



5 **Tsong-kha-pa and Mi-pham: A Multidimensional Controversy**

Summary 5.1 Tsong-kha-pa and His Disciples: Negating Self-Awareness Even Conventionally. – 5.2 Mi-pham: Positing Reflexive Self-Awareness Conventionally.

5.1 Tsong-kha-pa and His Disciples: Negating Self-Awareness Even Conventionally

To explore the broader Tibetan philosophical discourse on self-awareness, it is particularly illuminating to focus on a central controversy between two distinct positions on *rang rig*, as articulated by two of the tradition's most influential thinkers. Among the many interpretations of *rang rig* that have emerged over time, this debate is especially significant in that it engages both the epistemological and ontological dimensions of self-awareness while simultaneously intersecting with the doctrine of the two truths. Representing distinct doctrinal lineages and hermeneutical approaches, the opposing perspectives of Tsong-kha-pa and Mi-pham serve as the focal point for an enduring dispute that both reflects and shapes centuries of Tibetan philosophical and exegetical thought.

Mi-pham, an important figure in the Ris-med 'non-sectarian' movement that flourished in Tibet during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, features as a prominent scholar of the rNying-ma tradition who also underwent a thorough dGe-lugs education. With regard to *rang rig*, he challenges Tsong-kha-pa's rejection of the conventional existence of reflexive awareness – a

position Tsong-kha-pa grounds in his interpretation of Candrakīrti and Śāntideva.¹ By contrast, Mi-pham contends that the reflexivity of consciousness at the conventional level is simply self-evident. The implications of the ensuing debate are both far-reaching and complex. While not representative of the entire spectrum of Tibetan philosophical thought, this controversy offers a particularly significant lens through which to map much of the epistemological and ontological understanding of *rang rig*. The following discussion outlines its key elements, aiming to shed light on how this specific disagreement contributes to the broader discourse on self-awareness in the Tibetan tradition.

First of all, it is essential to return to Śāntideva's *BCA* to understand how Indian and Tibetan commentators have reflected on the topic, a perspective that will also be enriched by insights from contemporary exegesis. Williams offers a concise overview of these interpretations to show that verse 9.26,² where Śāntideva (*BCA* 9.17-26) concludes his critique of *svaṃvedana*, appears to have prompted a distinct and innovative response specifically among dGe-lugs interpreters. For Tsong-kha-pa and his disciples, in *BCA* 9.26, Śāntideva is understood to be refuting self-awareness both on the ultimate and the conventional levels. By contrast, the pre-dGe-lugs commentators unanimously interpreted Śāntideva's critique as targeting only the ultimate reality, excluding the conventional level from the scope of the refutation.³

In fact, the main point emphasized across the various pre-Tsong-kha-pa commentaries is that the Mādhyamikas do not negate the conventional: they accept whatever is well established in the world as it is, remaining unconcerned with mere conventional appearances. By contrast, the innovative dGe-lugs interpretation of Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamaka on this point warrants close attention. As Williams (1998, 70 fn. 16) observes, a significant shift occurs with Tsong-kha-pa and his disciples, with whom the explicit articulation of the conventional nonexistence of *svaṃvedana* emerges, marking a move toward a more deliberate doxographical strategy.

1 For textual references, see Moriyama 1995.

2 Śāntideva, *BCA* 9.26 (Bhattacharya 1960, 191); here follows the Sanskrit text: "yathā dr̥ṣṭam śrutam jñātam naiveha pratiśidhyate | satyataḥ kalpanā tvatra duḥkhaḥeturnivāryate ||". The Tibetan reads: "ji ltar mthong thos shes pa dag | 'dir ni dgag pa bya min te | 'dir ni sdug bsngal rgyur gyur pa | bden par rtogs pa bzlog bya yin ||" (The seen, the heard, and the known | are not what must be negated here. | Here what must be reversed is the thought [of them] as tru[ly existent], | which has come to function as the cause of suffering). It is interesting to see that La Vallée Poussin translates "dr̥ṣṭam śrutam jñātam" as "la connaissance sensible, la connaissance par témoignage, la connaissance produite par le raisonnement" (La Vallée Poussin 1907, 116-17).

3 For an extensive list of Indian and Tibetan commentaries concluding that Śāntideva does not refute self-awareness at the conventional level, see Williams 1998, 61-73.

By contrast with all other commentaries, Tsong-kha-pa approaches *BCA* 9.26 by shifting the focus of the debate. He alters the line of reasoning attributed to the presumed opponent, who originally argues that, without reflexivity, there could be no cognition of objects (that is, *mthong ba* 'seeing', *thos pa* 'hearing', and so on).⁴ Tsong-kha-pa interprets the passage as if the opponent were claiming that, without self-awareness, there could be no 'memory', and, 'therefore', no experience, nor any seeing or hearing of objects (*rang rig med na dran pa med pas yul myong ba dang mthong thos sogs med par 'gyur ro*).⁵ This represents a strategic move: by introducing the element of memory, as will be discussed below, Tsong-kha-pa shifts the debate in a direction aligned with Candrakīrti's reasoning, which becomes the central support for rejecting the necessity of self-awareness as a condition for memory. In other words, while commenting on *BCA* 9.26, Tsong-kha-pa stands out as the only interpreter to reintroduce the memory argument previously advanced by the opponent and rejected by Śāntideva in 9.24,⁶ though in a slightly altered form. Śāntideva's text itself offers no clear indication in support of such a reading, and there appears to be no compelling textual reason for Tsong-kha-pa to adopt this reinterpretation. In exploring possible motivations for this move, Williams ultimately sees it as a deliberate and refined commentarial strategy designed to reinforce the view that Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas, Śāntideva included, reject self-awareness even at the conventional level.

A crucial clue in resolving the puzzle of Tsong-kha-pa's unusual reading of *BCA* 9.26 lies in the fact that dGe-lugs scholars consistently

⁴ In La Vallée Poussin's annotated translation, the opponent's argument in 9.26 would be the following: "Mais si la pensée ne se connaît pas elle-même, l'objet non plus n'est pas connu, et il faut nier toute l'expérience" (La Vallée Poussin 1907, 116).

⁵ Tsong-kha-pa 1997b, 826.6-7.2: "*des na rang rig la khyad par ma sbyar bar tha snyad du rang rig grub pa'ang slob dpon 'di mi bzhed par gsal te | rang rig [mi] bzhed na rnam shes dran par ji ltar 'gyur | zhes pa'i lan du gzhan myong ba dang 'brel pa las zhes sogs smas mi dgos kyi | rang rig pa'i rgyu mtshan gyis yin no zhes smos pas chog pas so || ci ste rang rig med na dran pa med pas yul myong ba dang mthong thos sogs med par 'gyur ro zhe na | [...]*" (Therefore, it is clear that this Master does not accept self-awareness as conventionally established without positing some special features for it. If one does [not] accept self-awareness, one might ask, 'How then could consciousness be recollected?' - but in order to reply there is no need to invoke arguments such as 'it is connected with someone else's experience', and so on. It suffices to say that it is established by the very reasoning that proves self-awareness. If one objects, 'Without self-awareness there could be no recollection, and therefore no experience of objects, no seeing or hearing, and so on, then how would that be the case?' [...]). Here, the emendation to the Tibetan text suggested by Williams has been retained in square brackets, and is reflected in the translation, since Tsong-kha-pa "must be alluding to *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.24 which reads: '*gal te rang rig yod min na | rnam shes dran par ji ltar 'gyur*'. The alternative in this context makes no sense" (Williams 1998, 74 fn. 20).

⁶ For the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts of Śāntideva's *BCA* 9.24, see Bhattacharya 1960, 191; for an annotated translation see La Vallée Poussin 1907, 116.

appeal to a single quotation in support of their stance on *rang rig*.⁷ This passage, repeatedly cited across dGe-lugs commentaries, comes from Candrakīrti's *MAv* 6.73, where, within the context of the memory argument, the following is asserted: "appealing to worldly conventions, even on such a basis, it is impossible for there to be memory which has *svasaṃvedana* as a cause".⁸

The connection between this passage in which Candrakīrti explicitly denies the existence of self-awareness and Śāntideva's *BCA* 9.26 is constructed by inserting the memory argument into the final part of Śāntideva's treatment of *svasaṃvedana*. As a result, the dGe-lugs exegetical tradition comes to perceive no significant difference between Candrakīrti's and Śāntideva's positions on this issue. This alignment is considered crucial as both figures are identified as authoritative representatives of the same philosophical school: Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka. Thus, the refutation of self-awareness even at the conventional level becomes one of the 'eight great difficult points' (TIB *dka' gnad brgyad*), a set of key topics whose correct interpretation is said to define the true doctrinal identity of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka school.⁹ The *dKa' gnad brgyad kyi zin bris rje'i gsung bzhin brjed byang du bkod pa*,¹⁰ composed by rGyal-tshab Dar-ma-rin-chen, explicitly includes the rejection of *rang rig* at the conventional level among these eight critical points. This refutation is developed through the argument that memory does not require *rang rig*, and that one's prior cognition of an object can be established through the recollection of the object itself without recourse to self-awareness.

The impact of the dGe-lugs doxographical move becomes evident in the fifteenth century by the time of rGyal-tshab Dar-ma-rin-chen, when the entire claim that self-awareness does not exist conventionally has become thoroughly blended with the refutation of the memory argument. In his commentary on *BCA* 9.24, rGyal-tshab Dar-ma-rin-chen (1973, 222) explicitly states the following regarding Śāntideva's intentions:

⁷ This reference is quoted, for instance, by Tsong-kha-pa (see Thurman 1984, 318), mKhas-grub-rje (1972, 422.3; see Cabézon 1992, 349), and Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa (1990, 756.4-5).

⁸ Here is the Tibetan from La Vallée Poussin (1970, 169): "*jig rten gyi tha snyad kyi dbang du yin te | de lta na yang rang rig pa'i rgyu can gyi dran pa mi srid pa nyid do*".

⁹ It should be noted that, in general, a positive or negative stance toward self-awareness is employed by Tsong-kha-pa and his followers as a doxographical criterion for distinguishing among Indian philosophical schools.

¹⁰ Concerning the authorship of the text, the contents are stated to go back to Tsong-kha-pa himself but, nevertheless, rGyal-tshab Dar-ma-rin-chen has been considered its author (Seyfort Ruegg 2002, 153-4).

Regarding the statement “The intention of the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* is not to negate self-awareness on the conventional level”, it is said that this is definitely not the position of the Great Bodhisattva [Śāntideva].¹¹

In considering this strategic dGe-lugs move in interpreting *BCA* 9.26 and in assessing how it contributes to a broader philosophical reflection on the notion of self-awareness, the first point that can be firmly reiterated is the central role played by memory in the debate surrounding the necessity of self-awareness. From the outset, this study has examined various uses of the memory argument, demonstrating the deep conceptual connection between memory and *rang rig*. Yet, what emerges here from the dGe-lugs strategy is a distinct nuance: it appears to constitute a deliberate and calculated shift, one that strategically avoids engaging with the opponent’s original challenge as presented in the text, namely, that without self-awareness, there could be no experience of objects such as seeing, hearing or knowing. This is what Williams (1998, 74) identifies as “an argument concerning the nature of consciousness as such (the ‘Śāntarakṣita’ argument)”, that is, an argument akin to Śāntarakṣita’s position that self-awareness is a necessary condition for ordinary cognition. The fact that the dGe-lugs exegesis explicitly sidesteps this aspect of the debate raises a critical question: does this avoidance reflect a philosophical vulnerability? Why is Tsong-kha-pa so invested in denying the conventional existence of self-awareness? As will be shown, from Mi-pham’s perspective, denying the conventional status of *rang rig* amounts to overlooking the mind’s reflexivity, something he considers to be self-evident.

In examining the implications and motivations behind such a denial, Garfield (2006, 220) claims to have identified a specific passage in which, according to his reading, Tsong-kha-pa directly addresses the argument that, without reflexivity in awareness, awareness itself would be impossible. This line of reasoning closely parallels

11 rGyal-tshab Dar-ma-rin-chen 1973, 222: “*spyod ’jug gi dgongs pa ni tha snyad du rang rig ’gog pa min zhes pa ni rgyal sras chen po’i bzhed pa gtan min zhes gsung ngo* ||”. Cf. a very similar passage by Tsong-kha-pa (2009, 357.21-3). Much later, in the nineteenth century, Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa also adopts a characteristically dGe-lugs style (and intention) in his commentary on *BCA* 9.26 although he reorders the elements in Tsong-kha-pa’s interpretation of the opponent’s argument. Indeed, Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa (1990, 608) presents the opponent’s reasoning as follows: “If self-awareness does not exist, then there is no experiencing the object through seeing, hearing, and so on. If such experience does not exist, then there is no memory, and consequently, even the conventions of having seen or heard something and so on, as expressed by saying ‘I saw’ or ‘I heard’, do not exist”. The Tibetan reads: “*rang rig med na mthong thos sogs kyi yul myong ba med la de med na dran pa med pas ngas mthong ngas thos zhes pa’i mthong thos sogs kyi tha snyad kyang med par thal lo*” (Thub-bstan Chos-kyi-grags-pa 1990, 608.7-9).

the opponent's claim in *BCA* 9.26 to the point that Tsong-kha-pa's passage could be interpreted as a kind of reply. For this reason, it is a passage worth careful consideration. Yet, as Garfield presents it, the excerpt might appear to represent Tsong-kha-pa's actual position on the very point he had earlier modified – and arguably avoided – in his reading of *BCA* 9.26. The excerpt from Tsong-kha-pa's *dBu ma la 'jug pa'i rang 'grel dang rnam bshad dgongs pa rab gsal* identified by Garfield is presented here, along with the sentences that immediately precede and follow it. Three sections are marked typographically for emphasis.

'di yang yid shes kyi dbang du byas kyi dbang shes kyi tshor ba gsum gyis gzugs sgra sogs yongs su gcod de | de'i grub tshul ni sngar bshad pa bzhin no ||

'o na yid shes kyi tshor bas bde sdug sogs mngon gyur du gcod na rang rig tu mi 'gyur ram snyam na |

skyon med de bkag pa'i rang rig ni shes pa thams cad kha nang lta la rig bya dang rig byed tha dad par snang ba nub pa'i 'dzin rnam yan gar ba yin zhing | 'dir ni nyams su myong ba khyad par can tshor ba'i mtshan nyid du mdo sder gsungs la | 'jig rten gyi tha snyad las kyang bde ba dang sdug bsngal nyams su myong ngo zhes brjod pa'i phyir ro | myong bya dang myong byed tha dad pa nyid du snang ba'i phyir na phyogs snga ma'i rang rig dang mi gcig go || de'i phyir bde ba sogs nyams su myong bas grub pa nyid kyis tshor ba grub bo ||. (Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa 2009, 363.1-9)

Moreover, through the three feelings associated with the sense consciousnesses, which are subordinate to the mental consciousness, forms, sounds and so on are determined; as for how this is established, it is as previously explained.¹²

Suppose one thinks as follows: “Well then, if pleasant, unpleasant, and so on are directly determined by the feeling of the mental consciousness, then doesn't this turn out to be self-awareness?”

There is no such fault because, regarding the self-awareness that we have denied: the inward orientation of all the consciousnesses is a separate apprehending aspect, for which the appearing of the cognized and the cognizer as different has vanished. What is presented here is that distinct experience is taught to be the

¹² This likely refers to a passage a few lines earlier in the Tibetan text (Tsong-kha-pa 2009, 362.18-21), where three interpretations of the term ‘feeling’ (TIB *tshor ba*) are listed. These follow the standard three-fold division (TIB *'khor gsum*) into *byed pa po*, *byed pa*, and *las*: respectively, as ‘the feeler’ (the person who feels), ‘the feeling’ itself (as a mental factor and valid cognition), and ‘what is felt’ (an object of knowledge, such as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feelings).

definition of feeling in the *sūtras*, and even in ordinary language we say, “I experience pleasure” or “I experience pain”. Since the experienced and the experiencer do indeed appear as distinct, this is not the same as the self-awareness of the previous part [of the argument]. Therefore, since there is experience of pleasure and so on, by this very proof, feeling is established.

Note that, unusually, in the second section Garfield (2006, 220) translates “*yiḍ shes kyi tshor bas [...] gcod*” as “one experiences [...] through the introspective consciousness” whereas in the Author’s translation, the same phrase is rendered as: “are determined by the feeling of the mental consciousness”. In translating thus, Garfield shifts both the focus and the terminology of the passage, introducing ‘introspection’ where the text speaks of ‘the feeling of mental consciousness’, and ‘experiencing’ where the Tibetan refers more specifically to the process of ‘determining’ sensations such as pain or pleasure.

Moreover, the central part of this passage is so shortened and edited in Garfield’s translation that, ultimately, his rendering resembles more a paraphrase than a direct translation.¹³ In its final paragraph, partially departing from the textual source, Garfield (2006, 221) writes: “there is no need to posit reflexive awareness as per the previous position”. However, the Tibetan reads: “*snga ma’i rang rig dang mi gcig go*”, which the Author translates as: “it is not the same as the self-awareness of the previous part”. Therefore, Garfield does not consistently adhere to the Tibetan text, and this weakens the reader’s ability to navigate the complex and nuanced epistemological framework characteristic of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition. His translation reinforces the impression that one is accessing the very core of Tsong-kha-pa’s solution, namely, the refutation of *rang rig* at the conventional level while preserving awareness as such. However, upon closer examination, the passage in question does not appear to be directly addressing this specific issue.

In fact, when one adheres closely to the Tibetan text, the opponent’s claim can be summarized as follows: if pleasant and unpleasant sensations are directly determined by the feelings of the mental consciousness (*yiḍ shes kyi tshor ba*), does this not amount to self-awareness? The point Tsong-kha-pa appears to make in his response is that this situation does not qualify as *rang rig*. The reason is that, in this context, the experienced and the experiencer still

13 Garfield’s point is as follows: “We commit no such error, because the denial of reflexive awareness is consistent with the distinction between subject and object with respect to all cognitive states that are directed inwards [...]. According to mundane nominal convention as well, the experience of pleasure and pain occurs in this way” (Garfield 2006, 220-1).

appear as distinct whereas, in models of self-awareness, the cognized and the cognizer are not distinct entities. The mental consciousness's experience of pain does not entail a form of self-awareness in which subject and object are non-dual. To say that one's mental consciousness experiences one's own pain is not the same as affirming *rang rig*. Furthermore, since pain or pleasure can be experienced without invoking self-awareness – and in a way that accords with both the *sūtras*' definition of feeling and with conventional worldly usage – the reality of feeling is thereby established.

Although this is all the text appears to indicate, Garfield employs it in a somewhat different way. He interprets the passage as addressing the opponent's claim that, in the absence of *rang rig*, "one would never be aware at all" (Garfield 2006, 220). In doing so, Garfield treats the objection as concerning the very possibility of awareness as such rather than the more specific issue of feeling – which is what the opponent's question and the concluding part of the passage clearly refer to. The target Garfield proposes is, thus, considerably broader than what the text actually suggests, which concerns *yiḍ shes kyi tshor ba* 'the feeling of the mental consciousness', not the general category of awareness in its entirety. According to Garfield's interpretation, Tsong-kha-pa replies by asserting that, even without *rang rig*, the structure of 'introspective consciousness' alone is sufficient to account for awareness. The justification lies in the fact that this structure preserves a distinction between subject (the perceiver) and object (the perceived) – precisely how experiences such as pain or pleasure are understood in everyday convention. Therefore, Garfield concludes, *rang rig* is not necessary.

By shifting the focus of the debate from mental feelings to awareness in general, Garfield's rendering of the Tibetan passage leads the reader to believe that this is the point at which Tsong-kha-pa explains why and how conventional awareness as such is possible even without *rang rig*. However, a closer reading of the Tibetan suggests that Tsong-kha-pa is simply stating that the mental feelings of happiness, pain, and so forth do not constitute *rang rig* because, in such experiences, the experiencer and the experienced appear as distinct. It is difficult to discern anything beyond this in Tsong-kha-pa's words.

Garfield, by contrast, interprets the passage as responding to the opponent's claim that *rang rig* is necessary in order to be aware of anything whatsoever:

Tsong-kha-pa anticipates that behind the view that awareness must be reflexive is the intuition that if it were not, there would be no awareness at all: how could I be said to be aware of a strawberry if

I am not at the same time aware that I am aware of the strawberry?
(Garfield 2006, 221)¹⁴

And Tsong-kha-pa's alleged argument, according to Garfield, would be as follows: "I certainly can be aware of the pleasure of a strawberry [...] without being aware that I am aware of it" (221).

Therefore, Garfield appears to use this passage to advance a broad and ambitious claim about awareness in general despite the fact that Tsong-kha-pa's words refer to a specific case, namely, that of mental feelings. The introduction of the term 'introspective consciousness' seems to serve as a convenient rhetorical device to amplify the philosophical weight of the passage beyond its textual scope.

The claim Garfield builds upon the passage discussed above also extends to another significant issue: the problem of infinite regress in meta-awareness. Garfield argues that, for Tsong-kha-pa, it is possible to be aware of mental feelings without being aware that one is aware. However, if one wishes to determine whether one is aware of being aware, this can be accomplished through a subsequent cognitive act directed at the preceding one.

I can keep climbing the hierarchy of meta-awareness as long as I like, but that is only a *potential* regress, and hence is not vicious. I will get bored at some point with the endless contemplation of my own cognitive states and reach for another strawberry. (Garfield 2006, 221; italics in the original)

Once again, if these considerations, although perhaps legitimate, are being made on the basis of this quoted passage, then the textual evidence is insufficient.

However, when recalling the challenge posed by the opponent in *BCA* 9.26, the passage that Garfield explicitly selects and presents as a potential instance in which Tsong-kha-pa directly addresses this very question does not, in fact, succeed in demonstrating that ordinary awareness (*mthong*, *thos*, and *shes* 'seeing', 'hearing', and 'knowing') persist even in the absence of *rang rig*. Where Garfield suggests Tsong-kha-pa's position on the matter might be located, the issue does not appear to be directly confronted. Consequently, further inquiry is necessary in order to reach a more comprehensive understanding of Tsong-kha-pa's refutation of *rang rig* at the conventional level.

¹⁴ Curiously, the experience of strawberries is also the example Williams (1998, 135-6 fn. 17) chooses when commenting on the fact that, according to Mi-pham, "there is a real problem in maintaining that the mind which is the subject is a separate substance from the happiness and so on which are its experiential objects when experiencing happiness, and so on, and that the happiness and so on which are the objects are separate from that mind" (Williams 1998, 135).

Thus, to address the dGe-lugs refutation of *rang rig*, the refutation of the memory argument should be recalled once again. Tsong-kha-pa replies to the objection that without *rang rig* memory cannot occur can be found, for instance, in the pages devoted to *rang rig* in the *Drang nges legs bshad snying po* (Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa 1973, 170.14-9.8); in Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa/rGyal-tshab Dar-ma-rin-chen's *dKa' gnad brgyad kyi zin bris rje'i gsung bzhin brjed byang du bkod pa* (1997), where this topic is addressed as one of the eight difficult points; and in the *dBu ma la 'jug pa'i rang 'grel dang rnam bshad dgongs pa rab gsal* (Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa 2009).¹⁵ For Tsong-kha-pa, as shown above, memory is to be conceived simply as a causal process while there is no conventional evidence of self-awareness: a previous cognition of an object can be established through the recollection of the object itself. In other words, self-awareness is considered to be unnecessary for memory because a previous consciousness that has experienced an object and the later recollection of that object have 'the same' object. Among contemporary interpreters of Tsong-kha-pa, Jinpa (2002, 128) highlights the "rather pragmatic" character of Tsong-kha-pa's account of memory, emphasizing that his focus is on explaining 'how' memory occurs rather than 'why' it does. For Jinpa (2002, 129), Tsong-kha-pa is concerned with a first-person perspective because, in recollecting past experiences, one does so from a first-person perspective. In his way, the founder of the dGe-lugs tradition avoids speculating "beyond the phenomenal facts of the actual experience of memory", being aware of the risk of hypostatizing the phenomenon and thereby reintroducing an intrinsic nature into things (Jinpa 2002, 127). However, the mechanism of memory has been the subject of intense reflection and divergent views, even among dGe-lugs scholars (Cozort 1998, 160-9).

15 To gain insight into Tsong-kha-pa's line of reasoning, it is useful to consider the following steps (Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang-grags-pa 2009, 352.12-18): "*dran pas rang rig dpog pa min gyi | sngar bshad pa ltar dran pas sngar gyi shes pa la myong ba yod par dpog la | de la rang gis dang gzhan gyis myong ba gnyis su bcad nas bkag pa na | rang gis rang myong ba 'grub bo zhes smra mod kyang shes pas rig pa la mdo sde pa dang sems tsam pas bzhas pa de gnyis su kha tshon ma chod pa'i phyir te | mar mes rang gis rang gsal bar mi byed kyang | de la gsal ba mi ldog pa bzhin du | shes pas phyogs nga mas 'dod pa ltar du rang gis rang myong bar mi byed kyang de la myong ba tsam mi ldog pa'i phyir ro ||*" (It is not that self-awareness is assessed by means of memory; rather, as previously explained, what is assessed through memory is the existence of an experience in relation to a past [moment of] consciousness. Now, if one attempts to refute this by distinguishing between being experienced by oneself and [being experienced] by another, then – although it is said that 'It is proven that one experiences oneself' – regarding the fact that consciousness cognizes, the Sautrāntika and Cittamātra positions, being in agreement, are not thereby divided into two [distinct views]. Indeed, although a butter lamp does not act to illuminate itself, its illumination is not denied; likewise, even if consciousness, as considered in the first part [of the argument], does not act to experience itself, its mere experience is not negated).

Another important aspect of the dGe-lugs Prāsaṅgika view in rejecting self-awareness brings the discussion back to the concept of the mind's luminosity, a useful framework for clarifying their explanation of how memory functions (Cozort 1998, 160 ff.). According to this view, the mind is luminous but it is not self-aware in either a reflective or reflexive sense. Rather, since consciousness is by nature both awareness and luminosity, it is self-certifying through its very operation. However, it does not apprehend itself as an agent acting upon itself – this point will be examined further below. Thus, consciousness requires no supplementary awareness just as a lamp does not need to be illuminated in order to give light.¹⁶ What follows will show how this very nature of mind serves as the basis for explaining memory. In Cozort's words:

Consciousness shines forth as it knows its objects, and that shining forth is why it needs no further knower in order to be seen clearly at a later time. This, it seems, is finally how these explanations of memory without self-consciousness are justified; we can easily remember even that of which we were not specifically aware earlier simply because awareness shines forth just as does a previously experienced object. To engage in recollection, whether of the previously experienced object or of the consciousness that knew the object, is simple because one was illuminated and the other was simply luminous. (Cozort 1998, 173)

Jinpa's contribution to the discussion introduces another important concern related to the dGe-lugs argument against *rang rig*: the risk that a consciousness capable of validating its own nature would be construed as independent, and thus inherently existent. In fact, Jinpa identifies Tsong-kha-pa's central objection to *rang rig* as rooted in the concern that "positing such a faculty is tantamount to resurrecting the ghost of *svabhāva*, i.e., intrinsic being", something Tsong-kha-pa rigorously argued against (Jinpa 2002, 127). Garfield, by contrast, notes that there is no evidence Tsong-kha-pa explicitly formulates a logical argument against self-awareness on the basis of this concern. That is, he does not argue along the following lines: if awareness were self-aware, it would thereby validate its own nature and thus be independent and inherently existent; but since nothing possesses inherent existence, self-awareness cannot exist. However, Garfield notes that "this is indeed an argument that crops up in discussion with dGe-lugs scholars with disturbing regularity" (Garfield 2006, 218). Williams (1998, 186-7) reports this as a general dGe-lugs argument while Blumenthal (2004, 85) ascribes it to Tsong-kha-pa,

¹⁶ For textual references, see Cozort 1998, 170-3.

albeit without quoting any textual evidence. Williams (1998, 187-8) and Garfield (2006, 219) agree that this is not a strong argument, as self-validation is distinct from causation. One cannot be mistaken in wondering whether one is having a particular mental event or not; however, this does not imply that conscious episodes exist independently of their causes and conditions.¹⁷

Williams (1998, 206 ff.) attributes to the dGe-lugs system an additional significant argument against the conventional existence of *rang rig*, centered on the notion of a *buddha*'s non-dual awareness of its own consciousness. Garfield also engages with this claim, summarizing it as follows: such self-awareness "would be an ultimate truth, but would be a positive phenomenon" (Garfield 2006, 219). Yet, in the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka view, the only ultimate truth is emptiness, which is a negative phenomenon. If self-awareness truly existed, then a *buddha*'s cognitions would be ultimate and, at the same time, directed toward positive phenomena to be known – an apparent contradiction. This touches upon the limit-case of omniscience, an issue already present in the early, pre-Dignāga phases of the discourse on self-awareness. Garfield (2006, 220) swiftly rejects the argument attributed by Williams to the dGe-lugs tradition, claiming not only that such reasoning is not found in their canonical texts but also that, in his view, it constitutes a poor argument. Its weakness, he contends, is readily apparent: a *buddha* is aware of both the ultimate and the conventional; hence, the argument collapses.

Nevertheless, it is worth taking a closer look at this point to grasp fully the extent of its complexity and the challenges it presents.

17 For a passage concerning validation by valid cognition, see Tsong-kha-pa (2009, 359.17-60.4): "tshad ma 'grub pa la gzhal bya grub pa tsam gyis mi chog par tshad ma rang las tshad ma 'grub pa gzhan dag 'dod pa ltar yin na | gzhal bya la ma ltos par tshad ma 'grub par 'gyur || de 'dod na dngos po rnam rgyu rkyen gzhan la ma ltos par rab tu grub pa 'gyur ro || zhes bkag pas gzhal bya grub pa tsam gyis tshad ma grub par shugs kyis bstan no ||" (If it were as others [Yogācāras and Sautrāntikas] claim – that is, that *pramāṇa* is established by *pramāṇa* itself, on the grounds that it is insufficient for it to be established only through the establishment of the *prameya* – then *pramāṇa* would end up being established independently of the *prameya*. If one were to assert such a view, all objects would end up being established without depending on others, namely, causes and conditions. By refuting this position, it is implicitly shown that a *pramāṇa* is established merely through the establishment of its *prameya*). It is on the basis of this point, demonstrating the mutual dependence of *pramāṇa* and *prameya*, that Moriyama (1995, 641), for instance, explains how and why Tsong-kha-pa rejects the notion of self-awareness. In other terms, a question may arise: if it is commonly accepted that objects are validated through consciousness, would it not then be reasonable to assume that consciousness itself must likewise be validated by some form of awareness? Candrakīrti's reply is that self-awareness is not needed to certify or register the previous consciousness in the same way that an eye-consciousness is the certifier of a visual object (for textual references, see Cozort 1998, 165 fn. 27). Consciousnesses are certified simply by their activity of knowing an object, without the need to posit a two-fold movement of awareness, one towards itself (to certify itself) and the other towards the object (to certify the object).

To begin with, the dGe-lugs presentation of omniscience needs to be examined since it claims to be devoid of reflexivity. For Tsong-kha-pa, an omniscient consciousness knows an object in a manner appropriate to that object: conventional truths are known by way of dualistic appearances, whereas ultimate truths are known by way of the vanishing of dualistic appearances. Since the mind of a *buddha* is a positive, conventional phenomenon, it must be known through the appearance of subject and object as dual, that is, as distinct. However, here, the subject and the object are the same omniscient mind. How can a perfect omniscient mind know itself as different from itself, given that everything is identical to itself? Perhaps strategically, Tsong-kha-pa does not address the problem of how omniscience would know itself (Newland 1992, 201).

Among his disciples, rGyal-tshab-rje (1973, 211) suggests that a *buddha's* mind would know itself 'implicitly' (TIB *zhugs rtags*), without appearing to itself. He attempts to reconcile this with Tsong-kha-pa's assertion that a *buddha* does not possess any implicit knowledge by explaining that a *buddha's* self-knowledge is implicit in the sense that, while being an implicit cognition, it is never secondary (or implicit) to other explicit realizations.¹⁸ In this way, rGyal-tshab-rje addresses the problem by claiming that omniscience knows itself implicitly, that is to say, without any appearance of itself. mKhas-grub-rje, the other principal disciple of Tsong-kha-pa, takes a different approach: for him, a *buddha's* mind must know itself 'explicitly', in accordance with Tsong-kha-pa's position. In order for this cognition to be non-mistaken, there can be no alternative: a *buddha's* mind must know itself explicitly and non-dualistically. However, this solution also appears problematic: if such a view were correct, it would effectively imply the existence of something like *rang rig*, which is precisely what the Prāsaṅgika reject.¹⁹

The overall considerations presented by Newland at the conclusion of his inquiry into the topic of omniscience from the dGe-lugs perspective revolve around the need to find a reasonable explanation for the conceptual challenges this system encounters when addressing the *buddha* ground. According to Newland (1992, 214), the predominant dGe-lugs approach is "to speak in terms that make sense in relation to where we are now". This strategy

18 To clarify this point, Newland (1992, 200) offers the following example of a cognition that is implicit or secondary to another: the realization of the ability to hold water, which is secondary to the realization of the pot itself.

19 A later dGe-lugs scholar, 'Jam-dbyangs-bzhad-pa (1648-1721), offers a stance that is even more precarious. According to Newland's reading (1992, 206-8 and 298-9 fn. 55), it seems that this account allows a Prāsaṅgika to assert the conventional existence of *rang rig*, and this is a position that risks undermining the very foundations of the school's ontological framework.

reflects a philosophically and pedagogically calibrated method of instruction aimed at “minds enmeshed in conceptuality and a world of conventional distinctions” (Newland 1992, 216). However, the core question of how dGe-lugs scholars account for the knowledge that a *buddha’s* mind has of itself without resorting to *rang rig* seems to remain ultimately unresolved.

A consistent thread runs through the entire dGe-lugs Prāsaṅgika refutation of *rang rig*: the strict distinction between two levels of reality, the conventional and the ultimate. Their reasoning is rooted in the fundamental rejection of inherent existence, not only ultimately but even conventionally. The Prāsaṅgika approach seeks to mirror worldly conventions while avoiding any assumption of metaphysical entities at the conventional level, whose establishment would require ultimate analysis. For them, self-awareness stands in contradiction to worldly conventions and is not necessary in order to explain memory. Seeking to establish consciousness, whether through self-experience or as the object of another cognition, amounts to positing an imputed object that is neither obvious nor endorsed by everyday conventions, and which therefore demands ultimate analysis. If self-awareness were to be established at all, it would have to be through ultimate, not conventional, reasoning, that is, reasoning that pertains to the analysis of reality itself. Consequently, if *rang rig* exists, it must exist ultimately; but such ultimate existence is precisely what the Prāsaṅgika system denies.²⁰

Why, then, is Tsong-kha-pa so concerned about the conventional status of *rang rig*? Mi-pham’s considerations on Tsong-kha-pa’s view help bring this point into focus. Actually, the doctrine of self-awareness enters Indian Buddhist thought through the Cittamātra school, and the refutation presented by Candrakīrti and Śāntideva is framed within the general criticism of this philosophical system. However, at the time of Tsong-kha-pa’s formulation of Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka, the cultural and philosophical target and its challenges change, as Garfield remarks:

20 For insightful considerations on how Tsong-kha-pa navigates the two philosophical dimensions of *pramāṇa* and Madhyamaka, see Duckworth 2015. Dreyfus (1997, 335 ff.) offers a rather critical assessment of the dGe-lugs attempt to combine these two frameworks. Nonetheless, he provides a valuable overview of the range of Tibetan positions on issues related to *rang rig*, including its possible objects, the function of the aspect (TIB *rnam pa*) and related topics. For further discussion on the dGe-lugs synthesis of *pramāṇa* and Madhyamaka, see also Dreyfus 1997; 2003; Hopkins 1983; Jinpa 2002; Newland 1992. It is also worth noting a more recent trend in contemporary scholarship that interprets the dGe-lugs ontological framework as reducible to a purely linguistic or epistemological project, thereby overlooking its deeper ontological commitments regarding the nature of phenomena. Within this semantic reading of Madhyamaka, one may include works such as Siderits 1988 and Priest, Garfield 2002, which present Madhyamaka philosophy primarily as a reflection on the limits of language and conceptual thought in accessing, knowing, and expressing reality.

when we take Śāntarakṣita's discussion into account, the doxographic landscape changes, and we see that while for Cittamātra it is the ultimate status of reflexivity that matters, for Svātantrika reflexivity is posited *conventionally* as the mark of the mental. Given that the refutation of this position is central to Tsong-kha-pa's original formulation of the distinctiveness of Prāsaṅgika-madhyamaka, attention to the conventional status of reflexivity makes more sense. (Garfield 2006, 222; italics in the original)

On the other hand, it can also be said, according to Blumenthal, that

dGe-lugs criticism of self-cognizing cognition seems for the most part to be aimed at the position as held by Yogācāras such as Dignāga. That view was the target for Candrakīrti's criticisms, which they follow. Almost no reference is found in dGe-lugs writings relating to the manner in which Śāntarakṣita defines the term. (Blumenthal 2004, 226; with Author's adjustments for the transliterations from Tibetan)

Regardless, the ontological project of the dGe-lugs Prāsaṅgika builds up a sophisticated synthesis of the epistemology derived from the works of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti and the anti-essentialist dialectic of Candrakīrti; within it, the ontology of the two truths forms the very core.²¹

Up to this point, numerous arguments against self-awareness, even as a merely conventional entity, have been examined. This analysis has highlighted the recurring role of the memory argument and the complexities involved in accounting for the omniscient mind's knowledge of itself. It has also shown how self-awareness functions doxographically as a criterion for differentiating among various philosophical tenets. In particular, the dGe-lugs perspective on self-awareness has been situated within the broader framework of their anti-essentialist ontological project. This project centers on their interpretation of the two truths and constitutes the core of their critique of *rang rig*.

21 For a list of the principal sources to which the dGe-lugs exegetical tradition traces the Prāsaṅgika refutation of self-awareness, such as passages from the *Ratnacūḍaparipṛcchāsūtra*, as well as works by Candrakīrti and Nāgārjuna, see Cozort 1998, 158-60.

5.2 Mi-pham: Positing Reflexive Self-Awareness Conventionally

After examining Tsong-kha-pa's position on *rang rig* and his rejection of its conventional existence, it is now essential to contrast this with Mi-pham's standpoint to have a better grasp of the broader implications of the debate. The opposition between their views has been selected in this volume as a case study to illustrate the significance of one of the most important Tibetan controversies concerning the notion of self-awareness.

In his commentary to Śāntideva's *BCA* 9, *sPyod 'jug shes rab kyi le'u'i tshig don go sla bar rnam par bshad pa nor bu ke ta ka* (Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho 1972-99e), Mi-pham²² seeks to demonstrate that Śāntideva and, by extension, the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamikas, should not be interpreted as denying the conventional existence of self-awareness. To support this claim, he draws on references and theoretical frameworks that would be intelligible to dGe-lugs scholars. Moreover, he articulates this position in direct response to his dGe-lugs Madhyamaka critics in two specific texts: the *brGal lan nyin byed snang ba* (Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho 1972-79c), replying to Tre-bo-brag-dkar-sprul-sku Blo-bzang dPal-ldan-bstan-'dzin (1866-1927), and the *gZhan gyis brtsad pa'i lan mdor bsdu pa rigs lam rab gsal de nyid snang byed* (Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho 1969), replying to dPa'-ri Blo-bzang-rab-gsal (1840-1910).²³ Mi-pham argues that from the Prāsaṅgika point of view, and thus from the perspective of Candrakīrti and Śāntideva, self-awareness exists conventionally but does not exist on the ultimate level.

Mi-pham's theory of *rang rig* closely parallels that of Śāntarakṣita. Mi-pham presents consciousness as that which is luminosity and awareness, and as the defining feature of that which is not insentient. Furthermore, he regards consciousness as partless and unitary, aligning with Śāntarakṣita's *MAI* 16-17, as previously discussed in § 3.2.3. The following is a key passage from Mi-pham, accompanied by its English translation:

'di ltar gzhal bya sna tshogs pa snang ba'i yul dang | de 'dzin pa'i yul can so sor yod pa lta bu'i snang tshul gyi dbang du byas te gzung mam dang 'dzin rnam zhes bzhag kyang don la rnam par shes pa gang zhig shing rta dang rtsig pa la sogs pa bem po'i rang bzhin gsal rig dang bral ba dag las bzlog pa gsal zhing rig pa'i mtshan nyid can du rab tu skye ba ste | de ltar bem po min pa'i rang bzhin gang yin

²² For an introduction to Mi-pham and his philosophical view, see Duckworth 2008; 2010; 2011; 2015; Garfield 2006; Kapstein 2000; Pettit 1999; Phuntsho 2005; Wangchuk 2012.

²³ For the debate between Mi-pham and dPa'-ri Blo-bzang-rab-gsal, see Viehbeck 2014.

pa de lta bu 'di ni bdag rang nyid shes pa'am rang rig rang gsal zhes pa yin no ||. (Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho 1972-79a, 142.1-3)

Thus, we have posited an “apprehended aspect” and an “apprehending aspect”, for they concern the mode of appearance that consists in having, as separate, an object – namely, the appearances of many various objects of knowledge – and a subject which apprehends it. Nevertheless, actually, any consciousness occurs as possessing the feature of being luminous and aware, and as the opposite of those things which have the nature of matter and are devoid of luminosity and awareness – such as a chariot, a wall, and so on. Thus, what is by nature not matter is “cognition of its very own self”, or “self-awareness”, “self-luminosity”.

Consciousness has a unitary and partless nature, where the three-fold structure of action, doer, and object is not admissible.²⁴ As a constitutive feature of consciousness, reflexivity is what renders experience ‘experience’, and one cannot doubt²⁵ the occurrence of an experience while it is unfolding; in the very act of knowing, one knows that one knows.

As a proponent of the conventional existence of *rang rig*, by considering the common example of the sword which is unable to cut itself, Mi-pham claims that if one were to take it to mean that there is no *rang rig* even conventionally, certain absurd consequences would follow.²⁶ Thus, while Mi-pham holds that the Prāsaṅgikas do not refute the conventional existence of self-awareness, he also seeks to argue the positive counterpart: that, on the conventional level, consciousness is indeed characterized by reflexivity. Thus, for him, incorporating it into the Prāsaṅgika philosophical framework

²⁴ Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho 1972-79a, 142.3: “*gcig pa cha med rang bzhin la | gsum gyi rang bzhin mi 'thad phyir | de yi rang gis rig pa ni | bya dang byed pa'i dngos por yin ||*” (Because a unitary and partless nature is incompatible with having a three-fold nature, its own self-awareness is not a functioning entity characterized by action and agent).

²⁵ Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho 1972-79c, 207.1: “*rang la mngon du gsal zhing the tshom med pa*” (It clearly manifests to itself and there is no doubt).

²⁶ Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho 1972-79c, 210.1-2: “*de'i phyir ral gri'i dpe la sogs pa la bsams na ral gri rang gis rang tha snyad du gcod pa med mod kyi | de tsam gyis dpe can tha snyad du yang med mi dgos te [...] skye med kyi dper mo gsham bu sogs bkod pa bzhin no || de lta min na rang blo rang gis mngon sum shes pa tha snyad du yang med par 'gyur te [...] ||*” (Therefore, when considering examples such as a sword, and so on, although on a conventional level a sword does not cut itself, this alone does not imply that the thing exemplified is likewise nonexistent from a conventional perspective – just as in the case of [...] objects that have not come into existence, like the child of a barren woman, and so on. If it were otherwise, then even one's own mind's direct consciousness would end up being conventionally nonexistent [...]).

would serve a function analogous to that of medicine.²⁷ Among the various lines of thought that Mi-pham adopts to convince (dGe-lugs) Prāsaṅgikas to accept *rang rig* conventionally, one is his insistence on the definition of consciousness as luminosity and awareness, in opposition to insentience. For Mi-pham, the issue is not whether consciousness is aware of an object but rather what this means and how it is possible. Mi-pham's dGe-lugs critics share the same definition of consciousness as luminosity and awareness. However, since this is what distinguishes mind from matter, *inter alia*, consciousness makes itself known in making objects known. According to Mi-pham, what else could luminosity and awareness possibly mean in this context? Consciousness, insofar as it is consciousness, must be reflexive – as Śāntarakṣita also claims. It is important to note, then, that the definition of consciousness as luminous and aware serves as the conceptual bridge Mi-pham uses to move from the claim that Prāsaṅgikas 'do not deny' the conventional existence of *svasaṃvedana* to his own goal of making them 'positively affirm' it (Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho 1972-79a, 143-4).

In commenting on BCA 9.26, Mi-pham (1972-79e, 21.6-2.1) observes that

In brief, the refutation of *svasaṃvedana* is a refutation at the ultimate level, but it is not a refutation of its conventional conception, as the mere opposite of matter.²⁸

Here, there is a direct reference to Śāntarakṣita's stance. Thus, Mi-pham's claim supports a view that is explicitly detached from the Cittamātra philosophical tenet, which affirms the ultimate existence of self-awareness. Moreover, one methodological or logical criticism Mi-pham poses to the dGe-lugs scholars is that it is not correct to hold with such certitude that *svasaṃvedana* does not exist conventionally simply through the mere absence of its affirmation on the conventional level in Prāsaṅgika texts. This is especially because Prāsaṅgikas are well-known for not caring about conventional reality, being solely concerned with liberation from grasping to the true existence of phenomena. As Pettit (1999, 497-8) remarks, one of Mi-pham's arguments claims that things that are harmed by conventional valid cognition should not be posited conventionally; however, if everything that is negated ultimately is likewise not posited conventionally, then

²⁷ Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho 1972-79c, 210.3-4: "*thal 'gyur ba'i lugs la gnod pa med par ma zad phan byed kyi sman ltar 'gyur te ||*" (Not only does it not contradict the Prāsaṅgika system, but it becomes like a beneficial medicine).

²⁸ Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho 1972-79e, 21.6-2.1: "*mdor na rang rig pa 'gog pa ni don dam par 'gog pa yin gyi bem po las log tsam la tha snyad du rang rig par 'dogs pa'i tshul de 'gog pa ma yin te ||*".

the *skandhas* and *dhātus*, for instance, would also have to be accepted as completely non-existent. Another crucial methodological critique that Mi-pham expresses is that if the reflexivity of awareness were refuted even at a conventional level, it would be akin to a permanent sound or the Creator God of the theists, both of which would be invalidated by a valid cognizer examining conventional reality. However, that is not possible for *svasaṃvedana*: it cannot be refuted by any valid cognition analyzing the conventional²⁹ and, actually, has many compelling supporting arguments.

In his commentary to Śāntideva's *BCA* 9, Mi-pham offers four arguments in support of the conventional existence of self-awareness, each formulated as a *reductio*, in line with the Prāsaṅgika style of debate. It is important to go through them, for they target relevant philosophical issues. They are listed and addressed by Williams (1998, 92 ff.) as follows. To deny *svasaṃvedana* in this sense would mean that one's own mind becomes an object hidden to oneself, rendering experience invalidated. This would make it impossible to distinguish between one's own mind and another's, as one would know one's own mind in the same way one perceives the minds of others. Furthermore, how could one ever confirm the existence of one's own mind if it is hidden from oneself? This raises several issues, including a critical one: without proving the existence of one's own mind, and thus the possibility of experience, inference based on experiential data would be impossible. Ultimately, without knowing one's own mind, there could be no conscious awareness of cognitive referents within the conventional domain.

Without the reflexivity of mind as a basis for all further mental activities, the whole cognitive system would collapse and the entire experiential field would lack its validation and constitutive boundaries. Garfield helps to elucidate the relevance of these arguments within a broader, global philosophical discourse on self-awareness, as reflected in the following passage:

Mi-pham is worried that to deny the reflexivity of awareness would be to deny the immediacy of self-knowledge, privileged access, the certainty of one's own existence as a mind, and the possibility even of mediated knowledge, since one would not know anything as one's own representation. (Garfield 2006, 215; italics in the original)

²⁹ Mi-pham rNam-rgyal-rgya-mtsho 1972-79c, 201.3-4: “*rtaḡ pa'i sgra dang dbang phyug byed pa po la sogs pa bzhin du tha snyad dpyod byed kyi tshad mas gnod pa dngos su yod pa dgos na 'di la de mi srid pa'i phyir ro ||*” (Just as in the case of terms such as ‘permanent’ and ‘omnipotent creator’, and so on, if one were to posit an actual contradiction according to the standards of conventional analysis, it would not apply here because such a thing does not exist in this context).

These points are still extremely relevant and will be addressed in the final chapter (ch. 7) of the present inquiry, in the context of examining the contemporary philosophy of mind.

One crucial point that is implied in the first argument of the above list should be remarked upon. For Mi-pham, *rang rig* is the epistemological basis for all the other types of cognition. Kapstein paraphrases Mi-pham (1972-79b, 792.5-6.2) as follows:

All that is experienced through other modes of direct perception is ascertained as direct perception through self-presentation. If that were not the case, direct perception would in effect be epistemically unfounded (*'grub mi 'gyur te*). Inference is rooted in direct perception. Direct perception is made certain by self-presentation. After arriving at this, the experience of one's own mind, with respect to which there can be no error (*ma 'khrul blo yi nyams myong*), there can be no farther proof (*sgrub byed*). (Kapstein 1993, 158)³⁰

Therefore, according to Mi-pham, from the epistemological point of view, all conceptual cognitions (SKT *anumānāni*; TIB *rjes dpag*) culminate in perceptual cognitions or direct perceptions (SKT *pratyakṣāni*; TIB *mngon sum*), while all perceptual cognitions culminate in self-awareness, which is the cognition in which one's own mind is experienced as non-erroneous (TIB *ma 'khrul pa*).

The extensive interpretative work developed by Mi-pham must be situated within a broader theoretical and doxographical framework, as a detailed and sophisticated attempt to harmonize rDzogs-chen thought with more mainstream scholastic traditions. Mi-pham demonstrates particular attentiveness to the rDzogs-chen perspective, seeking to integrate it meaningfully with other strands of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. It is important to note that in the rDzogs-chen tradition, as will become clear in the next chapter (ch. 6), the reflexivity of mind plays a crucial role. It is understood as the luminous movement of the self-recognition of one's own mind's nature. Therefore, reflexivity has to be positively affirmed conventionally so that the whole process of self-awareness and self-liberation can actually unfold. Thus, the underlying soteriological concerns play an important role in Mi-pham's project, aimed at providing a Madhyamaka account that accords with the rDzogs-chen view (Kapstein 2000, 117-18). Thus, if Tsong-kha-pa's exegetical project is aimed at providing an ontological criticism of the independent nature of self-awareness, engaging in a delicate and refined process of 'subtraction', stripping even conventional reality from self-awareness, Mi-pham's project

30 Note that here Kapstein renders *rang rig* as 'self-presentation'.

leads in the opposite direction, towards the ‘addition’ of conventional reality to *rang rig*. As demonstrated, the implications of this debate are deep and complicated. Here, the main elements have been outlined, enriching the range of ontological, epistemological, and doxographical reflections on the intricate and heatedly debated issue of self-awareness. This discussion also paves the way for some final considerations on the dialogue between the tradition’s contributions and the contemporary inquiry into self-awareness.

