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DIGNĀGA ON REFLEXIVE AWARENESS



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Introduction

The nature of consciousness and the epistemology of self-knowledge, or how we know our own minds, have prompted many discussions in Western philosophy, particularly in recent analytic philosophy. Classical Indian philosophy has also made noteworthy contributions to the development of original theories and arguments concerning these issues. Unfortunately, these contributions are little known in contemporary philosophy. This article proposes and defends an interpretation of some central views of Dignāga on reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvedana*), or RA, which throw light on these philosophical questions. The Dignāgian account of RA rests crucially on the so-called memory argument, which has remained relatively unknown in contemporary discussions. The main purpose of this article is to defend an interpretation of the memory argument and thus to contribute to contemporary discussions about the nature of consciousness and the epistemology of self-knowledge.¹

Reflexive awareness is the view that a conscious mental event is not only directed at some object (or content), but that it is also directed at itself. In Western philosophy, Franz Brentano has endorsed a view that is quite similar to RA:

[Every conscious act] includes within it a consciousness of itself. Therefore, every [conscious] act, no matter how simple, has a double object, a primary and a secondary object. The simplest act, for example the act of hearing, has as its primary object the sound, and for its secondary object, itself, the mental phenomenon in which the sound is heard.²

The claim that conscious mental events have this reflexive character has been a very controversial issue throughout the history of classical Indian philosophy. As B. K. Matilal points out, while different versions of RA are accepted (1) by Buddhist philosophers in the tradition of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, (2) by the Prābhākara Mīmāṃsaka, and (3) by the Advaita Vedāntins, it is rejected by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and by the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsaka (followers of Kumārila Bhāṭṭa).³

My main claim is that the memory argument, as it is stated by Dignāga, can be interpreted in such a way that it does provide a very plausible support for RA.⁴ My general strategy is to defend the memory argument against the three main objections that can be raised against it. After clarifying some key notions, I formulate an interpretation of Dignāga's account of RA, pointing out that it is plausible to interpret it as a piece of conceptual analysis of our concepts of conscious mental events, such as the concept of *seeing*, the concept of *hearing*, et cetera, which, for the sake of convenience, I will call "cognitions," following Matilal's terminology. Dignāga's account

of RA, as I understand it, involves the important idea of the dual aspect of cognitions, namely that they have both an object and a subject aspect. In the first section, I propose an interpretation of an argument Dignāga proposes in support of the dual aspect of cognitions. I argue, however, that this argument is insufficient to support RA. It establishes only that cognitions have a dual aspect. This claim can, however, be used to defend the memory argument against some potential objections. In the following section, I make some terminological remarks and I propose an interpretation of Dignāga's idea of the dual aspect of cognitions.

In section 2, I formulate my interpretation of Dignāga's version of the memory argument. In sections 3 and 4, I present two different ways of developing a first strategy attempting to refute the memory argument. This strategy concedes a crucial assumption of the memory argument, namely that in order to remember a past cognition that cognition must have been cognized when it occurred, but it denies that it must have been cognized reflexively. For instance, the past cognition must have been cognized by a further numerically distinct cognition, which is the view of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika discussed in section 3, or it must have been cognized inferentially, which is the view of Kumāriila discussed in section 4. I argue that these two objections do not hold, and that the theory of reflexive awareness is preferable to these two rival views. In the last section, I discuss a different strategy to object to the memory argument. This strategy consists of rejecting the crucial assumption according to which the past cognition must have been cognized in order to remember it. I argue that this strategy also fails.

1. Dignāga's Account of Reflexive Awareness and the Dual Aspect of Cognition

The *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, which can be translated as the *Compendium of Valid Cognition*, is one of Dignāga's most important works. In it he develops the bulk of his theory of knowledge. The first chapter of this work, called *Pratyakṣapariccheda*, is concerned mainly with the theory of perception, and it is there that the Dignāgian views on RA and the memory argument are presented.⁵ To avoid any confusion, it is useful to make a few terminological remarks concerning my use of such expressions as "cognition," "self-knowledge," "cognition of cognition," and "second-order cognition." Though RA is understood to be a general characteristic of any kind of conscious mental event, the discussion, starting with Dignāga himself, has focused on conscious mental episodes of perception, which according to Dignāga's epistemology is one of the two means of knowledge, or valid cognition (*pramāṇa*), the other one being inference (*anumāna*). It is clear, however, that the theory of RA does not apply only to perceptions, especially if perceptions are understood as mental events that are cases of knowledge. Indeed, RA is a general claim that applies to any conscious mental event whatsoever, including cases of illusion as well as emotions, beliefs, desires, and sensations, such as pain. This being clear, it will do no harm to follow both Masaaki Hattori and B. K. Matilal in using the generic term "cognition" to talk of any conscious mental event falling under the theory of RA, that is to say, as being known reflexively.

This may seem a bit confusing insofar as the notion of *cognition* obviously connotes knowledge. This should not distract us, however, since the main issue, especially in the memory argument, is not whether RA is restricted only to conscious mental events that are cases of knowledge, but whether conscious mental events need to have this reflexive character, and if not, why not. In fact the appeal of RA is precisely that it would give us a general view concerning the nature of consciousness, which contributes to clarifying the epistemology of self-knowledge, or how we know our own minds. Thus, RA can be stated as saying that in any cognition—understood as any episode of conscious sensory perceptions, conscious beliefs, desires, emotions, conscious pains, et cetera—there is awareness not only of the object or content of the cognition, but also awareness of the very cognition itself.

Another terminological remark is in order. While we may accept the general claim that we do have some cognitions that constitute self-knowledge, that is, knowledge of our own conscious mental events or what we may call a “cognition of cognition,” or a “second-order cognition,” this claim in itself does not presuppose or entail RA. One can claim, as some have done, that a subject of first-order cognitions typically knows them, but these need not be known reflexively. For instance, they could be known non-reflexively by some other cognition, which can be construed as another perception or as another thought, or they could be known inferentially. Thus, it should be clear that when I use such expressions as “cognition of cognition,” “second-order cognition,” or “self-knowledge” this in no way presupposes or entails RA. The expression “self-knowledge” simply means knowledge of one’s own mental states, leaving it open that such second-order knowledge be understood in different ways. It is one thing to claim that a subject typically knows her conscious mental events, but it is another to claim that cognitions are reflexive. RA is the specific theory according to which any conscious mental event is by the same token a first-order cognition and a second-order cognition. It should be obvious that one can accept that there are second-order cognitions, or self-knowledge, while denying RA. RA can be stated thus:

RA. Whenever a cognition, say C_1 , arises, not only does it apprehend an object, or a proposition, but it also apprehends itself, C_1 , by the same token.⁶

An important feature of the Dignāgīan view is that a cognition must be understood as having a dual aspect, namely an object aspect and subject aspect. The object aspect is simply the object or propositional content apprehended, and the subject aspect is the very cognition that apprehends the object or content. It should be noted that from Dignāga’s point of view, such talk of object aspect and subject aspect is radically deflationist from an ultimate ontological perspective.⁷ For a Buddhist philosopher, such talk of object and subject aspects is merely a convenient way to clarify our conceptual understanding of cognitions and self-knowledge. This discussion of a subject aspect in no way commits Dignāga to the existence of a substantial self, person, or ego to fill the role of the subject aspect. The notion of the subject aspect is a functional one, that is to say, the notion of what does the

apprehending in a cognition, and so is the notion of the object aspect, namely what is apprehended.⁸

As I understand it, the claim that cognitions have such a dual aspect simply clarifies our commonsense intuitions concerning the distinction we readily make between self-knowledge, that is, knowledge of one's own conscious mental states, and knowledge of "non-mental" objects or facts. For example, suppose I look at a pond and see a white lotus. We can readily understand the distinction between the "object" or the "objective" perceptual content of my cognition, namely the white lotus or the fact that there is a white lotus in the pond, on the one hand, and my very *seeing* of the white lotus, on the other. To put it bluntly,

1. There is a white lotus in the pond,

and

2. I see that there is a white lotus in the pond

express different propositions, which we can readily distinguish.

Here is the relevant passage where Dignāga presents his argument in support of the dual aspect of cognition. In the root text, he writes:

How, then, is it understood that cognition has two forms? That cognition has two forms is [known] from the difference between the cognition of the object and the cognition of that [cognition].⁹

As far as I can tell, this passage must simply be understood in the sense that we can readily make a distinction between a first-order cognition and a second-order cognition, as I have just underscored it. Dignāga's point, and his argument, which I reconstruct in what follows, seems to be that if a first-order cognition did not somehow have some "subjective" characteristic, in addition to its object (or content), then we could not make such a distinction between first- and second-order cognitions.

In his auto-commentary on this passage, Dignāga says a bit more:

The cognition which cognizes the object, a thing of color, etc., has [a twofold appearance, namely] the appearance of the object and the appearance of itself [as subject]. But the cognition which cognizes this cognition of the object has [on the one hand] the appearance of that cognition which is in conformity with the object and on the other hand the appearance of itself. Otherwise, if the cognition of the object had only the form of the object, or if it had only the form of itself, then the cognition of cognition would be indistinguishable from the cognition of the object.¹⁰

The interpretation of this passage is somewhat puzzling. It is unclear whether it is intended, in and of itself, as an argument for RA, or whether it is intended only as support for the dual-aspect claim, namely that any cognition has both a subject and an object aspect. The argument does use the notion of cognition of cognition, both in the root text and in the second sentence of the auto-commentary. If the notion is

used in the sense of RA, and if the argument is intended to support RA, then such an argument would obviously beg the question. On the other hand, if “cognition of cognition” is used in the general and neutral sense that I have noted, then it is totally unclear how it could support RA. Be that as it may, according to my interpretation, it does not support RA, but it does establish that cognitions have a dual aspect.

Consider the following reconstruction of the argument:

1. The cognition of a cognition is not indistinguishable from the cognition of the object.
2. If the cognition of the object had only the form of the object, then the cognition of that cognition would be indistinguishable from the cognition of the object.
3. If the cognition of the object had only the form of itself, then the cognition of that cognition would be indistinguishable from the cognition of the object.
4. Thus, the cognition of the object does not have only the form of the object and it does not have only the form of itself.

[5. The cognition of the object has either (i) only the form of the object, (ii) only the form of itself; (iii) both the form of the object and the form of itself; or (iv) neither the form of the object nor the form of itself.]

[6. The cognition of the object has at least the form of the object.]

C. Therefore, the cognition that cognizes the object, a thing of color, et cetera has two forms, namely the form of the object and the form of itself, as subject.

First, let me note that I have added premises 5 and 6, which are not in Dignāga’s auto-commentary, only to make explicit what is implicitly needed for the argument to be valid. Nothing hinges on these premises, which I take to be trivial and obvious enough. Premise 1 simply expresses the distinction we readily make between knowledge of “non-mental” objects, or facts, and self-knowledge, which I have illustrated with the example of my seeing a white lotus in the pond.

Is this argument sound? Does it succeed in establishing that cognitions must have a dual aspect? Consider a cognition cognizing an object (or a content). Let’s call this cognition C_1 , and let’s schematically characterize it this way:

$$C_1: \dots O_1 \dots,$$

where “ O_1 ” denotes the object aspect of C_1 , and the dots leave it open that C_1 may or may not have some other feature characterizing it. Now consider the cognition of that cognition, which we may call C_2 . Here it is important to stress that claiming there

is such a cognition of cognition simply assumes the commonsense intuition of self-knowledge. C_1 and C_2 could be interpreted along the lines of the theory of RA, respectively as the object aspect and the reflexively cognized subject aspect of one and the same cognition. But they need not be. Indeed, C_1 and C_2 can also be interpreted as two numerically different cognitions. In any of these interpretations, the first-order cognition, C_1 , is the object that C_2 cognizes, where C_2 represents either only the very reflexive aspect of C_1 cognizing itself, according to RA, or a separate cognition cognizing C_1 , according to some non-reflexive conception of self-knowledge. In either case, C_2 can be characterized by the following:

$$C_2: \dots C_1. \dots$$

Now, supposing that C_1 is characterized only by an object aspect, we would have to characterize it like this:

$$C_1: O_1$$

This means that C_2 is also characterized only by an object aspect, which in this case happens to be C_1 , and C_2 would have to be characterized like this:

$$C_2: C_1$$

This is to say that C_2 would be indistinguishable from C_1 , as it is stated in premise 2. Moreover, it is easy to see that premise 3 can be established in a similar way. Premise 4 follows clearly from premises 1, 2, and 3, and the conclusion follows from premises 4, 5, and 6. So the argument is sound.

But does it support RA? RA is certainly compatible with the conclusion of that argument, but one may agree with the dual aspect of cognitions while denying RA. In fact, one could argue that a first-order cognition, for example my seeing a white lotus in the pond, has both a subject and an object aspect, but that in such a case only the object aspect is known, and that another numerically different cognition is required in order to know the subject aspect of the first-order cognition.

The general idea of the dual aspect claim can be represented as follows:

$$C_1: (S_1) O_1$$

$$C_2: S_1 (O_1).$$

This can be interpreted along the lines of RA, claiming that C_1 and C_2 are strictly identical and that this schema is only a way to underline the two different aspects of one and the same cognition. But this can also be interpreted according to a view that denies RA, claiming that C_1 and C_2 are two numerically distinct cognitions. According to the latter, while C_1 does have a subject aspect, this subject aspect is not cognized, and a numerically different cognition C_2 is required for the subject aspect to be cognized.

The upshot is that while Dignāga's argument for the dual aspect of cognitions is indeed sound, it would be uncharitable to interpret it as an argument that purports to establish RA. Thus, it should be interpreted only as an argument in support of the dual aspect of cognitions. This is why the memory argument, which I discuss in the next section, plays such a crucial role in support of RA.

There is a problem, however, with the argument for the dual aspect of cognitions. Suppose that the second-order cognition is not known directly, or non-inferentially. In other words, suppose that the second-order cognition, C_2 , is the result of an inference on the basis of the content of the first-order cognition.¹¹ If this is correct, then the second-order cognition could perhaps be distinguished from the first-order cognition, even if the latter has no subject aspect. This is simply because the former would be an inferential cognition (*anumāna*), while the latter is direct or non-inferential, and it would therefore be possible to distinguish C_2 from C_1 on this basis. It is unclear whether this objection succeeds in refuting the argument, but we can acknowledge this potential difficulty and reformulate the conclusion of the dual aspect argument in a more restricted way:

C' . Therefore, if the cognition that cognizes the object is direct, then it has two forms, namely the form of the object and the form of itself, as subject.

In other words, if self-knowledge is direct, or non-inferential, then it must have a dual aspect, because otherwise the cognition of cognition would be indistinguishable from the first-order cognition. As it appears in section 3, the dual aspect of cognition plays a crucial role in defending the memory argument against an objection that rests on the main rival account, the view that the cognition of cognition is an immediately following cognition.

II. A Rational Reconstruction of Dignāga's Version of the Memory Argument

Here is the passage of the *Pratyakṣapariccheda* where Dignāga gives a very concise formulation of the memory argument:

Sometime after [we have perceived a certain object], there occurs the recollection of our cognition as well as the recollection of the object. So it stands that cognition is of two forms. Self-cognition is also [thus established]. Why? Because it [i.e., recollection] is never of that which has not been [previously] experienced. It is unheard of to have a recollection of something without having experienced [it before]. For instance, the recollection of a thing of color, etc.¹²

The purport of the argument is clear, and it goes further than the argument for the dual aspect of cognition. The conclusion of the argument is precisely that RA is established. For example, suppose I was taking a walk in the park this morning and I saw, in the middle of a pond, a beautiful white lotus that caught my attention. Next suppose it is now the afternoon and I remember that earlier today I saw a white lotus. The point of the argument is that in order to have this recollection, I need not only to

have had a visual cognition cognizing the object but also a cognition of that visual cognition itself. This is expressed by saying that what I remember is that I saw a white lotus. In other words, the argument could be paraphrased as follows: how could I remember that I saw a white lotus if at the time of my seeing it I was not aware of my seeing it?

It is convenient to reconstruct the argument a bit more precisely as follows:

M1. If at time t' I remember that a past cognition C_1 (which occurred at some previous time t_0), then I was conscious of C_1 at t_0 .

M2. I do remember at time t' a past cognition C_1 , which occurred at some previous time t_0 .

M3. Hence, I was conscious of C_1 at t_0 .

M4. I was conscious of C_1 at t_0 only if RA is true.

MC. Hence, RA is true.

The argument is obviously valid. M2 is trivial and M3 follows from M1 and M2. Only the first and last premises are contentious. As I noted, there are two main strategies to resist the argument. The first strategy consists in granting the assumption according to which at time t_0 , or immediately after, I was aware of C_1 , while denying RA. The idea is to claim that C_1 was indeed cognized at t_0 , or immediately after, but it was cognized by a further numerically distinct cognition C_2 . In the tradition of classical Indian philosophy this strategy was upheld by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, who claim that C_2 is an immediately following cognition, which directly, or non-inferentially, cognizes C_1 . This strategy was also upheld by the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsaka, who claim that C_1 was cognized as the result of an inference. I call these two views “the immediately following cognition view” (IFCV) and “the inferential view” (IV).¹³ Thus, these two views object to premise M1 by claiming that C_1 must not have been cognized reflexively at t_0 , since it could be cognized immediately after t_0 , either directly or inferentially. There is also a variant of the view of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika that grants M1 while denying M4. The idea is simply to grant that I cognized C_1 at t_0 , but to insist that C_1 was cognized, non-inferentially, by a further numerically distinct cognition C_2 , which occurs simultaneously with C_1 . Again, the crucial idea is that C_1 is cognized by a further numerically distinct cognition C_2 , which obviously contradicts RA. In sections 3 and 4, I argue that this first strategy fails. In section 3, I focus mainly on the view of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. I argue that this view is faced with some serious problems, which make RA preferable. I also point out why the variant of this view according to which the numerically distinct C_2 occurs simultaneously with C_1 must also be rejected. In section 4, I argue that the inferential view must be rejected.

The second strategy to resist the memory argument is simply to deny that the memory of the past cognition, C_1 , presupposes that the cognition must have been

cognized at all, at time t_0 or immediately after. For reasons that appear in what follows, I call this second strategy “Śāntideva’s objection,” which is another way to object to premise M1. I focus on this strategy in section 5, arguing that it also fails.

To defend the argument, it is useful first to clarify some commonsense assumptions about memory. It seems obvious that we do sometimes remember correctly past events. Memory can often be unreliable, but this is no reason to hold that we never remember correctly past events. Of course, we can conceive a skeptical scenario according to which the universe just came into existence here and now and that all my memories of past events are false, as was once suggested by Bertrand Russell. This skeptical possibility, however, should not prevent us from accepting a crucial premise of the memory argument, namely that we can and do remember correctly some past events. We can certainly conceive that I had a visual perception of a white lotus in the pond, and that later I remember correctly that I saw a white lotus. Even if memory is often unreliable, we routinely accept as true some reports of past events, such as the one used in the example of the recollection of the white lotus. Normally, when we have clear memories of past events, especially recent past events, we simply take them at face value, unless we have independent reasons that strongly suggest that we should not—for instance, if one was drunk when the past event occurred. For example, I remember correctly that so and so was at the party because I remember *seeing* her there.

These commonsense intuitions about memory can be captured by the idea that we sometimes remember past events by way of a principled inference that is based on some present memory impressions.¹⁴ Suppose that I have a clear and vivid memory impression of seeing a white lotus, and I say or think:

(*) I saw a white lotus.

In a normal context, this statement can be taken at face value as being true. Here is an inference that captures the idea that (*) rests on a principled inference:

P1. I have a clear and vivid memory impression, as of seeing a white lotus.

P2. Nothing indicates that this memory is mistaken.

P3. Whenever I have a clear and vivid memory impression, as of Φ ing O , at an earlier time, and noting indicates that this memory impression is mistaken, then infer “I Φ ed O .”

C. I saw a white lotus.

(Since P3 expresses a quite general principle that can be applied for memory impressions such as seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting, but also thinking that p , I use the schematic “to Φ ” as a shorthand to express any of these different sorts of cognitions.)

This inferential account of my recollection gives some prima facie support to premise M1 of the memory argument, since the memory impression in P1 is not only a memory of the object or content remembered, but also a specific memory impression of *seeing* the object. This is probably not the only way in which we can remember things we saw, heard, et cetera. We can probably also remember such things in a more generic way. But it seems plausible, at least from a commonsense standpoint, that we do sometimes remember what we saw, heard, et cetera earlier on the basis of some properly *visual, auditory, et cetera* information. This way of understanding the inference to (*) (“I saw a white lotus”) suggests that to have a clear and vivid impression of seeing a white lotus, at t' , that is, an impression that can be used to infer the memory claim (*), I must have been conscious of seeing the white lotus when I did, that is, at t_0 . Since we do very often express our experiential memories by saying things like (*), and since (*) does mention seeing—that is, the subject aspect of the cognition and not only the object or content of the experience—then it is quite natural that in a cogent inference supporting (*) the experience remembered must figure in the premises of that inference, as it does in P1.

As I noted, someone inclined to object to the memory argument will quite naturally try to attack premise M1 or premise M4, along the lines I have already noted. Let us consider each of these objections in turn.

III. The Immediately Following Cognition View and a Variant of that View.

The first objection is based on the view of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. This objection is simply that though it is true that C_1 must have been cognized if it is to be remembered, it must not have been cognized reflexively at t_0 , as it is stated in M1, but it must have been cognized by an immediately following cognition, C_2 , at time $t_{0+\epsilon}$. I call this view “the immediately following cognition view.” It can be stated as follows:

IFCV. Whenever a cognition, say C_1 , arises, it apprehends only an object, or a proposition; C_1 can be apprehended but it is not self-apprehended. When C_1 is apprehended, it is apprehended by a further, separate cognition, say C_2 , which arises immediately after C_1 .¹⁵

We should first note that according to the Dignāgīan view, all cognitions are reflexive and hence all are cognized. But, according to the IFCV, not all cognitions are cognized. According to this view, cognition of cognition is not a necessary character of all cognitions; it is only a contingent relation between two separate cognitions, a relation that does occur sometimes but that need not always occur.¹⁶

There is another important feature of the IFCV that is not explicitly stated in this formulation. According to this view, when C_1 is cognized by an immediately following cognition C_2 , the latter is a direct, or non-inferential, cognition of C_1 . This claim could be understood in different ways. For instance, the second-order cognition could be viewed as a perception, or as a kind of perception, of the first-order cognition. Or else it could be understood as a properly conceptual thought about the

first-order cognition. But in any interpretation, the view must assume that the immediately following cognition, C_2 , is a direct, non-inferential, cognition of C_1 . Otherwise, the view would be identical to the inferential view, discussed in the next section. This is important since it entails that Dignāga's argument in support of the dual aspect of cognitions does apply in a straightforward way to the IFCV. As we recall, the restricted conclusion of that argument is that if the cognition of the cognition is direct, or non-inferential, then it must have a dual aspect, because otherwise the cognition of cognition would be indistinguishable from the first-order cognition.

As previously noted, the IFCV rejects premise M1 of the memory argument simply by claiming that it should be replaced by the following:

M1'. If at time t' , I remember a past cognition C_1 (which occurred at some previous time t_0), then I was conscious of C_1 at $t_{0+\epsilon}$.

As far as I can tell, there are four reasons why this objection does not hold. The first reason rests on a persisting Cartesian intuition concerning the immediate presence of conscious experiences. We do not need to engage in deep reflective introspection to realize that subjective conscious experiences happen to us, or for us, almost all the time: seeing, hearing, touching, thinking, et cetera. Moreover, we seem to be in a particularly direct and immediate epistemic contact with such conscious occurrences.¹⁷ Of course, we may know little about the nature of such conscious experiences, from a purely first-person perspective. Engaging in reflective introspection about such conscious experiences may be deceptive. For instance, we may be led to think that they are modifications in an immaterial substance, as Descartes thought, while such occurrences may be modifications of the nervous system. This, however, does not undermine the intuition that, when it appears to a subject that she is experiencing a certain conscious state of a certain kind K , there occurs in her a conscious state appearing to her as being of kind K . According to the IFCV, C_1 and C_2 are two numerically distinct cognitions, and the relation between them is contingent. Thus, this view leaves open not only the possibility that C_1 occurs and will not be immediately followed by C_2 , but also the possibility that a second-order cognition C_2 occurs while no first-order cognition C_1 occurred just before.

Given the conceptual independence of C_2 and C_1 , we should be able to conceive that C_2 does occur but that it fails to refer to any first-order cognition whatsoever. In other words, this view allows for the very strange case in which a subject would only have the illusion that there occurs in her a conscious state appearing to her as being of a certain kind.¹⁸ This consequence is obviously at odds with the persisting Cartesian intuition concerning the immediate presence of conscious experiences. Even in the scenario where a subject would be deceived by an evil demon, the subject would still know that she is experiencing a conscious experience that appears to her a certain way. According to the IFCV, however, when a subject believes that she experiences a conscious mental event that appears to her a certain way, this second-order cognition is open to Cartesian doubt, given that the relation between C_2 and C_1 is contingent. But this is highly counterintuitive. It is quite

evident that this problem does not arise for RA, which has the virtue of being compatible with the persisting Cartesian intuition concerning the immediate presence of conscious experiences.

This problem, stemming from the fact that the relation between C_2 and C_1 is contingent, can be illustrated further by the following example. Suppose that at a certain time I have a visual experience, call it C_1 , with the following indexical content:

- i. This is a white lotus.

Suppose next that C_1 is immediately followed by the second-order cognition C_2 , the content of which could be stated as follows:

- ii. I see that this is a white lotus.

The content of the indexical "this" in these two cognitions being a function of the context where it occurs, and C_1 and C_2 being two different contexts, it is left open that the content of C_1 , when it is embedded in C_2 , be different from its content when it occurs before being cognized by C_2 . The proponent of the IFCV might want to insist that the contexts of C_1 and C_2 are necessarily identical. But such a claim is far from obvious. It would need to be supported by an argument, and it is unclear what such an argument could be. Given that the relation between C_2 and C_1 is contingent, it is conceivable that C_2 be open to Cartesian doubt, which suggests that the use of "this" in (iv) could have a referent that is different from the referent of "this" in (iii). It is highly plausible, however, that the content of a first-order cognition is transparent to the second-order cognition, and it is precisely a virtue of RA to preserve such transparency of content.

There is a second problem for the IFCV that arises on the grounds that the relation between C_1 and C_2 is contingent. As I noted, a claim about one's past experiences, such as (*) ("I saw a white lotus"), can be understood as the result of a principled inference, which is schematized by the argument P1–C in section 2. If we endorse the IFCV, however, premise P3 of that inference becomes unwarranted. Since the relation between the immediately following cognition C_2 and the cognized cognition C_1 is a contingent relation, principle P3 should be replaced by the following:

- P3'. Whenever I have a clear and vivid memory impression, as of Φ ing O at an earlier time, and noting indicates that this memory impression is mistaken, then infer "I cognized that I Φ ed O."

Given that the relation between C_1 and C_2 is contingent, then the principled inference, on which the memory "I saw a white lotus" must rest, would warrant not the memory of C_1 itself, but only the memory of the numerically distinct C_2 . But this is counterintuitive. To be sure, if P3 is replaced by P3', then the whole inference to (*)

("I saw a white lotus") is no longer valid. The only thing that could be inferred would be the following:

C*. I cognized that I saw a white lotus.

This conclusion is quite strange because it is highly plausible that in the scenario of my correct recollection of the white lotus, what I recall is not a separate second-order cognition, but the first-order cognition itself.

Although this may not be a decisive objection to the IFCV view, it makes it very unattractive given that the original P3 is much simpler. To resist this objection the proponent of the IFCV would have to invoke a further general principle, namely:

P4. If I cognize(d) that I Φ (ed) O (or that p), then I Φ (ed) O (or that p).

But then she would owe us an argument in support of P4. Moreover, it is again unclear what such an argument could be, because given that the relation between C_2 and C_1 is contingent, it is always left open that C_2 could be false. A proponent of the IFCV might be tempted to try to resist this objection by saying that while the relation between C_2 and C_1 is not *conceptually* necessary, it is *nomologically* necessary, that is, necessary by virtue of some law of psychology. For instance, such a law might state that cognitions always, or with a high degree of probability, cause some immediately following second-order cognitions. But this is not an option, since it would trigger an infinite regress of immediately following cognitions, given that second-order cognitions are cognitions.

There is a third problem with the IFCV, which arises also because it construes C_1 and C_2 as separate cognitions that are only contingently related. As I noted, the IFCV is committed to Dignāga's argument in support of the dual aspect of cognition. As we saw, if C_1 was characterized only by its object (or content), then C_2 would also be characterized only by its object (or content), which is to say C_2 would be characterized only by the object of C_1 and, hence, C_2 and C_1 would be indistinguishable. Since C_2 and C_1 are distinguishable, C_1 must have both a subject aspect and an object aspect. The proponent of the IFCV may seem to be in a good position to accept this conclusion, insisting that since C_2 is about C_1 , and C_1 has both a subject and an object aspect, C_2 cognizes both the subject and the object aspect of C_1 . The problem, however, is that the IFCV leaves open the possibility that C_1 occurs without being immediately followed by C_2 while, arguably, the subject aspect of C_1 is an intrinsic property of C_1 . If so, then one would have to say that while it is true that C_1 has both a subject and an object aspect, when C_1 occurs independently from C_2 only its object aspect is cognized while its subject aspect is not. The proponent of the IFCV must hold that a separate cognition, C_2 , is required for the subject aspect of C_1 to be cognized. It is important to stress that the proponent of the IFCV is thus committed to maintaining that some cognitions have a subject aspect that is not cognized. It is difficult, however, to make sense of the notion of a subject aspect that is not cognized.

To see why this is a problem, we may recall Thomas Nagel's seminal paper "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?"¹⁹ wherein he points out that the reason we cannot know what it is like to be a bat is that we do not make experiences on the basis of a perceptual system of echolocation. In the same way, we know what it is like to have our human visual experiences because it is an intrinsic feature of such conscious experiences that we know what it is like to experience them. According to Nagel, the subjective character of any conscious experience, or what it is like to have the experience, is intrinsic to the very experience. Saying that the subjective character of, say, a visual experience is intrinsic to the experience itself is tantamount to saying that such a subjective character must be part of what is experienced in the very experience itself. In the context of our discussion, it seems plausible to hold that the subject aspect of a conscious experience just is its subjective character in Nagel's sense. Thus, if cognitions necessarily have both a subject and an object aspect, and if first-order cognition C_1 can occur without being followed by C_2 , as it is entailed by the IFCV, then there would have to be something that it is like to experience C_1 even though its subject aspect is not cognized. This consequence is very hard to accept. Claiming that one could have a first-order cognition cognizing only its object aspect would amount to denying, by the same token, that what it is like, subjectively, to have the experience is part of the experience, contrary to the assumption that the subject aspect is an intrinsic feature of the cognition. This comes very close, indeed, to denying that the cognition has a subject aspect after all.

At this point one might insist that when C_1 occurs without being immediately followed by C_2 , C_1 is not conscious. But granted that the subject aspect of C_1 is an intrinsic property of C_1 this would mean that there is something that it is like to experience an unconscious cognition and this consequence is difficult to accept because of the very close tie between the subjective character and consciousness.

Claiming that a mental event has a subject aspect is equivalent to claiming that there is something that it is like, for someone, to experience this mental event. It seems incoherent, however, to argue that what it is like for a mental event to occur is not known, and, thus, it also seems incoherent to argue that a cognition could have a subject aspect that is not cognized, as the proponent of the IFCV must accept. While the proponent of the IFCV is committed to maintaining that the first-order cognition does have a subject aspect, she is also obliged to defend that such a subject aspect need not be cognized in that very cognition. In other words, the IFCV is committed to the notion of an unconscious subject aspect, but it is difficult to make sense of this notion. One might be tempted to object that we may be consciously aware of objects without thematizing our own presence as subjects in that awareness and that we do this very often. This objection, however, misses the point of the argument because even in such cases there is something that it is like to have such experiences.

Finally, there is another problem that is quite similar to the previous one and which arises also on the basis of the dual aspect of cognitions. Insofar as the IFCV view must accept Dignāga's conclusion in support of the dual aspect of cognition, as I have argued, this view might be faced with a potential infinite regress of immedi-

ately following cognitions. This potential regress may not be obvious to see, however. After all, the proponent of the IFCV can insist that while C_1 is apprehended only when it is immediately followed by a further cognition C_2 , the latter need not be apprehended, though it could also be apprehended but only if it was followed by a further cognition C_3 . Given the independence of higher-order cognitions from the cognitions of lower-order, no infinite regress seems to arise. There is, however, a potential infinite regress that arises insofar as the proponent of the IFCV is committed to the dual aspect of cognitions. If C_2 and C_1 are numerically distinct cognitions and if all cognitions necessarily have both a subject and an object aspect, it follows that the numerically distinct C_2 must have a subject aspect, and this subject aspect is an intrinsic property of C_2 , as I have pointed out in the discussion of the previous problem. We can imagine that C_2 occurs while it is not immediately followed by a third-order cognition C_3 .

How are we to make sense of the subject aspect of C_2 ? It seems that the only way to do so would be to say that it is a feature of C_2 that would be apprehended if C_2 was in turn cognized by a further immediately following cognition C_3 . Since C_3 must also have a subject aspect, the only way to make sense of the subject aspect of C_3 would be to say that it is a feature of C_3 that would be known if C_3 was in turn cognized by a further immediately following cognition C_4 , and so on *ad infinitum*. This problem is indeed very closely related to the previous one. The potential regress threatens only because it is difficult to make sense of the idea that C_2 has a subject aspect understood as an intrinsic property that is not cognized, especially because this intrinsic property is just what it is like to have the experience. It should be noted that RA suffers no such infinite regress insofar as talk of C_1 and C_2 is only a way to talk of two different aspects of one and the same numerically identical cognition. RA is simpler than the IFCV, and it is not faced with these various problems. Thus, it should be preferred to the IFCV.

As I noted earlier, there is a variant of the IFCV that grants premise M1 while denying premise M4. According to this objection, I cognized C_1 at t_0 , but C_1 was cognized, non-inferentially, by a further numerically distinct cognition C_2 , which occurs simultaneously with C_1 . We can call this variant of the IFCV “the simultaneous cognition view”:

SCV. Whenever a cognition, say C_1 , arises, it apprehends only an object, or a proposition; C_1 can be apprehended but it is not self-apprehended. When C_1 is apprehended, it is apprehended by a further, separate cognition, say C_2 , which arises simultaneously with C_1 .

It is important to stress that if this view is to be a challenge to M4, then C_1 and C_2 must be understood as separate existents. If they were understood as necessary mereological parts of a larger whole, that is, a cognition constituted by the sub-cognitions C_1 and C_2 , this view would be a version of RA. As it is stated, RA is relatively unrestricted. It can be understood as the claim that the whole cognition

cognizes the whole of itself, but it can also be understood as the claim that a part of the cognition cognizes another part of itself. Thus, to object to M4 on the basis of the SCV, the latter must be understood as claiming that C_1 and C_2 are two numerically distinct cognitions. Moreover, they must not be understood as dispositional, or standing, states but as mental states that are co-instantiated.

First we must note that it is an open question whether the stream of our conscious mental lives is constituted by moments of consciousness in which a plurality of different separate mental states are instantiated, or whether only one state of consciousness can be instantiated at a time, complex though this state may be. Be that as it may, the SCV does not seem incoherent. For instance, one could claim that while C_1 and C_2 are numerically distinct cognitions, they occur simultaneously because they are brought about by the same collection of causes and conditions.

It is unclear, however, why the SCV should be in a better position than the IFCV to address the problems raised against the latter, given that these problems arise not because C_2 occurs after C_1 , but because these cognitions are understood as being numerically distinct. The SCV might seem to be in a good position to account for the persisting Cartesian intuition concerning the immediate presence of conscious experiences, but since C_1 and C_2 are two numerically distinct cognitions, the relation between them is contingent. Thus, this view also leaves open the possibility that a second-order cognition C_2 occurs while no first-order cognition C_1 occurs, and it allows the strange case in which a subject would only have the illusion that there occurs in her a conscious state appearing to her a certain way, when in fact she is experiencing no conscious cognition whatsoever.

Moreover, it is fairly easy to see that the other problems I have raised against the IFCV are also problems for the SCV. Premise P3 of the principled inference leading to (*) would also have to be replaced by premise P3'. The SCV is also in no better position than the IFCV to account for the subject aspect, or the subjective character, of C_1 or C_2 , respectively, when they occur unaccompanied by a cognition of a higher order.

As we know, it is doubtful that any philosophical arguments can be absolutely conclusive. From a dialectical standpoint, however, I take it that these problems for the IFCV and the SCV are serious enough. Thus, the objections to the memory argument based on these views are not really serious, and the argument remains unscathed by these objections.

IV. An Objection to the Memory Argument on the Basis of the Inferential View

The inferential view (or IV) agrees with the IFCV in rejecting RA—the claim that in any cognition there is not only awareness of the object (or content) of the first-order cognition, but also awareness of the very cognition itself. It also agrees with the IFCV that a second-order cognition, C_2 , which has the first order cognition C_1 as its object, is a numerically distinct mental event. But, while the IFCV asserts that C_2 cognizes C_1 directly (or non-inferentially), the IV claims that C_2 is the result of an inference based on the object (or content) of C_1 . The IV can be stated thus:

IV. Whenever a cognition, say C_1 , arises, it apprehends only an object, or a proposition; C_1 can be apprehended but it is not self-apprehended. When C_1 is apprehended, it is apprehended by a further, separate cognition, say C_2 , which arises as the result of an inference based on the object (or content) of C_1 .²⁰

For example, when I am visually aware of the blue sky, my visual awareness apprehends directly only the blue sky, or the blueness of the sky, or the fact that the sky is blue, but it does not apprehend itself. My second-order cognition that I see the blue sky is, allegedly, inferred on the basis of the object (or content) of my visual perception.

One might object to the memory argument on this basis, but it is unclear whether the proponent of the IV would object to M1 or to M4. We could interpret the proponent of IV as claiming that C_2 comes after t_0 , in which case she would object to M1. But the IV could perhaps be interpreted as claiming that the inference to C_2 is simultaneous with C_1 , in which case M1 would be accepted but M4 would be attacked. The difference between these two interpretations, however, is not pertinent to my discussion.

The main question this objection raises is the following: How should we interpret the form of such an inference? Before addressing this issue, we should note what might seem to be a *prima facie* problem with the IV. It is clear enough that an inferential relation is, by definition, a relation between propositional contents. The views discussed so far, that is, RA, the IFCV, the SCV, and the IV as stated, leave it open that first-order cognitions, such as visual awareness, can be characterized either as relations to objects or as relations to propositional contents. If a first-order cognition was construed as a relation to an object, however, then one could not *infer* the second-order cognition on the basis of the *object* of the first-order cognition, say the white lotus or the blue sky, for the obvious reason that objects simply cannot be *relata* in an inferential relation; only propositional contents can be such *relata*. It may seem that this problem can easily be fixed by insisting that the mental events that can be the objects of second-order cognitions must be restricted to mental events that have a propositional content. But this reply would be theoretically *ad hoc* unless there was some independent reason to deny that there are first-order cognitions that have no propositional content and are directed at particular objects, and that we do have second-order cognitions about such first-order cognitions. Another way to make this point is to underline an important theoretical cost to this reply. To endorse it we would seem to be bound by a certain general conception of conscious mental events as having, by definition, only propositional content as their "object." While this view is not incoherent, it seems more plausible that there are also conscious mental events that have no propositional content, but only particulars as their object, and that we typically have second-order cognitions about such mental events.

A more plausible way to address this problem would be to endorse the Kantian view according to which perception of objects implicates (transcendentally) perceptual judgments. Cases of illusions, such as the Müller-Lyer illusion, suggest, however, that perception need not implicate judgments, on pain of making the subject

irrational. In the Müller-Lyer illusion, while the subject may have good reasons to believe that the two lines she sees are actually of the same length, she still perceives them as being of different lengths. Thus, while the perception would implicate the judgment that the two lines are of different lengths, the subject also judges them to be of the same length, which would make her irrational. This suggests that perception need not implicate judgment.

This being said, the main question remains: How can a second-order cognition, C_2 , be inferred on the basis of the content of the first-order cognition, C_1 ? What form would such an inference take? It seems that the IV could endorse only one of two possible answers to this question: (a) that it must be a deductively valid inference or (b) that while such an inference is not deductively valid, it is a sound inference, that is, a piece of non-demonstrative reasoning, perhaps an inductive inference or an *inference to the best explanation*. According to the first answer, the proponent of the IV would have to maintain that the content of C_1 entails the content of C_2 . In light of the objections I have raised against the IFCV and the SCV, this first answer might seem appealing because it would be compatible with the persisting Cartesian intuitions concerning the immediate presence of conscious experiences. Let us consider these two possible answers in more detail.

Suppose that at a certain time I have a visual experience, call it C_1 , the propositional content of which would be the following:

- i. There is a white lotus in the pond.

Of course, there is a degree of vagueness in this way of formulating the propositional content of the visual experience. Nevertheless, we can assume that it can be made precise, for instance by specifying the location of the pond. It is clear enough, however, that such a proposition, even if it was made more precise, does not entail:

- ii. I see that there is a white lotus in the pond.

The proposition expressed by (i) could be true while I am sound asleep and see nothing whatsoever. It is easy to understand that there are many ways in which it can be true that there is a white lotus in the pond and false that I see a white lotus. This indicates that it might simply be generally incoherent to argue that the content of C_1 entails the content of C_2 .

It is interesting to note that the best-known proponent of the IV in the classical Indian tradition, Kumārila Bhāṭṭa, was certainly aware of a similar problem. According to Kumārila, as B. K. Matilal notes, "When an awareness apprehends an object, the latter (the object) takes on a new character, 'apprehended-ness' (it is 'tinged with awareness', so to say)."²¹ To use Dignāga's terminology of "subject and object aspects," for the content of C_1 to entail the content of C_2 , it is as if we somehow have to put the subject aspect, namely some essential characteristics of C_1 itself, into its

own propositional content to make sure that we can deductively infer the content of C_2 . This notion is quite striking; it suggests that just looking at something would bring into existence an objective feature that is contingently caused by the visual experience, but that is metaphysically independent of that experience. This reply, which consists of postulating the existence of quasi-subjective properties into the content of the first-order cognition, is an unreasonable way to salvage the deductive interpretation of the IV.

A proponent of this interpretation of the IV view could be tempted to replace (i) by the following:

i'. There is a visual appearance as of a white lotus in the pond.

We could make more precise the visual properties constituting such a visual appearance. For example, it could be a sophisticated description involving shapes, colors, boundaries, and edges, which are essentially defined in relation to visual systems. Notwithstanding the difficulty I have already noted, it is again clear that (i'), even if it was made more precise, simply does not entail (ii). There could be countless ways in which (i'), or one of its sophisticated variants, is true while (ii) is false, because the former could have been true before I was even born, for instance.

One possible way to try to save this first interpretation of the IV, namely the claim that the inferential relation is deductive, is to concede that the content of C_1 does not entail the content of C_2 , but that the content of C_1 plus some other implicit premises does entail it. In other words, the required deductive inference would have the form of an enthymeme. According to this line of reasoning, there exists a set of additional premises such that the content of C_1 plus these premises entail the content of C_2 . It is arguable, however, that there is no such set.²² The problem here is that in order to have a valid inference supporting (ii), reference must be made somewhere in the premises such as to *seeing*, to *myself*, to *my location* at the time of seeing, to *my orientation* toward the visual scene, et cetera—that is, to notions that are constitutive of the very experience itself. This is, however, tantamount to the claim that to infer (deductively) the content of C_2 , on the basis of the content of C_1 , the subject must not only be aware of the content of C_1 , but she must also be aware of some essential features of C_1 itself. The upshot, then, is that while this deductive interpretation of the IV would not be faced with the problems I have raised against the IFCV and the SCV, it is very implausible indeed. Thus, the proponent of the IV is in no position to object to the memory argument on the basis of this “deductive” interpretation of the form that the inference should take.

According to the second interpretation of the IV, the inferential relation must not be understood as deductively valid, but as a sound inferential relation, inductive or otherwise. Here, however, the content of C_1 would also be insufficient. Some further premises would have to be added. For example, one might be tempted to consider a very exhaustive description, from a third-person point of view, of the nervous system of the subject, and of the content of his visual experience. Assuming that the subject

knows all that, he would be warranted to infer, on that basis, that he has the second-order cognition. The reply to this interpretation of the IV is easy to see. Of course, on such a large basis of information the subject would be warranted to infer the content of his own second-order cognition, but he would also be warranted in exactly the same way to infer that someone else has a certain first-order cognition, on the basis of similar information about that person. For example, suppose I have enough third-person information concerning John's visual system, his location in front of a specific pond, and the fact that he looks with open eyes in the direction of the white lotus. On this basis, I would be warranted to infer (non-deductively):

- i. John sees that there is a white lotus in the pond.

The conclusion is that such an interpretation of the IV must pay the very high price of claiming that we know our own minds in exactly the same way that we know the minds of others. In other words, this claim is committed to denying that there is an important epistemic asymmetry between self-knowledge and knowledge of other minds. Such a denial is highly controversial.

One might try to resist this objection by insisting that we do indeed know our minds in the same way that we know the minds of others, that is, through theory and on the basis of inference and, thus, that there is no epistemic asymmetry between self-knowledge and knowledge of other minds. To support this objection, one might recall the widespread rejection, in contemporary philosophy of mind, of a certain Cartesian view of self-knowledge. According to this general Cartesian view, a subject has infallible direct knowledge of her own conscious mental states. Some have characterized this view as the view of the Cartesian theater. It is one thing, however, to reject this Cartesian picture of self-knowledge, and quite another to claim that there is no epistemic asymmetry between self-knowledge and knowledge of other minds, and that we know our minds in the same way that we know the minds of others: through theory and on the basis of inference. A very large number of contemporary philosophers of mind who reject the Cartesian picture of self-knowledge still acknowledge that there is such an epistemic asymmetry, which can be understood without endorsing the view of the Cartesian theater.²³ A quotation of the introduction of a recent anthology of essays on self-knowledge may be useful:

Each of us effortlessly knows an enormous amount about those attributes which go with our rationality, sentience, and affective susceptibilities: our beliefs, hopes, desires, and fears, whether we have a headache or an itchy toe, whether we are elated or depressed, whom we love or hate, what attracts or repels us. We are unhesitatingly sure about the normal run of our intentional states . . . , our sensations, and our emotions. Having great sweeps of such knowledge is the normal condition of a mature human being. True, it is also normal to know at least some other folk very well. However, knowledge of the sensations, emotions and intentional states of others demands reliance upon independently articulatable grounds—considerations concerning their sayings and deeds and context. By contrast, self-knowledge is characteristically immediate, at least in basic cases (though self-interpretation has its place).²⁴

That there is such a fundamental epistemic asymmetry between self-knowledge and knowledge of other minds is not to deny that we can engage in reflective introspection (or self-interpretation) in which we know our minds in a similar way as we know the minds of others, and that we may often be quite mistaken when we do so. The claim that there is no epistemic asymmetry between basic self-knowledge and knowledge of other minds is a very substantial philosophical claim and one that is far from being universally accepted.²⁵

Finally, as I noted, a virtue of the deductive interpretation of the IV, if it was not faced with the problems I have raised, is that it preserves the idea of RA according to which the relation between the contents of C_1 and C_2 is a necessary relation. Such an interpretation is thus compatible with the strong Cartesian intuitions I underlined in my rebuttal of the IFCV. If, however, the inference linking the contents of C_1 and C_2 is non-deductive, then obviously the relation between C_1 and C_2 is contingent, just as it is in the case of the IFCV. As we may recall, the main problems that confront the IFCV arise precisely because the relation between C_1 and C_2 is understood as a contingent relation. Thus, these problems are also present in the non-deductive interpretation of the IV.

We must conclude that the only two possible interpretations of the form of an inference from the content of C_1 to the content of C_2 must be rejected. Thus, an objection to the memory argument on the basis of the IV does not hold ground and the memory argument remains unscathed. In the next section, I discuss a second strategy to try to resist the memory argument.

V. Another Strategy to Try to Resist the Memory Argument

While the first strategy previously discussed accepts that the memory of a past cognition, C_1 , entails that C_1 must have been cognized, but denies that it must have been cognized *reflexively*, the second strategy simply denies that C_1 must have been cognized at all, reflexively or otherwise. In other words, according to this strategy, premise M1 would be false, since I can remember a past cognition C_1 (which occurred at some previous time t_0) even if C_1 was not cognized in any of the ways discussed so far: RA, IFCV, SCV, or IV. In the Indo-Tibetan doxographic tradition, the *locus classicus* of this line of objection to the memory argument is found in the ninth chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, a classical work of Madhyamaka philosophy by Śāntideva, an eighth-century Indian philosopher. The famous passage where Śāntideva states this objection is formulated in the following terms by Daniel Cozort:²⁶

If self-consciousness did not exist,
How would a consciousness be remembered?
Memory [of consciousness] occurs due to the relation [of an object] with other-experiencers²⁷
Like [being mindful of] the poison of a rodent.

The terminology used is slightly different from the one I have been using so far. In my terminology, the passage can be paraphrased as follows:

If reflexive awareness did not exist,
How would a previous cognition be remembered?
Memory of a previous cognition occurs due to the relation of an object [or content] with
a first-order cognition
Like being aware of the poison of a rodent.

Puzzling though this passage may sound, the main claim is quite simple and readily understandable in light of the analogy with a hibernating bear, alluded to in the last phrase. An episode of which the hibernating bear was not consciously aware when it occurred, namely a poisonous bite, produces a later effect, a pain, of which the bear is consciously aware when she wakes up. Analogically, I may have a visual perception of a white lotus, at time t_0 , while I am not aware of that perception, that is, neither at that time nor immediately after. Just as the poisonous bite can produce the later effect of the pain of which the bear is then conscious, the visual perception that occurred at t_0 can produce the later effect of my memory of the object (or content) of my past visual perception.²⁸ Thus, premise M1 would be false, since I can remember a past cognition C_1 in that sense even if C_1 was not cognized when it occurred (nor immediately after).

There is, however, an important difference between the scenario of the bear and the recollection of a past perception. At t_0 , when she is asleep, the bear is not consciously aware of the pain. Thus, insofar as the argument rests on this analogy, we would have to say that in the case of the visual perception of the white lotus, at t_0 , I had an unconscious or subliminal awareness of the white lotus, and that this unconscious perception triggered a causal sequence culminating in my memory of the object (or content) of the unconscious perception, namely the white lotus (or that there is white lotus nearby). It is implausible, however, that we have such memories of unconscious past cognitions. Moreover, the memory argument rests on the assumption that my past visual perception of the white lotus was conscious.

One may reply by granting that there is this important disanalogy between the two scenarios, while insisting that in the case of the visual perception of the white lotus I was consciously aware only of the white lotus (or of the presence of the white lotus nearby), and that this conscious visual perception triggered a causal sequence culminating in my memory of only the object (or content) of that perception, at (t'). This reply, however, begs the question of why it is that we seem to remember past cognitions. The problem is that it leaves totally unexplained the commonsense distinction we readily make between the propositional contents of the two following sentences:

- (a) Here is a white lotus.
- (b) I now see a white lotus.

The memory argument rests on the plausible assumption that many of our claims about past experiences such as (*) ("I saw a white lotus") are true. If recollection of past conscious cognitions, for instance my seeing a particular object O , at t_0 , would be only recollection of the object (or content) of such cognitions, then it would re-

main unclear why we accept as true such claims as (*). To see this more clearly consider the following example. Suppose that at t_0 , I touched a particular object O and that at a later time, t' , I have a recollection of that past cognition. According to Śāntideva's objection, at t' I recollect only the object (or content) of my past cognition, namely O (or that O was present nearby). Thus, this recollection would have to be indistinguishable from my recollection of my past visual perception of O , since the two cognitions, the sight and the touch, have the same object (or content), namely O (or that O was present nearby). This is intuitively hard to accept.

As I pointed out, the analogy with a hibernating bear is misleading because of the important disanalogy with the perception case. But short of this analogy, the argument seems to amount only to the claim that we never remember past cognitions but only their object (or content). This claim, however, is implausible because if it was so we could never distinguish memories of past cognitions that have the same object (or content) when these cognitions are in different sensory modalities.

One might be tempted to resist this argument by trying to find a way to say that the very nature of the object (or content) that is remembered, as the result of a causal sequence initiated by the past cognition, somehow reveals the sensory modality of the past cognition. This would enable us to distinguish the memory of a past visual perception from that of a past tactile perception of one and the same object. It is unclear, however, how such a reply can be coherently developed. I can think of only one way in which one might be tempted to develop it, namely by using a transcendental argument to the effect that the very nature of the object (or content) of the cognition somehow implicates its modality.

According to such a transcendental argument, it is a general condition of the possibility of the occurrence of a cognition that has an object (or content) of a particular type that the cognition itself must be of a correlative type. For example, for a cognition with a visual object or content to occur—that is, an object (or content) involving visual properties such as spatial forms, colors, et cetera—the cognition must be of the correlative type “seeing.” The consequence of such a transcendental argument, in the case of the memory scenario, is that I could remember only the object (or the content) of my past visual cognition, and this would suffice to warrant my memory that I saw a white lotus, because an object (or content) of that type could only be the object (or content) of a cognition of the type “seeing.” Moreover, the memory that I saw a white lotus would *ipso facto* be warranted without the need of my making an inference. For brevity's sake, let's call this view “the transcendental view” (or TV).

There are, however, two main reasons why this way to resist the memory argument fails. First, though the TV is different from the IV, insofar as it denies that the subject needs to make an inference from the object (or content) to the whole cognition, we must still have reasons to believe that there is indeed a transcendental relation between the type of the object (or content) and the type of the cognition. The TV is thus confronted with a difficulty that is similar to the one facing the IV, namely that it is hard to see how that relation could be specified in a non-circular way. It will not do simply to hold, trivially, that a cognition with an object aspect of the type “visual

content" is correlated with a cognition of the type "seeing," that a cognition with an object aspect of the type "auditory content" is correlated with a cognition of the type "hearing," and so on. Nothing seems to preclude, *a priori*, that typical visual properties might be cognized by machines or by strange creatures by producing in them cognitions that would be very different from visual experiences. In fact, nothing precludes that such visual properties could be cognized in some experiences involving perceptual modalities other than vision. Moreover, the properties of the various objects (or contents) have to be characterized more specifically than just as "visual properties" and so on, otherwise the TV is faced with the same problem as the one facing the IV, namely that it simply assumes without an argument that the cognition type is somewhat already contained in the object (or content), and that the object (or content) contains the relevant specific type of "apprehended-ness," to use Kumārila's expression. Although it may not be impossible to formulate such non-trivial correlations, the proponent of this objection must discharge the very substantial burden that they exist. RA is a much simpler view.

To make this objection to the TV sharper we can note a serious problem with which it would be confronted when attempting to specify such correlations. Insofar as the issues of consciousness and of self-knowledge are concerned with any kinds of conscious mental states, we can imagine a variation on the memory argument according to which the conscious mental state that is recollected at time t' is not the visual cognition of a white lotus but, instead, of a conscious belief, say my former belief that it is impossible that there be life on other planets. I may recall, at t' , that I had that belief earlier. However, it is implausible that the recollection of only the content of that conscious belief would suffice to recall that I had that conscious belief, because the conditions at t' may be quite different from those at t_0 . For instance, I may have changed my mind on this matter and no longer hold that belief. In such a case, it is totally unclear how recollection of only the content of the belief would warrant the memory that I *believed* that content. Such examples could be multiplied using memories of desires and memories of emotions.

The second reason why the TV fails is that it is quite similar to RA, and thus it could not coherently be used to deny premise M1. It is useful to recall that we can easily understand the conceptual distinction between the object (or content) of a cognition and the cognition itself. This idea is made clear by Dignāga's notion of the dual aspect of cognitions, which I presented in the first section, and, as I noted, it relates to the straightforward distinction between

- i. There is a white lotus in the pond,
- and
- ii. I see that there is a white lotus in the pond.

The question I want to raise is the following: How should we interpret that a subject can readily know (ii) given that she has a visual cognition, C_1 , which warrants (i)? Of course, proponents of RA, IFCV or SCV, and IV have different answers to this question. The proponent of RA can simply say that C_1 , the visual cognition cognizing that

there is a white lotus in the pond, also has a reflexive aspect that makes it by the same token a cognition of itself, and that this warrants (ii). The proponents of the IFCV (or of the SCV) would claim that C_1 , though not reflexive, is immediately followed by a second-order cognition C_2 (or simultaneously accompanied by C_2), the content of which is C_1 , and C_2 directly warrants (ii). The proponent of the IV would claim that (ii) is warranted by an inference from the content of C_1 . What about the proponent of the TV? The only plausible answer she could give is that given the conditions of possibility for the occurrence of a cognition that has the type of object (or content) that C_1 has, C_1 must itself be of the type “seeing” and, thus, to be aware of only the object (or content) of C_1 suffices to warrant (ii).

Since the TV is general enough, it entails that any subject who has a first-order cognition of a certain type T *knows by the very same token* that she has that cognition, because all that is required to know that she has that cognition is to cognize the object (or the content) of the cognition. Hence, any subject who has a first-order cognition of a certain type T *knows ipso facto* that she has a cognition of that type. Given that the transcendental argument warrants the passage from (i) to (ii), it follows that in any circumstance where the subject has a first-order cognition with the content (i), if she was prompted to answer the question “Do you see a white lotus?” she would assent to (ii) and she would *ipso facto* be warranted to do so. This view, however, starts to look very similar to RA. Once we understand that the transcendental argument is a very general claim, then we cannot fail to see that it entails that the second-order cognition is a necessary property of the first-order cognition. In other words, according to the TV, the occurrence of the first-order cognition “transcendentally” suffices for the second-order cognition. In this view, any conscious experience of type T must be simultaneously accompanied by (an) “I cognize a conscious experience of type T.” It should be clear, however, that it would be incoherent of the proponent of the TV to object to premise M1 of the memory argument on the ground that the cognition that is recollected need not have been cognized when it occurred, since the very transcendental argument entails that the cognition was indeed cognized at the very moment of its occurrence.

The result is that the transcendental argument makes a general conceptual claim about conscious cognitions, and one that is very similar to RA—namely that having the conscious first-order cognition is sufficient for having the second-order cognition *by the very same token*. Thus, such a transcendental argument cannot coherently be used as an objection to premise M1 of the memory argument. The TV is indeed very similar to RA. Both views deny that claims of self-knowledge such as (ii) must be warranted on the basis of a cognition other than the cognition that is reported in the very self-knowledge claim. Thus, both views are opposed to the claims of the IFCV, the SCV, and the IV, according to which a self-knowledge claim such as (ii) would be based on a further cognition. At this stage in the dialectic, the proponent of the TV could be tempted to change her strategy. Instead of proposing the TV as an objection to premise M1, she could present it as an objection to premise M4 of the memory argument. The claim would be that I could be aware of C_1 at t_0 even if RA is false, since the TV would be another way to be conscious of C_1 at t_0 .

While the TV is similar to RA, it is also importantly different, and the latter is much simpler. The proponent of the TV cannot simply assume that there are the required correlations between types of objects (or contents) and types of cognitions. As I noted, the TV has the theoretical burden of specifying these correlations in a non-circular way, and this seems to be highly problematic, for reasons I have noted. The simplicity of RA makes it preferable to the TV precisely because it incurs no such onerous theoretical commitment. For these reasons, the TV also fails to refute the memory argument.

To conclude this discussion, let me underline a further important difference between the TV and RA. The former claims that there is a necessary link between the object (or content) of the cognition and the type of the cognition. In claiming that such a link exists, the TV seems to be committed to a substantial epistemological claim concerning the nature of the object (or content) of cognitions. Indeed, it seems to be committed to a form of transcendental idealism, because the object (or content) of a cognition must, in a certain sense, be a mind-dependent entity, given that it is necessarily related (transcendentally) to the type of cognitions that can cognize it. Thus, this view rules out the possibility that the object (or content) of the cognition might be a mind-independent object, property, or fact. It should be obvious why this is so. If the object (or content) is indeed a mind-independent object, property, or fact, then it is just a contingent matter of fact that we do happen to cognize such mind-independent objects, properties, or facts with the types of cognitions with which we do in fact cognize them.

The end result is that the TV is committed to deny any form of direct realism. The beauty of RA is that it remains completely neutral with respect to the nature of the object (or content) of cognitions and with respect to substantial epistemological views such as direct realism, representationalism, idealisms of various kinds, and anti-realism. While it is true that Dignāga is famous for having endorsed an idealist epistemology of kinds, namely the Yogācāra epistemology, RA and the memory argument remain neutral relative to these various epistemological views. Indeed, RA is even compatible with direct realism. For instance, if we assume that the object (or content) of a cognition is (or is constituted by) some mind-independent entity, such mind-independent entity is also *ipso facto* constitutive of the second-order cognition. Though RA is compatible with direct realism, it does not entail it, since it is also compatible with all other major substantial epistemological views, and, thus, it is compatible with Yogācāra idealism. All it says is that a cognition is at once directed at an object (or content) and at itself, while it says nothing about the nature of the object (or content). RA is thus simpler and more economical than the TV, which is a further reason to endorse it. For this reason, it must be stressed that RA, as I interpret it, is very different from another version of the theory of reflexive awareness, which follows as a consequence of a form of idealism. According to the latter, any mental event is *ipso facto* about itself insofar as there does not exist any non-mental reality about which it could be. As I noted, the theory of reflexive awareness as I understand it is totally different from this idealist construal of RA.

I have argued that the main attempts to refute the memory argument fail. As far as I can tell, these are the only plausible ways to resist that argument. The upshot is that the memory argument is sound and it succeeds in establishing an epistemologically minimal interpretation of RA that is independent from Yogācāra idealism. Moreover, RA is a plausible view that throws light on our understanding of the nature of consciousness and on the epistemology of self-knowledge. As I already noted, in contemporary philosophy of mind, some philosophers have recently proposed so-called self-representational theories of consciousness that are very much in the spirit of Dignāga's RA (see note 3). Using the terminology of this article, we can say that according to such self-representational theories, a second-order cognition has an intentional content that represents the very first-order cognition. Some questions that remain to be explored are (a) whether RA should be understood in such representationalist terms or not, and, if so, (b) whether the representational content of such second-order cognitions should be understood as fully conceptual content or as non-conceptual content, in the spirit of theories of non-conceptual content that have recently been proposed, particularly in the philosophy of perception.²⁹ I leave these questions for further work on this topic.

Notes

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- 1 – My discussion owes much to B. K. Matilal (1986, chap. 5, pp. 141–179). Though my defense of the Dignāgian account of RA is at odds with Matilal's own views, the general motivation of this article is very much in the spirit of his work, which underscores the relevance of classical Indian philosophy to contemporary issues in analytic philosophy. Thus, a central goal of this article is to contribute to the inter-animation of these two traditions, or what Mark Siderits (2003) has called "fusion philosophy."
- 2 – Brentano 1874/1973, pp. 153–154. Victor Caston (2002) proposes an interpretation of Aristotle's *De Anima* (III.2, 425b12–25), which is also similar to RA.
- 3 – Matilal 1986, pp. 142–143. This issue has also been notoriously disputed in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. For instance, Gorampa and Mipham are important Tibetan philosophers who endorse RA, while the rejection of RA is considered one of the so-called "Unique Tenets" proper to the Gelukpa school following

the tradition of Tsongkhapa, as Daniel Cozort (1998, pp. 154–155) points out. This issue is also relevant to contemporary analytic philosophy. Recent suggestions of so-called self-representational theories of consciousness are quite similar to RA; see, for instance, Kriegel and Williford 2006 and Kriegel 2009. Moreover, so-called higher-order theories of consciousness are somewhat in the spirit of the view of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas, which raises an important objection to RA. This objection is discussed in section 3. For higher-order theories of consciousness, see Rosenthal 1997, Lycan 1996, Gennaro 2004 and 2012, and Carruthers 2005.

- 4 – The memory argument is typically attributed to Dignāga, but as Zhihua Yao (2005) makes clear, some versions of the argument were already discussed in Indian philosophy long before Dignāga stated it. Yao traces the genesis of the Dignāgian view to the Mahāsāṃghika school and also, in part, to some developments within the Sautrāntika tradition. In this article, I focus on Dignāga’s formulation.
- 5 – In what follows I use Masaaki Hattori’s (1968) authoritative translation of the *Pratyakṣapariccheda*.
- 6 – This is a slightly modified version of Matilal’s (1986, p. 142) formulation.
- 7 – That Dignāga assumes such a deflationist view is clear from the following passage of the *Pratyakṣapariccheda*: “the roles of the means of cognition (*pramāṇa*) and the object to be cognized (*prameya*), corresponding to differences of [aspect of] the cognition, are [only] metaphorically attributed (*upacaryate*) to the respective factor in each case, because [in their ultimate nature] all elements of existence are devoid of function (*nirvyapara*)” (Hattori 1968, p. 29).
- 8 – The question of how such an object aspect must be understood raises notorious epistemological problems that need not concern us here. For instance, should we understand the object aspect as an actual mind-independent object or an actual mind-independent fact? Should we understand it as a mental representation of sorts, or as a *sense-datum*? For the purpose of my discussion, “object aspect” is used neutrally, as a kind of place holder as it were, independently from any specific epistemological views concerning the nature of the object (or content) of perception.
- 9 – Hattori 1968, p. 29.
- 10 – Ibid., pp. 29–30.
- 11 – Such an inferential account is discussed in section 4.
- 12 – Hattori 1968, p. 30.
- 13 – As Matilal (1986, pp. 143–144) points out, the IFCV corresponds to the non-reflexive view of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, while the IV corresponds to the view of the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsaka followers of Kumārila Bhāṭṭa. It should be noted that so-called higher-order theories of consciousness, which have occupied center

stage in the recent literature on consciousness, are somewhat in the spirit of the IFCV of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika (see note 3). Moreover, in the recent literature on self-knowledge, some philosophers have endorsed an inferential view that is similar to the view of the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsaka; see, for instance, Dretske 1995 and 2000. While Murat Aydede (2002) rejects such an inferential view, Pascal Ludwig (2005) tries to defend it.

- 14 – While Dignāga does not count memory as a further means of knowledge, in addition to perception and inference, this does not entail that he would conclude that claims like “I saw a white lotus this morning” could not be true. He rules out that memory-based knowledge should be understood as a kind of perception, and since he claims that perception and inference are the only two kinds of knowledge, this suggests that he would agree that recollection should be understood as based on some inference.
- 15 – This, again, is a formulation that is slightly different from Matilal’s (1986, p. 142).
- 16 – Thus, such a view does not accept the assumption of RA according to which all cognitions are conscious. Indeed, it leaves it open that a first-order cognition might occur while not being immediately followed by a second-order cognition. In such a case, the first-order cognition would be unconscious.
- 17 – On the basis of this intuition Descartes formulated his famous cogito argument, according to which he claimed to know infallibly “I think, therefore I exist,” which he thought he could use as an ultimate foundation of knowledge. As we know, foundationalism in epistemology has been widely repudiated in contemporary epistemology under the influence of the work of such philosophers as Wilfrid Sellars, Richard Rorty, and Donald Davidson, to name only the most prominent. But even if we deny that there can be any such infallible foundation of knowledge, the phenomenological fact of the immediate presence of conscious experience remains intact.
- 18 – In contemporary discussions of higher-order theories of consciousness (see note 3), this problem is known as the problem of empty higher-order states; see Neander 1998 and Block 2011.
- 19 – Nagel 1974.
- 20 – See note 14.
- 21 – Matilal 1986, pp. 143–144.
- 22 – See Aydede (2002), who objects to Dretske’s version of the IV, arguing that there is no such set.
- 23 – See, for instance, Davidson 1984 and 1987, Burge 1988 and 1996, Shoemaker 1988, and Boghossian 1989. Most of the discussions on this topic have centered on whether or not this epistemic asymmetry is compatible with semantic externalism—the claim that propositional content depends, at least in part, on

relations between ourselves and our physical or sociolinguistic environment. While many philosophers have argued that the epistemic asymmetry is compatible with semantic externalism, some have denied that it is. Moreover, some who deny this compatibility take this as a reason to reject semantic externalism; see McKinsey 1991, for instance. This is not the place to engage this issue; it should only be stressed that all these philosophers accept that there is an epistemic asymmetry between self-knowledge and knowledge of other minds. For some important anthologies on this issue see Cassam 1994; Ludlow and Martin 1998; and Wright, Smith, and Macdonald 1998.

- 24 – Wright, Smith, and Macdonald 1998, p. 1.
- 25 – See Peacocke 1998, which argues that self-ascription of mental states is rationally justified even though it rests neither on an inference nor on observation.
- 26 – Cozort 1998, pp. 168–169.
- 27 – As Cozort (1998, pp. 168–169 n. 32) makes clear, an other-experiencer is simply any first-order cognition.
- 28 – I thank an anonymous referee for clarifying this understanding of Śāntideva's objection.
- 29 – See, for instance, Gunther 2003, which is a collection of essays on this topic.

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