

# Kumārila’s Refutation of Idealism

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## 1 The Text and its Target

- *The Text.* This piece will examine Kumārila Bhaṭṭa’s (7th century CE) refutation of Yogācāra idealism. Our focus will be on a section entitled “The Debate about Supportlessness” (*Nirālambana-vāda*) in Kumārila’s *Detailed Commentary in Verse (Śloka-vārttika)*.
  - The *Detailed Commentary* is a sub-commentary on Śabara’s commentary (*bhāṣya*, henceforth referred to as Śbh) on the first chapter of the *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā Sūtra*.<sup>1</sup>
  - This part of Śabara’s commentary is called *Tarka-pāda*, or the “part concerning reasoning,” where Śabara outlines an epistemological theory

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<sup>1</sup>The term “mīmāṃsā” (lit. “investigation”) refers to a collection of exegetical approaches to the Veda. The bulk of the system is based on a set of *sūtra*-s (i.e., aphorisms), viz., Jaimini’s *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* (henceforth *MS*). Jaimini’s text is possibly the earliest of the *sūtra* texts; some have persuasively argued that he was a contemporary of the grammarian Kātyāyana who definitely flourished before 200 CE (Paranjpe 1922, Parpola 1981). In contrast, we know less about his commentator, Śabara. Śabara definitely is acquainted with various versions of Mahāyāna Buddhism, some versions of the Nyāya arguments for the self (*ātman*) from memory and recognition, and a theory of *sphoṭa* that is somewhat cruder than that endorsed by the grammarian Bhartṛhari (5th century CE?). This makes it probable that he flourished around 400 CE. Around the seventh century (sixth century according to Krasser 2012), Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and Prabhākara Mīśra wrote commentaries on the Śabara’s commentary. Thus, Mīmāṃsā is traditionally divided into two schools: Bhaṭṭa Mīmāṃsā, which follows Kumārila, and Prabhākara Mīmāṃsā, which follows Prabhākara.

that is designed to support the reliability of Veda with respect to matters of *dharma* (roughly, righteous conduct).

- *The Target*. The target of the text is a Yogācāra claim defended in different ways by Vasubandhu (4th/5th century CE) in his *Twenty Verses* (*Viṃśikā*) and Dignāga (5th/6th century CE) in *The Examination of the Objective Support* (*Ālambana-parīkṣā*).<sup>2</sup>

SUPPORTLESSNESS. No awareness-event (*jñāna*), i.e., conscious experience or thought, has an *external objective support* (*bāhyālam-bana*), i.e., an object which is apprehended by the awareness-event and is distinct from the awareness-event or any of its aspects.

What does SUPPORTLESSNESS imply?

EPISTEMOLOGICAL IDEALISM. There is no mind-independent particular or property that is apprehended by our awareness-events.

This doesn't show that there are no material objects. However, we can take on board the following principle that treats absence of evidence as evidence of absence.

THE ABSENCE OF EVIDENCE PRINCIPLE. If there were any mind-independent material particular or a property of material particulars, then we would have some perceptual or inferential means of apprehending them.<sup>3</sup>

If we take the THE ABSENCE OF EVIDENCE PRINCIPLE for granted (which Vasubandhu seems to do), we could derive the conclusion that there are no

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<sup>2</sup>For an accessible translation of the key argument of the *Twenty Verses*, see Das (2018) and, for a translation of *The Examination of the Objective Support*, see Duckworth et al (2016).

<sup>3</sup>For discussion of whether Vasubandhu accepts the ABSENCE OF EVIDENCE principle, Kellner (2014).

mind-independent particulars or properties. That would yield ontological idealism.

- *Our Plan.* Following Śābara, Kumārila wants to show that a certain Buddhist argument for SUPPORTLESSNESS cannot succeed. I will do three things. In §2, I will present Śābara's treatment of an argument for SUPPORTLESSNESS in his commentary. In §§3-6, I will explain the objections that Kumārila presents against a version of the same argument in his *Detailed Commentary*. In §7, I will sketch Kumārila's independent argument (partly inspired by the 6th century Naiyāyika, Uddyotakara) against SUPPORTLESSNESS. In §8, I will close this piece.

## 2 Śābara on Supportlessness

- *The Context.* The debate about SUPPORTLESSNESS in Śbh takes off from Śābara's discussion of perception (which is based on an ancient commentary or *vṛtti* on MS 1.1.5).<sup>4</sup>

– *Good and Bad Cases of Perception.*<sup>5</sup>

1. A good or *veridical* case of perception (*sat-pratyakṣa*) involves a perceptual awareness of an object *o* as *F*, which is caused by a contact (*samprayoga*) between a person's senses and *o* and its *F*-ness.

Example: when I veridically perceive a banana as crescent-shaped, my perceptual experience is caused by the perceptual contact between my visual sense and the banana along with its shape.

2. A bad or non-veridical case of perception (*mithyā-pratyakṣa*) involves a perceptual awareness of an object *o* as *F*, which is caused

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<sup>4</sup>My translation of Śbh is based on the critical edition of the text in Subbāśāstrī (1929). Jha (1973) is the only complete English translation of the text.

<sup>5</sup>This discussion is a summary of Śbh on Subbāśāstrī (1929, pp. 31-4).

due to a contact (*samprayoga*) between a person's senses and an object *o* that doesn't possess *F*-ness.

Example: Out for a walk on the beach, when I misperceive a mother-of-pearl as silver, my perceptual experience may be caused by perceptual contact with the mother-of-pearl, but there is no contact with any piece of silver or its silver-hood.

For Śābara, non-veridical perception always is a result of a defect (*doṣa*) either in the agent's senses or her inner sense (*manas*, i.e., her faculty of attention), which prevents the agent's senses from being in contact with the right features of the object.

– *How Do We Determine Whether We Are In A Good Case of Perception?*

THE OPPONENT: How does one know the defectiveness or the non-defectiveness?

ŚĀBARA: If we don't not find any defect after having searched with much effort, we should think that they [i.e., the senses and the manas] are non-defective due to the absence of any supporting means of knowing (*pramāṇa*). (Subbāśāstrī 1929, p. 34)

There's an important epistemological principle at play here.

THE REQUIREMENT OF DEFAULT TRUST. If an agent has no reason to suspect the causal conditions that give rise to her awareness-events are defective in any way, she should treat the content of her awareness-events as true.

This principle is later taken up by Kumārila in his *Detailed Commentary* on MS 1.1.2, where he defends the theory of "intrinsic knowledgehood" (*svataḥ-prāmāṇya*), i.e., the view that we should treat our conscious experiences or thoughts as knowledge (which is just true awareness on this view) as long as we don't have any rebutting or undercut-

ting evidence against them.<sup>6</sup>

- *Supportlessness*. This is where the Yogācāra Buddhist enters the picture.

THE BUDDHIST: Well, every awareness-event is simply supportless like a dream. Indeed, the nature of an awareness-event as supportless is observed in dreams. Even a person who is awake undergoes the awareness, “Is that a pillar or a wall?” Therefore, that too is supportless. (Ibid.)

- *The Response, Part 1*.

ŚABARA: To that, we reply. The awareness of a person who is awake, “That’s a pillar,” is well-ascertained. How will it be wrong?

THE BUDDHIST: Before one wakes up, even in a dream, one’s awareness was well-ascertained in exactly this way. In that case, there is no difference between the two.

ŚABARA: No. For there’s an observation of error with respect to dreams, and, in other cases, there is no error.

THE BUDDHIST: Since other awareness-events have something in common with dream-awareness, that will be the case even in other cases. (Ibid., p. 35)

This last Buddhist response suggests the following way of formalising the argument.

**The Thesis.** Every awareness-event is supportless.

**The Statement of the Reason.** For it is an awareness-event.

**The Illustration.** Whatever is an awareness-event is supportless,

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<sup>6</sup>This principle largely motivated by a regress argument which says that if we had to run an independent check to ascertain whether an awareness-event is true, then we couldn’t take an awareness-event as true for the purposes of action without being launched on an infinite regress. For a critical edition and translation of the relevant section, see Kataoka (2011). For a sampling of the secondary literature on this, see Taber (1992), Arnold (2008), Freschi and Graheli (2011), and McCrea (2015).

e.g., a dream-awareness or a doubt about whether something is a pillar or a wall.

A quick note on how I am formalising the argument here.

Typically, Indian epistemologists (including the Yogācāra Buddhists and the Mīmāṃsakas) think that *inferences for others* (*parārthānumāna*)—i.e., verbalised inferences intended to convince others—have at least three parts. Take the following case.

*Smoke.* You look at a far-away hill, and notice that some smoke is coming out of it. So, you judge that there is smoke on the hill. Since you know that fire always accompanies smoke, you infer, “There’s fire on the hill.”

Now, suppose I ask you whether there’s fire on that hill. In order to answer my question, you start stating your inference. First, you assert: “The hill contains fire.” This first part of the inference is the *thesis* (*pratijñā*) which states that a certain property to be proved—call this the *target property* (*sādhyā*)—is present at a certain place, i.e., the *site* (*pakṣa*) of the inference. This will immediately make me wonder, “Why does she think that there’s fire on the hill?” Anticipating this query, you might assert, “For the hill contains smoke.” This second part is the *statement of the reason* (*hetu-vacana*) which conveys a property, i.e., the *reason* (*hetu*), whose presence in the site provides evidence for the presence of the target property in the site. But I might still not be satisfied; I might wonder, “Why should the presence of the smoke on the hill be a reason for thinking that there’s fire on it?” So, you might assert: “Whatever contains smoke contains fire, e.g., a kitchen.” This third part is the *illustration* (*udāharaṇa*) which says that the target property invariably accompanies, or *pervades*, the reason, and then describes an example that is supposed to confirm this.

The Buddhist argument for supportlessness is stated in this way. In that argument, the site of the inference consists in all awareness-events. The target

property is supportlessness. The reason is awareness-hood. The **Thesis** says that the site possesses the target property. The **Statement of the Reason** ascribes the reason to the site. Finally, the **Illustration** says that the target property pervades the reason, and offers a confirming instance of this relation.

- *The Response, Part 2.* Śabara makes three points in reply.
  1. The Buddhist argument predicts that many of our ordinary waking awareness-events are all false. Why? It seems that our ordinary perceptual experiences are not only about mind-independent particulars and properties, but are also caused by them. So, if they are truly supportless, then what they represent to be the case can't quite be true.
  2. But we are required by REQUIREMENT OF DEFAULT TRUST to think that the contents of many of our waking awareness-events are true. For we can't find any defect in the way they are produced.
  3. This is not how things are with dream-experiences. The difference between dream-experiences and ordinary waking experiences is that (i) dream-experiences are later rebutted by waking experiences (and thus revealed to be erroneous) and (ii) there is a natural explanation of why they are produced by a mechanism that is defective.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Here's the relevant passage.

ŚABARA: If the falsity of dream-awareness is due to its awareness-hood (*pratyayatva*), then even a waking awareness-event can have it.

THE BUDDHIST: The reason for the falsity is that it's an awareness-event.

ŚABARA: You cannot say that this [reason] is anything other than awareness-hood. In fact, the falsity of dream-awareness is known from something else, i.e., error.

THE BUDDHIST: How?

ŚABARA: Due to weakness of the *manas* in a person who is asleep, sleep is the cause of falsity in dreams, etc. And, when dreams end, there is an absence of dreams in someone who is deep sleep. Indeed, a person is said to be in deep sleep insofar as he is unconscious. Therefore, waking awareness-events aren't false.

THE BUDDHIST: Even in a person who is awake, there should be defects in the means by which his awareness-events arise.

ŚABARA: If there were such defects, they would be known.

- *Taking Stock.* Is Śabara’s argument convincing? One problem is that Śabara doesn’t give us any good reason for thinking that the Buddhist argument is unsound. Instead, he just claims that there is no counterevidence against our ordinary waking experiences. Why can’t the Buddhist argument itself may constitute counterevidence of this sort? Śabara doesn’t tell us.

### 3 Kumārila’s Aim

Kumārila wants to fill in this gap: he wants to show that the Buddhist argument is defective in several different ways. Let’s see now how he sets up his response.<sup>8</sup>

- *Why Supportlessness Matters.* The Veda, for the Mīmāṃsakas, is a means of knowing what *dharma* (or, righteous conduct) consists in. The subject-matter of the Veda are various ritual acts and their consequences. The Mīmāṃsakas defend the status of the Veda as a means of knowing; they explain how the different parts of the Vedic corpus relate to each other (so that the Veda doesn’t seem incoherent); they try to give an account of how performing various acts leads to pleasurable and painful consequences in this world and in the next (so that we don’t think the Veda doesn’t say false things). But note that all these things are distinct from our awareness-events about them. Kumārila, therefore, points out that all these things that Mīmāṃsakas discuss would be inappropriate as topics of discussion if our awareness-events regarding these matters were supportless (in the specified sense).<sup>9</sup>

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THE BUDDHIST: Even when one sees dreams, such defects aren’t known.

ŚABARA: In that case, after one does wake up, one does know, “My mind (*manas*) was overcome with sleep.” (Ibid., pp. 35-7)

<sup>8</sup>All translations are mine and are based the Sanskrit text of the *Detailed Commentary* contained in Sastri (1978). Other translations of the relevant sections occur in Jha (1907) and Allen (2014).

<sup>9</sup>As Kumārila puts it, “The status of something as a means of knowing and not as a means of knowledge; the merit and demerit as well as their consequences; the postulation of the meanings of injunctions, explanations, and sacrificial formulae as well as names in the Veda; the existence of all the definitions along with their own collections of their own means of knowing; the division between the view of the opponent and the view of proponent on the basis of differences in styles of

- *A Buddhist Response.* This isn't quite right: "Since this is all posited by means of a concealing truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*) even though there is only awareness, why are you obstinately inclined to posit objects in vain?" (*Nirālambanavāda* v. 5, in Sastri 1978, pp. 146). This invokes the doctrine of two truths. So, let me briefly explain what that is.

1. A content (of a statement or an awareness-event) can be true in two differently ways: *concealingly* (*saṃvṛtyā*) and *ultimately* (*paramārthena*).
2. A content is true concealingly if and only if (i) it presupposes or entails the existence of ultimately unreal things but (ii) taking it for granted leads to successful practical undertakings.
3. A content is true ultimately if and only if (i) it doesn't presuppose or entail the existence of ultimately unreal things but (ii) it reflects how things are at the level of ultimate reality.

So, even though it might be ultimately true that awareness-events are supportless, the claims of Mīmāṃsā could still be concealingly true (or false).

- *Kumārila's Rejoinder.*

1. The doctrine of two truths doesn't make sense: that which conceals the ultimate truth can't itself be true.<sup>10</sup>

expression; the connection between actions and their consequences in this world and beyond, and so on—all this would be inappropriate if awareness were devoid of an object. That is why, in order to act, those who seek *dharma* should first—using commonly accepted means of knowing—make an effort with respect to the existence and non-existence of such an object" (*Nirālambanavāda* vv. 1-4 in Sastri 1978, pp. 145-6).

<sup>10</sup>*Nirālambanavāda* vv. 6-10 in Sastri 1978, p. 146: "Truth doesn't belong to concealment; so now, how is this a variety of truth? If it is the truth, then what is this concealment? If it is falsehood, how can it be the truth? Truth isn't something shared by both the false and the ultimately real; for there is a conflict. This is just as tree-hood isn't shared by both a tree and a lion. Thus, even though the expressions "falsehood" and "concealment" are synonymous, the latter is applied in order to deceive people, just as in the case of the expressions "mouth-juice" and "saliva," etc. In order to avoid the charge of heteropraxy (*nāstikya*), the Buddhists appeal to concealment and construction (*kalpanā*). Construction also wouldn't take place with respect to something non-distinct [i.e., awareness] when that doesn't have an object. Therefore, if something doesn't exist, then it doesn't exist at all; that which exists ultimately is true. So, the two truths shouldn't be postulated."

2. Moreover, the Veda motivates us to act by pointing out which actions will yield pleasure or pain in this life or the next. If we realised that the pleasure or pain that we could enjoy as a consequence of our actions are only the kind of pleasures and pains that we experience in dreams, then that would undermine our motivation to perform those actions.<sup>11</sup>

*Upshot:* So, it's worth trying to establish that external objects exist.

- *The Target.* In vv. 18cd-19ab, Kumārila says why Śabara focuses on the Buddhist argument that he in fact attacks.
  1. The Buddhists have two strategies for denying the existence of external objects: the first is a metaphysical strategy (e.g., Vasubandhu's mereological argument) which involves the examination of material objects, and the second is an epistemological strategy, which involves the examination of the means of knowing by which we could gain knowledge of external objects (e.g., Dignāga's argument). Kumārila says that Śabara focuses on the latter (since it is the basis on which the other one stands).
  2. Even this epistemological strategy is two-fold: the first part involves rebutting our ordinary perceptual awareness by means of an inference, and the second part involves the investigation of the powers of perception with respect to external objects (e.g., arguing that the senses don't have the power to reach out to external objects or be causally affected by the external objects they seem to produce awareness of). It's the first component that Śabara focuses on.
- *The Revised Argument.* In order to avoid some obvious problems, Kumārila revises the argument that Śabara considers (v. 23).

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<sup>11</sup>*Nirālambanavāda* vv. 11-12 in *ibid.*: "And just in order to refute the position that our enjoyment is just like the enjoyment that takes place in dreams, we shall here make an effort with respect to ultimate reality. Indeed, no one proceeds towards *dharma* for the sake of dream-pleasure, etc. For, then, since dreams arise spontaneously, wise men would just rest quietly."

**The Thesis.** The (waking) awareness of a pillar, etc. is supportless.

**The Statement of the Reason.** For it is an awareness-event.

**The Illustration.** Whatever is an awareness-event lacks an external object, e.g., a dream-awareness.

In the rest of his discussion, it is this argument that Kumāriḷa targets. Kumāriḷa's criticism of the argument falls into four parts. The first part attacks the **Thesis** alone. The second part targets the reason that is adduced in favour of the **Thesis**. The third part is concerned with the relationship between the **Thesis** and the reason. The fourth part is just an independent argument against SUPPORTLESSNESS.

## 4 The Thesis

In the first part of his discussion, Kumāriḷa attacks the **Thesis** that the Buddhist puts forward.

### 4.1 Defeat

Kumāriḷa's first claim is that both perception and inference provide counterevidence against the **Thesis**.

- *Perceptual Evidence.*<sup>12</sup> Kumāriḷa points out that we have rebutting perceptual evidence against the **Thesis**: we are certain, on the basis of well-confirmed perceptual awareness-events, that there are mind-independent objects of awareness (v. 30cd).

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<sup>12</sup>A salient worry about Śabara's initial response to the Buddhist—namely, that waking awareness-events are well-ascertained—is that it begs the question against the opponent. For the opponent doesn't think that waking awareness-events are connected to any external objective support. So, at best, Śabara's response can only be treated as a sophistical rejoinder (*jāti*) in Nyāya terminology: it is either dissimilarity-based rejoinder (*vaidharmya-sama*) or a dilemma-based one (*vikalpa-sama*). See vv. 28-30 for discussion. However, Kumāriḷa offers a more charitable interpretation of Śabara.

- *Response 1.* In his *Compendium of Epistemology* (*Pramāṇa-samuccaya*, henceforth PS) 1.11-12ab, Dignāga accepts the theory of reflexive awareness (*sva-saṃvedana*), i.e., the view that any awareness-event constitutes an awareness of some aspect (*ākāra*) of itself. Now, one could turn this into a stronger claim, i.e., that an awareness-event apprehends nothing other than itself or its aspects. That would imply that there’s no perceptual evidence for external objects (v. 31)

*Counter-Response.* This theory, however, is independently implausible: an awareness cannot apprehend its own aspects. (Kumārila argues for this in the next section of his text called “The Debate About Emptiness” (*Śūnyavāda*.) Once the possibility of reflexive awareness is out of the picture, the opponent faces a dilemma: either her view just boils down to the claim that our awareness-events apprehend nothing, or that they apprehend things that are distinct from them and their aspects. The first horn is contradicted by our ordinary awareness-events (for we are always apprehending something), and the second claim contradicts SUPPORTLESSNESS. In either case, the **Thesis** is rebutted (v. 32).

- *Response 2.* The Buddhist might press on: “Why should we think that perceptual evidence is able to rebut the argument we’ve given? Why can’t it be the other way around?”

*Counter-Response.* Here, Kumārila appeals directly to the REQUIREMENT OF DEFAULT TRUST. He says:

Only the rebutting defeat of a content that is apprehended by a defective awareness is appropriate. If everything that is apprehended is rebutted, then your own view isn’t proved. (v. 34)

Given that we have searched and found no defects in the causal mechanism that produces our ordinary perceptual awareness-events, we must treat them as non-defective. That is why they remain unrebutted.

- *Inferential Evidence*. Later, Kumārila goes on to point out that we have inference-based evidence against the **Thesis**: there is an equally, if not more, plausible counterargument to the opposite conclusion (vv. 79cd-80ab):

**The Thesis.** The awareness, “Some awareness-events have as their objective support external objects” is correct.

**The Reason.** For it is an awareness without any rebutting defeater (*bādhaka*).

**The Illustration.** If any awareness-event is without a rebutting defeater, then it is correct, e.g., the awareness whereby the contents of dreams are rebutted.

If waking awareness-events are true, then they are made true by facts about the mind-independent external objects that are apprehended by those awareness-events. So, if this argument is at least as strong as the Buddhist argument, then either the conclusion of the Buddhist argument is rebutted, or the reason involved in that argument suffers from the fault of having an equally strong rival argument (*satpratipakṣa*). In either case, the Buddhist case for SUPPORTLESSNESS is undermined.

Can the Buddhist resist this argument?

- *Response 1*. The Buddhist might say the waking awareness-events, which provide rebutting evidence against dreams, are false (v. 80c).
- *K’s Counter-response*. Kumārila points out that this is a counter-productive move: since the Buddhist takes waking awareness-events to be false, she can’t appeal in her argument to the idea that the awareness-events that we undergo in dreams are supportless (v. 81ab). For, by the Buddhist’s own lights, the only way we can know that they are supportless is by discovering, by means of our waking awareness-events, that things we seemed to see in our dreams weren’t real.

Moreover, if the waking awareness-events are false, why can’t we find rebutting defeaters for them?

If an awareness-event [of a pillar, etc.] is false, how is a rebutting defeater not found? And if that falsity can obtain even without a rebutting defeater, the distinction between falsity and truth cannot be posited. On our view, the awareness-events that arise in dreams, etc. are false insofar as we observe a rival (*pratiyogin*) waking awareness-event. For you, what does the distinction depend on? Moreover, for a waking awareness-event there is no proper (*śobhana*) rival awareness-event, in virtue of observing which the awareness of a pillar, etc. would attain the status of being false. The status of waking awareness-events as rivals to awareness-events occurring in dreams, etc. is well-known. In virtue of that dissimilarity in properties, they are treated as rebutting awareness-events. (*Nirālambanavāda* vv. 87cd-91ab in Sastri 1978, p. 170).

- *Response 2.* In reply, the Buddhist might try a different tack. She could argue that our waking awareness-events are in fact rebutted by *yogic perception* (which is acknowledged by Dignāga at PS 1.6cd). The *yogins* who have access to how things really are undergo a form of extraordinary awareness that reveals to them the falsity of ordinary perceptual awareness-events.

The *yogins* undergo an awareness that rebuts and serves a rival to waking awareness-events about a pillar, etc. Therefore, they are comparable to dreams, etc. And this rebutting defeat should take place in every living creature that attains that stage. This establishes that even waking awareness-events have rivals. (*Nirālambanavāda* vv. 91cd-92ab in *ibid.*, p. 171)

*K's Counter-response.* This is implausible.

First, such yogic awareness isn't found in anyone in this birth. Moreover, we don't know what happens to those who attain

the yogic stage. And our *yogins* undergo a rebutting awareness-event that rivals the yogic awareness that you speak of, or is opposed to it. And so you can't rely on the example of yogic awareness-events. In contrast, we still have an observed example [of waking awareness-events]. (*Nirālambanavāda* vv. 92cd-95ab in *ibid.*, p. 171).

- *Response 3.* Finally, the Buddhist puts forward a different argument: “All waking awareness-events have rival awareness-events and can be rebutted, because they are awareness-events, just like the awareness of a mirage” (vv. 96cd-97ab).

*K's Counter-response.* In response, Kumārila points out two things. First, the Mīmāṃsaka needn't deny that waking awareness-events can have rivals, i.e, illusory awareness-events that conflict with them, like the awareness of a mirage. But, still, they don't have to accept that these awareness-events—at least when true—can be rebutted. So, the premise that the Buddhist relies on, namely, that all awareness-events can be rebutted, is false (vv. 97cd-98ab).

## 4.2 The Thesis Is Self-Undermining

For Kumārila, not only is the **Thesis** called into question by perceptual and inferential counterevidence, but it also undermines itself in three different ways.

- *No Difference Between Qualificand and Qualifier.* First, the conclusion of any argument makes sense only insofar as it involves two components. The first is a qualificand (*viśeṣya*), i.e., the site. In the Buddhist argument, the qualificand is the awareness of a pillar, etc.. The second is a qualifier (*viśeṣaṇa*), i.e., the target property that is inferred. In this case, it is *supportlessness*. But if there are no distinct objects apprehended by awareness-events apart from themselves or their aspects, then there can't be any distinction between the qualificand and the qualifier (v. 35).

- *Impossibility of Communication.* The awareness of the qualificand and the qualifier, which arises in both the speaker and the hearer, doesn't apprehend anything distinct from it. But the view that is being conveyed by the **Thesis** itself can only be known only if there are such objects. So, the Buddhist who puts forward this thesis is caught in a pragmatic contradiction: she asserts something which, if true, cannot be known (and therefore shouldn't be asserted) (v. 36).
- *Impossibility of Truth/Accuracy.* Finally, if all awareness-events lack an objective support, then it's impossible to undergo any true or accurate awareness at all (since truth, intuitively, involves some kind of correspondence with an independent reality). Various bad consequences will then follow.
  1. The awareness as of the reason being present in the site is either true or false. If it is false, then the view can't be proved on that basis (vv. 74cd-75cd). If the awareness is true, then it is made true by some apprehended objects, i.e., by the site and its possessing awareness-hood. So, at least, some awareness-events have to have an external objective support (v. 75cd).
  2. The Buddhist's own awareness that awareness-events exist, and are distinct and momentary, must either be true or false. If it is true, that awareness-event must have an external objective support, so the Buddhist's argument fails. If it is false, the Buddhist can't take her **Thesis** to be true (since it presupposes or entails the existence of such awareness-events) (vv. 81cd-82).
  3. Finally, if the **Thesis** is qualified so that it only says that all awareness-events other than the awareness-events about the site, the target property, or the reason, lack objective support, then we could still end up with the conclusion that these awareness-events have an external objective support. But since they aren't fundamentally different from other waking awareness-events, we wouldn't be able to rule out the possibil-

ity that those awareness-events also have an external objective support (v. 76).

Upshot: the **Thesis** is self-undermining.

### 4.3 The Target Property

Furthermore, Kumāriila points out that we don't really have a clue what the target property, i.e., supportlessness, is supposed to be.<sup>13</sup> The initial problem is this.

- If supportlessness is the property of not having *any* apprehended object, then we cannot know the target property itself, or the example (i.e., dream-awareness) that the Buddhist appeals to.
- If it is the property of not apprehending *some* particular apprehended object, then the argument suffers from the fault of proving what has been proved (*siddha-sādhana*) (vv. 49-50). For we all know that the awareness of colour doesn't apprehend certain other objects, e.g., flavour.

So, what's supportlessness? Kumāriila considers a number of proposals and rejects all of them. I'll focus on a few of them.

- *Proposal 1.* Supportlessness is just the property of not apprehending anything that has the same form as itself (v. 51ab).

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<sup>13</sup>In addition, Kumāriila also points to some relatively minor problems with the site. When the inference is stated in Sanskrit, the site of the inference is referred to by the term "*pratyaya*." Now, that term could refer either to a being (*bhāva*)—an agent (*karṭṛ*) or an instrument (*karāṇa*) that brings about the act of apprehension—or to a patient (*karman*), i.e., an object that is apprehended.

- If it's the latter, then the argument suffers from the fault of proving what has been proved (*siddha-sādhana*). After all, objects that are apprehended—e.g., material objects—don't need any objective support.
- If it's the former, then there's a contradiction. For an agent or an instrument that apprehends cannot exist unless there is something—an intentional object—to be apprehended (vv. 41-44).

*K's Counter-response.* The Buddhist himself thinks that an awareness apprehends itself in virtue of its own *form* or *aspect* (*ākāra*), so it does apprehended something that has the same form as itself (v. 51cd).

- *Proposal 2.* Supportlessness is just the absence of an apprehension of the form, “This is external.” (v. 52ab).

*K's Counter-response.* But no such apprehension occurs when we undergo ordinary perceptual awareness-events (v. 52).

- *Proposal 3.* Supportlessness is just the absence of any *external* object that has the same form as the relevant awareness (v. 53ab)

*K's Counter-response.*

1. First, Kumāriila registers the intuition that something external does seem to be presented to us in our ordinary awareness-events. In reply, the Buddhist might say that this is just an illusion, like the appearance of two moons in someone who has double vision.
2. In response, Kumāriila points out that an illusion of this sort is *supportless* only in the sense that it is directed at something—namely, the two-ness—with which the agent’s senses aren’t in contact. But that doesn’t mean that two-ness doesn’t exist at all. On Kumāriila’s view, even in erroneous awareness-events, the particulars and properties that we apprehend exist independently; the awareness-events are erroneous only insofar as our senses aren’t in contact certain objects that they apprehend (vv. 54b-56). (We will revisit this point later.)
3. Finally, given that the Buddhist doesn’t accept any such thing as *externality* (*bahirbhāva*), it’s not possible for them to assert the non-existence of any external objects of apprehension. This, presupposes a certain theory of absence: namely, that one can meaningfully talk or think about the absence of an *F* at some time or place only if one is independently aware of *F*-ness (v. 57).

- *Proposal 4.* Supportlessness is just the absence of any *distinct* object that has the same form as the awareness.

*K's Counter-Response.* Suppose this is right. If we take *distinctness* to be dissimilarity in all respects, there's a problem of proving what has been proved. For, since everything is similar to everything in virtue of sharing various properties like knowability (*prameyatva*), we know both versions of the **Thesis**. And if we take *distinctness* to be dissimilarity in some respect, there will be a problem of self-contradiction: after all, the Buddhist agrees that every awareness has a constructed external support; insofar as that constructed external support is somewhat dissimilar to the awareness-event (in virtue of being constructed), the **Thesis** can't be true (vv. 60-61).

The result: the **Thesis** in this argument is defeated by counterevidence; it is self-undermining; and it is hard to specify the target property.

## 5 The Reason

The *reason* (*hetu*) of an inference is a property on the basis of which the target property (*sādhya*) is inferred. In this case, the reason is awareness-hood (*pratyayatva*). As Kumārila shows, this reason suffers from a variety of defects.

### 5.1 The Reason Is Unestablished

The first is the fault of being unestablished (*asiddhi*). The problem is that, on the Yogācāra view, the ultimate constituents of reality are certain trope-like particulars (*svlakṣaṇa*). There are no general properties, like awareness-hood, that can reside in multiple awareness-events. So, there is no property of awareness-hood that's distinct from the awareness-events in which it is supposed to reside. So, the intended reason of the argument isn't known to the Buddhist or the Mīmāṃsaka;

it is unestablished for both (*ubhayāsiddha*) (vv. 102-103ab).<sup>14</sup>

- *Response 1.* The Buddhist could say that this isn't a serious problem. For she only wants to show that, *by the Mīmāṃsaka's lights*, there is a reason that proves the supportlessness of awareness-events (vv. 128cd-129ab).

*K's counter-response.* First, to be successful in proving the existence of the target property, the reason must be acceptable to both parties. In fact, Dignāga himself says this in PS (v. 131ab). Second, in a case where a person offers an argument that involves a reason that is unacceptable to her opponent, she can try to persuade the opponent into accepting the reason by offering further evidence. But in a case where the argument involves a reason that is unacceptable to the person who offers the argument, the proponent cannot put forward any evidence for the existence of the reason without undermining her own view (vv. 131cd-133ab).

- *Response 2.* In reply, the Buddhist can say the following: "In a debate, the opponent can't be coaxed into accepting what is unestablished for her. But, when the reason is unestablished for the *proponent*, that shouldn't matter at all." (vv. 133cd-142)

*K's counter-response.* This misses the point of the challenge. Kumārila points out that he is merely asking his Buddhist opponent what her reasons are for thinking that all awareness-events are supportless. The Buddhist hasn't answered that question.

True, if the desired result were solely my awareness in this case,  
then, even though a reason may be unestablished for you, it would

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<sup>14</sup>If the Buddhist wants to say that the relevant reason isn't awareness-hood, but rather the more specific property of being a waking awareness-event or the more specific property of being a dream-awareness, then the reason again won't work. For then either it will be *unestablished in the example* (i.e., dream awareness) (*dr̥ṣṭāntāsiddha*), or it will be absent from the site (i.e., waking awareness). Moreover, given the problems with the site (mentioned in the last section), the site is itself unknown here. This in turn makes the reason subject to the defect of having an unestablished site (*āśrayāsiddhi*) (v. 104cd-106ab).

have the status of reason with respect to me. But when you have the awareness as of there being only awareness, and are asked by me, “What is the reason here?”, then this move doesn’t make sense. For there is no way you could have become aware of the target property by means of a reason that was unapprehended by you but was established for me. And one doesn’t put forward a statement in response to a questioner for any purpose other than that of stating the reason for one’s own certainty. Moreover, how do you know that this is established for me? And how do you—who aren’t aware of the reason but talk about it on the basis of an awareness—intend to convey it here when you are asked the question? (*Nirāmbanavāda* vv. 143-148ab in Sastri 1978, pp. 180-1)

## 5.2 The Reason Conflicts With the Target Property

The second defect consists in a conflict (*virodha*) with the target property. Kumārila argues for this claim, by showing that every awareness-event—i.e., everything that possesses awareness-hood—has an external objective support.

1. First, he argues that any awareness-event that we undergo in dreams has an external objective support.

It is not accepted that awareness-events that arise in dreams, etc., have no external objects at all. Everywhere, there is an external support, which has the nature of being at another place or time. The intentional object of dream-awareness is something that exists in some birth or another, at that time or another, at that place or another. (*Nirāmbanavāda* vv. 107cd-109ab in *ibid.*, pp. 173-4).

The underlying idea is the a theory of error—the theory of *opposite presentation* (*viparīta-khyāti-vāda*) or *otherwise presentation* (*anyathākhyātivāda*)—

which was popular amongst both Naiyāyikas and Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsikas. The theory is this.

THEORY OF OTHERWISE PRESENTATION. Any erroneous awareness-event as of an object *o* being *F* at a certain place and time has as its intentional objects both the object *o* and the property of *F*-ness (both of which must exist somewhere at some time and must have been apprehended by the relevant subject).

For example, when I undergo the perceptual awareness as of there being a piece of silver before me even though all I perceive is a mother-of-pearl, the intentional objects of my awareness are the things before me—i.e., the mother-of-pearl—and the properties I ascribe to it—i.e., being before me and silverhood, which I’ve experienced before. All these objects exist somewhere and at some place. So, every awareness-event must have an external objective support. The same goes for dreams.<sup>15</sup>

2. What then is the difference between a bad case of perception and a good one, if both have external objective support? Kumārila’s answer: it is only in a good case of perception that one is really in perceptual contact with things that are present in one’s surroundings.

And this very property of having an intentional object that is present is a property of perception. The property of being about

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<sup>15</sup>Kumārila applies the theory to a range of cases.

In a wheel of fire, there’s fire that is whirled around rapidly. In a city in the sky (i.e., *fata morgana*), there are clouds, and houses, etc. that have been perceived before. In the awareness of a mirage, previously experienced water and barren land that has been heated up by the rays of the sun are posited as causes. And, the causes of an awareness of a hare’s horn are the horn on another substance and the nature of the hare. And when one denies the existence of a hare’s horn, the cause is the absence of horns on its head. The cause of an awareness of emptiness is an entity that is unrelated to something else. When it comes to an awareness of the false content of a sentence, the referents of subsentential expressions are the causes. (*Nirālambanavāda* vv. 109cd-113ab in *ibid.*, pp. 174-5).

an object that is proximate isn't present in other awareness-events.

THE BUDDHIST: If such objects aren't there, how do awareness-events arise with respect to them? Where does this power of producing awareness with respect to absent objects come from?

KUMĀRILA: Our dispute is about whether any awareness-event has an external support. If there is no proximity of an intentional object, is our view refuted by that? (*Nirālanbanavāda* vv. 114cd-117ab in *ibid.*, p. 175).

For Kumāriila, since every awareness-event has an external objective support, we need to reinterpret the talk of supportlessness in a different way. He says:

Therefore, that awareness-event which apprehends something as otherwise when it's not otherwise is supportless. (*Nirālanbanavāda* vv. 117cd in *ibid.*, p. 175)

This leaves us with a final question: Why should we prefer Kumāriila's view that all awareness-events have an external objective support to the view that some awareness-events, e.g., dreams, don't have any external objective support? Kumāriila would want to say that, at least on our ordinary way of thinking, all these so-called supportless awareness-events are in fact content-wise parasitic on other awareness-events which we take to have an external objective support. For example, in dreams, we aren't aware of anything that we have perceived before. Now, since these so-called supportless awareness-events causally depend these other awareness-events for content and apprehend the same intentional objects which were apprehended by these other awareness-events, they too must have an external objective support.

### 5.3 The Reason is Inconclusive

In order to inferentially know (with certainty) that a target property is present somewhere on the basis of one's knowledge of a reason, one must know that the target property *pervades*, i.e., invariably accompanies, the reason. For Yogācāra

epistemologists like Dignāga, if an agent is to know that a reason is invariably accompanied by a target property, she must ascertain that the reason has two properties: (i) it is present in *similar sites* (*sapakṣa*), i.e., other places where the target property is present, and (ii) it must be absent from all *dissimilar sites* (*vipakṣa*), i.e., all places where the target property is absent.<sup>16</sup>

Why do we need both conditions? Suppose I know that Sam is a raven. In order to infer from this (with certainty) that Sam is black, I need to be sure that all ravens are black. So, ravenness is my reason, and blackness my target property. How do I go about ascertaining that all ravens are black? I need to look at black things, and see if any of them are ravens. If, after a lot of investigation, I find no black things that are ravens, that will give me strong evidence that some ravens aren't black. (If all of them had been black, I'd have seen some black ones at least!) In contrast, if I find some or lots of black things that are ravens, that will give some evidence that all ravens are black. But I also need to check non-black things and see if any of them are ravens. If, after some investigation, I find a non-black thing that is a raven, that will give me conclusive evidence that some ravens aren't black. In contrast, if I find no non-black things that are ravens, that will give me some evidence that all ravens are black. This means that I need to observe similar sites, i.e, cases where the target property (blackness) is present, and dissimilar sites, i.e., cases where it's missing.

If this theory is right, then there are at least two problems with the Buddhist argument.

1. First of all, it's not clear that we know that condition (i) is satisfied here. Given that, from the Buddhist standpoint, properties like supportlessness and awareness-hood don't really exist, the Buddhist cannot claim that there is any ultimately real entity that possesses both the target property and the reason (vv. 120d-121ab).
2. Moreover, according to the Buddhist, there is no dissimilar site (i.e., a place where the target property, namely supportlessness, is absent). If awareness-

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<sup>16</sup>This idea is discussed by Dignāga in *The Wheel of Reason (Hetucakra)*. For discussion, see Hayes (2012).

events are all that there is, and no awareness-event has an external objective support, then there can't be any place from which the target property—supportlessness—is missing. So, condition (ii) isn't satisfied (v. 121cd).

So, since we can't ascertain that the reason is pervaded by the target property, it ends up being inconclusive (*anaikāntika*).

The second challenge gives rise to the following exchange.

- *Response 1.* The Buddhist might try to solve the second problem by saying that, since there are no places from which the target property is absent, it's not necessary to observe any dissimilar site to know the relation of pervasion between the reason and the target property (v. 122ab).

*K's counter-response.* This response would be acceptable if the conclusion were positive (*vidhi-rūpa*) (v. 122cd). In this case, the Buddhist's thesis is negative: she wants to deny that awareness-events have any external objective support. Once again, Kumārila implicitly appeals here to the principle that one can only think or talk about the absence of a particular or a property if one is independently aware of that particular or that property. If that is right, then it's necessary to observe or cite cases where things have an objective support in order to argue for SUPPORTLESSNESS.

- *Response 2.* The Buddhist may claim that non-existent objects can serve dissimilar sites in this case (v. 123ab). There are other inferences where they appeal to non-existent objects in this way. Take for example:
  - **The Thesis.** Everything is impermanent.
  - **The Statement of the Reason.** For everything is an effect.
  - **The Illustration.** Whatever isn't impermanent isn't an effect, e.g., the sky-flower (vv. 123cd-124ab).

*K's counter-response.* This doesn't help. Here, we can appeal to a fictitious object, i.e., the sky-flower, because it lacks the properties of being both impermanent and an effect. A fictitious object can have negative properties.

However, in the argument for SUPPORTLESSNESS, if we could appeal to a fictitious object that lacked the property of supportlessness, it would have the positive property of having an external objective support (vv. 124b-125ab). But that's just incoherent, since no non-existent object can have any positive properties whatsoever. (It's unclear what this objection really says, though. To my mind, the challenge seems to be this. Since the thesis postulates the absence of an external objective support in awareness-events, one can assert that thesis only if one is independently aware of the relevant property, i.e., having an external objective support. But appealing to a fictitious object cannot help, since one is never aware of such objects and therefore can't become aware of a positive property through such objects.)

- *Response 3.* We don't need a dissimilar site, since, even without one, the reason is invariably accompanied by the target property.

*K's counter-response.* Well, the problem for the Buddhist is deeper than that. It makes sense for someone to engage in a debate only insofar as she acknowledges the possibility of reasons that can prove the existence of various target properties. But the Buddhist cannot do so (insofar as she denies the existence of such reasons) (vv. 128cd-129ab).

Let's take stock. In this section, we've seen that Kumārila points out three different faults of the reason that the Buddhist employs: being unestablished, conflicting with the target property, and being inconclusive. In the next part of the text, he raises another problem, namely that the reason conflicts with the **Thesis**.

## 6 The Thesis and the Reason

Kumārila argues that the relationship between the **Thesis** and the reason suffers from a problem that, according to the Nyāya rules of debate, constitute a *defeat-situation* (*nigraha-sthāna*) in a debate. Why? The reason conflicts with the thesis: if awareness-events were to lack external objective support, then one couldn't un-

dergo an awareness-event which has awareness-hood as its external objective support, and therefore one couldn't come to know on that basis that awareness-events lack an external objective support. This defeat-situation is called *conflict with the thesis*. (*pratijñā-virodha*) in *Nyāya-sūtra* 5.2.4 (v. 154).

Can the Buddhist get out of this problem?

- *Response 1*. The Buddhist could make the following move: “My strategy is one of throwing away the ladder. First, I shall prove the target property by means of this commonly recognised reason. But then, I'll show that if the reason succeeds in proving that property, it itself ultimately doesn't exist. What's wrong with that?”

*K's Counter-Response*. In response, Kumāriila defends:

KUMĀRILA'S NO FALSE LEMMAS PRINCIPLE. In any inference, if an agent comes to know that a site *o* possesses a target property *S*, on the basis of premise that it possesses a reason *H*, then *o* must possess *H*.<sup>17</sup>

What explains this principle? For Kumāriila, knowledge (*pramā*) or correct awareness (*samyag-jñāna*) is just true awareness. So, his NO FALSE LEMMAS PRINCIPLE implies that one cannot arrive at a true awareness, which has as its content the claim that an object possesses *S*, on the basis of premise that it possess another property *H*, unless *o* in fact possesses *H*. Intuitively, this seems false. Consider:

*Smoke/Mist*. You look at a far-away hill, and see what looks like smoke emerging from it. So, you judge that there is smoke on the hill. Since you know that fire always accompanies smoke, you infer, “There's fire on the hill.” In fact, what you saw was just mist, but there is in fact fire on the hill.

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<sup>17</sup>For discussion of Kumāriila's views on this, see Ganeri (2007, ch. 5). A similar principle is defend by some in the literature on inferential Gettier cases; see, e.g., Harman (1973).

Here, your inferential judgement seems true, but the hill doesn't have any smoke. So, how can Kumārila's principle be right? My hypothesis is this. For Kumārila, the target property of any inference is individuated with reference to the reason on the basis of which it is inferred. So, in *Smoke/Mist*, the target property that you infer is that the fire that accompanies the smoke you took yourself to see. Since that fire is absent from the hill, your judgement isn't true.

Now, suppose this is correct. In the Buddhist argument for supportlessness, the property of awareness-hood that the Buddhist ascribes to waking awareness-events is much like the smoke that you ascribe to the hill in *Smoke/Mist*; it's not really there. So, one cannot arrive at true awareness on the basis of such a reason. Kumārila says:

How could that which is now manifested as non-existent exist earlier? If it is non-existent, how is it a reason? And if it is a reason, then it must have ultimate existence. It doesn't make sense that an ultimately unreal entity should prove an ultimately real entity; we don't observe that hare's horn, etc. bring about correct awareness, etc. Moreover, the awareness of fire that arises from mist, etc. which aren't smoke is also false. Therefore, the awareness which you have with respect to ultimate reality from a false reason must also be false; indeed, the truth cannot be known from that which merely appears as the truth. (*Nirālambanavāda* vv. 156-9 in Sastri 1978, pp. 182-3)

Therefore, the Buddhist strategy of using false reasons to bring about knowledge of the ultimate truth cannot succeed.

- *Response 2.* Here, the Buddhist opponent might push back. It seems that, often, we inferentially arrive at true awareness-events on the basis of false beliefs. For example, when a child is taught to read and write, she may be taught that the written characters themselves are the phonemes (*varṇa*) that

they stand for. That false belief may help her become inferentially aware of certain phonemes when she sees those written characters.

*K's Counter-Response.* In response, Kumāriḷa points out that the written characters don't bring about the awareness of phonemes in the same manner as the mist that brings about the awareness of fire. If the mist were perceived as mist, it wouldn't serve as evidence for fire; it serves as evidence for fire only insofar as it is perceived as something else. In contrast, the written characters must be recognised as written characters in order to produce the awareness of phonemes in both children and adults. The only difference is that, in children, there is also the false belief (instilled for the purposes of instruction) that the written characters themselves are the phonemes. Since the written characters are ultimately real *qua* written characters (but mist isn't ultimately real *qua* smoke), an ultimately real object still serves as the reason in the inference whereby the child becomes aware of phonemes (but not in the inference where you become aware of the fire).

Even the written marks, etc. that indicate phonemes are not devoid of ultimate reality as themselves.

[THE OPPONENT:] They aren't true *qua* phonemes.

[KUMĀRILĀ:] This is the rule with respect to all things: we don't accept anything as real *qua* another entity, even when the nature of that thing exists but it appears as such [i.e., as another entity.] But when the nature of something is well-established as absent, then it can neither be real nor unreal. Your reason, etc. are unreal even with respect to their own natures. Therefore, they can serve as the means of an inferential awareness just like mist, etc., but not like the written characters. (*Nirāḷambanavāda* vv. 160-3 in Sastri 1978, p. 183)

The important lesson is this. In the Buddhist argument for supportlessness, the reason, i.e., awareness-hood, is ultimately unreal and can serve as the

reason only insofar as it is ultimate unreal. So, this case is disanalogous from the case where the child becomes aware of phonemes on the basis of her awareness of the written characters.

- *Response 3.* The Buddhist might try to salvage her argument by appealing to the doctrine of two truths. She might argue that there are two levels of reality: ultimate and concealing. Various metaphysical and epistemological distinctions—like the distinction between awareness-events and the awareness-hood that resides in them, or the distinction between the target property and the reason—are distinctions amongst concealingly real things. So, the objection that, in the Buddhist argument for supportlessness, the reason, etc. are concealingly real doesn't have any force (v. 164).

*K's Counter-Response.* Kumārila repeats (in a way) what he had said earlier about the doctrine of two truths.

If a nature of a thing obtains in virtue of concealment, then it's based on language alone. It shouldn't be able to attain the status of a reason with respect to that which is ultimately real. And, moreover, you have no reason for distinguishing the ordinary world from ultimate reality. How that which is known by an ordinary means have the status of being ultimately real? (*Nirālam-banavāda* vv. 165-6 in Sastri 1978, p. 184)

In response, the Buddhist could point out that all our ordinary epistemic practices could be accommodated in the absence of external objective support just by appealing to different cognitive states, which in turn are caused by different impressions (*vāsana*) and different linguistic expressions (v. 167). Kumārila offers two responses to this.

1. First of all, it's not clear that mere differences in impressions or linguistic expressions can actually make a difference to the contents of

cognitive states. But the only obvious way of individuating cognitive states is with reference to their contents (vv. 169-170).

2. Second, even if they can have different contents, that won't help the Buddhist escape the various faults that have been raised against her. For the Buddhist would have to acknowledge the existence of a target property, a reason, and a site in her inference. And then all of Kumāriḷa's objections would apply to those components of the Buddhist inference (vv. 171-174).

At this point, the Buddhist might just say that since she doesn't accept the existence of the reason, etc. as distinct from awareness, Kumāriḷa's objections cannot affect the reason that she puts forward (v. 176). Once again, this is a bad reply. As Kumāriḷa puts the matter, if that is the case, there's no need for objections at all; for the Buddhist view isn't proved to be true at all. And that's really all the Mīmāṃsaka needs (v.177).

## 7 Kumāriḷa's Refutation of Yogācāra Idealism

In the final part of the text, Kumāriḷa goes on to explain how the Yogācāra Buddhist has no way of explaining how different awareness-events with different representational contents arise at different times. The argument may be reconstructed as follows.

P1. We undergo different awareness-events with different representational contents at different times.

P2. We can undergo different awareness-events (with different representational contents) at different times only if there are mind-independent objects, which are distinct from the awareness-events and which cause these awareness-events.

C. There is an external world.

The standard Yogācāra response: P1 is false. Due to various *karmic* facts (i.e., things we have done in this and past births), different impressions mature at different times and give rise to new awareness-events with different forms (or representational contents) at different times, so there is no need to accept the existence of an external world.

In reply, Kumāriila points out that, given her other commitments, the Yogācāra philosopher can't explain how impressions can give rise to awareness-events with different forms (and, in effect, different representational contents). The Yogācāra philosopher is committed to:

THE DOCTRINE OF MOMENTARINESS. For any ultimately real entity  $x$ , there aren't two distinct times  $t$  and  $t^*$  such that  $x$  exists at both  $t$  and  $t^*$ .

Given the DOCTRINE OF MOMENTARINESS, the Yogācāra philosopher cannot explain how impressions can be distinguished from each other, and, as a result, how impressions can give rise to awareness-events with different forms. Why? The natural explanation of differences amongst impressions is this: different impressions are just memory traces left by past awareness-events that have different forms. But if our minds (*citta*) are momentary, then we can't explain how different impressions are created by different awareness-events.

There is no means of knowing that supports the existence of, or the distinctions amongst, impressions. While impressions may bring about distinctions amongst the apprehenders [i.e., awareness-events], what explains the distinctions amongst the things that are apprehended?

[A BUDDHIST REPLY:] An impression, which just arises from an awareness-event, only gives rise to a recollective awareness.

[KUMĀRILA:] Since minds are momentary and their destruction is total, there is no co-existence between that which is impressed and that which impresses. So, there is no impression. The later time-slice isn't impressed unless it is produced by the previous time-slice. And since

the previous time-slice is destroyed by the later one, it doesn't leave an impression. And even if they could co-exist, there is no relation. So, there is no impression. Moreover, since they are momentary, they don't operate on each other; how can an object that is about to be destroyed be impressed upon by that which is being destroyed? Something that persists is impressed upon by a positive or negative entity that also persists. (*Nirālambanavāda* vv. 180-4 in Sastri 1978, pp. 186-7)

These are basically Uddyotakara's arguments from instability and absence of relations under *Nyāya-sūtra* 1.1.10 (and therefore not explained here).<sup>18</sup>

Kumārila goes on to explain why the differences in representational contents of different awareness-events also can't be explained by appealing to the similarity in form (*ākāra*) between them and the impressions that produce them. First of all, if the DOCTRINE OF MOMENTARINESS is true, this similarity can't be due to an earlier awareness-event.

If you accept the momentariness of awareness-events, this similarity doesn't exist. An earlier awareness-event doesn't produce its effect without being produced or after having been destroyed. Once it is produced, it doesn't persist even for a moment. Therefore, since it is destroyed as soon as it is produced, it doesn't even have a moment to produce its effect. Given that it is destroyed completely, how can there be a similarity? And, without having the same properties, there is no similarity. (*Nirālambanavāda* vv. 187cd-190ab in Sastri 1978, p. 188)

Moreover, memory can produce distortions in representational content. So, even though a person may undergo an awareness of a cow, she may later undergo an awareness of a horse on the basis of memory. And similarly, after an awareness of a horse, she may undergo an awareness of a cow on the basis of memory. In such

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<sup>18</sup>For a summary, see Taber (2016).

cases, there can be no intervening impression if impressions require similarity of form.

And, if an impression arises due to similarity, then, in a case where an awareness of an elephant follows the awareness of a cow, there won't be an impression due to dissimilarity. And, after that awareness, in virtue of having no foundation, the awareness of a cow won't arise. So, no distinct awareness-event would arise from anything that is distinct. (*Nirālambanavāda* vv. 190cd-192ab in Sastri 1978, p. 188)

Third, the Yogācāra has no explanation of how awareness-events arise sequentially from various impressions without any causal input from the external world.

Without any help from external objects, how would these awareness-events—which are unconstrained by distinct objects and destroyed completely—produce their effects in a sequence? (*Nirālambanavāda* vv. 192cd-193ab in Sastri 1978, p. 188)

For example, why aren't all impressions destroyed when a single awareness-event arises? Or, why isn't there an awareness-event that involves *all* the forms contained in all impressions?

The upshot: the appeal to impressions doesn't help explain how different awareness-events with different representational contents arise at different times.

## 8 Conclusion

It's time to sum up. What do Kumāriḷa's arguments against SUPPORTLESSNESS tell us? On the one hand, they show why it's extremely hard to be convinced by any argument in favour of SUPPORTLESSNESS. If we accept SUPPORTLESSNESS, then the ordinary conceptual framework that we use to do epistemology—which encodes certain epistemologically and metaphysically significant distinctions—simply collapses. In that respect, any argument for SUPPORTLESSNESS is bound to be self-undermining: in the very process of producing a conviction in SUPPORTLESSNESS,

it undermines the conceptual framework that makes it persuasive. On the other hand, given the Buddhist's own independent commitments like the DOCTRINE OF MOMENTARINESS, it's also hard to see how SUPPORTLESSNESS could be true and our mental lives could still be constituted by different representational states arising at different times. Both these considerations seem to suggest that the Buddhist cannot give produce any convincing argument in favour of SUPPORTLESSNESS. Given the REQUIREMENT OF DEFAULT TRUST, in the absence of counterevidence against the commonsense picture of the world, we should persist in our belief that our conscious experiences and thoughts indeed are caused by and are about objects that are distinct from them and their aspects. An external world exists.

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