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Kamalaśīla's Theory of *Vipaśyanā*:
An Exposition and Philosophical Defense

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An abstract of

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the

James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the Graduate Division of Religion

2020

Abstract

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This dissertation is an exposition and philosophical defense of the theory of *vipaśyanā* (insight meditation), as presented by the eighth-century Indian Buddhist Kamalaśīla in his triad of practice manuals, *The Process of Meditation (Bhāvanākrama I, II, III)*. In the dissertation, I explain what *vipaśyanā* is, how it functions, and why one should practice it. In *The Process of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla depicts *vipaśyanā* as a method for developing new recognitional capacities, used for the purpose of soteriological and ethical development. Through *vipaśyanā*, the practitioner learns how to recognize in phenomena particular properties, such as impermanence (*anitya*), mind-only (*cittamātra*), and emptiness (*śūnyatā*). According to Kamalaśīla's philosophy of mind, *vipaśyanā* accomplishes this by facilitating a form of ascertainment (*niścaya*) that directly follows a perceptual encounter. Despite the fact that, intuitively, it seems as though we cannot perceive the properties supposedly perceived through *vipaśyanā*, I argue that some of these properties are already conveyed in the content of our perceptual experience. In addition, I show how the perception of these properties can be explained on one contemporary theory of perception, namely the theory of perception presented by Wilfrid Sellars. On the Buddhist account, these new recognitional capacities transform the practitioner's experience of the world, and develop the practitioner ethically by removing their morally dysfunctional dispositions (*kleśa*). This remedies the practitioner's existential suffering, and undercuts an innate form of egoism.

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Acknowledgements

My time as a graduate student was, as is the case for many students, a series of small steps. Each step brought me closer to an academic career, and, at each step, I was offered a hand to guide me. It is impossible to list all those who provided me with support at each of these steps over the years. Those that I acknowledge here are only a small portion of the many that made this dissertation possible.

I returned to school eleven years ago, when Maitripa College opened its doors to me. Among the many incredible teachers there, I was particularly fortunate to be able to learn from Yangsi Rinpoche and James Blumenthal. Tragically, Jim left us in 2014. During my time working with him, he encouraged me to continue in an academic career, and his unhesitating confidence in my future studies has been a source of reassurance during tougher times. This work is dedicated to him.

Next, chronologically speaking, I have to thank all the language teachers I studied under at the Rangjung Yeshe Institute in Kathmandu. Karin Meyers was my first Sanskrit teacher, and so much of the research for this dissertation was made possible by the solid foundation in Sanskrit I gained from her class. Following this, I returned to the America to work with the phenomenal scholars at the University of Chicago, including, but not limited to, Dan Arnold, Matthew Kapstein, Wendy Doniger, and Steve Collins. I give special thanks to Dan Arnold for advising me during my time there. His work in Buddhist philosophy continues to inspire and influence my own.

This dissertation marks the completion of my time at Emory University. I learned so much from my courses there, especially those given by John Dunne, Susan Bredlau, and Robert McCauley. I also want to thank Andy Boyles, whose unending positivity and talent were crucial in helping me clear the administrative hurdles I stumbled upon. Above all, this dissertation was shaped through the guidance of my committee. John Lysaker gave judicious comments and advice on my work and my search for a career. Mark Risjord first taught me the invaluable skill of grant writing, and was there to help steer this dissertation at every step of the way. I am extremely fortunate to have gotten the chance to work with Jay Garfield. His astute insights have always helped advance my work, and his unstoppable commitment to doing rigorous scholarship in Buddhist philosophy will forever be a source of inspiration. No hand helped guide this work more than Sara McClintock's. An ever-supportive, ever-perceptive advisor, I owe Sara a debt of gratitude. My final year working on the dissertation was only possible because of the financial support of the Robert H.N. Ho Family foundation, whose fellowship allowed me to complete my work free from financial burden.

While my mentors helped steer this dissertation, I would not have been able to complete it without the motivational support and encouragement I received from peers, friends, and loved ones. My grasp of Buddhist philosophy was deepened through the discussions I had with colleagues in Buddhist philosophy, such as Roshni Patel, Jessica Locke, Upali Sraman, Cat Pruiett, and Seth Auster-Rosen. I kept sharp through the years through my philosophical conversations with Andrew Culbreth, Nikola Johnson, Jordan Daniels, Michael Chiddo, Jason Walsh, and Abbey

Scribner. I would have never been able to make the final push to finish this work without the talent and care of Sophia Gallagher. Finally, throughout my life, I have had the constant unconditional support of my family, if not always their approval. To Leo, Mary Beth, Catherine, and, of course, my first philosophy professor, my father Tom, thank you for always being there for me.

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Introduction

Academic Buddhist philosophy is in a transitional period. Whereas previously the universities of America and Europe had taught Buddhist philosophy only in their religious studies departments, gradually more and more philosophy departments have begun to integrate Buddhist philosophy into their programs. This is largely motivated both by the current cross-cultural philosophy movement as well as an influx of international undergraduates who have petitioned for the study of non-Western philosophical traditions in their schools. Slowly, American and European philosophers are beginning to recognize that philosophy has historically been a worldwide phenomenon, rather than one isolated to the global north.

This dissertation was written during this transitional period. As such, it attempts to speak to both the more traditional audience for academic Buddhist philosophy, as well as the audience that cross-cultural philosophers attempt to be in conversation with. In other words, this dissertation speaks to both classically trained scholars of Buddhist philosophy, whose research is more philological and squarely in the history of philosophy, as well as contemporary philosophers who are less trained in Buddhist philosophy specifically, but who are interested in how Buddhist philosophy intersects with the topics they work on.

The fact that this dissertation is oriented towards these different audiences can be seen in both the choice of terminology as well as different methodologies this work employs. For those philosophers who have less training in Buddhist philosophy, I have attempted to avoid jargon, and to translate Buddhist

philosophical terms in familiar philosophical terminology whenever possible, as seen in my choices of translating *jñāna* as “cognition,” *ākāra* as “representation,” and *prajñā* as “knowledge.” In these cases, I have explained my choice of translation if that choice was unorthodox. At other times, I have chosen to keep common translations of key terms in Buddhist philosophy, such as “emptiness” for *sūnyatā*, “suffering” for *duḥkha*, and “ascertainment” for *niścaya*; however, I have included a thorough description of what is meant by each of these terms. Finally, there are points where I felt I could not avoid neologisms, such as “mind-only” for *cittamātra*. In these cases, such as in my translation of “mind-only,” I have given an overview of the range of interpretations commonly accepted in Buddhist scholarship. For the audience of classically trained scholars in Buddhist philosophy, I have introduced all the most significant translated terms with their original Sanskrit, so that, even if a reader prefers a different translation, they can understand my translation as referring to the philosophical concept they know from the primary sources.

The wide range of audiences for which this work is intended can also be seen in the different philosophical methodologies that I use from chapter to chapter. This dissertation is both an explication and philosophical defense of the eighth-century Indian Buddhist philosopher Kamalaśīla’s theory of *vipaśyanā* (insight meditation), as described in his triad of practice manuals, *The Process of Meditation (Bhāvanākrama I, II, and III)*. These works are the key primary sources I use in this dissertation, although I regularly reference other Buddhist texts. All translations are my own, and the original Sanskrit is provided when it is extant. Otherwise I provide the Sanskrit’s Tibetan translation. In giving this explication and defense, I cover a

number of different fields from the discipline of philosophy, but my focus is on the fields of philosophy of mind, epistemology, and ethics. Different chapters focus on different fields, employ different methodologies, and are intended for different audiences.

The first chapter begins with an introduction to the historical and philosophical context of Kamalaśīla's theory of *vipaśyanā*, in order to both inform those readers who are not as familiar with this period in Buddhist philosophy, as well as to orient those readers who are well educated in the subject. This chapter involves methods such as an analysis of traditional histories, overviews of the key philosophical traditions of the period, and some textual analysis of *The Process of Meditation*. First, I give a potential sketch of Kamalaśīla's life and works. I then move into discussing the different traditions of Buddhist philosophy that are relevant to Kamalaśīla and his theory of *vipaśyanā*. I begin with a presentation of the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra traditions of Buddhist philosophy, and discuss Kamalaśīla's synthesis of these two traditions. I touch upon the Pramāṇavāda tradition, but save an in-depth analysis of this tradition's influence on Kamalaśīla for the third chapter. The final distinction in Buddhist philosophy that I look at is the gradualist-suddenist distinction. This distinction relates to the traditional history of *The Process of Meditation*, so I give an outline of this history. This traditional history, accurate or not, reveals certain motivations behind the text, and, in particular, it reveals the twofold soteriological and ethical purpose of the practice of *vipaśyanā*. In the final section in this chapter, I give an overview of Kamalaśīla's depiction of the Buddhist path, and locate *vipaśyanā* within it.

The second and especially the third chapter are primarily oriented towards those scholars who are more steeped in the Buddhist philosophy of this time period. The second begins with a textual analysis of *The Process of Meditation* that is focused on the theory of *vipaśyanā* that is given in these texts. Here I identify three key features of the practice: it is observational; it is conceptual; and it results in perceptual judgments. I then contrast Kamalaśīla's theory of this meditation with the interpretations of *vipaśyanā* given by a number of contemporary scholars of Buddhism. First, I present an account given by contemporary scholars, which I call "the discovery account." On this account, *vipaśyanā* is interpreted as a technique used to discover new truths about our inner experience. This supposedly results in the practitioner learning new declarative knowledge. I then show how this account differs from Kamalaśīla's. On Kamalaśīla's account, *vipaśyanā* is not used to facilitate new declarative knowledge, but new procedural knowledge, in the form of new recognitional capacities. This chapter is supplemented with an appendix, which is oriented towards an audience of contemporary philosophers. The appendix to the second chapter reviews the subtle differences between the procedural-declarative distinction and the distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that. It concludes with my reasons for using the language of procedural and declarative knowledge in my discussion of *vipaśyanā*.

The second chapter presents a rudimentary theory of *vipaśyanā*, which is then enriched by a rational reconstruction presented in the third chapter. Because it is a rational reconstruction, this explanation of *vipaśyanā* stays consistent with Kamalaśīla's philosophical commitments. This third chapter is intended for an

audience of philosophers whose focus is on the history of Buddhist philosophy, particularly from the Pramāṇavāda tradition. Nevertheless, I have attempted to make this chapter as accessible as possible for philosophers with less training in that tradition. I include overviews of Pramāṇavāda theories on relevant topics, a number of intuitive examples, and occasional references to the differences between Buddhist discourse on a particular topic and the discourse on that topic found in analytic philosophy. I begin with a review of the most relevant topics from the Pramāṇavāda tradition, namely, the Pramāṇavāda theories on perception and concept formation. I then identify what I call “direct perceptual ascertainment” as the primary cognitive act that is brought about through the practice of *vipaśyanā*. From here, I use the Pramāṇavāda discourse on the relationship of ascertainment to conceptual habituation (*vikalpābhyāsa*) and intrinsically (*svataḥ*) and extrinsically epistemic (*parataḥ prāmāṇya*) cognitions to enrich my reconstruction of Kamalaśīla’s theory of *vipaśyanā*. This chapter is supplemented with three charts that give an overview of the Pramāṇavāda tradition’s theory on perception and concept formation, in terms of both perception in our everyday encounters, as well as perception before and after the practice of *vipaśyanā*.

The fourth chapter is intended for a different audience, namely, contemporary philosophers of mind who are less likely to be familiar with or accept certain Buddhist philosophical tenets. Here I make the claim that the interpretation of *vipaśyanā* I gave in the second chapter describes something that is theoretically viable. I defend that claim with reference to two related debates from analytic philosophy. In particular, I argue that it is possible to perceive the properties that

are supposedly perceived in the practice of *vipaśyanā*, such as the property of mind-only. I begin with an argument that remains as neutral as possible on a variety of controversial topics in philosophy o

f mind, in order to appeal to a wide range of philosophical views. My claim here is that the property of “mind-only” is conveyed in the content of perceptual experience, and I use Susanna Siegel’s method of phenomenal contrast to argue for this claim. This claim does not explain how *vipaśyanā* could bring about this kind of perception. Instead, I only argue that this kind of perception is possible. However, this argument has wide appeal because it does not rely on any one particular theory of perception. I then narrow my focus, and provide one potential explanation for how *vipaśyanā* could function, according to the theory of perception given by Wilfrid Sellars. By presenting these two different arguments, I show that support for my theory for *vipaśyanā* can be found in the two most relevant debates in analytic philosophy—the contemporary debate on the perception of high-level properties, and the mid-20th century debate on observational and theoretical entities. This chapter sets aside Kamalaśīla’s own theory of the mind, and transitions from a focus in the history of philosophy in classical India to a focus on the contemporary era.

The final chapter shifts the audience once more. This time I return again to the audience of those philosophers more steeped in Buddhist philosophy. However, this chapter is also intended to be of interest to contemporary ethicists, as it presents arguments for how Buddhist ethics should be understood in relation to better-known normative theories. I begin with a review of the topic of dispositions, and discuss the crucial role that dispositions have played in my dissertation thus far.

I then introduce the Buddhist notion of the morally dysfunctional dispositions (*kleśa*), and explain how *vipaśyanā* can be used to remove these dispositions. This presentation explains the twofold soteriological and ethical purpose that Kamalaśīla gives to *vipaśyanā*, as I discussed in the first chapter. I then explain how this relates to Buddhist ethics. I argue that Buddhist ethics is a version of phenomenological ethics, which is focused on the experience of suffering and the elimination of that experience. Because *vipaśyanā* is used to alter our perceptual experience, it plays a key instrumental role in the Buddhist ethical project. My final section in this chapter begins with a discussion on the construction of the essential subject “I” (*aham*), and how this construction brings about suffering. I explain how *vipaśyanā* is used to deconstruct the essential subject “I,” and remedy these forms of suffering. This section ends with presentation of how the morally dysfunctional dispositions condition us to prioritize our own suffering over the suffering of others, and how *vipaśyanā* can be used to undo that conditioning. The practice conditions us so that we no longer see our suffering as essentially different from anyone else’s, such that we react to suffering *simpliciter*, regardless of whose suffering it is.

In sum, my first chapter gives the historical and philosophical context for Kamalaśīla’s theory of *vipaśyanā*. The second chapter explains what *vipaśyanā* is, according to Kamalaśīla, and the third chapter explains how it functions on his account. The fourth chapter argues that it is possible to do what this theory of *vipaśyanā* claims the practice does. The fifth and final chapter explains why someone should practice *vipaśyanā*.

Chapter 1: Kamalaśīla, *The Process of Meditation*, and the Path

1. Introduction

We often take ourselves to be passive when it comes to how we experience the world. Phenomena appear to us, we consider them in turn, and we then make decisions that lead to action. When we question whether those actions were the right ones to make, we tend to look only as far back as the decision-making process that led us to act. We ask if we made the right decision based on what we knew at the time. Buddhists contend that this line of questioning is not enough. According to much of the Buddhist tradition, when we encounter phenomena, we take an active role in how we perceive those phenomena, and this process forms the premises for any of our future decisions. If this process is faulty or biased, we are likely to make wrong decisions. The question is not simply how to make the right decision; it is how to change ourselves so that we experience the world in the right kind of way.

Many Buddhists, such as the eighth-century Indian philosopher Kamalaśīla, claim that meditation facilitates this kind of experiential change. In his triad of practice manuals, collectively titled *The Process of Meditation (Bhāvanākrama I, II, and III)*, Kamalaśīla describes the types of meditation a student of Buddhism should practice in order to bring about this transformation. The primary meditation he prescribes for the beginning student is *vipaśyanā*, or insight meditation.

In this dissertation, I interpret the theory of *vipaśyanā* given by Kamalaśīla in *The Process of Meditation*, and discuss what this theory entails for Buddhist and contemporary philosophy of mind and ethics. However, before we get to this

discussion, in this chapter, I first review the philosophical and historical context of Kamalaśīla and *The Process of Meditation*, as this context informs the way I interpret Kamalaśīla's theory.

There are a number of philosophical trends within the Buddhist tradition that play important roles in understanding the philosophical context of Kamalaśīla and *The Process of Meditation*. This chapter briefly introduces the most salient of these, including the Buddhist philosophical traditions of Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and Pramāṇavāda, as well as the division between gradualist and suddenist depictions of the Buddhist path. In discussing the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra traditions, I focus mainly on Kamalaśīla's integration of the Madhyamaka ontological tenet of emptiness into the Yogācāra path system. In addition, Kamalaśīla adopts much of his epistemology and philosophy of mind from the Pramāṇavāda tradition, and understanding these philosophical commitments is critical in order to grasp how Kamalaśīla understands his theory of *vipaśyanā*. In this chapter, I provide a brief introduction to the Pramāṇavāda tradition, leaving a thorough account for the third chapter, where I explain in detail the theories from that tradition that ground Kamalaśīla's theory of *vipaśyanā*.

The philosophical distinction between gradualist and suddenist forms of Buddhism is also highly relevant to the current discussion, because *The Process of Meditation* was written, in part, as a polemic against the suddenist interpretation of Buddhism. This polemic nature is seen in the texts' traditional history, and it helps clarify the motivation behind some of the key claims that Kamalaśīla makes in these texts, in particular, the notion that *vipaśyanā* is necessary for ethical development.

While these texts were written in part as a polemic, they were also written as a primer, to introduce the Buddhist path to the emerging tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. As such, these texts provide an outline of the Buddhist path, and, at the end of this introductory chapter, I give an overview of this depiction of the path, and locate the stage of the path where one practices *vipaśyanā*. This introduction to Kamalaśīla, *The Process of Meditation*, and the Buddhist path provides the background information needed to begin the task of interpreting Kamalaśīla's theory of *vipaśyanā* in detail, a task I take up in the following chapters.

2. The Life of Kamalaśīla

It is impossible to give accurate dates for most Indian Buddhist philosophers, due to the fact that most of their biographical details have been lost to history. However, Kamalaśīla and his teacher Śāntarakṣita's pivotal role in the transmission of Buddhism to Tibet provides us with a number of landmarks that we can use to date these figures fairly well. In a bid to make Buddhism the primary religious tradition of Tibet, the eighth century Tibetan king Trisong Detsen (*khri srong lde btsan*) invited Śāntarakṣita (c. 725—788), and then later Kamalaśīla, to come to Tibet from the Indian Buddhist monastery of Nālandā. Erich Frauwallner (1961) states that, according to a consensus of traditional Tibetan sources, Śāntarakṣita came to Tibet first in 763 CE, then again in 775 CE, when he helped found Samyé (*bsam yas*) monastery and became its first abbot (142-43). Śāntarakṣita reportedly lived at that monastery for thirteen years until his death in 788 CE (Frauwallner 1961: 143). Tibetan sources also tell us that he recommended that his pupil

Kamalaśīla should be invited to Tibet upon his death, in order to impede the influence of Chinese Buddhists from the Ch'an tradition (Tucci 1958: 8).

Kamalaśīla came to Tibet following the death of Śāntarakṣita, and the Tibetan historians tell us that shortly thereafter he participated in an influential debate with Ch'an Buddhists at Samyé. According to these same Tibetan historians, Kamalaśīla died shortly after the debate. Paul Demiéville has argued that this debate took place between 792 CE and 794 CE (1952). Kamalaśīla was a pupil of Śāntarakṣita in India before Śāntarakṣita came to Tibet in 763 CE, so we can estimate Kamalaśīla's birth to be somewhere around 740 CE. Because Kamalaśīla died shortly after the Samyé debate ended in 794 CE, we can estimate his death to be somewhere around 795 CE (Frauwallner 1961: 144).

Kamalaśīla's place of birth is suggested by the fact that Tibetans refer to him, along with Śāntarakṣita and Śāntarakṣita's teacher, Jñānagarbha (c. 700—c. 760), as the three Eastern *Svātantrikas* (*rang gyu shar sum*), implying that all three were from the Vanga kingdom of modern-day Bengal, where Śāntarakṣita supposedly was born into a royal lineage (Ruegg 1981: 88). Tibetan sources also tell us that before coming to Tibet, Śāntarakṣita was the abbot of the great monastic university Nālandā, located in modern-day Bihar. It is reasonable to assume that Kamalaśīla would have lived there as well, as Śāntarakṣita's student, before leaving for Tibet.

The historical accuracy of some of these sources, such as the traditional histories, may be questionable. However, they provide us with the only evidence we have to paint one possible picture of Kamalaśīla's life. According to this depiction, Kamalaśīla was born around 740 CE in Vanga, modern-day Bengal. He left at a young

age to enroll at Nālandā, in modern-day Bihar, where he became the student of the abbot there, Śāntarakṣita. After Śāntarakṣita left for Tibet in 775 CE, he summoned Kamalaśīla there. Kamalaśīla arrived in Tibet just after Śāntarakṣita's death in 788 CE, and he stayed in Tibet for around seven years until his death in approximately 795 CE.

As a dedicated student of Śāntarakṣita, Kamalaśīla wrote two commentaries on his teacher's works, namely, *Commentary on the Ornament of the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakālaṃkārapañjikā*), and *Commentary on the Compendium on Reality* (*Tattvasaṃgrahapañjikā*), the latter of which is valued for its extensive survey of the Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophical positions from that time. He also authored a number of commentaries on Mahāyāna scriptures (*sūtra*), including key scriptures such as *The Diamond Perfection of Knowledge* (*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*), and *The Heart of the Perfection of Knowledge* (*Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya Sūtra*). Kamalaśīla's best-known collection of works is *The Process of Meditation*, but he wrote another independent work titled *The Light of the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakāloka*). Whereas *The Process of Meditation* is primarily a set of practice manuals, *The Light of the Middle Way* gives a direct explanation and defense of Kamalaśīla's philosophical position.

3. The Yogācāra-Madhyamaka Synthesis

Due to their role in introducing Buddhism to Tibet, Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's philosophical position was dominant in central Tibet for more than a hundred years following their arrival (Blumenthal 2004: 26). Early Tibetan

doxographies refer to this position as Yogācāra-Madhyamaka, due to its synthesis of these two traditions.¹ Yogācāra and Madhyamaka are the two principle philosophical traditions of Mahāyāna Buddhism. With regard to the practice of *vipaśyanā*, the most important element of this synthesis is Kamalaśīla's integration of the Madhyamaka notion of emptiness into the Yogācāra path system.

Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is perhaps the key philosophical tenet of the Madhyamaka tradition. Generally speaking, Indian Madhyamaka philosophers focused on the questions of what ontological status we should confer on entities, and what is entailed when we do confer a certain status. One of their principle claims is that sentient beings innately and implicitly adhere to the mistaken ontological belief that entities have *svabhāva*. *Svabhāva* is a technical term that is closest, etymologically speaking, to “intrinsic nature,” though its use in Madhyamaka philosophy also has the sense of “essential nature” or “substance.” According to Madhyamaka philosophers, sentient beings' belief in an essential nature (*svabhāva*) is the source of our suffering (*duḥka*).² These philosophers claim that, despite the widespread belief in essential natures, entities lack any such nature. This lack is known as emptiness.

There is much debate in the Madhyamaka tradition, as well as in contemporary scholarship, over what this essential nature consists in, and what is

¹ More accurately, Tibetan doxographers referred to this position as Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Madhyamaka (*rnal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma rang rgyud pa*). The addition of “Svātantrika” adds a Tibetan distinction between the two philosophical positions of Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika. For more on this distinction, see Dreyfus & McClintock (2003).

² As we will see in the fifth chapter, it is not only the explicit belief in essential nature that causes suffering, but also our ingrained tendency to attribute an essential nature to phenomena in perceptual encounters.

entailed by its lack.³ Most of the arguments used by the founder of Madhyamaka, Nāgārjuna (c. 150-c. 250), refute this belief in essential nature by targeting a number of different entities, and showing how those entities are not primary or unconstructed substances (Westerhoff 2007: 20). According to Madhyamaka philosophers, we construct what we think is an essentially existing entity out of what is in fact a set of parts or causal relations. For this reason, these philosophers show that these entities are not in fact essential, because they lack mereological and causal independence. In other words, these entities lack an essential nature, because they are dependent on their causes, and because they are dependent on their parts. On this account, all the entities that we imagine to exist essentially are actually a type of mental fiction.

Kamalaśīla, in his *The Light of the Middle Way*, adopted the Madhyamaka principle that, in order to have essential nature, an entity must be both causally and mereologically independent. In this text, he argues that all entities lack both these forms of independence, and, hence, all entities are empty. Importantly, in *The Process of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla applied these arguments for mereological dependence not only to physical objects, but also to mental events, arguing that even mental representations were multifaceted, and dependent on their various aspects.⁴

³ Westerhoff (2009) gives a survey of the different academic interpretations of the founder of the Madhyamaka tradition, Nāgārjuna (c. 150-c. 250). He notes a trend over time, due to the influence of different trends in academic philosophy, as shown by the fact that these interpretations of Nāgārjuna by academic scholars first had a Kantian phase, then an analytic phase, and more recently a post-Wittgensteinian phase (9-12).

⁴ Tucci (1958: 202-203). This argument will be explained more in detail below.

While the Madhyamaka tradition disagrees over precisely what emptiness consists in, there is consensus within the tradition that the denial of an essential nature does not entail the refutation of a more qualified ontological status known as conventional existence (*saṃvṛti-satya*). Conventional existence is the reality of ordinary beings such as ourselves, made up of constructed entities that are defined through our conventions. Since, on this account, all existing entities are empty, all real entities exist conventionally.⁵ However, conventionally existing entities are also said to be deceptive, in that they appear to have an essential nature that they actually lack. Instead of existing with causal and mereological independence, entities exist through dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). This is the principle that every entity only exists through its causal and mereological dependence on some other entity or entities.

Despite affirming that entities existed conventionally, early Madhyamaka philosophers, such as Nāgārjuna and his disciple Āryadeva (c. 200-c. 250), focused on arguments regarding the denial of an essential nature, putting less effort into analyzing the variety of conventionally existing entities (Ruegg 1981: 87). Because

⁵ This includes the property of emptiness itself, which is also considered conventional. The Madhyamaka principle that all entities are empty entails that properties either exist conventionally, or they are non-existent. Famous Buddhist examples of non-existent properties include both logically possible non-actual properties, such as being a flower that lives in the sky (*khapuṣpa*), as well as logically impossible properties, such as being the son of a childless woman (*vandhyāyāḥ putra*). If it were the case that emptiness was non-existent, like a sky-flower, the Buddhist arguments for emptiness would be invalid. Buddhists certainly do not think that this is the case. Emptiness's status as a conventional property means that it is also mind-dependent, as this is true of all conventional properties. In the arguments in later chapters, it will be important that this mind-dependent status in no way prevents this property from being perceived and conceptually ascertained, just as it the case that other conventional properties, such as being red, can be perceived and conceptually ascertained.

of this, less of their writing deals with the conventional aspects of the path of a Buddhist practitioner.⁶ In contrast to this, philosophers from the Yogācāra tradition, such as Asaṅga (fl. 4th or 5th century), developed an extensive analysis of conventional entities, which included those entities' relation to the Buddhist path, and the methods used to progress along that path.⁷ As proponents of the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka synthesis, Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla adopted much of this Yogācāra depiction of the path and its methods, as seen in *The Process of Meditation* where Kamalaśīla regularly quotes scriptures that present this Yogācāra depiction. For instance, Kamalaśīla quotes an important scripture from the Yogācāra tradition, *Cutting the Knots (Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra)*, ten times in reference to the meditation practices of *vipaśyanā* and *śamatha* (attention-based meditations) (Adam 2003: 52).⁸

In *The Process of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla adopts the much of the Yogācāra path system, but alters it by introducing into it the Madhyamaka tenet of emptiness.⁹ These are some of the few extant Indian texts where we find this integration.¹⁰ For instance, in *The Process of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla prescribes a

⁶ There are exceptions to this, such as Nāgārjuna's *Precious Garland (Ratnāvalī)*.

⁷ E.g. Asaṅga's *Summary of the Great Vehicle (Mahāyānasamgraha)*.

⁸ My translation of this notoriously ambiguous scripture title, *Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra*, is based on Jñānagarbha's commentary on the title. Because Jñānagarbha was Śāntarakṣita's teacher, Kamalaśīla is likely to have read the title similarly. See Powers (1991: 59).

⁹ Yogācāra philosophers also promote their own understanding of emptiness. However, for the sake of clarity, when I refer to emptiness in the upcoming discussion, I will be referring to emptiness as it is understood within the Madhyamaka tradition.

¹⁰ Williams (2009) states, "Perhaps the main systematic Indian sources for the integration of emptiness teachings into specifically Mādhyamika meditation practice are the three *Bhāvanākramas* of Kamalaśīla" (79).

series of meditations that he adopts from *The Descent Into Lañka* (*Lañkāvatāra Sūtra*), another scripture typically associated with the Yogācāra tradition (1997: 216). *The Descent into Lañka* describes the path as leading up to a meditation on the Yogācāra tenet of *cittamātra*, also referred to as *vijñaptimātra*. The closest translations of *cittamātra* and *vijñaptimātra*, etymological speaking, are the neologisms “mind-only” and “consciousness-only.”¹¹ As we will see, there are two rival interpretations of the tenet of mind-only. It can be interpreted either as a claim of idealism, stating that only moments of consciousness exist essentially, or it can be interpreted as a phenomenological claim, stating that the phenomena that appear to us are not external objects. The way one interprets mind-only will make a difference in how one understands Kamalaśīla’s synthesis of the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka traditions.

In *The Process of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla prescribes the meditation on mind-only described in *The Decent into Lañka*, but he indicates that it should be followed by a meditation on emptiness. There are two alternatives for how Kamalaśīla could understand the nature of this synthesis of mind-only and emptiness. He could see it as a relation between two compatible tenets, or he could understand it as a pedagogical relationship between two contradictory tenets, where mind-only is learned initially only then to be supplanted by a realization of emptiness. On this latter interpretation, mind-only is learned first only because this aids the

¹¹ In this dissertation, I endeavor to avoid those neologisms that result from literal translation. However, in what follows, I will use the translation of “mind-only” in order to remain uncommitted to a particular interpretation of this tenet. Later in this section, I explain that it is unclear what interpretation of the mind-only tenet best fits Kamalaśīla’s own reading of the tenet.

practitioner in realizing the Madhyamaka notion of emptiness. It is unclear which of these two interpretations Kamalaśīla holds, because, while passages from *The Process of Meditation* can be read as promoting a pedagogical synthesis, a passage from Kamalaśīla's teacher Śāntarakṣita suggests that Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla understood Yogācāra and Madhyamaka to be compatible traditions.¹² The theory of *vipaśyanā* I give in the rest of this dissertation will not hinge on which of these interpretations best represents Kamalaśīla's view. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to examine both these potential interpretations, since understanding both will help enrich our understanding of Kamalaśīla's philosophical context.¹³

In *The Process of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla references an argument commonly interpreted as presenting mind-only as a tenet that promotes idealism. However, Kamalaśīla then appropriates this argument in order to turn it into a critique against idealism itself. Dan Arnold argues that this is evidence that Kamalaśīla's synthesis of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka was merely pedagogical (2017: 382). On this interpretation of Kamalaśīla's synthesis, the practitioner would use their understanding of the Yogācāra tenet of mind-only as a stepping-stone in order to understand the Madhyamaka tenet of emptiness. The tenet of mind-only is interpreted, on this reading, as an ontological claim promoting idealism, where mental events exist essentially, and external objects do not. For this reason, it would not be compatible with Madhyamaka claim that all entities are empty. Hence, the

¹² The passage in question is verses 92 and 93 from Śāntarakṣita's *Ornament of the Middle Way (Madhyamakālaṃkāra)* (Blumenthal 2004: 284). These verses will be discussed below.

¹³ For more on whether Yogācāra and Madhyamaka are compatible traditions, see Garfield and Westerhoff (2015).

synthesis of mind-only and emptiness is not one of two compatible tenets but is a synthesis based merely in its pedagogical value.

The argument in question is from *The Process of Meditation I*, where Kamalaśīla begins by adopting an argument given by the Yogācāra philosopher Vasubandhu (fl. 4th or 5th century) (Tucci 1958: 202-203). This argument comes from Vasubandhu's work, *Twenty Verses (Vimśatikā)*, a work commonly interpreted as promoting idealism.¹⁴ In this text, Vasubandhu first claims that existence is composed of consciousness. He states, "In the Mahāyāna, the three worlds, [i.e. all that exists], are established as being only consciousness."¹⁵ Vasubandhu then gives an argument that denies the essential existence of external objects.

Vasubandhu's argument depends on the premise that any entity that has an essential nature must be mereologically independent. Philosophers from the Abhidharma tradition of Buddhism held that there were entities that were mereologically independent and existed essentially, namely, atomic partless particles. These Abhidharma philosophers held that these particles aggregated to form the external objects of everyday life, e.g. chairs, fish, and so on. However, in *Twenty Verses*, Vasubandhu points out that even these atomic particles, when they aggregate, must be in contact with each other on one side or another. This indicates that the atomic particles have different sides, and are thus divisible into parts. If they have parts, they must be dependent on those parts. Vasubandhu thus refutes

¹⁴ Matthew Kapstein, for example, reads the argument in *Twenty Verses* as promoting idealism (2001: 181-204).

¹⁵ *mahāyāne traidhātukaṃ vijñaptimātraṃ vyavasthāpyate*. Tola & Dragonetti (2004: 123).

the claim that these atomic particles are mereologically independent and have an essential nature.

Kamalaśīla adopts Vasubandhu's argument against essential external objects, and rehearses it in *The Process of Meditation I* (Tucci 1958: 202-203). However, he then follows this argument with a similar mereological argument against the essential existence of consciousness. He begins with claim that if instances of phenomenal properties such as color do not belong to external objects, then these instances of phenomenal properties must belong to immaterial entities such as consciousness (Tucci 1958: 203). However, as Kamalaśīla points out, if a moment of consciousness represents a multitude of instances of phenomenal properties, it can be divided into these various phenomenal representations. He concludes that, if a moment of consciousness can be divided in this way, it too must lack mereological independence, and not exist essentially. In this way, Kamalaśīla shows that Vasubandhu's mereological argument, which divides atoms into their various sides, works equally well against moments of consciousness, whose content can be likewise divided into diverse phenomenal representations.

On Arnold's interpretation of this passage from *The Process of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla is showing that Vasubandhu's argument for idealism can be "further pressed" in order to make it a critique against idealism itself (2017: 395). Kamalaśīla's conclusion is that there is no essential nature to any entity whatsoever, material or immaterial. Thus the argument becomes an argument for the Madhyamaka tenet of emptiness. On this interpretation, the reason that Kamalaśīla first presents Vasubandhu's argument for idealism is that it is pedagogically useful.

Presenting the tenet of mind-only first helps prepare the reader for Kamalaśīla's upcoming argument for emptiness. On this reading, Kamalaśīla sees the tenet of mind-only as not compatible with the Madhyamaka tenet of emptiness. Emptiness supersedes it.

It is true that, in *The Process of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla states that, while the practitioner should meditate on mind-only, this meditation is to be practiced prior to a meditation on emptiness.¹⁶ This depiction of the path suggests that Kamalaśīla held that meditation on mind-only was the most effective method for preparing oneself to meditate on emptiness. In this way, his synthesis of mind-only and emptiness had a pedagogical purpose. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily entail that Kamalaśīla understood his synthesis as *merely* pedagogical, or that he saw mind-only and emptiness as contradictory philosophical positions. Kamalaśīla could hold that the tenet of mind-only was compatible with the Madhyamaka tenet of emptiness, while also holding that the meditation on mind-only should be prior to the meditation on emptiness for pedagogical reasons. On this alternative interpretation, Kamalaśīla's synthesis of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka is motivated by pedagogical reasons, but not only pedagogical reasons.

This interpretation of Kamalaśīla's synthesis is supported by a quote from Kamalaśīla's teacher, Śāntarakṣita. Śāntarakṣita states in his *Ornament of the Middle Way*:

On the basis of the Yogācāra, know that there are no external things.

On the basis of this way, also know that there is no self whatsoever.

¹⁶ For instance, see the discussion of the practice of *vipaśyanā* found at Tucci (1971: 3-8).

The Great Vehicle is obtained through riding the chariot of the two systems [of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra], and holding onto the reigns of logic.¹⁷

This quote suggests that Śāntarakṣita sees Madhyamaka and Yogācāra as compatible traditions. Śāntarakṣita's use of the phrase "know that there is no self," is, in this context, synonymous with a realization of emptiness. In the above quote, he is suggesting that one could understand emptiness from within the perspective of Yogācāra. This would only be possible if he saw the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka traditions as compatible. As in his description of two horses pulling a chariot, Madhyamaka and Yogācāra function as equals, without one necessarily supplanting the other. If Śāntarakṣita saw Yogācāra as compatible with Madhyamaka, it is likely that his student, Kamalaśīla, also saw them this same way.

This claim, that Yogācāra is compatible with Madhyamaka, is incoherent if one interprets Yogācāra as a form of idealism (Garfield 2016: 269-270). However, there are passages from Yogācāra literature that provide support for a different interpretation of Yogācāra, one in which the tradition is read as a type of phenomenology. On this interpretation, the tenet of mind-only is not a claim about ontology, but instead is phenomenological doctrine, which claims that the phenomena that appear to us are not external objects.

Perhaps surprisingly, Vasubandhu also presents a phenomenological depiction of Yogācāra in a different text, his *Treatise on the Three Natures*

¹⁷ *sems tsam la ni brten nas su | phyi rol dngos med shes par bya | tshul 'dir brten nas de la yang | shin tu bdag med shes par bya || tshul gnyis shing rta zhon nas su | rigs pa'i srab skyogs 'ju byed pa | de dag de phyir ji bzhin don | theg pa chen po pa nyid 'thob ||* Tibetan as found at Blumenthal (2004: 320).

(*Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*).¹⁸ In this text, Vasubandhu compares how the world appears to us to an illusion of an elephant, created by a magician chanting a mantra over a pile of sticks.¹⁹ This analogy can be read as a critique of appearances (represented by the elephant), which does not target either reality itself (represented by the pile of stick), or the psychological processes that make it appear as such (represented by the mantra). It is only the appearances that are not what they seem. In this depiction, Yogācāra does not provide an ontological refutation of external objects, but, instead, only refutes the claim that the phenomena that appear to us are external objects independent from cognition.

If we take Yogācāra to be a type of phenomenology, its tenets and the Madhyamaka tenet of emptiness are compatible. When questioning the ontological status of entities, one can conclude, with the Madhyamaka tradition, that all entities are empty. At the same time, one may instead adopt a Yogācāra perspective, and take a phenomenological stance, in order to deny that the appearance of entities is independent from the mind. These two positions are consistent. They are merely asking different sorts of questions. On this reading, Yogācāra and the mind-only tenet avoid any ontological commitments that would put them in conflict with Madhyamaka and its tenet of emptiness.

¹⁸ Though it might be confusing that Vasubandhu presents two seemingly contradictory philosophical readings of Yogācāra, this is not so rare in Buddhist philosophy. Buddhist philosophers commonly use a rhetoric device that is referred to in contemporary scholarship as “the sliding scale of analysis.” See discussion of this below. This is arguably what Vasubandhu is up to here, rather than changing his philosophical position between texts. For more on Vasubandhu’s presentation of various philosophical viewpoints see Gold (2015). On Kamalaśīla’s own use of a sliding scale of analysis, see McClintock (2003; 2014).

¹⁹ For more on this illustration, and how it supports a phenomenological reading of Yogācāra, see Garfield (2016: 266-269).

It is unclear to me whether, among these choices, there is a single interpretation of Kamalaśīla's synthesis that best fits his overall view. On the one hand, Kamalaśīla's use of Vasubandhu's argument from *Twenty Verses* in *The Process of Meditation* suggests that Kamalaśīla sees the tradition as form of idealism. On the other hand, his teacher Śāntarakṣita's quote from *The Ornament of the Middle Way* suggests that Kamalaśīla would believe that his synthesis is based on the compatibility of the two traditions. In the latter case, this would require Kamalaśīla to interpret Yogācāra along phenomenological lines.

Not only is it unclear which interpretation Kamalaśīla would finally agree with, it is also possible that Kamalaśīla never intended for there to be a single interpretation that best characterized his synthesis. Across his various texts, Kamalaśīla regularly presented arguments from various different philosophical perspectives, a rhetorical device that Sara McClintock has called a "sliding scale of analysis" (2003; 2014). This method involves the philosopher provisionally adopting a particular standpoint for pedagogical reasons, often in order to refute an opposing viewpoint. The philosopher then later, sometimes even in the same text, will argue from a different philosophical perspective. Arguably, Kamalaśīla's presentation of the synthesis of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka also functions along these lines, with the position that he takes up always adapting to the particular argument at hand. Regardless of which interpretation of Kamalaśīla's synthesis one accepts, my upcoming analysis of *vipaśyanā* is coherent with either of these two options. The cognitive function of *vipaśyanā* remains relatively the same whether one interprets Kamalaśīla's synthesis of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka as one of

compatibility, or interprets it as merely motivated by pedagogical reasons. That said, further research into the effects of each of the particular tenets employed in the practice of *vipaśyanā*, e.g. the tenets of mind-only and emptiness, would have to take this question into account.

4. Other Relevant Distinctions in Buddhist Philosophy

The categories of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka are two categories used in the Tibetan four-part taxonomy of the different Buddhist philosophical traditions.²⁰ However, Kamalaśīla was also heavily influenced by a third set of Buddhist philosophers, who do not fit as easily into this Tibetan taxonomy, because their area of focus differed from most Madhyamaka and Yogācāra philosophers. These philosophers are traditionally referred to as “those who follow reasoning” (*rigs pa rjes su 'brang ba*), though in contemporary scholarship they have been given the neologism Pramāṇavāda, or, the Epistemological Tradition. This tradition is comprised of the Indian Buddhists Dignāga (fl. 6th century) and Dharmakīrti (fl. 6th or 7th century) along with their commentators. They have retroactively been given the name Pramāṇavāda because their philosophical work developed a theory of our epistemic faculties (*pramāṇa*), and focused on forms of argumentation, including the development of the Indian syllogism. In *The Process of Meditation*, we can see the influence of the Pramāṇavāda tradition on Kamalaśīla, both in his philosophical

²⁰ This taxonomy, which is also widely used by contemporary academics, includes the traditions of Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika alongside Yogācāra and Madhyamaka.

tenets as well as in the numerous passages where he uses phrases that are identical to the phrases found in works by Dharmakīrti.²¹

Because Kamalaśīla adopted much of the Pramāṇavāda position on epistemology and philosophy of mind, the Pramāṇavāda theories in these fields will play an important role in the upcoming arguments in this dissertation. They are so important that I have dedicated the third chapter to explaining them in detail, in so far as they relate to my interpretation of *vipaśyanā*. There I draw upon the theories of Dharmakīrti and his commentators in order to describe the cognitive effects of practicing *vipaśyanā*, and provide a rational reconstruction of Kamalaśīla's theory of *vipaśyanā*. My focus in that chapter is on the Pramāṇavāda tradition's theories on perception (*pratyakṣa*) and concept formation, as these theories are important theoretical background for Kamalaśīla's theory of *vipaśyanā*.

The synthetic nature of Kamalaśīla's philosophy can be seen in *The Process of Meditation*, especially in the numerous passages where these texts seamlessly transition between theories from the Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and Pramāṇavāda traditions. This set of divisions of Buddhist philosophical traditions is a useful heuristic device when analyzing Kamalaśīla's texts; however, it is not the only way of categorizing Buddhist philosophical trends that proves useful in this context. In addition, the Tibetan division of Buddhist philosophers into gradualists (*rim gyis pa*) and suddenists (*gcig car ba*) is also a useful heuristic for understanding these texts. This is because the gradualist-suddenist distinction helps make clear the philosophical motivations behind many of the arguments given in *The Process of*

²¹ For an example of this, see Funayama (2011: 104 ft.26).

Meditation. While *The Process of Meditation* presents a synthesis of Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and Pramāṇavāda philosophical theories, this set of texts presents just the opposite when it comes to its relation to the gradualist and suddenist positions. *The Process of Meditation* is not syncretic with regard to this distinction, but is instead polemic, arguing against the suddenist position, while promoting the gradualist one. In fact, this polemic nature is explicitly represented in the traditional history of the origin of these texts.

5. Gradualists and Suddenists in the Debate at Samyé

Ever since Paul Demiéville's landmark text, *Le Concile de Lhasa*, the unique traditional history of *The Process of Meditation* has been the subject of a great deal of academic scholarship (1952).²² In his *History of Buddhism (chos 'byung)*, the Tibetan historian Butön Rinchen Drup (*bu ston rin chen grub*) (14th c.) reported that, following Kamalaśīla's arrival in Tibet, there was tension in the royal court between the proponents of two rival interpretations of the Buddhist path (Gómez 1983). On one side, there were the proponents of the gradualist position, led by Kamalaśīla. Opposed to them were proponents of the suddenist position, led by Heshang Moheyan (*Héshang Móhēyǎn*), who represented from the Ch'an tradition of China.

According to Butön, these tensions culminated in a debate between Kamalaśīla and Moheyan, presided over by the king Trisong Detsen (Gómez 1983). Kamalaśīla supposedly won this debate, and as a result, the kingdom of Tibet officially adopted the gradualist position. Kamalaśīla is said to have written *The*

²² Such as Gómez (1983), Gómez (1987), and Ruegg (2010).

Process of Meditation following these debates, in order to spell out his argument from the debate, and to give the fledgling tradition of Tibetan Buddhism a set of reference manuals for the practice of meditation. Thus *The Process of Meditation* became the foundational texts on meditation for Tibetan Buddhism.²³

The historical accuracy of this report on the debate is controversial.²⁴ However, my goal here is not to settle on a factual account of how *The Process of Meditation* came to be, but instead to develop a picture of the possible issues and controversies that motivate these texts. This can be used to identify where these motivations might be addressed within the texts. According to the traditional history, *The Process of Meditation* were written, in part, as a polemic against Mohenyan's position, and, in *The Process of Meditation III*, we do find a section where Kamalaśīla appears to paraphrase and refute a position that could be attributed to Moheyan (1997: 262). But the interpretation of these texts as polemical is a useful heuristic regardless of whether or not there was an actual debate that inspired Kamalaśīla to write them. If the debate actually took place, this heuristic is clearly useful in determining the motivations for the polemical sections of the texts; however, even if there was no debate, it is possible that instead it was the polemical nature of these sections that inspired the story of the debate that we find in the traditional histories. Either way, one motivation behind *The Process of Meditation* is that it is a polemic against the suddenists, a position that has come to

²³ These texts give instructions only for what is known as *sūtra* meditation, as opposed to tantric meditation. In Tibetan Buddhism, a practitioner is instructed to develop a solid grounding in *sūtra* meditation, which is based in the practices of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, before practicing tantric meditation.

²⁴ See Ruegg (2010: 254-259).

be represented by the character of Moheyan, and this helps explain the emphasis that Kamalaśīla gives to certain claims and arguments.

This distinction between gradualist and suddenist forms of Buddhism refers to two opposing depictions of enlightenment and the Buddhist path. Luis Gómez describes the distinction as follows:

The fundamental rift as seen in Indian Buddhism can be defined as an ideal polarity between those [suddenists] who understand enlightenment as a leap into a state or realm of experience which is simple (integral, whole), ineffable, and innate (that is, not acquired), and those [gradualists] who see enlightenment as a gradual process of growth in which one can recognize degrees, steps, or parts—a process, that is, which is amenable to description and conceptual understanding, and which requires personal cultivation, growth, and development. (1987: 71)

The gradualist position asserts that the Buddhist path consists in the practitioner using various practices and methods, including meditation, to cultivate a series of factors that lead to awakening (Ruegg 2010: 260). In contrast to this, suddenists claim that awakening is instantaneous and spontaneous, and is not mediated by any practices or methods (Ruegg 2010: 260). These opposing platforms represent an important source of tension found in a number of different Buddhist traditions. This tension manifested in China in the debates between the Northern and Southern Schools of Ch'an (Gregory 1987). It is also currently seen in Tibetan Buddhism and

in Buddhist modernism in debates over the efficacy of different styles of meditation (Tanaka and Robertson 1992; Dunne 2011).

But the tension between these two interpretations of the Buddhist path can be seen earlier on in Indian Buddhism, as indicated by the fact that Kamalaśīla was aware of this tension prior to his supposed confrontation with Moheyan. Many of the Indian Mahāyāna scriptures Kamalaśīla wrote commentaries for, such as *Recitation for Entrance into the Nonconceptual (Avikalpapraveśadhāraṇī)*, *The Diamond Perfection of Knowledge*, *The Heart of the Perfection of Knowledge*, and *The Perfection of Knowledge in Seven Hundred Lines (Saptaśatikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra)*, are precisely those scriptures that contain the passages most amenable to suddenist interpretation (Gómez 1983: 408). Kamalaśīla's commentaries to these scriptures provide gradualist interpretations of those particular passages, in order to prevent and correct suddenist readings of these scriptures (Gómez 1983: 408). Many of these scriptures' passages are quoted in *The Process of Meditation* along with Kamalaśīla's gradualist interpretation of them.²⁵ This suggests that Kamalaśīla was well aware of the tension expressed by the gradualist-suddenist distinction before the supposed debate at Samyé. This debate was thus not merely a confrontation between Ch'an and Indian Buddhism, but was instead representative of a tension that was already palpable within the Indian Buddhism that Kamalaśīla was familiar with (Gómez 1983: 408; Ruegg 2010: 262).

A key point of controversy between gradualist and suddenist views of the path is that gradualists maintain that a practitioner should train in a conceptual

²⁵ E.g. Tucci (1971: 211-214).

(*savikalpa*) form of meditation, which, according to Kamalaśīla, is the practice of *vipaśyanā*. However, suddenists like Moheyan hold that conceptual meditation practice was detrimental to the practitioner. They commonly prescribe practicing only nonconceptual (*nirvikalpa*) forms of meditation.

This suddenist proscription of conceptual forms of meditation was influenced by a number of meditation practices that eschewed conceptuality. Many of these practices were described in the early foundational texts of Yogācāra. For instance, one such text, *Foundation of the Bodhisattva (Bodhisattvabhūmi)*, describes a number of these meditation practices, including a meditative state where the yogi stabilizes their mind on that which is “free from the essence whose nature is any verbal expression.”²⁶ Even though he was a gradualist, Kamalaśīla also promoted a number of similar nonconceptual meditation practices for advanced practitioners. For instance, in *The Process of Meditation I*, following a section describing the practice of *vipaśyanā*, Kamalaśīla describes an advanced meditation in which the practitioner “enters into a nonconceptual meditative state” (*nirvikalpasamādhipraveśa*) (Tucci 1971: 211).

Nevertheless, Kamalaśīla argued against the suddenist position by insisting that the conceptual meditation of *vipaśyanā* is a necessary prerequisite for these advanced practices. He claimed that training in *vipaśyanā* is needed because, without *vipaśyanā*, the practitioner’s *kleśas*, or morally dysfunctional dispositions, could never be fully eliminated. He states this explicitly, “Moreover, the removal of the morally dysfunctional dispositions is impossible for someone who rejects

²⁶ *sarvābhilāpātmakena svabhāvena virahitaṃ*. Deleanu (2013: 899).

vipaśyanā.”²⁷ The Buddhist tradition considers *kleśas* to be tendencies that manifest as acts or mental events that exacerbate suffering. As I will explain in the fifth chapter, the Buddhist ethical project is focused on reducing and eventually eliminating suffering, so the removal of these morally dysfunctional dispositions is a form of ethical development. Moreover, the removal of these morally dysfunctional dispositions is a necessary part of the Buddhist path to awakening (*bodhi*), i.e. the liberation from suffering. Kamalaśīla states, “...liberation is attained only through the elimination of the morally dysfunctional dispositions.”²⁸

The traditional history of *The Process of Meditation* emphasizes the contrast between Kamalaśīla’s gradualist position and Moheyan’s suddenist one, and this highlights their disagreement over whether one should practice *vipaśyanā*. This raises the question of what Kamalaśīla thinks is at stake in this disagreement, or, in other words, why he argues that the practice of *vipaśyanā* is necessary. What we find in *The Process of Meditation* is that Kamalaśīla maintains that *vipaśyanā* is a necessary component of both the Buddhist path to awakening and the Buddhist ethical project, due to the fact that it is needed to remove our morally dysfunctional dispositions. The practice has both a soteriological and ethical purpose.

Any philosophical interpretation of Kamalaśīla’s theory of *vipaśyanā* should account for this twofold purpose. I set up the groundwork for this in the next chapter where I give my interpretation of the practice. However, I do not defend Kamalaśīla’s claim that *vipaśyanā* has an ethical and soteriological purpose until the

²⁷ *na cāpi tasya vipaśyanāpavādināḥ kleśakṣayaḥ sambhavati*. Kamalaśīla (1997: 267).

²⁸ *kleśakṣayād eva muktiḥ sidhyatīti*. Kamalaśīla (1997: 267).

fifth chapter, where I use my interpretation of the practice to explain how *vipaśyanā* facilitates ethical development, and how this relates to the practitioner's liberation from suffering.

6. Locating *Vipaśyanā* on the Buddhist Path

While *The Process of Meditation* was intended to be a polemic against the suddenist position, it was also supposedly written in order to introduce the Buddhist path to the tradition of Buddhism that was emerging at that time in Tibet. For this reason, *The Process of Meditation* is not just a polemic, but also serves as a primer for the Buddhist theory of the path. Accordingly, *The Process of Meditation* presents a basic overview of the path, from logistical details for meditation—such as proper diet and environmental hazards—to theoretical accounts of the advanced stages of meditation. In *The Process of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla references a number of different rubrics of the various stages that a Buddhist practitioner passes through in their study of Buddhism. Among these different rubrics, the three I will be comparing are:

- 1) the five paths (*pañcamārga*);
- 2) the four types of meditation; and
- 3) the three types of knowledge (*prajñā*).²⁹

²⁹ In the next chapter, I explain that my choice of translating *prajñā* as “knowledge” is based on a shared ambiguity between these two terms. Both “*prajñā*” and “knowledge” can refer to either declarative knowledge or procedural knowledge. I argue that while the first two of the three knowledges are declarative, the third type is procedural.

However, at no point in *The Process of Meditation* does Kamalaśīla aggregate these different rubrics in order to form a single cohesive map of the path. In this section, I compile such a map by comparing and aligning these three rubrics. In doing so, I locate *vipaśyanā* on Kamalaśīla's depiction of the Buddhist path. This allows me to determine the prerequisites and intended goal of the practice. These prerequisites and goal will be crucial to the interpretation of *vipaśyanā* I provide in the next chapter.

The Process of Meditation contains a number of passages that compare two or more categories from the three different rubrics given above. In what follows, I use these various passages in order to build a table that shows how these three rubrics align on the path. I start by describing the five paths and the four types of meditation. I then examine a passage from *The Process of Meditation* that states which meditation one practices on each stage of the path. From this, I map the four types of meditation onto five paths. Finally, I examine the three types of knowledge, and the relationship that Kamalaśīla describes between *vipaśyanā* and these knowledges. This allows me to complete the table aligning the five paths, four meditations, and three knowledges, and, in doing so, locate the practice of *vipaśyanā* on Kamalaśīla's depiction of the Buddhist path.

Even though the five paths are known as *pañcamārga*, and the most literal translation of *mārga* is path, the five paths are better understood not as five separate paths, but instead as five different stages on the singular Buddhist path. These stages are sequential, non-overlapping, and cover the whole of the path. When the practitioner completes one stage they immediately leave that stage and

enter into the next. The five paths begin with the student first becoming a Buddhist practitioner at the beginning of the first stage, and end with that student becoming a Buddha upon entering into the fifth stage. These five stages are the path of accumulation (*saṃbhāramārga*), the path of application (*prayogamārga*), the path of seeing (*darśanamārga*), the path of cultivation (*bhāvanāmārga*), and the path of no more learning (*aśaikṣāmārga*).

The path of accumulation begins when the student first becomes a Buddhist. At this point, they begin following a moral code (*śīla*) and accumulating merit (*puṇya*). When a student can consistently hold to the moral code, and has accumulated enough merit, a teacher deems the student ready to begin the practices of *vipaśyanā* and a set of attention-based meditations known as *śamatha*. This is the beginning of the path of application. According to Kamalaśīla, the student continues to practice *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* until this practice culminates with a realization of the emptiness of phenomena, whereupon the practitioner enters into the path of seeing.³⁰

The entire path of seeing occurs during this realization, after which the practitioner immediately enters the path of cultivation.³¹ On the path of cultivation, the practitioner enters into a number of different meditative states, each of which is used to eliminate different morally dysfunctional dispositions, also known as

³⁰ This is explained in more detail below.

³¹ Both Kamalaśīla's predecessor Dharmakīrti and the Abhidharma tradition of Buddhism held that the realization that comprises the entire path of seeing consists in sixteen moments. In each of these moments, there is a realization that corresponds to one of the four aspects of each of the four noble truths. See Eltschinger (2013: 266-270). The model, however, does not fit the depiction of the path given in *The Process of Meditation*, which does not mention the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths.

obscurations (*āvaraṇa*). This continues until the practitioner has removed all their remaining obscurations, at which point they have entered the path of no more learning. As the name implies, this stage is the end of the path, and entrance into this stage denotes that the practitioner has become a Buddha.

These latter three paths—the path of seeing, the path of cultivation, and the path of no more learning—are themselves subdivided into what are called the stages of the bodhisattva (*bodhisattvabhūmi*). On Kamalaśīla’s division of the path, the first stage of the bodhisattva corresponds to the beginning of the path of seeing, and the final stage of the bodhisattva corresponds to entering into the path of no more learning.³²

In addition to the five paths, Kamalaśīla lists four different types of meditation that the student uses in their practice. This same series of meditation is found in *Cutting the Knots*, and in the earlier *Foundation of the Disciple* (*Śrāvakaḥmūmi*), which is the first book, chronologically speaking, in the seminal collection of texts for the Yogācāra tradition known as *Foundation of the Yoga Practitioner* (*Yogācāraḥmūmi*).³³ The beginning of *The Process of Meditation III* lists each of these four types of meditation based on their object of focus (*ālambana*).³⁴ The first family of meditations is *samatha*. These attention-based meditations take

³² See Tucci (1958: 224).

³³ “Yogācāra” in this case is most likely used to mean “yoga practitioner.” See Schmithausen (2007: 213). This is only one taxonomy of many that are found in both *Cutting the Knots* and *Foundation of the Disciple*.

³⁴ “Hence, the Holy One taught yogis the four things that are intentional objects [of meditation]—nonconceptual content, conceptual content, the limit of things, and the perfection of aims.” *ata eva bhagavatā catvāryālambanavastūni yogināṃ nirdiṣṭāni. nirvikalpapratibimbakam. savikalpapratibimbakaṃ. vastuparyantatā. kāryapariniṣpattiśca.* Tucci (1971: 1).

nonconceptual content (*nirvikalpapratibimbaka*) as their focus. The second family, *vipaśyanā*, focuses on conceptual content (*vikalpapratibimbaka*). The third is the meditation whose focus is the limit of entities (*vastuparyantatā*), and fourth is the meditation whose focus is the perfection of the goal (*kāryapariniṣpatti*). Among these four, only *vipaśyanā* involves concepts, while the rest are nonconceptual.

The first two meditations, *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, are practiced in tandem, until they are fully integrated in what is referred to in path literature as “the union of *vipaśyanā* and *śamatha*” (*śamathavipaśyanāyoga*). Kamalaśīla claims that the practice of these meditations in tandem culminates in the meditation on the limit of entities, stating, “There is a realization of the limit of entities by means of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*.”³⁵ He then describes the practitioner’s progress from this point as follows:

When [the practitioner] penetrates the reality that is the defining characteristic of the limit of entities, then the [meditation’s] object of focus is called the limit of entities, because of being the understanding of the limit of entities [that occurs] on the first stage [of the bodhisattva]. After that, by means of the path of cultivation, in the remaining stages there is a reversal within the foundation consciousness, because of the gradual arising of purer and purer moments, as if from the application of an herbal medicine. When there is the completion of the goal, whose defining characteristic is the

³⁵ *śamathavipaśyanābhyāṃ samastavastuparyantatādhiḡamo bhavati*. Tucci (1971: 2).

removal of obscurations, then, in the stage of Buddhahood, that cognition is called that whose object of focus is the perfection of the goal.³⁶

In this quote, Kamalaśīla references the first stage of the bodhisattva, and, as we saw, this corresponds to the entrance into the path of seeing on his account. Since the meditation on the limit of entities occurs with the entrance into the path of seeing, we can align this meditation with this path. As is stated above, *vipaśyanā* and *śamatha* are practiced just previous to the meditation of the limit of entities, in order to realize this meditation. For this reason, they are aligned with the preceding path, the path of application. The quote given above suggests that the meditation on the limit of entities is continued in the path of cultivation in order to remove the practitioner's obscurations. Kamalaśīla states above that, with the removal of all obscurations, this practice culminates in Buddhahood, i.e. the path of no more learning. At this point, one's meditation takes as its object the perfection of the goal. In sum, the meditations and paths correspond as follows:

³⁶ *yāda vastuparyantatālakṣaṇāṃ tathatāṃ pratividhyati, tadā vastuparyantatāvagamāt prathamāyāṃ bhūmau vastuparyantatālabanam ucyate. tato bhāvanāmārgeṇa pariśiṣṭāsu bhūmiṣvoṣadhirasāyanopayogād iva krameṇa viśuddhataratamakṣaṇodayād, āśrayaparāvṛttau satyām, āvaraṇaprahāṇalakṣaṇā kāryaparisaṃptir yāda bhavati, tadā buddhabhūmau tad eva jñānaṃ kāryapariniṣpattyālabanam ucyate.* Tucci (1971: 2).

Paths	Meditations
1. Accumulation	None or preliminary meditations
2. Application	<i>Śamatha, vipaśyanā</i>
3. Seeing	On the limit of entities
4. Meditation	On the limit of entities
5. No more learning	On the perfection of aims

A final point regarding the four types of meditation is that the meditation on the limit of entities is likely equivalent to the meditation known as yogic perception, as described by Kamalaśīla's philosophical predecessors, such as Dharmakīrti and Vinītadeva (c. 690-c. 750). Toru Funayama has shown that the terms and phrases Kamalaśīla uses in *The Process of Meditation* to describe the meditation on the limit of entities match the definition of yogic perception given by Dharmakīrti (2011: 104-107). This equivalency lends support to the analysis given so far. According to the table above, practicing the meditation on the limit of entities corresponds with the entrance into the path of seeing. Contemporary scholars have argued that, according to Vinītadeva, the practitioner enters the path of seeing either with the initial practice of yogic perception, or in the moment directly following it.³⁷ If the meditation on the limit of entities is equivalent to yogic perception, Kamalaśīla and

³⁷ As Funayama explains, Kawasaki Shinjō and Inami Masahiro read Vinītadeva as stating that yogic perception occurs in the moment directly before entrance into the path of seeing, but Th. Stcherbatsky and Nagasaki Hōjun read Vinītadeva as saying that yogic perception occurs simultaneously with the entrance into the path of seeing (2011: 102-103).

Vinīadeva are in agreement that one begins practicing this meditation as one enters the path of seeing.

The Process of Meditation also describes a student's progression on the path according to the type of knowledge that student is attempting to develop. These texts list three types of knowledge. This framework of three knowledges is not unique to Kamalaśīla's work, but is a common pan-Indian trope. Not only are versions of these three knowledges found in Buddhist texts—such as Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Abhidharma*—but close variations of the list can also be found in non-Buddhist works—such as the *Esoteric Doctrine of the Great Wilderness* (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*) (Adam 2003: 23-24).³⁸ They are the knowledge of hearing (*śrutamayī prajñā*), the knowledge of reflection (*cīntamayī prajñā*), and the knowledge of meditation (*bhāvanāmayī prajñā*). These three are sequential, with each type of knowledge having the previous one as a prerequisite. This framework is important to our current discussion because *vipaśyanā* is practiced in order to develop the third of these knowledges, namely, the knowledge of meditation.

The knowledge of hearing consists in the student listening to and memorizing Buddhist doctrinal claims. Following this, the student reflects on these claims, using reasoning to understand the arguments behind these claims. This constitutes the knowledge of reflection. When the student has achieved these two

³⁸ The similar form found in the *Esoteric Doctrine of the Great Wilderness* is as follows: "You see, Maitreyī—it is one's self (*ātman*) which one should see and hear, and on which one should reflect and concentrate. For by seeing and hearing one's self, and by reflecting and concentrating on one's self, one gains the knowledge of this whole world" (Olivelle 1996: 69).

knowledges, they are ready to begin to meditate on what they have learned from these two knowledges. Kamalaśīla describes the process as follows:

In that case, in the very beginning, one should produce the knowledge of hearing. For first of all, one becomes acquainted with the meaning of the doctrine by means of that. After that, one penetrates the meaning of what is definitive and what is interpretable by means of the knowledge of reflection. From there, having ascertained the true meaning by means of that [knowledge of reflection], one should meditate on that true meaning, [and] not on what is not true.³⁹

Kamalaśīla states in this passage that one uses the knowledge of reflection to determine the “true meaning” of the Buddhist doctrine. The term “true meaning” in this passage is synonymous with those doctrinal claims that have definitive (*nītārtha*) meaning, and opposed to having what is called interpretable (*neyārtha*) meaning. The doctrinal claims that are defined as having a definitive meaning are those claims that are true when interpreted literally. Interpretable claims are not

³⁹ *tatra parthamaṃ tāvat śrutamayī prajñōtpādanīyā. tayā hi tāvad āgamārtham avadhārayati. tataścintāmayyā prajñayā nītaneyārthaṃ nirvedhayati. tatastayā niścītya bhūtamārthaṃ bhāvayennābhūtam.* Kamalaśīla (1997: 206).

In this passage, I consistently translate “*bhūtamārthaṃ*” as “true meaning,” rather than using the alternate translation of “real object.” *Bhūta* is ambiguous between “true” and “real,” while *artha* is ambiguous between “meaning” and “object.”

Translating “*artha*” as object is an incoherent translation of the first two instances of “*artha*” in this passage, namely, the phrases “*āgamārtham*,” and “*nītaneyārthaṃ*.” Following these two instances, I chose to continue to translate “*artha*” as “meaning,” and because of this, translate “*bhūtamārthaṃ*” as “true meaning.” I do so in order to emphasize the continuity of the content of the knowledge of hearing, the knowledge of reflection, and the knowledge of meditation. This continuity will be explained more fully in the next chapter.

taken literally, but are often interpreted figuratively or considered to be claims made for pragmatic reasons. A student with the knowledge of reflection learns which claims are the “true meaning,” i.e. the set of definitive statements.

In the quote given above, Kamalaśīla claims that, “one should meditate on that true meaning.” This refers to the meditation practices used to develop the knowledge of meditation. The most important of these practices is *vipaśyanā*.⁴⁰ Kamalaśīla emphasizes *vipaśyanā*’s close relationship to the knowledge of meditation through the use of a third term, “true discernment” (*bhūtapratyavekṣaṇā*).⁴¹ As will be explained in the second and third chapters, true discernment is the recognition of certain key properties, such as impermanence (*anityatva*) and emptiness, while the knowledge of meditation is the capacity to perceive phenomena in this way. This interpretation of the relationship of true discernment and the knowledge of meditation is supported by passages in *The*

⁴⁰ Adam (2003) analyzes the possible interpretations of the knowledge of meditation and concludes that, “Thus it seems that *bhāvanāmayī prajñā* [the knowledge of meditation], conceived as a process, can here be especially identified with one branch of the well-known two-branch schema of *bhāvanā: śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*” (29). The “one branch” he is referring to here is *vipaśyanā*.

⁴¹ My translation of the term *bhūtapratyavekṣaṇā* is based upon my interpretation of *vipaśyanā* and the knowledge of meditation, which I will give in the next two chapters. “*Pratyavekṣaṇā*” could alternatively be translated as “ascertainment.” However, I will be translating “*nīścayā*” as “ascertainment,” as this is the common translation for *nīścayā* in contemporary Buddhist scholarship. “*Bhūta*” is ambiguous between “real” and “true,” and either could function in this context. One could take the compound to have a genitive relation, such that it reads “discernment of what is real,” or to have an adjectival relation, such that it reads “true discernment.” Because these are equivalent in meaning, I have settled on the more concise “true discernment.”

Process of Meditation, where Kamalaśīla speaks of developing the knowledge of meditation in order to accomplish true discernment.⁴²

In *The Process of Meditation III*, Kamalaśīla indicates that *vipaśyanā* is equivalent to true discernment. He states, “And *vipaśyanā* is called true discernment.”⁴³ However, in this case, Kamalaśīla in using the term “*vipaśyanā*” in a somewhat different sense than he usually does. He is not referring to the practice of *vipaśyanā*, but instead to the ideal cognitive state brought about by that practice. Kamalaśīla’s use of “*vipaśyanā*” in *The Process of Meditation* is slightly ambiguous. It most commonly refers to a type of meditation one practices, but it can also refer to the ideal cognitive state of the practitioner who has perfected this practice. For instance, a master practitioner can be said to have achieved *vipaśyanā*. In the passage where Kamalaśīla states that *vipaśyanā* and true discernment are equivalent, he is referring to the ideal state of the *vipaśyanā* practitioner. It is this ideal cognitive state that is known as true discernment.

The relationship of *vipaśyanā* to the knowledge of meditation can be seen through each term’s relationship to true discernment. The knowledge of meditation is the capacity for true discernment. True discernment is the ideal cognitive state brought about by the practice of *vipaśyanā*. This indicates that the practice of *vipaśyanā* is used to develop the knowledge of meditation.

⁴² “And what is understood through the knowledge of hearing and reflection should be meditated on by means of the knowledge of meditation, not anything else. It is like a horse running on an indicated track. One will accomplish true discernment from this.”

kiṃ ca yad eva śrutacintāmayyā prajñayā veditaṃ tad eva bhāvanāmayyā prajñayā bhāvanīyaṃ nānyat. saṃdiṣṭa dhāvanabhūmyaśvadhāvanavat. tasmāt bhūtapratyavekṣā kartavyā. Tucci (1971: 20).

⁴³ *bhūtapratyavekṣaṇā ca vipaśyanocate.* Tucci (1971: 5).

From this, we can form the following line of reasoning. The knowledge of meditation is developed in the part of the path where one practices *vipaśyanā*. Because the knowledge of hearing and reflection are prerequisites for the development of the knowledge of meditation, and because the practice of *vipaśyanā* is what is used to develop the knowledge of meditation, the knowledge of hearing and reflection should be achieved before one practices *vipaśyanā*.

This allows us to add the three knowledges to the table given above that aligns the five paths with the four types of meditation. In sum, the five paths, four types of meditation, and three knowledges correspond as follows:

Path	Meditation	Knowledges Developed
1. Accumulation	None or preliminary meditations	Hearing, reflection
2. Application	<i>Śamatha, vipaśyanā</i>	Meditation
3. Seeing	On the limit of entities, i.e. yogic perception	
4. Meditation	On the limit of entities, i.e. yogic perception	
5. No more learning	On the perfection of aims	

From this table, we can see where *vipaśyanā* is situated on Kamalaśīla's depiction of the Buddhist path. *Vipaśyanā* is practiced on the path of application, where it is used in order to develop the knowledge of meditation. The prerequisites for practicing *vipaśyanā* are the achievement of the knowledges of hearing and reflection. These

prerequisites and *vipaśyanā*'s role in developing the knowledge of meditation will play a crucial role in the interpretation of the practice that I give in the next chapter.

7. Conclusion

The introduction given in this chapter provides the historical and philosophical context needed for my upcoming analysis of *vipaśyanā*. This context can be summarized as follows. Kamalaśīla synthesized a number of Buddhist philosophical positions. His theory of *vipaśyanā* reflects that through his placement of *vipaśyanā* within a Yogācāra path structure that includes meditation on both the Yogācāra tenet of mind-only as well as the Madhyamaka tenet of emptiness. While it is unclear whether or not Kamalaśīla views these tenets as compatible, it is clear that he views this integration as being pedagogically useful. While Kamalaśīla was syncretic with regard to these two philosophical traditions, *The Process of Meditation*, and its traditional history, reveals Kamalaśīla's position as a staunch gradualist. As a gradualist, Kamalaśīla insisted on the conceptual practice of *vipaśyanā*. It is necessary to practice *vipaśyanā* because *vipaśyanā* has a crucial role in both Buddhist soteriology and ethics. These two roles will be explored in the fifth chapter of this dissertation, after I have established a thorough description of how the practice affects cognition.

The Process of Meditation indicates that a practitioner should start the practice of *vipaśyanā* upon entering the path of application, after they have achieved the knowledge of hearing and reflection. *Vipaśyanā* relation to true discernment indicates that this meditation is practiced in order to develop the knowledge of

meditation. These two findings are crucial to my arguments in the next chapter. There I argue against an interpretation of *vipaśyanā* that takes it to be a technique used to discover some new facts about experience. To make this argument, I need to compare the knowledge the practitioner has before meditation to the knowledge they gain from meditation. Given Kamalaśīla's description of the path as laid out above, this means that we can compare the knowledge of reflection, achieved as a prerequisite for *vipaśyanā*, to the knowledge of meditation, achieved as the result of practicing *vipaśyanā*. Looking at these two points, I argue that *vipaśyanā* is not used to make some new discovery, but is instead used to develop new recognitional capacities. The historical and philosophical context described in this chapter informs the interpretation of *vipaśyanā* I give in the following chapters. These remaining chapters provide an exposition and philosophical defense of Kamalaśīla's theory of the practice, from both Buddhist and contemporary perspectives, as it relates to the fields of epistemology, philosophy of mind, and ethics.

Chapter 2: Two Accounts of *Vipaśyanā*⁴⁴

1. Introduction

You and a friend are hiking a favorite trail in the Appalachian mountains. You notice a small three-leafed plant, and your friend comments, “That’s poison ivy.” You have heard about the features of poison ivy. Looking at this plant, you can identify those features and infer that it is indeed poison ivy. Your friend, however, looked down and recognized the plant immediately. What is the epistemic difference between you and your friend in this case?

If asked what you learned from examining the foliage, both you and your friend could respond in the same way, “I learned that that plant is poison ivy.” You both know that that plant is poison ivy; however, you learned that fact in different ways. The difference between you two is not in *what* you learned, it’s *how* you learned it. While your only epistemic access to this fact was through inference, your friend was able to learn this fact simply through observation. This is a difference in your recognitional capacities. In this chapter, I argue that the difference between a novice and expert *vipaśyanā* practitioner is the same kind of difference as the difference between you and your hiking buddy. The expert practitioner has developed new recognitional capacities that the novice does not have.

The last chapter provided a basic overview of some of historical and philosophical context for *The Process of Meditation*, including an outline of the Buddhist path according to Kamalaśīla. Two claims from that outline will be

⁴⁴ The arguments in this chapter are based on work found in Schmid (2019).

particularly relevant to the arguments made in this chapter: the claim that the knowledge of reflection is a prerequisite for practicing *vipāśyanā*, and the claim that *vipāśyanā* is used to develop the knowledge of meditation. This second claim indicates that through *vipāśyanā*, the practitioner gains some new knowledge.

In what follows, I argue that this new knowledge is not a new form of declarative knowledge, but new type of procedural knowledge, despite the fact that this new knowledge is manifested in perceptual judgments. Since my argument depends on the difference between procedural and declarative knowledge, the chapter begins with a brief overview of these terms. This brief overview is supplemented by an appendix to this chapter that goes into detail about what is meant by these terms and my reasons for using them. Following the section on procedural and declarative knowledge, I provide an introduction to the practice of *vipāśyanā* as described in *The Process of Meditation*. Here I focus on its three primary features. *Vipāśyanā* is a form of observation; it is conceptual; and it results in perceptual judgments.

This introduction to *vipāśyanā* gives us a basic outline of the practice, which I draw upon in the rest of the chapter. After this introduction, I make an argument for what kind of knowledge a meditator develops through the practice. I start by presenting an interpretation of the practice that is prevalent in contemporary scholarship. I examine the work of three scholars who exemplify this view. These scholars all interpret *vipāśyanā* as a technique used to discover some new declarative knowledge about one's experience. Next, I challenge this interpretation, and give support for my critique by examining the passages in *The Process of*

Meditation that describe the relationship between the knowledge of meditation and the knowledge of reflection. I show that, in contrast to these scholars' interpretation, the description of the three knowledges found in *The Process of Meditation* indicates that all the declarative knowledge required for practicing *vipāśyanā* should be obtained *before* the practitioner sits down to meditate. There are no new discoveries made in the practice of *vipāśyanā*.

Nevertheless, it remains necessary to say what the knowledge of meditation consists in, if not declarative knowledge. According to *The Process of Meditation*, this new knowledge consists in procedural knowledge. In particular, it consists in new recognitional capacities. Through practicing *vipāśyanā*, the meditator gains the capacity to recognize directly in phenomena the particular properties that the Buddhist tenets attribute to them.

This claim, that *vipāśyanā* is used to develop recognitional capacities, is crucial to this dissertation's interpretation of *vipāśyanā*. I build upon this interpretation through the next two chapters. In the next chapter, I explain how one develops this kind of recognition according to Pramāṇavāda philosophy, and then, in the following chapter, I defend the claim that this kind of recognition is possible by drawing on contemporary philosophy of mind.

2. Procedural and Declarative Knowledge⁴⁵

Because my argument relies on the distinction between declarative and procedural knowledge, I should first make clear what is meant by these terms. In ordinary language, the possession of declarative knowledge is commonly expressed in sentences using the verb “know” and the preposition “that,” such as “Sam knows that the San Francisco 49ers lost the Super Bowl.” In cases of declarative knowledge, the knower, e.g. Sam, has a relationship to a proposition, e.g. “the San Francisco 49ers lost the Super Bowl.” Declarative knowledge has a number of cognitive characteristics. It is commonly thought to involve belief, justification, the ability to express the knowledge linguistically, the ability to use this knowledge in inference, and an understanding of the various concepts expressed in the proposition.⁴⁶

Procedural knowledge, on the other hand, is commonly thought to lack many, if not all, of these characteristics.⁴⁷ Possession of procedural knowledge is ordinarily expressed with the verb “know” and the preposition “how,” such as “Sam knows how to ride a bike.” In this case, the possessor of procedural knowledge has the ability or disposition to perform a certain skill or manifest a certain trait. Unlike

⁴⁵ An appendix to this chapter supplements the brief description that follows. In the appendix, I go into greater detail about these two terms, and explain why I use the distinction between procedural and declarative knowledge as opposed to a similar distinction in types of knowledge, namely, the distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that. In doing so, I take up an important challenge to the distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that by Stanley and Williamson (2001). Examining Stanley and Williamson’s argument reveals subtle differences between the uses of these terms. It is because of these subtle differences that I prefer to use the terms procedural and declarative knowledge rather than knowledge-how and knowledge-that.

⁴⁶ See the appendix to this chapter for a description of these characteristics.

⁴⁷ See the appendix to this chapter for the empirical evidence in Wallis (2008) that procedural knowledge lacks these characteristics.

declarative knowledge, the knower may not be able to express linguistically how they accomplish this. Moreover, procedural knowledge requires more than simply knowing all the relevant declarative knowledge. You might be told everything there is to know about riding a bike, but until you actually get on a bike and practice riding it, you will not be able to say truthfully that you know how to ride a bike.

Recognitional capacities are a form of procedural knowledge. As a form of procedural knowledge, these capacities consist in an ability or disposition that is distinct from simply knowing declarative knowledge. For instance, to return to the example of poison ivy, it requires more than the knowledge of what poison ivy looks like to be able to recognize it on sight. Developing new recognitional capacities requires a form of conditioning that only results through practice. Chicken sexers, a profession widely discussed in contemporary philosophy, undergo perceptual training in order to develop their skills in recognition.⁴⁸ Another example of perceptual training is how radiologists read radiographs. A number of empirical studies have shown that a radiologist's experience observing mammograms correlates to their accuracy in recognizing different forms in those mammograms.⁴⁹ This has led to studies suggesting that perceptual training programs can be used to improve radiologists' recognitional capacities.⁵⁰ As I will argue, the knowledge of meditation also consists in recognitional capacities, and, for this reason, it too requires a special type of training in order to be developed. This training is the practice of *vipaśyanā*.

⁴⁸ E.g. Brandom (2010)

⁴⁹ E.g. Nodine et al. (1996), Nodine et al. (1999), and Waite et al. (2019).

⁵⁰ See Chen et al. (2017).

3. Three Characteristics of *Vipaśyanā*

Before I argue for my claim that *vipaśyanā* develops recognitional capacities, it is necessary for me to give an introductory sketch of the practice, in order to facilitate understanding for the upcoming discussion. In this section, I introduce Kamalaśīla's theory of *vipaśyanā* by focusing on three primary characteristics of the practice. *The Process of Meditation* describes *vipaśyanā* as being: 1) a form of observation; 2) conceptual; and 3) resulting in perceptual judgments. These characteristics can be identified through passages that either state these characteristics directly, or indicate them through illustration.

First of all, according to Kamalaśīla, *vipaśyanā* is a form of observation. It is intentional, both in the common sense of intentional that means "done on purpose," and in the technical philosophical sense that means "object-directed." When one practices *vipaśyanā*, one observes a phenomenon (*dharma*). This is often some mental event, observed by means of introspection. One observes the phenomenon in *vipaśyanā* just as one might observe a physical object by way of the ordinary sense faculties.⁵¹ It is this analogy with sensory observation from which we get the Sanskrit term "*vipaśyanā*," which is built on the morpheme "*paś*," a derivation of the Sanskrit verbal root "*ḍṛś*," which means "to see."

In *The Process of Meditation*, there are myriad examples of *vipaśyanā* being described as a form of observation similar to sensory observation. Kamalaśīla often

⁵¹ In what follows, I, like Kamalaśīla, will focus on an analogy with visual observation. This is simply because our familiarity with vision makes it easy to analogize. I do not mean to suggest that *vipaśyanā* is more similar to vision than to any other sense faculty.

illustrates this with figurative examples, in which he compares *vipaśyanā* to vision. In the beginning of *The Process of Meditation III*, he states that when the yogi practices *vipaśyanā*, it is “like ascertaining the blemishes on his own face by means of examining a reflection of his face in a mirror.”⁵² In that same text, Kamalaśīla later compares the lack of *vipaśyanā* to someone who cannot see:

But when the yogi does not determine reality more clearly, like someone born blind, a person who has entered darkness, or someone whose eyes are closed, then he should know that his mind is stuck, and devoid of *vipaśyanā*.⁵³

Second, Kamalaśīla presents *vipaśyanā* as conceptual. When listing the four kinds of meditation a student practices on the Buddhist path, Kamalaśīla defines *vipaśyanā* as the type of meditation that has conceptual content (*savikalpapratibimbakam*) (1997: 253). He explains that this is “...called conceptual content because of the presence there of the defining characteristic of *vipaśyanā*, [namely,] a concept that corresponds to what is real.”⁵⁴ Kamalaśīla appears to have adopted this notion that *vipaśyanā* is conceptual from the scripture *Cutting the*

⁵² *darpaṇāntargatasvamukhapratibimbapratyavekṣeṇa svamukhagatavairūpyāṇām viniścayavat*. Tucci (1971: 2). Kamalaśīla here is using the literal meaning of *pratibimba* as “reflection.” Elsewhere, the related term *pratibimbaka* is used in a more technical sense, meaning “content.”

⁵³ *yadā tu jātyandhavad andhakārapraviṣṭipurūṣavad vinimīlitākṣavat sphuṭataraṃ tattvaṃ nāvadhārayed yogi tadā tasya cittaṃ līnaṃ veditavyaṃ vipaśyanārahitaṃ ca*. Tucci (1971: 9).

⁵⁴ *tad eva pratibimbakṃ yadā vipaśyanayā vicārayati yogī tattvādhigamārthaṃ tadā savikalpapratibimbakam ucyate. tattvanirūpaṇavikalpasya vipaśyanālakṣaṇasya tatra samudbhāvāt*. Kamalaśīla (1997: 253-254).

Knots.⁵⁵ When Kamalaśīla says that in *vipaśyanā* there is the “presence there of...a concept,” he means that in this meditation, the practitioner uses concepts in order to categorize the phenomena that are observed in meditation.

According to Kamalaśīla, concepts are expressible in language. He adopts this position from Dharmakīrti, who states in his *Determination of Epistemology* (*Pramāṇaviniścaya*) that conceptual content “is fit to be associated with words.”⁵⁶ A *vipaśyanā* practitioner could *potentially* describe the phenomenon they observed in meditation linguistically. Nonetheless, *vipaśyanā* is not explicitly linguistic. *Vipaśyanā* does not necessarily involve a form of inner monologue, and it is not to be mistaken with, for instance, the recitation of a mantra. That said, the potential to describe the phenomenon observed in *vipaśyanā* through language is important because, as we will see, Kamalaśīla describes the observations made in *vipaśyanā* in the form of declarative judgments that he explicitly quotes.

Vipaśyanā is thus a form of conceptual observation. As Paul Griffiths explains, this means that *vipaśyanā* is a form of “seeing-as” (1983: 83).⁵⁷ The philosophical term “seeing-as” refers to a perceptual experience that is conceptually ordered. In cases of “seeing-as,” one perceives a phenomenon such that one’s observation can be described through language. Take, for instance, the case of looking at your desk and seeing your laptop. You deploy the concept “laptop” in this situation and see

⁵⁵ *Vipaśyanā* is said to be conceptual in *Cutting the Knots* as well. See Powers (1995: 149).

⁵⁶ *abhilāpinī pratītiḥ* PVin 1.4

⁵⁷ Griffiths claims that *vipaśyanā* functions to transform the act of “seeing as” for the practitioner. However, he also claims that *vipaśyanā* elicits new “knowledge-that” for the practitioner (1983: 83). In the following sections, I will agree with the former claim while arguing against the latter.

that shiny metallic rectangle *as* a laptop. This requires that you have previously learned the concept “laptop.” Someone from the 1970s would not see that shiny metallic rectangle as a laptop, because such a person would never have learned that concept. Cases of seeing-as are dependent on our understanding of concepts. In our ordinary use of the English language, we use the preposition “as” and the conjunction “that” when describing this form of seeing.⁵⁸ You see what is in front of you *as* a laptop, or you see *that* a laptop is on your desk. In instances of “seeing-as,” the observer deploys concepts in order to recognize objects in their perceptual experience.

Because *vipaśyanā* is a form of seeing-as, a *vipaśyanā* practitioner will always observe a phenomenon *as* being thus and so. For instance, they will observe a phenomenon *as* being impermanent, or *as* being empty. In *The Process of Meditation*, these conceptual observations are expressed in the form of perceptual judgments. Kamalaśīla often quotes these judgments directly using the Sanskrit quotation marker “*iti*.” When practicing *vipaśyanā*, the proximate goal of a meditation session is to form one of these perceptual judgments.

The perceptual judgments made in *vipaśyanā* are analogous to the judgments made in ordinary everyday observation. Because you have learned the concept “coffee table,” you might look at a squat four-legged piece of furniture that has a couple of picture books on it, and make the perceptual judgment, “That is a coffee

⁵⁸ However, our uses of “seeing as” and “seeing that” are distinct. “Seeing-that” is used when one sees what is in fact the case. “Seeing-as” can be used for any conceptually ordered perceptual experience, whether or not one is correct about what one is seeing. Nevertheless, this distinction will not be significant for the upcoming arguments.

table.” In this case, you are deploying the concept “coffee table” when presented with this squat four-legged piece of furniture. You see it *as* a coffee table. In *vipaśyanā*, a similar process occurs through successful meditation. For example, if one begins meditation with the intention to see phenomena as impermanent, a successful practice would culminate in the practitioner making the perceptual judgment, “This phenomenon is impermanent.” But this does not mean that the perceptual judgment is actually expressed linguistically. The practitioner does not necessarily mutter, “This phenomenon is impermanent,” under their breath. Kamalaśīla’s quotations of perceptual judgments merely indicate that the practitioner *could* express these judgments in language if called upon to do so.

Kamalaśīla regularly quotes these perceptual judgments in *The Process of Meditation* in sections when he describes how a yogi should practice *vipaśyanā*.⁵⁹ For instance, in *The Process of Meditation III*, he describes the process of observing a mental visualization of the Buddha during *vipaśyanā*, and seeing it as empty:

From there, [the yogi] should cultivate *vipaśyanā* through discerning the coming and going of that content, which is in the form of the Buddha. And after that, he should think as follows: “Just as this content in the form of the Buddha neither comes from anywhere, nor will go to anywhere, but exists empty of essence and devoid of self and that which belongs to the self, so too

⁵⁹ E.g. Kamalaśīla (1997: 216); Kamalaśīla (1997: 256-257).

all phenomena are like a reflection—empty of essence, lacking any coming or going, and lacking the nature of real entities and so forth.”⁶⁰

The quoted statement found after “he should think as follows” contains the perceptual judgment that is made when the meditator sees the visualized Buddha as empty, namely, “this content...exists empty of essence and devoid of self and that which belongs to the self.”

According to this terse description, after observing the emptiness of the visualization of the Buddha, the meditator should then come to see all the phenomena of the world as empty. Before *vipaśyanā*, the practitioner observes phenomena in an ordinary fashion. After *vipaśyanā*, the practitioner observes that phenomena have specific properties such as being empty. This new observation is expressed as a perceptual judgment.

These three characteristics of *vipaśyanā* give us a basic outline of the practice. The meditator sits down to practice *vipaśyanā*. Because *vipaśyanā* is observational, this practice begins with the meditator observing a phenomenon through introspection. And because *vipaśyanā* is conceptual, the practitioner deploys a concept in response to that perceptual encounter, leading to the categorization of that phenomenon as having a certain property, such as being

⁶⁰ *tatas tasya tathāgatavigrahapratibimbakasyāgatigatinirūpaṇato vipaśyanā bhavet. tataścaivaṃ vidhaṃ vicintayet. yathedaṃ tathāgatavigrahapratibimbakaṃ na kutaścid āgataṃ nāpi kvacid gamiṣyati tiṣṭhad api svabhāvasūnyaṃ ātmātmīyarahitaṃ tathaiva sarvadharmāḥ svabhāvasūnyā āgatigatirahitāḥ pratibimbopamāḥ bhāvādirūparahitā iti.* Kamalaśīla (1997: 255).

empty. This is expressed in a perceptual judgment, such as “This phenomenon is empty.”

With this basic outline in place, in what follows, I delve into more controversial aspects of *vipaśyanā*, and discuss the difference between my interpretation of the practice and the account given previously by other contemporary scholars. Both interpretations hold that practicing *vipaśyanā* results in acquiring a type of knowledge. As we saw in the first chapter, Kamalaśīla refers to this knowledge as the knowledge of meditation. However, these other scholars and I disagree about this knowledge of meditation consists in.

4. The Discovery Account

Over the last century, as Buddhism has entered into modernity, many interpreters and teachers of Buddhist meditation have portrayed these practices as techniques for eliciting discoveries about the way we experience the world.⁶¹ Call this “the discovery account.” The discovery account claims that the practitioner learns some new declarative knowledge when practicing certain forms of meditation. In this section, I present the motivation behind the discovery account, and then identify three cotemporary scholars who interpret *vipaśyanā* according to this account.

The discovery account is appealing because this account of Buddhist meditation grounds the popular view that Buddhism is an “inner science,” i.e. a

⁶¹ McMahan (2008) lists Nyanaponika Thera (1954), Jayatilleke (1963), Kalupahana (1975), Hayward (1987), and Thurman (1991), among others, as examples of this (206-208).

science for analyzing experience.⁶² This view is tempting because Buddhism did promote a category of study named *adhyātmavidyā*, which is commonly translated as “science of one’s own self.” However, this translation of *vidyā* as “science” is based on an older use of the term “science,” where “science” was used to describe most forms of academic study. To be considered a type of science in the modern sense of the term, a tradition would need to have a form of empirical inquiry, similar to scientific inquiry. Proponents of the view that Buddhism is an inner science have claimed that certain forms of Buddhist meditation fulfill this role. David McMahan explains that, on this view, “As an instrument for ascertaining “natural laws” within the mind, [meditation] becomes a technique for empirical inquiry” (2008: 211).

The discoveries that result from these meditations are said to be either equivalent or akin to the kinds of discoveries made in scientific disciplines. McMahan explains that proponents of this view assert that, “As science explores the external world, meditation probes the internal world, discovering truths about the mind” (2008: 205). These discoveries are said to be achieved in a moment of insight, similar to the insights that lead to scientific discoveries, such as Archimedes’ famous “eureka moment.”

Prima facie, *vipaśyanā* might seem like the type of meditation that is the most amenable to the discovery account, since the perceptual judgments made in *vipaśyanā* are similar to the claims about experience that are found in Buddhist tenets. It is easy to see how a scholar might misinterpret these perceptual judgments as discoveries, and then conclude that this meditation lead to the

⁶² See McMahan (2008: 89-116, 204-211).

discovery of newly found truths about experience, which were then inscribed into Buddhist doctrine. For instance, from this perspective, when a *vipaśyanā* practitioner makes the perceptual judgment, “This phenomenon is impermanent,” they would be discovering the fact that that phenomenon is impermanent, and they would newly know that that phenomenon is impermanent.

For this judgment to count as a discovery, the declarative knowledge obtained by the meditator must be new.⁶³ A discovery is defined as something learned or found for the first time. In the case of meditation, for this judgment to qualify as a discovery, the declarative knowledge gained through meditation must be declarative knowledge that the practitioner did not already possess before they sat down to meditate. This view, that the practitioner acquires new declarative knowledge from *vipaśyanā*, is found in a number of interpretations of *vipaśyanā* made by contemporary scholars.⁶⁴ But as we will see, according to Kamalaśīla, the meditator already has all the necessary declarative knowledge *before* they begin to

⁶³ In ordinary language, we occasionally use the term “discovery” for discoveries that do not involve judgments, and thus do not involve new declarative knowledge. For instance, we talk about the discovery of a new location. For the purposes of this paper, however, I am only dealing with the more common use of the term “discovery,” that is, discoveries that involve judgments. For this reason, when I use the term “discovery,” I will be speaking in terms of the discovery of new declarative knowledge.

⁶⁴ Note that the scholarly works that I will be considering are interpreting *vipaśyanā*, but are not interpreting specific description of the practice found in Kamalaśīla’s *The Process of Meditation*. Instead, the three scholarly interpretations I will be examining are interpreting forms of *vipaśyanā* that are found both in traditions that directly influenced Kamalaśīla, as well as in traditions that were directly influenced by Kamalaśīla. Because these authors are not working with Kamalaśīla, I am not directly challenging their explanations of the specific texts or practitioners that they are working with. Instead, I am using their work only to present one possible interpretation of *vipaśyanā*, and argue that Kamalaśīla’s depiction of *vipaśyanā* differs from this interpretation.

their practice. There is no declarative knowledge of consequence that is learned in meditation. For this reason, Kamalaśīla's account of *vipaśyanā* differs from the discovery account.

Alan Wallace's interpretation of meditation is a clear example of what I am calling the discovery account. He is a well-known proponent of the view that Buddhism is a form of inner science, as can be seen from the title of his article, "A Science of Consciousness: Buddhism (1), the Modern West (0)" (2003a). On his view, Buddhists use *vipaśyanā* to conduct an empirical, and scientific, inquiry into experience. He claims, "The training in insight [meditation] may be viewed as a kind of contemplative science, aimed at acquiring experiential knowledge of the mind" (2007: 111). Moreover, he explicitly states that that the discoveries made when practicing *vipaśyanā* are equivalent to scientific discoveries:

Buddhist insights into the nature of the mind and consciousness are presented as genuine discoveries in the scientific sense of the term: they can be replicated by any competent researcher with sufficient prior training. (2003b: 8-9)

In this passage, Wallace is claiming that continued training in meditation allows one to observe repeatedly, and thus to confirm, what one first discovers in meditation. While Wallace is explicit about the claim that meditation brings about scientific discoveries, the next two contemporary works I examine do not use the phrase "scientific discovery" when describing Buddhist meditation. However, we can see that they are still committed to what I am calling the discovery account of *vipaśyanā*,

due to the fact that they claim that the meditator uses *vipaśyanā* to acquire some new declarative knowledge that they did not know previously.

Dahl et al. (2015) interpret *vipaśyanā* as a technique for discovery in their taxonomy of Buddhist forms of meditation. They categorize *vipaśyanā*—in both its Tibetan and Theravāda forms—as part of what they call the deconstructive family (2015: 517).⁶⁵ They define the cognitive mechanism for this family as an exploration of experience called self-inquiry (2015: 519). This inquiry is said to lead to some new insight into one’s self. They state:

In the deconstructive family, self-inquiry is practiced to elicit insight. Insight has been framed as a shift in consciousness, often sudden, that involves a feeling of knowing, understanding, or perceiving something that had previously eluded one’s grasp. Scientific studies of this phenomenon have focused on the burst of understanding that can occur in relation to solving simple mathematic or semantic problems. (2015: 520)⁶⁶

Insight, as described here, is defined by a sudden discovery of something new, something that was previously unknown to the practitioner. The examples of insight given in this quote are the insights elicited in mathematic and semantic problem solving. In such cases, an individual would suddenly realize the answer to a

⁶⁵ Note that here the authors refer to the Tibetan form of *vipaśyanā*, or *lhag mthong* (Tib.), as “Tibetan analytical meditations.” Tibetan insight meditation training is based upon the instructions first given by Kamalaśīla in *The Process of Meditation*.

⁶⁶ Though Dahl et al. (2015) list “perceiving” in the quote, they do not mean a change in the way we observe the world. This is indicated by their categorization of *vipaśyanā* as part of the family of deconstructive meditations, rather than within the subfamily they call “perception orientation meditations” (518-519).

problem, and their answer would take the form of some declarative knowledge that they did not realize previously. In other words, this kind of insight is the acquisition of some new declarative knowledge.

Paul Griffiths interprets *vipaśyanā* as being a technique for discovery as well (1983). Griffiths analyzes two texts in particular, Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Abhidharma* and Asaṅga's *Encyclopedia of Abhidharma (Abhidharmasamuccya)* (1983: 174-595). As stated in the first chapter, Vasubandhu and Asaṅga were both influential philosophers within the Yogācāra tradition that heavily influenced Kamalaśīla. Griffiths states that the practice of *vipaśyanā* has two primary results, which he describes with philosophical terms "knowing-that" and "seeing-as" (1983: 83). He describes these two roles respectively:

... after practicing this technique the practitioner both knows something different than he knew before, and has his vision transformed in accordance with such knowledge. (1983: 83)

Griffiths states here that *vipaśyanā* results in a change in the practitioner's "vision," i.e. their acts of "seeing-as." In other words, the practice results in a transformation of how the practitioner observes the world. I agree with Griffiths on this point, and I will argue that this transformation consists in new procedural knowledge. Nonetheless, Griffiths also claims that *vipaśyanā* results in some new "knowing-that," which is equivalent, in this case, to some new declarative knowledge.⁶⁷ He describes this as the practitioner acquiring some knowledge that is "something

⁶⁷ See the appendix to this chapter for a description of the close relation between knowledge-that and declarative knowledge.

different than he knew before.” Like Wallace and the authors of Dahl et al. (2015), Griffiths is asserting that the practitioner did not have this declarative knowledge before meditation, and that this new knowledge is discovered through the practice of *vipaśyanā*.

For all three of these contemporary versions of the discovery account of *vipaśyanā*, the key feature that diverges from Kamalaśīla’s view is the claim that the declarative knowledge involved in *vipaśyanā* is new to the practitioner. Wallace states that meditation produces a discovery, which is, by definition, something learned for the first time. Dahl et al. (2015) describes *vipaśyanā* as eliciting what “had previously eluded one’s grasp” (520), and Griffiths (1983) states that after practicing *vipaśyanā* the meditator “knows something different than he knew before” (88). In order to show how Kamalaśīla’s view differs from these interpretations, in the next section, I compare Kamalaśīla’s description of what the practitioner knows *before* meditation to what they know *after* meditation. By comparing the practitioner’s knowledge at these two points, I show that there is no significant addition to their declarative knowledge as the result of meditation. This lack of any new declarative knowledge of consequence entails that, according to Kamalaśīla, there are no discoveries made in *vipaśyanā*.⁶⁸

5. The Three Knowledges

Kamalaśīla discusses what the practitioner should know before meditation, as well as what the practitioner knows as a result of meditation, in terms of the

⁶⁸ Similarly, Tillemans (2013) argues that the related meditation of yogic perception (*yogipratyakṣa*) “adds no new discoveries of truths” (299).

three knowledges (*prajñā*). The translation of the Sanskrit term “*prajñā*” as “knowledge” is imperfect; however, I chose “knowledge” as a working translation in order to match an important ambiguity found in both the Sanskrit term “*prajñā*” and the English term “knowledge.”⁶⁹ Both “*prajñā*” and “knowledge” could mean either “procedural knowledge” or “declarative knowledge.” I will argue that the second type of knowledge, *cintāmayī prajñā*, i.e. the knowledge of reflection, involves the possession of declarative knowledge, while the third type, *bhāvanāmayī prajñā*, i.e. the knowledge of meditation, consists in procedural knowledge.

To make this argument, let us first review the passage discussed in the pervious chapter, where Kamalāsīla describes the stages in acquiring these three knowledges:

In that case, in the very beginning, one should produce the knowledge of hearing. For first of all, one ascertains the meaning of the doctrine by means of that. After that, one penetrates the meaning of what is definitive and what is interpretable by means of the knowledge of reflection. From there, having

⁶⁹ No English term covers the range one would need to accurately and consistently translate *prajñā* for all three of these types of *prajñā*. My translation of the first *prajñā*, “the knowledge of hearing,” may seem problematic, because the knowledge of hearing consists in memorization. It does not involve any strong form of justification. However, this problem can be mitigated by considering this knowledge to be knowledge of what the Buddhist tenets are, rather than knowing, and thus being able to justify, the particular content of those claims. The knowledge of hearing also consists in memorizing those tenets. Because of this, the practitioner gains a deep familiarity with those tenets. Further research would be needed to determine the role this deep familiarity plays in the practitioner’s meditation.

determined the true meaning by means of that [knowledge of reflection], one should meditate on that true meaning, [and] not on what is not true.⁷⁰

In the knowledge of reflection, the student listens to and memorizes the doctrine as stated by an authoritative source, and, in doing so, learns the Buddhist tenets through their linguistic community. Following this, in the knowledge of reflection, the student determines what is the “true meaning.” In the first chapter, we determined that these two knowledges are prerequisites for the practice of *vipaśyanā*. In other words, the practitioner is required to possess both the knowledge of hearing and the knowledge of reflection before they begin their meditation practice. This suggests that *vipaśyanā* and the observations one makes in *vipaśyanā* are dependent on one’s prior conceptual knowledge. This is to be expected if, as stated above, *vipaśyanā* is a conceptual form of observation, and thus a form of “seeing-as.” Acts of seeing-as are dependent on the concepts that one has already learned.

The passage above states that the knowledge of reflection is used to determine which doctrinal claims are definitive and which are interpretable. Buddhists developed the hermeneutical distinction between definitive and interpretable claims in order to make sense of doctrinal claims that seemed to contradict each other. Inferential reasoning is used to determine the largest

⁷⁰ *tatra parthamaṃ tāvat śrutamayī prajñotpādanīyā. tayā hi tāvad āgamārtham avadhārayati. tataścintāmayyā prajñayā nītaneyārthaṃ nirvedhayati. tatastayā niścītya bhūtamārthaṃ bhāvayennābhūtam.* Kamalaśīla (1997: 206). I chose here to consistently translate *artha* as “meaning,” rather than “object.” The translation of “object” is incoherent when used in the first instance of *artha* in this passage, namely, “*āgamārtham*,” which I have translated as “the meaning of the doctrine.”

coherent set of doctrinal claims. The claims in this set are deemed to be definitive, and those claims that are incoherent with this set are considered interpretable. The set of definitive coherent claims is what the passage refers to as “true meaning.” These claims are philosophical tenets, which commonly attribute certain properties to phenomena, such as stating that all phenomena are empty.

In order to acquire the knowledge of reflection, a practitioner must learn how to use inference to determine which doctrinal claims are definitively true. Because of this, a practitioner with the knowledge of reflection would be able to justify the definitive doctrinal claims through inference. This entails that the knowledge of reflection consists in the possession of declarative knowledge. For instance, a practitioner with the knowledge of reflection would know that all phenomena are impermanent, or know that all phenomena are empty. They would be able to justify these claims through reasoning and philosophical argumentation. Since the knowledge of reflection is a prerequisite to practicing *vipaśyanā*, this is all learned before meditation.

The passage quoted above tells us that after attaining the knowledge of reflection, the practitioner then meditates on this true meaning. In the first chapter, I showed that this meditation is the practice of *vipaśyanā*, and that *vipaśyanā* is practiced in order to acquire the knowledge of mediation. For this reason, an analysis of the knowledge of meditation will provide us with insight into the result of practicing *vipaśyanā*. Kamalaśīla describes the knowledge of meditation as follows:

Thus having ascertained the true meaning through the knowledge of reflection, one should give rise to the knowledge of meditation in order to perceive that [true meaning].⁷¹

In this quote, Kamalaśīla is claiming that the knowledge of meditation is developed in order to enable one to “perceive” the doctrine’s true meaning, i.e. the definitive Buddhist tenets. To be clear, this quote is not saying that through the knowledge of meditation one learns to perceive tenets. Instead, this quote indicates that the purpose of achieving the knowledge of meditation is in order to perceive phenomena in the way that they are described in these tenets.

In other words, this passage indicates that *vipaśyanā* is practiced in order to train a practitioner to recognize particular phenomena as instances of the kinds of phenomena described by Buddhist tenets. The Buddhist tenets describe phenomena as possessing certain properties, such as impermanence or emptiness, and *vipaśyanā* is used in order to identify these properties in an observed phenomenon. These properties are then expressed in perceptual judgments, such as “This

⁷¹ *tadevaṃ cīntamayyā prajñayā niścītya bhūtam arthaṃ tasya pratyākṣikaraṇāya bhāvanāmayīṃ prajñāṃ utpādayet.* Kamalaśīla (1997: 211). The most sensible referent of the demonstrative pronoun here, *tasya*, is the true meaning (*bhūtam arthaṃ*) acquired by the knowledge of reflection. However, the difficulty of the phrase “perceive that [true meaning]” makes it tempting to translate *bhūtam arthaṃ* as “object as it really is” in this case, so that the phrase would read, “perceive that object as it really is” (see ft. 39 for *artha*’s ambiguity between meaning and object). However, that translation would fail to express the continuity between what is learned in the knowledge of reflection and what is learned in the knowledge of meditation. The most accurate translation would both maintain that continuity and express the ambiguity found in *bhūtam arthaṃ* between “true meaning” and “real object.” For that, we would have to render the *tasya* as something like “that [object as it really is, as described by the true meaning.]” To avoid such a cumbersome translation, I have simply kept the translation of “true meaning” in this case.

phenomenon is impermanent,” or “This phenomenon is empty.” In this way, the Buddhist tenets first learned in the knowledge of hearing, and understood through the knowledge of reflection, can be thought of as a kind of blueprint for how the practitioner should come to see the world through the practice of *vipaśyanā*.

My interpretation of this passage is supported by looking at the sequence of perceptual judgments that Kamalaśīla prescribes for *vipaśyanā* in *The Process of Meditation* (1997: 216). As mentioned in the first chapter, Kamalaśīla adopts this sequence from the scripture *The Descent into Lañka*, but adds to it the Madhyamaka notion of emptiness. This sequence lists the different stages that the practitioner should progress through in their meditation. Each of these stages culminates with the meditator making a perceptual judgment that coincides with a particular tenet. For instance, according to this list, the practitioner should perceive phenomena according to the Yogācāra tenet of mind-only. Once a practitioner obtains the knowledge of reflection, they know the tenet that all phenomena are mind-only. They then use *vipaśyanā* in order to elicit the perceptual judgment, “This is all mind-only.”⁷² Following this meditation, the *vipaśyanā* practitioner then later meditates in order to see the world according to the Madhyamaka tenet of emptiness. This practice elicits the perceptual judgment, “This is all empty.” As the practitioner progresses through each stage, they learn to make perceptual judgments that identify phenomenon according to the particular Buddhist tenets associated with that stage.

⁷² Kamalaśīla states this perceptual judgment in full as: “This is all mind-only; indeed, there is no external object.” *cittamātramevaitat sarvaṃ na punarbāhyo ’rtho vidyate*. Kamalaśīla (1997: 216).

However, these new perceptual judgments do not indicate new declarative knowledge. Instead, Kamalaśīla is telling the practitioner to “perceive” what they already know. Because a practitioner has learned how to infer the Buddhist tenets as part of the knowledge of reflection, they already have the capacity to make the judgments that are made observationally in *vipāśyanā* as the conclusions of inferences. The tenets the practitioner knows as part of the knowledge of reflection are universal statements about all phenomena, such as “All phenomena are mind-only,” or “All phenomena are empty.” For this reason, these universal statements already entail the specific perceptual judgments prescribed in *vipāśyanā*. For instance, Buddhists tenets make the universal statement, “All phenomena are empty,” and the perceptual judgments made in *vipāśyanā* are specific, such as, “This phenomenon is empty.” If one knows that all phenomena are empty, one can infer that any particular phenomena they observe will be empty. Therefore, the judgments made in *vipāśyanā* are known by the practitioner before meditation. This only difference is that these judgments are initially known as the conclusions of inferences, and not observationally. This difference does not consist in a difference in any significant declarative knowledge. Instead, it consists in a difference in *how* the practitioner knows these tenets. In other words, it consists in what kind of epistemic access the practitioner has to this knowledge.

The discovery account claims the practitioner meditates in order to acquire new declarative knowledge. But according to Kamalaśīla, this is not the case. One does not discover some declarative knowledge “that had previously eluded one’s grasp,” or is different “than he knew before,” as per Dahl et al. (2015) and Griffiths

(1983). It is not some discovery that is learned for the first time, as per Wallace. Contrary to this, Kamalaśīla asserts that a practitioner should begin meditation with the knowledge of reflection, and hence the capacity to infer any of the judgments that will be made observationally in *vipaśyanā*.

Moreover, if the knowledge of meditation did consist in declarative knowledge, as per the discovery account, we would expect that that knowledge would be part of the Buddhist tenets. If this were the case, a practitioner would have already learned this declarative knowledge as part of the knowledge of reflection. This would make the knowledge of meditation redundant.⁷³ For instance, if the knowledge of meditation consisted in merely knowing that a phenomenon was impermanent, a practitioner would have already learned this fact as part of the knowledge of reflection. In this case, it would be unclear why one should bother to practice *vipaśyanā*. This redundancy is a problem for the discovery account.

Vipaśyanā does not teach the practitioner any new concepts, or teach them any new general declarative knowledge. Instead, this meditation trains them to make these judgments via observation rather than via inference. These perceptual judgments are recognitional judgments that therefore exemplify recognitional capacities, i.e. the ability to deploy general concepts in order to categorize and to react differentially to particular perceptual encounters. This is what Kamalaśīla means when he states that the knowledge of meditation consists in making the Buddhist tenets perceivable. In other words, the difference meditation makes is not

⁷³ In examining Kamalaśīla's account of the related meditation of yogic perception, Tom Tillemans does not distinguish between declarative and procedural knowledge, and so comes to the similar conclusion that yogic perception is epistemically redundant (2013: 298).

in *what* the practitioner knows, but *how* they know it. It trains them to deploy their knowledge in new ways, and it allows them to recognize experiences as instances of significant kinds.

Recognitional capacities are a form of procedural knowledge, rather than declarative. Because they are procedural knowledge, one cannot gain recognitional capacities simply by learning a set of propositions. For instance, prosopagnosia is the inability to recognize faces. It does not consist in a lack of declarative knowledge, and someone with prosopagnosia cannot learn to recognize faces by simply learning a set of propositions. This is the case even though the ability to recognize a face may result in declarative knowledge, such as the perceptual judgment, "This is Jack." Despite the fact that recognition often results in declarative knowledge, this declarative knowledge is not sufficient to constitute a recognitional capacity. For instance, one may learn to make the judgment, "This is Jack," through inference, but still be unable to recognize Jack in a perceptual encounter.

The recognitional capacities developed through *vipaśyanā* also consist in a form of procedural knowledge. This is despite the fact that they result in perceptual judgments, such as, "This phenomenon is empty." These judgments may express declarative knowledge, but, as explained above, this is not *new* declarative knowledge, since this knowledge was already attained in the knowledge of reflection. Declarative knowledge requires that the possessor can articulate that knowledge. Even though the perceptual judgments formed in *vipaśyanā* are articulable, the process of how one came to make this judgment, e.g. how one recognized the phenomenon as empty, may not be articulable. Just as one can

express their recognition of Jack in a perceptual judgment such as, “This is Jack,” that person is not necessarily able to say how one came to make that judgment.

Because recognitional capacities are a form of procedural knowledge, this cultivation of new recognitional capacities takes additional time and practice.⁷⁴ Because declarative knowledge is distinct from procedural knowledge, the knowledge of meditation, as a form of procedural knowledge, is a new and distinct knowledge from the knowledge of reflection. It is not the case that the meditator would already know how to practice *vipāśyanā* successfully from merely obtaining the knowledge of reflection. *Vipāśyanā*, on this interpretation, is not a redundant practice. Learning to recognize phenomenon as empty or impermanent requires additional practice, similar to any other training in recognitional capacities.

For example, let’s return to the example of hiking in the Appalachian mountains. If you wanted to be able to recognize poison ivy, this would involve first learning some facts about the plant’s appearance. You could do so by memorizing some facts about poison ivy that you have read about. You would learn what the plant looked like, such as the fact that poison ivy has three leaves, and that its leaves are pointed. However, once you are in the woods, you will not be able to identify the plant immediately, even with the declarative knowledge of these facts. Instead, initially you will have to infer that a certain plant is poison ivy. First, you would observe certain features of the plant, such as the fact that the plant has three

⁷⁴ While declarative knowledge is obtained quickly, procedural knowledge, such as recognitional capacities, is developed over time, and not in a single moment. Gilbert Ryle states, “Learning how or improving an ability is not like learning *that* or acquiring information. Truths can be imparted, procedures can only be inculcated, and while inculcation is a gradual process, imparting is relatively sudden” (1949: 59).

pointed leaves. You would then apply the facts that you learned about poison ivy's appearance, and, finally, conclude that this plant is indeed poison ivy. However this conclusion would be gained through inference, not recognition.⁷⁵ It takes additional practice observing poison ivy before one develops the procedural knowledge needed to recognize it on sight.

With regard to *vipaśyanā*, the practitioner knows the Buddhist tenets in the form of declarative statements before meditation. However, it requires additional training in order to learn to how to “perceive the true meaning,” i.e. recognize phenomena as instances of the kind described in Buddhist tenets. Because the knowledge of meditation is a form of procedural knowledge, it can only be obtained through practice.⁷⁶

6. Conclusion

One way to view the arguments given in this chapter is to consider them as an answer to the question of how to translate “*prajñā*.” “*Prajñā*” is most commonly translated as “wisdom” or “insight” in contemporary Buddhist scholarship. These definitions lack philosophical rigor if left without further explanation. Nevertheless, they still suggest an important fact about the use of “*prajñā*” in Buddhist

⁷⁵ See the fourth chapter for an argument that properties such as “being poison ivy” can be recognized through perception.

⁷⁶ Early Pāli scriptures, such as *The Bamboo Acrobat (Sedaka Sutta)*, suggest that other forms of Buddhist meditation involve the development of procedural knowledge. These scriptures describe the Buddha comparing acts of meditation to learning various skills. For example, the Buddha compares the meditation establishing mindfulness to acrobatics, and to carefully balancing a pot of oil on one's head while walking through a crowd that is watching a dancer (Bodhi 2000: 1648-49).

philosophy—“*prajñā*” means more than just the well-known philosophical definition of knowledge as justified true belief. However, if one translates *prajñā* as “wisdom” and “insight” for this reason, one has failed to recognize that our ordinary use of the English noun “knowledge” and the English verb “to know” also have a boarder semantic range than “justified true belief.” “Knowledge” and “to know” can be used to denote justified true belief, or they can be used to denote an ability or disposition.⁷⁷ In other words, the term “knowledge” can also refer to procedural knowledge. The semantic range of the English “knowledge” thus matches the semantic range of the Sanskrit “*prajñā*,” as the term is used in the framework of the three knowledges.

The mistakes of the discovery account of *vipaśyanā* can be expressed as a failure to recognize that *prajñā*, as a form of knowledge, could consist in procedural knowledge. As we saw, this interpretation takes the result of practicing *vipaśyanā* to be declarative knowledge, and this renders *vipaśyanā* useless. All the declarative knowledge of significance is learned in developing the knowledge of reflection, before one begins their meditation practice. Considering the possibility that *prajñā* could also refer to procedural knowledge opens up the possibility that *bhāvanāmayī prajñā*, the knowledge of meditation, could be a new form of procedural knowledge, distinct from the declarative knowledge learned in the knowledge of reflection. The passage from *The Process of Meditation* that describes the knowledge of meditation as perceiving what is expressed in the Buddhist tenets indicates that this new procedural knowledge is in fact a new recognitional capacity.

⁷⁷ See the appendix to this chapter for a review of ability and dispositional accounts of procedural knowledge.

In the next chapter, I use the epistemology and philosophy of mind from the Pramāṇavāda tradition to ground this new account of *vipaśyanā*. There I explain how, on Kamalaśīla's account, *vipaśyanā* could develop new recognitional capacities. Though Kamalaśīla never explicitly states that *vipaśyanā* affects cognition in the manner I will describe, the principles he adopts in his epistemology and philosophy of mind commit him to a theory of *vipaśyanā* along similar lines to what I will be presenting.

Chapter 2 Appendix: On Procedural and Declarative Knowledge

1. Introduction

The distinction between procedural and declarative knowledge is key to the arguments found in my second chapter, in particular, my argument that the knowledge of meditation is not a form of declarative knowledge, but is instead a form of procedural knowledge. For this reason, it is worthwhile to spend some time accurately defining these terms, and giving my reasons for using these terms instead of similar terminology from other taxonomies of knowledge. The distinction between procedural and declarative knowledge was first formulated in work on artificial intelligence and cognitive science, and it is most often employed in those disciplines. However, its formulation was strongly influenced by a closely related division of knowledge that was already prominent in analytic philosophy, namely, the distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that.⁷⁸ These two divisions

⁷⁸ It can be argued that this distinction, between knowledge-how and knowledge-that, was itself preceded by a division of knowledge formulated by the ancient Greek philosophers. This was the division of knowledge into either *epistêmê* (knowledge) or *technê* (craft). However, the relationship of *epistêmê* and *technê* to knowledge-how and knowledge-that is contentious, with differing opinions from contemporary interpreters on how closely they can be mapped onto one another. For instance, Gould (1955) argues that, a close reading of Plato shows that both *epistêmê* and *technê* consist in knowledge-how. However, Vlastos (1957) replies that knowledge-that is an important aspect of Plato's philosophy in general, such that it cannot be dismissed, or reduced to a form of knowledge-how. On Vlastos's account, the Greek philosophers did not distinguish between knowledge-how and knowledge-that, and therefore that distinction cannot be directly mapped onto *epistêmê* and *technê*. Because I do not have the space here to make a detailed examination of the philosophical views of the ancient Greek philosophers who employed these concepts, I will limit my discussion to the distinction between procedural knowledge and declarative knowledge, and the distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that.

of knowledge have a good deal of overlap, with scholars often comparing and even equating one division with the other.

This appendix has two goals. The first is to defend the view that procedural knowledge and declarative knowledge are distinct. This is a necessary presupposition for the argument I give in the second chapter regarding the knowledge of meditation. The second goal of this appendix is to make clear my reasons for using the terminology “procedural knowledge” and “declarative knowledge,” as opposed to the related terminology “knowledge-how” and “knowledge-that,” which are more commonly found in philosophical discourse.

To achieve these goals, I first review arguments that claim that knowledge-how is distinct from knowledge-that. These arguments also apply to the distinction between procedural knowledge and declarative knowledge. I then give the potential options for what knowledge-how consists in. This leads into the influential work of Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson, who claim that knowledge-how is not distinct from knowledge-that, but instead that knowledge-how is merely a subspecies of knowledge-that (2001). Their challenge will bring out the differences between the philosophical discourse regarding knowledge-how and knowledge-that, and the discourse in cognitive science regarding procedural knowledge and declarative knowledge. By discussing this difference, I will make clear what I consider to be at stake when I define *prajñā* in terms of procedural and declarative knowledge in the second chapter.

2. Distinctions between Knowledge-how and Knowledge-that

The distinction between procedural and declarative knowledge is common to the field of cognitive science, while the distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that is more commonly discussed in analytic philosophy. However, these two distinctions are very closely related. In fact, philosophers will often equivocate between the two.⁷⁹ I, however, feel that there are subtle differences regarding the kinds of questions that are asked about knowledge-how, and the kind of questions that are asked about procedural knowledge. The final section of this appendix explains this difference, and provides my reasons for speaking in terms of procedural and declarative knowledge in the second chapter.

The procedural-declarative distinction was heavily influenced by the distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that, and philosophers tend to use the terms of knowledge-how and knowledge-that more often than procedural and declarative knowledge. For this reason, it is pedagogically useful to begin my discussion with the distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that.

The distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that was first postulated by Gilbert Ryle in his work *The Concept of Mind* (1949). In this work, Ryle points out how the distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that is already expressed in the ordinary ways that we speak of knowledge and intelligence. He first examines the family of adjectives we used to ascribe intelligence—words such as clever, critical, and so on—as well as the adjectives that describe a lack of intelligence—such as stupid, uncritical, etc. Ryle calls attention to

⁷⁹ E.g. Wallis (2008).

the fact that we apply these adjectives to acts of skill, operation, or application, in order to indicate that they are enacted more or less intelligibly. For instance, we say that someone is a *smart* basketball player, or that they drive *like an idiot*. Ryle states that:

When a person is described by one or other of the intelligence-epithets such as 'shrewd' or 'silly,' 'prudent' or 'imprudent,' the description imputes to him not the knowledge, or ignorance, of this or that truth, but the ability, or inability, to do certain things. (1949: 27)

Ryle then demonstrates how the verb "to know" can also be applied to these abilities. For instance, we say that one knows how to drive, or one knows how to swim. This is in contrast to when we use the verb "to know" to express the possession of propositional knowledge. Propositional knowledge is generally defined as a type of relation between an individual and a proposition. We have propositional knowledge when we know *that* something is the case, for example, when we know that the Cubs won the World Series in 2016. But when we say we know *how* to swim, Ryle argues that we are using the verb "to know" in a different sense. In English, we express the difference between these two senses of "to know" with the preposition or conjunction we use just following the verb "know," namely "how" or "that." We speak of knowing *how* to perform certain actions, but we speak of knowing *that* something is the case. For this reason, Ryle refers to these two types of knowledge as knowledge-how and knowledge-that.

Ryle argues that knowledge-how is different than knowing a series of propositional statements, that is, it is not merely a complex of knowledge-that (1949: 31). This claim is in accordance with our intuitions about knowledge-how. For instance, *prima facie*, it seems that the knowledge of any number of propositional statements cannot, on its own, constitute the possession of knowledge-how. This can be argued through *reductio ad absurdum*. If knowledge-how were a complex of knowledge-that, we would be able to test if someone has knowledge-how by asking them to correctly state the relevant propositions. However, it may be possible for an individual to pass this test, even if we would not intuitively think of them as knowing how to perform the task.

For example, if knowledge-how consisted in a complex of knowledge-that, we should be able to test if a gymnast knows how to balance on a balance beam by simply asking them to state how they do so. Most gymnasts would only be able to tell us a number of general statements, such as that they shift their weight accordingly, line one foot up in front of the other, keep their center of gravity low, and so on. However, one could also test a gymnast coach—let us say, a coach who is unable to balance on a beam—in the very same manner. It is very likely that this coach would also know these particular propositions about balancing. Nevertheless, if they were unable to do it themselves, we still would say that they knew how to balance on a balance beam. This shows us that simply knowing these propositions, possessing this knowledge-that, is not enough to qualify as possessing knowledge-how. The difference between knowing how to do something and not knowing how

must lie in something other than possessing the relevant knowledge of propositional statements. Knowledge-that is not sufficient for knowledge-how.

Moreover, knowledge-that is also not necessary for knowledge-how. The argument for this claim draws on more than simply our intuitions. Charles Wallis presents a compelling list of empirical evidence for this claim from cognitive science (2008).⁸⁰ He argues that there are many cases where humans or animals possess knowledge-how, but lack the primary characteristic we associate with the possession of knowledge-that, that is, an explicit belief in the relevant propositions. The evidence for Wallis's argument comes from studies on four different sources: experts, laypeople, amnesia patients, and animals.

First, Wallis summarizes a number of studies regarding the problems involved in eliciting knowledge from experts about how it is that they perform their craft (2008: 130-131). Many clinicians, for example, are not only ignorant of the particular propositional statements that best characterize how they make clinical judgments, but they even have mistaken beliefs about the methods they use to make those judgments (Wallis 2008: 131). Wallis argues that this shows that even experts often lack belief in the propositions most relevant to how they perform their craft (2008: 131). Laypeople are no better. It is well established in psychology that introspective reports are untrustworthy, and this applies to mental tasks that express knowledge-how. For instance, in experiments on problem solving, subjects cannot accurately report, in the form of propositions, how they make the mental

⁸⁰ While Wallis (2008) himself speaks in terms of knowledge-how, the evidence he provides from cognitive science often refers to procedural knowledge instead. This is a typical difference in use between the two terms, and this subtle difference will be important to the discussion at the end of this appendix.

judgments that reliably result in correct answers, even when they clearly know how to solve these problems (Wallis 2008: 131).

Wallis's third source of evidence for the distinction between knowledge-how and the knowledge of propositions comes from studies on amnesia patients.⁸¹ Certain amnesia patients, such as those with bilateral hippocampal damage, are unable to form new beliefs; however, they learn perceptual-motor skills and problem solving skills at the normal rate (Wallis 2008: 133). These patients can learn new knowledge-how, even though they are physically unable to learn any new knowledge-that. Wallis then lists a variety of studies from neuroscience that argue that there are distinct areas of the brain associated with these two types of knowledge. Possession of knowledge-that is associated with the hippocampus and inferior frontal lobe, while knowledge-how, and the causal generation of the behavior associated with it, is associated with other areas of the brain, such as the basil ganglia and the motors areas (2008: 140).

Finally, Wallis discusses animal cognition, specifically cases where we intuitively attribute knowledge-how to animals, even though we do not attribute propositional beliefs to animals (2008: 133-134). For instance, Japanese carrion crows know how to use moving cars to crack nuts, and how to use the crosswalk to safely collect those cracked nuts (Wallis 2008: 134). Wallis argues that these cases cannot be dismissed as mere anthropomorphizing, given the success of using animal

⁸¹ In the literature cited by Wallis, this distinction of knowledge is referred to as procedural and declarative memory, while Wallis takes it to refer to knowledge-how and knowledge-that. This will be discussed at the end of this appendix.

cognition to model human cognition, the complexity of the animals' skills, and the processes involved in learning them (2008: 134).

Given this wide variety of evidence showing that knowledge-how and knowledge-that are distinct, one might think that the expression of knowledge-how never involves the use of any knowledge-that. However, this is often not the case.⁸² Knowing how to perform a skill may involve the actor possessing some knowledge-that regarding the skill. One might know certain rules, maxims, or criteria. For instance, if one knows how to drive, one knows that a red light means stop. But merely knowing these rules is not enough. One must also know how to apply, perform, or enact these rules. As Ryle puts it, "Knowing how to apply maxims cannot be reduced to, or derived from, the acceptance of those or other maxims" (1949: 31). To know how to perform a certain skill, I must actually be able to enact this skill in the proper circumstances.

This is particularly relevant in the case of *vipaśyanā*. The perceptual judgments formed in *vipaśyanā* are an expression of knowledge-that. However, they do not indicate *new* knowledge-that, since the practitioner could already make these judgments through inference. It is the new application of these judgments, in response to a perceptual encounter, that consists in new recognitional capacities for the practitioner. The *vipaśyanā* practitioner learns how to apply this knowledge-that in perceptual encounters. This new application is a form of knowledge-how.

⁸² As we saw in the second chapter, this is not the case in the procedural knowledge developed by practicing *vipaśyanā*. This knowledge depends on the knowledge of certain propositional statements, learned in the knowledge of hearing and the knowledge of reflection. However, despite this being the case, the knowledge learned through *vipaśyanā* is still a new form of knowledge that is distinct from those statements.

Despite the fact that this knowledge-how involves knowledge-that, as Ryle states, it cannot be reduced to those forms of knowledge-that.

3. What Knowledge-how Consists In

Since knowledge-how does not consist in knowledge-that, we should be able to define what it consists in instead. Given the examples of knowledge-how discussed so far, one might think that knowledge-how is a type of intentional behavior. However, this is not the case. One can possess knowledge-how even when the behavior is not being enacted. For instance, I can rightfully say I know how to swim when I am standing on dry land. However, to rightfully say that I know how to swim, I should be able to swim *if I were in water*. The conditional phrase here, “if I were in water,” indicates that knowledge-how relies on success in counterfactual situations.

Accordingly, contemporary philosophers who maintain that knowledge-how and knowledge-that are distinct give one of two accounts of what knowledge-how consists in, and both of these potential accounts address the counterfactual nature of knowledge-how. Some philosophers consider knowledge-how to be a disposition, while others consider it to be an ability. We should add one additional criterion to this. Given the fact that we express knowledge-how through terms that denote intelligence, knowledge-how must be an ability or disposition of something with cognition. We would not say a riveting machine knows how to rivet, even if it is able to punch a hole in steel, or if it is disposed to do when plugged in.

Though the ability account of knowledge-how is often attributed to Ryle, it is more accurate to interpret him as holding that knowledge-how is “a disposition, or a complex of dispositions” (Ryle 1949: 33). On this account, to know how to *F* is to have a complex of dispositions that manifest as *F*, given a certain set of conditions. However, this account of knowledge-how is challenged by the fact that, *prima facie*, there are many counterexamples where it seems that we know how to do something, but we are never disposed to do it. For instance, I may know how to insult my grandmother, but I am never disposed to do so. In these counterexamples, the knowledge of how to do *F* seems to come apart from having any disposition to do *F*.

However, dispositions are defined as only manifesting in particular counterfactual circumstances. Proponents of the dispositional account of knowledge-how can reply to these counterexamples, by explaining that these instances, where we have knowledge-how of things we would almost never do, are limiting cases. According to this response, even though it seems as if we would never manifest these dispositions, there are some, even if very few, counterfactual circumstances where we would in fact manifest that disposition.

The second commonly held position takes knowledge-how to consist in a type of ability. On this account, to know how to *F* is to have ability *F*. For instance, to know how to swim is to be able to swim. But the ability account of knowledge-how has also been challenged with a number of apparent counterexamples. Stanley and Williamson (2001) ask us to imagine a pianist who has lost his hands (416). This performer is no longer able to play piano; however, we would not typically say that

he no longer knows how to play piano. In this and similar cases, the knowledge-how remains even though the ability does not.

Stanley and Williamson, however, do not use this counterexample to promote Ryle's claim that knowledge-how is a complex of dispositions. Instead they argue against Ryle's primary point. They claim that knowledge-how is not distinct from knowledge-that, but is instead simply a special type of knowledge-that. This constitutes a third option to what knowledge-how consists in, where, counter Ryle, knowledge-how simply consists in knowledge-that. It is important for us to review Stanley and Williamson's challenge to Ryle, as this will make clear why, in the second chapter, I choose to talk in terms of distinction between procedural and declarative knowledge, instead of knowledge-how and knowledge-that.

Stanley and Williamson state that their account "is the account entailed by current theories about the syntax and semantics of the relevant constructions" (2001: 440). Their challenge to Ryle is motivated by the symmetries in linguistic analysis between "know how" phrases, and "know who, what, or where" phrases. Sentences such as "Hannah knows where John lives," or "Hannah knows who the 23rd president was," contain embedded questions, namely, "Where does John live?" or, "Who was the 23rd president?" What Hannah knows is the answer to those embedded questions, and these are propositions, such as "John lives at 745 Peachtree Lane," or "Benjamin Harrison was the 23rd president." Similarly, the sentence "Hannah knows how John rides a bike" contains the embedded question "How does John ride a bike?" The answer to that embedded question is what Hannah knows, and this is just a series of propositions, such as "John rides by

pressing the pedals,” “John rides by balancing with the handle bars,” and so on. This series of propositions can be generalized by saying “Hannah knows some way w for John to ride a bike.” In the case of “Hannah knows how John rides a bike,” what Hannah knows is simply a series of propositions, i.e. a complex of knowledge-that. This is despite the use of the locution “know how” in the sentence.

But the previous example, “Hannah knows how John rides a bike,” differs from a sentence expressing knowledge-how, such as, “Hannah knows how to ride a bike.” This is because in the latter, “how to ride a bike” is not obviously an embedded question. When Stanley and Williamson analyze this phrase, “how to ride a bike,” they again analyze it in the same way that a linguist would analyze similar “know where, who, what” statements. For instance, in the sentence “Hannah knows where to ride a bike,” the standard analysis holds that there is still an embedded question in these cases; however, in this case, there is also an implicit pronoun that indicates that the subject of the embedded question is the subject of the sentence. “Hannah knows where to ride a bike” can be analyzed as, “Hannah knows where *she* can ride a bike,” and this, in turn, is analyzed as, “Hannah knows *that* there is some place w where she can ride a bike.” In this way, knowledge-where is shown to be a form of knowledge-that. Similarly, Stanley and Williamson take “Hannah knows how to ride a bike” to mean, “Hannah knows that there is some way w for her to ride a bike.” On this account, the knowledge-how expressed in “Hannah knows how to ride a bike” is a form of propositional knowledge, i.e. a type of knowledge-that.

Stanley and Williamson immediately take up a number of potential objections to this account, the most important of which is evoked by imagining the

following situation (2001: 428-429). Hannah is not able to ride a bike. When she gets on a bike, she immediately falls over. But she watches John ride a bike, and is then told, "That is how you ride a bike." Hannah now knows some way w for her to ride a bike, namely, the way that John was riding it. However, it is clear from the example that most people would say that Hannah still does not know how to ride a bike. This is a problem for Stanley and Williamson, since, on their account, "Hannah knows how to ride a bike" should be equivalent to, and thus have the same truth conditions as, "Hannah knows that there is some way w for her to ride a bike." In the counterexample at hand, the latter statement is true while the former is false. Stanley and Williamson answer this objection by introducing what they call a practical mode of presentation.

Propositional attitudes are entertained under different modes of presentation. For instance, say that Hannah knows that someone failed her math class. This might mean that Hannah knows that she failed her math class, if she knows that she is that someone. However, it also could mean that Hannah only knows that someone failed her math class, without knowing who it was. These seem to be two very different things she could know, despite the fact that they can both be expressed by knowledge of the same proposition, namely, "someone failed her math class." Philosophers of language have accounted for this difference by introducing the notion of modes of presentation. If Hannah knows that she herself failed her math class, she knows this under a first-person mode of presentation. This first-person mode of presentation is supposed to account for the difference between

knowing that she herself failed her math class, and merely knowing that someone failed her math class.

The objection to Stanley and Williamsons' account of knowledge-how has us imagine a situation where Hannah could know that there is some way w to ride a bike, even if she still does not know how to ride a bicycle. Their answer to this objection is to say that Hannah knows how to ride a bike, if she knows that there is some way w to ride a bike, and she knows this under a practical mode of presentation. On their definition of practical mode of presentation, one demonstrates knowledge that is under a practical mode of presentation by enacting the skill expressed in the proposition. In Hannah's case, she would demonstrate such knowledge by actually riding a bike. Stanley and Williamson state that knowing a proposition under a practical mode of presentation "undoubtedly entails the possession of certain complex dispositions. It is for this reason that there are intricate connections between knowing-how and dispositional states" (2001: 429). In this way, they account for the intuition given in the counterexample above, where Hannah knows that there is way w for her to ride a bike, but she still does not know how to ride a bike. Hannah only knows how to ride a bike if she can demonstrate this knowledge by manifesting her dispositions to ride a bike, i.e. by actually riding a bike.

A number of contemporary philosophers have claimed that this added requirement of a practical mode of presentation is an *ad hoc* solution. John Koeth, for instance, argues that this added stipulation, that the proposition be known under a practical mode of presentation, contains within it the very thing Stanley and

Williamson set out to explain, due to the fact that it requires a complex of dispositions (2002). What Stanley and Williamson have actually given is simply a dispositional account of knowledge-how.

However, Stanley and Williamson predicted that this would be a common response. They respond by clarifying that their point is not as strong as one might first assume. They state:

But acknowledging such connections [between knowing-how and dispositional states] in no way undermines the thesis that knowing-how is a species of knowing-that. For example, such connections are also present in the case of first-person thought. But this in no way threatens the thesis that thought about oneself is genuinely propositional. It is simply a feature of certain kinds of propositional knowledge that possession of it is related in complex ways to dispositional states. Recognizing this fact eliminates the need to postulate a distinctive kind of nonpropositional knowledge. (2001: 429)

In a sense, their analysis achieves its goal of showing that knowledge-how can be understood as possession of propositional knowledge. At the same time, they try to accept most of the unique features commonly attributed to knowledge-how, such as its dependence on a complex of dispositions. They do so by attributing these features to the practical mode of presentation. Because these features are unique to the practical mode of presentation, knowledge-how cannot be explained entirely in terms of knowledge-that. Stanley and Williamson admit this, stating:

We are not engaged in the reductive project of reducing talk of knowledge-how to talk that does not involve knowledge-how. Our view is rather that knowledge-how is a species of knowledge-that. (2001: 433-434)

On their view, knowledge-how is not distinct from knowledge-that, even though it is a unique subspecies, similar to how first personal propositions are unique.

4. Knowledge-how and Procedural knowledge

Stanley and Williamson's account is compelling. However, at this point, we are left with a dilemma, because many of the unique features of knowledge-how, features that Stanley and Williamson have attributed to its practical mode of presentation, also suggest that one who possesses knowledge-how does *not* possess propositional knowledge. The empirical evidence given by Wallis (2008), as summarized above, supports the claim that someone who possesses knowledge-how does not necessarily have any explicit knowledge-that. Ephraim Glick attempts to resolve this tension, by distinguishing between two different philosophical questions regarding knowledge-how (2011). These two different questions reveal the subtle differences between using the term "knowledge-how" and using the term "procedural knowledge."

The first question is a question found in linguistics regarding the abstract notion of a proposition. It asks whether knowledge-how can be construed as a relation of an individual to a proposition. The second question is an empirical question common in philosophy of mind. It asks how the characteristics of paradigm

cases of knowledge-how are different from the characteristics of paradigm cases of knowledge-that. The latter question is more closely related to the way that procedural knowledge is discussed in cognitive science. As we will see, my interest is in this latter usage, namely, the discourse on knowledge-how that is focused on its particular set of characteristics.

Glick (2011) first reviews the argument for a distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that given by Wallis (2008). He then reviews the argument that knowledge-how is a subspecies of knowledge-that given by Stanley and Williamson (2001). He points out that these two arguments rely on different sets of data, the former on empirical evidence from cognitive science, and the latter syntactic and semantic evidence from linguistic analysis. Glick's conclusion is that the proponents of either side are talking past on another. To clarify the issue, he distinguishes between what he calls thinly and thickly propositional knowledge.

Thinly propositional knowledge is defined as any knowledge that consists in a relation between an individual and a proposition (Glick 2011: 411). Thickly propositional knowledge, which he refers to as theoretical knowledge, is knowledge that "requires (some subset of) belief, justification and Gettierizability, linguistic accessibility, availability of content for use in inference, and concept-possession" (Glick 2011: 411). Glick adds a number of other potential attributes, such "it is stored in a language of thought, it is generally accessible to central executive functioning, it is plastic in application, it can be acquired all at once, and so on" (2011: 411). While the argument by Stanley and Williamson succeeds in showing that knowledge-how can be construed as a form of thinly propositional knowledge,

it fails to show that knowledge-how is a form of thickly propositional knowledge. This latter claim would require the kind of evidence provided by cognitive science, and Wallis (2008) shows that there is evidence to the contrary. The evidence presented by Wallis supports the claim that knowledge-how lacks the particular characteristics required of thickly propositional knowledge, in particular, linguistic accessibility and accessibility to central executive functioning.

However, the evidence that Wallis provides comes from studies that are not uniform in their use of the terms “knowledge-how” and “knowledge-that.” Instead, they often either speak in terms of procedural knowledge and declarative knowledge, or they simply equate knowledge-how with procedural knowledge and knowledge-that with declarative knowledge (Wallis 2008: 124). For instance, many of the studies on amnesia patients given by Wallis refer to procedural and declarative memory, even though Wallis portrays these studies in terms of knowledge-how and knowledge-that (2008: 133).

Paradigm cases of knowledge-how are generally accepted by cognitive science to be form of procedural knowledge. However, it is important to recognize that there are subtle differences in the discourse about knowledge-how and the discourse about procedural knowledge. The discourse about knowledge-how in analytic philosophy has two separate kinds of questions. The first kind asks whether some cognitive act is a form of what Glick calls thinly propositional knowledge. The second kind asks whether it is a form of thickly propositional knowledge. The discourse on procedural knowledge, however, is focused only on the second set of questions, which ask whether some cognitive act is a form of thickly propositional

knowledge. If this act is a form of thickly propositional knowledge, then it is declarative knowledge and not procedural. Declarative knowledge is defined as having the characteristics Glick attributes to thickly propositional knowledge.

In this dissertation, my primary concern is the question of whether the knowledge facilitated by *vipaśyanā* has the attributes of thickly propositional knowledge, that is, whether it can be expressed linguistically, whether it is available for use in inference, and so on. That is to say, I can be construed as asking whether or not the knowledge attained through *vipaśyanā* is a form of knowledge that is thickly propositional. But this is equivalent to asking whether or not the knowledge attained by *vipaśyanā* is a form of declarative knowledge, rather than procedural. Thus I find it simpler, and more clear, to speak in terms of procedural and declarative knowledge. When I claim that practicing *vipaśyanā* does not result in new declarative knowledge, but in new procedural knowledge, I am claiming that it does not result in a new form of knowledge that is linguistically expressible, available for use in inference, and so on. My arguments do not hinge on whether or not this knowledge is thinly propositional, i.e. whether it can be expressed as relation between an individual and a proposition. To make it clear that I am not asking that particular question, I speak in terms of procedural and declarative knowledge, rather than knowledge-how and knowledge-that.

5. Conclusion

In sum, in this appendix, I argued that procedural knowledge is distinct from declarative knowledge. The predecessor to this distinction is first identified by Ryle

(1949), under the terms knowledge-how and knowledge-that. Subsequently, many empirical studies in cognitive science have argued for this distinction, and Wallis (2008) presents us with a compelling list of these studies. We can agree with Stanley and Williamson (2001) that knowledge-how is a subspecies of knowledge-that, in that knowledge-how is a form of propositional knowledge. At the same time, however, we can agree that knowledge-how is not what Glick (2011) calls “thickly propositional knowledge,” that is, it does not have the characteristics that we normally attribute to knowledge-that. This notion of thickly propositional knowledge is equivalent to the notion of declarative knowledge used in cognitive science. When cognitive science claims that procedural knowledge is distinct from declarative knowledge, this is equivalent to the claim that knowledge-how is not thickly propositional. In the second chapter of this dissertation, I argue that the knowledge attained through the practice of *vipāśyanā* is not thickly propositional, that is to say, it is not declarative, but is instead procedural.

Chapter 3: A Pramāṇavāda Theory of *Vipaśyanā*

1. Introduction

As discussed in the first chapter, Kamalaśīla was a syncretic philosopher. His philosophical views brought together tenets from the Yogācāra, Madhyamaka, and Pramāṇavāda traditions of Buddhism. The third of these traditions, Pramāṇavāda, is distinguished from the former two due to its focus on logic and epistemology. This tradition's tenets in logic, epistemology, and philosophy of mind were adopted by Kamalaśīla, as is evident in his works *Commentary on the Compendium on Reality*, and *The Light of the Middle Way*. While *The Process of Meditation* does not discuss epistemology and philosophy of mind as explicitly as those two works, Kamalaśīla's theories in these fields directly influence the theory of *vipaśyanā* he presents in *The Process of Meditation*.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the result of the practice of *vipaśyanā* is the development of new recognitional capacities. *The Process of Meditation* is not explicit about how *vipaśyanā* achieves this result. Furthermore, when Kamalaśīla presents an in-depth theory of epistemology and philosophy of mind in texts other than *The Process of Meditation*, he does not spell out the relationship between these theories and his theory of *vipaśyanā*. Because of this, we are left with the question of how *vipaśyanā* affects the cognition of the practitioner, so that they might come to recognize in phenomena the properties attributed to them in the Buddhist tenets.

Nevertheless, we can make a plausible reconstruction of what theoretical explanation Kamalaśīla would give, based on both his theories of the mind and the

theories on the mind promoted by the Pramāṇavāda philosophers to whom he was sympathetic. Not only will this reconstruction provide us with a more nuanced understanding of Kamalaśīla's theory of *vipaśyanā*, it will have the additional advantage of making explicit a number of implicit relationships between Kamalaśīla's theories on meditation and his theories on epistemology and philosophy of mind.

The previous chapter claimed that *vipaśyanā* is used to develop the practitioner's recognitional capacity. In Pramāṇavāda literature, recognition (*pratyabhijñāna*) is more commonly discussed under the category of ascertainment (*niścaya*).⁸³ In what follows, I draw on a number of the discussions about ascertainment found in Pramāṇavāda discourse. Recognition involves both perception (*pratyakṣa*) and concept formation. For this reason, the next section provides an overview of the Pramāṇavāda position on these two cognitive acts. This is necessary context for the argument in Section 3, where I identify direct perceptual ascertainment (*pratyakṣaprṣṭalabdhaniścayā*) as the particular cognitive act facilitated through the practice of *vipaśyanā*. "Direct perceptual ascertainment" refers to an act of ascertainment that directly follows a perceptual encounter.

In Section 4, I explain how the practice of *vipaśyanā* facilitates direct perceptual ascertainment. It does so by altering the cognizer's conceptual habituation (*vikalpābhyāsa*), through the formation of the necessary cognitive

⁸³ See Eltschinger (2013: 252) or Katsura (1993: 70) regarding the close relationship between recognition and ascertainment. It is important to note that while recognition, and proper perceptual judgments, are types of ascertainment, there are other types, such as the ascertainment that comes from inference (*anumāna*). This will be discussed in Section 2.

imprints (*vāsanā*). In Section 5, I suggest a series of stages that the *vipaśyanā* practitioner progresses through. This series is based upon Kamalaśīla's list of the various intrinsically (*svataḥ*) and extrinsically epistemic (*parataḥ prāmāṇya*) cognitions. I end with a potential method for forming the cognitive imprints needed to produce the direct perceptual ascertainment of properties such as emptiness. This method is suggested by the discourse regarding intrinsically and extrinsically epistemic cognitions. In sum, this chapter builds a nuanced reconstruction of Kamalaśīla's theory of *vipaśyanā*, which both explains how *vipaśyanā* affects the cognition of the practitioner, and is consistent with Kamalaśīla's own philosophical commitments.

2. Perception and Concept Formation⁸⁴

In the previous chapter, I presented passages from *The Process of Meditation* where Kamalaśīla describes *vipaśyanā* as being both observational and conceptual. I interpreted this as meaning that the practice is a form of seeing-as. Because it is a form of seeing-as, the practice is dependent on both the practitioner's perception and their use of concepts. Kamalaśīla adopted most of his theories on perception and concept formation from the Pramāṇavāda tradition. For this reason, it will be helpful to begin with an overview of the Pramāṇavāda theories on those two cognitive events.

⁸⁴ The discussion in this section and the next is supplemented with an appendix at the end of this chapter. The appendix provides a flowchart outlining the process beginning with a perceptual encounter up through concept formation, with regard to ordinary perception, perception before practicing *vipaśyanā*, and perception after practicing *vipaśyanā*.

The founders of the Pramāṇavāda tradition, the sixth- and seventh-century philosophers Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, held that there were two epistemic faculties (*pramāṇa*). In other words, there are two means of acquiring declarative knowledge. These are perception and inference (*anumāṇa*). According to these philosophers, the faculty of perception consists in a single type of cognition, namely, nonconceptual (*nirvikalpa*) sensory cognitions (*viññāna*). These sensory cognitions are produced through a causal interaction between an object and the sense faculties. They are comprised of a representation (*ākāra, pratibimbaka*) of perceived object's various tropes.⁸⁵ The contents of this multifaceted representation are also produced causally, through the interaction between the sense faculties and the object's tropes.

According to Pramāṇavāda theory, when a sensory cognition is produced in a perceptual encounter, the content of that sensory cognition represents all of the tropes of the perceived object.⁸⁶ According to Buddhists, these tropes include instances of impermanence, emptiness, and the other properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets.⁸⁷ In his *Commentary on the Compendium on Reality*, Kamalaśīla explains that sensory cognitions that represent instances of these properties are naturally produced in an individual's everyday perceptual encounters:

⁸⁵ Here I use "trope" according to its standard philosophical definition, namely, as a particular instance of a property. For example, while a rose might possess the property red, the particular instance of red perceived in a perceptual encounter with that rose is a trope.

⁸⁶ Vincent Eltschinger explains, "In other words, a single instance of perception grasps its object in all its aspects (*sarvākāreṇa, sarvātmanā*), leaving nothing of it unapprehended" (2013: 252).

⁸⁷ Kamalaśīla argues that these are real tropes of objects in *The Process of Meditation III* (Tucci 1958: 202-203). A sample of these arguments are briefly reviewed in Chapter 1 Section 3.

Therefore, it is established that it is the innate nature [of the mind] to apprehend a veridical representation of its object. And it has been established that the real nature of an object consists in it having the characteristics of being momentary, selfless, and so on. Therefore, it is the mind's nature to apprehend selflessness.⁸⁸

In this passage, the terms “momentary” and “selfless” are synonymous with “impermanent” and “empty.” In an ordinary perceptual encounter, an individual's sensory cognitions will represent tropes such as impermanence and emptiness. This occurs regardless of whether or not this individual has achieved the knowledge of meditation through the practice of *vipaśyanā*.

This is important, because one might think that *vipaśyanā* trains the practitioner to perceive “the true meaning” by altering what is represented in their sensory cognitions. In other words, on this mistaken view, practicing *vipaśyanā* would alter our cognition so that our sensory cognitions newly represent tropes of impermanence, emptiness and so on. However, that is not coherent with Kamalaśīla's philosophy of mind. As described in the quote above, according to Kamalaśīla, our sensory cognitions already represent those tropes.⁸⁹ For this reason,

⁸⁸ *tasmād bhūtaviṣayākāragrāhitāsyā svabhāvo nija iti sthitam. bhūtaś ca svabhāvo viṣayasya kṣaṇikānātmādirūpa iti pratipāditam etat. tena nairātmyagrahaṇasvabhāvam eva cittam [...]* TSP ad TS 3337

⁸⁹ Moreover, it would not be possible for a conceptual practice such as *vipaśyanā* to affect what our sensory cognitions represent. Sensory cognitions are nonconceptual, and their content is produced solely through the causal interaction of the object and the sense faculties. As explained in the last chapter, Kamalaśīla defines *vipaśyanā* as a conceptual meditation. Since there are no concepts involved in the production of a sensory cognition's content, *vipaśyanā* cannot affect what they represent.

practicing *vipāśyanā* does not alter the practitioner’s sensory cognitions. Instead, as I argue in the next section, it alters how the practitioner forms concepts.

According to the Pramāṇavāda philosophy of mind, our perceptual encounters produce sensory cognitions, and these, in turn, immediately trigger the process of concept formation. When we form concepts in response to a sensory cognition, we construct a token concept that is identical to the token concepts that we have constructed previously in response to similar sensory cognitions.⁹⁰ For instance, in the past, we have repeatedly formed the concept “stop sign” in response to sensory cognitions with content that represents the tropes “red,” “octagonal,” and so on. Because of this, we will form the concept “stop sign” again the next time we are presented with a sensory cognition that represents those same tropes.

In an ordinary perceptual encounter, some kind of concept formation follows the sensory cognition.⁹¹ However, there is not a concept formed for every trope

⁹⁰ Note that, in analytical philosophy, this would be referred to as concept *deployment*. I use the term “formation” because in Buddhist epistemology, these are token conceptual constructions, rather than persisting types of concepts. This theory—that we habitually form token concepts identical to the concepts formed in previous similar perceptual encounters—is similar to the theory in analytic philosophy of mind that we deploy the same type of concept in response to similar sets of stimuli. The reason that Buddhists most often speak in terms of a family of identical token concepts, rather than speaking of a persisting type of concept, is that Buddhist philosophy of mind holds that all cognitive events are momentary. Therefore, when interpreting Buddhist philosophy of mind, it is more accurate to speak of momentary token concepts rather than persisting types.

⁹¹ That said, many Buddhists claim that there are exceptions to this, where no concepts are formed following sensory cognition. This only occurs in the case of meditative states that are more advanced than *vipāśyanā*, such as the attainment of extinction (*nirodhasamāpatti*). It is claimed that, in these states, no concepts are formed following the practitioner’s sensory cognitions, and the practitioner remains in a state of non-conceptuality. For more on the attainment of extinction, see Griffiths (1986). In what follows, I do not discuss these exceptional cases, as they are

represented by the sensory cognition. For instance, because a stop sign has the property of “being a stop sign,” the sensory cognition that is produced from a perceptual encounter with a stop sign will represent the trope “being a stop sign,” but this does not mean that one will necessarily form the concept “stop sign” in response to that sensory cognition. For instance, one would not form this concept if one has never learned the concept “stop sign.” Nevertheless, some concept will be formed in response. For instance, even if one does not know the concept “stop sign,” one might instead form concepts that express simple sensory properties, such as “red” or “octagon.”

Whenever a concept is formed in response to a sensory cognition, Pramāṇavāda philosophers generally assume that the perceiver will predicate the property expressed by that concept to the observed object. This consists in a perceptual judgment. For instance, in response to a sensory cognition representing a fire, it is likely that one will form the concept “fire.” This is understood in this tradition as the individual predicating the property “being a fire” to the observed object, and making the perceptual judgment, “This is a fire.” These perceptual judgments are the same perceptual judgments (*ekapratyavamarśa*) we have previously made in response to similar sensory cognitions. For instance, whenever we encounter a fire, we are likely to make the perceptual judgment, “This is a fire,” because we have made that same perceptual judgment in our previous encounters with fires.

not relevant to the *vipaśyanā* practitioner. They are only achieved after a practitioner has perfected *vipaśyanā* and moved on to more advanced meditations.

However, the perceptual judgments formed in response to a sensory cognition do not necessarily correspond to the facts about the properties of the observed object.⁹² In Indian philosophy, this kind of error is often illustrated through the example of someone seeing a coiled rope as a snake. In response to seeing the coiled rope, our sensory cognition will represent a trope of “being a coiled rope.” Nevertheless, we might instead form the concept “being a snake” in response to this perceptual encounter. We would then predicate this property to the rope, and make the perceptual judgment, “This is a snake.” This error is due to intervening conditions (*pratyaya*), such as psychological factors (maybe our fear of snakes causes us to see them everywhere), or context (maybe the lighting is poor).⁹³ For these reasons, we will see the rope as a snake. This perceptual error (*pratyakṣābhāsa*) is a faulty case of seeing-as.

There are thus two potential outcomes of concept formation. On the one hand, concept formation can be successful, in which case the perceptual judgment that is made corresponds to the facts about the properties of the observed object. In this case, the properties of the object satisfy the concept that is formed. On the other

⁹² The kind of correspondence in this case is correlation without isomorphism. The Pramāṇavāda philosophers were nominalists. On their account, judgments are comprised of concepts, and these concepts express properties. When we make judgments, we mistakenly believe that these properties distribute over what are in fact unique particulars. Since, on this nominalist account, no property is actually shared across particulars, all judgments involve some amount of error (*bhrānta*). This error indicates a lack of any isomorphism between judgments and facts about particulars. Nevertheless, on Dharmakīrti’s account, judgments can be said to correspond to facts in a minimal correlational sense (Tillemans 1999: 9-10). For Dharmakīrti, for a judgment to be true, there must be some fact regarding the object that the judgment corresponds to. For more on the correspondence theory of truth for Dharmakīrti, see Tillemans (1999: 6-12).

⁹³ The conditions that cause us to make this kind of error will be discussed in detail in the fourth section of this chapter.

hand, concept formation can be unsuccessful. This is a case of perceptual error, where we mistakenly believe that the properties of the object satisfy this concept, such as in the example of mistaking a coiled rope for a snake. The perceptual judgment that is made in this case does not correspond to the facts about the properties of the observed object.

In the Pramāṇavāda tradition, if concept formation is successful, this is referred to as a type of ascertainment, and the concept formation that follows the initial sensory cognition is categorized as a type of ascertaining cognition (*niścayavijñāna*). This consists in recognition (*pratyabhijñāna*), in the form of a correct perceptual judgment.⁹⁴ The correct perceptual judgments formed through the practice of *vipaśyanā* are the perceptual judgments that I described in the previous chapter, such as “This phenomenon is impermanent,” and “This phenomenon is empty.”

It is important to note that an ascertaining cognition that directly follows a sensory cognition is only one particular type of ascertainment. In the Pramāṇavāda tradition, ascertainment occurs when one determines a particular property of a phenomenon. This can come about through a number of different cognitive acts. “Ascertainment” can refer to either the case where an ascertaining cognition is produced following a sensory cognition, or the case where an ascertaining cognition is produced through inference. Additionally, if the ascertaining cognition follows a sensory cognition, it may occur immediately following the sensory cognition, or an

⁹⁴ Vincent Eltschinger and Shōryū Katsura hold that ascertainment, recognition, and correct perceptual judgment are closely related in Buddhist discourse (2013: 252; 1993: 70).

additional perception or an inference may be needed to ascertain the properties of the object. A sound inference, however, always culminates in ascertainment, with no need for any subsequent cognition. From this, we can outline the different types of ascertainment as follows:

Types of ascertainment:

- 1) From inference
- 2) From perception
 - 2a) Directly following the initial sensory cognition
 - 2b) Produced through a subsequent inference or perception

These different types of ascertainment will be discussed in more detail in the fifth section of this chapter. At this point, however, I want to single out 2a, which I have been referring to as “direct perceptual ascertainment.” This particular form of ascertainment is crucial to the practice of *vipaśyanā*. In the next section, I will argue that *vipaśyanā* facilitates this kind of ascertainment with regard to the properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets.

3. Direct Perceptual Ascertainment and Contrary Concepts⁹⁵

When Kamalaśīla indicates that *vipaśyanā* is used to perceive “the true meaning,” this implies that the true meaning is not ordinarily perceived. In other words, without practicing *vipaśyanā*, we do not perceive the properties attributed to

⁹⁵ The discussion in this section and the previous one is supplemented with a flowchart in the appendix at the end of this chapter.

phenomenon in the Buddhist tenets, such as impermanence, mind-only, and emptiness. However, according to the Pramāṇavāda account of perception given above, we do represent tropes of these properties in our sensory cognitions. This raises the following question. Why do we fail to perceive these properties, despite the fact that we represent tropes of these properties in our sensory cognitions? This section argues that, on Kamalaśīla's account, we fail to perceive properties such as impermanence and emptiness because we form the wrong concepts in response to our sensory cognitions. The way to correct this error is to form the concepts that express these properties, directly in response to our sensory cognitions. In other words, we correct this error by producing the direct perceptual ascertainment of these properties. This is accomplished through the practice of *vipaśyanā*.

In the last section, I gave a quote by Kamalaśīla where he states that our sensory cognitions represent tropes such as being selfless. Following this quote, Kamalaśīla indicates that, rather than forming concepts such as "selfless" in response to these sensory cognitions, we instead form concepts that express some other kind of properties:

However, those who are deceived perceive this [entity] as having a nature other than [being selfless]. This is not due to the [entity's actual] nature, but is just a consequence of the effect of contingent conditions, such as in the example of the rope that, due to certain conditions, [is perceived] as a snake.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ *yat punar anyathāsvabhāvo 'sya khyātir mūḍhānāṃ sāmāthyād āgantukapratyayabalād evetyavatiṣṭhate na svabhāvatvena yathā rajjvāṃ sarpapratyayasya*. TSP ad TS 3337. The contingent conditions (*āgantukapratyaya*)

In this passage, “those who are deceived” refers to ordinary people, like us, who have not attained the knowledge of meditation. Kamalaśīla states that we erroneously see phenomena in some way other than the way these phenomena are described in the Buddhist tenets. This is because we see these phenomena as having some unspecified other properties. He then compares this to a case of faulty seeing-as, where someone sees a coiled rope as a snake.

The Process of Meditation I contains a section that answers what these other properties are (Tucci 1958: 211-214). This section suggests that rather than seeing phenomena as being impermanent, empty, and so on, we ordinarily see phenomena as being just the opposite. Rather than seeing phenomena as impermanent, we see them as permanent (*nitya*). Rather than seeing phenomena as mind-only, we see them as external (*bāhya*) to our minds. Rather than seeing phenomena as lacking an essential nature, i.e. as empty, we see them as having an essential nature. Kamalaśīla refers to the concepts that express these properties—permanence, externality, having an essential nature, and so on—as “contrary concepts” (*mithyāvikalpa*). Contrary concepts are the concepts that are antonymous to the concepts that express the properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets.

The section where Kamalaśīla discusses this is on removing “the seed of doubt” (*saṃśayabīja*) (Tucci 1958: 211-214). Here Kamalaśīla is arguing against a suddenist interpretation of the scripture *Recitation for Entrance into the Nonconceptual*. He reads this suddenist interpretation as claiming that a practitioner

that cause us to misperceive entities in this way will be explained in the fourth section.

should meditate with “the mere absence of [any] mental concentration” (*manasikārābhāvamātra*) (Tucci 1958: 212). Kamalaśīla responds that such a meditation could not remove the seed of doubt, which can only be removed through the knowledge of meditation:

And only when there is the light of meditative concentration, from a yogi who sees with the eye of the knowledge, does the seed of doubt...vanish, like the cognition [that misperceives] a rope as a snake.⁹⁷

The “knowledge” Kamalaśīla is referring to here is the knowledge of meditation. This knowledge removes the seed of doubt, which is again compared to the faulty case of seeing-as where one sees a rope as a snake.

The next passage in this text sheds light on what this seed of doubt consists in. Here Kamalaśīla uses the phrase “the seed of contrary concepts” (*mithyāvikalpabīja*) as a synonym for “the seed of doubt.” In this passage, Kamalaśīla reiterates that this seed of contrary concepts is removed through the knowledge of meditation, and he then identifies the meditations of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* as the methods to accomplish this:

Therefore, [the practitioner] grasps the mind with the hand of meditative concentration. Then, by means of the sword of subtle knowledge, [the practitioner] uproots the seed of contrary concepts, such as physicality and so forth, that exists there in the mind. Once that has happened, contrary concepts do not grow in the mind again, due to the foundation being free of

⁹⁷ *tacca saṃśayabījaṃ yoginah samādhyāloke sati prajñācakṣuṣā ... rajjau sarpajñānavad apagacchati nānyathā.* (Tucci 1958: 213).

their roots, like a tree whose roots have been excavated. In just this way, the Blessed One taught the path possessing the union of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, in order to remove the obscurations.⁹⁸

As an example of a contrary concept, Kamalaśīla lists “physicality” (*rūpadi*). This is synonymous with “external to mind,” and is the equivalent to saying “not mind-only.” The following phrase “and so forth” (*adī*) suggests that the other contrary concepts are those that are antonymous to the concepts that express the properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets. For instance, these contrary concepts would express the properties of permanence, or having an essential nature.

According to Kamalaśīla, we ordinarily see phenomena in a way that is contradictory with how they are described by Buddhist tenets. In these faulty cases of seeing-as, we form what he calls contrary concepts, and predicate them to phenomena in perceptual judgments such as “This is permanent,” or “This has an essential nature.” In the rest of this section, I argue that *vipaśyanā* can only prevent the formation of these contrary concepts if it results in the direct perceptual ascertainment of the properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets. *Vipaśyanā* can accomplish this, because, according to Kamalaśīla, it is a form of

⁹⁸ *tasmāt samādhīhastena manaḥ samdhāya sūkṣmataraṇajñāśāstreṇa tatra cetasi rūpādīmithyāvīkalpabijam uddharet. evaṃ saty utkhātāmūlā iva taravo bhūmer nirmūlatayā mithyāvīkalpāḥ punaś cetasi na virohanti. ata evāvaraṇaprahāṇāya śamathavipaśyanāyuganaddhavāhī mārgo bhagavatā nirdiṣṭaḥ.* Tucci (1958: 213).

conceptual observation that results in new perceptual judgments.⁹⁹ We can see how *vipaśyanā* prevents the formation of contrary concepts by comparing the perceptual judgments that are formed before practicing *vipaśyanā* to the judgments that are made as a result of the practice.

In the previous chapter, I described a number of perceptual judgments that are made as the result of practicing *vipaśyanā*, such as, “This is mind-only,” or “This is empty.” These judgments have all had affirmative predicates, but they can all just as easily be expressed with predicate negation. For instance, the affirmative judgments, “This is mind-only,” and “This is empty,” are equivalent in meaning to the predicate negations, “This is not external to the mind,” and “This does not have an essential nature.” *The Process of Meditation* contains a number of examples where Kamalaśīla states both these affirmative and negative predicates together. In *The Process of Meditation I*, he describes one of these perceptual judgments, stating, “This is all mind-only; indeed, there are no external objects,” and, in *The Process of Meditation III*, he states, “this content...exists as empty of essence and devoid of self and what is possessed by the self.”¹⁰⁰

The seed of contrary concepts, as outlined above, causes us to form concepts such as “permanent,” or “external to the mind,” in response to our sensory cognitions. The properties expressed by these concepts are then predicated to what is being observed, and we make perceptual judgments such as “This is permanent,”

⁹⁹ See Chapter 2 Section 2 for Kamalaśīla’s description of *vipaśyanā* as having these characteristics.

¹⁰⁰ *cittamātramevaitat sarvaṃ na punarbāhyo ’rtho vidyate*. Kamalaśīla (1997: 216). *pratibimbakaṃ... svabhāvaśūnyaṃ ātmātmiyarahitaṃ*. Tucci (1971: 5). Essence (*svabhāva*) and self (*ātman*) are functionally equivalent here.

or “This is external to the mind.” These perceptual judgments are contradictory with the judgments that result from the practice of *vipaśyanā*, as described above.

Vipaśyanā can prevent the judgments that result from the seed of contrary concepts, because it conditions the practitioner to make new perceptual judgments that directly contradict these erroneous judgments. For instance, rather than making the perceptual judgment, “This is external to the mind,” a trained practitioner responds with, “This is all mind-only; indeed, they are no external objects.”¹⁰¹ The practitioner comes to recognize that the properties of the observed phenomenon do not satisfy the concept “external to the mind.” At the same time, the practitioner recognizes that the properties of the observed phenomenon satisfy the concept “mind-only” instead.

It is crucial that the perceptual judgments that are made as a result of practicing *vipaśyanā* contradict the erroneous perceptual judgments formed as a result of the seed of contrary concepts. Otherwise, both judgments could still be made. However, because they contradict one another, the practitioner cannot hold both simultaneously.¹⁰² For instance, a practitioner cannot perceive a phenomenon

¹⁰¹ See ft. 100 above.

¹⁰² Note that this does not prevent an individual from making an inferential judgment that is contradictory with their perceptual judgment. These kinds of contradictory judgments are evidenced in examples such as the Müller-Lyer illusion, where one perceives one line as longer even if one knows that the lines are the same length. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that an individual would be able to hold two simultaneous contradictory *perceptual* judgments. While there might be rare cases of individuals for whom this kind of contradiction is possible, it is important to keep in mind the kind of person Kamalaśīla assumes would be practicing *vipaśyanā*. As McClintock (2010) explains, Kamalaśīla’s audience is, ideally, an audience of judicious persons (*prekṣāvanta*), and is, in fact, both fellow Buddhists and worthy opponents (49-62). McClintock is referring to the audience of Kamalaśīla’s *Commentary on the Compendium on Reality*, but it is reasonable to assume that

as both external to the mind and not external to the mind. The perceptual judgments made through *vipaśyanā* thus replace and prevent the judgments produced from the seed of contrary concepts.

Granted, a judgment that contradicts the erroneous perceptual judgments that result from the seed of contrary concepts could be formed in ways other than direct perceptual ascertainment. Such a judgment could be formed through inference. For instance, the seed of contrary concepts results in perceptual judgments such as “This phenomenon is external to the mind.” A novice practitioner, who has attained the knowledge of reflection, can infer that, “This phenomenon is mind-only.” Nevertheless, this inferential judgment will not prevent the erroneous perceptual judgments that result from the seed of contrary concepts. Inferential judgments can correct, but not prevent, these perceptual judgments. Without training in *vipaśyanā*, the practitioner will still habitually form a concept such as “external to the mind” in response to a perceptual encounter, and predicate the property “external to the mind” to the observed phenomenon in the perceptual judgment, “This is external to the mind.”¹⁰³ The only way to prevent these mistaken perceptual judgments is to form the proper concept initially, directly following the sensory cognition, instead of forming one of the contrary concepts. In other words, there must be direct perceptual ascertainment.

Kamalaśīla is speaking to a similar audience in other texts such as *The Process of Meditation*. It is difficult to imagine how this kind of rational thinker could perceive a phenomenon as both external to the mind and not external to the mind.

¹⁰³ This is due to the practitioner’s conceptual habituation, as will be explained in the next section. A practitioner can know that phenomena are mind-only, while still being habituated to form the concept “external to the mind” in response to their perceptual encounters.

In sum, in order to prevent the formation of contrary concepts, *vipaśyanā* facilitates the direct perceptual ascertainment of the properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets. When these properties are predicated to phenomena, the perceptual judgments that are formed contradict the judgments that result from the seed of contrary concepts. Through this, the practitioner is conditioned to no longer form those erroneous perceptual judgments. The direct perceptual ascertainment of the properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets is what Kamalaśīla calls true discernment (*bhūtapratyavekṣaṇā*). As I explained in the first chapter, Kamalaśīla equates true discernment with the ideal cognitive state of the *vipaśyanā* practitioner. In other words, the practice of *vipaśyanā* is intended to result in true discernment.

Take, for example, how a direct perceptual ascertainment of emptiness prevents the error of perceiving an essential nature in phenomena. As discussed in the first chapter, emptiness is defined as the lack of any essential nature. Due to the seed of contrary concepts, a novice practitioner will see a phenomenon as having an essential nature. In response to their perceptual encounters, they form the contrary concept “having essential nature” and predicate this property to the phenomenon in the erroneous perceptual judgment, “This phenomenon has an essential nature.” This perceptual judgment forms even if the practitioner is capable of inferring that the phenomenon does not, in fact, have an essential nature. Because the perceptual judgment, “This phenomenon has an essential nature,” occurs immediately following a sensory cognition, inference cannot prevent the initial formation of this erroneous perceptual judgment.

However, through *vipaśyanā*, the practitioner learns to ascertain directly that the phenomenon is empty. They repeat the practice until they learn to form the concept “empty” directly in response to the phenomenon, and predicate the property “empty” to the phenomenon instead of predicating the property “having an essential nature.” The practitioner cannot rationally predicate both these two properties to the phenomena, because the judgments, “This phenomenon is empty,” and “This phenomenon has an essential nature,” are contradictory. In this way, *vipaśyanā* prevents the formation of the contrary concept “having an essential nature,” by facilitating the direct perceptual ascertainment of emptiness. This is how the practitioner perceives the “true meaning,” that is, perceives phenomena as having the properties attributed to them in the Buddhist tenets.

In the passages I quoted above, Kamalaśīla refers not just to the act of forming a contrary concept, but to the “seed” (*bīja*), i.e. underlying cause, of the formation of these concepts. This is an important point for Kamalaśīla. In arguing against a suddenist interpretation of *Recitation for Entrance into the Nonconceptual*, he makes the point that one cannot simply stop the formation of these concepts directly, but that one must remove the underlying cause that results in these particular formations (Tucci 1958: 211-214). In the next section, I explain that this underlying cause consists in the ways in which we are habituated to form concepts. *Vipaśyanā* brings about the direct perceptual ascertainment of properties such as emptiness by altering that habituation.

4. Habituation and Cognitive Imprints

The last section identified direct perceptual ascertainment as the primary cognitive process that is developed by the practice of *vipaśyanā*. This section builds on that claim by arguing that, according to Kamalaśīla, as well as a number of other Pramāṇavāda philosophers, the decisive factor for producing direct perceptual ascertainment is conceptual habituation (*vikalpābhyāsa*). Conceptual habituation is defined as one's tendencies to form certain concepts in response to certain types of sensory cognitions. If *vipaśyanā* facilitates direct perceptual ascertainment, it would have to do so by reconditioning this form of habituation. This close connection between meditation and habituation is indicated by Kamalaśīla when, while commenting on a verse by Śāntarakṣita in his *Commentary on the Compendium on Reality*, Kamalaśīla glosses Śāntarakṣita's use of the term "meditation" (*bhāvanā*) as simply meaning "habituation" (*abhyāsa*).¹⁰⁴

Passages from the work of Kamalaśīla, Dharmakīrti, and Dharmakīrti's commentator Śākyabuddhi (fl. 8th century), all indicate that conceptual habituation is the decisive factor in direct perceptual ascertainment. However, these authors also list a number of other conditions that affect ascertainment. For instance, in his *Commentary on the Compendium on Reality*, Kamalaśīla states that ascertainment is produced through factors such as habituation, close proximity, and one's comprehension of the concept involved.¹⁰⁵ However, Dharmakīrti, in his

¹⁰⁴ *bhāvanāḥ abhyāsāḥ*. TSP ad TS 37

¹⁰⁵ "Since the differentiation in this case is differentiation through exclusion, the determination is [a form of] ascertainment. The causes of this are habituation, close proximity, degree of acuity of comprehension, and so on. For it is not the case that the mere appearance is the cause of ascertainment, but [its causes] are instead

Autocommentary to Explanation of Epistemology (Pramāṇavārttikasvavṛtti), singles out conceptual habituation as the decisive factor in ascertainment, stating, “A sensory cognition is caused to produce ascertaining cognitions in accordance to conceptual habituation.”¹⁰⁶ He goes on to claim that:

In this case, the acuity of the [conceptual] cognition, the habituation from the cognitive imprints of that [conceptual cognition], the [particular] context, and so on, [all] cooperate in producing the ascertainment of a property from a sensory cognition.¹⁰⁷

Birgit Kellner examines a number of Buddhist commentaries on this passage, and argues that Śākyabuddhi provides us with the best interpretation (2004: 19-32). Śākyabuddhi explains that, “habituation from the cognitive imprints of that” (*tadvāsanābhyāsa*) is synonymous with the term “conceptual habituation.”¹⁰⁸ Because of this, the demonstrative pronoun “that,” in the phrase “habituation from the cognitive imprints of that,” must refer to previous conceptual cognitions that left a cognitive imprint when they were formed. This imprint is then later triggered, or awakened (*prabodha*), by similar sensory cognitions in similar contexts

habituation and so on. For this reason, the meaning [of the pervious verse] is that ascertainment is brought about when all these [causes] are present.” *yasmādbhedo vyāvṛttiryadbhedastatra vyaśāyo niścayastasya kāraṇamabhyāsaḥ pratyāsattistāratamyabuddhipāṭavaṃ cetyādi. nahyanubhavamātrameva niścayakāraṇaṃ kimtvabhyāsādyo ‘pi. tena yatra te santi tatra niścayaḥ prasūyata ityārthaḥ.* TSP ad TS 587

¹⁰⁶ *anubhavo hi yathāvikalpābhyāsaṃ niścayapratyayān janayati.* PVSV 32.5

¹⁰⁷ *tatra buddhipāṭavaṃ tadvāsanābhyāsaḥ prakaraṇam ityādayo ‘nubhavād bhedaniścayotpattisahakāriṇaḥ.* PVSV 32.5-12. This translation is based on the translation and analysis found in Kellner (2004: 19-32).

¹⁰⁸ See Kellner (2004: 27-28).

(*prakaraṇa*). This causes the perceiver to form a token concept that is identical to the token concepts that they had formed in the past in similar contexts with similar sensory cognitions. In the terminology of analytic philosophy of mind, we would say that this conditions the observer to deploy the same concept in response to similar stimuli.

The cognitive imprints that are triggered in this case are associations between particular types of content in sensory cognitions and the formation of a particular concept. Take, for instance, the perceptual encounter with a stop sign that produces a sensory cognition that represents tropes such as “red,” “octagon,” “being a stop sign,” and so on. As described above, on the *Pramāṇavāda* account, we recognize the stop sign because we have regularly formed the concept “stop sign” in response to our past sensory cognitions of stop signs. When we did this in the past, it formed a cognitive imprint that associated this kind of sensory content with the formation of the concept “stop sign.” When we next encounter a stop sign, this will produce a sensory cognition representing the tropes “red,” “octagon,” and so on, and this content will trigger all our cognitive imprints associated with this kind of sensory cognition. These imprints will then cause us to form the concept “stop sign” in response to this sensory cognition, just as we have done in the past.

Conceptual habituation is the decisive factor in terms of what kind of concept is formed following a sensory cognition.¹⁰⁹ Kamalaśīla indicates this, by illustrating a case where one’s habituation determines the kind of perceptual judgment formed in

¹⁰⁹ See Kellner (2004) for a more thorough argument for this claim with regards to Dharmakīrti and Śākyabuddhi (19-32).

response to a sensory cognition. In a discussion on the various factors that facilitate ascertainment, he illustrates the importance of habituation by stating:

For instance, in the case where someone's father is also his teacher, when he sees his father approaching, he [would] ascertain, "My father is coming," not "My teacher is coming."¹¹⁰

Kamalaśīla's example indicates that, in response to a certain perceptual encounter, an individual will form the concept to which they are the most habituated. In the example, the perceiver is more habituated to seeing this individual as their father rather than their teacher. For this reason, in response to a sensory cognition of this individual, they form the concept "father," and predicate this to the perceived individual, making the judgment, "My father is coming." Even though the perceiver knows that this individual is also their teacher, they are more habituated to forming the concept "father" in response to this individual, and so the concept "father" is formed rather than "teacher." The concept that one is most habituated to forming will be formed initially, and this will be predicated to the perceived object in a perceptual judgment.

Even though an individual might be habituated to forming certain concepts, rather than others, this habituation can be altered. This can be accomplished by creating new cognitive imprints through intentional forms of training. Once a certain threshold of these imprints is reached, an individual will be habituated to forming a different concept in response to a certain kind of sensory cognition. This

¹¹⁰ *yathā janakādhyāpakāviśeṣe 'pi pitaramāthāntaṃ dṛṣṭvā pitā me āgacchati nopādhyāya iti niścinoti.* TSP ad TS 1305

individual will then directly ascertain the property expressed by that new concept. This kind of training can be observed in the case of experts whose expertise involves perceptual learning.

A radiologist, for example, engages in this sort of training over the course of their career. At the beginning of their career, a mammogram appears to the radiologist as a landscape of various grey shapes. But through the practice obtained from reading these mammograms, over time, the radiologist learns to recognize lesions and tumors.¹¹¹ Their practice reading mammograms forms the cognitive imprints needed to condition the radiologist to form concepts such as “lesion” and “tumor” directly in response to the appropriate stimuli from the mammogram. In this way, the radiologist learns to recognize lesions and tumors immediately upon seeing them on the radiograph.

Kamalaśīla describes a similar sort of training that took place in ancient India. In a passage in *Commentary on the Compendium on Reality*, an objector has asked Kamalaśīla how there can be the ascertainment of the empirical evidence given in an inference.¹¹² In other words, how is someone able to ascertain this evidence through observation? Kamalaśīla responds, “[One does so] through habituation, just as [in the case of] an expert in gems with regard to the characteristics of those gems.”¹¹³ Here Kamalaśīla is referencing an example from gemology (*ratnaśāstra*), a discipline that was well known in ancient India. He is

¹¹¹ For empirical studies on this process, see Nodine et al. (1996), Nodine et al. (1999), and Waite et al. (2019).

¹¹² “If someone objects, “How is there the ascertainment of evidence?””

liṅganiścaya eva kathamiti cet. TSP ad TS 1474-1476

¹¹³ *abhyāsāt. yathā maṅḍirūpādiṣu tadvidām. TSP ad TS 1474-1476*

suggesting that an expert jeweler’s experience with gems allows them to ascertain various properties of gems that are not perceived by others. The expert is able to accomplish this because their training has formed the necessary cognitive imprints, such that, in response to a sensory cognition of a gem, the expert directly forms the concepts that express these subtle properties.¹¹⁴

Training in *vipaśyanā* has a similar effect. The repeated practice of *vipaśyanā* creates the conditions for the direct perceptual ascertainment of properties such as emptiness by altering the practitioner’s conceptual habituation. It does so by forming more and more cognitive imprints that associate the practitioner’s sensory cognitions with the formation of concepts such as “empty.” Once enough of these cognitive imprints are formed through repeated practice, the concept “empty” will be formed directly in response to their sensory cognitions. At this point, the practitioner has a direct perceptual ascertainment of emptiness. They recognize phenomena as empty.

5. Intrinsically and Extrinsically Epistemic Perceptions

There is one final discourse from Pramāṇavāda epistemology that I will draw on to enrich my reconstruction of Kamalaśīla’s theory of *vipaśyanā*. This is the discourse on intrinsically epistemic (*svataḥ prāmāṇya*) and extrinsically epistemic

¹¹⁴ The 14th century Vedānta philosopher Vedānta Deśika makes a similar claim, stating that the expert jeweler can perceive sensory properties, such as subtle distinctions between colors, that the novice does not apprehend. Elisa Freschi provides a translation of Deśika’s work, *Theistic Mīmāṃsā*, in which Deśika states that, “[In the case of the expert jeweler,] the difference among colours [of a precious stone], which was first concealed by their similarity, is eventually made apparent as something sensual through accurate investigation” (2011: 12-13).

(*parataḥ prāmāṇya*) cognitions. Ascertainment and conceptual habituation play key roles in determining whether a cognition is categorized as intrinsically epistemic or extrinsically epistemic. Cognitions are categorized in this way based on how they are ascertained. On the one hand, when we ascertain the properties of a phenomenon immediately following a perception or inference, Pramāṇavāda philosophers categorize that perception or inference as intrinsically epistemic. In other words, a cognition is intrinsically epistemic if it is a sensory cognition that is followed by direct perceptual ascertainment, or if it is produced through sound inference. On the other hand, a sensory cognition is categorized as extrinsically epistemic if ascertainment does not directly follow it, but is produced later through a number of subsequent cognitions. These subsequent cognitions can be inferences or additional perceptions.

Kamalaśīla, in his *Commentary on the Compendium on Reality*, provides an extensive list of the different kinds of cognition that are either intrinsically epistemic or extrinsically epistemic. This list is useful to our discussion on *vipaśyanā*, because it provides us with categories that we can use to suggest a potential outline of the stages that a *vipaśyanā* practitioner progresses through as they perfect the practice and develop new recognitional capacities. In this section, I explain that the novice practitioner of *vipaśyanā* begins with observations that are extrinsically epistemic. They practice *vipaśyanā* until their observations directly ascertain the emptiness of phenomena. This is an intrinsically epistemic perception and the intended result of the practice of *vipaśyanā*. At the end of this section, I show how the discourse on intrinsically and extrinsically epistemic cognitions suggests

that repeated inferences could be used to form the cognitive imprints needed to accomplish this.

The distinction between intrinsically and extrinsically epistemic cognitions was developed by the Pramāṇavāda in order to explain how it is possible to have a sensory cognition where one is initially unsure of what object or property they are perceiving. This kind of doubtful observation is not intrinsically epistemic, but it may become extrinsically epistemic if the properties of the object are ascertained by a later cognition.

For instance, in twilight, you look at a nearby mountaintop, and see a dim light that is coming from a fire. On the one hand, if you immediately recognize the light as a fire, that perception would be intrinsically epistemic, because an ascertaining cognition immediately followed the sensory cognition. You had a direct perceptual ascertainment that the light was a fire. On the other hand, you may be unsure of what the light is. In this case, you might then see smoke rising up from above that light, and then infer that the dim light must be a fire. In this case, the initial sensory cognition of the light is extrinsically epistemic, because it required a subsequent epistemic faculty, namely inference, in order to ascertain the properties of the perceived object.

Śākyabuddhi, in his *Commentary to the Explanation of Epistemology* (*Pramāṇavārttikaṭīkā*), explains that the distinction between intrinsically and extrinsically epistemic is dependent on ascertainment, which, in turn, is dependent on the perceiver's habituation. He explains this through the example of perceiving either fire or water:

If, at first, one is not habituated to a [sensory] cognition that has the appearance of fire or water, then the [sensory] cognition does not have the capacity to produce ascertainment. This is because, even though the cognition may be grasped by [some other] independent epistemic faculty, there are [still] causes for error. In that case, it is established to be an epistemic faculty by the application of a subsequent epistemic instrument. Therefore, it is extrinsically epistemic. However, once one obtains habituation and clarity [with regard to that sensory cognition], then it is intrinsically epistemic.¹¹⁵

Here Śākyabuddhi explains that, once we become habituated to recognizing a phenomenon, our observations of that phenomenon will change from extrinsically epistemic to intrinsically epistemic, through the production of an ascertaining cognition directly following the initial sensory cognition. Habituation makes the difference in whether an ascertaining cognition is produced directly, and this determines whether or not the initial sensory cognition is considered intrinsically or extrinsically epistemic.

Kamalaśīla adopts this distinction between intrinsically and extrinsically epistemic cognitions, and, in his *Commentary on the Compendium on Reality*, he provides the most extensive taxonomy of these cognitions that can be found in

¹¹⁵ *dang po'i me dang chur snang ba'i shes pa yang goms pa med pa na rang rgyud kyi tshad ma nyid kyis gzung du zin kyang 'khrul pa'i rgyu mtshan yod pa'i phyir nges pa bskyed pa'i nus pa med pa de bas na / de la phyis kyi tshad ma 'jug pas tshad ma nyid du rnam par gzhag pa / de ltar na gzhan las tshad ma yin no / de yang goms pa yod cing gsal ba can thob pa na rang nyid las yin te / See Dunne (2004) for the Tibetan and a further discussion of this passage (294).*

Pramāṇavāda literature.¹¹⁶ He distinguishes five intrinsically epistemic cognitions and two that are extrinsically epistemic.

Intrinsically epistemic cognitions are:

- 1) perception from reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvedanapratyakṣa*)
- 2) yogic cognition (*yogijñāna*)
- 3) cognition that fulfills a goal (*arthakriyājñāna*)
- 4) inference (*anumāna*)
- 5) habituated perception (*abhyāsavat pratyakṣa*)

Extrinsically epistemic cognitions are:

- 6) cognition produced from directive (*codanājanitaṃ jñāna*)
- 7) perception that is not devoid of the causes of error (*pratyakṣaṃ anapagatabhrāntinimitta*)¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ See Krasser (2003) for the various lists of intrinsically and extrinsically epistemic cognitions given by a number of different authors in the Pramāṇavāda movement.

¹¹⁷ My presentation of this list is similar to the one given by Ernst Steinkellner (1992: 259). Kamalaśīla states this as follows:
 “These [Buddhists] accept that there are some [cognitions] that are intrinsically epistemic, namely, perception from reflexive awareness, yogic cognition, cognition that fulfills a goal, inference, and habituated perception. The latter is ascertained as intrinsic because of having removed the cause of error through the strength of habituation. [In addition,] there are some that are extrinsically [epistemic,] namely, that which is being disputed on this occasion, i.e. cognition produced from directive, and perception that is not devoid of the causes for error, because neither habituation nor a cognition that fulfills a goal has been obtained.” *taiḥ kimñcitsvataḥ pramāṇamiṣṭam yathā svasaṃvedanapratyakṣaṃ yogijñānam arthakriyājñānam anumānābhyāsavacca pratyakṣam taddhi svata eva niścīyate. abhyāsavalenāpahastitabhrāntikāraṇatvāt. kiñcidanyataḥ yathā vivādāspadībhūtaṃ codanājanitaṃ jñāna pratyakṣaṃ cānapagatabhrāntinimittam. abhyāsārthakriyājñānanavāptatvāt. TSP ad TS 2944*

Among these seven types of cognition, the three that are the most relevant to our discussion are (2) yogic cognition, (5) habituated perception, and (7) perception that is not devoid of the causes of error.

While this is the most extensive list of these cognitions given in Pramāṇavāda literature, it does not tell us which kinds of cognitions can subsequently ascertain extrinsically epistemic cognitions. For instance, if one is in doubt when perceiving a dim light on the mountaintop, what kind of cognition could be used to ascertain that the dim light is a fire? This question is answered by another Pramāṇavāda philosopher, Kamalaśīla's contemporary Karṇakagomin (c. 770-c. 830). Karṇakagomin explains that a perception that is not devoid of the causes of error can be indirectly ascertained by subsequent perceptions or inferences (Krasser 2003: 164).

Take the example given before, where you see a dim light on the mountaintop, but are unsure of what it is. You then notice that there is smoke rising from above the light. At this point, you can infer that the light must be a fire, by using *modus ponens*, with your new perceptual judgment, "There is smoke," and the knowledge that, "If there is smoke, there is fire," as premises.¹¹⁸ In this case, at first

¹¹⁸ Granted, one needs to add the caveat that here you would be assuming that, given that there is a fire, then the light you saw must have been that fire. The Buddhist account of this logical argument takes a slightly different form than how I described it above. On the Pramāṇavāda account, the thesis (*pakṣa*), "There is a place that has fire," is justified due to the reason (*hetu*) that "There is a place that has smoke." This reason is a good reason (*saddhetu*) if it satisfies the following three criteria:

- 1) Property possession of the thesis (*pakṣadharmatva*): the subject of the thesis (There) is ascertained as having the predicate of the reason (a place that has smoke);

you could not determine the sensory cognition, but through a subsequent perception of smoke, and an inference that concluded that there was fire on that mountaintop, you ascertained that what you saw was a fire. The initial sensory cognition in this case would be categorized as extrinsically epistemic, because the ascertainment of fire required subsequent cognitions.

Kamalaśīla's list of the different types of intrinsically and extrinsically epistemic cognitions, along with the addition of Karṇakagomin's comment that inference can be used to produce ascertainment for extrinsically epistemic sensory cognitions, can be used to describe how a practitioner progresses through the practice of *vipaśyanā*. An individual begins by making perceptual errors, where they form contrary concepts in their perceptual encounters. When they become a student of Buddhism, this individual learns to make (7) a perception that is not devoid of the causes of error. This is an extrinsically epistemic perception that they ascertain through an inference learned in the knowledge of reflection. As this student masters *vipaśyanā*, this cognition eventually becomes (5) a habituated perception, and this triggers (2) a yogic cognition.

To see this in more detail, let us take the perception of emptiness as an example. Before becoming a practitioner, an individual will perceive phenomena as having an essential nature, and maintain the erroneous belief that these phenomena have an essential nature. They form the concept "having an essential nature" in

2) Pervasion of existence (*anvayavyāpti*): instances of the predicate of the reason (a place that has smoke) only occur in instances of the predicate of the thesis (a place that has fire); and

3) Pervasion of absence (*vyatirekavyāpti*): there are no instances of the predicate of the reason (a place that has smoke) in instances where there is not the predicate of the thesis (a place that has fire).

response to their sensory cognitions, and predicate the property “having an essential nature” to phenomena. This is a form of perceptual error. When this individual becomes a student of Buddhism, they learn the knowledge of reflection, which consists in the ability to infer that phenomena have the property of emptiness.¹¹⁹ This occurs before they begin to practice *vipāśyanā*, because, as explained in the first chapter, the knowledge of reflection is a prerequisite for this practice. The novice with the knowledge of reflection can then, through inference, come to know that these phenomena are in fact empty. Nevertheless, at this point, they will still form the concept “essential nature” in response to their sensory cognitions, and predicate this property to phenomena in erroneous perceptual judgments such as “This phenomenon has an essential nature.” This occurs due to their conceptual habituation.

At this point, the practitioner is unable to perceptually ascertain emptiness, but they are able to ascertain that the phenomenon has the property of emptiness through a subsequent inference. This is (7) in the list above, a perception not yet devoid of the causes of error. The novice’s initial observation of the phenomenon’s emptiness thus consists in an extrinsically epistemic perception. It is extrinsically epistemic, rather than intrinsically epistemic, because subsequent cognitions were required to ascertain the property “emptiness.” In other words, there was no direct perceptual ascertainment of emptiness.

The reason there is no direct perceptual ascertainment of emptiness in the case of a novice practitioner is that this practitioner still lacks the proper conceptual

¹¹⁹ The knowledge of reflection is described in more detail in the first and second chapters.

habituation. The kind of perception made by a novice practitioner, namely, (7) a perception that is not devoid of the causes of error, is caused by this lack of habituation. Kamalaśīla states:

Now in some cases of perception, error arises because of the lack of the causes for ascertainment, such as habituation. Hence that [cognition] is not established as intrinsically epistemic.¹²⁰

However, this practitioner can alter their habituation through the repeated practice of *vipaśyanā*. According to Kamalaśīla, this change in their conceptual habituation removes the causes of error found in (7) a perception not devoid of the causes of error:

Therefore, the power of habituation produces the causes that completely remove error. Thus [the cognition] is established as an intrinsic epistemic act.¹²¹

The kind of perception that is developed from this habituation is intrinsically epistemic. It is what Kamalaśīla refers to as (5) a habituated perception.

Vipaśyanā can accomplish this by forming the cognitive imprints that associate various sensory cognitions with the formation of the concept “empty.” Once a threshold of these imprints is formed, the practitioner will develop the

¹²⁰ *abhyāsāderniścayakāraṇasyābhāvāt kacidādye pratyakṣe bhrāntirutpadyata iti na tasya siddhyetsvata eva pramāṇatā. TSP ad TS 3093*

¹²¹ *tasmād abhyāsabalāt protsāritabhrāntinimittam upajāyate yat tat svata eva pramāṇam iti sthitam. TSP ad TS 2968*

tendency to form the concept “empty” when observing phenomena, and directly ascertain that phenomena are empty. This (5) habituated perception of emptiness is the final perception within the path of application, and the final perception in the practice of *vipaśyanā*. According to Kamalaśīla, this perception triggers (2) a yogic cognition of emptiness.¹²² Kamalaśīla’s term here, “yogic cognition,” is the cognition formed through the meditation of yogic perception, i.e. the meditation on the limit of entities, which was discussed in the first chapter. This indicates that the practitioner has perfected and moved beyond the practice of *vipaśyanā*. They have entered into the path of seeing, and become a bodhisattva.

As a final point, this outline of the progression of a *vipaśyanā* practitioner suggests a possible method for producing the cognitive imprints that associate the practitioner’s sensory cognitions with the formation of concepts such as “impermanence,” or “emptiness.” These cognitive imprints and the kind of imprints needed to produce the direct perceptual ascertainment of properties such as impermanence or emptiness. As stated above, the initial kind of perception made by a novice practitioner is (7) a perception that is not devoid of the causes of error. This perception is considered extrinsically epistemic, because the practitioner uses

¹²² The manner in which the habituated perception of emptiness, gained through the conceptual meditation of *vipaśyanā*, triggers the nonconceptual meditation of yogic perception, is a topic for another dissertation. Suffice to say here that Kamalaśīla holds that the direct perceptual ascertainment of emptiness from *vipaśyanā*, though conceptual, acts as a catalyst to eliminate all subsequent conceptual formations. In *The Process of Meditation*, he compares this ascertainment of emptiness to rubbing two sticks together to start a fire (Tucci 1971: 20). The wood of the sticks is both the catalyst for the flame and is consumed in the flame. Likewise, the conceptual ascertainment of emptiness causes the nonconceptual meditation of yogic perception, and the initial conceptual ascertainment of emptiness is itself eliminated by that result.

a subsequent inference to ascertain the phenomenon's impermanence or emptiness. Given that the practitioner initially uses inference to ascertain these properties, this suggests that these inferences, if repeated often enough, could be used to form the cognitive imprints that associate sensory cognitions with the formation of concepts such as "impermanent" or "empty."¹²³ This would result in the direct perceptual ascertainment of the properties expressed by these concepts, in (5) a habituated perception.

For instance, a novice practitioner observes a phenomenon, and then determines, through inference, that the phenomenon is empty. This inference would conclude with the inferential judgment, "This phenomenon is empty." This judgment is equivalent in meaning to the perceptual judgment, "This phenomenon is empty," that is formed when one perfects their practice of *vipaśyanā*. The only difference is that the former is an inferential judgment, while the practice of *vipaśyanā* results in a perceptual judgment. In the beginning of their training, the novice repeatedly infers that the observed phenomenon is empty, making the inferential judgment, "This phenomenon is empty." This continues until this judgment, "This phenomenon

¹²³ Note that, on the Pramāṇavāda account, these repeated inferences would not qualify as genuine instances of the epistemic faculty (*pramāṇa*) of inference. This is because an epistemic faculty, on this account, has to produce *new* knowledge. In other words, it must produce some declarative knowledge that the individual did not have before. As explained in the second chapter, the practitioner begins their meditation already having learned the knowledge of reflection. This consists in the capacity to infer universal judgments such as "All phenomena are empty." The inferences that are repeated during *vipaśyanā* would be specific to whatever phenomena was being observed, concluding with judgments such as "This phenomena is empty." Given that the practitioner already knew that all phenomena are empty, this new judgment would not teach them anything new. For this reason, the inferences repeated during *vipaśyanā* would not qualify as genuine inferences, but would instead be considered mere repetitions.

is empty,” becomes associated with their sensory cognitions of that phenomenon. Once enough of those associations are formed, this causes the practitioner to make the same judgment—only this time is it made perceptually, with no need for inference. This consists in the direct perceptual ascertainment of the phenomenon’s emptiness, in other words, (5) a habituated perception of emptiness.

This suggestion for how to create the necessary imprints brings us full circle in my reconstruction of Kamalaśīla’s theory of *vipaśyanā*. A practitioner is able to use this method because, as described in the last chapter, this sort of inference is first learned when developing the knowledge reflection, which is a prerequisite to practicing *vipaśyanā*. As explained in that chapter, the knowledge of reflection is the capacity to infer that phenomena have the properties that the Buddhist tenets attribute to them. *Vipaśyanā* is then used to perceive this “true meaning,” through the direct perceptual ascertainment of these properties. To so do, the practitioner must alter their conceptual habituation, through the formation of the necessary cognitive imprints. The practitioner can form the proper imprints by repeating the inferences they first learned as part of the knowledge of reflection. This provides another reason for why Kamalaśīla would require the practitioner to learn the knowledge of reflection before they begin the practice of *vipaśyanā*. In this way, Kamalaśīla’s theories of ascertainment, conceptual habituation, and intrinsically and extrinsically epistemic cognitions can all be used to explain his depiction of the path.

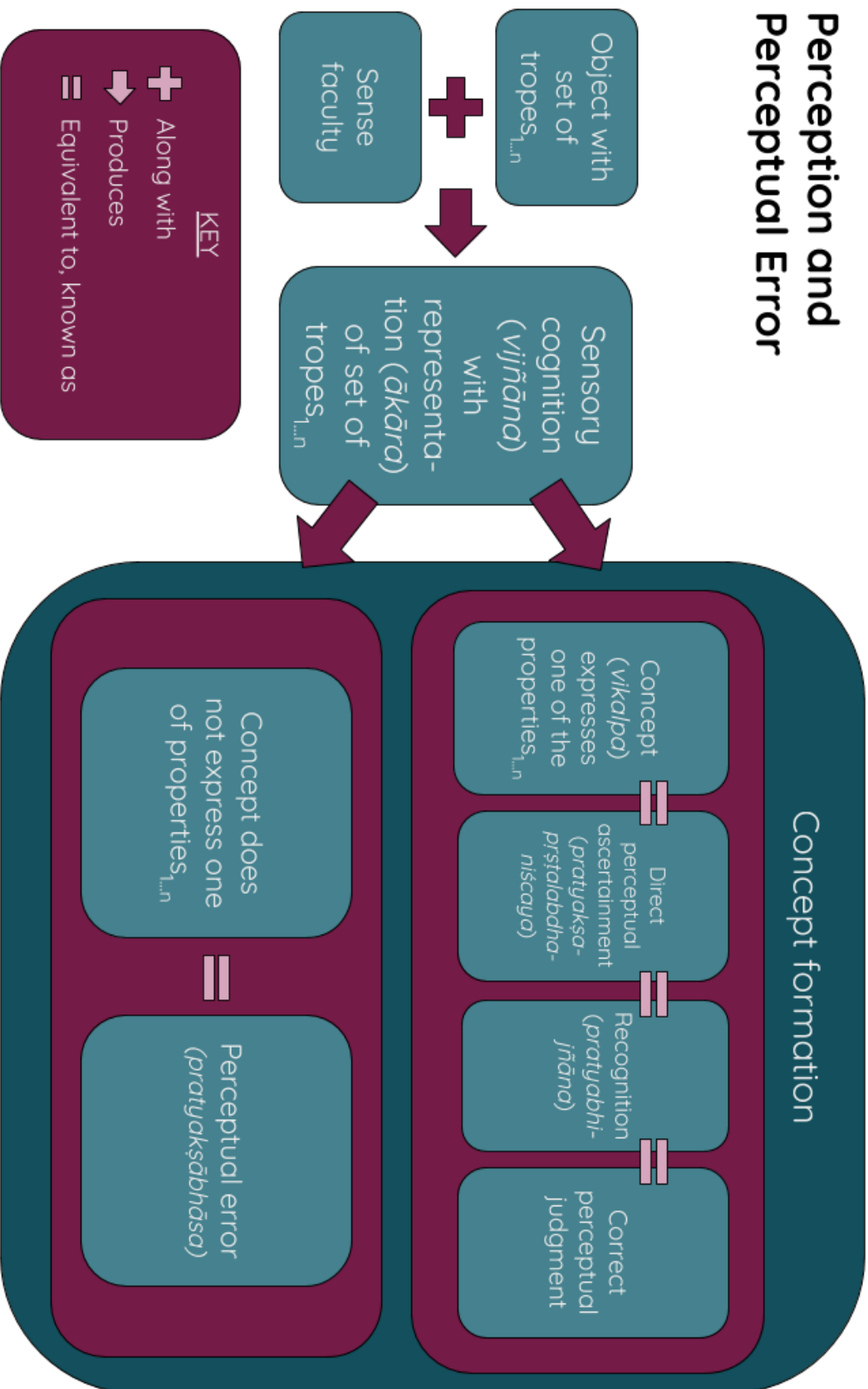
6. Conclusion

Kamalaśīla never explicitly states the connections between his theories on philosophy of mind and his theory of *vipaśyanā*. While *The Process of Meditation* give the most thorough description of *vipaśyanā* found in Kamalaśīla's work, Kamalaśīla's other works, such as his *Commentary on the Compendium on Reality*, provide a more thorough explanation of his epistemology and philosophy of mind. The relationship between these theories on *vipaśyanā* and these theories on the mind remain, for the most part, implicit in Kamalaśīla's work. Nevertheless, if, on a principle of charity, we take Kamalaśīla to be a consistent thinker, we can compare these various works in order to develop a detailed explanation of the cognitive function of *vipaśyanā* that is consistent with Kamalaśīla's philosophical commitments. This is what I have attempted to do in this chapter.

The explanation given here provides what I believe is the most plausible reconstruction of how Kamalaśīla would explain the ways in which *vipaśyanā* affects the practitioner's cognition. Given the prominence of *vipaśyanā* in the early stages of the path, this interpretation suggests that, according to Kamalaśīla, direct perceptual ascertainment is one of the most important cognitive acts in the development of a Buddhist practitioner. These sorts of insights help facilitate a more holistic understanding of Buddhism. A truly holistic understanding of Buddhism requires that we understand the relationship between Buddhist philosophers' theories on meditation and their philosophy of mind. While this chapter provides an interpretation of *vipaśyanā* along the lines of Kamalaśīla's thought, in the next chapter, I will be leaving the discourse of Buddhist epistemology and philosophy of

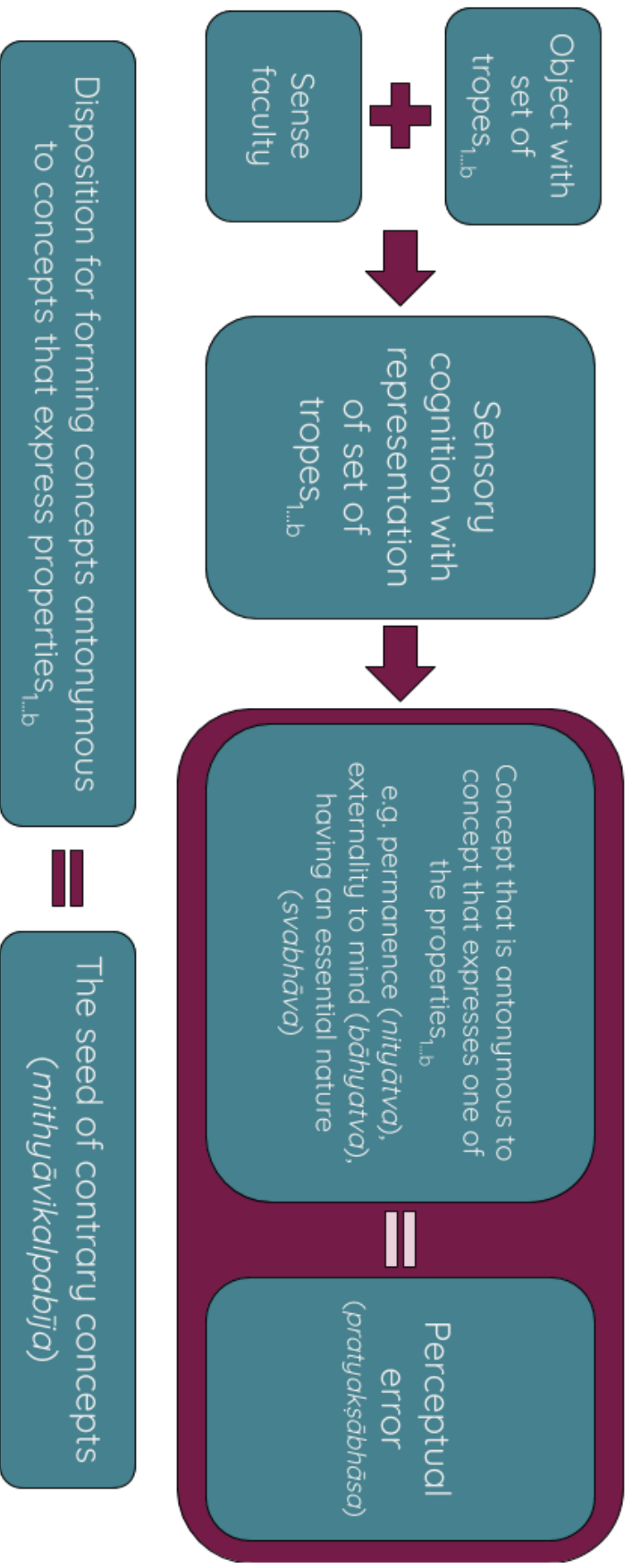
mind, and bringing this theory of *vipaśyanā* into conversation with analytic philosophy of mind.

Perception and Perceptual Error



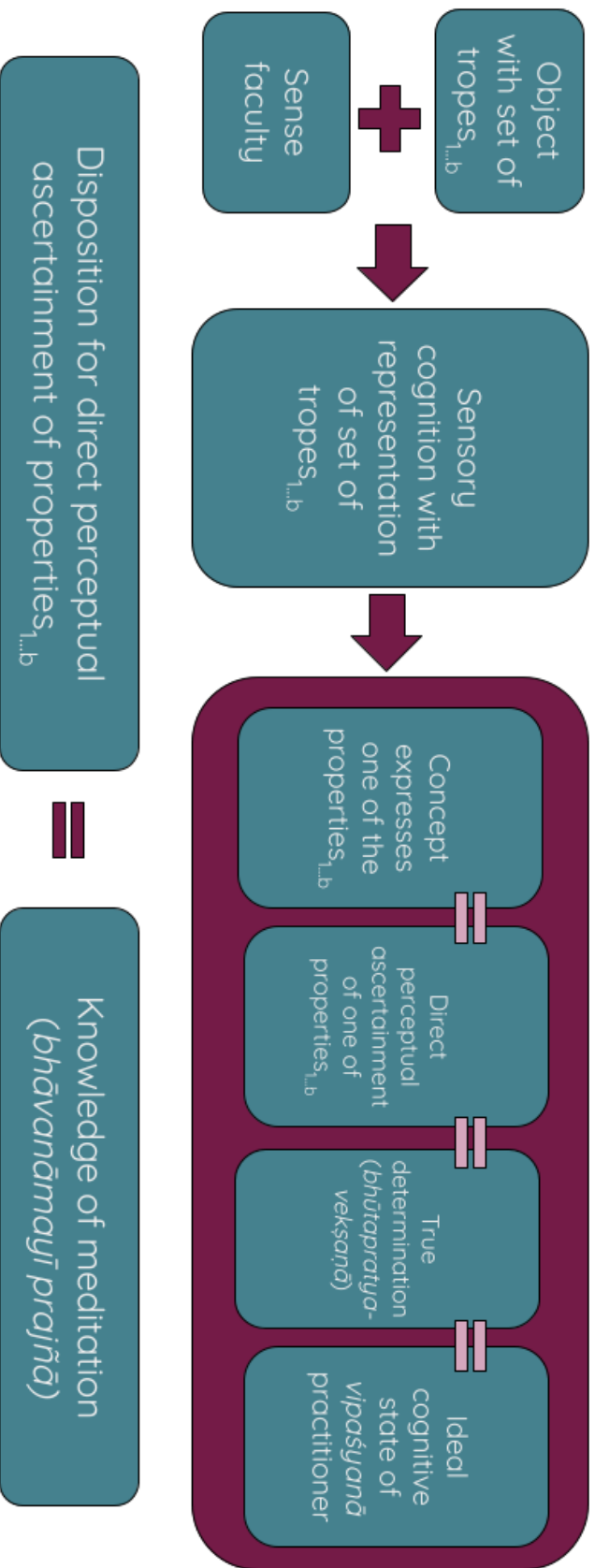
Before Training in *Vipaśyanā*

1...b = the subset of tropes_{1...n} or properties_{1...n} that are attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets,
e.g. impermanence (*anityātva*), mind-only (*cittamātra*), emptiness (*śūnyatā*)



After Training in *Vipaśyanā*

1...b = the subset of tropes_{1...n} or properties_{1...n} that are attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets, e.g. impermanence (*anityātvā*), mind-only (*cittamātra*), emptiness (*śūnyatā*)



Chapter 4: A Defense of *Vipaśyanā*

1. Introduction

The second chapter of this dissertation begins with the example of walking in the forest and learning to recognize poison ivy on sight. You and a friend are walking along a hiking trail. Your friend looks down, sees a three-leaved plant, and immediately recognizes it as poison ivy. What this entails is that when your friend looked at the plant, they identified that plant as having the property “being poison ivy.” I claimed that this is a perceptual judgment, and that it differs in kind from making the same judgment through inference. But is “being poison ivy” the kind of property that can be perceived? Many philosophers claim that properties like “being poison ivy” cannot be conveyed through perception, and can only be identified through other cognitive acts, such as inference. Almost all philosophers, however, agree that *some* kinds of properties can be conveyed through perception. The controversy lies in what kinds.

This controversy has arisen in two separate but related debates in analytic philosophy. In both cases, it has been almost universally agreed that we can perceive simple sensory properties, such as color, space, pitch, and spatial location. However, philosophers differ in opinion when it comes to other properties. In my second chapter, I argued that *vipaśyanā* teaches the practitioner to perceive the properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets, such as impermanence, mind-only, and emptiness. If one denies that these properties are perceivable, then this theory of *vipaśyanā* is untenable. I see this as one of the biggest challenges to

the theory of *vipaśyanā* I have presented thus far. In this chapter, I defend the theory of *vipaśyanā* from this challenge.

The first debate in analytic philosophy over what kinds of properties can be perceived took place in the mid-20th century. The logical empiricists of this period made a distinction between those entities that were observational, and those that were theoretical. On the one hand, an object or property was observational if it could be perceived and expressed in an observational report. Theoretical objects and properties, on the other hand, were held to be unobservable, and only knowable through inference.

Wilfrid Sellars responded to this debate, rejecting the idea that this distinction should be a distinction in kinds of entities. He felt that the distinction made by the logical positivists privileged observational entities in a manner that fell prey to the myth of the given. In response, Sellars presented his alternative theory of observation where the distinction between the observational and theoretical is not between kinds of entities, but between methods of epistemic access to those entities. This distinction in methods of epistemic access was malleable, and an individual could learn to perceive those objects or properties that previously they could only know through inference.

The controversy over what properties can be perceived has arisen again recently. This time, the debate is couched in terms of what kinds of properties can be conveyed in the contents of perceptual experience. While it is mostly agreed upon that sensory properties are conveyed in perception, there is controversy over whether properties such as natural-kind properties, causal properties, or the

property of subject-independence can be conveyed in the contents of perceptual experience. Contemporary philosophers refer to these controversial properties as “high-level properties.”

This contemporary debate has been heavily influenced by the work of Susanna Siegel and her method of phenomenal contrast (2010). In the second section, I explain Siegel’s method of phenomenal contrast, and use it to argue that the property of mind-only is conveyed in the contents of perceptual experience. Although the argument in these sections focuses on only one of the properties that are supposedly perceived through the practice of *vipaśyanā*, the advantage of this argument is that it is applicable across a wide range of different philosophical positions on perception. Siegel argues that her method of phenomenal contrast is compatible with both representationalist accounts of perception, as well as most naïve realist accounts of perception. Additionally, this method does not depend on any particular view of what the underlying structure of the contents of perception consist in. I defend the claim that the property of mind-only can be perceived in this second section, but I do not provide a theory for how *vipaśyanā* could bring about this kind of perception.

Such a theory is provided in the third section. Here I return to the earlier mid-century debate on observational and theoretical entities. I present the logical empiricist position, and the reasons that Sellars rejects it. I then give Sellars’ alternative account of observation, and use this account to develop a potential explanation for how *vipaśyanā* could train a practitioner to perceive properties such as emptiness. On Sellars’ account of observation, one can learn to directly observe

any property by developing the disposition to deploy the corresponding concept directly in response to the appropriate stimuli. I argue that a *vipaśyanā* practitioner could develop a similar kind of disposition, which would result in the perception of properties such as emptiness. Sellars gives an illustration of this process that is analogous to the training of a *vipaśyanā* practitioner, when he describes a scientist examining a cloud chamber (1965: 153). This section draws on Sellars to provide an explanation for how *vipaśyanā* could train a practitioner to perceive properties such as emptiness, but it does so only on the condition that the reader also accepts Sellars' theory of observation.

In my last chapter, I gave a different theory for how *vipaśyanā* could train the practitioner to perceive properties such as emptiness. This theory was a reconstruction based on the philosophy of mind of Kamalaśīla and the Pramāṇavāda tradition that influenced him. The Buddhist tradition has no qualms with the idea that an instance of any kind of property can be conveyed through perception.¹²⁴ As discussed in that chapter, according to Kamalaśīla, our sensory cognitions naturally represent instances of all the properties of a phenomenon.¹²⁵ This includes the high-level properties of impermanence, emptiness, and so on. Any of these properties can

¹²⁴ According to the Pramāṇavāda tradition, perception represents instances of properties, i.e. tropes, rather than properties themselves.

¹²⁵ As quoted in the third chapter, Kamalaśīla states that:

“Therefore, it is established that it is the innate nature [of the mind] to grasp a veridical representation of its object. And it has been established that the real nature of an object consists in it having the characteristics of being momentary, selfless, and so on. Therefore, it is mind's nature to grasp selflessness.”

tasmād bhūtaviṣayākāragrāhitāsya svabhāvo nija iti sthitam. bhūtaś ca svabhāvo viṣayasya kṣaṇikānātmādirūpa iti pratipāditam etat. tena nairātmyagrahaṇasvabhāvam eva cittam [...] TSP ad TS 3337

then be recognized through an ascertaining cognition and identified in a perceptual judgment.

However, in this chapter, I leave aside the explanation based on Kamalaśīla's philosophy of mind. I do so in order to give the claim that a *vipaśyanā* practitioner could perceive properties such as emptiness broader appeal. According to the Pramāṇavāda tradition's definition of a property, any real instance of a property must have a causal effect on the mind of a cognizer. This causal effect takes the form of producing a representation of that instance in the cognizer's perception. Because of these two conditions, it is definitional that every real instance of a property is capable of being conveyed through perception. As Dharmakīrti states, "To exist is to be perceived."¹²⁶ However, if one does not accept this definition of properties, then the question remains if properties such as impermanence and emptiness can be perceived.

Many contemporary philosophers would not accept this definition. Rather than defend this particular definition of properties, in this chapter, I take a different tact. Here my goal is to show that there is good reason to accept that it is possible to perceive the properties one is supposed to perceive through *vipaśyanā*, regardless of whether or not one accepts the principles of Kamalaśīla's philosophy of mind. Together, my use of Siegel and Sellars presents two different approaches to defending this claim. By drawing on Siegel, I defend the claim that it is possible to perceive one of these properties, namely, the property of mind-only. This defense is

¹²⁶ *sattvam upalabdhir eva*. PVSV 1.3

This definition of a real instance of a property, i.e. a real trope, shows the influence of the Yogācāra tradition of Buddhism on the Pramāṇavāda philosophers. As discussed in Chapter 1 Section 3, Yogācāra arguably promotes a form of idealism.

applicable to most theories of perception in philosophy of mind. By drawing on Sellars, I make the stronger claim that one can perceive all the properties supposedly perceived in *vipaśyanā*. I then use Sellars' theory to provide an explanation of how *vipaśyanā* could train the practitioner to do so. However, this explanation comes at the cost of committing to one particular theory of perception, namely, the theory given by Sellars. In addition, by using these two different approaches, I show that there is support for my claim in both of the two most relevant debates in analytic philosophy—the mid-century debate on the observational-theoretical distinction, and the contemporary debate over high-level properties.

2. The Perceptual Experience of Mind-Only

2.1 The Rich Content View

Though the contemporary debate over high-level properties is preceded by the debate on observational and theoretical properties, I start with the contemporary debate. I do so because the arguments made for the perception of high-level properties are compatible with a wide range of views on perception that are found in philosophy of mind. I start this section by explaining how Siegel's argument for the perception of these properties does not commit to any particular theory of perception, or any particular theory on how the contents of perceptual experience are structured. I then describe the method she uses to make these arguments, and illustrate this method by using the example of natural-kind

properties. Finally, I use this same method to argue that the property of mind-only is conveyed in the content of our perceptual experience.

Siegel defends the claim that the content of perceptual experience includes a number of properties that many philosophers do not consider perceivable, i.e. high-level properties. She calls this claim “the Rich Content View” (2010: 4). The Rich Content View, however, is framed by the logically prior claim that perceptual experience has content. She calls this framing principle “the Content View” (2010: 4). Once the Content View is accepted, one can then evaluate the Rich Content View. In other words, one can only assess what properties are conveyed in the content of perceptual experience, if one first accepts that perceptual experience has content. Siegel argues for the Content View, but also explains that this view is already accepted by a wide range of different philosophical positions on perception, including some accounts of perception that do not usually describe perception in terms of its content.¹²⁷ The reason Siegel believes that these accounts are compatible with the Content View is that she uses a very broad definition of content.

Content, on Siegel’s understanding of the term, can be thought of in two different ways. On the one hand, it can be akin to the content of a newspaper (Siegel 2010: 28). The newspaper analogy refers to the way that representational views of perceptual experience understand perceptual content. On these views, the content of a perceptual experience is what comprises the representations in perception. On the other hand, the content of perceptual experience can be thought of as the

¹²⁷ Some philosophers who potentially disagree with the Content View include Brewer (2006), and Travis (2004) (Siegel 2010: 5). For an argument for the Content View, and an argument against the views of Brewer (2006) and Travis (2004), see Siegel (2010: 44-70).

content of a bucket (Siegel 2016). On this view, the content is what the perception is in contact with. For this reason, this alternative understanding of content is compatible with most types of naïve realism.¹²⁸ On Siegel's view of content, if a naïve realist accepts that our perception is in contact with properties, then those properties would be considered the content of our perceptual experience.¹²⁹ Whether one considers content to be like the contents of a newspaper on a representational view of perception, or one considers content to be like the contents of a bucket on a naïve realist view of perception, either way perceptual experience can be thought of as having content. Once this Content View is accepted, we can question which properties that content either represents or consists in.

The advantage of the Content View is that it is compatible with a wide variety of accounts of perception, and this allows one to evaluate the Rich Content View regardless of which of those accounts one accepts. As explained, we can coherently evaluate the Rich Content View on either a representationalist or a naïve realist account of perception. Furthermore, Siegel (2010) explains that her arguments for the Rich Content View do not depend on how one characterizes the structure of

¹²⁸ To be more precise, Siegel argues that her understanding of the Content View can be divorced from a view of perceptual content where content is understood in terms of a phenomenologically identical mental state that is shared by both veridical perceptions and hallucinations or illusions (2010: 5-6). Naïve realists deny that there is any such mental state, but this is not the only possible construal of perceptual content on Siegel's definition.

¹²⁹ Though most naïve realists believe that perception is in contact with properties, there are some that do not accept this, such as Brewer (2006).

perceptual content. The minimal claim one needs to accept to get these arguments off the ground is that perceptual experience conveys properties.¹³⁰ Siegel states:

No matter what kind of abstract object turns out to be best for characterizing experiences, properties will figure in these contents one way or another: as properties had by things in the possible (centered) worlds that constitute an unstructured proposition, as constituents of a structured Russelian proposition itself, or as referents of modes of presentation that constitute a Fregean proposition. (2010: 77-78)

The Content View is compatible with most accounts of perception and most accounts of how the content of perceptual experience is structured. For this reason, Siegel's arguments for the Rich Content View—the claim that perceptual experience conveys high-level properties—are applicable to a wide range of positions within philosophy of mind. This is the reason I first use her arguments to argue that the property of mind-only can be conveyed in perceptual experience. These arguments, if accepted, provide support for my claim across a number of different perspectives on perceptual experience and its contents.

Siegel uses a method she calls “phenomenal contrast” to argue for the Rich Content View. This method is used to determine whether a target property is conveyed in perceptual experience. Given that the Content view applies to both representationalist and naïve realist accounts of perception, the phrase “conveyed

¹³⁰ In addition, one can still evaluate the Rich Content View if one takes perception to convey tropes instead of properties, simply by substituting the notion of a trope for property (Siegel 2010: 58).

in the content of perceptual experience” can refer to either a property being represented in perceptual experience, or perception being in contact with that property. Content is conveyed to a subject in a number of different ways. For instance, it can become part of the subject’s explicit beliefs, it can guide action, or it can be identified through introspection (Siegel 2010: 51). However resultant beliefs, resultant actions, nor introspection can by themselves help us distinguish which properties are conveyed in the content of our perceptual experience.

Granted, a resultant belief or action can provide evidence that a particular property was conveyed to the subject. But it cannot tell us whether that property was conveyed in perceptual experience or through some other cognitive act. For instance, in the example of identifying poison ivy while hiking, if someone avoided touching the poison ivy, or made the explicit judgment, “That is poison ivy,” this provides evidence that the property “being poison ivy” was conveyed to that individual. However, this does not answer the question of whether this property was conveyed through perception or some other cognitive act, such as inference. Our resultant beliefs and actions alone cannot determine this.

Introspection, by itself, also cannot determine all the particular properties conveyed by perceptual experience. It can arguably determine what simple sensory properties are conveyed in perceptual experience. For instance, one can use introspection to determine that one perceived the property “red” when looking at a stop sign, rather than the property “blue.” However, introspection is not reliable when it comes to determining whether high-level properties are conveyed through perceptual experience or some other cognitive act. For instance, when one identifies

a plant as poison ivy, introspection cannot tell you whether you recognized the property “being poison ivy” through perception, or you recognized the simple properties of the color and shape of the plant through perception, and then quickly and implicitly inferred that the plant was poison ivy.¹³¹ If introspection could identify the source of the content that conveys these kinds of property, there would be an intuitive answer as to whether one recognized the poison ivy through perceptual or inferential means. However, no such intuitive answer is forthcoming.

Nevertheless, introspection does play a minimal but important role in Siegel’s method of phenomenal contrast. In this method of argumentation, introspection is used to determine merely that there is *some* phenomenal difference between two contrasting experiences. It does not need to identify either what content differs between the experiences, what the source of that difference is, or the underlying structure of the phenomenal states that make up that difference (Siegel 2007: 139-140). In this way, introspection is only asked to what it is arguably capable of.

The method of phenomenal contrast is a form of inference to best explanation, used to evaluate a hypothesis that a specific target property is conveyed in the contents of perceptual experience (Siegel 2010: 87-88). First, one chooses a target property. One then considers two different experiences, which Siegel calls the “target experience” and the “contrasting experience” (2010: 90). The target experience is an experience where the target property is arguably conveyed

¹³¹ Siegel uses a similar example of looking at a bowl full of wax cherries (2010: 80). She argues that the question of whether the property “being a cherry” is represented in the content of that visual experience cannot be answered through introspection alone.

in the content of the subject's perceptual experience. The contrasting experience is a similar experience, but one where the target property is not conveyed to the subject. The two experiences are chosen such that there is an intuitive phenomenal difference between them. This intuition serves as the initial premise in the argument. Presumably, this intuition is provided by introspection, though conceivably another method could provide this judgment as well. Naturally, the strength of this intuition depends on the particular experiences one chooses (Siegel 2010: 91).

If one chooses two experiences that evoke a strong intuition that there is a phenomenal difference between them, then that intuition should be explained. Siegel points out that the phenomenal character of an experience is non-arbitrarily related to the contents of that experience (2010: 88). Because of this, the phenomenal difference between the target experience and the contrasting experiences can be plausibly explained by a difference in the content of these two experiences. Furthermore, the target and contrasting experiences are chosen such that the most straightforward explanation of their phenomenal difference is that, for the target experience, the target property is conveyed in the content of one's perceptual experience, while, in the contrasting experience, that target property is not conveyed in the content of one's perceptual experience. If this explanation is accepted, then it follows that the target property is a property that can be conveyed in perceptual experience, as exemplified by the target experience.

However, because phenomenal contrast is an inference to best explanation, one needs to evaluate all the possible explanations of the phenomenal difference

between the target and contrasting experience. Siegel uses the phenomenal contrast method to argue that a number of different kinds of high-level properties are all conveyed in perceptual experience (2010: 99-205). For each of these arguments, she considers three difference alternative explanations for the phenomenal difference.¹³² Among these three, the alternative explanation that comes from cognitive phenomenology is the most relevant to our question regarding the properties perceived in *vipaśyanā*. This alternative explanation claims that the phenomenal difference is not due to a difference in the content of perceptual experience, but is due to the presence of some additional cognition, such as an inferential judgment.

2.2 An Example of Phenomenal Contrast

It will be helpful to go through an illustration of how this method of phenomenal contrast works before using this method to argue that the property of mind-only can be conveyed in the content of perceptual experience. For the purposes of illustrating this method, let's choose the high-level property of "being poison ivy" as the target property, and evaluate the hypothesis that "being poison

¹³² The first alternative explanation is the possibility that the phenomenal difference is due some cognition other than perception. This is the alternative explanation we will be considering. In addition, Siegel considers the possibility that the phenomenal difference is due to a difference in perceptual experience that is not a difference in the contents of that perceptual experience. The most likely candidate for this alternative explanation is a difference in "raw feels," that is, nonrepresentational qualia. Next, she considers the possibility that the difference is due to a difference in the content of the perceptual experience, but a difference in some properties that are not the target property. The most likely candidate for the second alternative explanation is recognition through gestalt. For Siegel's argument against these two alternatives with regard to natural-kind and semantic properties see (2010: 109-113).

ivy” is a property that is conveyed in the content of perceptual experience. In the target experience, “being poison ivy” is arguably conveyed in the content of perceptual experience. This could be, for instance, the experience of looking at some foliage with poison ivy in it, after you have had a good deal of experience identifying poison ivy, and have learned to recognize it on sight. The contrasting experience is where the property “being poison ivy” is not conveyed. This is the experience of looking at that foliage before you have any idea what poison ivy looks like. The intended intuition is that there is some phenomenal difference between these two experiences. The foliage appears differently once you learn to recognize poison ivy.

If this intuition is not convincing, there are many other similar examples of recognition. For instance, there is a phenomenal difference between an amateur viewing an image from an ultrasound, and an experienced sonographer viewing that same image. It intuitively seems as though the image from the ultrasound would look different in these two cases. Whereas for the amateur, the image is a landscape of gray shapes, the experienced sonographer recognizes tumors, lesions, fetuses, and so on. Intuitively, these two experiences are phenomenally different.

In the example of recognizing poison ivy, there is a straightforward explanation for the phenomenal difference between the two experiences. This explanation is that, in the contrasting experience, “being poison ivy” was not conveyed in the content of your perceptual experience, while in the target experience, that property was conveyed in the content of your perceptual experience. If this explanation holds, then the property “being poison ivy” is a property that can be conveyed in the content of perceptual experience. However, as

the phenomenal contrast method is an inference to best explanation, alternative explanations for this phenomenal difference should be explored. The most pertinent alternative explanation comes from cognitive phenomenology.¹³³

According to cognitive phenomenology, cognitive acts subsequent to perception can have their own associated phenomenological character. This phenomenal character could be used to explain the phenomenal difference between the target and contrasting experience. For instance, one might claim that the process of recognizing poison ivy is an implicit inferential process. On this alternative explanation, in the target experience, one perceives the simple properties of the color, shape, and location of the leaves of the plant, and then quickly and implicitly infers that the plant is poison ivy. The concluding judgment of that inference, “That is poison ivy,” has its own phenomenological character. The phenomenal character of this judgment is what is missing in the contrasting experience. The phenomenal character of this inferential judgment thus explains the phenomenal difference between the two experiences. If this were the case, it is not necessarily true that “being poison ivy” is conveyed in the content of perceptual experience.

However, there are problems with this explanation. These problems arise out of the difference between the amount of time that it takes to alter one’s perceptual experience, and the amount of time it takes to alter an inference. This difference

¹³³ With regard to natural-kind properties, Siegel also argues against alternative explanations based on raw feels and recognition through gestalt (2010: 109-113). She argues that raw feels are considered to be nonrepresentational, and it is incoherent to have a feeling of recognition or familiarity without an associated intentional object (2010: 109-110). She then argues that recognition through gestalt is unlikely, by showing how a similar case where one recognizes the semantic properties of a text is not viable on a theory of recognition through gestalt (2010: 113).

could also be characterized as a difference in resistance to change. Inferential processes are less resistant to immediate change, while perceptual recognition is more resistant. If one learns some new information, this information can act as new premises that quickly alter an inference. However, perceptual recognition is not as quickly altered. In what follows, I present an example where a change in inferential judgments is enacted quickly. I then judge whether there is a corresponding change in the overall experience. Intuitively, there is not a change in the experience. This provides evidence that that inferential judgment is not making a significant change to the phenomenal character of the overall experience. Because this inferential judgment makes no significant phenomenal impact, it cannot be used to explain the phenomenal difference in the original example, between the target and contrasting experiences.

Consider an extension to the example of recognizing poison ivy. You are an experienced hiker, looking at the trail, and immediately recognize certain vines and shrubs in the foliage as poison ivy. But as you do, your friend, who is an expert botanist, tells you that those plants are not poison ivy, but a new invasive species that looks identical to poison ivy. This new information would alter your inferences regarding the plants, and you would no longer form the inferential judgment, "That is poison ivy." Intuitively, it seems that, even after you no longer formed this inferential judgment, your experience of the foliage would remain exactly the same. The plants would still look as they did before your botanist friend informed you that they are not poison ivy. The lack of any phenomenal difference between these two experiences shows that the inferential judgment, "That is poison ivy," did not make

an impact in the phenomenological character of the overall experience. For this reason, it cannot be used to explain the phenomenal difference in the original example. If it could, then there would have to be some corresponding phenomenal difference in the example of the identical invasive species.¹³⁴

The example can be extended further in order to strengthen the intuition that there is no significant phenomenal change as a result of your inferential judgments. As before, you recognize the plant as poison ivy, but your botanist friend tells you that it is instead a new identical invasive species. You no longer make the inferential judgment, "That is poison ivy." But then your botanist friend reflects, and informs you, "Actually it must be poison ivy, because that identical invasive species has not reached this part of Appalachia." You now again judge those plants to be poison ivy.

¹³⁴ Siegel (2010) presents a similar argument against the explanation from cognitive phenomenology (102-108). Though Siegel and I end up with the same conclusion, Siegel does not identify "resistance to change" as the decisive factor in her objection to the explanation from cognitive phenomenology. I think this factor is important to point out, because, in my example, the experience of seeing the identical invasive species *could* make a phenomenal difference, only this would take more time than is described in the example above. Just as the perceptual recognition of "being poison ivy" makes a phenomenal difference, the perceptual recognition of a different natural-kind property, namely, "being invasive poison ivy doppelgänger," would also make a phenomenal difference in the experience. However, the reason that, intuitively, there is no phenomenal difference in the example with the botanist is that this example relies on there being only a short amount of time between the experiences. The inferential judgment changes before a perceptual recognition of "being invasive poison ivy doppelgänger" can be developed. For this reason, there is no phenomenal difference between these two experiences. Granted, Siegel's argument uses the example of a perfect hologram rather than an identical invasive species; however, it is questionable whether the concept of "a perfect hologram" begs the question as to whether there is any phenomenal difference (2010: 105). Using a concept that does similar work, such as an identical species of plant, makes it clear that the perceptual recognition of this natural kind would also have its own distinct phenomenal character. For this reason, the lack of a phenomenal difference in the case with the botanist must instead be due to the lack of time described in the example. There is a lack of difference because it takes more time to develop that perceptual recognition than it does to change one's inferential judgment.

However, your friend then reaches for their phone, checks the updated range of the invasive species, and says, “Wait, no, actually it *has* reached this far north in Appalachia. Those plants *are* the invasive species.” You now go back to judging that the plant is not poison ivy. Does the experience of the foliage change at each of these steps? Intuitively, it seems absurd to say that the experience switches back and forth this quickly, each time your friend gives you new information. Yet your inferential judgments do change this quickly. For this reason, the inferential judgment that the plant is poison ivy must not make a noticeable difference in the phenomenal character of the overall experience, and, therefore, the phenomenal character of this inferential judgment cannot be used to explain the phenomenal difference in the original example. A difference in the content of one’s perceptual experience remains the best explanation for the phenomenal difference between the target and contrasting experiences in the original example. The upshot of this explanation is that “being poison ivy” is a property that can be conveyed in the content of perceptual experience.

2.3 Mind-Only in Perceptual Experience

My reason for reviewing how the phenomenal contrast method works is that, I use this method to argue that the property of mind-only can be conveyed in the content of perceptual experience.¹³⁵ *Prima facie*, there is one immediate difficulty in

¹³⁵ I will not weigh in on whether the perceptions that convey mind-only are veridical or not. Nor will I weigh in on the truth of the Buddhist claim that all entities are mind-only. For a brief overview of these arguments, see Chapter 1 Section 3. The following argument remains uncommitted on the question of whether that property is actually possessed by the entities in question. That said, I will be

employing the phenomenal contrast method to show that the properties attributed to phenomena in Buddhist tenets can be conveyed in the content of perceptual experience. The phenomenal contrast method involves conceiving both a target experience and contrasting experience, and then comparing their phenomenal character. In the target experience, the target property should arguably be conveyed in the content of perceptual experience. The difficulty is that it seems as though the properties that are supposedly perceived in *vipāśyanā* can only be perceived by expert practitioners. It seems as though ordinary people, such as ourselves, have never experienced properties such as impermanence, mind-only, or emptiness. If this were the case, we would not be able to conceive of the target experience, and, for this reason, we would be unable to form an intuition about the difference in phenomenal character between it and the contrasting experience.

This difficulty can be overcome with regard to the property of mind-only. As a working definition, “mind-only” means that the entity or the entity’s properties are dependent on a subject’s cognition. There are some phenomena, such as photopsias and afterimages, in which we arguably perceive this property, without needing to have mastered the meditation of *vipāśyanā* beforehand. For this reason, I will use the experience of an afterimage as the target experience in our argument from phenomenal contrast. Since almost all individuals have experienced seeing an afterimage, it is possible to evoke an intuition about the difference between that experience and the contrasting experience.

describing one entity that *arguably* possesses mind-only, in order to evoke an intuition about whether this property can be conveyed in perceptual experience.

An afterimage is a visual phenomenon that appears in one's visual field after staring directly at a light or brightly colored source. The most common afterimages are negative afterimages, where the afterimage takes the shape of the original source, but its colors are inverted. For instance, if one looks directly at the sun, afterwards there will appear a bluish circle in the middle of one's visual field. Afterimages are a good example of an entity that is perceived but is not external to the mind. They arguably exist only in the experience of the subject who sees them. For this reason, afterimages arguably possess the property of mind-only.

The way an afterimage appears to us can be contrasted to the way that an ordinary object appears.¹³⁶ For one, afterimages seem to change their location according to our line of sight. When you are seeing an afterimage, and you turn your head, the afterimage seems to follow with the turn, changing its location relative to nearby external objects. Second, afterimages have no profile. You cannot get a different angle on an afterimage, or look at a different side of it. Third, we cannot occlude an afterimage. Nothing can be placed in-between the afterimage and us. Even if we close our eyes, the afterimage still appears before us. This differs from what we find when we examine ordinary external objects. When examining a chair, if you move your head, the chair does not change its location relative to other objects. A chair also has many profiles. The profile that you see changes if you move beside the chair, behind it, below it, and so on. Lastly, we can block our vision of the

¹³⁶ These characteristics of how an afterimage appears are similar to a negation of the descriptions that Siegel gives for entities that possess the property of subject-independence (2010: 177-180).

chair by placing something in-between the chair and ourselves, or by closing our eyes.

If an entity possesses the unique characteristics of an afterimage, this does not necessarily entail that the entity possesses the property of mind-only. However, identifying these characteristics does usually convey to a subject that the entity possesses the property of mind-only. If an individual takes an entity to have these characteristics, they will likely form the belief that the entity is mind-only, and they will act as though the entity is mind-only. In the example of an afterimage, these characteristics immediately stand out to the subject. For this reason, most subjects will immediately judge that the afterimage is a visual phenomenon that is dependent on their cognition. At this point, most people ignore the phenomenon, and return to whatever it was that they had been up to before seeing the afterimage.

However, even though this property is conveyed to the subject, this does not necessarily mean that the property of mind-only is conveyed in the content of their perceptual experience. For instance, one could first perceive these characteristics, and then infer that the entity is mind-only. The question remains whether the property of mind-only is conveyed in perceptual experience, or through another cognitive act such as inference.

This question can be answered by applying the phenomenal contrast method.¹³⁷ In this case, the target property will be the property of mind-only. The

¹³⁷ My upcoming use of phenomenal contrast, where I argue that the property of “mind-only” is conveyed in the content of perceptual experience, is structured similarly to Siegel’s use of phenomenal contrast when she argues that subject-independence is conveyed in the content of visual experience (2010: 183-194). However, Siegel and I focus on different entities, and the experiences Siegel and I

target experience is the experience of seeing an afterimage. The contrasting experience is the experience of seeing something similar to an afterimage, but this entity lacks the characteristics of an afterimage that were described above. In the contrasting experience, the property of mind-only is not conveyed to the subject. The intended intuition is that there is a phenomenal difference in these two experiences. The straightforward explanation is that the property of mind-only is conveyed in the content of perceptual experience during the target experience, but not during the contrasting experience.

This explanation will be challenged by an alternative explanation from cognitive phenomenology. Finally, I will show that this alternative explanation has the same problems as the alternative explanation from cognitive phenomenology that was given in the example of recognizing poison ivy. These problems rule out the possibility that the phenomenal difference is due to an inferential judgment. The best explanation remains that the phenomenal difference is due to the property of mind-only being conveyed in the content of perceptual experience in the target experience, while not being conveyed in the contrasting experience. From this, it follows that the property of mind-only can be conveyed in the content of perceptual experience.

use for our target experience and contrasting experience are flipped, so to speak. Siegel focuses on an object that we assume has subject-independence, namely, a doll. Her target experience is an experience where subject-independence is arguably conveyed, while her contrasting experience is an experience where it is oddly lacking. My argument focuses on a phenomenon that lacks subject-independence, namely, an afterimage. My target experience is an experience where subject-independence is lacking, and mind-only is arguably conveyed, while my contrasting experience is an experience where subject-independence is conveyed, while mind-only is lacking.

The target experience is as follows. If you are in your yard, you might look at the sun for a little too long. Afterwards, if you walk inside, there will appear in your visual field a small circle with a bluish hue. If you move your head, this afterimage moves as well. Moreover, the afterimage does not change according to your perspective on it. You can try to peer your head around from the side or beneath it, but you always only see the face of it. Lastly, nothing can occlude your vision of this afterimage, not even closing your eyes. You sit down on the couch, and look at the afterimage as it appears in front of you on wall.

The contrasting experience is a little stranger. You look at the sun, go inside, and then see a bluish circle in front of you. However, in this case, the entity's location is independent from how you move your head. If you move your head, it stays in the same place relative to the other external objects in your house. You can also move around it and see different angles. As you move to other sides, the entity appears to be more like a sphere. If you put something in-between you and the bluish sphere, it obstructs your vision of the sphere. You sit down on the couch, and look at this bluish sphere that floats between you and the wall.

First of all, it is important to isolate the final moment in each of those descriptions. The target experience is after you sit down and face the afterimage. The contrasting experience is after you sit down and face the bluish sphere. This is important because, in these two moments, there is no phenomenal difference between the entities in terms of their location properties, shape, or profile. In both these two experiences, there is a bluish circle in the middle of your field of vision. However, the intended intuition is that there remains some phenomenal difference

between the experience of sitting on the couch and looking at the afterimage, and the experience of sitting on the couch and looking at the bluish sphere. The straightforward explanation for this difference is that the property of mind-only is conveyed in the content of your perceptual experience during the target experience, but not during the contrasting experience. The afterimage appears to you as a visual phenomenon dependent on your experience, while the bluish sphere appears as an external object.

Edmund Husserl similarly argued that there is a phenomenal difference between perceiving an ordinary object and perceiving an entity like an afterimage. Husserl claimed that we anticipate that an ordinary object will have many profiles (*Abschattungen*), and that this anticipation (*Antizipation*) is part of our perceptual experience of the object (1960). He states,

For example, there belongs to every external perception its reference from the “genuinely perceived” sides of the object of perception to the sides “also meant”—not yet perceived, but only anticipated...” (1960: 44)

According to Husserl, this anticipation of these other profiles of the object is part of the phenomenal character of our perceptual experience of the object, even though we can only ever directly perceive a single profile of an object. This added component of anticipation would result in a phenomenal difference between

perceiving an ordinary object and an entity that lacks these other profiles, such as an afterimage.¹³⁸

The straightforward explanation of the phenomenal difference between perceiving the afterimage and the bluish sphere is that the property of mind-only is conveyed in the content of perceptual experience during the former experience, but not the latter. However, another plausible explanation is that the property of mind-only is not conveyed in the content of your perceptual experience, but through a subsequent inferential judgment. On this alternative explanation, in the target experience, you see that the entity tracks when you move your head, has a fixed perspective, and cannot be occluded. Based on that information, you sit on the couch, and then infer that, "This is mind-only." In the contrasting experience, you see that the entity lacks these characteristics. You sit on the couch and infer that, "This is an external object." A proponent of cognitive phenomenology would hold that each of these judgments has a its own phenomenal character. The difference in the phenomenal character of these two judgments could then explain the difference in the overall experience between the target and contrasting experiences.

However, there are problems with this alternative explanation that are similar to the problems that arose for the alternative explanation given in the example of recognizing poison ivy. These problems can be seen by extending the example in a way that exploits the difference between the amount of time that it

¹³⁸ Similarly Strawson (1958) and Peacocke (1983) argued that, when perception represents an object as three-dimensional, it also represents that object as mind-independent.

takes to change an inferential judgment, and the amount of time it takes to change one's perceptual experience.

In the example of the contrasting experience, you see a bluish sphere, similar to an afterimage, but it stays in one location relative to other external objects, and has different profiles depending on your perspective. You take it to be an external object. But, say, you have an expert psychiatrist with you, who tells you that they do not see this object, and, in fact, your description fits the experience of a rare form of hallucination. You trust them, and you no longer make the judgment, "This is an external object," but instead make the judgment, "This is mind-only." Nevertheless, intuitively, your experience would still not be the same as when you perceive the afterimage. Instead, you would experience the sphere similarly to the way that you did before the psychiatrist told you it was a hallucination. It seems that you would still experience this entity as an external object, despite the fact that you know that it is not.

In this case, your inferential judgment has changed, but the phenomenal character of the experience has not significantly changed. This suggests that the phenomenal difference between the target experience and the original contrasting experience cannot be explained by a phenomenal difference in inferential judgments. The best explanation remains that the property of mind-only is conveyed in the content of your perceptual experience in the target experience, but not in the contrasting experience. From this, it follows that the property of mind-only can be conveyed in the content of perceptual experience.

Granted, this example of the psychiatrist and a rare form of hallucination strains the limits of our imagination. However, there are some more common examples where an entity can appear as an external object, even if one knows it is dependent on their mind. For instance, under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs, individuals report subtle hallucinations, such as trails of light or moving patterns, that appear external to their mind, even if the individual knows that these are the effects of the drug. Similarly, an individual with schizophrenia may experience auditory hallucinations, such as hearing voices. That individual may be aware that this is the effect of their schizophrenia, and be able to make the inferential judgment, "These are mind-only." Nevertheless, intuitively, these auditory hallucinations will still be experienced as external to the mind, despite this inferential judgment. One plausible explanation for these examples is that, in these cases, the property "being an external object" is conveyed in the contents of perceptual experience, despite the individuals making the inferential judgment that the entities have the property of mind-only.

These examples suggest that the inferential judgment, "This is mind-only," does not make a significant phenomenal difference in one's overall experience in these particular instances. This provides support for the claim that this inferential judgment could not explain the phenomenal difference in the example of the afterimage and the bluish sphere. The best explanation for the phenomenal difference in that example remains that the property of mind-only is conveyed in the content of perceptual experience during the target experience of the afterimage, but is not conveyed in the contrasting experience of the bluish sphere. If this

explanation is accepted, then the property of mind-only can be conveyed in the content of perceptual experience. If that is the case, then it is possible for the *vipaśyanā* practitioner to also learn to perceive this property in phenomena, as opposed to merely identifying it through inference.

One real advantage of the argument in this section is that it appeals to a wide range of philosophical views on perception. It is compatible with representationalist views of perception as well as most forms of naïve realism. Moreover, it is compatible with almost all views on how best to characterize the structure of the content of perception. However, the argument in this section only goes so far. It merely claims that it is possible for the property of mind-only to be perceived, and does not make any claims regarding the other properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets. Moreover, the argument here does not explain how *vipaśyanā* could train the practitioner to perceive these properties. In order to provide such an explanation, I will have to focus on one particular theory of perception. In the following sections, I do this by focusing on the theory of perception given by Sellars, and showing how this theory provides an explanation for how *vipaśyanā* could train the practitioner to perceive the properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets.

3. *Vipaśyanā* on a Sellarsian Theory of Perception

3.1 The Observable and the Theoretical

The debate over high-level properties is currently popular in philosophy of mind. However, this debate is preceded by a closely related philosophical debate

from the mid-20th century over observational and theoretical entities. This mid-century debate began with a distinction between observational and theoretical entities promoted by the philosophical movement known as logical empiricism. For this reason, it will be worthwhile to begin this section with a brief review of the relevant features of that position. This review will lead into Sellars' critique of this position, as well as Sellars' alternative account of what is observational and what is theoretical. My claim that *vipaśyanā* trains the practitioner to perceive properties such as emptiness is untenable on the logical empiricist account of observation. However, it is defensible if one accepts Sellars' account. Moreover, Sellars' account provides an explanation for how the practice of *vipaśyanā* could accomplish this.

Logical empiricism was a highly influential philosophical movement in both the United States and Europe from the early to mid-20th century. One of fundamental principles of this movement is the claim that only verifiable statements are meaningful. There were many debates over what made a statement verifiable, but these debates generally focused on two features: a statement's accessibility and its objectivity (Bogen 2017). In brief, a statement is considered to have accessibility if the public at large is able to confirm or deny the statement, and a statement is considered to be objective if one's evaluation of the statement is not as heavily influenced by the perspective, interests, or values of the individual, their community, or their culture.

Logical empiricists believe that these two features are strongest in reports on our observations. For instance, most of the public can confirm that, in normal daytime lighting conditions, the sky is blue. This claim is unlikely to vary much

across different individuals, communities, or cultures. According to the logical empiricists, these features of accessibility and objectivity are preserved in scientific theory. This is because, on their interpretation, scientific theory is grounded in observational reports. The way science functions is by generalizing observational reports, and then systematizing those empirical generalizations through scientific theory (deVries 2005: 152). However, in order to systematize these generalizations, scientific theory must introduce new terms. These terms are collectively known as the theoretical vocabulary. This vocabulary includes any term that only makes sense after it is introduced by way of a scientific theory, such as “electron,” “wavelength,” etc. Observational reports, as well as empirical generalizations, are comprised of the observational vocabulary. Because observational reports are widely accessible to the public, the observational vocabulary is as well. It is comprised of terms that express what is ordinarily observed in everyday life, such as simple sensory properties like “blue,” “loud,” and spatial locations, as well as ordinary physical objects like “cloud,” “fish,” and “table.”

This distinction between the observational and theoretical vocabularies has important ontological import. The terms in the observational vocabulary correspond to observational entities, while the terms in the theoretical vocabulary correspond to theoretical entities. Observational entities are, as you might expect, those entities that are observable. Theoretical entities are not observable, but scientists can use inference to identify these entities. Thus, on this account, entities are divisible into those objects and properties that are observable, and those that are not.

My interpretation of *vipāśyanā* claims that the *vipāśyanā* practitioner learns to recognize the properties attributed to phenomena in Buddhist tenets, such as impermanence, mind-only, and emptiness. While it is unlikely that any logical empiricist ever took these particular properties into consideration, it is clear that these properties would fall outside the range of what these empiricists would consider observable. Observational reports are supposed to be widely accessible to the public. Properties such as mind-only and emptiness are not observed by members of the public, so they would not be expressed in these reports, and would not be considered observational properties. For this reason, on the logical empiricist view, there would be no way for a *vipāśyanā* practitioner to learn to perceive properties such as impermanence or emptiness, simply because these properties cannot be perceived. However, Sellars rejects the logical empiricists' view of theoretical and observational entities, and provides an alternative account. In this alternative account, we find a theory of observation that can be used to explain how the *vipāśyanā* practitioner learns to perceive the properties attributed to phenomena in Buddhist tenets.

In his work "Scientific Realism or Irenic Instrumentalism," Sellars (1965) takes aim at the logical empiricist Ernest Nagel's position on observational and theoretical entities. According to Nagel's philosophy of science, scientific theory merely systematizes generalized observational reports. For this reason, scientific theory can neither enrich nor revise these reports (Sellars 1965: 184). In this way,

the meaning of scientific theory is grounded upon the meaning of the observational reports.¹³⁹

Sellars questions why the observational reports are thought to have this privileged status. His answer is that this status must derive from a supposed “psychological connection between predicates [of observation reports] and properties *construed as extra-linguistic entities*” (1965: 185, original emphasis). This answer can be explained with reference to the logical empiricists’ claim that observational reports are more objective than theory. As described above, logical empiricists thought that observational reports should ground scientific theory because these reports were more objective than other types of reports. Objectivity is defined in this case as an independence from the particularities of our different individual and cultural perspectives. Because our individual and cultural perspectives heavily influence our conceptual frameworks, if an observational report were more objective than other types of reports, then it must somehow be less affected by the differences in our conceptual frameworks.

But from where do observational reports get this degree of objectivity? On Sellars’ reading of Nagel, Nagel considers observational reports to be more objective because Nagel supposes that the meaning of these reports derives from a connection between the reports and some source that is independent of our

¹³⁹ While Nagel may have denied this characterization of his philosophy of science, Sellars argues that it is nevertheless still the case. Nagel (1961) had attempted to dissolve the tension between scientific realism and the view where scientific theory is merely instrumental. However, Sellars argues that he fails to genuinely do so, resulting in “the ultimate shipwreck of Nagel’s higher synthesis of instrumentalism and realism” (1965: 185). Because of this, Sellars (1965) claims that Nagel’s account is still a form of instrumentalism, as seen in the title of his article, where he refers to Nagel’s view as “irenic instrumentalism.”

conceptual frameworks. Sellars calls this source “properties *construed as extra-linguistic entities*” (1965: 185). In other words, these are properties considered apart from how they are conceptualized by the mind. The problem, according to Sellars, is that it is not possible for there to be some intermediate mental event that could connect these properties to the observational reports, while also preserving the objectivity of these properties.

In order to remain objective, the mental event that supposedly makes this connection must itself be independent of our conceptual frameworks.¹⁴⁰ However, to convey this objectivity to the observational reports, this mental event must also be able to justify the claims made in the observational reports. This commits the logical empiricist to the existence of some kind of mental event that could do both these things. Sellars refers to such a mental event as a “pre-conceptual awareness” (1965: 185). This kind of mental event qualifies as what Sellars calls the given.

The given, according to Sellars, combines two qualities. The given both provides epistemic support for cognitive states, such as observational judgments, while itself remaining epistemically independent from other cognitive states (deVries 2005: 98-99). “Epistemic support” means that other cognitive states can be validly inferred from this state. “Epistemically independent” means that this state’s epistemic status does not depend on its being inferred or inferable from other cognitive states.

Sellars (1997) argues that the given is a myth. This is because, while philosophers have proposed many different things as having both these qualities, all

¹⁴⁰ Sellars states that this mental event “is supposed to be the language independent foundation on which the meaningfulness of language rests” (1965: 152).

these proposals have failed to combine these two qualities successfully. One of Sellars' primary targets in dispelling this myth is the kind of pre-conceptual awareness that logical empiricists like Nagel would need in order for observational reports to be objective. This pre-conceptual awareness, like all other forms of the given, fails to successfully combine the two qualities stated above. Specifically, it lacks the first quality. It is not able to provide epistemic support. In other words, the epistemic status of other cognitions cannot be inferred from this type of awareness.

This is because, as stated above, a pre-conceptual awareness must be independent of our conceptual frameworks. For this reason, it cannot be propositionally structured, as this requires a mental event to be conceptual, and thus dependent on our conceptual frameworks. However, inferential relations only involve propositions. Any mental event that is not propositionally structured would be unable to justify other claims. Since Nagel's supposed pre-conceptual awareness is not propositionally structured, it would not be able to provide epistemic support for observational reports. It would thereby fail to fulfill the role that logical empiricists need it to accomplish.

The logical empiricist distinction between observational and theoretical entities privileges the observable. However, for the observable to be privileged, this would require a commitment to some form of the given. For this reason, Sellars rejects the distinction presented by the logical empiricists. However, Sellars does not throw out this distinction completely. Instead, he presents a theory where the observational-theoretical distinction indicates a difference in epistemic access to entities, rather than a distinction between two different kinds of entities.

Sellars considers an entity to be theoretical in those instances where it can only be identified through inference. However, it is possible that, in other instances, that same entity could be known through observation, in which case Sellars would categorize that entity as observational. Moreover, an individual's epistemic access to a particular entity can change over time, in which case there is a corresponding change in whether that entity is considered theoretical or observational. As we will see, these changes depend upon the individual's dispositions. Given the right change in their dispositions, an individual can come to observe what they had previously only been able to identify through inference. This is crucial to our discussion on *vipaśyanā*, because, on Sellars' account of observation, it is possible for the practice of *vipaśyanā* to change the practitioner's dispositions, so that the practitioner would become able to perceive properties such as emptiness and mind-only.

3.2 Example of the Scientist at the Cloud Chamber¹⁴¹

On Sellars' account of observation, an individual can, over time, acquire a new type of epistemic access to a particular entity. Sellars illustrated this kind of change in his example of a scientist learning to observe electrons in a cloud chamber (e.g. 1965: 188). When this scientist is a novice student, they will merely infer that an electron is present; however, as they become an expert, they learn to directly observe that electron. While, at first, this electron is a theoretical entity for the scientist, over the course of the scientist's training, the electron becomes observable.

¹⁴¹ This section and the next are based on a section found in Schmid (2019).

A cloud chamber is a particle detector where an unknown particle is shot through a vapor that is supersaturated with either water or alcohol. As it travels through the chamber, this particle ionizes the gas, forming condensation attractors. Because of this, a trail of condensation droplets forms following the path of the particle. Since different types of particles move through the chamber in different ways, this trail of droplets will have a distinctive pattern. A scientist can determine which type of particle had been shot through the chamber by way of this distinctive pattern.

A novice scientist observing a cloud chamber will merely observe that a certain pattern of droplets, such as a hooked vapor trail, has formed in the chamber. The novice then uses that observation to infer that it was an electron that passed through the chamber. At this point, the novice only knows of the electron through inference, so the electron is, for them, a theoretical entity. However, if this scientist has enough practice making this inference, they develop the ability to look into the cloud chamber and report on that electron directly, without needing to infer. This report comes in the form of a perceptual judgment. James O'Shea describes this perceptual judgment as follows:

"That is an electron" is how the trained physicist can directly and reliably perceptually respond by pointing to a streak of droplets in a cloud chamber, without having to cautiously *infer from* anything 'more immediately' perceptible such as the shape-and-color characteristics of the streak. (2007: 34, original emphasis)

In this instance, the electron identified by that perceptual judgment would be considered an observable entity.

This would not be possible if theoretical entities, such as electrons, were different in kind from observable entities, as is the case on Nagel's account. Instead, because the distinction between observational and theoretical is malleable, any theoretical entity can come to be observed directly. This is what occurs in Sellars' example of the scientist. The scientist develops a new form of epistemic access to the electrons in the cloud chamber, namely, direct observation.

If we accept Sellars' claim that a scientist can learn to observe an electron, then it is also possible for the *vipaśyanā* practitioner to learn to perceive the properties attributed to phenomena in Buddhist tenets. The example of the scientist is an apt analogy for the progression of the *vipaśyanā* practitioner. Before mediation, one first learns to infer that phenomena have certain properties. This culminates in the knowledge of reflection. Then, through the practice of *vipaśyanā*, one develops the capacity to make direct perceptual judgments regarding those properties, in the development of the knowledge of meditation. The *vipaśyanā* practitioner and the scientist at the cloud chamber may have begun their respective careers able only to infer that a certain entity is present; however, through practice, they each become able to observe the relevant entity directly. In each case, this process begins with perceiving commonly observable entities. In the example of the scientist, these commonly observable entities are the patterns of droplets in the cloud chamber. In the case of *vipaśyanā*, Kamalaśīla prescribes beginning with observing ordinary

material objects, saying: “Initially, the yogi should examine those phenomena that have material form, which are imagined by others to be external objects.”¹⁴²

3.3 Sellars’ Two-Ply Theory of Observation¹⁴³

Robert Brandom, in his explication of Sellars’ theory of observation, explains how it is possible for a scientist to come to perceive an electron (2002). Brandom explains that the scientist is able to observe the electron because that scientist has developed a certain kind of disposition. This disposition is the decisive factor, because observation for Sellars is “two-ply.” According to Sellars, observation has two requirements: that we understand the concepts involved in the observation, and that we reliably deploy those concepts directly in response to a perceptual encounter. Understanding a concept, in this case, means that the observer has:

A) the capacity to use that concept in inferential reasoning.

And the observer can reliably deploy a concept when they have:

B) the disposition to respond consistently to a particular type of stimulus.

With regard to *vipaśyanā*, a practitioner begins meditation already having the knowledge of reflection, which means that they already possess (A) the capacity to use the concepts in inferential reasoning. On this account, *vipaśyanā* would be practiced in order to develop (B) the appropriate disposition.

¹⁴² *prathamam yogī ye rūpiṇo dharmā bāhyārthatayā paraiḥ parikalpitāstās teṣu tāvad vicārayet.* Kamalaśīla (1997: 216).

¹⁴³ This section and the previous one are based on a section found in Schmid (2019).

The first requirement (A) is necessary because observation, according to Sellars, is a conceptual affair. An observer responds to perceptual stimuli by making perceptual judgments, but in order to make perceptual judgments, the observer needs to understand the concepts that constitute these judgments. For instance, Brandom explains that, with regard to the concept “red,” “The genuine observer responds to visible red things by coming to believe, claiming, or reporting *that* there is something red” (2002: 526). The observer needs to understand the concept “red” in order to genuinely believe, claim, or report that there is something red. We understand a concept when we know how to use that concept in judgments in ways that make sense. This entails knowing how to use that concept in properly formed inferences (A as stated above). For instance, to be able to genuinely use the concept “red,” such as in the perceptual judgment “That is red,” we first need to know how to make sensible judgments about what it means to be red. This involves knowing that being red entails being a color, that being red entails not being green, and so on.

No individual who lacks this capacity, who does not know the inferential uses of concepts, can make genuine observations. Brandom explains that, for instance, we may be able to train a parrot to respond to a stop sign by squawking “That is red” (2002: 525). But this does not mean the parrot is making the perceptual judgment “That is red.” The parrot’s response to the stop sign is simply a conditioned response, and not an observation. This is because the parrot lacks the capacity to use concepts in inferential reasoning. With regard to *vipaśyanā*, for a practitioner to make genuine observations on this account, the practitioner would need to understand the concepts they deploy in their observational judgments. They would

need to have the capacity to use these concepts in inferences if called upon to do so. As we saw in the first and second chapters, Kamalaśīla asserts that this capacity should be developed before meditation, in what he calls the knowledge of reflection.

The second requirement of observation is that (B) observation requires a certain kind of disposition. Brandom names these “reliable differential responsive dispositions,” which he abbreviates as RDRDs (2002: 525). This means that the individual has a tendency to respond in a particular manner to a particular type of stimuli. In genuine observation, the kind of RDRD in use is the disposition to reliably respond to particular types of stimuli by consistently deploying certain concepts, and making certain perceptual judgments. For instance, if we are presented with a stop sign, we may directly respond by coming to believe, claiming, or reporting, “This is red.” We do this because we have the disposition to respond in this manner whenever we are presented with red stimuli. In this case, we recognize that the concept “red” is satisfied by the stimulus properties of the stop sign.

In general, both genuine observers and a parrot that is conditioned to squawk “That is red” have a type of RDRD. The parrot has the tendency to respond to a particular type of stimuli (things that are red) with a particular response (squawking “That is red”). We are similarly conditioned to respond reliably with the perceptual judgment “That is red” whenever we are presented with a red stimulus. The difference is that the parrot does not make a genuine perceptual judgment when it squawks, “That is red.” It merely makes noises that sound to us like, “That is red” (Brandom 2002: 527). This is because, as discussed above, observation has two

requirements, and the parrot lacks the first. The parrot lacks (A), the capacity to use the concept “red” in inferential reasoning.

RDRDs are the decisive factor in whether one is able to make a perceptual judgment. In the example of the cloud chamber, at first the scientist can only infer that there was an electron in the chamber. This is because they lack a particular RDRD. They lack the disposition to directly respond to the pattern in the cloud chamber by deploying the concept “electron,” and making the perceptual judgment, “That is an electron.” But, according to Sellars, this disposition can be developed through the support of stimulus-response conditioning.¹⁴⁴ Initially, the scientist repeatedly infers that there is an electron in the cloud chamber whenever they see a hooked vapor trail. They use inference to come to the conclusion, “That is an electron.” In doing so, they become conditioned to deploy the concept “electron” in any circumstance where they are presented with a hooked vapor trail in the chamber.

As a consequence of this conditioning, the scientist eventually acquires the disposition to deploy this concept directly and without any need for inference. This disposition results in the scientist directly reporting, “That is an electron,” in response to the stimulus in the cloud chamber. They come to see the hooked vapor trail as an electron. The result of both having the capacity for inferential use of this

¹⁴⁴ With regards to another instance of this process, the case where we first learn to make non-inferential reports of our own thoughts through introspection, Sellars states: “The connection between Θ_i [a thought] and $M\Theta_i$ [a meta-thought] is in the first instance a *conditioning* and not an *inference*” (Castañeda & Sellars 2006, April 3, 1961 §11).

concept, as well as developing this particular disposition through conditioning (both A and B as given above), is that they now directly observe the electron.

On Sellars' account of observation, it would be possible for the *vipaśyanā* practitioner to learn to observe the properties attributed to phenomena in Buddhist tenets. We can use Sellars' account to explain how this kind of observation could come about with regard to the property "emptiness." On Sellars' account, in order to perceive a property such as emptiness, the practitioner would need to have (A) the capacity to use the concept that expresses that property in inferential reasoning, and (B) the disposition to consistently deploy that concept in response to a particular type of stimuli. The practitioner begins meditation with the knowledge of reflection, which means that they already have the capacity to make valid inferences regarding the properties they intend to observe, such as emptiness. This qualifies the practitioner for the first of Sellars' requirements for observation (A as given above).

A novice practitioner can only infer that a phenomenon has the property of emptiness. But they are conditioned through the repeated practice of *vipaśyanā*. This practice produces the necessary associations, until eventually the practitioner is conditioned to deploy the concept "emptiness" directly, whenever they are presented with phenomena in meditation. This results in a disposition to reliably respond to phenomena by directly deploying the concept "emptiness," and making the perceptual judgments, "This phenomenon is empty." This disposition is the second of Sellars' requirements for observation (B as given above). The practitioner now directly and reliably observes phenomena as empty. On this explanation, a

practitioner would acquire this disposition when they attain the knowledge of meditation.

According to the logical empiricists' account of observation, a *vipāśyanā* practitioner would not be able to learn to perceive emptiness, simply because this is not the kind of property that can be perceived. This property, as well as impermanence and mind-only, would not be considered observational entities. However, because the logical empiricists' account implies the existence of the given, there is good reason to reject this account. Alternatively, Sellars' account of observation not only makes it possible for *vipāśyanā* to train the practitioner to perceive the properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets, but it also shows us how this could come about. Training in *vipāśyanā* develops a disposition in the practitioner, namely, an RDRD, such that the practitioner becomes disposed to deploy a concept such as "emptiness" in response to a perceptual encounter with a phenomenon. On Sellars' account, the practitioner would then directly observe that the phenomenon is empty.

While it is likely that Sellars' never took into consideration the particular properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets, we can infer that, according to his theory of observation, these particulars could be observed. This is because, on Sellars' theory, in principle, anything can come to be observed. Brandom states this when replying to the objection that certain entities are "permanently and in principle inaccessible to observation" (2002: 544). He states that, "But Sellars denies that anything is unobservable in this sense. To be observable is just to be noninferentially reportable" (2002: 544). All that is required is that the observer

knows the inferential uses of the concepts involved, and develops the disposition to deploy these concepts directly.

On Sellars' account of the observational and the theoretical, it would be possible for the *vipaśyanā* practitioner to perceive the properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets. Moreover, Sellars' account provides us with an explanation for how this could happen. In order to perceive a property such as emptiness, all a *vipaśyanā* practitioner has to do is develop the disposition to deploy the concept "emptiness" directly in response to their perceptual encounters.

4. Conclusion

This chapter defends the claim that a *vipaśyanā* practitioner would be able to perceive the properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets. The chapter's focus is on the question of whether these properties can be perceived as opposed to merely inferred. This question is important, because, if these properties can only be inferred, then the practice of *vipaśyanā* is useless. Take the example of a student practicing *vipaśyanā*. This practitioner begins by sitting down and observing a phenomenon, often some visualization. If their practice is successful, they will arrive at a particular judgment, such as "This phenomenon is mind-only," or "This phenomenon is empty." But how do we know whether this judgment was reached through perception, rather than inference? With enough practice, the practitioner's inferences could become so quick and implicit that they could not be detected by introspection. This brings into question whether we can be sure that the practitioner actually perceives the phenomenon as mind-only or as empty. This is an

important question, because the practitioner can already infer that phenomena possess these properties. The practitioner is able to do so because, according to Kamalaśīla, they should have already learned the knowledge of reflection, before beginning their practice of *vipaśyanā*. The knowledge of reflection consists in the capacity to make these kinds of inferences. If *vipaśyanā* merely consists in the practitioner inferring that phenomena are impermanent or empty, then the practice is redundant.

It is an empirical question whether, in any given meditation session, a practitioner infers or perceives that a phenomenon is empty. However, before this is evaluated on a case-by-case basis, it is worthwhile to first ask if this kind of perception is even theoretically possible. If not, then there is no reason to practice *vipaśyanā*. This chapter argues that it is possible. An individual can come to perceive properties such as mind-only or emptiness, rather than needing to infer. I present two different types of arguments for this claim, by drawing on the work of both Siegel and Sellars. I also show how this claim relates to two different debates in analytic philosophy—the mid-20th century debate on observational and theoretical entities, and the current debate over high-level properties in perceptual experience.

First, I use Siegel's method of phenomenal contrast to argue that we already perceive the property of mind-only when we perceive visual phenomena such as afterimages. Second, I show how, on Sellars' theory of perception, any property can, in principle, come to be observed. Sellars' theory also provides us with an explanation of how the *vipaśyanā* practitioner can learn to observe properties such as emptiness. They do so by developing a disposition to deploy the corresponding

concept directly in response to their encounter with the phenomenon. This disposition is equivalent to the disposition I described in the last chapter, when I reconstructed a theory of *vipaśyanā* based on Kamalaśīla's philosophy of mind. In that chapter, I described how the practice of *vipaśyanā* alters the practitioner's conceptual habituation. In other words, it alters the practitioner's dispositions for deploying concepts.

This description of *vipaśyanā* as a method for altering dispositions also fits the intended purpose of the practice. In the first chapter, I described how the traditional history of *The Process of Meditation* depicts these texts as a polemic against the suddenist tradition of Buddhism. An important point of tension between this tradition and Kamalaśīla's gradualist position was the question of whether or not to practice conceptual forms of meditation such as *vipaśyanā*. Kamalaśīla defends the gradualist position in *The Process of Meditation*, stating that *vipaśyanā* needs to be practiced in order to remove the practitioner's morally dysfunctional dispositions.¹⁴⁵ In the next chapter, I describe how the practice of *vipaśyanā* removes these morally dysfunctional dispositions, and I then explain how this relates to the Buddhist ethical project of transforming our experience of the world.

¹⁴⁵ See Chapter 1 Section 5, and the discussion on the passage from Kamalaśīla (1997: 267).

Chapter 5: *Vipaśyanā* and Buddhist Ethics

1. Introduction

The second chapter of this dissertation discussed what *vipaśyanā* does. It develops recognitional capacities. The third chapter discussed how *vipaśyanā* does this, according to Kamalaśīla's epistemology and philosophy of mind. It can accomplish this by altering the practitioner's conceptual habitation, such that they deploy concepts such as "emptiness" directly in response to a perceptual encounter. The fourth chapter argues that it is possible for *vipaśyanā* to accomplish this. Properties such as "mind-only" can be perceived. I have explained *what vipaśyanā* does and *how* it could do this; however, I have yet to discuss *why* one should practice *vipaśyanā*.

In my first chapter, I briefly presented the reasons Kamalaśīla gives for practicing *vipaśyanā*. There I discussed the traditional history of *The Process of Meditation*, and how this history emphasizes the twofold soteriological and ethical purpose of the practice. Traditional Tibetan historians claim that *The Process of Meditation* was written following a debate between Kamalaśīla and a Ch'an Buddhist monk named Moheyan (Gómez 1983). This debate was centered on the differences between Kamalaśīla's gradualist understanding of the Buddhist path and Moheyan's suddenist position. In particular, these two Buddhists differed on the question of whether or not conceptual forms of meditation, such as *vipaśyanā*, were beneficial to the practitioner. On the one hand, Moheyan claimed that they were not, and that they should be avoided. Kamalaśīla, on the other hand, insisted on the practice of

vipaśyanā. When Kamalaśīla prescribes this practice in *The Process of Meditation*, he gives his reasons for doing so, stating, “Moreover, the removal of the morally dysfunctional dispositions is impossible for someone who rejects *vipaśyanā*.”¹⁴⁶

The removal of the morally dysfunctional dispositions (*kleśa*) is a necessary component of the Buddhist path according to Kamalaśīla. Without their removal, the practitioner cannot become awakened (*bodhi*) as a Buddha. However, this progress on the path towards liberation is at the same time a process of ethical development. The *kleśas* are *morally* dysfunctional dispositions, and their removal, on the Buddhist account, constitutes the ethical development of the practitioner. For this reason, when Kamalaśīla indicates that *vipaśyanā* is practiced in order to remove the morally dysfunctional dispositions, he is indicating that *vipaśyanā* should be practiced for both soteriological and ethical reasons. Any adequate account of Kamalaśīla’s theory of *vipaśyanā* needs to be able to explain how the practice achieves this twofold purpose. This chapter takes up this task.

In the next section of this chapter, I begin with a discussion on dispositions, and how dispositions have played a crucial role in the argument given in this dissertation. In the third section, I describe what the morally dysfunctional dispositions are, focusing on the morally dysfunction disposition known as delusion (*avidyā, moha*).¹⁴⁷ This disposition manifests as the perceptual error that

¹⁴⁶ *na cāpi tasya vipaśyanāpavādinah kleśakṣayaḥ sambhavati*. Kamalaśīla 1997: 26

¹⁴⁷ Here I translate both *avidyā* and *moha* as “delusion.” Buddhist philosophers differ on whether they speak of *avidyā* and *moha* as equivalent, or similar but slightly distinct problems. Kamalaśīla does not make a distinction between the two in *The Process of Meditation*, speaking at points of *moha* (e.g. Kamalaśīla 1997: 215) and other times in terms of *avidyā* (e.g. Tucci 1971: 16). These two terms are most often translated as “ignorance”; however, I chose to translate them as delusion in order to

misperceives phenomena as having an essential nature. The practice of *vipaśyanā* replaces this morally dysfunctional disposition with the recognitional dispositions that comprise the knowledge of meditation. In particular, practicing *vipaśyanā* replaces delusion with the disposition to recognize that phenomena are empty. This is why Kamalaśīla states that the knowledge of meditation is the antidote (*pratipakṣa*) to delusion.¹⁴⁸

Following this, in the fourth section, I explain how *vipaśyanā* has an instrumental role in Buddhist ethics. I argue that Buddhist ethics is a unique normative theory that is centered on the experience of suffering. Because this suffering pervades all of experience, Buddhist ethics takes every aspect of our experience as an object of moral concern. Ethical development requires nothing less than a transformation of one's entire experience of the world. As described in previous chapters, the practice of *vipaśyanā* results in a change in one's perceptual experience. For this reason, the practice of *vipaśyanā* is a crucial part of the Buddhist ethical project.

In the fifth section, I describe how *vipaśyanā* undercuts our innate egoism. When we perceive ourselves as having an essential nature, this results in the construction of an essential subject "I" (*aham*) and a perspective on the world that considers entities in terms of "mine" (*mama*). This leads to suffering in the form of attachment (*rāga*) and aversion (*dveṣā*). Moreover, our view of ourselves as the essential subject "I" is constantly in conflict with the fact of our conventional

emphasize the depth of the cognitive distortion entailed by this morally dysfunctional disposition.

¹⁴⁸ E.g. Kamalaśīla (1997: 215).

existence. *Vipaśyanā* remedies these types of suffering through removing delusion, which prevents the construction of “I” and “mine,” thus preventing the manifestation of attachment and aversion. Finally, I discuss how practicing *vipaśyanā* has the potential to transform our egoism into altruism, by training us to no longer perceive an essential difference between our own suffering and the suffering of others.

2. Dispositions

By introducing the topic of morally dysfunctional dispositions, this chapter adds to a theme that is prevalent throughout this dissertation. In the first chapter, I argued that *vipaśyanā* is practiced in order to learn the knowledge of meditation, and, in the second chapter, I argued that this knowledge is a form of procedural knowledge. In the appendix to the second chapter, I explained that procedural knowledge is commonly understood as a set of dispositions. In the third chapter, I showed how, according to Kamalaśīla’s philosophy of mind, *vipaśyanā* was used to alter the practitioner’s conceptual habituation, which consists in their tendencies to deploy certain concepts in response to certain sensory cognitions. These tendencies are also a set of dispositions. In the last chapter, I described how, on a Sellarian account of perception, *vipaśyanā* could function by developing the dispositions to deploy concepts such as “empty” reliably in response to stimuli. The current topic of the Buddhist theory of morally dysfunctional dispositions is part of this through line of argumentation. For this reason, it will be helpful to briefly review what

dispositions are, and what kind of dispositions have been discussed in this dissertation.

Dispositions are an important but controversial topic in contemporary philosophy. However, there are certain definitive aspects of dispositions that philosophers agree upon. One of these is the notion that dispositions can often be described through conditional statements.¹⁴⁹ When using a conditional statement to describe a disposition, the disposition can be formulated thus: if a certain set of circumstances were to obtain, then the event associated with that disposition will take place (McKittrick 2003: 157). For example, fragility is a disposition. For a glass to be fragile, it must be true that if that glass is struck, it will break. In this example, “being struck” is the circumstances that must obtain, and “breaking” is the occurrent event. This occurrent event is referred to as the manifestation of the disposition. In the example of a fragile glass, the glass’s disposition of fragility manifests as the glass breaking.

The various dispositions I discuss in this dissertation are all recognitional capacities. In other words, they are habitual tendencies that individuals have for categorizing entities as general kinds in perceptual encounters. When an individual intentionally develops this sort of habituation, they are developing new forms of procedural knowledge. For instance, for a certain individual to know how to

¹⁴⁹ Elizabeth Prior states, “What is commonly expected by *all* those who discuss dispositions is that there exists a conceptual connection between a statement attributing a disposition to an item and a particular conditional” (1985: 5). I am not claiming here that any disposition can be fully analyzed through one particular counterfactual. That is a stronger claim and is controversial (McKittrick 2003: 157). My purpose here is simply to give the reader some understanding of how to conceive of dispositions.

recognize poison ivy, it must be true that if that person encounters poison ivy, they will categorize that plant as poison ivy in a perceptual judgment. We can then say that this kind of person knows how to recognize poison ivy.

In the second chapter, I claimed that *vipaśyanā* was used to develop recognitional capacities, and in the third and fourth chapters I gave two different but closely related descriptions of these capacities. According to Pramāṇavāda philosophy of mind, recognitional capacities are part of one's conceptual habituation, i.e. one's dispositions for forming certain concepts in response to different sensory cognitions. Similarly, according to Sellars' theory of perception, recognitional capacities are dependent on dispositions to deploy concepts reliably in response to different kinds of stimuli, with the addition that, on Sellars' account, genuine recognition also requires the individual to have certain inferential capacities.

In this chapter, I discuss the morally dysfunctional dispositions, focusing in particular on the disposition of delusion. This disposition also consists in a tendency to deploy certain concepts in response to our perceptual encounters. *Vipaśyanā* is the method used to recondition this disposition. In this way, Kamalaśīla's depiction of the early stages of the Buddhist path is focused on reconditioning the practitioner's recognitional dispositions. As noted in the third chapter, Kamalaśīla indicates this close relationship between meditation and our dispositions, when he

comments on a verse by Śāntarakṣita, and glosses Śāntarakṣita's use of the term "meditation" (*bhāvanā*) as "habituation" (*abhyāsa*).¹⁵⁰

3. The Antidote to Delusion

According to Kamalaśīla, a student on the Buddhist path must practice *vipaśyanā* in order to remove their morally dysfunctional dispositions. Other aspects of Buddhist practice, such as attention-based meditations (*śamatha*), contribute to this, so practicing *vipaśyanā* is not sufficient. However, Kamalaśīla makes it clear that *vipaśyanā* is necessary. He states this in *The Process of Meditation I*, as quoted above, and, in *The Process of Meditation III*, he reiterates this, stating, "And the removal of the morally dysfunction dispositions is impossible for someone who rejects *vipaśyanā*."¹⁵¹ In this section, I explain Kamalaśīla's claim, by describing how practicing *vipaśyanā* replaces a practitioner's morally dysfunctional recognitional dispositions with morally salutary ones.

The Buddhist technical term *kleśa* has been translated in a number of different ways, such as "affliction" and "defilement." I chose to translate *kleśa* as "morally dysfunction disposition" for two reasons. First, the fact that the *kleśas* are dispositions is evident in Kamalaśīla's use of the terms *kleśa* and "latent tendency" (*anuśaya*). In *The Process of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla uses these two terms

¹⁵⁰ *bhāvanāḥ abhyāsāḥ*. TSP ad TSP 37. This gloss references the fact that the term for meditation, "*bhāvanā*," also means "cultivation."

¹⁵¹ *na cāpi tasya vipaśyanāpavādināḥ kleśakṣayaḥ sambhavatīyuktaṃ prak.* Kamalaśīla (1997: 267).

interchangeably, suggesting that he considers them to be synonyms.¹⁵² This is a common equivalency in Buddhist philosophy. For instance, Vasubandhu uses these terms as synonyms in his *Treasury of Abhidharma*.¹⁵³

Second, the *kleśas* are “morally dysfunctional” because they consist in those dispositions that manifest as acts and mental states that Buddhists consider detrimental. Though Kamalaśīla does not provide a list of the *kleśas* in *The Process of Meditation*, other Buddhist lists of the *kleśas* include a wide variety of affective, psychophysical, and cognitive dispositions, such as anger, restlessness, and lack of self-awareness.¹⁵⁴ What these dispositions all have in common is that they all manifest as physical actions, speech acts, and mental events that Buddhists categorize as unsalutary (*akuśala*). Unsalutary acts or events are defined as those acts or events that exacerbate the suffering (*duḥkha*) of sentient beings. As we will see, the Buddhist ethical project is focused on the elimination of suffering, and, for that reason, whatever contributes to our suffering is of moral concern.

Among the various morally dysfunctional dispositions, the three most fundamental (*mūla*) are known as the three poisons (*triviṣa*). They are delusion,

¹⁵² For instance, in *The Process of Meditation II*, he states, “Having solely practiced concentration meditation on its own, yogis do not remove their obscurations. Instead, this amounts to nothing more than the morally dysfunctional dispositions being temporarily repressed. They are not uprooted because it is impossible to fully uproot the latent tendencies without the light of knowledge.” *zhi gnas tsam 'ba' zhig goms par byas pas ni rnal 'byor pa rnams kyi sgrib pa mi spong gi. re shig nyon mongs pa rnams par gnon pa tsam du zad de. shes rab kyi snang ba 'byung ba med par bag la nyal legs par choms mi srid pa'i phyir bag la nyal legs par choms par mi 'gyur ro.* Kamalaśīla (1997: 92).

¹⁵³ Griffiths (1983) states, “It is clear from the discussion in [the *Treasury of Abhidharma*] and the commentaries that the terms *anuśaya* and *kleśa* are functionally equivalent here” (273).

¹⁵⁴ For two alternate lists of the morally dysfunctional dispositions from the Yogācāra tradition, see Lusthaus (2002: 543, 547).

attachment, and aversion. According to Kamalaśīla, delusion is at the root of both our attachment and aversion.¹⁵⁵ The influence of delusion is such that, even if we recondition ourselves and remove the dispositions for attachment and aversion, the manifestation of delusion will cause attachment and aversion to reform.¹⁵⁶ For that reason, the removal of delusion is paramount.

In *The Process of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla's use of the term "delusion" is ambiguous. At times, such as in *The Process of Meditation III*, Kamalaśīla refers to delusion *qua* disposition, while at other times, such as in *The Process of Meditation I*, he refers to delusion *qua* the manifestation of that disposition.¹⁵⁷ Regardless, the disposition of delusion is the particular focus of this chapter, and so, for clarity, I will use "delusion" to refer to the disposition rather than its manifestation.

We have seen the disposition of delusion in this dissertation before, only under a different name. Delusion is one particular aspect of the seed of contrary concepts that was discussed in Chapter 3 Section 3. On Kamalaśīla's account, delusion is the innate disposition to form the contrary concept "having an essential

¹⁵⁵ In what follows, I explain that the disposition of delusion manifests as the perceptual error in which one attributes to phenomena the property "having an essential nature." In his *Commentary on the Compendium on Reality*, Kamalaśīla refers to this perceptual error as the "false view of the self" (*vitathātmadarśana*). Kamalaśīla asserts that this manifestation of delusion is the root of the other morally dysfunctional dispositions, stating, "That is, these morally dysfunctional dispositions, such as attachment and so on, have their root in the false view of the self." *tathā hy amī rāgādayaḥ kleśā vitathātmadarśanamūlakā* TS ad TSP 3337. For more on the "false view of the self," see McClintock (2010: 191-198).

¹⁵⁶ This will be explained in the fifth section.

¹⁵⁷ Kamalaśīla refers to delusion *qua* disposition at Tucci (1971: 16) and to delusion *qua* manifestation at Kamalaśīla (1997: 215). This ambiguity is not too surprising, as we also have many terms in English that are ambiguous between being a disposition and being its manifestation. For instance, anger can be thought of as a disposition, e.g. "He is an angry person," or as the manifestation of that disposition, e.g. "I felt angry."

nature” in response to a perceptual encounter, and to predicate the property “having an essential nature” to a phenomenon in a perceptual judgment, such as “This has an essential nature.”¹⁵⁸ As discussed in Chapter 3 Section 3, the contrary concepts are those concepts that are antonymous to the concepts that express the properties that are attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets. The concept “having an essential nature” is antonymous to the concept “empty.” Due to our innate disposition of delusion, we perceive all entities as having an essential nature, rather than as empty.

Though delusion is an engrained and innate disposition, it can be removed by the knowledge of meditation. In *The Process of Meditation II*, Kamalaśīla states that knowledge (*prajñā*) is needed to remove our morally dysfunctional dispositions in general.¹⁵⁹ However, in *The Process of Meditation III*, Kamalaśīla is more specific, stating that, in particular, it is the disposition of delusion that is removed by knowledge.¹⁶⁰ While Kamalaśīla does not specify that this knowledge is the knowledge of meditation, as we will see, it is not possible for the knowledge of

¹⁵⁸ Kamalaśīla does not provide a definition for delusion in *The Process of Meditation*. However, it is likely that he would have accepted the definition given above, because one of his primary influences, Dharmakīrti, defines delusion similarly. Referring to delusion *qua* manifestation, rather than delusion *qua* disposition, Dharmakīrti states, “All kinds of faults are produced from the view of an essential self. That [view] is delusion.” *sarvāsāṃ doṣajātīnāṃ jātiḥ satkāyadarśanāt. sāvidyā...* PVSV 1.222.

¹⁵⁹ Quoting from the *Samḍhinirmocana Sūtra*, he states, “The latent tendencies are fully uprooted by means of knowledge.” *shes rab kyis ni bag la nyal legs par 'joms par byed do*. Kamalaśīla (1997: 92).

¹⁶⁰ “Therefore, having thus established the mind on the intentional object, one should examine by means of knowledge, since the complete removal of the seed of delusion is through the light of cognition.” *tadevamālabane cittaṃ sthīrīkrtya prajñayā vivecayet. yato jñānalokotpādāt sammohabījasyātyantaprahāṇaṃ bhavati*. Kamalaśīla (1997: 215).

hearing and reflection to remove delusion. One specifically needs the knowledge of meditation.

The knowledge of meditation can serve as an antidote for delusion because the knowledge of meditation and the morally dysfunctional disposition of delusion are incompatible dispositions. We can explain this through the same kind of description given in Chapter 3 Section 3 for how *vipaśyanā* removes the seed of contrary concepts.¹⁶¹ As explained in Chapter 1 Section 6, *vipaśyanā* is used to develop the knowledge of meditation. As explained in Chapter 3 Section 3, *vipaśyanā* accomplishes this by developing in the practitioner a disposition to form concepts such as “empty” in response to their perceptual encounters. This consists in the practitioner making the perceptual judgment, “This is empty.” This judgment is functionally equivalent to the judgment, “This does not have an essential nature.”¹⁶² This perceptual judgment contradicts the kind of perceptual judgment that is formed due to delusion, such as, “This has an essential nature.” Because the judgments formed through *vipaśyanā* directly contradict the judgments formed through delusion, the latter kind of judgments cannot form.¹⁶³ Kamalaśīla illustrates

¹⁶¹ The process for removing delusion described in the following two paragraphs is the similar to the explanation given in Chapter 3 Section 3 for how *vipaśyanā* removes the seed of contrary concepts. The primary difference is that here the concepts involved are specifically “having an essential nature” and “empty,” as opposed to the various contrary concepts and the concepts that express the properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets.

¹⁶² Recall from Chapter 3 Section 3 that Kamalaśīla occasionally states both these equivalent judgments together, such as ““this content...exists as empty of essence and devoid of self and what is possessed by the self.” *pratibimbakaṃ...svabhāvaśūnyaṃ ātmātmīyarahitaṃ*. Tucci (1971: 5).

¹⁶³ Note that the final stage in removing delusion is, according to Kamalaśīla, not a conceptual perceptual judgment but the nonconceptual perception of emptiness that results from yogic perception. This nonconceptual perception Kamalaśīla refers

the fact that two contradictory cognitions cannot simultaneously exist in the mind of a practitioner, when he states:

Wherever one thing exists, there its contradiction cannot be established, just like darkness [cannot be established] when the ground meets with a flood of splendor from a radiant lamp.¹⁶⁴

Through *vipaśyanā*, one develops the set of dispositions known as the knowledge of meditation, and the perceptual judgments formed from those dispositions prevent the formation of the perceptual judgments that manifest from delusion. This is how practicing *vipaśyanā* brings about the elimination of delusion.

The knowledge of meditation is needed to remove delusion, because the only kind of judgments that can remove delusion are perceptual judgments. Inferential judgments, such as those formed through the knowledge of reflection, are not up to this task. This is because delusion is not merely a set of false beliefs, but is a disposition for false perceptual judgments. If a practitioner merely corrects their false beliefs with the inferential judgments formed in the knowledge of reflection, their disposition of delusion will still remain. This practitioner will continue to misperceive entities as having an essential nature, because they will continue to be disposed to form the concept “having an essential nature” in response to a

to as the “vision of selflessness” (*nairātmyadarśana*). This yogic perception results immediately upon the mastery of *vipaśyanā*, in the path of seeing. *Vipaśyanā* prepares the practitioner for this final step in the process laid out above. For more on the yogic perception of the vision of selflessness see McClintock (2010: 195-200).

¹⁶⁴ ...*yarta yadviruddhavastusamavadhānaṃ na tatra tadaparam avasthitim āsādayati yathā dīprapradīpaprabhāvaprasarasamaṃsargiṇi dharaṇitale timiram*. TS ad TSP 3337

perceptual encounter. In order to remove this morally dysfunctional disposition, the practitioner needs to develop a morally salutary recognitional disposition that can replace it. This is what is accomplished through the practice of *vipaśyanā*.

As stated above, delusion is the root cause of the other morally dysfunctional dispositions. Without its removal, the other morally dysfunctional dispositions will reform, even if they are temporarily eradicated through other measures.¹⁶⁵ One needs to practice *vipaśyanā* in order to remove delusion, and prevent the other morally dysfunctional dispositions from reforming. This is why Kamalaśīla claims that one must practice *vipaśyanā* in order to remove the morally dysfunctional dispositions completely. This claim by Kamalaśīla only makes sense if we interpret *vipaśyanā* as a method for reconditioning our dispositions, such as in the account of *vipaśyanā* I have given thus far. In contrast to this, the discovery account of *vipaśyanā*, which was described in Chapter 2 Section 4, held that the practice of *vipaśyanā* resulted in new declarative knowledge, rather than a change in recognitional dispositions. Because declarative knowledge cannot remove the disposition of delusion, the discovery account of *vipaśyanā* is unable to explain Kamalaśīla's claim that *vipaśyanā* is needed to remove the morally dysfunctional dispositions. However, by understanding *vipaśyanā* as technique for developing new recognitional dispositions, we can explain Kamalaśīla's claim, and account for *vipaśyanā*'s twofold ethical and soteriological purpose.

¹⁶⁵ Many other forms of meditation can be used to help weaken the various morally dysfunctional dispositions on the early stages of the Buddhist path. However, according to Kamalaśīla, the complete elimination of the morally dysfunctional dispositions requires the elimination of delusion through *vipaśyanā*.

4. An Ethics of Experience

It may seem odd that developing one's recognitional capacities would be considered a form of *ethical* development. It might also seem odd that delusion, a disposition for perceptual error, would be categorized as a *morally* dysfunctional disposition, alongside dispositions that more intuitively relate to ethics, such as anger (*pratigha*) and pride (*māna*). In order to explain this, in this section, I argue that the way that we perceive phenomena is at the heart of the Buddhist ethical project. This ethical project requires a transformation of our perceptual experience of the world. Such a transformation is required because Buddhist ethics is oriented around the omnipresent experience of suffering (*duḥkha*), which manifests even in our perceptual experience. The most entrenched aspects of this suffering arise from our ontological condition as conventional beings. On the Buddhist account, the only way to escape that suffering is to fully realize that condition of our existence. This realization cannot merely be on the level of belief, but must permeate our engrained perceptual habits.

Buddhist ethics is a relatively new field in academic philosophy, and the question of how academic philosophers should interpret the ethics of the Buddhist tradition is still controversial. The difficulty lies in the fact that, while there is an endless amount of norms promoted across the various Buddhist traditions, traditional Buddhist philosophers did not provide us with a comprehensive normative theory. This has led to a number of contemporary academic scholars interpreting Buddhist ethics as a version of one of the three classes of normative theories that are better known in academic philosophy. For instance, Charles

Goodman (2008) argues that Buddhist ethics can be understood as a form of consequentialism, while Damien Keown (1992) argues that Buddhist ethics more closely resembles a type of virtue ethics. Granted, there are aspects of Buddhist ethics that do resemble each of these normative theories. For instance, the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka traditions promote what are called the six perfections (*ṣadpāramitā*), and these can be construed as six types of virtue. In contrast to this, the Buddhist theory of the karmic consequences of action could be read as consequentialist.¹⁶⁶ One could even argue that the emphasis on the five precepts (*pañcaśīla*)—five vows forbidding certain activities regardless of situation—is reminiscent of deontology.¹⁶⁷

This kind of conflicting evidence is to be expected when analyzing a tradition as expansive as Buddhism. For this reason, our attempts to understand Buddhist ethics need to do more than simply present various Buddhist norms, and show how these norms evidence one of the better-known normative theories. We need to do more, because, if we limit ourselves to these methods, we will not be able to resolve the question of which set of norms is more fundamental for Buddhists. As Jay Garfield explains, this problem can be construed as a generalization of the *Euthyphro* dilemma, where Socrates asks Euthyphro, “Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?” (2015: 278). The generalized version of this question asks: What is the foundation of an ethical system? With regard to Buddhism, our task as interpreters requires that we first

¹⁶⁶ Keown (1996) challenges this interpretation of karma.

¹⁶⁷ Note, however, that Goodman (2008) argues that the precepts reflect a rule-based consequentialism (49-78).

locate some foundational principle from which we can begin to sketch the outline of a potential normative theory for Buddhism.

One logical starting point for an ethical foundation for Buddhism is one of the principles stated in the first sermon of the Buddha, namely, the claim that we should eliminate *duḥkha*. *Duḥkha* is most commonly translated as “suffering,” but it is far more pervasive and embedded into our experience than what is conveyed by that term, and this is why some translators have chosen to translate the term as “ill-being,” “dissatisfaction,” or “stress.” Nevertheless, in what follows, I will use the most common translation, “suffering,” as a technical term, in order to reference the Buddhist notion of *duḥkha*.

There are two features that suggest that this principle of suffering is a potential foundation for Buddhists ethics. First, on the Buddhist account, this principle is explanatorily basic. In other words, Buddhists feel that there is no answer to the question of why we should try to liberate ourselves from suffering. There are no further principles that can be referenced in order to explain why the elimination of suffering is ethically relevant. Second, the principle of suffering is axiomatic for Buddhist ethics. The Buddhist ethical project cannot get off the ground unless one first accepts that we should eliminate suffering (Garfield 2015: 287). For these reasons, suffering has the characteristics of a foundation for Buddhist ethics.

Suffering, according to Buddhists, is an experience that arises out of our ontological status as conventional beings.¹⁶⁸ Buddhists distinguish between three

¹⁶⁸ See Chapter 1 Section 3 for the Madhyamaka tenet that all entities are conventional. While this tenet not shared by all Buddhists, almost all traditions of Buddhism hold that ordinary beings such as ourselves exist conventionally. The

different aspects of suffering (*triduḥkhatā*) according to the various characteristics of that conventional existence, such as our impermanence and our lack of mereological and causal independence.¹⁶⁹ The first aspect of suffering, literally “the suffering of suffering” (*duḥkhaduḥkhatā*), is closest to the ordinary understanding of suffering as pain, whether from a physical or psychological source. The second, literally “the suffering of change” (*vipariṇāmaduḥkhatā*), is the condition that results from the impermanence of ourselves and all the other entities that we interact with.¹⁷⁰ This condition is perhaps best characterized as the phenomenal character of being unstable. The third, literally “the suffering of conditioning” (*saṃskāraduḥkhatā*), is the experience that results from our interdependence with other entities, be that mereological or causal interdependence. It can be characterized as the phenomenal character of being vulnerable.¹⁷¹

possible exception to this is the Pudgalavāda (Personalist) tradition, which existed in India from around 300 BCE to sometime after 700 CE (Lusthaus 2009: 276). This tradition held that, while there is no essentially existing self (*ātman*), there is an essentially existing person (*pudgala*). This notion of the *pudgala* was attacked by all other Buddhist schools of that time period.

¹⁶⁹ This three-part taxonomy is described very early on Buddhism, in the Pāli *Scripture on Suffering (Dukkha Sutta)*, but has been adopted by many of the Buddhism traditions that followed (Bodhi 2000: 1299).

¹⁷⁰ Kamalaśīla gives an elegant description of this form of suffering, comparing it to trees living on the side of a cliff: “Even for those who are said to be somewhere happy and well-off, their acquisitions come to an end, and they are sunk in an abyss of wrong views. They accumulate karma and the morally dysfunctional dispositions, which are the various causes of the experience of suffering of the hell-beings and so on. They, like trees living on cliff, are living in the cause of suffering, and are, in actuality, truly suffering.” *ye kvacid īśvarāḥ sukhitā iva lapyante te ‘pi viparyavasānaśampado vividhakudṛṣṭigahananimagnā nārakādiduḥkhānubhavahetuvividhakleśakarmāṇy upacinvantāḥ prapātasthā iva taravo duḥkhaḥetau vartamānāḥ paramārthato duḥkhitā eva.* Tucci (1958: 499).

¹⁷¹ My interpretation of this third aspect of suffering, which I will be referring to as “vulnerability,” has certain similarities with the interpretation of this suffering as “unbounded finitude,” as found in Patel (2019).

The Buddhist ethical project's relationship to this existential suffering can be formulated in broadly therapeutic terms. This project takes the experience of suffering as its foundational problem, and is focused on remedying it. The latter two aspects of suffering—instability and vulnerability—arise out of ontological conditions. For this reason, they are experienced always and everywhere. In other words, instability and vulnerability pervade the entirety of our experience. As Kamalaśīla states, “And all those sentient beings of the three worlds are always afflicted by the threefold suffering, according to their own respective circumstances.”¹⁷² Because suffering permeates every aspect of experience, Buddhist ethics must attend to all these aspects. On this account, the entire phenomenal world is an object of moral concern. For this reason, the remedy for suffering, i.e. the culmination of the Buddhist ethical project, requires no less than a transformation of all of our experience.

This depiction of Buddhist ethics aligns with the interpretation of this ethics as a moral phenomenology.¹⁷³ To avoid confusion with the subfield of ethics called “moral phenomenology” that studies the phenomenology of morally relevant mental states, I will instead use the term “phenomenological ethics.” A phenomenological ethics is any normative theory that centers experience within its theory, rather than, for instance, centering virtues, duties, or consequences of actions. Buddhist ethics is

¹⁷² Sanskrit found in ft. 174 below.

¹⁷³ See Garfield (2010); Garfield (2015: 278-317). For other examples of interpretations of Buddhist meditation as instrumental to Buddhist ethics, when Buddhist ethics is read as a moral phenomenology, see Locke (2018) and Aitken (2016: 149-157).

version of phenomenological ethics that centers the experience of suffering and the cessation of that experience.

The focus on dispositions in this dissertation might give the impression that Buddhist ethics would be better characterized as a form of virtue ethics, where the morally dispositional dispositions are vices and the antidotes to these dispositions, such as the knowledge of meditation, are virtues. However, while the morally dysfunctional dispositions and their antidotes are crucial to Kamalaśīla's understanding of ethical development, simply having these dispositions is not the ethically relevant factor. Instead, the morally dysfunctional dispositions and their antidotes have ethical relevance because of the way that they relate to the experience of suffering. For instance, in the beginning of *The Process of Meditation I*, Kamalaśīla uses suffering as the motivation for cultivating the ethics of care (*karuṇā*) (Tucci 1958: 187-189). Here, morally dysfunctional dispositions are described as the reason that beings suffer, but the motivation for one's ethical practice is the suffering of sentient beings, not one's dispositions.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ First Kamalaśīla asserts that suffering is the motivation for care, stating, "And all those sentient beings of the three worlds are always afflicted by the threefold suffering, according to their own respective circumstances. Thus, [care] should be cultivated towards all." *...sarve ca te sattvās tridhātukāvacarās trividhaduḥkhatayā yathāyogam atyantaduḥkhitā eveti sareṣveva bhāvanīya*. Tucci (1958: 188). Kamalaśīla then describes the morally dysfunctional dispositions, not the motivation for cultivating care, but as the causes for suffering. He states, "And even if those in the form and formless realms have gone beyond the suffering of pain for a short time, because they have not completely abandoned the latent tendencies of the realm of desire, the suffering of change exists for them. This is because there is the possibility of falling to hell and so on once again." *ye ca rūpārūpāvacarāste'pi yadi nāma kiyatkālaṃ duḥkhaduḥkhatāṃ vyatītāstathāpyatyantaṃ kāmāvacarāṇām anuśayānām aprahāṇāt teṣāṃ punarapi nārakādivinipātasambhavād vipariṇāmaduḥkham astyeva*. Tucci (1958: 189).

As described so far, it may seem as though this ethical project is doomed to failure. The two more pervasive aspects of suffering, instability and vulnerability, are the product of the immutable ontological conditions of conventional existence. As conventional beings, we are necessarily impermanent and interdependent. Because we are impermanent, we experience instability. Because we are interdependent, we experience vulnerability. There is seemingly no way around this. However, according to Buddhists, our existential suffering depends not only on our ontological conditions, but also on our failure to realize those conditions. Suffering can come to an end if we fully realize the extent of our instability and vulnerability.

On Kamalaśīla's account, the full realization of our instability and vulnerability is a realization of emptiness. As we saw in Chapter 1 Section 6, the pivotal moment in Kamalaśīla's depiction of the path comes when the practitioner progresses from the path of application into the path of seeing, and becomes a bodhisattva. This moment occurs with a realization of emptiness, i.e. the realization that all entities lack an essential nature. In other words, this is a realization that all entities, including ourselves, exist conventionally. We suffer because we do not realize that we lack an essential nature. Instead, we mistakenly form the concept "having an essential nature" in response to our perceptual encounters, and perceive ourselves and all other entities as having an essential nature. Buddhists refer to this as a superimposition (*samāropa*), where one superimposes an essential nature onto these entities. This superimposition is a necessary condition for suffering. According to Buddhists like Kamalaśīla, without it, we can free ourselves from suffering.

As we saw in the last section, this superimposition is the manifestation of the morally dysfunctional disposition of delusion. Simply changing one's beliefs cannot eliminate delusion, because this superimposition is continuously reproduced in all of our perceptual encounters. Because delusion manifests in all our perceptual encounters, the suffering of instability and vulnerability permeates all of our perceptual experience. In order to eliminate that suffering, a practitioner must remove delusion and transform the way that they perceive the world.

It is here that we see why *vipaśyanā* plays such a key role in the Buddhist ethical project. *Vipaśyanā* is the method that a practitioner uses to remove delusion, transform their perceptual experience, and attune that experience to the reality of their conventional existence. According to Kamalaśīla, *vipaśyanā* trains us to perceive phenomena according to the "true meaning." In other words, a practitioner learns to recognize the properties attributed to phenomena in the Buddhist tenets, such as impermanence and emptiness. According to Buddhists, these are the actual properties of phenomena. In this way, *vipaśyanā* has an epistemological purpose. The practitioner learns to see the world as it truly is.

However, while there are important epistemological reasons for practicing *vipaśyanā*, the practice is also crucial for ethical reasons. The reason for the existential suffering of instability and vulnerability is that individuals constantly misperceive phenomena as being permanent and as having an essential nature. We can depict this as a type of tension. The suffering of instability and vulnerability results from the tension between the reality of one's conventional existence, and one's lack of recognition of that reality. That tension can be resolved through the

practice of *vipaśyanā*, which teaches a practitioner to recognize the full extent of their instability and vulnerability. This recognition is not on the level of belief, but takes place in all of their perceptual experiences. By using *vipaśyanā* to attune their experience to the truth of conventional existence, the practitioner resolves the tension between their existence and their faulty perspective on it, and liberates themselves from the suffering of instability and vulnerability.

5. *Vipaśyanā* and Egoism

In the last section, I explained that, according to Buddhists, the superimposition of an essential nature is a necessary condition for our existential suffering. This can be understood by examining how that superimposition reorients one's perspective on the relationship between oneself and the world. According to Kamalaśīla, the superimposition of an essential nature gives rise to egoism, where the world is conceived in terms of an essential subject "I," and what that subject possesses, which is expressed in the term "mine." Suffering depends on this egoism, because our ontological conditions of instability and vulnerability are not detrimental on their own. In this section, I show how this construction of "I and mine" (*ātmātmīya*) results in two different forms of suffering. First, due to "I and mine," we become attached to some entities and averse to others. Second, we find that the constructed image of ourselves as the essential subject "I" is constantly in conflict with the reality of our conventional existence. *Vipaśyanā* deconstructs this "I and mine," and remedies both these kinds of suffering. I end this section by explaining how this egoism results in the prioritization of one's own suffering over

the suffering of others. Practicing *vipaśyanā* remedies this distorted perspective, by eliminating our tendency to see ourselves as essentially different from others. This causes us to react to suffering in general, regardless of whose suffering it is.

The disposition of delusion manifests as the superimposition of an essential nature onto entities. The Buddhist ethical project puts particular emphasis on the fact that one of these entities is ourselves. When we superimpose this essential nature, also known as a self (*ātman*), onto ourselves as individuals, Buddhists refer to this as the construction of the essential subject “I.” This construction of an “I” causes us perceive the other entities of the world in terms of their relation to us. This perspective is known as “mine.” This is a problem for both epistemological and ethical reasons. First, on the Buddhist account, this is a mistaken way of seeing the world, because no individual has an essential nature. As Kamalaśīla states in *The Process of Meditation III*, “Therefore this ascertainment of the world as “I and mine” is just a false confusion.”¹⁷⁵

Second, the construction of “I and mine” has negative ethical ramifications. According to Kamalaśīla, this construction gives rise to self-cherishing, and the morally dysfunctional dispositions of attachment and aversion. This is why Kamalaśīla holds that delusion is the root of both attachment and aversion, as stated above in the second section of this chapter. Even if one removes their attachment and aversion, unless delusion is removed, the construction of “I and mine” will form, and attachment and aversion will reform out of that distorted perspective on the

¹⁷⁵ *tasmād alīkavibhrama evāyaṃ lokasya yadutāhaṃ mameti niścayaṃ pratipannasya*. Tucci (1971: 6).

world. However, when delusion is eradicated, the morally dysfunctional dispositions of attachment and aversion cannot manifest. Kamalaśīla explains this, stating:

That is to say, self-cherishing is not produced for one who does not perceive an “I.” Nor does attachment to what is one’s own arise for one who does not perceive “mine,” because [for this person,] entities are not apprehended in terms of how they conform to one’s own happiness. Additionally, for one who has no attachment, aversion does not manifest whatsoever, because [for this person,] entities are not apprehended as detrimental to one’s self or what one possesses. This is because there is no possibility of that [aversion] in one who is not hindered by “I and mine,” and who has a counteractive for that hindrance.¹⁷⁶

On Kamalaśīla’s description, the construction of “I and mine” distorts how one perceives entities, causing those entities to be seen in terms of what conforms to one’s happiness, and what is detrimental. The world appears to us only as it relates to what we find desirable and what we find adverse. This causes suffering, both through instability, when we lose what we are attached to, and through vulnerability, when we are confronted with what we are averse to. This suffering can be prevented if we eliminate our dispositions of attachment and aversion, which we can accomplish if we first remove delusion and prevent the construction of “I

¹⁷⁶ *tathā hy aham ity apaśyato nātmasneho jāyate nāpi mamety agrhṇata ātmasukhotpādānukūlatvenāgrhīte vastuny ātmīyatvenābhiṣvaṅgaḥ samudbhavati. dveṣo ‘pi na hi kvacid asaktasyātmātmīyapratikūlatvenāgrhīte vastuni prādurbhāvam āsādayati. ātmātmīyānuparodhini taduparodhapratighātini ca tasyāsaṃbhavāt. TSP ad TS 3337.*

and mine.” When the practitioner uses *vipaśyanā* to remove delusion, they no longer form the construction “I and mine.” Consequently, they are no longer attached to some entities while being adverse to others. Without this attachment and aversion, the conditions of instability and vulnerability no longer cause the practitioner these forms of suffering.

However, this construction of “I and mine” also brings about another more subtle form of suffering. This suffering is the way that the reality of our instability and vulnerability conflicts with how we envision ourselves as essential subjects. In our construction of ourselves as essential subjects, we take ourselves to possess the properties of “stability” and “invulnerability.” However, there will be the moments in which our own instability and vulnerability becomes undeniable, such as in moments of failure or assault. These events will be perceived not as facts about our existence, but as personal attacks on our vision of ourselves as someone with a stable and invulnerable core. Even in quieter times, there is still constant conflict between the facts of our instability and vulnerability—such as our ever-changing personalities, and the ways in which others perceive us—and our vision of ourselves as essential subjects. On the Buddhist account, we cannot be liberated from this suffering by making ourselves stable or invulnerable, because these are ontological conditions, facts of our reality as conventional beings. Instead, liberation from suffering comes from no longer identifying as essential subjects in contradiction with our actual conventional existence. We resolve the conflict between our perceived essential self and our conventional existence through fully realizing our own instability and vulnerability. In other words, we resolve this

conflict by no longer perceiving ourselves as having an essential nature. As described above, the Buddhist method for accomplishing this is the practice of *vipāśyanā*.

As a final point, I want to discuss how the practice of *vipāśyanā* affects our relation to others, and, in particular, our relation to others' suffering. This is important, because otherwise Buddhist ethics might appear as a version of hedonism, where the primary aim is to eliminate one's own suffering. However, this is not the case. One of the ways in which *vipāśyanā* develops us ethically is by removing our tendency to concern ourselves with only our own suffering and not the sufferings of others.

We naturally strive to reduce suffering, but ordinarily this instinct only applies to our own suffering. This is one aspect of what Buddhists call self-cherishing (*ātmasneha*). On this account, our egoism is result of perceiving an essential difference between others and ourselves. Due to delusion, we superimpose an essential nature onto both others and ourselves, and this causes us to perceive others as essentially different, rather than interdependent. When we perceive others as essentially different than ourselves, this causes us to neglect others' suffering, because we see their suffering essentially different than our own. Because delusion is an engrained perceptual habit, this prioritization of our own suffering is part of our experience of the world. We experience the world through this distorted perspective that prioritizes our own suffering over the suffering of others.

According to Buddhists, this is wrong on both epistemological and ethical grounds. Buddhists such as Kamalaśīla's contemporary Śāntideva (fl. 8th century)

argued that there is no reason why others' suffering should be treated as different from our own.¹⁷⁷ However, even if we accept the Buddhist argument that there is no essential difference between our own suffering and others, we will still react to the world as if this is the case, because we are conditioned to do by our delusion. Because of this delusion and self-cherishing, our natural tendency to reduce suffering is applied only to our own suffering. We react to the world through an egotistical framework, rather than a framework that leads to altruism.

This distorted perspective can be remedied through *vipaśyanā*, and the removal of delusion. When we remove delusion, by means of *vipaśyanā*, we recondition ourselves to no longer superimpose an essential nature onto others and ourselves. For this reason, we no longer perceive others as essentially different than ourselves, and no longer perceive their suffering as essentially different than our own. Our natural tendency to reduce suffering comes to react to suffering *simpliciter*, regardless of who possesses that suffering. Acts of altruism become as immediate and as natural as acts of self-concern. Practicing *vipaśyanā* remedies our egotistical prioritization of our own suffering, by cutting off that self-cherishing at the root, namely, at our tendency to perceive an essential self.

6. Conclusion

The preceding chapters of this dissertation have described *vipaśyanā* as a method for altering the way that we perceive the world. On this account, the way we perceive the world is an active process, where our habituation and conditioning play

¹⁷⁷ See Cowherds (2016: 55-139) for a detailed discussion of this argument.

an integral role in how we perceive phenomena. The current chapter applies this view to the field of ethics. On many ethical accounts, when we question whether what we did was right or wrong, we start with the question of what we knew at the time. This information is often provided to us by perception. Our perceptual judgments become the premises we use for decision-making. But if these perceptual judgments are faulty, and lead us to making the wrong decisions, we need to consider whether this is a type of ethical failure.

On the account of Buddhist ethics given in this section, our perceptual judgments are influenced by a distorted perspective that prioritizes ourselves, and sees all other entities in terms of their relation to us. Buddhists consider this an ethical failure, but one that can be remedied through practice. On this account, we should make efforts towards reconditioning our perceptual processes, as these processes are a crucial aspect of our ethical life. We should train ourselves to see the world in the right way, in order to morally attune our way of being in the world.

In this dissertation, I have described one of the primary methods Buddhists such as Kamalaśīla prescribe for accomplishing this. Kamalaśīla asserts that Buddhist practitioners should use *vipaśyanā* to alter the way that they perceive the world, in order to remove the faulty recognitional disposition of delusion. A student of Buddhism should endeavor to remove delusion because of delusion causes existential suffering. Delusion causes this suffering in the following way. Due to delusion, we see ourselves as having an essential self. We perceive entities in terms of their relationship to the essential subject "I." We become attached to some of these entities and adverse to others. We suffer when we lose what we are attached

to and when we are confronted with what we are adverse to. We suffer more as our view of ourselves as an essential subject constantly comes into conflict with the reality that we are instable and vulnerable beings.

The way to be freed from this suffering, according to Kamalaśīla, is by practicing *vipaśyanā*. A practitioner sits and observes a phenomenon. They learn to deploy the concept “empty” in response to this phenomenon. They train themselves to see all phenomena, including themselves, as being empty. They no longer conceive of themselves as having an essential nature. They no longer form the construction of an essential self “I.” They no longer become attached to some things and adverse to others. They no longer suffer at the loss of some things and the confrontation with others. Lastly, they no longer suffer from the conflict between their construction of an essential “I” and the reality of their conventional existence, because they have fully realized their own instability and vulnerability. According to Kamalaśīla, this is beginning of the Buddhist path, and the way that the practitioner becomes liberated from existential suffering.

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