

# The senses in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism from a philosophical perspective

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The distinguished contemporary philosopher J. McDowell holds that perceptual experience is a form of “openness to the world”.<sup>1</sup> Others have argued that “perceptual experience, in its character, involves the presentation (as) of ordinary mind-independent objects to a subject, and such objects are experienced as *present* or *there* such that the character of experience is immediately responsive to the character of its objects.”<sup>2</sup> But, as J. Ganeri writes, according to Buddhism “perception of objects is itself a rational activity. One does not, properly speaking, perceive objects at all, but only patterns of colour, sound, touch, smell and taste. From their sequence in time and arrangement in space, one infers the presence of an object of one kind or another. Reason here is a mental faculty of construction, synthesis and superimposition. It brings order to the array of sensory data.”<sup>3</sup>

With this framework in view, this article addresses how Indian and Tibetan Buddhist philosophers understand the way in which perceptions, sensations, and the senses provide knowledge or justified beliefs about the world. The basis of this investigation was a view that there is no substantial, enduring, and independent Self (*ātman*; *bdag*) and that “human beings are reducible to the physical and psychological constituents and processes which comprise them”.<sup>4</sup>

The first part of the article details the Buddhist philosophical analysis of the individual into five classes of physical and mental events, or aggregates (*skandha*; *phung po*). It subsequently discusses an alternative categorization, which holds that the individual comprises twelve sense-spheres or sense-fields (*āyatana*; *skye mched*), i.e. the six senses (*indriya*; *dbang po*), including the five physical senses and mind, and six classes of sense objects (*viśaya*; *yul*). Another variation that is examined understands the person as consisting of eighteen sense elements (*dhātu*; *khams*), i.e. six senses, six classes of sense objects, and six classes of sense-consciousness (*viññāna*; *rnam shes*). I concentrate here mainly on chapters I and II of Vasubandhu’s (fl. 4th to 5th century

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<sup>1</sup> McDowell 1994: 111.

<sup>2</sup> Crane and Craig 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Ganeri 2001: 17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

CE) influential Sanskrit text *Commentary on the Treasury of the Abhidharma* (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*), which was a key work that shaped Tibetan discourse on this issue.

The second part of the paper analyses the classification and characterization of the senses (*dbang po*), sense-fields (*skye mched*), sense-consciousness (*rnam shes*), sense-spheres (*kham*s), and aggregates (*phung po*) articulated by the great Nyingma scholar Mipham Rinpoche (1846–1912 CE) in his scholastic manual *The Gate for Entering the Way of a Pandita* (*mKhas pa'i tshul la jug pa'i sgo*).<sup>5</sup>

The third part of the article addresses the sophisticated account evident in Tsongkhapa's *Ocean of Reasoning* (*rTsa she tik chen rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*), which is a commentary on Nāgārjuna's (ca. 150 CE) key work *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. I focus here on Tsongkhapa's (1357–1419 CE) interpretation and discussion of the third chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* that is entitled "An Analysis of the sense-spheres" (*āyatanaparīkṣā*). In this section of the text, Nāgārjuna refutes the view of the Sarvāstivāda abhidharma scholastic tradition<sup>6</sup> that the twelve *āyatanas* are ultimately real since they have an inherent nature (*svabhāva*; *rang bzhin*). Nāgārjuna argues that all the *āyatanas* are empty (*śūnya*; *stong pa*) of an inherent nature, not unlike all of phenomenality.

The fourth part, which is quite short, concerns the concept of direct perception (*pratyakṣa*; *mngon sum*) as a source of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*; *tshad ma*), which played a key role in Buddhist epistemology. This part includes Mipham's characterization of the four types of direct perception (*pratyakṣa*).

### 1. The role of senses in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (AKBh)

*tassāhaṃ vacanaṃ sutvā khandhe āyatāni ca  
dhātuyo ca viditvāna pabbajim anāgiriyaṃ*

"Having heard (the Buddha's) word and learnt of the aggregates, bases, and elements, I went forth into homelessness."<sup>7</sup>

The main Buddhist soteriological project is to examine the world and see how things really are (*yathābhūtatadarśana*) to escape from the miserable cycle of continuous rebirth (*saṃsāra*; *'khor ba*), and thus get rid of the frustration, unsatisfactoriness and suffering (*duḥkha*; *sdug*

<sup>5</sup> *mKhas 'jug*: ff. 148–161b.

<sup>6</sup> Abhidharma (*chos mngon pa*), "higher" or "further" doctrine (*dharmā*), is (1) the set of texts that make up the *Abhidharmapiṭaka*, the third basket of the Buddhist Canon, (2) the very sophisticated system of texts and commentaries (1st BCE–2nd century CE) which is a systematic arrangement, clarification and classification of the Buddha's doctrine (*dharmā*; *chos*).

<sup>7</sup> *Theragāthā*, 1255.

*bsngal*) of existence. Buddhism therefore breaks down all reality, seemingly firm and relatively stable, into processes and changes. According to Buddhist thought, which is especially elaborate in the abhidharma metaphysics, the whole of reality is made up of “the elements of existence” (*dharmā; chos*). *Dharmas* are the ultimate ontological realities and can be characterised as “the basic qualities, both mental and physical, that in some sense constitute experience or reality in its entirety”.<sup>8</sup>

Nearly all *dharmas*, which are classified into different categories, are impermanent (*anitya; mi rtag pa*), painful (*duḥkha; sdug bsngal*) and selfless (*anātman; bdag med*). This is important from the soteriological point of view because watching *dharmas* in the meditation of insight (*vipaśyanā; lhag mthong*), that should be done without any attachment or clinging (*upādāna; len pa*), leads to the very deep experience of peace, awakening (*bodhi; byang chub*), and *nirvāṇa* (*mya ngan las 'das pa*), the final goal of Buddhist path.<sup>9</sup>

There are three schemes for classifying the *dharmas*, which constitute the whole of reality including human beings: (1) the concept of five aggregates (*skandha*), (2) the twelve bases (*āyatana*) and (3) the eighteen elements (*dhātu*). We start this triad with a concept of five aggregates, where each aggregate generally represents “a complex class of phenomena that is continuously arising and falling away into processes of consciousness (*vijñāna; rnam shes*) based on the six spheres of sense”.<sup>10</sup> According to Gethin, the concern in Pali suttas and early abhidharma “is not so much presentation of an analysis of man as object, but rather the understanding of the nature of conditioned existence from the point of view of the experiencing subject”.<sup>11</sup>

But it is not exactly correct to speak here about an “experiencing subject” as Gethin does. According to Buddhist philosophers the inner states of the person have a fleeting nature (compare Hume’s questioning of permanent “Self”)<sup>12</sup> and, therefore, there could not be a subject of experience because this claim necessarily leads to the concept of the Self. Buddhist philosophers used different strategies in their attempt to prove that “there is no entity that might serve as the referent of ‘I’ and to explain how the belief that there is such an entity

<sup>8</sup> Gethin 2004a: 537.

<sup>9</sup> Gethin 2004b: 215.

<sup>10</sup> Gethin 1986: 49.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> “For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception” (Hume, *Treatise*, 1.4.6.3).

might have arisen"; one of these concepts was the idea that "there is subjectivity but no subject".<sup>13</sup>

### 1.a. Aggregates (*skandha*)

Buddhism analyzed the individual into a flowing, still changing, but uninterrupted causal continuum (*saṃtāna*; *rgyun*, *rgyud*) composed of interdependently arising *dharmas* or causally connected five aggregates (*skandha*; *phung po*). They are inextricably linked to each other due to the causal principle of dependent arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*; *rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba*) and create living being or psychophysical personality in its unity called "mind and matter" (*nāmarūpa*, lit. "name-form"; *ming gzugs*).<sup>14</sup>

five aggregates ( <i>skandha</i> )
(1) material form ( <i>rūpa</i> ; <i>gzugs</i> )
(2) feelings or sensation ( <i>vedanā</i> ; <i>tshor ba</i> )
(3) perception ( <i>saṃjñā</i> ; <i>'du shes</i> )
(4) volitions or dispositional formations ( <i>saṃskāra</i> ; <i>'du byed</i> )
(5) consciousness or awareness ( <i>vijñāna</i> ; <i>rnam shes</i> )

The five *skandhas* are defined in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* as follows:

(1) The *skandha* of material form (*rūpaskandha*) consists of:

(a) Five sense organs (*indriya*), i.e. the eye (*caḥsur*; *mig*), the ear (*śrotra*; *rna ba*), the nose (*ghrāṇa*; *sna*), the tongue (*jihvā*; *lce*), and the body (*kāya*; *lus*).

(b) Five sense objects: visible matter (*rūpa*; *gzugs*), sound (*śabda*; *sgra*), smell (*gandha*; *dri*) taste (*rasa*; *ro*), and tangible things (*spraṣṭavya*; *reg bya*) (*AKBh* 1.9).

(c) Unmanifest or imperceptible form (*avijñaptirūpa*; *rnam par rig byed ma yin pa'i gzugs*; *AKBh* 1.11). This eleventh category of *rūpaskandha* is a special kind of materiality (*rūpa*) which is very subtle. It is something like a sign of *karman* and, according to the Sarvāstivāda school, it may or may not be connected with other *rūpadharmas*. It comes into existence dependent on the four great elements of which the material world including *rūpaskandha* is composed (*mahābhūta*; *'byung ba chen po*), i.e. earth, water, fire, and wind.

<sup>13</sup> Siderits et al (eds.) 2011: 5, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Unanimated things like rocks, trees or tables have only material form (*rūpa*), while human beings (including animals) have also mental "life" which is created by the four remaining *skandhas* and described as "name" (*nāma*).

Unmanifest form could be *karmically* wholesome (*kuśala*) or unwholesome (*akuśala*) because it depends on the intention (*cetanā*) of a person who is going to do some action (*karman*; *AKBh* 4.4–7).<sup>15</sup>

(2) The *skandha* of feelings or sensation (*vedanā*) is threefold: painful (*duḥkha*), pleasant (*sukha*) and neutral, i.e. “neither-painful-nor-pleasant” (*aduḥkhāsukha*). Again, this *skandha* can be divided into six classes, corresponding to the feelings which result from the contact (*sparśa*; *reg pa*) of sense organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind) with their objects (*viśaya*) (*AKBh* 1.14). Feelings can be “corporeal” through the sense organs, or “mental” through the mind (*manas*, *citta*; *jid*, *sems*).

According to Buddhism the mind is a sixth sense organ which can be controlled and developed like the other senses. The difference between the mind as a sensory organ and, for example, the eye is that the eye can experience only the world of colours and visible forms, while the mind experiences the world of ideas, thoughts and mental subjects. The eye can see only what is visible, the ear can hear only what is audible, etc., while the mind seizes both its objects and the objects of the other five senses, as well as these senses themselves.<sup>16</sup>

(3) The *skandha* of perception (*saṃjñā*; ‘*du shes*) is an aggregate of ideas which grasps (*udgrahaṇa*) special signs (*nimitta*; *mtshan ma*) of phenomenal objects such as blue, yellow, long, short, male, female, friend, enemy, and so on (*AKBh* 1.14).<sup>17</sup> Like the *skandha* of feelings (*vedanā*), it appears through the contact of internal sense-organs with the external sense-objects which are grasped, recognized, classified, and interpreted by our senses and mind.<sup>18</sup> But according to the commentaries the perception of “blue”, for instance, is “not so much a passive awareness of visual sensation we subsequently agree to call “blue”, but rather the *active noting of that sensation*, and the recognising of it as “blue”—that is, more or less, the idea of “blueness”.<sup>19</sup>

*Saṃjñā* is caused by many factors, such as memories, expectations, dispositions, etc., and could be, according to Coseru, broadly

<sup>15</sup> Intention (*cetanā*) “creates an ‘unmanifest’ type of materiality (*avijñaptirūpa*) that imprints itself on the person as either bodily or verbal information... Unmanifest materiality is the ‘glue’ that connects the intention that initiates action with the physical act itself” (Buswell and Lopez 2014: 86). The intention is a very important mental activity because it generates wholesome, unwholesome or indifferent *karman*. “Volition, monks, I declare to be *kamma*” (*cetanāhaṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi*) *Aṅguttaranikāya*, VI.63.

<sup>16</sup> *Saṃyuttanikāya*, III.59–60, 86–87.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, II.123.

<sup>18</sup> Gethin 1986: 36.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

compared to the Aristotelian concept of *sensus communis*, the general faculty of sense that unites the sensations of all senses into a “coherent representation of the object”; or it could be broadly understood as similar to Kant’s notion of the transcendental unity of apperception.<sup>20</sup> This faculty of “apperception” (*die Apperzeption*) is, according to Kant, active and brings about “the unity of this synthesis [of the various sensory materials]” (*Pure Reason*, A 94) and makes out of all appearances “a connection or coherence according to laws” (*Pure Reason*, A 108).<sup>21</sup>

(4) The *skandha* of volitions (*saṃskāra*; ‘*du byed*) is different from all other *skandhas* (*AKBh* 1.15). It includes six types of volitional states (*cetanā*) that are related to visual objects, sounds, odours, tastes, bodily impressions, and mental objects. *Saṃskāras* include everything that is conditioned (*saṃskṛta*; ‘*du byed*); i.e. *dharmas* that are in various combinations intrinsic to consciousness (*cittasaṃprayukta*), as well as *dharmas* that are dissociated from consciousness (*cittaviprayukta*). The most important *dharma* in this aggregate is volition (*cetanā*; see above). There are wholesome *dharmas*, such as faith, respect, fear, non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion, effort, etc.; unwholesome *dharmas*, such as desire, hatred, pride, ignorance, anger, envy, etc.; and indeterminate *dharmas*, such as regret, sleep, reasoning, and investigation, etc.

(5) The *skandha* of awareness or consciousness (*viññāna*; *rnam shes*) is characterised as seeing “what is recognized through differentiation” (*viññānaṃ prativiññaptiḥ*). Awareness is defined as the impression (*viññapti*) of each object (*viṣaya*) or as bare grasping (*upalabdhi*) of each object. It consists of six classes (*AKBh* 1.16): visual awareness (*caḥsurviññāna*), auditory awareness (*śrotraviññāna*), olfactory awareness (*ghrānaviññāna*), awareness of taste (*jihvaviññāna*), awareness of touch (*kāyaviññāna*) and mental awareness (*manoviññāna*). For instance, when visual awareness (*caḥsurviññāna*) apprehends colours (blue etc.) and shapes it is called mental perception (*saṃjñā*) because it apprehends certain characteristics (*nimitta*) of the sense object.

It has to be noted that only *rūpaskandha* is a physical aggregate as such because the other four aggregates, i.e. sensation, perception, volition, and awareness, are—according to the abhidharma’s analysis—mental factors (*caitta*). When we compare *rūpaskandha* with contemporary philosophy, “the empirical approach that characterizes the Buddhist analysis of materiality does not imply physicalism, at

<sup>20</sup> Coseru 2017: 13.

<sup>21</sup> Kitcher 2007: 184. But it has to be noted that, unlike *saṃjñā*, Kant’s transcendental apperception, which is uniquely capable of representing all objects, is pure, original, and immutable (!) consciousness (Kant, *Pure Reason*, A 107).

least not in the sense that everything is or supervenes on the physical. Rather, materiality is analyzed as being reducible to the phenomenal content of experience. Thus, the formal properties of material objects are analyzed either in terms of how they are impacted by contact or as factors that oppose resistance."<sup>22</sup>

### 1.b. Bases (*āyatana*)

The second classification of *dharmas* is their sorting out into twelve bases (*āyatana*, “place of entry”) of cognition, or bases (*āyatana*) for a production of consciousness (*viññāna*). The term *āyatana* etymologically means “entrance”, i.e. “that extends (*tanoti*) the entry (*āyam*) of the mind (*citta*) and its mental states (*caitta*)” (*AKBh* 1.16). It is important to note here that the three terms *manas* (“mental faculty,” “mind”), *citta* (“mind,” “thought”), and *viññāna* (“consciousness,” “discernment”), which designate mental reality or processes, i.e. “mind”, are near synonyms in early Buddhist texts and Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa*.<sup>23</sup>

six internal bases ( <i>adhyātmāyatana</i> )	six external bases ( <i>bāhyāyatana</i> )
1. faculty of eye ( <i>cakṣurindriya</i> )	7. forms ( <i>rūpāyatana</i> )
2. faculty of ear ( <i>śrotrendriya</i> )	8. sounds ( <i>śabdāyatana</i> )
3. faculty of nose ( <i>ghrāṇendriya</i> )	9. odours ( <i>ghrāṇāyatana</i> )
4. faculty of tongue ( <i>jihvendriya</i> )	10. tastes ( <i>rasāyatana</i> )
5. faculty of touch ( <i>kāyendriya</i> )	11. tangible objects ( <i>spraṣṭavyāyatana</i> ) <sup>24</sup>
6. faculty of mind ( <i>manendriya</i> )	12. mental objects ( <i>dharmāyatana</i> )

The bases are characterised as internal (*adhyātmāyatana*) or external (*bāhyāyatana*, *viśaya*). The six external bases are something like a cognitive support for the six sense faculties.

### 1.c. Elements (*dhātu*)

This third classification of *dharmas*, which is done from the point of view of the theory of cognition, is their division into eighteen elements (*dhātu*). In *AKBh* 1.20 Vasubandhu calls the term *dhātu* “lineage” or “family” (*gotra*). Just as there are many “families” of gems, like copper,

<sup>22</sup> Coseru 2017: 14.

<sup>23</sup> “*Citta*, *manas*, and *viññāna* have the same meaning (*artha*). It is *citta* because it accumulates (*cinoti*). It is *manas* because it thinks (*manute*). It is *viññāna* because it distinguishes (its objects; *viñānāti*)” *AKBh* 2.34.

<sup>24</sup> The bases 1–5 and 7–11 are included in *rūpaskandha* (*AKBh* 1.16).

silver, gold, etc., in a single mountain, there are eighteen different elements in a continuum of an individual (*saṃtāna*): six classes of sense-organs or faculties (*indriya*), six classes of sense-objects (*viśaya*), and six corresponding elements (*dhātu*). Sense-organs are here “conceived as receptacles of experience (*indriyādhiṣṭhāna*) rather than physical organs interacting with empirical objects,” so they do not function as “the faculties of an internal agent” but as “instruments or mediums joining together the external spheres of sensory activity with the internal spheres of perception” (see *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya* ad I, 4).<sup>25</sup>

eighteen elements ( <i>dhātu</i> )		
1. eye ( <i>caṣurdhātu</i> )	7. form ( <i>rūpadhātu</i> )	13. visual consciousness ( <i>caṣurvijñānadhātu</i> )
2. ear – auditory system ( <i>śrotradhātu</i> )	8. sound ( <i>śabdadhātu</i> )	14. auditory consciousness ( <i>śrotravijñānadhātu</i> )
3. nose – olfactory system ( <i>ghrāṇadhātu</i> )	9. odour ( <i>gandhadhātu</i> )	15. olfactory consciousness ( <i>ghrāṇavijñānadhātu</i> )
4. tongue – gustatory system ( <i>jihvādhātu</i> )	10. taste ( <i>rasadhātu</i> )	16. gustatory consciousness ( <i>jihvāvijñānadhātu</i> )
5. touch – tactile system ( <i>kāyadhātu</i> )	11. tangible object ( <i>spraṣṭavyadhātu</i> )	17. tactile consciousness ( <i>kāyavijñānadhātu</i> )
6. mind – cognitive system ( <i>manodhātu</i> )	12. mental object ( <i>dharmadhātu</i> )	18. mental consciousness ( <i>manovijñānadhātu</i> )

Mind (*manas*) or consciousness (*vijñāna*) is, according to this classification, divided into seven units, i.e. six different sensory elements (visual consciousness, etc.), and one element of mind (*manodhātu*), which is a part of an individual mental flow of a life continuum (*saṃtāna*).<sup>26</sup> Buddhism clearly distinguishes between the mind (*manodhātu*) as cognitive system and the six faculties of manifested consciousness. “Thus cognition, in its perceptual aspect, has a dual form: subjectively, it discloses a bare consciousness that merely attends to the flow of sensations; objectively, it corresponds to

<sup>25</sup> Coseru 2017: 18.

<sup>26</sup> Stcherbatsky 1923: 10.



each specific domain of empirical awareness: visual objects to visual awareness, sounds to auditory awareness, etc.”<sup>27</sup>

The second chapter of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* concerns “faculties” (*indriya*), which are directly analysed in the first twenty-one verses (*kārikās*). Vasubandhu starts with the etymological meaning of the word *indriya*, which according to him literally means “belonging to Indra” (root *idi-*, denotes *paramaiśvarya*), supreme power, force or authority etc. So *indriya* means a ruler (*adhipati*).

Vasubandhu writes that one should understand this predominance or sovereignty (*adhipatyam*) “(1) with regard to the perception of their special object and (2) with regard to all objects, six organs” (*AKBh* 2a.b). “That is, by reason of their predominance through their affinity to the six consciousnesses. The five organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, touch), the first of which is the organ of sight (*caḥsus*), are predominant through their affinity to the five sense consciousnesses (*viññāna*), visual consciousness (*caḥsurviññāna*), etc., each one of which distinguishes its own object (*viśaya*), visible things, etc. The mental organ (*manas*) is predominant with regard to the mental consciousness (*manoviññāna*) which distinguishes all objects. It is in this way that the six sense organs are predominant...” (*AKBh* 2.2a–b).<sup>28</sup>

“But, we might say, the sense objects, visibles, etc., are also predominant through their affinity to the consciousness, and as a consequence, should they not also be considered as *indriyas*? They are not predominant merely by this. ‘Predominance’ means ‘predominant power.’ The eye is predominant, for (1) it exercises this predominance with regard to the arising of the consciousness (*caḥsurviññāna*) that knows visible things, being the common cause of all consciousnesses of visible things, whereas each visible thing merely aids the arising of but one consciousness” (*AKBh* 2.2a–b).<sup>29</sup>

## 2. The role of senses in Mipham Rinpoche’s *The Gate for Entering the Way of a Pandita (GEW)*

*The Gate for Entering the Way of a Pandita* was written by Mipham, an indigenous Tibetan philosopher, who was a student of Jamgon Kongtrul, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, and Paltrul Rinpoche. This work is according Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche, a contemporary world-renowned Buddhist teacher and meditation master, a very useful and important key for comprehending the great treatises of Buddhist

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<sup>27</sup> Coseru 2017: 20.

<sup>28</sup> Pruden 1991: 156.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

philosophy such as Nāgārjuna's, etc.<sup>30</sup> Even in the following short summary of this key text for understanding Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, we will see that it is a typical scholastic classification. Because Mipham starts his first volume of these four volumes of scholastic manuals with a characterization of aggregates (*phung po*), the sense elements (*khams*), and faculties (*dbang po*), we can consider these issues as the first steps to a deeper understanding of Buddhist teachings.

In the *Prologue* Mipham notes that if one would like to get "the discriminating knowledge (*shes rab; prajñā*) that unmistakably ascertains what should be known",<sup>31</sup> he should study the ten topics (*don bcu*): (1) the aggregates; (2) the elements; (3) the sense-spheres; (4) dependent origination; (5) the correct and the incorrect; (6) the faculties; (7) time; (8) the truths; (9) the vehicles; and (10) conditioned and unconditioned things. I will concentrate here on the first three topics and the sixth one because they form the main theme of my article.

### 2.a. The aggregates (*skandha*)

Mipham's classification and characterization of the five aggregates (*phung po; skandha*) closely follows Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*. At first (GEW 1.3) he enumerates all five aggregates and then he refers to the aggregate of physical form (*gzugs; rūpa*) that he subdivides into four causal forms (*rgyu gzugs bzhi*) and eleven forms of effect (*'bras gzugs bcu gcig*).

The four causal forms (*rgyu gzugs*) consists of four great elements (*'byung ba chen po bzhi; caturmahābhautika*):<sup>32</sup> (1) the earth element (*sa'i khams; pṛthivīdhātu*), (2) the water element (*chu khams; āpodhātu*), (3) the fire element (*me khams; tejodhātu*), and (4) the wind element (*rlung khams; vāyudhātu*). These elements are characterized as follows: "The earth element is solidity and its function is to support. The water element is fluidity and cohesion. The fire element is heat and ripening. The wind element is motion and expansion" (GEW 1.4).<sup>33</sup> These great four elements (earth, etc.) are also termed as "radical substance" because the sense organs arise from them.

Mipham, still faithfully following Vasubandhu's *AKBh*, notes that the eleven forms of effect (*'bras gzugs bcu gcig*) include the five sense faculties/powers (*dbang po lnga; pañcendriya*) and the five sense objects

<sup>30</sup> Mipham Rinpoche 1997: 9.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*: 14.

<sup>32</sup> Vasubandhu writes that these four *dhātus* are called "great" ("primary", *mahā; chen po*) "because they are the point of support for all derived matter" (*AKBh* 1.12a–b).

<sup>33</sup> Mipham Rinpoche 1997: 16.

(*Inga don; artha*). He writes that, according to the *Abhidharmakośa*, there is also an eleventh type called “imperceptible form” (*rnam par rig byed min pa'i gzugs; avijñaptirūpa*), which is “the form for mental consciousness” (*chos kyi skye mched pa'i gzugs*), as Asaṅga’s *Abhidharmasamuccaya* says (GEW 1.5).<sup>34</sup>

The five sense faculties / powers (*dbang po*)—eyes, ear, nose, tongue, and body—are dominant causal-factors or dominant cognitions (*bdag rkyen; adhipatipratyaya*)<sup>35</sup> for their own respective cognitions (*rang rang gi shes pa*). They are subtle internal forms (*nang gi gzugs; ādhyātmikarūpa*)<sup>36</sup> “[based on the physical sense organ]” (GEW 1.7).<sup>37</sup> Mipham very poetically and interestingly describes the shapes of these five faculties as follows: “The eye faculty is similar to [the round and blue shape of] the *umaka* [sesame/cumin] flower; the ear faculty is similar to a twisted roll of birch bark; the nose faculty is similar to parallel copper needles; the tongue faculty is similar to a crescent moon disc; and the body faculty is [all-covering] similar to the skin of the smooth-to-the-touch bird” (GEW 1.8).<sup>38</sup>

The five sense objects (*don*; GEW 1.9) are visible forms (*gzugs*), sounds (*sgra*), odours (*dri*), tastes (*ro*), and tangible objects (*reg bya*). Visible forms, which are objects of eye (*mig gi yul*), are then divided into (1) colours (*kha dog*) and (2) shapes (*dbyibs*). Colours are divided into four *primary* colours (blue, yellow, white, and red) and eight *secondary* colours (cloudy and smoky, dusty and misty, sunny and shady, light and dark). But there are many different secondary colours that exist due to the interfusion of the primary ones. The shapes are “long or short, square or round, concave or convex, fine or gross, even or uneven”, and can be further subdivided into “triangular, crescent-shaped, oblong, and so forth”<sup>39</sup> (GEW 1.10–12).

The second kind of sense objects discussed is sounds (*sgra*), which are objects of the ear (*rna gi yul*). There are sounds that “originate from conscious elemental causes such as the voice of a sentient being or a finger snap; sounds that originate from unconscious elemental causes such as the sounds of a river, the wind, and so forth; sounds that originate from both [conscious and unconscious elements] such as a drum beat; animate sounds that express meaning; and inanimate sounds that don’t express meaning. Sounds that express meaning can

<sup>34</sup> See above. Cf. *AKBh* 1.9a–b, 1.11.

<sup>35</sup> This dominant cognition empowers/controls the arising of the *karmic* fruition, as for the eye sense and so forth. See *THL Tibetan to English Translation Tool*.

<sup>36</sup> These forms are defined as included within the mental continuum of beings (*saṃtāna*). See *THL Tibetan to English Translation Tool*.

<sup>37</sup> Mipham Rinpoche 1997: 17.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Mipham Rinpoche 1997: 18.

be either spoken by a mundane person or by a noble person. Sounds can also be divided into pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral" (GEW 1.13).

The third kind of sense objects is odours (*dri*), which are the objects of the nose. Odours can be "fragrant, foul, or neutral, and those that are natural or manufactured" (GEW 1.14).<sup>40</sup>

The fourth kind of sense objects is tastes (*ro*), which are the objects of the tongue. They can be "sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, and astringent", but there are also many other subtypes that arise from the mixing of these six tastes. The tastes as well as the sounds can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral (GEW 1.15).<sup>41</sup>

The fifth kind of sense objects is tangible objects (*reg bya*), which are objects of the body. There are many such objects, including smoothness, roughness, heaviness, lightness, etc. We can include here also inner physical sensations of "hunger, thirst and cold", as well as feelings of being "sated, ill, aged, dying", etc. (GEW 1.16).<sup>42</sup>

There are five types of forms producing mental objects (*chos kyi skye mched pa'i gzugs lnga*): (1) Deduced forms that are compounded from minute particles or atoms (*rdul phra rab; paramāṇu*). Even if they are physical, they can be known only mentally. (2) Spatial or clear forms like physical space, etc. (3) Imperceptible forms (*rnam par rig byed ma yin pa'i gzugs; avijñaptirūpa*)<sup>43</sup> resulting from a formally undertaken vow such as the ordination of a Buddhist monk. (4) Imagined forms (*kun btags pa'i gzugs*) such as mental images or dream forms. (5) Mastered forms (*dbang 'byor ba'i gzugs*), which are forms of one "who has attained mastery" and result from the force of mind that mastered its concentration (*bsam gtan; dhyāna*), for instance the totality of blue etc. (GEW 1.17).

The five sense faculties and five sense objects are composed of atoms (*rdul phra rab*); these are ultimately the smallest forms and are subtle and partless (GEW 1.21–22).<sup>44</sup>

The second aggregate is feeling or sensation (*tshor ba; vedanā*), defined as impression (GEW 1.24), and is characterised as pleasant, painful, and neutral, or as pleasure and mental pleasure, pain and mental pain, and neutral sensation (GEW 1.25). In relation to the six senses (*dbang po*) and their contact with objects, there are six types of sensation (*tshor ba drug*). They result from the contact of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind with their objects. When these six types of sensation are characterised in terms of pleasure, pain, and neutrality

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Mipham Rinpoche 1997: 19.

<sup>43</sup> See above. Cf. Also *AKBh* 1.11.

<sup>44</sup> Seven atoms make one particle or "molecule".

they form altogether eighteen sorts of sensation that accompany every cognitive act of the sense organ (*GEW* 1.26).<sup>45</sup>

The third aggregate I would like to mention is perception (*'du shes; samjñā*). It “consist[s] of the grasping of distinguishing features” of objects (*GEW* 1.28).<sup>46</sup> Perceptions are also divided according to sensations into six types that arise from the contact of the sense (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind) with their object (*yul; GEW* 1.29).<sup>47</sup>

### 2.b. The elements (*dhātu*)

The second chapter of *GEW* concerns the role of the elements (*kham; dhātu*). Mipham enumerates ten elements of the aggregate of forms. They are the five elements of the sense faculties and the five elements of the sense objects (see above). Then there are the seven elements of the aggregate of consciousness, i.e. six elements of consciousness (consciousness of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind), plus the mind element (*manodhātu; GEW* 2.1–2). The mind element is “the faculty which produces a mental cognition” (*GEW* 2.3).<sup>48</sup>

It is important to know that the elements can be demonstrated only in their respective field (for instance, in the visual field only the element of visual form can be demonstrated); “the remaining ones cannot be demonstrated” (*GEW* 2.16).<sup>49</sup> The sense faculties are considered the objective support (*dmigs pa; ālambana*) for the arising of their respective consciousnesses. For instance, when the eye is open and sees the shapes of a table then it is a “faculty with the support” (*GEW* 2.33).<sup>50</sup>

### 2.c. The sense-spheres (*āyatana*)

The third chapter of *GEW* concerns the twelve sense-spheres or sources (*skye mched; āyatana*). Mipham notes that the eye element (*mig gi kham; cakṣurdhātu*) and eye source (*mig gi skye mched; cakṣurāyatana*) are synonyms or have one meaning (*don gcig*). The only difference between them is that they are “different systems in different contexts”.<sup>51</sup> It is the same with the other elements (ear, nose, tongue, and body) and their objects or sources (*skye mched*) that are together included in a physical form (*gzugs kham; rūpadhātu*). Similarly, the

<sup>45</sup> Mipham Rinpoche 1997: 21. See *Samyuttanikāya*, 22.55 and *Dīghanikāya*, 22.

<sup>46</sup> Mipham Rinpoche 1997: 22.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Mipham Rinpoche 1997: 36.

<sup>49</sup> Eye can see only visible, ear can hear only audible etc. (see above).

<sup>50</sup> Mipham Rinpoche 1997: 41.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.: 43.

element of mental objects (*chos khams*) is the source of mental objects (*chos kyi skye mched; dharmāyatana*). The seven consciousness elements (*rnam par shes pa'i khams bdun*) are gathered in the sense-field sphere (*gid kyi skye mched*). Altogether they form twelve sense-spheres or sources (*skye mched; āyatana*), "from the eye source and [visible] form source to the mind source and mental object source" (GEW 3.1).<sup>52</sup>

Mipham moreover divides the sense-spheres as Vasubandhu does into six *internal* (*nang*) sources (from eye to mind) and six *outer* (*phyi*) sources (from visible form to mental object). They are literally called "apprehended" and "apprehender" (*gzung 'dzin; grāhya* and *grāhaka*) or apprehended object and apprehending subject. They are "sources (*skye mched*) because they are the medium for a cognition (*rnam shes; vijñāna*) to occur and unfold by means of apprehender and apprehended" (GEW 3.2).<sup>53</sup>

As described above, the mind (*blo*) plays the most important role in our perceiving and cognition because it "cognizes the object of the eye and as well as of the other faculties, which are visible form and the other [sense-objects]. Because it perceives in the manner of engagement [in] and disengagement [from sense-objects] together with the cognitions of [each of] the five sense faculties, it is the perceiver-subject of all knowable things" (GEW 3.6).<sup>54</sup> Mind is able to cognize without conceptualization not only the objects of "the five sense consciousnesses" (*rnam shes*), but also itself. Through conceptualization the mind can name all outer and inner objects of its knowledge. Mipham writes that this knowledge is "undeluded" (GEW 3.7) and that "the cognitions of the five sense doors are always nonconceptual, while mental cognition has the two modes of being conceptual and nonconceptual" (GEW 3.11).<sup>55</sup>

#### 2.d. *The role of the senses in dependent origination (pratīyasamutpāda)*

The fourth chapter of *GEW* concerns the principle of causality or dependent origination (*rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba*), a key element of Buddhist doctrine. It is "an elaboration of the truth of the origin of suffering, but this difficult teaching is intertwined with other important themes of Buddhist thought".<sup>56</sup> Tsongkhapa wrote about this hallmark concept of Buddhism in his *In Praise of Dependent Origination* (*brTen 'brel bstod pa*). Dependent origination "is concerned

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.: 44.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Gethin 1998: 74.

primarily with the workings of the mind: the way in which things we think, say, and do have an effect on both ourselves and others."<sup>57</sup> It roughly means that all phenomena, physical or mental, rise and fall dependent on their causes and conditions. It is depicted as the twelve-linked chain of dependent origination and is intended to explain the origin of suffering (*duḥkha*; *sdug bsngal*) as well as its termination.<sup>58</sup>

In his depiction of dependent origination Mipham is—as usual—very accurate and systematic. “Dependent origination is as follows: Because this exists, such and-such will arise. Because that has arisen, such-and-such arises. Hence, because of ignorance (*ma rig pa*) the formations (*’du byed*) arise, because of the formations the consciousnesses (*rnam shes*) will arise, and so forth. The same holds true for name-and-form (*ming dang gzugs*), the six sense-sources (*skye mched drug*), contact (*reg pa*), sensation (*tshor pa*), craving (*sred pa*), grasping (*len pa*), becoming (*srid pa*), and birth (*skye ba*), down to old age and death (*rga shi*). Sorrow, lamentation, misery, unhappiness and distress will then arise. Thus, this great mass of total suffering arises. Similarly, the formations will cease because of ignorance having ceased and so forth, down to the point where, because of birth, old age and death having ceased, sorrow and so forth, this great mass of total suffering will also cease” (GEW 4.6–7).<sup>59</sup>

The inner six sources (eye and so forth) are the fifth link in the chain (*gzhi/gleng gzhi*; *nidāna*) of dependent origination. They arise depending on (conditioned by) the fourth link, mind-and-body (*ming gzugs*; *nāmarūpa*; “name-and-form”; GEW 4.12). When the sense objects, sense faculties, and replete consciousnesses meet together then six types of contact arise “such as perception through the contact of the form of an object meeting with the eye” (GEW 4.13).<sup>60</sup> Conditioned by sense contact is link (7), feeling/sensation (*tshor pa*; *vedanā*), and conditioned by feeling is link (8), craving (*sred pa*; *tṛṣṇā*) towards the six sense objects (visible forms and so forth). This craving is a strong desire that is not “separated from a pleasant sensation, the fearful craving of desiring to cast away an unpleasant sensation, and a self-sufficient abiding in regards to indifferent sensations”; this link is “to experience the taste of the objects caused by sensation, and to draw in these objects because of taking delight in clinging to them” (GEW 4.15).<sup>61</sup> Conditioned by link (8), craving (*sred pa*), is link (9), grasping

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.: 153.

<sup>58</sup> See Siderits 2007: 41–45.

<sup>59</sup> Mipham Rinpoche 1997: 52.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.: 53.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.: 53–54.

(*len pa*), when one strongly wishes not “to be separated from what is beautiful and pleasant!” (GEW 4.16).<sup>62</sup>

### 2.e. The faculties (*indriya*)

The sixth chapter of *GEW* concerns twenty-two faculties (*dbang po*) that apprehend individual objects (GEW 6.1–2).<sup>63</sup> The faculties of eye and ear apprehend their objects “from a distance without meeting the object” and “without any regularity as to whether the object is bigger or smaller than itself” (GEW 6.12).<sup>64</sup> The faculties of nose, tongue, and body are different because they apprehend their objects after meeting with them and “take hold of the object in a size equal to itself” (GEW 6.13).<sup>65</sup>

### 3. Tsongkhapa's commentary to “An Analysis of the sense-spheres” (*āyatanaparīkṣā*) of Nāgārjuna's *MMK*

In the third chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*MMK*), Nāgārjuna analyses the doctrine of the twelve *āyatanas*, i.e. the six sense faculties (*indriya*) and their six respective sense fields/objects (*viṣaya*). Candrakīrti, in his commentary to *MMK*, *Prasannapadā*, calls this chapter “an analysis of the faculty of eye” (*caḥsurindriyaparīkṣā*) because Nāgārjuna examines here explicitly only the faculty of vision. Nāgārjuna argues that this faculty is empty (*śūnya*; *stong pa*) of inherent nature (*svabhāva*; *rang bzhin*) and therefore does not exist ultimately or is not established from its own side (*rang gi ngo bo grub pa*), as Tibetans say. In *MMK* 3.8 Nāgārjuna notes that the same argumentation is valid also for the other five sense faculties and their fields.<sup>66</sup> According to Kalupahana, Nāgārjuna concentrates his analyses on visual perception because among faculties and their functions this epistemological issue was the most important and complicated problem.<sup>67</sup>

Tsongkhapa's commentary on *MMK* (*rTsa she*), known as *Ocean of Reasoning* (*rTsa she ṭik chen rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*), or *dBu ma rtsa ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa shes rab ces bya ba'i rnam bshad rigs pa'i rgya mtsho* (*Ocean of Reasoning: Commentary on Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, the Text Known as*

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.: 54.

<sup>63</sup> They are: the life faculty; the male and female faculties; the five faculties of the sensations of pleasure, pain, mental pleasure, mental pain, and neutral sensation; the five faculties of faith, diligence, recollection, concentration, and discrimination control etc. (GEW 6.3–8).

<sup>64</sup> Mipham Rinpoche 1997: 72.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Siderits and Katsura 2013: 48–49.

<sup>67</sup> Kalupahana 1986: 132–133.



“Wisdom”) as it was called by Tsongkhapa, is a very important text for understanding the Tibetan approach towards—and interpretation of—Madhyamaka philosophy “founded” by Nāgārjuna. Tsongkhapa’s commentary is a very systematic, complex, and subtle analysis of *MMK* founded on highly developed Buddhist logic and epistemology.<sup>68</sup>

As in the case of other Tibetan Buddhist philosophical texts, *Ocean of Reasoning* is divided into sections, subsections, sub-subsections, etc.,<sup>69</sup> and this is also true of the third chapter, “An examination of sense faculties (*dbang po brtag pa*)”. This chapter explains how phenomena such as sense faculties (third chapter of *MMK*), aggregates (fourth chapter of *MMK*), and elements (fifth chapter of *MMK*) are without a permanent phenomenal self (*bdag*; *ātman*). Tsongkhapa’s analysis starts with a refutation of the view that sense faculties (*dbang po*) have self.

In the explanation of the third chapter (section 1), Tsongkhapa introduces the opponent’s thesis of some abhidharma schools (especially Sarvāstivāda) that was postulated by Nāgārjuna in *MMK* 3.1: “Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and mind are the six faculties. Their spheres are the visible objects, etc.”<sup>70</sup> According to Tsongkhapa this verse means that “if nothing exists essentially, such things as seeing would not be possible, and therefore that such things as seeing *do* exist essentially” (*rang bzhin kyis yod pa*) or as ultimately real, i.e. have inherent nature (*rang bzhin*; *svabhāva*).<sup>71</sup>

Tsongkhapa refutes this argument as invalid (section 1.2). He argues that “the eye as the agent of seeing” as well as “the object and action of seeing” cannot essentially exist.<sup>72</sup> To support this refutation he quotes a seemingly puzzling argument of Nāgārjuna’s from *MMK* 3.2: “That very seeing does not see itself at all. How can something that cannot see itself see another?”<sup>73</sup> Tsongkhapa explains this cryptic verse as follows. We cannot accept that the visual object and visual subject have an inherent nature because they can exist only interdependently. So, when we do not have any visual object we cannot have its receptive subject, and vice versa. If the visual object and visual subject existed inherently, they would not need causes and conditions for their existence. It means that the object of negation (*dgag bya*) is “the *inherent* existence of the seer, etc., but not their *mere* existence”.<sup>74</sup> Nāgārjuna of

<sup>68</sup> Geshe Ngawang Samten and Garfield 2006: xii–xiii.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*: xviii.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*: 128.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*: 129. Cf. also Siderits and Katsura 2013: 44.

<sup>72</sup> Geshe Ngawang Samten and Garfield 2006: 129.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*: 129–130. Cf. also Siderits and Katsura 2013: 44.

<sup>74</sup> Geshe Ngawang Samten and Garfield 2006: 130.

course does not want to say that sense faculties and their respective spheres do not exist at all! He just shows that they depend on each other and therefore exist only in a conventional way.<sup>75</sup>

Tsongkhapa's other comment is as follows: "How can something that cannot see itself see others such as blueness? So, there is no inherently existent seeing and the same applies to the ear, etc."<sup>76</sup> This argument is an allusion to the empirical *principle of irreflexivity* that Nāgārjuna uses in *MMK* 3.2. It is a very well-known argument that the knife cannot cut itself, the finger cannot point at itself, and so forth.<sup>77</sup> So, even the eye cannot see itself and this also holds for the other senses, i.e. the ear cannot hear itself, and so on. Tsongkhapa then comes to the conclusion, quoting Nāgārjuna's *MMK* 3.4: "When there is not the slightest seeing, there is no seer. How could it make sense to say that in virtue of seeing, it sees?"<sup>78</sup> And, when there is no seer, "how can there be seeing or the seen?" Nāgārjuna asks in *MMK* 6cd.

According to Tsongkhapa's commentary, this means that when no seer essentially exists then even the seen and seeing cannot essentially exist because they are without their cause, i.e. the seer.<sup>79</sup> And it follows that the seer, the seen, and seeing can exist only in interdependence and relative to each other, i.e. without having independent intrinsic nature (*rang bzhin; svabhāva*).<sup>80</sup> As it is accurately summarised by Garfield: "Vision and its subjects are thus relational, dependent phenomena and not substantial or independent entities. So neither seeing nor seer nor the seen (conceived of as the object of sense perception) can be posited as entities with inherent existence. The point is just that sense perception cannot be understood as an autonomous phenomenon, but only as a dependent process."<sup>81</sup>

From this follows that even "the four" (consciousness, contact, feeling and craving) cannot ultimately or essentially exist because consciousness (*rnam shes*) arises in dependence on the seeing and the seen. And in dependence on consciousness arises contact (*reg pa*), in dependence on contact arises feeling (*tshor pa*), and in dependence on feeling arises craving (*sred pa*).<sup>82</sup> If all this does not exist essentially but only in dependence or conditionally on each other "how could such

<sup>75</sup> Garfield 1995: 137.

<sup>76</sup> Geshe Ngawang Samten and Garfield 2006: 130.

<sup>77</sup> The *principle of irreflexivity*—"that an entity cannot operate on itself"—is generally used "when the opponent seeks to head off an infinite regress by claiming that an entity *x* bears relation *R* to itself." Siderits and Katsura 2013: 8–9.

<sup>78</sup> Geshe Ngawang Samten and Garfield 2006: 131.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*: 135.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Garfield 1995: 140.

<sup>82</sup> Geshe Ngawang Samten and Garfield, 2006: 134.

things as the appropriator exist?"<sup>83</sup> Then "such things" as becoming (*srid pa*), rebirth (*skye ba*), aging, and death (*rga shi*) also cannot exist essentially/inherently, i.e. they cannot have an intrinsic nature (*rang bzhin; svabhāva*).

But the opponent objects that the intrinsic nature of seeing was refuted, but those of other sense faculties such as hearing, and so on, were not addressed and therefore they have intrinsic nature. Nāgārjuna responds to this objection (*MMK* 3.8): "Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and mind are the six faculties. Their spheres are the visible objects, etc." Tsongkhapa comments that the refutation of seeing concerns also the other five senses and their objects, i.e. hearing, the hearer, and sound, and so on. Even "hearing does not hear itself at all", as well as smelling, tasting, and so forth.<sup>84</sup> All these are empty (*stong pa; śūnya*) and do not exist inherently. They exist only conventionally and dependent on their causes and conditions. This conclusion concerns all of perception and can be applied to all of phenomenality. Tsongkhapa supports his arguments with citations from Buddhist texts that have, according to his thinking,<sup>85</sup> definitive/ultimate meaning (*nges don; nītārtha*). They are the *sūtras* that teach the emptiness of all phenomenon, as is written, for instance, in the *Lalitavistarasūtra* (*mDo sde, Kha* 89b):

Depending on eye and material form the visual consciousness arises here. However, material form does not depend upon the eye. Material form does not enter the eye. These phenomena are selfless and without beauty, nonetheless people imagine them to have both self and beauty. They erroneously imagine them to have that which they lack. From this arises the visual consciousness. Through the cessation and arising of consciousness, respectively, the elimination of consciousness and its development are observed. Yogis see nothing as coming and going; rather as empty and illusion-like.<sup>86</sup>

In the summary of the third chapter Tsongkhapa writes that "the eye, seeing, etc., are completely tenable only as illusion-like objects..."<sup>87</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.: 135. See *MMK* 3.7.

<sup>84</sup> Geshe Ngawang Samten and Garfield 2006: 136–137.

<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, the status of which Buddhist texts constitute ultimate meaning (*nges don*) or provisional meaning (*drang don; neyārtha*) has been fiercely contested by Tibetan philosophers from other schools (I owe this thought to an anonymous reviewer).

<sup>86</sup> Geshe Ngawang Samten and Garfield 2006: 138. Dhondup 2006: 176.

<sup>87</sup> According to Tsongkhapa's school, Gelug, all things are *like* illusions and hallucinatory objects because they are empty and as "mental constructs, not existing from their own side". Williams 2009: 70, 296. As Nāgārjuna says in *Śūnyatāsaptati*: "Consciousness arises in dependence on internal and external (*nang dang phyi; ādhyātmikabāhya*) entrances (*skye ched; nyatana*). Because consciousness

when they are not found through the analysis, their *essential* existence is refuted, but such things as the eye are not refuted at all".<sup>88</sup> Because the seer and seeing depend on each other they do not exist inherently. Nevertheless, they exist conventionally and are functionally efficient because they arise and fall conditionally based on the effect of the *karman* principle. Due to this analysis (*dpyod pa*) one develops an outstanding knowledge (*shes rab; prajñā*) of the ultimate way things really are (*chos nyid; dharmatā*). Tsongkhapa ends his analysis of the six kinds of objects comparing all their experience to a magically created person (*sgyu ma'i skyes bu*) "experiencing an illusory object".<sup>89</sup>

This example of Tsongkhapa's seems to be an allusion to Nāgārjuna's *Vigrahavyāvartinī* 23, where Nāgārjuna speaks about illusionistic performance as an example of the functionality of the things that are empty (*śūnya*). He shows here that empty things can be functionally efficient, just as an illusory man (*māyāpuruṣa*) that tries to hinder another illusory man from doing something by "his illusionistic power" can be functionally efficient.<sup>90</sup> As Westerhoff points out, if we introduce these men in some movie where one of them prevents the other one from opening the door, then we can infer that although they are empty they can be functionally efficient, as in the cinema. Therefore, empty sense-spheres that depend on each other can be functionally efficient due to the *karman* principle.<sup>91</sup>

#### 4. Direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) in Buddhist epistemology

Above, I used three examples to show the role of sense organs in the history of Buddhist philosophy. I would like to thematise the role of direct perception using the Buddhist logic-epistemology tradition called *pramāṇavāda*, founded by the Buddhist philosophers Dignāga (c. 480–c. 540) and Dharmakīrti (c. 600–670), in which direct perception (*pratyakṣa*; literary "what is before eyes"; *mngon sum*) is, along with inference (*anumāna; rjes dpag*), the basic form of indubitable valid knowledge (*pramāṇa; tshad ma*). "Perception is always purely non-conceptual and non-linguistic, whereas inference is conceptual, linguistic thinking that proceeds on the basis of good reasons."<sup>92</sup> Inference or conceptual thought only has access to universals and is

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arises in dependence on the entrances, so it is like a mirage (*smig rgyu*) and a (magical) illusion (*sgyu ma*) which are devoid (*stong*) of inherent existence." Komito 1987: 168.

<sup>88</sup> Geshe Ngawang Samten and Garfield 2006: 140. Dhondup 2006: 180.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Westerhoff 2010: 49–50.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Tillemans 2016.

therefore “distorted (*bhrānta*) because it ‘superimposes’ universals that aren’t actually there in the particulars themselves”; perception has direct access to specific and real shapes, colours, and so on.<sup>93</sup> But due to the stipulation of the mind (*manas*) any instance of direct perception “may be an awareness of a mental object, rather than a visible form, sound, smell, taste, or tactile object.”<sup>94</sup> Even sense faculties (*indriya*) still play the key role in our perception (*pratyakṣa*) because it arises due to their contact (*sparsa*) with external objects (*viśaya*, *artha* etc.).

According to Buddhist epistemologists there are four types of direct perception (*pratyakṣa*): (1) sense perception (*indriyapratyakṣa*; *dbang po mngon sum*); (2) mental perception (*manobhavapratyakṣa*; *yid kyis myong ba’i mngon sum*); (3) the self-cognition of all mind and mental activities (*svasaṃvedanapratyakṣa*; *rang rig mngon sum*; lit. “self-awareness”); and (4) the yogic perception (*yogipratyakṣa*; *rnal ’byor mngon sum*).<sup>95</sup>

In a short verse tract called the *Sword of Wisdom* (*Shes rab ral gri*; SW)<sup>96</sup> that was written in 1885, Lama Mipham remarks that only due to these four direct perceptions can we have evidence such as the appearance of smoke and, because of inference (*’rjes dpag*; *anumāna*), know that a fire is present. Without direct perception it would not be possible to see the arising and ceasing of phenomena as sprouts and so on (SW 19).<sup>97</sup> He characterises these four types of perception as follows:

(1) “The sense consciousnesses, which arise from the five sense faculties, clearly experience their own objects. Without direct sense perceptions (*dbang po mngon sum*), one would not perceive objects, like someone who is blind” (SW 21).<sup>98</sup>

(2) “Having arisen on the mental sense faculty, mental direct perception (*yid kyis myong ba’i mngon sum*) clearly discerns outer and inner objects. Without mental direct perception, there would be no consciousness of all phenomena that are commonly known” (SW 22).<sup>99</sup>

(3) “A mind that is cognizant and aware naturally knows its objects, but at the same time is also aware of itself, without relying upon something else, and this is what is termed ‘self-awareness’ (*rang rig*)” (SW 25).<sup>100</sup>

(4) “Yogic direct perception (*rnal ’byor mngon sum*) is the culmination of meditation practised properly and according to the

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Dunne 2004: 23.

<sup>95</sup> Yao 2004: 57–79.

<sup>96</sup> The full title is *Don rnam par nges pa shes rab ral gri* (*The Sword of Wisdom: An Ascertainment of Meaning*).

<sup>97</sup> Khenchen Palden Sherab 2018: 3.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.: 4.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

instructions. It clearly experiences its own objects, and without it there would be no vision of objects beyond the ordinary" (SW 23).<sup>101</sup>

### Conclusion

The goal of my article was to demonstrate the standard categorization as well as the complexity and philosophical intricacy of the role of sense organs (*indriya; dbang po*), and their objects, sense elements, and causal relations in our perceiving of the world. It should be remembered that the Buddhist idea of mind (*manas, citta; blo*) as a sixth inner sense has "the same epistemic structure as outer senses and presumably subserved by analogical physical structures"<sup>102</sup>—this constitutes one important difference between Buddhism and the Western approach to senses. As far as mind is concerned, "perhaps no other classical philosophical tradition, East or West, offers a more complex and counter-intuitive account of mind and mental phenomena than Buddhism."<sup>103</sup>

In relation to the perception of the world and its phenomena, Buddhist philosophers worked out very detailed and elaborate schemes of six senses and their objects. Our senses, such as seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, etc., are the grounds not only for our perceptual knowledge, but also for our beliefs, justification, and understanding of the world. When we take seeing as "an epistemic principle", for example, then "seeing the green field, for instance, normally yields knowledge about the field as well as justified belief about it".<sup>104</sup> The senses and perceptual experience thus form and establish our *openness to the world* and are one of the main sources of our knowledge and justifications.

Sense organs played the most important role in our cognition of objects from the beginnings of Buddhist thought. Consciousness (*viññāna*) as such was only "a secondary product of the sense organ and object" because, according to Sarvāstivādins, "eyes, rather than eye-consciousness, see."<sup>105</sup> They thought that the senses, their objects, and so forth were endowed with an intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), the defining characteristic of all phenomena. *Svabhāva* must be eternal because "whatever is the defining characteristic of form (*rūpa*) exists

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Garfield 1995: 137.

<sup>103</sup> Coseru 2017: 1.

<sup>104</sup> Audi 1988: 26.

<sup>105</sup> Yao 2005: 8.

throughout time".<sup>106</sup> Therefore we could not imagine the non-existent intentional object of some act of consciousness and the causal consequence of something that has ceased to exist.<sup>107</sup> This opinion of the Sarvāstivādins was founded on the concept of *intentionality of consciousness*, the idea that any consciousness must be aware of something. An intentional object of consciousness must exist, otherwise the ethical *karman* principle of retribution would not work and we could not remember or recognize something that was or is not yet.<sup>108</sup> Williams writes that this concept of intentionality was known in "the very earliest strata of Buddhist epistemology in the theory of the twelve *āyatana*s—sense bases and their objects in the form of sense-data corresponding in type to each of the six bases—and the doctrine of the *dhātus*, the preceding twelve *āyatana*s plus six sorts of resulting consciousness (*vijñāna*)."<sup>109</sup>

But, as we saw above, the concept of the independent and fundamentally existent *svabhāvas* was very sharply criticized by Nāgārjuna. The twelve *āyatana*s, i.e. six sense faculties (*indriya*) and their six respective sense field objects (*viśaya*), are, according to him, empty (*śūnya*) of *svabhāva* and cannot be ultimately real since they originate from causes and conditions.<sup>110</sup> Later Tsongkhapa wrote in his commentary to *MMK* that the twelve *āyatana*s were illusion-like objects. Their *essential* existence is refuted but they still exist in a conventional manner and therefore are functionally efficient due to the *karman* principle.

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<sup>106</sup> Yaśomitra's commentary on *AKBh* 5.27: *yad rūpadeḥ svalakṣaṇam tat sarvasviṃ kāle vidyata iti*.

<sup>107</sup> Williams 1981: 42.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*: 230. See *AKBh* 2.54c–d, 5.25.

<sup>109</sup> Williams 1981: 230.

<sup>110</sup> According to Nāgārjuna, causes, effects and conditions "are both notionally and existentially dependent on one another. They therefore cannot exist from their own side, irrespective of the existence of one another. Moreover, they also depend for their existence on us, because it is our cognitive act of cutting up the world of phenomena in the first place that creates the particular assembly of objects that constitutes a causal field, which then in turn gives rise to the notions of cause and effect." Westerhoff, 2009: 98.

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