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Nihilists and Noble Ones:
Ratnākaraśānti's Engagement with Nāgārjuna, Mādhyamikas, and the Mahāyāna in the
Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti

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Abstract

Nihilists and Noble Ones: Ratnākaraśānti's Engagement with Nāgārjuna, Mādhyamikas, and the Mahāyāna in the *Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti*

By Daniel P. McNamara

This dissertation engages an important philosophical text by the Indian Buddhist scholar-saint Ratnākaraśānti (c. 970-1045 CE). While Ratnākaraśānti was a towering intellectual force in his own place and time, he came to be a controversial figure in Tibet. As a result, his sophisticated presentation of the Mahāyāna Buddhist path has only recently received significant attention in contemporary scholarship, and a great deal of confusion remains regarding his overall philosophical commitments as well as his specific positions and argument. This dissertation sets out to clear away some of this confusion, in both a specific and a general sense. Specifically, it offers a close reading of some of Ratnākaraśānti's central arguments against competing Buddhist philosophical systems. More generally, this dissertation identifies and explicates Ratnākaraśānti's underlying project—which is to present a unified view of Mahāyāna Buddhism which takes Maitreya as the primary philosophical interpreter. This explication is intended in part to explain just *why* Ratnākaraśānti's thought has proven so difficult for scholars to interpret.

The bulk of this dissertation consists in a partial study of one of Ratnākaraśānti's major philosophical works—entitled *Proving the Middle Path: A Commentary on the Ornament of the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti Madhyamāpratipad-siddhi*). The sections treated here are primarily concerned with Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms of the Madhyamaka tenet system, a major strand of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy that became overwhelmingly dominant in Tibet shortly after his lifetime. Because of this dominance, there are very few examples of sustained argumentation against Madhyamaka—or, more precisely, against Mādhyamika thinkers. *Proving the Middle Path* therefore provides a valuable case study for the content and underlying structures of these arguments. Building on these criticisms, this dissertation argues that Ratnākaraśānti has proven so difficult to understand primarily because his works are in tension with overwhelmingly prevalent presuppositions about Nāgārjuna, Madhyamaka, and Indian Mahāyāna. This has led Ratnākaraśānti to *seem* inscrutable—not because of any failing on the part of his own scholarship, but rather due to a failure to appreciate his perspectives on Mahāyāna Buddhism, Madhyamaka philosophy, and the figure of Nāgārjuna.

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List of Abbreviations

<u>Ratnākaraśānti's Works</u>

GSTK Kusumāñjalīnāma Guhyasamājanibandha

HPM Hevajrapañjikā Muktāvalī

MAU Madhyamakālaṃkāropadeśa

MAV Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti Madhyamāpratipad-Siddhi

PPU Prajñāpāramitopadeśa

<u>Other Works</u>

LAS Laṅkāvatārasūtra

MA Madhyamakālaṃkāra, by Śāntarakṣita

MH Madhyamakahṛdaya, by Bhāviveka

MMK Mūlamadhyamakakārikā by Nāgārjuna

MVB Madhyāntavibhāga, by Maitreya

MVBB Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya, by Vasubandhu

MVBT Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā, by Sthiramati

PV Pramāṇavarttika, by Dharmakīrti

SDV Satyadvāyavibhāgakārikā, by Jñānagarbha

SNS Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra

SSŚ Sākārasiddhiśāstra, by Jñānaśrīmitra

TJ Tarkajvāla, by Bhāviveka

YṢ Yuktiṣaṣṭikā, by Nāgārjuna

Table of Contents

Chapter Four: Relating Unreal Phenomena to their Real Nature (MAV verses 13–20).. 130

Chapter Five: Final Criticisms: MAV verses 21–22 and Later Passages.... 171

Concluding Notes: Madhyamaka, Mādhyamikas, and the Mahāyāna 213

Introduction

Aim and Scope of the Work

This dissertation centers around an important philosophical text by the Indian Buddhist scholar-saint Ratnākaraśānti (c. 970-1045 CE[1]). While Ratnākaraśānti was a towering intellectual force in his own place and time—earning him the title of "Omniscient One of the Kali-age"[2] either during or shortly after his lifetime—his philosophy came to be controversial in Tibet and has proven exceptionally difficult for contemporary scholars to interpret. This dissertation has two central aims: to clarify Ratnākaraśānti's philosophical commitments and to identify some underlying reasons for these scholarly difficulties. This work provides a foundation for further studies of Ratnākaraśānti's thought, his intellectual milieu, and the state of Buddhist philosophy in eleventh-century India more generally.

The specific focus here is one of Ratnākaraśānti's main philosophical works, entitled "*Proving the Middle Path: A Commentary on the Ornament of the Middle Way*" (*Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti Madhyamāpratipad-siddhi*, hereafter MAV).[3] This text was composed in Sanskrit but is currently available only in Tibetan translation.[4] The lack of a Sanskrit edition is quite unfortunate: while previous scholarship on Ratnākaraśānti's thought has rightly attended to some of the content of this important text, it is only natural (and responsible) that the Tibetan translation be treated with due care and caution.[5] That said, despite the lack of an original Sanskrit

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[1] Dates per Seton (2015).

[2] This is Isaacson's rendering of *Kalikālasarvajña* (2013, 1037). Isaacson also notes that Ratnākaraśānti is "unusual in the breadth of his learning and scholarship. He has a kind of breadth in the fields that he wrote on, which is almost unparalleled among Indian Buddhist teachers" (2013, 1037).

[3] This title and its variants are discussed below.

[4] Information about the text and its editions is given toward the end of this Introduction.

[5] This is, unfortunately, not an abnormal situation; a large number of works that were extremely influential for the intellectual trajectory of Indian Buddhism are currently only available in Tibetan or Chinese translation.

manuscript, the MAV is a valuable text that is worthy of more thorough consideration than it has hitherto received. It explicates a number of nuanced philosophical arguments that are, in many ways, unique; more importantly, the contents of this text clarify important aspects of Ratnākaraśānti's philosophical commitments; by extension, the MAV contains material that helps explain why his thought became so puzzling for later generations.

The specific material from the MAV treated here concerns Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms of Madhyamaka—a major strand of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy that became overwhelmingly dominant in Tibet shortly after the author's lifetime.[6] Because of this dominance, there are very few examples of sustained argumentation against Mādhyamika[7] thinkers leveled by non-Mādhyamikas.[8] Therefore, this text provides a valuable case study for the content, structure, and underlying reasoning non-Mādhyamikas used against Mādhyamikas. Stated in brief, I argue that Ratnākaraśānti's arguments and commitments have proven difficult to understand in large part because his works are in direct tension with an overwhelmingly dominant assumption held by traditional Himalayan scholars: that Madhyamaka is unquestionably the pinnacle of Mahāyāna Buddhist thought. Ratnākaraśānti's attempts to question this superiority were ultimately unsuccessful, but they nonetheless deserve attention from scholars for their unique place in Indian and Himalayan Buddhist intellectual history.

While the MAV is by no means the *only* text by Ratnākaraśānti that critically engages Madhyamaka and Mādhyamikas,[9] it is unique among his works—and also exceptional amongst Indian (and Tibetan) Buddhist literature more broadly—in that these criticisms are its primary

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[6] See below, "Point of Departure: A Doxographical Conundrum." For a more detailed account of how and why Madhyamaka came to be so dominant on the Tibetan Plateau, see Vose (2009, 41–61).

[7] "Madhyamaka" refers to the system of thought, while "Mādhyamika" denotes a follower of that system.

[8] Intramural debate between Mādhyamikas—as well as Madhyamaka criticisms of other systems—is quite prevalent.

[9] Other instances are discussed below.

focus. The text aims to both criticize and to correct Mādhyamikas—or as he calls them, "pseudo-Mādhyamikas" (*dbu ma ltar snang*, **madhyamakābhāsa*)[10]—and tries to re-assert what Ratnākaraśānti presents as the correct form of Mahāyāna Buddhist thought. Because of this unique manner of engaging with [pseudo-]Mādhyamika opponents and ideas, the MAV provides a rare and valuable testament to the strategies through which a prominent eleventh-century scholar conceived of—and criticized—followers of the Madhyamaka tenet system on the cusp of its rise to unquestioned dominance on the Tibetan plateau.

At this point I must pause to note a technical point that is simply too important to relegate to a footnote: because this dissertation engages Madhyamaka thought from several incompatible perspectives, I have elected to use distinct terms to indicate how "Madhyamaka" is being engaged. I use the term "Mādhyamika" when speaking about self-identified Mādhyamikas *from their own perspective*. The term "pseudo-Mādhyamika" refers to Ratnākaraśānti's perspective—i.e., his engagements with positions he finds faulty. Finally, "[pseudo-]Mādhyamika" is used in situations where a specific and recognizable Mādhyamika thinker or thesis is being engaged. In the latter case neither term—"Mādhyamika" or "pseudo-Mādhyamika"—would be satisfactory for both parties. The brackets indicate that while Ratnākaraśānti does not consider these thinkers to be "real" Mādhyamikas, they do identify themselves as such. Bearing this in mind, we continue.

This dissertation offers a progressive analysis of the first twenty-two verses and commentary of the MAV, which focus almost exclusively on Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms of [pseudo-]Mādhyamikas. We will then jump forward in the text to treat the text's closing arguments against those opponents. This is not to intimate that the interim material—which is largely

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[10] This translation of *dbu ma ltar snang* follows conventions used by (e.g.) Moriyama (2013) and Seton (2015). The origins and meanings of this term are discussed in some detail in Chapter Three.

dedicated to a presentation of Ratnākaraśānti's account of *pramāṇa*, along with lengthy discussions of the proper interpretation of Mahāyāna scripture—is not worthy of study in its own right; it most certainly is. However, the focus of this dissertation is necessarily limited to an exploration of Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms of Mādhyamika positions—in order to understand the arguments themselves, and also because this material helps to explain Ratnākaraśānti's unique presentation of Nāgārjuna's thought. Indeed, one aim of this dissertation is to provide the foundations for more detailed consideration of the text in its entirely—in order to fully appreciate Ratnākaraśānti's complex and often puzzling arguments, it is necessary to understand the underlying goals and strategies of those arguments. That is a primary goal of this work.

This introductory chapter will next present what I call the "Doxographical Conundrum." This term refers to the interpretive difficulties that are caused by—and, in their turn contribute to—the result of the bewildering breadth of labels through which scholars have tried to classify and understand Ratnākaraśānti's thought. It will then proceed to offer background information on the MAV—discussing available editions, explicating the title and colophon, and briefly discussing its relationship with Ratnākaraśānti's other works. The introduction will conclude with a brief survey of relevant scholarly literature on Ratnākaraśānti's thought, followed by an outline of the main chapters and their arguments.

Point of Departure: A Doxographical Conundrum

Indian and Tibetan Buddhist scholars—and, following them, contemporary academics—almost universally take for granted a schematic system of four Buddhist philosophical "schools" or tenet systems (*siddhānta*, *sgrub mtha'*). These are—again, almost universally—conceived of as forming a hierarchy of sophistication and profundity. This hierarchical set became prevalent in Indian Mahāyāna scholasticism and forms the very bedrock of Himalayan Buddhists' engagement

with philosophical discourse. While there is considerable variance in the details,[11] the names and order of these doxographical sub-units is ubiquitous in Tibetan commentarial traditions as well as in much contemporary academic discourse.

The first two of these tenet systems—Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika—are generally conceived as non-Mahāyāna and are only of tangential importance for the present study. Mahāyāna is most often parsed into the competing systems of Yogācāra ("practitioners of yoga")[12] and Madhyamaka ("followers of the middle way"). According to this schema, Nāgārjuna (c. 2nd century CE)[13] is understood to be the progenitor of Madhyamaka. Meanwhile, Yogācāra is considered to originate from the revelations of the celestial Bodhisattva Maitreya to his human disciple Asaṅga (c. 4th century CE) with his younger half-brother Vasubandhu also playing a vital role in its formation. Given the clarity of these distinctions, it makes sense that any particular Mahāyāna thinker should fit neatly into one or other of these categories. Describing this common and clear-cut formulation, John Dunne notes:

> Although clearly useful for Buddhist exegetes and academic interpreters, the concept of a *siddhānta* or school holds several problems. For example, if a taxonomy of schools is to be of any use, one must sort each thinker and his works into one school or another. In this sorting process, however, the way in which a thinker may resist or reinterpret his own school is all too easily lost. The sorting of thinkers into this or that school may also lead one to ignore noteworthy differences and create false boundaries. Candrakīrti (c. 625 CE) and Śāntideva (c. 650 CE), for example, diverge significantly in their views, but since they are lumped together into the same school, their important differences may be ignored. Likewise, Dharmakīrti (c. 650 CE) and Śāntarakṣita (c. 750 CE) are sorted into distinct schools, but their thought may converge in ways that are not apparent in terms of their schools' definitions. Along these same lines, the taxonomy of schools does not fare

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[11] The most important variances concern sub-classifications of Madhyamaka. These are laid out clearly in Dreyfus and McClintock's edited volume on the Tibetan "Svātantraka-Prāsaṅgika Distinction" (2003). For a thorough study of Indian sub-classifications of Madhyamaka, see Almogi (2010).

[12] Sometimes referred to as Cittamātra ("mind-only"), Vijñaptimātra ("representation-only") or Vijñānavāda ("proponents of consciousness [only]").

[13] Dates per Walser (2005).

well when confronted with liminal cases, where a thinker's allegiances are difficult
to discern. (Dunne 2005, 1204–5)

As Dunne notes, this fourfold system of classification for Buddhist philosophy is so pervasive that there are risks of misunderstanding both differences between thinkers from the same school and also critical relations between those of different schools. For the present purposes, the final sentence of this passage is most important, as Ratnākaraśānti is perhaps the best-known and most confounding of the "liminal cases" to which Dunne refers. This point will be explored in more detail below; for the time being it is sufficient to note this fourfold schema in order to highlight what I a calling Ratnākaraśānti's "conundrum-inducing" presentation. The distinctiveness of Ratnākaraśānti's conceptions of the fourfold doxography is evident throughout his works. That said, before discussing his view of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka specifically, it is worth examining Ratnākaraśānti's presentation of all four schools—especially as found in the MAV and a closely related text, the *Instructions on the Ornament of the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakālaṃkāropadeśa*, *dbu ma rgyan gyi man ngag*; hereafter MAU).

The Four Schools in the MAV and MAU

A key component for understanding Ratnākaraśānti's thought concerns his treatment of these four categories, particularly the ambiguity he displays when describing Madhyamaka and Yogācāra tenet systems. This ambiguity is on particularly stark display in the MAU and MAV. In the former text, Ratnākaraśānti presents this fourfold doxography in a manner that seems quite unusual. He writes:

Others explain Buddhists' positions as follows: those who assert the apprehension
of objects, blue and so forth,[14] through a cognition without [mediating] images are

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[14] *sngon po la sogs pa*, **nīlādi*. Throughout the MAV Ratnākaraśānti uses this as an example of ordinary cognition throughout the text; Indian philosophical example for an object or ordinary cognition; it is also a very common example in Indic philosophical discourse writ large. Throughout these arguments, Ratnākaraśānti focuses exclusively

> Vaibhāṣikas. Those who assert that objects are experienced as images which are reflections [which appear] on the basis of [external] objects are Sautrāntikas.
>
> The others are the three[15] [or third] positions of pseudo-Mādhyamikas and four[th] Yogācāra positions; these should be refuted by those knowledgeable in *pramāṇa*, scripture, and *śāstra*.[16]

The descriptions of the first two philosophical systems listed here are not controversial. Vaibhāṣika is taken as the lowest Buddhist system. Ratnākaraśānti characterizes its primary position as follows: perceptions arise from the meeting of an eye-consciousness with some set of circumstances—such as particular conglomerations of atomic particles (*paramāṇu*, *rdul phra*)—that is external to consciousness. This process takes place without recourse to any kind of mediating representation. Ratnākaraśānti then contrasts this with Sautrāntika positions, which *do* make use of mediating representations. This idea is considered to be more profound and closer to reality than what is offered by the Vaibhāṣikas.

Ratnākaraśānti's presentation of the Mahāyāna tenet systems stands in stark contrast to this uncontroversial depiction of these lower systems. An informed contemporary reader should be immediately struck by the fact that Ratnākaraśānti account does not treat Madhyamaka—which is almost universally taken for granted as the most profound expression of Buddhist philosophy—as the pinnacle in this hierarchical structure of views. Indeed, it is difficult to read this passage as

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on the cognitive content ("blue") or objective aspect (*grāhyākāra*) of awareness, but the subjective aspect (*grāhakākāra*) is also necessary for an ordinary cognitive event.

[15] Seton argues that *gsum* and *phyogs bzhi* represent cardinal numbers ("three… [and] four positions") rather than ordinals ("third… the fourth position") in the original Sanskrit. Defending this, Seton astutely notes that Ratnākaraśānti gives a very similar description in the HPM that treats "three" and "four" as unambiguous cardinal numbers: *itare trayo mādhyamikapakṣāś catvāraś ca yogācārapakṣa dūṣitāḥ pramāṇāgamaśāstranipuṇaiḥ* (HPM XV.23; cf. Seton 2015, 61 f.n. 136). That said, because it is still possible that Ratnākaraśānti intentionally phrased these descriptions so as to leave room for both cardinal and ordinal numbering, I have opted to use brackets despite their inelegance.

[16] *gzhan dag sangs rgyas pa rnams 'di skad du smra ste / gang zhig rnam pa med pa'i shes pas sngon po la sogs pa'i don rig par 'dod pa ni bye brag tu smra ba'o // gang zhig don gyis phan btags pa'i gzugs brnyan gyi rnam pa nyams su myong ba don rig par 'dod pa nyid ni mdo sde pa'o / gzhan dbu ma ltar snang ba'i phyogs gsum dang / rnal 'byor spyod pa'i phyogs bzhi / tshad ma dang lung dang bstan bcos la mkhas pa rnams kyis sun dbyung bar bya ste…* MAU P 611.14-20. This translation does not differ meaningfully from Seton's (Seton 2015, 136–37), but does diverge from Yiannopoulos' earlier translation (Yiannopoulos 2012, 228).

referencing Madhyamaka *at all*, in any meaningful sense. Instead, the MAU references positions—referred to here as "pseudo-Madhyamaka" and "Yogācāra"—that are to be refuted by learned scholars. The text does not address just how these reliable scholars *themselves* ought to be labeled, nor does it offer an obvious clue about what they themselves think (other than "none of the above"). Indeed, on its own, this passage could be taken to suggest that "those knowledgeable in *pramāṇa*, scripture, and *śāstra*" would not identify with *any* of the four tenet systems.

The MAV offers a similar presentation but also includes a consideration of the correct view. That said, the MAV does not settle matter. In what might be seen as an exasperating move, Ratnākaraśānti in the MAV seems to distinguish correct and incorrect versions of *both* Madhyamaka and Yogācāra. He writes:

> The Buddha taught four [*siddhānta*s] as follows: Those who assert that a cognition without an image apprehends an object such as blue are <u>Vaibhāṣikas</u>. Those who assert that objects are apprehended by the experience of an image, a reflection which [appears] on the basis of [external] objects are <u>Sautrāntikas</u>.
>
> Some do not assert that blue and so forth are external objects separate from consciousness, but rather that these are consciousness, and that blue and so forth arise through the power of latent karmic habits (*vāsanā*) from beginningless time. Those who assert this are <u>Yogācāras</u>. The position which adheres to the three natures[17] is the [correct] <u>Madhyamaka</u>. But those who assert that everything is false are [followers of] pseudo-Madhyamaka.[18]

The description of the four schools given here is, so far as I know, completely unique, both among Buddhist texts in general and in Ratnākaraśānti's work in particular. Ratnākaraśānti first offers a straightforward explanation of the first two types of *siddhānta* in a similar manner to the MAU. But when describing the Mahāyāna, Ratnākaraśānti seems to equate Yogācāra and Madhyamaka—

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[17] The three natures (*trisvabhāva*, *rang bzhin gsum*) are fundamental to Yogācāra philosophy, and are discussed in more detail in Chapter One.

[18] *de lta bas na sangs rgyas pa bzhi ji ltar yin / yang gang zhig rnam par shes pa las phyi'i don sngon po la sogs pa mi 'dod kyi / 'on kyang 'di dag rnam par shes pa nyid yin mod kyi / thog ma med pa'i bag chags kyi stobs kyis sngon po la sogs pa bskyed pa yin par smar ba de dag ni rnal 'byor spyod pa pa yin la rang bzhin gsum du smra ba ni dbu ma pa'o // yang gang zhig thams cad brdzun par smra ba ni dbu ma ltar snang ba yin no //* P 307.6-10; D 120a2-4.

though it is telling that, unlike the MAU, this passage preserves the commonly-presumed order by placing Madhyamaka[19] last on the list. He then contrasts this Yogācāra-Madhyamaka pair with pseudo-Madhyamaka positions.

Unlike the terse description in the MAU, this MAV passage also assigns specific positions to Yogācāra and [correct] Madhyamaka *siddhānta*. Yogācāras argue that external-seeming phenomena such as blue actually arise from **vāsanā*s (Tib. *bag chags*), the imprints from subtle karmic habits that produce incorrect cognitions. Meanwhile, Madhyamaka—which is to say, *correct* Madhyamaka—adheres to the doctrine of the three natures. This is particularly puzzling because, according to the overwhelming majority of Indian and Himalayan doxographical schemas, "Madhyamaka *siddhānta*" and "the three natures" are mutually exclusive—the former is a *siddhānta* system associated with Nāgārjuna and the two truths; the latter is a doctrine associated with the Bodhisattva Maitreya and with Yogācāra *siddhānta*. From this perspective, presenting a Madhyamaka that includes the three natures would be similar to positing the existence of a four-sided triangle.

Because of this seeming contradiction, it is important to note that Ratnākaraśānti's description of ordinary phenomenal experience—specifically, its association with Yogācāra *siddhānta*, here—is not in any obvious tension with the MAU's description of Madhyamaka as consisting in adherence to the three natures. There is also reason to think that in this MAV passage Ratnākaraśānti means to draw a complete separation between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka. "Yogācāra" is described in terms of the situation of ordinary, suffering beings who have roamed *saṃsāra* since beginningless time, while Madhyamaka is glossed in more properly philosophical

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[19] It is possible—though, I think, unlikely—that *dbu ma* here refers to the Middle Way rather than to "Madhyamaka." Certainty on the matter could only be reached if a Sanskrit edition of the MAV became available.

terms. Furthermore, Madhyamaka is associated with the three natures, which are not strictly tied to either *saṃsāra* or *nirvāṇa*. They are, however, unequivocally central to Ratnākaraśānti's presentation of the Mahāyāna *in toto*. In short, both "Yogācāra" and "Madhyamaka," as presented here, are consistent with Ratnākaraśānti's own view as articulated in the MAV. This text argues forcefully that if "Madhyamaka" and "Yogācāra" are taken to refer to the intentions of the two Noble Ones (*ārya*)—Nāgārjuna and Maitreya—then they are in fact necessarily synonymous. At the same time, the MAV gives a sustained critique of Nāgārjuna's followers—who call themselves Mādhyamikas but whom Ratnākaraśānti considers pseudo-Mādhyamikas. In other words: Ratnākaraśānti does not draw a distinction between the enlightened forefathers of the two tenet systems; instead, he clearly differentiates errant Mādhyamikas from the teachings of their founder.

Ratnākaraśānti on the "Agreement" Between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka

The presentations of siddhānta from the MAU and MAV relate closely to an assertion found in several of Ratnākaraśānti's other works: that Yogācāra and Madhyamaka are "in agreement."[20] For example:

> Therefore, Yogācāras are in accord with the philosophy of the Middle (**madhyamā siddhānta*).[21]

> Followers of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka[22] who debate each other without basis are truly ignoble creatures… you Yogācāras with excellent kinsman,[23] possessed of

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[20] In Tibetan this phrase is most often rendered mtshungs pa (see, for example, the next footnote). There is attested Sanskrit for, at the least, *sadṛśa*; it seems likely that other, similar terms were also used.

[21] *de lta bas na rnal 'byor spyod pa pa dang / dbu ma grub pa'i mtha' mtshungs pa yin no* // MAU P 610.15-16.

[22] For the sake of clarity, Madhyamaka will refer to the philosophical system (*siddhānta*) while Mādhyamika refers to followers of that system.

[23] *rtsa lag mchog*. Negi attests this as a Tibetan translation for **bandhu* (Negi 1993, 4729), and it is possible that Ratnākaraśānti is playfully referencing Vasubandhu.

hate; you Mādhyamikas with argumentative intent[24] who hold that your view is supreme—what's the reason for such dispute? This is extremely base.[25]

The philosophical position on which Mādhyamikas and Yogācāras agree is the superior [view].[26]

Yogācāras assert that [the Middle Way] is like this; Nāgārjuna considers it in precisely the same way. Since this is a single philosophical system (*ekasiddhānta); others, who assert differently, are not without fault.[27]

These quotes are drawn from four of Ratnākaraśānti's works—two of which are primarily philosophical, and two of which engage tantric exegesis. The first quote is from the aforementioned MAU; the second from *Instructions on the Perfection of Wisdom* (*Prajñāpāramitopadeśa*, PPU); the third from *Garland of Pearls: A Commentary on the Hevajratantra* (*Hevajrapañjikā Muktāvalī*, HPM); and the final citation is from *A Handful of Flowers: A Commentary on the Guhyasamājatantra* (*Kusumāñjalīnāma Guhyasamājanibandha*, hereafter GSTK).

Given the ubiquity of this claim that Madhyamaka and Yogācāra "agree" across his major works—including in the MAU—it is both conspicuous and significant that Ratnākaraśānti does *not* describe Yogācāra and Madhyamaka as concordant in the MAV. Instead, the text offers the most thorough-going critique of what he calls pseudo-Mādhyamika positions to be found in Ratnākaraśānti's available works. For this reason, I believe that the MAV is an ideal point of intervention for engaging the Doxographical Conundrum. Identifying the ways in which Yogācāra and [pseudo-]Madhyamaka do *not* agree is a crucial first step in determining how, why, and to

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[24] *rtsod par sems* if Ratnākaraśānti is indeed playfully referencing thinkers and works in these lines, this would most obviously refer to Nāgārjuna's *Vigrahavyāvartanī.*

[25] *rtsa ba med par rnal 'byor spyod pa pa rnams dang / dbu ma pa rnams lhan cig tu rtsod pa ni skye bo shin tu gnas ngan pa nyid… rtsa lag mchog gi rnal 'byor spyod pa pa la sdang bar sems ni 'dir bcas te / rtsod par sems pa'i dbu ma mchog 'dzin 'di dag ci'i phyir rtsod cing shin tu smad //* PPU P 398.1-7.

[26] *mādhyamikānāṃ yogācārāṇām ca sadṛśaḥ siddhāntaḥ śreyān. Hevajrapañjikā Muktāvalī.* Isaacson translates: "the position of the Mādhyamikas and Yogācāras, which is similar, is the best" (Isaacson 2013, 1043).

[27] *rnal 'byor spyod pa 'di ltar 'dod pa ji lta ba de bzhin du / nā gardzuna'i zhal snga nas kyang bzhed de / grub pa'i mtha' 'di ni gcig pa yin la / tha dad par 'dod pa gzhan dag ni kha na ma tho ba med pa ma yin no //* P 1420.2-4.

what extent Ratnākaraśānti considers these systems to be concordant. But before delving into this matter, it is necessary to further contextualize the issue by discussing previous studies of Ratnākaraśānti, with special attention to how other scholars have engaged his thought and his doxographical affiliation.

Previous Scholarship on Ratnākaraśānti's Doxographical Affiliation

While Ratnākaraśānti has attracted scholarly attention for several decades, recent years have seen a significant increase in attention to his thought.[28] This is due in no small part to the efforts of Harunaga Isaacson, who has published prolifically on the tantric works of Ratnākaraśānti and related thinkers.[29] It is also a product of increasing interest in Vikramaśīla Mahāvihāra as a vibrant intellectual community in the tenth- through twelfth-centuries.[30] Perhaps most importantly, a Sanskrit manuscript of the *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa*—the longest and arguably most influential of Ratnākaraśānti's philosophical treatises—is in the process of being edited, with an introduction and English translation, by Luo Hong (forthcoming a).[31] While this edition is not yet available, its mere existence has inspired several scholars to re-appraise Ratnākaraśānti's work as a whole.

The most important scholarship currently available for engaging Ratnākaraśānti's thought as a whole is certainly Gregory Seton's unpublished dissertation (2015). While ostensibly focused on one specific work—Ratnākaraśānti's *Sāratamā*—Seton's dissertation offers an overview of Ratnākaraśānti's overall thought that incorporates all of his major philosophical works. It also

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[28] Along with the sources discussed here, other recent examples include Luo (2018), Tomlinson (2018a), McNamara (2017), and Yiannopoulos (2017).

[29] See bibliography for details.

[30] This is due in part to group efforts such as the "Vikramaśīla Project," founded by Taiken Kyuma. This group has sponsored several independent workshops and also organized panels at the two most recent meetings of the International Association of Buddhist Studies (Vienna 2014 and Toronto 2017). So far, the proceedings of the first of those have been published (as JIABS volume 40).

[31] The Sanskrit of the PPU has been only partially available to me; I have included it where possible but otherwise rely on the Pedurma edition of the Tibetan translation. I would also note that Dr. Luo is also preparing an edition of the *Śuddhimatī*, one of Ratnākaraśānti's works on *Prajñāpāramitā* literature (Luo forthcoming b).

includes a detailed overview of sources on Ratnākaraśānti's life and a descriptive and putatively exhaustive list of his works—including those believed to be falsely attributed (2015, 289–300). Seton's specific theses on Ratnākaraśānti's philosophy will be discussed throughout this work.

A majority of academics who have written about Ratnākaraśānti describes his view in terms of Nirākāra Yogācāra—i.e., a Yogācāra position that does not accept images (*ākāra*) at the ultimate level.[32] That said, both traditional Buddhist scholars and contemporary academics have deployed an exceptionally wide variety of descriptions for Ratnākaraśānti's view, such as: Nirākāra-Vijñānavāda; Alīkākāra[-Vijñānavāda];[33] a synthesis of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka;[34] Nirākāra Madhyamaka;[35] *Vijñapti Madhyamaka;[36] Nirākāravādin-Yogācāra-Madhyamaka[37]; and Great Madhyamaka.[38, 39] In short, his thought is considered by some to be a form of classical Yogācāra; by others to be a synthesis of elements of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka; and by still others as a unique presentation that merits a non-standard doxographical label. Ratnākaraśānti's philosophy thus presents a doxographical conundrum.

Among the examples of scholarship that treat Ratnākaraśānti's work as a Yogācāra-Madhyamaka synthesis, two are worth discussing as they highlight the difficulties one faces in trying to categorize his work. The first is David Seyfort Ruegg's *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India* (1981) which is perhaps the earliest English-language text to engage

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[32] There are too many individuals to list, but to name a few prominent contemporary scholars: Harunaga Isaacson (2007, 2013), Yuichi Kajiyama (1998, 154–58), and Shinya Moriyama (2013 and 2014). Some Tibetan commentators, such as *Thu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma* (1737-1802), use the label *sems tsam* (*cittamātra*) instead of *rnal 'byor spyod pa* (*yogācāra*) (Blo-bzaṅ-chos-kyi-ñi-ma 2009, 152–53).

[33] Yiannopoulos (2012).

[34] Brunnhölzl (2011, 133); Ruegg (1981, 122); Ruegg (2010, 350).

[35] Brunnhölzl (2011, 157).

[36] Tibetan: *rnam rig dbu ma*, "The Middle Way of Cognitive Representations" (Ruegg 1981, 122).

[37] Seton (2015).

[38] *dbu ma chen po*. This is the nomenclature used by relatively recent Tibetan scholars such as Dudjom Rinpoche (2002, 184) and Jamgon Kongtrul (2007, 200).

[39] This list combines elements of litanies given by McNamara (2017, 192) and more recently by Hong (2018, 2).

with Ratnākaraśānti's philosophy in any detail. The second is Karl Brunnhölzl's (2011) work that explores possible Indian precedents for "other-emptiness" (*gzhan stong*) philosophy.[40] These will be taken in turn.

Ruegg offers a brief overview of Ratnākaraśānti's thought in an appendix to his *Literature of the Madhyamaka School* entitled "Ratnākaraśānti's *Vijñapti-Madhyamaka*" (*rnam par rig pa'i dbu ma*) (Ruegg 1981, 122–24). This is the only appendix devoted to a single thinker in Ruegg's work, suggesting that he felt Ratnākaraśānti to be particularly noteworthy within the spectrum of Indian presentations of Madhyamaka. According to Ruegg, Ratnākaraśānti's work is "another synthesis"—i.e., different from those offered by Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla—"of Maitreyanātha's and Asaṅga's Vijñānavāda philosophy with certain elements of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka" (Ruegg 1981, 122). Ruegg refers to this synthesis as "*Vijñapti Madhyamaka*," a Sanskrit reconstruction from *rnam rig gi dbu ma*. He borrows this nomenclature from the editors of the Tibetan translation of the MAU, obscure figures described only as "the Kashmiri (*kha che*) Amogha and the translator Oru."[41] Ruegg continues to describe Ratnākaraśānti's thought as *rnam rig gi dbu ma* in his later publications including, for example, a 1988 article treating "the Indo-Tibetan *dbu ma* (Madhyamaka)" (Reprinted in Ruegg 2010, 350). More recently, Seton has questioned Ruegg's straightforward adoption of this label, arguing that "*Vijñapti Madhyamaka" should be understood as an abbreviation for "Nirākāra-vijñaptimātravādin Mādhyamika" based on similar phrasing that Ratnākaraśānti himself uses in the PPU (2015, 32–33).

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[40] "Other-Emptiness," also sometimes called "Great Madhyamaka" (*dbu ma chen po*), is an important but sometimes controversial strand of Madhyamaka thought that developed in Tibet. Briefly stated, this system focuses on the idea that that awareness is "empty of other," i.e., empty of adventitious defilements. This stands in distinction to a focus on phenomena being "self-empty" (*rang stong*)—i.e., empty of intrinsic nature (*rang bzhin, svabhāva*).

[41] *kha che a mogha dang 'o ru lo tsā bas zhus te gtan la phab pa'o* // MAU P 623.16-17. I have thus far been unable to determine the identities of these figures. I would note that "Amogha" should not be confused with Amoghavajra— the prolific Sanskrit-Chinese translator who flourished in the eight century CE. Also, 'O ru is attested as a geographical location in Tibet, but I have yet to discover a clear relation between this place and any specific translator.

Writing before Seton but thirty years after Ruegg, Brunnhölzl largely echoes the latter's description of Ratnākaraśānti's thought. He devotes a lengthy passage in his work on "Indian *gzhan stong*" to describing Ratnākaraśānti's thought as a Yogācāra-Madhyamaka synthesis (2011, 133–58). At the outset of this section, Brunnhölzl argues:

> Ratnākaraśānti's position is rather complex in its synthesis of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, defying any easy classification within standard Tibetan doxographies (from which he is in fact often absent). As for the relationship between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, both his *Prajñāpāramitopadeśa* and *Madhyamakālaṃkāropadeśa* state that the philosophical systems of these two schools are congruent (*mtshungs pa*) (2011, 133).

Throughout his overview, Brunnhölzl argues that despite Ratnākaraśānti's ambiguous and/or inconsistent statements regarding his own doxographical affiliation, he is undoubtedly a Mādhyamika: "[i]n sum, Ratnākaraśānti sees himself clearly as a Mādhyamika, but integrates many essential elements of Yogācāra" (2011, 157). In light of this, Brunnhölzl concludes that Ratnākaraśānti's synthetic stance "would make him a *Nirākāra-Mādhyamika" (Brunnhölzl 2011, 157). *Pace* Brunnhölzl, I argue that the evidence he adduces shows that Ratnākaraśānti affiliated himself not with the Madhyamaka *siddhānta* but, rather, with what he called the Middle Path (*dbu ma'i lam*). Because Madhyamaka is so ubiquitously considered the pinnacle of Buddhist philosophy by Himalayan traditions and also by academic scholarship, it is understandable that "Madhyamaka *siddhānta*" and "Middle Path" could easily be conflated. But they are not identical, either for Ratnākaraśānti or elsewhere: in philosophical contexts, the term "Middle Path" is used by exponents of every *siddhānta* system to describe the highest view of that system. The MAV makes clear that according to Ratnākaraśānti, the "Middle Path" refers to the view that is *upheld* by both Maitreya and Nāgārjuna but is nevertheless most clearly *articulated* by the former. This point will be revisited in more detail in the following chapters.

In contrast to the labels mentioned thus far, I take the most immediately useful doxographic description of Ratnākaraśānti's thought to be an apparent neologism provided by Ratnakīrti, who is generally considered his junior contemporary.[42] In the course of discussing various Buddhist positions, he does not associate Ratnākaraśānti with either Yogācāra or Madhyamaka. Rather, Ratnakīrti treats Ratnākaraśānti's view as a special case, which he calls "*alīkākārayogin pāramārthikaprakāśamātra*" (Isaacson and Sferra 2014, 64).[43] This is the view that karmically conditioned experience "connects with false images" (*alīkākāra-yoga*), while "ultimately there is only luminosity" (*paramārthaprakāśamātra*). Isaacson and Sferra opine—rightly, in my view— that Ratnākaraśānti would be unlikely to object to this characterization.[44]

Ratnakīrti's decision to treat Ratnākaraśānti as a special case is also consistent with a central argument of this dissertation: Ratnākaraśānti does not fit neatly into the categories of "Yogācāra" or "Madhyamaka" *because he actively resists the utility of those categories*. While Ratnākaraśānti does discuss Yogācāra, Madhyamaka, and [pseudo-]Madhyamaka positions, his primary doxographical rubric in the MAV is not "Madhyamaka versus Yogācāra" but rather "authentic Mahāyāna versus spurious Mahāyāna." Only once this is clearly understood can one begin to speak of Ratnākaraśānti's doxographical position. This topic is taken up in later chapters; for now, we can consider some aspects of the MAV itself.

The Text and its Editions

The MAV is one of Ratnākaraśānti's longer philosophical treatises. It is comprised of forty-eight original verses accompanied by a prose commentary (*'grel pa*, *vṛtti*). All currently available

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[42] While scholarship has yet to settle on precise dates for Ratnākaraśānti, Jñānaśrīmitra, and Ratnakīrti, it is generally agreed that they were contemporaneous and that Ratnakīrti was the junior of the three (Kajiyama 1999, 1–8).

[43] Isaacson and Sferra specify that this characterization comes from *Citrādvaitaprakāśa* p. 129_6 (2014, 64).

[44] While he accepts this position, it is worth noting that Isaacson nonetheless prefers to describe Ratnākaraśānti's thought as *nirākāra* (personal communication, 3/11/2019).

editions of the text derive from a single translation by the eleventh-century translator 'Bro Seng dkar Śākya 'Od. For ease of access, this study primarily cites the Pedurma (*dpe bsdur ma*, hereafter P) and Derge (*sde dge*, D) editions of the root text. Where relevant, footnotes discuss significant variations among all editions consulted—The Pedurma, Derge, Peking (*pe cing*, Pk), Narthang (*snar thang*, N), and Cone (*co ne*, C)—and explain translation decisions. I have also consulted a draft of Shinya Moriyama's unpublished critical edition of the MAV—cited here as (Moriyama, n.d.)—which he kindly shared with me in March 2014. Please note that my citations of Moriyama's edition do not necessarily represent the current state of his research.

The Title: *Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti Madhyamāpratipad-siddhi-nāma*

When considered in terms of its historical context and philosophical content, the full title of the MAV conveys a great deal of information. The first half, *Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti*, can be straightforwardly translated as "a commentary (*vṛtti*) ornamenting (*alaṃkāra*) the middle way (*madhyamaka*)." This title communicates three inter-related ways in which the text can be considered: (1) It is "a commentary that ornaments the Madhyamaka[śāstra]," i.e. a commentary clarifying the meaning of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK) of Nāgārjuna. (2) It is "an ornament for the Madhyamaka tenet system" (*siddhānta*). These first two interpretations are consistent with the Mādhyamika scholar Bhāviveka's[45] usage of *madhyamaka*, which "can refer to either 'the Madhyamaka text' (*madhyamakaśāstra*) or the 'Madhyamaka system' (*madhyamakasiddhānta*)" (Eckel 2008, 66). (3) The title also situates the text as a "commentary"

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[45] Eckel 2008 presents the most in-depth study of Bhāviveka's Madhyamaka to date. Note that this figure is also known as "Bhāvaviveka" and "Bhāvya."

(which should be understood here as a rebuttal) of the well-known *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* of Śāntarakṣita.[46]

These readings are all reinforced by the second title of the text, "proving the Middle Path" (**madhyamāpratipad*[47]*-siddhi*). At any rate, the opening of the MAV makes clear that the Middle Path (*madhyamā pratipad*) which this text "proves" is set forth by the Noble One (*ārya*) Maitreya in the *Madhyāntavibhāga* (MVB)—the discourse that "Separates the Middle from the Extremes." Thus, the text sets out to properly explicate and defend the notion that the middle path set forth within it—and within the MVB—*is* the correct middle path.

Taken together, the title *Madhyamakālaṃkāra Madhyamāpratipad-siddhi* communicates the following: the text will ornament (*alaṃkāra*), i.e., clarify, Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka, and will prove (*siddhi*) the *madhyamā pratipad*, i.e., the Middle Path described by Maitreya in the MVB. The title could also be read as Ratnākaraśānti's Proof *that* Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka—when properly interpreted (i.e., ornamented)—is consistent with Maitreya's Middle Path. Ratnākaraśānti's penchant for Sanskrit poetics is on full display in this title, as he manages to communicate several overlapping positions into a relatively sparse number of syllables.

Colophon to the Text

The colophon to the MAV is for the most part succinct and straightforward, identifying the author and translator. However, there is a somewhat puzzling sentence in some versions of the translators' colophon. The initial colophon follows the closing verse of the text:

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[46] See Ichigō (1985 and 1989) and Blumenthal (2004) for studies and translations of this text and consideration of some major commentaries.

[47] M*adhyamapratipadasiddhi* is the Sanskrit title transcribed in every available Tibetan edition. Ruegg suggests *madhyamapratipadāsiddhi* as a correction (Ruegg 1981, 122). In an earlier article (McNamara 2017) I follow Ruegg; here, I argue that this title is a reference to the *madhyamāpratipad*—particularly as discussed in the *Madhyāntavibhā*ga—and reproduce it accordingly.

> Ratnākaraśānti composed this *Ornament of the Middle Way* for the purpose of delighting scholars who correctly understand the modes of *pramāṇa*, and who understand the meaning of the Buddha-vehicle //48//[48]

> This concludes the *Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti Madhyamāpratipad-siddhi* by the glorious learned Mahāpaṇḍita, Ratnākaraśānti.[49]

Regarding this, is sufficient for the time being to note that the author is clearly identified as Ratnākaraśānti (*rin chen 'byung gnas zhi ba*) and that his stated purpose is to "delight the learned"—i.e., people who share his understanding of Mahāyāna and *pramāṇa* to some meaningful extent. Based on the foregoing, it seems safe to say that Ratnākaraśānti is contrasting his audience with pseudo-Mādhyamikas, the errant followers of Nāgārjuna. This will be further elaborated throughout the body of this dissertation.

After the author's verse, all available editions of the MAV also include a simple colophon identifying Śākya 'Od as the sole translator: "Lotsāwa Shākya 'Od translated this on his own."[50] Among available translations of Ratnākaraśānti's works, this is the only text that Śākya 'Od undertook by himself. Colophons to the MAU and VMS attest him working with Śāntibhadra on that translation. Śākya 'Od also translated two works on logic with Kumārakalaśa: Ratnākaraśānti's *Antarvyāptisamarthana*, and a short work by Jñānaśrīmitra—the *Kārakakāraṇabhāvasiddhi* (*rgyu dang 'bres bu'i ngo bo grub pa*)—which he later edited with a Nepali *paṇḍita* named Anandaśrī.[51]

It is not clear precisely what motivated Śākya 'Od to translate the MAV by himself. One possibility is that his main collaborators were deceased or otherwise unavailable for consultation

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[48] *tshad ma'i tshul la yang dag mkhas pa dang / sangs rgyas theg pa'i don la mkhas pa rnams / dbu ma'i rgyan gyis dga' bar bya ba'i phyir / rin chen 'byung gnas zhi bas sbyar ba yin* // P 307.18-20; D 120a6-7.

[49] *dbu ma rgyan gyi 'grel pa dbu ma'i lam grub pa zhes bya ba slob dpon mkhas pa chen po dpal rin chen 'byung gnas zhi ba'i zhal snga nas kyis mdzad pa rdzad pa rdzogs so* // P 307.20-308.1; D 120a7.

[50] *lo tsā ba shākya 'od kyis rang 'gyur du mdzad pa'o* // P 308.2; D 120b1.

[51] *dpe bsdur ma* vol. 106, pp. 831-841.

during or after his translation, which would suggest that he worked on the MAV after the others were completed. Another possibility is that he felt comfortable translating the text on his own, which would also suggest he already had some experience working on similar treatises with *paṇḍita*s. This could be taken to suggest that the MAV was translated later than the MAU, VMS, and *Antarvyāptisamarthana*. But it is by no means a definitive indication.

While the Peking and Narthang editions of the MAV leave the colophon at that, the Pedurma and Derge editions continue by offering cryptic details of the translation's reception history:

> *dpal gyal po 'dod pa'i lha'i ring la / dpyid zla ra ba'i ngo la brtsams te lo brgya bzhi bcu lon no //* (P 308.3-4; D 120b1)

> [This text] was composed in the first month of spring during [the reign of] the glorious king *'dod pa'i lha*. One hundred forty years have passed.[52]

There are a number of mysteries here, most obviously the reference to the "first month of spring" followed by "one hundred forty years." It is also not definite precisely which king the name *'dod pa'i lha* refers to; though this phrase most likely renders *Kāmadeva.

Fortunately, none of these problems is intractable. First of all, there is precedent for both the name of the ruler and the style of dating in this colophon. In the course of considering the situation of Sanskrit-Tibetan translators from the tenth through thirteenth century, Ronald Davidson provides several pieces of pertinent information. For example, Davidson attests two Kathmandu rulers with "Kāmadeva" in their names: (1) Guṇakāmadeva, who ruled over most of the Kathmandu valley from approximately 980 CE through the early decades of the eleventh

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[52] *lon* can be interpreted as "arrive" or "receive;" this is the sense I have used in the translation. But it can also mean "passed" in a general sense, which in this context would render "one hundred forty years have passed [since its composition]." In the absence of any evidence about the circumstances in which this was written, it is impossible to judge which is the better reading; that said, the general meaning is clear.

century; and (2) a slightly later ruler of Lalita-Paṭṭana (roughly analogous to Pāṭan) called Lakṣmīkāmadeva (Davidson 2005, 131–32).[53]

One piece of textual evidence is of specific import for understanding our colophon as a whole. Namely: a Newar king Kāmadeva is referenced in a similar manner in the colophon to a Sanskrit manuscript of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*. Kern discusses this in the introduction to his translation, which comprises the twenty-first volume of Max Müller's series, *Sacred Books of the East*:

> The base of my translation [of the sūtra] has been an old manuscript on palm leaves, belonging to Dr. D. Wright's collection, in the University Library of Cambridge. The manuscript is dated Newar, era 159 (=A.D. 1039), and written in the reign of the king Kāmadeva (?), in the bright half of the month Vaiśakha, on a Thursday(Kern 1900, xxxviii, parentheses in original).[54]

As indicated by Kern's question mark, the identity of this Newari king is not obvious, but the date mentioned—1039 CE—suggests that he reigned during the latter part of Ratnākaraśānti's life.

On the one hand, it must be noted that the "Kāmadeva" of Kern's manuscript could be taken to refer to Guṇakāmadeva, Lakṣmīkāmadeva, or another ruler entirely—and there is no concrete evidence for these figures being the *'dod pa'i lha* referenced in the MAV, either. That said, the names of the rulers and also the peculiar description of the timing of the texts' composition cannot be ignored. While none of this constitutes concrete evidence on its own, it is also true that none of it undermines other reasonable speculations: that (a) Śākya 'Od was probably a junior contemporary of Ratnākaraśānti; (b) the MAV may have translated during or soon after its author's lifetime; and (c) the translation may have been either created in, or otherwise connected to, the Kathmandu valley of present-day Nepal.

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[53] Note that Davidson's account is directly (and in many details, exclusively) based in Petech's 1984 *Mediaeval History of Nepal*.

[54] Kern cites and comments on the Sanskrit as follows: "Samvat 159 Vaisākhasukle (illegible the Tithi) Gurudine, Kāmadevasya vigayāgye likhitam iti. There seem to be wanting two syllables before kāma" (1900, xxxviii f.n. 1).

Kern's colophon also helps to make sense of the allusion of "one hundred forty years." Given that both texts include the month and approximate date of their work, it is reasonable to conclude that Śākya 'Od is following an established pattern. This gives reason to suspect that the reference to "one hundred forty years" was added by a later, unnamed individual in the mid- to late twelfth century. This might suggest that the text was lost during that time, though there is no clear record of either that loss or any recovery. All that can be said with any certainty is that the text was available to Chomden Rigpa'i Raltri (*bcom ldan rig pa'i ral gri*, 1227-1305, hereafter Rigral), who authored the only available commentary on the text of the MAV—to which we now briefly turn.

Rigral's Word Commentary

Rigral composed the only commentary on the MAV in any language of which I am currently aware,[55] entitled Explanation of the Ornament of the Middle Way: A Flower that Clarifies the Words and Meaning (*dbu ma rgyan gyi rnam par bshad pa tshig don gsal ba'i me tog*). Rigral was a prominent Kadampa (*bka' gdams pa*) scholar from Narthang (*snar thang*) monastery, and he was a leading luminary of his time. He is credited with over twenty works on epistemology and logic, though only five are currently available (Kuijp and McKeown 2013, xci).[56]

Unfortunately, Rigral's commentary is of limited utility for understanding Ratnākaraśānti's text, though it is an important source-text for Tibetan intellectual history in its own right. Seton describes this commentary as "an early gZhan-stong work and demonstrates the attempt to transform Ratnākaraśānti into a justification for the new position" (2015, 300). Rigral cites

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[55] I am grateful to Greg Seton for making me aware of this commentary.
[56] For further information see Schaeffer (2005), van der Kuijp (2003), and Schaeffer and van der Kuijp (2009).

numerous sources that Ratnākaraśānti does not mention and—as Seton points out—adapts the text of the MAV so as to make it relevant for the intellectual landscape of thirteenth-century Tibet. That being the case, it is not a reliable source for understanding Ratnākaraśānti's own concerns.

Rigral's commentary is mainly helpful for the present project insofar as it treats the MAV as both a refutation of pseudo-Madhyamaka and a presentation of a unique version of the Middle Way. Transitioning from the former topic to the latter, Rigral writes:

> Having refuted Mādhyamikas—the master (*ācārya*) Bhāviveka, Candrakīrti, Jñānagarbha and so forth—[Ratnākaraśānti's own] system, the Middle Way of Yogic Praxis, will now be taught.[57]

This statement is noteworthy for three reasons. First, it claims to identify Ratnākaraśānti's primary opponents in the earlier part of the text. While this list of well-known figures aligns with Ratnākaraśānti's overall goal of refuting [pseudo-]Mādhyamikas, it is unlikely that Rigral intended this to be a specific and exhaustive list—particularly in light of the conspicuous absence of Śāntarakṣita, the one opponent whom Ratnākaraśānti identifies by name in the text. I suspect that rather than giving a rigorous account of the opponents with whom Ratnākaraśānti is directly engaging, Rigral is simply pointing out that he is targeting Mādhyamikas in general.

It is also noteworthy that Rigral identifies this group *as* Mādhyamikas—using the phrase *dbu ma rnams*—rather than using the MAV's preferred nomenclature of "pseudo-Mādhyamika." Rigral does use this more derogatory phrase in places, but he does not explicitly associate the pseudo-Mādhyamika position with any specific thinker, as Ratnākaraśānti does. Finally, Rigral identifies Ratnākaraśānti's position as "The Middle Way of Yogic Praxis" (*rnal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma'i lugs*). While this label is not inconsistent with Ratnākaraśānti's views in the MAV *per*

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[57] *slob dpon bha bya dang zla grags dang ye shes snying po la sogs pa don 'dod pa'i dbu ma rnams phyung nas rnal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma'i lugs ston pa ni* / 424.4-5.

se, it is not a title that Ratnākaraśānti self-applies so far as I am aware. This label also carries the risk of suggesting that Ratnākaraśānti is aligned with Yogācāra-Mādhyamikas—of which the primary representatives are Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, whose views are the direct object of criticism in the MAV.

It is worth noting that there are minor differences between Rigral's citations of the MAV compared to available editions of the translation. For example, there is a slight difference in how verse two is rendered in Rigral's commentary versus available editions of the MAV. The latter reads *bden pa gnyis 'dir bshad par bya*, while Rigral has *bden pa gnyis bshad par bya'o*. These variations are insignificant in terms of the meaning of the text but do raise the possibility that Rigral was either using a different translation of the text, or that he edited a version that is not currently available.

Outline of the Dissertation

As mentioned, this dissertation is primarily organized around discrete sections of the MAV, particularly the first twenty-two verses and their commentary. Chapter One provides a historical and philosophical introduction to the MAV. It outlines the historical evolution of fissures within Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism that eventually produced the distinction—now presumed—between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka *siddhānta*. This provides necessary background for both the MAV and the "doxographical conundrum." Specifically, this chapter identifies two competing rubrics through which the Mahāyāna has historically been parsed: "Madhyamaka versus Yogācāra" and "Mahāyāna versus spurious Mahāyāna." It argues that the confusion surrounding Ratnākaraśānti's intellectual project derives in large part from a failure to appreciate that he engages *both* rubrics but favors the latter. The chapter then goes on to offer background information that is particularly important for engaging the MAV. While this discussion focuses on doctrines associated with the

Yogācāra and Madhyamaka systems, it also briefly discusses Pramāṇa Theory—i.e., the Buddhist iteration of pan-Indic epistemological discourse typified by Dharmakīrti. This chapter closes by briefly discussing Ratnākaraśānti's primary opponents in the MAV and gives a preliminary description of some of their main positions.

Following this propaedeutic, chapters two through five primarily engage the first twenty-two verses of the MAV and their commentary. These are broken into discrete thematic sections as follows. Chapter Two engages primarily with the first four verses and their commentary in detail, which provide the rhetorical framing for the text. In these opening verses Ratnākaraśānti describes the two truths as the primary topic of the MAV. The chapter troubles this claim, arguing that the text is more closely focused on Ratnākaraśānti's argument that Nāgārjuna accepted, and taught, the doctrine of the three natures in accordance with Maitreya's *Madhyāntavibhāga*. It explicates Ratnākaraśānti's arguments in the text that the Mahāyāna is a single unified tradition that considers Maitreya to be the supreme authority for understanding the words of the Buddha. This chapter retains a particular focus on Ratnākaraśānti's depiction of Nāgārjuna's role in this unified Mahāyāna, with particular attention to his arguments that the Noble One must have accepted the three natures.

Chapter Three primarily discusses MAV verses five through twelve with their commentary, which begin a thorough engagement with Ratnākaraśānti's pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents—the eponymous "nihilists" of the title of this dissertation. This chapter discusses the two main sub-types of pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents that are the primary targets in the MAV. In these verses, Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms are primarily focused on the opponents' inability to put forth a coherent account of *pramāṇa*. Flaws in their philosophical presentations leave these groups open to charges of incoherence and, at worst, outright heresy.

Chapter Four builds on these arguments, focusing on continuing criticisms of the two main groups of pseudo-Mādhyamika opponent at verses thirteen through twenty. These verses engage in increasingly specific refutations of pseudo-Mādhyamika accounts of *pramāṇa*, in the course of which Ratnākaraśānti takes the opportunity to begin explicating his own view of the proper middle path. This chapter primarily engages two important themes in Ratnākaraśānti's philosophical program in the MAV. The first is the proper interpretation of Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* regarding valid direct perception (*pratyakṣa-pramāṇa*) and valid inference (*anumāna-pramāṇa*). Ratnākaraśānti challenges pseudo-Mādhyamikas' interpretation of these vital points, and also offers his own presentation—which is, curiously, in apparent tension with Dharmakīrti, regarding the relationship between conceptuality (*vikalpa*) and error (*bhrānta*). The second theme revolves around the complex relationships between perceptual images (*ākāra*) and awareness.

Chapter Five continues in much the same vein. It first treats the remainder of Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms of the main pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents, which proceed through MAV verse twenty-two. At that point, the discussion jumps to the end of the MAV, where Ratnākaraśānti briefly engages two other types of opponent, only one of which is obviously intended as a pseudo-Mādhyamika position.

This dissertation closes with some brief "Concluding Notes," as it would be too strong to claim to have reached a definitive "Conclusion." This final section re-assesses the Doxographical Conundrum; it likewise returns to the matter of Ratnākaraśānti's presentation of Nāgārjuna, Madhyamaka, and pseudo-Mādhyamikas in the MAV. This discussion emphasizes the underlying argument that runs through this dissertation: scholarly engagements with Ratnākaraśānti that proceed in terms of doxographical categories are, in effect, doomed to fail. They are so doomed because Ratnākaraśānti is not operating within the boundaries of that rubric. This point is difficult

to appreciate because he spends so much time discussing the categories of "Yogācāra" and "[pseudo-]Madhyamaka" in the MAV and across his philosophical works. But rather than providing a model for organization, he uses these labels in the course of pursuing his main methodological goal: the demarcation of authentic Mahāyāna from pseudo-Mahāyāna. This thesis directly inspires the title of this dissertation: according to the MAV, those who call themselves Mahāyāna Buddhists are either following the authentic teachings of the Noble Ones—particularly Maitreya, but also Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga—or they have strayed into the teachings of pseudo-Mahāyāna Nihilists. After the main body of the dissertation, an Appendix has been added that presents together the sections from the MAV that have been translated and discussed here.

Chapter One
Situating the *Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti* in its Historical and Doctrinal Contexts

Introduction

This chapter aims to situate the MAV—and Ratnākaraśānti's thought more generally—in the historical and doctrinal progression of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism. It will begin by focusing specifically on the historical and doctrinal fissures that appeared in the first half of the first millennium CE, which eventually led to the assumption that Mahāyāna can be divided cleanly into the two streams of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra. The history of this split is crucial for appreciating key aspects of the MAV, most importantly: (a) Ratnākaraśānti's presentation of the Mahāyāna in general, (b) the specific place of Nāgārjuna within that tradition, and (c) the sharp distinction drawn in the text between Madhyamaka and "pseudo-Madhyamaka." The chapter will then turn to particularly important doctrines associated with each of these positions. It will then discuss two other groups whose positions are necessary for appreciating Ratnākaraśānti's arguments in the MAV. The first is Pramāṇa Theory, the system of logic-based epistemology that derives most directly from the works of Dignāga (c. 480-540 CE) and Dharmakīrti (c. 7th century CE). The second is a group of three related thinkers—Jñānagarbha, Śāntarakṣita, and Kamalaśīla—referred to collectively by later Tibetans as "The Three Mādhyamikas from the East" (*dbu ma'i shar gsum*). Precise dates for these figures are unknown, but all are thought to have lived during the 8th century CE and are considered to share a direct lineage—i.e., Kamalaśīla is considered the disciple of Śāntarakṣita, whose guru was Jñānagarbha. According to Ruegg, Kamalaśīla—the youngest of the three—died around 795 CE (Ruegg 1981, 94). The title "Three Mādhyamikas from the East" is taken from a twelfth-century Tibetan text, the *dbu ma shar gsum gyi stong thun* ("Digest of the

Three Mādhyamikas from the East") by Chapa Chokyi Senge (Phya pa chos kyi seng ge, 1109-1169).[58] These thinkers and their doctrines are the most direct and explicit targets of Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms in the MAV. Bearing this in mind, we turn to what I call the doctrinal fissure in Mahāyāna.

Part I: Historical Background
Tracing the Fissure in Mahāyāna: Asaṅga, Bhāviveka, and Dharmapāla

Within Mahāyāna Buddhism, Madhyamaka and Yogācāra are generally understood to be separate philosophical systems. According to this understanding, Mādhyamikas give an account of the proper view of reality that differs from and competes with their Yogācāra counterparts. Both camps consider all parties to be part of the Mahāyāna. But the earliest iterations of this fissure tell a story in which the perceived stakes for relevant authors were much higher and the identities of each party in the ongoing debate were not so clear cut.

In terms of doxographical literature, the earliest clear evidence for separate intellectual strands of interpretation that have come to be known as Madhyamaka and Yogācāra is found in Bhāviveka's *Essence of the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakahṛdaya*, hereafter MH) and its auto-commentary, *Blaze of Reason* (*Tarkajvālā*, hereafter TJ). Bhāviveka devotes the fifth chapter of the MH to refuting followers of Yogācāra, which he treats as a rival tradition and defines as those who base themselves on the works of "Asaṅga, Vasubandhu and so forth" (Eckel 2008, 65). But is important to note that Bhāviveka seems to have considered himself and his system the victim rather than the aggressor in this matter. He traces the origin of the dispute to the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* section of Asaṅga's *Yogācārabhūmi*, and in particular to a lengthy passage worth reproducing:

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[58] Cf. Tauscher's introduction and edition of that text (1999) for further discussion.

When some people hear the difficult and profound Mahāyāna sūtras that deal with Emptiness and convey a meaning that needs to be interpreted, they do not discern the correct meaning, they develop false concepts and have unreasonable views based only on logic (*tarka*), and they say: "All of reality is nothing but a designation; whoever sees it this way, sees correctly." For these people there is no real thing to serve as the basis of designation. This means that there cannot be any designation at all. How can reality be nothing but designation? By saying this they deny both designation and reality. Someone who denies designation and reality should be known as the worst kind of nihilist (*nāstika*). Those who are wise and practice a religious life should not speak or share living quarters with this kind of nihilist. He causes himself to fall, and those who agree with his false views fall as well (Eckel 2008, 65–66).[59]

As Eckel notes, it is not obvious that Asaṅga had any particular group in mind when issuing this warning; if so, it is also not evident that he considered that group "Mādhyamikas" (2008, 65–67). However, this is precisely how Bhāviveka later construed it. At the very start of the aforementioned chapter on Yogācāra in his *Madhyamakahṛdaya*, Bhāviveka writes:

Other scholars, who are proud of their own approach, say that the Yogācāras have given the correct explanation of the introduction to the ambrosia of reality. The noble Nāgārjuna, whose awakening mind was predicted by the Tathāgata and who attained the [first] stage (*bhūmi*) [of the Bodhisattva Path], properly understood the approach (*nīti*) of the Mahāyāna. Other Mahāyāna masters, beginning with Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, have misinterpreted it. Without shame or embarrassment, they think that they understand it correctly, even though they misunderstand its meaning. Proud of their own knowledge, they say: "We alone have given the correct introduction to the ambrosia of reality, while the Mādhyamikas (*madhyamavādin*) have not" (Eckel 2008, 211).

For Bhāviveka, this division between Yogācāra followers and proponents of Madhyamaka was very real and had concrete social and political implications. It is also clear that he holds Asaṅga

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[59] Eckel's translation is based on Dutt's Sanskrit edition of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*: *ato ya ekatyā durvijñeyān sūtrāntān mahāyānapratisaṃyuktān gambhīrān śūnyatāpratisaṃyuktānābhiprāyikārthanirūpitān śrutvā yathābhūtaṃ bhāṣitasyārthamavijñāyāyoniśo vikalpyāyogavihatena tarkamātra-keṇaivaṃ dṛṣṭayo bhavantyevaṃ vādinaḥ / prajñaptimātramevasarvametacca tattvam / yaścaivaṃ paśyati sa samyak paśyatīti / teṣāṃ prajñaptyadhiṣṭhānasya vastumātrasyābhāvātsaiva prajñaptiḥ sarveṇa sarvaṃ na bhavati / kutaḥ punaḥ prajñaptmātraṃ tattvaṃ bhaviṣyatīti / tadanena paryāyeṇa taistattvam api prajñaptir api tad ubhayam apyapavāditaṃ bhavati / prajñaptitattvāpavādacca pradhāno nāstiko veditavyaḥ / sa evaṃ nāstikaḥ sannakathyo bhavatyasaṃvāsyo bhavati vijñānāṃ sabrahmacāriṇām / sa ātmānamapi vipādayati / loko 'pi yo 'sya dṛṣṭyanumata āpādyate /* (Dutt 1966, 31).

and Vasubandhu[60] responsible for the fissure; and seems likely that he believed at least some of his contemporaries continued that legacy. On this view, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu and their followers considered Mādhyamikas to be nihilists who were undeserving of inclusion in the Mahāyāna fold. Yogācāras who felt that way could—and, perhaps, did—seek to ostracize Mādhyamikas, even to the point of trying to expel them from the community of Buddhist practitioners (*saṃgha*).[61]

Given the intensity of Bhāviveka's rhetoric, it must be noted that these early Yogācāra figures did *not* draw any obvious distinction between their own views, on the one hand, and those of Nāgārjuna on the other. As seen in the above passage from Asaṅga's *Yogācārabhūmi*, these figures distinguished their view of the middle way from what they consider nihilistic misinterpretations of the Buddha's teachings. This suggests that—in sharp contrast to Bhāviveka—Asaṅga and other early Yogācāra thinkers did *not* consider Mādhyamika and Yogācāra to be rivals. Rather, they were concerned to distinguish the correct Mahāyāna from deviant misinterpretations.

There is slightly more reason to think that a strict Yogācāra-Madhyamaka distinction was accepted by Dharmapāla (530-561 CE),[62] a prominent Yogācāra scholar and contemporary of Bhāviveka. However, even in this case the evidence for this is weaker than some scholarly sources indicate. In the tenth chapter of his *Śataka Commentary*[63] on Āryadeva's *Verse Treatise in Four*

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[60] The absence of Maitreya in this list is quite conspicuous, though it is not clear to me whether—or in what way—that omission is significant.

[61] In addition to Bhāviveka's texts, the influential Chinese scholar-monk Xuan Zang (early 7th century CE) also recounts—in the narrative of his travels throughout South Asia—that there was a perceptible rivalry between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra amongst his Indic Buddhist contemporaries (Eckel 2008, 67).

[62] Dates per Tillemans (1990, 8 f.n. 4). This earliest explicit evidence for this textual "debate" between Dharmapāla and Bhāviveka is found in the writings of the Korean monk Wŏnch'uk. Cf. Tillemans (1990, 54 f.n. 114) for a lengthy list of secondary sources on the subject. While Kajiyama describes Ratnākaraśānti, Atīśa, Jñānaśrīmitra and Ratnakīrti as disciples of one "Dharmapāla" (1999, 1), this must refer to a later figure—most likely Dharmakīrtiśrī, who is considered a teacher this same set of scholars (Seton 2015, 40–41).

[63] Dharmapāla's commentary is currently available only in Chinese translation (*Ta-ch'eng Kuang Pai-lun Shih lin*, T 1569). It is discussed at length in Tillemans (1990) and Keenan (1997).

Hundred Stanzas (*Catuḥśatakaśāstrakārikā*), Dharmapāla critically engages Bhāviveka's treatment of Yogācāra and Mādhyamika. Tillemans summarizes the substance of the dispute between Dharmapāla and Bhāviveka—whom he calls by the common variant Bhāvaviveka—as follows:

> The essential point of the debate concerns the interpretation of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*'s pronouncements that dharmas are without natures (*niḥsvabhāva*), do not arise (*anutpāda*) or cease, have always been tranquil and by nature in *nirvāṇa*; Dharmapāla took the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*'s statements as being of "interpretive meaning" (*neyārtha*) and opted for the *Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra*'s explanation in terms of the three-nature (*trisvabhāva*) doctrine, while Bhāvaviveka took the statements about "non-arisal, " etc. as definitive (*nītārtha*) (Tillemans 1990, 55).

As Tillemans notes, the relationship between the two truths and three natures is intimately connected to the question of which *sūtra*s and *śāstra*s a particular author considers definitive (*nītārtha*). He highlights the centrality of the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*) literature— particularly its teachings on essencelessness (*niḥsvabhāvatā*)—for Bhāviveka, and similarly stresses the importance of the *Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra* and its teachings on the three natures for Dharmapāla.

In his study of the tenth chapter of the *Śataka Commentary*, Keenan describes Dharmapāla's text as "the very first explicit Yogācāra critique of Madhyamaka thought" (1997, 46). This description overstates its case in one crucial way: Dharmapāla does not self-identify as a follower of Yogācāra in that chapter, nor does he clearly refer to his opponents as Mādhyamikas.[64] Rather, his presentation is consistent with the one given by Asaṅga in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*: he is primarily concerned with properly representing the Mahāyāna, and his criticisms are likewise directed at those who misunderstand and misrepresent it. Likewise,

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[64] Given that I am unable to read classical Chinese, I cannot make this claim with any certainty; that said, it seems justified based on Keenan's discussion.

Dharmapāla's stated goal in the tenth chapter is to "once more clarify the true viewpoint by purified reason and doctrine (*yuktyāgama*) in order to banish... remaining doubts" (1997, 67). This gentle phrasing is a far cry from Bhāviveka's polemical attacks on Yogācāra from a self-identified Mādhyamika standpoint. Similarly, I would note that the title of Dharmapāla's commentary—as translated by Keenan—is *An Extensive Mahāyāna Commentary on the Śataka* (1997, 67, emphasis added). Taken together, all of this suggests that Dharmapāla's allegiance was not to Yogācāra per se, but to the *Mahāyāna*, although this clearly means to indicate the *correct* Mahāyāna, as opposed to the incorrect Mahāyāna of Bhāviveka and his ilk. Nonetheless, *pace* Keenan, Dharmapāla's self-identification and presentation does not at all suggest an "explicit Yogācāra critique of Madhyamaka thought." As will be shown, Ratnākaraśānti's strategy for engaging with [pseudo-]Mādhyamikas—i.e., opponents who call themselves Mādhyamikas but whom he does not accept as legitimate Mahāyāna Buddhists—echoes Dharmapāla's strategy.

Śāntarakṣita's Solution to the Fissure: *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* as Precedent, Opponent, and Foil for Ratnākaraśānti's MAV

Before proceeding with further details of Ratnākaraśānti's historical-intellectual contexts, it is vital to foreground the primary opponents with whom Ratnākaraśānti engages in the MAV: The Three Mādhyamikas from the East. The first of these—Jñānagarbha—is not explicitly engaged in the text of the MAV, though certain aspects of his thought are important for understanding Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that Śāntarakṣita is the primary target of Ratnākaraśānti's critiques in the MAV——specifically his *Ornament of the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakālaṃkāra*, hereafter MA). There are two obvious reasons to conclude this: Ratnākaraśānti's title is directly evocative of Śāntarakṣita's MA, and it is the only text in the MAV that is cited for refutation. But there are also compelling philosophical

reasons for why Ratnākaraśānti might have considered Śāntarakṣita to be a particularly dangerous enemy.

Śāntarakṣita's thought—particularly as laid out in the MA—is most often described by Tibetan doxographers as a Yogācāra-Mādhyamika, and that text is often cast in contemporary scholarship as an effort to synthesize[65] these two competing systems. The most obvious inspiration for this doxographical description is found in a series of verses toward the close of the MA:

> That which is cause and effect is nothing but mind-only. It is established that what is self-validated is knowledge. //MA 91//
>
> Based on [the standpoint of] mind-only one must know the non-existence of external entities. Based on this standpoint [of the non-intrinsic nature of all dharmas] one must know that there is no self at all even in that (which is mind-only). //MA 92//
>
> Therefore, those who hold the reins of logic while riding the carriage of the two systems [Madhyamaka and Yogācāra[66]] attain the stage of a true Mahāyāna practitioner. //MA 93//[67]

As these verses demonstrate, Śāntarakṣita takes Yogācāra to be subordinate to Madhyamaka, creating a synthesis whereby the latter is clearly privileged. It is therefore not difficult to understand why Ratnākaraśānti was so concerned to refute this thinker in particular, given his advocacy of a universal Mahāyāna based on the teachings of Maitreya.

Along with separating "Yogācāra" from "Madhyamaka" and subordinating the former to the latter, the MA also utilizes a mode of argumentation that is quite similar to—and yet meaningfully separate from—Ratnākaraśānti's preferred method in the MAV. Śāntarakṣita primarily relies on what is generally known as the "neither-one-nor-many" argument (*gcig dang*

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[65] This is how he is treated in foundational scholarship on the MA, e.g. Ichigō (1985, 1989) and Blumenthal (2004).

[66] Kamalaśīla provides this gloss in the *Madhyamakālaṃkārapañjikā* (Ichigō 1985, 227fn3).

[67] Ichigō 1985, CXLIV–V. *rgyu dang 'bras bu gyur pa yang / shes pa 'ba' zhig kho na ste / rang gis grub pa gang yin pa / de ni shes par gnas pa yin //* (91) *sems tsam la ni brten nas su / phyi rol dngos med shes par bya / tshul 'dir brten nas de la yang / shin tu bdag med shes par bya //* (92) *tshul gnyis shing rta zhon nas su / rigs pa'i srab skyogs 'ju byed pa / de dag de phyir ji bzhin don / theg pa chen po pa nyid 'thob //* (93) (Ichigō 1985, 222–23).

du ma dang bral ba, **ekānekatvaviyoga*).[68] This argument has an impressive pedigree in Indian Mahāyāna thought. It was deployed by Āryadeva,[69] Dharmakīrti,[70] and other early Mahāyāna thinkers of various stripes. That said, the argument is central to Śāntarakṣita's MA, featuring—directly or indirectly—in sixty-two of its ninety-seven total stanzas. This leads Blumenthal to call the text "the most well-known exposition of the argument within the Buddhist canon" (2004, 139). Given that Dharmakīrti uses this argument and Śāntarakṣita privileges it so much, it is not surprising that the argument features prominently in the sections of the MAV treated here.

Summarizing the argument in the context of Dharmakīrti's philosophy, Dunne relates that this argument serves to "demonstrate that it is untenable to maintain that a whole is identical to its real parts or that a whole is distinct from its real parts" (2004, 40). Because entities do not exist as either extended wholes or as a conglomeration of discrete parts, they are selfless (*dharmanairātmya*). In keeping with his Mādhyamika stance, Śāntarakṣita uses the argument to specifically highlight that all things are without a nature (*niḥsvabhāva*) that is either singular or plural. This subtle shift in emphasis is crucial for understanding Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms: while he does accept the neither-one-nor-many argument as a method, he does *not* accept the conclusion that nothing could have any kind of essence or nature.

Śāntarakṣita first mentions to the argument in the opening verse of the MA, establishing it as his primary philosophical method in that text. That verse reads:

> Those entities postulated as real by Buddhist and non-Buddhist
> schools have in reality no intrinsic nature, because they are

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[68] For sustained discussion this argument in a broader Madhyamaka context see Tillemans (2016), particularly chapters one through six.

[69] Moriyama cites *Catuḥśataka* 344 as an example (2014, 340 f.n. 2)

[70] See Dunne (2004, 40 and 62-3) for a summary of how Dharmakīrti deploys this argument in different contexts.

> possessed of neither a singular nor a plural nature, like a reflection.
> //MA 1//[71]

Śāntarakṣita uses the argument to conclude that because phenomena have neither a singular nor a

plural nature, they must be without essence, as in the case of a reflection. Blumenthal summarizes

Śāntarakṣita's usage of the argument as follows:

> The aim of the neither-one-nor-many argument, as presented by Śāntarakṣita, is to demonstrate that all phenomena lack an independent, unchanging nature of their own and thus are properly characterized as empty (*śūnya*) of any inherent nature. This is done by analyzing various phenomena asserted or implied by his opponents to have such a nature, and then determining that they do not have a nature, since they have neither a truly single nor truly manifold nature. (2004, 60).

As Śāntarakṣita's verse treatise progresses, it deploys this argument against increasingly

sophisticated theses about existence. These range from non-Buddhist presentations of essence up

to a rebuttal of Nirākāra Yogācāra, all of which fall prey to the neither-one-nor-many argument.

Stated differently, Śāntarakṣita echoes Dharmakīrti in using a "sliding scale of analysis" creating

a hierarchy of increasingly profound views that culminate in his own position (cf. McClintock

2003). As will be shown, the MAV can be seen as, *inter alia*, a direct response to just this strategy.

Another crucial distinction between Śāntarakṣita and Ratnākaraśānti concerns their views

on the status of interdependent origination, specifically its operation in cognition. Śāntarakṣita

refers to interdependence as "real convention" (*tathyasaṃvṛti*), locating it clearly within the rubric

of the conventional. Ratnākaraśānti, basing his view on the three-nature theory, classifies

dependent origination in terms of the dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*) in its aspect as the

imagination of the unreal. Moriyama notes that "[f]or Ratnākaraśānti, Śāntarakṣita's argument is

too extreme because it denies not only the nature of the imagined but also the basis of our cognitive

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[71] Ichigō (1985, CXXXV). Ichigō's Tibetan: *bdag dang gzhan smra'i dngos 'di dag / yang dag tu na gcig pa dang / du ma'i rang bzhin bral ba'i phyir / rang bzhin med de gzugs brnyan bzhin //* (1985, 22). Ichigō includes Sanskrit from Vaidya's edition of Prajñākaramati's *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā*: *niḥsvabhāvā amī bhāvās tattvataḥ svaparoditāḥ / ekānekasvabhāvena viyogāt pratibimbavat //* (1985, 22 f.n. 1).

act, *abhūtaparikalpa*, the nature of the other dependent" (Moriyama 2011, 10). Śāntarakṣita rejects any substantial and causally efficacious level of reality that would be categorized by Ratnākaraśānti as *paratantrasvabhāva* and/or *abhūtaparikalpa*. Śāntarakṣita's account of the conventional includes both linguistic and non-linguistic events that exhibit causal efficacy (*arthakriyā*); Ratnākaraśānti denies this and argues that the *paratantra* must be a meaningfully separate substratum.[72]

This dissertation engages only indirectly with Kamalaśīla, the last of the Three Mādhyamikas. Kamalaśīla is widely considered to be Śāntarakṣita's main student and to have taken his teacher's role as spiritual guide to the Tibetan Yarlung empire during the early days of Buddhism's establishment there. Kamalaśīla is most important for the present purposes insofar as he is the composer of the *Madhyamakālaṃkārapañjikā* (hereafter MAP), a sub-commentary on the MA that offers significant elaborations of that text's main arguments. It is also worth noting that Kamalaśīla remains a relatively under-studied figure in English and other Western-language literature, given his stature in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy: along with McClintock's several contributions (2003, 2010, 2014) I would also highlight Keira's study of the second chapter of Kamalaśīla's main independent philosophical work, the *Madhyamakāloka* (Keira 2004).[73] Keira relates that the *Madhyamakāloka* seems to have been composed in Tibet but was discovered by Atīśa, who sent a copy back to India (and most likely to Vikramaśīla monastery). Therefore, while it is not currently clear whether Ratnākaraśānti was engaging directly with the *Madhyamakāloka* in the MAV (or elsewhere), it is certainly a possibility that deserves pursuit in future studies of both Kamalaśīla and Ratnākaraśānti.

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[72] Sara McClintock notes that in his *Madhyamakāloka*, Kamalaśīla does equate *paratantra* with *pratītyasamutpāda* and, thereby, with the conventional (personal communication).

[73] The absence of such Western-language studies of this important work stands in stark contrast to Japanese scholarship; as evidenced by the bibliography in Keira (2004).

Preliminary Conclusions to Part I: The MAV as an Attempt to Heal the Fissure

To summarize the foregoing: the emergence of a Yogācāra-Madhyamaka fissure appears to stem most obviously from the distinction drawn by Asaṅga between authentic Mahāyāna practitioners and dangerous, confused nihilists. This is then followed by the attack on Yogācāra thinkers by the self-identified Mādhyamika Bhāviveka. Dharmapāla's answer to Bhāviveka echoes Asaṅga's rhetoric, as he seeks to clear away doubts about Mahāyāna on the part of confused scholars. Based on this I argue that the two groups commonly identified as Yogācāra and Madhyamaka did not only differ in terms of their sectarian affiliation. In fact, they adduced very different methods for understanding *what that distinction was*, and how it should be drawn. On the one hand, self-identified Mādhyamikas distinguish their own view from a group they identify as Yogācāra. But the latter group appears to self-identify as *Mahāyāna* rather than specifically as Yogācāra. It seeks to differentiate itself from misinterpretations of Mahāyāna—stated more succinctly, pseudo-Mahāyāna.

Ruegg makes a relevant point to a similar effect in his study of the history of Indian Madhyamaka, noting that so-called Yogācāra thinkers did not shy away from engaging with Nāgārjuna and did not obviously take him to represent a rival viewpoint. Ruegg writes:

> The existence of such commentaries on the MMK by leading authorities of the Vijñānavāda [i.e., Yogācāra] clearly indicate that Nāgārjuna's work was not considered to be the exclusive property of the Mādhyamikas in the narrow sense of a particular school, and that it was regarded as fundamental by Mahāyānist thinkers of more than one tendency (Ruegg 1981, 49).

Ruegg points out that Nāgārjuna's works were demonstrably influential for Mahāyāna thinkers of all stripes. That said, his description still presupposes a strong distinction between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra "tendencies" (as he puts it) for which the earliest clear precedent is Bhāviveka. Nonetheless, his main point stands: the figures we associate with early Yogācāra did not consider

Nāgārjuna's works to be controversial or to belong to another school. Rather than refute the *ārya*'s positions, they simply interpret them in accord with their Mahāyāna/Yogācāra viewpoint.

Engaging early Indian Yogācāra thinkers, Dan Lusthaus makes a similar observation:

…Yogācāra texts rarely challenge basic Madhyamaka, for example, Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, who are venerated in the Yogācāra tradition. Rather, when there is criticism, it is aimed at "those who misunderstand emptiness" (meaning later Mādhyamika authors who failed to properly understand the teachings of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva). Criticism is not leveled at the teachings of the founding figures. (Lusthaus 2015, 142).

Here again, while Lusthaus' point stands, his presentation does not reflect how early Yogācāra/Mahāyāna thinkers presented themselves or their doctrine. While these thinkers may acknowledge Nāgārjuna's status as a founding figure *for* Mādhyamikas, they would not consider Nāgārjuna himself to *be* a Mādhyamika. Ratnākaraśānti follows suit: it is clear in the MAV that he does not consider Nāgārjuna to be acceptable *despite* his Madhyamaka views. Nāgārjuna is an authoritative Mahāyāna figure who taught the correct view—notwithstanding the subset of Buddhists who claim to follow the *ārya* but unfortunately misinterpret that correct view.

A very clear pattern emerges from this brief survey, though it does not conform to the usual scholarly expectations. Rather than illuminating the development of a distinction between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, the foregoing suggests that these camps developed variant methods for framing Mahāyāna Buddhism and its internal debates. One of these methods—the bifurcation of Mahāyāna into Yogācāra and Madhyamaka—is now so overwhelmingly common that it is difficult to appreciate the idea that there would be an alternative. Acknowledging this second option—Mahāyāna versus pseudo-Mahāyāna—is crucial for appreciating Ratnākaraśānti's project. It is also essential for understanding why Ratnākaraśānti does not obviously fit with the categories of Yogācāra or Mādhyamika. Stated simply, he is difficult to categorize because he actively resists the validity of that bifurcation, opting instead for a distinction between Mahāyāna and pseudo-

Mahāyāna. This is difficult to appreciate because, at the same time, Ratnākaraśānti is arguing against an opponent who does take the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka split seriously. It is therefore necessary for him to engage this distinction even though he does not ultimately accept its validity.

This brings us to an initial conclusion that does not solve the doxographical conundrum but does shed light on why it seems so intractable. To a certain extent, Ratnākaraśānti uses both the above-explained methods for engaging the Mahāyāna. On the one hand, Ratnākaraśānti engages with Yogācāra and Madhyamaka as separate systems with particular characteristics. On the other hand, Ratnākaraśānti takes the other rubric—authentic versus deviant Mahāyāna—to be more important. That being the case, I argue that while Ratnākaraśānti criticizes [pseudo-]Mādhyamika opponents and advances a position that is consistent with Yogācāra, he is primarily following the rubric of "Mahāyāna versus pseudo-Mahāyāna" rather than "Madhyamaka versus Yogācāra."

Part II: Theoretical Background

The balance of this chapter will focus on briefly explicating other ideas and arguments that bear particular relevance for engaging with Ratnākaraśānti's MAV. This will begin with a survey of the main philosophical tenets identified with the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra tenet systems. While it must be acknowledged that the MAV attacks the notion that these are actually two separate systems, it is nonetheless necessary to be clear about how the distinction is understood by those who *do* uphold it. Stated differently: in order to fully appreciate Ratnākaraśānti's arguments in the MAV, it is necessary to understand who and what he is arguing *against*. In so doing, we will also engage figures and ideas—such as Dharmakīrti, *pramāṇa*, and the three natures—that inform Ratnākaraśānti's project. The reader should bear in mind that what follows is not a summary of

how Ratnākaraśānti understands these doctrines and figures, but rather how they are conceived more generally and how they may have been conceived in Ratnākaraśānti's own received tradition.

This section will first focus on Mādhyamikas' presentation—generally conceived—of the two truths and the doctrine of essencelessness (*niḥsvabhāvatā*). Following that, we will briefly engage the Yogācāra presentation of the three natures and eight types of consciousness. We will then engage a crucial distinction between these systems that is vital for understanding Ratnākaraśānti's intellectual project—the two types of negation that Yogācāra and Mādhyamika thinkers rely on, respectively.

Madhyamaka, the Two Truths, and the Critique of Natures

Some formulation of the doctrine of the two truths plays a role in every major Buddhist philosophical system—Abhidharma, Yogācāra, and Madhyamaka. That said, there is a wide variance in how the two truths are understood by these traditions, and in a Mahāyāna context the two truths are most often identified specifically with Madhyamaka. Ratnākaraśānti's own view of the two truths—discussed in the next chapter—is profoundly different from this presentation; in the context of understanding his Mādhyamika opponents on their own terms, we can note that Nāgārjuna's presentation of the two truths in the MMK is considered a hallmark of Madhyamaka thought.

The most detailed presentation of the two truths in the MMK is found in a series of verses in the twenty-fourth chapter. The terms are introduced in verse eight:

> The Dharma teaching of the Buddha rests on two truths: conventional truth and ultimate truth. //MMK 24.8//[74]

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[74] *dve satye samupāśritya buddhānāṃ dharmadeśanā / lokasaṃvṛtisatyaṃ ca satyaṃ ca paramārthataḥ //* (Siderits and Katsura 2013, 272).

Briefly stated, the conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*,[75] *kun rdzob bden pa*) is explained by Mādhyamikas as ordinary linguistic and conceptual conventions (*vyavahāra*), which are dependent designations. Along with the translation adopted here ("convention"), *saṃvṛti* can also mean "concealed" in the sense of being covered over[76] by ignorance. Siderits and Katsura gloss this etymology (following Candrakīrti) as "all those ways of thinking and speaking that conceal the real state of affairs from ordinary people" (2013, 272). Mādhyamikas, following Nāgārjuna, broadly agree that this involves the strong habit of imputation (*samāropa*, *sgro btags*). This specifically refers to the imputation of essence (or "self-essence," *svabhāva*)[77] onto phenomena that are interdependently-arisen and can therefore have no such essence.

The precise meaning of ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*, *don dam bden pa*) for Mādhyamikas in general and Nāgārjuna in particular is somewhat more contested, as decades of scholarly literature on the subject can attest.[78] That said, it is most often described in terms of "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*, *stong pa nyid*)—specifically, the emptiness of self-essence. For our purposes it will suffice to note that for Mādhyamikas, the ultimate truth is "insight into the true character of reality: that it is utterly devoid of existing entities" (Siderits and Katsura 2013, 272). Tillemans glosses this as the "cancellation view of negation," in which self-essence is negated but

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[75] This term is sometimes rendered as *saṃvṛttisatya*.

[76] This is the sense that figures most prominently in the Tibetan translation of *saṃvṛti*, *kun rdzob* ("completely covered" or "disguised").

[77] *svabhāva* is most often translated as "essence," "intrinsic existence" or some variation thereon. Because Ratnākaraśānti draws a firm distinction between two types of essence—unreal *svabhāva* and real **ātmya* (*bdag nyid*)—I consistently translate the former as self-essence in this dissertation in the interest of terminological clarity. For a relatively recent, sustained consideration of the term, cf. Westerhoff (2007).

[78] The sheer breadth of traditional and academic interpretations are on particularly clear display in two edited volumes: Dreyfus and McClintock (2003) and, more recently, Garfield and Westerhoff (2015).

no other mode of existence is actively affirmed (2016, 90–91).[79] This latter explanation is of particular interest in terms of the two types of negation, to which we now turn.

Two Kinds of Negation and their Attendant Arguments

Another crucial piece—more properly, pieces—of philosophical background are the two forms of negation prominent in Buddhist philosophical discourse. This is a vital point for understanding the program of the MAV because Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms of pseudo-Mādhyamika positions are rooted in two inextricable tenets: (a) the other-dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*) is a necessary basis for both conventional causality and liberating insight, and (b) non-arising is necessarily an affirming negation (*ma yin dgag, paryudāsa-pratiṣedha*) rather than a non-affirming negation (*med dgag, prasajya-pratiṣedha*).

Briefly stated, an affirming negation denies that *x* is the case but also implies some other state of affairs. For example, the phrase "owls, which are predatory birds, do not hunt during the day" implies that owls do hunt, just not during daylight. A non-affirming negation does not leave room for this kind of implication: "there is no elephant in this room" does not tell us anything about what *is* in the room. The latter form of negation is crucial for understanding Mādhyamika presentations of the ultimate truth, which is generally described in terms of the absence of some object of grasping—be it real things (*vastu, bhāva*), substantial existence (*dravyasat*), or intrinsic existence (*svabhāva*).

That said, for the most part[80] Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist thinkers of all stripes deploy both kinds of negations; examples of each can be found in the sections of the MAV under discussion

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[79] This discussion glosses over significant debate between Siderits (along with Garfield, Priest, et al.)—who tend to describe the ultimate in terms of the tidy paradox "the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth"—and Tillemans, who challenges that interpretation on several fronts. Cf. chapters three and four of Tillemans (2016, 67–94).

[80] Candrakīrti and Jayānanda are notable exceptions; cf. Vose (2009, passim).

here. However, after a certain point in the development of Indian Buddhist intellectual history, they became linked with the two types of argument that came to define the major "sub-schools" of Madhyamaka in the Tibetan imaginaire:[81] (a) *prasaṅga* (*thal 'gyur*, "consequence") arguments—where one party in a debate points out absurd or otherwise unwanted consequences in the opponent's position—came to characterize "*Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka;" and (b) *svatantra* (*rang rgyud*, "autonomous") arguments, otherwise characterized as "formal probative arguments," where a thinker presents arguments for her own position (Dreyfus and McClintock 2003, 6–7). These generally involved an appeal to the stylized logical formulations developed by *pramāṇa* theorists and became associated with so-called "Svātantrika Madhyamaka." As with the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka disjunct, the "Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika" distinction is generally thought to originate with Bhāviveka—though scholarly opinion varies somewhat about whether the origin lies in his criticisms of Buddhapālita (for *not* using autonomous arguments) or in Candrakīrti's criticism of Bhāviveka (*for* using them). It should be noted that Svātantrika Madhyamaka comes to be broken down into two further sub-types: those like Bhāviveka who assert external objects conventionally come to be known as Sautrāntika-Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas, and those like the Three Mādhyamikas of the East who deny external objects even conventionally are therefore called Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas. Of these groups, Ratnākaraśānti engages almost exclusively with the latter; some of his statements could even be taken to indicate that he does not consider Sautrāntika-Svātantrika-Mādhyamika positions to be valid iterations of the Mahāyāna.[82]

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[81] For more information, see Dreyfus and McClintock's introduction to their edited volume on "the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction" (2003).

[82] This is clear from Ratnākaraśānti's commentary on MMK XXIV.18, discussed in chapters two and three.

Yogācāra, the Three Natures, and the Eight Consciousnesses

The doctrine of the three natures (*trisvabhāva*) comes to be associated with Yogācāra thought as a corollary to the Madhyamaka two truths doctrine. While Yogācāra literature contains multiple accounts of the two-truths doctrine,[83] the parallel is somewhat justified insofar as the three natures are just as central to Yogācāra as the two truths are for Mādhyamikas. The three natures are particularly important for Yogācāra presentations of Abhidharma as found in, *inter alia*, the *Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra* (SNS) and *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (LAS), as well as the corpus of texts attributed to Asaṅga and Vasubandhu.[84]

Briefly stated, the three natures are: the imagined (or imputed, *parikalpitasvabhāva*); the other-dependent (*paratantrasvabhāva*); and the perfected (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*). These three natures function on a variety of levels and can be considered to simultaneously serve metaphysical, epistemological and hermeneutical purposes. Taken together, they describe a progression from unexamined apparent reality, saturated with dualistic conceptions and (unreal) imputations (*parikalpita*) to cognition of reality as it truly exists, free from duality and affliction (*pariniṣpanna*). The second nature, the "other-dependent" (*paratantra*) exists—albeit dependently—and serves as the basis for the deluded imputation of subjective (*grāhakākāra*) and objective (*grāhyākāra*) aspects of cognition. When the other-dependent is no longer subject to these delusory imputations of duality, it shines forth as the perfected.

On this view, the difference between a Buddha and an ordinary being hinges on whether reality (the other-dependent nature) is cognized correctly (perfected nature) or incorrectly (imputed

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[83] See Lusthaus (2010) for a broad survey of some of the more prominent of these accounts.
[84] Cf. Schmithausen (1987a) and Buescher (Buescher 2008) for detailed analyses these texts.

nature). Correct perception is, precisely, perception of the absence of the imputed nature in the other-dependent.

The doctrine of the three natures is tied to another closely related Yogācāra rubric, the cognitive model of eight consciousnesses, made up of the following: the six sense consciousnesses—i.e., consciousness of the five senses (*indriya*) with mentation (*manas*) as a sixth sense faculty; a seventh consciousness known as afflicted mind (*kliṣṭamanas*), which is responsible for the bifurcation into the duality of subject and object; and an eighth consciousness, known as the store-consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), which is composed of karmic seeds (*bīja*) and imprints (*vāsanā*)[85] that serve as the basis for the other seven consciousnesses. These eight types of consciousness depict how mind ordinarily functions in saṃsāra, while the three natures posit a trajectory through which consciousness ceases to be defiled.[86]

Imagination of the Unreal, Emptiness, and the Three Natures

The MVB discusses the three natures in two distinct ways, a practice that is echoed in the MAV. These two ways of discussing the three natures are the two "characteristics" referred to in the title of the first chapter of the MVB: "The Examination of Characteristics" (*Lakṣaṇapariccheda*): (1) affliction (*saṃkleśa*, *kun nas nyon mongs pa*) and (2) purification (*vyavadāna*, *rnam par byang ba*). Christian Bernert succinctly summarizes these two characteristics as "the processes active in the perpetual cycle of suffering and dissatisfaction (samsara) and in the process of liberation from this state (nirvana)" (2017, 13). The former, *affliction*, describes ordinary beings' impure perception, which corresponds to the imagined nature

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[85] Cf. Waldron (2003) and Schmithausen (1987b) for in-depth studies of the historical development of the eight-consciousness theory, particularly the *ālayavijñāna*.

[86] One major facet of the eight-consciousness theory is that it does not necessitate any kind of appeal to external objects (*bāhyārtha*) in explaining cognition.

and its basis, also understood as the impure aspect of the other-dependent nature, that is, the imagination of the unreal.[87] This is the primary focus of MVB 1.1-10.

The latter characteristic, *purification*, describes the emptiness of the other-dependent nature. This involves the recognition of emptiness, specifically the emptiness of imagined dualistic content in the other-dependent nature. The MAV treats this as the purifying aspect of the other-dependent nature. This is rooted in discussions in the second half of MVB I (v. 11-21). It is also discussed in the MVBB and MVBT commentaries on the third chapter ("The Examination of Reality," *Tattvapariccheda*). In sum, the three natures are used to describe affliction and purification with reference to ordinary beings' impure perception and the pure perception of the *ārya*s, respectively. These will be treated in turn.

Imagination of the Unreal as the Basis for Affliction

After an opening verse summarizing the text as a whole,[88] the second verse of the MV declares that "imagination of the unreal exists" (*abhūtaparikalpo 'sti*), then situates emptiness and duality as they occur (*vidyate*) regarding that imagination. Vasubandhu's *Bhāṣya* glosses this first verse in a manner that seems to directly inspire Ratnākaraśānti's commentary on verse three of the MAV. D'Amato translates this section of the MVB as follows:

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[87] *abhūtaparikalpa*, *yang dag ma yin pa'i kun rtog*. This phrase is often translated with the potentially misleading phrase "unreal imagination." D'Amato, who uses this phrase, clarifies in a footnote that this "should not be understood to mean that imagination is itself unreal, but rather that it imagines something to be unreal (2012, 117 f.n. 1). *Pace* D'Amato, I do not think that a footnote at the start of a translation serves sufficient guard against the possibility of misinterpreting an important term that occurs throughout the translated text, particularly for inexperienced readers of Buddhist thought. Despite its inelegance, I translate *abhūtaparikalpa* with the more precise "imagination of the unreal" throughout this dissertation. When citing D'Amato, I also replace his rendering with mine, in brackets.

[88] There is some disagreement about whether the opening verse of the text, which summarizes its contents, is part of chapter one; this leads to some inconsistency in numbering the verses. Pandeya (1971, 9–13) treats the homage as part of the first chapter, but most English translations (such as D'Amato 2012) take the first verse as an introduction and treat the above verses as the start of chapter one. For the sake of consistency with other English translations, I follow the latter strategy here. The reader should therefore be cautioned that my numbering is not consistent with Pandeya's Sanskrit edition. Thus, the verses cited above are listed as MVB I.1-2; Pandeya treats them as I.2-3.

"Duality" means subject and object.[89] And "emptiness" means leaving behind the positing of subject and object in [imagination of the unreal]. "That exists in this as well"[90] means that [imagination of the unreal exists in emptiness]. Thus, one perceives things as they really are: "This is empty of what does not exist here"; one knows things as they really are: "But what remains here, that does exist here." This is how one arrives at a correct definition of emptiness. (D'Amato 2012, 117–18).

The unreal objects imagined by the imagined nature do not exist at all; this describes ordinary dualistic experience. But there *is* an existent ground for affliction: in its impure manifestation as the imagination of the unreal, the other-dependent nature is responsible for the entirety of ordinary phenomenal reality insofar as it is the interdependently-existent ground upon which the phenomenal experiences of the imagined nature are projected.

This ground for mistaken experience consists primarily in consciousness, as identified in MVB I.8:

> Imagination of the unreal comprises the mind and mental factors of
> the three realms. Regarding these, consciousness perceives an object
> while the mental factors attend to its particulars. //MVB I.8//[91]

The imagination of the unreal is broken down into a mind (*citta*, *sems*), i.e. a basic cognitive event, and the secondary mental factors (*caitta*, *sems byung*) that accompany the cognition; for example, one's feelings and associations about it. This system summarizes the condition of ordinary sentient beings, who imagine (per the term *abhūtaparikalpa*) reality to be different than it is. This produces the experience of the imagined nature. Phenomenal experience arises by the power of karmic imprints (*vāsanā*) based in habits accrued over innumerable lifetimes. These experiences are parsed in terms of a cognizing subject ("grasper," *grāhaka*, *'dzin pa*) and cognized objects ("grasped," *grāhya*, *bzung ba*) which in turn produce the mistaken idea that we are truly existent

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[89] Gold argues that this gloss of duality specifically as "grasper/grasped" is an innovation by Vasubandhu that is not consistent with the earliest strata of Yogācāra literature (Gold 2015a, 158–69).

[90] This translation tracks the phrase "and it also exists in that" in my translation.

[91] *abhūtaparikalpaś ca citta caittās tridhātukāḥ / tatrārthadṛṣṭir vijñānam tadviśeṣe tu caittasāḥ //* (Nagao 1964, 20).

selves experiencing a truly existent external world. Sthiramati's MVBT glosses the cognizing subject as "the appearance of self and representations (*ātma-vijñapti-pratibhāsam*) and the cognized object as "consciousness that has the appearance of [referential] objects and sentient beings" (*artha-sattva-pratibhāsaṃ vijñānam*) (D'Amato 2012, 117 n. 3). These dualistic structures are the products of ignorance and are, fundamentally, errors. Hence, dualistic experiences are empty in the sense that how things appear—as if a stable subject is apprehending a separate object—is not how things actually *are*. But MVB I.1 also affirms that imagination of the unreal— the cognitive structuring which, according to the third verse, "generates the appearance of [referential] objects, sentient beings, self, and representation" (D'Amato 2012, 119)[92]—*does* exist, insofar as it serves as the basis of affliction and purification for unenlightened beings. This complex model will be discussed in further detail as the dissertation progresses; with this brief introduction in view, we should now turn to the basis for purification.

The Three Natures and Purification in the MVB

The above depiction of the imagination of the unreal is quite grim, depicting beings who are constantly experiencing suffering for no reason other than their own misapprehension of their actual circumstances. The MVB does offer a remedy, however, as a basis for purification. That remedy is emptiness. The text defines emptiness in two ways:

> The definition of emptiness is the non-existence of duality and the existence of that non-existence. [It is] neither existent nor non-existent. The definition [of emptiness] is neither the same nor different. //MVB I.13// (D'Amato 2012, 125)[93]

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[92] *arthasattvātmavijñaptipratibhāsaṃ prajāyate* / I.3ab (Nagao 1964, 19).
[93] *dvayābhāvo hy abhāvasya bhāvaḥ śūnyasya lakṣaṇam / na bhāvo nāpi cābhāvaḥ na pṛthaktvaikalakṣaṇam* //MVB I.13// (Nagao 1964, 23).

Per the basis of affliction, the dualistic experience of the imagined nature does not exist in the other-dependent. This verse goes further, making the confusing claim that this non-existence does, itself, actually exist. But this confusion is clarified by the synonyms of emptiness provided in MVB I.14: suchness (*tathatā*), the limit of reality (*bhūtakoṭi*), the absence of signs (*animitta*) the nature of the ultimate (*paramārthatā*), and *dharmadhātu* (Nagao 1964, 23).[94] Thus, the "existence" of emptiness can be understood through its more cataphatic synonyms. The MVBB informs us that the ultimate is so-called "because it belongs to the scope of noble awareness—because it is the object of ultimate awareness" (*āryajñānagocaratvāt paramajñānaviṣayatvāt*); the name *dharmadhātu* is used "because it is the cause of noble phenomena" (*āryadharmahetutvāt*)(Nagao 1964, 23–24). Thus, "emptiness" in the MVB corpus implies much more than the simple negation of duality. It is itself an object of awareness which has qualities and is directly apprehended by *ārya*s. As such, it serves as the basis for purification, as elucidated in MVB and MVBB at I.16-17:

> [Emptiness] is afflicted and purified, tainted and untainted.
> Its purity is asserted [to be like] the purity of the ocean, gold, and
> space //MVB I.16//[95]

Imagination of the unreal and emptiness are the same in nature; they are distinguished only in their functions as the bases of affliction and purification. Significantly, this purity is specifically described as "not being impermanent" (*anityā na bhavati*) in the context of a theoretical objection Vasubandhu raises at MVB I.16b: "if having been tainted, how is it not impermanent, since it undergoes change?"[96] He answers, explicating I.16cd, "there is simply no change in its nature

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[94] Ratnākaraśānti explicitly cites MVB I.14 when discussing emptiness in the MAU *ad* P 608.12-14; cf. Yiannopoulos (2012, 224–25).

[95] *saṃkliṣṭā ca viśuddhā ca samalā nirmalā ca sā / abdhātukanakākāśaśuddhivac chuddhir iṣyate //* (Nagao 1964, 24).

[96] *kathaṃ vikāra dharmmiṇītvād anityā na bhavati //* (Nagao 1964, 24).

when adventitious taints (*āgantukamala*) have been removed" (D'Amato 2012, 127).[97] This pure nature remains and, in some sense, exists.

In terms of the three natures, the impure dependent nature is impure precisely because it includes these "taints," i.e., the continuity of karmic seeds that produce and sustain suffering and *saṃsāra*. The imagined nature consists in ordinary (i.e., tainted) experience. But these taints are described as adventitious, i.e. non-essential, just as impurities in gold do not change the nature of gold. There is pure aspect to the other-dependent nature—*qua* basis of purification—that (like the aforementioned gold) is unaffected by such stains: emptiness, here more clearly understood as suchness (*tathatā*). The fact that purity remains, even when the dualistic impressions of the imagined nature are removed, is the perfected nature.

This highlights another important distinction between the imagination of the unreal, on the one hand, and emptiness which is the expanse of purity on the other: the former is impermanent and constantly shifting, while emptiness—once it has been thoroughly purified of karmic defilements, i.e., once full liberation has occurred—does not change. The shared nature between imagination of the unreal and emptiness is such that sentient beings are not utterly helpless; they possess that capacity to achieve liberation. Even though that is that case, the states of ordinary beings in *saṃsāra* and the state of full enlightenment—which is permanent, changeless, and pure—possess very different qualities. Ordinary experience is impermanent and conditioned (*saṃskṛta*), i.e. fabricated, while the enlightened state is permanent and unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*), i.e. it is naturally occurring and not dependent on other factors.

Recalling that the Yogācāra system considers itself to be in perfect accord with the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, we should briefly return to Vasubandhu's commentary on MVB I.2:

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[97] *svabhāvāntaramanāpadyamānāyā āgantukamalāpagamāt //* (Nagao 1964, 24).

"Not empty" is with respect to emptiness and imagination of the unreal. "Not non-empty" is with respect to the duality of subject and object. "Everything" means the conditioned—i.e., imagination of the unreal—as well as the unconditioned—i.e., emptiness. And it is established—it is specified—[that things are neither empty nor non-empty] because of the existence of the imagination of the unreal, the non-existence of duality, and the existence of emptiness in the imagination of the unreal, as well as of imagination of the unreal in [emptiness]. This indeed is the middle way: that everything is neither exclusively empty nor exclusively non-empty. This, therefore, is in accordance with texts such as the Prajñāpāramitā [sūtras] which state, "All this is neither empty nor non-empty."[98]

By arguing for the continuity of Nāgārjuna's compositions with Maitreya's, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Ratnākaraśānti is deliberately echoing this rhetoric found in Vasubandhu's commentary, just as he echoes the philosophical content of the MVB corpus as a whole.

Dharmakīrti and Pramāṇa Discourse

Along with Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, a third trend in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism must be briefly introduced in order to appreciate Ratnākaraśānti's intellectual context. Properly speaking, this is an important piece of the earlier story of the fissure that emerges between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka; that said, for the present purposes it is more important as a theoretical piece of Ratnākaraśānti's enterprise than as a facet of Indian Buddhist intellectual history. I refer to this trend as Pramāṇa Theory. In Buddhism, this trend is most strongly associated with the Buddhist thinkers Dignāga (c. sixth century) and Dharmakīrti. Pramāṇa Theory is not usually considered by Tibetan doxographers as a tenet system per se; rather, it is a philosophical method for argument that emphasizes logical inference and epistemology. Pramāṇa Theory is not the sole

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[98] As before, I have slightly altered D'Amato's translation (2012, 118) by replacing his "unreal imagination" with "the imagination of the unreal." The Sanskrit of this passage reads: *na śūnyaṃ śūnyatayā cābhūtaparikalpena ca / na cāśūnyaṃ dvayena grāhyena grāhakeṇa ca / sarvaṃ saṃskṛtaṃ cābhūtaparikalpākhyam asaṃskṛtaṃ ca śūnyatākhyam / vidhīyate nirdiśyate / satvād abhūtaparikalpasya / asattvād dvayasya / satvāc ca śūnyatāyā abhūtaparikalpe tasyāṃ cābhūtaparikalpasya sā ca madhyamā pratipat / yat sarvam naikāntena śūnyaṃ naikāntenāśūnyam / evam ayaṃ pāṭhaḥ prajñāpāramitādiṣv anulomito bhavati—sarvam idaṃ na śūnyaṃ nāpi cā 'śūnyamiti //* (Nagao 1964, 18).

property of Buddhist thinkers; rather, it is a vital component of philosophical conversations throughout India that took place both within and across individual intellectual traditions. Laying out the basic principles of Pramāṇa Theory, Dunne writes:

> The primary concern of Pramāṇa Theory is the determination of what constitutes indubitable or indisputable knowledge and the reliable means of attaining it... these thinkers continually refer not only to previous texts within their own traditions, but also in others' traditions. In employing such deliberate intertextuality, Pramāṇa Theorists do not simply note what had been thought in the past; rather, they attempt to justify a particular interpretation by responding to the criticisms of others, whether within or outside their own traditions. (2004, 16–17).

While major figures in the early phases of Buddhist Pramāṇa Theory—particularly Dignāga and Dharmakīrti—are generally associated with the Yogācāra school, Pramāṇa Theory constitutes a major development within Indian Buddhism as a whole. It is ubiquitous in the sense that Indian Buddhist thinkers following Dharmakīrti integrated Pramāṇa Theory into their presentations. Any thinker who did *not* accept and utilize Pramāṇa Theory would be expected to defend that position.[99]

Two aspects of Dharmakīrti's thought are worth highlighting here. First of all, he deployed a strategy of shifting perspective known as "the sliding scales of analysis" (McClintock 2010, 85–91).[100] The upshot of this technique is that Dharmakīrti will periodically abandon a level of analysis at which he has been presenting in favor of a subtler viewpoint. In the context of the MAV, it is important to note that Dharmakīrti will switch from a level of analysis at which external objects *could* exist (which Dunne calls the "External Realist" viewpoint and Dreyfus refers to as the "Standard Account") to one in which they could not (a viewpoint aligned with Yogācāra).

The second aspect of Dharmakīrti's thought informs Ratnākaraśānti's primary criticism of pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents—namely, that they cannot adduce a coherent account of causality.

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[99] It is worth highlighting that in India, Candrakīrti and Jayānanda were the primary exponents of this rejection of *pramāṇa*.

[100] See Dunne (2004, 53–79) and Dreyfus, who refers to this as Dharmakīrti's "ascending scales of analysis" (Dreyfus 1997, 98–105).

Consistent with (Indian) Pramāṇa Theory writ large, Dharmakīrti asserts that the object of a valid

cognition (*prameya*)[101] must be real (*sat*) in the sense of being causally efficacious. John Dunne

provides useful commentary on this point:

> The connotations of *sat* converge on the notion of something that is present in a substantial fashion, be it directly or indirectly. Such an object is "real" because only "the real" can be the content of a correct or indubitable knowledge event: for Pramāṇa Theorists, it makes no sense to speak of an indubitable cognitive event whose object is unreal (2004, 35–36).

Ratnākaraśānti emphasizes this point several times over the course of his criticisms of [pseudo-

]Mādhyamikas in the MAV. By definition, self-proclaimed Mādhyamikas argue that nothing can

have an essence (*svabhāva*); Ratnākaraśānti argues that they are therefore unable to present an

account of *pramāṇa*. He further argues that an account of *pramāṇa* is vital to the Mahāyāna

enterprise; therefore, [pseudo-]Mādhyamikas cannot be properly considered Buddhist.

Ratnākaraśānti on Pramāṇa and the Other-Dependent Nature

Before turning to the text of the MAV itself, it is worth briefly discussing Ratnākaraśānti's

presentation of the other-dependent nature in relation to Pramāṇa Theory. This relation plays a

crucial role in his arguments. Stated succinctly: Ratnākaraśānti holds that the other-dependent

nature is synonymous with clarity which is an all-pervasive non-dual awareness. Ratnākaraśānti

describes this variously as clarity (*gsal ba*), luminosity (*'od gsal*), and self-awareness (*rang rig*).[102]

This clarity is one of two necessary conditions for the possibility of phenomenal content, the other

being karmic imprints (i.e., *vāsanā*s) that result from ignorance. These habits distort clarity such

that non-dual awareness appears as ordinary dualistic cognitions—e.g., a subject sees a blue object

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[101] Dunne translates *prameya* as "instrumental object," but his gloss is consistent with my translation: "the object of indubitable knowledge derived from an instrument of knowledge or *pramāṇa*" (Dunne 2004, 35).

[102] *gsal ba* and *'od gsal* variously translate *prabhāsvara* and *prakāśa*; *rang rig* generally translates *svasaṃvitti* or *svasaṃvedana*.

that seems to exist "out there." Because these dualistic cognitions are in some kind of discord—i.e., they are not *avisaṃvāda*—they are not *pramāṇas* in any strong sense. However, when clarity is separated from these distortions it becomes a candidate—more precisely, *the only possible candidate*—for being a *pramāṇa*, because it is the only thing that could appear non-deceptively.[103]

Ratnākaraśānti's view of the other-dependent as clarity is prefigured in the MVB corpus. As has been discussed, those texts distinguish between what I call "impure" and "pure" dependent natures, divided in terms of its modes of affliction (*saṃkleśa*) and purification (*vyavadāna*). The former is the manifestation of the imagination of the unreal, which produces the phenomenal content and dualistic structure of the imagined nature. For the most part, the other-dependent is explicated in the MVB corpus in terms of emptiness—specifically, the emptiness of this dualistic structuring. This emptiness is cast as an affirming negation: duality is negated, but other qualities—most importantly, clarity—are affirmed. This relationship between emptiness and clarity is explicitly described toward the end of the first chapter of the MVB, in the context of "demonstrating emptiness" (*śūnyatā-sādhana*). D'Amato translates the root text with Vasubandhu's commentary:

> It [emptiness] is neither afflicted nor unafflicted, neither pure nor impure. //MVB I.22ab

How is it not afflicted or impure? By its very nature—

> Due to the luminosity of the mind. //MVB I.22c//

How is it not unafflicted or pure?

> Due to the adventitiousness of affliction. //MVB I.22d//

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[103] This is explicitly stated in the MAV *ad* verse 21, discussed in Chapter 5.

This is how the indicated aspects of emptiness are demonstrated (D'Amato 2012, 129–30).[104]

This passage describes the other-dependent nature in both of its aspects, beginning with clarity—or, as D'Amato translates, luminosity. Ratnākaraśānti's interpretation of the other-dependent closely follows this passage, describing these two modes as variant presentations of a single nature. Thus, even when false images are present—i.e., when other-dependent nature manifests as the imagination of the unreal—clarity remains the fundamental essence of all cognition. Because that essence exists, the imagination of the unreal also exists; it can therefore provide a basis for the appearance of false phenomena such as blue. This point is central to Ratnākaraśānti's presentation of phenomenal appearances, and we shall return to it throughout the balance of this dissertation.

Pramāṇa Theory in MAV: The Role of the Three Aspects of an Inference

It is important to emphasize that Ratnākaraśānti's attacks on pseudo-Mādhyamika accounts of *pramāṇa* presume a basic level of shared presuppositions, without which they would not have any traction. These are, most basically, the two forms of *pramāṇa* accepted in Buddhist discourse—direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*). Direct perception will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five; for the time being, it is more useful to focus on the niceties of inference. Indian Buddhists who claim to uphold Pramāṇa Theory—including Ratnākaraśānti, Śāntarakṣita[105] and, following him, Kamalaśīla—necessarily accept the basic tenets of inference

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[104] *na kliṣṭā nāpi vākliṣṭā śuddhāśuddhā na caiva sā* / *kathaṃ na kliṣṭā nāpi cāśuddhā* / *prakṛtāiva* / *prabhāsvaratvāc cittasya* / *kathaṃ nākliṣṭā na śuddhā* / *kleśasyāgantukatvataḥ* //I.22// evaṃ śūnyatāyā uddiṣṭaḥ prabhedaḥ sādhito bhavati // (Nagao 1964, 27). Following Nagao's convention, the root verses are in bold to distinguish them from Vasubandhu's commentary.

[105] At TS verse 1361cd, Śāntarakṣita defines inference as "the vision (or experience) or an inferential object through a triply characterized logical sign (*liṅga*)" (McClintock 2010, 82–83). *svārthaṃ trirūpato liṅgād anumeyārthadarśanam* / (2010, 83 f.n. 217). Cf. also Jha's translation, which numbers this as verse 1362 (1937, 679).

as presented by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti.[106] Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla discuss inference in the most depth in the TS and TSP—particularly in the seventeenth chapter, the examination of inference (*anumānaparīkṣā*, verses 1361-1485). In these works they echo Dharmakīrti's strategy of writing mainly from a Sautrāntika perspective, occasionally making Yogācāra arguments, and only indirectly or implicitly pointing to a Madhyamaka stance(McClintock 2010, 37–38).[107] It is worth noting that Ratnākaraśānti's account of inference—and *pramāṇa* in general—is broadly consistent with the Yogācāra-inflected presentations given in the TS and TSP. The problems arise from Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's presentation of *pramāṇa* in a specifically Madhyamaka context—especially the MA and its commentaries.

Ratnākaraśānti's Pramāṇa-based arguments against Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla—discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation—center around the basic critique that Mādhyamikas cannot offer a coherent account of inference. For that reason, it is worth briefly laying out just what is meant by the word "inference" (or, more precisely, "*anumāna*") here. All of these thinkers accept that an inference has three aspects (*trairūpya*, *tshul gsum*) that are also known as the "triply characterized logical sign"[108] and the "threefold evidence."[109] Stated briefly, these relate the subject (*pakṣadharma*), evidence (*hetu* or *liṅga*), and probandum (*sādhya*) of an inference. They do so in the following ways:

(1) The property that is to be established as present in the probandum is definitely present in the subject (*pakṣadharmatā*).

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[106] Dignāga sets out the three aspects in his *Hetucakra*. Anacker has suggested that this formulation does not meaningfully differ from Vasubandhu's description of inference in his *Vādavidhi*, implying that the latter figure should be considered the originator of the schema (1984, 34).

[107] In a later article McClintock considers whether Kamalaśīla's Madhyamaka stance might have informed his discussion of *ākāra*s in the TSP. She makes a strong case there that Madhyamaka views did influence the trajectory of arguments in the TS and TSP, despite not being explicitly discussed (2014).

[108] McClintock (2010, 82–83).

[109] Dunne (2004, 34–35, f.n. 45).

(2) The pervasion (*anvaya-vyāpti*), which Dunne glosses as "a state of affairs such that wherever the evidence is present, the predicate must be present"—e.g., in inferring fire from the visible presence of smoke, "there is smoke only where there is fire" (Dunne 2004, 28–29).

(3) The negative pervasion (*vyatireka-vyāpti*),[110] i.e., the fact that the evidence is *not* present in other circumstances apart from the predicate—"wherever there is no fire, there is necessarily no smoke" (2004, 29).[111]

This formulation builds on Dignāga's earlier logical proofs, which rely on evidence and are therefore necessarily inductive in nature (Dunne 2004, 148–49). Dharmakīrti insists on stronger logical criteria such that "the relation must always amount to an *avinābhāvaniyama*: a nomological 'rule' (*niyama*) or restriction such that the evidence (*hetu, liṅga*) does not occur (*na bhavati*) without (*vinā*) the predicate (*sādhya*)" (2004, 150).

The crucial point here is that Dharmakīrti's system of inference—which all of these thinkers claim to correctly uphold—depends on establishing existence in some manner. For example, the existence of smoke—which is identified through direct perception—allows for the inference of fire in a particular location. The MAV strenuously argues that [pseudo-]Mādhyamika opponents are either unable or unwilling to grant smoke the degree of existence that would allow that inference to prove anything. His sophisticated arguments about why this is the case—and the intensely negative conclusions he adduces for pseudo-Mādhyamika thinkers—will be drawn out throughout this dissertation; for the time being it is sufficient to simply identify this piece of common philosophical ground and to highlight its import for the trajectory of the MAV.

This chapter has surveyed much of the vital historical and theoretical background materials necessary for engaging the text of the MAV. While the following chapters will also consider

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[110] The latter two are often referred to as positive and negative concomitance. Cf. Dunne (2004, 28 f.n. 36) for discussion of these terms.

[111] For a thorough but very technical discussion of the three aspects from the perspective of Mokṣākaragupta, a near-contemporary of Ratnākaraśānti, cf. Kajiyama (1998, 63–76).

aspects of Indian Buddhist intellectual history and philosophical background, much of the necessary material is now in view. That being the case, we are now in a position to engage with Ratnākaraśānti's MAV with sufficient appreciation for both the content and the context of his arguments.

Chapter Two
Clarifying Nāgārjuna's Intent: Two Truths, Three Natures, and the Yogācāra Background of the MAV (verses 1-4)

Introduction

This chapter identifies and explicates the overarching rhetorical agenda of Ratnākaraśānti's MAV, which (per its title) I describe as "clarifying Nāgārjuna's intent." This title is inspired by the *Sūtra Clarifying the Intent* (*Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra*, hereafter SNS). As we shall see, this *sūtra* presents the definitive meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) literature in positive terms, so as to ward off nihilistic interpretations. The MAV has a similar agenda regarding Nāgārjuna: it sets out to "clarify" the *ārya*'s presentation of the Middle Way, refuting the nihilistic interpretations of pseudo-Mādhyamikas.

While the stated goal of the MAV—presented in verse two, discussed below—is to explain the two truths, this chapter will demonstrate that this concern must be understood in a very particular way. Despite their ostensible import, the two truths are paid curiously little attention in the body of the text. After the opening sections, there are only a few brief passages that directly engage the two truths; moreover, among those, the MAV is overwhelmingly more concerned with clarifying what the two truths are *not* than on offering a correct presentation of what they *are*. Specifically, Ratnākaraśānti "explains" that the two truths imply and require the three natures as a superseding category. In conjunction with this argument, Ratnākaraśānti sets out to prove that Nāgārjuna and his teachings fit comfortably within his vision of Mahāyāna Buddhism—which requires him to argue convincingly that Nāgārjuna accepted the doctrine of the three natures. According to Ratnākaraśānti, Nāgārjuna never intended the two truths to function in the absence of the three natures, and pseudo-Mādhyamikas are misunderstanding his intentions by asserting

that he did. The bulk of the MAV engages with this negative perspective—what the two truths *are not*. A positive explanation—what the two truths *are*—is offered only at the close of the MAV: at verses 42-44 he describes them as the scope of ordinary and enlightened cognition.[112]

In order to explicate these critical aspects of the MAV, this chapter will cite and discuss passages from that text wherein all three *ārya*s—Maitreya, Asaṅga, and Nāgārjuna—are described as sharing the same view. According to Ratnākaraśānti, all three rely on the three natures as a primary liberative framework; furthermore, of the three, Maitreya's presentation should be taken as definitive. In the course of "clarifying Nāgārjuna's intent," the MAV also presents the two truths as the first part of a fourfold list in the discourse of Mahāyāna abhidharma. Here, the two truths characterize two types of perception: (a) how ordinary beings experience the world (conventionally) and (b) the experience of the *ārya*s and other enlightened beings (ultimate). Crucially, Ratnākaraśānti presents the two truths as incomplete on their own; they can only be understood within a larger Mahāyāna framework that is primarily based in the doctrine of the three natures.[113]

As a result, the MAV offers a unified vision of Mahāyāna Buddhism with Maitreya serving as the principal interpreter of the Buddha's speech. This speech includes the vast corpus of the Perfection of Wisdom literature but privileges the SNS and *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (LAS) as the most important scriptures. This over-arching Mahāyāna view also includes Dharmakīrti's epistemology, particularly the *Pramāṇavārttika* (PV). In short, the MAV sends a clear message to its audience that the Mahāyāna is internally consistent: authoritative scriptures (i.e., the SNS and LAS), authoritative commentators (the three *ārya*s) and authoritative epistemologists (Dharmakīrti) all

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[112] These passages will be treated toward the close of this chapter.
[113] See below, "The MAV's Presentation of the Two Truths."

articulate the same view. This unified Mahāyāna position includes accepting the three natures. Standing in stark contrast to this unified vision are the pseudo-Mādhyamikas—a group who misunderstand Nāgārjuna's intent and, by extension, the Mahāyāna. Exploring Ratnākaraśānti's presentation of the Mahāyāna—specifically, his interpretation of Nāgārjuna's works—will pave the way for the analysis of his criticisms of pseudo-Mādhyamikas in the following chapters.

Outline of the Chapter

This chapter will begin with a focus on MAV verse two, which identifies Ratnākaraśānti's goal in composing the text: to correctly explain the two truths. The second verse also declares Maitreya as the highest authority regarding the Buddha's words; Nāgārjuna, though an ārya and therefore an authority, is cast as a lesser figure who does not present the correct Mahāyāna as thoroughly or clearly as Maitreya.

The chapter will go on to outline Ratnākaraśānti's general view of the Middle Path, with special attention to what I take to be the main sources for his presentation. In particular, it will highlight Ratnākaraśānti's strong reliance on Maitreya's *Madhyāntavibhāga* (MVB) along with its commentaries—Vasubandhu's *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya* (MVBB) and Sthiramati's *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā* (MVBT).[114] I refer to these collectively as the "MVB corpus."[115]

With this in view, the bulk of this chapter analyzes Ratnākaraśānti's citations of three key verses by Nāgārjuna: *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* (YṢ) 21 and 34, and *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK) XXIV.18. Ratnākaraśānti deploys these verses in order to argue that Nāgārjuna presented the three natures explicitly in the YṢ and implicitly in the MMK, and that the former text represents his final

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[114] I rely on Nagao's Sanskrit edition of the MVB and MVBB (1964). Since I do not have ready access to a better edition of the MVBT I rely—somewhat cautiously—on Pandeya's edition (1971).

[115] This grouping follows D'Amato 2012. Here I use MVB to refer to the *Madhyāntavibhāga* instead of D'Amato's "MĀV" and Gold's "MAV," so as to avoid confusion with Ratnākaraśānti's MAV.

intention. This highlights the distinction he draws between Nāgārjuna's own presentation of the two truths versus the pseudo-Mādhyamikas' misinterpretation. The chapter will then attend to the rhetorical aspects of Ratnākaraśānti's presentation by considering the juxtaposition of quotations by Nāgārjuna with those of the LAS and PV. I argue that these citations are designed to show the internal consistency of Mahāyāna sources as a whole, while implicitly highlighting their tension with Sarvālīkavāda, which Ratnākaraśānti considers to be pseudo-Mādhyamika positions. The closing section of this chapter presents the MAV's positive description of the two truths as a means for describing the cognitions that arise from the three natures.

The Opening Verses of the MAV

The MAV begins with a verse in homage to Buddha Śākyamuni,[116] after which Ratnākaraśānti sets forth his primary intention for composing the treatise: to clarify that the Middle Path was taught by Maitreya and to explicate the two truths. He proceeds to illustrate the harmony in the intentions of Maitreya, Asaṅga, and Nāgārjuna, and evaluates their relative authority based on their respective stations on the Bodhisattva path. The verse and its commentary run as follows:

> The two truths, which were stated by Maitreya and Asaṅga, and also accepted[117] by Nāgārjuna, will be explained here through *pramāṇa* together with scripture. //2//[118]

> The two truths are the ultimate truth and the conventional truth. In this regard, the phrase will be explained here[119] indicates the subject matter of this treatise. The remainder [of the verse indicates] that what is established through unerring worldly *pramāṇa*—perception and inference—is indeed proven.

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[116] See the Appendix. The only doctrinally significant aspect of this homage verse is Ratnākaraśānti's affirmation that Buddhas possess three enlightened bodies (*trikāya*), though this may not be a rejection of a fourth "Essential Body" (*svabhāvikakāya*). For further discussion cf. Makransky (1997, 269–27) and Seton (2015, 111–14).

[117] *bzhed pa* is likely a translation of either *iṣṭa* or *abhimata* (Negi 1993, 5339–40). Seton translates this as "asserted;" while justifiable in the context of the MAU (Seton 2015, 64), it is unlikely here, given that the MAV goes on to argue that Nāgārjuna did not consistently assert his final intention.

[118] *byams pa thogs med kyis gsungs shing / klu sgrub kyis kyang bzhed pa yi / tshad ma lung dang ldan pa yis / bden pa gnyis 'dir bshad par bya* //2// P 263.5-7; D 102a6-7.

[119] P reads *'di*; I follow Pk and N reading *'dir*, which is consistent with the root verse.

> Also, the Lord is a supreme *pramāṇa*; therefore, scripture is also included. In the phrase *pramāna* together with scripture, scripture indicates the Mahāyāna. Only *ārya*s are *pramāṇa*s regarding the profound meaning of those texts, and [those *ārya*s] are said to be Ārya Maitreya and so on.[120]

This passage first identifies the two truths as the main subject matter of the MAV, then proceeds to discuss the ways in which they can be properly understood. First of all, (a) the truths can be proven as true through direct perception and inference. The passage then cautions that this philosophical reasoning must be accompanied by a proper understanding of (b) the enlightened speech of the Lord (*bhagavān*), i.e., the Mahāyāna *sūtras* taught by Śākyamuni Buddha. This proper understanding can only be gleaned through reliance on (c) the *ārya*s, i.e. those who have directly experienced reality. Concerning the Mahāyāna, these *ārya* Bodhisattvas are the specific means for understanding the Buddha's word. In particular, a disciple should consult "the statements of Maitreya and others"[121]—"others" here indicating Asaṅga and, to a lesser extent, Nāgārjuna.[122]

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[120] *bden pa gnyis zhes bya ba ni don dam pa'i bden pa dang / kun rdzob kyi bden pa'o // de las 'dir bshad par zhes bya ba 'dis rab tu byed pa'i brjod par bya ba bstan to // lhag mas ni phyin ci ma log par 'jig rten pa'i tshad ma mngon sum dang rjes su dpag pa des grub pa ni grub pa kho na'o // bcom ldan 'das kyang mchog tu tshad ma yin te / de bas na lung yang gzung ngo // tshad ma lung dang ldan pa yis / zhes bya ba la lung ni 'dir theg pa chen po ste / de'i yang zab mo'i don la 'phags pa 'ba' zhig tshad ma yin te / de ni byams pa la sogs pas gsung pa yin no //* P 263.7-264.4 D 102a7-102b2. Cf. Hong Luo's recent article for an alternative translation (2018, 15–16).

[121] Rigral's commentary on verse 2 lists Maitreya's authoritative "statements" as the MVB, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, and *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*. Rigral then lists Asaṅga's authoritative works elliptically: *rnam par gtan la dbab pa bsdu ba dang / sdom rnam gnyis.* The first reference is most likely the **Viniścaya-saṃgrahaṇī*—i.e., the *Yogācārabhūmiviniścayasaṃgrahaṇī*, also known as the *Yogācārabhūminirṇayasaṃgraha* (D 4038). The second refers "two compendia" (*sdom rnam gnyis*, **samuccayadvaya*). One of these is certainly the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*. The second is most likely the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*; *Mahāyānasamuccaya* is attested as a variant title (Zhang 1985, 1480). Rigral's commentary reads: *bshad pa'i dam bca'i sgo nas rang dga' spang pa la **byams pa** ni mdo sde brgyan dang / dbu mtha' dang / chos nyid dang / **thogs med** kyis rnam par gtan la dbab pa bsdu ba dang / sdom rnam gnyis nas **gsung** la // **klu sgrub kyis kyang bzhed pa** ni… bka' tha ma don dam par nges pa'i dgongs pa bzhad pa chos kyi dbyings su bstod pa dang / theg chen nyi shu pa dang / rim lnga dang / rigs pa drug cu pa la sogs pa…//* (418.4-7).

It is important to note that Rigral's citations reflect his own conception of the *ārya*s' works, not Ratnākaraśānti's. For example, Rigral describes the *Dharmadhātuvibhāga* as one of Maitreya's authoritative treatises; I have not seen evidence that Ratnākaraśānti was even aware of that text. According to tradition, it was re-discovered by Ratnākaraśānti's younger contemporary Maitrīpa (after the death of the former?)(Isaacson and Sferra 2014, 82). Similarly, Rigral states that Nāgārjuna explained the definitive intent in the *Dharmadhātustava*, *Mahāyānaviṃśātikā*, *Pañcakrāma*, and *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*. Of these, only the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* is cited in available editions of the MAV.

[122] Later in the text Ratnākaraśānti includes Vasubandhu in a list of authoritative commentators, so it is possible that he is one of the "others" indicated here.

The wording of this verse seems to deliberately echo Śāntarakṣita, who admonishes the audience to "always exert great effort toward realizing the lack of inherent nature in all phenomena by use of reasoning and scriptures" (*rigs pa dang lung gis chos thams cad rang bzhin med par khong du chud par bya ba'i phyir rab tu 'bad do*) (Blumenthal 2004, 363 f.n. 172). In place of Śāntarakṣita's deployment of the common phrase "reasoning and scriptures" (*rigs pa dang lung*, **yuktyāgama*), Ratnākaraśānti uses the phrase *tshad ma dang lung* (**pramāṇāgama*). This serves to highlight the import of *pramāṇa*—specifically, Dharmakīrti's works—for Ratnākaraśānti's understanding of a unified Mahāyāna. It is also worth noting that Ratnākaraśānti engages with many of the same scriptures and works of logic—in several cases, the same verses—discussed by Śāntarakṣita's MA and commentary (*-vṛtti*) along with Kamalaśīla's *-pañjikā* (MAP). Of these citations, the most important concern the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (LAS) and *Pramāṇavārttika* (PV). Thus, when Ratnākaraśānti claims to rely on scripture and reasoning (or, as he puts it, scripture and *pramāṇa*), this should be understood as part of a strategy to correct (i.e., "ornament") the interpretations of these texts and figures in particular.

After defining the two truths and indicating that it is only the three mentioned *ārya*s who can provide reliable guidance to the Buddha's most profound teachings, Ratnākaraśānti next describes a hierarchy of the three *āryas*, implying their respective stations of authority as commentators on the Buddha's intent:

> Lord Maitreya has perfected the Bodhisattva path and is about to attain complete and perfect enlightenment. Ārya Asaṅga is a third-stage Bodhisattva. Ārya Nāgārjuna is on the first stage, as indicated [in the prophecy]: "having reached the stage of Great Joy, He will depart to Sukhāvatī."[123]

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[123] *bcom ldan 'das byams pa byang chub sems dpa'i mthar phyin pa de ma thag tu mngon par rdzogs par 'tshang rgya ba dang / 'phags pa thogs med sa gsum pa dang / 'phags pa klu sgrub ni sa dang po yin te / rab tu dga' ba'i sa bsgrubs nas / bde ba can du de 'gro'o // zhes gsung pa'i phyir ro //* P 264.4-7; D 102b2-3.

Ratnākaraśānti asserts that Maitreya is on a stage just prior to becoming a fully awakened Buddha. This closely echoes Sthiramati's description of the *ārya* at the outset of the MVBT. Sthiramati gives an elaborate praise of Maitreya's superior virtues among *āryas* and Bodhisattvas and states that he is "only separated by a single birth" from the attainment of Buddhahood (*sa caikajātipratibandhāt*).[124] Sthiramati goes on at some length describing Maitreya as the being who is in the best possible position to interpret the Buddha's intent. He then praises Asaṅga as an *ārya* and Vasubandhu as a learned master (*ācārya*), but conspicuously omits any mention of Nāgārjuna in this context.

By contrast, Ratnākaraśānti *does* acknowledge that Nāgārjuna is an *ārya*, and appeals to a well-known prophecy about Nāgārjuna that seems to have originated in the LAS.[125] That said, the MAV then offers two lines of reasoning to demonstrate that—while an *ārya*—Nāgārjuna should not be considered to possess the same caliber of authority as Maitreya.[126] By identifying these figures based on their respective stations on the Bodhisattva path, Ratnākaraśānti indicates a hierarchy of authority with Maitreya at the apex and Nāgārjuna in the lowest (though still exalted) station. Extant versions of the text—which, recall, are all Tibetan translations—are not consistent

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[124] The section in full reads: *yasyā 'sya kārikāśāstrasyāryamaitreyaḥ praṇetā / sa caikajātipratibandhāt sarvabodhisattvābhijñādhāraṇī pratisaṃvitsamādhīndriyakṣāntivimokṣaiḥ paraṃ pāraṃ gataḥ sarvāsu bodhisattvabhūmiṣu niḥśeṣamapi prahīṇāvaraṇāḥ /* (Pandeya 1971, 3–4). Pandeya notes that Yamaguchi's edition reads *pratibaddhāt* instead of *pratibandhāt*. Yamaguchi's reading may be preferable but the meaning is not significantly different (1971, 3 f.n. 7).

[125] LAS X.165d: *āsādya bhūmiṃ muditāṃ yāsyate 'sau sukhāvatīm* (Nanjio 1956, 286). See Funayama for a useful discussion of this particular prophecy and its interpretations (2011, 109). Eckel provides a thorough list of textual citations of prophecies about Nāgārjuna, with some helpful notes on available editions (Eckel 2008, 210–11 f.n. 3)For a more general scholarly engagement with legends of Nāgārjuna, cf. Walser (2005, 65–73). For a traditional account of these prophecies cf. Mabja's commentary on the MMK (Dharmacakra Translation Group 2011, 97–98).

[126] Funayama points out that Bu ston quotes this section of the MAV, which he refers to as the *Sems tsam rgyan* (**Cittamātrālaṃkāra*, "Ornament for the Mind-Only") (Funayama 2011, 108–9). While noting that a similar passage occurs in the *Sūtrasamuccayabhāṣya*, Funayama mistakenly indicates that the MAV does not discuss the status of Maitreya; I believe he meant to say that about the *Sūtrasamuccayabhāṣya* (See also Obermiller 1999, 140–42).

in their depiction of Asaṅga's place in this hierarchy,[127] but they all portray the station and the reliability of Maitreya as being significantly higher than that of Nāgārjuna.

The commentary in the MAV immediately draws out some implications of this hierarchy. Most strikingly, Ratnākaraśānti refers to Maitreya as *pramāṇabhūta* ("validity incarnate"), a technical term that warrants some explanation. By calling Maitreya *pramāṇabhūta*, Ratnākaraśānti is evoking Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, progenitors of Buddhist *pramāṇa*; that said, his deployment of the term deviates significantly from theirs. Dignāga uses *pramāṇabhūta* as a descriptive epithet for Buddha Śākyamuni; Dharmakīrti elaborates extensively on his predecessor's description in the second chapter (*Pramāṇasiddhi*) of the PV. Neither author gives any indication that the word *pramāṇabhūta* should be applied to anyone apart from the Buddha. Thus, by using this term for Maitreya, Ratnākaraśānti is rhetorically associating that figure with the authoritative status of a fully enlightened Buddha; in doing so, he is clearly deviating from Dignāga and Dharmakīrti's usage of the term.[128] It may be significant that Candrakīrti makes a similar move: he refers to Nāgārjuna as *pramāṇabhūta* in his *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* (*ad* verse VI.2).[129] Jayānanda, writing in the twelfth century CE, follows suit in his *Madhyamakāvatāraṭīkā* (Ruegg 1994, 305 f.n. 5).[130] We should therefore not discount the possibility that Ratnākaraśānti is directly answering either Candrakīrti or his later followers by using this term for Maitreya (and *not* for Nāgārjuna).

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[127] Asaṅga is included as a referent of "taught" (*gsungs*) in the verse (*byams pa thogs med kyis gsung shing*), but not in the commentary (*bcom ldan 'das byams pas gsungs shing legs par gsung la / 'phags pa thogs med dang / 'phags pa'i glu sgrub kyis kyang ci ma gsungs sam*). This ambiguity is probably the result of a translation error.

[128] This departure is significant, and worthy of further consideration. That said, it is not addressed in the MAV— nor, to my knowledge, in any of Ratnākaraśānti's other writings. It therefore falls outside the scope of this dissertation. For detailed consideration of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti's engagement with the idea of *pramāṇabhūta*—which is deeply entrenched in their debates with non-Buddhists, particularly Kumārila—see Franco (1997, passim) and Dunne (2004, 234–45).

[129] Ruegg reconstructs *pramāṇabhūta* from *tshad mar gyur pa* (1994, 303–4).

[130] Vose dates Jayānanda to the twelfth century based on anecdotal evidence about his relationship with Chapa Chokyi Senge (*phya pa chos kyi seng ge*, 1109-1169 CE) (2009, 53). This suggests that the debate regarding the relative status of Nāgārjuna and Maitreya was still active more than a century after Ratnākaraśānti's lifetime.

The PV stipulates that someone who is *pramāṇabhūta* must satisfy three criteria: (a) they have directly seen the nature of reality—or, as Franco puts it, "they have to know the truth;" (b) they lack any faults that could potentially motivate them to lie about that reality; (c) they must have a motivation of pure compassion to properly share the truth (Franco 1997, 40–41). Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla follow suit in their discussion of *āpta* ("credible person"), a very similar term:[131] they "accept that a person endowed with extraordinary wisdom and compassion will necessarily speak the truth and will thus be a credible person" (McClintock 2010, 262).[132] In light of this background, it is clear that Ratnākaraśānti describes Maitreya as *pramāṇabhūta* in order to highlight the *ārya*'s authority on the proper interpretation of scripture and compassionately motivated exposition of reality.

Ratnākaraśānti also refers to Maitreya as *pramāṇabhūta* in the concluding verses of the MAV. There, he writes:

> Due to their connection with *pramāṇa*, scripture, and treatises (**śāstra*),[133] the insights contained in this text are the Middle Way (*dbu ma'i tshul*). Regarding the meaning of whatever is the speech of a Victor, how could the Unconquered Protector [Maitreya[134]] not be a *pramāṇa*? //45//

> Maitreya is the foundational *pramāṇa* regarding the meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom //48ab//[135]

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[131] Franco treats *pramāṇabhūta*—as it occurs in the *Pramāṇasiddhi* chapter of the PV—as "part of a cluster" of qualities that also includes *āpta* ("trustworthy") and, e.g., *sarvajña* ("omniscient")(1997). In the present context, I feel it is justifiable to discuss Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's engagement with the term *āpta* as relevant to their understanding of *pramāṇabhūta*.

[132] Note that while Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla accept this definition of a credible person, they "are similar to Dharmakīrti in their apparently staunch resistance to the idea that one can determine that any *particular* person is credible (McClintock 2010, 262–63). Therefore, Ratnākaraśānti's description of Maitreya as *pramāṇabhūta* is likely a departure from their understanding of the term as well.

[133] *tshad ma lung dang bstan bcos kyis sbyar bas* could alternatively be construed as "due to *pramāṇa* [in connection with] scripture and treatises."

[134] *mi pham dgon po*, **ajitanātha*. *mi pham* is a well-attested epithet of Maitreya in the Tibetan tradition.

[135] *tshad ma lung dang bstan bcos kyis sbyar bas / rtogs pa de 'dir dbu ma'i tshul yin te / gang zhig rgyal ba yi ni gsung don la / mi pham mgon po ji ltar tshad ma min //45//… shes rab pha rol phyin pa'i don la ni / tshad ma'i gtso bo 'dir ni byams pa yin //48ab// P 307.11-17; D 120a4-6.*

The message of these verses is clear: when analyzing scripture—specifically, the Perfection of Wisdom—the teachings of Maitreya should be taken as the definitive interpretation.

Turning back to the commentary on MAV verse two: the next section echoes the presentation of the of the second and third wheel in the SNS. Specifically, the text suggests a parallel between the second- and third-turnings of the wheel of Dharma and the *ārya*s with whom each wheel is most directly associated. Nāgārjuna should be understood in line with the second turning of the wheel of Dharma, and Maitreya with the third. While the former *ārya* (like the second wheel) does teach the correct meaning, the latter provides an unprecedented level of clarity and consistency. Ratnākaraśānti writes:

> Stated by Lord Maitreya [means what he] taught well (*legs par gsungs*, **subhāṣita*). But does this mean that Ārya Asaṅga and Ārya Nāgārjuna did not also teach [well]? The term stated indicates that [Maitreya] taught [the truth] consistently. The word accepted is used because [Nāgārjuna] teaches this in some portions[136] [of his texts, but] generally he is known to teach two natures. One might wonder why he teaches the other-dependent only in some places, and not all the time. The reason is that, by teaching emptiness, even though that [other-dependent nature] is not stated, it is still established. If there were no other-dependent, emptiness could not be the nature of things, just as particular attributes cannot be applied to the horns of a rabbit. If there were nothing with a luminous nature, then how would *ārya*s realize it?[137]

After having earlier appealed to prophecy to establish Nāgārjuna's credentials, Ratnākaraśānti now argues from necessity. He begins by acknowledging a difference in the two *ārya*s' teaching styles. Maitreya teaches the three natures "continuously" or "without interruption" (*rgyun ma chad par*) throughout his works; Nāgārjuna, on the other hand, does teach the three natures, but only in some

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[136] *phyogs*, **dig*; see below.
[137] *bcom ldan 'das byams pas gsungs shing legs par gsungs la / 'phags pa thogs med dang / 'phags pa klu sgrub kyis kyang ci ma gsungs sam / gsungs pa smos pas ni rgyun ma chad par bstan pa'i phyir ro / bzhed pa smos pas ni des phyogs kha cig tu bstan pa'i phyir des phal cher rang bzhin gnyis bstan par grags so / kha cig tu gzhan gyi dbang kho na bstan gyi ci'i phyir thams cad du ma yin / stong pa nyid bstan pas yang de ma smras kyang grub pa'i phyir ro / gzhan gyi dbang med na stong pa nyid chos nyid du mi 'gyur te / ri bong gi rva la bye brag tu byar med pa bzhin no / gsal ba'i rang bzhin rnams med na / de ji ltar 'phags pa rnams kyis thugs su chud par 'gyur //* P 264.8-17; D 102b3-5.

"portions" (*phyogs*) of his writings. In a philosophical context, *phyog* (**pakṣa*) is most often translated "position" or "thesis" (or more literally, "side" or "location"). Rendering this term "portions" reflects my reading of Ratnākaraśānti's point: Nāgārjuna *did* explicitly teach the three natures, just not all the time. Further, Nāgārjuna is "famous for teaching" (*bstan par grags*) only two natures— i.e., the two truths, conventional and ultimate.

Ratnākaraśānti argues that when Nāgārjuna seems to only engage with two natures—as in his most famous and influential work, the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*s (MMK)—the third nature is necessarily implied. This is because (a) as an *ārya*, Nāgārjuna's teachings must be consistent with the teachings of the *ārya* (and near-Buddha) Maitreya; (b) from a more practical (or philosophical) standpoint, realization—and, by extension, liberation—would be impossible without the existence of the third component, the other-dependent nature. Ratnākaraśānti argues that Nāgārjuna *must* have accepted the other-dependent; otherwise he would be denying the very possibility of becoming an *ārya*—which would be a deeply ironic thing for an *ārya* to do. That being the case, Nāgārjuna *did* teach the Middle Path in a complete way but did not always do so explicitly across his corpus of writings. Just as the second turning of the wheel of Dharma gives the correct teachings in a manner that is sometimes obscure or incomplete, Nāgārjuna's teachings about emptiness and the three natures are not as clear or explicit as Maitreya's, even if they are ultimately consistent with the latter's teachings.

Ratnākaraśānti's bold statements raise an obvious question: if—contra widespread assumption—the MMK does *not* represent Nāgārjuna's final intentions, then in what text (or texts) *is* the *ārya*'s final view to be found? The frequency of Ratnākaraśānti's citations of the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*—specifically verses 21 and 34—makes it clear that he takes that text as authoritative. He makes this point explicitly in the MAU: after citing them together, he comments that YṢ 21

and 34 "explain everything" (*zhes bya ba 'di thams cad gsungs pa yin no*). I agree with Seton's interpretation of this phrase: the verses "explain everything [else that Nāgārjuna wrote]" (2015, 76).[138] I further argue that the MAV considers YṢ the main source text for understanding Nāgārjuna's intentions, while the MMK—which is indisputably the bedrock of [pseudo-]Mādhyamika thought—requires interpretation.

It is significant that Ratnākaraśānti describes Nāgārjuna as generally discussing two natures (*rang bzhin gnyis*). The use of "nature" rather than "truth" is likely a thinly-veiled criticism of common [pseudo-]Mādhyamika understandings—or as Ratnākaraśānti would see it, misunderstandings—of Nāgārjuna's teachings. While pseudo-Mādhyamikas hold that the MMK describes the two truths as the *ārya*'s central philosophical rubric, Ratnākaraśānti suggests that Nāgārjuna was in fact presenting the imagined and perfected natures, with the third nature, the other-dependent, being implied. According to this passage, Nāgārjuna would have expected his audience to understand that the other-dependent was part of the overall schema of the MMK; without it, neither the other two natures nor the two truths make any sense. The MMK is, in other words, a teaching which requires interpretation. The YṢ, on the other hand, *does* explicitly describe the three natures, particularly at YṢ 21 and 34; that text (and within it, those verses) should therefore be considered the most important for understanding the *ārya*'s intentions.

The final section of the commentary on MAV 2—from "[i]f there were no other-dependent…" up to "how would *āryas* realize it?"—emphasizes the necessity of the other-dependent nature from a philosophical perspective. Ratnākaraśānti alludes here to arguments brought out in more detail at MAV verses 5-12, which are discussed in the following chapter.

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[138] Seton cites MAU D 226a5 here (f.n. 171). The MAU follows up this statement with one of Ratnākaraśānti's proclamation that "therefore Yogācāra and Madhyamaka *siddhānta* are in agreement" *de lta bas na rnal 'byor spyod pa pa dang / dbu ma grub pa'i mtha' mtshungs pa yin no //* (Seton 2015, 76).

Here, he likens the opponent's presentation of emptiness to a position about the properties of a rabbit's horns—an image to which we shall return several times throughout the balance of this dissertation. The rabbit's horn is a stock example in Indian philosophy for an utterly non-existent entity, and discussions of its properties are similar to Bertrand Russell's logical conundrum, "the present king of France is bald." Just as "the present king of France" is non-existent and therefore neither bald nor hirsute, the horns of a rabbit cannot possess any properties (e.g. "long" or "brown") because they do not exist. Ratnākaraśānti will adduce a number of arguments against what he considers pseudo-Mādhyamika positions that fall along similar lines: conventional phenomena are empty in the sense that they do not exist, but it is philosophically incoherent to argue that nothing exists in any way whatsoever. Ratnākaraśānti suggests here that emptiness can be attributed to something—namely, the other-dependent nature—and that nature must therefore exist in some meaningful sense.

The tone of this final section of the commentary is striking. Ratnākaraśānti is unambiguously arguing that Nāgārjuna *must* have accepted the three natures; otherwise emptiness would be wholly negative, a position that he treats as baldly nonsensical. This is consistent with Ratnākaraśānti's emphasis on affirming (rather than non-affirming) negation. This stands in contrast to Madhyamaka positions, which consistently rely on non-affirming negations for understanding emptiness and selflessness. Ratnākaraśānti's discussion of emptiness vis-à-vis a "luminous nature" (*gsal ba'i rang bzhin*, **prabhāsvarasvabhāva*) follows classical Yogācāra doctrine, which dictates that emptiness is not a stand-alone quality. Rather, it is one of several attributes of *dharmatā*,[139] the luminous nature of reality. As such, emptiness is not strictly apophatic in nature: Ratnākaraśānti insists here that there must be some positive aspect of

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[139] This is discussed further below, in the context of MVB I.14.

emptiness—albeit, an aspect beyond concepts or duality—that the *āryas* realize. Otherwise, their realizations would be no more profound than a child "realizing" that her imaginary friend has brown hair, or that the non-existent horns of a rabbit are long. As with the partial teaching of two natures rather than three, Ratnākaraśānti is suggesting here that while apophatic presentations of emptiness may not be wholly incorrect, they are incomplete. They do not present the entire picture and are therefore susceptible to being misunderstood as nihilism. According to Ratnākaraśānti, his pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents have fallen prey to precisely this sort of error.

From the standpoint of scholarly understandings of Mahāyāna thought, Ratnākaraśānti's description of Nāgārjuna as an advocate for the three natures is shockingly casual. It invites the reader to conclude that no rational person could possibly disagree. But the idea that Nāgārjuna accepted the three natures runs contrary to the way in which an overwhelming majority of both traditional and contemporary academic scholarship has understood that thinker and engaged with his works.[140] That being the case, before treating the next section of the MAV it is worth briefly sketching the early Yogācāra roots of this position. This will illustrate Ratnākaraśānti's deep reliance on classical Yogācāra sources—particularly the SNS and MVB—for his interpretation of Nāgārjuna and his presentation of the Middle Way.

Sources for Ratnākaraśānti's Interpretation of Nāgārjuna

By treating Nāgārjuna and his presentation of the Middle Path as essentially correct but nevertheless inferior to that of Maitreya, the MAV builds on the logic of the SNS: scriptures of the second turning are interpretable while those of the third turning are definitive; the same applies to

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[140] Scholarship that treats Nāgārjuna from a viewpoint sympathetic to Yogācāra views is a distinct minority compared to Mādhyamika-inflected work. Some useful examples of the former include Lusthaus (2010); Keenan (1997); and the contributions to Garfield and Westerhoff 2015 by Gold, Lusthaus, Shulman, and Westerhoff.

the *ārya*s most closely associated with them. Powers translates a particularly relevant section of

the SNS—from the Seventh Chapter, "The Questions of Paramārthasamudgata"—as follows:

> [After turning the first wheel of doctrine, which is surpassable], [t]hen the Bhagavan turned a second wheel of doctrine which is more wondrous still for those who are genuinely engaged in the Great Vehicle, because of the aspect of teaching emptiness, beginning with the lack of own-being of phenomena, and beginning with their absence of production, absence of cessation, quiescence from the start, and being naturally in a state of nirvāṇa. However, this wheel of doctrine that the Bhagavan turned is surpassable, provides an opportunity [for refutation],[141] is of interpretable meaning, and serves as a basis for dispute.
>
> Then the Bhagavan turned a third wheel of doctrine, possessing good differentiations, and exceedingly wondrous, for those genuinely engaged in all vehicles, beginning with the lack of own-being of phenomena, and beginning with their absence of production, absence of cessation, quiescence from the start, and being naturally in a state of nirvāṇa. Moreover, that wheel of doctrine turned by the Bhagavan is unsurpassable, does not provide as opportunity [for refutation], is of definitive meaning, and does not serve as a basis for dispute.

Commenting on this passage, Jonathon Gold highlights the point that the SNS does not see itself

as propounding a *separate* doctrine from the intent of the Perfection of Wisdom literature:

> The SNS is the basic scriptural source for Asaṅga's and Vasubandhu's Yogācāra, and the SNS's distinction between the second and third turnings of the wheel is widely blamed for causing the division between the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra schools.[142] Yet according to this very passage, the doctrines taught in the second and third turnings are *identical to the word*… it says quite plainly that the Buddha taught the same doctrine twice. The difference is that the last time through, the meaning is understood (Gold 2015a, 226).

As Gold points out, the broad Yogācāra tradition (which includes Ratnākaraśānti) does not portray

the teachings of the third turning or Maitreya's explications as more profound than those of the

second turning and Nāgārjuna. Rather, the SNS "clarifies the intent" of the second turning. It casts

itself as the Buddha's effort to settles all disputes about the Mahāyāna and should therefore be

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[141] The initial bracket is my addition; this bracket is in the original.

[142] *Pace* Gold, this seems somewhat of an overstatement. While Eckel does acknowledges precursors such as the SNS and *Yogācārabhūmi*, I also take him to suggest that the later scholar Bhāviveka truly sparked the debate, which I find more defensible (2008, 62–85).

treated as his primary teaching. This strategy prefigures Ratnākaraśānti's own program. In a later section of the MAV, Ratnākaraśānti includes the SNS in a list of figures (Maitreya, Asaṅga, Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu) and texts that correctly expound the three natures as authorities.[143] This passage makes clear that when Ratnākaraśānti says in MAV verse 1 that his explanation accords with valid scripture, he primarily has the SNS in mind;[144] likewise, the three natures form the primary rubric for understanding those texts. This is consistent with his view that the three natures are the true Middle Way for both Nāgārjuna and Maitreya, and that the latter brought to its full expression what the former taught only partially or by implication.

Having briefly sketched some of Ratnākaraśānti's sources for his position on Nāgārjuna, we should now turn to the presentation of the Middle Path in the MAV, attending in particular to its deep resonance with early Yogācāra and particularly with the MVB corpus.

The Middle Path and the Three Natures in the MAV[145]

In MAV verses three and four and their commentary, Ratnākaraśānti offers an overview of his vision of the Middle Path with specific reference to the three natures. After effectively restating MVB I.1-2 at verse three,[146] he offers a gloss and then cites Maitreya's root text. This passage will first be quoted at length, then discussed in sections.

What is it like, this Middle Path which is the means for awakening?

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[143] The passage occurs in Ratnākaraśānti's commentary on verse 45: *shing rta chen po ni 'phags pa byams pa dang / thogs med dang / klu sgrub dang / dbyig gnyen rnams kyis lam gang yin pa de gsung te / de dag gis yang dag par bstan pa'i phyir ro // de la bdag cag rnams kyis zhe bya ba ni rang bzhin gsum gyi tshul gyis shes par byed pa dgongs pa nges par 'grel ba la sogs pa'i mdo'i cha rnams yin no* // P 292.19-293.5; D 113b4-5.

[144] Toward the end of the MAV Ratnākaraśānti again cites the SNS as the primary example of a *sūtra* that gives an authoritative presentation of the three natures: *rang bzhin gsum gyi tshul gyis shes par byed pa dgongs pa nges par 'grel ba las sogs pa'i mdo'i cha rnams yin no* // P 293.3-5; D 114 a5-6.

[145] Cf. Seton (2015, 66–71) for a similar discussion of Ratnākaraśānti's presentation of the three natures, based primarily on the PPU and MAU.

[146] Moriyama points out that this verse is essentially a restatement of MVB I.1-2 (2013, 53).

The nature (*bdag nyid*, **ātman*) of duality is entirely non-existent.
The nature that is error about duality does exist. That nature is
emptiness. This is explained as the Middle Path. //3//[147]

Duality [means] the apprehended and apprehender. The nature of those is their
[first] nature (*rang bzhin*, **svabhāva*). That they are entirely non-existent means
that the five aggregates and so forth are non-existent. The non-dual appearing as
dual constitutes error. The nature in that regard is the aggregates and so forth [in
terms of the] second [nature]. Therefore, they exist. Emptiness is the emptiness of
duality there. Freedom from duality, which is the nature of the dependent, is the
aggregates [in terms of the] third [nature]. For that reason, as well, they exist. That
is explained as the Middle Path, because *dharma*s of the first nature do not exist,
but the others do exist. While [things] do exist in some way, they do not exist in
[another] way. This is the meaning of the Middle Path. [Moreover,] while there is
existence in some sense, some things do not exist. This is the meaning of
"Middle."[148]

What are the names of those natures, and why are they so-called?

They are the imagined, the other-dependent, and the perfected.
Because one is imagined, one is arisen from causes, and one does
not change, respectively. //4//[149]

These three natures are named as the imagined, the other-dependent, and the
perfected, respectively. [The first is called imagined] because it is imagined in
error; [the second is called other-dependent] because it arises from causes, and [the
third is called perfected] because it does not change. The other-dependent is also
the imagination of the unreal, [so-called] because of the imputation of [existence
onto] non-existent phenomena.[150]

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[147] *byang chub kyi thabs dbu ma'i lam de 'dir ji lta bu zhig yin zhe na // byang chub kyi thabs dbu ma'i lam de 'dir
ji lta bu zhig yin zhe na / gnyis kyi bdag nyid thams cad med / gnyis su 'khrul pa'i bdag nyid yod / de ni stong pa'i
bdag nyid de / dbu ma'i lam du de bzhed do //3//* P 264.17-20; D 102b5-6.

[148] *zhes bya ba smras te / gnyis ni gzung ba dang 'dzin pa'o / de'i bdag nyid ni rang bzhin no / des thams cad med
pa ni phung po la sogs pa med pa'o / gnyis med pa la gnyis su snang ba ni 'khrul pa'o / de la bdag nyid ni phung po
la sogs pa gnyis pa'o / de'i phyir 'di ni yod pa nyid do/ de la stong pa nyid ni gnyis kyis stong pa ste / gnyis dang bral
ba gzhan gyi dbang gi bdag nyid phung po la sogs pa gsum pa'o / des na yang 'di dag ni yod pa nyid do / de ni dbu
ma'i lam zhes bzhed do // dang po'i rang bzhin gyi chos rnams ni med pa'i phyir la / gzhan dag gis ni yod pa'i phyir
ro // 'ga' zhig gis ni yod la / 'ga' zhig med pa ni dbu ma'i don zhes bya'o //* P 264.20-265.8 D 102b6-103a1. Cf. Hong
Luo's recent article for an alternative translation and discussion (2018, 592–93).

[149] *'o na rang bzhin de dag gi ming ci zhes bya // yang gang las de ni de dag gi ming du btags she na // kun brtags
dang ni gzhan dbang dang // yongs su grub pa 'di rnams ni // btags dang rgyu las skye ba dang // mi 'gyur phyir na
go rims bzhin //* P 265.8-11; D 103a1-2.

[150] *zhes bya ba smras te / 'di gsum gyi rang bzhin ni go rims ji lta ba bzhin du kun brtags dang gzhan dbang dang
yongs su grub pa zhes bya ba'i ming can te / 'khrul pa la sgro btags pa'i phyir dang / rgyu las skye ba'i phyir dang /
mi 'gyur ba'i phyir go rims ji lta ba bzhin no // yang gang gzhan gyi dbang de nyid med pa la sgro 'dogs pa'i phyir
yang dang pa ma yin pa'i kun tu rtog pa ste /* P 265.11-16; D 103a2-4.

In the *Treatise on the Differentiation Between the Middle and the Extremes*, Ārya Maitreya states:[151]

> Imagination of the unreal exists. Duality does not occur there. Emptiness does occur there, and it [imagination of the unreal] also occurs in that [emptiness]. //MVB I.1//

> It is not empty, but also not non-empty; because of that, everything can be explained.[152] Because something exists, something else does not exist, and something else also exists, this is the Middle Path (*madhyamā pratipad*). //MVB I.2//[153]

This passage interprets the Middle Path—and, consequently, what Ratnākaraśānti understands to be Maitreya and Nāgārjuna's common view—as follows: ordinary phenomena, which are manifestations of the imagined nature (*parikalpita-svabhāva*) are non-existent. But it is not the case that nothing exists: the other-dependent nature (*paratantra-svabhāva*) and the perfected nature (*pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*) are *not* non-existent. This is consistent with the MVB's presentation of a middle path between extreme views of non-existence, i.e. views which over-negate (*apavāda*, *skur 'debs*)[154] and under-negate or impute (*samāropa*, *sgro 'dogs*),[155] and which thereby lead ignorant beings into either nihilism or reification.

Citations of Nāgārjuna in the MAV

Ratnākaraśānti's interpretation of Nāgārjuna effectively inverts long-accepted understandings and assumptions among both traditional and contemporary scholars. As the

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[151] *'phags pa byams pas kyang dbus dang mtha' rnam par 'byed pa'i bstan bcos las //* P 265.16-17; D 103a4-5.

[152] In the MAV, Śākya 'Od translates *vidhīyate* as *bshad*; my translation reflects that. D'Amato translates this term as "established," highlighting a different valence of the Sanskrit term (2012, 118).

[153] *abhūtaparikalpo 'sti dvayan tatra na vidyate / śūnyatā vidyate tv atra tasyām api sa vidyate // na śūnyaṃ nāpi cāśūnyaṃ tasmāt sarvaṃ vidhīyate / satvād asatvāt satvāc ca madhyamā pratipac ca sā //* I rely on Nagao's edition (1964, 17–18); cf. Pandeya (1971, 9–13) 1971 for an alternative edition. The Tibetan in the MAV reads*: yang dag ma yin kun rtog yod // de la gnyis po yod ma yin // stong pa nyid ni de la yod // de la yang ni de yod do // stong pa ma yin mi stong min // de ltar bas na thams cad bshad // yod pas med pas yod pas na // de ni dbu ma'i lam yin no //* P 265.17-20; D 103a4-5. This verse is cited again at P 305.18-22, D 119b1-119b2.

[154] *apavāda*, from *apa-√vad*, can be translated quite literally as negative speech (Monier-Williams 1956, 52).

[155] *samāropa* (*sam-ā-√ruh*), also translated as super-imposition or over-burdening (Monier-Williams 1956, 1162).

founding father of the Madhyamaka *siddhānta*, it is an article of faith for [pseudo-]Mādhyamikas that his works—particularly MMK—constitute the most profound means for understanding scripture and attaining realization. Concomitant with this reading is that Nāgārjuna bases his Middle Way on the Perfection of Wisdom literature, and that the later explanations of the Third Turning *sūtra*s arose as a corrective for those of lesser intellect who could not fathom emptiness— a persistent concern for these thinkers.[156] This interpretation of Nāgārjuna vis-à-vis the Third Turning and the Yogācāra *siddhānta* is succinctly summarized by Jan Westerhoff:

> Nāgārjuna elaborates "the Buddha's teaching that all is merely mind" [in a manner that]… implies that the Yogācārin's final analysis of reality into three natures—the imagined (*parikalpita*), dependent (*paratantra*), and perfected nature (*pariniṣpanna*)—is in fact not final but has to be understood in terms of a more fundamental concept, namely the Madhyamaka theory of emptiness (Westerhoff 2015, 173).

Westerhoff here seems to suggest that Nāgārjuna was aware of the three-nature theory—a position with which Ratnākaraśānti would certainly agree, but which is not generally accepted in academic scholarship. That said, Westerhoff does clearly illustrate how later [pseudo-]Mādhyamika thinkers—who were aware of Yogācāra but follow their own interpretation of Nāgārjuna—make sense of the two rubrics: the three natures are of provisional meaning, while the two truths are definitive. As we have seen, Ratnākaraśānti argues precisely the opposite: he is not only concerned to show that Nāgārjuna's works imply the theory of the three natures, but he seeks also to establish the overall unity of the Mahāyāna path. In order to show how he does this, the present section will examine the citations, context, and explanations of Nāgārjuna's root verses in the MAV, proceeding in the order of their appearance in the text.

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[156] This idea is pervasive throughout Mādhyamika thinkers' writings, but a *locus classicus* for the later tradition is *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.3-5 and its -*Bhāṣya*. Candrakīrti's auto-commentary to verse 3 notes that those of lesser faculties who engage with emptiness will either abandon the teachings and travel to bad migrations, or will misunderstand emptiness as non-existence, and "propagate nihilistic philosophical views" (Huntington 1989, 226 f.n. 5). It is noteworthy that Ratnākaraśānti shares these concerns with at least some of his apparent opponents.

Citation I: *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* 21

YṢ 21 is one of a handful of verses that Ratnākaraśānti cites twice in the MAV. In both

deployments, Ratnākaraśānti sets the verse alongside LAS X.592, highlighting the assertions in

both verses that awareness is a causal substratum for ordinary experience. The clear implication

for Ratnākaraśānti is that both verses necessitate the rubric of the three natures. These citations

will be discussed in turn, after which the significant textual variations between Ratnākaraśānti's

citations and other available editions of both verses will be briefly discussed.

First Deployment of YṢ 21

YṢ 21 is first deployed in a passage describing certain aspects of causality, specifically the

relationships between the other-dependent nature and the broader Buddhist concept of

interdependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). The passage, which begins at MAV verse 8 and

ends with the gloss on verse 9, is worth including in full:

> Also, causal capacity is not seen [in ordinary phenomena] because
> seeds and so forth do not exist. It *is* seen in terms of a mind which
> appears as seeds and so forth, because that *does* exist. //8//

Statements such as "seeds and so forth have the capacity to give rise to sprouts and
so forth" are erroneous. Seeds and so forth which are devoid of singular or plural
natures do not exist, so it is not reasonable for them to have causal capacity. But
the cognition[157] which is taught as the other-dependent, which appears as seeds and
sprouts and so forth, does possess causal capacity, because it does exist.

The author of the *Pramāṇavārttika* makes this statement, and others:[158]

> The establishment of a causal agent or inferential evidence that is
> dependent upon external objects, as in the case of the production of
> a sprout from a seed or the proof of fire from smoke, could also be
> conceptualized as having the appearance of those natures (*rūpa*) in

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[157] Here *shes pa* glosses *blo* in the verse.

[158] nus pa'ang mthong bar mi 'gyur te / sa bon la sogs de med phyir // sa bon la sogs snang ba yi / blo yis de ni yod pa'i phyir //8// zhes bya ba ni / sa bon la sogs pa las myu gu la sogs pa'i nus pa zhes bya ba 'di dag ni 'khrul pa ste / gcig dang du ma'i rang bzhin dang bral ba'i sa bon la sogs pa ni med de / de nus pa mi rigs pa'i phyir ro // sa bon la sogs par snang ba'i gzhan gyi dbang du bstan pa'i shes pa de la nus pa dang ldan te / de ni yod pa'i phyir ro // gang tshad ma rnam 'grel mdzad pas 'di skad du // P 267.14-21; D 103b5-104a2.

dependence upon cognitions with that kind of restricted coherence. If that is the case, what is contradicted? //PV 3.392-3//[159, 160]

Also, the *Laṅkāvatāra* states,

> Through the refutation of an agent excluded from causes and conditions, I state that non-arisal is the presentation of mind alone. //LAS X.592//[161]

Here, <u>causes</u> indicate the six types [of causation], "spontaneously arisen" and so forth. [162] There are four <u>conditions</u>: [163] cause, support, and so forth. The <u>agent</u> that is <u>refuted</u> through these, along with a creator god and so forth—by negating that [agent], [causes] are <u>proven</u> to arise from <u>mind alone</u>. For that reason, it is not the case that a creating agent creates. This is the meaning of these statements. [164]

Nāgārjuna also stated,

> Here, there is not anything whatsoever that arises, and not anything whatsoever that ceases. Only cognitions arise and cease. //YṢ 21//

The word <u>here</u> is in the locative case,[165] [used] in the sense of restriction (*avadhāraṇa), [applied to] to the aggregates, constituents, and so forth. <u>Only cognitions</u> mean other-dependent cognitions.[166]

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[159] *bījād aṅkurajanmāgner dhūmāt siddhir itīdṛśī / bāhyārthāśrayiṇī yāpi kārakajñāpakasthitiḥ //392// sāpi tadrūpanirbhāsās tathāniyatasaṅgamāḥ / buddhīr āśritya kalpyeta yadi kiṃ vā virudhyate //393//* (Tosaki 1985, 74–75). Sākya 'Od translates this in the MAV as*: sa bon las ni myu gu skyes // du bas me 'grub ci 'dra bar // phyi yi don la rten pa 'di // byed po shes par byed par gnas //392// de yang sa bon la sogs sngang // de bzhin du ni byed dang 'brel // shes la brten pa'i rtog yin par // gal te 'gal ba ci zhig yod //393//. P 267.21-268.4; D 104a2-3*

[160] Moriyama's translation of these verses reads: "[Usually,] the establishment of cause (*kāraka*) and reason (*jñāpaka*) is dependent on external objects in a manner such as the arising of a sprout from a seed or the proof of fire from smoke. [Nevertheless,] if the same [establishment] could be also assumed by relying on a cognition that possesses its nature (e.g., a cognition with the appearance of a seed), possessing so-restricted connection [with other cognitions, e.g., a cognition with the appearance of a sprout], what does this [assumption] oppose?" (2013, 66 f.n. 2).

[161] *'phags pa lang kar gshegs pa las kyang / rgyu dang rkyen las bzlog pa yi / byed pa po ni bkag pa yis // sems tsam nyid du rnam gzhag cing / skye ba med par ngas bshad do //LAS X.592//* P 268.4-6; D 104a3. See below for consideration of textual issues in the MAV's citation of this verse, and for citation of Nanjio's Sanskrit edition.

[162] The set of six causes (*ṣaḍhetu*) is primarily a *sarvāstivāda* set. According to Ven. K.L. Dhammajoti, they are: *karaṇahetu* (efficient cause), *sabhāgahetu* (homogenous cause), *sarvatragahetu* (universal cause), *vipākahetu* (retribution cause), *sahabhuhetu* (simultaneous cause) and *saṃpryuktahetu* (conjoined cause)(2007, 161–64).

[163] According to the MMK, these four are: the primary cause, objective support, proximate condition, and dominant condition (Siderits and Katsura 2013, 20–21).

[164] *zhes gsungs so // rgyu ni rnam pa drug ste / lhan cig 'byung ba la sogs pa'o // rkyen ni bzhi ste / rgyu dang dmigs pa la sogs pa'o // de dag las bzlog pa'i byed pa po dang dbang phyug la sogs pa'o // de dag bkag pas ni sems tsam nyid du skye bar rnam par gzhag ste / de dag gis bskyed pa'i skye ba med do zhes bya ba'i don to //* P 268.6-11; D 104a3-5.

[165] This refers to the seventh grammatical case in the original Sanskrit.

[166] *klu sgrub kyi zhal snga nas kyis kyang ji skad du / 'dir gang cung zad skye med pa / cung zad 'gag pa'ang yod ma yin // skye ba dang ni 'gag pa dag / shes pa 'ba' zhig kho na'o //YṢ 21// zhes gsungs so // 'dir zhes bya ba'i phung*

In this passage, Ratnākaraśānti brings together discussions of causality and non-arising from the *Pramāṇavārttika*, a summary of *abhidharma*, and non-arising in the LAS, and the YṢ. He thereby highlights the fact that all of these texts and traditions discuss (explicitly or implicitly) awareness and/or the other-dependent nature as a substratum for ordinary conventional experience. Given the overall orientation of the MAV, it seems clear that Ratnākaraśānti cites these texts in order to show their harmony with Maitreya's teachings, specifically the presentation of the three natures. Ratnākaraśānti thereby illustrates the unity of every genre of Mahāyāna literature in their interpretations of causality, non-arising, and awareness, all of which depend on the three-nature theory.

Second Citation of YṢ 21

The second citation of YṢ 21 is partial, including only its third and fourth *pādas*. Here, the text again names Nāgārjuna as the author, but curiously refers to him as an *ācārya* rather than an *ārya*.[167] The context is effectively identical to the one just examined in that the verse is once again juxtaposed with LAS X.592. This can be taken to re-iterate Ratnākaraśānti's position that Nāgārjuna's final view of non-arising agrees with the *sūtra*:

> I state that non-arisal is the presentation of mind alone. //LAS X. 592cd//.

So it's said. Also, from Ācārya Nāgārjuna:

> Only cognitions arise and cease. //YṢ 21cd//[168]

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po dang khams la sogs pa ste / nges par bzung ba'i 'dun pa'o // shes pa 'ba' zhig ces bya ba ni gzhan gyi dbang gi shes pa'o // P 268.11-15; D 104a5-6.

[167] I am not certain whether this is significant, and likewise do not know whether this shift derives from Ratnākaraśānti himself or from Śākya 'Od's translation.

[168] *sems tsam nyid du rnam gzhag pas / skye ba med par ngas bshad do // zhes gsung so // blod dpon klu sgrub kyi zhal nas kyis kyang / skye ba dang ni 'gag pa ni / shes pa 'ba' zhig kho na'o* // P 297.20-298.1; D 116a5.

This condensed juxtaposition underscores the common theme of the two *pāda*s: awareness is the key to understanding causality, and mind-only is the key to understanding non-arising. Both arising and non-arising come down to awareness. This reflects the MAV's reading of the three natures: the other dependent (awareness/mind only) is the basis for both the imagined (arising) and the perfected (non-arising). I argue that Ratnākaraśānti's juxtaposition of YṢ 21 with scripture serves to associate Nāgārjuna's ideas with a wider body of Mahāyāna literature, one in which the three natures—and, in particular, the other dependent—are a primary rubric. Before turning to the final citation of Nāgārjuna in the MAV, it is necessary to briefly discuss the phrasing of these citations versus other extant Tibetan and Sanskrit editions of YṢ and LAS; they are both unique, and the latter in particular has concrete philosophical consequences for Ratnākaraśānti's view.

Textual Issues with These Citations

It is significant that the MAV's rendering of YṢ 21 and LAS X.592 diverges from other available editions of these texts. Regarding YṢ 21, which is currently unavailable Sanskrit: in particular *pāda* cd, "arising and cessation are nothing but awareness itself" (*skye ba dang ni 'gag pa dag / shes pa 'ba' zhig kho na'o*) is completely different from the translations of Patsab Nyima Drag[169] and Yeshe De[170] identified by Scherrer-Schaub, which both read "the paths of production and cessation were taught for a specific purpose" (*skye ba dang ni 'jig pa'i lam / dgos pa'i don du bstan pa'o*).[171] One might argue that Ratnākaraśānti is here deliberately misquoting Nāgārjuna,

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[169] *pa tshab nyi ma grags* (1055-1145? CE), hereafter Patsab.

[170] *ye shes sde* (8th-9th centuries CE).

[171] Patshab translates: *de ltar ci yang skye ba med / ci yang 'gag par mi 'gyur ro / skye ba dang ni 'jig pa'i lam / dgos pa'i don du bstan pa'o* // (Scherrer-Schaub 1991, 11). Ye shes sde's translation reads: *de ltar gang yang skye ba med / gang yang 'gag par mi 'gyur ro/ skye ba dang ni 'jig pa'i lam / dgos pa'i don du bstan pa'o* // (1991, 61). The difference between these two is negligible, but difference in the MAV's reading—specifically, *pāda* d—is quite significant. See also Scherrer-Schaub's discussion in the context of her French translation (1991, 201, f.n. 344). In an unpublished manuscript of SSŚ II, Hejung notes the similarity of the MAV's phrasing with LAS II.140 / X.85: *na hy atrotpadyate kiṃcit pratyayair na virudhyate / utpadyante nirudhyante pratyayā eva kalpitāḥ* // (personal communication).

but its more charitable and more likely that the MAV is citing an edition of the YṢ that appears to be otherwise unknown.

It may also be significant that the MAV's YṢ 21cd is strikingly similar to Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* 91ab: "Causes and their effects also arise; these are just awareness itself" (*rgyu dang 'bras bur gyur pa yang / shes pa 'ba' zhig kho na ste*) (Ichigō 1985, 292).[172] Rigral's commentary to the MAV cites this verse exactly as it is found in that text, but does not follow Ratnākaraśānti's attribution to Nāgārjuna. Instead, Rigral identifies this as a verse from the LAS as it is found in Śāntarakṣita's MA.[173] This must refer to LAS X.85, which is not found in Śāntarakṣita's root text but is obliquely referenced in his Vṛtti.[174]

The version of LAS X.592 that appears in both citations also bears discussion. Ratnākaraśānti is obviously using a very different edition than any to which Nanjio had access when compiling his critical edition. Nanjio's edition reads:

> *hetupratyayavyāvṛttaṃ kāraṇasya niṣedhanam / cittramātra-vyavasthānam anutpādaṃ vadāmy aham //* (Nanjio 1956, 338)[175]
>
> Excluded from causes and conditions; the negation of a cause; the presentation of mind only: this I declare to be non-arising.[176]

Ratnākaraśānti seems to be either relying on an edition that reads *kāraka* ("agent," *byed pa po*) in compound in place of *kāraṇa* ("cause") or is interpreting the text to yield the former meaning. Nanjio does not attest to any such variation. John Dunne suggests the following reconstruction of

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[172] Ichigō's translation: "That which is cause and effect is nothing but knowledge" (1985, CXLIV).

[173] Rig pa'i Raltri opens the citation with: *slob dpon zhi ba 'tshos dbu ma rgyan du lang kar gshegs pa las* / (426.6). There is one inconsequential variation in the Tibetan editions: Rigpa'i Raltri's first line reads *'dir gang cung zad <u>skye ba med</u>* where the MAV reads *'dir gang cung zad <u>skye med pa</u>*.

[174] *'phags pa la lang kar gshegs pa las gsungs pa'i khungs shes pa 'ba zhig kho na'o //* (Ichigō 1985, 303) *na hy atrotpadyate kiṁcit pratyayair na nirudhyate / utpadyante nirudhyante pratyayā eva kalpitaḥ* (Nanjio 1956, 84).

[175] The Derge edition of the Tibetan reads: *rgyu dang rkyen rnams bzlog pa dang / 'byed pa dag ni dgag pa dang / sems tsam du ni rnam gzhag pa / skye ba med par ngas bshad do //* D 218a.

[176] Suzuki translates: "The doing away with the notion of cause and condition, the giving up of a causal agency, the establishment of the Mind-only [sic]–this I state to be no-birth" (1932, 173–74). It is possible that Suzuki's rendering reflects the Chinese edition(s) of the LAS, to which I do not have access.

the MAV's Tibetan edition of the first two *pāda*s: *hetupratyavyāvṛttakārakasya niṣedhanāt /* (personal communication). The main import of these variations is that Ratnākaraśānti glosses **kāraka* specifically in terms of a creator-god (*īśvara*); *kāraṇa* can be interpreted in that way but has a more general sense of cause.

This reading of the LAS—specifically, *kāraka* vs. *kāraṇa*—is philosophically significant for Ratnākaraśānti, insofar as he holds that "unarisen" phenomena of the imagined nature *do* have a cause, i.e. the other-dependent nature.[177] Other available readings of this verse are consistent with [pseudo-]Mādhyamika interpretations of mere non-arising, i.e., non-arising as a non-affirming negation. Ratnākaraśānti's edition leaves room for an affirming negation insofar as it distinguishes Yogācāra accounts of a substantial causal *basis* (i.e., the other-dependent nature) from non-Buddhist accounts of an existent causal *agent*. There is no obvious evidence that this reading of LAS X.592 represents an innovation on Ratnākaraśānti's part, but it does mark an interesting case of variant editions of a *sūtra* suggesting competing philosophical agendas on the part of their editors and/or translators. With all this in mind, we return to the text of the MAV and its citation of Nāgārjuna's most well-known verse.

Citation II: *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK) 24.18

Ratnākaraśānti's discussion of MMK XXIV.18 is crucial for his larger argument in the MAV. It is of fundamental import for [pseudo-]Mādhyamikas; Garfield rightly opines that it "can truly be said to contain the entire Mādhyamika system in embryo" (J. L. Garfield 1995, 304). As such, it is necessary for Ratnākaraśānti render this verse consistent with Maitreya's presentation of the three natures. This is a necessary facet of his larger program to show that Nāgārjuna's true

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[177] These themes are further discussed in the next chapter.

intentions are revealed at YṢ 21 and 34, and that he therefore agrees straightforwardly with Maitreya's teachings. The MMK, by contrast, would be of only interpretable meaning. Ratnākaraśānti cites the verse and proceeds to gloss the first *pāda* as follows:

> Whatever is dependently arisen, just that we declare to be emptiness.
> That is a dependent concept; just that is the Middle Way. //MMK XXIV.18//[178]

> <u>Whatever is</u> of the nature of the other-dependent is <u>dependently arisen</u>. Since the imagined does not exist in <u>just that</u>, how could dependent arising be denigrated?

> Imagined objects of grasping are also dependently arisen. When there is the imagination of the unreal, imputation of the aggregates of appropriation (*upādānaskandha*) occurs. This is the intention [of *pāda* a].[179]

It is not surprising that this commentary associates the other-dependent nature with dependent origination. It is more significant that Ratnākaraśānti first glosses the first two *pāda*s separately in order to show that his interpretation avoids the fault of over-negation. To over-negate would entail the denigration of dependent arising—a charge he levels against his opponents. Ratnākaraśānti highlights the need to preserve a meaningful difference between dependent arising, which exists, and the dualistic experiences of the imagined nature, which do not. [Pseudo-]Mādhyamikas consider both of these to be part of the conventional truth. Ratnākaraśānti thereby implies that his opponents cannot avoid nihilism because they cannot appeal to anything beyond the conventional, a charge that is the focus of the following chapter.

After considering this issue, Ratnākaraśānti proceeds to discuss the verse in its entirety. Rather than parsing the verse by either word or by meaning, he offers what he calls "the definitive

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[178] gang zhig rten cing 'brel bar 'byung/ de ni stong pa nyid du bshad / de ni rgyur bcas brtags pa ste / de ni dbu ma'i lam yin no // P 269.14-16 D 104b5. yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracakṣmahe / sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā // (Ye 2011, 426).

[179] *gang zhig gzhan gyi dbang gi ngo bo nyid rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba yin la / de nyid la kun tu brtags pa'i ngo bo med pa'i phyir ji ltar rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba la skur ba btab par 'gyur / nye bar len pa btags pa de nyid kyang rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba yin te / yang dag pa ma yin pa'i kun tu rtog pa yod na / des nye bar len pa'i phung po la sogs pa rnams 'dogs pa'i phyir ro zhes dgongs pa yin no* // P 296.16-270.1; D 104b5-6.

proof" (*nges par 'grub pa*) of the Middle Way; that is to say, he interprets the verse in its entirety

in accordance with what he takes to be Nāgārjuna's final intent:

> The intention of <u>Whatever is dependently arisen […] just that is the middle way</u> is as follows: while imagined natures (*bdag nyid*, **ātma*) are all non-existent, the nature of the other-dependent is not non-existent. Therefore, this is <u>the middle way</u>.
>
> Therefore, since appearances lack duality,[180] just so, the imagination of the unreal exists. Since that exists, just so, the emptiness of duality [also] exists. This [reasoning] proves[181] *dharma*s [as having] three natures (*rang bzhin*, **svabhāva*). While the imagined nature does not exist, the other [two natures] are not non-existent. This is the Middle Way; this is definitively proven.[182]

This is less a commentary than it is an inscription of Maitreya's thought onto Nāgārjuna's verse,

lining up the systems through juxtaposition rather than philosophical argumentation. Insofar as the

MAV's commentary on MMK XXIV.18 could be seen as an argument, it mainly serves to show

that the verse *can* be coherently read in terms of the framework of the three natures, which—on

Ratnākaraśānti's reading—should be supplied in accordance with the definitive Mahāyāna.

Furthermore, Ratnākaraśānti can be seen to argue that his interpretation avoids a problematic

nihilism to which his pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents fall prey.[183] The verse also gives

Ratnākaraśānti an opportunity to present a central verse for those opponents in a manner that is

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[180] *gang gi phyir gnyis po med par snang ba*. Pk and N attest *smra* instead of *snang*, yielding "since [someone] posits the non-existence of duality." On this reading, the "someone" is most obviously Nāgārjuna, which would merit a reconsideration of the entire passage: "Therefore, since [Nāgārjuna] posits that appearances lack duality, just so, [he also accepts] that the imagination of the unreal exists. This proves [that even Nāgārjuna accepts] *dharma*s [as having] three natures." In the absence of Sanskrit attestation, we cannot be sure whether *snang* or *smra* is the preferable reading.

[181] *grub par gyur pa*, more literally "has proven."

[182] *gang zhig rten cing 'brel bar 'byung / de nyid dbu ma'i lam yin no / zhes bya ba ni 'di ltar dgongs pa yin te / kun du brtags pa'i bdag nyid thams cad med la / gzhan gyi dbang gi bdag nyid ni med pa ma yin te / de'i phyir dbu ma'i lam zhes bya'o / de lta bas na gang gi phyir gnyis po med par snang ba de nyid kyi phyir yang dag pa ma yin pa'i kun tu rtog pa ni yod do / gang gi phyir de yod pa de nyid kyi phyir gnyis kyis stong pa de la yod de 'di ni chos gsum gyi rang bzhin du grub par gyur pa yin no / kun tu brtags pa'i rang bzhin de ni yod pa ma yin gyi / gzhan dag ni med pa ma yin pa 'di ni dbu ma'i lam yin no zhes nges par 'grub pa yin no //* P 270.1-9; D 104b6-105a2. This translation builds on a previously published version (McNamara 2017, 128).

[183] This stands in stark contrast to Ratnākaraśānti's commentary on this verse in the MAU; there, he takes the occasion to argue that luminous awareness (*prakāśa*) is the highest *pramāṇa*. Cf. Seton (2015, 85–86) and (2012, 240).

consistent with Maitreya, drawing out the implications of the passage in much the same way that the SNS claims to draw out the true intent of the Buddha's second turning of the wheel of Dharma.

Citation 3: *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* 34

If MMK XXIV.18 is Nāgārjuna's most famous verse, YṢ 34 may be his most infamous. Westerhoff rightly calls it "the most famous passage from Nāgārjuna's works with a clear Yogācāra flavor" (2015, 166). Ratnākaraśānti cites this verse ubiquitously,[184] taking it as conclusive proof that Nāgārjuna's Middle Way engages with the three natures. The verse (as it occurs in the MAV) and Ratnākaraśānti's commentary read:

> The great elements and so forth—which are explained [by the Lord]—are contained in consciousness. They cease in awareness of that;[185] they are surely falsely imagined.[186] //YṢ 34//

The meanings of this verse are as follows:

I. The great elements and so forth, earth etc.,[187] are stated[188] by the Lord. Their appearances are contained—that is, completely included—in consciousness, which is the imagination of the unreal. This is because those [elements] appear by way of the imagination of the unreal.

II. Likewise, due to the force of having cultivated correct awareness, those [appearances] dissipate—they cease arising; i.e. they do not appear. Why is this? They are surely falsely imagined indicates that what appears in false awareness does not appear in correct awareness. Here, earth and so forth are included in

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[184] For example, it is cited at MAU P 610.13-15; PPU P 397.17-19; GSK P 1419.10-11; and HPM *ad* Hevajratantra ii.XIII.10. For an insightful discussion of the latter citation, cf. Isaacson (2013, 1041–42). In a previously published article I also engage with scholarly appraisal of these seemingly ecumenical statements (McNamara 2017).

[185] Isaacson points out that Ratnākaraśānti glosses the Sanskrit compound *taj jñāne* (here, "awareness of that") in a potentially novel manner (2013, 1041–42). This leads Luo to describe Ratnākaraśānti's interpretation as "peculiar" (2018, 594 f.n. 62)

[186] In the MAV, this verse reads: *'byung ba che la sogs bshad pa / rnam par shes su yang dag 'du // de shes pas ni bral gyur na / log par rnam brtags ma yin nam //* P 286.4-5; D 111a7. Isaacson gives the Sanskrit of this verse as: *mahābhūtādi vijñāne proktaṃ samav arudhyate / taj jñāne vigamaṃ yāti nanu mithyā vikalpitam //* (2013, 1041). Lindtner's Tibetan edition reads: *'byuṅ ba che la sogs bśad pa / rnam par śes su yaṅ dag 'du / de śes pas ni 'bral gyur na / log par rnam brtags ma yin nam //* (1982, 110). Cf. also Scherrer-Schaub (1991, 252–59) and Westerhoff (2015, 167 f.n. 5) for detailed discussions of this verse and its translations. Isaacson translates Scherrer-Schaub's French rendering as: "The universal elements [and other entities], which are taught [to some], are contained in *vijñāna*. Since they cease [to exist] when this is known, how [could they] not [be] false imagination" (Isaacson 2013, 1041, f.n. 7).

[187] I.e., water, fire, air, and space.

[188] *gsung pa*, glossing "explained" (*bshad pa*) in the verse.

consciousness, and that when correct awareness arises, delusion is excluded [from it].[189]

III. Some [opponents] argue that the aggregate of form is, itself, [the product of] an external object.[190] They assert that the overturning of delusion is characterized by the exhaustion of the other four[191] aggregates.[192] Those individuals are not followers (*slob ma*) of Nāgārjuna because they declare the negation of an existent awareness and so forth, and [because Nāgārjuna] taught that earth and the other [elements] are imputations.

IV. There are also some who assert that blue and so forth along with the awareness that apprehends them are similarly false, asserting that they are of equal status (*gnas par 'dra bar smra ba*). These are also not followers of Nāgārjuna.[193]

Ratnākaraśānti takes this verse as an opportunity to do three things: First (I) he asserts it as proof that Nāgārjuna accepted the dependent nature, since phenomenal experience occurs *in awareness* due to the imagination of the unreal. He then (II) briefly explains how meditative cultivation can lead to the overturning of delusion and the realization of an *ārya*, consisting in correct awareness in which the elements and so forth do not arise. Finally, (III and IV) he declares that anyone who accepts external objects as a basis for experience, or does not acknowledge the primacy of

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[189] "Included" and "excluded" translate the technical terms *bsdu ba'i tshig* (**saṃkarṣaṇapada*) and *bzlog pa'i tshig* (**niśkarṣaṇapada*) and set up a type of *anvaya*/*vyatireka* dichotomy. I am grateful to John Dunne and Mattia Salvini for helpful comments on an earlier translation of this passage (McNamara 2017, 129).

[190] *phyi rol gyi rang gi gzugs kyi phung po*, **bāhyārthasvarūpaskandha*. Because Ratnākaraśānti is discussing opponents who consider themselves Mahāyāna Buddhists, it is unlikely that he is ascribing to them a direct realist view. The idea that visual perceptions are representations caused by external objects—i.e., atoms—is broadly consistent with both Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika presentations.

[191] Following Pk and N, I read *bzhi* instead of *gzhi*.

[192] Other than appearance/form (*rūpa*), the first aggregate. The others are feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saṃjñā*), volition (*saṃskāra*), and consciousness (*vijñāna*).

[193] *zhes gsungs pa'i don ni 'di dag yin te / 'byung ba chen po la sogs pa ni sa la sogs pa ste / bcom ldan 'das kyis gang gsung pa de dag rnam par shes pa yang dag pa ma yin pa'i kun tu rtog pa la snang ba ni 'du ba yang dag par 'dus pa yin te / yang dag pa ma yin pa'i bdag nyid des de snang ba'i phyir ro / de nyid kyi phyir yang dag pa shes pa bsgoms pa'i stobs las byung ba'i bral ba ni nub pa ste / mi snang bar gyur pa yin no / gang gi phyir / log par rnam brtags ma yin nam / zhes bya ba ni log pa'i shes pa nyid la snang ba ni yang dag pa'i shes pa la ma yin no / 'dir sa la sogs pa rnam par shes par bsdu ba'i tshig yin pa'i phyir dang / yang dag pa'i shes pa skyes pa la 'khrul pa bzlog pa'i tshig yin pa'i phyir ro // gang zhig phyi rol gyi rang gi gzugs kyi phung po dod pa dang / gzhan phung po bzhi'i zad pa'i mtshan nyid 'khrul ba bzlog par 'dod pa de dag ni / klu sgrub kyi slob ma ma yin te / shes pa yod pa la sogs pa dgag par brjod pa'i phyir dang / sa la sogs pa sgro btags par bstan pa'i phyir ro // yang gang zhig sngon po la sogs pa dang / de shes pa gnyis brdzun par 'dra ba nyid dang / gnas par 'dra bar smra ba de dag kyang / klu sgrub kyi slob ma ma yin no //* P 286.6-21; D 111a7-111b5.

awareness, arguing that mind and its apprehended objects are equally unreal, is not a follower (or "disciple") of Nāgārjuna.

This passage could hardly be clearer: the three natures are Nāgārjuna's intended teaching and are the means to achieve liberation. The third paragraph states this flatly, leveling the charge that anyone who denies the three natures—particularly, anyone who denies that the other-dependent serves as a basis for both ordinary phenomenal experience and "correct awareness"—is not worthy to be called a follower of Nāgārjuna. This once again highlights the centrality of the need to account for liberation for Ratnākaraśānti; it is significant that in paragraph (II) Ratnākaraśānti gives an account of the soteriological path in terms of the three natures. Once again, by the logic of the MAV, Nāgārjuna must have had the path to realization in mind when teaching, and the three natures are a crucial facet of that path.

It is important to highlight Ratnākaraśānti's interpretation of dependent arising in his discussions of Nāgārjuna's verses—particularly MMK XXIV.18. The dualistic experiences of the imagined nature cannot exist as interdependently originated phenomena because, according to both the MAV and MVB, they do not exist *at all*. The experiences of the imagined are no more real than the imagined snake. If someone were to argue that these *are* dependently arisen, she would fall into a complete causal relativism and thereby denigrate any causal processes which *do* exist. Ratnākaraśānti solves this dilemma by positing that while "imagined objects of grasping" do not truly exist, they nonetheless *participate* in dependent origination, insofar as they are brought about by the imagination of the unreal in its function as the basis for affliction. The aggregates and other cognitive structures which form the imagination of the unreal are themselves part of the dependent nature, and therefore dependently arisen. These are the bases for imputation, misapprehension, and delusion; they interact with interdependent origination insofar as the person mistaking the rope for

a snake is, on some level, interacting with the rope—albeit in an entirely misguided manner. With Ratnākaraśānti's interpretations of Nāgārjuna's verses in full view, we are now in a position to examine the presentation of the two truths in the MAV.

The MAV's Presentation of the Two Truths

Although at verse two, the MAV announces that the two truths are the main topic of the text, they are for the most part treated only indirectly. By arguing that both Maitreya and Nāgārjuna discuss the Middle Way in terms of the three natures, Ratnākaraśānti is clarifying what the two truths are *not*: a rubric intended to replace the three natures. It is only toward the close of the text that Ratnākar0aśānti gives an account of how the two truths *should* be understood. Once again, his interpretation is directly inspired by the MVB corpus. The MAV's treatment of the two truths begins at verse 42:

> The focus that is afflicted and the focus that is pure:
> The conventional and ultimate are the two truths, respectively. //41//

That which is [an object of] focus which is afflicted is the conventional truth. That which is [an object of] focus which is pure is the ultimate truth. What are these? [The next root verse] states:

> The nature (*bdag nyid*) which is imagined by the imagination of the unreal is the conventional. Just so, the nature which is empty is known as the ultimate truth. //42//[194]

The Tibetan word *dmigs pa* (*ālambana* or *upalambhya*) is rendered here as "[an object of] focus" because it can refer to the object of one's focus, or to the act of focusing, or both. Ratnākaraśānti's commentary makes clear that this ambiguity is intentional: on this account, "conventional truth"

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[194] *kun nas nyon mong dmigs pa dang / gang zhig dmigs pa can dag ni / kun rdzob dang ni don dam ste / de gnyis bden dang go rims bzhin //41// kun nas nyon mongs pa'i dmigs pa gang yin pa de ni kun rdzob kyi bden pa'o / rnam par dag pa'i dmigs pa gang yin pa de ni don dam pa'i bden pa'o // de yang gang zhig yin zhe na / smas pa // yang dag ma yin kun rtog gis / btags pa'i bdag nyid kun rdzob yin / de nyid stong pa'i bdag nyid ni / dam pa'i don du shes par bya //42//* P 292.4-10; D 113b6-114a1.

simultaneously refers to objects that are impure—i.e., the imagined nature—and with the structure

of impure perception (the impure other-dependent nature, i.e. the imagination of the unreal).

Likewise, the ultimate truth is related to both a pure object and to purifying cognitions, which can

be associated with the pure other-dependent nature and with the perfected.

> The passage continues:

> Being from the Mahāyāna, four aspects are asserted. In order to explain them, the [next verse] states:

>> These truths are asserted to be the conventionally existent and the ultimately existent. "Existent as imputation" and "substantially existent" [refer to] the imputed and the imagination of the unreal. //43//

> The conventional truth is <u>conventionally existent</u>. The ultimate truth is <u>ultimately existent</u>. The imagined nature (*ngo bo*) is "<u>existent as a designation</u>," since it is mere convention. The nature (*ngo bo*) of the [impure[195]] other-dependent is <u>substantially existent</u> because it arises interdependently.

> These are the two truths.[196]

Here Ratnākaraśānti enumerates "four aspects" (*rnam pa bzhi*), stating that these are commonly

accepted in Mahāyāna discourse; the latter point will be discussed below. The four aspects are: (a)

"conventionally existent" (*saṃvṛtisat*), (b) "ultimately existent" (*paramārthasat*), (c) "existent as

a designation" (*prajñaptisat*),[197] and "substantially existent" (*dravyasat*).

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[195] It is clear that the commentary is describing the impure other-dependent nature because it serves as a gloss for imagination of the unreal (*yang dag min kun rtog*) in verse forty-three.

[196] *theg pa chen po las yod pa rnam pa bzhir bzhed de / de bstan pa'i phyir smras pa // bden pa de nyid kun rdzob dang / dam pa'i don du yod par bzhed /brtags par yod dang rdzas yod dang / brtags dang yang dag min kun rtog //43// kun rdzob kyi bden pa nyid ni kun rdzob tu yod pa'o // don dam pa'i bden pa nyid ni don dam par yod pa'o // kun brtags pa'i ngo bo ni brtags par yod pa yin te / tha snyad tsam yin pa'i phyir ro // gzhan gyi dbang gi ngo bo ni rdzas su yod pa yin te / rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba yin pa'i phyir ro // de dag ni bden pa gnyis so //* P 292.10-18; D 114a1-3.

[197] Negi's Tibetan-Sanskrit dictionary does not attest *brtags par yod pa* as a phrase, and does not include *prajñapti* in its substantial entries on *brtags* and *brtags pa* (1993, 1905–7). Here I follow Seton's translation of a very similar passage from the PPU that I suspect will be corroborated by Luo's Sanskrit edition of that text (Seton 2015, 70–71).

Before discussing the specifics of this passage, it is important to highlight the rhetorical implications of Ratnākaraśānti's assertion that this list of four aspects comes "from the Mahāyāna." It is discussed in several sources, all of which are tied to Yogācāra presentations of Abhidharma. As is to be expected, they are discussed in the MVB corpus—specifically in Vasubandhu and Sthiramati's commentaries on MVB III.16 (Salvini 2015, 57–59). Asaṅga's *Abhidharmasamuccaya* also describes this set—albeit in a slightly different order[198]—and explains each aspect in detail.[199] Thus, when Ratnākaraśānti stipulates that this list comes "from the Mahāyāna," this rhetoric reinforces the idea that the Mahāyāna is a single, unified system that is most clearly and authoritatively expressed by Maitreya in the MVB. It highlights Ratnākaraśānti's position that the correct (i.e., the Mahāyāna) understanding of the two truths should be gleaned from the MVB and related texts. The clear implication is that other explanations of the two truths—such as those offered by the pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents—are *not* representative of the Mahāyāna and therefore not consistent with Nāgārjuna's intent.

Turning to the four aspects and Ratnākaraśānti's brief commentary on how they relate to the two truths, it should be noted immediately that Ratnākaraśānti folds the two truths into the first two items on this set of four: conventional truth (*samvṛttisatya*) relates to the first term, conventionally existent (*saṃvṛtisat*); ultimate truth is then associated with ultimately existent (*paramārthasat*). This method for interpreting the two truths is, itself, an argument: it suggests to the audience that discussions of the two truths found in authoritative *sūtra*s and *śāstra*s—for example, in Nāgārjuna's MMK—should be understood in terms of this Yogācāra abhidharma framework. The implication is that neither Maitreya *nor Nāgārjuna* considered the two truths as a

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[198] Specifically: *dravyasat, prajñaptisat, saṃvṛtisat, paramārthasat* (Salvini 2015, 52).
[199] Translations and citations are drawn from Salvini (2015).

separate, self-sufficient rubric. I believe Ratnākaraśānti is taking this opportunity to argue that pseudo-Mādhyamikas are wrong to treat the two truths as an individual rubric and to clarify that they are but one piece of an over-arching Mahāyāna structure that also includes the three natures.

After linking the two truths with the first two members of this list of four aspects, Ratnākaraśānti then glosses the remaining two in terms of the imagined and the other-dependent natures. The imagined nature is "existent as a designation" (*prajñaptisat*), which Ratnākaraśānti associates with "mere conventions," i.e. with language and concepts. This highlights the idea that while phenomena associated with the imagined nature do not exist in the sense of having any substantial basis, they cannot be considered *completely* non-existent insofar as they play a role in this explanatory framework. By contrast, the impure other-dependent nature—i.e. the imagination of the unreal—is substantially existent (*dravyasat*) and can thereby play a role in interdependent origination.

This account explains the two truths in terms of two types of cognition: afflicted—i.e., conducive to *saṃsāra*—and pure, i.e., conducive to *nirvāṇa*. Ratnākaraśānti treats them as part of a larger set derived from the shared Mahāyāna abhidharma that can account for (a) how ordinary cognition works, (b) the path to realization, and (c) the results of that realization. They should not be treated as an independent rubric because they are incomplete: while they describe how two types of beings see reality, they do not explain *what* is being seen or *how* that cognition arises. That explanation requires the three natures.

This presentation closely mirrors the MVB's discussion of the imagination of the unreal as the basis of affliction, and the enlightened vision of the *āryas* as the basis of purification. Meanwhile, conventional causality is preserved by interdependent origination—the imagination of the unreal—which is described here as substantially existent. But the *way* interdependent

origination is experienced—through the filter of imagined nature—is deceptive. This allows Ratnākaraśānti to present Maitreya and Nāgārjuna as unified in their explication of the Mahāyāna tradition, rather than being fractured into competing traditions of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra *siddhānta*. While Ratnākaraśānti's account highlights this harmony, in larger context of the MAV this can also be seen as a clear, if subtle, rebuke of pseudo-Mādhyamikas who reject the three natures and treat the two truths as a complete explanatory framework.

Conclusion

This chapter has engaged the opening verses of the MAV, with particular attention to the description of doctrinal authority—i.e. which scriptures present the Buddha's intent in the most complete manner, and which authorities should be consulted for understanding those texts. As evidenced here, the MAV offers a unified vision of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The text portrays the primary elements of Mahāyāna—sūtras, the authoritative treatises of Maitreya and Nāgārjuna, and Dharmakīrti's *pramāṇa*—as all being consistent with one another. The over-arching philosophy of this unified Mahāyāna is what he calls "Three Natures Madhyamaka" (*trisvabhāvamadhyamaka*). This view is set out most clearly in Maitreya's MVB; Nāgārjuna teaches it explicitly in some places—most obviously, YṢ 21 and 34—but only partially in other texts such as the MMK.

By way of concluding this chapter, it is useful to briefly return to a passage from the commentary on verse 2 cited earlier, which can now be appreciated more fully:

> If there were no other-dependent, emptiness could not be the nature of things, just as particular attributes cannot be applied to the horns of a rabbit. If there were no luminous nature, then how would *ārya*s realize it?

In this passage, Ratnākaraśānti is highlighting a major problem with pseudo-Mādhyamika accounts of the two truths: the other-dependent nature is a necessary basis for both ordinary

cognition (as imagination of the unreal) and the luminous nature that is *dharmatā*, i.e. the existent-but-inexpressible ultimate truth. If there were only two natures—i.e., the pseudo-Mādhyamikas' two truths—then the (cataphatic) emptiness of duality in the other-dependent would be meaningfully different from the (apophatic) qualities of *dharmatā*, the pure nature of phenomena which is realized by the *āryas*. The example of the horns of the rabbit demonstrates that something that does not exist (a rabbit's horns) cannot have attributes (such as "long" or "brown"). But emptiness *must* be associated with more positive attributes. This is consistent with MVB verse I.16—cited previously—which describes emptiness is synonymous with the nature of reality and is precisely *what* is realized by an *ārya*. Without the other-dependent, the continuity between *saṃsāra* and liberation would be broken, and the Buddhist path would be fruitless. It is only because the other-dependent serves as the basis for affliction and purification—and concomitantly, for the relative and ultimate truths—that enlightenment could be possible. All this helps explain Ratnākaraśānti's insistence that Nāgārjuna *must* have accepted the three natures: Nāgārjuna is, himself, an *ārya*; it would therefore be rather absurd for his teachings to negate the possibility of *becoming* an *ārya*.

This is at root a deeply religious argument, insofar as what's at stake for Ratnākaraśānti is the possibility of enlightenment. The other-dependent nature is the necessary ground for achieving Buddhahood; to forsake that is to deny the possibility of enlightenment. The proclamation that such a teaching is the Buddha's Dharma would be flatly heretical. Understanding the doctrinal orientation of the text as a whole will allow us to more fully appreciate Ratnākaraśānti's more philosophical engagements with his pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents and also his own view. The remaining chapters of this dissertation focus on these engagements.

Chapter Three
Ornamenting Madhyamaka: Refutations of Pseudo-Mādhyamika Accounts of Causality and Temporality (MAV verses 5–12)

Introduction: Framing Ratnākaraśānti's Concerns

With Ratnākaraśānti's unified vision of the Mahāyāna in full view, we are now in a position to engage the text's specific criticisms of his pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents. This engagement is framed by the over-arching question of how [pseudo-]Mādhyamikas fit into Ratnākaraśānti's presentation of Buddhist views. As we have seen with Ratnākaraśānti's interpretation of Nāgārjuna's thought, whether a particular philosophical system counts as an authentic Mahāyāna view hinges on the acceptance of the three natures. Thinkers who do not accept the three natures as an authoritative rubric—a group which is effectively co-extensive with the label "Mādhyamika"[200]—are not true Mahāyāna Buddhists. Rather, they are peddlers of pernicious simulacra of the Buddha's teachings.

Ratnākaraśānti is concerned to prove this point with reasoning as well as scripture, as he regards pseudo-Mādhyamikas as being both religiously and philosophically aberrant. The previous chapter highlighted the scriptural aspect, discussing Ratnākaraśānti's presentation of the authentic Mahāyāna and emphasizing Nāgārjuna's consistency with that position. This chapter engages with the philosophical aspects of Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms, focusing primarily on the various contradictions that arise from pseudo-Mādhyamikas' failure to accept the three natures.

Ratnākaraśānti begins his engagements with pseudo-Mādhyamikas immediately after his brief summary of the Middle Path at verse three. Rigral's commentary treats the passages discussed

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[200] Note that the Three Mādhyamikas from the East *do* accept the three natures; however, they subordinate them to the rubric of the two truths—specifically relating them to conventional truth. This interpretation would not be acceptable for Ratnākaraśānti.

here as the third major section of the text, after (1) the opening verses and (2) the introductory teaching on the Middle Path. Introducing this section, Rigral provides a useful summary of Ratnākaraśānti's opponents:

> The third topic is the refutation of pseudo-Madhyamaka which asserts everything to be non-existent. It rebuts those who hold that, like the imagined [nature], everything that is other-dependent is also false.[201]

This description highlights Ratnākaraśānti's primary issue with pseudo-Mādhyamikas: they fail to distinguish an interdependently-existent basis—i.e., the other dependent nature—from ordinary conceptual conventions, and they thereby descend into nihilism. To this extent, pseudo-Mādhyamikas—stated more broadly, anyone who claims to follow the Mahāyāna but does not accept the other-dependent nature—have gone astray. These individuals do not correctly understand Nāgārjuna's intent, nor do they fully grasp the meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom; their doctrine is therefore pseudo-Madhyamaka.

The specific arguments that engage this counterfeit Middle Way vary in scope throughout the MAV. They range from wholesale dismissals of pseudo-Mādhyamikas to a sustained criticism of a single verse, Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* 64. The opening verses of this section of the MAV address this variance by establishing two broad types of opponents who are engaged with more specifically over the course of the text: (a) those who say that everything is false (*thams cad brdzun par smra ba*, *sarvālīkavāda*), and (b) those who say everything is non-existent (*thams cad med par smra ba*, *sarvanāstivāda*). Along with these two main themes, there is also a third presentation of Mādhyamika: those who hold that "all phenomena are illusion-like" (*sgyu ma lta bu nyid chos thams cad*, *sarvadharmamāyopama*). That position is mentioned only at the end of

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[201] *don gsum pa thams cad med par smra ba'i dbu ma ltar snang dgag pa ni / gzhan dbang thams cad kyang kun brtags ltar brdzun par 'dod pa rnams 'gog pa ste…//* (423.5-6).

the text; it is discussed in this dissertation in Chapter Five. These first two—particularly those who say everything is false—are engaged directly or indirectly throughout the bulk of the MAV.

Outline of the Chapter

This chapter begins with an overview of the two types of pseudo-Mādhyamika positions with which Ratnākaraśānti engages throughout this section of the MAV. Turning to the MAV itself, this chapter will first engage Ratnākaraśānti's description of two types of opponent at verses five through seven with their commentary. These opponents are further explicated later in the MAV, in the course of Ratnākaraśānti's citation and discussion of MMK XXIV.18. We will therefore briefly jump forward in the text to consider that section once more, attending specifically to the philosophical implications of Ratnākaraśānti's commentary where the previous chapter highlighted the rhetorical import of that citation.

Following this introductory discussion, the chapter will mainly follow the progression of verses eight through ten, pausing periodically to discuss arguments by the Three Mādhyamikas from the East that are particularly relevant for contextualizing Ratnākaraśānti's arguments. The philosophical critique in this section of the MAV is primarily focused on pseudo-Mādhyamika accounts of *pramāṇa*. Ratnākaraśānti argues that the opponents cannot give an acceptable presentation of *pramāṇa*, for which some things must be "real" (*sat*) in some meaningful sense; this requires precisely the sort of existence that pseudo-Mādhyamikas dispute. The opponents are therefore unable to give a coherent account of *pramāṇa*; according to Ratnākaraśānti, this inability necessarily commits pseudo-Mādhyamikas to an incoherent nihilism. This critique theoretically applies to all pseudo-Mādhyamikas, but I posit that Ratnākaraśānti is specifically targeting the three Mādhyamikas and particularly Śāntarakṣita.

The final section of this chapter engages MAV verses eleven and twelve, which specifically critique Śāntarakṣita's presentation of the conventional truth as given in the *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*. While more narrowly focused, the substance of Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms are consistent with his previous arguments. Here he is specifically concerned to refute Śāntarakṣita's position that what is conventionally true—i.e., what is empty of *svabhāva*—could possess causal efficacy. Bearing this trajectory in mind, we turn first to a general presentation of pseudo-Mādhyamika positions before engaging Ratnākaraśānti's arguments at verses five through seven.

Overview of the Two Main Pseudo-Mādhyamika Positions

Introducing Those Who Say Everything is False (**Sarvālīkavāda*)

The first type of pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents—those who say that everything is false—attempt to offer an account of *pramāṇa* despite that falsity. These opponents do not accept the three natures, but nonetheless portray themselves as custodians of Dharmakīrti's *pramāṇa* tradition. These are the main foci for Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms: he accuses pseudo-Mādhyamikas both of being philosophically incoherent and of misinterpreting Dharmakīrti.

As previously indicated, Ratnākaraśānti's descriptions of those who say everything is false are broadly consistent with the Three Mādhyamikas from the East. That said, Śāntarakṣita is clearly Ratnākaraśānti's main opponent, and the MAV specifically singles out that thinker's presentation of conventional truth at verse 64 of the *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*. In that verse, Śāntarakṣita describes conventional phenomena in three ways. First of all, (a) they are "agreeable so long as they are not analyzed"—or, as Ratnākaraśānti puts it, "they do not withstand analysis" (*rnam par dbyad na mi bzod pa*). The specific analysis they fail to withstand is the neither-one-nor-many argument. (b) Second, conventional phenomena arise and cease, i.e., they are

impermanent. (c) And third, conventional things (*dngos po*, **vastu*) possess causal capacity (*don byed nus pa*, **arthakriyā*).

The idea that something could be both false and causally efficacious is deeply problematic for Ratnākaraśānti. Following Dharmakīrti, he considers "existence" and "*arthakriyā*" as synonymous—or, to use the language of *pramāṇa*, they share an identity relation (*tādātmyasaṃbandha*). This position is strongly implied by the arguments in the MAV but is not explicit. Ratnākaraśānti does spell it out in another text, however, the *Antarvyāptisamarthana* or *Establishment of Internal Pervasion*. Ratnākaraśānti makes his position clear in the very first sentence of that text, which Kajiyama translates as: "Here 'existence' (*sattva*) means 'making effective action' (*iha sattvam arthakriyākāritvaṃ*)" (1999, 41). Ratnākaraśānti's pseudo-Mādhyamikas claim that conventional phenomena are false, which is fundamentally incompatible with their being existent. Thus, according to Ratnākaraśānti it is *de facto* impossible for them to be functional at even the most basic level of causality.

Introducing Those Who Say Everything is Non-Existent (**Sarvanāstivāda)

In contrast to his engagement with the first group of pseudo-Mādhyamikas—which is extensive, detailed, and rigorous—Ratnākaraśānti's discussion of the position that all phenomena are non-existent is more of a curt dismissal than a sustained refutation. It is also not obvious whether Ratnākaraśānti is targeting a specific person or group(s), though the brief treatment indicates that he may not have a specific target in mind. What is clear, however, is that the MAV associates the position that everything is non-existent with a categorical denial of *pramāṇa*—a position that Ratnākaraśānti's regards as totally incompatible with Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Ratnākaraśānti describes the position that everything is non-existent as "worse than nihilism" (see below, *ad* MAV verse six). This position is worse than the idea of non-existence

because its advocates deny the Three Jewels, Four Noble Truths, and karmic cause and effect. In other words, the idea that everything is non-existent is even more dangerous than a non-Buddhist position extolling overt nihilism. This suggests that Ratnākaraśānti is targeting a specific person or group who are, in his estimation, deceptively passing off their view as genuine Buddhist teachings. Thus, along with holding incorrect tenets, those who say that nothing exists are guilty of actively leading the faithful astray.

Verse Five: The Opening Critique of Those Who Say All is False

The introduction to MAV verse 5 describes thematic group (a), those who say that all is false. It constitutes an opening salvo that prefigures Ratnākaraśānti's overall criticisms of his pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents in the MAV:

> Others explain the Middle Path differently. To be specific, there is the view that blue and so forth are not non-existent because they are established by experience, but they are also not existent, because they do not withstand analysis.

> That is not true. Why not? Though that experience [blue and so forth] contradicts the non-existence of the experience, it does not [contradict the experience of blue] as being false. Therefore, something is not proven to exist just because it is experienced. But it is also not non-existent, as that would be unreasonable. It would be reasonable for it to not exist, provided there were a proven contradiction with analysis.[202]

Ratnākaraśānti's response to this initial opponent makes use of his *alīkākāra* viewpoint: phenomena exist as luminosity but appear falsely as cognitive contents such as colors—or as he puts it, as "blue and so forth" (*sngon pa la sogs pa*, **nīlādi*). In other words, Ratnākaraśānti separates the validity of the experience ("seeing blue") from the validity of the content of that

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[202] *gzhan dag ni gzhan du dbu ma'i lam smra ste / 'di la ste sngon po la sogs pa 'di dag ni med pa ma yin te / nyams su myong bas grub pa'i phyir ro // yod pa ma yin te / rnam par dpyad na mi bzod pa'i phyir ro zhe na / de ni bden pa ma yin te / gang gi phyir zhe na / de nyams su myong bas nyams su myong ba med pa 'gal bas sel gyi brdzun pa ni ma yin te / de'i phyir nyams su myong ba tsam gyis yod par mi 'grub la / med par yang ma yin te / mi rigs pa'i phyir ro / yod pa ma yin pa'i rigs par ni 'di 'gyur na / gal te rnam par dpyad pa dang 'gal ba nyid grub na ni 'gyur ro //* P 265.21-266.7; D 103a5-7.

experience. The image of blue is experienced, and that experience cannot be contradicted. But that fact alone does not prove that one's cognition is accurate about a patch of blue existing. However, that imagination is actually taking place; that is to say, cognition is operative. But that tells us nothing about whether we ought to believe what we see. For example, when someone sees a mirage in the desert, that experience cannot be denied, but that does nothing to prove the existence of water in the distance.

The final sentence of the passage—"It would be reasonable for it to not exist, provided there were a proven contradiction with analysis"—echoes Śāntarakṣita's position that phenomena are 'agreeable only so long as they are not analyzed.' Ratnākaraśānti and his opponents agree that investigating phenomena can prove that they do not exist; at the same time, both parties accept that that those phenomena nonetheless appear. I interpret this as a suggestion by Ratnākaraśānti that his opponents are either being willfully disingenuous or are confused about the consequences of their stated position. The idea that "phenomena do not exist but are also not non-existent" is refuted by logic that even Ratnākaraśānti's opponent accepts, so this kind of position is untenable.

The passage continues by engaging a pseudo-Mādhyamika articulation of the Middle Way. The position is stated in a sufficiently general way that it could be applied to virtually anyone who calls herself a Mādhyamika.[203] Ratnākaraśānti's answer anticipates arguments that feature prominently in the balance of the chapter:

> Others assert [the following]: "while phenomena such as the aggregates[204] are ultimately non-existent, they do exist conventionally. This is the Middle Way." This also is not true.

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[203] I cannot think of any self-described Mādhyamika who would take issue with this as a general description of the Middle Way. That said, there are certainly Mādhyamikas (such as Candrakīrti) who would be uncomfortable making the explicit assertion that "things exist conventionally" in the context of a philosophical argument.

[204] Later in the text, when presenting the first of four stages of yoga (*rnal 'byor gyi sa*, *bhavanākrama*), Ratnākaraśānti treats the five aggregates, twelve sense-bases (*skye mched*, *āyatanā*), and eighteen sense-spheres (*khams*, *dhātu*) as an exhaustive list of types of perceptual experiences. I suspect that Ratnākaraśānti is referencing

> If real things do not exist [at all], then how could they exist conventionally? Since things do not exist ultimately, how *do* they exist? //5//

> The meaning of this verse is: something that is refuted by the highest *pramāṇa* <u>does not exist</u> <u>ultimately</u>. But [things] cannot be proven to <u>exist</u> by means of <u>conventional</u> [truth], which is not a *pramāṇa*. Please tell me, <u>how</u> is it that [something] <u>exists</u> conventionally?[205]

The opponent aligns the Middle Way with the position that the aggregates and so forth do not exist ultimately but do exist conventionally. This position putatively avoids the extremes of reification—defined here as asserting ultimate existence—and a nihilistic assertion of non-existence. Ratnākaraśānti's response—in verse five and its commentary—is specifically focused on the relationship between the two truths and *pramāṇa*.

It is worth noting immediately that Ratnākaraśānti's answer is significantly more precise than the assertion he assigns the opponent. The opponent posits that phenomena such as the aggregates (*phun po la sogs pa'i chos*, **skandhādidharmāḥ*) are ultimately non-existent. Verse five glosses these phenomena as "real things" (*dngos pa'i chos*, **vastudharma*). This term is not explicitly defined in the MAV, but from the overall context we can be confident that it describes something causally efficacious—i.e. something that possesses *arthakriyā*.[206] Following Dharmakīrti, Ratnākaraśānti holds "causally efficacious" to be co-extensive with "existent." The problems Ratnākaraśānti proceeds to highlight proceed mainly from pseudo-Mādhyamikas' attempts to give an account of *pramāṇa* while denying existence (and, concomitantly, efficacy).

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the same list here. That later passage reads: *mdor bsdus pa'i chos ni 'di dag yin te / phung po lnga dang / skye mched bcu gnyis dang / khams bco brgyad ces bya ba 'di dag ni rnal 'byor gyi sa dang po yin te* P 303.7-9; D 118b1-2.

[205] *phung po la sogs pa'i chos don dam par ni med la / kun rdzob tu yod pa 'di ni dbu ma'i lam yin par gzhan dag 'dod de / de yang bden pa ma yin te // dngos po'i chos rnams med na ni / gal te kun rdzob ji ltar yod / dam pa'i don du yod min phyir / de ni yod par ji ltar 'gyur //5// zhes bya ba ni gang gi phyir tshad ma dam pas gnod pa gang yin pa de ni don dam par med pa yin no // de tshad ma ma yin par 'gyur ba'i kun rdzob kyis yod par ni mi grub bo // de ji ltar kun rdzob tu yod ces brjod //* P 266.7-14; D103a7-103b2.

[206] *arthakriyā* is most often rendered in Tibetan as *don byed nus pa* but generally discussed in the MAV as simply *nus pa* (**kriyā*).

Ratnākaraśānti's deployment of the term "real things" may be specifically intended to contrast with Jñānagarbha's description of conventional phenomena as "mere things" (*vastumātra*); this is discussed toward the close of this chapter.

The commentary on verse five clarifies Ratnākaraśānti's argument significantly. According to the opponent, the aggregates and so forth are ultimately non-existent; that is to say, they cannot be ultimately established. Ratnākaraśānti articulates this point with the phrase, "something refuted by the highest *pramāṇa* does not exist ultimately." This nuance is important because Ratnākaraśānti posits that there is something that exists ultimately and is not refuted by the highest *pramāṇa*. The opponent disagrees, asserting instead that nothing exists ultimately. That being the case, the opponent cannot appeal to the ultimate truth in order to prove anything, since the ultimate analysis can only prove that something *does not* exist. She also cannot prove any kind of existence by appealing to the conventional truth, because conventions are not *pramāṇa*s and *pramāṇa* is the only way to prove something. Not being able to prove existence from either perspective, Ratnākaraśānti sardonically asks the opponent, "so how is it that you can say things do not exist ultimately but do exist conventionally?"

It is useful here to briefly summarize Ratnākaraśānti's own position as a contrast to the opponent. On his view, "the aggregates and so forth" are the imagination of the unreal, otherwise known as the impure dependent nature. The imagination of the unreal is not non-existent, and provides the basis for ordinary experience—i.e., the imagined nature, which is non-existent. Because he accepts the three natures, Ratnākaraśānti can accept that ordinary phenomena do not exist ultimately. Likewise, Ratnākaraśānti is able to answer the question the opponent cannot, since he accepts the three natures: "how is that [something] exists conventionally?" The specifics of this answer will become clear over the course of the following chapters. For the time being it is

sufficient to highlight Ratnākaraśānti's focus on *pramāṇa* and the opponents' denial of existence in his criticisms of pseudo-Mādhyamikas who hold that everything is false.

Verse Six: Engaging Pseudo-Mādhyamikas Who Say Nothing Exists

Having briefly introduced the first group opponents in verse five and its attendant commentary, Ratnākaraśānti then turns to the second group—those who hold that nothing at all exists—in his comments on verse six. He writes:

> Furthermore, to those who advocate complete non-existence ultimately [the root verses] say:
>
> > [Proponents of] complete non-existence are worse than nihilists. If a previously existent thing were destroyed by a counter-agent, it would be counterfeit. //6//
>
> Those who advocate complete non-existence reach a view that surpasses even nihilism, insofar as nihilists view the truths, the jewels, karma and its effects and so forth as non-existent.
>
> Also, if one says that dharmas are non-existent because something previously existent is destroyed by a counter-agent, then it would undesirably follow that that would be counterfeit. In the *Noble* [*Eight-Thousand Verse*] *Perfection of Wisdom*, the counterfeit of the Perfection of Wisdom is stated: "form is impermanent means form is destroyed," up to "consciousnesses is impermanent means consciousness is destroyed." Those would obtain [for that view].[207]

Ratnākaraśānti's commentary makes it clear that verse six separates into two parts. The first is a blunt, polemical dismissal: the opponents described here are "worse than nihilists"—more literally, they "attain [a state] that exceeds the nihilists" (*med pa pa las lhag pa 'thob*). The second part references an obscure philosophical argument associated with *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, which

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[207] *gzhan yang don dam par thams cad med par smra ba de la / thams cad du ni kun med na / med pa pa las lhag pa 'thob / sngon yod pa ni gnyen po yis / bshig pa nyid na gzugs brnyan 'gyur //6// zhes bya ba smras te / thams cad du thams cad med par smra na / med pa pa las lhag par 'gyur te / gang gi phyir med pa pa dag ni bden pa dang / dkon mchog dang las dang 'bras bu la sogs pa med par lta'o // 'on te sngar yod pa'i gnyen pos bshig par gyur pas chos rnams med do zhes zer na de'i tshe gzugs brnyan yin par thal bar 'gyur te / 'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa las shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i gzugs brnyan gsungs te / gzugs mi rtag pa ni gzugs 'jig pa'o zhe bya ba nas / rnam par shes pa mi rtag pa ni rnam par shes pa 'jig pa'o zhes bya ba'i bar du de dag 'thob par 'gyur ro //* P 266.14-267.4; D 103b2-5.

the commentary calls a "counterfeit Perfection of Wisdom" (*shes rab kyi pha rol tu gzugs brnyan*, *prajñāpāramitāprativarṇikā*[208]). These two points will be taken in turn.

First of all, advocates of complete non-existence are "worse than nihilists" because they claim to uphold the Buddha's teachings, but advocate a position that denigrates the most fundamental Buddhist doctrines such as the Four Noble truths and the Three Jewels. Discussing early debates between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, Jonathan Gold observes that "as always, in Buddhist critiques of nihilism, it is not the view itself that is truly dangerous, but rather the fact that it will lead its advocates to disbelieve and ignore the reality of karma and its consequences" (2015b, 218). In other words, these pseudo-Buddhist nihilists are like wolves in sheep's clothing, leading pious neophytes astray from the true teaching of the Dharma.

I posit that, by describing his opponents as "worse than nihilists," Ratnākaraśānti is intentionally echoing the passage from Asaṅga's *Bodhisattvabhūmi* discussed in Chapter One. There, Asaṅga states that "[s]omeone who denies designation and reality should be known as the worst kind of nihilist," and that a devotee of the Mahāyāna must not associate with such a person (Eckel 2008, 67). Eckel's phrase "the worst kind of nihilist" translates *pradhāno nāstika*. It seems highly unlikely that Ratnākaraśānti used this particular phrase in the original Sanskrit version of the MAV, which was then rendered in Tibetan as *med pa pa las lhag par 'thob*.[209] Nevertheless, given the content of this particular passage and the context of the MAV as a whole, I posit that Ratnākaraśānti likely does intend to draw a parallel between pseudo-Mādhyamika theses and the distorted views of Asaṅga's opponents. At the very least, this is consistent with the position that

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[208] While *gzugs brnyan* is most obviously back-translated as *pratibimba*, all the Sanskrit editions of the *Eight-Thousand Verse Perfection of Wisdom* that I consulted attest *prativarṇika*.

[209] This is a reasonable assumption due to the sheer number of grammatical differences between these Sanskrit and the Tibetan phrases. Note that Negi (1993) does not attest any Sanskrit terms for *lhag par 'thob*.

the MAV is written in answer to [pseudo-]Mādhyamika thought—most obviously Śāntarakṣita and his cohorts, but also Bhāviveka.

The second point from MAV verse six is similar to the first, in that it also expresses concern about the dangers of false views being passed off as Mahāyāna doctrine. Here, Ratnākaraśānti describes an obscure position whereby "something previously existent is destroyed by a counteragent" (*sngon yod pa ni gnyen po yis bzhig nyid*). In this context he makes oblique mention of a passage from the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature that also discusses a "counterfeit Perfection of Wisdom" (*prajñāpāramitāprativarṇikā, shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i gzugs brnyan*). This most likely refers to a section in the fifth chapter of the *Eight-Thousand Verse Perfection of Wisdom*, the "Chapter on Merit" (*Puṇyaparyāyaparivartaḥ*).[210] Seton's translation[211] of this section is worth quoting at length; I have underlined sections of particular import for the present discussion:

> Then, the powerful lord of gods Śakra said this to the Blessed One: O Blessed One, must even this Transcendent State of Discernment be taught?
>
> When this was said, the Blessed One said this to the powerful lord of gods Śakra: O Kauśika, even this Transcendent State of Discernment must be taught for a noble son or daughter who does not understand (*abudhyamānaḥ*). Why? Since, O Kauśika, in the future, a counterfeit (*prativarnikā; gzugs brnyan*) Transcendent State of Discernment will come to exist (*utpatsyate*). At that [time] (*tatra*), having heard that counterfeit Transcendent State of Discernment, a noble son or daughter who does not understand, [but] wishes to realize unsurpassed, perfect awakening, must not become inclined (*mā pranamksīt; chud zos par gyur*) towards it.
>
> Then, the powerful lord of gods Śakra said this to the Blessed One: O Blessed One, in the future, how will one be able to know (*veditavya*) "*This* is that counterfeit Transcendent State of Discernment being taught?"
>
> When this was said, the Blessed One said this to the powerful lord of gods Śakra: O Kauśika, in the future, there will come to be some monks, whose bodies are not cultivated (*abhāvitaḥ*), whose discipline is not cultivated, whose proper mindset is

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[210] I am grateful for John Dunne's help in identifying this passage.
[211] I am indebted to Greg Seton for sharing this section of his translation, which will be published as part of the Eighty-Four Thousand Project (http://84000.co).

not cultivated, whose discernment (*prajñā*) is not cultivated, who are dumb like sheep (*eḍamūkajātīyā*) void of discernment. [Saying] "We teach the Transcendent State of Discernment," they will teach its counterfeit. And how, O Kauśika will they teach its counterfeit? They will teach, "<u>The impermanence of physical phenomena means the utter annihilation (*vināśaḥ*) of physical phenomena</u>." Likewise, they will teach, "The impermanence of feelings, conceptions, conditioning forces, and perceptions means the impermanence of [feelings, conceptions, conditioning forces, and] perceptions." <u>And in this way, they will teach, "One who strives (*gaveṣayiṣyati*) for [utter annihilation] like this (*evam*) is going about their lives in the Transcendent State of Discernment</u>." O Kauśika, one can recognize *this* as that counterfeit Transcendent State of Discernment. However, one should not see (*draṣṭavyā*) the impermanence of physical phenomena as utter annihilation (*vināśaḥ*) of physical phenomena. Likewise, one should not see the impermanence of feelings, conceptions, conditioning forces, and perceptions as the impermanence of [feelings, conceptions, conditioning forces, and] perceptions. If they were to see this way, they are going about their lives in a counterfeit Transcendent State of Discernment. Therefore, O Kauśika, noble son or daughter should teach the meaning of the Transcendent State of Discernment. Noble son or daughter, who teach the meaning of the Transcendent State of Discernment, would earn more merit (*puṇyam*).[212]

This passage includes the prophecy of a future time when a counterfeit dharma would be propagated. It stipulates that this counterfeit dharma takes the doctrine of impermanence to mean that an entity exists, and that impermanence destroys it—or in the language of the MAV, "something previously existent is destroyed by a counteragent."

In sum, Ratnākaraśānti's critique of those who say that everything is non-existent appears to be based primarily in scripture, specifically prophetic warnings about a dangerous

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[212] Vaidya's edition reads: *atha khalu śakro devānāmindro bhagavantametadavocat kathaṃ bhagavan anāgate 'dhvani prajñāpāramitāprativarṇikā veditavyā iyaṃ sā prajñāpāramitāprativarṇikopadiśyata iti / evamukte bhagavān śakraṃ devānāmindrametadavocat - bhaviṣyanti kauśika anāgate 'dhvani eke bhikṣavaḥ abhāvitakāyā abhāvitaśīlā abhāvitacittā abhāvitaprajñā eḍamūkajātīyā prajñāparihīṇāḥ / te prajñāpāramitāmupadekṣyāma iti tasyāḥ prativarṇikāmupadekṣyanti / kathaṃ ca kauśika prajñāpāramitāprativarṇikāmupadekṣyanti? rūpavināśo rūpānityatetyupadekṣyanti / evaṃ vedanāsaṃjñāsaṃskārāḥ / vijñānavināśo vijñānānityatetyupadekṣyanti / evaṃ copadekṣyanti ya evaṃ gaveṣayiṣyati, sa prajñāpāramitāyāṃ cariṣyatīti / iyaṃ sā kauśika prajñāpāramitāprativarṇikā veditavyā / na khalu punaḥ kauśika rūpavināśo rūpānityatā draṣṭavyā / evaṃ vedanāsaṃjñāsaṃskārāḥ / na khalu punaḥ kauśika vijñānavināśo vijñānānityatā draṣṭavyā / sacedevaṃ paśyati, prajñāpāramitāprativarṇikāyāṃ carati / tasmāttarhi kauśika kulaputreṇa vā kuladuhitrā vā prajñāpāramitāyā artha upadeṣṭavyaḥ / prajñāpāramitāyā arthamupadiśan kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā bahutaraṃ puṇyaṃ prasavet //* (Vaidya 1960, 59). This passage was translated earlier by Edward Conze (1973, 121–22). The Tibetan of this passage can be found in of the Pedurma edition of the Kangyur (*bka' 'gyur, dpe bsdur ma* edition. Vol. 33: 149.20-151.6).

misinterpretation of the correct view. Ratnākaraśānti's rhetorical point is quite blunt: pseudo-Mādhyamikas who posit that nothing at all exists were prophesied by the Buddha as dangerous proponents of counterfeit Dharma. They do not properly articulate the Perfection of Wisdom and are guilty of leading themselves and others into nihilism. If I am correct that verse six alludes to the nihilists described in Asaṅga's *Bodhisattvabhūmi*—and by extension, to [pseudo-] Mādhyamikas such as Bhāviveka—that would indicate an even stronger rebuttal: authoritative literature from *both* the second and the third-turning describe the view of complete non-existence as heretical, nihilistic, and counterfeit.

The commentary on verse six is the first of three places in the MAV where Ratnākaraśānti accuses his opponents of denigrating a fixed set of fundamental Buddhist doctrines: The Three Jewels, Four Noble Truths, and karmic cause and effect. The second accusation is levelled a bit later in the text—specifically, in the transition between verses nine and ten—in the context of discussing MMK XXIV.18. It is worth briefly diverging from the progression of the MAV in order to engage that passage because, along with its similar denunciation of pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents, it offers further details about each of the two sub-types discussed so far.[213]

Descriptions of Pseudo-Mādhyamikas at MMK XXIV.18

The rhetorical aspects of Ratnākaraśānti's commentary on MMK XXIV.18 were treated in the previous chapter, which emphasized Nāgārjuna's agreement with Maitreya's interpretation of the Middle Path. Introducing that section of the text, Ratnākaraśānti describes three pseudo-Mādhyamika positions that he then sets out to correct through his commentary on Nāgārjuna's verse:

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[213] The third accusation is leveled against the third type of pseudo-Mādhyamika, who hold that all phenomena are like illusions. The position—along with Ratnākaraśānti's criticism—is discussed in Chapter Five.

I. Another [position] asserts that in the phrase "one who holds the emptiness of all dharmas is a Mahāyāna practitioner," "emptiness" means non-existence. [In that case,] since nothing exists, there would be no causes for anything. Since that would contradict dependent origination, the [Four Truths of the Noble One], the [Three] Jewels, karma, fruition and so forth would also be denigrated.[214]

II. If one says, "while things do not exist ultimately, they do exist conventionally," this is also not true. The designation "chariot" [is used] if the parts of the chariot exist. In the same way, when the aggregates exist, they are designated as a person. If these are all non-existent, what is the basis (*upādāna*), and what is imputed (*upacāra*) onto it?[215, 216]

III. Otherwise, one might say "we hold that everything is not existent, but also not non-existent; this is the Middle Path. Therefore, it is not that everything is non-existent." That is also not reasonable. Because existence and non-existence are mutually exclusive. Refuting one implies the other; it is not reasonable to refute them both.[217]

Paragraphs I and II clearly refer to pseudo-Mādhyamikas who hold that nothing exists and that everything is false, respectively. The first equates emptiness with non-existence, which Ratnākaraśānti decries as heretical; this is the second deployment of the set of Four Truths and so forth that these opponents are said to contradict. The second view effectively restates the positions described in verse 5; both advocate ultimate non-existence and conventional existence. Ratnākaraśānti's description highlights his major concern with those who say all is false: conceptual cognitions necessarily have a basis (*upādāna*) upon which they are overlaid or imputed

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[214] *chos thams cad stong pa nyid du smra ba ni theg pa chen po pa yin no zhes smra ba de la gzhan gyis smras pa / stong pa nyid ni med pa yin te / gang gi tshe thams cad med pa yin na de'i tshe 'ga' la yang rgyu med do // rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba dang 'gal ba'i phyir ro // bden pa dang dkon mchog dang las dang 'bras bu la sogs pa la skur pa btab par yang 'gyur ro //* P 269.1-6; D 104 b1-2.

[215] *nye bar gdags.* Negi attests *upacāra* (vol 4: 1547).

[216] *gal te don dam par ni med la / kun rdzob tu ni yod do zhes zer na de yang bden pa m yin te / shing rta'i yan lag yod na shing rtar gdags so // de bzhin du phung po yod na gang zag la gdags so // thams cad med pa nyid yin na ci zhig nye bar len cing ci zhig la nye bar gdags //* P 269.6-9; D 104b2-3.

[217] *'on te yang thams cad yod pa yang ma yin med pa yang ma yin pa dbu ma'i lam yin te / thams cad med pa ma yin no zhes bdag cag smra'o zhe na / de yang mi rigs te / yod pa dang med pa phan tshun gzhan sel ba'i mtshan nyid gcig yin pa'i phyir gcig bkag pa nyid kyis gnyis pa mtshon pa'i phyir gnyis bkag pa ni mi rigs so //* P 269.10-14; D 104b3-4.

(*upacāra*). By denying the existence of that basis, the pseudo-Mādhyamikas descend into an incoherent nihilism.

The third position may not be intended to stand on its own, given that it answers Ratnākaraśānti's criticism of the second position. That said, the Tibetan grammar—*'on te yang* ("otherwise")—suggests a meaningful separation, and my translation reflects this. In any case, where the second position specifically associates "existence" with the conventional and "non-existence" to the ultimate, this third position takes the more general stance of refusing to affirm either existence or non-existence. The phrase "therefore, it is not that everything is non-existent" is an attempt to answer Ratnākaraśānti's criticism of the second. To restate the argument: the opponent takes issue with Ratnākaraśānti's point in paragraph II—"[i]f all these are non-existent, what is the basis, and what is imputed onto it?" The opponent argues that they would not say "all these are non-existent" because they refuse to advocate for either existence or non-existence. Ratnākaraśānti responds by denying the validity of this somewhat tedious argument: it does not matter that the opponent will not affirm a claim of either existence or non-existence; she refutes the existence of a basis, and so is necessarily committed to affirming its non-existence.

Having briefly engaged with the passages that summarize his main opponents' positions the remainder of this chapter will consider Ratnākaraśānti's detailed arguments against those who say that everything is false at MAV verses seven through twelve. Over the course of this section, the positions of these pseudo-Mādhyamikas come to increasingly resemble those of the Three Mādhyamikas from the East. The most obvious individual opponent is Śāntarakṣita, who is cited in the course of Ratnākaraśānti's involved commentary on MAV verse ten.

Detailed Refutation of the *Sarvālīkavāda*

Verse Seven: Causal Efficacy (*arthakriyā*) and Purposeful Action (*prayojanakriyā*)

MAV verses seven through nine and their commentary focus primarily on conventions and causality. In brief, Ratnākaraśānti accuses the Three Mādhyamikas from the East of giving a contradictory account insofar as they take conventions to be both false and causally efficacious. He begins this section of the MAV by questioning the coherence of the idea that causal efficacy could be conventional:

> "[Things] appear as if they had causal capacity." If that is the case, then what is the purpose of that Middle? Since that capacity is produced from error, purposeful actions cannot be performed[218] //7//[219]

> [The opponent] says, "Although dharmas do not exist because they are ultimately empty of causal capacity, they nevertheless <u>appear to have that capacity</u> conventionally. Therefore, this is the Middle Way."[220]

> [We respond:] What is the purpose of that kind of Middle? That kind of causal capacity is produced from error. Since it does not exist, purposeful actions cannot be performed.[221]

This passage manages to distill and criticize the general systems of the Three Mādhyamikas from the East in a handful of lines that are unpacked in detail in the following verses. It should be noted that Ratnākaraśānti ultimately agrees with his interlocutors that ordinary phenomena lack the causal capacity that they appear to have. Both parties would agree that seeds *seem* to produce

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[218] Moriyama's translation reads: "[Objection:] If the Middle [Way] is [explained] by the appearance [of entities] in this [cognition] as if [they possess] causal efficacies, why is this [efficacy] required? [Reply:] Since the efficacy arises from erroneous cognition, [if you deny the efficacy of this erroneous cognition,] various actions of things do not work" (2013, 57 see also 66, footnote 22).

[219] *nus pa lta bur der snang bas / gal te dbu ma de ci dgos / nus pa 'khrul pa las skyes pas / dgos pa'i bya ba rnams mi byed /* P 267.4-6; D 103b2.

[220] Moriyama translates this passage as: "Whereas [all] entities ultimately do not exist because they lack causal efficiencies, conventionally, they appear as if they possess causal efficiencies. Therefore, [this] is the Middle Way" (Moriyama 2013, 57–58 and 66, footnote 22). He also calls this "the most sophisticated opinion with regard to the notion of 'causal efficiency'" in the MAV (2013, 57).

[221] *ces bya ba ni chos rnams don dam par nus pas stong pa'i phyir med kyang kun rdzob tu yang nus pa dang ldan par snang bas de'i phyir dbu ma'i lam yin no zhes zer ba de 'dra ba'i dbu ma ci zhig dgos te / 'di lta bu'i nus pa ni 'khrul pa las skyes pa yin te / de ni med pas dgos pa'i bya ba rnams mi byed do //* P 267.6-10 D 103b2-6

sprouts, and that a chain of events that begins with an urge to take a sip of coffee can, in normal circumstances (where, for example, a cup of coffee is near one's hand) lead to the experience of tasting that beverage. However, the seeds, sprouts, and coffee of these examples are deceptive in that they appear to possess an essence that they cannot logically have; therefore, the commonsense notion that "x cause yields y effect" cannot be entirely accurate.

While both camps agree to that extent, they draw markedly different conclusions from the premise that conventional phenomena falsely appear as if they had causal capacity. Ratnākaraśānti's solution—discussed in more detail in the next chapter—is to make a firm distinction between the (non-existent) imagined nature and the (existent) other-dependent. Imagined phenomena have no efficacy because they are non-existent; but they are imputed onto the other-dependent nature, which *can* have efficacy because it *does* exist. By that same token, Ratnākaraśānti argues that the pseudo-Mādhyamikas cannot offer a viable presentation precisely because they will not accept the other-dependent. This leaves them with no choice but to argue that conventions are be both efficacious and illusion-like, which Ratnākaraśānti considers a bald contradiction.

Ratnākaraśānti's criticism thus hinges on his insistence that something must exist if there is to be a coherent account of causal efficacy. The final line of MAV seven plays on this idea: "[s]ince that capacity is produced from error, purposeful actions cannot be performed." "Purposeful action" (*dgos pa'i bya ba*) likely translates **prayojanakriyā*. This discussion playfully highlights the dual meaning of *artha*, which has been translated as "object" but can also mean "goal" (as can *prayojana*). Stated briefly: if causes are non-existent, then they cannot *cause* anything, as they do not possess *arthakriyā* in the sense of causal capacity. Here, Ratnākaraśānti builds on this point to argue that even if purely conventional phenomena *could* possess *arthakriyā*

qua causal capacity—a position he has already critiqued—they still could not account for *arthakriyā* in the sense of purposeful action (*prayojanakriyā*). Purpose is a necessary feature for any putative *pramāṇa* insofar as it provides the context for a valid knowledge-event (Dunne 2004, 45–49). In sum, MAV verse 7 builds on Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms of pseudo-Mādhyamika accounts as incoherent, making the further claim that they are also without purpose—or, stated more bluntly, they are useless.

Verse Eight: Pseudo-Mādhyamika Accounts of Causal Capacity

At verse eight, Ratnākaraśānti engages a specific pseudo-Mādhyamika account of conventions and causality that evokes all of the Three Mādhyamikas. Introducing verse eight, Ratnākaraśānti writes:

> [The opponent says,] "Since cause and effect are seen conventionally, the effect is achieved when the causes are established. One sees the capacity for seeds and so forth to produce sprouts and so forth. There is nothing unreasonable in what is observed."

> [We respond:] That might be the case, except that since phenomena (*chos rnams*, **dharmāḥ*) are proven by *pramāṇa* to have causal capacity, they would exist ultimately [according to you]. Therefore, this cannot be the Middle.[222]

The opponent here presents an account of causality based on everyday human discourse (*vyavahāra*). Anyone can observe that rice seeds yield one sort of plant while acorns produce another; there is no need for Ratnākaraśānti to insist on a *pramāṇa*-based account of causality.

Ratnākaraśānti's response to this account builds on his previous critiques. It also reflects his insistence that, *pace* the opponent, *pramāṇa is* necessary. He has already dismissed the pseudo-Mādhyamikas' attempt to ground experience in the conventional truth: because the opponent

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[222] *gang gi phyir kun rdzob tu rgyu dang 'bras bu mthong na rgyu grub pas 'bras bu thob par 'gyur ro// sa bon la sogs pa las myu gu la sogs pa'i nus pa mthong bas mthong ba la rigs pa ma yin pa med do zhe na / de lta mod kyi tshad mas chos rnams nus pa dang ldan par grub pas don dam pa nyid du yod par 'gyur bas de ni dbu mar mi 'gyur ro //* P 267.10-14; D 103b6-7.

characterizes conventions as non-existent, they are unable to prove anything. That being the case,

if the opponent wishes to establish causality, she is only able to do so by appealing to the ultimate,

despite her insistence to the contrary.

Ratnākaraśānti's argument here echoes his engagement of positions II and III discussed

above, in the context of MMK XXIV.18. There, the opponent insists that she need not commit to

either existence or non-existence. Ratnākaraśānti rejects that claim, pointing out that the rules of

logic apply regardless of whether or not the opponent accepts them. In the same way,

Ratnākaraśānti rejects this opponent's appeal to observation as a proof for causality. Any such

account the opponent might wish to give must necessarily involve an appeal to the ultimate,

regardless of whether she might insist otherwise.

Verse eight continues along the same lines. In particular, it highlights the main difference

between Ratnākaraśānti's account and those of his opponents. According to the Three

Mādhyamikas, conventions are ultimately empty; that said, they have apparent causal capacity and

are true according to ordinary experience and worldly discourse. For Ratnākaraśānti, imputed

phenomena have no causal capacity because they are non-existent; that said, causal capacity is

nonetheless operative because the mind—i.e., imagination of the unreal—does exist. He writes:

> Furthermore,
>
>> Also, causal capacity is not seen [in ordinary phenomena] because
>> seeds and so forth do not exist. It *is* seen in terms of a mind which
>> appears as seeds and so forth, because that does exist. //8//
>
> Statements such that "seeds and so forth have the capacity to give rise to sprouts
> and so forth" are in error. Seeds and so forth which are devoid of singular or plural
> natures do not exist, so it is not reasonable for them to have causal capacity. But

the cognition[223] which is taught as the other-dependent, which appears as seeds and sprouts and so forth, does possess causal capacity, because it does exist.[224, 225]

Ratnākaraśānti agrees with the Three Mādhyamikas that any intrinsic nature on the part of seeds and sprouts is refuted by the neither-one-nor-many argument. That said, he disputes their conclusion that phenomena are therefore without any nature whatsoever—if that were the case, how could there be any causal capacity? He suggests an answer: causal capacity is located in the other-dependent nature upon which imaginal conventions are imputed. This allows him to avoid the tension that Ratnākaraśānti identifies in the Three Mādhyamikas' accounts of correct versus incorrect conventions.

Revisiting Ratnākaraśānti's Citations ad MAV verse 8

At this point there is a transition in the text. Ratnākaraśānti continues to focus on pseudo-Mādhyamikas' accounts of causality, but his method of engagement changes. He cites short passages from three authoritative texts—PV 3.392-3; LAS X.592; and YṢ 21—that were discussed in the previous chapter. That earlier discussion focused on Ratnākaraśānti's vision of a unified Mahāyāna; here we will attend to the philosophical aspects of these citations, bearing in mind the context of Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms of pseudo-Mādhyamika position.

Recall Dharmakīrti's verse, with Ratnākaraśānti's introduction:

The author of the *Pramāṇavārttika* makes this statement, and others:

The establishment of a causal agent or inferential evidence that is dependent upon external objects, as in the case of the production of a sprout from a seed or the proof of fire from smoke, could also be conceptualized as having the appearance of those natures (*rūpa*) in

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[223] "Cognitions" (*shes pa*) glosses "a mind" (*blo*) in the verse.

[224] *gzhan yang / nus pa'ang mthong bar mi 'gyur te / sa bon la sogs de med phyir / sa bon la sogs snang ba yi / blo yis de ni yod pa'i phyir //8// zhes bya ba ni / sa bon la sogs pa las myu gu la sogs pa'i nus pa zhes bya ba 'di dag ni 'khrul pa ste / gcig dang du ma'i rang bzhin dang bral ba'i sa bon la sogs pa ni med de / de nus pa mi rigs pa'i phyir ro // sa bon la sogs par snang ba'i gzhan gyi dbang du bstan pa'i shes pa de la nus pa dang ldan te / de ni yod pa'i phyir ro //* P 267.14-20; D 103b7-104a2.

[225] Moriyama also translates and discusses this passage (2013, 58–59).

> dependence upon cognitions with that kind of restricted coherence.
> If that is the case, what is contradicted? //PV 3.392-3//[226]

In these verses, Dharmakīrti questions whether the position that perceptions are based on external factors such as atoms (*paramāṇu*) is intrinsically superior to the Yogācāra assertion: there are no such factors; rather, perceptions are the product of the various facets of consciousness (*cittacaitta*). While his language is difficult to parse, the force of Dharmakīrti's reasoning is straightforward. To restate the appeal he makes in these verses: "to you who insist that perceptions must be caused by some force external to the mind, I must ask: what would be wrong with asserting that perceptions are rooted in the mind—rather than external phenomena—if the person making this assertion could present logical proofs for cause and effect that have the level of rigor (i.e., the 'kind of restricted coherence') that you provide?" This is a direct challenge to opponents who hold that common-sense explanations of perception are intrinsically stronger than Yogācāra accounts.

It is not difficult to appreciate why Ratnākaraśānti chose to cite this particular passage, given its straightforward consistency with his own views. Given their juxtaposition with sources that are clear authorities for Ratnākaraśānti, it is evident that he considers these two verses indicative of the great logician's final intentions and demonstrative of Dharmakīrti's participation in the unified Mahāyāna. Ratnākaraśānti's allusion to other similar citations—i.e., Dharmakīrti "made this statement, and others"—suggests that he feels the logician was consistent on this point. Philosophically speaking, it is clear that Ratnākaraśānti takes these verses as proof that Dharmakīrti accepted awareness to be a basis upon which a causal framework for experience can be built.

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[226] See Chapter Two for information on these citations.

Ratnākaraśānti does not offer his own comment on Dharmakīrti's verses. Rather, he juxtaposes it with LAS X.592 and briefly glosses the meaning of that verse. Given their thematic similarity of the verses, I suggest that Ratnākaraśānti is using the LAS in part to clarify Dharmakīrti's intent. To restate that verse with Ratnākaraśānti's commentary:

> Also, the *Laṅkāvatāra* states,
>
>> Through the refutation of an agent excluded from causes and conditions, I state that non-arisal is the presentation of mind alone. //LAS X.592//
>
> Here, <u>causes</u> indicate the six types [of causation], "spontaneously arisen" and so forth. There are four <u>conditions</u>: cause, support, and so forth. <u>Because an agent</u> such as a creator god [who is] <u>excluded from</u> [these] <u>causes and conditions is refuted</u>, [phenomena] are <u>proven</u> to arise as <u>mind alone</u>. There is the <u>non-arisal</u> of that which is produced by them. This is the meaning of these statements.

I take this verse to serve as a gloss of sorts on Dharmakīrti's verses, insofar as it highlights the idea that ordinary phenomena have awareness as their substratum. It also serves as a transition to the closely-related topic of non-arising. The verse rejects the idea that phenomena could arise from any sorts of causes or conditions, concluding that they "arise as mind alone," i.e., they do not arise. This idea is the main subject of the third citation, Nāgārjuna's YṢ 21:

> Nāgārjuna also stated,
>
>> Among these,[227] there is not anything whatsoever that arises, and not anything whatsoever that ceases. Only cognitions arise and cease. //YṢ 21//
>
> The words <u>among these</u> is a locative in the sense of restriction (*nges par gzung ba* *avadhāraṇa), [applied to] the aggregates, constituents, and so forth. <u>Only cognitions</u> mean other-dependent cognitions.

Ratnākaraśānti's gloss of this verse argues for its consistency with the previous two. Among the aggregates and so forth, there is actually no arising; arising and cessation only take place in

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[227] The Tibetan reads simply *'dir*; this translation reflects the commentary's stipulation that the original Sanskrit is a locative plural—most likely *teṣu*.

cognition. In short, Ratnākaraśānti takes this verse as a restatement of the LAS—while there seem to be arising and cessation of phenomena that are apparently external to awareness, "arising and cessation" could only ever apply to cognition—specifically, "other-dependent cognition" rather than "imputed cognitions.

Taken together, these three verses serve to reinforce Ratnākaraśānti's argument about the consistency of the Mahāyāna, and to dramatically highlight their inconsistency with pseudo-Mādhyamika presentations. As noted, they also mark a subtle shift in the narrative of the text, transitioning from a focus on causality to a discussion of non-arising. At MAV verse nine, Ratnākaraśānti begins his own account of this process.

Correcting the Three Mādhyamikas' Accounts of Non-arising

Non-Arising and Non-Perception (*anupalabdhi*)

Following these citations, Ratnākaraśānti raises a potential objection to his position: "how is it that ordinary appearances are unarisen, given that production and causality seem to be constantly taking place?" He responds by explaining that "non-arising" negates the arising of imagined phenomenal content but it does *not* negate awareness:

If one asks, "but how is there non-arising regarding production?" We answer:

> In what way is something unarisen, and how are [phenomena] produced (*gang gis skye bar 'gyur ba*)? [We answer:] The word "unarisen" is like "not eaten" and "not touched." //9//[228]

A person who eats some things and touches some things is said to not eat and not touch other things. [Some things are] <u>not eaten</u>, such as urban fowl. [Some people/things] are <u>not touched</u>, such as *caṇḍāla*s. Likewise, some imagined unreal

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[228] *yang ji ltar skye ba nyid la skye ba med pa zhes bya zhe na // gang zhig ji ltar skye med pa / gang gis skye bar 'gyur ba ni / skye ba med ces de la brjod / mi bza' ba dang mi reg bzhin //9//* P 268.15-18; D 104a6-7.

thing that arises [from the imagination of the unreal] is unarisen. This is the intention.[229, 230]

Here Ratnākaraśānti draws on grammatical examples to explain "unarisen" as an affirming negation. In doing so, he restates—in a slightly altered form—a passage from Dharmakīrti's *Hetubindu*. There, Dharmakīrti describes *non-perception* (*anupalabdhi*) in exactly the same terms that Ratnākaraśānti uses to describe *non-arising*:

> Therefore, perceiving something else (*anyopbalabdhi*) is [a type of] non-perception because it is [a perception of something] other than what one intends to see; as with "inedible" and "untouchable" it is an affirming negation.[231]

Commenting on this passage, Arcaṭa's *Hetubinduṭīkā* glosses "inedible" and "untouchable" with the same examples: urban birds (*grāmyakukkuṭa*), and *caṇḍālas*.[232] While [pseudo-]Mādhyamikas consider non-arising and emptiness to be non-affirming negations, these examples characterize non-arising as an *affirming* negation. To restate: imputed phenomena are empty of being either one or many, so they do not exist; but something else *does* exist.[233] The idea that something is inedible or untouchable necessarily implies that something else can and should be eaten; likewise, "non-arising" negates the notion that imputed phenomena arise or appear, but something else does appear.

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[229] Mattia Salvini suggests the following reconstruction: *tathā yo' bhūtaparikalpasya utpādaḥ so' nutpāda iti kathyate //* (personal communication). Note that the referent of "unarisen" is grammatically ambiguous and the sentence could also be reasonably translated as "the arising of the imagination of the unreal."

[230] *zhes bya ba smras te // 'di ltar gang gi phyir gang zag kha cig za ba dang / reg pa nyid kha cig mi za zhing reg par mi byed do zhes brjod do // mi za ba ni grong khyer gyi bya gag la sogs pa'o // mi reg pa ni gdol pa la sogs pa'o // de bzhin du yang dag pa ma yin pa'i kun tu rtog pa'i gang skye ba de ni skye ba med pa zhes bstan do //* P 268.18-269.1; D 104a7-b1.

[231] *tasmād anyopalabdhir anupalabdhiḥ vivakṣitopalabdher anyatvād abhakṣāsparśanīyavat paryudāsavṛttyā //* (Cited in Keira 2004, 57 fn 98) Also see Keira for an alternative translation and useful discussion. (2004, 57)

[232] Arcaṭa's Hetubinduṭīkā glosses Dharmakīrti with these same examples: *yathā bhakṣābhyakṣya prakaraṇe vivakṣitād bhakṣyād anyatvād abhakṣyo grāmyakukkuṭaḥ bhakṣyo 'pi san tadanyasyocyate / ...anyasparśanīyād anyatvād asparśanīyaś cāṇḍālādiḥ…* (Cited in Keira 2004, 57 f.n. 98). The example of urban fowl is likely ultimately derived from Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*: *abhakṣyaḥ grāmyakukkuṭaḥ abhakṣyaḥ grāmyaśūkaraḥ iti ukte sutarām nāgaraḥ api na bhakṣyate* (Kielhorn/Abhyankar edition vol. 3: 320, accessed via "Patanjali: Vyakaranamahabhasya" n.d.) The caṇḍāla example is not obviously identifiable from that text, but also not without precedent.

[233] Later in the MAV Ratnākaraśānti elaborates that this "something else" is the pure other-dependent nature, i.e., the clarity that is the essence of all apparent phenomena. See Chapter Four.

This discussion of non-arising marks a break in the trajectory of the MAV; immediately after this, MMK XXIV.18 is introduced, cited, and discussed. Because that passage has been translated and discussed previously, it will not be reproduced here. That said, the foregoing discussion of a shared Mahāyāna view, not held by Ratnākaraśānti's Mādhyamika interlocutors, allows us to appreciate his deployment of MMK XXIV.18 more fully: by this point in the text, Ratnākaraśānti has defended his position about the three natures on both logical and scriptural grounds. He has also argued that Nāgārjuna—when read primarily through the YṢ—is consistent with this unified Mahāyāna vision. It therefore makes sense that he would engage with the most famous verse in the MMK—in order to show that it is compatible with the shared Mahāyāna viewpoint, when properly interpreted through the lens of Nāgārjuna's definitive treatise (i.e., the YṢ). If Ratnākaraśānti has successfully convinced his reader at this point that Mādhyamika language is faulty and that Nāgārjuna agrees with Dharmakīrti and with the LAS on the topic of "non-arising," then it makes sense to deploy MMK XXIV.18 here in order to highlight that even *this* verse can be interpreted so as to be consistent with the general presentation of Mahāyāna.

A Nāgārjunian Critique of Śāntarakṣita

The next portion of the MAV treats a string of arguments focused around Śāntarakṣita's discussion of conventional truth in the MA. Interestingly, Ratnākaraśānti's answer to Śāntarakṣita draws directly from Nāgārjuna's philosophical playbook. He first engages with Śāntarakṣita's criticisms of *nirākāra* positions at MA vv. 52-60, which adduce eight absurd consequences (*prasaṅga*) that he alleges to follow from them.[234] In that section, Śāntarakṣita argues that the *nirākāravādin* must hold that images are completely separate from consciousness. This is because

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[234] These are discussed in detail by Blumenthal (2004, 127–34).

conventional phenomena are by definition non-existent, while consciousness must exist. Stated briefly, Ratnākaraśānti responds: "I am not susceptible to this critique, because I do not hold the position you describe. However, *your* position is susceptible to this very critique!" This argument proceeds over as series of moves from verses 10 to 12. For the sake of clarity, the MAV passages will first be presented and then tied to relevant sections of Śāntarakṣita's corresponding argument.

The introduction to MAV verse 10 frames the discussion in terms of problems that arise because the opponent does not acknowledge the imagination of the unreal:

> Now, some assert that because they do not hold even the imagination of the unreal
> to exist, everything is false. To them, we answer:
>
>> If [everything] were just false, there would be no cause and no co-incidence.[235] There would be no causal capacity, only error. Every kind of *pramāṇa* would be impossible. //10//
>
> If everything <u>were false</u>, in that case <u>there would be no causes</u>, so [everything] would arise causelessly.[236]

The first part of this verse echoes the arguments above: "being false" and "being a cause" are mutually exclusive in Ratnākaraśānti's estimation, and so Mādhyamika accounts of the conventional truth can only descend into nihilism. He then introduces another aspect of the argument, which I have translated "coincidence" but more specifically indicates temporal sequencing (*res 'ga'* most obviously translates **ekadā* or **kadācit*). I take this to be a direct reference to Śāntarakṣita's argument at MA 58 and its attendant auto-commentary:

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[235] This generally means "occasion" or "temporality," but Ratnākaraśānti is using it here in the sense that that specific causes (such as barley seeds) produce specifc effects (such as barley sprouts).

[236] *yang gang zhig yang dag pa ma yin pa'i kun tu rtog pa yang yod par mi bzhed pa'i phyir thams cad brdzun pa yin no zhes smra ba de la lan gdab par bya ste // brdzun pa 'ba' zhig yin pas na / rgyu med pa dang res 'ga''ang min / nus pa med dang 'khrul pa tsam / thams cad tshad ma yin mi 'gyur //10// gal te thams cad brdzun par gyur pa yin na de'i tshe rgyu med pa'i phyir rgyu med par 'gyur zhing //* P 270.9-15; D 105a2-3.

If there were no cause [for images], how is it suitable that they arise
only on occasion? If they have a cause, how could they not be other-
dependent?[237] // *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* 58//

Because images do not really exist, there is no real cause. If there is no cause, there
should be no periodic arising because there is no reliance [on causes for arising].
Such faults are said to occur [due to holding this view]. If you accept that [images]
possess causes, then according to that you must immediately accept [images] as
existent. If there is no [cause], then there would be no arising [of images] from other
powers. How would you be able to respond to this? Arising from other powers is
nothing other than dependent origination. Existence due to the nature of arising
from conditions is also not other than this (Blumenthal 2004, 132).

Here, Śāntarakṣita aims to catch his *nirākāravādin* interlocutor in a double-bind. To summarize

his argument: if images do not really exist, then they do not have any real cause. But if there is no

cause for a particular phenomenon to arise, then there is no restriction on whether or when that

phenomenon *could* arise. It therefore could not be expected to arise on specific or predictable

occasions (*res 'ga'*).[238] For example, a person with a cataract sometimes sees floating hairs in their

field of vision. These appearances are unrestricted: when and where they occur, how they move,

and when they cease are all indeterminate because they are not dependent on external causal

factors. If all phenomenal experience is non-existent, as Śāntarakṣita's *nirākāravādin* alleges, then

there would similarly be no restriction for any phenomenal event. Seeds would not even *seem* to

cause sprouts, as the arising and disappearances of either would not give rise to any sense of

correlation, let alone causation.

If, on the other hand, the *nirākāravādin* does acknowledge that seeds seem to produce

sprouts, and there does at least *appear* to be causality (or at the least, stable coincidence) in the

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[237] Translation slightly emended from Blumenthal. He translates "other-dependent <u>nature</u>," adding *gzhan dbang gi
ngo bo* in parenthesis. This is consistent with Gyaltsab's commentary, on which Blumenthal relies (2004, 334).
However, "nature" ([*gi*] *ngo bo*) is found in neither the verse nor in any edition that Ichigō cites (1985, 154). I therefore
emend Blumenthal to reflect Ichigō's edition and conclude that *gi ngo bo* must be an interpolation by Gyaltsab or a
later Tibetan editor.

[238] The need for Yogācāras to explain fixed causality (which occurs in waking life, for example, but not in dreams)
is first identified and discussed in the opening verses of Vasubandhu's *Twenty Verses* (*Viṃśātikā*). For a thorough
discussion of this problem and the text as a whole, see Kachru (2015).

world more generally, then she must grant phenomenal images some semblance of existence. This would once again entail the fault of *siddhāntavirodha*, because the *nirākāravādin* here would seem to hold that images do not exist, but consciousness does. This the opponent is obliged to either give up her viewpoint or acknowledge its incoherence.

Before answering this charge, the MAV continues the discussion of coincidence and occasion. Next, Ratnākaraśānti cites another verse from Dharmakīrti to highlight the problem with using "false" phenomena to account for causality:

> They would also <u>not</u> arise <u>only</u> on particular <u>occasions</u>. [As Dharmakīrti states,]
>
>> Since that which is causeless does not depend on anything else, it would be either permanently existent or permanently nonexistent. //PV 1.35ab// (Dunne 2004, 336)[239]
>
> This is a logical axiom.

Ratnākaraśānti's stipulation that "this is a logical axiom" (*zhes byas ba'i rigs pas so*, **iti nyāyāt*) suggests that if his opponents consider themselves to be trained in formal logic—let alone considering themselves to be followers of Dharmakīrti—they are obliged to agree. In other words, Śāntarakṣita must acknowledge that anything which has no cause must either always already have existed or could never exist. In either case, such a causeless appearance could not provide a cause for anything, nor could it account for the fact that causality does seem to be taking place in the world. Ratnākaraśānti appeals to Dharmakīrti specifically to address this problem of temporality or occasion: a causeless appearance would have to either always be present or never arise.

After citing Dharmakīrti as evidence for his position, Ratnākaraśānti then continues his gloss on verse 10:

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[239] *res 'ga' bar yang mi 'gyur te // rgyu med gzhan la mi ltos phyir // rtag tu yod pa'am med par 'gyur* // PV I.35ab // P 270.15-16; D 105a3-4. *nityaṃ sattvam asattvaṃ vā 'hetor anyānapekṣaṇāt //* (Dunne 2004, 336).

There would be no causal capacity because capacity is defined in terms of existence; it is not possible for something non-existent to have [causal] capacity.[240] The [view that] everything is only error would be attained, because of being illuminated as non-existent. It would then absurdly follow that the *āryas*, who do not [see] delusory things, would not see [anything]. Moreover, if everything were error, there would be no valid direct perception or inference, and so everything without exception would be non-*pramāna*.[241]

This passage directly comments on *pāda*s c and d of verse ten.[242] It serves to tie the section's overall argument—that something false cannot yield valid knowledge (i.e., cannot be a *pramāṇa*)—with the doctrinal issue of whether an *ārya* perceives anything. This elegantly reinforces Ratnākaraśānti's central message: Mādhyamikas fall astray of both logic and Buddhist doctrine by trying to fold both causality and apparent phenomena into the conventional truth.

Having argued that it is incoherent to hold that something false has causal capacity, Ratnākaraśānti cites Śāntarakṣita here as an example of someone who holds precisely such a problematic view:

Someone posits that [causal capacity] has the character of being conventional:

What is agreeable only when not analyzed, dharmas that arise and cease, and natures [or: real things[243]] that possess causal capacity: these are asserted to be conventional //*Madhyamakālaṃkāra* 64//[244]

That position contradicts temporality. As for being "agreeable only when not analyzed," if something is refuted by any kind of investigation, it is said not to exist.

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[240] *nus pa med par yang mi 'gyur ba yod par nus pa'i mtshan nyid yin pa'i phyir*. Moriyama suggests emending mi 'gyur ba to 'gyur te; I have not accepted this emendation.

[241] *nus pa med pa yin te / nus pa med par yang mi 'gyur ba yod par nus pa'i mtshan nyid yin pa'i phyir ro // 'khrul pa tsam thams cad kyis thob par 'gyur te / med par gsal ba'i phyir ro // de bas na ma 'khrul pa 'phags pa rnams kyis ma gzigs par thal bar 'gyur ro // thams cad 'khrul pa yin na yang mngon sum med pas rjes su dpag pa yang med pa'i phyir thams cad tshad ma ma yin pa ma lus pas thob bo //* P 270.17-271.1; D 105a4-5.

[242] The last section is underlined because I take it to be a restatement of 10d. In the absence of other editions (including Sanskrit), it is not possible to know whether Ratnākaraśānti or Śākya 'Od is responsible for the inconsistency between the verse and commentary, but the meaning is not substantially affected in any case.

[243] The MAV reads *rang bzhin* where Ichigō attests *dngos po*.

[244] *gang yang des kun rdzob kyi mtshan nyid du bzhag pa // ma brtags gcig pu nyams dga' ba / skye ba dang ni 'jig pa'i chos // don byed nus dang ldan pa yi / dngos po kun rdzob yin par 'dod //* MA 64 // P 271.1-4. Ichigō's edition of this verse reads: *ma brtags gcig pi nyams dga' zhing / skye dang 'jig pa'i chos can pa / don byed pa dag nus rnams kyi / rang bzhin kun rdzob pa yin rtogs //* (1985, CXXV).

> How could these [non-existent] things have causal capacity or arising-and-cessation?[245]

Ratnākaraśānti's critique is that if phenomena are false then they are causeless, and "that position contradicts temporality." Ratnākaraśānti then bluntly asks how Śāntarakṣita could possibly hold that phenomena—which the latter thinker argues do not exist as either one or as many—could have causal capacity. Ratnākaraśānti elaborates further, arguing that Śāntarakṣita cannot provide an account of how phenomena would ever arise or cease.

It is important here to consider the larger context in which Śāntarakṣita declares his definition of conventional truth, as this will allow us to appreciate precisely what is at issue for Ratnākaraśānti. Specifically: the term "conventional" as it appears at MA 64 includes words and concepts—which Ratnākaraśānti holds to be part of the imagined nature—as well as their causally effective referents (i.e., the other-dependent). Śāntarakṣita denies the other-dependent because—on his view—there cannot be any non-conventional intermediary to serve as a substratum for language and thought. He argues that such a non-conventional substratum for experience is impossible because nothing can withstand the neither-one-nor-many argument: since the conventional truth includes any phenomena that cannot withstand that argument, all phenomena are conventional. The three verses following MA 64 are particularly relevant for the present discussion. Ichigō translates these as follows:

> Even that which is agreeable and acceptable only as long as it is not
> investigated critically implies the production of similar successive
> effects conditioned by their own successive causes.
> // *Madhyamakālaṃkāra 65*//

> Therefore, it is also correct to say that it would be impossible for
> conventional truth to be causeless. But if (you claim that) its

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[245] *ces smras pa de snga phyi 'gal ba yin te / ma brtags gcig pu nyams dga' ba de ni gang zhig dpyad pas 'gal ba'i phyir / de med pa zhes bya ste / de rnams kyis don byed pa dang / skye ba dang 'jig par gang las 'gyur //* P 271.1-7; D 105a5-6

substratum (*upādāna*) is real, you have to explain what it is. //*Madhyamakālaṃkāra* 66//

We reject the intrinsic nature of all entities postulated by those among our opponents who follow the way of logic. Therefore, (there is nothing) to be refuted (in our system, since) we hold no position (of our own) //*Madhyamakālaṃkāra* 67// (Ichigō 1985, CXLII).[246]

While he does not explicitly cite them, Ratnākaraśānti's discussion directly engages the content of all three of these verses. As already discussed, he refutes the position of MA 65: apparent phenomena, on their own, could not produce any change in content at all, to say nothing of the coincidence of apparent causes (such as a rice seeds) and effects (a rice sprout, rather than barley). He answers the charge Śāntarakṣita levels at verse 66: not only does Ratnākaraśānti feel he can he provide a substratum for conventional experience (in the form of the other-dependent nature), but that in doing so he is following the Buddhist tradition as well as logic.

Finally, as the foregoing discussion has demonstrated, Ratnākaraśānti accuses Śāntarakṣita of being disingenuous in his claim at MA 67. The latter thinker *does* have positions—specifically, he holds that conventional phenomena are false but also possess causal capacity—and those positions entail significant problems. Ironically (and certainly intentionally), Ratnākaraśānti turns Śāntarakṣita's claim in this verse on its head, giving a rebuttal reminiscent of Nāgārjuna. To restate Ratnākaraśānti's logic, as I understand it: "Mādhyamikas are not true followers of Nāgārjuna; they claim to have no views at all, even while holding contradictory positions. But I (Ratnākaraśānti) do not have these faults, because my position is consistent with the intentions of Nāgārjuna, Maitreya, and Dharmakīrti." This is precisely the kind of trick that Nāgārjuna is known for, as evidenced throughout the MMK and elsewhere. It is strongly associated with Madhyamaka

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[246] *brtags pa ma byas nyams dga' ba'ng / bdag rgyu snga ma snga ma la / brten nas phyi ma phyi ma yi / 'bras bu de 'dra 'byung ba yin // MA 65 // de phyir kun rdzob rgyu med na / rung min zhes pa'ang legs pa yin / gal te 'di yi nyer len pa / yang dag yin na de smros zhig // MA 66 // dngos po kun gyi rang bzhin ni / rigs pa'i lam gyi rjes 'brang ba / gzhan dag 'dod pa sel bar byed / de phyir rgol ba'i gnas med do // MA 67 // (1985, CXXV–VI).*

siddhānta (which largely echoes Nāgārjuna's claim to have no views, as Śāntarakṣita does at MA 67). It is therefore remarkable that Ratnākaraśānti deploys this tactic in the context of a Yogācāra critique of Mādhyamikas. Such a move is, however, totally consistent with his position that Nāgārjuna's intentions are identical to Maitreya's presentation of the Middle Way.

Concluding Criticisms of Śāntarakṣita's Pseudo-Madhyamaka

After subjecting Śāntarakṣita to this Nāgārjunian critique, Ratnākaraśānti proceeds with a counter-argument at MAV verses eleven and twelve. He begins this with a rhetorical question about how any phenomena could appear for pseudo-Mādhyamikas, to whom he refers here by the alternative name "proponents of a lack of nature" (*niḥsvabhāvavādin*):

> Moreover, to one who has established dharmas as without essence, one should ask:
>
> > (a) Mere things (**vastumātra*), (b) appearances, (c) capacities, [or]
> > (d) the dependently arisen: by asserting that these are without nature,
> > you completely negate phenomena! //11//[247]
> >
> > The subject—self-nature (**svabhāva*)—is not proven and is refuted
> > by experience. For the first and the others there could be no
> > potential, nor arising and ceasing. //12//[248]
>
> The term *niḥsvabhāva* excludes[249] natures. Therefore, [phenomena] arise as <u>mere things</u> (*vastumātra*), or <u>appearances</u>, or <u>capacities</u> (*nus pa*, **śakti*) or <u>interdependent origination</u>.
>
> Among these, the first two are not established, are not[250] proven as self-essences, and contradict experience. As for the remaining two (c and d), <u>there could be no potential, nor arising and ceasing</u>.[251]

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[247] *dngos tsam snang dang nus pa dang / rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba ni / khyed kyis rang bzhin med smras pas / chos rnams rab tu bkag par 'gyur //11//* P 271.8-10; D 105a7-b105b1.

[248] *chos can rang bzhin mi 'grub dang / nyams su myong bas gnod pa dang / dang po'i phyogs dang lhag ma la / nus dang skye dang 'jig mi 'gyur //12//* P 271.10-12; D 105b1.

[249] Reading **vyavacchinatti* from *rnam par gcod pa* (Negi 1993, 3061).

[250] D and P both read *nyid*. I follow Moriyama, who emends this to *mi* based on the verse.

[251] *zhes bya ba la / rang bzhin med pa'i tshig gis rang bzhin rnam par gcod de / de yang dngos po tsam du gyur pa'm / snang ba'm / nus pa'am/ rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba'o // de la dang po'i phyogs gnyis la brten nas mi 'grub pa dang / rang ngo bo mi 'grub pa dang / nyams su myong ba dang 'gal ba yin no // lhag ma'i phyogs gnyis po la nus pa dang / skye ba dang 'jig pa med par 'gyur ro //* P 271.12-17; D 105b1-2.

Ratnākaraśānti concludes this discussion of Śāntarakṣita by restating some major assertions of the Three Mādhyamikas: per Jñānagarbha, correct conventions are (a) "mere things" (*vastumātra*) rather than real or truly existent things. They are also (b) appearances which are agreeable so long as they are not analyzed, but which (c) possess causal efficacy and are (d) interdependently originated.

Here, Ratnākaraśānti is essentially summarizing the points he has already made. The first two do not possess any essence according to Mādhyamikas, and so cannot possess causal capacity. They cannot account for apparent causality because (a) a "mere entity" is defined as lacking capacity, and (b) rejecting analysis regarding appearances is tantamount to rejecting even the search for causality, let alone its proof. These both "contradict experience" insofar as anyone, regardless of education, can see that phenomena do not simply blink in and out of the world causelessly, or that rice seeds to not produce barley sprouts. Regarding (c) and (d), Ratnākaraśānti alludes to the previous discussions of non-arising. I interpret his point in two ways: first, he is alluding to the idea that arising necessitates the other-dependent nature; secondly, he reiterates the argument that Mādhyamika theories of non-arising go too far in their negations.

This chapter constituted the first round of arguments against pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents in the MAV. Here the specific focus has been on causality and arising, and we have given special attention to Śāntarakṣita's account. The following chapters shift slightly: they continue to engage Śāntarakṣita's thought—primarily in the MA—along with Kamalaśīla's attendant commentary; they depart from the discussions here about causality in order to focus increasingly on the topics of awareness and *pramāṇa*.

Chapter Four
Relating Unreal Phenomena to their Real Nature
(MAV verses 13–20)

Introduction

Verse thirteen marks another significant shift in the progression of arguments in the MAV. At this point, Ratnākaraśānti takes a pause in criticizing pseudo-Mādhyamikas to present one aspect of the correct Middle Path—specifically, the manner in which phenomena appear. Following this, Ratnākaraśānti continues his critique of both types of pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents discussed thus far—those who say everything is false, and those who say everything is non-existent. But the focus of his arguments shifts: where the previous section highlighted problems with these pseudo-Mādhyamikas' accounts of causality and temporality, verses thirteen through twenty engage their presentations of phenomenal appearances (*rnam pa*, *ākāra*). Specifically, Ratnākaraśānti critiques his opponents' presentation of the relationship between phenomenal forms and the awareness that cognizes those forms. That said, these discussions also serve as a continuation of Ratnākaraśānti's rebuttal to Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*.

In the course of presenting his arguments, Ratnākaraśānti gestures toward his own account of perception. Stated briefly: Ratnākaraśānti argues that phenomenal appearances—individual perceptions such as blue—are non-existent but nonetheless have the nature of clarity.[252] For our present purpose the most important aspect of this account it that it seeks to resolve the problems Śāntarakṣita adduces for his *nirākāra* opponents at MA 53-60. It proposes to reconcile apparent phenomena—which are unreal and deceptive—with awareness (i.e., clarity), which exists and is non-deceptive. In offering such an account, Ratnākaraśānti aims to walk a fine line. His account

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[252] "Clarity" and "luminosity" translate *'od gsal* and *gsal ba*, **prakāśa* and **prabhāsvara*.

must avoid the problems Mādhyamika adduces for Yogācāra while maintaining the existence of the other-dependent nature, which is crucial for Ratnākaraśānti. This strategy will be considered further in the conclusion of this chapter, once the specifics of Ratnākaraśānti's arguments are in view.

Summary of Arguments

At verse thirteen Ratnākaraśānti gives a brief description of how phenomena appear. In the ensuing verses Ratnākaraśānti adopts a bipartite strategy: he argues against his opponents and, in so doing, defends and nuances his own position. This verse builds on his earlier description of non-arising as an affirming negation. This allows him to refute the imagined nature—i.e., ordinary phenomenal appearances—yet affirm the reality of the other-dependent nature as clarity.

At verse fourteen Ratnākaraśānti posits that the imagined nature is identical with what his pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents call *samāropa*, translated here as "imputation." He argues that the opponents contradict themselves insofar as they appeal to imputation while denying the possibility of a basis *for* that imputation. Ratnākaraśānti concludes that these opponents have no choice but to abandon the pseudo-Mādhyamika viewpoint and accept the imagination of the unreal as the basis for imputed phenomena.

Verse fifteen opens Ratnākaraśānti's explanation of how false phenomena could appear to a real awareness, a topic that occupies the remainder of the section. This presentation hinges on the technical term *mngon par zhen pa* (sometimes abbreviated to *zhen pa*, **abhiniveśa*), which I translate as "habituated misconstrual." The Sanskrit and Tibetan terms have a sense of attachment, firm adherence, or even obstinance that is not easily conveyed in any single English translation

(Apte 1957, 175).[253] The reader should therefore bear in mind that this misconstrual is not a habit that could be easily mended. It is a product of sentient beings' fundamental ignorance and karmic conditioning, comprised of the conceptual (*savikalpaka*) and non-conceptual (*nirvikalpaka*) errors that continually bind us to *saṃsāra*. As such, it has been and remains operative in every single moment in the lives of all unrealized beings.[254] Ratnākaraśānti deploys this term to explain how non-dual awareness is consistently mis-perceived by ordinary beings: despite the fact that this awareness is the only thing that could exist, it nonetheless *seems* as if we are all subjects apprehending perceptual objects such as blue. Thus, "non-dual awareness" is habitually misconstrued by sentient beings as, e.g., "[I am seeing] blue," a process that necessarily involves *samāropa*.

Introducing verse sixteen, Ratnākaraśānti cites two more verses from the PV as evidence for his position: phenomenal appearances are not real—i.e., causally efficacious—but appearances nonetheless can be established insofar as their nature is awareness. He continues to engage the problem of how phenomena could appear in the absence of anything external to awareness. It is incumbent on him to make sense of why phenomena appear *as if* they were external and, more generally, why they appear in any particular way at all.

In the final piece of this section—verses eighteen through twenty—Ratnākaraśānti gives an extensive presentation of his solution to Śāntarakṣita's criticisms of *nirākāra*. This is one of the most difficult sections of the MAV, and it is not always possible to completely reconstruct the details of Ratnākaraśānti's arguments with confidence based only on the Tibetan translation. That said, there is nonetheless a great deal to be gleaned from these verses and their commentary.

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[253] In his critique of the PPU, Jñānaśrīmitra plays on this range of meaning, accusing Ratnākaraśānti of abandoning reasoning in favor of "dogmatic adherence" (*abhiniveśa*) based on faith (*śraddha*) (Tomlinson 2018a, 360).
[254] See below, "Ratnākaraśānti and Dharmakīrti on Internal Cognitive Distortion."

Verse Thirteen: Appearance, Non-Arising, and the Middle Way

At verse thirteen, Ratnākaraśānti declares a Middle Path (*dbu ma'i lam*) regarding how phenomena appear. This description echoes earlier discussions of non-arising at verse nine; it is also consistent with the scriptural citations Ratnākaraśānti has adduced thus far. All of these emphasize that "non-arising" is an affirming negation, and awareness (i.e., clarity) survives that negation. Here, he writes:

> The Middle Path is as follows:
>
>> Those non-existent dharmas appear—not from material, nor from something other, nor from the non-existent, because there are two faults. For that reason, they have the nature of awareness. //13//[255]

The first half of this verse refers to phenomena "appearing" rather than "arising." This is an important distinction: phenomena cannot truly be said to arise, because they do not actually exist. This is consistent with Ratnākaraśānti's thesis that the imagination of the unreal arises, but its content—for example, the dualistic perception of blue—does not. Because they are false, images such as blue cannot *arise*, but they can *appear*. This distinction allows Ratnākaraśānti to maintain that phenomena are not separate from awareness; rather, they are distorted cognitions *of* awareness. Ratnākaraśānti acknowledges that there are problems with the thesis that blue *arises from* awareness; his own position—that awareness *appears as* blue—putatively avoids these.

Ratnākaraśānti glosses the first half of verse thirteen as follows:

> Dharmas, [i.e.] the aggregates and so forth, are <u>non-existent</u> because, apart from the characteristic of non-duality, they lack a self-nature (*svabhāva*) which is singular or multiple. In that way, it is established that "<u>These</u> [<u>dharmas</u>] <u>appear</u>." When analyzed, from what do these dharmas appear? First of all, <u>not from</u> material, because appearances are established as [arising] from that which has only

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[255] *dbu ma'i lam ni / yod min chos rnams de dag snang / bems po las min gzhan las min / med pa las min nyes gnyis phyir / de phyir shes pa'i bdag nyid yod* //13// P 271.17-19; D 105b2-3.

awareness [as its nature]. Awareness is also <u>not from something other</u>, because qualities (*dharma) of one thing do not arise as the objects of another thing.[256]

The commentary opens with a straightforward gloss on the verse's statement that "those non-existent (*yod min*) dharmas appear." Appearances lack a singular or multiple nature, and so it can be said that they do not exist (*yod pa ma yin*). This is consistent with a well-established Mahāyāna tradition of mereological argument presented by Śāntarakṣita and others. Ratnākaraśānti then asks how appearances *could* occur, given that they are non-existent, framing the question in terms of the source or cause of appearances. Ratnākaraśānti first establishes that they could not be produced from anything non-mental—or, as rendered above, anything "material" (*bem*[*s*] *po,* *jaḍa). Ratnākaraśānti is almost certainly alluding to Śāntarakṣita's MA 16, which uses the term much the same way: arguing that consciousness cannot be produced from something other than consciousness.[257] Despite this similarity, Ratnākaraśānti makes a slightly different point from Śāntarakṣita, engaging cognized images rather than consciousness *per se*. He would agree with Śāntarakṣita that these images cannot be produced from something other than consciousness but does not thereby conclude that they *arise from* consciousness. As noted, he rather holds that phenomena *are* consciousness—more precisely, awareness—that is being misconstrued due to karmic distortions.

The commentary goes on to identify the two faults (*nyes gnyis*) mentioned in the verse, both of which follow from the idea that appearances arise from "<u>[something] non-existent</u>" (*med pa*). The commentary parses this position in two ways: (a) having no [self-]nature (*rang bzhin med*

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[256] *ces bya ba ni chos ni phung po la sogs pa yod pa ma yin te / gnyis med pa'i mtshan nyid las gcig dang du ma'i rang bzhin dang bral ba'i phyir ro // de bzhin du 'di dag snang ngo zhes bya bar ni grub po / 'di dag rnam par dpyad na gang las 'di dag snang ba zhe na / re zhig bems po las ni ma yin te / snang ba ni shes pa gcig pu dang ldan pa las grub pa'i phyir ro // shes pa yang gzhan las ni ma yin te / gzhan gyi chos ni gzhan gyi spyod yul du mi 'gyur ba'i phyir ro //* P 271.19-272.5; D 105b3-5.

[257] "Knowledge is intrinsically opposed to insentient matter" (Ichigō 1985, CXXXVI). *rnam shes bem po'i rang bzhin las / bzlog pa rab tu skye ba ste //*MA 16ab// (1985, CXV).

pa, *niḥsvabhāvatā), and (b) being false (*brdzun pa*). These parallel the two main types of pseudo-Mādhyamika opponent: those who hold that everything is non-existent and those who say everything is false. Ratnākaraśānti identifies a problematic consequence for each of these positions:

> They do not arise from what is without nature, nor from falsity, because of there being two faults. To be specific:
>
> [Fault 1:] If these [appearances arise from] what is without nature, they would not arise as real things, which are awareness that possesses causes.
>
> [Fault 2:] Also, things would not be non-random, because they would not depend on what is established at a specific time, and interdependent origination would also be abandoned.[258]

Ratnākaraśānti has already adduced problems with the position that phenomena could be devoid of any nature whatsoever and yet still possess causal capacity. The first fault highlights Ratnākaraśānti's argument that pseudo-Mādhyamikas who believe that everything is non-existent cannot give an account of "real things" (*dngos po*, *bhāva or *vastu[259]), i.e., things that possess *arthakriyā*. Here he specifies that these "real things" have awareness as their nature—an awareness that possesses causal efficacy.

The second fault alleges that for pseudo-Mādhyamikas who hold that all is false, phenomena could not seem to possess causal or temporal constraints in the world. This is because, since everything is false, if phenomena are produced at all, they must be produced from something false. But that which is completely false has no anchor in temporal reality. Appearances could therefore arise at any time, without regard to any kind of temporal restriction—yet that is not how

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[258] *rang bzhin med pa dang brdzun pa las ni mi 'gyur te / gang gi phyir zhe na / nyes pa gnyis yod pa'i phyir ro / 'di ltar gal te 'di dag rang bzhin med na rgyu dang ldan pa'i shes pa'i dngos por ni mi 'gyur ro / de bzhin du yang res 'ga' bar yang mi 'gyur te / dus nges par 'grub pa la ltos pa med pa'i phyir ro / rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba yang spangs par 'gyur ro //* P 272.5-10; D 105b5-6.

[259] In the absence of a Sanskrit original, we can only speculate as to which of these *dngos po* is translating, but it is clear that the text here is simultaneously engaging with Śāntarakṣita's critique of *bhāva*-s from the MA and also discussing *vastu*-s as described by Dharmakīrti.

we actually experience appearances. Therefore, this pseudo-Mādhyamika position cannot be correct.

Ratnākaraśānti rounds off his commentary on this verse by restating his conclusion: since it is not reasonable that phenomena arise in any of the aforementioned ways, they must have the nature of awareness. He writes:

> For that reason, those [non-existent dharmas] have the nature of awareness. Since they are not [produced] from something material, nor from something other, nor from the non-existent, they should be understood as appearing falsely out of just this true nature which is awareness.[260]

This point is consistent with Śāntarakṣita's argument that phenomena could not appear based on something other than awareness—i.e., something material or inanimate. Ratnākaraśānti has demonstrated the problems that arise from the two types of pseudo-Mādhyamika arguments that aim to demonstrate that phenomena are merely conventional. Based on that, he appeals to these opponents to accept his own position: phenomena must exist on the basis of a real awareness, despite appearing falsely in and of themselves.

Equating Imputation (*samāropa) with the Imagined Nature

In what follows, Ratnākaraśānti continues in this tenor. He invites the pseudo-Mādhyamikas to accept that the scope of their criticisms of conventions are identical; while they use different vocabulary, the substances of their arguments are the effectively the same. Having established that phenomena are the misconstrued appearances of awareness, Ratnākaraśānti must now explain ordinary experience in a way that avoids the problems he has already adduced for the pseudo-Mādhyamikas. This begins with an appeal: like his opponents, he is interested in purifying

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[260] *de'i phyir shes pa'i bdag nyid du ni yod do // gang gi phyir bems po las ma yin pa dang / gzhan las ma yin pa dang / med pa las ma yin pa de'i phyir shes pa'i rang bzhin bden pa 'di nyid las brdzun par snang bar rig par bya'o // P 272.10-13; D 105b6-7.*

imputations (*samāropa*) born out of ignorance; the difference is one of vocabulary rather than substance:

> "That which has an existent and non-existent nature does not exist."
> Then what is being negated? //14ab//

If <u>existent and non-existent natures do not exist</u>, <u>what</u> are you trying to <u>negate</u>?[261]

> If you answer "imputation" (*samāropa*) then that would be just like
> what is imagined by the imagination of the unreal.[262] //14cd//

[The opponent] says, "we negate that which has an existent and non-existent nature that is <u>imputed</u>." In that case, the aggregates and so on, which have the nature of the imagination of the unreal, are imputed to be existent. By what is it so imputed? <u>By the imagination of the unreal!</u>[263]

The first *pāda* of this verse is evocative of MA 1. There, Śāntarakṣita declares that entities (*bhāva*) are like reflections because they do not withstand the neither-one-nor-many argument. Here Ratnākaraśānti refers to *natures* (*bdag nyid*) rather than Śāntarakṣita's entities; he describes these natures as *yod dang med pa'i bdag nyid*, which I translate as "existent and non-existent." This Tibetan phrase likely translates a *dvandvasamāsa*—possibly **bhāvābhāvātmakā* or **bhāvābhāvasvabhāva*—that leaves the precise relation between "existent" and "non-existent" grammatically indeterminate. We should therefore leave open the possibility that the object of negation here could be something that's either ontologically indeterminate ("existent *or* non-existent") or contradictory ("existent *and also* non-existent").[264] In any case, Ratnākaraśānti goes

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[261] *yod dang med pa'i bdag nyid ni / med do zhes ni ci zhig dgag //* 14ab *// ces bya ba ni gal te yod pa dang med pa'i bdag nyid med na / khyod kyis ci zhig dgag par bya //* P 272.13-15; D 105b7.

[262] The verse reads only *kun rtog*, which the commentary glosses as *yang dag pa ma yin pa'i kun tu rtog pa*.

[263] *gal te sgro btags yin zhe na / kun rtog gis btags de bzhin no //* 14cd *// zhes bya ba smras te / gal te 'di skad du sgro btags pa'i yod pa dang med pa'i bdag nyid bdag cag 'gog par byed do zhes zer na / de lta yin na phung po la sogs pa yang dag pa ma yin pa'i kun tu rtog pa'i bdag nyid yod par sgro btags par gyur pa nyid yin no // gang gis sgro btags pa yin zhe na / yang dag pa ma yin pa'i kun tu rtog pa nyid kyis so //* P 272.15-21; D 105b7-106a2.

[264] It is possible that Ratnākaraśānti is also engaging the more general pseudo-Mādhyamika position—described in the introduction to MAV 5: "[o]thers explain the Middle Path differently. To be specific, there is the view that blue and so forth are not non-existent because they are established by experience, but they are also not existent, because they do not withstand analysis." Cf. Chapter Three for further discussion.

on to specify a specific position for these opponents: that natures are wrongly imputed due to habitual ignorance. This is why phenomena *seem* like they must have an essence or nature, even though both Ratnākaraśānti and the opponents argue that this could not really be the case.

Ratnākaraśānti reaches out to his opponents here, suggesting that their position aligns with his own: both are interested to correct the habit of wrongly imagining essences in phenomenal experience. He goes on to argue that both kinds of imputation—*samāropa* and *parikalpita*—require that the imagination of the unreal must be present to serve as an imputing process. Thus, Ratnākaraśānti's opponents *must* accept the imagination of the unreal; regardless of their preferred terminology for the habit of wrongly imputing essences onto apparent phenomena, there has to be a basis *for* that imputation.

While it is not clear that Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla are the only opponents here, it is certainly the case that his criticism directly opposes their views. Both thinkers accept "interdependently arisen appearances"—i.e., the thesis that appearances arise without any basis that transcends the conventional (McClintock 2014, 336). If, as the opponent alleges, the imagination of the unreal (and concomitantly the aggregates and its other constituent parts) were of the same status as the imputations it produces, there would be a vicious circularity: imputations would impute imputations without basis, similar to illusions producing other illusions in the absence of a magician. According to Ratnākaraśānti, this is an intractable circularity for pseudo-Mādhyamikas; the only solution is to accept the imagination of the unreal as the imputing process.[265]

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[265] It should be noted that this kind of thesis is generally consistent with [pseudo-]Mādhyamika positions, and it is not clear that they wuld see this as a criticism.

Continuing to comment on MAV 14, Ratnākaraśānti takes the opportunity to explicitly state his solution to Śāntarakṣita's criticism. Recall that for Śāntarakṣita, there could be no basis for imputation. Any such basis would have to survive the neither-one-nor-many argument, and nothing that has any kind of self-nature (*svabhāva*) could do so. Ratnākaraśānti answers:

> Because it also has the nature (*ngo bo nyid*) of clarity, that which has an unreal nature (*bdag nyid*)—i.e. the aggregates and so forth—appears clearly.[266]

The imagination of the unreal—glossed here as "the aggregates and so forth"—is the impure aspect of the dependent nature, and in this respect it "has an unreal nature" (*yang dag ma yin pa'i bdag nyid*). Nonetheless, its essence is luminosity (*gsal ba*), the pure aspect of the dependent nature. Thus, even though it is impure and produces deceptive phenomenal appearances, it can nonetheless "appear clearly." This is a difficult but crucial point for Ratnākaraśānti's account: even though phenomenal appearances are false, the essence of the imagination of the unreal, which is pure luminosity, nonetheless appears clearly in and through them.

Relating Unreal Phenomena to Their Real Nature

Laying Out the Problem

Now that Ratnākaraśānti has explicitly acknowledged clarity as his candidate for what remains after the neither-one-nor-many analysis, he is obligated to explain the following: (a) how the imagined nature and other-dependent nature relate to one another, (b) how appearances should be properly characterized, and (c) how he avoids the problems adduced in Śāntarakṣita's criticisms of *nirākāravāda*. The remainder of this section addresses these issues, beginning with an objection that challenges the position that appearances and their nature are somehow identical:

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[266] *de ni gsal ba'i ngo bo nyid yin pa'i phyir yang dag pa ma yin pa'i bdag nyid phung po la sogs pa gsal bar snang ngo //* P 272.21-273.1; D 106a2.

[Objection:] How is that called a nature?[267] It is not appropriate that the absence of a nature [i.e., an unreal nature] would appear clearly. How does an unimputed absence of nature appear?[268]

Here the opponent objects that something without a nature could not appear clearly; how is it, then, that something with an unreal nature (discussed in the previous passage) could do so? Both parties agree that imputations are non-existent and yet—somehow—they appear. The crucial difference is that for Ratnākaraśānti, imputed phenomena do not exist, but their other-dependent basis does exist. He argues that because blue and so forth appear, they must have a nature of some sort. But he also agrees with the opponent that blue and so forth have no nature—at least, no self-nature— because they are susceptible to the neither-one-nor-many argument. The opponent thereby accuses him of a contradiction: something that does exist (clarity) would be identical to something non-existent (blue). The opponent tries to back Ratnākaraśānti into a corner: he must either (a) accept that the nature of clarity is also susceptible to the neither-one-nor-many argument, or (b) he must acknowledge that appearances are indeed fully separate from clarity. The former would ensnare Ratnākaraśānti in the fault of contradicting his own tenets (*siddhāntavirodha*); the latter would leave him vulnerable to Śāntarakṣita's critique.

Ratnākaraśānti responds to these allegations in a series of moves that occupy the text up to MAV verse 20. To briefly summarize: Ratnākaraśānti first argues that "error" and "concept" are in some meaningful sense co-extensive. He then cites one and a half verses from the first chapter of the PV—verses 77 and 84ab—as part of an argument that karmic habituation alone can account for phenomenal appearances, while maintaining that these appearances are falsely imputed onto an awareness that is, itself, real.

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[267] My translation interprets bdag as short for *bdag nyid*, but the Tibetan—*bdag ces bya ba*—could also be read as "why is it called that?" The latter interpretation would not substantially change how the passage is read, in my view.

[268] *bdag ces bya ba gang las yin / bdag nyid med pa de ni gsal bar snang bar mi rigs so / sgro ma btags pa'i bdag nyid med pa ji ltar snang zhe na /* P 273.1-3; D 106a2-3.

Existence, Error, and Conceptuality

Ratnākaraśānti opens his response to the opponent's objection by highlighting the relationships between error and conceptuality. In so doing, he directly addresses the opponents' questions about how appearances and their nature could be identical, and their objection that in that case it would not make sense for phenomena to appear clearly. Ratnākaraśānti's overall position is only gradually explained; briefly stated, this is the beginning of an argument that phenomena such as blue *do not* appear clearly, because they are wrapped up in error. He states that ordinary phenomena do not exist apart from imputation, because of the omnipresence of error:

> [Answer:] It is because there are no unimputed [objects]. Since there are no external objects, cognitions of the imagined [nature] are erroneous. They are not non-conceptual, because it is not reasonable for self-awareness to be erroneous.[269]

Ratnākaraśānti first answers his opponent by saying that things do indeed appear, "because there are no unimputed [objects]" (*sgro ma btags pa med pa'i phyir ro*). Recall that he is addressing the opponent's question, "how does an unimputed absence of nature appear"? Ratnākaraśānti's answer emphasizes that appearances simply have no existence of apart from imputation. This is in keeping with his general *alīkākāra* stance, according to which anything that is (or could be) the object of ordinary phenomenal experience falls within the category of the imagined nature. All of these phenomena—including, for Ratnākaraśānti, everything that ordinary cognitions seem to be engaging with—are non-existent. However, they nonetheless appear through the force of karmic habits that distort non-dual awareness. Ratnākaraśānti points out here that if something appears but does not exist, that thing is inherently deceptive and erroneous.

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[269] *sgro ma btags pa med pa'i phyir ro // phyi rol gyi don med pas kun du rtog pa'i shes pa ni 'khrul pa yin no / rnam par mi rtog pa ni ma yin te / rang rig pa ni 'khrul par mi rigs pa'i phyir ro // P 273.3-6; D 106a3-4.*

As evidence for this claim Ratnākaraśānti appeals to the error of seeming externality. The world appears in ordinary cognitions as though it is external to a stable subject, even though this is demonstrably not the case according to both Ratnākaraśānti and the opponents with whom he engages here. These cognitions are therefore erroneous because phenomena seem to be a certain way—i.e., external to cognition—when they are actually not that way. Ratnākaraśānti suggests here that "seeming blue" is similar to "seeming external." It is an erroneous quality that is imputed onto appearances, and that does not accord with their nature. Stated differently: Ratnākaraśānti and his opponents agree that phenomena *seem* external to the mind as a result of cognitive error, and that this could not actually be the case. Because phenomena present erroneously in one respect, Ratnākaraśānti reasons, one should treat *all* of their apparent qualities as suspect.

The final line of the passage is grammatically straightforward, but perplexing in its philosophical implications: "[erroneous appearances] are not non-conceptual, because it is not reasonable for self-awareness to be erroneous." Ratnākaraśānti seems to be arguing that non-conceptuality is the purview *solely* of self-awareness (*rang rig*, **svasaṃvedana*), which would preclude the possibility of non-conceptual error.[270] I read this as an argument that if erroneous cognitions were non-conceptual, then they would be co-extensive with self-awareness. Ratnākaraśānti follows Dharmakīrti in arguing that self-awareness (i.e., clarity) cannot be erroneous regarding its own nature.[271] However, the above formulation goes further than this insofar as it seems to suggest that self-awareness is the *only* thing that could be non-conceptual,

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[270] While it falls outside the scope of this dissertation, I would note that the Śaiva polymath Abhinavagupta (who is, perhaps not coincidentally, roughly contemporaneous with Ratnākaraśānti) makes precisely this same move. He too denies non-conceptual error in order to adapt—and criticize—Dharmakīrti. Cf. Catherine Prueitt's dissertation (2016) and recent article (2017).

[271] This is further discussed below, in the context of verse 21.

which would preclude the possibility of non-conceptual error. This point bears further consideration.

Ratnākaraśānti alleges that there is no such thing as an ordinary appearance that is not imputed, because appearances necessarily contain error. If imputations (*samāropa*) necessarily requires conceptuality, then this carries the important implication that *ordinary phenomenal appearances are not candidates for valid direct perception* (*pratyakṣapramāṇa*). This is prima facie in tension with Dharmakīrti's presentation. Dharmakīrti explicitly accepts the possibility of non-conceptual error; his standard example for this is "floating hairs" (*timira*) in the field of vision of a person afflicted with an eye-disease such as myodesopsia (more commonly known as "floaters").[272]

While Ratnākaraśānti's statements on the matter are rather oblique, it seems possible to resolve his apparent tension with Dharmakīrti on the matter of non-conceptual error. In this regard, Ratnākaraśānti's description of error vis-à-vis self-awareness here is crucial for understanding both his account of appearances and his interpretation of the *Pramāṇavārttika*. Before proceeding further with Ratnākaraśānti's account, therefore, it is worth briefly engaging with Dharmakīrti's presentation of non-conceptual error in order to identify precisely what the MAV might be arguing, and why. This will pave the way for a fuller appreciation of Ratnākaraśānti's further arguments, which discuss error in terms of two of the three natures: the imagined and the impure aspect of the dependent. Before proceeding, this point bears further explication.

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[272] E.g., PV 3.293: *apavādaś caturtho 'tra tena uktam upaghātajam / kevalaṃ tatra timiram upaghātopalakṣaṇam //PV 3.293//*. I thank Alex Yiannopoulos for sharing with me his draft translation of this section of the PV, discussed in his forthcoming dissertation.

A Necessary Excursus: Dharmakīrti on Internal Cognitive Distortion

The main difference between conceptual errors and non-conceptual errors for Dharmakīrti has to do with the type of remedy necessary. A conceptual error can be cured with appropriate training: to take a classic Buddhist example, the belief in a stable, permanent Self can be overturned through logic, by which a person can come to the realization that there is no such Self. Conceptual errors can also be cured through familiarity or expertise, as in the case of the seasoned desert traveler who knows better than to think there's an oasis in the sand when he sees a mirage.

The position that a blue image is an error relies on Dharmakīrti's theory of internal cognitive distortion (*antarupaplava*), a non-conceptual flaw in cognition that cannot be remedied through reasoning. Explaining this idea, Dunne gives the example of a "cataractous optometrist" who sees hairs even after he's earned a Ph.D. in the field of vision (Dunne 2004, 89). Dunne's ophthalmologist "cannot distinguish between hairs and certain effects of cataracts just by looking at the hair-like images appearing in his visual perception" (2004, 89). For non-conceptual errors, a more radical therapy is required beyond the recognition that one's perception is erroneous. In the case of the optometrist it is not enough to understand that the hairs are not real; eye-surgery is required if one wishes to eradicate them. Likewise, Dharmakīrti's remedy for non-conceptual error requires more than mere re-habituation: for this, he prescribes meditation that can produce direct yogic perception (*yogipratyakṣa*) (Dunne 2018, 19).[273]

It is important to note here that the person who "sees hairs" is not seeing hairs *per se*; such hairs do not actually exist. Rather, one is experiencing the effects of a faulty ocular organ that produces the image. That faulty organ does not appear as an object of cognition and can only be

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[273] This somewhat complex topic falls outside of the scope of this discussion. For a specific discussion of *yogipratyakṣa* as a remedy for non-conceptual error, see Dunne (2018). For a broader discussion of yogic perception, see Franco and Eigner (2009), particularly Franco's introduction.

determined to be faulty in an indirect manner, through the presentation of symptoms. Specifically, the perception of hairs can serve as evidence that could help the ophthalmologist recognize—and thereby remedy—a fault in his perception. In that sense, these hairs are a visible symptom of an otherwise invisible illness. If Dunne's ophthalmologist underwent the appropriate surgery, the hairs in his field of vision would clear away because the defect that caused their appearance has been remedied. Similarly, for Ratnākaraśānti, "seeing blue" could never mean *really* seeing blue. Rather, "blue" is the product of a faulty cognitive apparatus—specifically, awareness that has been muddled by karmic habituation—that likewise ceases when those root causes have been remedied.

Ratnākaraśānti's argument resonates with Dunne's description of Dharmakīrti's critique of perception from an Epistemic Idealist (i.e., Yogācāra) perspective. Dunne writes:

> At that level of analysis, not only inference, but also perception is distorted and erroneous (*bhrānta*) because perception involves an "internal distortion" (*antarupaplava*). [a] This distortion, a form of ignorance, makes the cognitive image in perception seem as if the objects of perception are external, even though, according to Epistemic Idealism, no such objects exist outside the mind. [b] On an even stronger reading, this distortion also causes the "variegation" (*citratā*) of the object, such that it appears to have various attributes (such as colors) and dimensions (such as height and width). (Dunne 2004, 315).

Dunne goes on to refer to these two interpretations—which I have demarcated by adding "[a]" and "[b]" in the passage—as "weak" and "strong" accounts of internal cognitive distortion, respectively (2004, 315). According to the weak interpretation, internal cognitive distortion makes appearances seem as if they originate "out there" (*bāhyārthatā*)—i.e., external to a subjective apprehender. However, they are also not errors, in the sense that the phenomenal content of blue remains even after erroneous imputations have been stripped away. Thus, blue exists; its appearance *as external* is false, but its appearance *qua* blue is true.

According to the "strong" interpretation, distortion is responsible not only for an object's seeming to be "out there" but for all of its qualities, including spatial extension (*sthulatā*).[274] In other words, any phenomenal experience of blue—or even any sense of there being dimensions or differentiations—is thrown out. In an unpublished conference paper Dunne translates and discusses Dharmakīrti's auto-commentary (*svavṛtti*) and Śākyabuddhi's sub-commentary on one and a half verses (PV 1.98-99ab[275]) that adopt this perspective.[276] These comments are worth reproducing at length insofar as they highlight the ultimately soteriological import of the strong reading, which is consistent with Ratnākaraśānti's presentation.

> Conceptual errors do not depend just on external factors. Rather, they also come from internal confusion, as when a person with cataracts erroneously sees hairs.

> [Opponent:] "But if confusion comes from ignorance, then you would be forced to conclude that ocular awareness and such are also erroneous [because they come from confusion]."

> That is not the case because ignorance is defined as conceptuality. That is, ignorance *is* conceptuality. Ignorance leads one astray by its very nature. But sensory awareness is not conceptual in this way. Or [if one accepts that ignorance is understood to be dualistic awareness], this fault still does not apply to sensory awarenesses because they are non-dual, although they appear as dual. I will explain this [in the third chapter[277]]. Although all [cognitions that are contaminated by ignorance] are confused, we still define some as *pramāṇa*s and some as spurious. We do so because we agree on the intended capacity [or lack thereof] for telic function. We do so until foundational transformation (Dunne 2012, 2).[278]

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[274] Cf. Dunne (Dunne 2004, 404–5 f.n. 14) for translation of a particularly relevant discussion of spatial extension by Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi *ad* PV 3.211.

[275] *jñānādyarthakriyāṃ tāṃ tāṃ dṛṣṭvā bhede 'pi kurvataḥ / arthāṃs tadanyaviśleṣaviṣayair dhvanibhiḥ saha //98// saṃyojya pratyabhijñānaṃ kuryād apy anyadarśane //99ab//* (Gnoli 1960, 49).

[276] Note that these are included in the same block of verses in the PVSV as the two that Ratnākaraśānti cites.

[277] E.g., PV 3.194-224—translated by Dunne (2004, 396–411)—and 3.288-300, discussed in Yiannopoulous' forthcoming dissertation.

[278] *kiṃ tu viplavād āntarād api keśādivibhramavat / avidyodbhavād viplavatve cakṣurvijñānādiṣv api prasaṅgaḥ / na / tasyā vikalpalakṣaṇatvāt / vikalpa eva hy avidyā / sā svabhāvenaiva viparyasyati / naivam indriyajñānāni vikalpakāni / na vā teṣv apy eṣa doṣo 'dvayānāṃ dvayanirbhāsād iti vakṣyāmaḥ / sarveṣāṃ viplave 'pi pramāṇatadābhāsavyavasthā ā āśrayaparāvṛtter arthakriyāyogyābhimatasaṃvādanāt /* (Gnoli 1960, 50–51; see also Dunne 2012, 2).

The passage begins with Dharmakīrti distinguishing between external and internal errors, and he initially maintains a firm distinction between conceptual errors and non-conceptual, perceptual distortions. On the one hand, Dharmakīrti maintains that ignorance consists in conceptuality itself (*vikalpa eva hi avidyā*). Dharmakīrti then introduces an alternative—beginning with "Or…" (*vā*)—and begins discussing cognition from the Yogācāra standpoint. He highlights the position that although they could be considered non-conceptual, direct perceptions of phenomena are nonetheless confused.

This somewhat oblique passage is very similar to a more direct statement in the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*. Discussing correct and incorrect cognitions in an ordinary context, Dharmakīrti writes there:

> Since some cognitions have the fault of lacking a consistent imprint for distortion (*viplava*), even the unskilled say that some cognitions are not reliable for practical action (*vyavahāra*); thus, it is said that a cognition of that type is not instrumental [i.e., is not a *pramāṇa*]. The other kind of cognition has a stable imprint; hence, for as long as *saṃsāra* endures, it has an unbroken continuity. Having such an imprint, the cognition is in this context an instrumental cognition in terms of being trustworthy for practical action… it is only those who cultivate the wisdom born of contemplation that thereby orient themselves toward the ultimate instrumental cognition that is devoid of error and immaculate (Dunne 2004, 315–16).

According to both of these passages, all ordinary cognitions are distorted from a soteriological viewpoint, but a practical hierarchy is nonetheless maintained. Some distorted cognitions—for example, seeing water—are stable in the sense that they are shared perceptions that allow for the attainment of practical goals in the world. From an ordinary perspective, it is necessary to distinguish water (which can quench thirst) from a mirage (which cannot). But in another sense— which is soteriologically higher but also less practical—"water" and "mirage" are equally flawed in that they are both appearances that seem external to awareness. On that level of analysis *all* ignorance, karma, and error must be purified.

This interpretation of PV 1.98-99ab is further strengthened by Dharmakīrti's crucial stipulation that he accepts ordinary *pramāṇa*s "until foundational transformation" (*ā āśrayaparāvṛtteḥ*). *Āśrayaparāvṛtti* is a technical term in Yogācāra thought that describes the point at which karmic habits are completely purified and enlightenment is attained.[279] Translated into the terminology of the MVB corpus, the foundational transformation refers to the moment that the imagination of the unreal—the nature of which is and was always emptiness (or, per Ratnākaraśānti's account, clarity)—becomes completely purified, and thereby stops producing deceptive appearances.

With Dharmakīrti's hierarchy in view, we are in a position to offer a preliminary method for resolving the apparent conflict between his acceptance of non-conceptual error and Ratnākaraśānti's denial of it. This resolution depends on the fact that both thinkers are speaking from a soteriological vantage, where the point is not to avoid dehydration but rather to attain freedom from suffering for the benefit of all sentient beings. From this viewpoint, distinguishing types of delusion is far less important than emphasizing that *all* cognitive error—conceptual or not—requires purification. Seeing atoms and seeing hairs must be remedied in different ways, but the crucial point is that both can and should be remedied.

Ratnākaraśānti on Error and Conceptuality

An actual proponent of *satyākāra* would be very unlikely to simply accept Ratnākaraśānti's strategy of blurring the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual error. They could just as easily interpret Dharmakīrti as maintaining that the appearance of blue is an imputation. To his credit, Ratnākaraśānti does not pretend otherwise. In a move that seems designed to challenge his

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[279] In terms of Buddhist philosophical treatises, this is most clearly presented in Sthiramati's commentary to verses 29 and 30 of Vasubandhu's *Thirty Verses* (*Triṃśikā*)(cf. Buescher 2007, 138–43). See also Schmithausen (1987b) and Waldron (2003).

own thesis that only self-awareness could remain after conceptuality (and error more generally) is removed, the opponent suggests that phenomenal appearances could still appear, because they are not imputations.

> [The opponent] says: "In that case [we assert that] blue, yellow, and so forth are not imputations"[280]

Granting that things' seeming external is indeed an error, the opponent suggests that "blue," unlike "external," is *not* included in "cognitions of the imagined" (*kun du rtog pa'i shes pa*) because images by themselves are not imputations.

Ratnākaraśānti responds in a new verse by pointing out that conceptual habits can and do produce images:

> [We answer:] Imputations, which appear without existing, are reasonable, as in the case of habitual misconstrual (**abhiniveśa*). //15ab//[281]

> The error that takes concepts to be atoms [causes what is not produced by atoms] to appear as atoms even though those do not exist. Therefore, [atoms] are an imputation. In the same way, [due to] error that takes the non-conceptual to be blue and so on, there is the appearance of blue.[282]

This verse does not engage the opponent's new claim—that phenomenal appearances are not imputations—but rather implies that such a move is unnecessary by offering an argument for how appearances could be considered imputations. Ratnākaraśānti describes a case of someone—for example, a Vaibhāṣika—who believes that cognitive images are the product of externally-existent atoms (*rdul*, **paramāṇu*)[283] that conglomerate to form objects in the world. Because this Vaibhāṣika has a strong habit (another possible translation of **abhiniveśa*) of thinking that objects

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[280] *de'i phyir de ni sngon po dang ser po la sogs pa'i sgro btags pa ma yin no zhe na //* P 273.6-7; D 106a4.

[281] *med par snang ba'i sgro btags ni / rigs la mngon par zhen pa bzhin* //15ab// P 273.7-8; D 106a4.

[282] *zhes bya ba smras te / ji ltar rnam par rtog pa rdul du 'khrul pa ni med par rdul du snang bas de ni sgro btags pa yin no // de ltar rnam par mi rtog pa yang sngon po la sogs par 'khrul pa ni med pa'i sngon po la sogs par snang ba sgro btags pa yin no //* P 273.8-11; D 106a4-5.

[283] These are "atoms" in the sense that they are irreducible (i.e., partless) particles.

are made of atoms, he might train himself to (mistakenly) imputes the concept "made of atoms" onto appearances.

According to this account, seeing a cup, a Vaibhāṣika might think "this only seems like a cup, but actually it's atoms that appear to be a single form that I then, out of habit, conceptualize as a cup." The point here is that engaging with things in the world as if they were made of atoms is a mistaken conceptual habit. The Vaibhāṣika thinks that his habit is in accord with the way things are, when in fact (at least for Ratnākaraśānti) he is simply adding an extra layer of concepts onto a perception that is already inherently skewed. Seeing the appearance of a jar, he would not only think "that's a jar," but also "in reality, I am seeing a conglomeration of atoms that appear as a single, unified jar." This extra layer of conceptuality is similar to a person who believes that everything is the product of an omnipotent creator god such as Śiva, and thinks "this is a jar, and it (like everything) was created by Śiva." According to Ratnākaraśānti (and Mahāyāna Buddhists more generally), neither "made of atoms" nor "created by Śiva" are qualities that any real thing actually can have, because neither Śiva nor atoms actually exist.[284] The Vaibhāṣika and the devotee are, rather, mistaking their concepts for reality and mixing those concepts with their perception.

Ratnākaraśānti uses this process of conceptualizing atoms as a means to explain his more contentious idea that the non-conceptual appearance of blue works in a similar way. This example paves the way for his further argument that seeing any phenomenal form whatsoever works in much the same way as seeing atoms: there is no agent that sees "blue." Rather, clarity is being misconstrued as a dualistic cognition of a subject seeing a patch of blue that appears as if it were an external object. That being the case, Ratnākaraśānti can draw a parallel: just as the concept

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[284] Note that Buddhists do not (at least in principle) rule out the existence of deities such as Śiva or Indra. Rather, they stipulate that such deities dwell in *saṃsāra* and would, in that respect, be no different from any other sentient being. For example, in the previous chapter we saw the Buddha address Indra, the king of the gods, in the *Eight Thousand Line Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra*.

"made of atoms" does not accurately describe anything real in the world, "blue" similarly does not apply to anything real. And just as a Vaibhāṣika is engaging with *something* that she imputes as being made of atoms, Ratnākaraśānti argues that we are engaging, not with blue or with any other phenomenal appearance, but with clarity that *seems* blue. And "seeming blue" is a habituated misconstrual, a misinterpretation of what is actually present—i.e., clarity. In both of the examples Ratnākaraśānti adduces above—seeing atoms and seeing blue—the crucial point is not the conceptuality or the non-conceptuality of the imputation, but rather the presence of habits which can be engaged with and ultimately cleared away. On this account this can only be accomplished through the Buddhist path to awakening, since these errors are caused by deeply held karmic seeds that have kept beings bound in the cycle of rebirth and suffering since beginningless time.

Further Distinguishing Unreal Blue from Real Awareness

Ratnākaraśānti next engages with an opponent's charge that images are susceptible to the neither-one-nor-many argument, insofar as they have the substantially established nature of awareness:

> [Opponent: blue and so forth cannot be imputations] because [the idea that] the imputation is of the nature of mental substance is refuted by trustworthy awareness (*pramāṇa*).[285]

Here the opponent is pressuring Ratnākaraśānti to admit that non-existent imputations cannot share an identity relation with awareness, which the opponent holds exists as a substance. The opponent's appeal to *pramāṇa* may be a specific reference to MA 55-57, which stipulate (*inter alia*) that "[t]he term 'knowledge' is not in reality appropriate to [perception of an unreal] image, because (such perception) is contrary to the very nature of knowledge" (Ichigō 1985, CXLI). In

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[285] *sgro btags pa de la yang shes pa'i rdzas kyi bdag nyid yin par tshad mas gnod pa'i phyir ro zhes zer na //* P 273.11-13; D 105a4. Note that the grammar of this passage is not completely clear.

short, images are not candidates for being the direct objects of *pramāṇa*s because they are false.

That being the case, if Ratnākaraśānti wishes to say that their nature is established, then he stands

accused of contradiction.

Naturally, Ratnākaraśānti has an answer to this accusation:

We respond:

> Distinctions (*bye brag*, **bheda*), which are proven to be just false,
> are established because they appear. //15cd//[286]

> [Distinctions, i.e.,] particular qualities (*khyad par rnams*, **viśeṣa*) of what is false
> are themselves also <u>false</u>, [but] they are <u>established</u> in terms of their being
> <u>appearances</u>. It is only through *pramāṇa* that [the experience of something] as a
> real thing is established or refuted. And this is applied [in determining that] that
> which has the characteristics of the aggregates and so forth does not have a nature
> (*bdag nyid*) and so forth [in that it] has been refuted by *pramāṇa*. In terms of the
> conceptual aspect, their [seeming] externality and commonality (*thun mong nyid*,
> **sādhāraṇatā*) and so forth are established as appearing, as in the example of a
> cow.[287]

Ratnākaraśānti and the opponent agree that appearances are false because they do not exist *in the*

way that they appear—i.e., as if they were discrete objects, external to awareness. But

Ratnākaraśānti goes on to emphasize that they do nonetheless *appear*—in terms of ordinary

cognition, appearances that seem external also seem to be valid referents of terms like "cow." This

is not a product of their being real things that have their own causal efficacy—they do not; that

idea "has been refuted by *pramāṇa*." Rather, this limited existence comes from appearances' being

the imagined products of the impure other-dependent nature. Ratnākaraśānti associates this with

the "conceptual aspect" (*rnam par rtog pa'i cha*) of awareness. He specifically references the fact

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[286] *brdzun pa nyid du grub pa yi / bye brag snang bas grub pa yin* //15cd// *zhes bya ba smras te* // P 273.14-14; D 106a4-5.

[287] *brdzun pa'i khyad par rnams kyang brdzun pa yin te / de rnams snang ba nyid kyis grub pa yin no // tshad mas kyang dngos po nyid du bsgrub pa'am / 'gog pa ste phung po la sogs pa'i mtshan nyid la tshad mas gnod pa'i bdag nyid la sogs pa med do zhes sbyor ba'i phyir ro // rnam par rtog pa'i cha las phyi rol nyid dang thun mong nyid la sogs pa snang bar grub ste ba lang bzhin no* // P 273.14-18; D 106a6-7.

that appearances seem to be external and likewise seem to share commonality—for example, the

mug on my desk seems to be "out there;" it also seems to be "the same as" other mugs with which

I have interacted in the past. It is striking that Ratnākaraśānti identifies both of these features of

ordinary cognition as conceptual, as this strengthens the case that his account of conceptual and

non-conceptual error does indeed differ from Dharmakīrti's.

In order to clarify his position, Ratnākaraśānti next adduces two verses from the first

chapter of the *Pramāṇavārttika* (treating inference, *anumāna*). These will be taken in turn.

Pramāṇavārttika I.77

Also, the *Pramāṇavārttika* states:

The form[288] appears in that [cognition] as though it were external,
as though it were a single thing, and as though it were excluded from
other things. [But that form] is unreal, because it is not a factor in
analysis (*parikṣānaṅgabhāvataḥ*) // PV I.77//[289]

Ratnākaraśānti deploys this verse as evidence for his case that images are included in the scope of

samāropa. Dharmakīrti juxtaposes three qualities of images in this verse: (a) their seeming

externality, (b) their seeming singularity, and (c) their presentation as excluded (*vyāvṛtta*) from

other things.[290] All of these qualities are deceptive, and the form itself is unreal. As a reason for

this unreality, Ratnākaraśānti points to a particularly technical term: a form "is not a factor in

analysis" (*parīkṣānaṅgabhāvataḥ*). While Dharmakīrti does not explicitly discuss the verse—

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[288] Note that while the Sanskrit edition reads *rūpa*, the MAV's translation is *ngo bo*—which has been translated throughout this dissertation as "nature." This is not necessarily a mistake; *rūpa* generally means "form" but can in certain contexts—including Dharmakīrti's works—can have a sense of "nature" (John Dunne, personal communication).

[289] *tshad ma rnam 'grel las kyang / de la ngo bor gang snang ba / phyi rol gcig dang gzhan las ni / ldog pa lta bu de nyid min / yongs brtags yan lag dngos med phyir //* P 273.19-21; D 106a7-106b1. Moriyama identifies the verse (n.d., 8). Gnoli's Sanskrit edition reads: *tasyāṃ yad rūpam ābhāti bāhyam ekam ivānyataḥ / vyāvṛttam iva nistattvaṃ parīkṣānaṅgabhāvataḥ //* (1960, 44).

[290] The latter two points—(b) and (c)—are crucial facets of Dharmakīrti's theories of inference and *apoha*; they are also necessarily conceptual (Dunne 2004, 131–33 and 339-352).

including this term—in his auto-commentary, Karṇakagomin does engage with it in his sub-commentary (*ṭīkā*). The latter comments that "only that which is capable of *arthakriyā* is a factor in analysis."[291] This is consistent with Ratnākaraśānti's engagement with the term in the MAV: apparent phenomena do not possess *arthakriyā*—though they do *appear* to, in the sense that seeds appear to produce sprouts. Ratnākaraśānti has already drawn a distinction between causal efficacy and apparent causal efficacy in his commentary on MAV 15cf, affirming that he holds appearances' lack of *arthakriyā* to preclude their utility in *pramāṇa*-based analysis.

Having already linked his pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents' presentation of *samāropa* with the imagined nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*) from the MVB corpus, Ratnākaraśānti's citation of PV I.77 further associates both of these with Dharmakīrti's presentation of universals (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*). All of these are described as unchanging, conceptual, and ultimately non-existent. By drawing this link, Ratnākaraśānti highlights Dharmakīrti's consistency with both the earlier Yogācāra tradition and the intended meaning of *samāropa*, positing that these sources are all in agreement about the status of phenomenal experience: images are imputed and thus completely false. But those images appear because they are an erroneous cognition of luminosity, which *is* real. Ratnākaraśānti's defense of his position here is based less on argument than on authoritative precedent. He is claiming consistency with both the MVB corpus and with Dharmakīrti, rather than engaging directly with his opponents' suggestion that perhaps images are in some meaningful sense non-conceptual.

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[291] *arthakriyāsamartham eva parīkṣāṅgamataḥ* (Sāṃkṛtyāyana 1943, 190). Translation per Dunne (personal communication).

Pramāṇavārttika I.84

Immediately after PV 1.77, Ratnākaraśānti cites the first half of PV 1.84, adding that like

phenomenal forms, universals such as the referent of the word "jar" do not exist. To provide

context, the remainder of the verse is also included here in brackets:

[The PV] also states:

> The referent of words [is expressed in the way that it is cognized],
> but it does not exist. [And co-instantiation does not exist in a real
> thing.] //PV 1.84//[292]

> Therefore, because a false thing has the nature of mental substance, a false thing is
> established as appearing. Therefore, it is not refuted by *pramāṇa*, but it being a real
> thing *is* refuted by *pramāṇa*.[293]

Ratnākaraśānti takes the conclusion of this verse as an opportunity to clearly state his position

regarding appearances and *pramāṇa*: appearances are deceptive insofar as they seem to be external

and "blue," but are real (and so not to be refuted) insofar as what is appearing is clarity. To restate

the verse in the context of Ratnākaraśānti's argument: the referent of a word such as "blue" does

not exist. Per the second line (which Ratnākaraśānti omits), words correspond to how phenomena

appear in the world (e.g., as discrete and external) but that appearance is misleading.

It is not clear exactly why Ratnākaraśānti chose not to cite this verse in its entirety. He does

cite two other partial verses in the MAV, both of which have already been discussed: the second

citations of YṢ 21 and LAS X.592. While we cannot ignore the possibility that Ratnākaraśānti is

cherry-picking the parts of the verse that seem to cast Dharmakīrti as taking an *alīkākāra* stance,

it would be uncharitable to presume as much. That said, the final omitted line concerns a technical

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[292] Dunne's translation (personal communication). The MAV citation reads: *zhes pa dang / yang / ji ltar bur ni rab brjod pa / sgra don de bzhin yod ma yin // zhes gsungs pa* // P 273.21-274.1; D 106b1-2. Moriyama identifies the verse (n.d., 8). Gnoli's edition of the full verse reads: *yathāpratītikathitaḥ śabdārtho 'sāv asann api / sāmānādhikaraṇyaṃ ca vastuny asya na saṃbhavaḥ* //PV 84// (1960, 45).

[293] *de lta bas na brdzun pa shes pa'i rdzas kyi bdag nyid las brdzun pa nyid snang bar grub pa ste / de bas na tshad mas gnod pa ma yin la / dngos por gyur pa nyid yin par ni tshad mas gnod do* // P 274.1-4; D 106b1-2.

point that does not obviously relate to Ratnākaraśānti's argument; this might be taken to suggest that he is indeed taking these verses out of their original context.[294] These citations are part of a string of verses—PV 1.76-93—that Dharmakīrti's auto-commentary cites together and then comments on in general (Gnoli 1960, 44–46). The larger argument in the PV concerns exclusion, specifically the idea that two real universals cannot co-instantiate (*sāmānādhikaraṇya*) in a single particular. Ratnākaraśānti seems to ignore this context, instead citing the verses as support for his argument that ordinary perceptual objects—which are the product of both perception and conception—do not exist but are imputed onto an awareness that does.

Avoiding Nihilism

At verse 16, Ratnākaraśānti lays out his strategy for avoiding the sort of relativistic nihilism for which he has criticized pseudo-Mādhyamikas. Having just cited PV 1.84 in a partial manner that suggests the referents of words (and hence, words themselves) are false; he now anticipates an opponent who argues that he is therefore unable to make any proof statements, since such statements would rely on false words:

> [Opponent:] If it is correct to say it is false, how could you speak of a proof statement (*grub pa'i sgra*)? We respond:[295]

>> It is false, but that nature is contradictory with external objects.
>> *Everything* is not established to be false; since [if it were,] how
>> would distinctions appear? //16//[296]

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[294] I suspect that Ratnākaraśānti may be obliquely answering an unnamed opponent's interpretation of these verses, though it is not immediately obvious who that opponent could be. Neither Śāntarakṣita nor Kamalaśīla cite either verse in their commentaries on the MA, but they do discuss co-instantiation at length in the *Śabdārthaparīkṣā* chapter of the TS/P (*circa* verses 1100-1125). While the relationships between the MAV and TS fall somewhat outside the scope of this dissertation, future comparison of the texts could further insights into Ratnākaraśānti's presentation.

[295] *brdzun pa zhes brjod par ni rigs na grub pa'i sgra ci'i phyir smos she na / smras pa /* P 274.4-5; D 106b2.

[296] *brdzun pa yin yang bdags nyid de / phyi yi don dang 'gal ba yin / thams cad brdzun par mi 'grub phyir / de yi bye brag gang las snang* //16// P 274.5-7; D 106b2.

Ratnākaraśānti's response in this verse stipulates that phenomena (i.e., the referents of words) are not *completely* false insofar as their nature is non-deceptive. He has posited that appearances are false because they seem external when they are not, so it is incumbent upon him to account for why appearances *seem* the way they do. This includes their seeming externality, but it also applies to any kind of phenomenal distinction (such as the horns and legs of a cow). Ratnākaraśānti does not offer his own solution just yet, but rather suggests that neither an opponent who accepts external objects nor a pseudo-Mādhyamika could solve this problem coherently. He writes:

> There are two [possible ways to approach] the non-establishment of what is false:
> (1) blue and so forth are not real things; or (2) everything is just false.[297]

Both Ratnākaraśānti and his opponent wish to show that false things cannot be established. He posits two ways that this might be accomplished, both of which hinge on the idea that there needs to be *something* that is not false. He expands on the first possibility—that blue and so forth are not real things—by stipulating that he's referring to a real thing *apart from awareness*, i.e., something external to awareness such as conglomerations of atoms:

> Per the first: (1) if blue and so forth were [caused by] <u>external objects</u>, then they would be <u>objects</u> separate from awareness, so it would be <u>contradictory</u> for [blue] to be a real thing that is of that nature [of awareness].[298]

Ratnākaraśānti's criticism is consistent with general Yogācāra arguments against the production of perceptions on the basis of anything external to cognition. If blue and so forth were external, they could not be real, causally efficacious things. In order for something to be causally efficacious, it must cause an appearance in the mind, which contradicts its being external. The conclusion we

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[297] *brdzun pa nyid mi 'grub pa ni gnyis te / sngon po la sogs pa dngos po ma yin pa'am / thams cad brdzun pa nyid do //* P 274.7-8; D 106b2-3.

[298] *gal te re zhig sngon po la sogs pa phyi'i don yin na de'i tshe de shes pa las don gzhan yin pa'i phyir dngos por gyur pa de'i bdag nyid du 'gal ba yin no //* P 274.7-10; D 106b2-3.

are left with is that external objects cannot be real things, meaning that false things (such as words)

cannot arise in dependence on them.

The second alternative is philosophically much more interesting. As we have seen,

Ratnākaraśānti holds that phenomenal appearances are false but that their nature is real; he has

already adduced several arguments for why phenomena cannot be completely false. Here he offers

a new and sophisticated formulation of that reasoning:

> (2) It is also contradictory for [the experience of seeing blue] to be false. As for
> seeing blue and so on: if that appears as having the self-nature of a false blue then
> its nature would be false. That is not the case, because it would absurdly follow that
> even [the mere appearance of] blue and so on are false.[299]

> Also, things' appearing as particulars such as blue and so on would not be
> established, because no false thing whatsoever can be established. There cannot be
> direct perception or inference about something completely false, as was previously
> shown.[300]

This discussion refers back to a point discussed in Chapter Three. While the experience of

cognition cannot be doubted—the example given earlier was seeing something (either water, or a

mirage) in the desert. Ratnākaraśānti takes for granted here that appearances must have some basis

for appearing, so if the self-nature of blue is false then there must be another basis. Here,

Ratnākaraśānti and the opponent agree that self-nature (*svabhāva*) cannot be a basis because it is

false.[301] They differ, however, in that Ratnākaraśānti can coherently reject the self-natures of

cognized objects while maintaining that there is still a nature (i.e., luminosity). Because the

[pseudo-]Mādhyamika has no recourse to anything apart from *svabhāva*, she is now forced to

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[299] *brdzun par yang 'gal ba nyid de / 'di ltar sngon po la sogs pa mthong ba nyid ni gal te yang dag pa ma yin pa'i sngon po la sogs pa'i rang bzhin gyis so sor snang na de ni de'i bdag nyid brdzun par 'gyur na / de ltar yod pa ma yin te / sngon po la sogs pa yang brdzun par thal bar 'gyur ro //* P 274.10-14; D 106b3-4. This translation remains somewhat tentative due to the obscurity of the Tibetan.

[300] *thams cad brdzun pa la yang sngon po la sogs pa'i bye brag tu snang bar mi 'grub ste / brdzun pa nyid 'ga' yang ma grub pa'i phyir ro / thams cad brdzun pa nyid la ni mngon sum dang rjes su dpag pa med pa ni sngar bstan pa nyid do //* P 274.14-17; D 106b4-5.

[301] *yang dag pa ma yin* is the "unreal" (*abhūta*) part of the phrase "imagination of the unreal" (*abhūtaparikalpa*).

accept a position that entails even the *experience* of cognition—according to Ratnākaraśānti, this is an over-negation with unacceptable consequence.

This rather complex argument bears restatement: if the nature of blue is false, then even the very appearance of blue is false; according to that logic, blue is not even appearing—or, perhaps more charitably, blue could not *seem* to be anything more than an illusion. Thus, the opponent has descended into a nihilism that cannot admit to ordinary experience, wherein blue appears and also seems to be more than an illusion or a rainbow. While Ratnākaraśānti treats these as examples of over-negation with problematic consequences, it is not clear that a Mādhyamika thinker would see this as a damaging argument on its own.[302]

However, the second leg of the argument—which begins with "also, things'…"—may not be as easy for an opponent to dismiss. Here, Ratnākaraśānti alleges that the opponent cannot provide any criteria for distinguishing blue phenomena from something non-blue. If nothing can be established, then the position that "everything is false" necessarily entails that everything is equally—and inescapably—false. To restate: the first limb of this argument negates blue *qua* appearance (nothing could appear); the second negates appearance *qua* blue (there is nothing that could *be* blue). Direct perception and valid inferences both require certainty (*nges pa*, *niścaya*), which is impossible here; the opponent is therefore unable to give an account of *pramāṇa*.

The upshot of these arguments is that if Ratnākaraśānti's opponent wishes to deny his thesis—that phenomenal appearances are false, but their nature is real—then she is left with no satisfactory alternative for explaining how phenomena appear the way they do. Phenomena cannot appear on the basis of external objects or atoms, but they also cannot appear if their basis is false.

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[302] As we have seen (for example, at MA verse one) Śāntarakṣita denies the possibility of any basis for conventions—be it self-nature *svabhāva*, or something else. Śāntarakṣita considers such a basis to be impossible and unnecessary.

Per verse thirteen, which opened this chapter, Ratnākaraśānti seems to consider these three options—that phenomena arise on the basis of something mental, something extramental, or on something false—as exhaustive. The opponent is therefore left without any options.

Verse Seventeen: Ranākaraśānti's Solution

While he has adduced problems with other possible accounts of how phenomena could appear in the manner that they do, Ratnākaraśānti has so far not presented his own solutions. At this point he alludes to that presentation in the course of addressing Śāntarakṣita's central criticism of *nirākāra*. According to Śāntarakṣita, if appearances are false but their nature is true or real, then there is an unbridgeable gap between them; any attempt to bridge that gap leads to myriad contradictions. The beginning of verse 17 tersely summarizes this argument; the rest of it responds:

> [Opponent:] It is difficult to connect false [appearances] with the true awareness that is their nature.[303] [We respond: in that case,] concepts and objects would occupy the same space; [but they are] even more difficult to connect! //17//[304]

The opponent alleges that it is "difficult to connect" (*'brel par dka'*, **durghaṭa*)[305] false appearances and their nature—i.e., that Ratnākaraśānti is faced with a difficult problem, in that he must explain how a nature that serves as a basis for conventions could survive the neither-one-nor-many argument. Ratnākaraśānti responds by drawing out the undesirable consequence to his

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[303] This could also mean "it is difficult to connect true and false cognitions with their nature." However, given that Ratnākaraśānti is trying to demonstrate that appearances can be false even while their nature is real, the reading given above is stronger.

[304] *gal te brdzun dang yang dag rig / de yi bdag nyid 'brel par dka' / rnam rtog don dang phyogs gcig tu / de bas shin tu 'brel par dka'* //17// P 274.17-19; D 106b5-6.

[305] (Negi 1993, 4109). The Sanskrit often means "impossible" or "impossible to understand" (Apte 1957, 821). According to the Buddhist Digital Resource Center (www.tbrc.org), the term *'brel bar dka'* is only attested in five texts included in the *bstan 'gyur*, all of which are relatively late works on *pramāṇa*. The most relevant attestations are in translations of the eighth chapter of Śāntarakṣita's TS and Kamalaśīla's TSP, where the phrase translates **durghaṭa* (e.g., vol 107, 531); I argue it is doing the same here. The Tibetan phrase is also found in translations of Dharmottara's *Pramāṇaviniścayaṭīkā*, Yamāri's *Pramāṇavarttikālaṃkāraṭīkāsupariśuddī*, and Jinendrabuddhi's *Pramāṇavārttikālaṃkāraṭīkā*.

opponents' position. The opponent argues that there is necessarily a problematic disjunct between

false appearances and a true nature serving as their basis—i.e., they are "difficult to connect"

because while the latter survives the neither-one-nor-many argument, the former does not.

Ratnākaraśānti retorts that, if that were the case, there must be an even deeper divide between

concepts and perceptual objects. The commentary elaborates this point and draws out its

problematic implications for the opponent:

> Imputations and their nature are not difficult to connect. If one thinks they are
> difficult to connect in that way, then concepts would not be errors. In a conceptual
> cognition, one cognizes the mere exclusion of a "non-cow.[306] Because that
> [cognition] has the self-nature of being a concept, the appearance [in the conceptual
> cognition] is habitually misconstrued as being of the same nature as the object
> which is clearly appearing. Exaggerated (*yongs su lhag pa*) concepts and the actual
> objects [to which they are applied] are not of the same nature. Why would someone
> think these are not even more difficult to connect [than phenomena and their
> nature[307]]?[308]

Ratnākaraśānti here alleges that if—as the opponent argues—there is a disjunct between a false

appearance and its true nature, then there should also be one between a concept and an object. This

is a problem for the opponent because, as Ratnākaraśānti notes, concepts do not seem different

from the particulars to which they are applied in ordinary cognition. For example: I see a

phenomenal form in a field and, through the process of *apoha*, judge that form to be "cow" (or,

more precisely, "not non-cow." But the image and the concept "cow" do not seem to be at all

different; in fact, conceptually distinguishing the idea of "cow" from the phenomenal form in my

vision takes effort.

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[306] *zhes bya ba ni sgro btags pa de'i bdag nyid 'brel par dka' ba ma yin te / de bzhin du yang gal te 'brel par dka' bar sems na / de lta na ni rnam par rtog pa de 'khrul par mi 'gyur te / 'dir ba lang ma yin pa las ldog pa tsam rtogs par 'gyur ro //* P 274.19-275.1; D 106b6.

[307] More literally, "those [phenomena] are not the nature of that [concept]" (*de dag de'i rang bzhin ma yin te*).

[308] *de rnam par rtog pa'i rang bzhin yin pa'i phyir rab tu snang ba la don gyi rang bzhin nyid du zhen pa yin no / yongs su lhag pa'i rnam par rtog pa dang / don gyi chos rnams gang yin pa de dag de'i rang bzhin ma yin te / de lta bas na shin tu 'brel par dka' bar ci'i phyir mi sems //* P 275.1-5; D 106b6-107a1.

The important point here is that when we have a cognition "that is a cow," both the perceptual image and the universal "not non-cow" are in play. Ratnākaraśānti is highlighting the fact that these two are meaningfully separate. On this account, the universal "cow" has the self-nature of a universal, rather than the image of a cow. This is a somewhat subtle point, but one that Dharmakīrti makes clear at the beginning of the chapter on perception of the *Pramāṇavārttika*: PV 3.9cd: "We do indeed assert that the universal is a particular" (Dunne 2004, 395). Devendrabuddhi's commentary is consistent with Ratnākaraśānti's view: "Since the universal also is by nature awareness itself, we accept that it is a particular" (2004, 395 f.n. 7). Describing this point earlier, Dunne remarks, "[i]n short, the image in a conceptual cognition is both real (as a unique mental event) and unreal (as an apparently distributed universal)" (2004, 130).

To restate this point in the context of Ratnākaraśānti's commentary: the opponent argues that something false and something true are meaningfully different and could not be coherently identified. Ratnākaraśānti points out that in the process of ordinary cognition, this merging of two separate things with different degrees or types of reality happens *all the time*, or at least every time we have a conceptual cognition. Such cognitions require two distinct things—the image and the concept, both of which have their own natures—to be considered as "the same."

In his two initial points, Ratnākaraśānti alleges that if the opponent were correct then (a) concepts would not be errors and (b) it would be possible to have a cognition (or realization, *rtogs pa*) through a mere exclusion. I interpret (a) to mean that concepts are erroneous insofar as they *seem* to be the objects of perception. When I see a cow, I see "cow," not "perceptual image onto which I am overlaying the concept 'not non-cow'." Ratnākaraśānti reminds us here that we are not, in fact, seeing a "cow." The concept "cow" *is* available to us; we can all ponder the meaning of the word "cow" independent of any specific referent. To that extent, we can take the universal

"cow-ness" as an object of perception. But that is very different from recognizing something in our phenomenal field as a cow. The latter necessarily involves an error insofar as we treat the concept "cow" *as if that is what we're seeing*, when we're actually seeing a phenomenal image. The error comes when we mistake "image which I conceptually label as cow" with "cow," i.e., when we mix the concept into the percept. This ties back to Śāntarakṣita's criticism—namely, if there is a firm distinction to be made between false appearances and true natures, then it should be impossible to mix these two separate things. Ratnākaraśānti points out that the opponent accepts that we do mix separate things, constantly, in ordinary cognition. Thus, if the opponent's criticism of false appearances and true natures were correct, then there should be an equally intractable problem making sense of ordinary cognition.

The second assertion—(b) that cognitions should be possible through mere exclusions—describes a further undesirable consequence entailed by the first. Ratnākaraśānti's opponent alleges—albeit somewhat uncomfortably—that there is a disjunct between the image and the concept; these two parts together produce the cognition, "that is a cow." From that, Ratnākaraśānti asserts that if they are completely separate, the perceived image is not actually necessary; it should be possible perceive a cow simply through the process of exclusion, in the absence of any direct perception.

In the final section of the passage, Ratnākaraśānti anticipates an opponent's response to the above. Presumably at a loss to respond to Ratnākaraśānti's arguments, the opponent's response echoes the doctrine that ordinary phenomena are "satisfactory so long as they are not analyzed." She alleges that while false phenomena may be problematic from the ultimate perspective, there is nothing wrong with treating conventions as such:

"There is no problem in presenting false things in accord with the way they are experienced." If someone says this, then what fault is there in conceptual[309] cognition, either?[310]

The opponent—who may now be convinced that her objections to the *alīkākāra* position entails absurd consequences for ordinary cognitions—seems to adopt a quietist stance. "Perhaps there are such problems," she might say, "but let ordinary cognitions be what they are." Ratnākaraśānti responds by sardonically asking how conceptual cognitions could be faulty, given that—from the standpoint of ordinary experience—they also seem to *be* the objects to which they allegedly refer. If there is no fault in positing things in terms of the way that they are experienced, then conceptual cognitions would no longer involve the error of misconstruing their content as real objects in the world. No self-identified Buddhist could coherently accept this position, as it is fundamentally incompatible with a central orientation of Buddhism: ordinary experience, *saṃsāra*, is a product of ignorance. If one adopts a strategy of just letting things be as they are, then ignorance and its causes could be neither identified nor rectified—meaning that liberation would be impossible. While Ratnākaraśānti does not take the opportunity to draw out his conclusion—that the opponent is simply a nihilist who masquerades as a Buddhist—he does state that clearly elsewhere.[311] This argument can be straightforwardly read as an explanation of the philosophical bases for these allegations against pseudo-Mādhyamikas.

Ordinary Experience: Carving "Blue" Out of Awareness

Following these arguments, the MAV shifts to a slightly separate topic at verses 18-20. This indicates that Ratnākaraśānti feels he has adequately demonstrated the problems with his

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[309] Reading *rtog pa* (Pk and N) rather than *rtogs pa* (P and D). The latter could be translated "what fault is there in realization, either," which is not philosophically coherent.

[310] *brdzun pa ji ltar nyams su myong ba bzhin du rnam par gzhag pa la nyes pa med do zhe na rtog pa la yang ci zhig nyes pa yod //* P 275.5-7; D 107a1.

[311] See, for example, the discussion of MAV verse six in Chapter Three.

opponents' arguments about the relations between appearances and their nature. That said, Ratnākaraśānti is still faced with the task of explaining precisely *how* they are related. How are false appearances experienced if awareness is the only thing anyone is ever engaging? Answering this quandary, Ratnākaraśānti appeals to the idea of habituated misconstrual. The section begins with an objector pressing him on this point, inquiring how habituated misconstrual could account for the rich plurality of cognitive experience.

> [Opponent:] Moreover, [if] just through habituated misconstrual cognition has the nature of a resemblance [to its alleged object], then [cognition appears with] the image of *what*?
>
> [We respond by asking:] How then are [individual appearances] differentiated from one another (*so so*[312] *las*)? //18//[313]

> Having cognized something that is other than the image, one is unable to make distinctions, [as in the case of] cognizing[314] a vase and not a cloth. In this context, as in the case of seeing [a vase], one conceptualizes a vase in the way that there is an image of a vase through seeing a vase.[315]

The opponent asks Ratnākaraśānti how it could be that the nature of awareness is misconstrued as ordinary phenomena such as blue. Ratnākaraśānti's response comes in the form of a question about the way in which perceptual objects are differentiated from one another. As a whole, this verse engages with a position that accepts an identity that is in some way more than the mere perceptual image, though the precise details are not completely clear. The first part of the commentary centers around the argument that while one can make conceptual distinctions about an image (e.g., "over there," "tall"), it is not possible to make such distinctions about things that are not images. Here

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[312] Following Pk and N; other editions read *so so'i las*.

[313] *gzhan yang zhen pa tsam gyis ni / shes pa 'dra ba'i bdag nyid de / gang gi rnam pa yin zhe na / so so las gang yin pas dbye* //18// P 275.7-8; D 107a1-2.

[314] Here I again follow Pk and N, reading *rtogs pa* instead of *rtog pa*. The Tibetan reads *yin gyi*, which I take as contrasting the vase (*ghaṭa*) that is seen with a cloth (*paṭa*) that is not.

[315] *zhes bya ba ni rnam pa las gzhan gyi don rtogs par rnam par dbye bar mi nus te bum pa rtogs pa yin gyi snam bu ni ma yin no / 'di ltar yang bum pa mthong bas bum pa'i rnam pa ltar de bzhin du bum pa'i rnam par rtog pa yin te / de mthong ba bzhin no //* P 275.8-12; D 107a2-3.

Ratnākaraśānti refers to a stock example in Indian *pramāṇa* discourse—seeing a vase (*ghaṭa*) versus seeing a cloth (*paṭa*). Here in the MAV, the vase-cloth example seems to be used negatively: "seeing a vase" depends on seeing the image that is subsequently determined to be a vase; it does not depend on something else. Thus the "vase" can be conceptualized on the basis of that image in a way that the cloth, which is not seen, cannot.

The end of the passage explains Ratnākaraśānti's perceptual theory: "seeing a vase" does not entail seeing a representation of an external object or any other sort of entity apart from appearance. Rather, "vase" is connected with an image that appears to be external, which also appears to have qualities. It is crucial to the argument that there does not need to be a basis for designation of a vase beyond the image identified as such, along with the perceiver's conceptual engagement with that image.

Ratnākaraśānti's commentary on verse nineteen[316] continues in a similar manner:

Even conceptualization takes as its object a thing[317] (*dngos po*, **vastu*) in its entirety because the thing lacks any parts (*cha shas*, **aṁśa*).[318]

> Also, one is aware of, and misconstrues, conceptual images as
> having the characteristic of being excluded from being singular.
> Therefore, conceptual cognitions (*blo*) are established through error.
> //19//[319]

Those <u>conceptual cognitions</u> are <u>established</u> as dual through <u>error</u>. The error consists in its phenomenal representation (*rang gi rnam par rig pa*) having a nature

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[316] While this is clearly a separate verse, Moriyama points out that Peking does not treat it as such (n.d., 9). The first *pāda* of the verse is irregular: it has eight syllables instead of seven (*rnam par rtog pa'i rnam pa de yang*). This could be simply a transcription error: Śākya 'Od could have written *de'ang*, which is sometimes accepted as a single syllable in Tibetan literature.

[317] "Thing" is an admittedly inelegant translation. However, the preferable phrase "real things" is somewhat misleading in this context, given that Ratnākaraśānti does not accept that there are any *things*—real or otherwise—that truly exist apart from awareness.

[318] *rnam par rtog pas kyang thams cad kyi bdag nyid kyi dngos po yul du byed / dngos po yul du cha shas med pa'i phyir ro //* P 275.12-13; D 107a3. While this does not appear to be a direct citation of the PV or PVSV, it is most obviously a restatement of PV I.135 and its commentary: *ekatvād vasturūpasya bhinnarūpā matiḥ kutaḥ / anvayavyatirekau vā naikasyaikārthagocarau //*PV I.135// *tad ekam anaṁśaṁ vastu katham bhinnākārābhir buddhibhir viṣayakriyate / ākārabhedāśrayatvāt bhedasya / tasya cābhedāt //* (Gnoli 1960, 65).

[319] *rnam par rtog pa'i rnam pa de yang / gcig las bzlog pa'i mtshan nyid du / rig dang mngon par zhen pa'i phyir / rnam rtog blo ni 'khrul pas grub //19//* P 275.13-15; D 107a3.

(*ngo bo*) that is <u>excluded from being singular</u>. The misconstrual of that[320] as being an object—[that] is an error. Likewise, [other instances of] awareness are erroneous about something else (*kha cig du*, **kvacit*).[321]

Ratnākaraśānti opens this verse by making a rather complex point: conceptual cognitions, like perceived images, take the entirety of a conceived object such as a cow as their object. This is because these objects do not truly exist, nor do they have causal capacity; they therefore could not have real parts. In the verse, he goes on to highlight the main point that makes ordinary cognitions erroneous: they seem to have the characteristic of "not-being-awareness" when they cannot be anything other than awareness. The commentary further clarifies the nature of this error: it causes a false sense of duality, and likewise enables awareness to manifest as if it were the people and objects engaged with in everyday life.

At verse twenty, Ratnākaraśānti entertains a hypothetical objection: if there is only awareness, then how is it that beings experience suffering through ignorance? Ratnākaraśānti's answer once again resonates strongly with the first chapter of the MVB. The passage reads:

> [Opponent:] If this single knower (*rig pa po gcig pu 'di nyid*) is mistaken as regards [dualistic appearances of] blue and so forth, how does [this kind of] error arise? We answer:
>
>> Blue and so forth and cognition of them are not separate; they are asserted to be similar. The actuality of cognition is directly perceived; [perceiving it] as having the nature of blue and so forth[322] is an error. //20//[323]

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[320] P and D attest an additional *shen pas* is this sentence that is omitted in Pk and N. I follow the latter.

[321] *ces bya ba ni rnam par rtog pa'i blo nyid de ltar 'khrul pas gnyis su grub ste / de nyid gcig las bzlog pa'i ngo bo rang gi rnam par rig pa'i 'khrul pa'o // de nyid la zhen pas don gyi rnam par zhen pa ni 'khrul pa yin no // de bzhin du rig pa gzhan yang kha cig tu 'khrul pa yin no //* P 275.15-19; D 107a4.

[322] Pk and N read *sngo sogs* ("blue and so forth"), which is consistent with the commentary; I follow it here. P and D read *sngon brton*, which would result in the translations "according to the previous [arguments]" or "[by the force of] previous habits."

[323] *rig pa po gcig pu 'di nyid gal te sngon po la sogs pa 'khrul pa yin nam 'khrul pa gang las yin zhe na / smras pa / sngon po la sogs de yi blo / tha dad ma yin de 'drar 'dod / rtogs pa'i dngos de mngon sum ste / sngo sogs bdag nyid de 'khrul yin //20//* P 275.19-276.1; D 107a4-5.

> The nature of awareness[324] is asserted to be singular because blue and so forth and the awareness [that cognizes them] are not different. However, that very awareness is a valid direct perception regarding knowing itself to have the nature of cognition; cognizing [itself] as having the nature of blue and so forth is an error. This is because blue and so forth are false, since they are devoid of being one or many.[325]

> For example, conceptual cognition is a valid direct perception in regard to its own nature but is erroneous in terms of misconstruing [that nature] as the object (*don*, **artha*). This is because blue and so forth and the cognition of them are not different.[326]

The commentary clarifies that the first part of the verse—"mind and blue are not separate"—means that they are ultimately non-dual. Images are, from that standpoint, just awareness. That said, insofar as error is operative, it makes sense to speak of subjective awareness and its apprehended objects. The object is ultimately just awareness erroneously perceived as an apprehended object, conceptualized as "blue." "Blue" does not have a singular or manifold nature because it does not have any nature *qua* "blue." Thus, the neither-one-nor-many argument harms a perception of blue insofar as that blue is a dualistic appearance that seems different from—and external to—awareness. But the nature of blue—awareness—is *not* harmed by this argument because it is not a dualistically structured phenomenal appearance. This is the crux of Ratnākaraśānti's affirming negation: erroneous aspects of awareness are susceptible to the neither-one-nor-many argument, but awareness itself is not.

The remainder of the passage draws out some implications of this thesis. Throughout the MAV, Ratnākaraśānti accepts that valid direct perception is both possible and necessary—specifically, the direct perception of clarity or awareness. Here he offers an account of how and

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[324] N erroneously reads *rigs* ("reason") rather than *rig* ("awareness").

[325] *rig pa'i dngos po de nyid ni gcig tu 'dod de / sngon po la sogs pa rnams dang rig pa de tha dad pa med pa'i phyir ro / 'on kyang rig pa de nyid rtogs pa'i bdag nyid rig par bya ba la mngon sum gyi tshad ma yin la / sngon po la sogs pa'i bdag nyid rig pa ni 'khrul pa yin te / sngon po la sogs pa gcig dang du ma dang bral bas brdzun pa'i phyir ro //* P 276.1-6;

[326] *dper na rnam par rtog pa de nyid kyi dngos po la mngon sum gyi tshad ma yin la / don du mngon par zhen pa las ni 'khrul pa yin no / sngon po la sogs pa dang / de rtogs pa tha mi dad pa'i phyir ro //* P 276.6-9.

why that's possible, though not all of the details are obvious. This hinges on Ratnākaraśānti's presentation of the other-dependent nature: anything and everything that one perceives is (in some sense) luminosity, because that is the essence of the other-dependent. That being the case, it is reasonable to argue that on some level direct perception is always taking place: luminosity could not possibly be truly cognizing anything except itself, because it is the only thing that actually exists. Nonetheless, ordinary cognitions are not valid direct perceptions because awareness is being distorted by karmic habituation. Instead of appearing in a manner that accords with its nature, awareness is misapprehended as dualistic phenomenal appearances in these ordinary cognitions.

Conclusions

Verses thirteen through twenty of the MAV serve to further criticize Ratnākaraśānti's opponents—in particular, pseudo-Mādhyamika presentations of appearance—while also informing the audience of his own presentation. To briefly summarize these arguments before turning to Chapter Five: these verses explain that the essence of ordinary experience is clarity, but this clarity is distorted by what Ratnākaraśānti calls the "conceptual aspect" (*rnams rtogs gyi cha*) of the other-dependent, brought about by karmic habituation. This distortion causes clarity to appear in ways that do not accord with its nature—i.e., the plethora of dualistic experiences that characterize the life-world of sentient beings.

That said, *clarity is nonetheless appearing*; it is, in fact, the only thing that could ever appear. In other words, there is an implicit corollary of the "conceptual aspect" of cognition: the "awareness aspect," i.e., the pure other-dependent nature. This clarity or awareness is always present, even in deluded cognitions. "Delusion" is so-called precisely because non-dual clarity appears in a manner inconsistent with its nature. Instead of being seen as it is—i.e., as non-dual clarity devoid of phenomenal content such as "blue"—awareness is construed as dualistic, i.e., as

if there were a grasping subject (*grāhakākāra*, *'dzin rnam*) and apprehends objects (*grāhyākāra*, *gzung rnam*). The latter consists in perceptions of objects that appear to be "out there," i.e., outside of one's perceptual apparatus. They are experienced as having color, shape, and defining characteristics—a classic example is that fire has the quality of heat. The former pole of duality— grasping at a subject—results in a sense of cognitive interiority, i.e., the false sense that some real "I" is apprehending those objects that are other than (and external to) it.

In view of these arguments, we now turn to the final chapter of this dissertation. There, Ratnākaraśānti engages the remaining sections of the MAV in which Ratnākaraśānti engages his pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents. Along with nuancing Ratnākaraśānti's refutations and his presentation of his own position, engaging these final sections will help contextualize his puzzling statements about *siddhānta*.

Chapter Five
Final Criticisms: MAV verses 21–22 and Later Passages

Introduction

This last chapter of the dissertation contains Ratnākaraśānti's final criticisms against his Mādhyamika opponents. Note that, as previously discussed, this is not the end of the text itself—following verse twenty-two, Ratnākaraśānti embarks on a lengthy presentation of his own thought, paying particular attention to his accounts of worldly *pramāṇa*. While this material certainly warrants thorough study, it falls outside the proper scope of this project—i.e., Ratnākaraśānti's engagements with his [pseudo-]Mādhyamika opponents.

As with the previous chapter, the sections of the MAV treated here form a discrete unit. They begin with a declaration about Ratnākaraśānti's own view of the Middle Path, which signals a shift in the flow of the text. Specifically, verse twenty-one declares that awareness—i.e., the nature of cognition in general and also of specific perceptions such as "seeing blue"—is not susceptible to the neither-one-nor-many argument. Ratnākaraśānti's statement here initiates a discussion that criticizes his pseudo-Mādhyamikas opponents—specifically regarding their views on *pramāṇa*—while also continuing to elaborate his own position of the proper Middle Way.

Because I believe that Ratnākaraśānti is specifically targeting Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla in these passages, a note to the reader is warranted here regarding their presentations in particular. These [pseudo-]Mādhyamikas discuss inference in the most depth in the TS and TSP,[327] particularly in the seventeenth chapter—the "Examination of Inference" (*anumānaparīkṣā*, verses 1361-1485). There, these scholars follow Dharmakīrti's strategy of writing mainly from a Sautrāntika perspective, occasionally making Yogācāra arguments, and only indirectly or

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[327] Please note that Kamalaśīla also addresses inference from a Mādhyamika viewpoint in his *Madhyamakāloka*.

implicitly pointing to (what they consider) a Madhyamaka stance[328] (McClintock 2010, 37–38). In their available Madhyamaka works, discussions of inference are significantly less robust. It is worth noting that Ratnākaraśānti's account of inference—and *pramāṇa* in general—is broadly consistent with the Yogācāra-inflected presentations given in the TS and TSP. That being the case, Ratnākaraśānti's issues are not with Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's treatment of *pramāṇa* per se, but rather their presentation *in a specifically Madhyamaka context*, i.e., as the MA and its commentaries. It is possible that Ratnākaraśānti's corrective may be an olive branch of sorts to their followers: while those scholars strayed into nihilism by adopting pseudo-Mādhyamika tenets, they might still be considered trustworthy Mahāyāna Buddhist commentators up to a point.

Outline of the Chapter

The previous chapter concluded with a consideration of MAV verse twenty, in which the opponent responds to Ratnākaraśānti's thesis that "blue" is not separate from awareness. In the introduction to verse twenty-one the opponent responds. She reasons that if Ratnākaraśānti is correct—if awareness is indeed inseparable from blue—then like blue, awareness should be susceptible to the neither-one-nor-many argument. She formulates this thesis in two ways, to which Ratnākaraśānti responds in turn: awareness should fail the neither-one-nor-many argument if it is identical to either (a) the nature (*ngo bo*) or (b) identity (*bdag nyid*) of blue. Ratnākaraśānti's answer to these critiques hinge on his fundamental thesis that the qualities of awareness are unique, and that it constitutes a special case by virtue of which it is not susceptible to the neither-one-nor-many argument. That being the case, these important passages convey as much information about Ratnākaraśānti's account of luminosity as they do about his refutations of pseudo-Mādhyamika.

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[328] In a more recent article McClintock considers whether Kamalaśīla's Madhyamaka stance might have informed his discussion of *ākāra*s in the TSP. She makes a strong case there that Madhyamaka views did influence the trajectory of arguments in the TS and TSP, despite not being explicitly discussed (2014).

The bulk of this chapter engages with Ratnākaraśānti's commentary on verse twenty-two. The most important topic covered in this section deals with pseudo-Mādhyamika presentations of inference as part of the path to meditative realization—in particular, those adduced by Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla.

The chapter then engages a series of arguments found near the very end of the MAV. There, Ratnākaraśānti gives a final round of criticisms of his previous opponents along with a critique of two new positions: (a) pseudo-Mādhyamikas who claim that all dharmas are like illusions (*chos thams cad sgyu ma lta bu*, **sarvadharmamāyopama*) and (b) an unidentified position that Ratnākaraśānti calls "those who say that everything exists" (*thams cad yod par smra ba*, **sarvāstivāda*), who are manifestly *not* pseudo-Mādhyamikas. Regarding the first, it is notable that Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms do not attack the idea *that* ordinary phenomena are illusion-like; instead, he focuses on the opponents' presentation of *how* phenomena can be so understood. To that end, he first criticizes pseudo-Mādhyamikas presentation of how phenomena are similar to illusions, then goes on to give his own account on the basis of the three natures.

While Sarvāstivāda ("those who say that everything exists") is the name of a well-known group of non-Mahāyāna Buddhist thinkers,[329] it is clear from Ratnākaraśānti's discussion that he is *not* engaging this group. Instead, I argue that Ratnākaraśānti most likely uses this term as a rhetorical foil for the *Sarva<u>nāsti</u>vādins. Rather than over-negate by saying that *nothing* exists, this group is guilty of under-negation insofar as they posit that images are in some way ontologically equal to awareness.

Bearing in mind this overall trajectory, we now turn to Ratnākaraśānti's discussions at verse twenty-one.

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[329] For useful overviews of Sarvāstivāda history and doctrines, see Dhammajoti (2015) and Willemen et al. (1997).

MAV 21: Avoiding the Neither-One-Nor-Many Argument

First Critique: Nature (*ngo bo*) and the Neither-One-Nor-Many Argument

Introducing verse twenty-one, Ratnākaraśānti first has the opponent argue that if the neither-one-nor-many argument refutes blue, it should be taken to refute the nature (*ngo bo*) of the cognition of blue as well:

> [The opponent] says: "What refutes blue and so forth also refutes the nature of the cognition of them."[330]

If, as Ratnākaraśānti alleges, cognizable entities have some kind of nature or essence that serves as their substratum, then this nature should be examined and, according to the opponent, will be found not to possess any kind of nature that is either singular or plural. Ratnākaraśānti responds with a verse that explicates his position that the nature of cognition is not susceptible to the neither-one-nor-many argument. He writes:

> We respond—
>
>> Because it is a direct perception, because there is nothing superior [to it],[331] and because it is not imputed: [for these reasons] self-awareness—which is the nature of cognition—is not harmed, [but] blue and so forth[332] are refuted.[333] //21//

In this verse Ratnākaraśānti explicitly glosses clarity as self-awareness (**svasaṃvedana*), referring to this as the essence of cognition (*rtogs pa'i ngo bo*). He gives three reasons why self-awareness is not harmed by the neither-one-nor-many argument: (a) because it is perceived through valid direct perception; (b) because there is no awareness superior to valid direct perception that could refute it; and (c) because, unlike phenomenal appearances such as blue, self-awareness is not an

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[330] *sngon po la sogs pa la gnod pa gang yin pa de nyid rtogs pa'i ngo bo la yang 'gyur ro zhe na //* P 276.9-10; D 106b7-107b1.

[331] Negi glosses *phul byung* ("*phul du byung ba*") as *atiśayaḥ* or *utkarṣaḥ* (Negi 1993, 3518).

[332] The available editions of the verse read either *sno* (P) or *stsogs* (D). The commentary reads *sngon*, which I follow.

[333] *smras pa // mngon sum phyir phul byung med phyir / sgro btags min phyir rang rig pa / rtogs pa'i ngo bo gnod med pa / sngo stsogs bzlog par gyur pa yin //21//* P 276.10-12; D 107b1.

imputation. That is to say, within the rubric of the three natures, self-awareness is *not* to be

associated with the imputed nature, which is non-existent. Ordinary phenomena such as blue *are*

imputed and non-existent, but self-awareness is to be understood in terms of the other-dependent

and the perfected natures, both of which are asserted by Ratnākaraśānti to exist.[334]

Three Reasons the Nature of Awareness is Not Refuted

The first part of the commentary to verse twenty-one elaborates on these points:

There is nothing that refutes the nature (*ngo bo*) of self-awareness because (a) it is
a <u>direct perception</u> of itself (*de la de'i mngon sum*). Direct perception cannot be
refuted by something else. (b) <u>Nothing</u> <u>superior</u> means that something superior to
direct perception, which could refute it, does not exist. (c) If its nature as cognition
were refuted, then that [cognition] would have to have been an <u>imputation</u>. And
that is incorrect, because it does not have any other nature.[335]

Ratnākaraśānti first states that self-awareness is a direct perception, citing this as a reason that

nothing refutes its nature. This highlights the close relationship he sees between self-awareness

and the other-dependent nature. This is unlike the phenomena of the imputed nature. While these

appear in ordinary awareness, they are not candidates for "true"—which is to say, ultimate or trans-

worldly—direct perception. This is because they are both deceptive and non-existent. By contrast,

Ratnākaraśānti describes the other-dependent nature as something that *can* be directly perceived,

albeit under specific circumstances. So long as the other-dependent manifests impurely—as the

imagination of the unreal—in a person's awareness, all of her cognitions will be distorted. This

prevents the possibility of any ordinary direct perception being truly valid. But if the other-

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[334] As in, for example, MVB I.1, which describes the imagination of the unreal as existent, duality (i.e., the imputed
nature) as non-existent, and emptiness (the perfected) as existent.

[335] *yang rang rig pa'i ngo bo la gnod par byed pa ni med de / de la de'i mngon sum yin pa'i phyir ro // mngon sum
la ni gzhan gyis gnod par mi nus so // phul byung med ces bya ba ni mngon sum de la gnod par byed pa phul du byung
ba med do // gang gis de la gnod par 'gyur // sgro btags zhes bya ba ni gal te yang rtogs pa'i ngo bo la gnod na de'i
tshe sgro btags par 'gyur te / de yang mi rigs te / ngo bo gzhan med pa'i phyir ro //* P 276.12-17; D 107b2-3.

dependent nature manifests in its pure aspect—discussed in the MAV as self-awareness and clarity, and in the MVB corpus as emptiness—then direct perception would be possible.

Ratnākaraśānti's commentary notes that this kind of valid, non-dual direct perception of self-awareness or clarity is the highest, i.e. the most authoritative, form of valid cognition. This indicates a hierarchy of cognitions with the direct perception of self-awareness at the apex, such that nothing could refute such an awareness.[336] That is to say: if this kind of valid direct perception takes place, there is nothing that can refute it. If some other cognition could refute self-awareness—i.e., the nature of cognition—then it would follow that even that nature would be an imputation. To restate this point: there are two possible scenarios in which "the nature of cognition" could harm the nature of cognition. The first is that the nature of cognition is itself an imputation, in which case something other than "the nature of cognition" would be the *real* nature of cognition. The other option is to claim that cognitions have no nature and there is only imputation, in the absence of any basis for such imputation.

Three Contrary Reasons: Why Blue and so forth *are* Refuted

In the last part of the commentary on MAV verse 21, Ratnākaraśānti moves on from explaining why self-awareness is *not* refuted to a discussion of why blue *can* be refuted:

> Blue and so forth are refuted by self-awareness. The reason is explained through the contraries [of the above proof]: (a) merely conceptualizing something does not make[337] [it] perceptible; (b) because there does exist a refuting *pramāṇa* superior to [blue]; and (c) because [blue] is an imputation, since there exists an essence of a cognition that is different from yellow and so forth.[338]

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[336] This kind of hierarchy is perhaps best known from Śāntideva's *Bodhicāryāvatāra*, IX.3-4, which stipulates that the cognitions of *ārya*s refutes ordinary cognitions, and "superior and superior *yogins* refute other *yogins* as well" (*yogino 'pyuttarottaraiḥ*)(Salvini 2015, 280–83).

[337] My translation follows Pk and N, which read *mi byed pa'i phyir*. P, M, and D read *mi phyed pa'i phyir*.

[338] *sngon po la sogs pa rang rig pas gnod pa nyid yin te / go bzlog nas 'chad par 'gyur ba'i phyir ro / de la de'i rtog pa tsam gyis mngon sum du mi byed pa'i phyir dang / gnod par byed pa'i tshad ma phul du byung ba yod pa'i phyir dang / ser po la sogs pa las shes pa'i ngo bo gzhan yod pas sgro btags pa yin pa'i phyir ro //* P 276.18-277.1; D 107b34.

Ratnākaraśānti announces that blue and so forth *can* be refuted—specifically, by self-awareness. He stipulates that his proof involves a "contrary" (*go bzlog*)[339] presentation, i.e., a consideration of how imputed phenomena such as blue differ from self-awareness. Ratnākaraśānti has just adduced a set of three reasons for why self-awareness is not susceptible to the neither-one-nor-many argument; he proceeds to give a parallel list of three reasons why blue *is* so susceptible.

The first reason—"merely conceptualizing something does not make [it] perceptible"—is offered as the "contrary" of the first reason that self-awareness is not refuted. Recall Ratnākaraśānti's gloss of the latter: self-awareness cannot be refuted because "it is a direct perception." Because of this, nothing that is *not* a valid direct perception could refute it. On the other hand, blue and so forth are *not* direct perceptions because perceiving them necessarily involves concepts; this means they *can* be refuted by a superior cognition—namely, the direct perception of self-awareness.

The second line of reasoning builds on the first: blue is susceptible to refutation because there is a higher, more authoritative cognition that can refute it—i.e., the direct perception of self-awareness. In this way, blue is very much the opposite of self-awareness—per (b) above, there is nothing superior to the latter, but valid direct perception is clearly more authoritative than what Ratnākaraśānti casts as an inconclusive presentation of some non-conceptual blue.

Ratnākaraśānti's third reason is that blue is, in fact, an imputation, which is straightforwardly the opposite of his final argument about self-awareness (which is "not imputed"). Here he again builds on the previous argument: not only is blue *not* conclusively a direct

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[339] In full, *go bzlog nas 'chad par 'gyur ba*. This phrase also has the sense of reversal. Negi does not give Sanskrit attestations for the phrase as a whole; nor for *go bzlog* or *mgo bzlog*. Hong Luo's forthcoming Sanskrit edition of the PPU will provide evidence for which, if any, of these terms Ratnākaraśānti seems to favor in that text (forthcoming a). For the time being, I suspect that the Sanskrit word here used was *vyatireka*, based on compelling arguments put forth by Tomlinson (2018b).

perception, it *is* conclusively conceptual, and hence could at best be a candidate for inference. The reason he gives that blue must be conceptual is that blue only exists in contrast to other colors; he gives the example of yellow. And because it is conceptual, seeing blue cannot be a candidate for direct perception.

Second Critique: Self-Nature (*bdag nyid*) and the Neither-One-Nor-Many Argument

Having dispensed with the opponents' qualm about the *ngo bo* of blue and so forth surviving the neither-one-nor-many argument, Ratnākaraśānti next engages a similar qualm about their self-nature—in Tibetan, *bdag nyid*. This term that can often be translated as "nature," but specifically refers to the nature of a particular entity such as "me." This stands in contrast with the more generalized *ngo bo,* which could in principle refer to either the nature of specific things or—in a broader sense—nature in general.

Here Ratnākaraśānti first criticizes the position of a pseudo-Mādhyamika who holds that everything is false, then offers a corrective based on the three natures. Because Ratnākaraśānti's criticism engages with some technical points of *pramāṇa* theory, we will briefly explicate those points before moving on to Ratnākaraśānti's corrective.

Those Who Say All is False Contradict Direct Perception

Ratnākaraśānti first states the opponent's position: the self-nature of phenomena such as blue should be susceptible to the neither-one-nor-many argument. He then offers a terse response:

> [An opponent says:] If the previous reasoning of being neither-one-nor-many refutes blue and so on, it also refutes the cognition that is their self-nature.[340]

> [We respond:] It is not like that. Since, according to the system of those who maintain that everything is false in that way, all these cognitions—which seem to

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[340] *gcig dang du ma dang bral ba'i gtan tshigs kyis sngar sngon po la sogs pa la gnod na de'i bdag nyid rtogs pa la yang gnod do zhe na /* P 277.1-2; D 107b4.

be non-existent—are erroneous. Therefore, one could not prove direct perception even in the slightest. Therefore, because there could be no definition determination (*nges pa*) regarding the three modes [of a logical syllogism], all this reasoning is pseudo-reasoning.[341]

Ratnākaraśānti points out that if the opponent's statement is correct—if the neither-one-nor-many argument *does* refute every kind of nature—then she will not be able to offer any account of direct perception. Because direct perception is by definition undistorted (*avisaṃvāda*), it is contradictory to maintain that something false could be directly perceived. The opponent maintains that everything is false, meaning that there are no candidates for direct perception. Thus, direct perception cannot be proven according to the opponent's system. Ratnākaraśānti does not leave the argument there. Declaring that the opponent cannot give a coherent account of direct perception, he playfully concludes that "all this reasoning"—literally, "all these logical marks" (*gtan tshigs 'di dag thams cad*)—is " pseudo-reasoning" (*gtan tshigs ltar snang, *hetvābhāsa*) advanced by the pseudo-Buddhist pseudo-Mādhyamikas.

Thus far, Ratnākaraśānti has refuted the pseudo-Mādhyamikas' account of direct perception, on the basis that they hold all phenomena to be false. If all phenomena were false, then there would be no direct perception; moreover, it is not possible to satisfy *any* of these criteria based on a spurious perception. Per the first, no property could be attributed to a false subject—or a false probandum, for that matter. That being the case, there would be no way to establish a positive pervasion, let alone a negative one. In short, by refuting the pseudo-Mādhyamikas' account of direct perception, Ratnākaraśānti has exposed their entire logical system as spurious. These points are examined in more detail in Ratnākaraśānti's commentary on verse twenty-two.

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[341] *de ltar ma yin te / 'di ltar thams cad brdzun pa'i tshul gyis shes pa 'di dag thams cad med par snang ba 'khrul pa yin pas de nas mngon sum cung zad kyang ma grub po / de'i phyir tshul gsum la nges pa med pas gtan tshigs 'di dag thams cad gtan tshigs ltar snang bar 'gyur ro //* P 277.2-6; D 107b4-5.

Ratnākaraśānti's Corrective

Following this playful denunciation of the opponent, Ratnākaraśānti continues his commentary on verse twenty-one by presenting his own view of the relationship between images and self-awareness. Not surprisingly, this account relies on the three natures, particularly the imagination of the unreal. He writes:

> Therefore, while conceptually constructed (*rnam par rtogs pa*, **vikalpita*) things do not exist, the imagination of the unreal does exist. It remains the case that due to that imputational cognition, there is awareness of itself but what is appearing does not exist.[342]

Ratnākaraśānti stipulates here that conceptually constructed phenomena—e.g., "blue"—do not exist, but the imagination of the unreal does exist. He has already clarified that the imagination of the unreal is the substratum onto which these false images are imputed. In other words, while subject-object duality does not exist, the imagination of the unreal is the backdrop upon which it *seems* to exist. This summarizes the relationship between the imputed and the other-dependent in ordinary cognition: when we seem to be seeing blue, perception is taking place; this perception necessarily has an object—awareness—that is misconstrued as "blue." These ordinary cognitions are therefore not direct perceptions because of the presence of error. That said, they include the *potential* for valid direct perception insofar as non-dual awareness is a necessary component of even these ordinary cognitions. In order for direct perception to take place, awareness must be free from the distortions of both duality and phenomenal content.

On the whole, verse twenty-one and its commentary constitute Ratnākaraśānti's corrective to his opponents' misinterpretations of the relationship between awareness and phenomenal content: they are not ontologically distinct but are nevertheless not identical; moreover, while non-

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[342] *de bas na yang rnam par brtags pa'i chos rnams med la yang dag pa ma yin pa'i kun du brtags pa ni yod pas sgro btags pa des bdag nyid rig pa dang 'di ni snang ba med par gnas so* // P 277.6-9; D 107 b5-6.

dual awareness plays a necessary role in ordinary cognitions, these cognitions are not viable candidates for valid direct perception. In the lengthy commentary on the next verse, Ratnākaraśānti continues to elaborate on these relationships, adducing several more problems with his opponents' various positions.

MAV 22: Condensed Refutation of Pseudo-Mādhyamika

> If all cognitions have appearances [of what] does not exist, there could be neither direct perception nor inference. How could someone who advocates a position in which there is no evidence (*rgyu*) and everything is false be a speaker (*smra ba*, **vādin*)? //22//[343]

MAV twenty-two tersely describes two distinct but related sets of criticisms against Ratnākaraśānti's pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents. The first half of the verse (i.e., the first sentence in this translation) flatly states that none of its targets are able to give an account of either perception or inference that would qualify them as *pramāṇa*s. The accompanying commentary presents a series of possibilities through which the opponent might try to establish *pramāṇa*s, refuting each in turn.

The first phrase of the verse—*shes pa thams cad med snang na* ("if all cognitions are appearances [of what] does not exist")—is difficult to render into English. I believe that the Tibetan here may reflect Sanskrit that was intentionally ambiguous: the commentary parses "all cognitions" and "does not exist" in multiple ways as Ratnākaraśānti adapts his reading of the verse to describe various opponents' interpretations of conventional phenomena, none of which do any obvious violence to the verse. That said, its phrasing does clearly articulate a position that contemporary scholarship treats as constitutively Mādhyamika: while phenomena appear, they

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[343] *shes pa thams cad med snang na / mngon sum rjes su dpag pa'ang med / rgyu med thams cad brdzun smra ba'i / smra ba nyid ni gang las 'gyur* //22// P 277.9-11; D 107b6.

lack any essence or nature by virtue of which they could be said to exist; i.e., they are *niḥsvabhāvatā*. I suspect that Ratnākaraśānti intentionally phrased the first part of the verse such that it could apply to all three types of his pseudo-Mādhyamika opponent—(a) those who say that nothing exists, (b) those who say that everything is false, and (b) those who say that everything is illusion-like.

The second half of the verse offers a slightly different critique, one reminiscent of those discussed by Nāgārjuna in (*inter alia*) the twenty-fourth chapter of the MMK and throughout the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*:[344] a pseudo-Mādhyamika cannot be a "speaker" (*smra ba*, *vādin) in the sense that they are unable to defend or reject a thesis (*pratijñā*). To restate the objection: according to pseudo-Mādhyamikas' telling of their own position they are unable to offer proofs or refutations for anything, let alone establish *pramāṇa*s. Bearing in mind this broad sketch of Ratnākaraśānti's overall arguments, the commentary on this verse will be explored in detail.

The Pseudo-Mādhyamikas' Proof Statement

Instead of beginning with a gloss on its terse arguments, Ratnākaraśānti's initial commentary on MAV 21 restates the pseudo-Mādhyamikas' formulation in a manner that is again reminiscent of the opening verse of Śāntarakṣita's MA:

> Those who assert that everything is false give a proof: "Whatever is neither one nor many is devoid of nature, like the horns of a rabbit. Blue, yellow, and so forth [are devoid of nature] because they are neither one nor many."[345,346]

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[344] This is perhaps most famously articulated at verse twenty-nine: "If I had any thesis, that fault would apply to me. But I do not have any thesis, so there is indeed no fault for me" (Westerhoff 2010, 29). *yadi kācana pratijñā syān me tata eṣa bhaved doṣaḥ / nāsti ca mama pratijñā tasmān naivāsti me doṣaḥ* (Bhattacharya, Johnston, and Kunst 1986, 14). For a recent survey of academic interpretations of this verse, see Williams-Wyant (2017).

[345] *zhes bya ba ni thams cad brdzun par smra bas yang grub pa smras pa / gang gcig dang du ma dang bral ba de ni rang bzhin med pa yin te / dper na ri bong gi rwa bzhin no / sngon po dang ser po la sogs pa de dag kyang gcig dang du ma dang bral ba'i phyir ro zhe na /* P 277.11-14; D 107b6-7.

[346] Moriyama also discusses this proof and notes its similarity to the opening verse of the *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* (2014, 341–42 f.n. 8).

At first glance, this formulation closely echoes the first verse of Śāntarakṣita's MA. That said, if Ratnākaraśānti is intentionally evoking that verse, his restatement is not entirely faithful.[347] Śāntarakṣita makes no mention of rabbits' horns in the MA or his commentary, instead giving the example of a reflection (*gzugs brnyan*), which appears without existing. This example is qualitatively different from a rabbit's horns, which only exist as concepts and are therefore not candidates for phenomenal appearances. Ratnākaraśānti's formulation in the MAV runs afoul of Kamalaśīla's MAP, which restates Śāntarakṣita's verse as a formal argument: "the proof-statement (*prayoga*) is as follows: things that do not have a nature which is one or many are ultimately without nature; an example is a reflection."[348] Also, later on (*ad* Śāntarakṣita's verse 64), Kamalaśīla's MAP explicitly notes that the account of the conventional is limited to "true conventional truth" (*tathyasaṃvṛti*) rather than false conventions (*mithyāsaṃvṛti*). He defines the former as "dependent origination, causal efficacy, which is well known even to a cowherd, and that to which the word 'convention' refers in common usage (*saṃketa*)" (Ichigō 1985, LXII). The latter category includes words or ideas of non-existent entities such as rabbits' horns or the children of barren women (1985, LXI–LXII).

That said, while Ratnākaraśānti's articulation of the inference may not be precisely true to Śāntarakṣita's intent or Kamalaśīla's explicit statement, it does not seem to me that either figure would be likely to take issue with it. In strictly philosophical terms, these thinkers would agree with Ratnākaraśānti's presentation of his opponents' position: conventions are similar to rabbits' horns insofar as they are devoid of a nature which is either one or many. Kamalaśīla distinguishes

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[347] This reasoning might also be intended to echo Kamalaśīla's proof in the second chapter of the *Madhyamakāloka*—though it is not clear whether Ratnākaraśānti was aware of that text. It is also possible that Ratnākaraśānti has another [pseudo-]Mādhyamika work in mind that is not currently available to us.

[348] My translation. *sbyor ba ni 'di lta bu yin te / gang dag gcig dang du ma'i rang bzhin ma yin pa de dag ni don dam par na rang bzhin med de / dper na gzugs brnyan bzhin no //* (Ichigō 1985, 23).

between conventions that seem to have causal capacity (such as water) versus those that do not (such as a mirage); in terms of their being devoid of nature, they are on equal ontological footing.

It is also possible—if unlikely—that Ratnākaraśānti is engaging with a different opponent here. One important precedent for Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's thesis that phenomena are similar to a rabbit's horn is no less than Nāgārjuna himself, who states in the *Dharmadhātustava*:

> Just like the horns on a rabbit's head, which are only imputed and do not exist—
> In the same way all phenomena are also merely imputed and do not exist.[349]

Leaving aside the question of whether Nāgārjuna (*qua* author of the MMK) wrote this text, it is attributed to Nāgārjuna by several other Indian sources that either predate or are roughly contemporaneous with Ratnākaraśānti.[350] It is notably cited as verse nineteen of Atīśa's *Dharmadhātudarśanagīti*.[351] This text first presents the Madhyamaka view—including this verse—before describing Yogācāra, where he cites several verses of Ratnākaraśānti's PPU[352] and, more importantly, quotes verse thirteen of the MAV (Rabling 1999, 121).[353] While this is a particularly striking example of Atīśa's assertion that conventions are similar to rabbits' horns, it is by no means the only place he explicitly says this.[354] That said, if Atīśa is the (or at least, a)

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[349] *ji ltar ri bong mgo bo'i rwa / brtags pa nyid de med pa ltar / de bzhin chos rnams thams cad kyang / brtags pa nyid de yod ma yin //* (Rabling 1999, 85). My translation differs nominally from Rabling's. I do not currently have access to Zhen's critical edition of the Sanskrit, but would direct the interested reader to that text (Zhen 2015).

[350] The attribution of this text to Ārya Nāgārjuna (i.e., the author of the MMK) is not contested in late Indian Mahāyāna or Tibetan traditions. In addition to the sources discussed above, other examples include Atīśa's *Ratnakaraṇḍodghātanāmamadhyamakopadeśa*, Bhāviveka's *Madhyamakaratnapradīpa*, and Naropa's *Sekoddeśaṭīkā* (Brunnhölzl 2007a, 23 and f.n. 18-21). Cf. Also Rabling (1999, 85 f.n. 2). For a thorough consideration of this text and its legacy for the study of Madhyamaka, cf. Ruegg (2010, 113–43).

[351] I am not aware of any scholarship that casts serious doubt on the attribution of this text to Atīśa; cf. Ruegg (2010, 142–43).

[352] Atīśa's text quotes the PPU in verses 54 and 58-61 (Brunnhölzl 2007b, 84–85; Rabling 1999, 120–27).

[353] While further research is needed on what the relationships might be between these two texts, it is certainly possible that Ratnākaraśānti has his [pseudo-]Mādhyamika student in mind when formulating this position. In any case, Atīśa's citation of the MAV makes him one of only a handful of early scholars from either the Indian subcontinent or the Tibetan plateau to have definitely been familiar with this text.

[354] See, for example, Atīśa's "General Explanation of the Two Realities," which states that "[a]ppearances, again, are from the perspective of being free from the two extremes; space, a rabbit's horn, and the eight similes of illusion are established as examples of mere imputation" (Apple 2018, 199).

major target for Ratnākaraśānti's criticisms here, the MAV's representation of the opponent is once again not strictly accurate, as Atīśa consistently rejects the utility of formal inferences for realization, and restricts their usage to debate with non-Buddhists (Apple 2018, 51). As will be shown, while this formulation may be resonant with Atīśa's thought, the arguments themselves are far more evocative of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla than they are of either Atīśa or his predecessor Candrakīrti.

Bracketing the precise identity of Ratnākaraśānti's opponent here, we can note that his description of his opponents' proof follows Dharmakīrti's formulation of an "inference for the sake of others" (*parārthānumāna*). Keira offers a cogent summary of *parārthānumāna* which will help us to understand and engage this proof:

> In Dharmakīrti's later works and post-Dharmakīrtian logic, a *parārthānumāna* should always consist of two statements. The first statement is that of *vyāpti*, i.e., the pervasion or implication. This statement shows that the reason implies the property to be proved (*sādhyadharma*). On the other hand, the second statement is that of *pakṣadharmatva*, the fact that the reason is a quality of the subject (*pakṣa*) of the proposition. The thesis-statement (*pakṣavacana*) and the conclusion are not regarded as members of a *parārthānumāna*, as they are known by implication from the above-explained two statements (Keira 2004, 114 f.n. 182).

Keira points out that Dharmakīrti's "later works"—most notably the *Vādanyāya*, widely considered his last work—maintain that an inference for others consists of these two separate statements with an implied thesis and conclusion. Ratnākaraśānti's formulation of his opponents' proof follows this structure. The first statement—"Whatever is devoid of being either one or many has no nature, like the horns of a rabbit"—demonstrates the pervasion. That is to say, it connects between the evidence—"being devoid of being either one or many"—and the property to be proved, "having no nature." The second statement presents the *pakṣadharmatva*, the claim that the evidence is present in the main subject of the proof—meaning, for our proof, that "being devoid of one or many" is present in "blue, yellow and so forth," i.e., ordinary phenomenal content. The

conclusion—which, following this later/post Dharmakīrtian style, is not made explicit—is that ordinary content is devoid of any nature whatsoever.

Formulated in this way, the proof that Ratnākaraśānti places in the mouths of his opponents is consistent with Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's presentations in the *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* and its commentaries, and it seems unlikely that either figure would have objected to being described in this way. But it is also very much at odds with Ratnākaraśānti's interpretation of ordinary phenomena as non-existent imputations which lack any individual nature of "being blue" and so forth but which nonetheless *do* have a nature—albeit the all-pervasive nature of awareness. While the style of argument in this section is rather different from earlier sections of the MAV— particularly in its sophisticated engagement with the technical language of *pramāṇa*—the scope of the argument has not changed, and neither have the stakes: Ratnākaraśānti remains committed to demonstrating that the critiques of individual essences that are most closely associated with Nāgārjuna and his [pseudo-]Mādhyamika followers do not (and must not) entail that nothing whatsoever exists; re-stated in the language of negations, Ratnākaraśānti remains committed to the necessity of an affirming negation. Bearing in mind this consistency of orientation, we now examine Ratnākaraśānti's arguments against the opponents' proof in turn.

First Argument: Pseudo-Mādhyamikas Cannot Offer Evidence

Ratnākaraśānti begins his critical discussion of his opponents' proof by refuting the idea that they could offer any evidence at all for their claims; this would mean the opponents' inference has the flaw of not producing certainty (*niścaya*). After laying out the opponents' proof, he first dismisses it wholesale, then moves on to point out specific problems:

This [position] is completely incoherent.[355] That is to say, for them, knowing all cognitions to be false makes them appear as non-existent. Therefore, [cognitions in which phenomena appear to exist] are erroneous, and erroneous cognitions are not direct perceptions. Because of that, there could also be no inference.

Since the three aspects are not established, all evidence is counterfeit evidence for those [arguments]. A false thing is not evidence for anything. And if something is not evidence for an inference, then how could it [count as] evidence [at all]? Or, if [the opponents maintain that] there is evidence for inferences, that would contradict their own [pseudo-Madhyamaka] philosophical system. Moreover, those who argue that everything is false were [also] refuted earlier [in this text].[356]

Ratnākaraśānti first declares that the opponents' proof is utterly incoherent. He clarifies this by offering an initial gloss on the phrase "all cognitions appear to be non-existent" from the verse: if the opponents' proof is valid—i.e., if all phenomena are indeed devoid of nature because they are devoid of being either one or many—then these phenomenal appearances are non-existent. They are therefore false insofar as they appear to have an existence that they do not actually have. If all phenomena are non-existent, then everything is deceptive or erroneous. Ratnākaraśānti's opponent—who holds this view but apparently also wishes to preserve a theory of direct perception that accords with Dharmakīrti—would seem to be in an impossible bind, insofar as she must accept that either direct perception must be flawed, or that erroneous phenomena can be directly perceived. In either case the opponent contradicts with Dharmakīrti's definition of direct perception as clear and non-deceptive.

Having argued against the possibility of direct perception for the opponent, the commentary then points out that in its absence, the other *pramāṇa*—inference—is also impossible.

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[355] *shin tu 'brel ba*, **sunibandha* (Negi vol 15: 6882).

[356] *de ni shin tu 'brel pa med de / 'di ltar de dag gi shes pa thams cad brdzun par rig pa las med par snang ba de'i phyir 'khrul pa yin te / 'khrul pa yang mngon sum du ma yin no / de bas na rjes su dpag pa yang med de / de'i phyir tshul gsum pa ma grub pas gtan tshigs thams cad de dag gi gtan tshigs ltar snang bar 'gyur ro / brdzun pa ni gang gi yang rgyur mi 'gyur ro / yang gang rjes su dpag pa la rgyu med na de ji ltar rgyur 'gyur / gal te rjes su dpag pa la rgyu yod na de nyid kyis grub pa'i mtha' la gnod par 'gyur ro // gzhan yang thams cad brdzun pa nyid sngar bsal to // P 277.14-278.1; D 107b7-108a2.*

If everything is false, then all potential evidence is invalid, or as he puts it "a false thing is not evidence for anything" (*brdzun pa ni gang gi yang rgyur mi 'gyur ro*). That is to say, if one cannot perceive that smoke is in fact smoke, then one cannot reliably infer fire, as the evidence is potentially counterfeit. Thus, certainty could never be achieved for either direct perception or inference. The opponent is therefore caught in a logical bind: she either holds her position and denies the possibility of certainty—thus descending into a nihilism—or she accepts the possibility of certainty, in which case she is guilty of contradicting her philosophical system.

The closing note of this passage has a ring of finality to it—"[m]oreover, those who argue that everything is false were refuted earlier." But Ratnākaraśānti continues along the same lines of reasoning, rather than indicating that his criticisms of this group of opponents is complete. The text continues:

> Furthermore: how is it that phenomena such as blue and so forth are established in this context? If one says it is through experience, [according to the opponent] experiential awareness is false, so it does not exist as an established object (**artha*) [that could prove something else]. If one says [they are established] through direct perception, that's also not true, because what appears falsely is an error.[357]

"In this context" (more literally "here," *'dir*) refers to the [pseudo-]Mādhyamika opponents' proof statement, namely: "phenomena are devoid of nature because of being devoid of being either one or many, like the horns of a rabbit." This clearly signals that Ratnākaraśānti is not making a strong break between arguments, as there is thematic continuity. In this commentary and in what follows, he proceeds to cut off each possible strategy through which his opponents could prove their thesis in logical terms, including here a restatement of previous criticisms. He begins by once more noting that phenomena—here, the example of seeing a patch of blue—cannot be established for

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[357] *gzhan yang sngon po la sogs pa'i chos 'dir gang las grub / nyams su myong ba las so zhe na / nyams su myong ba'i shes pa de ni brdzun pa yin te / de la don grub pa med do / mngon sum gyis so zhe na ma yin te / brdzun par snang ba nyid 'khrul pa yin pa'i phyir ro //* P 278.1-4; D 108a2-3.

his opponent, who holds that all experience is false or non-existent. This recalls Ratnākaraśānti's very first refutation of [pseudo-]Mādhyamika theses in the MAV, discussed early on in Chapter Three. After briefly nodding to the fact that he has already refuted this position, Ratnākaraśānti then points to the criticisms he has just adduced against pseudo-Mādhyamika accounts of direct perception.

These points conclude Ratnākaraśānti's general refutation of the idea that pseudo-Mādhyamikas could provide evidence for their thesis that phenomena are devoid of nature. In the following two sections Ratnākaraśānti treats this same topic in more detail by individually refuting pseudo-Mādhyamikas' ability to produce the two types of evidence admitted by Dharmakīrti: evidence that consists in an effect (*kāryahetu*) and evidence that consists in a nature (*svabhāvahetu*)(Dunne 2004, 152–53). The latter type of evidence includes a subset—evidence that consists in non-perception (*anupalabdhi*)—that is of particular importance here.[358] These two major types of evidence—relating to effect and nature, respectively—will be taken in turn.

Refuting "Devoid of Nature" as a *Kāryahetu*

Of the three alternatives, the MAV first criticizes the idea that pseudo-Mādhyamikas could prove that phenomena are devoid of nature through evidence that consists in an effect. While he does not explicitly formulate the arguments in this manner, it can be inferred from both their content and (more importantly) the fact that he goes on to explicitly engage the other two types of evidence. Regarding the evidence that consist in an effect, the text states:

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[358] I would note that Keira considers non-perception to be a third type of evidence, whereas I treat it here as a sub-type. Keira cites Dharmakīrti's *Nyāyabindu ad* II.10-11 as evidence for his position (Keira 2004, 52–53, f.n. 90). It is possible that Keira is following Kamalaśīla's *Madhyamakāloka* on this point; in any case, the MAV clearly treats non-perception as a sub-type of *svabhāvahetu*. See below, "Refuting 'Devoid of Nature' as a *Svabhāvahetu*."

> Also, "devoid [of being one or many]" does not exist, so it is devoid of all causal capacity. Therefore, how could it be evidence? Or, if ["devoid" indicates] an affirming negation, that is not established by itself.[359] [360]

This criticism opens with a pun: "devoid" is not a property that could exist, so it is devoid of causal capacity. Thus, the putative property "being devoid of x" could not count as effect-evidence for an inference. That being the case, the opponents' formulation of her proof collapses. This refutes the hypothesis that the evidence in this argument is considered to be a *kāryahetu* because that evidence—"devoid of being one or many"—is not produced. It does participate in causal functioning and therefore cannot be the effect of anything, which is necessary for a *kāryahetu* (which is, after all, "evidence from the effect"). This echoes Ratnākaraśānti's argument earlier in the MAV that [pseudo-]Mādhyamikas could not account for causal capacity. In short, the idea that "devoid" could be used as effect-evidence in an inference is paradoxical on its face.

In the second section of this passage ("or, if…"), Ratnākaraśānti shifts focus. Here he identifies another possible strategy for his opponent, however improbable this might be: she could abandon the (constitutively [pseudo-]Mādhyamika) tenet of non-affirming negation in favor of affirming negation. On this reading, "devoid of being one or many" would indicate that while *svabhāva* does not exist, the opponent could posit something that does exist that would allow for a satisfactory account of evidence for an inference. Ratnākaraśānti does not elaborate on this rather far-fetched scenario, merely stating "then it is not established by itself"—that is to say, the evidence in the logical proof statement would not be established by itself and could therefore not properly be considered evidence. For his part, Ratnākaraśānti goes on to offer an account for valid evidence beginning at verse twenty-four of the MAV.

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[359] I follow D and P here: *rang nyid kyis ma grub po*. Peking and Narthang read *rang nyid la ma grub po* (P 309, note 278.4)

[360] *gzhan yang gal te bral ba ni med pa yin pas nus pa thams cad dang bral ba'i phyir ji ltar gtan tshigs su 'gyur / gal te ma yin par dgag pa yin na rang nyid kyis ma grub po* // P 278.4-7; D 108a3-4.

This summary restatement of pseudo-Mādhyamikas' inability to account for causal capacity does not add much that Ratnākaraśānti has not already said. This would seem to be included *pro forma* in order to show that the opponent truly has no options. The next refutation—attacking pseudo-Mādhyamikas' possible appeals to *svabhāvahetu* and *anupalabdhi*—has more bite, and cuts much closer to Kamalaśīla's presentation in the MAP and MĀ.

Refuting "Devoid of Nature" as a *Svabhāvahetu*

Having offered a refutation of the pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents' proof of selflessness as an inference using effect-evidence, Ratnākaraśānti next refutes in quick succession the idea that their proof could employ evidence that consists in a nature. Ratnākaraśānti includes in this evidence that consists of non-perception. Here the MAV is explicit in its rebuttal of pseudo-Mādhyamikas' use of *svabhāvahetu* for inference, and is very specific in its implications:

> Or, if this is a case of *svabhāvahetu*, then it is [either] a perception of something that contradicts the pervader, or it is the non-perception of the pervader. In either case [the evidence] is not established on its own, because "non-perception" also [means non-perception of] a thing that has the characteristic of being perceptible in principle.[361, 362]

The text first lays out two possible ways in which a *svabhāvahetu* can be used as evidence for the absence or lack of something else. That is, in the first case, a *svabhāvahetu* may be in a positive form, as the perception of a property that stands in contradiction with a property that is to be established such that the perception of the evidence would effectively prove the absence of the property. Alternatively, the *svabhāvahetu* may be in the negative form, as the nonperception of the property that is to be established. In that case, the property that is to be established must be

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[361] *dngos po dmigs pa'i mtshan nyid yin pa*, *upalabdhilakṣaṇaprāpta.

[362] *gal te 'di rang bzhin gyi gtan tshigs yin na / khyab par byed pa 'gal ba dmigs pa'am / khyab par byed pa mi dmigs pa yin na thams cad du rang nyid kyis ma grub ste / mi dmigs pa zhes bya ba ni yang dngos po dmigs pa'i mtshan nyid yin pa'i phyir ro //* P 278.7-10; D 108a4-5.

something that is perceptible in theory. Ratnākaraśānti indicates the two options for the *svabhāvahetu* evidence in the passage just quoted by saying that it is either "a perception of something that contradicts the pervader" or (b) "it is the non-perception of the pervader."

Now in the first place, Ratnākaraśānti points out that the evidence—"because x is devoid of being either one or many"—is not seen because it is not a positive quality. Therefore, it cannot be a "perception of something that contradicts the pervader." This is relatively straightforward: if someone were to claim to have a direct perception of the property of being "devoid of being either one or many," then "devoid" would need to be a presence, rather than an absence, which would be contradictory.

In the balance of this passage ("in either case…"), Ratnākaraśānti builds on this by dismissing the viability of the opponents' appeal to non-perception in their inferential proof. This argument can be reconstructed as follows: "devoid of *svabhāva*" cannot be proven because in order to definitively determine that there is no *svabhāva*, the Mādhyamika should be able to adduce another situation where *svabhāva is* perceptible—this is the upshot of Ratnākaraśānti's point that "non-perception" is only applicable if something is perceptible in principle (*upalabdhilakṣaṇaprāpta*). McClintock notes that this situation—in which an appeal to direct perception is not possible—is precisely why Ratnākaraśānti's opponents need to appeal to inferential reasoning to investigate whether it exists.[363] But if the property under investigation is not perceptible in principle, then the inference cannot be valid.

To take a more (or less) concrete example: I can definitely state that there is no elephant on my desk, because elephants are the sorts of things that can be perceived by a properly-functioning ocular organ. Thus, while there is no elephant on my desk, an elephant could be

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[363] Personal communication.

perceived if it *were* present; for example, if I were transported to an elephant sanctuary. Thus, I can be certain about the non-perception of an elephant on my desk and, if I am in an elephant sanctuary, I can also have certainty about my perception of the elephant (relatively speaking). That kind of certainty is not possible for an entity—such as an imperceptible ghost—that is not perceptible in principle Because my ocular organ is not fit to perceive invisible entities, it is not possible for me to *definitively* determine the absence of a ghost because I would not see it regardless of whether it was present. Here, Ratnākaraśānti is arguing that the opponent cannot appeal to non-perception because she cannot point to an instance of "devoid," since "devoid" is not perceptible in principle. Ratnākaraśānti thereby cuts off the opponent's ability to appeal to *svabhāvahetu* in general and *anupalabdhihetu* in particular.

Second Arguments: Pseudo-Mādhyamikas Cannot Offer a Subject

After refuting the Mādhyamika opponents' appeals to evidence for the pervasion of their proof, Ratnākaraśānti very briefly turns to attack the idea that Mādhyamikas could provide even a *subject* for their formulation. He writes:

> Moreover, if blue and so on lack *svabhāva*, then what is the *svabhāva* of the subject [of the syllogism]?[364]

This terse note serves to point out that the arguments preventing Mādhyamikas from establishing evidence for their pervasion also applies to the subject of the proof, i.e., "[phenomena such as] blue and so forth." Let us translate this into the well-known example of inferring the presence of fire on a mountaintop through the direct perception of smoke: Ratnākaraśānti has thus far problematized the idea that (a) a Mādhyamika could establish smoke, since that would entail an

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[364] *gal te yang sngon po la sogs pa rang bzhin med na de'i tshe chos can gyi rang bzhin gang zhig yin /* P 278.10-11; D 108a5.

appeal to some sort of nature; or that (b) smoke and fire share a nomological relation: "if smoke, then fire; if no fire, then no smoke." Here, Ratnākaraśānti takes this criticism further, arguing that the Mādhyamika could not even establish that there is a mountaintop to serve as the locus for the perceived smoke and the inferred fire. Thus, Ratnākaraśānti has criticized every major aspect of the opponents' proof, all on the grounds that she will not admit to any sort of nature.

Before moving on to address other aspects of the verse in more detail, Ratnākaraśānti fields one further possibility his opponent could adduce:

> Or else, [an opponent] might say: The subject is the self-nature of blue and so on. The self-nature of a specific thing (*dngos po*) is to be proven as emptiness. While the self-nature of blue ought to be pervaded by the property of being either "one" or "another," that is not the case for mere self-nature.

> That [position] is also not reasonable, because the pervasion is not established. There is no capacity to prove real things because there is no *pramāṇ*ic perception or inference that proves it. Therefore, even the subject of the example is not established.[365]

Ratnākaraśānti's opponent here tries to distinguish the nature of a real thing—i.e., the *svabhāva* of a specific object (here, "blue,")—from "mere *svabhāva*." Specifically, Ratnākaraśānti's opponent seems to be trying to argue that while specific objects such as seeds—which appear as if they were real, functional things in the world—do not have causal capacity, there is nonetheless some minimally functional conventional thing—"mere self-nature." According to the opponent the former is susceptible to the neither-one-nor-many argument, but the latter is not.

Stated in terms of the inference: the opponent holds that if the subject, "blue," is a specific object then it must have a nature which is either one or many. It cannot be proven to have such a

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[365] *'on te sngon po la sogs pa'i rang bzhin chos can dang / dngos po'i rang bzhin stong pa nyid du bsgrub par bya ba ni dngos po'i rang bzhin ni gcig nyid dang / gzhan nyid kyis khyab pa yin gyi / rang bzhin tsam ni ma yin no zhe na / de yang mi rigs te khyab pa ma grub pa'i phyir ro / dngos po sgrub par nus pa med de / de'i sgrub par byed pa'i tshad ma mngon sum dang rjes su dpag pa med pa'i phyir ro / de nyid kyi phyir dpe'i chos can yang ma grub po //* P 278.12-17; D 108a5-7.

nature, and so must not be a *vastu* with a true self-nature. Ratnākaraśānti's object is that the Mādhyamika cannot even formulate the inference since she does not accept that the subject exists! The opponent, however, seems to argue that "mere self-nature" is not pervaded by the binary of having either one or many natures. The lack of "mere self-nature" is not the object to be proven (*sādhya*) of this sort of inference, and so "mere self-nature" is not subject to the neither-one-nor-many argument. Note that the opponent does not explicitly argue that blue *qua* "mere-svabhāva" *could* withstand this argument, but rather seems to imply that it *does not need to be*. So long as the phenomenal experience of blue is not expected to be anything but a mere appearance, it need not pass any ontological tests proving its existence.

I understand this argument as follows. Ratnākaraśānti responds that the opponent is throwing the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak. If the opponent wishes not to analyze phenomena, then she forsakes the possibility of proving (or disproving!) them in any way. "The pervasion is not established" means, on this reading, that the opponent must relinquish the idea that inferences should be applied, in which case nothing can be either proven or disproven. It is certainly possible that Ratnākaraśānti intends to treat a more nuanced view than I have described, but it is at least clear that he is critiquing an opponent who appeals to the qualifier "mere" as a means to get out of the logical issues that our author has already adduced against his opponents.

Taken together, the logic of these arguments strongly suggest that Ratnākaraśānti is primarily engaging with Śāntarakṣita and/or Kamalaśīla. He first denies that the opponent could appeal to *kāryahetu* (which the latter authors do not use), then argues that they could not appeal to *svabhāvahetu* either (which they do). Finally, left with no logical choice, Ratnākaraśānti's opponent seems to appeal to these two Mādhyamikas' account of conventions as "satisfactory so long as they are not analyzed," arguing that this position preserves a sufficiently strong account of

causality to avoid nihilism. Ratnākaraśānti refutes all of these, finally arguing that "mere [i.e.,

unanalyzed] *svabhāva*s" are not sufficient to account for causal efficacy in the world.

First Argument Against a "Speaker"—[Pseudo-]Mādhyamikas Cannot Make Arguments

       Ratnākaraśānti shifts focus at this point, offering the first of two refutations of the final

pāda of MAV verse twenty-two. Here he continues the refutation of Mādhyamikas who say that

all is false, before later turning to those who say that nothing exists.

> Moreover, "how could there be a speaker" means that there is no proponent of a
> proof, or a proponent of a refutation. If someone who says that everything is false
> proposes [proofs or refutations], that would contradict her own tenet system,
> because [proofs and refutations] are causes for others' understanding, and if
> everything is false then everything is causeless.[366]

The reasoning here is relatively straightforward: if a Mādhyamika denies the possibility that any

position could be taken—an approach suggested by, for example, verse twenty-nine of

Nāgārjuna's *Vigrahavyāvartanī*—then one can neither advance nor refute any argument. In that

case, any attempt to criticize an opponent's doctrine would render one guilty of going against one's

tenet system. Ratnākaraśānti also argues a subtler point here: Mādhyamikas would be unable to

either advance arguments or criticize others' positions, rendering them utterly useless in the

Buddhist intellectual sphere. The reason he gives serves as yet another jab against the

Mādhyamikas' proof that he had been discussing, which was formulated as an inference for the

sake of others (*parārthānumāna*). This argument throws out the idea that a Mādhyamika could

produce such a proof, as Mādhyamika positions *ipso facto* negate the possibility of causal capacity,

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[366] *yang na / smra ba nyid ni gang las 'gyur / zhes bya ba ni sgrub pa smra ba yang med la / dgag pa smra ba yang med do zhes bya ba'i don to // thams cad brdzun par smra bas de dag smra na rang gi grub pa'i mtha' dang 'gal te / de dag gzhan rtogs pa'i rgyu yin pa'i phyir ro // thams cad brdzun na thams cad rgyu med pa'i phyir ro //* P 278.17-279.1; D 108a7-b1.

a requirement for an inference for others. If proof statements have no causal capacity, then they are by definition unable to cause understanding in the listener.

The wording of this argument—particularly at the end, "if everything is false then everything is causeless"—suggests that Ratnākaraśānti is still engaging specifically with Mādhyamikas who say that everything is false. Interestingly, he goes on to accuse this group— which, as we have seen, do seem to advance presentations of *pramāṇa*, however flawed Ratnākaraśānti might consider them to be—of not accepting *pramāṇa*. He writes:

> Further, all proofs and refutations are not established for you, because proofs depend on *pramāṇa*s, and you do not accept *pramāṇa*. If [you did] accept it, then since proofs [are given] in the modes of the three natures, how could you be a proponent [of the position] that everything is false? Thus, all of your own and others' proofs and refutations are unproven [according to your own position].[367]

It is not clear from the passage whether Ratnākaraśānti is asserting (a) that his opponent actively denies *pramāṇa* or (b) that they could not provide a coherent account of it, despite claiming to do so. Up to this point Ratnākaraśānti has been engaging with thinkers such as Śāntarakṣita who argue that while conventions are false in the sense of having no nature, they can nonetheless give an account of *pramāṇa*. It is possible that he has now shifted to an opponent who denies *pramāṇa*— a position he has previously associated with Mādhyamikas who hold that everything is non-existent—but that he associates with the group of Mādhyamikas who say that everything is false. I suspect that Ratnākaraśānti is making the former argument—that the opponent *could* not give an account of *pramāṇa* despite trying to—because he goes on to say that if the opponent did accept *pramāṇa* she would have to accept the three natures.

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[367] *gzhan yang de'i sgrub pa dang / sun 'byin pa thams cad rang nyid la ma grub ste / sgrub pa ni tshad ma la rag lus pa'i phyir dang / tshad ma yang khas mi len pa'i phyir ro / khas len na ni rang bzhin gsum gyi tshul du grub pas thams cad brdzun du smra ba ga la yin / de lta na khyed dang gzhan la yang sgrub pa dang sun 'byin pa thams cad ma grub po //* P 279.1-5; D 108b1-2.

Third Argument: Refuting Those Who Say that Nothing Exists

Ratnākaraśānti's commentary on verse twenty-two shifts topics here, perhaps anticipating an opponents' response to his challenge: rather than accept the three natures, she might respond to the foregoing arguments by throwing out the idea of *pramāṇa* altogether. It is unclear whether Ratnākaraśānti is speaking to the same (or a similar) opponent as above who makes this kind of shift, or whether he is moving to an altogether different interlocutor. He writes:

> If [an opponent] says, "we argue that *pramāṇa*s are non-existent," [we respond:] There are *pramāṇa*s; therefore, since that kind of [position] is not a *pramāṇa*, we are able to refute it and to prove our own view. *Pramāṇa* is not refuted, even by a hundred [non-]*pramāṇa*s! One can state the opponents' mere assertions, which are not *pramāṇa*s, but what's the point, since one would be stating what is not established for the other [party in the debate]?[368]

Ratnākaraśānti first responds to his opponents' denial of *pramāṇa* by insisting that she is simply wrong. It as if he is saying, "*pramāṇa*s exist, and if you do not accept them then you are committing yourself to nihilism." Perhaps he feels he has adequately demonstrated the need for *pramāṇa* earlier in the text or in his other writings. The second section of this passage contains a rhetorical point that seems rather comedic: whatever the pseudo-Mādhyamikas' feelings about the existence of *pramāṇa*s themselves, *pramāṇa discourse does exist*. Not only that, the pseudo-Mādhyamika is, herself, actively engaging in *pramāṇa* discourse in order to refute *pramāṇa*. This is a futile endeavor—all of the pseudo-Mādhyamikas' opponents do accept *pramāṇa*s and so would not accept the legitimacy of a non-*pramāṇa* as part of the debating process. In my view. This is similar to the idea of someone joining a basketball game and then insisting that an opponent's points are not valid when she makes a basket. Ratnākaraśānti is accusing the pseudo-Mādhyamika opponent of joining a game and then insisting that the rules do not apply. Such a person would be impossible

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[368] *bdag cag ni tshad ma med par rtsod do zhe na / tshad ma yod do / de'i phyir 'di ltar yang tshad ma ma grub pas bdag cag sgrub pa dang sun 'byin pa yin te / tshad ma ni tshad ma brgyas kyang mi gnod de / tshad ma ma yin pa'i pha rol gyi 'dod pa tsam gyis smos kyang ci dgos gang gi phyir gzhan la ma grub par brjod //* P 279.5-9; D 108b2-3.

to reason with. The MAU makes a very similar point that emphasizes the comically tragic pointlessness of the pseudo-Mādhyamikas' endeavor: those who engage in pramāṇa discourse but do not accept *pramāṇa* are, as Yiannopoulos aptly translates, "just clowns" (2012, 193).[369]

Ratnākaraśānti does not stop there. After putatively exposing his pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents as simply hopeless in debate, the MAV elaborates on the various absurdities that arise from the opponents' position:

> According to this position, anything non-different from what is false is also false. An example is a false thing. One should not refute the arguments of an opponent by saying something like "a cognition in which things appear to be false is not different from the false."[370]

This passage is as notable for what it implies about Ratnākaraśānti's own philosophical commitments as it is useful for understanding his arguments against opponents. Here, Ratnākaraśānti offers a partial inference, from the pseudo-Mādhyamikas' point of view: the subject—"anything"—is not different from what is false. The example is the essential nature (*ngo bo*) of a false thing. Ratnākaraśānti is returning to a criticism we have seen before against an opponent who holds that both false appearances *and their cognitions*—i.e., the experience—should be negated. As we have seen, such a position is antithetical to his own understanding of phenomenal experience: the *content* of ordinary cognitions (such as extended objects) are utterly false, but the *experience* is not therefore non-existent. Rather, ordinary beings engage with something that does exist—i.e. *prakāśa*—through habitual misconstrual (*abhiniveśa*). This leads

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[369] *bzhad gad*. I translate the full statement in the MAU as follows: "if one says, 'therefore, we do not accept *pramāṇa*,' [we respond:] someone who makes arguments for the sake of [proving] there is no *pramāṇa* is joking around." *gal te bdag cag ni tshad ma mi 'dod pa'i phyir ro zhe na / tshad ma med pa'i phyir rtsod par smra ba ni bzhad gad pa yin no //* MAU P 619.12-14.

[370] *phyogs 'di la gang brdzun pa las tha mi dad pa de yang brdzun te / dper na brdzun pa'i ngo bo bzhin no / brdzun par snang ba'i shes pa yang bzdrun pa las tha mi dad pa yin no zhes bya ba la sogs pas pha rol gyi sbyor ba rnams la sun 'byin pa brjod par mi bya'o //* P 279.9-13; D 108b3-4.

him to argue that phenomena are "neither different nor non-different" (*bhedābheda*)[371] from their

nature, which is *prakāśa*.

Fourth Argument: Refuting *Sarvāstivādins

At this point in the commentary on verse twenty-two, Ratnākaraśānti shifts focus entirely.

He now entertains a position that he describes as "holding that everything exists" (*thams cad yod

par smra ba*, *sarvāstivāda*). Lest the reader presume that he's engaging with the group of non-

Mahāyāna abhidharma theorists known as Sarvāstivādins, he immediately glosses "everything" as

phenomenal appearances:

> Those who assert that everything exists declare that those [objects] of which one is
> aware are not false, like the nature of awareness.[372]

The fact that Ratnākaraśānti takes "everything" here to mean "everything besides awareness that

could exist"—i.e., phenomenal appearances—highlights his position that accepting external

objects is wholly incompatible with Mahāyāna Buddhism writ large. That being the case,

"everything existing" is limited to phenomenal appearances rather than either external objects or

atoms that conglomerate to create the appearance of an external object in the mind. Instead, the

opponent suggests that awareness and phenomenal appearances are on the same ontological level.

The thinker that this position brings immediately to mind is Jñānaśrīmitra, who does hold this kind

of position. That said, it is also possible that Ratnākaraśānti has in mind some type of Mādhyamika

position, however curious it might be. This is possible because the passage is couched within a

larger refutation of various sub-types of Mādhyamika, and also because of a comment

Ratnākaraśānti makes in the context of MMK XXIV.18 that was discussed in chapter three:

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[371] Cf. Moriyama for discussion of Ratnākaraśānti's *bhedābheda* thesis, particularly in the context of the MAU (2014, 346–47).

[372] *thams cad yod par smra bas brjod pa / gang rig par bya ba de ni brdzun ma yin te / shes pa'i ngo bo bzhin no //* P 279.13-14; D 108b4.

> There are also some who assert that blue and so forth along with the awareness that apprehends them are false in the same way, positing that they are of equal status (*gnas par 'dra bar smra ba*). These are also not followers of Nāgārjuna.

There is an important distinction between the Nāgārjuna's errant followers here, who holds that "awareness and its objects are false in the same way," and the Ratnākaraśānti's *Sarvāstivādin, who holds that "blue, like awareness, exists." That said, I do not believe that it should be ruled out that these might be related positions. Ratnākaraśānti has been arguing with Mādhyamika opponents who advance an account of *pramāṇa* and posit that "things' being devoid of nature because they are devoid of being one or many" does not negate such an account. In particular, Ratnākaraśānti has previously entertained a Mādhyamika position that rejects "*svabhāva-qua-vastu*" but tries to uphold a "mere *svabhāva*" that *does exist*. That being the case, it is certainly possible that Ratnākaraśānti could (perhaps jokingly) cast some of those Mādhyamikas as "Sarvāstivādins" as a rhetorical foil for the nihilist interpretation of Mādhyamika that holds that nothing exists (**sarvanāstivāda*).

It is, of course, also possible that Ratnākaraśānti chose to insert a non-Mādhyamika position here without providing significant signaling about the dramatic shift in perspective. One might speculate that he may have done this in order to round out the summary of wrong views, before offering his own position. That said, in the absence of evidence that further suggests who the opponent is, I believe we are equally justified in treating this position as potentially 'Satyākāra Yogācāra' or as 'Satyākāra Madhyamaka,' without drawing a strong conclusion about the opponent's position.

Ratnākaraśānti continues:

Those who proclaim that everything exists declare: "Since blue [or: specific objects][373] and so forth are objects of knowledge, [the evidence would consist of] the perception of something that contradicts the pervader."[374]

[Response:] This [argument] also is not good.

In this kind of reasoning, because one is engaging with an object of awareness even in the case of conceptualizing an other-exclusion (*apoha), there is no certainty due to [the evidence] being too general (*thun mong gi ma nges pa, *sādhāraṇānaikāntika*).

Or, if [concepts consisting in other-exclusions] are not objects of knowledge, because the pervasion is not established regarding false things, then their exclusion [from the domain of dissimilar instances] would be doubtful.[375]

Moreover, [blue] is an object devoid of being one or many. It is thereby established as a non-existent object, so the basis is not established (*gzhi ma grub pa*, *āśrayāsiddhiḥ*).[376]

The thrust of this argument is that opponent could not provide the requisite level of certainty to qualify a cognition as valid. Specifically, Ratnākaraśānti argues that the opponent cannot sufficiently distinguish between an appearance—which, for her, exists in some meaningful way—and objects of conceptual cognition such as "this is a cow." The latter necessarily involves mixing an appearance (such as the image that we could judge as "cow") with a concept ("cow"), as discussed in the previous chapter. In order to hold a coherent position, the opponent should be able to convincingly distinguish real appearances from false concepts, which she is unable to do.

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[373] Moriyama and the Pedurma follow with the Derge here, which gives *dngos* ("specific object") instead of *sngon* ("blue"). The latter is attested in Peking and Narthang (cf. P 309 *ad* 279fn6). "Blue and so forth" has been the common example for a cognized object throughout the MAV, so I find that to be the better reading here.

[374] *khyab par byed pa 'gal ba dmigs pa*, *vyāpakaviruddhopalabdhi*.

[375] *ldog pa la the tshom za ba*, *saṃdigdha[vipakṣa]vyāvṛtta*.

[376] *dngos* [Pk N *sngon*] *po la sogs pa rig par bya ba yin pas zhes bya ba ni khyab par byed pa 'gal ba dmigs pa yin no zhe na / de yang bzang po ma yin te / 'di ltar gtan tshigs 'di ni brdzun pa gzhan sel ba'i rnam par rtog pa la yang rig par bya ba 'jug pa'i phyir thun mong gi ma nges pa yin no // yang rig par bya ba ma yin pas brdzun pa la khyab pa ma grub pa'i phyir ldog pa la the tshom za ba yin no // yang na gcig dang du ma dang bral ba'i yul yin pa'i phyir dang / de med pa'i yul du grub pa'i phyir gzhi ma grub pa yin no //* P 279.14-21; D 108b4-6.

Second Argument Against a "Proponent:" Pseudo-Mādhyamikas are Not Buddhists

After briefly criticizing an opponent who holds that everything—or at least, "all phenomenal content"—exists, Ratnākaraśānti returns to criticize Mādhyamikas from a soteriological stance. He deploys a set of Buddhist doctrines—karma, the Four Noble Truths, the Three Jewels and others—and argues that a Mādhyamika could not provide an account of any of these. Here, however, the problem is not that Mādhyamikas do not have an adequate account of causality; rather, the problem is that they cannot say anything at all and therefore could not uphold (much less propagate) the Buddha's dispensation:

> To give another [gloss on] "how could there be a proponent"—it can mean that there would not even be proponents of the dharma, as follows.

> For those who propound that everything is false, all these cognitions are delusion. For that reason, even the Perfection of Wisdom—which has the characteristic of not being delusory—would be thrown out, even for accomplished Buddhas and for Bodhisattvas.[377]

This criticism is similar to Ratnākaraśānti's quip early on in the MAV, commenting on verse two:

> If there were no other-dependent, emptiness could not be the nature of things, just as particular attributes cannot be applied to the horns of a rabbit. If there were no luminous nature, then how would *ārya*s realize it?[378]

These passages evince much the same concerns about pseudo-Mādhyamika presentations of the path and the attainment of Buddhahood: if everything were false or non-existent, then it would be impossible to distinguish between ordinary cognition and enlightened realization. Here Ratnākaraśānti frames the concern by explicitly accusing his opponents of over-negation: if everything were false, everything would be delusory; in that case, even constitutively non-

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[377] *yang / smra ba nyid ni gang las 'gyur / zhes bya ba ni chos smra ba nyid ma yin no zhes bya ba'i don te / 'di ltar thams cad brdzun par smra ba'i shes pa 'di dag thams cad 'khrul pa yin te / de'i phyir shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa ma 'khrul pa'i mtshan nyid kyang spong bar 'gyur la / des bsgrubs pa'i sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' rnams kyang ngo* / P 279.21-280.4; D 108b6-7.

[378] See Chapter Two.

deceptive cognitions such as Buddhas' and *ārya*s' meditative realization would be delusory. The opponent is either left holding a contradictory view—everything is delusion, but Buddhas and āryas exist—or is denying the very possibility of enlightenment and therefore going against Buddhism *in toto*. Per the argument in the verse, they therefore cannot be "proponents" (***vādin*s) in the sense that they cannot uphold Buddhist doctrines and are therefore not Buddhists at all.

Ratnākaraśānti does not stop there. He continues to elaborate the view that his opponents' position is not only philosophically untenable but also flatly heretical. After attacking Mādhyamikas' attempt to present enlightened direct perception, he moves on to criticize the opponents' ability to account for Buddhas' use of inference:

> By rejecting inference, omniscience and the attainment of other worlds and so forth would also be rejected. Since cause and effect are rejected, karma, result, the [Four] Truths, and the [Three] Jewels would also be rejected. So how could these be advocating dharma?[379]

After arguing that his opponents could not propound (*√*vad*) Buddhist teachings, Ratnākaraśānti now accuses them of being unable to advocate (*√*vad*) dharma. While he does not explicitly argue for it here, the conclusions reached in this passage are consistent with his broad critique of pseudo-Mādhyamikas being unable to put forth any individual aspects of an inference, let alone a complete and valid presentation of one. That being the case, this passage reads most obviously as a criticism of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's attempts to present inference. That said, the passage could be understood as an argument against an opponent who actively rejects the utility of inference. This would point directly to Candrakīrti and Atīśa, who explicitly reject inference. While possible, this is unlikely given that the MAV does not offer any signal of a shift in targets, which it does elsewhere.

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[379] *rjes su dpag pa la skur pas thams cad mkhyen pa dang / 'jig rten pha rol la sogs pa sgrub pa la skur par gyur pa dang / rgyu dang 'bras bu la skur na las dang 'bras bu dang / bden pa dang dkon mchog la skur pa yin te / gang gis na 'di dag chos smra ba yin /* P 280.5-8; D 109a1-2.

Whomever the opponents, this criticism marks the third deployment of a list of basic Buddhist doctrines that Ratnākaraśānti accuses his opponent of contravening: cause and effect, karma, the Four Noble Truths and the Three Jewels. Note that this is in essence a *religious* argument that only has teeth insofar as the target considers herself a follower of the dharma. It limits discussion of inference to the ways it can be used by an enlightened being—specifically omniscience (*sarvajña*)[380] and "the attainment of other worlds (*paraloka*) and so forth" (*'jig rten pha rol la sogs pa sgrub pa*), which most likely refers to a Buddha's unique ability to infer the precise circumstances of a particular being's rebirth These are inferences about facts that are "extremely remote" (*atyantaparokṣa*), meaning that "neither the objects [of inference] themselves nor any logical sign that can be linked to them are amenable to the perception of ordinary beings" (McClintock 2010, 84). That is to say, such information is solely the purview of fully enlightened Buddhas; the rest of us can only rely on such beings regarding these topics. Following Dharmakīrti, Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla do explicitly accept this special case of inference with the caveat that scripturally-based inferences (*āgamāśritānumāna*) should be relied on only "when there is no other way" (*agatyā*) (2010, 84). That said, Dharmakīrti and his inheritors do accept that a Buddha has these unique abilities, and probably share Ratnākaraśānti's concern that any account of causality that denies them would be anathema for a Buddhist. Ratnākaraśānti's point seems to be that if his opponent wishes to deny the possibility of a valid inference then she is effectively denigrating the Buddha's qualities and teachings.

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[380] Cf. McClintock (2010, 23–35) for discussion of the concept of omniscience in premodern Indic contexts.

Fifth Argument: Engaging the Third Type of Mādhyamika

After spending the majority of twenty-two verses (and nearly half of the text) arguing against his opponents through both reasoning and, here, doctrinal affiliation, Ratnākaraśānti declares that his task is finished:

> This [completes] the refutation of the positions of those who posit that everything is false.[381]

This phrasing highlights the extent to which the MAV is focused on refuting this particular group of pseudo-Mādhyamikas; while Ratnākaraśānti does argue against those who say that nothing exists, he does not take that group anywhere near as seriously as the *Sarvālīkavādins.

After this extensive refutation—which has taken up MAV verses five through twenty-two along with their commentary—Ratnākaraśānti invites his audience to listen to his own presentation of the Middle Way, extensively treating the relations between awareness, phenomenal appearances, and *pramāṇa*.[382] He then offers an interpretation of how meditation and philosophical reasoning relate to one another, glossing several verses each from the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* and the *Avikalpapraveśadhāraṇī*. This occupies the vast majority of the remainder of the text and includes his commentary on verses twenty-three to forty-one. It is only in the final movement of the MAV that Ratnākaraśānti briefly returns to a discussion of philosophical systems. This final movement takes place in three distinct sections: (a) a restatement of Ratnākaraśānti's Middle Way based on MVB I.1-2; (b) concluding refutation of Mādhyamikas; (c) a presentation of the four Buddhist tenet systems. Of these sections, only the second falls within the focus of this chapter. Bearing in

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[381] *thams cad brdzun par smra ba'i smra ba nyid bkag pa yin no //* P 280.8-9; D 109a2.

[382] Quite literally: after verses twenty-three and twenty-four, Ratnākaraśānti writes, "these verses are an invitation to hear our own proof of the non-existence of dharmas" (*zhes bya ba ni kho bo cag gi chos la bdag med par sgrub pa nyon cig //* (P 280.13-14; D 109a3). See Moriyama for translation and discussion of these two verses (2014, 341–42).

mind that it's couched between presentations of Ratnākaraśānti's own system and his presentation

of *all* systems, we turn to these concluding criticisms.

In this final round of arguments, Ratnākaraśānti briefly gestures toward the other two sub-

types of pseudo-Mādhyamika before discussing a third type, the *Māyopamavāda. Interestingly,

Ratnākaraśānti's account of this group contains a corrective along with its criticisms. In the first

section, he adduces problems with the Mādhyamikas' position, then gives his own view of how

phenomena are illusion-like. In short, he agrees with his interlocutors that phenomena are like

illusions but asserts that illusions depend on a cause or agent—namely, awareness—for their

production. The passage begins by introducing the *Māyopamavāda position and differentiating it

from other types of Mādhyamika:

> The position that the Middle Path means that while ultimately nothing exists, things
> do exist conventionally, has already been refuted.[383]

> Others assert the following: "just as the appearances of illusory elephants are not
> existent, likewise all phenomena are also not existent. As for that, non-existence is
> said to appear; therefore, that all phenomena are just like illusions is the Middle
> Path."[384]

Ratnākaraśānti draws a notable distinction here between these two types of Mādhyamika. While

the former position distinguishes between something that exists (conventions) and something that

does not exist (ultimate), this novel sub-type of Mādhyamika argues that these are not separated

to the same extent: for *Māyopamavādins, non-existence *is* what appears. As with the

aforementioned *Sarvāstivādins, we should not immediately assume that Ratnākaraśānti is

referring to the well-known sub-type of Mādhyamika that was likely part of his own intellectual

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[383] *don dam par ni med la / kun rdzob tu yod pa de'i phyir / dbu ma'i lam yin no zhes zer na / de ni sngar bkag zin to /* P 306.1-2; D 119b2-3.

[384] *gzhan ni 'di ltar 'dod de / ji ltar sgyu ma'i glang po snang ba ni yod pa ma yin no / de bzhin du chos thams cad kyang yod pa ma yin te / de ni med pa snang ba yin par smra ste / de bas na sgyu ma lta bu nyid chos thams cad dbu ma'i lam yin no zhes zer ro //* P 306.2-5; D 119b3-4.

landscape;[385] that said, Ratnākaraśānti's description is fairly close to those found in other sources. Maitrīpa's *Tattvaratnāvalī*, for example, names a very similar view as Māyopamādvayavāda, "those who maintain non-duality [in the sense of everything being] like an illusion" (Mathes 2015, 70). It would appear based on Ratnākaraśānti's succinct description that he does indeed have this group in mind. While it is difficult to say with certainty whether Ratnākaraśānti is targeting specific individuals who hold this view, it is worth noting that Maitrīpa describes this group as primarily relying on Āryadeva's *Jñānasārasamuccaya*; Bodhibhadra's *Nibandhana* commentary on that text is one possible representative of the system.[386]

Leaving aside the question of who Ratnākaraśānti's specific opponents are—and whether any would agree with Ratnākaraśānti's characterizations—we can note that this presentation of *Māyopamavāda is markedly closer to our author's own view than previous iterations of Mādhyamika positions treated in the MAV. The major difference comes down to negation: Māyopamavādins argue that non-existence appears—reflecting their reliance on non-affirming negation—whereas Ratnākaraśānti argues that awareness, which exists, appears as ordinary phenomena; this reflects his adherence to affirming negation. Once again, the primary stakes of this disagreement center around the opponents' inability to account for *pramāṇa*:

> This is also not true. If it were like that, since those [Māyopamavādins] establish *pramāṇa* as non-existent,[387] they are therefore unable to prove the existence of

[385] See Almogi (2010) for extensive discussion of this group vis-à-vis the Sarvadharmāpratiṣṭhānavāda, the other main sub-type of Mādhyamikas from Ratnākaraśānti's approximate time period. Note that all of Almogi's sources place Māyopamavāda beneath Apratiṣṭhānavāda, which suggests that their descriptions of the former view should perhaps be treated with caution. It is extremely notable that Ratnākaraśānti mentions only the first of these two groups; this, along with the fact that Māyopamavāda is consistently treated as inferior to Apratiṣṭhānavāda, could suggest that latter group rose to prominence later, perhaps only after Ratnākaraśānti's lifetime.

[386] A search for any strong tradition of Māyopamavāda literature has thus far yielded surprisingly thin results; further research could certainly be done to illuminate this position and identify any historical figures who were active advocates. In keeping with the previous footnote, it is markedly difficult to find specific instances of Māyopamavāda literature. The position is well-known but, as mentioned, it is consistently described *by* Apratiṣṭhānavādins and treated as inferior.

[387] *de dag tshad ma med par grub na* (following D and M). Pk and N attest *tshad mas med par grub na*, "they prove non-existence by *pramāṇa*," but that reading does not make sense in the context of this passage.

anything at all![388] When there is no *pramāṇa*, what need is there to speak of [proving things] through mere appearances?[389]

Here Ratnākaraśānti levels a familiar argument: the Māyopamavādins hold that *pramāṇa* is non-existent, leaving them unable to prove anything at all. If the opponents here deny the possibility of evidence and so forth, they deny the possibility of any robust account of perception or inferences. Instead, everything is mere appearances, meaning that a mirage and water cannot meaningfully be distinguished. Ratnākaraśānti's phrasing here—that his Māyopamavāda opponents "establish *pramāṇa* as non-existent" (*tshad ma med par grub*) might be taken to suggest that this actively refutes *pramāṇa*. That said, Ratnākaraśānti may rather be adducing this as an undesirable consequence of their thesis that appearances are non-existent. In short: for the Māyopamavādins, any candidate for direct perception or evidence for an inference is not-existent, rendering any putative *pramāṇa*s invalid. Thus, regardless of whether or not this group *claimed* to uphold a theory of *pramāṇa*, their inability to do so would doom any account of proof they might put forward.

Ratnākaraśānti continues:

[An opponent] might argue that while [phenomena] do not exist in terms of their having the characteristic of causal capacity, they do exist insofar as they have the characteristic of being appearances. If that were the case, they would exist as mere imputations. Furthermore, while the horns of a rabbit could exist [according to this position], they could not cease to exist. On the other hand, rabbits' horns and so forth are also not considered to be solely (*gcig tu*) non-existent.[390]

Ratnākaraśānti proceeds to argue that any definition of "existence" his opponents could coherently put forward would still be too minimal. They might argue that their quarrel is with the causal

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[388] Taking *'gas kyang* to translate **kenacit* (Negi 1993, 691).

[389] *de yang bden pa ma yin te / 'di ltar gal te 'di dag tshad ma med par grub na de'i phyir 'gas kyang yod par sgrub par mi nus so / tshad ma ma yin pa la sang ba tsam gyis lta smos kyang ci dgos /* P 306.5-8; D 119b4.

[390] *gal te nus pa'i mtshan nyid du ni yod pa ma yin gyi / snang ba'i mtshan nyid du yod par 'dod na de lta na ni / brtags pa tsam du yod par 'gyur ro / ri bong gi rwa de yang de tsam du yod kyi de med par ni mi 'gyur ro / 'on kyang ri bong gi rwa la sogs pa gcig tu med par 'dod do //* P 306.8-12; D 119b4-5.

capacity of phenomena, not the appearance of phenomena. But in the absence of causal capacity, "appearances"—including the horns of a rabbit—would be imputations. In other words, these phenomena would be classified as part of the imagined nature, rather than the other-dependent.

Ratnākaraśānti wraps this criticism up with another Nāgārjunian twist, quite similar to his earlier refutation of Śāntarakṣita. If something appears that does not possess causal capacity, then there is no force through which it could disappear. The opponent must therefore argue that appearances always exist, or never exist—they can only ("solely") be appearing or non-appearing. Both options are absurd, and both follow from the opponents' stated theses. Regardless of whether one ultimately finds Ratnākaraśānti's arguments convincing, it is certainly interesting to see *prasaṅga*-style arguments levelled against Mādhyamika opponents!

Ratnākaraśānti's Own View of How Phenomena are Like Illusions

Immediately after adducing these criticisms of the third sub-type of Mādhyamika opponent, Ratnākaraśānti transitions to his own view. Here he engages the opponents' example of an illusory elephant to point out the flaws with that position and to clarify his own. In so doing, Ratnākaraśānti highlights the crucial difference between himself and his interlocutors: the need for a basis. He writes:

> Moreover, if one negates existence as a defining characteristic of causal capacity, it would follow that there could be no certainty about accomplishing what is beneficial and avoiding what is not,[391] and so forth. Therefore, it is correct that, by asserting existence, causal capacity also exists; it is not the case that there is just mere appearance.
>
> For example, wood, rocks, and so forth. While these exist with their own nature, they can appear with a nature they do not have—such as being an elephant—due to

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[391] This is a somewhat loose translation. I take *don dang don ma yin pa bsgrub pa la 'jug pa dang ldog pa* to render something like **arthānarthaheyopadeya*.

the manipulations of an illusionist. To say that, for this reason, the wood etc. is also illusory is the position of that [opponent].[392]

Thus, while all phenomena have the nature (*ngo bo*) of awareness, [that awareness] appears as the nature of blue and so forth through contamination of karmic tendencies (**vāsanā*) from beginningless time. Therefore, all phenomena are asserted to be like illusions.

Therefore, the appearances (**ākāra*) of blue and so forth do not exist, but it is not the case that something erroneous (*'khrul pa'i dngos po*) and the emptiness that is its nature are non-existent. This is called the Middle Path. Therefore, it [i.e., awareness] is asserted to have the three natures, and this is the correct interpretation (*tshul*) of the Madhyamaka system.[393]

Ratnākaraśānti opens this passage by pointing out the opponents' inability to establish a level of certainty that is necessary for ethical action. If one wishes to engage in beneficial activities and avoids what is not beneficial, this requires a basic level of certainty that the opponent cannot provide. I take the "and so forth" here to refer to other activities in the world that are possible on the basis of a moral compass—particularly, in a Mahāyāna Buddhist context, study and meditation. He concludes from this that the opponent cannot be correct that everything is mere appearance, as causal capacity must exist.

Ratnākaraśānti then offers his own interpretation of the illusory elephant simile and contrasts that with the opponents' problematic presentation. This well-known example relates that a skilled magician can entice a crowd to perceive wood, pebbles and so forth as a depiction of elephants. While the opponent takes this to mean that apparent phenomena are simply illusory,

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[392] *gzhan yang nus pa'i mtshan nyid du yod pa bkag na / don dang don ma yin pa bsgrub pa la 'jug pa dang / ldog pa la sogs pa nges par mi 'gyur thal bar 'gyur bas de bas na yod par 'dod pas nus pa nyid yod par rigs kyi / snang ba tsam ni ma yin no / 'di ltar shing dang rdo ba la sogs pa rang [rang] gi ngo bos yod pa yang rgyu ma mkhan gyis bya bas glang po la sogs pa'i ngo bo med pa snang ba'i phyir shing la sogs pa yang sgyu mar smras pa ni de'i 'dod pa'o* // P 306.12-18; D 119b5-7.

[393] *'di ltar chos thams cad ni shes pa'i ngo bo yin la / thog ma med pa'i bag chags kyis bslad pas sngon po la sogs pa'i ngo bor snang ste / de bas na chos 'di dag thams cad sgyu ma lta bur 'dod do // de'i phyir sngon po la sogs pa'i rnam pa ni yod pa ma yin la / 'khrul pa'i dngos po de dang stong pa nyid kyi ngo bo med pa ni ma yin te / de ni dbu ma'i lam zhes bya'o // de lta bas na / de nyid rang bzhin gsum 'dod par gyur pa yin te / tshul 'di ni dbu ma par rigs so* // P 306.18-307.3; D 119b7-120a2.

Ratnākaraśānti notes that this is not a valid interpretation. The elephants experienced by the entranced audience do not simply arise out of empty space. Rather, the audience is seeing wood and pebbles appear as if they were something else. In order to maintain a coherent position, the opponent would have to say that not only the elephant is illusory, but also the wood. This does not make sense: the wood is appearing *as* the elephant, thus there is no illusion of wood.

The remainder of this commentary relates the example to Ratnākaraśānti's position: just as the magician's showmanship causes a crowd to perceive "wood" as "not-wood" (i.e., elephant), in the same way the force of karmic habits causes sentient beings to perceive awareness as "not-awareness." On that basis, he once again briefly summarizes his presentation of the three natures: ordinary phenomena—"blue and so forth"—are not existent (imagined nature). But "something erroneous" (i.e., the impure other-dependent) and the emptiness which is its nature (pure other dependent, perfected) do exist. He declares this to be the middle path and also the correct way to engage in Madhyamaka. While we cannot say for certain that the original Sanskrit read *madhyamaka* here, that is the most straightforward way to read the Tibetan phrase *dbu ma pa*.

This chapter detailed the final arguments against Ratnākaraśānti's main pseudo-Mādhyamika opponents in the MAV and concluded with a dramatic declaration of how the Middle Way and Madhyamaka relate. With that in view, we are in a position to re-asses Ratnākaraśānti's understanding of Madhyamaka, pseudo-Mādhyamikas, and the Mahāyāna.

Concluding Notes:
Madhyamaka, Mādhyamikas, and the Mahāyāna

This dissertation began by identifying and explicating the problem that I have called the Doxographical Conundrum. Over the course of investigating this Conundrum, I have sought to identify Ratnākaraśānti's philosophical commitments while also explicating the nuances of his criticisms against [pseudo-]Mādhyamika opponents. As such, it would be misleading to feign that this dissertation could result in any sort of definitive "conclusions" and I will not pretend do so here. It is more accurate to describe this dissertation as an effort to clear the conceptual ground and lay the foundations for further studies—of Ratnākaraśānti's thought, and of his intellectual milieu. Stated in terms that echo the beginning of this dissertation: having delved into the Doxographical Conundrum, we now find ourselves at another, more nuanced, "point of departure."

This conclusion begins by discussing the final passages of the MAV, just prior to the closing verses (which are included in the Appendix). These give a final summary of Middle Way and offer a unique presentation of the four categories commonly used in Mahāyāna descriptions of Buddhist thought—Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra, and Madhyamaka. Following this, we will briefly revisit the doxographical conundrum with which this dissertation began.

Ratnākaraśānti's "Definitive Explanation" of the Middle Way

Toward the end of the text—specifically, in a section that immediately precedes the criticisms of that sub-type of [pseudo-]Mādhyamika that I have been calling Māyopamavāda, Ratnākaraśānti offers his own summary of the universal Mahāyāna viewpoint. This section specifically casts the proper view of the Middle Way as the "System of the Middle Way in the

Mode of the Three Natures" (*rang bzhin gsum gyi tshul la*[394] *dbu ma'i tshul*, **trisvabhāvanaya*

madhyamaka). He also calls this "the definitive understanding (*nges par rtog pa*)"[395] of the three

natures. The passage in full reads:

> Now, if one asks about the expression, "the system of the Middle Way in the mode
> of the three natures," it proclaims [the following]. What is called "existent" is one
> extreme. What is called "non-existent" is the second extreme. What takes place
> (*gyur pa*) in the middle of these is the mode of the middle way, the definitive
> understanding (*nges par rtog pa*) of the natures.
>
> So, how are these expressed? All *dharmas* are not existent; they are also not non-
> existent. [What appears] as the imputed nature does not exist; [there is existence]
> by way of the other-dependent and perfected natures, as stated in the
> *Madhyāntavibhāga*:[396]
>
>> Unreal imagination exists. Within it, duality does not exist, but
>> emptiness does exist in it. It also exists in terms of that [emptiness].
>>
>> Not empty, but also not non-empty: from that, everything is
>> explained. Because of existing, not existing, and existing, that is the
>> Middle Path. (MVB I.1-2)[397]

Here Ratnākaraśānti clarifies precisely what the Middle Way is in the middle *of*: the extremes of

existence and non-existence. This is consistent with the presentation of the Middle Way in the

MVB, which also casts non-existence as nihilism and existence as reification. In view of the

foregoing, it is clear that Ratnākaraśānti's method for avoiding these extremes—and his

presentation of the "definitive understanding" that lies between them—also derives from the MVB.

To give a final summary of Ratnākaraśānti's presentation of the Middle Way in the MAV:

The content of ordinary cognitions—such as the phenomenal experience of blue that leads to the

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[394] Pk and N omit *la*, but the meaning is not significantly affected.

[395] D attests *nges par rtogs pa*, "definitive realization."

[396] *'o na rang bzhin gsum gyi tshul la dbu ma'i tshul zhes ji skad brjod ce na / smras pa / yod pa zhes bya ba ni mtha' gcig go / med pa zhes bya ba ni mtha' gnyis pa'o // de dag gi dbus su gyur pa ni dbu ma'i tshul te / rang bzhin rnams nges par rtogs pa'o // de yang gang yin zhe na / gang zhig chos thams cad yod pa yang ma yin med pa yang ma yin pa ste / kun tu brtags pa'i rang bzhin gyis ni yod pa yang ma yin / gzhan gyi dbang dang yongs su grub pa'i rang bzhin gyis ni med pa yang ma yin te / gang dbu dang mtha' rnam par 'byed pa las //* P 305.11-18; D 118a6-119b1.

[397] Cf. previous citation of these verses for Tibetan and Sanskrit. P 305.18-21; D 119b1-2.

concept of "that blue coffee cup, over there"—are utterly false, but they are not thereby non-existent. All beings—be they ordinary or enlightened—are engaging with something that does exist: *prakāśa*. The difference is that ordinary beings engage *prakāśa* in a manner that is skewed by habitual misconstrual (*abhiniveśa*). Ordinary beings are mistaking prakāśa for "blue" and so forth. That does not mean that they are seeing something other than *prakāśa*; rather, ordinary beings experience *prakāśa* incorrectly. Thus, ordinary phenomena are "neither different nor non-different" (*bhedābheda*)[398] from their nature—blue can't be something else *besides prakāśa*, but it's also not correct to say that "seeing blue" and "seeing *prakāśa*" mean exactly the same thing.

To briefly re-state this in a manner that highlights this view point as a "Middle Way:" It is incorrect to treat ordinary dualistically-cognized phenomena as "existent." They are non-dual awareness which has been distorted such that it appears as the physical universe and its contents. It would be equally incorrect to deny that experience is taking place—i.e., that awareness is operative. The three natures accurately describe the correct Middle Way because they hold this balance—not over-negating by denying the existence of experience, not under-negating by affirming the existence of imagined phenomenal objects. With this summary in view, let us briefly re-assess the implications of Ratnākaraśānti's view for his treatment of others' positions (particularly, of course, those of the [pseudo-]Mādhyamikas).

Nihilists and Noble Ones: Troubling the Madhyamaka-Yogācāra Typology

All of the foregoing has certainly clarified vital aspects of both the content and underlying motivations of Ratnākaraśānti's presentations of Yogācāra, Madhyamaka, and the Middle Path. What is has not done, however, is clarify where exactly Ratnākaraśānti's view ought to be located

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[398] Cf. Moriyama for discussion of Ratnākaraśānti's *bhedābheda* thesis, particularly in the context of the MAU (2014, 346–47).

in the fourfold hierarchical schema of *siddhānta*s. On the one hand, Ratnākaraśānti's philosophy is consistent with doctrines that are widely considered as constitutively "Yogācāra"—for example, he holds Maitreya in the highest esteem, considers the doctrine of the three natures (*trisvabhāva*, *rang bzhin gsum*) to be fundamental for Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy, and regards the *Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra* as an authoritative scripture. On the other hand, Ratnākaraśānti insists that Yogācāra and Madhyamaka "agree," as we saw in the Introduction. Likewise, the MAV's presentation of the four tenet systems combines Yogācāra and Madhyamaka and contrasts them with pseudo-Mādhyamika positions; the MAU lists Yogācāra after Madhyamaka but treats all of the four systems as, in some respect, imperfect or incomplete.

In view of this, I argue that Ratnākaraśānti's MAV can be understood as an eleventh-century iteration of earlier arguments by figures who are now considered foundational Yogācāra thinkers—particularly Asaṅga and Dharmapāla. Like these predecessors, Ratnākaraśānti is primarily concerned with distinguishing between "Mahāyāna" and "pseudo-Mahāyāna" rather than thinking in terms of "Yogācāra and/versus Madhyamaka." Insofar as "Madhyamaka" and "Yogācāra" *are* taken to refer to the intentions of the two Noble Ones (*ārya*)—Nāgārjuna and Maitreya, respectively—then they both reflect the authentic Mahāyāna and are, to that extent, not different. This does not, however, make them *equal*, much less identical. As discussed in Chapter Two, Ratnākaraśānti distinguishes these *ārya*s in terms of their relative station on the Bodhisattva path as well as their clarity and consistency. He can therefore be best understood as re-presenting this fundamental approach to Mahāyāna Buddhism. However, Ratnākaraśānti's intellectual world—Vikramaśīla in the eleventh-century CE —was extremely different from the intellectual worlds of his predecessors. Ratnākaraśānti was required to attend to the developments that had occurred over the intervening centuries—most importantly, the fissure that produced a competing

model of how to "fundamentally approach Mahāyāna Buddhism" and the developments of Madhyamaka, Yogācāra and Pramāṇa Theory.

In this regard, I have argued that Ratnākaraśānti is once again following the strategy of interpreting the second and third turnings of the wheel of Dharma in accord with the method found in the SNS. To restate: the second turning of the wheel of Dharma is a correct teaching but it is incomplete. Likewise, Nāgārjuna's view is the correct Mahāyāna view, but some of his texts teach this incompletely and are thereby liable to be misinterpreted. Here Ratnākaraśānti extends this logic to his teachings: they are correct but require that the reader understand the role played by the three natures, even in texts such as the MMK where they are not clearly articulated. While this suggests a clear hierarchy, it is telling that Ratnākaraśānti does not take the further step of explicitly stating that Yogācāra supersedes Madhyamaka—again, this suggests that "Madhyamaka versus Yogācāra" is not his main rubric. On this point, it is worth briefly returning to one of the citations given at the outset of this dissertation, from Ratnākaraśānti's commentary on the *Guhyasamājatantra* (GSTK). There he makes much the same point that I have articulated here, albeit quite elliptically:

> Yogācāras assert that [the Middle Way] is like this; Nāgārjuna considers it in precisely the same way. Since this is a single philosophical system (*ekasiddhānta*); others, who assert differently, are not without fault.[399]

In view of the foregoing, we can interpret this passage as follows: If one must speak in terms of philosophical systems, then Yogācāra asserts the correct Middle Way. Nāgārjuna's presentation is consistent with this Middle Way; thus, those who truly follow him are part of the Noble Mahāyāna and—to invoke the title of this dissertation—are themselves following the path of the Noble Ones.

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[399] *rnal 'byor spyod pa 'di ltar 'dod pa ji lta ba de bzhin du / nā gardzuna'i zhal snga nas kyang bzhed de / grub pa'i mtha' 'di ni gcig pa yin la / tha dad par 'dod pa gzhan dag ni kha na ma tho ba med pa ma yin no //* GSTK P 1420.2-4.

Others, which distinguish Yogācāra from a putatively better presentation of the Middle Way, are "not without fault" (*kha na ma tho ba med pa ma yin*). The MAV describes these individuals in rather more vitriolic terms, calling them "worse than nihilists."

In view of this, we can conclude by answering the doxographical conundrum: to ask which *siddhānta* Ratnākaraśānti belongs to is to ask the wrong question. He is engaged in the altogether different venture of differentiating the true Mahāyāna—the Mahāyāna of the Noble Ones, articulated by both Nāgārjuna and Maitreya—from the false Mahāyāna of the pseudo-Mādhyamika Nihilists. In this, he is following a rubric that was used by his intellectual predecessors—Asaṅga, Dharmapāla, and others.

In short, the fact that Ratnākaraśānti is difficult to categorize is not the product of any obfuscation on his part—indeed, he is both consistent and clear in the MAV and throughout his literary corpus. Instead, it is a product of both traditional and academic commentators who presume that Ratnākaraśānti must belong to either Yogācāra or Madhyamaka; because he does not fit neatly into either, he is treated as an intellectual aberration. In this dissertation I have tried to demonstrate that, far from being an aberration, Ratnākaraśānti's presentation is deeply rooted in the foundations of Mahāyāna Buddhism. If this is difficult for us to see, it is because we are asking the wrong questions.

Appendix
English Translations of Selections from *Proving the Middle Path: A Commentary on the Ornament of the Middle Way*

In Sanskrit: *Madhyamālaṃkāravṛtti Madhyamāpratipad siddhināma*
In Tibetan: *dbu ma rgyan gyi 'grel pa dbu ma'i lam grub pa zhes bya ba*

Passage One: Verses One Through Twenty-Two with their Commentary

Homage to Mañjughoṣa!

> You cultivated renunciation for three incalculable eons.
> So long as beings abide, for their sake
> You abide through the three perfect bodies.
> O Sage, may you always protect us! //1//[400]

> The two truths, which were stated by Maitreya and Asaṅga, and also accepted by Nāgārjuna, will be explained here through *pramāṇa* together with scripture. //2//

The two truths are the ultimate and the conventional. In this regard, the phrase will be explained here indicates the subject matter of this treatise. The remainder [of the verse indicates] that what is established through unerring worldly *pramāna*—perception and inference—is indeed proven.

Also, the Lord is a supreme *pramāṇa*; therefore, scripture is also included (*gzung*). In the phrase *pramāṇa* together with scripture, scripture indicates the Mahāyāna canon. Only *ārya*-s are *pramānas* regarding the profound meaning of those texts, and [those *āryas*] are said to be Ārya Maitreya and so on.

Lord Maitreya has perfected the Bodhisattva path and is about to attain complete and perfect enlightenment. Ārya Asaṅga is a third-stage Bodhisattva. Ārya Nāgārjuna is on the first stage, as indicated [in the prophecy]: "having reached the stage of Great Joy, He will depart to Sukhāvatī."

Stated by Lord Maitreya [means what he] taught well. But does this mean that Ārya Asaṅga and Ārya Nāgārjuna did not also teach [well]? The term stated indicates that [Maitreya] taught [the truth] consistently. The word accepted is used because [Nāgārjuna] teaches this in some portions [of his texts, but] generally he is known to teach two natures. One might wonder why he teaches the other-dependent only in some places, and not all the time. The reason is that, by teaching emptiness, even though that [other-dependent nature] is not stated, it is still established. If there were

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no other-dependent, emptiness could not be the nature of things, just as particular attributes cannot be applied to the horns of a rabbit. If there were nothing with a luminous nature, then how would *ārya*s realize it?

What is it like, this Middle Path which is the means for awakening?

> The nature (*bdag nyid*, **ātman*) of duality is entirely non-existent.
> The nature that is error about duality does exist. That nature is emptiness. This is explained as the Middle Path. //3//

Duality [means] the apprehended and apprehender. The nature of those is their [first] nature (*rang bzhin*, **svabhāva*). That they are entirely non-existent means that the five aggregates and so forth are non-existent. The non-dual appearing as dual constitutes error. The nature in that regard is the aggregates and so forth [in terms of the] second [nature]. Therefore, they exist. Emptiness is the emptiness of duality there. Freedom from duality, which is the nature of the dependent, is the aggregates [in terms of the] third [nature]. For that reason, as well, they exist. That is called the Middle Path, because *dharma*s of the first nature do not exist, but the others do exist. While [things] do exist in some way, they do not exist in [another] way. This is the meaning of the Middle Path. While there is existence in some sense, some things do not exist. This is the meaning of "Middle."

What are the names of those natures, and why are they so-called?

> They are the imagined, the other-dependent, and the perfected.
> Because one is imagined, one is arisen from causes, and one does not change, respectively. //4//

These three natures are named as the imagined, the other-dependent, and the perfected, respectively. [The first is called imagined] because it is imagined in error; [the second is called other-dependent] because it arises from causes, and [the third is called perfected] because it does not change. The other-dependent is also the imagination of the unreal, [so-called] because of the imputation of [existence onto] non-existent phenomena.

In the Treatise on the Differentiation Between the Middle and the Extremes, Ārya Maitreya states:

> Imagination of the unreal exists. Duality does not occur there.
> Emptiness does occur there, and it [imagination of the unreal] also occurs in that [emptiness]. //MVB I.1//

> It is not empty, but also not non-empty; because of that, everything can be understood. Because something exists, something else doesn't exist, and something else also exists, this is the Middle Path (*madhyamā pratipad*). //MVB I.2//

Others explain the Middle Path differently. To be specific, there is the view that blue and so forth are not non-existent because they are established by experience, but they are also not existent, because they do not withstand analysis.

That is not true. Why not? Though that experience [blue and so forth] contradicts the non-existence of the experience, it does not [contradict the experience of blue] as being false. Therefore, something is not proven to exist just because it is experienced. But it is also not non-existent, as that would be unreasonable. It would be reasonable for it to not exist, provided there were a proven contradiction with analysis.

Others assert [the following]: "while phenomena such as the aggregates are ultimately non-existent, they do exist conventionally. This is the Middle Way." This also is not true.

> If real things do not exist [at all], then how could they exist conventionally? Since things do not exist ultimately, how *do* they exist? //5//

The meaning of this verse is: something that refuted by the highest *pramāṇa* <u>does not exist</u> <u>ultimately</u>. But [things] cannot be proven to <u>exist</u> by means of <u>conventional</u> [truth], which is not a *pramāṇa*. Please tell me, <u>how</u> is it that [something] <u>exists</u> conventionally?

Furthermore, to those who advocate complete non-existence ultimately [the root verses] say:

> [Proponents of] complete non-existence are worse than nihilists. If a previously existent thing were destroyed by a counter-agent, it would be counterfeit. //6//

Those who advocate <u>complete non-existence</u> reach a view that <u>surpasses even nihilism</u>, insofar as nihilists view the Truths, the Jewels, karma and its effects and so forth as non-existent.

Also, if one says that dharmas are non-existent because something <u>previously existent</u> is <u>destroyed by a counter-agent</u>, then it would undesirably follow that that <u>would be counterfeit</u>. In the *Noble* [*Eight-Thousand Verse*] *Perfection of Wisdom*, the counterfeit of the Perfection of Wisdom is stated: "form is impermanent means form is destroyed," up to "consciousnesses is impermanent means consciousness is destroyed." Those would obtain [for that view].

> "[Things] appear as if they had causal capacity." If that's the case, then what is the purpose (*prayojana*) of that Middle? Since that capacity is produced from error, purposeful actions cannot be performed //7//

[The opponent] says, "Although dharmas don't exist because they are ultimately empty of causal capacity, they nevertheless appear to have that capacity conventionally. Therefore, this is the Middle Way."

[We respond:] What is the purpose of that kind of Middle? That kind of causal capacity is produced from error. Since it does not exist, purposeful actions cannot be performed.

[The opponent says,] "Since cause and effect are seen conventionally, the effect is achieved when the causes are established. One sees the capacity for seeds and so forth to produce sprouts and so forth. There is nothing unreasonable in what is observed."

[We respond:] That might be the case, except that since phenomena (*chos rnams*, **dharmāḥ*) are proven by *pramāṇa* to have causal capacity, they would exist ultimately [according to you]. Therefore, this cannot be the Middle.

Furthermore,

> Causal capacity is not seen [in ordinary phenomena] because seeds
> and so forth do not exist. It *is* seen in terms of a mind which appears
> as seeds and so forth, because that does exist. //8//

Statements such that "seeds and so forth have the capacity to give rise to sprouts and so forth" are erroneous. Seeds and so forth which are devoid of singular or plural natures do not exist, so it is not reasonable for them to have causal capacity. But the cognition which is taught as the other-dependent, which appears as seeds and sprouts and so forth, does possess causal capacity, because it does exist.

The author of the *Pramāṇavārttika* makes this statement, and others:

> The establishment of a causal agent or inferential evidence that is
> dependent upon external objects, as in the case of the production of
> a sprout from a seed or the proof of fire from smoke, could also be
> conceptualized as having the appearance of those natures (*rūpa*) in
> dependence upon cognitions with that kind of restricted coherence.
> If that is the case, what is contradicted? //PV 3.292-3//

Also, the *Laṅkāvatāra* states,

> Through the refutation of an agent excluded from causes and
> conditions, I state that non-arisal is the presentation of mind alone.
> //LAS X.592//

Here, causes indicate the six types [of causation], "spontaneously arisen" and so forth. There are four conditions: cause, support, and so forth. Because an agent such as a creator god [who is] excluded from [these] causes and conditions is refuted,

[phenomena] are <u>proven</u> to arise as <u>mind alone</u>. There is the <u>non-arisal</u> of that which is produced by them. This is the meaning of these statements.

Nāgārjuna also stated,

> Among these, there is not anything whatsoever that arises, and not anything whatsoever that ceases. Only cognitions arise and cease. //YṢ 21//

The word <u>here</u> is in the locative case, [used] in the sense of restriction [applied to] to the aggregates, constituents, and so forth. <u>Only cognitions</u> mean other-dependent cognitions.

If one asks, "but how is there non-arising regarding production?" We answer:

> In what way is something unarisen, and how are [phenomena] produced (*gang gis skye bar 'gyur ba*)? [We answer:] The word "unarisen" is like "not eaten" and "not touched." //9//

A person who eats some things and touches some things is said to not eat and not touch other things. [Some things are] <u>not eaten</u>, urban fowl and so forth. [Some people/things] are <u>not touched</u>, *caṇḍāla*s and so forth. Likewise, some imagined unreal thing that arises [from the imagination of the unreal] is unarisen. This is the intention.

Another [position] asserts that in the phrase "one who holds the emptiness of all dharmas is a Mahāyāna practitioner," "emptiness" means non-existence. [In that case,] since nothing exists, there would be no causes for anything. Since that would contradict dependent origination, the [Four Truths of the Noble One], the [Three] Jewels, karma, fruition and so forth would also be denigrated.

If one says, "while things do not exist ultimately, they do exist conventionally," this is also not true. The designation "chariot" [is used] if the parts of the chariot exist. In the same way, when the aggregates exist, they are designated as a person. If these are all non-existent, what is the basis (*upādāna*), and what is applied to it (*upacāra*)?

Otherwise, one might say "we hold that everything is not existent, but also not non-existent; this is the Middle Path. Therefore, it is not that everything is non-existent." That is also not reasonable. Because existence and non-existence are mutually exclusive, refuting one implies the other. It is not reasonable to refute them both.

Ācārya Nāgārjuna answers these as follows:

> Whatever is dependently arisen, just that we declare to be emptiness. That is a dependent concept; just that is the Middle Way. //MMK XXIV.18//

<u>Whatever</u> is of the nature of the other-dependent <u>is dependently arisen</u>. Since the imagined does not exist in <u>just that</u>, how could dependent arising be denigrated?

Imagined objects of grasping are also dependently arisen. When there is the imagination of the unreal, imputation of the aggregates of appropriation (*upādānaskandha*) occurs. This is the intention [of *pāda* a].

The intention of [the entire verse,] "<u>what is dependently arisen… just that is the Middle Way</u>" is as follows: while imputed identities are completely non-existent, the identity (*bdag nyid*, **ātma*) of the other-dependent is not non-existent. Therefore, this is the Middle Way.

Therefore, the imagination of the unreal exists, because there are appearances that lack duality. Likewise, insofar as non-existent dualities exist, just so, the imagination of the unreal exists. Insofar as that exists, it is empty of duality too. The fact of the one existing in the other shows the proof of the natures of all three dharmas [i.e., the three natures]. The imputed nature is the reason [we say] "not existent;" the other two are not non-existent. This is the Middle Way; this is definitively proven.

Now, some assert that because they do not hold even the imagination of the unreal to exist, everything is false. To them, we answer:

> If [everything] were just false, there would be no cause and no co-incidence. There would be no causal capacity, only error. Every kind of *pramāṇa* would be impossible. //10//

If everything <u>were false</u>, in that case <u>there would be no causes</u>, so [everything] would arise causelessly.

They would also <u>not</u> arise <u>only</u> on particular <u>occasions</u> (*res 'ga'*). [As Dharmakīrti states,]

> Since that which is causeless does not depend on anything else, it would be either permanently existent or permanently nonexistent. //PV 1.35ab// (Dunne 2004: 336)

This is a logical axiom. <u>There would be no causal capacity</u> because capacity is defined in terms of existence; it is not possible for something non-existent to have [causal] capacity. The [view that] everything is <u>only</u> <u>error</u> would be attained, because of being illuminated as non-existent. It would then absurdly follow that the *āryas*, who do not [see] delusory things, would not see [anything]. Moreover, if everything were error, there would be no valid direct perception or inference, and so <u>everything</u> without exception <u>would be non-*pramāṇa*</u>.

Someone posits that [causal capacity] has the character of being conventional:

> What is agreeable only when not analyzed, dharmas that arise and cease, and natures [or: real things] that possess causal capacity: these are asserted to be conventional. //*Madhyamakālaṃkāra* 64//

That position contradicts temporality. As for being "agreeable only when not analyzed," if something is refuted by any kind of investigation, it is said not to exist. How could these [non-existent] things have causal capacity or arising-and-cessation?

Moreover, to one who has established dharmas as without essence, one should ask:

> (a) Mere things (*vastumātra), (b) appearances, (c) capacities, [or] (d) the dependently arisen by asserting that these are without nature, you completely negate phenomena! //11//

> The subject—self-nature (*svabhāva)—is not proven and is refuted by experience. For the first and the others there could be no potential, nor arising and ceasing. //12//

The term *niḥsvabhāva* excludes *svabhāva*. Therefore, [phenomena] arise as <u>mere real things</u> (*vastumātra*), or <u>appearances</u>, or <u>capacities</u> (*nus pa*, *śakti) or <u>interdependent origination</u>.

Among these, the first two are not established, are not proven as self-essences, and contradict experience. As for the remaining two (c and d), <u>there could be no potential, nor arising and ceasing</u>.

The Middle Path is as follows:

> Those non-existent dharmas appear—not from material, nor from something else, nor from nothing, because there are two faults. For that reason, they have the nature of awareness. //13//

Dharmas, [i.e.] the aggregates and so forth, are <u>non-existent</u> because, apart from the characteristic of non-duality, they lack a self-nature (*svabhāva*) which is singular or multiple. In that way, it is established that "<u>These</u> [<u>dharmas</u>] <u>appear</u>." When analyzed, from what do these dharmas appear? First of all, <u>not from material,</u> because appearances are established as [arising] from that which has only awareness [as its nature]. Awareness is also <u>not from something other</u>, because qualities (*dharma) of one thing do not arise as the objects of another thing. <u>They do not arise</u> from what is <u>without</u> nature, nor from something false, because of there being <u>two faults</u>. To be specific:

[Fault 1:] If these [appearances arise from] what is without nature, they would not arise as real things, which are awareness that possesses causes.

[Fault 2:] Also, things would not be non-random, because they would not depend on what is established at a specific time, and interdependent origination would also be abandoned.

For that reason, those [non-existent dharmas] have the nature of awareness. Since they are not [produced] from something material, nor from something other, nor from the non-existent, they should be understood as appearing falsely out of just this true nature which is awareness.

> "That which has an existent and non-existent nature does not exist."
> Then what is being negated? //14ab//

If existent and non-existent natures do not exist, what are you trying to negate?

> If you answer "imputation" (*samāropa) then that would be just like
> what is imagined by the imagination of the unreal. //14cd//

[The opponent] says, "we negate that which has an existent and non-existent nature that is imputed (samāropa)." In that case, the aggregates and so on, which have the nature of the imagination of the unreal, are imputed (samāropa) to be existent. By what is it so imputed? By the imagination of the unreal!

Because it also has the nature (ngo bo nyid) of clarity, that which has an unreal nature (bdag nyid)—i.e. the aggregates and so forth—appears clearly.

[Objection:] How is that called a nature? It is not appropriate that the absence of a nature [i.e., an unreal nature] would appear clearly. How does an unimputed absence of nature appear?

[Answer:] It is because there are no unimputed [objects]. Since there are no external objects, cognitions of the imagined [nature] are erroneous. They are not non-conceptual, because it is not reasonable for self-awareness to be erroneous.

[The opponent] says, "in that case [we assert that] blue, yellow, and so forth are not imputations," [We answer:]

> Imputations, which appear without existing, are reasonable, as in the
> case of habitual misconstrual (*abhiniveśa). //15ab//

The error that takes concepts to be atoms [causes what is not produced by atoms] to appear as atoms even though those do not exist. Therefore, [atoms] are an imputation. In the same way, [due to] error that takes the non-conceptual to be blue and so on, there is the appearance of blue.

[Opponent: blue and so forth can't be imputations] because [the idea that] the imputation is of the nature of mental substance is refuted by trustworthy awareness (i.e., pramāṇa).

We respond:

> Distinctions (*bye brag*, **bheda*), which are proven to be false, are [nonetheless] established because they appear. //15cd//

[Distinctions, i.e.,] particular qualities (*khyad par rnams*, **viśeṣa*) of what is false are themselves also <u>false</u>, [but] they are <u>established</u> in terms of their being <u>appearances</u>. Whether they are established or refuted as being real things by *pramāṇa*, that which has the characteristics of the aggregates and so forth does not have a nature (*bdag nyid*) [in that it] has been refuted by *pramāṇa*. In terms of the conceptual aspect, their [seeming] externality, commonality, and so forth are established as appearing. Take, for example, a cow.

Also, the *Pramāṇavārttika* states:

> The form (*rūpa*) appears in that [cognition] as though it were external, as though it were a single thing, and as though it were excluded from other things. [But that form] is unreal, because it is not a factor in analysis // PV I.77//

[The PV] also states:

> The referent of words [is expressed in the way that it is cognized], but it does not exist. [And co-instantiation does not exist in a real thing.] //PV I.84//

Therefore, because a false thing has the nature of mental substance, a false thing is established as appearing. Therefore, it is not refuted by *pramāṇa*, but it being a real thing *is* refuted by *pramāṇa*.

In saying that it is false, why do you speak of a proof statement? [We respond:]

[Opponent:] If it is correct to say it is false, how could you speak of a proof statement (*grub pa'i sgra*)? We respond:

> It is false, but that nature is contradictory with external objects. *Everything* is not established to be false; since [if it were,] how would distinctions appear? //16//

There are two [possible ways to approach] the non-establishment of what is false: (1) blue and so forth are not real things, and (2) everything is just false.

Per the first: (1) if blue and so forth were [caused by] <u>external objects</u>, then they would be <u>objects</u> separate from awareness, so it would be <u>contradictory</u> for [blue] to be a real thing that is of that nature [of awareness].

 (2) It is also contradictory for [the experience of seeing blue] to be false. Seeing blue and so on—if that appears through the self-nature of a false blue, then that

[blue appearance] would have the false nature of that [false blue]. That is not the case, because it would absurdly follow that even [the mere appearance of] blue and so on are false.

Also, things' appearing as particulars such as blue and so on would not be established, because no false thing whatsoever can be established. There cannot be direct perception or inference about something completely false, as was previously shown.

> [Opponent:] It is difficult to connect false [appearances] with the true awareness that is their nature. [We respond: in that case,] concepts and objects would occupy the same space; [but they are] even more difficult to connect! //17//

Imputations and their nature are not difficult to connect. If one thinks they are difficult to connect in that way, then concepts would not be errors. In a conceptual cognition, one cognizes the mere exclusion of a "non-cow." Because that [cognition] has the self-nature of being a concept, the appearance [in the conceptual cognition] is habitually misconstrued as being of the same nature as the object which is clearly appearing. Exaggerated concepts and the actual objects [to which they are applied] are not of the same nature. Why would someone think these are not even more difficult to connect [than phenomena and their nature]?

"There is no problem in making a presentation in accord with the way that a false thing is experienced." If someone says this, then what fault is there in conceptual cognition, either?

> [Opponent:] Moreover, [if] just through habituated misconstrual cognition has the nature of a resemblance [to its alleged object], then [cognition appears with] the image of *what*?
>
> [We respond by asking:] How then are [individual appearances] differentiated from one another? //18//

Having cognized something that is other than the image, one is unable to make distinctions [or classifications], [as in the case of] cognizing a vase and not a cloth. In this context, as in the case of seeing [a vase], one conceptualizes a vase in the way that there is an image of a vase through seeing a vase.

Even conceptualization takes as its object a thing (*vastu*) in its entirety because the thing lacks any parts (*aṁśa*).

> Also, one is aware of, and misconstrues, conceptual images as having the characteristic of being excluded from being singular. Therefore, conceptual cognitions (*blo*) are established through error. //19//

Those conceptual cognitions are established as dual through error in that way. The error consists in the representation of itself (*rang gi rnam par rig pa*) with a nature (*ngo bo*) that is excluded from being singular. The misconstrual of that as being object—[that] is an error. Likewise, [other instances of] awareness are erroneous about something else.

[Opponent:] If this single knower (*rig pa po gcig pu 'di nyid*) is mistaken to be [dualistic appearances of] blue and so forth, how does [this kind of] error arise? We answer:

> Blue and so forth and cognition of them are not separate; they are asserted to be similar. The actuality of cognition is directly perceived; [perceiving it] as having the nature of blue and so forth is an error. //20//

The nature of awareness is asserted to be singular because blue and so forth and the awareness [that cognizes them] are not different. That very awareness is a valid direct perception regarding knowing itself to have the nature of cognition; [cognizing itself as] having the nature of blue and so forth is an error. This is because blue and so forth are false, since they are devoid of being one or many.

For example, conceptual cognition is a valid direct perception in regard to its own nature but is erroneous in terms of misconstruing its object (*don*, **artha*). This is because blue and so forth and the cognition of them are not different.

[The opponent] says: "What refutes blue and so forth also refutes the nature (*ngo bo*) of the cognition of them.

We respond—

> Because it is a direct perception, because there is nothing superior [to it], and because it is not imputed: [for these reasons] self-awareness—which is the nature of cognition—is not harmed, [but] blue and so forth are refuted. //21//

There is nothing that refutes the nature (*ngo bo*) of self-awareness because it is a direct perception of itself. Direct perception cannot be refuted by something else. Nothing superior means that something superior to direct perception, which could refute it, does not exist. If its nature as cognition were refuted, then that [cognition] would have to have been an imputation. And that is incorrect, because it does not have any other nature.

Blue and so forth are refuted by self-awareness. The reason is explained through the contraries [of the above proof]: (a) merely refuting a conceptualization does not make [something] perceptible; (b) because there does exist a refuting *pramāṇa* superior to [blue]; and (c) because [blue] is an imputation, since there exists an essence of a cognition that is different from [the cognition of] yellow and so forth

[An opponent says:] If the previous reasoning of one-nor-many refutes blue and so on, it also refutes the cognition that is their nature.

[We respond:] It is not like that. Since, according to the system of those who maintain that everything is false in that way, all these cognitions—which seem to be non-existent—are erroneous. Therefore, one could not prove direct perception even in the slightest. Therefore, because there could be no definition determination regarding the three modes [of a logical syllogism], all this reasoning is pseudo-reasoning.

Therefore, while conceptually constructed things do not exist, the imagination of the unreal does exist. It remains the case that due to that imputational cognition, there is awareness of itself but what is appearing does not exist.

> If all cognitions are appearances [of what] does not exist, there could
> be neither direct perception nor inference. How could someone who
> advocates a position in which there is no evidence, and everything
> is false, be a speaker? //22//

Those who assert that everything is false give a proof: "Whatever is neither one nor many is devoid of nature, like the horns of a rabbit. Blue, yellow, and so forth [are devoid of nature] because they are neither one nor many."

This [position] is completely incoherent. That is to say, for them, knowing all cognitions to be false makes them appear as non-existent. Therefore, [cognitions in which phenomena appear to exist] are erroneous, and erroneous cognitions are not direct perceptions. Because of that, there could also be no inference.

Since the three aspects are not established, all evidence is counterfeit evidence for those [arguments]. A false thing is not evidence for anything. And if something is not evidence for an inference, then how could it [count as] evidence [at all]? Or, if [the opponents maintain that] there is evidence for inferences, that would contradict their own [pseudo-Madhyamaka] philosophical system. Moreover, those who argue that everything is false were [also] refuted earlier [in this text].

Furthermore: how is it that phenomena such as blue and so forth are established in this context? If one says it is through experience, [according to the opponent] experiential awareness is false, so it does not exist as an established object (*artha) [that could prove something else]. If one says [they are established] through direct perception, that's also not true, because what appears falsely is an error.

Also, "devoid [of being one or many]" does not exist, so it is devoid of all causal capacity. Therefore, how could it be evidence? Or, if ["devoid" indicates] an affirming negation, that is not established by itself.

Or, if this is a case of *svabhāvahetu*, then it is [either] a perception of something that contradicts the pervader, or it's the non-perception of the pervader. In either

case [the evidence] is not established on its own, because "non-perception" is [about] a thing that has the characteristic of being perceptible in principle.

Moreover, if blue and so on lack *svabhāva*, then what is the *svabhāva* of the subject [of the syllogism]?

Or else, [an opponent] might say: The subject is the self-nature of blue and so on. The self-nature of a specific thing (*dngos po*) is to be proven as emptiness. While the self-nature of blue ought to be pervaded by the property of being either "one" or "another," that is not the case for mere self-nature.

That [position] is also not reasonable, because the pervasion is not established. There is no capacity to prove real things because there is no *pramāṇ*ic perception or inference that proves it. Therefore, even the subject of the example is not established.

Moreover, "how could there be a speaker" means that there is no proponent of a proof, or a proponent of a refutation. If someone who says that everything is false proposes [proofs or refutations], that would contradict her own tenet system, because [proofs and refutations] are causes for others' understanding, and if everything is false then everything is causeless.

Further, all proofs and refutations are not established for you, because proofs depend on *pramāṇa*s, and you do not accept *pramāṇa*. If [you did] accept it, then since proofs [are given] in the modes of the three natures, how could you be a proponent [of the position] that everything is false? Thus, all of your own and others' proofs and refutations are unproven [according to your own position].

If [an opponent] says, "we argue that *pramāṇa*s are non-existent," [we respond:] There are *pramāṇa*s; therefore, since that kind of [position] is not a *pramāṇa*, we are able to refute it and to prove our own view. *Pramāṇa* is not refuted, even by a hundred [non-]*pramāṇa*s! One can state the opponents' mere assertions, which are not *pramāṇa*s, but what's the point, since one would be stating what is not established for the other [party in the debate]?

According to this position, anything non-different from what is false is also false. An example is a false thing. One should not refute the arguments of the opponent by saying something like "a cognition in which things appear to be false is not different from the false."

Those who assert that everything exists (*Sarvāstivādins) declare that the objects of which one is aware is not false, just like the nature of awareness.

Those who proclaim that everything exists declare: "Since blue and so forth are objects of knowledge, [the evidence would consist of] the perception of something that contradicts the pervader.

[Response:] This [argument] also is not good.

In this kind of reasoning, because one is engaging with an object of awareness even in the case of conceptualizing an other-exclusion (*apoha*), there is no certainty due to [the evidence] being too general.

Or, if [concepts consisting in other-exclusions] are not objects of knowledge, because the pervasion is not established regarding false things, then their exclusion [from the domain of dissimilar instances] would be doubtful.

Moreover, [blue] is an object devoid of being one or many. It is thereby established as a non-existent object, so the basis is not established.

To give another [gloss on] "how could there be a proponent?" (v. 22d): it can mean that there would not even be proponents of the dharma, as follows.

For those who propound that everything is false, all these cognitions are delusion. For that reason, even the Perfection of Wisdom—which has the characteristic of not being delusory—would be thrown out, even for accomplished Buddhas and for Bodhisattvas.

By rejecting inference, omniscience and the attainment of other worlds and so forth would also be rejected. Since cause and effect are rejected, karma, result, the [Four] Truths, and the [Three] Jewels would also be rejected. So how could these be advocating dharma?

This [completes] the refutation of the positions of those who posit that everything is false.

Passage Two: MAV on *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* verse 34 (*ad*. MAV verses 33-34)

Nāgārjuna also says this:

> The great elements and so forth—which are explained [by the Lord]—are contained in consciousness. They cease in awareness of that; they are surely falsely imagined. //YṢ 34//

The great elements and so forth, earth etc., are stated by the Lord. Their appearances are contained—that is, completely included—in consciousness, which is the imagination of the unreal. This is because those [elements] appear by way of the imagination of the unreal.

Likewise, due to the force of having cultivated correct awareness, those [appearances] dissipate—they cease arising; i.e. they do not appear. Why is this? They are surely falsely imagined indicates that what appears in false awareness does not appear in correct awareness. Here, earth and so forth are included in

consciousness, and that when correct awareness arises, delusion is excluded [from it].

There are those who assert that the aggregate of form consists in the self-appearance of external objects. They assert that the overturning of delusion as characterized by the exhaustion of the other four aggregates. Those individuals are not followers (*slob ma*) of Nāgārjuna, because they declare the negation of an existent awareness and so forth, and [because] it is taught that earth and so forth are imputations.

There are also some who assert that blue and so forth along with the awareness that apprehends them are false in the same way, positing that they are of equal status (*gnas par 'dra bar smra ba*). These are also not followers of Nāgārjuna.

Passage Three: The Two Truths (*ad.* MAV verses 42-44)

> The focus that is afflicted and the focus that is pure:
> The conventional and ultimate are the two truths, respectively. //42//

That which is [an object of] <u>focus</u> which is <u>afflicted</u> is the <u>conventional</u> truth. That which is [an object of] <u>focus</u> which is <u>pure</u> is the <u>ultimate</u> truth. What are these? [The next root verse] states:

> The nature (*bdag nyid*) which is imagined by the imagination of the unreal is the conventional. Just so, the nature which is empty is known as the ultimate truth. //42//

Being from the Mahāyāna, four aspects are asserted. In order to explain them, [the next verse] states:

> These truths are asserted to be the conventionally existent and the ultimately existent. "Existent as imputation" and "substantially existent" [refer to] the imputed and the imagination of the unreal. //43//

The conventional truth is <u>conventionally existent</u>. The ultimate truth is <u>ultimately existent</u>. The imagined nature (*ngo bo*) is <u>existent as imputation,</u> since it is mere designation. The nature (*ngo bo*) of the [impure] other-dependent is <u>substantially existent</u> (**dravyasat*) because it arises interdependently.

These are the two truths.

Passage Four: Concluding Sections

IV.1 The Middle Way of the Three Natures

Now, if one asks about the expression, "the system of the Middle Way in the mode of the three natures" it proclaims: What is called "existent" is one extreme. What is

called "non-existent" is the second extreme. What takes place (*gyur pa*) in the middle of these is the mode of the middle way, the definitive realization (*nges par rtogs pa*) of the natures. Also, how are these expressed? All *dharmas* are not existent; they are also not non-existent. [What appears] as the imputed nature does not exist; [there is existence] by way of the other-dependent and perfected natures, as stated in the Madhyāntavibhāga:

> Unreal imagination exists. Within it, duality does not exist, but emptiness does exist in it. It also exists in terms of that [emptiness].

> Not empty, but also not non-empty: from that, everything is explained. Because of existing, not existing, and existing, that is the Middle Path. (MVB I.1-2)

So it's said.

IV.2 Refuting *Māyopamavāda

The position that the Middle Path means that while ultimately nothing exists, things do exist conventionally, has already been refuted.

Others assert the following: "just as the appearances of illusory elephants are not existent, likewise all phenomena are also not existent. As for that, non-existence is said to appear; therefore, that all phenomena are just like illusions is the Middle Path."

This is also not true. If it were like that, since those [Māyopamavādins] establish *pramāṇa* as non-existent, they are therefore unable to prove the existence of anything at all! When there is no *pramāṇa*, what need is there to speak of [proving things] through mere appearances?

[An opponent] might argue that while [phenomena] do not exist in terms of their having the characteristic of causal capacity, they do exist insofar as they have the characteristic of appearance. If that were the case, they would exist as mere imputations. Furthermore, while the horns of a rabbit could exist [according to this position], they could not cease to exist. On the other hand, rabbits' horns and so forth are also not considered to be solely non-existent.

Moreover, if one negates existence as a defining characteristic of causal capacity, it would follow that there could be no certainty about accomplishing what is beneficial and avoiding what is not, and so forth. Therefore, it is correct that, by asserting existence, causal capacity also exists; it is not the case that there is just mere appearance.

For example, wood, rocks, and so forth. While these exist with their own nature, they can appear with a nature they do not have—such as being an elephant—due to

the manipulations of an illusionist. To say that, for this reason, the wood etc. is also illusory is the position of that [opponent].

Thus, while all phenomena have the nature of awareness, [that awareness] appears as the nature of blue and so forth through contamination of karmic tendencies (*vāsanā) from beginningless time. Therefore, all phenomena are asserted to be like illusions.

Therefore, the appearances (*ākāra) of blue and so forth do not exist, but it is not the case that something erroneous and the emptiness that is its nature are non-existent. This is called the Middle Path. Therefore, it [i.e., awareness] is asserted to have the three natures, and this is the correct interpretation (*tshul*) of Madhyamaka. Thus.

IV.3 The Four Schools

The Buddha taught four [*siddhānta*s] as follows: Those who assert that a cognition without an image apprehends an object such as blue are Vaibhāṣikas. Those who assert that objects are apprehended by the experience of an image, a reflection which [appear] on the basis of [external] objects are Sautrāntikas.

Some do not assert that blue and so forth are external objects separate from consciousness, but rather that these are consciousness, and that blue and so forth arise through the power of latent karmic habits (*vāsanā) from beginningless time. Those who assert this are Yogācāras. The position which adheres to the three natures is the [correct] Madhyamaka. But those who assert that everything is false are [followers of] pseudo-Madhyamaka

IV.4 Concluding Verses and the Colophons

Due to their connection with *pramāṇa*, scripture, and treatises (*śāstra), the insights contained in this text are the Middle Way (*dbu ma'i tshul*). Regarding the meaning of whatever is the speech of a Victor, how could the Unconquered Protector [Maitreya[401]] not be a *pramāṇa*? //45//

Entering into a state of unerring certainty
The ultimate teaching, the activity of the Dharmakāya,
This definitively conquers various wrong views
Regarding the meaning of the sphere of Buddhahood (*sangs rgyas yul*). //46//

Maitreya is the foundational *pramāṇa*
Regarding the meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom.
Whatever teachings were spoken by this Victor

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[401] *mi pham dgon po*, *ajitanātha*. *mi pham* is a well-attested epithet of Maitreya in the Tibetan tradition.

Cause one to enter unerring certainty //47//

Ratnākaraśānti composed this *Ornament of the Middle Way* for the purpose of delighting scholars who correctly understand the modes of pramāṇa, and who understand the meaning of the Buddha-vehicle //48//

This concludes the *Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti Madhyamāpratipad-siddhi* by the glorious learned Mahāpaṇḍita, Ratnākaraśānti.

Lotsāwa Shākya 'Od translated this on his own. [This text] was composed in the first month of spring during [the reign of] the glorious king *'dod pa'i lha* (*Kāmadeva). It was received one hundred forty years [later].

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MAV   P   Pedurma: Ratnākaraśānti. *dbu ma rgyan gyi 'grel ba dbu ma'i lam grub pa zhes bya ba* (*Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti Madhyamāpratipad-siddhi*), trans. Śākya 'Od. *bstan 'gyur*, *dpe bsdur ma* edition. Vol 78: pp. 263-312. Toh. 3935.

    D   *bstan 'gyur*, *sde dge* edition. *Sems tsam* Vol. *Hi*, 102a5-120b1.

PPU   P   *shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i man ngag* (*Prajñāpāramitopadeśa*), trans. Śāntibhadra and 'Gos Lhas btsas. *bstan 'gyur*, *dpe bsdur ma* edition. *Sems tsam*. Vol. 78, pp. 357-434. Toh. 4085.

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