

Dharmakīrti on *punarbhava*

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1993*

1 Introduction

Religious doctrines and the philosophical arguments supporting them often become more clearly defined as a result of being challenged by opposing views and counterarguments. Conversely, ideas that are never challenged often remain relatively obscure and poorly defined. The process of encountering rival ideas and alternative theories requires people to re-examine their own assumptions and provide reasons for holding views that could previously be taken for granted. It is not surprising, therefore, that a number of important notions within Buddhist philosophy became better defined in the centuries after they became more widely dispersed in the Indian subcontinent; for it was only after coming into contact with opposing theories that many of the ideas articulated by the Buddha, and the presuppositions underlying those ideas, were seriously examined. Once these doctrines were challenged, later Buddhist philosophers had the task of either offering solid arguments in their support or revising the doctrines to a form in which they could be supported.

Among the most important doctrines of early Buddhism, and one that remained unexamined for a relatively long time, was the doctrine of rebirth (*punarbhava*). It appears that most other philosophical systems in India were, like Buddhism, based on the notion that the foremost predicament for all living beings is that they are bound to experience the consequences of actions performed in previous lives; therefore, few philosophers challenged the Buddha in his statement of this as the problem most in need of a solution. Eventually, however, philosophers did arise who began to question the doctrine of rebirth and to pose strong arguments against it. Once this opposition had been stated, it was no longer possible for Buddhist apologists to take the doctrine of rebirth for granted. It became necessary to defend their position by finding evidence in support of it and by finding flaws in the arguments adduced against it.

*Published as "Dharmakīrti on *punarbhava*." In Egaku Maeda (ed), *Studies in Original Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism*. Kyōto: Nagata Bunshodo. Volume One, p. 111–30.

One of the Buddhist philosophers to rise to the challenge of providing a reasoned defense of the doctrine of rebirth was Dharmakīrti. A large part of one of the four chapters of his *Pramāṇavārttika* is dedicated to answering the arguments that had been posed against the rebirth hypothesis. The present paper contains a review of the arguments for and against the theory of rebirth that Dharmakīrti takes into consideration. This review will include a discussion of how the debate over rebirth is related to other philosophical issues that Dharmakīrti treats in his *Pramāṇavārttika*.

2 Context of the discussion

Before examining the arguments that Dharmakīrti presents for and against rebirth, it may be helpful to place this discussion into a context. One of the four divisions of the *Pramāṇavārttika* is dedicated to an investigation of the authority of the Buddha. The central question in this chapter is whether or not the Buddha is a source of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), and if so, then on what basis he can be said to be one. In arguing that the Buddha was—or more properly, that his words still are—a source of new knowledge, Dharmakīrti first sets out to establish that, in general, something is a source of knowledge if it discloses previously unknown truths. And a truth, says Dharmakīrti, is a belief that yields expected results when one acts upon it, or at least it is a belief that would yield expected results if one were to act upon it. This being the case generally, the Buddha is a source of knowledge insofar as he disclosed previously unknown truths. In particular, says Dharmakīrti, the words of the Buddha disclosed for the first time accurate information about the nature of discontent (*duḥkha*), the nature of its cause, the fact that removing the misconceptions and desires that cause discontent will eliminate discontent itself, and the method of removing those misconceptions and desires. The disclosures are, of course, very well known to Buddhists as the Four Noble Truths (*catvāri āryasatyāni*).

It may be noted in passing that Dharmakīrti remains silent about several issues about which there might be controversy today. He does not, for example, raise the issue of which Buddhist writings contain the most reliable records of the Buddha's words. This issue, which engages the attention of some modern scholars, is not important to Dharmakīrti's overall purpose. His principal task is to show that the Four Noble Truths, which he considers the very essence of the Buddha's teaching, are indeed true rather than to examine any other nonessential claims made in Buddhist texts. Since on these essential points all Buddhist scriptures are in agreement, there is no need to enter into the potentially divisive issue of which Buddhist community holds the most reliable records of what the Buddha said. Another issue that Dharmakīrti does not explore at all is the question of whether the Four Truths really were unknown before the Buddha disclosed them. This question, like the question of the canonicity of Buddhist texts, tends to be much more interesting to some modern scholars of comparative religion than it ever was to

classical Buddhist philosophers. To a philosophical Buddhist there is really nothing to be controverted, since it is almost a matter of definition that the person who made the Four Noble Truths available to human beings was the Buddha; no detail of the life of whoever it was who first disclosed these truths can compare in importance to the truths themselves.

Although Dharmakīrti does not moot the question of who exactly the Buddha was in particular, he does make a point of establishing that the Four Truths must have been disclosed by a mortal rather than by an immortal being. In making this point, Dharmakīrti explicitly rejects the view that truths are revealed to human beings by an eternal god. The person who disclosed the four noble truths must have been capable of change, he argues, for only beings that change are capable of acting, since action necessarily involves some kind of change. Therefore the actions of learning, knowing and communicating information can be carried out only by beings who undergo change, and all beings who undergo change are ultimately mortal. And all mortals are limited in what it is possible for them to know. Therefore, the Buddha was a mortal with limited knowledge of the world, not an eternal and omniscient being. This limitation in the Buddha's knowledge, however, only means that he could not know all the world in all its details; he could not, for example, know how many maggots there are in the world—but then, asks Dharmakīrti, to what use could one put the knowledge of the world's maggot population anyway?

prāmāṇyaṃ ca paroḥśārthajñānaṃ tatsādhanasya ca
abhāvān nāsty anuṣṭhānām iti kecit pracakṣate (1.31)¹

jñānavān mṛgyate kaścit taduktapratipattaye
ajñōpadeśakaraṇe vipralambhanaśaṅkibhiḥ (1.32)

tasmād anuṣṭheyagataṃ jñānam asya vicāryatām
kīṭasaṃkhyāparijñānaṃ tasya naḥ kvōpayujyate (1.33)

heyōpadeyatattvasya sābhypāyasya vedakaḥ
yaḥ pramāṇam asāv iṣṭo na tu sarvasya vedakaḥ (1.34)

dūram paśyatu vā mā vā tattvam iṣṭam tu paśyatu
pramāṇam dūradarśī ced eta ḡdhrānupāsmahe (1.35)

31 Some people assert that cognition of hidden objects is authoritative but that one should not undertake some things because there is no proof of their existence.

32–33 People fear failure when acting on the advice of someone who does not know; they seek out some knowledgeable person in order to undertake what he says. Therefore, one should investigate that [knowledgeable person's] views about what ought to be undertaken. To what use can we put his knowledge about how many maggots there are in the world?

¹References to chapter and verse numbers follow the enumeration in Ram Chandra Pandeya, *The Pramāṇavārttikam of Ācārya Dharmakīrti: with the commentaries Svopajñāvṛtti of the author and Pramāṇavārttikavṛtti of Manorathanandin*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989.

34 What is desired is an authority who is knowledgeable about what ought to be avoided and what ought to be acquired, not an authority who is knowledgeable about everything.

35 Whether or not one can see what is far away, an authority must see the truth that people seek. If we want someone who can see far, we will worship vultures.

What the Buddha did know was what was what it is necessary for a person to do in order to become free of the kinds of discontent caused by attachments and aversions that are rooted in misunderstanding. Since this is all a person really needs to know, and since this kind of knowledge can be learned and communicated by one mortal to another, the Buddha's knowledge is adequate to counteract the main problem that human beings face: their own disquietude.

While depicting the Buddha as a mortal with limited knowledge, Dharmakīrti also emphasizes that the Buddha was not entirely like all other mortals. On the contrary, he was in some respects an extraordinary man. And what made the Buddha extraordinary, says Dharmakīrti, was his remarkable degree of compassion for the sufferings of other living beings, a compassion that had been cultivated over the course of many lifetimes of practice (*abhyāsa*). It was this compassion that elevated the Buddha above the level of all other mortal human beings, and even above the level of the gods. It is at this stage of his overall argument for the Buddha's authority that Dharmakīrti must defend the doctrine of rebirth from those who rejected it. If compassion cultivated over the course of many lifetimes is said to be what made the words of the Buddha more worthy of being heeded than the words of other human beings, then anyone who does not believe that beings are reborn will not be convinced that the Buddha was especially trustworthy.

3 The relationship of mental events to the body

The first issue that comes up for discussion within the context of the debate on rebirth is that of the relationship between mental events and the physical body. Dharmakīrti writes:

sādhanaṃ karuṇābhyāsāt sā buddher dehasaṃśrayāt
asiddhōbhyāsa iti cen nāśrayapratīṣedhataḥ (1.36)

That which establishes [the Buddha as a source of knowledge] is compassion that comes from constant practice. One might think that constant practice cannot be established, since consciousness is dependent on the body. But that is not correct, because it can be disproved [that the body] is a support [of consciousness].

The opponents to the doctrine of rebirth, identified by the commentator Manorathanandin as Cārvākas, hold a purely materialistic account of consciousness. According to the materialists, consciousness and all other mental

events are nothing more than by-products of physical processes. Since mental events are dependent upon the healthy functioning of the physical body, when the physical body ceases to function as a living organism, all mental events come to an end. And when mental processes come to an end, then all the psychological qualities associated with those mental processes also come to an end. Therefore, whatever virtuous or vicious habits a person has cultivated over the course of a lifetime come to an end when the physical body loses its life. This being the case, the materialists would argue, it is impossible for merit accrued during the lifetime of one body to be carried over to a different body that is born after the death of the first. Similarly, it would be impossible for the wisdom or compassion that a mind cultivates in one body to become part of the mentality of a mind residing in a different body.

Before looking at how Dharmakīrti goes about criticizing the view of the materialists, it may be useful to examine the epistemological problems that this controversy raises. The issue here is whether or not the physical body is the cause of mental events. Establishing a causal connection between two things is a notoriously difficult problem. The approach to this problem that is found in classical Buddhism is the theory of conditioned origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), the most general statement of which is “When this is present, that arises; when this is not present, that does not arise.” A causal condition of a given effect, in other words, is that in the presence of which the effect arises and in the absence of which the effect does not arise.

On first examination, this formula appears to be a satisfactory account of our intuitions about the relation between cause and effect. But on closer inspection, this general formula turns out to leave some questions unanswered. The controversy concerning the causal relationship between the body and mental events is one area in which the classical formula of conditioned origination fails to provide a clear answer. Since some level of consciousness occurs at every moment of life, it is not possible to determine, using the general formula of conditioned origination, whether it is the life of the physical body that causes mental events or mental events that cause a physical body to have life. It is necessary, therefore, to look at a number of more particular pieces of evidence to see whether they support the materialist hypothesis or the Buddhist hypothesis.

Dharmakīrti denies the materialists’ contention that mental events are a mere by-product of processes in the physical body. Rather, he says, both mental events and physical events can be seen as effects of the same set of causal conditions.

prāṇāpānēndriyadhīyaṃ dehād eva na kevalāt (1.37ab)

Breathing in, breathing out, the faculties of sensation and consciousness are not products of the physical body alone.

These things are also products of antecedent causal conditions of the same class. Since there are other factors involved, which aid their production, it is an oversimplification to say they are based only on physical causes. In fact,

according to Buddhist abhidharma, nothing has a single cause. Rather, everything that comes into being is the product of a complex of causal factors. One kind of causal factor that is always present is an antecedent condition that belongs to the same class of thing as the product itself. A mental event, for example, is caused by many factors, one of which is a previous mental event. Therefore, such things as the life principle, consciousness and other such faculties always depend upon a combination of non-material conditions and material conditions. That being the case, it is quite an oversimplification to say that physical elements are the only cause of consciousness. The relationship between consciousness and the physical signs of life, such as breathing, can be seen as being parallel to the relationship between the red colour of a rose and the rose's aroma; the aroma does not cause the colour, nor does the colour cause the aroma, but both are products of the complex set of factors that caused the rose to blossom. Dharmakīrti follows a similar pattern of thinking in his explanation of the relationship between body and mind:

hetvabhedāt sahaṣṭhiṭṭh
akṣavad rūparasavad (1.50bc)

The coincidence [of the body and consciousness] is due to their having the same cause, like the physical senses and like colour and flavour.

In saying that mental events are not causally dependent on *only* the physical body, Dharmakīrti is not claiming that mental events are entirely independent of the physical body. Rather, he is claiming that both physical factors and nonphysical factors play a role in the formation of mental events. Nonphysical factors are necessary, he observes, to account for the qualitative difference between living beings and inanimate objects. A sentient being, even of the lowest order of complexity, is different in kind from the four elements that constitute the material world. As Dharmakīrti elaborates in verses 127–133, the mental body—that is, the collection of mental events contained in the four nonmaterial aggregates—have properties of a different nature from the properties of the physical body. The mental body has such properties as compassion, dispassion, and wisdom or cruelty, attachment and delusion. These are not physical properties at all. Nor are these mental properties even correlated with physical properties. Compassion, for example, is not restricted to people who have certain physical characteristics, nor are there any physical characteristics that cause or even help compassion to arise. Compassion is a purely mental phenomenon, caused by other purely mental phenomena, such as the ability to imagine oneself in the situation of other beings and the decision to practice meditation in order to improve one's character. Therefore, sentience cannot be accounted for through purely material causes. Some other factor must be present along with the physical factors. The physical elements themselves can be compared to a seed; in the same way that there can be no plant without a seed, there can be no consciousness without the physical elements. But a seed cannot grow into a tree all by itself; it

requires the help of other factors. And similarly, the physical elements cannot produce consciousness by themselves but must be aided by other non-material factors.

na sa kaścit pṛthivyāder aṃśo yatra na jantavaḥ
saṃsvedajādyā jāyante sarvaṃ bījātmakaṃ tataḥ (1.39)

tat saajātanapekṣāṇām akṣādīnām samudbhava
pariṇāmo yathāikasya syāt sarvasyāviśeṣataḥ (1.40)

39 There is no part of [the four elements, namely,] earth and so on in which creatures such as those [insects] which are born of moisture can be born. Therefore everything must have the nature of a seed.

40 Therefore, if the sense faculties arise without depending on nonmaterial causes, then the evolution of everything would be like the evolution of any one thing, without any distinctions [in cause].

If there were no nonmaterial factors to account for the special qualities of sentience, says Manorathanandin in his commentary, there would be no distinction between a sentient being and a lump of earth, for both would be derived from exactly the same causes and conditions.

Now in saying that the physical body is not the only factor in the production of mental events, Dharmakīrti has still not fully answered the challenge of the materialists. For even if they concede the point that there are factors other than physical processes involved in the formation of mental events, it is still possible to claim that no mental events can occur in the absence of certain physical processes. In other words, even if physical processes are not a sufficient condition for mental events, they may still be a necessary condition. And if this is the case, then it would still be impossible for the package of mental events that have accompanied one physical body to leave that body and become associated with a different physical body. Therefore, if Dharmakīrti wishes to salvage the doctrine of rebirth, he must show that mental events can occur even in the absence of physical processes. This he tries to do in the following verse:

pratyekam upaghāte 'pi nēndriyāṇām manomateḥ
upaghāto 'sti bhaṅge 'syās teṣām bhaṅgaś ca dṛśyate (1.41)

Even if the sense faculties are destroyed individually, the thoughts within consciousness are not destroyed. And it is observed that when there is a modification in the thoughts within consciousness, there is a change in the sense faculties.

The point seems to be that the mind does not stop working, even if every one of the physical senses stops functioning. Even if a person had no sight, no hearing, and no sense of smell, taste and touch, the mind would continue to produce thoughts. This shows, claims Dharmakīrti, that consciousness is not dependent on the physical senses. On the other hand, a slight modification in mood can have a profound effect on the way the senses operate.

Manorathanandin elaborates this by observing that the senses of a person who is very excited or panic-stricken function differently from the senses of a person who is calm. This means not only that the mental processes are independent of the physical faculties of sense but that the physical senses are dependent on consciousness. This argument is evidently designed to lead to the conclusion that one must reject the materialist's claim that consciousness is purely a by-product of physical processes.

There is, unfortunately, one glaring oversight in Dharmakīrti's argument; while claiming that thoughts can occur even when the five physical senses are impaired or destroyed, he fails to take into account the possibility that these thoughts do nevertheless have a physical basis themselves other than the five physical senses. Several schools of Buddhist abhidharma did subscribe to the view that the heart (*hṛdaya*) is the physical basis of thinking in the same way that the eye is the physical basis of seeing.² Dharmakīrti's arguments against the materialistic view of mental events and for the position that mental events are ultimately independent of a physical basis would therefore not be acceptable to all Buddhists. Perhaps out of a desire to avoid topics that were controversial within Buddhism while arguing against non-Buddhist positions, Dharmakīrti seems to avoid altogether the issue of whether or not thinking depends on the functioning of a physical organ.

As has been stated above, the position of the materialist is that the body is a sufficient condition for consciousness; there is, in other words, no other causal factor that one must appeal to in order to account for the presence of awareness. But if this were so, argues Dharmakīrti, then a person would never die. The reasoning is as follows: It is common observation that all the elements of the physical body continue to be present when a person dies, and if these elements were sufficient to support life, then life would never end, because the physical elements are always present. The materialists might reply to the above argument by saying that life is not caused by the mere presence of the elements of the physical body; rather, the elements must be arranged in a particular way so that they can work together to draw air into the body. It is the function of breathing that accounts for life, and it is the presence of life that accounts for consciousness. Anticipating such an argument from the materialists, Dharmakīrti replies that if it is admitted that life depends on breathing, then it can be shown that breathing is caused by consciousness, not vice versa. First of all, breathing and consciousness are coincident—one is never found without the other. Therefore, it is just as likely that consciousness causes breathing as that breathing causes consciousness.

²See Louis de La Vallée Poussin, *L'Abhidharmakośa de Vasubandhu*, Brussels: Institut belge des hautes études chinoises, 1971 [reprint], volume 1, p. 32. In a note La Vallée Poussin compares the views of several schools of Buddhism on this issue. Some schools, such as the Theravādins and the Tāmraparṇīyas, accepted a physical basis for thought; the Theravādin canonical works on abhidhamma did not name this physical basis, but later Theravādin doctors such as Buddhaghosa specified that thought is based on a physical organ named the *hadaya* (heart). The view of Vasubandhu, expressed in his prose commentary to 1.17cd in his *Abhidharmakośa*, a text that clearly had a strong influence on Dharmakīrti, is that thought does not have a physical basis as the other types of awareness do.

But in fact, says Dharmakīrti, it is much more likely that consciousness is the cause of breathing than that breathing is the cause of consciousness, because if breathing were the cause of consciousness, then an increase in the amount of air breathed would lead to an increase in consciousness.

tadbhāvabhāvād vaśyatvāt prāṇāpānau tato na tat (1.53cd)

preraṇākaraṣaṇe vāyoḥ prayatnena vinā kutaḥ
nirhrāsātīśayāpattir nirhrāsātīśayāt tayoḥ (1.54)

Breathing in and out occurs when consciousness is present; therefore breathing arises from the powers of the mind rather than vice versa.

There is no exhalation or inhalation of air without conscious effort. One would get a decrease or increase of consciousness as a result of a decrease or increase of breathing.

One can only guess to what extent Dharmakīrti intended this last argument to be taken seriously; it is likely to be one of the many examples in the *Pramāṇavārttika* of the author's philosophical playfulness. On the other hand, Dharmakīrti does return several times in the chapter under discussion to this issue of the relationship between physical events and mental events. In verse 105, for example, he argues that if the body is the cause of the mind, then either the body in its totality must be the cause of consciousness, or different parts of the body must be the independent causes of different parts of consciousness. If it were the case that the body as a whole must be present in order for consciousness to arise, then the loss of even one atom of the body would result in the loss of consciousness. And if different parts of the body gave rise to different parts of awareness, then we would in effect have many acts of consciousness at once rather than just one at a time. He then uses an argument of exactly the same structure to support the view that consciousness is not caused by the the act of breathing taken as a whole nor by one breath at a time. Therefore, concludes Dharmakīrti, mental events are not caused by physical events of any kind; rather, mental events and physical events simply occur together at the same place and the same time, each being the result of separate chains of antecedent conditions.

4 The question of whether death has a cause

Another issue that arises from this entire discussion of how physical events and mental events are related is the question of what causes the death of the physical body—or rather, whether there is a special cause for death. The materialists argue that life and consciousness can be fully explained in purely physical terms; they hold, nevertheless, that much more than the mere presence of the physical elements is necessary to support life. The humours must also be in proper balance. When the humours are out of balance, say the materialists, the result is disease. A diseased body ultimately causes a cessation of the life processes, or at least ceases to be a support of continued life. If

this purely materialistic account of life and death is correct, says Dharmakīrti, we should expect that once a person dies, the diseases will also disappear. And since the diseases were the only things obstructing life, once they are gone, the body should return back to life.

na doṣair viguṇo deho hetur vartyâdivad yadi
mr̥te śamīkr̥te doṣe punarujjīvanam bhavet (1.56)

If a body that is corrupted by diseases is not a cause [of life] as a [defective] wick [is not a cause of flame], [then] there would be a revival [of the vital breath] when [the body is] dead and its corruption is neutralized.

The materialists might reply to the above argument by suggesting that the kinds of change that the body undergoes at death are irreversible, and therefore it is silly to suggest that when the body dies of a disease, then the disease that caused death disappears, allowing the body to return to life. Anticipating this line of reasoning, Dharmakīrti rejoins that not all changes caused by disease are irreversible. Diseases cause changes in the body, such as fevers, but these changes can be reversed by applying medications. Therefore, it would not be inconsistent with a purely materialistic view of life and death to suppose that death, which is one of the changes caused by disease, might disappear when its cause disappears. While it is true, says Dharmakīrti, that if a body is ripped to shreds by the sharp teeth of some animal, then it could not possibly return to life, it would be consistent with a materialistic view of life that if a person died of a curable disease, then the person might return to life when the disease itself came to an end. Therefore, it is possible for a purely materialistic account of life to result in the false conclusion that people might return to life after the cause of death has disappeared.³

Dharmakīrti's attempts to point out a weakness in the materialists' theory are not compelling. In order to give a definitive refutation of their position it would be necessary to show that the materialistic account of death logically entails a falsehood or a contradiction. The most Dharmakīrti succeeds in doing is to show that a falsehood would be logically compatible with the materialist's hypothesis; this is hardly a strong indictment against any position.

The position taken by Dharmakīrti himself on the question of whether death requires a special cause follows the line of reasoning set out by Vasubandhu at *Abhidharmakośa* 4.2–3; the position taken here is that the cause of the cessation of a complex thing is the thing's very existence as a complex (*saṃskṛta*) thing. In other words, the very fact that a complex thing is made up of many components is ultimately responsible for the fact that the complex thing inevitably decomposes. And since a tendency to decompose is innate in all complex things, there is no need to posit a separate cause for why things decompose. Therefore, the causes of a thing's coming into being are also the causes of the same thing's ceasing to be.

³These arguments appear in PV 1.57–61 and in Manoranandin's commentary to those verses.

5 The body as support of the mind

Closely related to the question of what causes the death of the physical body is the question of what causes continued life in the living body. As was stated above, Dharmakīrti takes the position that a tendency to stop existing is innate in all complex things; it requires no energy or effort for things to decompose. What would seem to follow from this view is that it must require some energy or effort to prevent decomposition; that is, if work is required for anything, it must be required to hold a complex being together, to keep it from losing its existence, or, in the case of a sentient being, to keep it alive. Foreseeing that the materialists will accuse him of being committed to just such a view, Dharmakīrti anticipates their argument and makes his riposte.

anāśrayāt sadasator nāśrayaḥ sthikāraṇaṃ
sataś ced āśrayo nāśyāḥ sthātur avyatiṛekataḥ (1.65)

Neither an existent thing nor a non-existent thing has any support, because there is no such thing as support. It might be suggested that an existent thing must have something that causes it to continue existing. But that is not the case, because there is no difference between the fact of continuing and that which continues.

The view of the materialist is that the physical body acts as a support for consciousness and mental events. Dharmakīrti's response is that the very concept of a support is superfluous. Once a thing has come into being owing to its causes, it has no need of a support. Therefore, mental processes, which are caused by antecedent mental processes of the same type, do not need any further support from the body.

It may very well be, says the materialist, that mental processes come into being as a result of their own complex of causes. But once they have come into being, they require the physical body to support their continued existence. Dharmakīrti's reply is that continuity is merely an alternative name that can be given to that which continues. The continuum of mental causes and effects continues on its own—each moment causes the following moment, and it is this continuity that one can call continued existence. But in saying that the mental processes continue to exist, one is not saying that there is a separate entity called continuity that has its own separate causes.

vyatiṛeke 'pi taddhetus tena bhāvasya kiṃ kṛtam
avināśaprasaṅgaḥ sa nāśahetor mato yadi (1.66)

tulyaḥ prasaṅgas tatrāpi kiṃ punaḥ sthithetunā
ānāśakāgamāt sthānaṃ tataś ced vastudharmatā (1.67)

nāsasya satyabādho 'sāv iti kiṃ sthithetunā (1.68ab)

66 But if there were a difference, continuity would have a cause. What would that [cause] accomplish for the continuing being? This would

entail that the being never comes to an end. It might be thought that coming to an end has its own cause.

67 That would lead to the same unwelcome consequence. In this case, too, what would be the use of a something that causes a thing to come to an end? It might be argued that a thing endures until it encounters what destroys it. [If that is the case, then] perishability is a property of the thing itself.

68ab While a thing exists, it has nothing harming it, so what need does it have of something to help it continue existing?

Dharmakīrti's argument can be summarized as follows: If one were to insist that continuity is a separate thing from the thing that continues, then one would have to say that this continuity has its own cause, which is different from the causes of the thing that continues. But nothing is gained by this hypothesis, and in fact it creates a new problem. For if continuity were a thing in itself, and if it were a property of a thing, then the thing that had this property would be eternal. In order to counter this objection, someone might say that a thing has the property of continuity until it comes into contact with something that destroys it. A pot, for example, might have the property of continuing to exist until such time as it came into contact with a hammer. But in saying this, one is now committed to the view that not only the continuity of a thing has a cause, but also the destruction of a thing has a cause. And again it might be asked what is gained by this hypothesis. If we say that a thing can be destroyed, then we are saying that it has the property of perishability. And if it already has the property of perishability, then it needs nothing to cause it to perish. It should also be remembered that the hypothesis that a thing needs something to destroy it was devised to account for why a thing might come to an end even though it had something that was causing it to continue existing. But we can now see that if a thing requires a cause of its coming to an end, then it will continue automatically until it meets the cause of its destruction. And if that is the case, then it needs nothing further to cause its continued existence. Therefore, this second hypothesis ends up rendering useless the very hypothesis it was devised to salvage! Dharmakīrti himself summarizes all the arguments in verses 65–71 in three concise verses:

parato bhāvanāśāś cet tasya kiṃ sthīhetunā
sa vinaśyed vināpi anyair aśaktāḥ sthīhetavaḥ (1.72)

sthitimān nāśrayaḥ sarvaḥ sarvōtpattau ca sāśrayaḥ
tasmāt sarvasya bhāvasya na vināśaḥ kadācana (1.73)

svayaṃ vinaśvarātmā cet tasya kaḥ sthāpakaḥ paraḥ
svayaṃ na naśvarātmā cet tasya kaḥ sthāpakaḥ paraḥ (1.74)

72 If it is argued that the destruction of a being comes from something other than the being itself, then nothing is gained by saying that there is a cause of its continued existence. A thing will come to an end even without an outside factor, and causes of continuity are incapable [of preventing the destruction].

73 Everything that has a substratum has continuity, and there is something that has a substratum in every act of becoming. Therefore, there would never be any destruction for any being.

74 If things have the nature of perishing by themselves, then nothing outside them can make them continue existing. And if things do not have the nature of perishing by themselves, then they do not need anything outside them to make them continue existing.

6 Observations on the preceding discussions

In the parts of the first chapter of the *Pramāṇavārttika* that have been reviewed above, we see that the question of rebirth leads into a series of issues connected with the relationship of the body (more accurately, physical events) to the mind (mental events). This discussion in its entirety extends for approximately ninety verses—the exact number is difficult to assess, because of Dharmakīrti's rather loosely organized style of presentation, in which the discussions of several topics are frequently intertwined, and in which some threads are apparently dropped only to be picked up again in other parts of the text. Although he does occasionally make specific references to doctrines of other schools of philosophy, such as the Vaiśeṣikas and the Mīmāṃsikas, Dharmakīrti appears to have been far more concerned with offering arguments against the materialists than against any other philosophical position. In particular, Dharmakīrti was apparently concerned to provide as many arguments as possible for the conclusion that mental events have a series of causes that is independent of the multiplicity of causes of which the physical body is an effect.

Dharmakīrti's preoccupation with materialism is not surprising, since the *Pramāṇavārttika* was written as a defense of the principles of Buddhism against non-Buddhist critics, and there is probably no other philosophical view that is more radically opposed to the tenets of Buddhism than materialism. If the materialist's conclusions are true, then the continued existence of mental events after death is impossible. And if the continuity of consciousness after the death of the body is impossible, then there can be no rebirth. And if there is no rebirth, then the very goal of attaining nirvāṇa, understood as the cessation of rebirth, becomes almost perfectly meaningless. Or rather, nirvāṇa comes automatically to every living being that dies, regardless of how that being has lived. If every living being attains nirvāṇa automatically, then no special effort is needed by anyone to attain the goal; in particular, the rigours of Buddhist practice are neither necessary nor fruitful. Given all these consequences of the materialistic outlook, it is obvious that Buddhists interested in maintaining traditional Buddhist teachings were obliged to find arguments against the materialist's position. Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* is one of the first Buddhist texts—at least of those that still survive—to take the challenges of materialism seriously enough to try to provide a number of counterarguments to their position. In answering these challenges, Dharmakīrti

kīrti explored such issues as the mind-body problem in much greater depth than his Buddhist predecessors had done.