Here many problems arise, including a very serious one: “... there could be no inference based on data provided from experience, since one has yet to prove one’s own mind and therefore the possibility of experience” (*id.*).
- iv) “Eventually, the transactional conventions of awareness of referents would also be annihilated (*mthar don rig gi tha snyad kyang rgyun chad par ’gyur ba sogs*). Obviously, if one could not know one’s own mind then there could be no conscious awareness of cognitive referents” (*ibid.*, 96).

Without the reflexivity of mind as a basis for all further mental activities, the whole cognitive system would collapse and the entire experiential field would lack its validation and constitutive boundaries. Garfield (2006, 215; italics in original) helps reveal the significance of these arguments for a global philosophical discourse on self-awareness: “Mi-pham is worried that to deny the reflexivity of awareness would be to deny the immediacy of self-knowledge, privileged access, the certainty of one’s own existence as a mind, and the possibility even of mediated knowledge, since one would not know anything as one’s *own* representation.” These points are still tremendously relevant and will be addressed in the last chapter (ch. VI) of the present inquiry, when looking at contemporary philosophy of mind.

One crucial point that is implied in argument (i) of the above list should be remarked upon. For Mi-pham, *rang rig* is the epistemological *basis* for all the other types of cognition. Williams (1998, 94n7) comments on this point by explaining that “Inference is generated in dependence upon a perceptually-experienced sign (the perception of smoke as an indication of fire on the mountain).

Therefore, the very root of inference is direct perception, and that perception is (itself) ascertained by self-awareness” Kapstein (1993, 158) paraphrases Mi-pham as follows:

All that is experienced through other modes of direct perception is ascertained as direct perception through self-presentation. If that were not the case, direct perception would in effect be epistemically unfounded (*'grub mi 'gyur te*). Inference is rooted in direct perception. Direct perception is made certain by self-presentation. After arriving at this, the experience of one’s own mind, with respect to which there can be no error (*ma 'khrul blo yi nyams myong*), there can be no farther proof (*sgrub byed*).³²

Therefore, according to Mi-pham, from the epistemological point of view all conceptual cognitions (*anumāna: rjes dpag*) culminate in perceptual cognitions (*pratyakṣa: mngon sum*), while all perceptual cognitions culminate in self-awareness, which is the cognition where one’s own mind is experienced as non-erroneous (*ma 'khrul pa*).³³

The huge body of interpretative work that Mi-pham elaborates has to be read in terms of a theoretical and doxographical perspective, that is, as a detailed and sophisticated method aimed at harmonizing rDzogs-chen thought with more mainstream scholastic traditions. In fact, in the rDzogs-chen tradition, as will become clear in the next chapter (ch. V) of the thesis, the reflexivity of mind plays a very crucial role, being the luminous movement—so to speak—of the self-recognition of one’s own mind’s nature. Reflexivity has to be positively affirmed conventionally so that the whole process of self-awareness and self-liberation can actually unfold. Thus, the underlying soteriological concerns play an important role in Mi-pham’s project, aimed at providing a Madhyamaka account that accords with the rDzogs-chen view (Kapstein 2000, 117–118). Thus, if Tsong-kha-pa’s exegetical project is aimed at providing an ontological criticism of the independent nature of self-awareness, thus being a delicate and refined process of subtraction, taking even conventional reality away from self-awareness, Mi-pham’s project leads in the opposite direction, towards the addition of conventional reality to *rang rig*. The implications of this debate, as demonstrated, are deep and complicated; here, the main elements have been outlined, enriching the

32. Note that here Kapstein renders *rang rig* as “self-presentation.”

33. Here in Mi-pham’s words: “*mngon sum rang rig nyid kyis nges || ma 'khrul blo yi nyams myong la || thug nas sgrub byed gzhan du med ||*” (Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho 2007a, 437); “*de thams cad shes pas rang rang gi yul mngon sum myong ba yin zhing | myong ba thams cad kyi mtha' rang rig pa la thug pa ste | mngon sum myong ba'i don la sgrub byed gzhan mi dgos pa ni | rang blo ma 'khrul pa nyid rang gsal du nyams su myong ba las the tshom chod pa yin pas rang rig 'di ni tshad ma thams cad kyi mtha' gtug sa yin no ||*” (id., 2007b, 294); “*mngon sum gyi mtha' rang rig gis nges te ma 'khrul pa'i blo yi nyams myong la thug nas sgrub byed gzhan btsal mi dgos pa bde sogs nyams su myong ba bzhin no ||*” (ibid., 295).

range of ontological, epistemological and doxographical reflections on the delicate and heatedly debated issue of self-awareness. Leading, also, to some final considerations regarding a dialogue between the tradition's contribution and the contemporary inquiry on self-cognition.

V. *Rang rig* and Soteriological Breakthrough

1. Gnosis and Soteriology in the rNying-ma Tradition

The pre-Dignāga Buddhist sources mentioned in the first part of this research connect the idea of self-awareness with soteriological issues mostly related to omniscience, whereas later, at the time of its technical formulation within Buddhism's epistemological turn, this notion acquires a notably epistemological orientation. In addition to the intersections between its soteriological and epistemological aspects, its ontological framework also plays a crucial role in the development of the notion of self-awareness, formulating it either as a presupposition of the whole metaphysical system as accessed through experience or as an explanation of it. This chapter attempts to shed light on some understandings of *rang rig* that have been chosen as representative of at least the main aspects of the role it plays on the spiritual path towards liberation, in terms of yogic practice and soteriological breakthrough. To that end, some sources belonging to the rNying-ma tradition in general and its rDzogs-chen view in particular¹ will be taken here as emblematic of this dimension of the discourse.

The reason why this school is particularly relevant for the present inquiry rests, first of all, in the specific gnoseological dimension it deepens and taps into. Note that in this chapter the term “gnoseology” will be specifically (and unusually) used to refer to a discourse about gnosis (*jñāna: ye shes*), the high-level mind at the stage of a Buddha or at other stages of the path towards enlightenment, as opposed to “epistemology,” that in the present chapter will indicate the discourse about the ordinary mind (*citta: sems*).² Gnoseology represents a higher version of epistemology and, as it will become clear, this usage of this pair of terms reflects and is based on the philosophical outlook of the rNying-ma tradition.

In fact, as Davidson (2004, 236; with my adjustments for the transliterations from Tibetan) states, “If Indic works featuring knowledge (*jñāna*) seemed privileged in the eleventh century,

1. Teachings classified as rDzogs-chen are common to the rNying-ma school of Buddhism and the pre-Buddhist Bon tradition; the present thesis considers only the former system of thought. For a detailed historical and philosophical overview of rNying-ma rDzogs-chen, see Germano (1994); for a study of the obscure regions in which the rDzogs-chen scriptures were created, see van Schaik (2004b). For a systematic overview of Bon rDzogs-chen philosophy, see Rossi (1999).

2. To further clarify this usage of the terms “gnoseology” and “epistemology” and their implications, see Wangchuk (2007, 43).

awareness commanded much of the field in many rNying-ma centers.” Talking about Rong-zom Chos-kyi-bzang-po (1012–1088) and other rNying-ma figures, he (*ibid.*, 235; with my adjustments for the transliterations from Tibetan) remarks: “In Rong-zom’s case, as with some rNying-ma scholars, he closely followed and amplified the Indian emphasis on gnosis [*jñāna: ye shes*] ... to develop an indigenous gnoseology.” In fact, the rNying-ma “spiritual culture” is typified by the focus it puts, especially in the rDzogs-chen view, on an account of philosophy of mind in which the gnoseological (from ‘gnosis,’ *ye shes*) aspect plays a crucial role: the level of *rig pa*, or primordial gnosis (*ye shes*), as opposed to that of ordinary consciousness (*rnam shes* or *sems*), is the key-element of the whole system. In terms of the difference between these two dimensions, Germano and Waldron’s (Germano and Waldron 2006, 53) explain:

It is a distinction between distorted and optimal experience, as well as the corresponding unconscious matrices. More typically, the focus is on the ordinary mind (*sems*) or ordinary consciousness (*rnam shes*) contrasted to pure awareness (*rig pa*) or primordial cognition (*ye shes*). The discussions are straightforward in terms of buddhology—namely, models of consciousness for Buddhas in contrast to sentient beings, or, in epistemological terms, the contrast of global, holistic, and reflexive modes of awareness to ... dualistic, and non-reflexive modes of awareness.

This specific tradition of Tibetan Buddhism has a particular relevance for a (universal) philosophical discourse on consciousness, in that the fundamental *sems/ye shes* distinction has deep philosophical implications; the richness of this specifically gnoseological account has not yet been properly analyzed by modern scholarship, and Higgins (2012, 441) points out

... the absence of any systematic appraisal of rNying-ma views on the nature of mind that traces their evolution and complex relationships with other Indian Buddhist philosophies of mind such as Cittamātra, Madhyamaka, Pramāṇavāda, and Vajrayāna. The rNying-ma views merit attention not only because of their intrinsic interest and relevance to contemporary philosophies of mind but also because they provide an invaluable key to understanding the tradition’s distinctive doctrines and practices.

Thus, center stage and the formative element of the rDzogs-chen (and rNying-ma) system is the distinction between the dualistic mind (*sems*) and primordial gnosis (*ye shes*); this difference emerges as a key component of the whole system, deemed indispensable for understanding its philosophy and meditation practice, as well as the soteriological discourse of proceeding towards

liberation. This tight link between gnosis and soteriology becomes clear when further considering the implications of the *sems/ye shes* distinction.

Primordial gnosis refers to a mode of knowledge that is considered genuine and primordial, in contrast to normal cognition, which is adventitious, transient and derivative. Germano (1992, 829), in his “Mini-Encyclopedia of Great Perfection Terminology,” depicts the rDzogs-chen technical take on the term *rig pa* as indicating the “... ‘aware-ing’ dimension of the Universe itself in its pure undiluted intensity... .” On the other hand, what characterizes the ordinary cognitive activity of *sems* is a “distorted derivative” (*id.*) of that very radiation of intense awareness, a dualistic distortion of the dimension of *rig pa* as it is considered in rDzogs-chen tradition, which is “... ever-present awareness in its unrestricted openness and undefiled purity ...” (Higgins 2013, 84). The *sems/ye shes* distinction, for Higgins (2012, 442) is:

... first systematically presented in the seventeen Atiyoga *tantras* (*rgyud bcu bdun*) that make up the Heart Essence (*snying thig*) subclass of the Esoteric Guidance Class (*man ngag sde*) of rDzogs-chen teachings. These teachings often take the form of personal instructions advising the practitioner to discern within the flux of adventitious thoughts and sensations that characterize dualistic mind (*sems*) an invariant pre-representational structure of awareness known as primordial knowing, open awareness or the nature of Mind (*sems nyid*) from which this turmoil arises. The idea is to directly recognize (*rang ngo shes*) and become increasingly familiar with this abiding condition without confusing it with any of its derivative and distortive aspects.

Many esoteric instructions (*man ngag*) on distinguishing mind and primordial gnosis are found among rNying-ma collections (such as, for instance, the *Bai ro'i rgyud 'bum*) and are some of the earliest evidence of deep gnoseological works where a rich use of terminology specifies the mode of awareness of primordial gnosis (*ye shes*). In varying combinations, this is referred to as *rig pa*, *rang rig*, *byang chub kyi sems* (*bodhicitta*), and *sems nyid* (Mind). Dualistic mind, on the other hand, is understood in the rDzogs-chen gnoseological system by combining also analyses taken from Cittamātra and Madhyamaka sources.

This being said, what is the meaning and importance of such a structural division for the path towards liberation? How does the gnoseological dimension intersect soteriology? To answer these questions and unpack the straightforward claim Higgins (2012, 443) makes about “The rDzogs-chen philosophy of mind [as] inseparable from its distinctive soteriology,” it is important to

identify the way in which a rDzogs-chen practitioner goes through the path to liberation in the first place.

What is, then, the soteriological model of the Great Perfection view? It has an underlying “... inclusivist schematization of the Buddhist path in terms of the progressive disclosure of primordial knowing—a clearing process (*sbyong byed*) that seamlessly integrates elements of Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna and rDzogs-chen—that lays the doctrinal and hermeneutical foundation for all the subsequent rNying-ma treatments” (*id.*). In fact, the nature of Mind, or *buddha*-nature, is available to both enlightened beings and sentient beings; however, it is not easily accessible to the latter, for whom it is covered by the distortions of the dualistic mind. In other words, the rDzogs-chen model that describes the way one becomes enlightened is not one of *abandonment and obtainment*, that is, where one discards distorted behaviors and mental attitudes and cultivates wholesome ones (a model that could be referred to, in general, as the *sūtra* tradition); it is not even one that retraces the tantric dynamic of *transformation* of one’s ordinary consciousness into the enlightened one;³ on the contrary, it is a process of “recovery or retrieval,” “disclosure” (Higgins 2012), or *revelation* of what otherwise is obscured and covered by afflictive distortions. “On this account, the Buddhist path is construed not as a developmental process of accumulating merits and knowledge that serve as causes and conditions leading to goal-realization (as in Mahāyāna gradualist paradigm), but as a disclosive process of directly recognizing and becoming increasingly familiar with primordial knowing as the mind’s objectifications and their obscuring effects subside” (*ibid.*, 445). In more general terms, following Seyfort Ruegg, as elaborated by Wangchuk (2007, 38–41), in the Māhāyana it is possible to identify two main soteriological ways of becoming a *buddha*: “... what I call the ‘generation model’ and the ‘revelation model,’ which, borrowing from Seyfort Ruegg [1989, 3], could also be termed the ‘nurture model’ and the ‘nature model,’ respectively” (Wangchuk 2007, 39). Whereas the former entails the two accumulations of merit and wisdom in order to *generate* the *buddha* bodies (*kāya*), the latter implies spiritual practices that *reveal* the (*buddha*) nature that every being already has. In rDzogs-chen, the latter model is adopted,⁴ specifying that it is not a gradual model but rather a model according to which the

3. In this respect, see Germano’s (1992, 87–88) words relating to Klong-chen-pa’s thought of enlightenment.

4. See this very distinction depicted by Klong-chen-pa (1983a, 1169.4–1170.5) and Rong-zom-pa (1999c, 32.6–8).

ontological-soteriological ground (*gzhi*), path (*lam*), and goal (*'bras bu*) are conceived of as a singular point.⁵

In light of what has been said, the close connection between soteriology and gnoseology in the Great Perfection soon becomes clear. In distinguishing between *sems* or *rnam shes* and *ye shes*, as, for instance, in some Mahāyāna and rDzogs-chen literature, gnosis is ranked higher than ordinary mind or cognition. This is clearly indicated in the doctrine of the four types of reliance (*pratisaraṇa: rton pa*).⁶ “For a seeker of salvation within Buddhism, the cognitive acuteness of mind is certainly a valuable asset, but it can never take the place and role of gnosis ...” (Wangchuk 2007, 43), and this is of utmost importance, given that “The actual spiritual breakthrough in Buddhism is an intellectual event, inasmuch as a direct cognitive insight is called for, not a physiological or emotional one” (*id.*).⁷ The salvific value of understanding and knowing, a typical feature of Indian thought, in rDzogs-chen is actually fully-fledged: discovering and recognizing the gnoseological dimension of *rig pa*, and familiarizing with it, corresponds to soteriological *praxis*.

In light of this tight link between the two above-mentioned dimensions, which actually might be seen as two different perspectives on the same issue, nothing has yet been said about *rang rig* itself. What, then, is the soteriological role it plays in the rDzogs-chen path to liberation? How is it conceived within the framework of the *sems/ye shes* distinction? The following sections will show that in the rNying-ma tradition the term *rang rig* is associated with the gnoseological dimension of *rig pa*. It is used synonymously with expressions such as *rang byung (gi) ye shes* (self-occurring gnosis),⁸ *rang byung rig pa* (self-occurring awareness), and *'od gsal* (luminosity).⁹ By deepening

5. This is an idea also proposed by Rong-zom-pa in 1999a (94.11–13 and, more explicitly, also 201.24–202.3, where it says: “*sangs rgyas sa'i chos thams cad kyang 'di'i gnas skabs su gzhi dang lam dang 'bras bu'i chos mams rang bzhin bye brag tu gyur pa med de | gzhi nyid lam du byas pa yin la | 'bras bu gzhi las khyad par 'phags pa med pas | 'di ni sangs rgyas thams cad kyi gsang ba'i man ngag nges pa'i don mthar thug pa yin no zhes bstan no ||*”).

6. See Fukuda and Ishihama (1989, no. 1548–1551) s.v. “*rton pa bzhi'i ming la*”; Sakaki ([1916] 1987, no. 1545–1548) s.v. “*rton pa bzhi'i ming la*”; in particular, see the fourth one: “*ye shes la rton par bya'i rnam shes la rton par mi bya ba*” (Fukuda and Ishihama 1989, no. 1551; Sakaki [1916] 1987, no. 1548), that is, one has to rely on *ye shes*, and not on *rnam shes*.

7. See for instance Rong-zom-pa (1999a, 198.5–10) and, more importantly, the passage (*id.*, 1999c, 32.6–8) where Rong-zom-pa claims that “it is commonly known that from the basis of the *śrāvaka* vehicle to the culmination, that is Great Perfection, when one sees the correct sense/reality, one is liberated.” (“*di ltar nyan thas kyi theg pa nas gzhi bzung nas | rdzogs pa chen po'i mthar thug gi bar du | gang zhig yang dag pa'i don mthong na rnam par grol lo zhes thun mong du grags pa yin la |*”)

8. On the notion of *rang byung gi ye shes* see, for instance, Almogi (2009, 206):

The notion of self-occurring gnosis (*svayaṃbhūjñāna: rang byung [gī] ye shes*) in the sense of intrinsic gnosis is central to the philosophy of the rNying-ma school, particularly in connection with

the implications of the view of self-awareness and pointing out the specificities of some rDzogs-chen understandings of *rang rig*, its soteriological relevance will be sketched.

the rDzogs-chen tradition. The term *svayaṃbhūjñāna* as such occurs in earlier Indian literature, although in most cases not in the sense of intrinsic gnosis, but in the original meaning of the term, namely, the ‘gnosis of a self-occurring one,’ where *svayaṃbhū* is a term for *buddhas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, one expressive of the fact that they attain awakening without the help of others; or, along the same lines, when *svayaṃbhū* is taken as qualifying gnosis, ‘autogenous gnosis,’ that is, gnosis that has come about independently of external influence.

9. See Higgins (2013, 86). Davidson (2004, 236–237) notes that, in its technical use in translations from Sanskrit, *rig pa* sometimes appears as a shortened form of the more common expression ‘self-awareness’ (*rang gi rig pa*). On the other hand, Van Schaik (2004b) suggests instead a different source for the use of the term *rig pa* in the Great Perfection texts. Some of the earliest rDzogs-chen texts use ‘bodhicitta’ (*byang chub kyi sems*) as a synonym for the primordially enlightened mind and the phrase “bodhicitta awareness” (*byang chub kyi sems kyi rig pa*) can also be found. “Since, then, the term ‘bodhicitta’ bridges the gap between the Mahāyoga *sādhana*s and the early Great Perfection texts of the Mind Series, we should seriously consider the term ‘bodhicitta awareness’ as a source of the Great Perfection’s ‘awareness’” (ibid., 16).

2. Specificities of *Rang rig* in Contrast with Other Tantric and Māhāyanic Traditions

In order to outline some specificities of the notion of *rang rig* within the Great Perfection perspective, it could be useful to consider some rDzogs-chen sources where this concept is formulated and contrasted with Yogācāra and tantric interpretations. To begin with, the complex relationship between the Yogācāra and the Great Perfection accounts cannot be said to have had a unidirectional trajectory of development.¹⁰ “If the provenance of the rDzogs-chen *rang rig* and the extent and specifics of its indebtedness to Yogācāra conceptions of self-cognition (*svasaṃvedana*) remain far from transparent, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that rDzogs-chen scholars were inclined from early on to distinguish their own understanding of self-awareness from Yogācāra and Mahāyoga interpretations” (Higgins 2013, 93).

In fact, the Yogācāra idea of self-awareness is explicitly criticized, for instance, in a passage of the *Khu byug gi lta ba spyod pa'i 'khor lo*, taken from the *Bai ro'i rgyud 'bum*,¹¹ which says: “Followers of Cittamātra meditate on suchness, that is, experience luminous self-awareness. ... Followers of Cittamātra, Pratyekabuddhas, and Mādhyamikas, in so far as they practice non-conceptual meditation, are wrong: they sink into the darkness of non-thought, the appearances stop, gnosis does not arise, and the [process of] the arising of causes and their effects collapses.”¹² rNying-ma scholars are “... even more resolute in denying any connection between rDzogs-chen and [the] Yogācāra-Cittamātra conception of *rang rig*” (Higgins 2013, 93). Among others, Klong-chen-pa Dri-med-'od-zer, who received the *sNying thig* tradition and elaborated a refined philosophy based on it, explicitly distinguishes its view of *rang rig* from the Yogācāra one. He refutes the Yogācāra understanding of self-awareness as he moves toward a more general and ontological critique of the main tenet, namely, the reality of mind (which is not acceptable if, according to the *sNying thig* tradition, *sems* is distorted, samsaric and derivative). Consequently, a notion of *rang rig* as possessing true essence is totally refuted, together with a view of it as simply self-illumination (*rang gsal*), that is, as understood based upon the model of the lamp that

10. On this topic, see Germano and Waldron (2006) and van Schaik (2004, 78–84; 2018).

11. See also Higgins (2013, 93).

12. *Khu byug gi lta ba spyod pa'i 'khor lo* (1971, 349.5–350.1): “*sems tsam rang rig pa gsal ba nyams su myong ba'i* ji bzhin pa la bsgom | ... rang rgyal sems tsam dbu ma gsum mi rtog pa sgom pas skyon yin te | mi rtog pa'i mun thim pa dang | snang ba 'geg pa dang | ye shes mi skye ba dang | skye ba'i rgyu 'bras log pa'o |*.” (* I correct *mongs pa'i* to *myong ba'i*)

illuminates itself.¹³ Thus, negating any idealistic position that asserts the true reality of mind, and consequently also of self-awareness, Klong-chen-pa defends a rDzogs-chen view of *rang rig* as a process devoid of true existence and whose description is not meant to denote anything real.¹⁴ Together with the ontological issue at stake in Klong-chen-pa's argument, there is also a historical reason for his staunch denial of the Yogācāra notion of *rang rig*, namely, the increasing marginalization of the Yogācāra doctrine during his time. In fact, whereas in the eighth and ninth centuries in Tibet, during the early propagation (*snga dar*) of Buddhism, Śāntarakṣita's presentation of Buddhist thought was dominant and his reading of the Madhyamaka view (known in early Tibetan doxographies as Yogācāra-Madhyamaka) was considered Buddhism's highest metaphysics, in the period of the later dissemination (*phyi dar*), that is, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Śāntarakṣita's view of Madhyamaka begins to be called into question by the first translations of Candrakīrti's major works in Tibetan. In fact, mainly thanks to sPa-tshab Nyi-ma-grags' (1055–?) body of translations the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka view began to spread and be widely taught, while Śāntarakṣita's system began to encounter serious opposition.¹⁵ Therefore, at the time when Klong-chen-pa was active, the tendency to marginalize the Yogācāra view might have influenced his discourse against the Yogācāra position on *rang rig*.

13. See Klong-chen-pa Dri-med-'od-zer (1983b, 1111.5 ff.; 1983c, 772.2–775.1). Note in particular the similarity between the dGe-lugs criticism of *rang rig* and the passage in 1983c, 772.4–5: “*blo rdzas gcig dus gcig la rig bya dang rig byed gnyis rdzas 'gal ba'i phyir | rang gis rang rig pa'ang mi srid de | ral gris rang gi rtse mo gcod pa'am reg par mi nus pa bzhin no |.*”

14. Klong-chen-pa Dri-med-'od-zer (1999, 321.1–322.3): “*gang la gzung ba dang 'dzin pa med par rtogs pa'i rig pa de'i ngo bo la ni rang byung gi ye shes su tha snyad btags kyang | rang rig rang gsal lo zhes rnal 'byor sems tsam pa ltar mi 'dod de | phyi nang med pas nang gi sems su ma grub pa dang | rang gzhan med pas rang gi rig pa kho nar ma grub pa dang | gzung 'dzin yod ma myong bas de nyid dang bral bar ma grub pa dang | tshor rig gi yul na med pas myong ba gnyis med du ma grub pa dang | sems dang sems byung med pas rang gi sems su ma grub pa dang | gsal mi gsal du med pas rang gsal du ma grub pa'i phyir ro | rig ma rig las 'das pas rig pa tsam du'ang gdags su med pa 'di ni | mtha' bral yongs su rdzogs pa chen po zhes bya ste | mtshon tshig gi tha snyad rang byung gi ye shes dang | byang chub kyi sems dang | chos sku dang | dbyings lhun grub chen po dang | rig pa rang gsal rjen pa zhes brjod kyang | brda shes pa'i phyir btags pa tsam las rang ngo brjod med chen por rtogs par bya'o | de ltar ma yin par ming la don du zhen na sems tsam pa'i rang rig rang gsal gzung 'dzin gnyis med kyi shes pa dang khyad par mi rnyed do |.*” See also van Schaik (2004, 80–84).

15. For the importance of Śāntarakṣita in Tibetan Buddhism, see Seyfort Ruegg (1981, 89); for a discussion on the introduction of Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka into Tibet, see Lang (1990). Here it should be noted that two centuries after sPa-tshab, Tsong-kha-pa promotes the Prāsaṅgika views even more, with his own nuanced understanding, and since then in Tibet this has actually been the dominant view: “Since the time of Tsong-kha-pa, it has been his Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka system to which all rival positions in Tibet have had to answer” (Blumenthal 2004, 28; with my adjustments for the transliterations from Tibetan).

Now, in order to compare rDzogs-chen and other tantric understandings of *rang rig*, Davidson's (2004, 237) considerations are helpful in tracing the development of this notion. In fact, he remarks that whereas *svasamvedana* was initially established by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti as a kind of perception, later tantric traditions (and Davidson seems to be referring specifically to the tantric tradition of the rNying-ma school) radically changed the use of the term in the exclusively gnoseological direction.

Whereas the epistemologists posited self-referential perception in all cases of the perceptual event, Vajrayāna authors focused on the perception of the awakened individual. The shift in emphasis was significant: instead on concentrating on the means of knowledge of the ordinary individual ..., the Vajrācāryas concentrated on the gnostic perception of the yogin—thus, “pure awareness”—in terms of the ground of being, the soteriological path, and the goal to be realized. (*id.*)

Therefore, if in the tantric assimilation of *rang rig* the shift from the epistemological (*sems*) to the gnoseological (*ye shes* or *rig pa*) level of discourse is already quite remarkable, is there any further soteriological shift or nuance that might be specific to rDzogs-chen's view of self-awareness, as opposed to the tantric use of it? Are there any specificities of the rDzogs-chen *rang rig* that can be identified? Given the wide range of positions within the multi-faceted and manifold Great Perfection tradition, no conclusive answer will be found to such general questions. However, in the following paragraphs a few considerations will be forwarded.

One pivotal work by gNyan Dpal-dbyangs (eighth century CE), a renowned master learned in Mahāyoga tantras, titled *sGron ma drug*, includes a long work, *Thugs kyi sgron ma*,¹⁶ that lists a few features of *rang rig*. It includes, on the one hand, gNyan dPal-dbyangs's injunctions to Mahāyoga, and on the other his description of the realization of reality as unmediated and beyond any dichotomization or reification, sprinkling apophatic expressions throughout the text. Thus, by expressing these two tendencies, this work can be considered a useful guide not only to Mahāyoga but also to the spirit of the Great Perfection view that was about to emerge in Tibet around that time.¹⁷ gNyan dPal-dbyangs's recommendations point to visions or experiences that are luminous,

16. For a detailed work on the main topics of the text, see Takahashi (2018).

17. On the relationship between Mahāyoga and rDzogs-chen, see van Schaik (2008). In short:

... we find both Mahāyoga and Great Perfection being interpreted by Tibetans in the tenth century in very close association with each other. ... Dunhuang manuscripts show that Mahāyoga was from an early stage approached through the view of Great Perfection understood as a mode (*tshul*) of

natural, spontaneous, and free from any reification of whatever extremes, and the apophatic use of the language, together with the sense it conveys, resonates with that of the later the rDzogs-chen tradition. Next to apophatic expressions, the text also includes descriptions stressing the dimension of luminosity and primordial gnosis, thus preparing the ground for the specific features that will fully bloom in the Great Perfection discourse. *sGron ma drug* serves as a paradigm for the way the early rDzogs-chen scriptures comes into light, since gNyan Dpal-dbyangs "... is one of the earliest masters who seem to have begun to formulate the rDzogs-chen doctrines" (Karmay 2007, 68).¹⁸ In gNyan Dpal-dbyangs' *Thugs kyi sgron ma* there are many different descriptions of *rang rig*; just to pick a few of them, it is said to be: devoid of any object and therefore devoid of the apprehending-subject ("yul med de la 'dzin med," gNyan Dpal-dbyangs 1999, 1027.2), accomplishing all aspirations ("smon pa kun rdzogs," *ibid.*, 1027.4), the Lord of all results ("'bras bu kun bdag," *ibid.*, 1031.1) because there is nothing to be obtained ("thob bya'i chos med," *id.*), non-conceptual ("rtog med," *ibid.*, 1040.1), totally pure ("rnam par dag," *ibid.*, 1009.1), with no aspects ("rnam pa med pa," *ibid.*, 1011.5), luminous and transparent as a crystal ("'od gsal shel ltar dag pa," *id.*), and free from extremes ("mtha' ... bral," *ibid.*, 1025.5). Therefore, this description of *rang rig* shows nuances that might be considered to be revelatory of both the Mahāyoga and Great Perfection views, and gNyan Dpal-dbyangs makes no attempt to outline any difference between these two outlooks. This is actually in line with the aim of the text, which is pervaded by encouragements to take inspiration from Mahāyoga tantric instructions while not conforming to any particular tenet system, but rather to cut through such conceptual reifications.

However, it is in the work of one of his (supposed) students, gNubs-chen Sangs-rgyas yeshe, that the description of *rang rig* includes explicit reference to the difference between Mahāyoga and rDzogs-chen. There is still much confusion regarding the life and studies of this important rNying-ma scholar of early Tibetan Vajrayāna, as well as regarding the date of composition of the *rNal 'byor mig gi bsam gtan*, or *bSam gtan mig sgron*, the text which will be referred to here.¹⁹ Certainly, gNubs-chen translated new texts into Tibetan, was prominent within subsequent Tibetan lineages, and was recognized as "... the final descent of *tantra* that

Mahāyoga practice, and that the hardening of doxographical categories which separated Anuyoga and Atiyoga from Mahāyoga as vehicles per se was not itself generally accepted until at least the eleventh century. (*ibid.*, 5)

18. For further discussions and references related to gNyan Dpal-dbyangs' identity, see Karmay (2007, 67 ff.), van Schaik (2004b), Kapstein and Dotson (2007, 266n104), and Dalton (2005).

19. For a thorough examination of his life and dating, together with further references, see Esler (2014); see also: Germano (2002, 252–255), Boaretto (2012, vol. 1, 7–15), Higgins (2013, 37), and Meinhert (2003, 175–176n2).

formed the basis of the later rNying-ma transmissions” (Germano 2002, 252; with my adjustments for the transliterations from Tibetan). He was “...the earliest Tibetan author to have given a coherent exposition of the different doctrines, viz. Rim gyis pa, Cig car ba, Mahāyoga and rDzogs-chen” (Karmay 2007, 142) and it was also thanks to him that by the tenth century rDzogs-chen become a well-established philosophical doctrine. The text that will be tapped into, *bSam gtan mig sgron*, is “... the earliest surviving substantial exegetical work on the Great Perfection attributed explicitly to a Tibetan author ...” (Germano 1994, 219) and the *locus classicus* for the nine-vehicle classification used by the rNying-ma school in later centuries, thus providing useful insight into how *rang rig* was presented at the very beginning of the Great Perfection tradition. To begin with, here *rang rig* is identified as a key notion of the Mahāyoga tradition, where all phenomena are held to be luminous self-awareness. In this text, gNubs-chen also sets forth the specific meaning of *rang rig* as it is understood in the rDzogs-chen context, where it is seen as that through which the vast and kaleidoscopic luminosity of the various manifestations/appearances are allowed to shine.

In fact, gNubs-chen explains that, in the tantric view, suchness of phenomena is the all-pervasive luminosity of non-dual self-cognition (“*rang rig gnyis med kun tu ’od gsal ba*,” *ibid.*, 491.4). In other words, the insight gained through the method of Mahāyoga is a non-dual non-conceptuality (“*gnyis su med pa’i mi rtog pa*,” *ibid.*, 197.1–2), where non-dual suchness means that *dhātu* and its gnosis (“*dbyings kyi ye shes*,” *ibid.*, 197.2) are only mere self-awareness. This point depicts the relationship between *dbyings* and its *ye shes* as a reflexive one: gnosis does not take *dhātu* as an object of observation, that is, *dhātu* is not considered to be the object (“*dbyings yul du byed pa’i rig*,” *id.*) of any thematic gnostic cognition.

On the other hand, as explained by gNubs-chen, in the rDzogs-chen view suchness is ultimate and spontaneously perfected (“*lhun rdzogs de bzhin nyid mthar thug*,” *ibid.*, 491.4). In the spontaneously present²⁰ great non-conceptuality (“*lhun gyis grub pa’i mi rtog pa chen po*,” *ibid.*, 60.2–3), the whole phenomenal world is inherently, perfectly, primordially, and naturally luminous in the completely pure sphere of primordial gnosis. In fact, within this dimension of spontaneity everything is luminous/clear (“*thams cad lhun gyis grub pa’i ngang du gsal ba*,” *ibid.*, 293.1–2). In this primordially luminous self-awareness, which is non-established, not-moving, not contaminated, and not dwelling, what is to be meditated or reflected upon? Nothing. All there is, is this actual

20. In the tradition, the term *lhun gyis grub*, ‘spontaneous presence,’ can be found associated with the presence of the enlightened state prior to and independent of any attempt to attain that level (van Schaik 2008, 12); it is also referring to the absence of effort or striving (*brtsal med*). Van Schaik (id.) remarks that the term *lhun gyis grub* appears in several *sūtras* and tantric sources, particularly in the Māyājāla *tantra* group, although in later Tibetan literature its meaning was overshadowed by its popular use in Great Perfection sources where it generally indicates the absence of striving. Note that van Schaik here explicitly disagrees with Karmay’s (2007, 119) claim that *lhun gyis grub* “may be considered as rDzogs-chen’s own terminology.”

absence (“*med pa’i don de nyid kho na yod,*” *ibid.*, 60.4–5). What is stressed here is that, within the primordial great non-conceptuality, the manifestations are not blocked (“*snang ba bkag pa yang med,*” *ibid.*, 60.5). In this description of *rang rig*, however, it must be borne in mind that even “non-conceptuality” is only a figurative expression (“*rtogs pa med de nyid kyang bla dwags so,*” *ibid.*, 60.5–6). Therefore, in light of what the text says about the rDzogs-chen view,

... we may label it as the insight into “dynamic emptiness,” which is in its empty aspect “nonexistence” ... beyond duality and at the same time in its luminous aspect “intrinsic awareness” (*rang rig pa*) allowing the kaleidoscope of manifestations arise. Therefore, in rDzogs-chen meditation the real issue is not simply a non-referential (*mi dmigs pa*) situation [as in Mahāyoga], but innate and luminous awareness itself. (Meinhert 2003, 189)

Thus, in contrast with the Mahāyoga tantric position, gNubs-chen (*ibid.*, 291.2–3) sets forth the earliest rDzogs-chen reading of self-awareness by stressing its innate luminosity, the horizon of the display of the various possible manifestations, and explicitly positing *rang rig*, as opposed to any intellectual discrimination, as that which allows one to internalize the actuality/goal (*don*) of the Great Perfection²¹ and which allows the effulgence of appearances to display.

21. To be sure, in the overall quite complicated—and not yet analyzed by modern scholarship—transformation of terminology from the Mahāyoga to the rDzogs-chen contexts, as Higgins (2013, 95) comments, “All this goes to show how little is yet known about the assimilation and transformation of Yogācāra ideas within Tibetan Mahāyoga and rDzogs-chen traditions.”

3. How *Rang rig* Makes the (Soteriological) Difference

The crucial soteriological role of reflexivity in rDzogs-chen also emerges in the view that, among others, Klong-chen-pa elaborates on the basis of the *Seminal Heart* (*sNying thig*) tradition. Here, self-awareness makes the (soteriological) difference between one's being on a path leading to *nirvāṇa* and one's being on a path leading to *samsāra*. In other words, salvific transformation ultimately depends upon reflexivity. In order to fully appreciate its importance for the path to liberation, the tradition's whole soteriological setting must be presented. Germano and Waldron (2006, 58) say of *buddha*-nature:

While presented as a cosmogonic ground which ontologically precedes cyclic existence (*samsāra*) and transcendence (*nirvāṇa*), ... is also explicitly located within the human interior as an ongoing, deeply unconscious dimension. This dimension is engaged in a constant efflorescence that gives rise to both *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, leading to the stock formulation of a single ontological ground leading to two paths, that is, interpretative trajectories resulting in a bifurcation of life-worlds.

From a single ontological ground (*gzhi*),²² two paths extend: one to liberation and one to *samsāra*. The difference between the two resides in the fact that the former (that is, *grol tshul*) is as such "... by means of the cognitive capacity recognizing the appearances as self ..." (*id.*), that is, due to the infusion of ontological ground with reflexivity, whereas the latter (that is, *'khrul tshul*) is as such "... by means of a lack of such recognition" (*id.*). This "... bifurcation hinges on what is termed 'recognition,' namely the reflexivity involved in this process of manifestation" (*id.*). To summarize the mode of liberation (*grol tshul*): "... Buddha-nature is the cosmogonic ground, and the Reality Body [*dharmakāya*] is its transformation with reflexive self-awareness ..." (*ibid.*, 59). This also resonates with what gNubs-chen (1974, 291.2–3; italics mine) states: "... the essence of this treasury of all vehicles—that is the great universal grand-father—[is] the sense of the spontaneous state. The great goal, being internalized through the direct perception of self-awareness, is not a thing to be kept in mind, and it will be made clear *in self-awareness*."²³ Karmay (2007, 175) explains that

22. For the four-fold formulation of *gzhi* that Klong-chen-pa offers, see Germano and Waldron (2006, 53 ff.). See also Karmay (2007, 51 ff.).

23. gNubs-chen (1974, 291.2–3): "... *theg pa thams cad kyi yang mdzod spyi mes chen po 'di'i ngo bo lhun gyis [grub] pa'i ngang nyid kyi don | rang rig pa'i mngon sum khong du chud nas blo bzhas par byar yang med pa'i don chen po rang gi rig pa la gsal bar bya ba yang |.*" Compare my translation with Davidson's (2004, 238), Karmay's

in rDzogs-chen, “... given a chance to revert and look to itself directly and eliminate all conceptualisation, it is ... possible for [*sems*] to recognise its own reality again (*sems kyi chos nyid ... rang gi rig pa*) from which it strayed and which it has forgotten for so long.” Here an aspect of memory (*dran pa*) or recollection is implied in that which is primarily a matter of recognition (*rang ngo shes*), where reflexivity is crucial in being able to recognize the appearances as self. The self-presenting/appearance (*rang snang*) of *rig pa* consists in the “... Ground as experiencing its own self-lighting-up in full self-consciousness and self-awareness (*rang rig*) of itself, which is why an Awakened One’s experience is always *rang snang* [appearance as self], while other living beings’ experience of his/her presence is *gzhan snang* [appearance as other], i.e. experienced as intertwined with the illusory specter of the other” (Germano 1992, 826, s.v. “Appearances”).

As just said, in the rDzogs-chen tradition reflexivity and memory are deeply connected. As for the vast topic of memory (*dran pa*) in the Great Perfection, it is worth mentioning Kapstein’s (1992) thoughtful and inspiring study on the various understandings of mnemonic engagement in the Great Perfection practice. Here, in various contexts, memory might refer to different disclosures, such as the reflexive disclosure of the meditator’s awareness, having genuinely realized the introduction (*ngo sprod*), and “... the reflexive recovery of the pristine gnosis of the ground-of-all (*kun gzhi ’i ye shes*) that is the *dharmakāya* in its noetic aspect” (*ibid.*, 187), the self-presentation of awareness as *dharmakāya*. Note that here the only similarity with the ordinary notion of memory, understood as an intentional act oriented toward the past, is the phenomenon of recovery. What generally emerges is that memory is rather “... all that is present as such in the mind, or ... the mnemonic engagement of the *dharmakāya* and thus standing outside of time ...” (*ibid.*, 195). The soteriologically valued use of *dran pa* in the Great Perfection is meant “... to arouse mnemonic engagement of a type that, indirectly or immediately, re-calls, calls one back to an object of loss, the revelation of the *dharmakāya qua* self-presenting awareness” (*ibid.*, 187). Thus, Casey (1992, 290) summarizes this point as follows: “... I ultimately remember (myself as) the Buddha. But if this is so, then I also ultimately remember everything—everything that matters, or, in the language of the Great Perfection, the ground of self-presenting awareness. Or else I remember the emptiness of everything”²⁴

(2007, 107–108), and Higgins’ (2013, 95); note that Davidson diverges from the basic rendering that Karmay, Higgins and I share.

24. Kapstein also reflects about the crucial role of reflexivity in rDzogs-chen meditation elsewhere (1993; 2000), referring to the *ngo sprod*, the introduction of the disciples to their nature of mind, as an act of *rang rig* (according to Mi-pham’s view). See also Griffiths (1992), who contends that Buddhist practice is concerned with *attention* rather than with *memory*.

Therefore, there is a strong contrast between the gnoseological dimension of “... global, holistic, and reflexive modes of awareness...” and the epistemological one, characterized by “... dualistic, non-reflexive modes of awareness” (Germano and Waldron 2006, 53). The reflexivity of this process of recognition enacts the very shift from a dualistic mode of knowing to a non-dualistic mode. Van Schaik (2004a, 56) is also explicit, following the same direction: “The ripening of awareness into delusion is said to be brought about by awareness’s nonrecognition of its own nature (*rang ngo ma shes pa*), which is followed by dualistic conceptualization.” More specifically, “The catalyst that switches the practitioner’s mode of being from samsaric to nirvanic is the recognition of gnosis (*rig pa’i gno sprod* or *ngo shes*), which may be more simply called self-recognition (*rang ngo sprod*)” (*id.*). The reflexivity that is the awareness’ recognition of itself as itself is therefore the pivot of the entire literature’s stock of dyads that articulate the soteriological distinction between *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, such as the ontological pair of universal ground (*kun gzhi*)²⁵ versus *dharmakāya* and the gnoseological one of *sems* versus *ye shes*.²⁶

Thus, within the rNying-ma literature’s stock perspective, that holds primordial gnosis (*rang byung ye shes*) or awareness (*rig pa*) to be empty, luminous and cognizant (at least intransitively and pre-reflectively aware of itself) (*gsal stong rig*), reflexivity allows the shift from the epistemological (*sems*) to the gnoseological (*ye shes*) mode of cognizing. Summarizing this general framework, it could be said that:

... primordial knowing ... is presentational (the pre-reflective occurring of experiencing itself) while dualistic mind is representational (the reflective grasping or singling out and thematic elaboration of particular instances thereof). So self-occurring primordial knowing (*rang byung gi ye shes*) is nothing other than the as yet undifferentiated taking place of appearing itself while mind consists in a complex variety of transitive (object-oriented) and reflexive (subject-oriented) differentiations within the stream of experience that thematize it in terms of self and other, ‘I’ and ‘mine.’ (Higgins, 2011 [2012], 32n3)

With respect to the importance of overcoming or clearing dualism, explicit indications can be found in Klong-chen-pa’s thought. He receives and systematizes the vast project of the Seminal Heart (*sNying thig*) tradition and therefore articulates that which will turn out to be the structure of the rDzogs-chen view from the fourteenth century onwards. For him, the soteriological shift could be

25. For the conception of *kun gzhi* in rDzogs-chen and the specific view Klong-chen-pa holds of it, see Karmay (2007, 178 ff.) and Waldron and Germano (2006, 52 ff.).

26. For these pairs, see Karmay (2007, 57) among others.

depicted in terms of “... becom[ing] aware of consciousness simpliciter to the extent that the reifying and distorting self-identifications with its contents subside. This radical *clearing of dualistic tendencies* and attendant familiarization with the implicit awareness from which they have arisen is known as the path” (*ibid.*, 43; italics mine). Within the Great Perfection tradition, thanks to Klong-chen-pa (among others), the *sems/ye shes* distinction undergoes various exoteric and esoteric formulations: on the one hand, there is the need to find Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna sources where this difference can be traced and attested to, while on the other, that is, the more esoteric side of the tradition, a wide range of teachings indicate specific contemplative and soteriological instructions concerning, for instance, *Khregs chod* and *Thod rgal*, as well as practices involving eliciting the four gnostic lamps (*sgron ma bzhi*) and using *rtsa*, *rlung*, and *thig le*. Despite the complex development of the *sems/ye shes* distinction, however, what resides at the core of the gnoseological, and therefore soteriological, transformation that is linked to it is the crucial factor of the clearing of dualistic tendencies; “... the path is therefore both a process of de-identifying with superimpositions and disclosing the implicit mode of being and awareness that they conceal” (*ibid.*, 51). What should be clear about the whole distorted world and cognition in which sentient beings abide is:

Moreover, from the mind [that is oriented towards the] apprehended [object], the absence of any apprehended object manifests as the five senses’ objects (forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects); from the apprehending[-aspect of the] mind, *karman* and its effects and intellectual-emotional defilements infinitely manifest; thus, *samsāra* consists in grasping an object where there is no object and grasping a mind where there is no mind, and it appears before sentient beings like a dream, having originated from the arising of mind’s apprehending and apprehended [aspects]. (Klong-chen-pa Dri-med-’od-zer 1999, 495.3–5)²⁷

In light of the framework depicted thus far, one might have noticed that while the *sems/ye shes* or *samsāra/nirvāṇa* distinction shapes the core of the soteriological and philosophical heart of the rNying-ma and rDzogs-chen views, the immanent presence of one mode/display within the other is also stressed. In other words, in order to overcome dualistic cognition, one is not supposed to reach anywhere but the mind’s own implicit *ye shes* and thus contact one’s own *buddha*-nature that underlies all possible derivative forms of distortion. It is to the soteriological aspect of the ground (*grol gzhi*) that one has to return by attaining enlightenment; one arrives back to where one

27. Klong-chen-pa Dri-med-’od-zer (1999, 495.3–5): “*de’ang gzung ba’i sems las gzung yul med pa gsal snang gzugs sgra dri ro reg lngar snang la | ’dzin pa’i sems las las dang rnam smin nyon mongs pa dpag tu med par snang ste | yul med yul du ’dzin pa dang | sems med sems su ’dzin pa’i ’khor ba sems can la rmi lam ltar snang ba sems gzung ’dzin gyi rnam par shar ba las byung ba’o |.*”

was originally, enlightened from the beginning (*ye grol*). Such intense tension between the crucial *samsāra/nirvāṇa* distinction, on the one hand, and their immanence on the other (*ye shes*, the nirvanic awareness, being immanent in and essential to all sentient beings), is already present in the *sNying thig* tradition, and it is only in the *transition* from samsaric to nirvanic awareness that the need for reflexivity arises.

In order to bridge the gap, so to speak, within the two poles of the tension, as van Schaik (2004a, 63) notes, Rong-zom-pa is the first exponent of rDzogs-chen (so considered by van Schaik) who explicitly uses the theory of *buddha*-nature; later on, Klong-chen-pa also follows Rong-zom-pa's intent. *Buddha*-nature is what remains when dualistic superimpositions subside and corresponds to the gnoseological mode of cognizing. It consists in the indivisibility of gnosis and its sphere/domain (*dbyings dang ye shes 'du bral med pa*), and of luminosity and emptiness (*snang stong dbyer med*). However, this stock and crucial point of *buddha*-nature and the indivisibility of *dbyings* and *ye shes* should be investigated in terms of the stance of each thinker of the tradition, since no general assessments could be made about such an intricate philosophical topic.²⁸

28. Just to have an idea of how the non-duality of *dbyings* and *ye shes* might be conceived of, it is worth looking at Rong-zom Chos-kyi-bzang-po, since the complexity of his philosophical thought is reflected and converges in his interpretation of the indivisibility of *dbyings* and *ye shes*—this is, in fact, a delicate and crucial point, since *Buddha*-nature is left when dualism totally vanishes.

Rong-zom-pa, for his part, one among the three figures—Rong-zom-pa, Klong-chen-pa, and Mi-pham—that have been taken to represent the rNying-ma's "archetypical intellectual figures" (Wangchuk 2004, 173), has worked for the defense and development of the rDzogs-chen view and expressed it in his works (Karmay 2007, 124–125). Before focusing on his specific view of the indivisibility of *dbyings* and *ye shes*, it should first be mentioned that Rong-zom-pa depicts *rang rig* as devoid of cognitive qualities (*shes rig gi chos*) and primordially luminous; it is also referred to as *rang byung ye shes* (Rong-zom Chos-kyi bzang-po 1999a, 174.14–16). As for the equivalence of *rang rig* and *rang byung ye shes*, Rong-zom-pa claims (1999d, 65.20–23): "Self-occurring gnosis is simply the mind that is awareness of itself. [In contrast], other-cognitions are delusive. ... Self-awareness itself is empty by nature, and therefore it is self-occurring gnosis" ("*rang byung gi ye shes kyang sems rang rig pa tsam yin pa dang | gzhan rig pa rnam kyang 'khrul ba yin pa'i phyir | ... rang rig pa nyid kyang ngo bo nyid kyis stong pa'i phyir | rang byung gi ye shes so* |"). Moreover, *rang rig* is also linked to *ye shes* (id. 1999c, 117.13–15): "... in any consciousness, in the very moment in which apprehended- and apprehending-aspect arise, it is proved that it is simply self-awareness itself, devoid of both [those aspects]. Self-awareness itself is called gnosis, for it is not mistaken with respect to the object/reality" ("*... shes pa gang la gzung ba dang 'dzin pa'i rnam par snang ba de'i tshes nyid na gnyis pos stong pa'i rang rig pa tsam nyid yin par grub pa'o | rang rig pa de nyid ye shes zhes bya ste | don la phyin ci log pa med pa'i phyir ro* |").

This said, much of the complexity of his ontological and philosophical view fully converges in the way Rong-zom-pa depicts the indivisibility of *ye shes* and *dbyings*. As Almogi (2009, 232) points out:

... for Rong-zom-pa, self-occurring gnosis is not a cognitive phenomenon in any sense of the term, ... whereas for Mi-pham it is the ultimate valid cognition. In view of Rong-zom-pa's rejection of any cognitive feature within self-occurring gnosis or the dharmadhātu, it will be worthwhile to examine how he understands the notion of the 'non-duality of the sphere and gnosis' (*dbyings dang ye shes gnyis su med pa*), which he clearly seems to profess [see for instance Rong-zom Chos-kyi bzang-po 1999b, 143.20 and 150.7–8].

To conclude, after a survey of the main dimensions of the multi-faceted understanding of self-awareness in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the richness of this contribution can now be put in dialogue with the contemporary reflections on the issue of consciousness and its reflexivity, the topic of the next chapter (ch. VI) of the thesis. Since some concern for the phenomenological and subjective aspects of experience has arisen in reaction to the dominant materialist and reductionist strands in today's philosophy of mind, the perspectives provided by those Buddhist standpoints will be helpful in restoring some balance. Moreover, the soteriological inquiry of the tradition might call into question our modern approach to those aspects and qualities of experience that, within the framework of the Buddhist discourse about liberation, might be identified as ethical, wholesome or crucially leading to inner awakening, which in our societies are often neglected. If the whole Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophical articulation is aimed at a salvific attainment and has this quest as its fundamental *raison d'être*, this perspective might lead us to reflect upon the reasons for our contemporary inquiry into the nature of consciousness and its features, given that such investigations have largely fallen outside responding to the needs of a soteriological view.

Thus, on the one hand, Rong-zom-pa claims that the purified *dharmadhātu* or *tathatā* is the sole constituent of soteriological awakening, and thus rejects the existence of gnosis in the Buddha state (id., 1999d). On the other hand, however, he claims the non-duality of *dharmadhātu* and gnosis, saying Buddha's gnosis is *rang rig*, *gnyis su med pa'i ye shes*, non-conceptual gnosis, the cognitive subject of *tathatā*, its gnosis (*de bzhin nyid kyi ye shes*). What actually underlies this intricate understanding of the non-duality of *dbyings* and *ye shes* is his theory about manifestations/appearances (*snang ba*) and dependent arising (*rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba*). In 1999a (130.21–22) he explains that appearances and perceptions have no actual basis (*gzhi*), no root (*rtsa ba*), no substratum (*rten*). Moreover, he (id. 1999a, 132.16–18) explains that samsaric phenomena are *sems rang snang*, whereas nirvanic ones are *ye shes rang snang*; finally, when one becomes a *buddha*, Rong-zom-pa (ibid., 43.3–4) claims that one has exhausted all residual impressions and negative propensities and thus is free from all appearances. How is that possible? He explains this with the theory of dependent arising, which implies that if causes and conditions are there, results will arise, and if they cease, their results also cease; therefore, if for *buddhas* all latencies and negative propensities come to an end, the resultant appearances also cease. This complicated point of the indivisibility of *dbyings* and *ye shes* as understood by Rong-zom-pa raises a problem that is difficult to solve. As such, as Wangchuk (forthcoming) notes, it might be suggested that in Rong-zom-pa's stance a gnostic non-dual cognition would probably prevail anyway, given his use of the expression "*dbyings dang ye shes gnyis su myed pa'i rig pa*" (Rong-zom Chos-kyi bzang-po 1999d, 502.15).

For further readings about Rong-zom-pa's life and works, see Almogi (1997; 2009) and Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo (2017, that is, the English translation of his *Theg pa chen po'i tshul la 'jug pa zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos*).

PART THREE: CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS

VI. Tibetan Buddhist Accounts in Dialogue with Contemporary Philosophy of Mind

1. The Contemporary Context: The Hard Problem of Consciousness

The final section (ch. VI) of this research will focus on the way the issue of self-awareness is discussed in the ongoing debates in philosophy of mind. This chapter will attempt to open a dialogue between the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition and the contemporary philosophical discourse by selecting some of the latter's most recent viewpoints while also tapping into the older Western concepts they rest on. The aim here will be to see whether and how some aspects of the traditional accounts considered in the previous chapters might constitute a fresh and transformative cross-cultural contribution to current debates on consciousness and its reflexivity.

Let's begin by contextualizing the contemporary discussion on the mind's knowing of itself. The issue of self-awareness is a hotly debated one in the contemporary philosophy of mind discourse and locates itself within the complex inquiry on what subjective experience is. To begin with, a gross truism: Western philosophical studies concerning the issue of the nature of awareness and its characteristics— reflexivity among them—have their roots in a rich tradition that ultimately goes back to ancient Greece. Subjectivity, consciousness, and experience have been key philosophical topics for centuries. In the materialistic and reductionist perspective that has widely spread in the last decades, however, the nature of consciousness has once again gained attention due to Chalmers' (1995; 1996) launch of the "hard problem of consciousness", returning this topic to the spotlight of contemporary research on mind. The problem touches on issues in ontology, epistemology, as well as on the accuracy and scope of first-person perspective, to name but a few. Despite its recent and innovative formulation, the topic is not a new one, belonging to the old mind-body problem;¹ Chalmers (1995, 202) presents the conundrum as follows:

What makes the hard problem hard and almost unique is that it goes beyond problems about the performance of functions. To see this, note that even when we have explained the performance of all the cognitive and behavioral functions in the vicinity of experience— perceptual discrimination, categorization, internal access, verbal report—there may still

1. Levine (1983, 361): "... this kind of intuition about our qualitative experience seems surprisingly resistant to philosophical attempts to eliminate it. As long as it remains, the mind/body problem will remain."

remain a further unanswered question: *Why is the performance of these functions accompanied by experience?* (Italics in original)

When consciousness is the phenomenon under investigation, the commonly used reductive explanation is bound to fail. In Chalmers's (1995; 1996) sense, in fact, a reductive explanation consists in providing a form of argument that concludes by stating the identity of the *explanandum* and a lower-level physical (or easily reducible to physical) phenomenon. There are two premises: the first offers an analysis of the target entity in terms of its functional role and the second presents an empirically-discovered realizer of the target phenomenon. Then, by transitivity of identity, the *explanandum* and the realizer are deduced to be identical. Nevertheless, when it comes to consciousness, since it cannot be functionally characterized, the reductive explanation does not work. We are left with the following main alternatives: either we deny that consciousness exists at all or we add consciousness to our ontological scenery, as an unreducible feature of reality itself. Either way, we are faced with a problem that the usual reductive methods cannot solve. The range of reactions and responses to the hard problem goes from eliminativism (denying this very issue) and reductionism (in its multiple versions) to panpsychism and mind-body dualism.

Before proceeding in this inquiry, the division Chalmers makes in the associated problems of consciousness between “hard” and “easy” ones must be mentioned, in order to precisely delineate the nature and target of the hard problem:

The easy problems of consciousness include those of explaining the following phenomena:

- the ability to discriminate, categorize, and react to environmental stimuli
- the integration of information by a cognitive system
- the reportability of mental states
- the ability of a system to access its own internal states
- the focus of attention
- the deliberate control of behavior
- the difference between wakefulness and sleep. (Chalmers 2010, 4)²

There are no complete explanations of these phenomena but we know how we might go about explaining them; this is why Chalmers (*id.*) calls these the “easy problems.” To get a proper explanation of them through cognitive science and neuroscience might take centuries of work;

2. Please note that, as Chalmers (2010, 4n1) clarifies, “The list should be understood as calling attention to the functional rather than the experiential aspects of these phenomena.” The list is taken from *ibid.* chapter 1, which is drawn from the first work by Chalmers (1995) on this topic.

nevertheless, there is reason to believe that the standard methods will succeed. These problems are easy precisely because they concern cognitive abilities and functions, which only require the specification of the mechanisms that can perform these functions for their explanation.

On the other hand, the so-called “hard problems” are phenomena that seem to resist these usual methods. “The really hard problem of consciousness is the problem of *experience*. When we think and perceive, there is a whirl of information processing, but there is also a subjective aspect. As Nagel (1974) has put it, there is *something it is like* to be a conscious organism. This subjective aspect is experience” (Chalmers 2010, 5; italics in original). The felt quality of emotions, of bodily sensations, of a stream of conscious thought, and so forth, are all states of experience. “Why should physical processing give rise to a rich inner life at all? It seems objectively unreasonable that it should, and yet it does” (*id.*). Since an organism is said to have consciousness if there is something it is like to be that organism (this being *subject*-consciousness), this also applies to mental states: a mental state is conscious if there is something it is like to be in that state (this being *state*-consciousness). “Sometimes terms such as ‘phenomenal consciousness’ and ‘qualia’ are also used here, but I find it more natural to speak of ‘conscious experience’ or simply ‘experience’” (*id.*). Here, the phenomenal, subjective, first-person dimension takes center stage. Majeed (2016), examining the issue of the hard problem as a whole, detects two distinct targets that would be encompassed by it: on the one hand, the explanation of the relationship between the physical and the phenomenal that arises from it and, on the other hand, the explanation of the phenomenal itself, in terms of its own nature. The debates on the hard problem address one or both of these aspects.³

Thanks to Chalmers’ formulation of the hard problem of consciousness, a split between the explanation of functions and abilities of consciousness, on the one hand, and that of experience itself, on the other, becomes subject to debate. Already prior to Chalmers, in 1983, Levine formulated the “explanatory gap,” targeting a closely related issue. In fact, as Chalmers (2010, 8) comments, “We know that conscious experience *does* arise when these functions are performed, but the very fact that it arises is the central mystery. There is an *explanatory gap* (a term due to Levine 1983) between the functions and experience, and we need an explanatory bridge to cross it.” Why should any physical process make experience emerge?⁴

3. The literature on the hard problem is extremely rich; for a multifaceted approach to the issue, see in particular Shear (1997).

4. Levine (1983, 357–358):

Indeed, we do feel that the causal role of pain is crucial to our concept of it, and that discovering the physical mechanism by which this causal role is effected explains an important facet of what there is to be explained about pain. However, there is more to our concept of pain than its causal role, there is

This issue boasts a long and ubiquitous heritage. In 1714, Leibniz, for instance, continuing the reasoning he started in *Commentatio de anima brutorum* (1840, 463) dedicates a paragraph of his *Monadology* (17, Leibniz 1898, 227–229) to the issue of the (*ante litteram*) hard problem:

17. Moreover, it must be confessed that *perception* and that which depends upon it are *inexplicable on mechanical grounds*, that is to say, by means of figures and motions. And supposing there were a machine, so constructed as to think, feel, and have perception, it might be conceived as increased in size, while keeping the same proportions, so that one might go into it as into a mill. That being so, we should, on examining its interior, find only parts which work one upon another, and never anything by which to explain a perception. Thus it is in a simple substance, and not in a compound or in a machine, that perception must be sought for. Further, nothing but this (namely, perceptions and their changes) can be found in a simple substance. It is also in this alone that all the *internal activities* of simple substances can consist. (Italics in original)

Interestingly, such a fantasy has been recently been written, embellished and modernized by Bieri (1995, 49–54) in a funny “guided tour of the brain,” where explorers enter an enlarged human brain, the same way one might enter a factory, and explore it in the hope of finding what makes a human being a subject with experiences and an inner world. The guide is a brain scientist on top of present-day knowledge, ready to answer all their questions, but at the end is drained by the explorers’ pressing philosophical questioning and leaves them empty-handed. In terms of exploring consciousness as the capacity for sensing, we could inquire either about the specific process that results in a particular sensing event or in general about the reason for experience itself being there. In either case, Bieri (*ibid.*, 50; italics in original) makes it clear that those “two questions amount to one and the same problem[.] If we knew why a particular neural process results in a particular experiential quality—so that the connection would no longer appear accidental but necessary—we would thereby know why it has to be an *experience*.”

its qualitative character, how it feels; and what is left unexplained by the discovery of C-fiber firing is *why pain should feel the way it does!* ... It is precisely phenomenal properties—how it is for us to be in certain mental (including perceptual) states—which seem to resist physical (including functional) explanations. (Italics in original)

MacKenzie (forthcoming) comments on the explanatory gap and the hard problem by claiming that “... given the undeniable reality of consciousness and the absence of any epistemically transparent account of how it relates to the physical, we have reason to believe that the explanatory gap reflects an ontological gap.”

If today the hard problem arises within a general philosophical framework that tends towards physicalism, this does not imply that the link between the hard problem and physicalism is a necessary one. In fact, also in the idealist Indo-Tibetan tradition something comparable to the hard problem has been debated. In this regard, Arnold's (forthcoming) attempt to read the hard problem in light of Buddhist idealism reveals that the issue of physicalism, which is nowadays predominant in the debate around the nature of experience, may not be central to the hard problem itself. The hard problem is not, after all, a problem just for physicalists: in the idealist version of the hard problem the same point is addressed, but is nevertheless independent from whether or how consciousness can emerge from the physical. For instance, Dharmakīrti's celebrated proof of rebirth is an idealist argument where Dharmakīrti is not concerned with how to reconcile mental and physical but rather with showing that mental continuity is basic or, in other words, that the mental—and not the physical—is what ultimately exists. Moreover, following Arnold (*ibid.*), Dignāga's idealist project also gets stuck with something like the hard problem, or perhaps even a more basic version of it: the problem of reconciling first- and third-person perspectives on mental content. Perhaps, what turns out to be hard about getting subjectivity out of objectivity is not whether or how the former can emerge from the latter but rather trying to reconcile two different perspectives, each of them involving different *temporalities*. In terms of experience, what is relevant for a *third*-person perspective identifies psychological factors as *causing* moments of experience, moments that must precede it. On the other hand, especially in terms of the Cittamātra *bīja* (seeds) theory, what is relevant for a *first*-person perspective is the *content* of an experience. Being part of the experience itself, however, the mental content cannot at the same time be one of its causes, that is, a cause of the very event that contains it. Thus, Arnold argues that the main problem is how to reconcile first- and third-person perspectives on, allegedly, the same cognitive event. This implies a remarkable shift towards a different angle for approaching the hard problem, a perspective reminiscent of the difference, in actual terms, between the neural correlations of a mental state and its own phenomenological experience.

In short, this issue has turned out to be deeply affected by the multidisciplinary approach to its study, so much so that, as Metzinger (1995, 7; italics in original) remarks, "... in the present state of interdisciplinary research on consciousness the *explananda* still remain undefined: it is not at all clear *what* it is that has to be explained. Conscious experience is not a single problem, but a whole cluster of problems." Among the wide range of issues and nuanced questions, it might be useful to observe, at least, a few correlations among topics; as Güzeldere (1995, 124) usefully explains, "... the line that separates Chalmers' 'easy' and 'hard' problems is the counterpart of the line that

separates ‘access’ and ‘phenomenal’ consciousness in Block, which also aligns well with the distinction between the ‘causal’ [that is, what consciousness does (from the third-person perspective)] versus ‘phenomenal’ [that is, how consciousness feels (from the first-person perspective)] characterizations of consciousness”⁵ Certainly, such a multifaceted approach to consciousness, with no place for transcendental concerns, builds up a completely different setting and background than that of the Buddhist debates, where there is general agreement about the existence of consciousness, its basic definition, the notion of mental causation (which is necessary to guarantee the possibility of the Buddhist path) and the soteriological process of inner transformation.⁶

5. On the distinction between phenomenal- and access-consciousness, see Block (1997); for further discussions on this division, see the chapter “Function of Consciousness” in Block, Flanagan, and Güzeldere (1997, 355–442).

6. See MacKenzie (forthcoming).

2. Reflectivity and Reflexivity Today: Challenges and Directions

Having laid out the context for the contemporary conversation on the nature of mind, let's focus on the way this issue and in particular that of self-awareness is approached today. The most relevant challenges in the Western contemporary scene will be taken into account and discussed in order to envision the most compelling directions for further investigation; to this end, this inquiry will tap into the richness of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist legacy as well as the Western phenomenological strand.

In order to frame the topic as expressed in Western terms, it will be useful to consider that, among the main features of the mental, Chalmers (1996, 339) identifies phenomenal “[c]onsciousness and intentionality [as] perhaps the two central phenomena in the philosophy of mind.” In his view, “... neither consciousness nor intentionality is more fundamental than the other. Rather, consciousness and intentionality are intertwined, all the way down to the ground” (*ibid.*, 371). He also notices that in the last decades the philosophical approaches to the issue of consciousness and intentionality have diverged, relegating their link to the background; only recently have two new tendencies emerged to bring these two features closer together again. One tendency consists of grounding consciousness in intentionality (i.e., the higher-order theories, where a mental state becomes conscious when it is held by a higher-order state as its intentional object, and is represented by it), and the other consisting of grounding intentionality in consciousness (i.e., the phenomenological approach, where consciousness is pre-reflectively self-aware by nature and its intentionality is grounded on this fundamental feature). In other words, these two strands represent the two main branches for explaining self-awareness from a *mentalistic* perspective: what makes a mental state conscious is explained with reference to another (or the same) mental state.⁷ This will be the focus of this section of the present inquiry.

It must be noted, first, that what lies behind this recent terminology is the rich Western legacy on the topic of self-awareness, a tradition whose history reaches back to Aristotle (*On the Soul*, 3.2.415a16).⁸ What is interesting about Aristotle's pioneering position is that he gets close to the relational suggestion of modern higher-order theories and yet insists that the self-awareness feature is intrinsic to the conscious state, thus going against those higher-order theories; for him, all

7. See Gennaro (1996).

8. For Western sources of the discourse on self-awareness and for a study of Aristotle's view on the awareness that one has of one's own mental states as an intrinsic and essential feature of those states, see Caston (2002).

perceptions occur together with a secondary awareness of themselves.⁹ Aquinas takes up the Aristotelian track and the view that consciousness of external objects has priority over the consciousness it has of itself;¹⁰ this view was widely held by early modern thinkers who tended towards empiricism. Avicenna's discussion of primitive self-consciousness, albeit less known, is in line with Augustine's, claiming (*The Trinity*, 10.9.12) that the mind knows itself simply by being present to itself, via a pre-reflective knowledge of itself (*ibid.*, 10.4.6). This is the deep root of a legacy and background that brought about many further developments; among the philosophers who wrote about self-awareness in various forms are Descartes, Kant, Locke, Leibniz, and the phenomenological philosophers. Interestingly, it was in the early modern period, around the 1720s, that consciousness started to be considered as an object of inquiry in its own right, mainly interpreted as a way of relating to one's own mental states. Thus, the ongoing debate mostly consists of updating this long history, albeit with one important additional component, that is, the exchange and fruitful interaction with philosophical traditions belonging to other cultures and contexts, now more than ever easily accessible to scholars.

Thus, theories of self-awareness formulated in the Western and Indian traditions, as MacKenzie (2007) outlines in his thoughtful paper, generally fall into two broad typologies: one gathering the reflective theories, or other-illumination (*paraprakāśa*) theories, and the other collecting the reflexive theories, or self-illumination (*svaprakāśa*) theories. While their Indian and Western philosophical formulations are remarkably different in their arguments and formulations, there are also striking similarities, which MacKenzie focuses on in order to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of both models. For him (*ibid.*, 60), "Although reflexivism is perhaps 'slightly ahead,' it is not yet ... an acceptable theory of self-awareness in either its Buddhist or its Sartrean forms." Thus, none of the approaches examined by MacKenzie are completely adequate, for him, to account for all the fundamental issues relating to a contemporary theory of self-awareness, but both Indian and Western sources provide valuable contributions that could form the foundations of a more adequate theory. The most recent debates on the topic, in fact, have outlined a list of issues an

9. Caston (2002, 799):

... Aristotle holds that a single token perception can be about an external object *and* about itself. This sort of awareness is therefore *both* intrinsic *and* relational. ... Aristotle rejects the notion that our perceptions, or parts of them, literally embody the qualities they are about. But he also rejects a strict intentionalist stance Rather, our perceptions have a phenomenal character, that has to do with the qualities they represent, but is not exhausted by representational content. Aristotle thus attempts to do justice to the intuitions on both sides, while avoiding their respective errors; and we might well regard this as a step forward

10. For a quick overview of these and the following sources, see Thiel (2011, 6 ff.). Also see Siewert (1998).

appropriate and convincing philosophical theory of self-awareness must tackle: in light of the most recent studies in psychology, neuroscience, and other fields, there are many dimensions and aspects of self-cognition that deserve attention.¹¹ The aim here is to shed light on the main challenges that a modern theory of self-awareness has to face in order to pinpoint specifics and potentials of the contemporary inquiry on consciousness and its reflexivity, an inquiry that today has the privilege of tapping into the wealth of its own philosophical, psychological, and scientific traditions, as well as gaining insights and valuable inspiration from the richness of other contemplative traditions.

2.a The Ineffability of Subjective Experience

The first challenge for a contemporary theory of self-awareness is a methodological one, made in relation to the subjective and phenomenal character of experience. This first point targets the possibility of studying, examining, and describing it without objectifying, and therefore falsifying, it and without having to talk about it only via negationis.

This challenge has always threatened the possibility for experience to be expressed in a linguistic framework, while a convincing theory of self-awareness must be able to tackle this difficulty. In the previous section of the thesis (ch. V.2) it was shown that the rDzogs-chen tradition has particularly been characterized by a wide use of apophatic expressions, hinting at a non-dual experience of reflexivity within the semantics of the kaleidoscopic luminosity of mind. Those formulations are meant to encourage going beyond reifications and conceptualizations. A recent attempt to preserve the subjective feature of experience, without excluding it from thought and description, can be found in Nagel's position (1986). Leaving aside his entire (perhaps debatable) philosophical project, of particular interest is his attempt to formulate a philosophical perspective on consciousness that is respectful of the subjective character of one's own and others' experience. In so far as it is a feasible way to ascribe consciousness to other beings, this approach has a slightly different orientation: Nagel's suggestion tries to rescue the *others'* subjectivity from one's own objectifying perspective. Nevertheless, what is at stake is indeed the intersection between subjectivity and objectivity, the topic that under consideration here. If there are, in fact, other beings in the world one has to "... conceive of experiences of which one is not the subject: experiences that are not present to oneself. To do this it is necessary to have a general conception of subjects of experience and to place oneself under it as an instance" (Nagel 1986, 20). What is of interest in

11. For some lists, see MacKenzie (2007, 60–61) and Zahavi (1999, 38–42; 2005, 28–29; 2006, 282 ff.; 2007, 281–285).

Nagel's suggestion here is what he calls "the first stage of objectification of the mental," that is, despite the labels he uses, the attempt to view one's own and others' subjective experiences "without depriving them of their character as perspectives" (*id.*). In order to do so, he suggests that we consider experiences as events in the world, representing "an experience from outside by *imagining it subjectively*" (*ibid.*, 21; italics mine). Nagel's attempt basically hints at a "dual aspect" theory, where one thing can have two sets of mutually irreducible and equally essential properties, that is, the mental and the physical. This is a departure from the issue here, but what is of interest is the fact that Nagel lingers on the threshold between the subjective and perspectival points of view, on the one side, and the objective one, on the other, thus seeking a way to rescue subjectivity from the thematizing gaze of the *other*, being the gaze of reification. Of course, this main methodological issue has a long history and is perhaps bound to find no easy solutions.

2.b The Inner Structure of Self-awareness: Reflectivity, Intentionality, Temporality, and Spatiality

A cluster of other challenges a theory of self-awareness has to tackle are issues related to the inner structure of self-awareness. Here four topics will be touched upon: its inner articulation in terms of the possibility of reflectivity, self-awareness in relation to the intentionality of consciousness, the inner temporality of self-cognition, and the—so to speak—spatial boundaries of its structure.

Concerning the first, it must be said that reflectionism has not been decisively eliminated together with its problems, despite the wealth of non-dual accounts of self-awareness in both Eastern and Western traditions.¹² The tension between the reflective and reflexive models has run through the Indo-Tibetan tradition, assuming different forms, and (as was previously shown) the same tension is also reflected in the tendencies adopted by the modern exegesis in its interpretations of the textual and philosophical materials. The implications that have been examined in the previous sections of the thesis were approached in terms of the contemporary reflections on the topic. Now a few considerations must be made in relation to the specific phenomenological contribution to the issue.

If reflectivity is not banned from the philosophical discourse on self-awareness, the question arises as to how exactly pre-reflective self-cognition, non-relational and non-dual, is thought to give rise to reflective self-awareness. Indeed, the distance between the reflexive and the reflective

12. See Gennaro (1996; 2004).

models is huge and an adequate theory must make sense of the shift from non-duality to the structural and intentional *rupture* that reflectionism entails (Zahavi 2007, 282). While reflexivity posits consciousness as an intrinsic feature of the mental, reflectivity considers it as an extrinsic feature; however, the problematic nature of this point¹³ has led to a more recent tendency of bringing the two orders of mental states closer together:

Gennaro ... has argued that ... the HOT [higher-order thought] is better viewed as *intrinsic* to the target state, so that there is a complex conscious state with parts. Gennaro calls this the “wide intrinsicity view” (WIV) and he has also recently argued that Jean-Paul Sartre’s theory of consciousness can be understood in this way Robert Van Gulick ... has also explored the alternative that the HO state is part of the “global” conscious state. He calls such states “HOGS” (= higher-order global states) within which the lower-order state is “recruited” and becomes conscious. (Gennaro 2004, 4; italics in original)

In fact, Van Gulick (2006, 25) presents the HOGS model in order for the meta-intentional element not to be isolated as a distinct and separate state, instead locating it within the whole organization of the global state:

... [a state] into which the formerly nonconscious state is recruited and of which it itself becomes a component. Thus the distinctness principle is weakened, but not totally abandoned. Although the object state is retained as a component of the global state, it is typically altered somewhat in the process. In that respect the transition to conscious status involves some changes in the state’s intrinsic properties, as well as its gaining a new systemic significance in virtue of the larger active context into which it is recruited. It’s the same state, yet importantly different. Indeed, ... the question of whether it is the same state or a different state gets somewhat blurry, and the answer largely turns on how we individuate states.

13. Van Gulick (2004, 72):

Thus the transformation from unconscious to conscious state involves no change in the state itself but only the addition of a purely external and independent state which has it as its intentional object. Yet in so far as one interprets the conscious/unconscious distinction as dividing states in terms of whether they are conscious in the sense of there being “something that it is like to be in them” it seems difficult to accept the idea that the division involves no differences in the intrinsic properties of the states themselves but only differences in purely relational facts about which other states if any are intentionally directed at them.

The HOGS model is still higher-order (and therefore reflective), however, only insofar as the nonconscious–conscious transformation is a process of recruitment into an integrated organization that entails an intentional content and a higher-order component. This is also what moves Kriegel (2006) to make awareness inherent in or *built into* experience, rescuing it from its condition of being an extra mental state to be *added* to experience. The two mental states of higher-order theories, that are usually thought of as independent, have only recently tended to be formulated as “... entertaining some kind of *constitutive relation*, or *internal relation*, or some other *non-contingent* relation, so that they are *not* logically independent of each other” (*ibid.*, 143; italics in original). This is what Kriegel strategically calls “the same-order monitoring theory” (SOMT) and permits many possible versions of part-whole relationships between the two states, the strongest being holding a mental state to be identical with its higher-order representation (self-representationalism).¹⁴ Although higher-order theories have enjoyed great popularity for two or three decades, they have recently turned out to be dissatisfactory, giving way to the aforementioned alternatives. “But if one is on the lookout for promising and sophisticated alternatives to the higher-order accounts, one should take a closer look at phenomenology. Given the resources of the latter, the customary stance of analytical philosophy toward it—which has ranged from complete disregard to outright hostility—can only be characterized as counterproductive” (Zahavi 2006, 293).

This is reminiscent of the debates examined in the previous sections of the thesis, where the tensions between reflective and reflexive models of self-awareness in Buddhism were examined at various levels of the traditional and exegetical discourse. Interestingly, the contribution of phenomenology is in line with that of the Indo-Tibetan tradition on this tension, while also suggesting a fruitful direction for facing this specific challenge. As Zahavi remarks on the basis of Sartre’s (1984; 1960) insight, in fact, reflective and pre-reflective modes of self-consciousness should be thought of as having something in common:

... the two modes ... must share a certain affinity, a certain structural similarity. Otherwise, it would be impossible to explain how the prereflective cogito could ever give rise to reflection. It is a significant feature of the lived experience that it allows for reflective

14. By comparing various attempts at bringing the two mental states closer together, Kriegel (2006, 150) argues as follows:

... in Gennaro’s ... “wide intrinsicity view” what makes the two states “... two parts of a single mental state is simply our decision to treat them as such. There is no psychologically real relation between them that unites them into a single, cohesive mental state. By contrast, according to Van Gulick’s ... “higher-order global states” account and my ... model ... they are integrated and unified through a psychologically real cognitive process of information integration.

appropriation, and a theory of self-consciousness that can only account for prereflective self-consciousness is not much better than a theory that *only* accounts for reflective self-consciousness. ... The reason why reflection remains a permanent possibility is precisely that *prereflective* self-consciousness already involves a structural self-differentiation In other words, reflection merely articulates the unity of unification and differentiation inherent in the prereflective lived presence: its ecstatic-centered structure of protending, presencing, retaining. (Zahavi 2006, 287–288; italics in original)

Thus, most phenomenologists would argue that pre-reflective self-awareness must be considered as a dynamic and temporal self-differentiation, "... a dynamic and differentiated openness to alterity" (Zahavi 1998b, 35).

This consideration would lead to what has been anticipated as the third challenge of this cluster: that of explaining self-awareness' temporality or how one can have self-awareness over time or, in other words, why one can remember a past experience as one's own. However, before proceeding, one more point needs to be addressed, that is, the second of the abovementioned one: the problem of intentionality. It is a challenge that is related to the abovementioned issue concerning the transition from pre-reflective to reflective modes of awareness, since the latter refers to the inner intentionality of mind while the former indicates its outer intentionality, meaning, the fact that consciousness is co-originally and simultaneously aware of itself and of the world.

This issue arose during the discussion about the role of *ākāras* and the problematic interaction between consciousness and its objects, while in the West this topic has been discussed in great detail by Brentano (1973, 78–120), who specifically talks about self-awareness or, as he calls it, "inner consciousness" (*inneres Bewußtsein*). Brentano argues that the inner consciousness in question, rather than being a further mental state, is an internal feature of the primary experience. Thus, a mental state is conscious insofar as it is intentionally directed at itself, taking itself as its *secondary* object (thus preventing any infinite regress). At the same time, there is another *primary* object: the one related to the world; for instance, the sound one hears while also being aware of this perception. In the structure of one's consciousness there are, consequently, two objects (the heard sound and its perception, being respectively the primary and the secondary objects)¹⁵ and one single

15. Brentano (1995, 98; italics in original):

We can say that the sound is the *primary object* of the *act* of hearing, and that the act of hearing itself is the *secondary object*. Temporally they both occur at the same time, but in the nature of the case, the sound is prior. A presentation of the sound without a presentation of the act of hearing would not be inconceivable, at least *a priori*, but a presentation of the act of hearing without a presentation of the

mental state. Interestingly, as Brentano (1995, 127–128) points out, the perception of sound and the awareness of that perception give rise to one single mental phenomenon: the apparent separation between them is a merely “conceptual” differentiation (*ibid.*, 98). “In the same mental phenomenon in which the sound is present to our minds we simultaneously apprehend the mental phenomenon itself. What is more, we apprehend it in accordance with its dual nature insofar as it has the sound as content within it, and insofar as it has itself as content at the same time” (*ibid.*, 98).¹⁶ The entire discourse is strikingly similar to the complex discourse on the subjective and objective aspects of a cognition presented in the Indo-Tibetan tradition.¹⁷ Interestingly, in the contemporary exegesis of Brentano, there is no agreement on whether to consider his view a reflexive or reflective one; Brentano’s account is often cited as representative of the philosophical difficulty in keeping self-awareness together with intentionality that opens cognition to the world. It seems that a ubiquitous tension in the history of philosophy has always linked the importance of pre-reflective immediacy of self-awareness to a discourse on its inner articulation (often conceptually analyzed as reflective).¹⁸

The first of these four challenges dealt with the problem of making the transition from pre-reflective to reflective self-awareness comprehensible; thanks to the phenomenological account, it

sound would be an obvious contradiction. The act of hearing appears to be directed toward sound in the most proper sense of the term, and because of this it seems to apprehend itself incidentally and as something additional.

16. This in reference to Aristotle’s *On the Soul* (3.2.425b12).

17. Moreover, it is interesting to note that, similarly to Mi-pham, for instance, Brentano (1995, 70) also takes self-awareness to play an epistemologically foundational role:

Moreover, inner perception is not merely the only kind of perception which is immediately evident; it is really the only perception in the strict sense of the word. ... the phenomena of the so-called external perception cannot be proved true and real even by means of indirect demonstration. For this reason, anyone who in good faith has taken them for what they seem to be is being misled by the manner in which the phenomena are connected. Therefore, strictly speaking, so-called external perception is not perception. Mental phenomena, therefore, may be described as the only phenomena of which perception in the strict sense of the word is possible.

This idea is comparable to some understandings of the Buddhist doctrine of self-awareness seen thus far: since inner perception is uniquely indubitable, the kind of certainty this awareness uniquely bears must be considered as somehow basic to all other types of knowledge.

18. For further discussions on Brentano’s contribution to the doctrine of self-awareness, see the critical points made by Zahavi (1998a), Janzen (2008, 194 ff.), and Montague (2017). On the topic of intentionality, see Ryle (2009, 144): “... even though the self-intimation supposed to be inherent in any mental state or process is not described as requiring a separate act of attention, or as constituting a separate cognitive operation, still what I am conscious of in a process of inferring, say, is different from what the inferring is an apprehension of.”

has been suggested that pre-reflective self-cognition should be considered as a dynamic and temporal self-differentiation, with this line of reasoning leading towards the delicate topic of self-awareness' temporality.

This relates to the Buddhist controversies on the mental function of memory, examined in the epistemological context, first in relation to Dignāga and Dharmakīrti and then to Tsong-kha-pa and the Tibetan subsequent tradition. MacKenzie (2017) summarizes this point by claiming that, for Buddhist reflexivists, *svasaṃvedana* not only is the synchronic phenomenal point of view but, as Dignāga argues, it plays a crucial role in the *diachronic* relations of access-consciousness in recollection: *svasaṃvedana* allows for the apprehension of both aspects of experience by a later cognition, *from the inside*. Moreover, it has been shown (ch. V) the role it plays in the soteriological framework, where the notion of memory (or perhaps *presence*) is one way to express the fundamental role of reflexivity in the rDzogs-chen practice. The issue of the inner temporality of consciousness could also be addressed by tapping into the phenomenological tradition, as Zahavi (2007, 282) suggests, recalling Husserl's thoughtful notion of inner time-consciousness.¹⁹ The first consideration to be made is about James' (1981) influence upon Husserl's thought on the structure of inner temporality, as Cobb-Stevens (1998, 43) remarks:

... I shall suggest that James' description of the "specious present" corresponds closely to what Husserl referred to as the "living present." Before developing this thesis, it will be helpful first to summarize the relevant themes from Husserl's lectures on "inner" time-consciousness. Husserl's mature writings on time-consciousness describe two closely interrelated presentations of the flow of our experiences: i) the flow of intentional acts reflectively thematized as identities in a manifold of temporal phases (now-phase, past-phase, and coming-phase), and ii) the "absolute" flow of unthematized experience whose phases (primal impression, retention, and protention) are the pre-reflective awareness of our acts. These two dimensions are not separate flows, but rather different modes of presentation of one and the same flow of experience. The key to their difference is the structure of reflection. Husserl points out that whereas perception, memory, and reflection explicitly posit or thematize their objects, the consciousness operative within the absolute flux precedes all objectification.

In fact, prior to Husserl, James (1981, 593) states:

19. Also Sartre (1960, 39), for his part, recognizes Husserl's point: "It is consciousness which unifies itself, concretely, by a play of 'transversal' intentionalities which are concrete and real retentions of past consciousnesses."

[The] content [of the specious present] is a constant flux, “events” dawning into its forward end as fast as they fade out of its rearward one, and each of them changing its time coefficient from “not yet” or “not quite yet” to “just gone” or “gone” as it passes by. Meanwhile, the specious present, the intuited duration, stands permanent, like the rainbow on the waterfall, with its own quality unchanged by the events that stream through it.

A duration-block is described, whose span encompasses the fading past and the upcoming future: “In short, the practically cognized present is no knife-edge, but a saddle-back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions into time” (*ibid.*, 574).

Following James, Husserl’s investigation of the structure of inner time-consciousness identifies duration-blocks of protention, primal impression and retention, that should be read as an investigation of the self-luminous²⁰ structure of inner consciousness. Thus, Husserl (1977, 155; italics mine) outlines “... the various kinds of modifications of the type of lived experience, perception as such, of *retention* as still having consciousness of what has gone by as perceptual present, of having consciousness in the mode ‘just-having been,’ of *protention* as the original foreseeing of what announces itself as ‘just-coming’.” Retention and protention are automatic and involuntary processes, a two-fold temporal scene that opens up without providing new objects (in the retention and protention phases) but rather letting the temporal horizon of the phenomenon manifest and allowing the temporal flow of consciousness to be experienced. On the other hand, when one reflects and thematizes one’s experiences, in recollection and expectation, one’s own acts become temporal enduring *objects*: a new temporal form is imposed upon them and they are inserted or framed into a sequential time-line. Following Zahavi’s reading of Husserl’s inner temporality, such a specious pre-reflective present might be interpreted as a way to insert complexity within the pre-reflective self-giving of experience, such that it can unfold and fully manifest at a pre-reflective level. Moreover, pre-reflectively, one’s stream of consciousness is given as a flowing unity. Therefore, Husserl’s analysis of inner time-consciousness explains not only how one is aware of extended temporal blocks, but also how one can be aware of one’s own stream of experiences. To put it differently, it also describes how consciousness unifies itself across time:

In this way, it becomes evident that concrete perception as original consciousness (original givenness) of a temporally extended object is structured internally as itself a streaming system of momentary perceptions (so-called originary impressions). But each such

20. For a detailed study on the mind’s luminosity in Husserl’s account, see Hart 1998.

momentary perception is the nuclear phase of a continuity, a continuity of momentary gradated retentions on the one side, and a horizon of what is coming on the other side: a horizon of “protention,” which is disclosed to be characterized as a constantly gradated coming. This *momentary continuity of retention and protention* belonging to every originary impression undergoes a modification difficult to describe, in the flowing off of the originary impression; in any case the multiplicity of appearances of the linear stretch of time is multi-dimensional. (*ibid.*, 154–155; italics mine)

“In sum, the three-fold structure of time-consciousness is the condition of the possibility of both the diachronic unification of the stream of consciousness and the experienced continuity of temporal objects” (MacKenzie 2011, 96). In claiming that Husserl distinguished two types of experiential self-givenness, a reflective and pre-reflective one, and in linking them to two sets of temporality, Zahavi (1999, 71) diverges from the general interpretation that sees Husserl equating self-awareness with reflective (that is, introspective) self-awareness. The Heidelberg School, whose main proponents (Henrich, Frank, Pothast, and Tugendhat) argue against higher-order theories, sees and criticizes Husserl’s account’s (alleged) basic reflective schema.²¹

However, the topic of the inner complexity and articulation of self-awareness, which has been seen to be problematic since Dignāga’s time²² and continues to be debated in the most recent exegesis of his work, is also still a difficult point for the contemporary discourse on self-awareness. Indeed, the Heidelberg School, which could be considered as one of its most remarkable protagonists, struggles with this point.²³ However, the precious reflections that can be taken from Dignāga’s account of *svasaṃvedana* (as was previously discussed) and those that can be identified

21. Zahavi (1998a, 135):

As Frank puts it, Husserl’s entire investigation of consciousness is based on the tacit assumption that consciousness is conscious of something different from itself. Due to this fixation on intentionality Husserl never managed to escape the reflection theory of self-awareness. He persistently operated with a model of self-awareness based upon the subject-object dichotomy, with its entailed difference between the intending and the intended, and therefore never discovered the existence of a prereflective self-awareness.

For a presentation and critique of the Heidelberg School, see Zahavi (1999; 2007). The Heidelberg School’s contribution to the study of self-awareness has mainly consisted of a criticism of the reflectionist model. Their arguments are hardly satisfactory, however, in that they do not provide a positive description of the structure of pre-reflective self-awareness. For references on the Heidelberg School’s critique of Husserl, see Zahavi (1999, 230n13).

22. For a discussion on how Dignāga could help read Husserl’s account of temporality, see Ganeri (2012, 174–175).

23. For a critical presentation of the attempts made by the Heidelberg School in order to highlight the internal complexity of self-cognition, see Zahavi (1999, 35–37).

in Husserl's account, reveal different angles from where to articulate the inner structure of inner reflexivity, a point that cannot be neglected by a theory of self-cognition.

After examining the inner temporal structure of self-awareness, its spatial boundaries will now briefly be taken into consideration. This metaphorical expression, "spatial boundaries," refers to the two main levels of self-cognition: the first concerning its perspectival structure and the second relating to the (Freudian) unconscious. This second level, despite its relevance, will not be addressed in the present inquiry since it reflects considerations that mainly emerged from modern issues and find little support in the Buddhist tradition.²⁴

An adequate theory of self-cognition should be able to confront the structural issue of the minimal point of view required by experience: the question here is whether self-awareness is just the anonymous acquaintance of a single experience with itself or whether it implies a broader egocentric structure, referring either to the stream of consciousness or to the self.

Looking to the Buddhist tradition, a valuable contribution can be found in the way experience is framed by the theory of self-awareness; as MacKenzie (2017) claims, for Buddhist reflexivism, *svasamvedana* is the synchronic conscious point of view within which the two aspects of experience are given. It is a minimal form of subjectivity, in the sense of a phenomenological *dative* of manifestations, that to which phenomenal experiences are presented. This does not entail any separate or enduring subject existing over and above the stream of the individual episodes of experience: rather, each experiential episode is its own subject. Experiences are given in a phenomenal first-person perspective and the mind's reflexivity is therefore the necessary condition of any phenomenal appearance, subjective or objective. The various levels and forms of the emergence of a self-referential structure are vast and deeply articulated.²⁵ The Buddhist reflexivist

24. Concerning this second level, that is, the problem of the unconscious, the main question is whether all experiences are characterized by a primitive, pre-reflective self-awareness (thus not admitting the existence of the unconscious) or whether the unconscious can be posited as compatible with a theory of basic reflexivity of consciousness. See Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991, 48–50), Zahavi (1999, 203–220), Gennaro (2004).

It has been argued (Zahavi 1999; id. 2006; MacKenzie 2007) that a modern theory of self-awareness should also confront other complex issues, such as that of embodiment and the social and linguistic mutually transformative contacts with other embodied subjectivities. However, these are issues that are mainly connected to a broader concept of self-awareness, that is, one in which reflexivity is not just linked to each experiential event and the structure of consciousness itself, but is also connected to the identity of a self (an embodied self, having interactions with others). Therefore, since these topics are not directly included in the scope of the present research, they will not be taken into account.

25. For further discussion, see Albahari (2006), where the Pāli Canon is interpreted as implicitly, but centrally, assuming the existence of a witness-consciousness—"...a reading," as she admits, "that aligns Buddhism more closely to Advaita Vedānta than is usually acknowledged" (ibid., 2). See also Siderits, Thompson, and Zahavi (2011), and in particular Fasching (2011), Thompson (2011), Dreyfus (2011). On the topic, see also Dreyfus and Thompson (2007).

proponents concede a subjective character of experience but for them this does not at all necessitate positing an additionally existing subject. Rather, the searched for subject (the ‘experiencer’) is simply the experience itself and not something *behind* it, as an additionally existing self. This is indeed the position advanced by Dignāga’s school: the subjectivity (the being-subjectively-experienced) of experience is asserted but a subject beyond *svasaṃvedana* is rejected. Self-awareness provides a continuous, immediate, and internal perspective on one’s own stream of experience that is given to *itself* and not to *a self*.²⁶

However, on the basis of what has been said thus far, one fundamental and basic point crops up, which has indeed been expressed by Zahavi (2005). Consciousness implies a pre-reflective account of subjectivity, that is, first-person self-givenness, the fact that when the subject has an experience there is no doubt about who is having that experience (in Zahavi’s words, “When I undergo an experience, I cannot be in doubt about who the subject of that experience is,” [*ibid.*, 124]). However, this would not be sufficient for establishing subjective experience, which requires a pole of invariance in relation to which one can determine that experiences are one’s own. Dreyfus (2011, 142) argues for a Buddhist response to Zahavi’s challenge:

This response rests on the distinction between two senses of who we are: the subject, or, rather subjectivity, that is, the continuum of momentary mental states with their first-personal self-givenness, which are central to being a person (more on this shortly), and the self, which is an illusory reification of subjectivity as being a bounded agent enduring through time, rather than a complex flow of fleeting self-specified experiences. ... But this does not entail that there is an act-transcendent pole of identity, an entity that endures before and after the moment of experience

The view Dreyfus is arguing for agrees that the person is a conceptual fiction but asserts a minimal phenomenological self-consciousness in any experience, which is necessary for the attribution of such concept. One attributes personhood to oneself not only based upon one’s psycho-physical complex (and the main reference here is to Abhidharma) but also on the basis of the self-givenness of one’s experiences (for the Yogācāra view), which arise as belonging to a minimal I. Here the

26. In considering the Buddhist contributions to the concept of self-reference, Mackenzie (2011) describes various accounts of the tradition and particularly examines Tsong-kha-pa’s suggestion of a minimal self (*nga tsam*). For him, the sense of self is natural and pre-linguistic but it is not true that each moment of consciousness is self-aware: it’s a process of I-making (*ahaṃkāra*), without any *svasaṃvedana* involved. Here, MacKenzie (*ibid.*, 93n21, with my adjustments for the transliterations from Tibetan) argues: “Unlike Tsong-kha-pa, I do accept the notion of *svasaṃvedana*. On my view, the minimal self (*ahaṃkāra*) emerges from the more basic inherent reflexivity of consciousness. Thus my view is closer to the Mādhyamika of Śāntarākṣita (in India) or the bKa’-brgyud and rNying-ma traditions (in Tibet).”

minimal I would be the constantly changing stream of pre-reflectively self-aware experiences. “Hence, the experiences on the basis of which we understand ourselves as persons are not impersonal but intrinsically self-specified, and this is why they are immune to any possible doubt as to whom the subject of the experience is” (*ibid.*, 145). Thus, stressing this difference between the self-giveness of consciousness and the self seems to be one pivotal contribution that Buddhist philosophy can make to the contemporary discussion about the self-identity, immediacy, and privileged access to self-awareness. However, the whole issue of subjectivity and self is made ever so much more complicated in terms of the soteriological Buddhist path. For instance, the doctrine of basic consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna: kun gzhi rnam shes*) is formulated by the tradition in order to answer the main objection that, without a self beyond fleeting mental states, karmic latencies could not be transmitted. However, the assertion of such basic consciousness raises difficult philosophical questions and their examination would certainly exceed the scope of the present inquiry.²⁷ This being said, a modern theory of self-awareness able to tackle the topic of subjectivity can find invaluable help in the various strands of the Buddhist tradition. Moreover, nowadays the possibility of a convergence between the rich and complex Buddhist contribution and the Western phenomenological approach is particularly promising. With respect to this, it is worth mentioning Thompson’s (2011, 185) insightful attempt for a reconciliation of phenomenology and the Buddhist view of no-self, where the subjectivity of experience is precisely the selfhood (ipseity) of time-consciousness in the Sartrean and Husserlian phenomenological accounts:

Here it may be possible to reconcile phenomenology and the Buddhist no-self paradigm. From a phenomenological perspective, there is no need to suppose that ‘I’ or ‘me’ corresponds to an enduring entity with an existence separate or somehow distinct from the stream of mind-body events. Rather, the ‘I’ picks out the stream from its own self-individuating phenomenal perspective. To use an Indian turn of phrase, we could say that the stream is fundamentally I-making (*ahamkāra*).

Moreover, Zahavi (forthcoming) examines the what-it-is-like-ness of phenomenal states in terms of a what-it-is-like-for-me-ness. On this view, experiential processes have an inherent reflexive self-consciousness in the weak sense that they are like something for the subject: for-me-ness entails a kind of *state* self-awareness, as distinguished from a *subject* self-awareness. Thus, it is clear that this matter intersects and also questions many categories that have been adopted in the recent studies of consciousness and its reflexivity, and today further research is desirable.

27. For a philosophical interpretation of this doctrine, see Dreyfus (2011).

In conclusion, within the complexity of the topic of perspectival experience and self-reference, many possibilities of egological and non-egological structures of consciousness can indeed be conceived of and examined. The self-awareness' inner time and its spatial (or perspectival) boundaries, together with the possibility for reflectivity and intentionality, are all hotly debated topics and no conclusive statement can be uttered. On the contrary, as Flanagan (1992, 195) conveniently summarizes, these days there is a rich range of topics available for further research: "In sum, at one end of the spectrum there is the self-consciousness involved in having a subjective experience. At the other end of the spectrum is the sort of self-consciousness involved in thinking about one's model of one's self, or as I shall say for simplicity, the self."

2.c Contemporary Philosophical and Scientific Challenges: Towards a Common Ground

From the philosophical point of view, the most recent and hegemonic framework is that of naturalism; it therefore seems reasonable that today a theory of self-awareness must be compatible with at least some form of it. Moreover, such theories must also be capable of entering into meaningful dialogue with the latest empirical findings in the cognitive sciences. Those two sides, one philosophical and the other scientific, represent two major elements which the ongoing debate on self-awareness must deal with. With respect to that, one important (and maybe ambitious) direction for developing and deepening a discourse on self-cognition emerges from the (not always easy) convergence of naturalism, phenomenology, and contemplative traditions, on the one side, and neuroscience on the other. The goal being a synthesis of phenomenology in light of cognitive science and other philosophical and contemplative traditions that focus on experience.

There have been some attempts to proceed in this direction. Coseru (2012), for instance, sees Indian Buddhist epistemology as being in continuity with the naturalistic approaches of contemporary epistemology and philosophy of mind, as well as with some of the phenomenological theories of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. Coseru, in fact, endorses a phenomenological naturalistic position: "... adopting the approach of phenomenological naturalism, I want to emphasize the pragmatic character of epistemic inquiry in the Buddhist tradition" (*ibid.*, 54). Coseru considers Buddhist epistemology as an intellectual project that has been built on naturalist grounds but would benefit from further naturalization.²⁸ On the other hand, however, the convergence between phenomenology and naturalism, as well as the general perspective of philosophy of mind, is not at all easy. Varela (1996, 334) clearly states:

28. See also MacKenzie (forthcoming).

The phenomenological approach starts from the irreducible nature of conscious experience. Lived experience is where we start from and where all must link back to, like a guiding thread. Most modern authors are disinclined to focus on the distinction between mental life in some general sense and experience, or manifest some suspicion about its status. From a phenomenological standpoint conscious experience is quite at variance with that of mental content as it figures in the anglo-american philosophy of mind.

Ganeri (2012, 218) also stresses the divergence between naturalism and phenomenology: “Much contemporary research into Buddhist philosophy of mind has been conducted ... within a framework of naturalization, seeking a hard naturalist rapprochement with contemporary science. ... I believe it is more correct to regard the [Buddhist no-self] theory rather as providing a compositional phenomenological psychology.” A phenomenological standpoint is also vividly and lucidly endorsed by the uncompromising neurophenomenological attitude that Bitbol (2015) defends, standing against those strands that, although neurophenomenological, ultimately subordinate experiences to their neural correlates and formulate a physicalist hierarchy according to which neurobiological processes are more fundamental than phenomenal consciousness.

Thus, Bitbol (2015) helpfully details three main versions of the neurophenomenological approach. According to a minimal (or naturalistic) version of it, its role is only to contribute to the findings of a hegemonic objective neuroscience. The mild (or neutral) version of neurophenomenology consists of adopting a sort of uncommitted standpoint, thus placing the phenomenological description and the neurobiological processes on an equal footing. While it is the full-fledged (or radical) phenomenological approach of neurophenomenology that, for Bitbol (2008, 71), Varela is committed to. Varela’s (1996, 344) notion of “mutual constraints” between the study of experience and its correlates entails a reciprocal transformation and enrichment: if phenomenological reports can help identify unnoticed neural patterns then neurological findings can aid phenomenological research. Indeed, “Experience and scientific understanding are like two legs without which we cannot walk” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991, 14).

What is, then, the concrete and methodological common ground of phenomenology, contemplative practices and traditions, naturalism, and the cognitive sciences? Neurophenomenology is the field where this encounter can actually happen. Representative of this new frontier is a recent book by Thompson (2015) where, drawing upon his unique position as philosopher of mind and active participant in the ongoing dialogue between neuroscience and

contemplative traditions.²⁹ Despite the legitimate criticism Bitbol (2015) makes about Thompson's tendency to ultimately consider neurobiological processes as more fundamental than phenomenal consciousness, Thompson's work is particularly effective in weaving cognitive science together with Indian and Tibetan philosophical traditions in order to explore consciousness and the sense of self. By mapping the main states of consciousness in which the self dwells, neurophenomenology addresses various issues raised by the meeting of neuroscience and the contemplative traditions. In this final part of the thesis, special attention will be devoted to describing the potentials of this field, as the spring of meaningful studies on the reflexivity of consciousness, its states and features. The intention is to envision the most compelling directions for further investigation that only a common project of the two disciplines, the scientific and experiential/contemplative, could conduct.

In framing his reflections on such a multidisciplinary and innovative field, Thompson (2015, xxxiii), borrowing its principal outlines from the Indian yogic traditions (including Buddhism), addresses the account of consciousness by taking the “threefold framework of awareness, contents of awareness, and self-experience—or what the Indian tradition calls ‘I-making’—and puts it to work in cognitive science.” The sense of self and the consciousness thus identified are then explored by Thompson across a structure that, again coming from the Indian tradition, encompasses four different states: waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and pure awareness. The central idea of this line of research is investigating the view of the self as an experiential process undergoing constant change. The author criticizes the position that he labels “neuro-nihilism,” that is, the neuroscientific view of the self as just an illusion created by the brain, suggesting instead an “enactive understanding of the self” (*ibid.*, 324) in which the self is nothing but the I-making process. The self, a dependently-arisen series of events, is thus not an entity: “The self is a process of I-ing—an ongoing process that enacts an ‘I’ and in which the ‘I’ is no different from this process itself” (*ibid.*, 326).

This framework also provides an inspiring definition of consciousness: Thompson refers to it as experience manifesting itself across the four abovementioned states and describes it using the threefold framework cited. Another fundamental issue extensively addressed by Thompson concerns the basic differences between the Indian and Western traditions' maps of consciousness. The latter tend to focus on the presence or absence of consciousness and consider waking sensory experience as the basis for all consciousness. The former, on the other hand, tend to focus on varying levels of consciousness, ranging from the grossest to the subtlest and consider sensory experience to be gross and dependent on subtler ones. Despite this difference, Thompson shows a

29. See also Lutz, Dunne, and Davidson (2007).

significant correspondence between the Indo-Tibetan and scientific accounts of consciousness: there is detailed neuroscientific evidence that consciousness is made up of discrete cognitive events, as is asserted in Buddhist Abhidharma philosophy. With respect to that, Thompson focuses on neuroscientific experiments that show how focused- and open-awareness forms of meditation enhance the brain's ability to organize and structure the sensory flow into discrete moments of awareness. Another crucial point addressed by this field of research is the relationship between consciousness and the brain, as well as issues regarding the primacy of consciousness: "consciousness is our way of being, and it cannot be objectified, that is, treated as just another kind of object out there in the world, because it is that by which any object shows up for us at all" (*ibid.*, 100). Thompson refutes all the traditional positions about the mind-brain problem in favor of forging a new understanding of what "physical" means, pointing beyond the dualistic conception of consciousness versus physical being.

Thompson starts investigating various states of consciousness by presenting the hypnagogic state, the one leading up to sleep, and compares it to the dreaming state. The former is characterized as "... a slackening of the sense of self and a spellbound identification of consciousness with what it spontaneously imagines" (*ibid.*, 122). Since the boundaries between oneself and the world are blurred in the hypnagogic state, one is not constrained within the waking ego structure, which means that one can tap into different sources of creativity and rest by becoming absorbed in the images one is examining. When one enters the dreaming state, however, the sense of self is restored and one experiences oneself as the subject of the dream world; the studies Thompson reports show how the difference between the two states is reflected in a shift in the type of waves emitted by the brain.

What happens when one is able to focus one's attention on a dream while knowing one is dreaming? This question leads to the state of consciousness referred to as lucid dreaming, one that neuroscientists have just begun to explore but is well-known and widely utilized in Tibetan Buddhist contemplative practices. The study of lucid dreaming and its implications represents one of the most promising points of intersection between science and the contemplative traditions. Its link to the issue of self-awareness is deep, since it can be seen as a specific instance of recognition of one's own state; therefore, studying this state of consciousness might enhance the actual knowledge of this specific and fundamental feature of consciousness.

It is worth mentioning the method used in this kind of research, which is paradigmatic of the general methodology adopted by neurophenomenology and which reveals the precious and unique contribution of the Buddhist contemplative traditions. The subjects of the experiments are meditators trained in the traditional contemplative techniques of lucid dreaming. While their

physiology and brain activity is being measured in the sleep lab, they can communicate to the outside world (the lab) through prearranged eye movements, using an ‘eye-language’ that allows them to communicate when their lucid dream begins and to report about specific features of the experience. Being trained, they are able to move flexibly and reliably between different states of awareness and can vividly describe their experience from moment to moment. Thanks to their training they are able to enhance the link between first- and third-person perspective and lead contemporary Western philosophers of mind to examine states of consciousness that have thus far either been neglected or dismissed. Bitbol’s phenomenological curiosity also goes along these lines, tapping into contemplative traditions where investigation stems from a mindful survey of the flux of lived experience, finding that “... each alternative state of consciousness might well have an important lesson to teach about how to tackle the problem of consciousness” (Bitbol 2015, 108). Therefore, Bitbol (2008, 71) explains: “... if experience is systematically trained and educated, either in the first person by meditation ..., or in the second person by making explicit unsuspected features of experience in dialogue ..., or in a combination of first- and third-person modes by bio-feedback, the basis of possible intersubjective consensus is likely to expand beyond recognition.” A fundamental way to bridge neurocognitive and Eastern approaches seems to be, therefore, that of promoting first-person experience transformation by training in meditative or yogic states.

The scientific and philosophical consequences of such an encounter between such technological tools, on the one hand, and knowledge held by contemplative traditions, on the other, may soon prove to be remarkable. The potentials of lucid dreaming is mainly discussed in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of dream yoga, the highest abilities one could acquire by training—by transforming one’s own dreams and thus working with one’s emotions—are said to disclose the lucid experience of seeing through the dream by dissolving it completely, releasing all imagery and “... simply being aware of being aware” (*ibid.*, 170). The factor of lucidity and reflexivity involved in lucid dreaming seems thus to be trainable and have many applications. Therefore, as Thompson suggests, our most common neuroscientific models of dream interpretation should be corrected, since they cannot adequately explain the dream state in light of what lucid dreaming reveals; Dreaming can no longer be seen as a passive epiphenomenon of the sleep state, but rather as an intentional imagination process. Thus, a new dream science could fruitfully combine dream yoga with psychology and neuroscience.³⁰

30. Closely related to lucid dreaming are out-of-body experiences, in which one sees oneself from outside one’s body while nevertheless experiencing it as one’s own. These states are investigated in a similar way. Thompson presents these states as revelatory about the sense of self: in the dissociation between our body-as-object and our body-as-subject, our sense of self and self-location follows our body-as-subject, that is, the one that holds our spatial perspective. It is true that much is still unclear about these experiences: why can they represent only some things in the

According to this innovative approach, another state through which consciousness and its reflexivity can be investigated is deep and dreamless sleep. While most neuroscientists today think of it as a state during which consciousness fades away and vanishes, Indian and Tibetan traditions see it as possessing a subtle form of awareness and consider this state of consciousness from a completely different perspective. According to these contemplative traditions, through meditative training one can actually access these deep levels of awareness. In these states the consciousness is said to be so subtle that it becomes just a “witness consciousness,” awareness that “... watches the carousel of sleeping, dreaming and waking, but without participating in this mental whirling” (*ibid.*, 248) and without any sense of ego. Thus, “... the progression from deep sleep to dreaming to waking is a progression from subtler to grosser levels of consciousness and embodiment” (*ibid.*, 260). The interesting question here (*ibid.*, 232–233) is whether it makes sense to presuppose the presence of a minimal pre-reflective self-awareness during sleep and dreamless sleep, that is, the presence of a reflexivity of mind that manifests and unfolds as flowing retentions and protentions (recalling Husserl’s terms), since “[t]he crucial point is that retention or primary memory is an essential ingredient of every conscious experience ...” (*ibid.*, 232). Thompson comments on “contemplative sleep science” (*ibid.*, 268) as follows: if highly experienced meditation practitioners could provide reports upon awakening from deep sleep and their physiology and brain activity could be measured, then the neural and physical data could be combined with first-person reports, thus having new evidence that this is indeed a state of consciousness and that it is accessible. In fact, one ordinarily does not have cognitive access to deeper levels of phenomenal consciousness, but according to the contemplative traditions one’s mind can be efficiently trained. Thus, “... much of what Western science and philosophy would describe as unconscious might qualify as conscious, in the sense of involving subtle levels of phenomenal awareness that could be made accessible through meditative mental training” (*ibid.*, 8).

As Bitbol (2014, 267) suggests, “Instead of remaining stuck within the third-person attitude, the new science should include a ‘dance’ of mutual definition taking place between first-person and third-person accounts, mediated by the second person level of social exchange.” Therefore, in conclusion, while contemplative accounts are able to cast new light on the scientific approach for studying states of consciousness, findings from neuroscientific experimental research can bring scientific accuracy and evidence to contemplative traditions. Contemplative neuroscience and neurophenomenology turn out to be innovative projects that may dramatically enrich and problematize our understanding of consciousness together with its specific features, as well as that

environment correctly and not others? Are there specific kinds of lucid dreams? Are these experiences repeatable in a rigorously controlled experimental setting? These and many other questions are still awaiting answers.

of the self. The most relevant challenges related to the Western contemporary discourse on consciousness and its reflexivity that have been discussed, can actually be seen as opportunities to envision the most compelling directions for further investigations on the topic. Here, the Indo-Tibetan contribution and its integration with the contemporary field is crucial. The potentials of a common ground between the rich legacy of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition, on the one hand, and Western phenomenological and scientific studies, on the other, are yet to be fully realized.

Concluding Remarks

The aim of this dissertation has been to examine the concept of self-awareness (*svasaṃvedana: rang rig*) as it developed in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition, particularly in terms of its potential contribution to the ongoing philosophical discourse on the topic, with the aim of enriching and deepening its related philosophical field of research.

The mind's knowing of itself is a highly technical notion in Buddhist philosophy and represents a crucial subject of debate within the tradition, but has not yet been fully examined by modern scholarship. Specific conceptions of *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig* have been studied over the years, while Williams (1998) and Yao (2005) have considered this issue in the broader contexts of Tibetan Madhyamaka and pre-Dignāga Buddhist accounts, respectively. Nevertheless, there are no studies that encompass the range and complexity of this concept across the Buddhist tradition. As such, this study aimed to convey an overview of *svasaṃvedana* or *rang rig* that covers its main aspects. This examination of the main understandings of this Buddhist notion has selected, unpacked, and compared various philosophical accounts that show the importance of self-awareness in the context of epistemology, gnoseology, soteriology, ontology, and consequently also doxography.

Recently, suggestions have been made by various scholars to put the tradition's understanding of *svasaṃvedana/rang rig* in contact and dialogue with the contemporary exegesis and ongoing philosophical debates around the issue. Thus, this research has set the examined accounts against the wider reflections upon the universal problem of self-awareness, through considering the various bridges between the tradition and contemporary thoughts on self-awareness. In order to do so, the methodological approach adopted here drew inspiration from a cross-cultural *praxis* where each of the tradition's understandings of *svasaṃvedana* has also been examined through modern interpreters' understandings of the topic, intertwining the traditional contributions with comparable ongoing reflections upon the nature of consciousness.

After a few introductory remarks, the initial part of the research investigated the main Indian developments of the Buddhist notion of *svasaṃvedana*. First, it was shown how the emergence of this notion in some pre-Dignāga Buddhist sources initially occurred within the soteriological discourse about the Buddha's omniscience, only becoming an epistemological concern at the time of Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's epistemological project.

The following section took a closer look at Dignāga's formulation of *svasaṃvedana*, in light of various modern scholars' interpretations. Through considering some recent philological works on *Pramāṇasamuccaya* and -*vṛtti* 1.8cd–10, where Dignāga presents *svasaṃvedana* as *pramāṇaphala*, the nature and function of epistemological self-awareness were examined. Although for decades its main role (conveyed by that passage) was considered to be bridging the gap between externalism and internalism, due to being the intentional (and thus dualistic) cognizance of the objective aspect by the subjective aspect of experience, in recent years it has been argued that instead its role as *pramāṇaphala* is that of providing access to any experience whatsoever, to the *how* of the appearance of any possible object. Thus, it ends up bridging the gap between externalism and internalism but in a totally different way from what was previously suggested. By considering the main post-Dignāga Indian developments of the notion, the memory argument was then examined in detail, together with other relevant positions on the topic. These first two sections have thus prepared the ground for fully appreciating the Tibetan assimilations and developments of the notion of self-awareness.

The central part of the thesis investigated the multifaceted relevance of *rang rig* in the Tibetan arena. To begin with, the third section examined Williams' (1998) manifesto where he outlined the main models (reflective and reflexive) that modern scholarship would later adopt for the classification of the various (Indo-)Tibetan understandings of self-awareness. In scrutinizing these two categories, the way Williams identified the reflective model in the Tibetan passage chosen for his manifesto was questioned together with his way of seeing it as representing a Buddhist traditional standpoint on the issue, stemming from Dignāga and the Yogācāra school and reflected in the dGe-lugs interpretation. However, it was argued that the reflective model cannot be neatly mapped upon Dignāga's formulation and should perhaps rather be read as an attempt to analytically think through the conceptual relationship between the inner components of Dignāga's non-dual account of self-awareness, while never implying dualism (this would seem to be the case of the dGe-lugs criticism of *rang rig*). Alternatively, it might be understood as indicating one possible (and perhaps frequent) wrong interpretation of self-awareness, derived from positing a non-dual mental phenomenon in a dualistic framework or by adapting it to linguistic constraints. Then, the developments and relevance of the feature of the luminosity of consciousness in the tradition was investigated, distinguishing between luminosity as *prabhāsvara(tā)* ('*od gsal [ba]*) and as *prakāśa(tā)* (*gsal [ba]*), arguing for a possible convergence of those two meanings.

The subsequent section focused on the multidimensional controversy that emerges (and has emerged) when comparing the views of *rang rig* endorsed by Tsong-kha-pa and Mi-pham, showing

how self-awareness turns out to be a crucial element for their overall ontological and epistemological accounts. This section, therefore, analyzed some of the main epistemological issues *rang rig* entails, such as memory and validity of cognition, and examined the role of ontology in interpreting self-awareness, especially in relation to the two truths.

Following this, the crucial soteriological role of *rang rig* in relation to spiritual practice and breakthrough was examined, with special reference to the rNying-ma and rDzogs-chen views. It was shown how in these traditions salvific transformation ultimately depends upon reflexivity, for self-awareness—as intended by these traditions, in relation to the self-manifestation of the ontological ground—makes the (soteriological) difference between one’s being on a path leading to *nirvāṇa* or one leading to *samsāra*. Thus, the central part of the thesis recalled the main dimensions of the philosophical notion of *rang rig* in the Tibetan tradition, always in view of the Indian legacy on the one side and the contemporary exegesis on the other.

The final part of the thesis examined how the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition can contribute to a contemporary theory of self-awareness that could adequately face the various challenges that emerge from a diverse and multidisciplinary approach. By examining the main issues of the discourse on self-cognition that such a theory should be able to tackle, the possible resonances, contributions and support that the tradition and the Western phenomenological approach can fruitfully and harmoniously provide each other has been investigated. Finally, a promising common ground has been pointed out where the cognitive sciences and phenomenology in partnership with the Indian and Tibetan philosophical and contemplative traditions could work together in order to explore consciousness, reflexivity, and the nature of self. Moreover, the potentials of neurophenomenology were discussed as the framework for innovative projects that may dramatically enrich and problematize our understanding of consciousness together with its specific features. The intention here was to envision the most compelling directions for further research that only a common project of the two disciplines, the scientific and the experiential/contemplative, could conduct. An interesting question about self-awareness in this field is whether it is possible to study the presence of a minimal pre-reflective self-awareness during sleep and dreamless sleep, that is, the presence of a reflexivity of mind that manifests and unfolds through the various states of consciousness. In order to do that, an innovative and promising way to fruitfully intertwine neurocognitive and contemplative approaches seems to entail promoting first-person experience transformation, by training in meditative or yogic states, in combination with third-person modes of data gathering through bio-feedback. Thus, the rich legacy of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition turns out to be extremely relevant in meeting with Western phenomenological and scientific studies

in order to expand our understanding of the dimensions and features of consciousness. The potentials of such a common ground are yet to be fully realized.

As for the limitations of this thesis, the scope of this research only included the Buddhist tradition, leaving aside the debates between non-Buddhist and Buddhist schools in the Indian arena. Consequently, only the main elements of the Indian Buddhist tradition have been examined (mainly as preparation for examining their Tibetan assimilation) while the meaningful contributions of the non-Buddhist schools to *svasaṃvedana* have not been taken into account. Concerning the Tibetan arena, a limited selection of emblematic accounts were considered with the aim of representing at least the main dimensions of such a rich philosophical concept, without intending to be exhaustive. However, a broader inquiry should include many other instances and nuances of the Tibetan conceptions of and around *rang rig*. For example, the role of *rang rig* in the soteriological dimension as a crucial element for the practice of Mahāmudrā would be of great value if properly examined. As for the secondary literature, as was remarked from the outset of this thesis, the language barrier excluded the use of recent Chinese and Japanese studies in the field.

All this being considered, much further research is required in this field in terms of the Buddhist tradition and its possible contributions to the contemporary philosophical arena; even more so in light of the neurophenomenological inquiry examined in the final part of the thesis. An attempt has been made to contribute to this vast and challenging project, by tapping into the mutually transformative potentials of a cross-cultural philosophical enterprise whose questions now more than ever are becoming urgent as well as constructive.

Abbreviations

- D sDe-dge bKa’-’gyur and bsTan-’gyur.
Numbers According to: Ui, Hakuju, et al., eds. 1934. *A Complete Catalogue of the Tibetan Buddhist Canons (Bkaḥ-ḥgyur and Bstan-ḥgyur)*. Sendai: Tōhoku Imperial University.
- P Peking bKa’-’gyur and bsTan-’gyur.
Numbers According to: Suzuki, Daisetz T., ed. 1985. *The Tibetan Tripitaka. Peking Edition: Catalogue & Index*. Reduced-Size Edition. Kyoto: Rinsen Book Co.
- T Taishō shinshū daizōkyō.
Numbers According to: Takakusu, Junjirō, and Kaigyoku Watanabe, eds. 1924–32. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*. 85 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai.

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- bTsan-lha Ngag-dbang-tshul-khrims. 1997. *brDa dkrol gser gyi me long*. Beijing: Mi-rigs-dpe-skrun-khang.

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