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Thinking the Unthinkable / Unthinking the Thinkable:
Conceptual thought, nonconceptuality,
and Gorampa Sonam Senge's *Synopsis of Madhyamaka*

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Abstract

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The fifteenth-century Sakyapa scholar-monk Gorampa Sonam Senge was a prolific author, but he is most renowned for his philosophical writings on Madhyamaka. His encyclopedic *Synopsis of Madhyamaka* (*dbu ma'i spyi don*) has come to represent the mainstream philosophical view of the Sakya tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, and its arguments continue to be studied in both Sakya and non-Sakya monastic institutions throughout Asia. Gorampa's unique flavor of Madhyamaka is distinguished based on his understanding of the two truths (*bden pa gnyis*), his methods for employing analysis within the tetralemma (*mu bzhi*), and his conception of a buddha's enlightened awareness (*ye shes*). Focusing on these key issues, Gorampa manages to successfully debate with other Mādhyamika thinkers using rational, analytic arguments, while simultaneously employing those rational arguments against the entire project of rational analysis itself. As a result, Gorampa advocates for a philosophical practice by which one utilizes conceptual thought in order to eradicate conceptual thought in its entirety.

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A note about technical terminology:

All Tibetan terms are transliterated according to the Wylie system. Proper Tibetan names are rendered phonetically, and their Wylie transliteration is given along with their first occurrence in the text. Proper names, when transliterated, are not italicized, and their initial main letters (*ming gzhi*) are capitalized for the sake of clarity.

Sanskrit terms, when used, are provided with diacritics, with the exception of words that have been standardized in English (e.g., "samsara").

Chapter 1: Gorampa, the *Synopsis*, and The Way Things Really Are

It is common to hear that a skilled musician "loses herself" in her performance, or that an athlete is "in the zone" while competing. States such as these seem to arise effortlessly, without the use of rational thought processes. These sorts of mental states might be understood as being entirely devoid of conceptual thought; or they might be understood as necessarily involving concepts, even if those concepts are not foregrounded in one's experience at the time. The status of seemingly nonconceptual mental states similar to these is the main focus of the present project. In particular, this dissertation seeks to contribute to discussions regarding the question, "What is nonconceptuality, and how does it relate to conceptual thought?"

I ask this question specifically in relation to the writings of the fifteenth-century Tibetan Buddhist scholar Gorampa Sonam Senge (Go rams pa bSod nams Seng ge, 1429-89),[1] and his understanding of a particular nonconceptual mental state known as *spros bral*.[2] The term *spros bral* means "freedom from conceptual proliferations," and it represents the state of an enlightened mind, free from all forms of ignorance. It is, in other words, the culmination of the Buddhist path; it is the end goal toward which all Buddhists should strive.

Gorampa, as we will soon see, is first and foremost a philosopher. Many of his writings involve analyzing things that appear to ordinary persons in an attempt to understand their true nature. This is not uncommon to the practice of Buddhist philosophy as a whole; all Buddhist philosophy relies on the shared assumption that that

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[1] Gorampa's full name with titles is Gowo Rabjampa Sonam Senge (Go bo Rab 'byams pa bSod nams Seng ge), and he is sometimes referred to as Sonam Senge.
[2] Pronounced *trö drel.* The Sanskrit term is *niśprapañca*.

there is a difference between the way that things appear and the way that things really are,[3] and all Buddhists agree that the goal of Buddhist practice involves ceasing to engage with things just as they appear, and coming to perceive things as they really are. However, different Buddhist traditions have developed competing theories regarding the nature of and relationship between appearances and reality, as well as the techniques that one must practice in order to come to perceive things as they truly are.

According to Gorampa, reality is something that must be experienced without being mediated by concepts. At the same time, he argues that in order to access this reality, one must first go through a rigorous process of conceptual analysis. Gorampa contends that one must investigate appearances so thoroughly that at the end of one's investigation, one comes to the realization that rational analysis alone is insufficient to fully engage with reality. That is, rational analysis can *approximate* a realization of the way things really are, but it cannot take someone to an *actual* realization of reality. One must engage in subsequent practices that transcend conceptual thought in order to fully access reality. In the same way, a skilled pianist might argue that while repeated practice and a conceptual understanding of the mechanics of the piano are necessary for developing one's skills, after a certain amount of practice, *thinking* too much about the sonata that one is playing will prevent one from fully experiencing the music as it is meant to be experienced.

Gorampa claims that while philosophy is an indispensible tool on the Buddhist path to enlightenment, it is by itself insufficient for inducing an accurate realization of the way things really are. Philosophy must, at a certain point, turn in on itself, in order to

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[3] Tibetan Buddhist philosophers refer to the way that things appear as *snang tshul*, a "mode of appearance." The way things really are is called *gnas tshul*, the "mode of existence."

allow one to transcend the very philosophical concepts that one has constructed. In other words, Gorampa argues that the role of philosophy is to undo philosophy; one must cultivate certain kinds of conceptual thoughts in order to eventually undermine conceptuality in its entirety.

Appearances and Reality

The Madhyamaka, or "Middle Way" school of Buddhism, which began in India around the second century, C.E., understands reality in terms of emptiness (*śūnyatā, stong pa nyid*). For followers of this tradition (referred to as Mādhyamikas), seeing things as they really are involves realizing that all appearances are actually empty. Although the term "emptiness" carries negative overtones in English, the Madhyamaka tradition does not argue that reality is nothingness. Rather, emptiness means that all of the things that appear to us – things such as objects, ideas, and persons – lack a stable, unchanging, independent, permanent essence. All things, in other words, are *empty of an essence*.

Madhyamaka explains the relationship between appearances and reality in terms of the two truths (Tib. *bden pa gnyis,* Skt. *satyadvaya*). The way that things appear is called the conventional truth (Tib. *kun rdzob bden pa*, Skt. *saṃvṛtisatya*),[4] and the way things really are is called the ultimate truth (Tib. *don dam bden pa*, Skt. *paramārthasatya*). The two truths doctrine is central to Madhyamaka thought, and the

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[4] Throughout most of this work, I translate the term *kun rdzob* as "conventional." It is important to note, however, that the term carries the connotation of "concealing" or "obscuring." That is, in the context of the two truths, the conventional truth (*kun rdzob bden pa*) can also be understood as "a truth which conceals/obscures." Another term that can be translated as "conventional" is *tha snyad* (Skt. *vyavahāra*). This term denotes something that can be expressed in words. While Gorampa occasionally uses *kun rdzob* and *tha snyad* interchangeably, and both *kun rdzob bden pa* and *tha snyad bden pa* are similarly understood as that which is not ultimate truth (*don dam bden pa*), it is important to keep their connotative distinctions in mind. In short, *kun rdzob bden pa* means "conventional truth (in that it obscures the way things really are)," and *tha snyad bden pa* means "conventional truth (in that it can be expressed linguistically)."

ways in which Mādhyamikas understand the two truths inform their conceptions of the entirety of Buddhist thought and practice.

Over 500 years after Madhyamaka's initial conception in India, the tradition was introduced to Tibet. The seventh-century Indian Mādhyamika Candrakīrti, whose works were later translated into Tibetan by the scholar Patsab Nyimadrak (sPa tshab Nyi ma grags, 1055-1145?), became a highly influential figure in Tibetan Buddhism.[5] Candrakīrti's writings eventually achieved semi-canonical status among Tibetan Mādhyamikas, and by the fifteenth century, philosophical debates concerning Candrakīrti's particular interpretation of the two truths and their relationship to emptiness were commonplace. The heart of these debates focused on the ways in which Candrakīrti was understood to have articulated the discrepancies between appearances and emptiness, as well as the ways in which Buddhist practitioners should realize emptiness according to Candrakīrti's system.

Gorampa was one of the most influential interpreters of Candrakīrti's Madhyamaka in Tibet. An adherent of the Sakya (*sa skya*) school of Tibetan Buddhism, Gorampa was a vocal debater, involving himself in sectarian disputes with rivals belonging to a number of Tibetan traditions, most notably the Gelug (*dge lugs*) and Jonang (*jo nang*) sects. Although the Sakya school has produced many skilled debaters and philosophers over the course of the last millennium, Gorampa's particular interpretation of Candrakīrti has come to be upheld as representative of the mainstream

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[5] The Indian scholar Jayānanda (fl. 12th c.) is the only known Indian commentator on Candrakīrti's texts, and he also worked closely with Tibetan scholars to translate Candrakīrti's thought into Tibetan. Vose suggests that Jayānanda did not work with Patsab, but worked closely with several of Patsab's direct disciples. (Vose 2009, 54.)

Sakya view.[6] Gorampa's presentation of Madhyamaka remains a core component in the curriculum in Sakya monastic colleges, and continues to be studied, memorized, debated, and defended to this day.

The present study is concerned with Gorampa's understanding of the relationship between conceptual thought and *spros bral* as explained in his *Synopsis of Madhyamaka* (*dBu ma'i sPyi Don*,[7] hereafter *Synopsis,* abbreviated BPD). I have chosen to focus on this text specifically, because it is the most detailed of Gorampa's Madhyamaka works and presents the most thorough explanation of this relationship. In particular, I will explore Gorampa's understanding of the differences between appearances and reality, and the ways in which he utilizes logic and reasoning to argue against his philosophical opponents. Gorampa argues that a conceptual, intellectual understanding of reality is necessary in order to eventually realize emptiness, but that this understanding alone is insufficient. Emptiness, he argues, is something that must be experienced – not just understood – in order to be fully realized. That is, although one "sees things as they really are" upon realizing emptiness, this realization does not involve concepts, nor does it actually involve the seeing of any *thing*.[8] A realization of emptiness is, according to Gorampa, a nonconceptual and nondual state that cannot be expressed in words. This

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[6] Gorampa's views are considered to represent the "mainstream" Sakyapa position by virtually all Sakyapa scholars who have been educated in major Sakya monastic institutions. This view was repeatedly expressed by every scholar with whom I worked during the course of my Fulbright-supported research in Nepal: both at the International Buddhist Academy in Kadhmandu, and at two Sakya Monlam festivals in Lumbini.

[7] The full title of this work is *The Profound Wish and Intention of All the Victors: The Suchness of Madhyamaka, Taught in General Terms, Which Is the Illumination of Its Definitive Meaning* (*rgyal ba thams cad kyi thugs kyi dgongs pa zab mo dbu ma'i de kho na nyid spyi'i ngag gis ston pa nges don rab gsal*). Although some summarize this text's title as *nges don rab gsal*, many Sakyapa scholars prefer to refer to this text as *dbu ma'i spyi don* to avoid confusion with another of Gorampa's texts, a commentary on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, which is more commonly abbreviated as *nges don rab gsal.*

[8] As will be explained below, Gorampa equates concepts (*rnam rtog*) with dualistic appearances (*gnyis snang*) of an apprehending subject and an apprehended object. As such, Gorampa argues that a realization of emptiness – that is, *spros bral* – is both nonconceptual and nondual.

understanding of freedom from conceptual proliferations is the heart of Gorampa's Madhyamaka, and it is his particular interpretation of this key point that sets his view apart from other Tibetan philosophers.

In addition to investigating Gorampa's ideas on their own terms, this dissertation also places Gorampa's Madhyamaka in dialogue with some contemporary discussions in analytic philosophy. With respect to Gorampa's understanding of rational analysis, I investigate the seemingly paradoxical way in which Gorampa interprets the tetralemma, and compare it to the theory of dialetheism in paraconsistent logic.[9] Regarding Gorampa's emphasis on *spros bral*, I place his views in dialogue with contemporary discussions of the distinction between "knowing-that" and "knowing-how."[10]

While the primary aim of this project is to arrive at a deeper understanding of Gorampa's Madhyamaka as it relates to the connections between conceptual thought and *spros bral*, I also utilize some of Gorampa's ideas to address several issues in analytic philosophy. While it would be naïve to think that Gorampa's views can fully resolve certain problems in western philosophy, I do believe that he has some useful things to say that can add to discussions among contemporary analytic thinkers. Gorampa's approach is one that builds on analytic thought, but also acknowledges that reality cannot be fully encompassed by analysis. By highlighting salient aspects of this particular approach to doing philosophy, I aim to addresses some issues that are either overlooked, or cannot be fully resolved by analytic philosophy alone.

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[9] See chapter 4.
[10] See chapter 5.

A Brief Biography of Gorampa

Gorampa was born in 1429, in the Gowo (go bo) region of Kham (Khams), in Eastern Tibet. His father's name was Rutsa Zhangkyab (Ru tsa Zhang skyabs), and his mother was Gyalwamen (rGyal ba sman). His biographies[11] indicate that as a child, he easily mastered reading and showed a strong affinity for the dharma. At age eight or ten, Gorampa received novice monastic vows from his teacher, Kunga Bum (Kun dga' 'bum), and was given the name Sonam Senge (bSod nams Seng ge). During his teenage years, Gorampa studied Madhyamaka texts and received a number of tantric[12] empowerments. Several of his biographies indicate that at a young age, he had a powerful vision of the bodhisattva of wisdom, Mañjughoṣa, holding his sword of wisdom in the air.[13] His teachers were increasingly impressed with his studies, and he eventually came to be known as Rabjampa (*rab 'byams pa*), a title that means "all-encompassing one," signifying his excellent command of the textual tradition. His full name thus became Gowo Rabjampa Sonam Senge (Go bo Rab 'byams pa bSod nams Seng ge).

At age nineteen, Gorampa traveled to central Tibet to further pursue his studies. He briefly attended Nalendra (Na len dra) Monastery in Central Tibet, one of the country's prominent Sakya monastic institutions, where he studied Madhyamaka texts with the monastery's founder and prominent Sakyapa teacher, Rongton Sheja Kunrig

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[11] The works that inform this short biography are a collection of seven hagiographies (*rnam thar*) collected in A mes zhabs Ngag dbang Kun dga' bSod nams 2003, vol. XXIX. The authors of these hagiographies are: rJe btsun Sangs rgyas Rin chen (15th-16th c.?); gLo bo mKhan chen (1441-1525); Ra dbon Yon tan 'Byung gnas (15th c.); Yig mkan a'u gZhon nu bZang po (n.d.); dGa' gdung pa Rin chen dPal bzang (15th c.); gSang phu ba Don grub Legs bzang (15th c.); and Chos rje Kun dga' mChog ldan (15th c.). While there are some discrepancies concerning dates and minor details in some of these works, the major events in Gorampa's life are related similarly in all seven of these hagiographies, indicating that a fairly standard account of Gorampa's life had been agreed upon during or shortly after his death.

[12] Tantra (also known as Vajrayāna) is considered by Tibetan Buddhists to be one of the three vehicles (*yāna*) to enlightenment: Śrāvakayāna, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna. This system consists primarily of esoteric practices, and is understood as being capable of leading to enlightenment in a single lifetime.

[13] Mañjughoṣa, or Mañjuśrī, is a bodhisattva associated with the highest form of wisdom (*prajñā*).

(Rong ston Shes bya Kun rig, 1367-1449). Rongton passed away the following summer, and Gorampa began to travel throughout central Tibet, studying with a number of other Sakyapa scholars. He spent several years in Lhasa, where he studied with Sangye Phel (Sangs rgyas 'phel, 1412-1485) at Dreyul ('bras yul) Monastery. There he mastered Madhyamaka, Pramāṇa,[14] and Abhidharma[15] texts, and received a number of tantric transmissions.

At age twenty-five, Gorampa traveled to Ngor Ewam Choden (Ngor E wam Chos ldan) to study tantra with the monastery's founder, Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo (Ngor chen Kun dga' bZang po, 1382-1456), and at age twenty-six, he received full monastic ordination. He stayed at Ewam Choden for several years, receiving the complete Lamdre (*lam 'bras*)[16] initiation twice, as well as many other tantric transmissions and instructions from a number of other teachers, including Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo's successor, Muchen Konchok Gyaltsen (Mus chen dKon mchog rGyal mtshan, 1388-1469).

At age thirty-two, Gorampa left Ewam Choden to return to Kham. On the way, he stopped to make a brief visit to Dreyul Monastery. His former teacher, Sangye Phel, seeing his mastery over many texts, requested that Gorampa stay at Dreyul to teach the younger monks. At first Gorampa refused, but he was eventually persuaded to stay. After some time, Sangye Phel temporarily left Dreyul, and Gorampa replaced him as abbot of

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[14] The *pramāṇa* (*tshad ma*) literature of Buddhist thought is primarily concerned with logic and epistemology. See Dreyfus 1997; Dunne 2004.

[15] *Abhidharma* (*chos mngon pa*) refers to a class of texts consisting of highly systematized lists based on early Buddhist *sūtra*s. Later commentaries on *Abhidharma* literature such as Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* became influential in Tibetan thought. See de La Vallee Poussin 1988, vol. I; Bodhi 1993; Asaṅga 2001.

[16] Lamdre (literally "Path and Result") is the main tantric tradition of the Sakya school. See Stearns 2006.

the monastery. During this time he composed several commentaries, and gave teachings on Prajñāparamitā,[17] Pramāṇa, Vinaya,[18] and Abhidharma.

After Sangye Phel returned to Dreyul, Gorampa traveled back to Ewam Choden. He continued his studies and composed a number of commentaries on tantra. Shortly after this, Gorampa founded Tanag Serling (rTa nag gSer gling), a small institute in the upper Tsang (gTsang) region of Tibet. During 1473-1474, Gorampa founded another monastery, Thubten Namgyal Ling (Thub bstan rNam rgyal Ling). There, he developed a curriculum that emphasized both rigorous philosophical education and thorough training in tantra.

After nearly a decade at Thubten Namgyal Ling, Gorampa returned once more to Ewam Choden, where he was installed as the sixth abbot of the monastery. He remained there for four years, teaching the Lamdre, in addition to a number of other sutric and tantric texts. At the end of his tenure as abbot of Ewam Choden, Gorampa returned to Thubten Namgyal Ling to further develop the monastic curriculum there.

By the end of his lifetime, Gorampa was well known throughout Tibet. In 1488, he traveled to Sakya to give teachings and receive offerings. On his return trip, however, he fell ill, and passed away in 1489. His body was transported back to Thubten Namgyal Ling, where he was cremated and his remains were enshrined. He is considered to be an incarnation of Jetsun Drakpa Gyaltsen (rJe btsun Grags pa rGyal mtshan, 1147-1216), the third of the Five Founding Masters of the Sakya tradition (*sa skya gong ma lnga*).

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[17] "Perfection of Wisdom," the texts which formed the basis for the Mahāyāna stream of Buddhism (of Madhyamaka can be considered a part). See Conze 2000; O-rgyan-jigs-med-chos-kyi-dban-po, Brunnhölzl, and Tson-kha-pa Blo-bzan-grags-pa 2012.

[18] Rules for Buddhist practitioners. See Gyonen and Gishin 1995; Hartmann 2010. Vinaya literature, together with *sūtra* and *abhidharma*, form the "three baskets" (*tripiṭaka*) of the Buddhist canon.

The Suppression and Resurgence of Gorampa's Texts

Gorampa lived during a period of political instability in Tibet. The Sakya sect had once dominated the country as a result of close ties with the Mongol army,[19] but by the mid-fourteenth century, the Sakyapas had been overthrown. Shortly after the fall of the Sakya hegemony, a new sect began to form. The monk Tsongkhapa (Tsong kha pa Blo bzang Grags pa, 1357-1419), a philosopher who was originally educated in the Sakya tradition,[20] founded Ganden (dGa' ldan) Monastery near Lhasa. His successors came to be known as Gandenpas, and out of this tradition the Gelug sect (*dge lugs*, literally "Virtuous Tradition") eventually formed. Although he did not set out to create his own distinct philosophical school, Tsongkhapa was a reformer of sorts, imposing strict monastic rules and emphasizing philosophical studies and analytical debate at Ganden. As the tradition became systematized, largely under the influence of Tsongkhapa's student Kedrup (mKhas 'grub dGe legs dPal bZang po, 1385-1438), it garnered a reputation as the most philosophically rigorous school of Tibetan Buddhism.[21]

The late fifteenth century saw rapid growth in the Gelug school, and by the sixteenth century, Mongols once again showed an interest in forming ties with Tibet. In 1578, the Mongol ruler Altan Khan (1507-1582) invited Sonam Gyatso (bSod nams rGya mtsho, 1543-1588), the third incarnation of the abbot of Drepung monastery, to his court.[22] In 1578, Sonam Gyatso received the name "Dalai," a translation of the name Gyatso (ocean), and became known as the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama's relationship

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[19] For details about the political history of the Sakya tradition, see Kapstein 2006, 110–116; Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang Chos kyi Nyi ma 2009, 169–196; Smith 2001, 99–109; Tseten 2008, 228–255; Van Schaik 2011, 72–84.

[20] Tsongkhapa was a student of the Sakyapa master Rendawa (1349-1412), a teacher whose views had great influence on Gorampa.

[21] For a brief overview of the early history and development of the Gelug tradition, see Powers 1995, 467–496; Kapstein 2006, 119–121.

[22] Van Schaik 2011, 114–117.

with the Mongol Khan assured Gelugpa dominance across Tibet. The death of Altan Khan in 1583, however, led to conflicts within Tibet.[23] The fourth Dalai Lama's death in 1617 led to escalated violence and rivalry among sects, leading the Gelugpas to seek out more Mongol support. By the mid-seventeenth century, the Mongol ruler Gushri Khan had granted full control of Tibet to the fifth Dalai Lama.[24] During his rule, the "Great Fifth" Dalai Lama orchestrated the forcible conversion of a number of non-Gelug monasteries in order to eliminate the threat of rebellion, further establishing Gelugpa dominance across Tibet. Although the fifth Dalai Lama did not convert any Sakya monasteries, his assertion of Gelugpa dominance did involve the destruction and suppression of texts that were critical of Tsongkhapa and the Gelug sect.[25]

Gorampa's texts were expressly critical of Tsongkhapa's views, and as such, they were among those destroyed or suppressed at the hands of the Gelugpa hegemony. It is worth noting that while the majority of Tibetan polemical texts – especially those composed in the centuries surrounding Gorampa's lifetime – do not explicitly identify their opponents, Gorampa's works offer harsh criticisms of Tsongkhapa, frequently referring to him by name. His *Distinguishing the Views* (*lta ba'i shan 'byed*), for example, contains an entire section refuting the view of "those who purport the extreme of nihilism to be Madhyamaka," singling out Tsongkhapa as the main proponent of this school of thought.[26] As a result, Gorampa's texts were destroyed or otherwise removed from Sakyapa monastic institutions, but his thought continued to be studied in Eastern Tibet – mostly in Kham – where the Gelugpa authorities were unable to exert as much

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[23] Ibid., 116–118.
[24] Ibid., 118–120.
[25] Kapstein 2006, 136–139.
[26] Cabezón and Dargyay 2007, 77, 155*ff.*

influence.[27] Gorampa's texts remained largely hidden, primarily studied in monasteries in Eastern Tibet, until the early twentieth century. Around 1905, the Sakyapa monk Jamgyal Rinpoche ('Jam rgyal Rin po che) collected Gorampa's extant works from monasteries across Eastern Tibet, and with permission from the thirteenth Dalai Lama, republished these works in Derge (sde dge) between 1910 and 1925.[28]

Today, Gorampa's texts are widely studied in a variety of Tibetan monastic communities. His texts constitute a core component of the curriculum in Sakya monastic colleges, and non-Sakya sects – most notably the Nyingma (*rnying ma*) and Kagyu (*bka' brgyud*) – have relied on the structure of Gorampa's arguments to further develop their own analytic traditions.[29] Although Gorampa's texts were banned from circulation in Tibet for nearly two hundred years, his philosophy was – and continues to be – taken seriously by Tibetan Buddhists both inside and outside of the Sakya tradition.

Gorampa's recovered texts comprise thirteen volumes, although some modern Sakyapa scholars suspect that a handful of his texts no longer exist.[30] Gorampa's extant texts, however, span a wide range of genres, indicating the scholar's mastery over a number of topics in Tibetan Buddhism. He composed treatises on the Abhidharma and Vinaya, several commentaries on the text *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, various meditation texts based on Tantra, and several Madhyamaka commentaries.[31] Gorampa's Madhyamaka

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[27] Acharya Thubten Gongphel, personal communication.

[28] Jackson 2003, 58.

[29] The Nyingma scholar Mipham ('Jam mgon 'Ju Mi pham rNam rgyal rGya mtsho, 1846-1912) is a notable example of this, mirroring many of Gorampa's arguments in his own writings. It is partially this mirroring of Gorampa's philosophy that led to Mipham's role as an influential thinker in the development of ecumenical (*ris med*) thought in Tibetan Buddhism. See Chapter 6 below; Duckworth 2011; Pettit 2002.

[30] Khenpo Ngawang Jorden, personal communication.

[31] For a complete list of Gorampa's extant works, see Jorden 2003, 181–207.

texts comprise only two of these thirteen volumes. His three complete[32] Madhyamaka

texts are:

- *Distinguishing the Views* (*lta ba'i shan 'byed*), a polemical text contrasting Gorampa's views with those of Tsongkhapa and Dolpopa (Dol po pa Shes rab rGyal mtshan, 1292-1361);
- *Removal of Wrong Views (lta ba ngan sel)*, a commentary on Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra* which responds to fifty-eight distinct points of difference with Tsongkhapa;
- *Synopsis of Madhyamaka* (*dbu ma'i spyi don*), an encyclopedic text outlining Gorampa's views on the major points of Madhyamaka, as well as the views of a number of earlier and contemporary Indian and Tibetan scholars with whom he both agrees and disagrees. The views presented in this text are the focus of the present dissertation.

Although there are some subtle differences in the presentation of Gorampa's philosophy

in each of these three texts, his explanation of the Madhyamaka view is relatively

consistent throughout. Indeed, Sakyapas today consider Gorampa to be a particularly

adept scholar because over the course of his extensive philosophical career, his views did

not change significantly.[33]

The Sakya tradition has produced a number of prolific and highly skilled

philosophers, but Gorampa continues to be upheld as the proponent of the "mainstream"

Sakyapa view. This is primarily due to the consistency throughout his texts, as well as his

close alignment with his predecessors. Gorampa is often contrasted with his

contemporary co-religionist, Śākya Chokden (gSer mdog Paṇ chen Śākya mChog ldan,

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[32] There is a partial commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, titled *Radiance of the Authentic View* (*dbu ma rtsa ba'i shes rab kyi rnam par bshad pa yang dag lta ba'i 'od zer*), among Gorampa's extant works, but because this work is incomplete and not widely studied in Sakya monastic institutions, I have not included it in this list.

[33] This understanding of Gorampa's works was expressed by most of the Sakyapa scholars with whom I worked during the course of my research. This claim appears to be true, at least with respect to the views expressed in Gorampa's three major Madhyamaka texts. Although he emphasizes different points in each of his texts, his overall philosophical view remains relatively consistent throughout. This point is especially salient when Gorampa's works are compared to the writings of scholars such as Tsongkhapa and Śākya Chokden, whose views appear to change over the course of their philosophical careers. (Jinpa 2002, 18–19; Komarovski 2011.)

1428-1507), whose works were similarly banned during the height of Gelugpa hegemony. Śākya Chokden issued equally harsh criticisms against Tsongkhapa and the Gelugpas, and wrote extensively on many of the same topics as Gorampa. However, Śākya Chokden also famously questioned the views of Sakya Paṇḍita (Sa skya Pan di ta Kun dga rGyal mtshan, 1182-1251) [34] in his commentary on Sakya Paṇḍita's *Differentiating the Three Vows* (*sdom gsum rab dbye*), and was considered to be an adherent of the so-called "other emptiness" (*gzhan stong*) view of Tibetan Buddhism.[35] Although Śākya Chokden was an incredibly skillful philosopher, his controversial views relegated him to the margins of Sakyapa study, despite the fact that his texts were better preserved than those of Gorampa.[36]

It is primarily due to Gorampa's responses to Śākya Chokden's criticisms of Sakya Paṇḍita that he came to be perceived as a scholar whose views were in strict agreement with those of the Five Founding Masters of the Sakya tradition. As such, he garnered the reputation as a systematizer and upholder of the mainstream Sakyapa view. Although Śākya Chokden's texts (which were recovered from Bhutan in 1975) are studied in Sakya monastic institutions today, it is Gorampa who continues to be upheld as the authority with respect to the true Sakya position.

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[34] Sakya Paṇḍita, one of the Five Founding Masters of the Sakya school, is most renowned for his treatises on logic.

[35] "Other emptiness," made famous by the scholar Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltsen (Do po pa Shes rab rGyal mtshan, 1292-1361), was widely criticized by the Sakya and Gelug schools. This is a view that contrasts with the view other Madhyamaka traditions (described, in contrast, as *rang stong* ("Self-emptiness)) in that it asserts that phenomena are not empty of everything, but only empty of everything that is *false*. This is a view that is based, in part, on the Yogācāra theory of the three natures (*trisvabhāva*). Many Mādhyamikas (including Gorampa) rejected this view, claiming that it was a quasi-realist position. Gorampa's most explicit refutation of *gzhan stong* can be found in his *lta ba'i shan 'byed*. For an English translation of this refutation, see Cabezón and Dargyay 2007, 97–113. For more on *gzhan stong* in general, see Hopkins 2006; Stearns 1995; Stearns 1999; Burchardi 2007.

[36] Śākya Chokden's works were preserved in Bhutan, where it is possible that they continued to be studied by some monastic communitites. For a thorough overview of Śākya Chokden's life and philosophy, see Komarovski 2011.

Gorampa's Philosophical Identity and Interlocutors

While Gorampa clearly and skillfully explains his own position in his three Madhyamaka texts, he also devotes considerable effort to carefully delineating what his position is *not*. By presenting his own view as well as those of his interlocutors, Gorampa manages to clearly delineate the boundaries of his philosophical position— a strategy that is most clearly seen in *Distinguishing the Views*. This text is considered among Sakyapa scholars to be the most concise and straightforward presentation of Gorampa's Madhyamaka, even though the vast majority of this text is devoted to refuting the views of others.[37] The *Synopsis*, although not as overtly polemical as *Distinguishing the Views*, similarly constructs Gorampa's view presenting both what his position *is* as well as what it *is not*.

The *Synopsis* is an encyclopedic text, referencing dozens of Indian and Tibetan scholars with respect to nearly every conceivable aspect of Madhyamaka. However, Gorampa's primary philosophical opponent in this text – as in his other Madhyamaka works – is Tsongkhapa. Because these two thinkers were rough contemporaries who received training in some of the same monastic institutions, it appears as though part of Gorampa's aim in his criticisms of Tsongkhapa is to distance himself and the Sakya school from the newly established Gandenpas. Through his criticisms, Gorampa characterizes Tsongkhapa and his followers as a newly established fringe group who have misunderstood the overall Madhyamaka project.[38] Specifically, Gorampa argues against

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[37] See Cabezón and Dargyay 2007, 41–56.
[38] In one of his more scathing criticisms, for example, Gorampa writes that Tsongkhapa's view of emptiness is "the deceptive blithering of [individuals] of little intelligence and merit, the demonic words that slander the Freedom from Proliferations [doctrine], which is the heart of the teachings." (*bstan pa'i snying po spros bral nyams par byed pa'i bdud tshig blo gros dang bsod nams chung bar nams bslu bar byed pa'i gtam ste/*) Translated in Ibid., 124–125.

the highly analytical approach that Tsongkhapa and his followers take. As will become clear in the following chapters, Gorampa presents Tsongkhapa's position as one that over-emphasizes conceptual thought and analytic reasoning, while simultaneously deemphasizing the importance of nonconceptual meditative practice.

Although Gorampa criticizes Tsongkhapa's overly analytical approach, he does not dismiss analytic reasoning altogether. Indeed, what is most remarkable about Gorampa's approach—and what contributes to his success in his criticisms of Tsongkhapa—is his own use of analytic reasoning in constructing his arguments.[39] That is, although Gorampa wishes to emphasize the experience of emptiness over an analysis of it as a final goal, he nevertheless employs analyses of emptiness in order to debate with Tsongkhapa and establish his own view.[40] In other words, Gorampa manages to engage with Tsongkhapa in his own language, utilizing Tsongkhapa's rational style in order to undermine rational analysis in its entirety. The ways in which Gorampa goes about arguing in this way will be the focus of the following chapters.

Another of Gorampa's rhetorical opponents in the *Synopsis* is the Chinese monk Hashang Mahāyāna (Hwa shang ma hA yA na, fl. 8th C.). This figure, well-known in Tibetan Buddhist discourse, was reportedly part of the "Great Debate" at Samye (*bsam yas*) Monastery, which many sources say shaped the development of Buddhism in Tibet. According to Tibetan sources, Hashang debated the Indian monk Kamalaśīla; the former represented the Chinese Ch'an Buddhist view that enlightenment occurs suddenly as a

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[39] It should be noted that Gorampa is not unique in his approach of using rational analysis to argue against conceptual thought. What is unique about Gorampa's approach, however, is the particular *way* in which he constructs his arguments. This will be elaborated in the following chapters.

[40] It should be noted that Gorampa does not *only* utilize rational analysis for the sake of refuting Tsongkhapa; Gorampa highly values rational analysis, and argues that it is necessary for many practitioners in order to cultivate an eventual realization of emptiness.

nonconceptual direct realization of the nature of mind, and the latter represented the Indian Buddhist view that enlightenment occurs gradually through cultivating positive qualities based on insights derived from rational analysis. Kamalaśīla reportedly defeated Hashang in this debate, securing the "gradualist" view as the form of Buddhism that was to be adopted in Tibet. Hashang and his "subitist" view were sent back to China.[41]

While there were clearly immediate political reasons as to why Gorampa would feel the need to distance himself from Tsongkhapa and the Gandenpas/Gelugpas, it is less obvious why he would choose Hashang as a primary interlocutor. An eighth-century Chinese scholar does not appear to be an immediate threat to Gorampa's philosophy in the same ways that a rough contemporary whose school is rising to political dominance during Gorampa's lifetime might be. Gorampa's arguments distancing himself from Hashang are, however, closely related to his critical response to Tsongkhapa. That is, in his writings, Tsongkhapa equates the views of Gorampa's Sakyapa predecessors with those of Hashang, emphasizing the cessation of all mental activity devoid of any analysis over and above careful rational thought.

In the context of monastic scholasticism, therefore, equating an opponent to Hashang was considered a serious insult. Hashang became, as José Cabezón notes, "the quintessential philosophical other" among Tibetan scholars.[42] The rhetoric surrounding the "Great Debate" at Samye had established the Tibetan Buddhist philosophical project as one that only takes Indian Buddhism seriously, and vilifies a simplistic understanding

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[41] The historicity of an actual debate between Kamalaśīla and Hashang is disputed among modern scholars. There is little textual evidence in Tibetan sources of an actual debate taking place; all references to this event are found in texts composed in the twelfth century onwards. See Ibid., 19–21. For more on the historicity of the Samye debate and the character of Hashang, see Ruegg 1989; Gomez 1983; Broughton 1983; Houston 1980; van der Kuijp 1983. While Tibetan sources indicate that Kamalaśīla won the debate, Chinese sources suggest that Hashang was the winner.

[42] Cabezón and Dargyay 2007, 20.

of enlightenment in terms of "no thought." Tibetan thinkers thus understood themselves to be engaged in a process of commenting and elaborating on Indian – and *not* Chinese – Buddhist texts.

It is likely that most Tibetan scholars in the fifteenth century did not actually study Hashang's writings.[43] Instead, the mere idea of Hashang came to represent something undesirable: an anti-rational approach to Buddhist practice that was incapable of bringing a practitioner to enlightenment. Hashang was understood not as a person with subtle views, but rather as a caricature whose views were so outlandish as to be dismissed outright.

With this in mind, we ought to understand that Gorampa responds to Hashang not as an actual historical and philosophical figure, but as a character in a story – a philosophical straw-man – who is used to help Gorampa define his own view. Gorampa is not Hashang, he argues, because he does not advocate for the complete cessation of all thought without any prior rational analysis. Freedom from conceptual proliferations involves the absence of *conceptual* thought, and is only brought about after a thorough analysis of appearances.[44] Hashang is simply a foil in the debate between Tsongkhapa and Gorampa; both Tibetans agree that Hashang's views are anathema to Tibetan Madhyamaka. Tsongkhapa, by equating the Sakya view to that of Hashang, is attempting a rhetorical strategy in which he is dismissing the Sakya position altogether. Gorampa, in turn, distances himself from Hashang, emphasizing that his views *must* be taken seriously.

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[43] Gorampa's understanding of Hashang's views may have been informed by the *Testament of Ba* (dBa' bzhad / sBa bzhad), an 11th-century text outlining the Samye debate and the spread of Buddhism in Tibet.

[44] We will see precisely how this argument is presented is in the following chapters.

While it is easy to see that Hashang is a character in Gorampa's philosophical story, it is less obvious – but equally important to keep in mind – that Tsongkhapa is also a character in the *Synopsis*. It is not Tsongkhapa *himself* who is the object of Gorampa's criticisms; rather, it is Gorampa's characterization of Tsongkhapa that is criticized and debated. Gorampa's characterizations of Tsongkhapa's views appear to be fairly accurate (although a comparison of Gorampa's paraphrases and Tsongkhapa's actual writings would be a useful topic for further study). Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that just like Hashang, Tsongkhapa is a foil whom Gorampa uses to clarify his own positions in his writings.

Situating the *Synopsis* in Buddhist Scholarship

The *Synopsis* is Gorampa's most significant contribution to Madhyamaka thought. Although the exact date of this work is unknown, its colophon states that it was composed in Tanag, at Thubten Namgyal Ling, the monastery that Gorampa founded sometime between 1473 and 1474. Among Gorampa's four Madhyamaka texts, only his *Distinguishing the Views* lists a date in its colophon, indicating that it was written in 1469. His *Removal of Wrong Views* was also composed at Thubten Namgyal, and his commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, Radiance of the Authentic View* (*dbu ma rtsa ba'i shes rab kyi rnam par bshad pa yang dag lta ba'i 'od zer)* is incomplete and lacks a colophon. When compared to the dates in his other texts, however, it can be assumed that the *Synopsis* is one of Gorampa's later texts, written between 1473 and his death in 1489.[45]

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[45] I suspect that the *Synopsis* was Gorampa's last complete Madhyamaka work, a philosophical *magnum opus* of sorts, and was probably written during his final, most prolific years after returning to Thubten Namgyal from Ewam Choden in 1486.

Unlike the texts of scholars such as Tsongkhapa or Śākya Chokden, which seem to indicate a gradual refinement of their authors' views over time, all four of Gorampa's Madhyamaka texts present the same general view of emptiness. The main differences between these texts involve the ways in which this general view is presented. *Distinguishing the Views,* for example, presents the Madhyamaka view as free from the four extremes of conceptual elaboration *(mtha' bzhi spros bral)*, while *Removal of Wrong Views* presents the Mādhyamika practitioner as one who has wisdom that lacks dualistic appearances (*gnyis snang med pa'i ye shes*). Both texts, however, outline similar views concerning the relationship between the two truths, the nature of ultimate reality and buddhahood, and the ways in which a practitioner is to proceed along the path – all topics we will explore in this thesis.

The *Synopsis* is the most detailed among Gorampa's treatises on Madhyamaka. In addition to explaining Madhyamaka as the basis (*gzhi*) that is to be understood, as the path (*lam*) that is to be practiced, and as the result (*'bras bu*) that is to be obtained, Gorampa explains each of his points by referring to a number of well-known canonical sūtras, as well as to commentaries written by dozens of Indian and Tibetan scholars. Although it is not as overtly critical of Tsongkhapa as his *Distinguishing the Views* (which devotes an entire chapter to refuting Tsongkhapa as the one who "Advocates that the Extreme of Nihilism is Madhyamaka") or as his *Elimination of Wrong Views* (which presents 58 refutations of Tsongkhapa's arguments while commenting on Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*), the *Synopsis* is nevertheless highly critical of Tsongkhapa and his Gelugpa followers, frequently referring to them as "those who arrogantly claim to be Mādhyamikas" (*dbu ma pa rlom pa*). Unlike his other Madhyamaka texts, however,

Gorampa also criticizes some other "earlier Mādhyamikas" (*sngon gyi dbu ma pa kha cig*) who do not appear to be Tsongkhapa, and cites a number of "later Mādhyamikas" (*phyis kyi dbu ma pa kha cig*) – most notably Mabja (rMa bya Byang chub brTson 'grus, d. 1185) and Sakya Paṇḍita – with whom he generally agrees. The *Synopsis* is, therefore, encyclopedic not only with respect to the topics that he discusses, but also with respect to the scholars with whom he engages.

By constructing a view that stands in opposition to a wide range of characters, Gorampa attempts to carve out a very specific space for himself in the Madhyamaka landscape. Recall that Hashang is reputed to advocate for sudden enlightenment based on meditative experience in the absence of any rational analysis, and Tsongkhapa argues for gradual enlightenment resulting from careful analysis with comparatively less emphasis on meditative experience. Gorampa's main position is that enlightenment is the result of a gradual process, but that this process involves both rational analysis *and* nonconceptual meditative experiences. In this way, Gorampa manages to walk a line between the purely analytical and the purely experiential. The extent to which he is successful in walking this line will be explored in the course of this dissertation.

Situating Gorampa in Contemporary University Scholarship

Although Gorampa is an influential scholar among Tibetans, he has received comparatively little attention from scholars trained in the academy. To date, two book-length works have been written in English that focus specifically on Gorampa's thought, but both emphasize Gorampa's philosophical position in relation to that of Tsongkhapa

rather than on its own terms.[46] Gorampa's own thought has received little attention from contemporary scholars trained in the academy, and this may well be due to the space that it occupies between the analytical and the experiential. Located in that space, Gorampa's philosophy does not fit neatly into the molds that have been created by academics to understand Tibetan thought.

A discussion of Gorampa's philosophy in modern scholarly discourse warrants some contextualization. Specifically, I aim to contextualize the ways in which Gorampa fits into larger conversations in the academy concerning (a) the study of Madhyamaka in general, and (b) discussions of conceptual thought in western philosophy. While my current project is not explicitly a comparative one, it is nevertheless important to place Gorampa's philosophy into relevant academic contexts, if for no other reason than to understand the general academic conceptual framework through which his views can be understood.

Approaches to Madhyamaka in Western Philosophy

Indian Madhyamaka thought made its way into western philosophy during the 20th century due to the influence of Jan Willem de Jong and David Seyfort Ruegg,[47] two prolific scholars whose philological interests presented Indian Buddhism as a primarily textual and philosophical tradition.[48] Similarly, early studies of Tibetan Madhyamaka in the academy were influenced by the work of scholars who were primarily educated in Gelug textual traditions, such as P. Jeffrey Hopkins and Robert Thurman. These scholars'

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[46] It is worth noting that the authors of both of these books were originally trained as Gelugpa monks. See Cabezón and Dargyay 2007; Thakchoe 2007.

[47] For survey of just some of the contributions that Ruegg has made to the study of Madhyamaka in the academy, see Ruegg 2010.

[48] This explicitly textual presentation of Buddhism contrasts with the work of later scholars such as Schopen 1994; and Cohen 1995.

textually oriented training resulted in early presentations of Tibetan Madhyamaka to academic circles that were somewhat limited, focusing primarily on the writings of Tsongkhapa and his followers. [49]

Following in the wake of these early scholars, western philosophers – primarily those with backgrounds in analytic philosophy – began to interpret Indian and Tibetan Madhyamaka through the lens of western logic. Philosophers such as Jay Garfield and Graham Priest, for example, have attempted to impose classical western logic onto Madhyamaka as a whole, reading Nāgārjuna as a type of dialetheist.[50] Others, such as Tom Tillemans,[51] Mark Siderits,[52] and Jan Westerhoff[53] have similarly attempted to interpret Madhyamaka in terms of analytic philosophy, reading certain Indian and Tibetan Mādhyamikas as paraconsistent logicians, anti-realists, or even perhaps as proto-Wittgensteinians. It should be noted here that although there have been some attempts at overarching studies of academic interpretations of Madhyamaka, these are by no means comprehensive,[54] and the general trends in English-language scholarship elaborated here are based on my own observations.[55] Westerhoff, for example disagrees with this characterization of the current field of scholarship, arguing, "Since a great part of the contemporary Western studies of Nāgārjuna are interested primarily in philological,

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[49] See, for example, Hopkins 1996; Hopkins 2002; Thurman 1989.
[50] Garfield and Priest 2003, 87.
[51] Tillemans 2009, 84.
[52] Siderits 2003, 113.
[53] Westerhoff 2009a, 12.
[54] Tuck (1990), for example, identifies the academic study of Nāgārjuna in three phases, interpreting Madhyamaka thought in terms of Kantian, analytic, and post-Wittgensteinian lenses.
[55] There are, of course, a number of dissenting views that challenge the analytic approach to the interpretation of Madhyamaka. For an example of one such dissenting view and a subsequent response, see Huntington 2007; and Garfield 2008. See also Hayes 1994.

historical, or religious aspects of his works, genuinely philosophical studies have been rare."[56]

The response to these philosophically-oriented studies of Madhyamaka in the academy has tended to involve a radical rejection of analytic philosophical categories such as classical logic. One relatively recent example of this tension between analytic and non-analytic interpretations of Madhyamaka can be seen in a series of papers exchanged between C. W. Huntington and Jay Garfield.[57] In his paper, "The Nature of the Madhyamaka Trick," Huntington argues that the correct interpretation of Nāgārjuna rests in a literary reading of his Madhyamaka texts, and that he should be understood first and foremost as a practitioner who advocates transcending conceptual thought in favor of a nonconceptual experience of reality. Garfield's reply, "Turning a Madhyamaka Trick," argues that Nāgārjuna is first and foremost a philosopher, who primarily emphasizes logic and reasoning in order to cultivate a particular conceptual understanding of the ultimate truth.

Similar reactions to the analytic trend in academic Madhyamaka scholarship can be seen in early studies of non-Gelug Tibetan traditions. Early studies of the Kagyu and Nyingma traditions tended to focus primarily on the schools' meditative practices, overlooking their philosophical arguments. This trend, too, was largely a result of Gelug-influenced understandings of doxographical categories; Gelugpa debate manuals (*yig cha*) presented their own school as being the most philosophically sophisticated, while the Kagyu and Nyingma traditions were described as being anti-rational, closer to the

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[56] Westerhoff 2009a, 3. Given Westerhoff's background in analytic philosophy, he likely means something very specific when he speaks of "genuinely philosophical studies."
[57] See Huntington 2007, 111; Garfield 2008, 508.

view of Hashang.[58] As a result of early analytical studies and later anti-analytical reactions, studies of Madhyamaka written by academic scholars have tended to emphasize either philosophical or meditative approaches. Few, it seems, acknowledge the importance of both.

There are, however, exceptions to these general trends, most notably in terms of more recent scholarship that has been published on the philosophical views of the Nyingma scholar Jamgon Ju Mipham ('Jam mgon 'Ju Mi pham rNam rgyal rGya mtsho, 1846-1912).[59] My suspicion is that academic scholars find Mipham appealing precisely because he stands in contrast to these already constructed frameworks for interpreting Tibetan Madhyamaka; Mipham stands out because he articulates a philosophical view that can, at times, fit within the Gelug-centric, analytic framework, even though he is "supposed to be" a part of the presumably anti-rationalist, "mystical" Nyingma tradition.[60]

There appear to be strong affinities between the Gelug tradition and analytic thought, for reasons which will be made clearer in the following chapters. When earlier Indian scholars such as Candrakīrti or Nāgārjuna are read through this analytic/Gelugpa lens, some of their ideas, such as their understandings of negation, causation, or personal identity, can be made to fit onto this framework. When the views of a philosopher such as Gorampa are applied to this type of framework, however, the similarities begin to break down. Gorampa does indeed frame some of his arguments in terms of affirming and non-affirming negations (*ma yin dgag* and *med dgag*, respectively), or the "understanding of

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[58] See, e.g., Hopkins 2003. This text structures Buddhist views hierarchically, with the Gelug sect representing the most philosophically rigorous view of Madhyamaka.
[59] Pettit 2002; Duckworth 2008; Phuntso 2005.
[60] Interestingly, Mipham frequently refers to Gorampa to support his arguments. See Pettit 2002, 134–141.

the nature of two negations" (*dgag pa gnyis kyi rnal ma go ba*),[61] terms which have a certain resonance for Western philosophers.[62] At the level of ultimate truth, however, these logical arguments no longer continue to hold. For Gorampa, the end result of *spros bral* is entirely free from concepts, logic, and dualistic thought. As such, his views do not fit so neatly into the framework imposed by those scholars who rely on analytic philosophy as their primary mode of philosophical inquiry.

The term "analytic philosophy" is, of course, a broad categorization. Here, however, what I mean by the term is something similar to Richard Swinburne's classification:

> 'Analytic philosophy' is the somewhat misleading name given to the kind of philosophy practiced today in most of the universities of the Anglo-American world. This stream of philosophy started off in the Oxford of the 1950s; it saw the task of philosophy as analysis, clarifying the meaning of important words, and showing how they get that meaning; and this was done by studying in what circumstances it was appropriate in ordinary language to use the words… But the goal is now metaphysical: to give a correct account of what are the ultimate constituents of the world and how they interact. 'Analytic' is merely a title for this kind of philosophy inherited from its ancestry.[63]

That is, analytic philosophy is largely concerned with what constitutes the truth of the world. Knowledge about this truth, moreover, is propositional. In other words, knowledge must correspond to truth in analytic philosophy, and for analytic styles of analysis, only propositions can bear a truth value. If this is the case, then Gorampa's project, which asserts that the highest form of knowledge (*spros bral*) is non-propositional, makes no sense. A mental state that is *spros bral* is, by its very nature, nondual and therefore non-propositional. It cannot, for mainstream analytic thinkers, be considered knowledge at all.

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[61] The understanding of this term is similar to the law of double-negation. See chapter 4.
[62] See, e.g., Frege 1960; Horn 1989; Priest, Beall, and Armour-Garb 2004.
[63] Swinburne 2005, 34.

According to Gorampa, propositional knowledge is necessarily dualistic, and as such, cannot be the end result of Madhyamaka. Gorampa's entire project articulates a process that results in a non-propositional mental state that is free from concepts and does not structure reality in terms of subject-object duality. In fact, he argues that from the standpoint of the ultimate truth, concepts and dualistic distinctions are entirely erroneous, and that if one continues to see the world in these ways, one cannot come to realize the way things really are. Concepts, language, and the dualistic distinctions that result from these are inextricably tied to the ignorance that keeps sentient beings in samsara, the cycle of rebirth and suffering.

In other words, Gorampa argues that ultimately, there is no truth that we must strive to understand, and there is no "view" that must be held. He writes in the *Synopsis* that we ought to use the term, "'realizing the Madhyamaka view' as a term for merely not finding, at the end [of analysis], any conceptual proliferations, such as existence and nonexistence."[64] That is, Gorampa's end goal is to completely eliminate any beliefs about some sort of objective *truth* about the world that exists as a thing that can be known. And if there is no truth that exists as a thing that can be known, then it cannot be transposed into an analytic project. This contrasts with the view of Tsongkhapa, who contends that a realization of the ultimate truth is based on carefully identifying a concept of emptiness. This concept, for Tsongkhapa, is understood as a rationally determined object (*yul)* that must be apprehended if one is to arrive at the ultimate truth.

The present study of Gorampa's thought can be classified as a sort of rational reconstruction of his views, in an attempt to place him in dialogue with contemporary

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[64] *mthar yod med la sogs pa'i spros pa gang yang ma rnyed pa tsam la dbu ma'i lta ba rtogs zhes pa'i tha snyad mdzad pa yin* BPD 194.

analytic philosophers. At the same time, however, I don't believe that an accurate or responsible recreation of Gorampa can be represented without taking some of his wider context into account. With that in mind, it is important to note that although Gorampa was an accomplished philosopher, he also composed extensive commentaries on tantra and meditation-oriented texts. Although the current project focuses explicitly on Gorampa's views with respect to Madhyamaka, it is important to bear in mind that he was a prolific writer and an accomplished practitioner who also authored dozens of meditation-oriented texts. It is my hope that the present study will enable other non-Tibetan scholars to engage with Gorampa's work, and will inspire future English-language scholarship on other aspects of Gorampa's writings.

Situating Gorampa's Views of Conceptual Thought in Academic Contexts

In addition to understanding how Gorampa fits into academic conceptions of Tibetan Madhyamaka, we also need to see how his views about conceptual thought and nonconceptuality might relate to academic theories of concepts, consciousness, and the mind. It is important to understand that for Gorampa, terms such as "concept" (*rtog pa*) and "nonconceptual" (*ma rtog pa / spros bral*) are specific. We cannot, when reading Gorampa's philosophy, impose preconceived notions based on western philosophy onto his arguments. Nevertheless, if Gorampa's philosophy is correctly understood, his views are capable of being placed into fruitful dialogue with western theories of mind.

Gorampa's views on the two truths, rational analysis, and the relationship between conceptual thought and nonconceptuality are closely related to academic theories of logic, ontology, and epistemology. Specifically, the following chapters will address Gorampa in relation to Jay Garfield and Graham Priest's theories of

dialetheism,[65] David Chalmers's discussions of ontological deflationism,[66] and Gilbert Ryle's distinctions between knowing-that and knowing-how.[67] While my project is not explicitly comparative, I believe that a fruitful dialogue can be constructed between Gorampa and these university-educated scholars, enabling us to better understand both Gorampa and some problems in Western philosophical thought.

The Structure of the *Synopsis*, and a note on what follows

The *Synopsis* consists of four chapters: (1) The general introduction, (2) the explanation of the importance of Madhyamaka, (3) the distinctive qualities of the Mādhyamika practitioner and Madhyamaka view, and (4) the actual explanation of Madhyamaka. Of these main chapters, the first three present a general introduction to the text, while the fourth chapter deals with most of the philosophical argumentation (roughly 400 of the text's 459 pages are devoted to this fourth chapter).

This fourth chapter is divided into three sections, describing Madhyamaka in terms of (4.1) the basis which is to be understood,[68] (4.2) the path which is to be practiced, and (4.3) the result which is to be realized. Among these sections, the first (Madhyamaka as basis) is the most substantial; Gorampa devotes over 300 pages to this section alone, leaving less than 50 pages each to explain the path and result.

Based on the structure of the text, then, it is apparent that although Gorampa intends to present his general view of Madhyamaka, his primary concern in the *Synopsis* involves an explanation of proper Madhyamaka reasoning—i.e., Madhyamaka as the

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[65] Garfield and Priest 2003.
[66] Chalmers 2009.
[67] Ryle 1945.
[68] In the context of Buddhist thought, "basis" (*gzhi*) generally refers to ontology, i.e., what exists. As we will see in chapter 3, however, Gorampa attempts to explain Madhyamaka in terms of the basis in a way that deemphasizes his need to make robust ontological commitments.

basis which is to be understood. Although he continually stresses in his arguments that logical reasoning and analysis are not enough to advance one all the way to Buddhahood on the Madhyamaka path, the basic organization of the *Synopsis* indicates that analysis is the most important, fundamental aspect of realizing the Madhyamaka view. Without a solid foundation – a fully-understood *basis* – the true Madhyamaka view cannot be fully realized.

Gorampa argues that the main aspect of Madhyamaka that must be understood is the two truths (61-113).[69] From the perspective of the conventional truth, that is, from the perspective of ordinary, unenlightened beings, there is a conventional truth (the way that things appear) and an ultimate truth (the way things really are). From the perspective of a more spiritually advanced person, however, there is only freedom from conceptual elaborations (*spros bral*). If the two truths are analyzed further, they can each be broken down again into two (113-148). The conventional can be explained in terms of the *merely* conventional (*kun rdzob tsam*), and the conventional *truth* (*kun rdzob bden pa*). The ultimate, similarly, can be explained in terms of the ultimate that is *taught* (*bstan pa'i don dam*) and the ultimate that is *realized* (*rtogs pa'i don dam*). After setting forth this general explanation of the division of the two truths, Gorampa presents the views of Indian and Tibetan scholars, and refutes those with whom he disagrees, as well as praises those with whom he agrees (148-162). The remainder of the basis section (162-378) presents a detailed analysis of the two truths.[70] He begins by refuting the realist position (164-167), then presents the proper method for understanding the conventional truth

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[69] See chapter 2.
[70] See chapter 3.

(167-173), and for realizing the ultimate truth (173-379).[71] The Madhyamaka as Path (378-430) and Madhyamaka as Result (430-451) sections, in addition to refuting others' views, present general outlines for the cultivation of the six perfections, and for the nature of Buddhahood, respectively.[72]

When the *Synopsis* is analyzed structurally, we can easily identify the issues with which Gorampa is most concerned. Specifically, the most important aspect of Madhyamaka is that which is to be understood through rational analysis (61-379). When cultivating a correct understanding of Madhyamaka, it is essential that one develop a correct conceptual understanding of the two truths (162-379). Furthermore, among these two truths, the correct establishment through reasoning of the ultimate truth is most important (173-379).

The structure of the *Synopsis* informs the structure of my dissertation. Specifically, I will analyze the issues that Gorampa has deemed important, namely: the relationship between the two truths and an analysis of the four extremes. After these aspects of Madhyamaka in terms of its basis are understood, I will then turn to an investigation of the nature of the nature of Buddhahood (as articulated in the path and result chapters). In this way, I will show that Gorampa's understanding of the relationship between conceptual thought and nonconceptuality informs his entire Madhyamaka project.

Chapter 2 outlines Gorampa's general presentation of the two truths. Specifically, the conventional truth is conceptual and is based on object-subject duality, and the ultimate truth is free from conceptual proliferations and dualistic distinctions.

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[71] See chapter 4.
[72] See chapter 5.

Chapter 3 examines Gorampa's interpretation of Candrakīrti with respect to the two truths, and contrasts this interpretation with that of Tsongkhapa. This chapter concludes by investigating Gorampa's ontological commitments, placing him in dialogue with the theory of ontological deflationism, as explained by David Chalmers and Matthew MacKenzie.

Chapter 4 builds on the previous discussions of the two truths in order to explain Gorampa's approach to rational analysis. This chapter focuses specifically on the role of logic in the context of the tetralemma (*catuṣkoṭi, mtha' bzhi*), and contrasts Gorampa's position with that of logicians.

Chapter 5 shows the ways in which Gorampa articulates the relationship between rational analysis and meditative practices in the Path chapter of the *Synopsis*, as well as the ways in which he explains the nature of the resultant state of buddhahood. Specifically, this chapter examines some of the difficulties involved in reconciling rational, conceptual thought and a resultant state of mind that is free from all conceptual proliferations.

Finally, the conclusion considers some of the implications of Gorampa's approach to the Buddhist path, and addresses some miscellaneous points that were not able to be explored fully in the course of the current project.

Chapter 2: The Two Truths: The Scaffolding of Madhyamaka

Gorampa, like all Mādhyamikas, relies on the doctrine of the two truths (*bden pa gnyis*) to develop his philosophical view.[73] According to this doctrine, there is a difference between the way that things appear and the way that things really are; the former is explained as conventional truth (*kun rdzob bden pa*), and the latter is described as ultimate truth (*don dam bden pa*). The way in which a Mādhyamika interprets the two truths has a significant impact on his or her overall philosophical view. In the *Synopsis*, a coherent picture of the two truths is essential for understanding the methods of rational analysis described in the Basis chapter, as well as for making sense of the meditative practices and enlightened states that Gorampa describes in the Path and Result chapters.

Specifically, Gorampa contends that the two truths correspond to different types of perspectives with respect to appearances (*snang ba*), and that these different types of perspectives allow practitioners both to engage in conceptual, rational analysis, *and* to eventually abandon those concepts in favor of nonconceptual meditative realization. The conventional truth corresponds to a perspective in which external objects appear to apprehending subjects; the ultimate truth corresponds to a perspective in which this object-subject duality dissolves completely. As such, Gorampa's presentation of Buddhist practice involves shifting one's perspective, transforming one's mind from that of an ordinary person to that of an enlightened being. This shift in perspective occurs gradually, but results in a radical transformation of the mind.

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[73] In the Madhyamaka tradition, the *locus classicus* for this doctrine is Nāgārjuna/'s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā,* which famously states, "The Buddha's teaching of the dharma depends upon two truths: a truth of worldly convention and an ultimate truth." (*dve satye samupāśritya buddhānāṃ dharmadeśanā / lokasaṃvṛtisatyaṃ ca satyaṃ ca paramārthataḥ) Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXIV:8

If we understand the *Synopsis* as a manual for practice that can help lead a practitioner to enlightenment, then the Basis chapter should be understood as describing the philosophical view that must be cultivated prior to achieving spiritual awakening. Within the context of the Basis chapter, then, the two truths doctrine ought to be understood as the scaffolding of Gorampa's Madhyamaka; that is, the relationship between conventional and ultimate truths represents a certain framework that structures the entirety of Gorampa's understanding of Madhyamaka thought and practice. Once this framework is in place, a practitioner can then develop the proper Madhyamaka view through the methods of rational analysis described in the following chapters. The present chapter details Gorampa's definitions of the conventional and ultimate truths, and sets out the ways in which they are distinguished from each other based on these definitions. Before turning to an analysis of Gorampa's specific definitions, however, let us first consider the two truths doctrine more broadly.

The two truths are two realities

The Tibetan term *bden pa* has a broad semantic range, and its translation into English as "truth" can be misleading. The term *bden pa* is a translation of the Sanskrit word *satya* or *sat*, both of which generally mean "existence" or "presence."[74] With this in mind, when we are speaking about the two truths (*bden pa gnyis, satyadvaya*), we should understand these as two types of existence, or two realities, whose opposites are nonexistent. They are not, in other words, two truth statements, whose opposites are false.

The origins of the two truths doctrine can be traced back to early Buddhist literature. Newland and Tillemans suggest that the two truths were "initially a construct

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[74] Kapstein describes the term as "'what stands in relation to, has affinity with, being.' Read more weakly it is simply 'what has being'." Kapstein 2001, 212.

for reconciling apparently contradictory statements in scripture based on their pedagogical intent."[75] The two truths schema developed out of an attempt to reconcile apparent contradictions among different teachings attributed to the Buddha. Because the Buddha was considered a skillful teacher, Buddhist interpreters understood his contradictory teachings through the lens of skill-in-means (*upāya*), based on his ability to teach students differently according to their individual levels of understanding.

The doctrine of selflessness *(anātman)*, for example, is understood to be one of the most fundamental views in Buddhist thought, but some of the Buddha's teachings explicitly describe the nature of persons.[76] In attempting to make sense of apparent contradictions such as this, early Buddhists developed a distinction between teachings which could be considered definitive (*nītārtha*) and those which were interpretable (*neyārtha*). Definitive teachings could be taken literally, while interpretable teachings required some sort of further explanation or interpretation in order to be fully understood. In the case of teachings about persons, the Buddha's descriptions of selflessness were considered definitive and could be taken literally, while teachings of the existence of persons were considered interpretable, being taught to students who could not – for whatever reason – comprehend the doctrine of selflessness.

As Newland and Tillemans note, the two truths appear to be linked to this *nītārtha/neyārtha* distinction in early Buddhism, with interpretable statements being understood as conventionally true, and definitive statements being ultimately true.[77] Gorampa similarly references this development in his introduction to the *Synopsis*. In

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[75] Newland and Tillemans, 'An Introduction to Conventional Truth,' Cowherds 2011, 5.
[76] For example, "The self is the protector of the self. What other protector could there be? Through subduing the self, One gains protection difficult to gain." *Dhammapada* XII.4/160.
[77] See Cowherds 2011, 5n4: The Aṅguttaranikāya mentions this linkage. See also Jayatilleke 1980, 361–363.

explaining that *all* of the Buddha's teachings present the Madhyamaka view in some way or another, Gorampa suggests that while some teachings require interpretation and should be understood from a conventional perspective, others can be taken literally and should be understood from an ultimate perspective. He argues,

> All of the Buddha's sermons are subsumed into two categories: those which are definitive and those which are interpretable. They are so divided because definitive sermons teach ultimate truth as their topic, and interpretable scriptures teach conventional truth as their topic. The *Samādhirāja Sūtra* states, "Emptiness was taught by the Sugata; these are known as definitive types of scriptures. That *dharma* in which 'being,' 'individual,' or 'person' is taught is known as interpretable." In this regard, by knowing that the topics are the two truths, one will not be confused about the Buddha's sermons, and by not knowing this, one will be confused.[78]

Based on this explanation, teachings pertaining to the ultimate truth (dealing with topics such as emptiness) can be taken literally, while teachings pertaining to the conventional truth (dealing with topics such as persons) should be understood as requiring a specific type of interpretation in order to be understood correctly. Gorampa reminds his audience that understanding this distinction is essential if one is to understand the Buddha's teachings. This is why we can talk about the conventional and ultimate as two *truths*; they correspond to two different perspectives from which certain statements can be said to be "true."

As Madhyamaka thought developed, this understanding of the two truths became so ingrained in the conceptual landscape that it was often taken for granted. Later debates regarding the two truths concern not whether the conventional and ultimate truths exist,

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[78] *gsung rab thams cad ni nges don gyi gsung rab dang drang don gyi gsung rab gnyis su 'dus shing/ nges don gyi gsung rab ni brjod bya don dam pa'i bden pa ston pa dang/ drang don gyi gsung rab ni brjod bya kun rdzob kyi bden pa ston pa'i phyir te/ tin nge 'dzin rgyal po las/ stong pa bde bar gshegs pas bstan pa ltar/ nges don mdo sde dag gi bye brag shes/ gang las sems can gang zag skyes bu bstan/ chos de thams cad drang ba'i don du shes/ zhes gsungs so/ de la brjod bya bden gnyis shes mi shes kyis gsung rab la mi rmongs pa dang rmongs par 'gyur ba yin* BPD 38.

but rather the *ways* in which they can be said to exist, and the bases upon which they are divided.[79] Newland and Tillemans argue that for Mādhyamikas, this later development of the two truths comes to represent "a conception of standpoints from which (1) certain types of *objects* exist, and (2) certain types of statements are *true*."[80] Gorampa's articulation of the two truths in his *Synopsis* is no exception; he argues that from the perspective of the conventional (i.e., the way things appear in the context of the conventions of ordinary persons), things can be said to exist in certain ways, while from the perspective of the ultimate (i.e., the way things really are, independent of our conventions), everything is empty and free from conceptual proliferations (*spros bral*). As such, different types of true statements can be made from each of these perspectives. From the conventional perspective, my pen is black, approximately six inches long, and made out of plastic; from the ultimate perspective, there is no such thing as "a pen."

Gorampa's general presentation of the two truths

Gorampa's presentation and analysis of the two truths doctrine in the *Synopsis* involves giving an account of the ways in which the two truths exist, and identifying the means by which the conventional and ultimate can be distinguished from one another. At the outset of the Basis chapter of the *Synopsis,* Gorampa argues that the Madhyamaka view is superior to all others because of its presentation of the two truths. He argues,

> The two truths are the ultimate basis (*gzhi'i mthar thug*) for the following reasons: Since they are the phenomenal quality of things and reality itself (*chos can dang chos nyid*) which pervade all frameworks (*lus*) of knowable things, they are the very framework (*lus nyid*) of reality. Since they exhaustively abandon the extremes of reification and deprecation through realization, they are the actual abode of objects of knowledge.

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[79] For more on the development of the two truths in Tibet, see Thakchoe 2007; Cowherds 2011; Duckworth 2010a; Kapstein 2001.

[80] Cowherds 2011, 8 (emphasis mine).

> And since affliction and purification occur by virtue of being distorted and non-distorted about those [two truths], they are the reference point (*dmigs pa*) for definitive goodness.[81]

If we understand that the Basis chapter of the *Synopsis* is the foundation for the practices and realization explained in the Path and Result chapters, then the two truths must be understood as something fundamental to the Basis itself. By describing the two truths as "the very framework of reality," "the very basis of objects of knowledge," and "the foundation for definitive goodness,"[82] Gorampa sets up a system in which the two truths organize our world, and determine the ways to behave within it. The two truths organize our world because they comprise both the phenomenal quality of all things (*chos can*) as well as reality itself (*chos nyid*).[83] The two truths structure our perception of reality, allowing us to make distinctions between the way that things appear and the way that things really are. And, the two truths can be understood as the basis for ethical behavior; when one understands the conventional and ultimate in the right ways, she will act appropriately in the world.

After demonstrating the import of the two truths, Gorampa continues by citing two of the most basic descriptions of this doctrine. The first, elaborated by Śāntideva in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, explains the two truths in terms of the ways in which they are

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[81] *bden pa gnyis po ni gzhi'i mthar thug yin te/ shes bya'i lus thams cad la khyab pa'i chos can dang chos nyid yin pas dngos po'i lus nyid dang/ rtogs pas sgro skur gyi mtha' zad par spong bas shes bya'i gnas nyid dang/ de la 'khrul ma 'khrul gyis nyon mongs dang rnam byang du 'gyur bas nges legs kyi dmigs pa yin pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 35

[82] i.e., awakening

[83] The term *chos can* (Skt. *dharmin*), literally meaning "dharma-possessor," refers to things that have qualities. That is, they are phenomena. The term *chos nyid* (Skt. *dharmatā*) is generally understood as (ultimate) reality, and is equated with emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Mathes explains the relationship between these two terms as follows: "In the context of phenomena (*dharma*) and their true being (*dharmatā*), *dharmin* refers to dharmas which possess *dharma[tā]*." (Mathes 2004, 308.) And Doctor explains: "When the objects of cognition are tested for singularity and multiplicity there comes a point at which it dawns upon the mind that neither the subjects (Skt. *dharmin*, Tib. *chos can*) under investigation nor their intrinsic nature (Skt. *dharmatā*, Tib. *chos nyid*) can withstand the analysis." (Doctor 2014, 57.) In Gorampa's explanation above, he equates the two truths with both *chos can* and *chos nyid*, suggesting that the phenomenal quality of reality and reality itself constitute the entirety of knowable things.

understood by apprehending subjects (*yul can*): "The ultimate is not the domain of the rational mind (*blo*). It is asserted that the rational mind is conventional."[84] This means that the rational mind[85] apprehends the conventional truth, but is incapable of knowing the ultimate. The next description of the two truths, from Jñānagarbha's *Satyadvaya-vibhaṅga*, explains them in terms of the ways in which objects (*yul*) appear: "Only this, as it appears, is conventional. The other is the opposite."[86] That is, appearing objects are conventional, while the ultimate cannot be understood in terms of the appearance of an external object. By referencing these two passages together, Gorampa suggests that ordinary appearances, i.e., "the domain of the rational mind," (*blo yi spyod yul*), comprise the entirety of the conventional truth. The ultimate, on the other hand, is beyond the realm of conventional appearances and conceptual thought.[87]

Following these quotes, Gorampa elaborates on the general nature of the two truths. He begins by explaining that the classification of appearances into two truths is complex, and depends on the mind of the subject who apprehends such appearances. His understanding of the two truths is informed by *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI:23 and its commentary. The verse states,

> All phenomena have two natures, apprehended by correct or false seeing.
> The object of correct seeing is suchness (*de nyid, tattva*); the object of

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[84] *don dam blo yi spyod yul min/ blo ni kun rdzob yin par 'dod/* BPD 61. From *Bodhicaryāvatāra* IX:2: *saṃvṛtiḥ paramārthaś ca satyadvayam idaṃ matam/ buddher agocaras tattvaṃ buddhiḥ saṃvṛtir ucyate/*

[85] The term *blo* here means "rational mind," and is specifically related to conceptual thought. It is distinct from the term *sems*, which means "mind" more generally, and typically is used to denote a more general form of awareness, that is not necessarily conceptual.

[86] *ji ltar snang ba 'di kho na/ kun rdzob gzhan ni cig shos yin/* BPD 61. Eckel translates this as, "Only what corresponds to appearances (*yathādarśana*) is relative (*saṃvṛti*) [truth], and only something different [from appearances] is the opposite [i.e., ultimate truth]." (Eckel 1987, 71.)

[87] As we will see below, Gorampa considers any dualistic appearance that is structured in terms of an apprehending subject and an apprehended object to be conceptual, and therefore, the domain of the rational mind. This direct relationship between dualistic appearances and conceptual thought is crucial for Gorampa's overall project.

false seeing is called conventional truth (*kun rdzob bden pa, saṃvṛtisatyam*).[88]

Leaving the complexities in interpreting this passage aside for the time being,[89] Gorampa's main point here is that terms such as "correct seeing" and "false seeing" correspond to the ultimate and conventional, respectively. However, Gorampa adds that these different types of perception are explained differently depending on whether one is considering the mind of an ordinary person, or the mind of an *ārya*.[90] In short, both the type of person under consideration, *as well as* that person's ability to perceive appearing phenomena either correctly or incorrectly, determine whether one is engaging with the conventional or ultimate truth. Gorampa explains:

> All objects and subjects which appear dualistically as appearances of objects and subjects are conventional truth; freedom from conceptual proliferations which is experienced by the subsiding of dualistic appearances through the meditative equipoise of *ārya*s is the ultimate truth.[91]

This explanation adds an important component to the points referenced above: any appearances that rely on a dualistic structure, existing in terms of an apprehending subject (*yul can*) that grasps an apprehended object (*yul*), correspond to the conventional truth. Appearances that are devoid of this dualistic object-subject structuring are free from conceptual proliferations (*spros bral*), and correspond to the ultimate. Gorampa's explanation of the meaning of *spros bral* will be explored in greater detail below, but in

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[88] *samyagmṛṣādarśanalabdhabhāvaṁ rūpadvayaṁ bibhrati sarvabhāvāḥ / samyagdṛśāṁ yo viṣayaḥ sa tattvaṁ mṛṣādṛśāṁ saṁvṛtisatyam uktam //* Madhyamakāvatāra VI:23; (Tib. *dngos kun yang dag brdzun pa mthong ba yis/ dngos rnyed ngo bo gnyis ni 'dzin par 'gyur/ yang dag mthong yul gang yin de nyid de/ mthong ba brdzun pa kun rdzob bden par gsungs//*)

[89] This verse and its interpretation are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

[90] BPD 61-62. An *ārya* (*'phags pa*) is a being who has progressed significantly along the Buddhist path. These beings rank higher, spiritually speaking, than ordinary persons, but are not yet fully awakened buddhas. See Chapter 3 for a detailed treatment of this passage.

[91] *yul yul can gnyis su snang ba'i yul dang yul can thams cad ni kun rdzob bden pa dang/ 'phags pa'i mnyam gzhag gis gnyis snang nub pa'i tshul gyis nyams su myong bar bya ba'i spros bral ni don dam pa'i bden pa'o/* BPD 63

short, this term describes the mind of an *ārya* in meditative equipoise (*'phags pa'i mnyam gzhag*), in which all conceptual thought subsides, and no dualistic distinctions that carve up the world in terms of objects and subjects occur. In other words, the two truths are best understood in terms of two perspectives or modalities: one which engages in dualistic distinctions, and one which is free from dualistic distinctions.

This twofold division is not, however, just this simple. The division into "conventional" and "ultimate" is itself a dualistic distinction, and therefore only really occurs from the perspective of an ordinary person. Gorampa elaborates:

> However, from the perspective of the rational mind of an apprehending subject, the two truths – which are taught verbally by the teacher and taken as objects by the student through study and contemplation in statements such as, "The dharma taught by the buddhas is based on two truths" – are each set out correctly. But, from the perspective of an *ārya*'s meditative equipoise, both are conventional.[92]

Although explaining the two truths in terms of object-subject duality and freedom from conceptual proliferations is correct from the perspective of ordinary conventional thought, from the perspective of a mind that is free from conceptual proliferations, making distinctions between "conventional" and "ultimate" makes no sense. Drawing distinctions is a characteristic of conceptual thought, and since all conceptual thought has been pacified in the mind of an *ārya* in meditation, such distinctions are impossible. As we will soon see, it is essential to Gorampa's overall philosophical project that the two truths can be distinguished conventionally, but not ultimately. At its most basic level, then, Gorampa's articulation of the two truths involves giving an account of appearances (*snang ba*). Ordinary appearances rely on conceptual distinctions between objects and

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[92] *'on kyang/ sangs rgyas rnams kyis chos bstan pa/ bden pa gnyis la yang dag brten/ zhes pa lta bu 'chad pa po'i sgras bstan pa dang/ nyan pa pos thos bsam gyis yul du byas pa'i bden pa gnyis ni/ yul can gyi blo de la ltos nas bden gnyis so sor gzhag tu rung yang/ 'phags pa'i mnyam gzhag la ltos nas gnyis ka'ang kun rdzob yin no/* BPD 63

subjects, and are therefore said to be conventional. Appearances that do not rely on such conceptual distinctions are only experienced by *āryas* in meditation, and correspond to the ultimate truth.

It is worth noting here that for Gorampa, dualistic appearances (*gnyis snang*) and conceptual thought (*rtog pa*) are directly related. According to his system, any conceptual thought is dualistic, and any dualistic appearance is conceptual. That is, all concepts occur by positing an apprehending subject (*yul can*) in opposition to an apprehended object (*yul*). It doesn't matter whether the object is an external thing, such as a tree, or an internal object, such as a mental state. Moreover, all appearances that occur in terms of object-subject duality are necessarily conceptual. This stance differs from the Indian epistemological tradition developed by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti; while these thinkers assert that certain kinds of perception can be nonconceptual, Gorampa contends that all perception is dualistic, and therefore conceptual. Moreover, because it is conceptual, it is relegated to the realm of the conventional.[93]

In order to understand exactly what Gorampa means by "dualistic appearances" here, let us consider an example. When I observe my surroundings right now, various things appear to me: I see a coffee cup and some books, I hear the sound of Dock Boggs's music on the stereo, and I smell sourdough baking in the oven. If I investigate the appearance of, say, my coffee cup, I find that it relies on a certain structure, namely, that it appears to me as something that exists separate from myself. I can reach out, pick up my cup, and drink from it. This also implies that *I* am something that exists separately from these appearances. So, in this very ordinary example, a structure emerges in which

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[93] A detailed explanation of Gorampa's epistemology is outside of the scope of the current project. However, for an overview of some broad strokes of Gorampa's epistemological views, see Dreyfus 1997, 256–259, 404–409, 543n25.

the object that appears – e.g., the cup – is perceived as distinct from the subject for which there is an appearance – e.g., myself. Everything that is conventional, Gorampa argues, appears with this type of dualistic object-subject structure. That is, anything that appears to the mind of an ordinary person appears as an object that is separate from the subject who apprehends it. The Basis chapter of the *Synopsis* involves giving an exhaustive account of the nature appearing phenomena, and explaining the proper methods for analyzing these appearances.

Gorampa on the Conventional Truth: What it isn't

After setting out this general overview of the two truths, Gorampa then proceeds to analyze each of the two truths in detail. In spelling out the nature of the conventional truth, he begins by posing a question: "So, suppose one asks, 'What are these things which appear as fire, water, and so on in the world?'"[94] Gorampa then presents – and subsequently refutes – answers to this hypothetical question as they would be explained by the Buddhist realist schools, the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika, who assert the existence of external objects, and the two subdivisions of the Yogācāra tradition – Satyākāravāda and Alīkākāravāda – which assert the existence of a mind.[95] Gorampa glosses over these schools' positions without much detail, refuting them with what he considers to be standard Madhyamaka reasoning.

He argues that the Vaibhāṣikas claim that appearances correspond to truly existent external objects, but that this is not correct from the Madhyamaka perspective:

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[94] *'o na 'jig rten na me dang chu la sogs par snang ba 'di gang zhe na* BPD 67

[95] These two subdivisions are not necessarily "schools" in a strict sense; they are doxographical distinctions that began in India, but were further solidified and refined in Tibet. See Funayama 2007; McClintock 2014, 328–329.

> The Vaibhāṣikas accept appearances as actually external objects which are established from the perspective of the mode of existence of the object itself, independent of a rational mind. But this is not correct, because they are established in mutual dependence on the rational mind of a subject.[96]

Because seemingly external objects cannot be found independently of the ways in which they appear to a mind, they must be understood as being established in a mutual relationship with the mind of the person who apprehends them.

With respect to the Sautrāntika position, which asserts that external objects do not appear directly to the mind, Gorampa argues that this is also not correct:

> The Sautrāntikas claim that appearances are consciousness, since they are mental events which are projected from their own side by external objects, and that these external objects that are projecting [images into awareness] exist in a hidden way. But this is also not reasonable, because there is no way to counter the actual existence of things like fire, and there is no way to establish them in the consciousness which is the result of that.[97]

In other words, the Sautrāntikas claim that the apprehension of external objects is mediated by appearances. That is, external objects are "hidden" from consciousness, and are only "projected" into consciousness via appearances. This is because, they argue, appearances have the nature of awareness, while external objects do not.[98] Gorampa argues that this view is not reasonable, because if this were the case, then there would be no way to separate appearances from objects. If objects can only be known via appearances, then one cannot establish that an appearance is distinct from the object that it represents, and one cannot prove that the appearance was caused by an external object.

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[96] *'di la bye brag tu smra bas/ blo la ma ltos par yul rang gi sdod lugs kyi ngos nas grub pa'i phyi don dngos su 'dod do/ de ni mi 'thad de/ yul can gyi blo dang phan tshun ltos nas grub pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 67

[97] *mdo sde pas phyi rol don gyis rang ngos nas gtad pa'i rnam pa yin pas shes pa yin la/ gtod byed kyi phyi don lkog na mo'i tshul gyis yod do/ zhes 'dod pa'ang mi rigs te/ me la sogs pa'i don dngos yin pa la gnod byed med cing/ de'i 'bras bur gyur pa'i shes pa yin pa la grub byed med pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 67

[98] Dreyfus compares this view to Western theories of representationalism. Dreyfus 1997, 335–338.

Gorampa's main point in these brief refutations is that we cannot talk about appearances in terms of external objects that somehow exist "out there" in the world, independent of our minds. Prior to any rational analysis, it may *seem* that our appearances correspond to things that are separate from ourselves, but upon further reflection, we must realize that we cannot verify the existence of anything independent of our own experience of it. We cannot, in other words, separate an object from our *experience* of that object. Because of this, Gorampa argues (along with other Mādhyamikas) that any position that advocates the true existence of external objects is necessarily flawed from the outset.

If external objects cannot be established as truly existent, then perhaps we can conclude that appearances are just consciousness. Gorampa replies to this view according to the manner in which it is put forth by two schools. First, he suggests that the Satyākāravāda (*rnam bden pa*) school[99] presents appearances in terms of images which exist in consciousness:

> The Satyākāravāda school says: "According to scriptural references and reasoning such as 'Objects do not exist; the mind itself does,' and reasonings such as 'because [consciousness] is aware *(rig pa)* or clear,' that which appears as an object in sense consciousness is consciousness. Moreover, in the absence of projecting external objects, things appear as objects through the force of karmic imprints.[100]

According to this school, although we cannot verify that external objects truly exist, we *can* say that images truly exist in the mind. That is, the images that appear as objects in consciousness are as real as consciousness itself. Dreyfus explains that according to this

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[99] Again, the term "school" here should not be taken to mean a distinct tradition that was intentionally created by followers of this line of thought; it is best understood as a doxographical category.

[100] *rnam bden pa/ don yod ma yin sems nyid de/ zhes sogs kyi lung dang rig pa'am gsal ba yin pa'i phyir zhes pa'i rigs pas dbang shes la don du snang ba ni shes pa yin zhing/ de yang gtod byed phyi don med par bag chags kyi dbang gis yul du snang ba yin no/* BPD 67

school, "perception is mistaken with respect to the externality of its objects," in the sense that ordinary beings mistakenly perceive objects as being external to the mind, but that "this distortion does not affect the nature of perception itself."[101] In other words, appearances truly exist as aspects of one's mind.

Gorampa argues that this view is not correct, for a handful of reasons:

> This is not correct, because the scriptural references are interpretable; and because when the object of awareness or the object of clarity are posited as the reason, it is inconclusive; and because when that which is being aware or clear is posited as the reason, it is not established; and, because things appear in the form of external objects, but do not in the form of enjoyment and irritation.[102]

Gorampa's refutation of this position is rather obscure here, but he presents his argument based on four different reasons. Firstly, he dismisses the Satyākāravādin's scriptural references as being of interpretable (rather than definitive) meaning. Next, he argues that based on the opponent's reasoning, if it is claimed that appearances are mind because they are the things that are illuminated, then this is inconclusive (*ma nges pa*); this line of reasoning could just as well be used to prove that appearances are *not* mind. Moreover, if the opponent argues that appearances are mind because they are that which illuminates, then this is not established (*ma grub pa*); if mind is understood as "that which illuminates," then this line of reasoning does nothing more than beg the question of whether appearances are mind. Finally, Gorampa argues that if an external object appears as mind, then it should appear in the same way as internal mental states, such as enjoyment and irritation. Gorampa concludes that the Satyākāravāda position that appearances are mind is untenable.

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[101] Dreyfus 1997, 433.

[102] *zhes zer ba mi 'thad de/ lung drang don yin pa'i phyir dang/ rig bya dang gsal bya rtags su bkod na ma nges/ rig byed gsal byed rtags su bkod na ma grub pa'i phyir dang/ phyi rol gyi ngo bor snang gi/ sim gdung la sogs pa'i ngo bor mi snang ba'i phyir ro/* BPD 67-68

Next, Gorampa presents the Alīkākāravāda view, which states that whatever presents itself as an external appearance is necessarily false:

> The Alīkākāravāda school asserts that according to scriptural references and reasonings such as "external objects are incorrect seeing," and "because what does not exist appears as an object," that which appears to consciousness as an external object is neither consciousness nor an object. Therefore this is a distorted appearance similar to appearances of floating hairs for one who has an eye-disease.[103]

While this position shares the view with that of Satyākāravāda that the mind truly exists, it differs in that it rejects the reality of images within the mind, arguing that images are only superimposed onto consciousness, in the same way that floating hairs are superimposed onto the eye-consciousness of one who has a certain type of eye disorder. The images are not really there, even though they appear. Consciousness itself exists as something which is luminous, nondual, and therefore ineffable. Images within consciousness, because they are cognizable, are therefore not identical to the mind.[104]

Gorampa argues that this position is not rational, either:

> Just as pleasure and pain are established as real because they appear as things which function as causing enjoyment and irritation; in the same way, fire and water must be accepted as substantial, since they are perceived as things which function as causing heat and cold. And, just as, although they are seen, when they are analyzed in terms of singularity and plurality they are not found; consciousness is similar in that when it is analyzed in terms of parts of time, it is not found.[105]

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[103] *rnam brdzun pas/ phyi rol don mthong log pa yin/ zhes dang/ yod pa ma yin don snang phyir/ zhes pa'i lung dang rigs pas shes pa la kha phyir ltos don du snang ba ni don shes gnyis ka ma yin pas 'khrul ba'i snang ba rab rib can la skra shad snang ba dang 'dra bar dod pa/* BPD 68

[104] The differences between Satyākāravāda and Alīkakāravāda are too subtle and complex to address here. Different Tibetan interpreters have drawn distinctions between these two schools in various ways (see Dreyfus 1997, 433ff. Some, such as Śākya Chokden, draw distinctions between these two traditions that perhaps even exclude the Alīkākāravāda as being a subdivision of the Mind-Only (Cittamātra, *sems tsam pa*) school (see Komarovski 2011, 8–9.)

[105] *de'ang mi rigs te/ bde sdug sim gdung gi don byed par snang bas dngos por 'jog pa ltar/ me chu yang tsha grang gi don byed par mthong bas dngos por khas lan dgos pa'i phyir dang/ mthong yang gcig du bral gyi rnam par dpyad na mi rnyed pa ltar/ shes pa'ang dus kyi cha shas kyis rnam par dpyad na mi rnyed par mtshungs pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 68

In other words, when one analyzes the mind, one finds that the images that appear in the mind must be accepted as things (*dngos po*), because they are causally efficacious in the same ways as external objects. A mental state like pleasure causes enjoyment in the same way that an external object like fire causes heat. However, when one analyzes things – regardless of whether they are mental states or external objects – they are not found. And if this is the case, then the mind similarly cannot be found; just as an object like a tree cannot be found when it is analyzed in terms of its singularity and plurality,[106] consciousness is similarly not found when analyzed in terms of time.

Again, Gorampa's refutation is a bit obscure here, and his responses to the realist schools are not explained in any more detail in the *Synopsis*. In brief, however, Gorampa's main argument in response to all four of the above so-called realist schools is that when one analyzes appearances, one cannot posit them as essentially distinct from the mind, nor can one posit them as essentially identical to the mind.

Based on these refutations, Gorampa concludes that none of these realist approaches, which cast appearances in terms of substantially existent entities in one way or another, are tenable. He concludes,

> Thus, just as when one tries to attain a fruit one climbs a tree, and having let go of the previous branch one doesn't grasp the next one, one falls into a great abyss and does not obtain the fruit. In the same way, realists also fall into the chasm of wrong views, rejecting things even familiar to cowherds, and also not apprehending reality since self and phenomena are imputed in another way; since they have fallen away from the two truths, they do not obtain the fruit. This is stated by the master Candrakīrti.[107]

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[106] This is one of the "Five Madhyamaka Reasonings" (*dbu ma'i gtan tshigs lnga*) used to establish emptiness. It is a style of mereological analysis that establishes things as lacking inherent existence. See chapter 4 for a thorough explanation of this line of reasoning.

[107] *de ltar dngos por smra ba dag ni shing thog don du gnyer bas shing sdong la 'dzegs te yal ga snga ma btang nas phyi ma ma bzung na shing thog ma thob par g.yang sa chen por lhung ba bzhin du/ gnag rdzi yan chad la grags pa'i 'jig rten gyi dngos po dor zhing/ bdag dang chos gzhan tu btags pas de kho na nyid kyang ma bzung zhing lta ba ngan pa'i ri sul du lhung ste bden pa gnyis las nyams pas 'bras*

Here, Gorampa urges us to keep in mind that a correct understanding of the conventional truth of appearances will eventually lead to a realization of the ultimate truth of the way things really are. Furthermore, understanding phenomena as essentially existent in any of the above four ways is not only wrong, but actually detrimental to spiritual progress on the Buddhist Path. Without grasping the first branch – that is, understanding the conventional truth – one will be unable to ascend to higher states of understanding. Instead, one will only descend into wrong views and will be unable to attain the fruit of enlightenment.

After refuting the views of the realists, Gorampa then goes on to refute "the other systems of those who arrogantly claim to be Mādhyamikas" (*dbu ma par rlom pa'i lugs gzhan*).[108] He mentions no figures or schools by name here, but he divides his refutation into four parts, carefully distancing himself from certain interpretations of Madhyamaka texts that pertain to the conventional truth. Gorampa describes these four refutations as: (1) the refutation of the assertion that all conventions are the system of worldly persons (*'jig rten pa*); (2) the refutation of the assertion that the two truths are the systems of ordinary persons (*so so [skye bo]*) and *ārya*s, respectively; (3) the refutation of the assertion that the conventional is neither existent nor nonexistent; and (4) the refutation of the existence of a designation on a nonexistent designated object.[109]

bu mi 'thob pa yin no/ zhes slob dpon zla bas bshad do/ BPD 68. This passage is a paraphrase of Candrakīrti's commentary on *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI:26: *mu stegs can 'di dag ni de kho na nyid la 'jug par 'dod pas skye bo ma byang ba gnag rdzi dang bud med la sogs pa yin chad la grags pa'i dngos po skye ba dang 'jig pa la sogs pa phyin ci ma log pa yang dag par nges par ma bzung bar phul du byang bar 'gro bar 'dod pas shing la 'dzigs pas yal ga snga ma btang nas yal ga phyi ma bzung ba ltar ltung ba chen pos lta ba ngan pa'i ri sul dag tu ltung bar 'gyur zhing/ bden pa gnyis mthong ba dang bral bas 'bras bu mi thob par 'gyur ro/*

[108] See BPD 69-84.

[109] *dbu ma pas rlom pa'i lugs gzhan dgag pa la bzhi ste/ kun rdzob thams cad 'jig rten pa'i lugs su 'dod pa dgag pa/ bden gnyis skye 'phags so so'i lugs su 'dod pa dgag pa/ kun rdzob yod min med min du 'dod pa dgag pa/ btags don med pa'i btags pa yod pa dgag pa'o/* BPD 68-69

Refutation of the assertion that all conventions are the system of worldly persons

First, Gorampa refutes the notion that the entirety of the conventional truth can be said to correspond to "worldly persons" (*'jig rten pa*). He claims that some opponents who arrogantly claim to be Mādhyamikas assert,

> The Mādhyamika does not accept any system of his own, because the Mādhyamika is a person who is an *ārya*, and the Madhyamaka view is that *ārya*'s meditative equipoise. Therefore, from the perspective of that meditative equipoise, all conceptual proliferations (*spros pa*) are pacified. As such, all presentations of basis, path and result which are established in the scriptures are merely established as the system of worldly persons.[110]

According to this view, the Mādhyamika is defined as a being whose mind is free from conceptual proliferations. As such, any conventional explanations of rational analysis (basis), methods for practice (path), or the state of buddhahood (result) only pertain to worldly (i.e., non-Mādhyamika) persons, and should not be considered to exist within the purview of Madhyamaka. In other words, *ārya*s are the only true Mādhyamikas, and everyone else is considered a "worldly person" (*'jig rten pa*). As such, anything that is not an *ārya*'s meditative equipoise is conventional, and exists within the purview of non-*ārya*s.

Gorampa responds to this assertion by inquiring what is meant by "worldly person" in this case.[111] He proceeds through four different ways of conceiving of worldly persons, responding to hypothetical definitions given by unnamed opponents who adhere to this view. None of these definitions, we will soon see, can be applied to Gorampa's understanding of the conventional truth.

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[110] *dbu ma par rlom pa kha cig/ dbu ma pa la rang lugs kyi khas blangs ci yang med de/ dbu ma pa ni 'phags pa'i gang zag yin la dbu ma ni de'i mnyam gzhag yin pas de'i mnyam gzhag gi ngo na spros pa thams cad zhi bas so/ des na gzhung 'dir bkod pa'i gzhi lam 'bras bu'i rnam gzhag thams cad ni 'jig rten pa'i lugs bkod pa tsam ste/* BPD 69

[111] *de la 'jig rten pa'i don gang yin zhes 'dri/* BPD 70

The first definition of "worldly persons" refers to those who do not hold any philosophical view whatsoever. The opponent here suggests that "Because realists who are affected by their tenets fall away from both of the two truths, 'worldly' means those ordinary worldly people who do not engage in any tenet system whatsoever. Thus, things familiar to them are stated in [Madhyamaka] texts."[112] In other words, the conventional truth explained in Madhyamaka texts corresponds to that which is seen by ordinary beings who do not engage in any sort of philosophy at all.

Gorampa refutes this view as follows:

> Now, things which are explained in the texts – such as the grounds and paths of the three vehicles which are the ten generations of bodhicitta, and the resultant body, wisdom, and activities – will be unestablished because of the following: they will not pertain to the system of the Mādhyamika because she has no system of her own; nor will they pertain to the system of the realists, since they have fallen away from the two truths; nor will they pertain to the system of ordinary worldly persons, since they are not familiar to them in the least.[113]

In short, Gorampa argues that there are certain ideas contained in Madhyamaka texts – specifically those pertaining to enlightened states – that are within the purview of the conventional, but are not familiar to ordinary persons who do not engage in philosophy. Therefore, "worldly persons" cannot refer to those who do not adhere to any philosophical tenets whatsoever.

The next opponent modifies his claim slightly: "Suppose, although it is not the case that those things are explicitly known to worldly persons, the *possibility* that they are

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[112] *grub mthas bsgyur ba'i dngos smra ba rnams ni bden pa gnyis ka las nyams pa'i phyir 'jig rten ni grub mtha' la gtan ma zhugs pa'i 'jig rten tha mal pa rnams yin pas de la grags pa rnams gzhung 'dir bkod pa'o* BPD 70

[113] *'o na gzhung 'dir bshad pa'i sems bskyed pa bcu la sogs pa theg pa gsum gyi sa lam dang 'bras bu sku dang ye shes dang phrin las la sogs pa rnams ni gzhi ma grub par 'gyur te/ dbu ma pa la ni rang lugs med pas de'i lugs ma yin/ dngos por smra ba rnams ni bden pa gnyis ka las nyams pas de'i lugs kyang ma yin/ 'jig rten tha mal pa la ni cung zad kyang ma grags pas de'i lugs kyang ma yin pa'i phyir/* BPD 70

known is the system of worldly persons. Therefore, those things become known even to worldly persons when engaging on their respective paths."[114] So, Gorampa's imagined opponent wonders, perhaps "worldly persons" can still refer to those who do not engage in philosophy, and the conventional truth is that which is potentially known by these ordinary persons after they start to engage in philosophical analyses. Gorampa replies that this view also makes no sense:

> Well, then, in that case, it follows that even the self, primordial matter, atoms, and true consciousness which are imputed by exponents of Buddhist and non-Buddhist tenet systems will be the system of worldly persons, because although they are not explicitly known now, they will similarly become known when they engage in their respective tenet systems. If you accept that, then the explanations in the texts, falling away from the system of worldly persons, also contradict what you have accepted.[115]

Here, Gorampa argues that if the opponent's claim were true, then it would be the case that *all* things that could potentially be known would pertain to the conventional truth – even things such as selves, atoms, and other entities that are not accepted within the purview of Madhyamaka. This would contradict the conventional truth as it is explained in Madhyamaka texts.

The third possibility broadens the definition of "worldly persons" slightly:

> "Worldly" refers to persons who are between the lowest hell and the peak of cyclic existence (*srid rtse*), up to the highest mundane qualities (*chos mchog chen mo*).[116] Regardless of whether these persons engage in tenet systems or not, their rational minds which have been cultivated since

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[114] *gal te de rnams 'jig rten pa la dngos su grags zin pa min kyang/ grags su rung bas 'jig rten pa'i lugs te/ 'jig rten pa'ang nam zhig lam de dang de la zhugs pa na grags par 'gyur pas so/* BPD 70-71

[115] *zhe na/ de ltar na phyi nang gi grub mtha' smra bas btags pa'i bdag dang gtso bo dang/ rdul dang shes pa bden pa ba rnams kyang 'jig rten pa'i lugs su thal te/ da lta dngos su grags zin pa med kyang nam zhig grub mtha' de dang de la zhugs pa na grags par 'gyur bar mtshungs pa'i phyir ro/ 'dod na/ de rnams 'jig rten pa'i lugs las nyams par gzhung las bshad cing/ khyed rang yang 'dod pa dang 'gal lo/* BPD 71

[116] *chos mchog* is the fourth stage of the Path of Preparation (*sbyor lam*); the final stage before one ceases to be an ordinary person and becomes an *ārya*. See Chapter 3.

beginningless time are not affected by tenet systems. So just what appears to those rational minds is posited in Madhyamaka texts.[117]

This definition of worldly persons refers to ordinary beings who do not adhere to any sort of tenet system, and also includes those Mādhyamikas who have not yet progressed to the state of *ārya*s. On this view, whatever appears to the minds of any non-*ārya* is considered within the purview of the conventional truth.

> Gorampa replies that this view is also not correct,
>
> because it has been taught that topics such as the basis which is the two truths, the path which is interdependence free from extremes, and so on are the domain of the *āryas*, but not the domain of the rational minds of ordinary persons whose minds have been cultivated since beginningless time.[118]

That is, Madhyamaka texts teach certain conventional topics that are said to be objects of knowledge for *ārya*s, but not for ordinary persons, so the opponent's reasoning is incorrect. Following this argument, Gorampa supplies several quotes from the autocommentary on the *Madhyamakāvatāra* to support his point. He cites passages which specifically state that the essence (*rang gi ngo bo, svarūpa*) of things is perceived by awakened beings, and that the nature of things (*chos kyi rang bzhin*) is perceived by a practitioner's enlightened awareness (*rnal 'byor pa'i ye shes*).[119] He goes on to argue as follows:

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[117] *gzhan dag 'jig rten ni mnar med pa dang srid rtse'i bar dang/ chos mchog chen po'i bar gyi gang zag rnams yin la/ gang zag de rnams grub mtha' la zhugs pa'am ma zhugs pa su yin kyang bla ste/ de rnams kyis thog med nas goms pa'i blo ni grub mthas ma bsgyur ba yin zhing/ blo de la ji ltar snang ba dbu ma'i gzhung du bkod pa'o zhe na/* BPD 71

[118] *de'ang mi 'thad de/ 'dir bshad pa'i gzhi bden pa gnyis dang/ lam mtha' dang bral ba'i rten 'brel la sogs pa 'phags pa'i spyod yul yin gyi/ so so skye bos thog med nas goms pa'i blo'i spyod yul ma yin par gsungs pa'i phyir* BPD 71

[119] *'jug 'grel las de'i rang gi ngo bo ni ma rig pa'i ling thog mthug pos blo'i mig ma lus par khebs pa bdag cag gi yul du nye bar 'gro ba ma yin gyi drug pa la sogs pa/ sa gong ma la gnas pa'i byang chub sems dpa' rnams kyi yul du ni 'gyur ba yin te zhes dang/ kho bo cag ni rnal 'byor pa rnams kyis dngos po de dag 'di ltar gzigs shing/ gzhan gang dag rnal 'byor pa'i ye shes thob par 'dod pa de dag gis kyang chos kyi rang bzhin de skad bshad pa la lhag par mos par bya'o/ zhes lung ji lta ba bzhin du rnal 'byor pa'i*

> One may think that those [i.e., basis, path, etc.] are considered only from the point of view of the ultimate truth. But this is not the case, because the conventional interdependence which is established as illusory is distinguished by realizing the ultimate truth such as this.[120]

Here, Gorampa argues that these topics that are said to be the domain of *ārya*s are still within the purview of the conventional. It is not the case, therefore, that the entirety of the conventional is seen only by "worldly persons," if those persons are considered to be any sentient being who is a non-*ārya*.

Finally, Gorampa's opponent expands the definition of "worldly persons" even further, to include all beings who have any sort of ignorance:

> "The world" is all persons who have ignorance, from the lowest hell to the tenth *bhūmi*. Since for those persons, an invention by intellectual views does not even exist conventionally, those topics which are presented in the texts are the basis, path, and result, however they appear naturally and without effort, through the force of primordial ignorance which exists for those persons since beginningless time. And, since things do not appear to ordinary persons but they do appear to *ārya*s, all presentations are appropriate.[121]

Here, the opponent argues for the broadest possible definition of "worldly persons," namely, any being who is not a fully awakened buddha. As such, the opponent argues that the entirety of the conventional truth appears to those beings through the force of their ignorance, regardless of their philosophical training or lack thereof.

Gorampa argues that this, too, is an unacceptable definition of "worldly persons":

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ye shes kyis thug su chud pa'i sgo nas dngos po rang bzhin med par 'chad par zhugs pa yin kyi/ rang gi shes pa la ltos nas ni ma yin te/ zhes gsungs pas so/ BPD 72

[120] *gal te de dag don dam bden pa kho na'i dbang du byas so snyam na/ de'ang ma yin te/ kun rdzob rten 'brel sgyu ma lta bur rnam par gzhag pa ni de lta bu'i don dam bden pa rtogs pas khyad par du byas pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 72

[121] *yang la la dag 'jig rten ni mnar med pa nas sa bcu pa'i bar ma rig pa dang bcas pa'i gang zag mtha' dag yin la/ gang zag de rnams las kun btags kyi lta bas gsar du btags pa ni tha snyad du'ang med pas gzhung 'dir bshad pa'i rnam gzhag rnams ni gang zag de rnams la thog med nas yod pa'i lhan skyes kyi ma rig pa'i dbang gis gzhi dang lam dang 'bras bu ci rigs pa rang gi ngang gis 'bad med du snang ba rnams te/ so skye la mi snang ba rnams kyang 'phags pa la snang bas/ rnam gzhag thams cad rung snyam na* BPD 72-73

> Since all conceptual proliferations of the basis, path, and result are pacified from the point of view of an *ārya*'s meditative equipoise, nothing at all is established; and in the post-meditative state, presentations of the basis, path, and result appear. Moreover, if they appear just through the force of innate ignorance, it follows that they also appear to common ordinary persons.[122]

Here, Gorampa argues that this line of reasoning is incorrect, because it conflates that which is seen by ordinary persons and that which is seen by *ārya*s in the post-meditative state. Presumably, Gorampa means that this line of reasoning contradicts the notion that *ārya*s engage with certain kinds of concepts (e.g., those pertaining to the basis, path, and result) that are not known to all ordinary persons.

In sum, Gorampa uses these objections and their subsequent refutations to show that the conventional truth refers to something specific; it does not simply refer to anything at all that might appear conceptually or linguistically. The conventional is not understood uniformly by all beings; while beings who do not engage in philosophical analysis understand certain conventions, only persons who engage in Madhyamaka analysis understand the conventional *truth*. Moreover, *ārya*s in the post-meditative state engage with the conventional in different ways than non-*ārya*s. For these reasons, Gorampa argues that it is incorrect to think of the conventional truth in terms of that which is understood by so-called "worldly persons."

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[122] *de'ang mi rung ste/ 'phags pa'i mnyam gzhag gi ngo na ni gzhi lam 'bras bu'i spros pa thams cad nye bar zhi bas gang yang ma grub la/ rjes thob tu gzhi lam 'bras bu'i rnam gzhag snang ba de yang/ lhan skyes kyi ma rig pa'i dbang kho nas snang na/ de dag so skye tha mal pa la'ang snang bar thal ba'i phyir ro/* BPD 73

Refutation of the assertion that the two truths are the systems of ordinary persons and

*ārya*s, respectively

Next, Gorampa refutes the view that the conventional truth corresponds to the

view of ordinary persons (*so so skye bo*), while the ultimate truth corresponds to the

views of *ārya*s. His opponent suggests,

> The Mādhyamika does not posit the two truths according to his own
> system. The ultimate which is established in the scriptures is the system of
> the *ārya*s, because only an *ārya* is a valid cognizer for the ultimate; an
> ordinary person is not. The conventional is the system of ordinary persons.
> The conventional appears only through delusion; therefore, just as the
> floating hairs of a person with an eye disorder do not appear to someone
> with good vision, the conventional does not appear to an *ārya* who is free
> from delusion... Therefore, [the Mādhyamika] asserts nothing more than
> following *āryas* with respect to the ultimate, and following ordinary
> persons with respect to the conventional.[123]

This opponent's view differs from the one above in one significant respect: while the

previous view asserted that the conventional should not be considered within the context

of Madhyamaka at all (because the Mādhyamika holds no position of her own), this view

argues that the conventional can be perceived by those on the Madhyamaka path, but

should be understood only in terms of that which appears to ordinary persons through the

force of their delusion. By the same token, the ultimate should be understood in terms of

that which appears to *ārya*s, because they are free from delusion.

Gorampa refutes this position as follows:

> From the perspective of an *ārya*'s meditative equipoise, conceptual
> proliferations of ultimate existence and nonexistence are pacified.
> Therefore, the term "ultimate" is not established. And since the

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[123] *kha cig dbu ma pa la ni/ rang lugs kyi bden gnyis kyi rnam gzhag med la gzhung 'dir bkod pa'i don dam
ni 'phags pa'i lugs te/ don dam la 'phags pa 'ba' zhig tshad ma yin gyi so skye tshad ma min pas so/ kun
rdzob ni so skye'i lugs te/ kun rdzob ni gti mug 'ba' zhig gis snang la/ de'ang mig dag pa la rab rib can
gyi skra shad mi snang ba bzhin du gti mug dang bral ba'i 'phags pa rnams la mi snang ste/ ... des na
don dam 'phags pa dang/ kun rdzob so skye'i rjes su 'brangs nas smras pa tsam du zed/* BPD 73

conventional is a distorted appearance, the ultimate cannot occur as its object. Thus, there is the fault that the ultimate is not established. And there is also the fault that the conventional is not established; does the delusion of an ordinary person establish the conventional as conventional or not? If it does not, then no one at all will establish it as conventional, because according to you, the conventional does not exist for *ārya*s. Therefore it is not established, and it is also not established for ordinary persons. If the delusion of an ordinary person *does* establish the conventional as conventional, it absurdly follows that the delusion of an ordinary person establishes that conventional as illusion-like, having false and deceptive qualities, because he establishes the conventional as conventional.[124]

What this means is that since the ultimate truth is free from conceptual proliferations, then when an *ārya* is actively engaging with the ultimate truth, she does not have any concept of "ultimate." Because of this, an *ārya* could never claim, "I am currently experiencing the ultimate truth," because as soon as she utters those words, she is engaging in concepts and language, which places her outside of the realm of the ultimate.[125] Moreover, if an ordinary person were to recognize the conventional truth *as* "conventional," then it would absurdly follow that an ordinary person's deluded cognition would be capable of recognizing the false and deceptive qualities of the conventional. However, if ordinary persons could not establish the conventional as conventional, then the conventional would not exist at all, because it has already been shown that it does not exist for *ārya*s! In these ways, Gorampa argues that it makes no sense to divide the two truths on the basis of the perspectives of ordinary persons and *ārya*s.

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[124] *de'ang mi mtshungs te/ 'phags pa'i mnyam gzhag gi ngo na ni don dam yod med kyi spros pa zhi bas don dam gyi tha snyad mi 'grub la/ kun rdzob ni 'khrul snang yin pas de'i yul du don dam mi 'gyur bas don dam ma grub pa'i skyon yod cing/ kun rdzob kyang ma grub pa'i skyon yod de/ so so skye bo'i gti mug des kun tdzob de kun rdzob yin par grub bam ma grub/ ma grub na kun rdzob yin par sus kyang ma grub par 'gyur te/ 'phags pa la ni khyed ltar na kun rdzob mi mnga' bas ma grub la/ so so skye bos kyang ma grub pas so/ grub na so skye'i gti mug des kun rdzob de brdzun pa bslu ba'i chos can sgyu ma lta bur grub par thal/ des kun rdzob de kun rdzob yin par grub pa'i phyir/* BPD 74-75

[125] This raises an important issue, concerning how an enlightened being is capable of speaking and teaching ordinary beings. This issue will be addressed in chapter 5.

Refutation of the assertion that the conventional is neither existent nor nonexistent

So far Gorampa has shown us that it makes no sense to classify the conventional according to the views of so-called "worldly persons" who exist outside of the Madhyamaka system, nor to classify it based on the perspective of ordinary persons as opposed to *ārya*s. He next considers the view that conventional truth is neither existent nor nonexistent. His opponents, whom he identifies as "some later Mādhyamikas" (*phyis kyi dbu ma pa kha cig*) suggest,

> In the Prāsaṅgika[126] system, a vase, a blanket, and so on, must be accepted as neither existent nor nonexistent in the superficial conventional (*kun rdzob tha snyad du*); because of scriptures which refute conceptual proliferations of the four extremes such as, "not existent, not nonexistent, not existent and nonexistent...", and because of the following reasoning: if it is existent, it is permanent, and if it is nonexistent, it is annihilated.[127]

This view states that conventional phenomena cannot be classified as either existent or nonexistent, because existence implies permanence, while nonexistence implies nihilism. And according to all Mādhyamikas, the conventional is neither permanent nor annihilated. Therefore, Madhyamaka texts have stated that the conventional is neither existent nor nonexistent.[128]

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[126] The Prāsaṅgika tradition of Madhyamaka will be addressed below. It is worth noting that while Gorampa devotes a considerable amount of effort in the *Synopsis* to distinguishing the Prāsaṅgika tradition from its counterpart, the Svātantrika tradition, his motivations in doing so are largely to refute the views of Tsongkhapa and other "later Mādhyamikas." As such, this dissertation does not address Gorampa's views on the distinctions between Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika in detail; my current project attempts to Gorampa on his own terms, and *not* through the lens of Tsongkhapa.

[127] *phyis kyi dbu ma pa kha cig thal 'gyur ba'i lugs la kun rdzob tha snyad du bum pa dang snam bu sogs yod min med min du khas len dgos te/ lung ni/ yod min med min yod med min/ zhes sogs mtha' bzhi'i spros pa bkag pa'i lung rnams dang/ rigs pa ni yod na rtag par 'gyur cing/ med na chad par 'gyur ba'i phyir/* BPD 75

[128] The phrase, "Not existent, not nonexistent, not existent and nonexistent…" (*yod min med min yod med min*) comes from Āryadeva's *Jñānasārasamuccaya*. It is also found in Nāgārjuna's *Śūnyatāsaptatikārikā*. See Chapter 4 for further discussion of this important quote.

Gorampa divides his refutation of this view in terms of "the unacceptability of the proofs"[129] and "the existence of refutations."[130] Regarding the first, he first argues that the statement "not existent, not nonexistent..." applies only to analysis of the ultimate truth:

> The scriptures which refute the four extremes of conceptual proliferations are intended to refer to the ultimate; but they are not intended to refer to the conventional. This is because the ultimate is free from conceptual proliferations, and the conventional possesses them.[131]

The ultimate, in short, is defined in terms of freedom from conceptual proliferations (*spros bral*), while the conventional is understood as being endowed with them. Next, Gorampa argues that the opponent's understanding of the relationships between existence and permanence, and nonexistence and nihilism are flawed:

> The logical proof is also incorrect; if mere existence were pervaded by permanence, it would contradict Āryadeva's assertion that existent entities are pervaded by impermanence: "When any entity exists, it abides in the realm of destruction." And if mere nonexistence were pervaded by nihilism, it would follow that the two selflessnesses would annihilate the self. Moreover, interdependence as in the statement, "When this exists, that arises" would be irrational, because this existence would not occur.[132]

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[129] *sgrub byed mi 'thad pa* BPD 75

[130] *gnod byed yod pa* BPD 75

[131] *dang po la mtha' bzhi'i spros pa bkag pa'i lung rnams ni don dam la dgongs pa yin gyi/ kun rdzob la dgongs pa ma yin te/ don dam spros bral yin pa'i phyir dang/ kun rdzob spros bcas yin pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 75-76

[132] *rigs pa'i sgrub byed kyang mi 'thad de yod pa tsam la rtag pas khyab na/ slob dpon 'phags pa lhas/ re zhig dngos gang yod na ni/ rnam par 'jig pa'i gnas la gnas/ zhes dngos por yod na mi rtag pas khyab par gsungs pa dang 'gal ba'i phyir dang/ med pa tsam la chad pas khyab na/ bdag med gnyis kyang bdag chad par thal ba'i phyir ro/ gzhan yang 'di yod na 'di 'byung zhes pa'i rten 'brel yang mi 'thad par 'byur te/ 'di yod pa mi srid pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 76.

By this argument, Gorampa argues that in the opponent's view, the pervasion (*khyab pa*) between existence/nonexistence and permanence/nihilism is false, and that if this were the case, then interdependence (*rten 'byung*) would not be possible.[133]

With respect to the second part of his refutation, Gorampa argues that the opponent's position makes no sense whatsoever at the level of conventional analysis, because an investigation of the two truths involves analyzing *appearances*:

> [The opponent's view] is refuted by scripture, because it is inconsistent with the sutra that states, "The Blessed One has said, 'The world disputes with me, but I do not dispute with the world. Whatever is accepted as existent in the world, I also accept as existent. Whatever is accepted as nonexistent in the world, I also accept as nonexistent.'" Therefore, teaching existence and nonexistence in the world is accepted as existence and nonexistence conventionally.[134]

Gorampa uses this frequently-cited passage to argue that discussion of the conventional pertains to ordinary appearances, as they are accepted in the world. Whatever is accepted as existent or nonexistent by beings in the world is also accepted as existent or nonexistent when analyzing the conventional. Thus it is incorrect to argue that the conventional is neither existent nor nonexistent.

Gorampa continues with this refutation, suggesting that if one were to ask an ordinary person whether he perceives external objects, he will reply with either "yes" or "no":

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[133] In Madhyamaka, interdependence and emptiness are inextricably linked. See *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXIV:18: "Whatever is dependently arisen is explained to be emptiness. Being a dependent designation, that itself is the middle way." *yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracakṣmahe/ sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipad saiva madhyamā//*

[134] *gnyis pa gnod byed yod pa la lung gis gnod de/ mdo las/ bcom ldan 'das kyi 'jig rten nga dang lhan cig rtsod kyi/ nga ni 'jig rten dang lhan cig mi rtsod de/ gang 'jig rten na yod par 'dod pa de ni ngas kyang yod par bzhed do/ gang 'jig rten na med par 'dod pa de ni nga yang med par bshed do/ zhes gsungs pa dang 'gal te/ 'jig rten na yod med de ston pas tha snyad du yod med la bzhed pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 76

> [The opponent's view] contradicts what is familiar; when another person asks a Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika, "For you, does fire or water exist?", it is observed that if it exists, he says that it exists, and if it does not exist, he says that it does not. However, we do not observe him say that fire and water are neither existent nor nonexistent. Even if he did say this, it would be an objectionable utterance, and it would not establish any object known in the world.[135]

To say that conventional appearances are neither existent nor nonexistent contradicts the conventional language of the world. Such language, Gorampa reasons, should be reserved for analysis at the ultimate level.

Refutation of the existence of a designation on a nonexistent designated object

So far, Gorampa has refuted "those who arrogantly claim to be Mādhyamikas" by refuting the assertion that the conventional applies to so-called "worldly persons," that the conventional and ultimate are the domains of ordinary persons and *ārya*s, respectively, and that the conventional is neither existent nor nonexistent. The final refutation considers a view that Gorampa later reveals to be that of Tsongkhapa, although he does not mention Tsongkhapa by name in this passage. This view agrees with Gorampa's point above that it is incorrect to say that the conventional is neither existent nor nonexistent, but it differs from Gorampa's view in an important respect:

> Since, when one in a pair of opposites is negated and eliminated, the other is established and affirmed, not being existent and not being nonexistent is impossible in a common ground, even in each of the two truths. Thus, all conventional statements referring to persons such as "This is Devadatta," "This is Yajñadatta," and so on, and all conventional statements referring to phenomena such as, "This is Devadatta's ear," are just nominal designations. But when one searches for their referents, they are not found.

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[135] *grags pa dang 'gal ba ni dbu ma thal 'gyur ba zhig la phyi rol nas gzhan zhig gis khyod la me yod dam/ chu yod dam zhes dris pa'i tshe/ de dag yod na yod ces dang/ med na med ces smra bar mthong gi/ me dang chu yod pa yang ma yin/ med pa yang ma yin zhes smra bar ma mthong zhing/ smra na yang klan ka'i tshig tu 'gyur gyi 'jig rten na grags pa'i don gang yang mi 'grub pa'o/* BPD 77

> This being the unique system of the Prāsaṅgikas, all conventional presentations exist as just nominal designations, but their referents do not exist.[136]

This long passage makes two basic claims. Firstly, the opponent claims that in any pair of opposites, the negation of one entity is equivalent to the affirmation of its opposite. Therefore, it is impossible to say that something is "neither existent nor nonexistent." If existence is negated, then nonexistence is affirmed; and if nonexistence is negated, then existence is affirmed. Based on this premise, the opponent then argues that conventions exist in the sense that they are mere nominal designations (*btags pa tsam*), while their referents (*btags pa'i don*) do not exist.[137]

Gorampa presents a lengthy response to this, but in short, he argues that this explanation of conventional appearances is based on two fundamental misunderstandings. First, there is a misunderstanding of the way that negation functions. The negation of nonexistence does not necessarily imply existence, as this opponent would like to claim.[138] Gorampa presents a number of examples to refute his opponent here. If, for example, a ghost is present in front of an ordinary person, that person's inability to perceive the ghost does *not* imply that the ghost is nonexistent. At the same time, on the opponent's view, to say that the ghost is not nonexistent would necessarily affirm its existence. The point here is that in the case of things about which one is uncertain, such as the presence ghosts, the denial of one possibility does not necessarily imply the

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[136] *phyis kyi dbu ma pa kha cig/ dngos 'gal gcig rnam bcad la khegs na gcig shos yongs gcod la grub pas/ bden pa gnyis char du'ang yod min med min gzhi gcig la mi srid do/ des na 'di ni lha sbyin no 'di ni mchod sbyin no zhes sogs gang zag dang/ 'di ni lha sbyin gyi rna ba'o/ zhes sogs chos kyi tha snyad thams cad ming gis btags pa tsam yin gyi/ btags pa'i don de btsal na mi rnyed pa de thal 'gyur ba'i lugs thun mong ma yin pa yin pas kun rdzob kyi rnam gzhag thams cad ming gis btags pa tsam yod kyi/ btags pa'i don ni med do zhes smra'o/* BPD 77

[137] Gorampa presents this view similarly in the *lta ba'i shan 'byed*. See Cabezón and Dargyay 2007, 133–137.

[138] That is, Gorampa argues that negation functions non-implicatively, rather than implicatively. For more on the distinctions between these two types of negations, see Chapter 4.

affirmation of its opposite. Gorampa applies similar reasoning to a number of other examples, here, pertaining to things that are difficult to perceive in several different respects.[139]

The second misunderstanding with respect to the opponent's view is based on the idea of nominal designations and their referents. Gorampa asks whether the "non-finding" of the referent of nominal designations occurs at the level of conventional or ultimate analysis. This "non-finding" cannot occur at the level of ultimate analysis, because, as Gorampa has already explained, at the level of the ultimate there are no conceptual proliferations, and therefore there can be no nominal designations. If we are talking about referents of nominal designation at the conventional level, on the other hand, this also makes no sense. Something can only be understood as a "nominal designation" if it exists in relation to an equally existent referent. But the opponent has just suggested that the referent does not exist.[140]

Through these four presentations of possible views concerning the conventional and Gorampa's thorough refutations of each, he approaches conventional truth by way of explaining what it is *not*. This is an important strategy for Gorampa, as it allows him to anticipate objections and misunderstandings with respect to his presentation of what the conventional truth *is*. By refuting wrong views of the conventional truth first, Gorampa preemptively eliminates the potential for mistaken interpretations of his own view.

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[139] BPD 77 *ff.*

[140] BPD 79*ff.* This refutation is quite dense, and presupposes thorough knowledge of assumptions pertaining to the assumed distinctions between Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika styles of reasoning, as well as arguments related to *pramāṇa*. For these reasons, I have only summarized and paraphrased Gorampa's arguments here. Gorampa's refutations of Tsongkhapa's views will be treated at various points below. For a more thorough (although very clearly biased) treatment of the differences between the views of Gorampa and Tsongkhapa with respect to the two truths, see Thakchoe 2007.

Gorampa on the Conventional Truth: What it *is*

After refuting the views of the Buddhist realists and "those who arrogantly claim

to be Mādhyamikas," Gorampa goes on to present his own view of the conventional truth.

He asserts that there are multiple acceptable ways of understanding conventional

appearances, but there are two perspectives that are the best:

> Although, as previously explained, there are five ways of accepting the
> conventional for the Mādhyamika, here, the two primary methods will be
> stated: the system of the Yogācāra-Mādhyamika, and the system of the
> Mādhyamika who acts according to what is established in the world.[141]

Gorampa briefly glosses these five ways of accepting the conventional earlier in the

Synopsis, citing Drakpa Gyaltsen.[142, 143] Here, however, he argues that the view of "those

who practice yoga" (which I will refer to as Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Mādhyamika)[144] and

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[141] *dbu ma pa la kun rdzob kyi 'dod tshul sngar bshad pa ltar lnga yod kyang 'dir gtso bor gyur pa rnal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma pa dang/ 'jig rten grags sde spyod pa'i dbu ma pa'i lugs gnyis brjod* BPD 84

[142] "The unmistaken venerable Grags pa rGyal mtshan states, 'Here, there are five conflicting assertions of the conventional. They are the called Mādhyamikas: (1) who act according to what is established in the world, (2) whose method is similar to that of the Vaibhāṣika, (3) who follow sutras (i.e., the Sautrāntika), (4) for whom things are illusion-like, and (5) who practice yoga (i.e., Yogācāra).'" *'khrul pa zad pa'i rje btsun grags pa rgyal mtshan gyi zhal snga nas/ 'di la ni kun rdzob kyi 'dod pa mi mthun pa lnga yod de/ 'jig rten grags sde pa dang/ bye brag tu smra ba dang tshul mtshungs pa dang/ mdo sde spyod pa'i dang/ sgyu ma lta bu dang/ rnal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma zhes bya ba lnga yin no/* BPD 55-56

[143] Vose notes that this fivefold division stems from Drakpa Gyaltsen's *Clearly Realizing Tantra: A Precious Tree* (*rgyud kyi mngon par rtogs pa rin po che'i ljong shing*). He writes that this text "includes a doxographical section that, when dividing types of Madhyamaka, does not use the terms 'Prāsaṅgika' and 'Svātantrika' but instead employs a five-fold division of Madhyamaka according to assertions on conventional truth. One of these divisions, 'Mādhyamikas of Worldly Renown' (*'jig rten grags sde pa*), is understood by later commentators to encompass followers of Candrakīrti's thought." (Vose 2009, 58.) Vose also notes that the equation of this category with Prāsaṅgika is not made explicitly by Drakpa Gyaltsen, but by his later commentators. (Ibid., 199n113.)

[144] "The fifth position is that of Jñānagarbha, Śāntarakṣita, and so on. Ye shes sde following Nāgārjuna said the following with regard to the lack of clarity concerning the acceptance and non-acceptance of external objects: since Bhāviveka accepted external objects, the Sautrāntika-Mādhyamikas emerged; and since Jñānagarbha explained appearances as mind, the Yogācāra-Mādhyamikas emerged." This statement was well known to earlier scholars. In this way these both are divisions of the Svātantrika school." *lnga pa ni ye shes snying po dang/ zhi ba 'tsho la sogs pa ste/ klu sgrub kyi rjes su ye shes sdes phyi don khas len mi len gyi gsal kha ma 'byung ba la/ legs ldan byed kyis phyi don khas blangs pas mdo sde spyod pa dang/ ye shes snying pos snang ba sems su bshad pas rnam 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma pa byung/ zhes snga rabs pa rnams la grags te/ de ltar na 'di gnyis ka rang rgyud pa'i dbye pa'o/* BPD 59. Note that Gorampa himself does not use the term "Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Madhyamaka" in the BPD, but I believe that this is the doxographical category that he has in mind.

the view of those "who act according to what is established in the world" (which I will refer to as Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika) [145] are the main ways of understanding the Madhyamaka view with respect to the conventional. [146] He presents the distinctions between these two main views in four different ways: (1) the way in which both systems are explained in scriptures, (2) the way in which Nāgārjuna explains their respective significance, (3) the way in which they become two from the perspective of practitioners, and (4) the way in which both masters (i.e., Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti) explain them. [147]

Gorampa is aware that advocating for two acceptable views is a controversial claim to make for someone who is attempting to set out the definitive Madhyamaka position, but he argues that "there are many scriptures that explain appearances as mind... and there are many scriptures that explain them as conforming with the conventional world." [148] Gorampa cites the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* [149] and the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* [150] as

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[145] "The first position is that of Candrakīrti. Because he accepts external objects, this is not at all similar to the Yogācāra position. And because he also does not accept hidden things which project forms onto the sense-consciousness, this is not similar to the Sautrāntika position. Nor is it similar to the Vaibhāṣika position, since the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā-vṛtti* explains a mind with images and external objects such as pots, cloths, and so on. However, this position accepts conventions such as object, consciousness, and so on, just as they appear to the perspective of the innate [i.e., untrained] mind of a worldly person." *dang po ni zla ba grags pa ste/ phyi don khas blangs pas rnal 'byor spyod pa dang sgo bstun pa'ang ma yin/ de dbang shes la rnam pa gtod byed kyi lkog na mor mi 'dod pas mdo sde pa dang sgo bstun pa'ang ma yin/ rigs pa drug cu pa'i 'grel par blo rnam bcas su bshad cing bum snam sogs kyang phyi don du bshad pas bye brag tu smra ba dang sgo bstun pa'ang ma yin gyi/ 'on kyang 'jig rten lhan skyes kyi blo ngo la ji ltar snang ba ltar don dang shes pa sogs kyi tha snyad zhal gyis bzhes pa'i phyir/* BPD 56

[146] Tauscher claims that Gorampa does not refer to Prāsaṅgika when singling out the two "acceptable" positions mentioned by Grags pa rGyal mtshan, but rather, that he identifies these two positions as Sautrāntika-Madhyamaka and Yogācāra-Madhyamaka, respectively. This is not the case, however; Gorampa mentions the proponents of these positions by name, equating the former with Jñānagarbha and Śāntarakṣita, and the latter with Candrakīrti (Tauscher 2003, 209.)

[147] *lugs gnyis mdo las gsungs pa'i tshul/ klu sgrub kyis dgongs pa so sor bkral pa'i tshul/ gdul bya'i ngos nas gnyis su 'gyur ba'i tshul/ tha snyad kyi mtshams ngos gzung zhing slob dpon gnyis kyis bkral tshul so sor bshad pa/* BPD 84

[148] *... snang ba sems su gsung pa'i lung mang du yod... tha snyad 'jig rten dang mthun par gsungs pa'i lung yang mang du yod do/* BPD 84

[149] "The Daśabhūmikasūtra states, 'O sons of the Victor, these three realms are mere mind.'" *mdo sde sa bcu pa las/ kye rgyal ba'i sras dag/ khams gsum po 'di dag ni sems tsam mo/* BPD 84

[150] "The *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* states, 'External appearances do not exist; the mind appears as different things. I explain things like bodies, possessions, and places as mere mind.'" *lang kar gshegs pa las/ phyi rol*

examples of the former, as well as the frequently-cited statement attributed to the

Buddha, "the world disputes me, but I do not dispute the world,"[151] as an example of the

latter. Gorampa's citing of scripture serves to ground his own position in the wider

Buddhist tradition; by referring to scripture that is considered authoritative by his fellow

Mādhyamikas, Gorampa demonstrates that it is entirely acceptable to understand the

conventional truth in multiple ways.[152]

To lend further credit to this position, Gorampa cites Nāgārjuna himself, quoting

the *Cittavajrastava,*[153] *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā,*[154] and *Ratnāvalī*[155] as examples of texts in which

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snang ba yod med de/ sems ni sna tshogs rnams su snang/ lus dang longs spyod gnas 'dra ba/ sems tsam du ni ngas bshad do/ BPD 84

[151] *'jig rten nga dang lhan cig rtsod kyi nga ni 'jig rten dang lhan cig mi rtsod do/* BPD 84

[152] Cabezón notes that Gorampa takes this approach as well in his *lta ba'i shan 'byed*, suggesting that unlike Tsongkhapa, Gorampa "appears to be claiming that Candrakīrti's represents only one option as regards the way in which the conventional world may be understood by the Madhyamaka." (Cabezón and Dargyay 2007, 330n369.) See chapter 6 for more on this.

[153] "The *Cittavajrastava* states, 'Seeing the mind is enlightenment, and the mind is the five types of beings. Apart from the mind, happiness and suffering do not even have the slightest characteristics. Even the slightest aspect of meditation, all of those, seen by all beings, are shown by saying just that, as the network of the mind.'" *sems kyi rdo rje'i bstod pa las/ sems mthong ba ni byang chub ste/ sems ni 'gro ba lnga po yin/ bde dang sdug bsngal mtshan nyid dag/ sems las ma gtogs cung zad med/ 'gro ba kun gyis mthong ba rnams/ cung zad bsgom pa'i rnam pa yang/ de kun sems kyi drva ba ru/ de nyid gsungs pas bstan pa yin/* BPD 84-85. Lindtner reproduces a portion of this passage in Sanskrit: *cittena labhyate bodhiś cittena gatipañcakam/ na hi cittād ṛte kiṃ cil lakṣaṇaṃ sukhaduḥkhayoḥ/* Lindtner 2002, 14n24.

[154] "The *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* (verse 34) states, 'Things explained, such as the great elements, are fully absorbed into consciousness. When they are separated from consciousness, aren't they incorrectly imputed?'" *rigs pa drug cu pa las/ '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/* BPD 85. For an English translation of this text, see Loizzo 2007.

[155] "The *Ratnāvalī* states, 'The Buddha declared that earth, water, fire, and air; long, short, subtle, and gross; virtue, and so on cease in consciousness. Since limitless, indemonstrable consciousness is completely sovereign, earth, water, fire, and air do not find a place. Thus, long and short, subtle and gross, virtue and nonvirtue, and also name and form, completey cease. They all previously appeared separate from consciousness because they were not known; later, they cease in consciousness because they are known.'" *rin chen phreng ba las/ sa dang chu dang me dang rlung/ ring thung phra dang sbom nyid dang/ dge sogs nyid ni rnam shes su/ 'gag par 'gyur zhes thub pas gsungs/ rnam shes bstan med mtha' yas pa/ kun tu bdag po de las ni/ sa dang chu dang me dang ni/ rlung gis gnas thob 'gyur ma yin/ 'dir ni ring dang thung ba dang/ phra sbom dge dang mi dge dang/ 'dir ni ming dang gzugs dag kyang/ ma lus par ni 'gag par 'gyur/ gang ma shes phyir rnam shes las/ sngon chad byung ba de kun ni/ de shes phyir na rnam shes su/ phyis ni de ltar 'gag par 'gyur/* BPD 85. Chapter 1, vv. 93-96. For an English translation, see Nāgārjuna 2007.

Nāgārjuna describes appearances as mind, and the *Śūnyatāsaptati*[156] as an example in which he describes appearances as conventions conforming to the world. By doing this, Gorampa shows his readers that the view that the conventional can be understood from two perspectives is not an innovation or a contradiction of Madhyamaka thought. This view has been expressed by both Nāgārjuna and by the Buddha himself. All of these quotations serve to reinforce the point that Gorampa makes earlier in his *Synopsis*, and upon which he elaborates below: when giving accounts of the conventional, the Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Madhyamaka and Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka positions differ. However, this is not a problem. Since both of these positions lead to a final Madhyamaka view that asserts freedom from conceptual elaborations, they can both be said to articulate the ultimate in the same way:

> Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika are divided based on their methods of producing the ultimate view, but with respect to the way that they accept the ultimate, there is no distinction.[157]

This, Gorampa wants to show, is in perfect accord with the fact that both the Buddha and Nāgārjuna describe conventional appearances according to two different perspectives. Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika may differ with respect to their initial descriptions of the conventional truth (i.e., the methods of producing the ultimate *view*), but both of these descriptions are nevertheless acceptable because they both lead to the same acceptance of the *actual* ultimate truth. In other words, while Gorampa allows for different

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[156] "The *Śūnyatāsaptati* states, 'The Buddha has explained abiding, creation, destruction, existence, nonexistence, equivalent, inferior, and superior, through the force of the world's conventions; he did not explain these through the force of actual reality.'" *stong nyid bdun cu pa las/ gnas pa'am skye 'jig yod med dam/ mnyam pa'am dman dang khyad par can/ sangs rgyas 'jig rten bsnyad dbang gis/ gsung gi yang dag dbang gis min/* BPD 85.

[157] *don dam gyi lta ba bskyed tshul gyi sgo nas thal 'gyur ba dang/ rang rgyud pa gnyis te/ don dam gyi 'dod tshul la ni khyad par med do/* BPD 59

philosophical approaches to the ultimate, he argues that for Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika

both, the actual realization of the ultimate truth is *spros bral.*

Gorampa argues that both of these positions – the Yogācāra-Svātantrika view

which understands appearances as mere mind, and the Prāsaṅgika view which

understands appearances as that which is in conformity with the world – are acceptable

for the Mādhyamika, because different practitioners are disposed to understanding

appearances in different ways. With respect to the former position, he elaborates,

> For some practitioners, if appearances are not initially established as mind,
> they will not be able to realize suchness, but on the basis of establishing
> conventional appearances as mind, they will be able to easily ascertain
> suchness. This occurs to practitioners either due to the force of the karmic
> imprints of hearing and contemplating in a previous life, or to those who
> previously had the view of Vijñaptivāda[158] in this life. Āryadeva has
> explained the way to teach the Madhyamaka view to them. The
> Madhyamaka view is not initially taught to them by setting out
> appearances as external objects. Instead, this previous acceptance of
> appearances as mind – even though they are accepted as ultimate in his
> (i.e., the Vijñaptivādin's) own system – is taken as the basis for realizing
> the ultimate, and there are then proofs to establish [the mind] as unreal
> *(bden med)* by the reasoning of "neither one nor many" and so on.[159] Thus,
> from the point of view of those practitioners, the first system is
> necessary.[160]

For practitioners who are predisposed to thinking in certain ways, either because of their

karmic imprints from previous lives or because they currently adhere to the Vijñaptivāda

(Consciousness-Only) school, conventional appearances should initially be understood as

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[158] Vijñaptivāda (or Vijñaptimātra) means "representation-only." According to this view, appearing things are representations of consciousness. This is a view that is associated with the Yogācāra school of Buddhism, and while it is sometimes conflated with the term Cittamātra ("mind-only"), these terms do not necessarily mean the same thing.

[159] This is a particular style of analysis that will be explained in detail in chapter 4.

[160] *gdul bya la'ang thog mar snang ba sems su ma bsgrubs na de tho na nyid rtogs mi nus shing/ tha snyad du snang ba sems su bsgrub pa'i steng du de kho na nyid bde blag tu gtan la dbab nus pa'i tshe snga ma'i thos bsam gyi bag chags kyi dbang gis byung ba'am/ tshe 'dir rnam rig pa'i grub mtha' sngon du song ba la dbu ma'i lta ba ston tshul 'phags pa lhas gsungs la de la thog mar snang ba phyi rol gyi don du phab nas dbu ma'i lta ba bstan pa ma yin gyi sngar snang ba sems su 'dod pa de nyid kho rang gi lugs kyi don dam du 'dod kyang de nyid don dam rtogs pa'i rten du byas nas gcig du bral rtags kyis bden med du bsgrub pa lta bu'ang yod pas gdul bya de dag gi dbang du byas nas lugs dang po dgos so/* BPD 86

mind. This view, Gorampa argues, serves as a basis for a later understanding of the Madhyamaka view of the ultimate. Again, Gorampa appeals to authority here, indicating that this view is not his own, but Āryadeva's.

On the other hand, some practitioners are predisposed to understanding appearances as external objects, conforming to the ways in which ordinary persons perceive things:

> Also, for some practitioners, suchness is easily shown if appearances are accepted as how they are familiar to the world. Otherwise, having produced wrong concepts about appearances, they would also not be able to easily understand suchness. Therefore, from their perspective, the latter system is necessary.[161]

Again, for those who are not predisposed to understanding conventional appearances as mind, Gorampa argues that it is acceptable for those practitioners to understand appearances in terms of the ways in which things are known by ordinary persons in the world. If such practitioners did not understand appearances in this way, Gorampa argues, then they could not subsequently realize the ultimate. Based on these arguments, Gorampa reasons that either one of these positions is acceptable when one is attempting to make sense of the conventional truth. One will eventually, through further analysis and meditation, come to realize the ultimate truth that is freedom from conceptual proliferations, based on either one of these initial conceptual understandings of conventional appearances.

In spite of this apparent tolerance of separate views, however, Gorampa argues that there are important differences between understanding appearances in terms of mind, and in terms of external objects as they are commonly understood in the world. Once

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[161] *yang gdul bya 'ga' zhig gi snang ba 'di 'jig rten na jig ltar grags pa ltar khas blangs na de kho na nyid bde blag tu bstan nus shing/ gzhan du na snang ba nyid la log rtog skyes nas de kho na nyid bde blag tu rtogs mi nus pa'ang yod pas de'i dbang du byas nas lugs phyi ma ste/* BPD 86

again, Gorampa argues that the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika schools differ with respect to this issue,[162] but the main point is that different ways of understanding the conventional truth serve different purposes. Some ways of explaining appearances are just called the worldly conventional truth (*'jig rten kun rdzob kyi bden pa*), while other ways are explained as conventional truth which is the basis for the realization of the ultimate (*don dam bden pa rtogs pa'i dngos brten du gyur pa'i tha snyad kyi bden pa*).[163] Gorampa stresses that in order to directly and nonconceptually realize the ultimate, one must first have a correct conceptual understanding of the conventional truth, and that this is not just blindly accepted; the conventional truth that is the basis for the realization of the ultimate only arises after a thorough analysis of the world.[164] It is this type of conventional truth that is the subject with which the *Synopsis* is primarily concerned.

It is important to note that the conventional truth is understood in terms of certain conventional constraints, namely, the sense perceptions of persons who have unimpaired sense organs. To explain this, Gorampa references Candrakīrti's distinction between true and false convention in the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, which states,

> Apprehension of the conventional[165] is understood in two ways: having unimpaired sense faculties, and having defective sense faculties. The consciousnesses of those with defective sense faculties are understood as erroneous from the point of view of the consciousnesses of those with working senses. Any objects understood through the six unimpaired senses

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[162] BPD 86-89, see below.

[163] BPD 88

[164] Again, it is important to note that on Gorampa's system, there is more than one way for a Mādhyamika to understand the conventional. A "correct" conception of the conventional is one that leads to a realization of the ultimate.

[165] Candrakīrti actually says "false seeing" (*mthong ba brdzun pa*) here, but in the previous verse of the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, he equates false seeing with apprehension of the conventional. See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of this issue.

are true from the perspective of worldly experience; anything else is posited as incorrect from the perspective of worldly experience.[166]

Based on the perceptions of ordinary beings who do not have impaired sense organs, things such as mirages (formed on account of the sun being in a certain location relative to one's eyes), the appearance of yellow (on account of jaundice), or the appearance of floating hairs (on account of an eye disorder) do not exist. Such appearances are considered to be false conventions, because they do not match up with what ordinary people – who have unimpaired sense faculties – perceive to be true.

True conventions, on the other hand, *do* match up with what most ordinary people perceive to be true. Candrakīrti argues that this is a fundamental aspect of the conventional; things are conventionally true in the sense that they are commonly accepted as true. As we will see below, Gorampa argues that there is nothing external to one's own mind that determines the truth or falsity of the conventional. That is, there is nothing that is really, objectively, independently "true" about conventional truth. Nevertheless, even within the context of our subjective conventions, things can be understood as either true or false; one cannot simply make up whatever conventions one wishes.

Three ways of understanding the conventional: the Svātantrika perspective

In the context of Gorampa's twofold distinction with respect to understanding the conventional, and the twofold distinction between worldly conventional and the conventional which is the basis for a realization of the ultimate, he argues that from the

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[166] *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI:24-25: *mthong ba brdzun pa'ang rnam pa gnyis 'dod de/ dbang po gsal dang dbang po skyon ldan no/ skyon ldan dbang can rnams kyi shes pa ni/ dbang po legs 'gyur shes ltos log par 'dod// gnod pa med pa'i dbang po drug rnams kyis/ gzung ba gang zhig 'jig rten gyis rtogs te/ 'jig rten nyid las bden yin lhag ma ni/ 'jig rten nyid las log par rnam par gzhag//* Huntington notes the Sanskrit for the second verse: *vinopaghātena yad indriyāṇāṁ ṣaṇṇām api grāhyam avaiti lokaḥ/ satyaṁ hi tal lokata evaṁ śeṣam vikalpitaṁ lokata eva mithyā//* (Huntington 1995, 232n40.)

Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Madhyamaka perspective, there are multiple ways in which an appearance of something can be explained:

> For the Yogācāra-Mādhyamikas, the scriptures explain a single appearance such as a sprout in three ways: as an external object, as mind, and as freedom from the proliferations of being and not being those. The first is explained intending accordance with the world, the second is explained intending reasoning which analyzes the conventional, and the third is explained intending reasoning which analyzes the ultimate.[167]

Here, Gorampa suggests that these three ways of explaining appearances are arranged hierarchically. At the most basic level of understanding, appearances can be explained as external objects: things that exist "out there" in the world, separately from one's mind. This corresponds to the way in which ordinary persons understand appearances prior to any philosophical analysis. If these conventional appearances are analyzed through Yogācāra analysis, however, then they are understood as things that are not separate from one's mind. Upon further analysis still – specifically, analysis which investigates the ultimate truth – one will come to realize that appearances are neither identical to, nor separate from, the mind itself.

If a Yogācāra-Svātantrika Mādhyamika explains appearances in terms of external objects, this pertains to the ways in which ordinary persons see the world, and this is called "worldly conventional truth." Gorampa explains:

> The first way of explaining appearances is in terms of the worldly superficial truth (*'jig rten kun rdzob kyi bden pa*), explained in the scriptures when it is said, "The Buddhas teach the dharma in dependence on the two truths." However, it is *not* the conventional truth (*tha snyad kyi bden pa ni ma yin*) that is intended when it is said, "Without depending on the conventional, the ultimate will not be realized." This is because [this

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[167] *rnal 'byor spyod pa'i dbu ma pa dag gis ni gsung rab las myu gu lta bu'i snang ba gcig nyid la phyi rol gyi don yin par bshad pa'i skabs dang/ sems yin par bshad pa'i skabs dang/ de dag yin min gyi spros pa dang bral bar bshad pa'i skabs gsum yod pa las/ dang po ni 'jig rten mthun 'jug dang/ gnyis pa ni tha snyad dpyod pa'i rigs pa dang/ gsum pa ni don dam dpyod pa'i rigs pa la dgongs nas gsungs so/* BPD 87

first level of explanation] is the merely conventional (*tha snyad tsam*) which is the basis for teaching what accords with merit, namely, the accomplishment of virtues and the abandonment of nonvirtues. This is taught to those whose rational minds are unable to initially engage with suchness.[168]

This way of explaining appearances is in accord with the ways in which ordinary people experience the world. When scriptures say that the Buddhas teach in dependence on two truths, this refers to a distinction between the way things appear to ordinary beings, and the way things really are. The way things appear to ordinary beings is called the conventional truth, but this is not, Gorampa argues, something which the Yogācāra-Mādhyamika claims can serve as the basis for a later realization of the ultimate truth. In other words, explaining appearances as external objects is not incorrect, but it is also not a basis for further levels of realization on the Buddhist path.[169]

If one explains appearances as things that come from one's own mind, rather than as external objects, Gorampa argues that this view is the result of reasoning which analyzes the conventional truth from the Yogācāra-Mādhyamika perspective. He argues,

The second way of explaining appearances is in terms of both of those (i.e., the worldly conventional and the conventional which is a basis for realization of the ultimate). This is because, since the subjects of the scriptures do not go beyond the two truths, it is said that to realize suchness, one must ride in the chariot of the two approaches.[170]

Here, Gorampa suggests that although understanding appearances as external objects is not entirely false, upon further analysis, the Yogācāra-Mādhyamika will conclude that appearances are mind. Because this realization comes about through analyzing the way

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[168] *de la dang po ni/ sangs rgyas rnams kyis chos bstan pa/ bden pa gnyis la yang dag brten/ zhes pa'i skabs kyi gsung rab kyi brjod bya 'jig rten kun rdzob kyi bden pa yin kyang/ tha snyad la ni mi brten par/ dam pa'i don ni rtogs mi 'gyur/ zhes pa'i skabs kyi tha snyad kyi bden pa ni ma yin te/ de kho na nyid la re zhig blo sbyar mi nus pa rnams la bsod nams cha mthun dge sdig gi blang dor bstan pa'i rten du gyur pa'i tha snyad tsam yin pa'i phyir/* BPD 87

[169] At least, it is not a basis for further levels of realization according to *this* system.

[170] *gnyis pa ni de gnyis char yin te/ gsung rab kyi brjod bya bden pa gnyis las ma 'das shing/ de kho na nyid rtogs pa la tshul gnyis kyi shing rta zhon dgos par gsungs pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 87

that things appear, explaining appearances as mind is a view that can be said to be in conformity with the world, *and* can serve as the basis for a subsequent realization of the ultimate.

The final way in which a Yogācāra-Mādhyamika explains appearances is in terms of being neither external objects nor mind. This understanding, Gorampa argues, is based on reasoning which analyzes the ultimate truth:

> The third way of explaining appearances is in terms of the actual state of the ultimate, which arises through the methods of the conventional truth. Here, there is no distinction between the former and latter systems. Therefore, engaging with the meaning of the scriptures by means of this third method is excellent.[171]

This, the Yogācāra-Mādhyamika contends, is the best way to understand appearances, because it will definitely lead to realization of the ultimate.

When the Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Madhyamaka view of appearances is set out in this way, we can see that there is a progression involved in the correct understanding of the conventional. One first understands appearances as external objects, and then, upon further reflection, one understands them as no different from the mind. Upon further analysis still, one understands that ordinary conventional appearances are ultimately neither external objects nor the mind.[172]

<u>One way of understanding the conventional: the Prāsaṅgika perspective</u>

Next, Gorampa turns to an explanation of conventional appearances from the Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika point of view, as explained by Candrakīrti. He argues that from

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[171] *gsum pa ni tha snyad bden pa'i thabs las byung ba'i don dam gyi skabs nyid yin te/ 'di la lugs snga phyi gnyis char la khyad par med do/ des na 'jug tshul gsum po 'di'i sgo nas gsung rab kyi don la 'jug pa ni 'jug tshul rmad du byung ba zhig 'dug go/* BPD 87-88

[172] Note that this position differs from the realist Satyākāravāda and Alīkākāravāda schools that Gorampa refuted above. While those schools assert the mind's existence at the ultimate level, the Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Madhyamaka school denies the mind's ultimate existence, even though it describes appearances in terms of mind conventionally.

this perspective, there is no differentiation between the conventional truth that is in conformity with the world and the conventional truth which is the basis for the realization of the ultimate. Gorampa contends that according to Candrakīrti,

> The subject matter of the scriptures, i.e., the conventional truth which is divided into two truths, is the conventional truth, but it is not *mere* (*tsam*) conventional truth. This is because false convention – in the context of the statement, "conventional truth is the method"[173] – is unsuitable as a method and is therefore not the subject matter of the scriptures. Therefore, the worldly superficial truth and the conventional truth which is a basis for the actual realization of the ultimate are the same.[174]

The main point here is that on Candrakīrti's view, whatever is accepted as true by ordinary persons in the world as true can serve as a basis for realizing the ultimate. Unlike the Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas, who argue that conventional appearances must be understood in terms of mind in order to realize the ultimate, the Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas argue that an ordinary, worldly, pre-analytical understanding of appearances is sufficient ground for later realizations.

Gorampa provides an example to explain the Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika view further:

> A statement such as "a sprout arises from a seed" is worldly superficial truth, because it appears to the perspective of the instinctual mind of a worldly person, and it is designated (*tha snyad byed*) in accord with the way that it appears. It is also conventional truth which supports the actual

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[173] *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI:80: "Conventional truth is the method, ultimate truth is the result. Whoever does not understand the distinction between the two embarks on the wrong path of mistaken concepts." *tha snyad bden pa thabs su gyur pa dang/ don dam bden pa thabs byung gyur pa ste/ de gnyis rnam dbye gang gis mi shes pa/ de ni rnam rtog log pas lam ngan zhugs// upāyabhūtaṁ vyavahārasatyam upeyabhūtaṁ paramārthasatyam/ tayor vibhāgaṁ na paraiti yo vai mithyāvikalpaiḥ sa kumārgayātaḥ//* Cited in Huntington 1995, 246n108.

[174] *yang slob dpon zla ba'i bzhed pas gsung rab kyi brjod bya bden pa gnyis su phye ba'i kun rdzob kyi bden pa ni 'jig rten kun rdzob kyi bden pa yin gyi kun rdzob bden pa tsam ni ma yin te/ log pa'i kun rdzob ni/ tha snyad bden pa thabs su gyur pa dang/ zhes pa'i thabs su mi rung bas gsung rab kyi brjod bya ma yin pa'i phyir des na 'jig rten kun rdzob kyi bden pa dang/ don dam bden pa rtogs pa'i dngos brten du gyur pa'i tha snyad kyi bden pa gnyis don gcig te/* BPD 88

> realization of the ultimate, since when one analyzes the four extremes of
> the ways of arising, the arising itself is not even found.[175]

In other words, an ordinary appearance such as the arising of a sprout from a seed is understood as "worldly superficial truth," because it conforms to what ordinary persons perceive. All beings with unimpaired sense-faculties can agree that a seed is the cause of a sprout. However, this ordinary appearance can also serve as the basis for a later realization of the ultimate, because it can serve as an object of analysis and further investigation. When one analyzes the seed and sprout, searching for the essential relationship between cause and effect, Gorampa argues that one will come to the conclusion that no such essence can be found.[176] And once this analysis is applied to such an ordinary, worldly experience, it can serve as a support for meditation which eventually leads to a realization of the ultimate.

The *truth* in Gorampa's and Candrakīrti's understanding of the conventional truth thus may be best understood as a type of fictionalism.[177] This approach allows us to talk of truth and falsity within a particular context, while acknowledging that from a standpoint outside of that context, all such truth claims are merely fictional. Take, for example, the classic Bollywood film *Sholay*. Within the context of this film, certain things are true, while other things are false: it is undeniably true that Gabbar Singh is an evil villain, and it is undeniably false that Jai and Veeru are father and son. From a perspective outside of the context of the film, however, neither of these statements is true, because neither Jai, nor Veeru, nor Gabbar are real people. *Sholay* is a fictional world,

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[175] *sa bon las myu gu skye zhes pa lta bu 'jig rten lhan skyes kyi blo ngor snang zhing snang ba ltar tha snyad byed pas 'jig rten kun rdzob kyi bden pa'ang yin la/ skye tshul nyid la mtha' bzhir dpyad pa'i tshe skye ba nyid kyang mi rnyed pas don dam rtogs pa'i dngos brten du gyur pa'i tha snyad bden pa'ang yin pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 88

[176] For more on this analytical procedure, see chapter 4.

[177] For more on fictionalism as it is understood in philosophical contexts, see Blackburn 2005; D'Amato 2013; and Rosen 2005.

and from a perspective outside of the context of that fiction, it makes no sense to talk about the truth or falsity of states of affairs that pertain to that world.

In the same way, the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka view suggests that we can understand the conventions of ordinary persons as a type of fiction. For ordinary persons, that which conforms to unimpaired sense-perception is conventionally true, while that which does not is conventionally false; but from a perspective outside of the context of that conventional world (e.g., from the perspective of an *ārya*'s meditative equipoise), everything in the conventional world is a mere fiction. Tillemans notes that for the Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika, the advantage of fictionalism "is that a philosophical understanding that certain propositions are literally false will not lead one to simply eliminate all talk of the entities and properties in question."[178] Because conventional reality is useful for ordinary persons, and serves as a basis for a later realization of the ultimate, it is useful to talk about conventional truth in ways that correspond to the perspectives of ordinary persons, even though the conventional is ultimately false.

The conventional truth, therefore, is true in the sense that it is something upon which all ordinary human beings who do not have impaired forms of perception can agree. The conventional truth is what allows for ordinary persons do things like talk about the weather or engage in debates about politics. It is also, more importantly, that which allows people to understand conceptually what a realization of the ultimate truth is like, and what enables Buddhist practitioners to correctly engage in rational analysis and meditative practices. In other words, some features of the conventional—such as reasoning and language—can be used to approach an understanding of the ultimate, even though the ultimate itself (as we will see below) transcends those features.

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[178] Cowherds 2011, 159.

<u>Gorampa's way(s) of understanding the conventional</u>

Gorampa concludes his discussion of the conventional by summarizing the above points as follows:

> In sum, the master Śāntarakṣita and his disciple[179] taught that the worldly conventional truth is divided into two: that which is in accord with the world, and the conventional which is the support for an actual realization of the ultimate. Thus, in the context of the latter, appearances are mind. And according to the master Candrakīrti, the conventional truth is generally divided into two: correct and incorrect. However, all three – worldly conventional truth (being the correct conventional itself), that which is in accord with the world, and the conventional which is the support for the actual realization of the ultimate – are subsumed into one meaning.[180]

That is, Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas argue that one must understand conventional appearances as mind in order to perform the rational analysis that is necessary to later realize the ultimate, while Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas contend that the way in which ordinary people accept appearances (i.e., as external objects) is an acceptable basis for analysis.

This notion that Svātantrikas hold a position of their own (in this case, that external appearances are mind) while Prāsaṅgikas accept things just as they are known to everyone else in the world is fairly standard rhetoric in Tibetan discourse around the divisions between these two traditions. As analyses of the distinctions between these two approaches are abundant in current English-language scholarship on Madhyamaka,[181] it would be redundant to restate them here. However, Cabezón sums up the basics of this distinction quite succinctly:

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[179] Kamalaśīla

[180] *mdor na zhi ba 'tsho dpon slob kyis 'jig rten kun rdzob kyi bden pa la 'jig rten mthun 'jug dang/ don dam rtogs pa'i dngos brten gyi tha snyad bden pa gnyis su phye nas phyi ma'i skabs su snang ba sems yin par bzhed la/ slob dpon zla bas spyir kun rdzob bden pa la yang log gnyis su phye yang/ 'jig rten kun rdzob bden pa ni yang dag kun rdzob nyis yin pas de dang/ 'jig rten mthun 'jug dang/ don dam rtogs pa'i dngos brten du gyur pa'i tha snyad bden pa gsum ka don gcig la 'dus pa ni/* BPD 89

[181] See, e.g., Dreyfus and McClintock 2003; Donald S. Lopez 1987; Cabezón 1994; Vose 2009.

> The classical Indian locus for the distinction is, of course, the discussions between Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka, and Candrakīrti, in their respective commentaries on the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, over the type of reasoning Mādhyamikas can and should use to bring their opponents to an understanding of emptiness. Buddhapālita uses chiefly prasaṅga-type arguments aimed at demonstrating the absurdity in his opponents' positions. Bhāvaviveka criticizes Buddhapālita, claiming that *prasaṅga*s are insufficient, and argues for using independent (*svatantra*) syllogisms. Candrakīrti not only defends Buddhapālita's use of *prasaṅga*s, but also criticizes Bhāvaviveka's notion of *svatantra* syllogisms as incompatible with the Mādhyamika view as a whole. In India… this disagreement over Madhyamaka method does not seem to have given rise to a full-blown doxographical distinction between Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas. In Tibet, on the other hand, the disagreement between Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti on this issue was seen by some as representing a radical split in the Madhyamaka.[182]

Tibetan Mādhyamikas, who universally uphold Candrakīrti's interpretation of Nāgārjuna as authoritative, tend to identify themselves as Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas, and subordinate the Svātantrika "tradition" to their own. There is not, however, a uniform understanding among Tibetan scholars as to how the Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas are distinguished.

It is significant that Gorampa posits the above distinction between Śāntarakṣita and Candrakīrti specifically, rather than between the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika "traditions" as a whole. While Gorampa explores the divisions between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika in enough detail to warrant its own separate study,[183] he does this primarily in response to Tsongkhapa's presentation of these two schools. Tsongkhapa's *Eight Difficult Points* (*dka' gnad brgyad*) draws sharp distinctions between the Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas, and divides the two schools based on their respective understandings of

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[182] Cabezón 2003, 292–293.

[183] Gorampa's analysis of the distinctions between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika in the *Synopsis* is complex, and beyond the scope of the present volume. For a presentation of these two schools that follows Gorampa's general outline in the *Synopsis*, see Santina 1986.

both the conventional and ultimate truths.[184] In presenting his own analysis of the division between these two schools, Gorampa suggests that they only differ with respect to methods of analysis at the conventional level, and do not, in fact, differ with respect to the ultimate view. This point is important for Gorampa: Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas are *both* Mādhyamikas, and as such, they both advocate that the ultimate truth is free from conceptual proliferations (*spros bral*). With respect to conventional analysis, however, Gorampa argues that the methods of both of these schools differ, and that in this regard, the Prāsaṅgika position is superior.

However, in dividing the above understandings of conventional appearances along the lines of Śāntarakṣita and Candrakīrti, Gorampa appears to be making a different sort of doxographical distinction than the one made by other fifteenth-century Tibetans between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika. Instead, Gorampa's distinction appears to be more closely in line with the views of earlier Indian Mādhyamikas, rather than Tibetans. As Dreyfus and McClintock suggest:

> The basic division was between those – such as Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti – who accepted external objects conventionally and those – such as Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla – who argued for an interpretation of conventional reality similar to the Yogācāra in which external objects do not exist.[185]

This distinction aligns Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti, rather than placing them at odds. By explaining conventional appearances in terms of the views of Śāntarakṣita and Candrakīrti, Gorampa is implicitly suggesting that the differences between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika might not be as important as his Gelugpa contemporaries make them out to be.

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[184] See Ruegg 2002.
[185] Dreyfus and McClintock 2003, 2.

That being said, Gorampa also seems to show some affinity for the Yogācāra position. In the above presentation, he explains that based on a person's previous karmic imprints, it is sometimes easier to initially grasp the (Yogācāra) idea that appearances are mind, and later develop an understanding of the Madhyamaka view of emptiness as freedom from conceptual proliferations. He elaborates, "if appearances are not initially established as mind for students, it will be impossible for them to realize suchness; they are able to easily ascertain suchness based on establishing conventional appearances as mind."[186] In other words, understanding appearances as mind is not entirely false; however, once one has a conceptual understanding of appearances as mind, one can further develop one's understanding of the conventional in order to realize the ultimate truth from the Madhyamaka perspective. Due to his lineage, monastic affiliations, and a host of other factors, Gorampa must identify himself as a Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika in order to be taken seriously as a philosopher, but references to acceptable non-Prāsaṅgika (and even seemingly non-Madhyamaka) views occur frequently throughout his Madhyamaka texts.[187]

Gorampa reasons that once one can understand appearances in one of these two ways – either as mind or as that which is familiar to the world – one can use this understanding to later come to a realization of the ultimate. He contends that either one of these conceptualizations of the conventional is capable of eventually leading a Mādhyamika to a realization of emptiness, because once one realizes the ultimate truth and is in a state of *spros bral,* one no longer engages with conceptual thought or the conventional truth. The above passages allude to an important philosophical point for

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[186] *gdul bya la'ang thog mar snang ba sems su ma bsgrubs na de kho na nyid rtogs mi nus shing/ tha snyad du snang ba sems su bsgrub pa'i steng du de kho na nyid bde blag tug tan la dbab nus pa* BPD 86

[187] See chapter 6 for a discussion of these issues.

Gorampa, namely, that while an enlightened being is experiencing the ultimate, she is incapable of engaging with the conventional. Based on this distinction, Gorampa is able to allow for slightly more diverse descriptions of the conventional.

Recall that at the outset of his discussion of the two truths, Gorampa describes the conventional truth in terms of object-subject duality, and describes the ultimate truth in terms of freedom from dualistic distinctions. A correct understanding of the conventional truth, therefore, depends on accurately understanding dualistic appearances. These appearances can be understood in terms of mind or in terms of external objects, but when they are investigated through rational analysis,[188] they will eventually lead the practitioner to a conceptual understanding of what the ultimate truth is like.

Although an actual realization of the ultimate truth involves the subsiding of dualistic, conceptual thought, these types of thought are nevertheless necessary at the outset of the Buddhist path. Without cultivating certain kinds of concepts – namely, concepts about the right ways of interpreting dualistic appearances – one cannot come to a later realization of the ultimate truth. The conventional truth is a useful fiction; it is a context that is useful in the sense that it orients one toward the ultimate truth, it is fictitious in that it is eventually abandoned upon a realization of the ultimate truth. In short, Gorampa's main point is that we need the dualistic, conceptual constructs of the conventional to get us to the nondual, nonconceptual ultimate, but these conceptual constructs are not actually present in the ultimate itself.

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[188] See chapter 4

The Ultimate Truth is Beyond Concepts and Language

After explaining the characteristics of the conventional truth, Gorampa then sets

out to characterize the ultimate truth. He is aware, however, that because the actual

ultimate truth is free from conceptual proliferations, it cannot actually be shown. So,

before beginning his explanation of the ultimate he reminds us,

> The ultimate truth – that is, the way in which freedom from conceptual
> proliferations is experienced by an *ārya*'s meditative equipoise – cannot
> be shown by definitions, examples, or anything at all. This is because it is
> neither expressed in words nor made into a mental object.[189]

The ultimate truth is beyond definitions. As the correlative of the conventional truth, it

lacks object-subject duality, it is free from all conceptual proliferations, and it cannot be

expressed conceptually or linguistically. It can only be experienced directly by the

nonconceptual meditative equipoise of *āryas*.

Gorampa does not mean to suggest, however, that just because the actual

experience of the ultimate truth is beyond our ability to explain or conceptualize, one

cannot come to some sort of understanding of some of the general features of the

ultimate:

> Now, one may think that there is no way in which a practitioner can
> realize the ultimate truth. But, in order for practitioners to understand it, it
> is taught through reification in the conventional truth as an object
> expressed through words or as an object of mental activity.[190]

Because ordinary persons engage with the world in terms of language and concepts, the

ultimate must be explained for them in terms of language and concepts, even though the

ultimate itself is beyond such distinctions. Through attempts to reify this elusive

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[189] *don dam pa'i bden pa 'phags pa'i mnyam bzhag [sic] gis ji ltar spros pa dang bral ba'i tshul gyis myong ba ltar mtshan nyid dang mtshan gzhi sogs gang gis bstan par mi nus te/ tshig gis brjod par bya ba ma yin zhing/ blos yul du bya ba ma yin pa'i phyir/* BPD 96-97

[190] *'o na gdul bya don dam pa rtogs pa'i thabs med par 'gyur ro snyam na gdul bya de rtogs pa'i don du tshig gi brjod bya dang/ sems kyi spyod yul du tha snyad kyi bden par sgro btags nas bstan pa/* BPD 98

experience of the ultimate, ordinary persons understand it linguistically and conceptually. It is because of this seemingly paradoxical nature of the ultimate, Gorampa argues, that we find verses in Nāgārjuna's texts that state things like, "All is real, or all is unreal, all is both real and unreal, all is neither unreal nor real; this is the teaching of the Buddha."[191] Gorampa suggests that a verse such as this demonstrates the way in which the ultimate can be explained to ordinary persons, and that this should be understood as an instruction to teach the ultimate in stages, according to the mind of the student to whom it is being taught.

Gorampa presents this graded teaching in the following way: The teaching "All is real" should be taught to those who hold nihilistic views, so that they may begin to adopt virtuous qualities and abandon negative ones. Then, because clinging to reality (*bden pa*) is a cause of suffering, one should be taught that "All is unreal." Next, in order to understand that things can be seen as either existent or nonexistent based on one's perspective, "both" is taught. Finally, in order to understand that from the perspective of an *ārya's* meditative equipoise no conceptual proliferations exist at all, "neither" is taught.[192] Regarding these four stages of teaching, Gorampa argues that "One should know that they are for the purpose of engaging with the nectar of emptiness, freedom from all extremes of conceptual proliferation."[193] This brief commentary on Nāgārjuna's verse[194] serves to illustrate Gorampa's awareness of the apparent contradiction that arises when one describes the ultimate truth as that which cannot be described. By showing

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[191] *sarvaṃ tathyaṃ na vā tathyaṃ tathyaṃ cātathyam eva ca/ naivātathyaṃ naiva tathyam etad buddhānuśāsanam// Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XVIII:8

[192] BPD 98-100

[193] *mthar spros pa thams cad dang bral bas tong pa nyid kyi bdud rtsi la 'jug pa'i ched yin par shes par bya'o/* BPD 100

[194] Which, moreover, relies heavily on Candrakīrti

these four ways in which Nāgārjuna claims that ultimate reality can be taught to different types of students, Gorampa shows us that a rational understanding of the ultimate can be described to – and therefore induced in – ordinary persons, even if it cannot be directly and fully known by them.

So, Gorampa begins his explanation of the ultimate by explaining that although the actual ultimate truth cannot be explained, we can nevertheless gesture in its general direction. With all of this prefacing out of the way, he then puts forth his own explanation of the ultimate (insofar as it can be explained). "The exemplification of the ultimate," he states, "is freedom from conceptual proliferations."[195] Regarding the term "conceptual proliferations" (*spros pa*), Gorampa argues that "it does not refer truly existing things, nor to an affirming negation (*ma yin dgag*)[196] alone, but to that with which the mind engages and proliferates; i.e., all positive or negative characteristics of things."[197] This means that the ultimate is free from anything at all that can possibly be conceived. It is not just the absence of thoughts that one currently has, or the negation of things that we take to be truly existing; rather, freedom from conceptual proliferations refers to the complete absence of *all possibility for conceptual thought in any form whatsoever*. It is important to note that this is not nihilism; nihilism is the denial of existence, and denial is a type of conceptual thought. Freedom from conceptual proliferations transcends the distinctions between permanence and nihilism, affirmation and negation, or existence and nonexistence.

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[195] *don dam pa'i mtshan gzhi ni spros pa dang bral ba* BPD 100-101

[196] This technical term refers to a specific type of negation in which, while something is being negated, something else is implicitly asserted. This stands in contrast to a non-implicative negation (*ma yin dgag*). For more on these terms, see Chapter 4.

[197] *'dir spros pa zhes pa bden pa'i dngos po'am ma yin dgag kho na ma yin gyi gang la blo 'jug cing 'phro ba dgag sgrub kyi chos kyi mtshan ma thams cad yin* BPD 101

Gorampa continues in his explanation of the ultimate by stating, "nothing whatsoever is found that is free from the mere things that are negated or affirmed."[198] By this, he means that independently of our own conceptual thought (i.e., establishing and refuting, or thinking in terms of existence and nonexistence), nothing at all can be found. That is, nothing can be said to exist apart from our own conceptual proliferations. And since the ultimate is free from these conceptual proliferations, it cannot be found. Gorampa clarifies this point further, stating that the ultimate is "beyond examples, words, or objects of mental activity."[199]

None of this, however, means that the ultimate is nonexistent, or that freedom from conceptual proliferations implies nihilism. To refute the idea that the ultimate is completely nonexistent, Gorampa goes on to express freedom from conceptual proliferations in more positive terms:

> The ultimate is that which has the quality of being the basis upon which all things depend, and this is the *dharmatā* which is of one taste. The *Uttaratantra*[200] states that just as all worldly environments are supported by space, all things such as aggregates arise from the nature of the mind. And a scripture states, "All things have one characteristic; that is, no characteristic," and, "Since divisions are not tenable in non-existent things, there is non-duality, and in this, there is nothing to abandon and nothing to accept." Therefore, there is no path to be accomplished, and because there is no difference between the nature of a sentient being and a buddha, one does not seek a buddha elsewhere. Because of this, the concept that equates the ultimate to the horn of a rabbit is abandoned.[201]

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[198] *dgag sgrub kyi chos tsam dang bral ba'i ci yang ma rnyed pa nyid* BPD 102

[199] *dpe dang sgra dang blo'i spyod yul las 'das pa* BPD 102

[200] For a detailed analysis of Gorampa's views on Buddha-nature as expressed in the *Uttaratantra*, see Jorden 2003.

[201] *de thams cad rten pa'i gzhi chos can dang ro gcig pa'i chos nyid yin pa ste/ rgyud blar snod kyi 'jig rten thams cad nam mkha' la brten pa ltar phung sogs kyi chos thams cad sems kyi rang bzhin las byung bar gsungs pa dang/ mdo las chos thams cad ni mtshan nyid gcig pa ste 'di lta ste mtshan nyid med pa'o/ zhes dang/ chos rnams kyi med pa nyid la khyad par mi 'thad pas rnam gzhag gnyis su med pa dang/ 'di la ni spang ba dang blang bar bya ba ma mchis so/ zhes lam bsgrub tu med pa dang/ sems can dang sangs rgyas kyi rang bzhin tha dad du med pas sangs rgyas gzhan du mi btsal bar gsungs pa ste/ 'dis ni don dam pa ri bong gi rwa dang 'dra bar rtog pa spong ba yin no/* BPD 103

This long passage requires a great deal of unpacking, and many of the issues discussed here will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 5. The main thrust of Gorampa's argument here is that it is a mistake to think that because the ultimate cannot be expressed in words or conceived in our ordinary minds, that it is therefore completely nonexistent. Even though we cannot describe the ultimate, it remains something upon which everything depends. It is something out of which conceptual proliferations arise, and although it is said to be free from conceptual proliferations, it is not actually different from them, either.

The above passage highlights one of the important ways in which Gorampa articulates the distinction between the two truths, as well as the relationship between conceptual, analytic thought and nonconceptual, nondual realization. The section of the *Synopsis* in which Gorampa describes the nature of the conventional truth uses language that is direct and highly analytical, spelling out logical arguments using clearly defined concepts.[202] And when describing what the ultimate truth is *not*, Gorampa continues to use analytic language and logical reasoning.[203] But when he turns to a description of what the ultimate truth *is*, we can see a distinct shift in his language. When describing the ultimate truth, Gorampa begins to introduce terms that haven't been seen so far in the *Synopsis*. "The *dharmatā* which is of one taste," for example, carries with it a much more poetic, experiential feeling than a statement such as "characteristics of things that proliferate negatively or positively." The phrase "one taste" also resonates specifically with certain practice lineages, specifically Mahāmudrā (*phyag chen*) and Lamdre (*lam*

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[202] e.g., "All objects and subjects which are dualistic appearances of objects and subjects are conventional truth"

[203] e.g., "it does not refer to things that are true, or to an affirming negation alone, but to all characteristics of things that proliferate negatively or positively with which the mind engages."

'bras). Because the ultimate truth is beyond the realm of language and concepts, any attempts to describe it linguistically or conceptually will undoubtedly fall short. For this reason, when speaking about the ultimate, Gorampa abandons his characteristic analytical style of writing, making a marked shift to a more poetic and practice-oriented style.[204]

Continuing with this explanation of the ultimate in terms of *spros bral*, Gorampa writes,

> "Whether the tathāgatas appear or do not appear, the reality of phenomena (*chos rnams kyi chos nyid*) remains." In accord with this statement, the emptiness which is not established in any way always pervades all phenomena such as form and so on, just as heat pervades fire and sweetness pervades sugar. And when one searches by correct reasoning for an establishment in any extreme, it remains unestablished in any way whatsoever.[205]

In other words, freedom from conceptual proliferations is the ultimate nature of all things, pervading everything. This is true regardless of whether or not there are beings who can teach and understand the dharma. However, if we search for this ultimate nature through analytical reasoning, we cannot find it.

Moreover, Gorampa argues that the ultimate is realized only by a particular type of mind, and that such a mind is

> the domain of the perfection of wisdom – the final limit of cognitions – because a worldly mind with concepts that investigates the ultimate realizes it by means of generalities through inference, and the nonconceptual mind of an *ārya*'s meditative equipoise realizes it by means of enlightened awareness (*so so rang gi rig pa*).[206]

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[204] See Chapter 5 for more on this.

[205] *de bzhin gshegs pa rnams byung yang rung ma byung yang rung/ chos rnams kyi chos nyid ni gnas pa'o/ zhes pa'i tshul gyis gzugs la sogs pa'i chos thams cad la dus thams cad du me'i tsha ba dang/ bu ram gyi mngar ba ltar cir yang ma grub pa'i stong nyid des khyab pa dang/ rigs pa yang dag gis mtha' gang du grub btsal ba na gang du'ang ma grub par gnas pa/* BPD 103-104

[206] *de'ang blo zab mo shes pa rnams kyi mthar thug pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i yul te 'jig rten pa'i rtog bcas kyi blo mthar thug tshol ba'i rjes dpag gis spyi'i tshul du rtogs pa dang 'phags pa'i mnyam bzhag rnam par mi rtog pa'i blos so so rang gis rig pa'i tshul gyis rtogs pa'i phyir/* BPD 104. The term *so so rang gi rig pa* bears resemblance to the term *rang rig*, but nevertheless has a very

Here, Goramp argues that from the perspective of ordinary, unenlightened minds, the ultimate is inferred through conceptual thought, while from the perspective of *āryas,* the ultimate is directly realized by enlightened awareness. Ordinary persons, in other words, can know *about* the ultimate – that is, they can know what the ultimate is *like* – but only *ārya*s in meditative equipoise can directly experience the actual ultimate truth.

The enlightened awareness of an *ārya* in meditation must be understood differently than the way in which we understand ordinary cognition. Recall from above that Goramp understands conceptual thought as something which apprehends things in a dualistic way; an ordinary person perceives by conceiving of herself as a subject (*yul can*) that grasps an object (*yul*) in some way. Conceptual awareness, therefore, is always understood as awareness *of.* An ordinary person can be aware of a feeling, or a thought, or a color. Enlightened awareness, on the other hand, is nondual. It is not awareness *of*; it is simply awareness, free from dualistic divisions into subjects and objects.

The above passages demonstrate that a conceptual understanding of the ultimate can be understood in two ways. In referring to the ultimate in terms of *so so rang gi rig pa*, Goramp describes the ultimate in positive terms. In other areas of the *Synopsis*, in which Goramp refers to the ultimate in terms of *spros bral*, he describes it in negative terms. It is important for Goramp to refer to the ultimate through both of these approaches, for two reasons. Firstly, by referring to the ultimate in both positive and

different meaning. While *rang rig* refers to reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvedana*) in general, *so so rang rig* refers specifically to the reflexive awareness of an enlightened buddha. As we will see below and in the following chapters, an enlightened buddha's awareness is nondual, and therefore necessarily reflexive. I have chosen to translate *so so rang rig* as "enlightened awareness," in order to avoid confusion with the more general "reflexive awareness" that is meant by *rang rig*, as well as to emphasize the fact that this term refers specifically to the nondual reflexive awareness of an enlightened buddha. There is debate within the Tibetan traditions regarding the differences between *rang rig* and *so so rang rig*, outlined rather thoroughly in Kapstein 2000. This article is a response to Williams 1998. Interestingly, Kapstein notes that Goramp's Sakyapa contemporary, Śakya mchog ldan, does not differentiate between these two terms. This is an issue that warrants further study.

negative terms, Gorampa reminds us that clinging to any particular view at this level is wrong, and is not a correct way of understanding emptiness. The Madhyamaka view of emptiness is explained in terms of being neither existent nor nonexistent, so by explaining the ultimate in both cataphatic and apophatic terms, Gorampa reminds us to refrain from clinging to one idea of emptiness. Secondly, while the ultimate is empty of all qualities, it can also be described as "full" – that is, full of the potentiality for all that we can conceive and experience. In this sense, Gorampa's explanation of the ultimate in terms of *spros bral* conveys its emptiness (in terms of its emptiness of conceptual proliferations), while his explanation of it in terms of *so so rang gi rig pa* reminds us that it is not entirely nonexistent; it is something that *can* be experienced, known, and realized.

After further discussion of the nature of the ultimate, in which he alludes to dozens of sūtras and Mahāyāna texts supporting his position that the ultimate can be directly realized by *ārya*s and inferred by ordinary persons,[207] Gorampa acknowledges a possible objection to his approach:

> Here, one might say, "In the context of the previous identification of freedom from conceptual proliferations, it has been explained as being free from all signs such as expressed and expression, object and subject, and negation and establishment. Therefore, it would be impossible to know it, just like explaining the vast qualities of a flower in the sky."[208]

The objection here is that Gorampa has gone to great lengths to explain that the ultimate truth, which is freedom from conceptual proliferations, is beyond our ability to conceptualize and categorize. Because it is neither expressed nor expression, subject nor

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[207] BPD 105-110

[208] *'o na sngar spros bral ngos gzung ba'i skabs su brjod bya rjod byed dang/ yul yul can dang/ dgag sgrub kyi mtshan ma thams cad dang bral bar brjod nas 'dir de lta bu'i che ba nam mkha'i me tog gi yon tan brjod pa ltar shes par mi nus so zhe na/* BPD 111

object, and so on, Gorampa's imagined opponent argues that the ultimate cannot, therefore, be known in any way. However, Gorampa replies that this is not so:

> That is true, but here it is also not made into an object of experience or an object of conceptual thought, nor is it shown to be an efficient cause of anything.[209]

In other words, although it is not incorrect to describe the ultimate apophatically, in terms of an absence of conceptual proliferations, Gorampa argues that this does not mean that the ultimate is completely nonexistent and cannot be realized. When ordinary persons talk about the ultimate truth, they reify it and make it into an object of language or thought:

> Even though freedom from conceptual proliferations it is not established in any way whatsoever, this non-establishment is expressed by being reified through examples as an object that is realized by practitioners.[210]

In short, although the actual ultimate truth cannot be explained in words or conceived by the minds of ordinary persons, this does not mean that it is therefore nonexistent, unknowable, or unattainable. Gorampa argues that while ordinary persons cannot understand the actual ultimate truth in the way that it is realized by enlightened beings, they can nevertheless understand what the ultimate truth is *like*, through rational analysis and inference based on a correct understanding of the conventional truth.[211]

Conclusion

Gorampa begins the Basis chapter of his *Synopsis* by explaining the conventional and ultimate truths in terms of the presence and absence of dualistic conceptual thought,

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[209] *de lta mod kyi 'dir yang de rtog pa'i shes pa dang myong bas yul du byas pa'am 'ga' zhig gi byed rgyur bstan pa ma yin/* BPD 111

[210] *cir yang ma grub pa nyid yin yang ma grub pa nyid gdul byas rtogs pa'i don du mtshan gzhir sgro btags nas bsnyad pa yin* BPD 112

[211] The differences between the actual ultimate truth in terms of its realization and the conceptual ultimate truth in terms of the ways in which it is taught will be examined in detail in the following chapter.

respectively. By setting out the two truths doctrine in this way, Gorampa constructs a framework that will allow him to develop a system in which a practitioner can follow a gradual path to enlightenment, *and* which results in a radical transformation of one's mind.

If we understand the Basis chapter of the *Synopsis* as the philosophical groundwork that must be laid out prior to later practice and realization, then the two truths doctrine should be understood as something which structures that basis. The conventional truth allows us to make sense of dualistic appearances, and to understand those appearances in ways that will help us to eventually realize the ultimate. We can explain the conventional in terms of mind, or in terms of external objects, but we *must* talk about the conventional in terms of the ways in which phenomena appear to ordinary persons with unimpaired forms of sense-perception. Based on a thorough analysis of the conventional, one will come to understand the general features of the ultimate. A realization of the ultimate is, however, devoid of conceptual thought and dualistic distinctions.

In other words, Gorampa's system involves a process in which one first constructs a conceptual world, and then removes those conceptual constructs. It is in this way that we can think of the two truths doctrine as a type of scaffolding; just as a scaffolding is necessary in the construction of a building but is not actually a part of the building itself, the two truths are necessary in the development of the final Madhyamaka view of emptiness, but are not actually a part of that emptiness. From the perspective of one who has realized the actual ultimate truth that is free from conceptual proliferations, there is no two truths schema (because thee is no division between conventional and ultimate),

but in order to cultivate that perspective, one must initially rely on the division between the two truths.

The concept of a logical scaffolding is, of course, an idea that has been most famously explained by Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus*: "Logical propositions describe the scaffolding of the world, or rather they present it."[212] This logical scaffolding is a framework that structures our world, and allows us to engage with it. Wittgenstein later explains this engagement with the world in terms of "language-games," but we can also think of this engagement in terms of the Mādhyamika's fictionalist account of the conventional truth. Recall from our earlier discussion that Gorampa describes the two truths as "the very framework of reality" (*dngos po'i lus nyid)*. So, just as Wittgenstein's logical scaffolding allows us to play certain language-games, we can say that the two truths allow us to engage with the conventional in ways that lead to a realization of the ultimate. Similarly, Wittgenstein argues that a logical scaffolding is necessary in order to make sense of the world, but that eventually one must "throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it."[213] In much the same way, Gorampa argues that one must rely on the two truths in order to make sense of the Buddha's teachings, but that this dualistic structure must eventually be abandoned.

As we will see in the following chapters, this general presentation of the two truths grows increasingly complex throughout the *Synopsis*. Gorampa elaborates on this basic framework, delineating different ways in which each of the two truths can be understood, and developing methods for analyzing appearances based on this

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[212] Wittgenstein 2014, sec. 6.124.
[213] Ibid., sec. 6.54.

increasingly complicated structure. The end result, however, is that an enlightened being "throws away the ladder," by turning rational analysis against itself.

Chapter 3: The Experiential Division Between the Two Truths

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, Gorampa argues that the two truths correspond to two ways of engaging with appearing phenomena. The conventional truth involves conceptual, dualistic distinctions between apprehended objects (*yul*) and apprehending subjects (*yul can*), while the ultimate truth involves the dissolution of dualistic distinctions and is free from conceptual proliferations (*spros bral*). In short, this means that the conventional truth is distinguished from the ultimate truth based on the ways that beings engage with and understand appearances (*snang ba*).

As we have also seen, Gorampa bases his distinctions between the conventional and ultimate on Candrakīrti's explanation of the two truths in *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI:23:

> All things have two natures, apprehended by correct or false seeing. The object of correct seeing is suchness (*de nyid, tattva*); the object of false seeing is called conventional truth (*kun rdzob bden pa, saṃvṛtisatya*).[214]

In this verse, Candrakīrti explicitly connects correct seeing to suchness (i.e., the ultimate), and false seeing to the conventional. The autocommentary clarifies the rest of this verse, elaborating on what is meant by the phrase "all things have two natures":

> The buddhas, who correctly understand the nature of the two truths, taught that all internal and external things such as conditioned mental states and sprouts have two kinds of natures: conventional and ultimate. The ultimate is the nature (*bdag gi ngo bo*) that is found as the object of a particular kind of wisdom of those who have correct seeing, but it is not established on its own (*rang gi bdag nyid*). This is one nature. The other is the existence (*bdag gi yod pa*)[215] that is found through the force of the false seeing of ordinary persons whose mental eye is completely covered by a film of ignorance. This is not intrinsically established as an essence in the

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[214] Tib: *dngos kun yang dag brdzun pa mthong ba yis/ dngos rnyed ngo bo gnyis ni 'dzin par 'gyur/ yang dag mthong yul gang yin de nyid de/ mthong ba bdzun pa kun rdzob bden par gsungs//* Skt: *samyagmṛṣādarśanalabdhabhāvaṁ rūpadvayaṁ bibhrati sarvabhāvāḥ / samyagdṛśāṁ yo viṣayaḥ sa tattvaṁ mṛṣādṛśāṁ saṁvṛtisatyam uktam // Madhyamakāvatāra* VI:23 (Huntington 1995, 237n37.)

[215] Huntington translates this term as "intrinsic nature" (Ibid., 231n38.)

way that it is seen as an object by naïve people. Therefore, all things are apprehended in terms of those two natures.[216]

Candrakīrti argues that the conventional nature is the object of false seeing, which is defined as a mind that is "covered (*khebs pa*) by the film of ignorance." Candrakīrti (following Nāgārjuna and his Mādhyamika successors) generally uses the Sanskrit term *saṃvṛti* (Tib: *kun rdzob*) to refer to the conventional truth. This term is literally understood as "concealer" or "cover," which means that in the context of the two truths, the conventional is something that conceals or obscures the way things really are.[217] This terminology is important to keep in mind as we progress through the following analysis of the two truths; as we will see, Gorampa's explanation of the ultimate truth indicates that it is something which is always present, and needs to be uncovered through the practice of the Buddhist Path. With respect to the ultimate nature, Candrakīrti asserts that it is the object of "a particular kind of wisdom" *(ye shes kyi khyad par)* of "those who have correct seeing" *(yang dag par gzigs pa rnams kyi)*. Two aspects of this description of the ultimate are worth bearing in mind, here: firstly, Candrakīrti explicitly describes the ultimate nature as an object (*yul*) of wisdom. Secondly, this wisdom is said to belong to those who have "correct seeing" (*yang dag par gzigs pa*).

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[216] *'di ni bden pa gnyis kyi rang gi ngo bo phyin ci ma log par mkhyen pa sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das rnams kyis/ 'du byed dang myu gu la sogs pa nang dang phyi rol gyi dngos po thams cad kyi rang gi ngo bo rnam pa gnyis nye bar bstan te/ 'di lta ste/ kun rdzob dang don dam pa'o/ de la don dam pa ni yang dag par gzig pa rnams kyi ye shes kyi khyad par gyi yul nyid kyis bdag gi ngo bo rnyed pa yin gyi/ rang gi bdag nyid kyi grub pa ni ma yin te/ 'di ni ngo bo gcig yin no/ gzhan ni so so'i skye bo ma rig pa'i rab rib kyi ling thog gis blo'i mig ma lus par khebs pa rnams ki mthong ba brdzun pa'i stobs las bdag gi yod pa rnyed pa yin te/ byis pa rnams kyis mthong ba'i yul du gyur pa ji lta ba de lta bu'i rang bzhin du rang gi ngo bos grub pa ni ma yin no/ de'i phyir dngos po thams cad rang bzhin de gnyis 'dzin pa yin no//* Madhyamakāvatāra 104-105

[217] Candrakīrti explains: "Ignorance is a concealer (*kun rdzob*) because it obscures the nature of things; thus, that which is fabricated appears to be real. The Sage called this 'conventional truth' (*kun rdzob bden pa*), and the thing that is fabricated 'the conventional' (*kun rdzob*)." *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI:28, Tib: *gti mug rang bzhin sgrib phyir kun rdzob ste/ des gang bcos ma bden par snang de ni/ kun rdzob bden zhes thub pa des gsungs te/ bcos mar gyur pa'i dngos ni kun rdzob tu'o//* Skt: *mohaḥ svabhāvāvaraṇād dhi saṃvṛitiḥ satyaṁ tayā khyāti yad eva kṛtimam / jagāda tat saṃvṛtisatyam ity asau muniḥ padārthaṁ kṛtakaṁ ca saṃvṛtim //* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra* 171, cited in Huntington 1995, 232n45.)

In short, Candrakīrti draws connections between correct seeing and the ultimate; the ultimate nature is the object that is found by authentic perception. And false seeing is related to the conventional; the conventional nature is the object that is seen by an ignorant person. Recall from the previous chapter that for Gorampa, any type of mental activity that distinguishes between objects and subjects is necessarily conceptual, and is therefore considered conventional. Any type of perception – even perception that is considered correct – relies on object-subject structuring and is therefore not equivalent to a direct realization of the actual ultimate truth. There seems to be a tension between Candrakīrti's description of the ultimate as an object of correct seeing, and Gorampa's explanation of the ultimate as being free from conceptual proliferations. As we will see below, however, Gorampa draws on interpretations of two of his Tibetan predecessors, rMa bya Byang chub brTson 'grus (d. 1185) and bZad pa,[218] in order to argue that each of the two truths can be understood in different ways, depending upon the mind of the person who is being considered in relation to those two truths. This allows him to put forth a heavily revised version of the two truths doctrine, without explicitly contradicting Candrakīrti.

Interpreting Candrakīrti

In interpreting the above verse and corresponding commentary from the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, Gorampa focuses on identifying Candrakīrti's use of the terms, "correct seeing" (Skt: *samyagdarśana*, Tib: *yang dag mthong ba*) and "false seeing" (Skt: *mṛṣādarśana*, Tib: *brdzun pa mthong ba*). As we have seen, correct seeing apprehends

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[218] This is possibly bZad pa (gZad pa) ring mo dBang phyug, a student of mNyal pa Dad pa bzang po, but there is little evidence to properly identify this figure. See Cabezón and Dargyay 2007, 298n114.

reality (*tattva, de nyid*) – which is the ultimate truth – while false seeing apprehends the conventional. Gorampa elaborates,

> In the Madhyamaka system, the two truths are not divided on the basis of objects. Rather, they are divided into conventional truth and ultimate truth on the basis of the way that a *single appearing entity* is seen by a subject who is either seeing falsely or seeing correctly; or is distorted or undistorted; or is confused or not confused; or is erroneous or non-erroneous; or is a valid cognition or an invalid cognition.[219]

In other words, Gorampa argues that the distinction between the two truths depends on the way in which one's mind engages with appearances. A single appearance can be apprehended in one of two ways: if it is apprehended erroneously, it is labeled as conventionally true; and if it is apprehended correctly, then it is called ultimately true. Realizing the ultimate truth, therefore, involves changing one's perception so that one can see correctly.

Although Gorampa follows Candrakīrti in defining the two truths in terms of correct and false seeing, his definitions of these two types of seeing are complex and varied. The manner in which one sees determines whether one is engaging with the conventional or ultimate truth, but the classifications of correct and false seeing differ depending on the perspectives of the beings who are doing the seeing. Gorampa bases his own argument on the next two verses in the *Madhyamakāvatāra:*

> False seeing is regarded in two ways: based on having unimpaired sense-faculties, and having impaired sense-faculties. The consciousnesses of those who have impaired senses are regarded as mistaken from the perspective of the consciousness of one with good senses. Worldly cognition based on an apprehension by the six unimpaired sense-faculties

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[219] *dbu ma'i gzhung lugs 'dir ni yul rang ngos nas bden pa gnyis su dbyed med kyi snang ba'i dngos po gcig la'ang yul can brdzun pa mthong ba dang/ yang dag mthong ba gnyis sam/ 'khrul ma 'khrul gnyis sam/ rmongs ma rmongs gnyis sam/ phyin ci log ma log gnyis sam/ tshad ma yin min gnyis kyis mthong tshul gyi sgo nas kun rdzob bden pa dang/ don dam bden pa gnyis su phye ba* BPD 119, emphasis mine

is true in the worldly sense; but the remainder are posited as mistaken in the worldly sense.[220]

In other words, the distinction between correct seeing and false seeing depends on one's perspective. From the perspective of ordinary persons, one with defective sense organs engages in false seeing, while one with unimpaired sense organs is said to engage in correct seeing. When we shift our focus to include those who have progressed to a certain extent along the Buddhist path, this distinction shifts. From the perspective of a more spiritually advanced person, even sense perceptions of unimpaired faculties are considered false. For example, if we consider two ordinary persons, one colorblind and one non-colorblind, the non-colorblind person is described as having correct seeing. He is understood as having unimpaired sense organs, and is therefore capable of engaging in correct seeing with respect to the conventional. When compared to a Buddhist practitioner who has abandoned grasping to any appearances as truly existent, however, this same non-colorblind person is described as having false seeing. In other words, the definitions of "correct seeing" and "false seeing" are fluid, and can be applied differently to the same types of minds in different contexts. The non-colorblind person has correct seeing when compared to a colorblind person, but false seeing when compared to an *ārya.*

These passages also serve to remind us of what we have earlier described as Candrakīrti's fictionalist stance. From within the context of the world, certain things can be classified as correct seeing and other things can be classified as false seeing. For example, if we are discussing the film *Sholay*, describing Gabbar Singh as an evil villain

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[220] *mthong ba brdzun pa'ang rnam pa gnyis 'dod de/ dbang po gsal dang dbang po skyon ldan no/ skyon ldan dbang can rnams kyi shes pa ni/ dbang po legs 'gyur shes ltos log par 'dod// gnod pa med pa'i dbang po drug rnams kyis/ gzung ba gang zhig 'jig rten gyis rtogs te/ 'jig rten nyid las bden yin lhag ma ni/ 'jig rten nyid las log par rnam par gzhag// Madhyamakāvatāra* VI:24-25.

would be considered an accurate or correct description of the state of affairs within that particular context, while describing him as a hero would be considered false. From a perspective outside of that constructed fiction, however, we cannot describe any reference to events within that fiction as true. While it is true that Gabbar Singh is an evil villain in the context of the world that *Sholay* presents, it is *not* true to say that Gabbar Singh is *really* an evil villain. (Nor is it true that he is a hero.) Similarly, according to Candrakīrti's presentation of the two truths, the perception of ordinary beings with unimpaired sense-faculties is considered correct seeing in the context of the ordinary world; but from the perspective of an enlightened *ārya*, such perceptions are not *really* correct.

Elaborating on these verses, Gorampa identifies three different types of minds, and argues that the distinction between correct and false seeing – and therefore the conventional and ultimate truths – must be drawn differently according to each of these three perspectives. These three different types of minds are: the minds of ordinary persons, the minds of *āryas* in meditative equipoise (*mnyam gzhag*), and the minds of *āryas* in the post-meditative state (*rjes thob*).[221] In order to explain these three types of minds, Gorampa refers to classifications drawn by two earlier Tibetan Mādhyamikas — rMa bya and bZad pa.

According to Gorampa, "rMa bya explains that the rational minds of all ordinary persons and the post-meditative state of the three lower kinds of *ārya*s are distorted minds, and that the meditative equipoise of the three lower kinds of *ārya*s and the

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[221] As we have previously seen, an *ārya* in meditative equipoise is engaged in a nondual, nonconceptual meditative state that is free from conceptual proliferations and directly apprehends the ultimate truth. An *ārya* in the post-meditative state has previously engaged in meditative equipoise, but has since returned to a conceptual, dualistic apprehension of the conventional. See chapter 2 for a detailed explanation.

wisdom of the buddhas are non-distorted minds."[222] In other words, ordinary persons and post-meditative *ārya*s have false seeing, while *ārya*s in meditation and fully enlightened beings have correct seeing.[223] bZad pa, on the other hand, "asserts that the rational consciousness (*rigs shes*) of ordinary beings, all of the meditative and post-meditative states of the three lower kinds of *ārya*s, and the wisdom of the buddhas is non-distorted, and that all minds other than these are distorted."[224]

Gorampa, rMa bya, and bZad pa all agree that *ārya*s in meditative equipoise have correct seeing, and that ordinary persons who have impaired faculties have false seeing. This is also in line with what is stated explicitly by Candrakīrti. With respect to the rational cognition of ordinary persons and *ārya*s in the post-meditative state, however, rMa bya contends that they both engage in false seeing, while bZad pa suggests that they both have correct seeing. Gorampa steps in to clarify this disagreement by providing a more nuanced interpretation of the mental states of these types of beings.

Drawing on the interpretations of both rMa bya and bZad pa in his own unpacking of the above passages from the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, Gorampa suggests that the views of both of these earlier Tibetans can be combined:

> However, the *Madhyamakāvatāra* explains correct seeing as the meditative equipoise of *ārya*s and false seeing as a mind that is polluted by ignorance which grasps to truth. Hence, the rational consciousness of ordinary beings and the post-meditative state of the lower kinds of *ārya*s

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[222] *rma byas so so skye bo'i blo thams cad dang 'phags pa 'og ma gsum gyi rjes thob ni blo 'khrul ba dang/ 'phags pa 'og ma gsum gyi mnyam gzhag dang/ sangs rgyas kyi ye shes ni blo ma 'khrul bar bzhed/* BPD 61-62

[223] This appears to be a summary of rMa bya's position as explained in his commentary on the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*dbu ma rtsa ba shes rab kyi 'grel ba 'thad pa'i rgyan*), although rMa bya himself adds much more nuance to these distinctions. See Rma bya Byang chub Brtson 'grus 2011, 125–135.

[224] *bzad pas de bkag nas so so skye bo'i rigs shes dang/ 'phags pa 'og ma gsum gyi mnyam rjes thams cad dang/ sangs rgyas kyi ye shes rnams ma 'khrul ba yin la/ de las gzhan pa'i blo thams cad 'khrul pa yin par 'dod do/* BPD 62

are not intended.[225] Nevertheless, it is clear that the rational consciousness of ordinary persons, in terms of refuting true existence *(bden pa)* as its object of negation, is categorized as correct seeing. And by construing the post-meditative state of the lower kinds of *ārya*s as the chief mode of conventional apprehension, it is categorized as false seeing.[226]

Gorampa argues that in the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, Candrakīrti does not explicitly categorize the rational consciousness of ordinary persons or the post-meditative states of *ārya*s as having either correct seeing or false seeing. On its surface, this statement seems to suggest that Gorampa is in agreement with rMa bya, and that the term "correct seeing" should only be applied to *ārya*s in meditative equipoise. However, Gorampa adds more nuance to his interpretation, suggesting that these two kinds of minds must also be understood in relation to the objects that they apprehend. Recall from the previous chapter that when Gorampa describes the minds of ordinary persons and *ārya*s in the post-meditative state, he argues that they engage in creating dualistic object-subject distinctions. There can be no apprehending minds (*yul can*) without apprehended objects (*yul*); therefore, in order to fully understand these minds that engage in an ordinary person's rational consciousness or an *ārya*'s post-meditative state, the objects with which they engage must be considered as well.

With respect to ordinary persons, Gorampa argues above, "the rational consciousness of ordinary persons, *in terms of refuting true existence as its object of negation*, is categorized as correct seeing" (emphasis added). This means that although ordinary persons are generally understood as engaging in false seeing, if an ordinary

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[225] That is, these two types of minds are not among the intended objects of Candrakīrti's analysis in this section of the *Madhyamakāvatāra*.

[226] *'on kyang 'jug par bshad pa'i mthong ba yang dag pa ni 'phags pa'i mnyam gzhag dang/ mthong ba brdzun pa ni bden 'dzin gyi ma rig pas bslad pa'i blo yin par bshad pas/ so skye'i rigs shes dang/ 'phags pa 'og ma'i rjes thob de nyid dgongs min kyang so skye'i rigs shes ni dgag bya bden pa bkag pa'i cha nas mthong ba yang dag pa'i khongs su bsdu zhing/ 'phags pa og ma'i rjes thob kun rdzob 'dzin stangs kyi gtso bor byed pas/ mthong ba bdzun pa'i khongs su bsdu ba gsal* BPD 62

person is engaged in a particular type of rational thought – specifically the type of rational thought that refutes true existence (*bden pa*) – then this can be called "correct seeing" in this context. The specific ways in which rational analysis refutes true existence will be addressed in Chapter 4, but in short, Gorampa's point is this: an ordinary person's perception cannot really be considered correct seeing, because ordinary persons are incapable of directly experiencing the ultimate truth. However, if an ordinary being is engaged in rational thought which analyzes what the ultimate truth is *like* (namely, that things ultimately lack true existence), then there is a sense in which we can call this type of rational thought "correct seeing."

At the same time, when an *ārya* has emerged from meditative equipoise and entered into the post-meditative state, we cannot call her perception "correct seeing," even though she conceptually and rationally knows what the ultimate truth is like in much the same way as does the ordinary person engaging in rational analysis. In Gorampa's words, "by construing the post-meditative state of the lower kinds of *ārya*s as the chief mode of *conventional apprehension,* it is categorized as false seeing" (emphasis added). Again, the object of the *ārya*'s perception is significant here. Recall from the previous chapter that when an *ārya* is engaged in meditative equipoise, her mind is in a state of *spros bral* – direct, nonconceptual experience of the ultimate truth. When in the post-meditative state, the *ārya* reverts back to conceptual thought based on object-subject structures, and she is at that time not capable of directly engaging with the ultimate truth. Her experience of the ultimate that was previously directly experienced in meditative equipoise is now mediated by thoughts and language in the post-meditative state. From

this perspective, Gorampa argues, the conventional, conceptual apprehension of things is categorized as "false seeing."

In short, it is not only the mind that determines whether one is engaging in correct seeing or false seeing, but also the context in which this distinction is being applied. An ordinary person is generally understood as having false seeing because he operates at the level of the conventional, but when engaging in rational Madhyamaka analysis that considers what the ultimate truth is like, this type of analysis can be considered correct seeing. Moreover, when an *ārya* is engaged in meditative equipoise, she is directly experiencing the ultimate truth, and this is correct seeing. However, when an *ārya* is in the post-meditative state, she reverts back to engaging with the conventional, and as such, her perception is necessarily understood as false seeing, even if such perception conceptually understands the absence of true existence.

Although correct and false seeing can be said to correspond to the ultimate and conventional, respectively, ordinary beings are by definition incapable of directly experiencing the nonconceptual, nondual ultimate truth. Therefore their apprehension of the ultimate through rational analysis is sufficient to be categorized as correct seeing *for them,* even though their rational analysis, being conceptual, is structured by subject-object duality. At the same time, because *ārya*s are by definition capable of directly and nonconceptually experiencing the ultimate truth without any dualistic structures, any cognition that relies on conceptual thought is necessarily categorized as false seeing. What is most significant here is that the post-meditative state of an *ārya* cannot be considered correct seeing, even though an *ārya* in the post-meditative state can conceptually understand the absence of ultimate existence in ways that appear similar to

an ordinary person engaged in rational analysis. Both of these beings are capable of rationally understanding the absence of true existence, but while ordinary persons are only able to conceptually understand what the ultimate truth is like, *ārya*s are also capable of having an actual, direct, nonconceptual experience of the ultimate truth while in meditative equipoise.

In order to understand the significance of Gorampa's view here, consider the table below. If we understand the Buddhist Path as a process, one begins with an ordinary mind that is capable of perceiving the conventional truth, and then through reasoning, one arrives at a rational understanding of emptiness. Through further practice still, one eventually comes to a direct, nonconceptual realization of that emptiness. For ordinary persons, then, cultivating a conceptual, rational understanding of the absence of inherent existence is an act of looking forward on the Path, in the direction of the ultimate. For *ārya*s, on the other hand, conceptual thoughts involve looking backward on the path, toward the conventional. (This is the case even if such conceptual thoughts are of the absence of inherent existence.)

Understanding of conventional truth	→	Rational understanding of the absence of true existence	→	Realization of ultimate truth
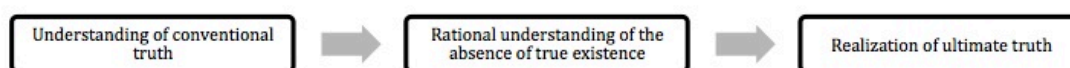
The Path is a process, progressing from an understanding of the conventional truth, to a rational understanding of the absence of true existence, to a direct realization of the ultimate truth.

Ordinary Person	→	Rational understanding of the absence of true existence	←	Ārya
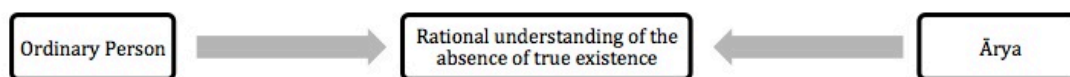
When ordinary persons have a rational understanding of the absence of true existence, they are looking forward on the path (toward ultimate truth). When *ārya*s have a rational understanding of the absence of true existence, they are looking backwards on the path (toward the conventional truth)|

Figure 1.

The distinction between correct seeing and false seeing, therefore, is relational. Just as my desk is considered "big" in relation to the books that are on it, but "small" in relation to the room in which it sits, a rational understanding of the absence of true existence is considered "correct seeing" in relation to the mind of an ordinary person, but "false seeing" in relation to that of an *ārya*. This means that the distinction between correct seeing and false seeing cannot be explained independently of the types of minds that are engaging in these different types of seeing.

Gorampa's emphasis on relationality with respect to correct and false seeing also helps us to understand his seeming flexibility with respect to different views of the conventional truth. Recall from the previous chapter that Gorampa argues that one can understand conventional appearances in two ways: either as mind (in line with the Yogācāra-Svātantrika-Madhyamaka view), or as that which is in conformity with the world (in line with the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka view). Both of these approaches to conventional appearances are capable of leading one to a realization of the ultimate that is free from conceptual proliferations, and Gorampa argues that they are both, therefore, acceptable views. Again, whether one understands the conventional in terms of mind, or in terms of conforming to the world, depends on the karmic dispositions in one's mind. In the same way, the labeling of certain types of cognitions as "correct seeing" or "false seeing" similarly depends on one's mind and on where one happens to be on the Buddhist Path.

The Twofold Divisions of the Two Truths

In order to explain the relationships between ordinary persons and *ārya*s, correct and false seeing, and the conventional and ultimate truths, Gorampa relies on further

subdivisions of each of the two truths. Following Candrakīrti, Gorampa explains that the

conventional[227] can be divided into two: the conventional truth (*kun rdzob bden pa*) and

the merely conventional (*kun rdzob tsam*).[228] And with respect to the ultimate, Gorampa

also divides this into two: the ultimate that is realized (*rtogs pa don dam*) and the ultimate

that is taught (*bstan pa don dam*).[229]

With respect to the conventional, Gorampa argues that it must be divided into

two, because it is explained differently depending on whether it is being experienced as

correct seeing by an ordinary person, or as false seeing by an *ārya* in the post-meditative

state. He explains,

> The conventional is divided into the conventional truth and the merely
> conventional, because it is said that it is divided in terms of the grasping at
> truth of ordinary beings and the post-meditative state of the lower kinds of
> *ārya*s.[230]

Here, Gorampa explains that the conventional is described as "conventional truth" with

respect to ordinary beings, but as "merely conventional" with respect to *ārya*s. Ordinary

persons who correctly perceive appearances with unimpaired sense-perception (but who

are not yet engaging in Madhyamaka analysis and are therefore "grasping at truth") are

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[227] That is, the conventional understood in terms of true convention, apprehended by unimpaired sense-faculties. This twofold distinction excludes false conventions, apprehended by impaired sense-faculties.

[228] These are terms described by Candrakīrti in his autocommentary on the *Madhyamakāvatāra*: "Thus, the Blessed One initially taught the conventional truth and the merely conventional. Whatever is ultimate for ordinary persons is merely conventional for *ārya*s whose experiences are endowed with appearances. Whatever is the nature of that – emptiness – is ultimate for them. The ultimate for buddhas is that very nature, and that, because it is non-deceptive, is the ultimate truth. This is to be known as their enlightened awareness (*so so rang gis rig pa*). The conventional truth, because it is deceptive, is not the ultimate truth." *de ltar na re zhig bcom ldan 'das des kun rdzob kyi bden pa dang kun rdzob tsam gsungs pa yin no/ de la so so'i skye bo rnams kyi don dam pa gang yin pa de nyid 'phags pa snang ba dang bcas pa'i spyod yul can rnams kyi kun rdzob tsam yin la/ de'i rang bzhin stong pa nyid gang yin pa de ni de rnams kyi don dam pa'o/ sangs rgyas rnams kyi don dam pa ni rang bzhin nyid yin zhing/ de yang slu ba med pa nyid kyis don dam pa'i bden pa yin la/ de ni de rnams kyi so so rang gis rig par bya ba yin no/ kun rdzob kyi bden pa ni slu bar byed pa nyid kyi phyir don dam pa'i bden pa ma yin no/ Madhyamakāvatāra* 110-111

[229] BPD 49*ff.* See below.

[230] *kun rdzob la kun rdzob bden pa dang kun rdzob tsam gnyis su dbye ba de/ so skye'i bden 'dzin dang 'phags pa 'og ma'i rjes thob kyi sgo nas dbye bar gsungs pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 62

said to grasp the conventional truth. *Ārya*s, on the other hand, who have directly apprehended the ultimate truth while in meditative equipoise, experience the conventional as merely conventional.

The ultimate is similarly divided based on the perspectives of ordinary persons and *ārya*s. Ordinary persons who, through analysis, rationally understand emptiness are said to understand the ultimate that is taught, while *ārya*s who directly and nonconceptually experience emptiness are said to understand the ultimate that is realized. Gorampa explains,

> In this way, all Madhyamaka is divided into two: the ultimate that is realized, which is realized in an inexpressible way by *ārya*s in meditative equipoise; and the ultimate that is taught, which is realized in an expressible way by the rational minds of ordinary persons.[231]

This twofold division of the ultimate is, in other words, what allows ordinary persons to understand what the ultimate truth is like, even if they cannot yet directly experience the actual, nonconceptual ultimate truth. To clarify this point further, Gorampa cites Candrakīrti in the *Prasannapadā*:

> [The ultimate] is not expressed as "empty," nor should one express it as "nonempty," nor as both or neither. However, if they are not expressed, realizers will not be able to realize the nature of things just as they are. Therefore, abiding in the conventional truth, we reify it in accord with the perspective of those who are practitioners so that they can interact. Reifying it thus, we say, "empty," or "nonempty," or "not empty and not nonempty." Because of this, [Nāgārjuna] says that "they are expressed for

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[231] *de lta bu'i dbu ma thams cad la 'phags pa'i mnyam gzhag gis brjod du med pa'i tshul gyis rtogs pa'i rtogs pa don dam dang/ so so skye bo'i rigs shes kyi blos brjod pa dang bcas pa'i tshul gyis rtogs pa'i bstan pa don dam gnyis su phye/* BPD 49

the sake of pointing something out."[232] The purpose for which emptiness
and so on is taught is to bring about understanding through analysis.[233]

In other words, the actual ultimate that is realized cannot be expressed in words – even in words such as "empty" or "nonempty." Nevertheless, in order for ordinary persons to cultivate an understanding of what the ultimate is like, it must be taught using expressions such as "empty," "nonempty," and so on.

Gorampa's twofold division of the ultimate appears to mirror a better known distinction, spelled out by Bhāviveka[234] in the *Tarkajvālā* as the non-nominal ultimate (Skt: *apāryayaparamārtha,* Tib: *don dam rnam grangs ma yin pa*) and nominal ultimate (Skt: *pāryayaparamārtha,* Tib: *don dam rnam grangs pa*):

> The ultimate is of two kinds: The first is effortless, transcendent (*lokottara*), free from impurity, and free from discursive ideas (*niṣprapañca*). The second is accessible to effort, consistent with the prerequisites of merit and knowledge, pure, and accessible to discursive ideas (*saprapañca*) in the sense that it can be referred to as worldly knowledge (*laukika-jñāna*).[235]

The "ultimate that is realized" and the "non-nominal ultimate" are both realized directly, unmediated by language or concepts; while the "ultimate that is taught" and the "nominal ultimate" are both accessed through reasoning by ordinary persons, and can be expressed in words. In spite of these similarities, however, Gorampa is careful to explain that his

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[232] This passage is a commentary on *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXII:11, which states, "'It is empty' should not be expressed. 'It is not empty' should not be expressed. Nor should 'both' or 'neither.' They are expressed for the sake of pointing something out." Skt: *śūnyam iti na vaktavyam aśūnyam iti vā bhavet/ ubhayaṃ nobhayaṃ ceti prajñaptyarthaṃ tu kathyate//* Tib: *stong ngo zhes kyang mi brjod de/ mi stong zhes kyang mi bya zhing/ gnyis dang gnyis min mi bya ste/ gdags pa'i don du brjod par bya/*

[233] *tshig gsal las stong ngo zhes kyang mi brjod de/ mi stong zhes kyang mi bya zhing/ gnyis dang gnyis min mi bya ste/ 'di dag thams cad brjod par bya ba ma yin mod kyi/ 'on kyang ma brjod na rtogs pa po rnams kyis ji lta ba bzhin du gnas pa'i rang bzhin rtogs par mi nus te/ de'i phyir kho bo cag tha snyad kyi bden pa la gnas nas tha snyad kyi don du gdul bya'i skye bo'i ngor lhag par sgro btags nas/ stong pa zhes kyang smra la/ mi stong zhes bya ba dang/ stong pa yang yin la mi stong pa yang yin zhes bya ba dang/ stong pa yang ma yin mi stong pa yang ma yin zhes bya ba smra'o/ de nyid kyi phyir/ gdags pa'i don du brjod par bya/ zhes gsungs te/ dgos pa gang gis stong pa nyid la sogs bstan pa'i dgos pa de ni brtags pa las khong du chud par bya'o/ zhes gsungs shing/* BPD 49-50

[234] Also known as Bhāvaviveka or Bhavya.

[235] Translated in Eckel 1987, 112–113n9.

position is not identical to Bhāviveka's. Gorampa asserts, "The Prāsaṅgikas accept both [divisions of the ultimate] as the actual ultimate truth divided into two truths, while the texts of the Svātantrikas appear to divide them into the two: nominal and non-nominal."[236] And elsewhere in the *Synopsis*, Gorampa explains,

> According to the Svātantrikas, there are two ultimates that are realized by the rational mind of the subject: the ultimate which negates conceptual proliferations by means of a rational valid cognition; and the manifest (*mngon du gyur pa*) ultimate that is experienced by the meditative equipoise of *ārya*s. Among these, the first is regarded as nominal, the second is regarded as non-nominal.[237]

This difference is subtle, but important. Gorampa describes Bhāviveka's position as one that asserts the existence of *two* ultimate truths; a nominal ultimate truth, and a non-nominal ultimate truth.[238] In contrast to this, Gorampa argues that his own position divides the *single* ultimate truth in terms of two perspectives. That is, the same ultimate truth can be experienced in different ways depending on the rational mind of the subject (*yul can gyi blo*).

Just as the conventional can be described as "the conventional truth" or "the merely conventional" depending on the mind of the subject apprehending it, so too can the ultimate be described in terms of "the ultimate that is taught" and "the ultimate that is realized," based on one's progress along the Buddhist Path. An ordinary person engages with the ultimate truth conceptually, mediated by words and thoughts. An *ārya* engages with the ultimate truth nonconceptually, experiencing it directly and without dualistic

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[236] *thal 'gyur bas gnyis ka'ang bden pa gnyis su phye ba'i don dam bden pa mtshan nyid par 'dod la/ rang rgyud pa'i gzhung rnams las ni/ rnam grangs pa dang/ rnam grangs ma yin pa gnyis su phye bar snang ngo/* BPD 50

[237] *rang rgyud pa dag/ yul can gyi blo'i sgo nas rigs shes tshad mas spros pa bkag pa'i don dam pa dang/ 'phags pa'i mnyam bzhag gis myong ba mngon du gyur pa'i don dam gnyis las snga ma ni rnam grangs pa dang/ phyi ma ni rnam grangs ma yin par bzhed do/* BPD 148

[238] To my knowledge, there is little evidence in Bhāviveka's texts to support Gorampa's claim that Bhāviveka's nominal and non-nominal ultimates actually constitute two *distinct* ultimate truths.

structures. This does not mean, however, that there are two ultimates – one conceptual and one nonconceptual. There is simply one ultimate truth that is accessed differently depending on one's perspective.

Once again, we see that Gorampa is describing the ultimate truth in the same ways that he described the conventional, above. The way in which one engages with the ultimate is relational, depending on the mind of the subject. This is significant for Gorampa's overall philosophical project. Because the distinction between correct seeing and false seeing – and, by extension, conventional and ultimate truths – is relational and depends on the minds of subjects rather than on some sort of objective reality, there is much more flexibility in terms of the ways in which one may make sense of appearances. The definitions of the two truths, therefore, are not fixed; the ways in which they are perceived depend on the minds of the persons who perceive them. Ordinary persons with unimpaired sense perception perceive the conventional truth (*kun rdzob bden pa*), and when they engage in rational analysis of the ultimate, they perceive the ultimate that is taught (*bstan pa'i don dam*). *Ārya*s in meditative equipoise directly experience the ultimate that is realized (*rtogs pa'i don dam*), while in the post-meditative state they understand that the conventional is only merely conventional (*kun rdzob tsam*), and not conventional truth *(kun rdzob bden pa)*.

Furthermore, when the two truths are divided in these ways, we can see that for both ordinary persons and *ārya*s, engagement with the conventional (whether it is the conventional truth or the merely conventional) is tantamount to false seeing, while engagement with the ultimate (whether it is the ultimate that is taught or the ultimate that is realized) is tantamount to correct seeing. When each of the two truths are divided in

these ways, Gorampa manages to synthesize the views of both rMa bya and bZad pa, demonstrating that "correct seeing" depends on the mind of the person whose seeing is being analyzed, as well as on whether one is referring to seeing with respect to the conventional or the ultimate truth. When one understands the relationships between ordinary and enlightened minds and the conventional and ultimate truths, one will have an understanding of the nature of the path that one must follow in order to become enlightened.

The Two Truths Structure the Path

So far we have seen that according to Gorampa's presentation of the two truths as based on his interpretation of *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI:23, ordinary persons with unimpaired sense-faculties engage with the conventional truth, and when conceptually understanding the absence of true existence, they are said to experience the ultimate that is taught. *Ārya*s directly perceive the ultimate truth that is realized while in meditative equipoise, and apprehend the merely conventional when in the post-meditative state. Moreover, engagement with the conventional is considered false seeing, while engagement with the ultimate is correct seeing. The Buddhist path, therefore, involves a progression of perceiving the conventional truth and rationally understanding the nominal ultimate, and then directly experiencing the ultimate truth while understanding that what was once conventionally "true" is actually merely conventional.

Based on this model, as one proceeds along the Path and learns to engage with appearances in different ways, there is a shift in the definition of correct seeing and its relationship to false seeing (and therefore also a shift in the definition of the ultimate and

its relationship to the conventional). Gorampa begins to explain this shift by describing

this distinction for worldly persons, who do not engage in any type of analysis:

> Worldly persons[239] commonly regard false and deceptive phenomena as
> "fraudulent," and those that are correct and non-deceptive as "ultimate."
> When the Mādhyamika[240] presents the two truths he follows these terms,
> but his basis for identifying them is completely different than that of
> worldly persons.[241]

Prior to any philosophical analysis, the difference between "conventional" and "ultimate"

is merely a matter of distinguishing between that which is false and deceptive, and that

which is correct and non-deceptive. Floating hairs seen by a person with an eye disorder,

for example, are considered to be false and deceptive. Mādhyamikas, on the other hand,

make this distinction differently, based on the criteria that Gorampa has already

mentioned above.

Gorampa elaborates on these different distinctions between the two truths,

beginning with the perspective of worldly persons:

> Worldly persons see that among these things which are just as they appear
> (*ji ltar snang ba'i dngos po*), some are false and deceptive phenomena,
> and they accept them as spurious (*kun rdzob*); these are cognitions of
> impaired sense faculties together with their objects. Generally, imagining
> that things are correct and non-deceptive, [worldly persons] reify them as
> ultimate; these are cognitions of unimpaired sense faculties together with
> their objects.[242]

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[239] Worldly persons (*'jig rten pa*) are different than the ordinary persons (*so so skye bo*) who Gorampa
mentions above. Worldly persons are non-Mādhyamikas, the so-called "women and cowherds" who do
not engage in philosophical analysis. Ordinary persons, on the other hand, are Mādhyamikas who are
capable of engaging in rational analysis, but who have not yet progressed to the state of an *ārya*.

[240] This refers to both "ordinary persons" (*so so skye bo*) who engage in Madhyamaka analysis, and *ārya*s
who have experienced *spros bral*.

[241] *'jig rten pa brdzun pa bslu ba'i chos can la kun rdzob zhes grags shing/ yang dag par mi slu ba la don
dam zhes grags pa'i tha snyad kyi rjes su 'brangs nas dbu ma pa bden gnyis kyi rnam gzhag byed cing/
de dag ngos gzung ba'i gzhi ni 'jig rten pa dang btan mi 'dra ste/* BPD 63

[242] *'jig rten pa ni ji ltar snang ba'i dngos po 'di dag gi nang nas kha cig ni brdzun pa bslu ba'i chos can du
mthong bas kun rdzob tu 'dod de/ dbang po skyon ldan gyi shes pa yul dang bcas pa rnams so/ phal
cher ni yang dag par mi slu bar zhen nas don dam du sgro 'dogs te dbang po skyon med kyi shes pa yul
dang bcas pa rnams so/* BPD 63-64

Here, Gorampa asserts that from the perspective of a worldly person, the difference between the conventional and the ultimate is related to whether one's sense-faculties are considered to be impaired or unimpaired. A worldly person understands that things which appear incorrectly are the result of impaired sense-perception, and as such, calls such things "conventional." Things that are the result of unimpaired sense-faculties and appear to be true, on the other hand, are reified and accepted as truly existent phenomena. These become known as "ultimate" by worldly persons.

However, as has been explained above, Gorampa argues that the two truths are distinguished differently from the Madhyamaka perspective. He explains:

> If one uses Madhyamaka reasoning to analyze what is taken to be ultimate for worldly persons, it is established as a phenomenon that is false and deceptive. Therefore, both the "conventional" and the "ultimate" of the worldly person are conventional (*kun rdzob*) for the Mādhyamika. And the suchness of those things – emptiness – is ultimate for the Mādhyamika, because it is established as correct and non-deceptive from the perspective of ultimate reasoning *(mthar thug dpyod pa'i rigs)* – or from the perspective of an *ārya*'s meditative equipoise.[243]

This is a restatement of the position which we have seen Gorampa articulate above. The ultimate is experienced from the perspective of ultimate or final reasoning (i.e., reasoning which refutes true existence), or from the meditative equipoise of an *ārya* (i.e., nonconceptual, nondual awareness). These perspectives apprehend the ultimate that is taught, and the ultimate that is realized, respectively.

Again, the definitions of conventional and ultimate differ depending on whether one is considering the perspective of a worldly person, an ordinary Mādhyamika, or an *ārya*. This point bears repeating, because it is a crucial element of Gorampa's overall

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[243] *'jig rten pa'i don dam de nyid la dbu ma pa'i rigs pas rnam par dpyad pa na/ brdzun pa bslu ba'i chos can du grub pas 'jig rten pa'i don dam dang kun rdzob gnyis ka'ang dbu ma pa'i kun rdzob yin la/ de rnams kyi chos nyid stong pa nyid mthar thug dpyod pa'i rigs ngo'am/ 'phags pa'i mnyam gzhag gi ngor yang dag par mi slu bar grub pas dbu ma pa'i don dam ste/* BPD 64

Madhyamaka project. By arguing that the distinction between false seeing and correct seeing – and, by extension, the distinction between the conventional and ultimate truths – is based on the mind of the person under consideration, Gorampa is arguing that the distinction between the two truths must be understood differently depending on how far along the Buddhist path one has progressed. In his elaborations on *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI:23, Gorampa can be said to employ a "sliding scale of analysis," in which certain things are understood to be ultimately true from one perspective, but rejected as ultimately true at another level.[244] McClintock summarizes the main point of this method: "Each level of analysis is both a refinement and a corrective of the preceding level, which is itself judged accurate only to a certain degree."[245]

If we understand Gorampa as applying a sliding scale of analysis with respect to false seeing and correct seeing, then his understanding of the Buddhist path looks like this:

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[244] See McClintock 2003.
[245] Ibid., 140.

	Worldly Persons not engaged in philosophical analysis	Ordinary Persons engaged in Madhyamaka reasoning	*Ārya*s in meditative equipoise (*mnyam gzhag*)	*Ārya*s in the post-meditative state (*rjes thob*)
Impaired Sense Perception	False Seeing	False Seeing	False Seeing	False Seeing
Unimpaired Sense Perception	Correct Seeing	False Seeing	False Seeing	False Seeing
Rational Analysis (that ascertains emptiness)	–	Correct Seeing	False Seeing	False Seeing
Direct realization of the ultimate (*spros bral*)	–	–	Correct Seeing	–

Figure 2.

One is, of course, expected to proceed along the path (moving from left to right in the top row) from the mind of a Worldly Person (*'jig rten pa*) who does not engage in any type of philosophical analysis, to that of an Ordinary Person (*so so skye bo*) who engages in Madhyamaka reasoning, to that of an *ārya*, who realizes freedom from conceptual proliferations while in meditative equipoise. (Additionally, when an *ārya* is in the post-meditative state, he does not directly perceive the ultimate, but his rational analysis that conceptually understands emptiness is now categorized as false seeing.) Only after one has progressed along the path in this way does one eventually attain Buddhahood. In order for one to progress in this way, one must learn to engage with the world in different ways (moving from top to bottom in the left-hand column): from distinguishing between impaired and unimpaired sense-perception, to distinguishing between rational analysis that refutes true existence and all other types of sense-perception, to experiencing *spros bral* as opposed to any type of sense-perception and rational analytic thought.

As we can see from the table above, what is considered "correct seeing" shifts depending on the mind of the person being considered. By employing this sliding scale of analysis,[246] Gorampa shows that the difference between correct seeing and false seeing becomes more refined as one progress along the Buddhist path. These instances of correct seeing, moreover, must be experienced sequentially; one must begin by learning to distinguish between impaired and unimpaired sense perception. Based on that, one can then learn to carry out Madhyamaka analysis in order to rationally refute true existence. Based on that analysis, one can engage in meditative practices in order to eventually arrive at a state of *spros bral*, free from conceptual proliferations.

These steps along the path are structured in a hierarchy; the best kind of "correct seeing" is the *spros bral* that is experienced by the meditative equipoise of an *ārya*. Anything else, from that final perspective, is conceptual, dualistic, and necessarily false. This is why Gorampa explicitly states at the outset of his description of the two truths that "all objects and subjects which are dualistic appearances of objects and subjects are conventional truth." This means that from the final perspective on the Path, anything that presents itself dualistically, in terms of an object which is apprehended by a subject, is necessarily conventional, and therefore falls under the category of "false seeing." Nevertheless, in order to arrive at that final state, one must first engage in dualistic, conceptual thought. The sliding scale of analysis enables a practitioner to progress gradually toward buddhahood.

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[246] When understood in terms of the progression along the Buddhist path, it seems more logical to use Dreyfus's term, "ascending scale of analysis." But, like McClintock, I prefer the term "sliding," as it suggests that a person at a higher level of understanding is capable of moving down to a lower level when necessary (e.g., for the purposes of teaching or debating). See Ibid., 163n53.

For Gorampa, this final distinction between the conventional and ultimate truths, based on whether they are or are not structured by the presence or absence of object-subject duality, respectively, is a crucial element of the Buddhist path. When one is capable of conceptually understanding the ultimate that is taught through particular types of reasoning (which will be explained in Chapter 4), one begins to engage in meditative practice (which will be explained in Chapter 5). After sufficient experience with meditation, one has an initial experience of *spros bral*, in which object-subject duality dissolves. This is called the Path of Seeing (*mthong lam*), and marks the transition of a practitioner's mind from that of an ordinary person to that of an *ārya*. At this point, one becomes an *ārya* who is capable of entering into meditative equipoise, and one directly experiences the ultimate that is realized. Immediately after attaining the Path of Seeing (which lasts for only a moment), the practitioner enters the post-meditative state (*rjes thob*), in which she once again employs concepts and engages with the conventional. This is the initial experience of understanding the conventional truth as merely conventional. The remainder of the Buddhist path to enlightenment after this point involves lengthening and expanding this state of nondual, nonconceptual meditative equipoise, until one can constantly and effortlessly remain in this state.[247]

In short, the Madhyamaka path involves progressing from the state of an ordinary person who engages in dualistic perception, to the state of an *ārya* who is capable of dissolving dualistic distinctions while in meditation. Eventually, one progresses to the point of buddhahood, in which remaining in a state of freedom from conceptual proliferations is effortless. The main thrust of Gorampa's argument here is that a realization of the ultimate involves cultivating a type of cognition that is fundamentally

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[247] See Chapter 5 for a more detailed explanation of the Path of Seeing.

different than the type of cognition involved in sense-perception and rational analysis. Any sense-perception or rational analysis necessarily relies on dualistic object-subject structuring, and is therefore conceptual. While this can be considered "correct seeing" in some contexts, it is not really correct seeing from this final perspective.

The preceding explanation has shown that according to Gorampa, the mind is the basis for the division between the two truths, and one's mode of engagement with appearances determines whether one is seeing falsely or correctly. The actual ultimate truth is freedom from conceptual proliferations, but one must nevertheless rely on concepts in order to begin to progress toward a realization of this truth. One first relies on conventional analysis in order to conceptually understand the ultimate that is taught. Then, one progresses further by engaging in meditative practices in order to transform one's mind and one's relationship to reality. The result of these practices is a nondual realization of the ultimate that is free from conceptual proliferations.

Tsongkhapa's Ontological Distinction Between the Two Truths

Gorampa's discussion of the two truths serves, at least in part, as a reply to the views put forth by Tsongkhapa. While the *Synopsis* is not as overtly polemical as his other Madhyamaka works (especially the *lta ba'i shan 'byed*), Gorampa still explicitly engages with Tsongkhapa's views on a number of important points throughout the text, and he works hard to distinguish his own Sakyapa view from those of his non-Sakyapa opponents. In the foregoing presentation of the two truths, Gorampa bases his analysis on the distinctions between "correct seeing" and "false seeing," as explained in *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI:23. Recall that this verse states,

> All things have two natures, apprehended by correct or false seeing. The object of correct seeing is suchness; the object of false seeing is called conventional truth.

Gorampa's interpretation of this passage stands in stark contrast to that of Tsongkhapa, who places his interpretive emphasis on the phrase, "all things have two natures." By focusing on the two natures of all things, Tsongkhapa reasons that the two truths are divided based on the types of objects that appear to different types of persons, rather than on the minds of the persons who are apprehending those objects.[248]

To put it another way: Tsongkhapa's interpretation of *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI:23 divides the two truths ontologically, rather than experientially. He explains in his *dBu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*:

> The buddhas, whose knowledge is unsurpassed, taught the nature of the two truths as follows: the nature of all internal mental formations (*'du byed*) such as intention, and all external objects such as sprouts, are apprehended as having two aspects. What are they? They are the nature of conventional truth, and the nature of the ultimate truth.[249]

Here, Tsongkhapa explains that every single thing – regardless of whether it appears as an internal mental phenomenon or as an external object – possesses both a conventional nature and an ultimate nature, and that the nature (*ngo bo*) that one perceives determines whether one is engaging with the conventional truth, or with the ultimate truth. This interpretation of Candrakīrti's verse shifts the focus away from the subjective mind in determining the distinction between the two truths, and instead places the focus on the objects that are apprehended by different cognitive processes. In short, this means that

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[248] For more on Tsongkhapa's understanding of the two truths in terms of two natures, see Tsongkhapa's *dbu ma dgongs pa rab sel*; Jinpa 2002; Thakchoe 2007; Tsong kha pa 2006; Newland 1992.

[249] *bden gnyis kyi rang gi ngo bo phyin ci ma log pa mkhyen pa'i bcom ldan 'das rnams kyis 'dus byed sems pa sogs nang dang myu gu sogs phyi rol gyi dngos po kun te thams cad kyi rang gi ngo bo rnam pa gnyis ni 'dzin par 'gyur par nye bar bstan te/ de gang zhe na/ kun rdzob bden pa'i ngo bo dang don dam bden pa'i ngo bo'o/* BPD 173

two different types of cognitions apprehend two different objects, and these objects – these *natures* – comprise the two truths.

Unlike Gorampa, who argues that the difference between correct and false seeing corresponds to the way in which a particular type of person is said to engage with a single appearance, Tsongkhapa contends that the acts of correct seeing and false seeing actually engage with two different types of objects. It is the existence of these objects, he argues, that constitutes the basis of division into conventional and ultimate. He elaborates,

> This means that when one divides the nature of one thing such as a sprout, it is revealed to be two natures: a conventional and an ultimate. However, this does not at all show that the single nature of the sprout is two truths from the perspectives of ordinary persons and *āryas*.[250]

According to Tsongkhapa, the conventional and ultimate natures are equally existent in any given thing. That is, the two natures have the same *ontological* status. One type of seeing (i.e., "false seeing") perceives the conventional nature of things, while another type of seeing ("correct seeing") perceives the ultimate nature. This is an important point that marks a sharp distinction between Tsongkhapa and Gorampa. While Gorampa contends that the conventional is no longer true from the perspective of one who realizes the ultimate, Tsongkhapa's system preserves the truth of the conventional, regardless of one's perspective.

Tsongkhapa is careful to note that the objects that matter when making these distinctions between correct seeing and false seeing are the *natures* of things, and not the things themselves. He contends that when an ordinary person perceives something such as a pot, she initially apprehends it as an ultimately existent thing. From an ordinary

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[250] *'dis ni myu gu lta bu gcig gi ngo bo la yang phye na kun rdzob yin pa dang/ don dam yin pa'i ngo bo gnyis yod par ston gyi myu gu'i ngo bo gcig nyid so skye dang 'phags pa la bltos nas bden pa gnyis su bstan pa gtan min no/* BPD 173

person's perspective, something like a pot appears to really, truly exist. But from the perspective of an *ārya*, that same pot is understood to be a conventional object, while the pot's *nature* is said to be ultimate. In other words, the pot is merely conventional, but the *nature* of that pot is the ultimate truth. What this implies is that from the perspective of the mind of an *ārya*, there is a twofold division of things: there is the merely conventional thing, and there is the ultimately true nature of that thing.[251]

When compared to Gorampa's arguments above, in which the mind is the basis for the division between the two truths, we can see that Tsongkhapa's two truths schema relies much more heavily on the objects that are perceived, rather than on the minds of the persons who are perceiving them. The two truths, he argues, cannot be understood without considering the two natures in all appearances. What this means is that on Tsongkhapa's view, the process of coming to see the ultimate truth involves discovering something that was previously unseen. On this model, one progresses from a state in which an ordinary person only perceives the conventional, to a ^{state} in which an enlightened buddha perceives both the conventional and ultimate natures of things *at the same time*. As such, when one sees things correctly, one apprehends something new about those things.

Because Gorampa argues that the two truths are divided on the basis of minds, seeing the ultimate truth on his system does not involve coming to see some thing that was previously unseen; it involves seeing differently. For Gorampa, the two natures refer to two perspectives with respect to the things that we see, *not* two distinct aspects of things. Gorampa's ultimate is not an object to be discovered; it is the result of a radical

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[251] Both of these aspects exist equally for Tsongkhapa. That is, even though the *ārya* discovers that the conventional is *merely* conventional, conventional entities remain real (*bden pa*) entities. See Jinpa 2002, 148ff.

transformation of one's mind, in which one no longer engages in conceptual thought, and is free from conceptual proliferations.

Tsongkhapa's ontological distinction between the two truths forms the basis for a formulation of the Madhyamaka view that looks very different than that which Gorampa develops. When the two truths are grounded in an ontological distinction, it becomes possible for an enlightened being to perceive the conventional truth *and* the ultimate truth. That is, when one discovers the ultimate nature of a thing, it remains possible for him to continue to perceive the conventional nature of that thing as well, and for the conventional nature of that thing to be considered *true*. In other words, unlike the chart above, an *ārya*'s rational apprehension of the conventional in the post-meditative state is still considered "correct seeing."

It is not my aim here to provide a detailed analysis of Tsongkhapa's presentation of the two truths as it stands in contrast to that of Gorampa, as that has been attempted elsewhere.[252] I only wish to sketch a general outline of Tsongkhapa's understanding of the division between the two truths to highlight an important issue: The ways in which one understands the division between the two truths dramatically affects the ways in which one understands the efficacy and ontological status of the conventional truth, as well as the ways in which one understands the nature of buddhahood. For Tsongkhapa, not only is it possible to continue to apprehend the conventional at the level of the realization of the ultimate truth, it is necessary.[253] This is because, as we will see below, Tsongkhapa has strong ontological commitments. For Gorampa, on the other hand, a cognition in which one simultaneously apprehends each of the two truths (*as* two distinct

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[252] See, e.g., Thakchoe 2007; Cabezón and Dargyay 2007; Pettit 2002; Dreyfus 1997.

[253] For more on the ways in which the two truths inform Tsongkhapa's understanding of the simultaneous apprehension of the conventional and ultimate truths, see Thakchoe 2007, 139ff.

truths) is impossible. Tsongkhapa's model preserves the conventional truth at the level of buddhahood, while Gorampa's model negates it entirely.

What's at stake, here? Gorampa and Ontological Deflationism

So far we have seen that according to Gorampa's Madhyamaka, the two truths schema serves as a scaffolding for reality. And according to this scaffolding, the conventional is conceptual, involving the apprehension of dualistic appearances, while the ultimate truth is free from conceptual proliferations and is the dissolution of dualistic distinctions. On this model of the two truths schema, one can either perceive the conventional or experience the ultimate, but one cannot engage with both of these distinct realities simultaneously. For ordinary persons, this means that one either perceives the conventional truth, or rationally apprehends the ultimate truth that is taught. For *ārya*s, this means nonconceptually experiencing the ultimate truth that is realized while in meditative equipoise, or conceptually engaging with the merely conventional while in the post-meditative state (while realizing that it is not *really* true). Gorampa's presentation of the two truths sets out a system in which one's experiences determine the distinctions between conventional and ultimate.

Gorampa's experiential division between the two truths has some important implications. For one, this affects his understanding of the nature of buddhahood. If enlightened buddhas do not engage in conceptual thought or perceive the conventional truth, then how can they be understood to work in the world for the sake of sentient beings, giving teachings and showing ordinary persons the path to liberation? This is, in fact, a criticism that Tsongkhapa levels against this style of reasoning, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five. However, another implication of Gorampa's

experiential division between the two truths is, perhaps, more immediately important for ordinary persons who are engaging with the Buddhist Path (not to mention for scholars who are attempting to make sense of Madhyamaka philosophy). If the ultimate truth is empty and free from conceptual proliferations, then in what way can it be said to exist? Conversely, if conceptual, dualistic conventions are eventually abandoned upon realizing the ultimate truth, then what purpose does the conventional actually serve? Both of these questions lead one to wonder: With Gorampa's insistence on the supremacy of *spros bral* (freedom from conceptual proliferations), how seriously do we need to take the conventional truth, and why should one exert oneself through philosophical reasoning to get the conventional truth "right"?

According to Gorampa, knowledge of the conventional is a tool that enables one to advance toward enlightenment, but it is not a component of enlightenment itself. That is, the conventional is conceptually constructed, and is not real. What, then, is the purpose of cultivating knowledge of something that isn't real? If the Buddhist Path is a process by which a practitioner comes to see things as they really are, then it seems counterintuitive that one would spend so much time and effort cultivating knowledge of something that is ultimately unreal.

The answer to this problem can perhaps best be explained by invoking the idea of "ontological deflationism," a term coined by Hilary Putnam,[254] and further refined in two recent articles by David Chalmers[255] and Matthew MacKenzie.[256] Putnam argues that the project of ontology can be explained in three different ways: inflationism, reductionism, and eliminationism. Briefly, ontological inflationism corresponds to strong ontological

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[254] Putnam 2005.
[255] Chalmers 2009.
[256] MacKenzie 2008.

realism, asserting the need for robust ontological commitments. Ontological reductionism, on the other hand, asserts that entities can be reduced to ontologically more basic things, and ontological eliminationism maintains that there are no wholes at all that can be reduced to smaller parts. Putnam argues that these latter two positions constitute ontological deflationism (as opposed to inflationism), because they reject a commitment to strong ontological claims.

MacKenzie, following Chalmers, argues that all three of Putnam's categories are "internal to the project of Ontology,"[257] and therefore do not offer a satisfactory critique of ontological claims overall. Ontological deflationism, MacKenzie argues, is a "metaontological position," which "involves an attempt to reject or avoid the project [of Ontology] itself, and thus cannot be associated with any of the positions within the project."[258] So, while Putnam's positions all make claims within the ontological project (i.e., they implicitly assert *something* about the project of Ontology), MacKenzie argues that a true deflationist avoids making any claims within the ontological project as a whole. There are thus two ways to be an ontological deflationist. The first is to avoid any ontological claims whatsoever. The second, which is what MacKenzie suggests Mādhyamikas are doing, is a weaker form of deflationism, in which one "may still find some use in ontological discourse, suitably deflated."[259] A weak deflationist, therefore, can say things about ontology without making any actual ontological commitments.

From an ontological deflationist's perspective, reality does not need to be grounded in any ontological basis, and reasoning does not need to be grounded in any ontological reality. There is nothing, for the deflationist, that is necessarily ontologically

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[257] Ibid., 198.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid.

more basic than the things with which one ordinarily engages. Affirming the existence of a table, for example, does not need to involve affirming some sort of objective, concrete existence of the table or its parts, *nor* does it need to involve denying the existence of the table and its parts altogether. For an ontological deflationist, a statement that attempts to assert some further fact about the table does not actually add any useful information. If one says that "The table's existence is true," the deflationist argues that this is no different than asserting "The table exists." In other words, adding "is true" to a proposition does not add any new information to the statement. The deflationist argues that we can simply say, "There is a table there," without saying that "There is *truly* a table there."

Turning to the Madhyamaka project, we can begin to see the parallels between Gorampa's insistence on *spros bral* and ontological deflationism. The ultimate truth is empty, free from conceptual proliferations. Thus, insofar as we can talk about the existence of things, we can only talk about the *conventional* existence of things. There is no further fact to conventional existence; no ontologically more basic level of reality that underlies a thing's conventional existence.

On an ontological deflationist Madhyamaka view, then, we can say that reality is not grounded in any ontological basis, and reasoning is not grounded in any ontological reality. With this in mind, if we follow Gorampa's presentation of the distinction between the two truths, we can also say that Buddhahood is not grounded in anything that fundamentally underlies the world as we see it. This is an important point, which highlights a key aspect of Gorampa's Madhyamaka. For Gorampa, becoming a Buddha, seeing the ultimate that is realized, just involves transforming the ways in which one sees.

Realizing the ultimate does *not* consist in coming to discover something new. Gorampa's entire project thus involves showing that there is no ontological basis underlying our conventional perceptions of things. There is, in other words, no ultimate nature that exists distinct from conventional appearances.

In short, we can understand Gorampa's Madhyamaka in terms of ontological deflationism, while Tsongkhapa's appears to involve some sort of commitment to an ontology at the conventional level. Jinpa describes Tsongkhapa's ontological commitment as "conventional realism." That is, following Candrakīrti's fictionalist stance, Tsongkhapa's sense of knowledge about the truth is "veridical only within the limited framework of our everyday transactional, conventional world."[260] Jinpa goes on, however, to argue that "In the ultimate sense, all such knowledge remains provisional."[261] This is an important distinction; while Gorampa contends that conventional appearances no longer remain at the level of the ultimate, Tsongkhapa argues that they are still accepted, but with certain qualifications.[262] We will see the implications of qualifications such as these in the following chapter.

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[260] Jinpa 2002, 168. This particular quote is speaking in reference to Tsongkhapa's epistemology, but Jinpa's use of the term "conventional realism" applies to Tsongkhapa's ontology as well. See Ibid., 116–147.

[261] Jinpa 2002, 168.

[262] With this in mind, Jinpa summarizes the distinction between Tsongkhapa's position and that of his opponents such as Gorampa as follows: "For Tsongkhapa, as shown earlier, the conventional (*saṃvṛti*) and the ultimate *(paramārtha)* are not two distinct entities with a categorically different ontological status. Rather, they are two aspects of one and the same world. There is only one world, the lived-in world of our everyday experience. This, however, is not the case with Tsongkhapa's critics. For them, the world of *saṃvṛti* is a world of illusion, which has no place within the perspective of an enlightened mind. At the stage of full enlightenment, the only perception that remains is that of emptiness. Like a mirage that disappears when approached, the perceptions of the multiple world of *saṃvṛti* are said to dissolve at enlightenment. Because of this, conventional reality cannot be accorded any established existential status. According to Tsongkhapa, however, '...it is necessary to accept a mode of being *(gnas lugs)* that is dependently originated, without essence, like a reflection.' Therefore, for Tsongkhapa, the rejection of this mode of being is not only logically incoherent, it is also spiritually dangerous, for it constitutes nihilim." Ibid., 158.

Tsongkhapa's emphasis on the two natures of things leads one to practice in such a way that one seeks out some fundamental substratum (i.e., the ultimate nature) in all things. When Madhyamaka is understood in this way, the conventional continues to be true, even after the ultimate truth has been discovered. Gorampa, on the other hand, has no such commitment to preserving truth at the conventional level. Once one has realized the ultimate truth, the conventional level of reality is no longer conventional *truth*, but rather *merely* conventional. Gorampa can, in other words, talk in terms of conventions without having any sort of commitment to the *truth* of those conventions.

By emphasizing the distinctions between correct and false seeing, rather than identifying two natures in things, Gorampa presents a system in which ontological commitments are not fundamentally important. Just as adding "is true" to a statement about a thing's existence does not actually provide the deflationist with any useful information over and above the statement of existence itself, Gorampa's position is that there is no further fact underlying conventional existence, and any attempt to find some ultimate nature in conventional existence will undoubtedly fall short.

This should not be taken to mean that Gorampa believes that an experience of the ultimate involves an experience of nothing whatsoever. As we will see in the next chapter, Gorampa holds that the application of a specific type of analysis allows one to come to a realization of the ultimate truth. This analysis, however, reveals that there is no ontologically basic ground upon which the conventional truth is constructed. The implication of this, which we will see in chapter five, is that accomplishments such as becoming a Buddha, behaving ethically, and cultivating wisdom, are processes which are inextricably linked to our conventional world and actions.

Gorampa argues that a correct understanding of the conventional is the basis for a subsequent realization of the ultimate. This does not mean that there is something that is somehow fundamentally true to our experiences, but rather that our ordinary, conventional experiences nevertheless help us to eventually arrive at a state that is free from conceptual proliferations. As noted above, Gorampa contends that if this were not the case, then *any* philosophical view (or, even more problematically, no view at all) could serve as a basis for a realization of the ultimate.[263] The fact that conceptual thought is eventually abandoned does not imply that the conventional does not matter. Gorampa's implementation of a sliding scale of analysis shows us that it does matter, but that it is slowly refined and eventually given up, in favor of a more accurate understanding of the way things really are. As McClintock suggests,

> …conventional reality… is *not* infallible or unassailable, a finding that can itself be demonstrated through analysis. But for this demonstration to occur, one must begin with the conventional and then apply analysis to it. Once this has been done, one can then use the conventional as a field for dialectical reasoning, offering inferences that start out from whatever can be agreed upon to appear to oneself and others in order to help others arrive at the Madhyamaka perspective.[264]

The conventional, therefore, is necessary precisely because it can be analyzed and eventually abandoned. As one moves toward buddhahood on Gorampa's sliding scale of analysis, one's understanding of the conventional is continually revised and refined until eventually, at the level of the realization of the actual ultimate that is free from conceptual proliferations, the conventional is no longer perceived at all.

This is a complicated problem, not just for Gorampa, but for all Mādhyamikas: if there is nothing really, substantially existent, then why is it the case that some

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[263] See Chapter 2.
[264] McClintock 2003, 152.

conceptually constructed things are conventionally *true*, while other conceptually constructed things are conventionally *false*? Candrakīrti's explanation is as follows: "Even though [objects] do not exist [in a substantial sense], because they are taken for granted throughout the context of everyday experience, they are said to exist strictly with reference to worldly convention."[265] The conventional truth (as opposed to conventional falsity) is that which is in accord with the conventions of the world. Conventional truths are conceptual constructions, but they are conceptual constructions that do not conflict with all of the other intricately related conceptual constructions with which ordinary beings engage every day. As Jan Westerhoff explains,

> The Mādhyamikas do not deny that there is a tree outside of my window, that 7+5=12, or that water is H_2O. What they deny is the claim that there is anything to these true statements that we do not make ourselves, based on an ongoing and intricate process of conceptual construction.[266]

There are certain conceptual constructs that make sense in the context of our worldly conventions, and others that do not. Those that make sense are conventionally true, while those that do not are conventionally false. Again, from Gorampa's deflationist perspective, there is no need to account for this in terms of anything that is fundamentally basic to our ordinary experiences.

The conventional truth is constructed by our conceptual proliferations, and when these conceptual proliferations subside, the conventional truth is no longer constructed. The only way to eliminate these conceptual proliferations (and therefore eliminate suffering in its entirety) is by thoroughly understanding them. Once one is capable of understanding the conventional truth and conceptual proliferations, one can analyze these

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[265] *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*, cited in Cowherds 2011, 205n19. *yod pa ma yin yang 'jig rten kho na la grags par gyur pas yod do zhes 'jig rten gyi ngo bo kho nar brjod pa yin te/*
[266] Ibid., 205.

things, and progress along the sliding scale of analysis in order to eventually eliminate them. This is why Gorampa contends that a correct understanding of the conventional truth is necessary for a nonconceptual, nondual realization of the ultimate truth.

At first glance, it seems contradictory that one would perform a conceptual analysis of the conventional in order to eliminate conceptual thought, for this appears to be creating a system in which one is weighing oneself down with more concepts, rather than getting rid of them. But Gorampa argues that analysis is, at least initially, the *only* way for conceptual proliferations to subside completely.[267] This conceptual analysis must be carried out, however, in a very specific way, according to a specific process of reasoning known as the tetralemma (*catuṣkoṭi*, *mtha' bzhi*). One must first understand the conventional truth and its relationship to the ultimate as we have seen Gorampa describe above. Then, one must analyze the conventional truth through the tetralemma. As we will see in the following chapter, Gorampa argues that when the tetralemma is conceptualized correctly, it serves as a basis for the nonconceptual realization of the ultimate.

In short, Gorampa argues that the Buddhist Path involves a process of transforming one's perspective. One begins by correctly identifying and understanding the conventional truth. Then, through logical reasoning and meditative practices (which, again, will be elaborated in the following chapter), one gradually begins to realize that this so-called truth is merely conventional and that it is not grounded in anything other than our own conceptual constructs. This leads to a conceptual understanding of the ultimate that is taught. Through more analysis and practice still, one eventually leaves

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[267] This is yet another point of distinction between Gorampa and his Sakyapa contemporary Śākya mchog ldan. The latter argues that one needn't *necessarily* engage in rational analysis in order to arrive at freedom from conceptual proliferations; tantric techniques may induce such a state as well. See Komarovski 2011.

behind the merely conventional and directly experiences the ultimate truth that is realized, which does not depend on language and concepts. In other words, when one realizes the ultimate that is taught, a distinctive feature of this realization is that, even though it depends on concepts (and thus ignorance), it can actually be used to negate concepts and eliminate ignorance. For Gorampa, seeing the ultimate is not about seeing something new (or simply forgetting about what we conventionally see); it is about seeing differently.

Chapter 4: The Tetralemma: A logical process with a soteriological goal

Gorampa argues that realizing the ultimate truth involves transforming the ways in which one engages with the world. One initially uses rational analysis to cultivate a conceptual understanding of the ultimate that is taught (*bstan pa'i don dam*), and then based on that understanding, one engages in further practices in order to directly and nonconceptually experience the ultimate that is realized (*rtogs pa'i don dam*). At the outset, it appears counter-intuitive that engaging in rational analysis might eventually lead to a nonconceptual mental state, but this is precisely Gorampa's argument throughout the *Synopsis*. He argues that when different types of rational analysis are arranged together and carried out through a specific process known as the tetralemma (*mu bzhi, catuṣkoṭi*), they serve to transcend rational analysis entirely.

The tetralemma is a style of analysis in which four alternatives are considered: one proposition, its negation, both, and neither. That is, as opposed to a twofold *di*lemma, in which only two contradictory propositions are considered, a tetralemma also considers the union and disjunction of these, in order to perform an exhaustive analysis of all conceptual possibilities with respect to a given situation. Tetralemmic analysis is not unique to Gorampa's Madhyamaka; it is a style of reasoning that can be traced to the Nikāyas, and has been employed in various ways throughout the development of Buddhism, especially in India and Tibet.[268] More recently, contemporary American, European, and Australian scholars have begun to investigate Buddhist tetralemmic

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[268] Ruegg 1977, 1–2.

analyses as well.[269] There is a great deal of debate among scholars regarding the logical implications of tetralemmic analysis, and we will consider a few of these interpretations below. In the context of Gorampa's philosophy, however, it is important to note that each of the individual analyses within the tetralemma is logically consistent,[270] while the application of the tetralemma as a whole is anti-rational. In other words, the tetralemma is a tool that utilizes rational analysis in order to undermine rational analysis.

Regardless of whether or not the tetralemma is understood as adhering to certain logical laws, it is always understood within Madhyamaka as a tool that orients a practitioner towards enlightenment. As such, the way in which it is understood informs the way in which enlightenment is conceptualized. If the application of tetralemmic analysis leads to the formation of a specific concept, for example, then that concept must fully encompass a buddha's enlightened mind. If, on the other hand, tetralemmic analysis leads to the pacification of all concepts, then a buddha's enlightened mind must be entirely free from all concepts.

Tibetan Mādhyamikas disagree about the nature of enlightenment, and this is reflected in their different interpretations of the tetralemma. Gorampa understands enlightened buddhas as beings who nonconceptually apprehend the ultimate truth and do not engage with the conventional,[271] while thinkers such as Tsongkhapa understand enlightenment as a state in which one is capable of perceiving both the conventional and ultimate truths, and necessarily has conceptual thoughts.[272] When these two views are

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[269] See, e.g., Jayatilleke 1967; Wayman 1977; Ruegg 1977; Newland 2001; Garfield and Priest 2003; Westerhoff 2006; Tillemans 2009.

[270] A "consistent" system of logic is a system that does not involve contradictions.

[271] Although, as we will see in the following chapter, they nevertheless *seem* to engage with the conventional.

[272] See pp. 117-121, above.

understood in the context of the Buddhist path, we will see that they have far-reaching ethical implications. How, for example, can a buddha teach the dharma to sentient beings if he does not employ concepts? On the other hand, if he does employ concepts, then it appears as though he hasn't succeeded in completely eliminating ignorance. These larger implications will be addressed in greater detail in the next chapter; the focus of the present chapter is to present Gorampa's interpretation of the tetralemma, and to understand the ways in which he employs logical reasoning while advocating for an enlightened state that is free from conceptual proliferations. But first, let us briefly consider the history and context of the tetralemma, in order to better situate and understand Gorampa's own interpretation.

The Tetralemma

In the context of Madhyamaka, tetralemmic analysis is applied to a number of different topics. In general, however, all instances of the Madhyamaka tetralemma involve the analysis of contradictory predicates applied to a subject. That is, for any appearing thing (such as a sprout), one may utilize the tetralemma to inquire about certain properties of that thing (such as its causes, or its ontological status). If, through tetralemmic analysis, one of these contradictory predicates can be said to bear on the subject in question, then the subject is established as real. Mādhyamikas seek to refute all four possibilities through tetralemmic analysis in order to establish emptiness. Because these four possibilities are exhaustive in every application of the tetralemma, by refuting

all of these possibilities, the Mādhyamika demonstrates that nothing at all can be established.[273]

The most well known example of tetralemmic analysis in Madhyamaka occurs in the first verse of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*:

> Neither from itself nor from another,
> Nor from both,
> Nor without a cause,
> Does anything, anywhere, ever arise.[274]

This fourfold refutation of an effect being produced by something identical to itself, by something other than itself, by something that is both the same as and different from itself, or by neither (i.e., causelessly), forms the basis for many of the arguments in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, and comes to represent a style of reasoning that embodies much of Madhyamaka thought. The above verse occurs within the context of Nāgārjuna's analysis of causation; his goal is to demonstrate that something as seemingly straightforward as the relationship between a cause and an effect does not actually hold up under analysis. The conclusion of this fourfold reasoning suggests that our assumptions about the way that things appear do not correspond to the way things really are. Specifically, Nāgārjuna means to show that things that appear to be substantially existent entities are actually empty; they lack inherent existence (*svabhāva, rang bzhin*).

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[273] It is important to note that there is also another version of the Madhyamaka tetralemma, in which all four possibilities are affirmed. Westerhoff calls this a "positive" tetralemma. In general, however, Madhyamaka thought develops further after Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva without calling into question the fourfold refutation of the negative tetralemma. (Westerhoff 2006, 391–393.)

[274] *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* I:1 Tib.: *bdag las ma yin gzhan las min/ gnyis las ma yin rgyu med min/ dngos po gang dag gang na yang/ skye ba nam yang yod ma yin//* Skt.: *na svato nāpi parato na dvābhyāṃ nāpy ahetutaḥ / utpannā jātu vidyante bhāvāḥ kva cana ke cana //* For helpful commentary on this and related verses in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, see Garfield 1995, 103–123; Siderits and Katsura 2013, 17–29.

The first possibility in the tetralemma, that an effect is not produced by something identical to itself, is a refutation of the *satkāryavāda* position held by the non-Buddhist Sāṃkhya school.[275] Briefly, *satkāryavāda* is the view that cause and effect are not substantially different, because an effect is already present in its cause.[276] For example, one can say that a pot's material cause is a lump of clay; without the clay, the pot could not come into existence. According to the *satkāryavādin*, the pot already exists as a potentiality in the lump of clay, and is made manifest through certain conditions. The prior potential existence of the pot is what makes the clay the cause of the pot. At the same time, the clay and the pot cannot be considered substantially different. Therefore, the *satkāryavādin* claims, an effect must be produced by something identical to itself.

Nāgārjuna rejects this position in the next verse,[277] arguing that upon analyzing an effect's conditions, the essence of that effect cannot be found. The idea here is that if cause and effect were identical, then the essence (*svabhāva, rang bzhin*) of the effect would also exist in its cause. Nāgārjuna's objection is that, no matter how carefully one scrutinizes a lump of clay, a potter's wheel, and all of the other conditions that go into producing a pot, the essence of a pot (that is, "pot-ness") cannot be found. If it were to be found, then there would be no need for the pot to be produced, because it would already exist.

Having rejected the possibility that cause and effect are identical, the next possibility is that cause and effect are distinct. This view suggests that a cause is

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[275] See BPD 125*ff.*

[276] For more on this view, see Larson and Bhattacharya 1987, vol. 4.

[277] *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* I:2: "The essence of things does not exist in the conditions, etc. Without the essence, the extrinsic essence is not found." *na hi svabhāvo bhāvānāṃ pratyayādiṣu vidyate / avidyamāne svabhāve parabhāvo na vidyate //* Siderits and Katsura reverse the order of the second and third verses of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* I, arguing that this is the order in which they are treated in various commentaries on the text. See Siderits and Katsura 2013, 18–19.

necessarily prior to its effect: the existence of the pot depends on the existence of the clay. Or to put it another way, the pot "borrows" its essence from the clay.[278] Nāgārjuna describes this as "extrinsic essence" (*parabhāva, gzhan bzhin*), proposed by opponents as the opposite of the *satkāryavāda* view (*asatkāryavāda*).

In response to this view, Nāgārjuna argues that without essences (*svabhāva*), there can likewise be no extrinsic essences (*parabhāva*). In order for an effect to borrow an essence from its cause, that cause must have its own essence. But because this has been refuted, Nāgārjuna reasons that the notion of extrinsic essence makes no sense. Moreover, without essences, there can be no way to establish things as essentially distinct from one another. Thus, an effect cannot be produced by something that is distinct from itself.

The third possibility is that cause and effect are somehow identical and distinct at the same time. One way of understanding Nāgārjuna's refutation of this view is that he views this third possibility as a combination of the first two views, so he dismisses it for the reasons explained in the previous two refutations.[279] Another way of understanding this third possibility and its refutation is a bit more nuanced.[280] On this reading, the opponent might be suggesting that the cause contains the effect as a potentiality that is actualized only in the presence of certain external conditions. One might suggest, for example, that a lump of clay contains a pot as a potentiality, but that the pot is only made manifest when a multitude of conditions are met, such as the potter's act of forming the clay into the shape of a pot and the sun's ability to dry the clay. This particular

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[278] Ibid., 19–20.

[279] This is how Siderits and Katsura understand the refutation. We can see Nāgārjuna employ a similar line of reasoning in, for example, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXII:9a: "If suffering were caused by both, suffering could be caused by each." *syād ubhābhyāṃ duḥkhaṃ syād ekaikakṛtam yadi/*

[280] See Westerhoff 2009b, 109–111.

understanding of the relationship between cause and effect appears to avoid the problems brought about by the positions that Nāgārjuna refuted above: cause and effect are not essentially identical, nor are they essentially distinct, but the effect is brought about through certain conditions. However, when this relationship is analyzed further, one once again finds that neither the cause nor the effect can be said to exist independently. The conditions (the process of forming the clay) must depend upon the cause (the lump of clay). Moreover, the effect (the pot) depends upon both the causes and the conditions. In other words, none of these elements can be said to exist inherently, independently of the others. Cause and effect can only be said to exist in dependence on one another.

The final possibility is that cause and effect are neither identical nor distinct. However, if this were the case, then it would mean that that effects could come about causelessly. Nāgārjuna rejects this possibility because it contradicts the way that we understand things to function in the world. It appears to us, conventionally speaking, that certain causes produce certain effects; if they did not, anything could be produced from anything else (e.g., a pot could be produced from a seed, or a sprout from a lump of clay). Nāgārjuna rejects this possibility on the grounds that it violates our commonsense understanding of the world.

From this brief overview, we can see that Nāgārjuna uses the tetralemma to refute the view that things exist inherently. His method involves analyzing a view from four different angles, and by refuting them all, arriving at the conclusion that the view rests on faulty assumptions. Once one understands that effects are not essentially identical to their causes, nor distinct, nor both, nor neither, one's only recourse is to reconsider one's assumption that causes and effects are essentially existent entities in the first place.

The Indian scholar Āryadeva[281] applies this same type of fourfold reasoning to the idea of ontological existence, stating in his *Jñānasārasamuccaya*,

> The reality of the learned Mādhyamikas is freedom from the four extremes: not existence, not nonexistence, not existence and nonexistence, nor the absence of the essence of both.[282]

Again, this formulation of the tetralemma forces one to reconsider one's notion of "existence." What does it mean for a thing to exist? It appears as though things have *svabhāva*, but Āryadeva suggests that the tetralemma serves to undermine this assumption completely.

This particular formulation of the tetralemma is a recurring theme in the *Synopsis*. Gorampa repeatedly cites this passage from Āryadeva to demonstrate that a negation of the four extremes of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither leads to *spros bral*, and that this is the most important goal of Madhyamaka analysis. He states,

> Since the actual freedom from conceptual proliferations – which is the perspective of an *ārya's* meditative equipoise – is erroneously presumed to be established (*gtan la phab par rlom*), the ultimate truth – freedom from

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[281] It is uncertain whether the author of the *Jñānasārasamuccaya* is Nāgārjuna's direct disciple Āryadeva, or an eigth-century scholar by the same name. Ruegg suggests that this text bears some relationship to later tantric developments (Ruegg 1981, 105–106. However, the phrase "*yod min med min...*" in the *Jñānasārasamuccaya* bears a resemblance to the final verse in (the 2nd century) Āryadeva's *Catuḥśataka*: *yod dang med dang yod med zhes / gang la phyogs ni yod min pa / de la yun ni ring po na'ang / klan ka brjod pa nus ma yin //*

[282] *yod min med min yod med min/ gnyis ka'i bdag nyid kyang min pas/ mtha' bzhi las grol dbu ma pa/ mkhas pa rnams kyis de kho na/* BPD 173. *na san nāsan na sadasan na cāpy anubhayātmakaṁ/ catuṣkoṭi-vinirmuktaṁ tattvaṁ mādhyamikā viduḥ//* (Cited in Mimaki 2000.) Mimaki notes that "There is a slight difference in the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions of pāda b. The Sanskrit version is easier to understand, whereas we need a somewhat acrobatic interpretation in order to understand the Tibetan version. That is what Bodhibhadra and Mi pham do in their commentaries. The third and fourth categories of the catuskoti usually are the same as they are in our translation. But the commentaries of Bodhibhadra and Mi pham make the third category the negation of existence and nonexistence, and the fourth category the affirmation of the both." (Ibid., 241n26.) Mimaki translates this verse (relying on Sanskrit and Tibetan) as: "Neither existence [as in the case of the consciousness of the Yogācāra], nor nonexistence [as postulated by the Lokāyata, etc.], nor [the third category which is the affirmation of both, namely] existence and nonexistence, nor [the fourth category, which has] the nature of the negation of both, are [admitted]. The Mādhyamika know reality which is free from these four extremes." (Ibid., 241.)

conceptual proliferations of the four extremes – is the thing to be proven from the perspective of conceptual thought.[283]

Here, Gorampa is reminding us once again that freedom from conceptual proliferations is only experienced by *ārya*s in meditative equipoise, and as such, it is not established in any way. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the conceptual minds of ordinary persons, the "refutation of the four extremes" is something that must be established. In other words, when one is engaged in rational analysis, one comes to a conceptual understanding of the ultimate that is taught through the four refutations of tetralemmic analysis. After this conceptual understanding is attained, one then goes on to familiarize oneself further with these four refutations until the actual the ultimate truth is realized nonconceptually.[284] The idea that freedom from conceptual proliferations is the end result of the refutation of the four extremes is integral to Gorampa's entire Madhyamaka view.

Gorampa reads the tetralemma literally, understanding that its negations apply solely to the *ultimate* existence of things:

> The scriptures which refute conceptual proliferations of the four extremes refer to the ultimate but not to the conventional, because the ultimate is free from conceptual proliferations, and the conventional is associated with them.[285]

As I will show below, philosophical opponents such as Tsongkhapa argue that a literal refutation of all four extremes violates logic and common sense. Gorampa, however, contends that the tetralemma's specific purpose is to transcend the limits of logic. The four extremes represent all possibilities for logical, conceptual thought; there is no possible way to conceive of things other than as existent, nonexistent, both, or neither.

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[283] *'phags pa'i mnyam gzhag gi blo ngo'i spros bral mtshan nyid pa gtan la phab par rlom nas rtog ngor don dam bden pa mtha' bzhi'i spros pa dang bral ba ni bsgrub bya'o/* BPD 175.

[284] This process will be explained below.

[285] *mtha' bzhi'i spros pa bkag pa'i lung rnams ni don dam la dgongs pa yin gyi/ kun rdzob la dgongs pa ma yin te/ don dam spros bral yin pa'i phyir dang/ kun rdzob spros bcas yin pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 75-76

Once these four extremes are refuted through the tetralemma, one's only recourse is to abandon concepts completely. In other words, if one can successfully eliminate the possibility of conceiving of things as existent, nonexistent, both, and neither, then one is left with no other possible ways to conceive of things. The conclusion is that ultimately, things cannot be conceived at all.

Interpretations of the Tetralemma

A number of non-Tibetan scholars, many of whom come from backgrounds in analytic traditions,[286] have interpreted Nāgārjuna's tetralemma in recent years. Such interpretations have led to Nāgārjuna being understood as, for example, an anti-realist,[287] a paraconsistent logician,[288] and even a proto-Wittgensteinian.[289] Nāgārjuna's dense, terse, and at times confusing formulations of tetralemmic and other styles of analysis have allowed contemporary philosophers to interpret him within the framework of analytic philosophy, to varying degrees of success. While these analytically-oriented interpretations of Nāgārjuna can serve to shed some light on contemporary problems in analytic philosophy, I believe that when we shift our attention to Gorampa's analysis of the tetralemma, such approaches only serve to detract from a deeper understanding of his overall project. This is so because a general trend in analytic philosophy suggests that objective knowledge about the world arises through the use of logic, language, and concepts. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, however, Gorampa's approach is based on the notion that in order for a Buddhist to have knowledge of the ultimate truth,

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[286] Analytic philosophy is, of course, a term that evades an all-encompassing definition. Martinich and Sosa describe analytic philosophy as a "cluster concept," but summarize it as a sort of "widespread scientism." Martinich and Sosa 2001, Introduction.
[287] Siderits 2003.
[288] Garfield and Priest 2003.
[289] Tuck 1990.

she must transcend the use of logic, language, and concepts, and come to an experience of the way things truly are that is entirely free from conceptual proliferations.

This does not mean, however, that Gorampa's approach is completely devoid of analysis as understood in western philosophical traditions. The main difference is that on Gorampa's view, rational analysis can orient a practitioner toward *knowledge about* the ultimate truth, but rational analysis alone does not constitute a direct *experience of* the ultimate. Nevertheless, it will be useful for us to pause briefly here, in order to consider some analytically-oriented approaches to the tetralemma. Doing so will enable us to more clearly understand some of the nuances of Gorampa's own approach.

Analytic Approaches to the Tetralemma

An analytically-oriented approach to tetralemmic analysis attempts to resolve problems stemming from apparent contradictions in the fourfold negation. Under the laws of formal logic, the possibilities of "existent" and "nonexistent," as well as "both" and "neither" are contradictories, as are their respective negations. Analytic approaches to the tetralemma attempt to make sense of these apparent contradictions, in order to preserve the coherency and consistency of Nāgārjuna's philosophical system.

One of the most basic resolutions to apparent contradictions in the tetralemma involves adding certain parameters to the four lemmas, qualifying each in certain ways. One might, for example, add the qualification that the negation of existence applies to the ultimate truth, while the negation of nonexistence applies to the conventional truth. This type of parameterization eliminates an apparent contradiction entirely, and leaves us with

the rather uncontroversial claim, "Things exist conventionally, but not ultimately."[290]
This approach has been dismissed by some contemporary interpreters as an overly-simplistic misreading of the tetralemma,[291] but it is nevertheless an important backdrop against which we can understand later developments in analytic interpretations of tetralemmic reasoning.[292]

Philosophers such as Tom Tillemans[293] and Jan Westerhoff,[294] among others,[295] have attempted to understand Nāgārjuna's formulation of the tetralemma through the use of symbolic logic. As such, they have translated the tetralemma into logical notation as:

[1] $\sim x$	[Neither from itself]
[2] $\sim(\sim x)$	[Nor from another]
[3] $\sim(x \ \& \sim x)$	[Nor from both]
[4] $\sim(\sim x \ \& \sim\sim x)$[296]	[Nor without a cause]

Tillemans bases this formulation of the tetralemma on the *Catuḥśātaka* XIV:22, and Westerhoff bases his on *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXII:11, but we can see that regardless of the *content* of the tetralemmic reasoning being applied in each instance, the *form* of the reasoning is the same. Tillemans explains that a straightforward reading of all four of these possibilities violates the law of excluded middle, leads to a number of contradictions, and appears to be redundant if one accepts the law of double negation.[297]

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[290] I.e., Things are ultimately nonexistent, conventionally not-nonexistent. This interpretation also relies on the law of double negation elimination, which will be addressed below.

[291] See, e.g., Falls 2010.

[292] Tsongkhapa is often understood as employing parameterization within the context of the tetralemma, but as I will discuss below, his methods of parameterization are more complex than this.

[293] Tillemans 1999.

[294] Westerhoff 2006, 275.

[295] e.g., Galloway 1989; Garfield and Priest 2003.

[296] Equivalent to $\sim(\sim(x \ v \sim x))$

[297] He explains, "Since [1] and [2] would imply $\sim(P \ v \sim P)$, the law of excluded middle falls by the wayside, but what is worse, we would likewise encounter various contradictions: $\sim P \ \& \sim\sim P$ from [1] and [2];

Westerhoff similarly suggests that were one to read the tetralemma in a straightforward way, then lemmas [3] and [4] would be logically equivalent, based on the law of double negation elimination.[298] On both of these interpretations, a straightforward reading of the tetralemma violates a number of logical principles, and Tillemans and Westerhoff each set out to reconcile these apparent violations through their own analytic interpretations of tetralemmic reasoning.

Tillemans resolves the problems associated with apparent contradictions in the tetralemma by adding more nuance to his logical notation, suggesting that each of the four limbs ought to be read in terms of existential quantification. That is, he argues that we should understand the tetralemma in terms of entities (x) to which a property (F) may be applied in various ways.[299] On this interpretation, the tetralemma becomes translated into symbolic logic as follows:

[1] ~(Ex)Fx
[2] ~(Ex)~Fx
[3] ~(Ex)(Fx & ~Fx)
[4] ~(Ex)(~Fx & ~~Fx)

In this case, if we understood the entity x as "a thing," and the property F as "being produced from itself," we could read the limbs as follows: [1] It is not the case that there exists a thing that is produced from itself; [2] It is not the case that there exists a thing that is not produced from itself (i.e., from something different); [3] It is not the case that

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($\sim P$ & $\sim\sim P$) & $\sim$($\sim P$ & $\sim\sim P$) from [1], [2], and [4]; or again simply P & $\sim P$ from [1] and [2] by the law of double negation." (190)

[298] As Westerhoff suggests, "Given the prominent place which the tetralemma occupies in Mādhyamika literature we would have to charge both Nāgārjuna as well as later Mādhyamika authors with remarkable logical naïvety for not realizing that instead of considering four possibilities, they were in fact only dealing with three." (Westerhoff 2006, 376.)

[299] Tillemans 1999.

there exists a thing that is both produced from itself and produced from something different; and [4] It is not the case that there exists a thing that is neither produced from itself nor from something different. Here, Tillemans explains,

> Since we are dealing with a tendency to attribute properties to entities, the semantics here must be referential; in other words, the opponent maintains that there really is some thing that has, or does not have, property *F*. It is precisely this attribution of properties to *entities* that the Buddhist wishes to oppose... If we interpret the quantification in a referential manner – as we must do in this context – all four alternatives can be denied without the least logical deviance.[300]

In other words, if a Mādhyamika denies essential existence, then there is no *x* to which the property *F* can be applied; there is no essentially existent thing that can be understood in terms of being produced in any of the four ways. On this reading, the tetralemma is a tool used to deny ontological existence. By understanding the tetralemma in this way, problems involving contradiction are avoided, and Nāgārjuna is seen as maintaining a consistent logical view.

Westerhoff resolves the problem of redundancy based on the law of double negation elimination by arguing that Nāgārjuna is actually using different types of negation within tetralemmic analysis.[301] Indian philosophical traditions make a distinction between *prasajya* and *paryudāsa* negations; the former negates a verb (e.g., "That is not a Brahmin"), while the latter negates a noun (e.g., "That is a non-Brahmin"). In other words, the *paryudāsa* negation can be understood as functioning implicatively; while it negates a particular term (e.g., Brahmin), it simultaneously implies the existence of something else in its place (e.g., being some caste other than Brahmin). A *prasajya*

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[300]Ibid., 199–200.

[301] It is worth noting that he also makes a passing reference to the types of parameterization mentioned above, but dismisses this strategy on the basis that "there seems to be no textual evidence that Nāgārjuna expected qualifications of [these] kind to be supplied when interpreting the tetralemma." See Westerhoff 2006, 376n39.

negation, on the other hand, can be understood as functioning non-implicatively; it negates the entire proposition without necessarily asserting anything in its place (e.g., it negates the *existence* of a Brahmin).[302] Westerhoff argues that the best way to understand Nāgārjuna's tetralemmic analysis is based on these two types of negations, which he explains as follows: "*paryudāsa*-negations will be regarded as negations which continue to endorse the presuppositions made by the proposition they negate, while the purpose of *prasajya*-negations is to be able to formulate negations which explicitly reject some of these presuppositions."[303] The former type of negation consists of an implicit affirmation, while the latter only negates without affirming anything at all.

Westerhoff begins his reconciliation of the logical problems in the tetralemma by assuming that the negations of all four lemmas are *prasajya*-negations,[304] and he argues that *prasajya*-negations adhere to the law of double negation elimination (i.e., $\sim\sim x = x$).[305] However, this presents a problem when we consider the fourth lemma: $\sim\sim(x \text{ v } \sim x)$. If the first two *prasajya* negations cancel each other out, then the fourth lemma is simply (x v $\sim x$), a possibility which has already been rejected in the previous lemmas, thus making the fourth lemma redundant. If this is the case, then it doesn't make sense that Mādhyamikas would see the need to refute *four* extremes, instead of only three.

In order to resolve this problem, Westerhoff introduces yet a third type of negation: the illocutionary negation.[306] This type of negation is based on the idea that

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[302] Westerhoff also invokes the distinction between choice negation and exclusion negation to illustrate one way in which the *prasajya/paryudāsa* distinction can be understood. Ibid., 369–370.

[303] Ibid., 370.

[304] He bases this on the *Prasannapadā* (see Ibid., 377n40.

[305] Ibid., 378. He also mentions Gorampa in a footnote here, noting his "interesting" interpretation that a *med dgag* does not adhere to double negation elimination.

[306] Ibid., 379. It is worth noting that Westerhoff is not the only scholar to discuss the implications of illocutionary negations in Madhyamaka tetralemmic analysis. See, e.g., Matilal 1985, 17–18; Jinpa 2002, 59.

"propositions expressing a content can be prefixed by illocutionary operators forming assertions, commands, requests, promises, and so on."[307] This means that when we consider a property (e.g., being open) applied to an entity (e.g., a window), if it is prefixed by an assertion operator, we end up with the assertion, "The window is open." When the same property-entity combination is prefixed by a command operator, we end up with the command, "Open the window!" Westerhoff suggests that when negation comes into play with these types of statements, it makes a difference whether one is applying the negation to the illocutionary operator or not. That is, the difference between the propositional negation, "I assert that the window is <u>not</u> open," and the illocutionary negation, "I do <u>not</u> assert that the window is open," is significant; these two negations have very different meanings.

It is the illocutionary negation (e.g., "I do not assert that the window is open") that Westerhoff suggests is at play in Nāgārjuna's tetralemmic analysis. Applying illocutionary negations to the tetralemma, Westerhoff suggests that the fourth lemma $[\sim\sim(x \text{ v } \sim x)]$ can be understood as, "I do not assert that I do not assert $(x \text{ v } \sim x)$." This avoids the problem of double negation elimination mentioned above. Illocutionary negations can similarly be applied to the previous three lemmas, allowing us to read the tetralemma in a way that does not violate the law of double negation elimination. Westerhoff concludes that by understanding tetralemmic analysis in this way,

> it is possible to see that the four alternatives of the tetralemma are logically independent, as well as to understand how the rejection of the four alternatives (as illocutionary negations based on a presupposition failure) fits in with Nāgārjuna's general philosophical attempt to demonstrate the non-existence of *svabhāva*.[308]

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[307] Westerhoff 2006, 379.
[308] Ibid., 392.

Westerhoff's reading of the tetralemma takes Nāgārjuna a bit farther on the Buddhist path than Tillemans' analysis. Above, Tillemans argues that tetralemmic analysis is an ontological tool, aimed at refuting the ultimate existence of entities. Westerhoff agrees with this, but adds that the tetralemma is also a logical tool, and should be understood as something that does not involve contradictions, ignore double negation elimination, *or* collapse any of the lemmas into each other.[309]

When the tetralemma is translated into symbolic logic in the ways that Tillemans and Westerhoff have described above, it results in complicated applications of reasoning and multiple understandings of the function of negation, in order to adhere to certain logical laws. These readings lend themselves to preserving consistency in Nāgārjuna's logical system, and while they allow us to understand the tetralemma as a logical tool that can be used to make sense of the conventional world, they do not interpret the tetralemma in a way that can help a practitioner to nonconceptually realize the ultimate truth.

Dialetheism and the Tetralemma

Another analytically-oriented approach to the tetralemma involves a more straightforward reading of the negation of the four extremes, but is based on paraconsistent logic. Jay Garfield and Graham Priest argue that Nāgārjuna is best understood as a dialetheist – i.e., that the tetralemma involves a set of true contradictions.[310] According to Garfield and Priest, these true contradictions are not asserted within the confines of our ordinary concepts, but they occur at the so-called "limits of thought." That is, contradictions in the tetralemma occur when an operator is

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[309] Jinpa argues that understanding the tetralemma in terms of illocutionary negations is problematic, in that it "inevitably leads to an interpretation of Madhyamaka dialectics as purely deconstructive with no commitments of its own." He argues that according to Tsongkhapa, negation in the tetralemma is propositional, rather than illocutionary, and ontological, rather than linguistic. (Jinpa 2002, 59–60.)
[310] Garfield and Priest 2003.

applied to all of the individual items *within* the set of conceptual thought, as well as *to* the

entire set itself. Such a contradiction can be seen in the phrase, "all things have one

nature; that is, no nature." In this example, when the characteristic "naturelessness" is

applied to the set of all things, then that set of all things has something in common,

namely the lack of a nature. But if all things have something in common, then they

necessarily have a nature. In this way, all things have the nature of lacking a nature.

Garfield and Priest call this type of paradox an inclosure paradox, and explain that

because naturelessness is both in and not in the set of all things, it is a contradiction that

occurs at the limits of "all things."[311] Furthermore, because contradictions such as these

occur *at* the limits of thought, rather than *within* them, they do not affect the

completeness or consistency of Nāgārjuna's logical system inside these limits.[312]

In a later article responding to Garfield and Priest, Tom Tillemans tentatively

suggests that the tetralemma might be able to be interpreted rather loosely as part of a

paraconsistent system of logic, but unlike Garfield and Priest, he argues that Nāgārjuna's

contradictions are merely "weak contradictions." Weak dialetheism, he argues, involves

the acceptance of weak contradictions: "an acceptance of the truth of a statement x[313] at

some point and an acceptance of the truth of not-x at another."[314] This is contrasted with

Garfield and Priest's strong dialetheism, which involves "accepting the truth of a

conjoined statement, x and not-x, i.e., $x \ \& \ \neg \ x$."[315] In other words, Garfield and Priest

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[311] Here, "all things" refers to all things that can be conceived; i.e., all thought.

[312] See Garfield and Priest 2003, 102–104.

[313] Tillemans uses the letter Φ in his article, but I substitute x in my discussion and quotations, for the sake of consistency.

[314] Tillemans 2009, 87.

[315] Ibid.

read Nāgārjuna as accepting strong contradictions at the limits of thought, while Tillemans contends that such a position takes the interpretation too far.[316]

It is important to note that Tillemans' weak dialetheist interpretation of Nāgārjuna is not a type of parameterization. Weak dialetheism accepts both *x* and not-*x* in different instances, allowing for the existence of weak contradictions; parameterization, on the other hand, qualifies *x* and not-*x* in ways that eliminate contradictions entirely. Tillemans suggests that weak dialetheism ought to be the favored approach when interpreting Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka. Rather than suggesting that certain parameters are implicit in certain statements where Nāgārjuna does not supply them, Tillemans suggests that there are cases in which "the same completely unparameterized statement is being affirmed and negated" in Nāgārjuna's texts.[317] In other words, Tillemans argues that one should understand that Madhyamaka texts contain "different kinds of supportive reasoning as to why one statement is true and why its denial is true."[318] One might, for example, have good reason to say that phenomena exist when undertaking certain (conventional) types of analysis, and one might have equally good reason to say that phenomena do not exist when undertaking other types of (ultimate) analysis. The result is that Nāgārjuna should not be read as implicitly asserting two parameterized statements about existence and nonexistence, but rather that the same unparameterized statement about the nature of existence is both affirmed and denied.

Tillemans goes on to suggest that if we are able to read Nāgārjuna without adding qualifications and implicit parameters to his statements, then we should do so; adding additional layers of interpretation onto Nāgārjuna's philosophically astute writings serves

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[316] Ibid.
[317] Ibid., 92.
[318] Ibid.

to unnecessarily detract from his view.[319] Tillemans suggests that by following such an

approach, we are led to

> a type of paraconsistent logic according to which Nāgārjuna will in certain
> discussions admit that x is true (for worldly, doctrinal, or even
> Abhidharmic reasons) and in other contexts that $\neg x$ is true (for reasons
> involving the emptiness of intrinsic nature); however, Nāgārjuna will
> recognize no good reasons at all to ever admit the truth of the conjunction
> $x \mathbin{\&} \neg x$.[320]

This is because, Tillemans argues, Nāgārjuna is "deeply respectful of the third negation

in the tetralemma."[321] Tillemans' argument, therefore, is that if we read Nāgārjuna

literally and without parameterization, we find that he asserts x sometimes, and $\neg x$ at

other times, but never x and $\neg x$ together, because that would violate the third negation of

the tetralemma (i.e., the negation of the conjunction $x \mathbin{\&} \neg x$). Tillemans concludes that

Nāgārjuna accepts weak dialetheism, but not strong, because there is no instance in his

system in which the conjunction $x \mathbin{\&} \neg x$ is true.

In short, Garfield and Priest read Nāgārjuna's tetralemma more literally than

Westerhoff and Tillemans (1999), but this literal reading occurs at the expense of logical

consistency. Garfield and Priest argue, however, that contradictions in tetralemmic

analysis only occur at the limits of thought and therefore do not pose a problem for the

ways in which Nāgārjuna's logic functions within those limits (i.e., within the realm of

the conventional). Tillemans's (2009) more conservative reading of dialetheism involves

the acceptance of weak contradictions at the limits of thought, but once again, this seems

to complicate a reading of the tetralemma unnecessarily, involving an understanding of

different contexts in which analysis is carried out.

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[319] Ibid., 93.
[320] Ibid., 94.
[321] Ibid.

<u>Implications of these views</u>

In sum, Tillemans (1999) and Westerhoff reinterpret what I take to be Gorampa's intended reading of the tetralemma in order to preserve the logical consistency of the four negations. By understanding the tetralemma as an ontological tool, Tillemans reads each of the four lemmas in terms of four different ways in which properties can be applied to entities. But if there are no ultimately existent entities to which properties can be applied, then there are no contradictions in tetralemmic analysis. The problem with this approach, as Westerhoff points out, is that based on this reasoning, the third and fourth possibilities in the tetralemma end up being redundant. In order to avoid the problem of redundancy, Westerhoff introduces illocutionary negations into the tetralemma. In doing so, he argues that not only is the tetralemma a method by which ontological claims about emptiness can be made, but it is also a logical tool, enabling one to make sense of the conventional world. Both of these approaches preserve consistency within Nāgārjuna's system, but involve unnecessarily complicated interpretations of the tetralemmic reasoning that is "not this, not that, not both, not neither."

Garfield and Priest, along with Tillemans (2009) read the tetralemma in a more literal sense, but at the expense of logical consistency. Garfield and Priest argue that Nāgārjuna's tetralemma asserts contradictions at the limits of thought, but preserves logic within those limits. Tillemans, while hesitant to accept dialetheism as wholeheartedly as Garfield and Priest, argues that if we are to accept contradictions, we should only understand them as weak, rather than strong contradictions. By accepting contradictions at, but not within, the limits of thought, both of these dialethic interpretations of Nāgārjuna allow the tetralemma to take a practitioner *to* the limits of thought, but they

still do not enable one to get *beyond* those limits, as Gorampa intends the tetralemma to do.

While these analyses of the tetralemma may prove useful as methods of "rational reconstruction,"[322] and can provide analytic philosophers and scholars interested in symbolic logic with new ways of thinking about classical logic, these approaches differ quite significantly from Gorampa's reading of Nāgārjuna's tetralemma. In fact, these approaches might actually be detrimental if they are used to formulate an understanding of Gorampa's use of tetralemmic analysis that results in *spros bral*. As we will see below, Gorampa's own interpretation of Nāgārjuna advocates for a straightforward, literal understanding of the tetralemma, and does not advocate any violation of logical consistency. In this way, he understands the tetralemma not as a logical tool, but as a soteriological tool; it is something that can take a practitioner *beyond* the limits of thought, and enable one to transcend conventions and arrive at a realization of the ultimate truth.

Gorampa on the Tetralemma: Refutation of the Four Extremes Results in *spros bral*

As previously mentioned, Gorampa bases his formulation of the tetralemma on Āryadeva's *Jñānasārasamuccaya*. Recall that this verse states,

> The reality of the learned Mādhyamikas is freedom from the four
> extremes: not existence, not nonexistence, not existence and nonexistence,
> nor the absence of the essence of both.[323]

Gorampa reads this as a systematic refutation of the four extremes, negating the possibilities of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither, all at the level of ultimate

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[322] Garfield and Priest 2003, 88.

[323] *yod min med min yod med min/ gnyis ka'i bdag nyid kyang min pas/ mtha' bzhi las grol dbu ma pa/ mkhas pa rnams kyis de kho na/* BPD 173.

analysis. As we will see, Gorampa argues that these four negations are interrelated, and that the order in which they occur is significant. Each subsequent refutation builds upon the previous one, leading to the conclusion that conceiving of the existence of things in any way whatsoever is ultimately untenable.

Each of the *individual* refutations within the tetralemma are formulated based on standard methods of Madhyamaka reasoning and adhere to certain logical laws. However, when all four refutations are understood *simultaneously* and the tetralemma is considered in its entirety, this induces a state of *spros bral*, in which it is impossible for concepts to occur at all. Initially, it appears as though Gorampa's approach to the tetralemma is similar to those of contemporary analytic philosophers in the sense that the treatment of each extreme is grounded within a consistent logical system, and that the negation of each extreme makes ontological claims. However, when all four extremes are understood together – an integral part of Gorampa's tetralemmic analysis – the tetralemma becomes a soteriological tool that can transform an ordinary mind into an enlightened mind. In order for the tetralemma to accomplish these soteriological aims, Gorampa argues, the refutation of each extreme must first be considered independently.

Refutation of the First Extreme

In explaining the way that the first extreme of existence is refuted, Gorampa simply states that it is refuted by "most of the reasonings which occur in this text, such as 'neither one nor many.'"[324] This is a reference to the so-called "Five Madhyamaka Reasonings" (*gtan tshigs lnga*). These are five styles of argumentation that were first elaborated by Kamalaśīla in his *Madhyamakāloka*, which are used to refute the notion of

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[324] *gzhung las 'byung ba'i rigs pa phal che ba ste/ gcig du bral la sogs pa'i gtan tshigs rnams so/* BPD 177

inherent existence (*svabhāva*, *rang bzhin*) in various ways.[325] They are known as: neither one nor many (*gcig du dral*); diamond slivers (*rdo rje gzegs ma*); refuting the arising of an existent or nonexistent thing (*yod med skye 'gog*); refuting the arising in terms of the four alternatives (*mu bzhi skye 'gog*); and interdependence as evidence (*rten 'brel gyi gtan tshigs*). Gorampa argues that these five methods of reasoning analyze essence, cause, effect, both cause and effect, and everything, respectively.[326] Each of these five styles of reasoning is complex, and it is worth pausing briefly here to consider each of them in some detail.

'Neither one nor many'

The first reasoning, neither one nor many, or "freedom from identity and difference" (Tib. *gcig du bral*, Skt. *ekānekavicāra*) most famously occurs in the first stanza of Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*: "Since these things that are affirmed by our own and others' schools are free from being inherently singular or multiple, they do not exist inherently; they are like reflections."[327] This argument demonstrates that all things, including appearances, do not ultimately exist, because when they are analyzed, they cannot be established either as singular, unitary entities, or as a multiplicity of things. Gorampa elaborates on this reasoning as follows:

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[325] "The first known summary of four of these five reasonings (excepting the fourth) is found in Bhāvaviveka's *Summary of the Meaning of Centrism* (lines 14-17). Later, Atīśa gave a more detailed overview of the same four reasonings in his autocommentary on verses 48-52 of the *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*. Kamalaśīla explains all five in his *Illumination of Centrism*." (Brunnhölzl 2004, 236.)

[326] "The five arguments are: neither one nor many, which analyzes essences; diamond slivers, which analyzes causes; negating the arisal of an existent thing and a nonexistent thing, which analyzes effects; negating the arisal of the four limits, which analyzes both; and reasoning of interdependence, which analyzes everything." *ngo bo la dpyod pa gcig du bral/ rgyu la dpyod pa rdo rje gzegs ma/ 'bras bu la dpyod pa yod med skye 'gog/ gnyis ka la dpyod pa mu bzhi skye 'gog/ thams cad la dpyod pa rten 'brel gyi gtan tshig dang lnga/* BPD 340

[327] *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/ Madhyamakālaṃkara* 1.

> The false singularity and multiplicity is the singularity and multiplicity that has parts, and the true singularity and multiplicity is the singularity and multiplicity that is without parts. This is so because, since a singularity that has parts is complex, when it is analyzed, there is no singular object; and because something such as a false singularity is incompatible with a true plurality.[328]

Here, Gorampa explains that when one analyzes a seemingly singular object, such as a tree, one sees that it actually appears to consist of parts, such as a trunk, limbs, roots, leaves, and so on. If one narrows one's focus and analyzes further, one will find that any one of these parts can be further broken down into other parts: down to cells, then molecules, then subatomic particles, and so on. Therefore, any given object cannot be established as singular because all such objects actually consist of parts. Moreover, when these parts are analyzed, they, too can be broken down *ad infinitum*. At the same time, and by the same token, an object cannot be established as a multiplicity, because the term "multiplicity" signifies that something is composed of a number of singular parts. However, Gorampa has just explained that singular parts cannot be established! Therefore, objects cannot be established as either singular or plural.

Gorampa further argues that although we cannot establish entities as singular or multiple after analysis, this does *not* mean that ordinary persons cannot speak of singularities or multiplicities at all. He reasons,

> Here, mere singularity and multiplicity in the conventional is not the thing to be negated, because in the context of the correct conventional, there are many designations of singular and plural. Therefore, at the time of rational

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[328] *brdzun pa'i gcig dang du ma ni cha shas dang bcas pa'i gcig dang du ma yin zhing/ bden pa'i gcig dang du ma ni cha shas med pa'i gcig dang du ma ste/ cha shas dang bcas pa'i gcig ni zla bcas su 'gyur bas dpyad na gcig gi don med pa'i phyir dang/ brdzun pa'i gcig sogs de bden pa'i du mar 'gal ba'i phyir ro/* BPD 342

analysis, the establishment as singular or multiple is the thing to be negated.[329]

In the context of our ordinary conventional speech, we might be correct in talking about a forest, a tree, a leaf, a cell, or a collection of any of these, depending on the context of our discussion. However, when we investigate these conventional designations further, we discover that they cannot be established as true singularities or pluralities. Gorampa's point here is that at the ultimate level – that is, when we are attempting to understand the ultimate that is taught (*bstan pa don dam*) through rational analysis – things cannot be established as singular or plural. And if things cannot be established in the ultimate sense as either singular or plural, then things cannot be established at all in the ultimate sense.

In addition to objects, Gorampa argues that moments of consciousness can also be analyzed with the reasoning of neither one nor many. What one conventionally understands as a stream of consciousness can be broken down into moments, and those moments can be further broken down, each consisting of a beginning, middle, and end, and so on. Therefore, just as objects cannot be established as either singular or plural under analysis, neither can one's continuity of consciousness.[330] Gorampa elaborates: "Because there is no true singularity in internal and external things, true multiplicity cannot be established; without single things that accumulate, the accumulated multiplicity is not established."[331] In short, if things are neither singular nor plural, then things do not exist at all.

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[329] *'dir tha snyad du gcig dang du ma tsam ni dgag bya ma yin te/ yang dag kun rdzob kyi dbang du byas nas gcig dang du ma'i tha snyad mang du yod pa'i phyir ro/ des na rigs pas dpyad pa'i tshe gcig dang du mar grub pa ni dgag bya'o/* BPD 342-343

[330] See BPD 345

[331] *phyi nang gi dngos po rnams la bden pa'i gcig med phyir bden pa'i du ma'ang mi 'grub par 'gyur te/ gsog byed med pas bsags pa mi 'grub pas so/* BPD 345

'Diamond Slivers'

The second of the five Madhyamaka reasonings, called diamond slivers, is employed throughout the *Synopsis* to analyze causes. This reasoning is employed so frequently, in fact, that Gorampa glosses over this method in one sentence when explaining the five Madhyamaka reasonings.[332] In general, however, this particular line of reasoning is attributed to Nāgārjuna's verse on causation in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, mentioned above. Most importantly, the Diamond Slivers reasoning is employed to refute arising from other. Brunhölzol notes that of the four possibilities for causation, causation from self, both, and neither are refuted by all Buddhists, but that arising from other is refuted by the Madhyamaka school alone.[333] When substantially existent causes are refuted through this line of reasoning, the Mādhyamika argues that one must conclude that neither causes nor their effects can exist.

'Refutation of the arising and cessation of existence and nonexistence'

The third line of reasoning is the "refutation of the arising of an existent or nonexistent thing," which builds on the refutation of causes in "diamond slivers" to similarly refute the existence of effects. Specifically, this type of reasoning analyzes whether or not the effect already exists in the cause.

Refuting the Sāṃkhya notion that an effect is already present in its cause, Gorampa argues that "one does not observe a result that should be perceptible in its causes."[334] If a pot, for example, were present in its causes such as a lump of clay, it should be perceived because a pot is a perceptible entity, but it is not perceived. And

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[332] "With respect to 'diamond slivers,' which analyzes causes, this has already been discussed at length in the section on Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika." *rgyu la dpyod pa rdo rje gzegs ma'i gtan tshigs ni sngar thal rang gi skabs su rgyas par bshad zin to/* BPD 346.

[333] Brunnhölzl 2004, 238–239.

[334] *de ni mi 'thad de/ 'bras bu ni rgyu de dag la lta rung ma dmigs pa'i phyir/* BPD 347

refuting the Vaibhāṣika view that a future effect arises from a present cause, he contends, "the future means that an essential thing is not obtained, and since that does not exist, existence is contradicted."[335] In other words, a future pot does not yet exist when the unformed lump of clay exists. With respect to both of these views, Gorampa argues, "in general, for both positions, an existent thing will not arise, because an arising serves to establish a real thing; but a real thing itself is already established."[336] In other words, if an effect already exists, then it makes no sense to speak of an effect coming into existence from a cause; and if an effect does not yet exist, then it also makes no sense to speak of its existence in the present.

Moreover, the Sautrāntika and Vijñaptivāda schools contend that a result does not exist in its cause, and arises as something completely new (in other words, the result does not exist in its cause). Gorampa refutes this argument in four ways. First, he reasons that the activity of arising and the effect exist in dependence on one another, so neither cause nor effect can be established independently.[337] Second, he argues that if a result does not exist, then neither can a cause, because these two things exist in mutual dependence as well; a cause is only labeled as such in dependence on an effect, and vice versa.[338] Third, he suggests that the opponent's position entails the absurd consequence that things could

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[335] *ma'ongs pa ni bdag nyid kyi dngos po ma thob cing med pas yod par 'gal ba/* BPD 347

[336] *gnyis ka la thun mong du yod pa ni skye bar mi 'gyur te/ skye ba ni dngos po grub pa'i don du yin la/ dngos po nyid grub zin pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 347-348

[337] "Since the activity of arising and the dependent entity which is the result are mutually dependent, neither is really established in the end." *skye ba'i bya ba dang/ rten 'bras bu'i dngos po phan tshun brten pas mthar gang yang mi 'grub pa nyid/* BPD 348

[338] "With respect to the phrase, 'This is the cause of this, and this is the result of this,' the terms 'cause' and 'effect' are mutually dependent; when this is posited, if there is no result, of what is a cause posited? Thus, there is basis on which to establish a cause." *'di ni 'di'i rgyu yin la/ 'di ni 'di'i 'bras bu yin no/ zhes rgyu 'bras kyi tha snyad phan tshun ltos nas 'jog pas na 'bras bu de med na gang gi rgyur btags te rgyu'i rnam 'jog gi rgyu med pa'i phyir/* BPD 348

arise causelessly.[339] And finally, Gorampa contends that it is impossible for a previous non-entity to become an entity.[340]

Having refuted the possibility that an effect already exists in its cause, as well as the possibility that an effect arises from its cause as something completely new, Gorampa concludes by demonstrating the reasoning that underlies his arguments: "Since the existence and the non-existence of a result prior to the arising are direct contradictories, another option, a third one between them, is not possible; and it has already been explained that other non-arisen things are not possible."[341] Here, Gorampa demonstrates, via the law of excluded middle, that if effects cannot be established as either existent or nonexistent in their causes, then they cannot exist ultimately.

'Refutation of the arising in terms of the four alternatives'

The fourth reasoning is the "refutation of the arising of the four alternatives," and analyzes the relationship between cause and effect. These four alternatives are that a singular cause can produce one or many results, and that many causes can produce one or many results. Gorampa argues that one cause cannot produce only one result, because we ordinarily perceive multiple results coming from a single cause. An eye, for example, is said to be the cause of a visual consciousness *as well as* the cause of the next moment of

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[339] "If anything arises without having a previous nature of being a result, or without conditions, then anything could arise from non-existent conditions, such as the horn of a rabbit, because there is no difference with respect to nonexistent things." *'bras bu'i ngo bo sngar med pa'am rkyen la med kyang skye na ni/ ri bong gi rwa la sogs pa'i rkyen ma yin pa las kyang skye bar 'gyur te/ med par khyad par med pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 349

[340] "The question is: Does the prior [non-]entity become an entity after having abandoned its nature of nonexistence, or not abandoning it? If it is the latter, it contradicts mutuality; if it is the former, there is no referent and there is mutual dependence." *sngar gyi dngos po med pa'i rang bzhin dor nas sam/ ma dor na dngos po 'gyur grang/ phyi ma ltar na phan tshun 'gal zhing snga ma ltar na don med pa dang/ phan tshun brten par 'gyur* BPD 349

[341] *skye ba la 'bras bu sngar yod med dngos 'gal yin pas bar du phung po gsum pa gzhan mi srid la/ ma skyes pa'i dngos po gzhan mi srid pa ni bshad zin to/* BPD 349

the existence of the eye.[342] However, one cause cannot be said to cause many results either, because this would lead to the conclusion that properties of different results would be causeless.[343] If one suggests that multiple causes might give rise to one result, Gorampa argues that dissimilarities in the causes would not produce dissimilar results.[344] Finally, many causes are incapable of producing many results, because of the reasons already mentioned.[345] Having refuted these four possibilities, Gorampa argues that there is no other way to conceive of the relationship between cause and effect. Therefore, he argues, no arising can be said to exist.

'Interdependence as Evidence'

The fifth Madhyamaka reasoning, interdependence as evidence, is a style of reasoning that simultaneously investigates causes, effects, and the notion of inherent

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[342] "One result is not made by one cause: this is because cause and effect are not established as singular since they are seen as manifold parts, like the smallest subtle particles; and because since the visual consciousness, etc. is seen as arising from the eye, etc., a later continuum of an eye, etc. would not arise, although it is seen to arise." *rgyu gcig gis 'bras bu gcig byed pa ni med de/ rgyu dang 'bras bu ni tha na rdul phra mo lta bu la sogs pa'i cha du ma nyid du mthong bas gcig tu grub pa med pa'i phyir dang/ mig la sogs pa las mig gi rnam par shes pa la sogs pa 'byung ba nyid du mthong bas na mig la sogs pa'i rgyun ni phyi ma mi 'byung bar 'gyur na 'byung ba yang mthong ba'i phyir ro/* BPD 350. This argument is based on the Abhidharma theory of momentariness, namely, that the existence of an entity over time can be reduced to a succession of discrete parts. See Ronkin 2005.

[343] "Nor are many results made by one cause: this is because a single permanent thing such as Iśvara, primordial substance, etc. has already been refuted as a cause; and because even if many results did come from one cause, the things which were the different effects would be causeless, because there would be no distinctions in different causes." *rgyu gcig gis 'bras bu du ma phyed pa'ang ma yin te/ dbang phyug dang gtso bo la sogs pa rtag pa gcig pu ni rgyu yin pa bkag zin pa'i phyir dang/ rgyu gcig las kyang 'bras bu du ma 'byung na 'bras bu tha dad pa'i chos rnams rgyu med pa nyid du 'gyur te/ rgyu la mi 'dra ba'i khyad par med pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 350-351

[344] "Nor is one effect produced by many causes, because different causes would not produce different results, and therefore the various differences would be causeless." *rgyu du mas 'bras bu gcig bskyed pa'ang min te/ rgyu mi 'dra bas 'bras bu mi 'dra bar byed par mi 'gyur ba de lta na'ang mi 'dra ba sna tshogs rgyu med par 'gyur ba'i phyir ro/* BPD 351

[345] "Nor are many effects produced by many causes, because when one asserts that all effects are produced by all causes, this is not possible. And if it were possible, it would be included in the production of one by many, and this fallacy has already been explained. And when one asserts that each result is produced by each cause, this is the production of one by one; this fallacy has also been explained." *rgyu du mas 'bras bu du ma byed pa'ang ma yin te/ de'ang rgyu thams cad kyis 'bras bu thams cad byed pa la 'dod na de mi srid pa'i phyir dang/ srid kyang du mas gcig byed pa'i nang du 'dus la de la'ang nyes pa brjod zin to/ rgyu re res 'bras bu re re byed pa la 'dod na de ni gcig gis gcig byed pa yin la/ de la'ang nyes pa brjod zin pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 351

existence. Based on this method of reasoning, one can conclude that there are no things whatsoever that can exist independently or inherently. This reasoning is related to the analyses of cause and effect mentioned above; in order for something to be labeled as a "cause," it must exist in relation to an effect. Similarly, "effects" only exist in dependence on the existence of causes.[346] Gorampa further argues that all concepts are similarly relational:

> In just this way, all things such as characteristic and characterized, reason and probandum, cognition and cognizer, part and part-possessor, negatee and negation, long and short, former and latter, this side and that side, and so on, are established as mutually dependent.[347]

Again, if these sorts of things cannot be established essentially or independently, then they cannot be established as ultimately existent; they only exist dependently.

These five reasonings are, according to Gorampa, the reasonings which, when taken together, constitute an exhaustive refutation of the inherent existence of all phenomena. It is important to keep in mind that through these five Madhyamaka reasonings, Gorampa only intends to negate the extreme of existence at the ultimate level, not at the conventional. Refutation of the four extremes is an analysis that only pertains to our conceptual understanding of the ultimate truth. Gorampa argues that there is no problem whatsoever with accepting existence conventionally. There are, after all, pots, persons, ideas, Buddhas, and so on – at least, conventionally speaking. Ultimately,

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[346] "Terms such as cause and effect are also mutually dependent, because with respect to the phrase, 'this is the result of this,' when there is no dependence on a cause, a result is not established; and because with respect to the phrase, 'this is the cause of this,' when there is no dependence on a result, a cause is not established." *rgyu 'bras la sogs pa'i tha snyad kyang phan tshun ltos pa nyid de/ 'di'i 'bras bu'o zhes rgyu la ltos pa ma yin na 'bras bu'i 'jog byed med cing/ 'di'i rgyu'o zhes 'bras bu la ltos pa ma yin na/ rgyu'i 'job byed med pa'i phyir/* BPD 353

[347] *'di nyid kyis mtshan nyid dang mtshon bya/ gtan tshigs dang bsgrub bya/ shes pa dang shes byed/ yan lag dang yan lag can/ dgag bya dang bkag chos/ ring po dang thung ngu/ snga ma dang phyi ma/ pha rol dang tshu rol la sogs pa thams cad phan tshun ltos par grub bo/* BPD 354

however, the existence of such phenomena must be refuted if one is to experience emptiness and eventually attain buddhahood.

'Why the fuss?'

The majority of Madhyamaka thinkers agree that at the ultimate level, all phenomena are empty. However, before moving on to present the refutations of the next three extremes, Gorampa pauses here, in order to elaborate on precisely why he is so concerned with refuting inherent existence in its entirety. His emphasis on the refutation of the first extreme of existence appears to be directed against the view of Dolpopa Sherap Gyaltsen (Dol po pa Shes rab rGyal mtshan, 1292-1361), a figure who represents the so-called "Other-Emptiness" (*gzhan stong*) school of Madhyamaka. Unlike the "Self-Emptiness" (*rang stong*) school to which Gorampa most of his other philosophical opponents belong, the Other-Emptiness view purports that the ultimate nature of phenomena is not empty of *everything*, but merely empty of everything that is *false*.[348]

Adherents of *gzhan stong* accuse their *rang stong* opponents of interpreting emptiness in a way that leads them to nihilism, while adherents of *rang stong* accuse their *gzhan stong* opponents of interpreting emptiness in a way that leads them to permanence. *Gzhan stong* has close ties with the Yogācāra view, interpreting the ultimate truth in terms of the three natures (*trisvabhāva, mtshan nyid gsum*).[349] On this model of understanding reality, the perfected nature (*pariniṣpanna, yongs su grub pa*) truly,

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[348] While Gorampa does engage with Dolpopa and the *gzhan stong* position to some extent in the *Synopsis*, his refutation of the "other-emptiness" view is much more clearly stated in his *lta ba'i shan 'byed*. For that reason, I do not consider his engagement with this tradition in much detail here. (See note 34, above.)

[349] In general, this theory purports that all phenomena can be explained in terms of three natures (as opposed to two truths). They are: the constructed nature, the dependent nature, and the perfected nature. The perfected nature is understood as the dependent nature empty of the constructed nature. There are varying interpretations of the relationships between the three natures, as well as the ways in which they are understood to interact with each other. See D'Amato 2005; Garfield 1997; Gold 2007.

ultimately exists. In other words, contrary to the *rang stong* position which argues that nothing whatsoever exists ultimately, Dolpopa and *gzhan stong* proponents argue that while false phenomena do not ultimately exist, the perfected nature does. To fail to acknowledge this, they argue, would be tantamount to nihilism. By refuting the first extreme of existence through the Five Madhyamaka Reasonings, Gorampa argues that all phenomena that appear to be ultimately existent are negated in their entirety. As a result, nothing whatsoever can be said to be ultimately existent.

Gorampa explains that the refutation of ultimate existence serves two purposes on the Buddhist path: to remove suffering, and to attain enlightenment. The refutation of existence leads to the removal of suffering, because misapprehending things as truly existent is the primary cause of suffering. Gorampa argues,

> When there is truth-grasping that apprehends the things that are the aggregates as true, the apprehending of a person as true will definitely occur as a direct result. Just this is the primordial ignorance of the twelve links. Since the subsequent links proceed from it, the primary cause of suffering is truth-grasping that apprehends things as true.[350]

In other words, self-grasping initiates the twelve links of interdependence that bind beings to samsara, and this is a direct result of grasping to appearing things as truly existent. Thus, if one can eliminate grasping to phenomena, one can eliminate self-grasping. And if one eliminates self-grasping, one can stop the cycle of samsara that originates from the twelve links, and eliminate suffering in its entirety. Gorampa continues,

> Based on the reasonings which refute the first extreme that are explained in Madhyamaka texts, when one understands the meaning of "dependent origination without arising," personal self-grasping is ceased, and

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[350] *chos phung po la bden par 'dzin pa'i bden 'dzin yod na dngos 'bras gang zag gi bden 'dzin nges par 'byung/ de nyid yan lag bcu gnyis kyi thog ma'i ma rig pa yin zhing/ de las yan lag phyi ma rnams 'byung bas sdug bsngal gyi rgyu'i gtso bo ni chos la bden par 'dzin pa'i bden 'dzin yin/* BPD 181

afflictive emotions are not produced from that. Therefore, since karma is not amassed, the result – all aggregates of suffering – ceases.[351]

When one understands interdependence and eliminates self-grasping, one stops producing afflictive emotions, which stops the subsequent generation of karma. And without these, there is no way for suffering to arise. Based on this reasoning, Gorampa argues that it is imperative to refute the first extreme of existence before moving onto refutations of the final three extremes.

In addition to removing suffering, Gorampa argues that the refutation of existence can also serve as the basis for attaining various types of enlightenment. He reasons,

> Those who desire to attain enlightenment must negate true existence: to attain Śrāvaka enlightenment, true existence depending on the appropriated aggregates must be negated; to attain Pratyekabuddha enlightenment, true existence in terms of apprehended external objects, thoroughly afflicted phenomena, and so on must be negated in addition to that; and to attain Mahāyāna enlightenment, conceptual proliferations of all four extremes must be negated.[352]

That is, Śrāvaka enlightenment depends on negating the ultimate existence of the aggregates. Pratyekabuddha enlightenment builds on that, and involves negating the ultimate existence of all external objects. Mahāyāna enlightenment, moreover, builds on that, and involves negating all four extremes conceptual proliferations. Thus, the negation of ultimate existence is crucial for all types of Buddhist enlightenment. In order to achieve complete, Mahāyāna enlightenment, however, the refutation of existence alone is not enough. Gorampa argues, "If one does not negate the elaborations of the *four*

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[351] *dbu ma'i gzhung las bshad pa'i mtha' dang po 'gog pa'i rigs pa la brten nas rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba skye med kyi don rtogs na gang zag gi bdag 'dzin 'gags shing/ des nyon mongs pa mi bskyed/ des las mi sog pas 'bras bu sdug bsngal kyi phung po mtha' dag 'gags/* BPD 182

[352] *byang chub thob par 'dod pa dag gis bden pa dgag dgos te/ nyan thos kyi byang chug thob pa la nyer len gyi phung po'i steng du bden pa dgag dgos/ rang rgyal gyi byang chub thob pa la de'i steng du gzung ba phyi rol gyi don dang kun nas nyon mongs kyi chos sogs la bden pa dgag dgos/ theg chen gyi byang chug thob pa la mtha' bzhi char gyi spros pa dgag dgos pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 183

extremes, the unique Mahayana view will not be established."[353] One must continue from this first refutation, therefore, and eventually eliminate all four extremes in succession.

Refutation of the Second Extreme

Gorampa devotes a considerable amount of attention to the proper explanation of the refutation of the first extreme, because he argues that, of the four extremes that must be refuted, it is the most important and the most difficult to realize. Gorampa considers the refutations of the last three extremes in much less detail, addressing them all together in the *Synopsis*.[354] For the sake of clarity, however, I will divide the analyses of the last three reasonings here.

The refutation of the second extreme of nonexistence depends upon the successful refutation of the first extreme. Gorampa cites several texts, including the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, to prove this point: "If there is no existent thing, then with respect to what will there be any nonexistent things?"[355] In other words, once the extreme of ultimate existence is negated, it makes sense that a person might subsequently adopt the opposite view that all things are completely nonexistent. However, without existence, there can be no nonexistence. The latter makes no sense at all unless it stands in relation to the former; the two concepts depend on each other. Gorampa does not feel the need to elaborate this point much further, as he considers it to be fairly standard Madhyamaka reasoning.

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[353] *mtha' bzhi'i spros pa ma bkag na theg chen thun mong ma yin pa'i lta ba mi 'grub* BPD 184 (emphasis mine).

[354] The subject headings that he provides in the *Synopsis* are "the refutation of the first extreme," and "the refutation of the last three extremes."

[355] *dngos po yod pa ma yin na/ dngos med gang gi yin par 'gyur/* BPD 184 (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* V.6ab: *avidyamāne bhāve ca kasyābhāvo bhaviṣyati/*)

Suppose, for example, that there is a color called "blorange." If I have a concept of what this color is, then I can go through the world analyzing the colors of things, and I can accurately tell you whether or not a particular object is blorange. If someone asks me what color my bicycle is, and if blorange is a real color, I can tell you whether or not my bicycle is blorange. If, however, we agree that blorange is not an actual color, then the statement, "My bicycle is not blorange" is nonsensical; it doesn't provide us with any useful information about the color of my bicycle. The concept "not-blorange" only makes sense in relation to a concept of the color blorange. The two stand in relation to each other, and if we agree that the former does not exist, then describing things in terms of the latter is not a useful way to describe things at all.

In the same way, Gorampa asserts that once we have completely refuted the concept of things as ultimately existent, then it makes no sense whatsoever to describe things as ultimately nonexistent. To say that things are nonexistent implies that there are things that are also existent, just as saying that things are not-blorange implies that there are other things that are, in fact, blorange. If one concept is eliminated in its entirety, then thinking of things in terms of the opposite of that concept is not a useful way to think about things.

Refutation of the Third Extreme

The refutation of the third extreme, that things are both existent and nonexistent, again depends upon the refutation of the first two extremes. In fact, this is so plainly obvious to Gorampa that all that he says about this is: "The reasoning which refutes the third extreme is both of the reasonings which were previously stated."[356] That is, since

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[356] *mtha' gsum pa 'gog pa'i rigs pa ni/ sngar bshad pa'i rigs pa gnyis char ro/* BPD 184

existence and nonexistence were already each refuted individually, then there is no way that one can assert both existence and nonexistence together. There is thus no need for a separate refutation of "both existence and nonexistence" in the context of the tetralemma, because by the time we get to this third refutation, the work has already been done.

This appears to be a curious move on Gorampa's part; he repeatedly refers to refuting the *four* extremes of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither, based on the *Jñānasārasamuccaya*. However, when actually explaining the process of this fourfold refutation, he condenses his argument into refutations of the first, second, and fourth extremes, omitting discussion of the third extreme entirely. He reasons,

> Although there are many presentations in the texts [which present the refutation of the four extremes according to Āryadeva's presentation], if abbreviated, they are condensed into three: Nonexistence, the extreme of deprecation; existence, the extreme of reification; and firm adherence to the extreme of emptiness,[357] which is the refutation of the object of negation.[358]

The refutation of the third extreme of both existence and nonexistence is simply omitted here, based on the reasoning that if the extreme of existence and the extreme of nonexistence are successfully eliminated individually, then the notion that "both existence and nonexistence" somehow remains a possibility makes no sense.

The omission of the third lemma is not unique to Gorampa's philosophical view. Tsongkhapa's student (and another philosophical opponent of Gorampa's position), Kedrup (mKhas grub dGe legs dPal bzang, 1385-1438), similarly glosses over an analysis of the third lemma in his *Stong thung chen mo*, stating, "The position that accepts the arising from both suffers from the faults stated of both arising from self and arising from

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[357] This corresponds to the fourth extreme, "neither existence nor nonexistence."

[358] *de ltar gzhung las rnam gzhag du ma yod kyang bsdu na/ med pa skur 'debs kyi mtha' dang/ yod pa sgro 'dogs kyi mtha' dang/ dgag bya bkag pa'i stong nyid la mnyon par zhen pa'i mtha' gsum du 'dus pa/* BPD 304

another."[359] It is curious, then, that Gorampa emphasizes freedom from the *four* extremes

of conceptual proliferation, if the third extreme is nothing more than an extension of the

first two. Even if he only understands there to be three extremes in actuality, Gorampa –

along with other Tibetans who similarly gloss over the third lemma – likely includes the

"extreme of both" in his analysis for pedagogical purposes. While practitioners who have

a certain level of intellectual capacity may be able to infer the rejection of the third

lemma from the rejection of the first two, it is possible that this is not the case for

everyone. Thus, Gorampa only mentions the third lemma briefly, in order to ensure that

students do not mistakenly adhere to the "extreme of both" after the first, second, and

fourth lemmas have been negated.

Refutation of the Fourth Extreme

After arguing for the refutation of the extremes of existence and nonexistence –

and, by extension, both – Gorampa finally turns to the refutation of the fourth extreme,

neither existence nor nonexistence. In explaining this refutation, he argues,

> If one grasps only that which is neither truly existent nor truly nonexistent,
> then one will remain there, due to perceiving a middle that abandons those
> two extremes. However, one should not remain there due to perceiving
> that middle, because it is not established; and because if it were
> established, it would also be an extreme.[360]

This means that one should not simply refute the first two extremes of existence and

nonexistence, and then settle on a middle point between the two. If one stops analysis at

this point, Gorampa argues, it is possible to cling to an idea of the ultimate truth as

something that is a refutation of existence and nonexistence. And according to Gorampa's

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[359] Cabezón 1992, 305.

[360] *bden par yod pa dang / bden par med pa gnyis ka ma yin pa zhig tu gzung na / mtha' gnyis spangs pa'i dbus la dmigs pa'i sgo nas gnas par 'gyur la / de la'ang dmigs pa'i sgo nas gnas par mi bya ste / de ma grub pa'i phyir dang / gal te grub na de'ang mthar 'gyur ba'i phyir/* BPD 184.

view of Madhyamaka, if one grasps to anything—even if it is a refutation—it is also an extreme. By positing "neither existence nor nonexistence" as some sort of midpoint between the extreme of existence and the extreme of nonexistence, one essentially posits *this* position as an extreme.

It may be helpful here to use an analogy: imagine a spectrum representing all possible ways of conceiving of appearing phenomena, with "existent" at one end and "nonexistent" at the other. One is attempting to utilize logical reasoning in order to locate "Ultimate Truth" as a point somewhere on that spectrum. One first eliminates the possibility of the point existing at the extreme end of existence, and then the possibility of its existing at the extreme end of nonexistence. Furthermore, because one is searching for a single point, there is no way that it can simultaneously occupy both ends of the spectrum. So, the only remaining possibility is for the point to exist somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, between the two extremes. Gorampa argues, however, that this possibility makes no sense. If both extremes are eliminated, then there can be no middle between them. There can be no point that is in the middle without the extremes of existence and nonexistence, just as there can be no gray without the extremes of black and white. When one analyzes existence in this way, one realizes that there are no extremes and there is no middle; the spectrum doesn't exist at all.

Based on these reasonings, Gorampa presents the refutation of the four extremes as a process. The first extreme is refuted through the Five Madhyamaka Reasonings, taking as their objects anything that is believed to be truly established. The refutations of each of the subsequent extremes, in turn, depend on the refutations of the previous ones. Gorampa explains:

Now, the concise meaning of the essential points will be taught: When ordinary persons analyze the natural state of things, they initially refute the truth of the first extreme by reasonings such as "neither one nor many." At that time, since the act of that rational cognition is the thing that refutes truth, it is not faulty with respect to adhering to truthlessness. This is because the conceptual refutation of truth is nothing other than adhering to truthlessness.

However, relying on a later intelligence, that [adhering to truthlessness] is faulty; therefore, by means of not finding the conceived object – i.e., that very truthlessness – adhering to truthlessness must be negated. This is because at that time, since the activity of that intelligence refutes adhering to truthlessness, it is not truthlessness. There being no fault in adhering to that thought, it is similar to what was previously said.

Moreover, relying on a third intelligence, it also becomes faulty; therefore the third also refutes adhering to non-truthlessness. And relying on a fourth intelligence, this also becomes faulty; therefore the fourth also refutes. In sum, the four extremes are refuted in stages.[361]

This long passage presents the crux of Gorampa's argument. First, when one investigates appearances by means of the Five Madhyamaka Reasonings, one cannot find anything at all that is truly existent. That is, one refutes the truth (*bden pa*) of the first extreme. At this point, having refuted truth, the practitioner believes that she has established truthlessness. Gorampa argues that the practitioner must then go on to analyze that concept of truthlessness that she has just cultivated, in order to realize that it too cannot be found. Now she may have a concept of "non-truthlessness," but Gorampa argues that this concept must be similarly investigated and not found. And finally, Gorampa concludes, a fourth process of analysis must occur, in order to refute any remaining

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[361] *da ni gnad kyi don bsdus te bstan par bya ste/ so so skye bos gnas lugs la dpyod pa'i tshe thog mar gcig du bral la sogs pa'i gtan tshigs kyis mtha' dang po bden pa bkag pa'i tshe rigs shes de'i byed pa ni bden pa bkag pa don yin pas bden med du mngon par zhen pa skyon ma yin te rtog pas bden pa bkag pa la bden med du mngon par zhen pa las ma 'das pa'i phyir/ blo phyi ma la ltos nas de nyid skyon yin pas zhen yul bden med nyid ma rnyed pa'i sgo nas bden med du zhen pa nyid kyang dgag dgos te/ de'i tshe blo de'i byed pa ni bden med du zhen pa bkag pa yin pas bden med ma yin no snyam du mngon par zhen pa skyon ma yin pa ni snga ma dang 'dra'o/ de'ang blo gsum pa la ltos nas skyon du song bas gsum pas bden med ma yin par mngon par zhen pa'ang bkag la/ de'ang blo bzhi pa la ltos nas skyon du song bas bzhi pas de'ang bkag ste mdor na mtha' bzhi rim pa bzhin du 'gog pa'o/ BPD 197-198*

concept left behind after the first three stages (presumably thoughts of "neither truth nor truthlessness" or "not-non-truthlessness").

The tetralemmic process, as Gorampa understands it, involves a progressive analyzing and "not-finding" of different sorts of concepts. At the end of this process, one has effectively eliminated all possibility for conceptual thought. Gorampa argues that these four ways of conceiving of the true existence of things are the only four ways that a thing can be conceived, and that once one has refuted all four extremes, the process of rational analysis is complete. He explains as follows:

> Since a mode of apprehending beyond the fourth extreme is impossible, this process will not be endless. When the nature of things is directly realized after continuously familiarizing oneself with those rational cognitions, since none of the conceptual proliferations of the four extremes arise, there is no need for refutations by means of something higher (*gtso bo*).[362]

In short, each of the four extremes of the tetralemma is individually refuted, in order, through rational analysis. Gorampa argues that these four extremes are exhaustive of all possibilities for conceptual thought, so analysis stops after the fourth level of analysis (which investigates the concept of "non-truthlessness"). Once one has thoroughly understood all of these refutations, one is prepared to directly realize the nature of things (i.e., the ultimate truth).

Once these four extremes have been refuted, the practitioner then "familiarizes herself" (*bsgoms pa*) with these refutations in order to directly realize the nature of things. This is a crucial step on the path to buddhahood, even though Gorampa does not elaborate much on this process in the *Synopsis*. This familiarization – sometimes

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[362] *mdor na mtha' bzhi rim pa bzhin du 'gog pa'o/ bzhi pa phan chad kyi 'dzin stangs mi srid pas thug med du mi 'gyur ro/ rigs shes de'i rgyun goms nas gnas lugs mngon sum du rtogs pa'i tshe mtha' bzhi char gyi spros pa mi 'byung bas gtso bo'i sgo nas dgag dgos pa ni ma yin no/* BPD 198

translated into English as "meditation" or "habituation" – involves contemplating each of the four refutations in the tetralemma individually, until a moment of direct, nonconceptual understanding is reached. One might think of this as an "ah-ha" moment (Cabezón refers to it as a "Gestalt"[363]); it is the point at which one first realizes the refutation of all four extremes at the same time. The important point here is that for Gorampa, each of the four refutations is a component of the ultimate nature of things, but because one can only conceptualize one refutation at a time, one cannot understand the ultimate nature of things in its entirety if this understanding is mediated by conceptual thought. The initial realization of all four refutations simultaneously is the moment at which the practitioner first "gets it" all at once, without having to walk step-by-step through the conceptual process. To continue with our analogy in previous chapters, this stage is similar to the initial moment that one finds balance on the two wheels of a bicycle.

This approach is especially significant when compared to the contemporary analytic approaches considered above. When the tetralemma is translated into logical notation in the ways that Westerhoff, Tillemans, and Garfield and Priest have done, the four extremes are independent propositions that are individually negated. The negation of all four extremes leads one to certain conclusions about logic or ontology, but these negations can be carried out in any order. It does not matter, in other words, whether one begins tetralemmic analysis by understanding "$\sim x$", or whether one begins by understanding "$\sim(\sim x \,\&\, \sim\sim x)$"; these are simply negations of certain propositions about existence. For Gorampa, however, it is imperative that one begins by refuting existence, and then proceeds through the subsequent refutations in order. Otherwise, the tetralemma

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[363] Cabezón 1992, 447n337.

cannot function as a soteriological tool that leads a practitioner to a direct realization of the ultimate; it will merely be a logical tool that leads to a conceptual understanding of entities in the conventional world. Gorampa's tetralemma is something that one does not simply think about, but practices and experiences. This is a crucial element of Gorampa's philosophical view.

Tsongkhapa on the Tetralemma: Refutation of the Four Extremes Preserves Conceptual Thought

Because Tsongkhapa was originally educated by Sakyapa masters, most notably Rendawa (Red mda' ba, 1349-1412), the philosophical views he espouses that diverge from the standard Sakya interpretation are some of Gorampa's favorite objects of critique. Based on Gorampa's status as the great systematizer of Sakya philosophy, his harsh criticisms can be seen as an attempt to distance Tsongkhapa – and the Gandenpa (*dga' ldan pa*) school that was forming during Gorampa's lifetime – from the Sakyapas. This point becomes especially salient when we compare Gorampa's analysis of the four extremes to that of Tsongkhapa and his Gandenpa/Gelugpa successors. Unlike Gorampa's interpretation of Nāgārjuna's tetralemma, which results in the practitioner attaining a state which is free from all conceptual proliferations, Tsongkhapa's interpretation culminates in the cultivation of one very carefully constructed concept, namely, the concept of emptiness as the absence of inherent existence.

Tsongkhapa argues that one cannot read the fourfold negation of the tetralemma literally. He understands Āryadeva's assertion of "Not existent, not nonexistent, not both, nor the absence of the essence of both" as being qualified in specific ways. He explains in

his *Lam rim chen mo* that when we discuss the existence of entities (*dngos po*) in the context of the tetralemma,

> "Entity" has two meanings. With respect to entities that are inherently established, we refute the assertion that they exist as one of the two truths. However, with respect to entities that are capable of performing a function, we do not refute them conventionally. With respect to nonexistent entities, if you accept uncompounded phenomena as nonexistent entities that are inherently established, we also refute nonexistent entities such as those. In the same way, we also refute entities that are both existent and nonexistent, and we also refute entities which are inherently established as neither. Therefore, all methods for refuting the tetralemma should be understood in this way.[364]

In other words, Tsongkhapa argues that inherently existent entities are negated completely, but that when we are considering "entities that are capable of performing a function" (*don byed nus pa'i dngos po*),[365] these are not refuted conventionally. Tsongkhapa argues that whenever undertaking tetralemmic analysis, the entities to which such analysis is applied should always be understood in this way. In short, entities are refuted ultimately, but not conventionally.

Tsongkhapa continues by explaining the problems associated with reading the tetralemma literally:

> Suppose you refute the four extremes without affixing any such distinction. When you refute existent entities and you refute nonexistent entities, you then say, "they are not both." Having refuted these, if you

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[364] *dngos po la gnyis las rang gi ngo bos grub pa'i dngos po ni bden pa gnyis gang du yod par 'dod kyang 'gog la/ don byed nus pa'i dngos po ni tha snyad du 'gog pa ma yin no/ dngos po med pa'ang 'dus ma byas rnams la rang gi ngo bos grub pa'i dngos med du 'dod na ni de 'dra ba'i dngos med kyang 'gog go/ de bzhin du de 'dra ba'i dngos po yod med gnyis char yang 'gog la/ gnyis ka ma yin pa rang gi ngo bos grub pa'ang 'gog pas mu bzhi 'gog tshul thams cad ni de ltar du shes par bya'o/* Tsong kha pa, *lam rim chen mo*, ACIP: http://asianclassics.org/release6/webdata/monastic/open/html/S5392L/S5392L-37.html, Folio 411 Side 1.

[365] The term *don byed nus pa* is the standard translation for the Sanskrit term *arthakriyāsamartha* (Negi, Kendrīya-Tibbatī-Ucca-Śikṣā-Saṃsthānam, and Kośa Anubhāga 1993. In the Buddhist episetmological tradition, that which is capable of performing a function is considered real. Dunne calls this capability "telic function." (*Rigzin 1986.* Tsongkhapa's point here is that he is not discussing entities that are false, such as illusions; when tetralemmic analysis is applied to entities which are capable of performing a function, they are not negated conventionally.

refute further, saying, "they are not neither," then this explicitly contradicts what you have said. If you deny this, saying, "Even so, I am faultless," then we do not debate with deceitful people.[366]

Here, Tsongkhapa insists that each of the four limbs of the tetralemma must be qualified, because a literal negation of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither without qualification invokes explicit contradictions. In these passages, Tsongkhapa implicitly suggests that anyone who reads the tetralemma literally is so severely mistaken that he is not even a worthy opponent in debate.

Gorampa summarizes Tsongkhapa's position as follows:

> The meaning of ["not existent, not nonexistent..."] is as follows: things are neither ultimately existent nor conventionally nonexistent, so it is also untenable that they are apprehended as such by the rational mind. However, it is untenable to accept "not existent, not nonexistent" literally, because by the understanding of the nature of two negations (*dgag pa gnyis kyi rnal ma go ba*),[367] when something does not exist it must be nonexistent and when something is not nonexistent it must exist.[368]

The tetralemma, in other words, cannot be read literally, because to do so would necessarily imply contradictions, based on the law of double negation elimination. The negation of existence implies nonexistence, and the negation of nonexistence implies existence. Based on this understanding of the tetralemma, Tsongkhapa suggests that we ought to understand "not existent, not nonexistent" as a parameterized statement, in which the negation of existence occurs at the ultimate level, while the negation of nonexistence occurs at the conventional level. What we are left with, then, is a

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[366] *de 'dra ba'i khyad par sbyar rgyu med par mu bzhi ka 'gog na dngos po yod pa dang dngos po med pa 'gog pa'i tshe de gnyis ka ma yin te zhes bkag nas/ slar yang gnyis ka ma yin pa'ang ma yin zhes bkag na ni khas blangs dngos su 'gal ba yin la/ de ltar yin kyang skyon med do zhes bsnyon na ni kho bo cag bsnyon pa dang lhan cig tu mi rtsod do/* Tsong kha pa, *lam rim chen mo*, ACIP: http://asianclassics.org/release6/webdata/monastic/open/html/S5392L/S5392L-37.html, Folio 411 Side 1-2.

[367] Cabezón and Dargyay translate *dgag pa gnyis kyi rnal ma go ba* as "the law of double-negation."

[368] *de'i don ni don dam du yod pa yang ma yin kun rzob tu med pa yang ma yin pas blos kyang de ltar 'dzin du mi rung zhes pa'i don yin gyi yod min med min sgra ji bzhin du khas len du mi rung ste/ dgag pa gnyis kyi rnal ma go bas yod pa ma yin na med dgos shing/ med pa ma yin na yod dgos pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 188

conception of reality in which things are conventionally existent, and ultimately nonexistent.

In short, Gorampa's argument demonstrates that Tsongkhapa's view is based on the laws of double-negation elimination and bivalence, similar to the logical laws defended by analytic philosophers in the preceding sections. Tsongkhapa's view is that something can either be existent, or it can be nonexistent. There is no third possibility, unless one adds certain qualifications.

One of the most significant points with respect to Tsongkhapa's take on the tetralemma, then, has to do with his adherence to the laws of bivalence and double-negation elimination. Because he foregrounds these logical laws, there is no way in which Āryadeva's fourfold rejection of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither, can be read literally; "Not existent, not nonexistent" is a contradiction. This is why Tsongkhapa adds qualifications, rejecting essential, ultimate existence, yet leaving conventions intact.[369]

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[369] Edward Falls notes that the parameterization that Tsongkhapa employs in Madhyamaka analysis is based on three different modes of apprehension: the mistaken, the unmistaken, and the mode that apprehends "mere existents in conformity with worldly conventions." He suggests that with respect to the first two of these three modes: "The mistaken mode of apprehension which apprehends things as intrinsically existent is contradicted by the unmistaken mode of apprehension which apprehends the absence of intrinsic existence. These two modes of apprehension are on a continuum of logical possibilities governed by a single form of conceptual structuring, or style of reasoning, which makes propositions of the form "there are intrinsically existent x's" true-or-false." In other words, as one progresses along the Buddhist path, one shifts from a mistaken perspective in which entities are wrongly perceived as having inherent existence, to an unmistaken perspective in which one correctly perceives the absence of inherent existence in those entities. On this spectrum of perspectives, the view that entities inherently exist is either true or false; there is no third option. Falls continues: "However, the third mode of apprehension, which apprehends mere existents in conformity with worldly conventions, is incommensurable with the other two. This mode of apprehension is constructed according to a style of reasoning which contains no rules for propositions of the form "there are intrinsically existent x's."" Falls 2010, 195. This schematic warrants a comparison to Gorampa's explanation of the types of minds qualified by the terms "correct seeing" and "false seeing," outlined in chapter 3.

When the four limbs of the tetralemma are qualified, Tsongkhapa claims to be able to negate all four extremes while preserving common sense and the laws of logic. He argues that it is necessary for a Mādhyamika to qualify the tetralemma in this way, because to negate any more than ultimate, inherent existence would lead to nihilism. Tsongkhapa argues that this is equivalent to the view of Hashang, the Chinese scholar who later Tibetans insist was defeated by Kamalaśīla in the "Great Debate" at Samye Monastery, and whose quietist view is nearly universally rejected by Tibetans.[370] Gorampa summarizes this criticism as follows:

> When a mind that does not apprehend any extreme whatsoever is accepted as the Madhyamaka view, this resembles the view of the Chinese Hashang. Therefore, after having negated truth, the apprehension of emptiness which is empty of truth is a mind which realizes the nature of things.[371]

What is meant by this criticism is that for Tsongkhapa, it is not existence, but rather *true* existence, that is the object of Madhyamaka analysis. Gorampa claims that on Tsongkhapa's view, "the Madhyamaka object of negation is only truth,"[372] and that a literal reading of the tetralemma only induces a state in which one simply stops thinking, and *not* a state in which one directly realizes emptiness.

By upholding bivalence and the law of double-negation in the context of the four extremes, Tsongkhapa argues that he is avoiding the view that external phenomena are "neither existent nor nonexistent" (*yod min med min gyi lta ba*). If one denies both existence and nonexistence altogether, one denies conceptual thought and necessarily falls into the extreme of nihilism. Negating the first two extremes of the tetralemma

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[370] For more on Hashang in the context of negation and tetralemmic analysis, see Cabezón and Dargyay 2007; Broughton 1983; van der Kuijp 1983. See also Chapter 1, above.

[371] *blos mtha' gang du'ang mi 'dzin pa dbu ma'i lta bar 'dod pa ni rgya nag ha shang gi lta ba dang mtshungs pas bden pa bkag zin nas bden pas stong pa'i stong nyid de kho nar gzung ba ni gnas lugs rtogs pa'i blo yin no/* BPD 188

[372] *dbu ma'i dgag bya ni bden pa kho na yin/* BPD 187

thereby leads to a contradiction, because if both possibilities are negated, there is no third alternative. The same can also be said for negating the last two extremes of both and neither. Because he qualifies the tetralemma, Tsongkhapa allows for the conventions of ordinary beings to continue to function in the world, even after the ultimate existence of things has been rejected. Arguing in such a manner, Tsongkhapa preserves the efficacy of the conventional truth, and as such, emphasizes the importance of logical, conceptual thought in the process of realizing emptiness.

Gorampa's Response to Tsongkhapa[373]

Gorampa primarily takes issue with Tsongkhapa's emphasis on refuting only ultimate, true existence. According to him, Tsongkhapa only negates the concept of ultimate existence through tetralemmic analysis, while leaving conventional existence intact. Gorampa presents his own view in opposition to this, understanding the tetralemma as something that negates all possible conceptions of truth, truthlessness, and combinations thereof. Through understanding the tetralemma in this way, Gorampa concludes that enlightened beings only experience the ultimate truth, but do not perceive conventional objects. In other words, while Tsongkhapa works hard in his arguments to *preserve* conventions, Gorampa argues that from the standpoint of one who has realized the ultimate truth, there is no longer any need for the conventional.

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[373] It is worth mentioning here again that Tsongkhapa lived and died just before Gorampa, and that the two scholars never engaged in any actual debates with each other. Tsongkhapa's texts respond to Gorampa's Sakyapa predecessors, *not* to Gorampa himself. Gorampa's texts, on the other hand, respond directly to the views of Tsongkhapa. Later in the development of Gelugpa thought, Tsongkhapa's successors (most notably mKhas grub) respond to Gorampa's criticisms, defending their interpretation of Tsongkhapa's own views. These debates led to the solidification of a divide between the Sakyapas and the Gelugpas, and served to further solidify the identity of the Gelug tradition as a distinct sect.

Gorampa also argues that Tsongkhapa's qualifications of the four extremes goes against the very purpose of the tetralemma. He argues,

> The meaning of "not existent, not nonexistent" explained as "not ultimately existent, not conventionally nonexistent," must be explained as such in some contexts when abandoning permanence and nihilism depending on relation to the two truths; *however*, when explaining freedom from proliferations of the four extremes, this explanation is inappropriate. The actual freedom from proliferations of the four extremes is the perspective of the uncontaminated wisdom of the *ārya's* meditative equipoise.[374]

Here, Gorampa suggests that the tetralemma is a special kind of reasoning, distinct from the more common twofold dilemma. When analyzing ideas such as whether an entity endures permanently or is eventually annihilated, it is perfectly reasonable to supply certain qualifications, for the sake of preserving conceptual thought.[375] Permanence and nihilism, Gorampa argues, exist as a set of two – and only two – extremes, and therefore, they can be analyzed on the basis of certain parameters. When there are only two possibilities to consider (as opposed to four), Gorampa argues that this implies an "either-or" scenario, in which the law of double negation elimination holds. In such a situation which analyzes conventional reality, an unqualified negation of both possibilities would lead to a contradiction, and would violate common sense. However, because Āryadeva specifically mentions *four* possibilities with respect to existence, a different system of reasoning is at play, and in this system, qualification is unnecessary. The fourfold

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[374] *yod min med min gyi don don dam du yod pa ma yin/ kun rdzob tu med pa ma yin ces pa la 'chad pa ni bden pa gnyis char la ltos nas rtag chad spang pa'i skabs 'ga' zhig tu de ltar 'chad dgos pa yod kyang/ mtha' bzhi'i spros bral gyi tshe de ltar 'chad du mi rung ste/ mtha' bzhi'i spros bral mtshan nyid pa ni 'phags pa'i mnyam gzhag zag pa med pa'i ye shes kyi gzigs ngo yin* BPD 192, emphasis mine.

[375] By referring to the extremes of permanence and nihilism here, Gorampa is referencing a comment made earlier in the Synopsis: "In general the four exponents of the Buddhist schools are equal in that they regard their respective schools as the 'middle way' which refutes permanence and nihilism." *spyir sangs rgyas pa'i grub mtha' smra ba bzhi po rang rang gi grub mtha' de rtag chad spangs pa'i dbu mar 'dod* BPD 41. Gorampa then goes on to describe the different ways in which the Vaibhāsika, Sautrāntika, Cittamātra, and Madhyamaka schools each refute the two extremes of permanence and nihilism. The Madhyamaka school, however, goes on to also refute the four extremes of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither.

negation involves reasoning that applies to ultimate analysis, the end result of which is the pure, nonconceptual meditative equipoise of an *ārya*. This special type of reasoning results in *spros bral*, and it is what distinguishes the Madhyamaka view from those of the other Buddhist schools.

Gorampa also responds to Tsongkhapa's accusations that compare him to Hashang, contending that his own view is not the quietist position that Tsongkhapa suggests that he has. It is, in fact, one that involves analysis and a gradualist path:

> The Chinese scholar Hashang asserts that realizing the ultimate view is the mere absence of any kind of mental activity (*yid la mi byed pa*), when one has spontaneously stopped cognition without analyzing and investigating the meaning of the nature of things. The learned Kamalaśīla has refuted this by scriptures and reasonings.[376] Here, having established the nature of objects through the reasonings which are explained in the Madhyamaka scriptures, the conceptual objects of extremists are refuted individually, so one uses "realizing the Madhyamaka view" as a term for merely not finding, at the end [of analysis], any conceptual proliferations, such as existence and nonexistence.[377]

Here, Gorampa emphasizes that while the final, ultimate Madhyamaka view is free from concepts, conceptual analysis is nevertheless a necessary step on the path to realizing such a nonconceptual state. As he describes Hashang's view, one simply stops thinking, without any analysis whatsoever. Realization of the ultimate truth, Gorampa argues, is a mental state that only arises after thorough analysis of each of the four extreme views. In other words, it is not sufficient for one to simply "think of not thinking" and expect to attain enlightenment. If this were so, then one would become enlightened upon falling into a deep sleep or otherwise becoming unconscious. Gorampa's point here, is that in

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[376] In the *Bhāvanākrama*.

[377] *rgya nag ha shang gis ni gnas lugs kyi don la brtags dpyad mi byed par rtogs pa rang dgar bkag nas ci'ang yid la mi byed pa tsam la lta ba mthar thug rtogs par 'dod pa yin zhing/ de nyid mkhas pa ka ma la shī las lung dang rigs pas sun phyung ba yin la 'dir ni dbu ma'i gzhung lugs las bshad pa'i rigs pa rnams kyis yul gyi gnas lugs gtan la phab nas mthar 'dzin gyi zhen yul re re nas sun phyung ste mthar yod med la sogs pa'i spros pa gang yang ma rnyed pa tsam la dbu ma'i lta ba rtogs zhes pa'i tha snyad mdzad pa yin* BPD 194.

order to *truly* eliminate conceptual thought in its entirety, one must put forth a considerable amount of effort. One must, in other words, use conceptual thought in order to sufficiently eliminate conceptual thought.

In short, Gorampa maintains that the refutation of all four extremes occurs solely at the ultimate level, and that it therefore must occur gradually, in stages. One begins by using analysis to refute existence, and then refutes nonexistence, both, and neither, in that order. When contrasted with Tsongkhapa's qualified treatment of the four extremes, which does not necessarily adhere to a specific sequence by which the extremes are to be negated, we can begin to see that these two thinkers understand the function of the tetralemma in radically different ways. Gorampa's literal, process-oriented refutation of the four extremes utilizes the tetralemma as a soteriological tool; it is something that, when used correctly, can lead a practitioner to the complete abandonment of conceptual thought and eventually, to a state of buddhahood. It is, in a sense, an "undoing" of conceptuality. Tsongkhapa's qualified reading of the tetralemma is, like those of the analytic philosophers discussed above, something that makes it function as a logical tool. It is a process that, when used correctly, serves to help a practitioner cultivate one specific concept of emptiness as the absence of inherent existence – the negation of *truth*. In other words, while Tsongkhapa's tetralemma serves to cultivate one specific concept, Gorampa's tetralemma serves to eliminate all conceptual thought completely.

The Implications of Tetralemmic Analysis

Gorampa's use of the tetralemma as a soteriological tool has important implications. If, contrary to Tsongkhapa, the end result of the fourfold negation is a state free from conceptual proliferations, and if the result of this fourfold negation also leads a

practitioner all the way to the "uncontaminated wisdom of the *ārya's* meditative equipoise," then an *ārya's* meditative state — as well the wisdom of a Buddha which follows from that state — must similarly be free from concepts. As Gorampa makes clear, however, the nonconceptual state that is the result of careful analysis should not be mistaken to be equivalent to the state claimed by those (such as Gorampa's characterization of Hashang) who espouse an extreme, anti-conceptual view. Logical analysis is essential on the Madhyamaka path to enlightenment, even though (contrary to Tsongkhapa and his followers) logic and concepts are given up at the end of this path.

Because Gorampa's arguments stress that the end result of the fourfold negation is a state that is entirely free from conceptual constructs, the particular conceptual constructs that lead a practitioner to that state are necessary, but are ultimately abandoned. The process of negating the four extremes is a process of cultivating an enlightened mind by means of negating concepts. One begins by negating the first extreme view of existence, and then proceeds through the negation of the views of nonexistence, both, and neither, in succession, until all four are realized simultaneously in their entirety. Because this approach is focused on eliminating concepts, rather than cultivating them, Gorampa acknowledges that there may be alternative methods that different practitioners can employ to arrive at the same result.[378]

As one progresses along the Buddhist path, one transitions from being on the level of ordinary persons to the first of the so-called "Supramundane Paths," known as the path of seeing (*mthong lam*). Gorampa claims that at this stage, all four extremes of the tetralemma are eliminated simultaneously, so that "the reality that is to be realized and

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[378] This is precisely why Gorampa argues for several "acceptable" ways of conceiving of the conventional truth. See chapter 2.

the mind that realizes it do not appear as two distinct things."[379] Ordinary beings give this realization the name "ultimate truth," but from the perspective of one who nonconceptually realizes the ultimate, there is no thought that arises in that person's mind along the lines of: "*this* is the ultimate truth."

The differences in the ways in which Tsongkhapa and Gorampa understand the function of the tetralemma have explicit ethical implications. On both views, the tetralemma negates that which cannot be said to exist at all; for Tsongkhapa this is inherent existence, and for Gorampa this is all conceptual proliferations, i.e., conventional truth. When only inherent existence is negated, logic and conceptual thought are preserved, and as such, one who has correctly understood and used the tetralemma remains able to function in the conventional world in a way similar to ordinary beings. When conventional truth is negated, on the other hand, logic and conceptual thought are likewise negated, and as such, one who has correctly understood and used the tetralemma is unable to function in the conventional world in a way similar to ordinary beings.

Gorampa does not mean to suggest, however, that enlightened buddhas cannot continue to work for the benefit of sentient beings who perceive the conventional truth. Because the realization of emptiness that results from the tetralemma is not simply a negation of one concept, but rather a negation of conceptuality itself, it transcends all conceptual thought. The state of a fully enlightened buddha is simply beyond any ordinary being's attempts to characterize it.

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[379] *rtog bya'i chos nyid dang rtogs byed kyi blo gnyis so sor mi snang ba/ lta ba'i shan 'byed* (cited in Cabezón and Dargyay 2007, 217.)

Chapter 5: Buddhahood as Knowledge-How

So far, we have seen that according to Gorampa's presentation of Madhyamaka, one must begin the journey along the Buddhist Path by understanding the two truths in terms of two perspectives regarding appearing phenomena. Based on this understanding, Gorampa then demonstrates that the conventional truth is characterized by object-subject duality, and that the ultimate truth is free from conceptual proliferations. As such, the goal of Buddhist practice is to transform the way in which one sees, progressing from a state in which one engages conceptually and dualistically with the conventional truth, to a state in which one nonconceptually and nondually realizes the ultimate truth.

This nonconceptual realization – known as *spros bral,* the freedom from conceptual proliferations – is brought about initially through tetralemmic analysis, in which one analyzes and negates each of the four extremes individually. This rational refutation of each of the four extremes is the culmination of conceptual analysis for the Mādhyamika, and represents the farthest point that an ordinary person can progress along the Buddhist Path. In order to progress beyond this point, one must subsequently familiarize (*bsgoms pa*) [380] oneself with the refutations of all four extremes simultaneously, inducing a state that is free from conceptual proliferations. This initial direct experience of *spros bral* marks a Buddhist practitioner's transformation from an ordinary person (*so so skye bo*) to an *ārya* (*'phags pa*). From this point onward, one understands that what was once known as conventional *truth* (*kun rdzob bden pa*) is

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[380] The term *bsgoms pa* (Skt. *bhāvanā*) is commonly translated as "meditation," but also carries the sense of habituation, or cultivation.

actually *merely* conventional (*kun rdzob tsam*), and that the ultimate that is taught (*bstan pa'i don dam*) is not the ultimate that is realized (*rtogs pa'i don dam*).

On Gorampa's model, therefore, a realization of the ultimate truth is an experience. It is something that can be discussed and described for the purposes of showing practitioners what such a realization is like (inasmuch as they can realize the ultimate that is taught), but the realization itself (i.e., the ultimate that is realized) cannot be fully encompassed in words. A buddha's knowledge of the ultimate is a particular kind of knowledge, distinct from the knowledge of ordinary persons. As such, Gorampa's account of Buddhist practice involves articulating the relationship between these two distinct types of knowledge. The twentieth-century British philosopher Gilbert Ryle provides a useful point of comparison, here. Ryle famously coined the terms "knowledge-how" to refer to experiential knowledge, and "knowledge-that" to refer to conceptual knowledge.[381] Viewing Gorampa through a Rylean lens, then, we might say that knowledge of the ultimate truth that is realized (*rtogs pa'i don dam*) is knowledge-how, while knowledge of the ultimate that is taught (*bstan pa'i don dam*) is knowledge-that.

Although the definitions of, and relationships between, knowing how and knowing that have been fiercely debated in Western philosophy since Ryle's seminal essay, a number of Indian and Tibetan Mādhyamikas have similarly disagreed with Gorampa's view that the ultimate must be experienced nonconceptually. Such thinkers have argued that a realization of the ultimate – and indeed, *all* conscious mental activity – necessarily involves some amount of conceptual thought. Without concepts, they argue, there would be no way to distinguish a fully awakened buddha (who skillfully and compassionately engages in enlightened activity for the sake of all beings) from a

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[381] Ryle 1945.

completely insentient being that exists without mental content.[382] The present chapter will examine Gorampa's views of enlightened awareness in terms of knowing how, and will sketch some of the points of contention between Gorampa and other Mādhyamikas on this issue.

Buddhahood as Knowledge-how

Knowledge-how is experiential, and it differs from knowledge-that in the sense that it is non-propositional. Take, for example, knowledge about riding a bicycle. A person could certainly know *about* riding a bicycle (e.g., one could know that one must be moving at a certain speed in order to avoid falling over), but not actually know *how* to ride a bicycle. Although a certain amount of conceptual understanding may be useful in the initial stages of learning to ride a bike, the only way to really know how to actually perform the act of riding a bike is by practicing repeatedly. Before getting on a bike for the first time, for example, one must understand the direction in which the pedals should turn, and that one needs to continuously move forward in order to stay upright. Based on this understanding, one practices repeatedly until one is finally able to balance long enough to stay upright for a short period of time. With repeated practice, one can balance for longer and longer periods of time, until the act of pedaling and remaining upright on a bicycle becomes effortless. Only once one can balance on a bicycle do we say that she actually knows *how* to ride a bike.

Gorampa presents the practice of realizing the ultimate truth in much the same way. One must first begin by employing tetralemmic analysis to cultivate a conceptual

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[382] Siderits and others have suggested that this insentient being might be best understood as a robot (which is programmed to act in specific ways), or a zombie (which lacks conscious experience). Siderits 2011. See note 455 below.

understanding of what the ultimate truth is like. Then, based on this understanding, one engages in certain meditative practices (which will be elaborated below), progressing to a point in which one can directly and nonconceptually experience the actual ultimate truth. After attaining an initial experience of freedom from conceptual proliferations, Gorampa argues, one continues to practice until remaining in such a state is effortless. As such, a Buddha does not actually have to exert any effort to remain in a state of *spros bral* – in much the same way that a cyclist like Eddy Merckx does not have to exert any special effort to balance on a bicycle.

Of course, it is one thing to write about what it is like to ride a bicycle, but it is quite another to convey in words the actual *experience* of balancing on two wheels, pedaling, shifting, turning, and braking. There is a certain amount of actual practice and experience involved in learning to ride a bike that cannot be obtained through intellectual knowledge alone, regardless of how much one studies. It is, moreover, feasible that a person could study *too much*, learning the mechanics of a bike's drivetrain, the physics of angular velocity, and so on, resulting in an over-intellectualization of the act of cycling and an inability to actually experience how it *feels* to balance and pedal at the same time. Similarly, Gorampa is aware that although he can write a great deal about what *spros bral* is *like*, at a certain point, it is up to the practitioner herself to actually practice based on this intellectual understanding if she is to have an actual experience of *spros bral*. Gorampa also argues that getting mired down in too much conceptual analysis will actually hinder a practitioner from nonconceptually experiencing the ultimate truth.[383]

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[383] This is, in a sense, one of Gorampa's main criticisms of Tsongkhapa's approach. See Cabezón and Dargyay 2007, 52ff.

Again, turning to Ryle, we could say that a conceptual understanding of the ultimate that is taught is knowledge-that, while a direct, nonconceptual realization of the ultimate truth is knowledge-how. These two types of knowledge are related, but distinct. In "Knowing How and Knowing That,"[384] Ryle argues against what he calls *intellectualism*. This, he claims, is a position in which knowledge-how can be reduced to knowledge-that. This position is summarized by John Bengson and Marc A. Moffett as follows:

> Intellectualism entails... that knowledge how is a matter of possessing some relevant propositional attitude (or combination of propositional attitudes), and... that actions which display knowledge how are always produced by a causal process somehow involving the relevant propositional attitude (or combination of propositional attitudes).[385]

In other words, intellectualism argues that experiential knowledge (knowledge how) can be reduced to a series of propositional attitudes (knowledge that); knowing how to perform an action just consists in having the right kinds of propositional attitudes about the action that is performed. The intellectualist would argue, for example, that knowing how to ride a bicycle is brought about through an intellectual understanding of certain propositions related to the act of bike riding.[386]

Ryle argues against this position, taking what has come to be known as an *anti-intellectualist* stance with respect to the relationship between knowing-that and knowing-how. He argues that the latter cannot be defined in terms of the former, and that knowledge-that depends in a sense on knowledge-how. He suggests,

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[384] Ryle 1945.

[385] Bengson and Moffett 2011, 8. For the sake of clarity here, I have removed two technical terms that Bengson and Moffett introduce in their essay ([I_{MIND}] and [I_{ACTION}]). Their characterization of intellectualism remains the same without the introduction of these terms. In an even more condensed form of their presentation of Ryle's intellectualist, they introduce the term, [$I_{KNOW-HOW}$]: "A state σ of an individual x is a state of knowing how to φ if and only if σ is or involves x's having some relevant propositional attitude(s) regarding φ-ing." (Ibid.)

[386] For a thorough presentation and defense of the intellectualist position, see Stanley and Williamson 2001.

> When a person knows how to do things of a certain sort (e.g., make good jokes, conduct battles or behave at funerals), his knowledge is actualized or exercised in what he does. It is not exercised in the propounding of propositions or in saying "Yes" to those propounded by others. His intelligence is exhibited by deeds, not by internal or external dicta.[387]

Knowledge-how is enacted and is non-propositional. Of course, others can describe a person's knowledge-how in terms of propositional statements (e.g., I can describe Eddy Merckx's expertise when it comes to riding a bicycle), but the actual knowledge-how itself cannot be reduced to knowledge-that.

Ryle goes on to argue that knowing-that actually presupposes knowing-how. This is the crux of his anti-intellectualist stance, and he explains this in two ways. First, he suggests, "To know a truth, I must have discovered or established it. But discovering and establishing are intelligent operations, requiring rules of method, checks, tests, criteria, etc."[388] To illustrate this claim, Ryle gives the example of a scientist, defining him as someone who

> knows how to decide certain sorts of questions. Only secondarily is he a man who has discovered a lot of facts, i.e., has achieved successes in his application of these rules, etc. (though of course he only learns how to discover through exercises in discovery. He does not begin by perfecting his method and only later go on to have successes in applying it.)[389]

A scientist, in other words, is someone for whom knowing-that derives from knowing-how. Without knowing *how* to go about discovering, he would not be able to make discoveries. Ryle concludes by suggesting that knowing-that requires knowing how to implement that knowledge in a given place or time. For example, Ryle might argue that Eddy Merckx's knowledge that he must shift into a low gear while climbing the Col du

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[387] Ryle 1945, 8.
[388] Ibid., 15–16.
[389] Ibid., 16.

Tourmalet requires having the previous experience of climbing hills on a bicycle. His knowledge-that depends on prior knowledge-how.[390]

If we view Gorampa's Madhyamaka in light of the intellectualist/anti-intellectualist distinction, we can see that he does not align squarely with either. His position is similar to the anti-intellectualists in the sense that there is a definite distinction between knowing-that and knowing-how; conceptually understanding the ultimate that is taught is distinct from directly apprehending the ultimate that is realized. The former is conceptual and propositional; the latter is nonconceptual and non-propositional. However, Gorampa's position differs from that of Ryle in the sense that knowledge-that is necessarily prior to knowledge-how. A conceptual understanding of the ultimate is necessary in order to have an experience that is actually free from conceptual proliferations. This is, after all, what distinguishes his view from that of Hashang.[391]

We might think, then, that Gorampa falls into the intellectualist camp. Gorampa's view that knowledge-that is necessarily prior to knowledge-how seems to be in alignment with this sort of stance. However, Gorampa's position is distinct from the intellectualists in an important respect: while the intellectualists go on to argue that knowledge-how is a "species" of knowledge-that,[392] and that the former can be explained in terms of the latter, Gorampa wants to maintain that these two types of knowledge are distinct. For Gorampa, knowledge-that is *prior* to knowledge-how, but knowledge-how cannot be *reduced* to knowledge-that. In light of this discussion, we can categorize Gorampa as a *weak-intellectualist*. He argues that rational analysis resulting in a conceptual understanding of

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[390] For an overview the intellectualist/anti-intellectualist debate that has continued in the decades following Ryle, see Bengson and Moffett 2011. For more contemporary defenses of intellectualism and anti-intellectualism, respectively, see Stanley and Williamson 2001; Noë 2005.

[391] See chapters 3 and 4.

[392] Stanley and Williamson 2001, 411–412.

the ultimate that is taught is necessarily prior to a direct experience of the ultimate that is realized, but that this direct experience cannot be explained in terms of a conceptual understanding.

These distinctions between knowing-that and knowing-how will be useful to keep in mind as we investigate the remainder of the *Synopsis*. The primary aim of the *Synopsis* involves cultivating an intellectual understanding of how the ultimate that is taught ought to be understood,[393] but the final few pages of the text go on to describe the ways in which one must cultivate an enlightened mind in order to apprehend the ultimate that is realized.[394] Although Gorampa's description of an enlightened mind is comparatively short in this text, we should not take this to mean that Gorampa dismisses this as unimportant.[395] Instead, we should understand that by Gorampa's brevity here, he is indicating that it is not necessarily useful (or, indeed, even fully possible) to explain what the nature of buddhahood is like; the only way to really understand the nature of a buddha's awareness is to cultivate that awareness for oneself.[396] That said, Gorampa is also aware that in order to help orient practitioners toward cultivating that awareness, he

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[393] In other words, this text is primarily concerned with knowing-that.

[394] In other words, the last pages turn their attention to knowing-how.

[395] Quite the opposite; by including these short chapters at the end of a text that is primarily concerned with Madhyamaka as it is understood through rational analysis, Gorampa is signaling to his readers that consideration of the practice and the end result are nevertheless indespensible.

[396] Gorampa's more explicit treatments of the nature of buddhahood can be found in his multiple commentaries on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*. His three commentaries on this important text are: (1) *yum don rab gsal* (full title: *shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i man ngag gi bstan bcos mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan 'grel pa dang bcas pa'i dka' ba'i gnas rnam par bshad pa yum don rab gsal),* (2) *sbas don zab mo* (full title: *shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa man ngag gi bstan bcos mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan gyi gzhung snga phyi'i 'grel dang dka' gnas la dpyad pa sbas don zab mo'i gter gyi kha 'byed),* and (3) *sbas don rab gsal* (full title: *shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i man ngag gi bstan bcos mngon par rtogs pa'i rgyan gyi mtshon byed kyi chos rnams kyi yan lag khyad par bshad pa sbas don rab gsal).* These texts have not been treated extensively in English; however, for a treatment of *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* literature that is informed by Sakyapa interpretations, see Harter forthcoming. Other texts that focus more explicitly on the Buddhist path (at least, according to the *sūtrayāna*) are his *zhugs gnas kyi rnam gzhag skyes bu mchog gi gsal byed, mthar gyi gnas pa'i snyoms par 'jug pa'i rnam bshad snyom 'jug rab gsal,* and *bsam gzugs 'gog snyoms thod rgal rnams ston pa snyoms 'jug rab gsal* (also known as *mthar gyi gnas pa'i snyom par 'jug pa'i rnam bshad snyoms 'jug rab gsal* (Cabezón and Dargyay 2007, 37, 268n191.

needs to address the issue in some respect in his *Synopsis*. He must, in other words, describe an enlightened Buddha's knowledge-how in terms of propositions, even though that knowledge-how itself is non-propositional. By including these few pages at the end of the *Synopsis*, Gorampa shows that rational analysis is necessary for enlightenment, but not sufficient.

Madhyamaka as the Path that is to be practiced

The end of the *Synopsis* spells out Gorampa's understanding of the nature of an enlightened mind, and briefly outline the techniques that one must practice in order to cultivate an enlightened state. Gorampa acknowledges that rational analysis is key to realizing the Madhyamaka view, but that one must also practice based on that analysis. He begins his explanation of the Madhyamaka Path and Result as follows:

> Having understood – through hearing and contemplating – the nature of all things, i.e., nirvana which has a nature that is free from all extremes of conceptual proliferation, certainty arises. However, if one does not put this into practice through meditation, it will not be realized.[397]

In other words, while hearing about the Madhyamaka view and contemplating the refutation of the four extremes can produce a definite rational understanding of the ultimate that is taught, this alone is insufficient for an actual direct apprehension of the ultimate that is realized. In order to bring about such an apprehension, one must meditate (*bsgoms pa*) on the refutation of the four extremes involved in tetralemmic analysis.

How, exactly, must one meditate in order to directly realize the ultimate truth? Gorampa argues that the proper way to do this is described by Atiśa,[398] and that it is

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[397] *de ltar chos rnams kyi rang bzhin spros pa'i mtha' thams cad dang bral ba'i rang bzhin gyi mya ngan las 'das pa thos bsam gyis gtan la phab nas nges pa'i shes pa skyes kyang bsgoms pas nyams su ma blangs na de mngon du mi 'gyur ba* BPD 378

[398] "With respect to the detailed explanation of the practice of the path, although many systems linked to earlier masters have appeared, the practice will be explained here by means of the special transmission

based on the accumulation of merit (*bsod nams*) and wisdom (*ye shes*). While Gorampa addresses practices involved in the accumulation of merit, such as going for refuge, developing compassion, and having faith in the Buddha,[399] the activities that are most relevant to his analytic discussions earlier in the *Synopsis* are related to the accumulation of wisdom. This practice primarily involves the establishment of tranquility (Tib. *zhi gnas,* Skt. *śamatha*) and insight (Tib. *lhag mthong,* Skt. *vipaśyanā*).

An important framework underlying the structure of accumulating merit and wisdom is the system of the Five Paths (*lam lnga*). This is a Mahāyāna system, based on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*, which correlates to the ten bodhisattva levels, as well as to the thirty-seven practices of bodhisattvas.[400] The Five Paths are the Path of Accumulation (*tshogs lam*), the Path of Preparation (*sbyor lam*), the Path of Seeing (*mthong lam*), the Path of Meditation (*sgom lam*), and the Path of No More Learning (*mi slob lam*). The Path of Accumulation involves all of the practices associated with accumulating merit. The Path of Preparation, as its name suggests, serves to prepare an ordinary person for the bodhisattva path, and involves performing practices that generate wisdom. These practices are described in greater detail in several of Gorampa's more practice-oriented texts,[401] but his cursory descriptions in the *Synopsis* serve to give his readers a sense of what Gorampa understands wisdom – and the resultant state of buddhahood – to be.

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of oral instruction by Divine Atiśa." *de'i nyams len zhib tu bshad pa ni dam pa gong ma dag la brgyud pa'i bka' srol mang du snang yang 'dir nyams len gdams pa'i bka' babs pa jo bo rje lha gcig gis bzhed pa/* BPD 384. Although Gorampa doesn't mention a text explicitly here, his presentation appears to follow that of the *Bodhipathapradīpa* (*byang chub lam gyi sgron ma*).

[399] BPD 378-420

[400] The Five Paths are a complex topic in Buddhist scholarship, but for one presentation of this system according to the Shangs pa bka' brgyud tradition, see Kapstein 1992.

[401] See, e.g., Gorampa's *mthar gyi gnas pa'i snyoms par 'jug pa'i rnam bshad snyom 'jug rab gsal*, a text which explains meditative absorption.

After sufficient merit has been accumulated on the Path of Accumulation through going for refuge, performing prostrations, giving offerings, and so on, one begins the practice of cultivating wisdom on the Path of Preparation. In order to do this, Gorampa asserts that one must first establish tranquility. He argues,

> Since body and mind deteriorate when there is no meditative stabilization (*ting nge 'dzin, samādhi*), even virtuous activities such as reciting mantras will have little power. And since the taste of emptiness will not be experienced by the mere knowledge that arises from hearing and contemplating, and afflictive emotions will not be abandoned, there will be little capacity for achieving one's own welfare. And lacking clairvoyance, one will also be unable to establish the welfare of others. Therefore, one should initially pursue the tranquility of an adept mind.[402]

One must, Gorampa argues, establish a tranquil mind at the outset. Otherwise, one will not be able to accumulate merit, fully understand emptiness, or abandon afflictive emotions. Moreover, without a tranquil mind, one will be unable to cultivate the ability to benefit others.

In order to establish tranquility, Gorampa suggests that a practitioner situate himself in a quiet place that is free from distractions, and remain in the company of a qualified teacher. Then, one practices according to a specific sequence, in order to bring about the necessary conditions for establishing meditative stabilization. He explains,

> There [i.e., situated in a quiet place and in the company of a teacher], the stages of activities are as follows: worldly activity and all concepts which proliferate – such as desire, malice, etc. – must be cast away; hindrances must be reversed by means of offerings to a special support, food offerings to the spirits and dharma-protectors, and supplication, recitation, and so on; hindrances which arise must be dispelled by means of abandoning

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[402] *ting nge 'dzin med na lus sems rgud pas bzlas brjod la sogs pa'i dge ba'ang mthu chung ba dang/ thos bsam gyi shes rab tsam gyis stong pa nyid kyi ro mi myong zhing nyon mongs mi spong bas rang don gyi mthu chung la/ mngon shes med pas gzhan don yang mi nus pas thog ma sems las su rung ba'i zhi gnas btsal bar bya* BPD 420

non-virtue and obscurations through the hundred-syllable mantra of the Tathāgata…[403]

Gorampa continues with a long list of other practices here, but what is most significant in this list is that the *first* practice that must be carried out involves "casting away all concepts which proliferate" (*spros pa'i rnam rtog thams cad dor ba*). At first glance, this first practice appears to be equivalent to establishing the "freedom from conceptual proliferations" (*spros pa dang bral ba*) mentioned earlier. However, these terms are not identical. While the former practice consists of eliminating conceptual thoughts that arise in one's mind, the latter state involves transforming one's mind so that conceptual thoughts do not arise to begin with. The initial practice of rejecting concepts which proliferate, then, can be seen as learning to ride a bicycle with training wheels. Just as one begins by learning how it feels to ride a bike without actually being able to balance on one's own, Gorampa shows us that Buddhist practice begins by learning how it *feels* to have a mind that is free from conceptual proliferations, even if one's mind is not yet fully capable of being in such a state. One practices what it's like to experience the ultimate, therefore, before actually having an experience of the ultimate.[404]

Once a practitioner has generated the appropriate conditions for establishing meditative stabilization, he then focuses his mind on an object. Gorampa suggests that while in general, any object will suffice for this practice, it is best for one to focus on something such as the body of a deity.[405] Once the practitioner can focus his mind on a

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[403] *der bya ba'i rim pa ni/ 'jig rten gyi bya ba dang/ 'dod pa dang gnod sems la sogs pa spros pa'i rnam rtog thams cad dor ba dang/ rten khyad par can bzhugs pa la mchod pa dang/ chos skyong dang 'byung po la gtor ma dang/ gsol ba gdab pa dang bzlas brjod la sogs pas bar gcod zlog pa dang/ de bzhin gshegs pa'i yi ge brgya pa la sogs pas sdig sgrib sbyong ba'i sgo nas skye ba'i gegs bsal ba dang...* BPD 421

[404] Again, these processes are explained in detail in other texts, most notably in Gorampa's commentaries on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*.

[405] "In general, it is said that any singular object is suitable; although meditative stabilization even arises by means of an object such as a blue flower, being a beautiful support, at an appropriate distance, and

stable object, he then begins the process of establishing meditative equipoise (*mnyam gzhag*). The successful establishment of meditative equipoise corresponds to the Path of Seeing, and marks a practitioner's transition from an ordinary person to an *ārya*. The Path of Seeing also corresponds to a practitioner's initial experience of *spros bral*. To continue with our analogy, we could equate this with the first moment that one finds balance on the two wheels of a bicycle.

The initial experience of meditative equipoise only lasts for an instant, but Gorampa explains that there is a subtle, gradual path leading up to this state. He explains that after one has accumulated sufficient merit, he is capable of actually beginning to cultivate tranquility, and that this process occurs in nine stages:[406]

> Elaborating on the benefits of meditative stabilization, one should rely on an objective support. Then, one needs methods of establishing the mind single-pointedly, explained in the scriptures as abiding by the nine methods of mental abiding: settling the mind, constant settling, certain settling, close settling, disciplining, pacifying, completely pacifying, making single-pointed, and establishing in complete balance.[407]

After focusing on an object, the practitioner then progresses through nine stages by which she gradually develops the ability to maintain her focus for longer periods of time with diminishing amounts of effort. Eventually, she is able to remain in a state in which meditative equipoise arises effortlessly.

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unwavering… Nevertheless, here, when the scripture says, 'of a body which is like the color of gold,' one should train in the body of a deity." *spyir dmigs pa gang yang rung ba gcig la zhes byung ste/ me tog sngon po la sogs pa'i rten mdzes pa nye ring ran pa mi g.yo ba zhig la dmigs pas kyang skye mod kyi/ 'on kyang… 'dir ni mdo las/ gser gyi kha dog lta bu'i sku lus kyi/ zhes 'byung bas lha'i sku la bslab par bya'o/* BPD 421-422

[406] These nine methods of stabilizing the mind (*sems gnas pa'i thabs dgu*) are attributed to Asaṅga, and are well-known in Indian and Tibetan traditions. Descriptions of these are found in the *Yogācārabhūmi* and the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṁkāra*, among other texts. See e.g., Asaṅga 2004; Hopkins 1996; Wayman 1978. Gorampa's presentation of these nine stages is fairly standard.

[407] *ting nge 'dzin gyi phan yon la spros bas dmigs rten brtan par byas te/ de la sems rtse gcig tu gzhag pa'i thabs dgos te mdo las sems 'jog kun tu 'jog/ nges par 'jog nye bar 'jog dul bar byed zhi bar byed nye bar zhi bar byed rgyud gcig tu byed mnyam par 'jog par byed ces sems gnas pa'i thabs dgus gnas par gsungs pa* BPD 422

Following the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṁkāra*, Gorampa argues that after meditative stabilization is established, "wisdom – i.e., insight – is cultivated."[408] Gorampa then outlines the ways in which wisdom is first cultivated (*bsgom pa'i tshul*), and then the ways in which one familiarizes oneself (*goms par byed pa*) with that wisdom. Gorampa argues that the cultivation of wisdom based on meditative stabilization can occur in one of three possible ways: through simultaneous engagement (*cig car 'jug pa*), through gradual engagement (*rim gyis 'jug pa*), and through the "condensation of oral instructions" (*man ngag gi gnad bsdus*).[409]

With respect to cultivating wisdom through simultaneous engagement, Gorampa explains,

> When one analyzes any persons or phenomena through the reasonings previously explained, they are not found. And one does not find any other appearing phenomena when analyzed by that very reasoning. Then, having abandoned the faults of meditative stabilization, [the mind] is placed within that state [of not finding]. When that happens, through the power of the previous tranquility, one can remain for as long as one desires; that is the unity of tranquility and insight. Here, one should know the key point that the reasoning which establishes phenomenal selflessness is connected to persons, and the reasoning which establishes personal selflessness applies to phenomena. This was already explained in the section on Madhyamaka as Basis.[410]

This is the summation of the actual practice that is to be carried out, and is one way of understanding the connection between Gorampa's Madhyamaka in terms of the basis that is to be understood and the path that is to be practiced. First, Gorampa argues, one uses rational analysis (through the fourfold negation of the tetralemma) to induce a state of

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[408] *de ltar zhi gnas grub nas/ gsum pa des shes rab lhag mthong bsgom pa la/* BPD 425

[409] BPD 426

[410] *gang zag gam chos gang yang rung ba zhig la sngar bshad pa'i rigs pa rnams kyis dpyad nas ma rnyed par byas la rigs pa de nyid kyis snang ba'i dngos po gzhan thams cad la'ang dpyad de ma rnyed par byas nas de'i ngang la ting nge 'dzin gyi skyon rnams spangs nas bzhag pa na sngar gyi zhi gnas kyi dbang gis ji srid 'dod kyi bar du gnas par 'gyur ba ni zhi lhag zung 'brel lo/ 'di la chos kyi bdag med sgrub pa'i rigs pa gang zag la sbyor ba dang gang zag gi bdag med sgrub pa'i rigs pa chos la bsgre ba'i gnad shes dgos te/ sngar gzhi dbu ma'i skabs su bshad zin to/* BPD 426

"not finding" any ultimately existent person or thing. Based on this understanding, one

can utilize the procedures set forth in the Path section to unite tranquility and insight.

This method is called "simultaneous engagement" because when one realizes that objects

do not essentially exist, one can apply that same reasoning and realization to the essential

existence of persons. Or, if one realizes the emptiness of persons first, one can apply that

same reasoning to phenomena.

Gorampa asserts, however, that although this method of engagement is called

"simultaneous," this does *not* mean that he in any way ascribes to the view of the

subitists, characterized by Hashang:

> The view of Hashang, which previously occurred here in Tibet, advocates
> practicing the cessation of concepts even without finding certainty which
> is ascertained through hearing and contemplating. And the later view,
> which advocates practicing the counting of a rosary, thinking "I do not
> exist, I do not exist," are degenerate views. Therefore, it should be
> remembered that they were refuted elsewhere.[411]

Here, Gorampa reminds us that Hashang advocates for the "cessation of concepts"

without engaging in any prior rational analysis. That is, he argues that one can have

knowledge-how with respect to the ultimate without first having knowledge-that. Another

method of establishing selflessness, brought about through the repetition of mantras, is

similarly not plausible.[412] One *must* begin with rational analysis if one wishes to properly

cultivate wisdom (even though that wisdom is nonconceptual). The "simultaneous"

method of engagement only refers to the notion that one can understand personal

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[411] *gangs ri'i khrod 'dir sngon byung ba thos bsam gyis gtan la phab pa'i nges pa ma rnyed kyang/ rtog pa kha tshom la sgom du smra ba ha shang gi lta ba dang/ phyis byung ba nga med nga med ces pa'i rtog pa'i phreng ba bgrang ba la sgom du smra ba ni lta ba'i snyigs ma yin pas gzhan du dgag pa byas zin pa dran par bya'o/* BPD 426

[412] It is unclear to whom Gorampa is referring by this second classification, and it is uncertain where Gorampa means when he says that this view has been refuted "elsewhere." He gives explicit refutations of Hashang elsewhere in the *Synopsis*, as well as in various sections of the *lta ba'i shan 'byed*.

selflessness through the same reasoning that realizes phenomenal selflessness, and vice versa.

The second way of cultivating wisdom is gradually. In explaining this method, Gorampa states,

> First, when one does not find the personal self by means of reasonings which establish personal selflessness, one remains in that state. Next, when one does not find external objects by means of the reasonings of the simultaneous connection of six [atoms], one remains in that state. Then, not finding an apprehending subject when there is no apprehended object, one remains in that state. Subsequently, when nondual consciousness is established as free from conceptual proliferations of the four extremes, one remains in that state.[413]

This method can be understood as a "turning off" of concepts. One first uses arguments specifically directed at refuting the personal self,[414] and comes to the conclusion that a self cannot be found. This results in the practitioner's realization that conceptual thoughts pertaining to personal selves are to be abandoned. Next, one analyzes objects[415] and realizes that they, too, cannot be found. Likewise, the practitioner abandons concepts pertaining to the essential existence of objects. Realizing that there can be no objects in the absence of subjects, and vice versa, the practitioner concludes that all things which appear cannot be established ultimately. This process results in the cultivation of a non-dual consciousness, which is free from conceptual proliferations.

The main difference between these so-called simultaneous and gradual practices is that in the former, personal selflessness and phenomenal selflessness are understood through the same types of analyses; in the latter, the two types of selflessness are

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[413] *dang por gang zag gi bdag med sgrub pa'i rigs pas gang zag gi bdag ma rnyed par byas nas de'i ngang la bzhag pa dang/ de nas drug gis gcig car sbyar ba'i rigs pas phyi don ma rnyed par byas nas de'i ngang la bzhag pa dang/ de nas gzung ba med na der 'dzin kyang ma rnyed pas de'i ngang la bzhag pa dang/ de nas gnyis med kyi rnam shes de yang mtha' bzhi'i spros pa dang bral bar byas nas de'i ngang la bzhag par bya'o/* BPD 426-427

[414] E.g., through Candrakīrti's sevenfold analysis of the self.

[415] E.g., through the Mahāyāna analysis of *dharmas*

understood through different types of analysis, carried out in a specific order. It is important to note, however, that for both of these methods of cultivating wisdom, one *must* begin with rational analysis before developing a nondual awareness. This, Gorampa argues, is precisely what distinguishes his own view from that of someone like Hashang.

It is also important to note that according to Gorampa, rational analysis results in the "not finding" of certain things. When one searches for a personal self, for example, it cannot be found, and the practitioner's only recourse is to stop conceiving of selves. This method does not, *pace* Tsongkhapa, result in the finding of the ultimate nature of things (i.e., emptiness). This is a crucial point for Gorampa: rational analysis serves to eliminate concepts; it does *not* serve to establish emptiness as an object.[416]

The third method of establishing wisdom is by what Gorampa calls "the condensation of oral instructions." With respect to this method, Gorampa states,

> Through the example of a dream, all appearances are established as mind. Moreover, through the example of an illusion, all appearances are taught as illusions. Then: "recitation, lamp, mirror, *mudrā*, sunstone, seed, tamarind, and speech – through [these examples], wise ones should understand that the aggregates do not transmigrate."[417] Through these examples, illusions are also established as interdependent. And, having understood interdependence as being free from expression, one settles the mind in that. Then, having abandoned all afflictions included in what is to be abandoned on the Path of Seeing, uncontaminated awareness arises. This is because the objects of abandonment and the antidotes are distinctively arranged as follows: wisdom arising from hearing generates a mind that is opposed to afflictions, contemplation dulls them, worldly meditation suppresses them, and transcendent meditation eliminates the seeds from the root.[418]

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[416] See chapter 3.

[417] This appears to be a quote from the *Pratītyasamutpādahṛdaya*: *svādhyāyadīpamudrādarpaṇaghoṣārka-kāntabījāmlaiḥ| skandhapratisandhir asaṅkramaś ca vidvadbhir avadhāryau* (5)

[418] *rmi lam gyi dpes snang ba thams cad sems su bsgyur ba dang/ de nas sgyu ma'i dpes snang ba thams cad sgyu mar bstan pa dang/ de nas kha ton mar me me long rgya/ me shel sa bon skyur dang sgras/ phung po nying mtshams sbyor ba yang / mi 'pho bar ni mkhas rtogs bya/ zhes pa'i dpes sgyu ma de'ang rten 'brel du bsgrubs te/ rten 'brel de yang brjod par bral bar shes par byas nas de'i ngang la blo bzhag pas mthong spang gis bsdus pa'i nyon mongs pa thams cad spangs nas zag pa med pa'i ye*

Here, Gorampa outlines a process in which one understands the ultimate by means of examples, and then gradually abandons the afflictions through hearing (*thos*), contemplating (*bsam*), and meditating (*sgom*). This third method of establishing awareness is intended for those who are either not as philosophically inclined as others, or for those whose previous karma is such that they can understand the ultimate that is taught by means of examples.[419]

What is most significant about these practices is that they all involve processes that must be cultivated slowly and deliberately. They do not, *pace* Hashang, involve a sudden moment of realization that arises spontaneously. The establishment of meditative equipoise comes about after careful preparation and steady progress in gaining familiarity with single-pointed concentration, combined with the development of tranquility based on this. When conceptual proliferations subside and wisdom is established based on that, one completes the Path of Preparation and enters into the Path of Seeing. It is at this stage that one becomes an *ārya* who engages in direct, nonconceptual apprehension of the ultimate that is realized (as opposed to a conceptual understanding of the ultimate that is taught). This state marks the transition from knowing-that to knowing-how.

The Path of Seeing only lasts for an instant. After initially engaging in meditative equipoise, an *ārya* falls into the post-meditative state (*rjes thob*), which begins the Path of

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shes skye bar 'gyur te/ thos pa'i shes rab kyis nyon mongs pa la mi mthun pa'i blo skyes pa dang/ bsam pas rtse 'jil ba dang 'jig rten pa'i sgom byung gis mgo gnon pa dang/ 'jig rten las 'das pa'i sgom byung gis sa bon rtsa ba nas spangs pa ni spang bya dang gnyen po'i go rim khyad par can yin pa'i phyir ro/ BPD 427

[419] Once again, we see here a relative tolerance for distinct methods that are capable of leading to the same result. (See Gorampa's presentation of the conventional truth in Chapter 2.) It is interesting to note that this passage seems to suggest that despite his arguments for the importance of rational analysis throughout the *Synopsis* and his other Madhyamaka texts, Gorampa might accept the possibility that there are certain types of beings for whom tetralemmic analysis is not necessary in order to induce a state of *spros bral*. However, given that this is the only instance in the *Synopsis* in which Gorampa mentions this particular process, and that he does not elaborate on this point further, one can only speculate as to his reasons for including it here. A broader study of Gorampa's extant texts might provide us with more information about this particular process and its role in Gorampa's overall view.

Meditation. On this level, an *ārya* alternates between meditative equipoise and the post-meditative state, progressing along the ten bodhisattva levels.[420] The *ārya*'s repeated alternation between meditative equipoise and the post-meditative state is crucial at this point. Without returning to the realm of conceptual thought and engagement with the conventional (even though it is only *merely* conventional at this point), one would be unable to eliminate the remaining defilements and obscurations that prevent one from becoming a fully awakened buddha. The post-meditative state is a bodhisattva's link to the conventional realm, and is the condition in which he perfects the qualities associated with each of the ten bodhisattva stages. As such, he must alternate between these two states if he is to continue to progress toward buddhahood.[421]

Gorampa concludes this section of the *Synopsis* by arguing that the proper practice of the Path as he has outlined it here leads to buddhahood. He begins,

> At the time of the Paths of Accumulation and Preparation, the mind that [seeks to] achieve buddhahood in order for all sentient beings to transcend samsara is generated. Then, by superior, vast, sustained effort which is like a blazing fire, one trains in generating a compassionate mind, a nondual mind, and conventional bodhicitta. After one incalculable eon, the Mahāyāna Path of Seeing will be attained.[422]

In order to complete the Paths of Accumulation and Preparation and to arrive at the Path of Seeing, it takes a practitioner one countless eon. That is, in order to successfully master all of the rational analysis set forth in the Basis chapter and carry out all of the

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[420] Gorampa asserts that the *mthong lam* consists entirely of *mnyam gzhag*, while others (e.g. Tsongkhapa's disciple Gyaltsap (rGyal tshab rJe Dar ma Rin chen, 1364-1432) contend that there is also *rjes thob* on this Path.

[421] A detailed explanation of the ten bodhisattva stages can be found in Gorampa's *lta ba ngan sel*, his commentary on Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*.

[422] *de ltar lam de dag tshogs sbyor gyi gnas skabs su sems can thams cad 'khor ba las brgal ba'i phyir sangs rgyas sgrub pa'i sems bskyed nas brtson 'grus me 'bar ba lta bus sbyor ba rgya che ba drag pa yun ring bas snying rje'i sems dang/ gnyis su med pa'i blo dang/ kun rdzob byang chub kyi sems gsum la bslab pas/ bskal ba grangs med gcig nas theg pa chen po'i mthong lam thob par 'gyur zhing/* BPD 430

practices described in the Path chapter, a practitioner must spend one eon continually working toward that stage. One must, in other words, spend an eon learning to differentiate between the two truths, and work toward cultivating a conceptual understanding of the ultimate that is taught, before one ever has an initial experience of the ultimate that is realized.[423]

Next, Gorampa argues that to progress along all ten bodhisattva *bhūmis*, one must strive for two additional countless eons. That is, from the Path of Seeing, one must work for two more eons to complete the Path of Meditation:

> Then, although the ten separate perfections are indistinguishable in the nonconceptual awareness that is the meditative equipoise of the tenth *bhūmi*, in the post-meditative state, the two accumulations which are the primary practices of the ten perfections at each of the ten *bhūmi*s are united. After two incalculable eons, the level of buddhahood definitely emerges.[424]

In other words, while the first three paths take one incalculable eon to complete, the Path of Meditation, in which an *ārya* alternates between meditative equipoise and the post-meditative state and progresses along the ten bodhisattva levels, takes another two eons to complete.[425] It is important to note here that because meditative equipoise is a state in which nonconceptual freedom from conceptual proliferations emerges, the states of meditative equipoise experienced within each of the ten bodhisattva stages on the Path of

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[423] The incredibly long period of time that it takes for an ordinary person to reach the Path of Seeing *might* be one way to explain the different methods for understanding the conventional truth (described in chapter 2), and the different methods of realizing *spros bral*, outlined above. That is, one might not need to (or be capable of) carrying out tetralemmic analysis in this current life, but in the greater context of the Path, it is necessary at some point. Moreover, it should be noted that this explanation (in addition to Gorampa's entire presentation of the Basis, Path, and Result in the *Synopsis*) corresponds to the more gradual *sūtrayāna* – that is, the non-tantric path. Many of Gorampa's works deal with tantra, but none of his Madhyamaka texts are included in this.

[424] *de nas sa bcu po'i mnyam gzhag rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes la phar phyin bcu ldog pa'i sgo nas tshang ba khyad par med kyang/ rjes thob tu sa bcu so so la phar phyin bcu gtso bor spyod pa'i tshogs gnyis zung 'jug des bskal pa grangs med gnyis nas sangs rgyas kyi sar nges par 'byung ba'o/* BPD 430

[425] It is important to keep in mind that the *Synopsis* (along with Gorampa's other Madhyamaka texts) is written from a non-tantric (*pāramitāyāna*) perspective. Gorampa's many tantric texts assert that it is possible to traverse the path to enlightenment much more quickly.

Meditation are identical; there are no degrees of *spros bral*. The post-meditative state, on the other hand, is the state in which an *ārya* returns to perception of and interaction with the conventional. This is where distinctions between each of the bodhisattva stages are made, and the state in which an *ārya* perfects enlightened qualities on the path to buddhahood.

After at least three countless eons, when merit and wisdom have been accumulated and become inseparable through the practices outlined above, a bodhisattva arrives at the Path of No More Learning, also referred to as the eleventh *bhūmi*, or more simply, buddhahood. It is this final state which Gorampa explains in the final chapter of the *Synopsis,* which will be addressed below.

At first glance, this chapter on the Path appears to consist primarily of relatively straightforward descriptions of the practices that a Buddhist is supposed to carry out. However, by spelling out the methods for the proper accumulation of merit and wisdom based on the nine stage process of cultivating tranquility and the three possible ways of cultivating insight, this chapter serves as the link between the rational analysis carried out in the basis chapter, and the nonconceptual awareness described in the result chapter.

Ordinary persons begin the Path by accumulating merit through rituals, prayers, offerings, and other sorts of practices. They then accumulate wisdom by cultivating both tranquility and insight. Tranquility is cultivated gradually in a nine-stage process, while insight can be cultivated in one of three ways, based on one's karmic predispositions. Once insight has been established on the basis of tranquility, the two become inseparable. This moment marks the Path of Seeing; it is the first taste of nonconceptual, nondual awareness that a practitioner obtains, and marks the practitioner's transition from an

ordinary person to an *ārya*. Next, the *ārya* progresses along the ten bodhisattva *bhumi*s, practicing remaining in a state that is free from conceptual proliferations while in meditative equipoise, and further perfecting enlightened qualities while in the post-meditative state. Eventually, when an *ārya*'s enlightened qualities become so perfected in the post-meditative state that they are indistinguishable from nonconceptual meditative equipoise, the *ārya* becomes a fully awakened buddha.

How does this schematic relate to Gorampa's description of Madhyamaka as the basis that is to be understood, explained in the previous chapters? There is not a clear one-to-one correspondence between, say, tetralemmic analysis and the meditative practices spelled out on the path. However, in general we can say that rational analysis occurs in conjunction with the accumulation of merit and wisdom on the paths of accumulation and preparation. Rational analysis and the accumulation of merit and wisdom are all, in a sense, interrelated. One's ability to understand tetralemmic analysis is based on a certain level of merit and wisdom. At the same time, the deeper one's understanding of rational analysis of Madhyamaka as the basis, the more merit and wisdom one is understood as having accumulated. Thus, while it is difficult to map the accumulation of merit and wisdom onto specific stages of conceptual understanding of Madhyamaka as the basis, the important correlation between the two processes is this: the culmination of tetralemmic analysis *and* the accumulation of merit and wisdom (resulting in the union of tranquility and insight) *both* result in an initial, momentary, nonconceptual experience of the ultimate truth. That is, a correct rational understanding of reality must

be combined with specific types of practices that develop merit and wisdom in order to progress from the state of an ordinary person to that of an *ārya*.[426]

Madhyamaka as the Result that is to be realized

What remains now is the result; the aspect of Madhyamaka toward which all practitioners strive. Although this final chapter of the *Synopsis* is short, it contains some important topics that must be considered if we are to understand the nature of perfect enlightenment (at least, insofar as the nature of perfect enlightenment can be conceptually understood). In this chapter, Gorampa presents enlightened awareness (*ye shes*) by addressing five different questions. The answers to these questions serve as Gorampa's definition of the mind of a fully awakened buddha.

Inquiry into whether the two truths exist or do not exist on the buddha ground

The first question concerns the two truths; if a buddha's mind is free from conceptual proliferations, then can we say that the two truths – which, as we have seen, form the scaffolding for Madhyamaka reasoning – exist from the perspective of a buddha? In other words, if a buddha has eliminated the dualistic distinctions that give rise to perception of the conventional, then can *both* the conventional and ultimate truths be said to exist from a buddha's perspective?

Gorampa argues that with respect to statements such as "the teaching of the doctrine of the buddhas is based on two truths,"[427] and "all phenomena have two natures, apprehended by true and false seeing,"[428] the conventional truth cannot be said to exist for a buddha. He claims that in these instances, "the conventional truth which is taught in

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[426] Again, Gorampa focuses primarily on the process of rational analysis in the *Synopsis*, but he addresses practices in greater detail in other texts.

[427] *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXIV:8ab

[428] *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI:23ab, See Chapter 3

these statements does not exist, because without subjective false seeing, there is no object."[429] In other words, when one no longer engages in false seeing (which we have seen to be the case with enlightened beings in Chapter 3), then there can be no objects of false seeing for that being. When dualistic distinctions are eliminated, so too are the divisions of the two truths.

This does not mean, however, that the conventional truth does not exist *at all* from the perspective of a buddha. Gorampa argues,

> The conventional truth which is a part of the inseparability of the two truths does exist, because it is necessarily a part of the two truths. Since these are two truths which appear specifically to a buddha, they are not synonymous with the two truths that are taught to practitioners.[430]

Here, Gorampa reminds us that from the perspective of an enlightened buddha, there are no dualistic distinctions. There is no distinction between object and subject, no distinction between meditative equipoise and the post-meditative state, and no distinction between the conventional and ultimate truths. Therefore, it is incorrect to say that the conventional does not exist at all from a buddha's perspective; Gorampa reminds us that from a buddha's perspective, dualistic divisions between "conventional" and "ultimate" do not exist, and as such, the two truths are inseparable (*zung 'jug*).

However, Gorampa also reminds us that the two truths are divided based on one's perspective, rather than on objects that somehow exist "out there" in the world, independent of our minds. As such, the inseparable two truths for a buddha are not the same as the two truths that can be distinguished by ordinary persons. An ordinary

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[429] *sangs rgyas rnam kyis chos bstan pa/ bden pa gnyis la yang dag brten/ zhes dang/ dngos kun yang dag brdzun pa mthong ba yis/ dngos rnyed ngo bo gnyis ni 'dzin par 'gyur/ zhes pa'i skabs nas bstan pa'i kun rdzob bden pa ni med de/ yul can mthong ba brdzun pa med pas/ de'i yul med pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 435-436

[430] *bden gnyis zung du 'jug pa'i kun rdzob bden pa ni yod de/ zung 'jug la ya gyal dgos pa'i phyir ro/ 'di ni sangs rgyas rang snang gi bden pa gnyis yin pas/ gdul bya la bstan pa'i bden pa gnyis dang don mi gcig go/* BPD 436

person's two truths are those described in the above lines by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, and should not be confused with the inseparable two truths from a buddha's perspective.

In short, the answer to this first inquiry shows us that a buddha's mind is a special kind of mind. It is entirely free from dualistic, conceptual thought, and engages with appearances in ways that are completely different than those of ordinary persons. This does not mean, however, that a buddha's mind is completely blank. A buddha is not some kind of robot[431] devoid of all mental content entirely. The two truths exist for buddhas; they just don't exist in the same ways that they exist for ordinary beings.

It seems as though Gorampa wants to have it both ways, here. On the one hand, we cannot say that the two truths are nonexistent from a buddha's perspective; they are, after all, two *truths*. On the other hand, we cannot say that the two truths really exist as such; the conventional truth is associated with ignorance and false seeing, and in addition the two truths themselves are a duality that must be counted as unreal. In this and the four remaining inquiries about the nature of a buddha's mind, Gorampa walks a fine line, careful to avoid asserting one extreme position or another.

Inquiry into whether appearances exist or do not exist

Gorampa argues that buddhas engage with appearances (*snang ba*) in ways that are different than those of ordinary persons. However, if a buddha's mind is entirely free from conceptual proliferations, then can we even say that there are appearances on the buddha-ground? After all, in order for appearances to exist, it seems as though there must

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[431] That a fully awakened buddha might be devoid of all mental content entirely is an issue that has been addressed by Tibetan Mādhyamikas, and will be elaborated below. In contemporary scholarship, the term "Robo-Buddha" has come to be a sort of shorthand to refer to the problems involved with buddhas being devoid of conceptual thought. For an overview of this discourse, see Siderits 2011.

be an object (*yul*) which appears to a subject (*yul can*). This is the topic of Gorampa's next inquiry.

With respect to appearances, Gorampa begins by reminding us that

some earlier Mādhyamikas assert that appearances are completely nonexistent, because if appearances were to exist, they would necessarily be associated with distorted appearances. However, this is also not correct. When it is said, "All objects of knowledge appear only in endless purity," and "All objects of knowledge appear in the *dharmadhātu*," are these a buddha's internal appearances, or are they the external appearances of a buddha that are apprehended by ordinary practitioners? The former contradicts the claim that a buddha has no appearances, and the latter has the consequence of ultimate purity appearing even for practitioners.[432]

This passage refutes the position that because buddhas have eliminated all false and deceptive appearances, they must not have any appearances at all. Gorampa cites two texts to remind us that buddhas are omniscient, and that although their minds are free from conceptual proliferations, "all objects of knowledge" nevertheless appear to them. Therefore, we cannot say that buddhas have no appearances. However, these appearances must be different than dualistic appearances that ordinary persons have; otherwise we could say that ordinary persons are capable of perceiving "ultimate purity."

So, Gorampa argues that Buddhas do have appearances, but that these must be special kinds of appearances. He explains,

Therefore, although there are no appearances of the conventional truth which are a part of the two truths taught to practitioners, such as arising, ceasing, and so on, there must be an appearance which is the appearing ultimate of the inseparability of the *dharmadhātu* and awareness (*dbyings rig dbyer med*).[433] Otherwise, if the *dharmadhātu* did not appear at the

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[432] *sngon gyi dbu ma pa kha cig/ snang ba yod na 'khrul snang dang bcas dgos pas/ snang ba gtan med pa 'dod do/ de'ang mi 'thad de/ shes bya thams cad dag pa rab 'byams 'ba' zhig tu snang ba zhes dang/ shes bya thams cad chos kyi dbyings su snang ba zhes pa de sangs rgyas rang gi rang snang yin nam/ gdul bya gzhan la snang ba'i gzhan snang yin/ dang po ltar na/ sangs rgyas la snang ba med pa dang 'gal la/ phyi ma ltar na gdul bya des kyang dag pa mthar thug snang bar thal lo/* BPD 436

[433] Duckworth translates this as "indivisible expanse and awareness" (Duckworth 2008, 64.) Van Schaik translates this as "the inseparability of gnosis and the expanse" Van Schaik 2004, 104. Thakchoe cites

time of final meditation on the *dharmadhātu*, it would follow that the final
awareness which is the appearance of the *dharmadhātu* would not exist.[434]

Just as the conventional and ultimate are indistinguishable from a buddha's perspective,

so too are the *dharmadhātu* (*chos dbying*) and awareness (*rig pa*). The term *dharmadhātu*

is difficult to translate into English. It is used to convey reality, the ultimate truth,

emptiness, or the space which allows for conventional appearances to exist.[435] What

Gorampa means in this passage, therefore, is that ordinary conventional appearances do

not occur for buddhas, but reality does appear. However, this reality is not an object that

is perceived by the buddha, because it is indistinguishable from the buddha's mind itself.

Gorampa argues that this must be the case, because if it were otherwise, then it would be

impossible for a buddha to have awareness of the actual ultimate truth, i.e., the ultimate

that is *realized*.

Gorampa concludes by arguing that for a buddha, "appearances which are

dualistic appearances do not exist, because distorted karmic imprints are completely

abandoned."[436] As we have seen in the previous chapters, when one eliminates ignorance

and comes to see the ultimate truth that is realized, one no longer engages in dualistic

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this exact passage from the *Synopsis* in *The Two Truths Debate,* but does not seem to translate the phrase *dbyings rig dbyer med*. He writes, "[A buddha] does perceive the apperance of the nondifferentiated being (*dbyings*) of the ultimate reality" (Thakchoe 2007, 145. Thakchoe's translation seems to overlook the presence of the term *rig*. Brunnhölzl translates this term as "inseparability of [mind's] open expanse and awareness" (Brunnhölzl 2004, 108.) According to the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, this phrase only occurs in the Sakya tradition in *lam 'bras* literature and Gorampa's writings. In the context of Gorampa's writings, the phrase is found in the *Synopsis*, and in Gorampa's commentaries on the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*. It is also mentioned once in a text by Thar lam Rab 'byams pa Kun 'dga Ye shes (1397-1470), the founder of Nalendra monastery, but this instance appears to occur in the context of an homage verse to Heruka.

[434] *des na skye 'gag la sogs pa gdul bya la bstan pa'i ya gyal gyi kun rdzob bden pa'i snang ba med kyang dbyings rig dbyer med kyi don dam pa snang ba'i snang ba yod dgos te/ gzhan du chos dbyings goms pa mthar thug pa'i tshe chos dbyings mi snang na/ chos dbyings snang ba'i ye shes mthar thug med par thal ba'i phyir ro/* BPD 436

[435] As Douglas Duckworth has pointed out (personal communication), we might be better off understanding *dharmadhātu* in terms of Merleau-Ponty's "phenomenal field."

[436] *gnyis snang dang bcas pa'i snang ba ni med de/ 'khrul pa'i bag chags ma lus par spangs pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 437

distinctions. As such, a buddha cannot have dualistic appearances. At the same time, however, Gorampa argues that it is incorrect to say that a buddha sees nothing whatsoever. Once again, Gorampa is working hard to avoid asserting any extreme position in his description of a buddha's mind. His conclusion is that while appearances do exist for a buddha, such appearances are nondual.

Inquiry into whether awareness exists or does not exist

Even if one were to grant that for Buddhas, the two truths exist (although they are not differentiated) and that appearances exist (although they are nondual), one might deny that a buddha actually has awareness. Citing "earlier Mādhyamikas" (he mentions gTsang nag pa[437] by name, here), Gorampa claims that some thinkers have stated,

> A buddha has no enlightened awareness that is contained by his own mind. If he did, then perfect abandonment would be impossible, because of having the error of being a subject [that knows] false objects of knowledge. And when a perfect buddha sent forth many emanations, it would contradict reason if these were separate mental continua. It also could not be asserted that one mind would have enlightened awareness, while the others would not; therefore, perfect enlightened awareness would be illogical. And since objects of the past, future, and so on are not possible, it would be unsuitable for the three times to be directly accessible [to a buddha].[438]

Here, Gorampa suggests that these earlier thinkers have argued against the notion that a buddha has awareness for a number of reasons. First, these thinkers assert that awareness involves object-subject duality, which, as we have already seen, is associated with

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[437] Smith notes, "Gtsang Nag pa Brtson 'grus seng ge lived during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. He was one of the four chief disciples of Phywa pa and was renowned for his brilliance in logic." (Smith 2001, 326n763.)

[438] *dge ba'i shes gnyen gtsang nag pa sogs sngon gyi dbu ma pa kha cig sangs rgyas la rang rgyud kyis bsdus pa'i ye shes med de/ yod na shes bya brdzun pa'i yul can gyi 'khrul pa mnga' bas spangs ba phun tshogs mi rung ba dang/ rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas kyis sprul pa du ma sprul pa na de rnams rgyud tha dad na rigs pa dang 'gal zhing/ gcig ye shes rgyud la ldan te/ gzhan rnams ye shes dang mi ldan par yang brjod mi nus pas ye shes phun tshogs mi 'thad pa dang/ 'das ma 'ongs sogs kyi don mi srid pas/ dus gsum mngon du mdzad pa mi rung ba'i phyir zhes smra'o/ BPD 437*

ignorance. Therefore, if a buddha had awareness, then we could not say that he had completely abandoned ignorance. Secondly, when we talk about a buddha's emanations, we run into problems concerning whether a buddha's mind is in only one of those emanations, or in multiple emanations. If it were only in one, then other emanations would not have a buddha's awareness, while if it were in many emanations, then we would have to conclude that one buddha had many distinct minds. Since none of these options are tenable, these other Mādhyamikas argue that a buddha's mind cannot contain awareness.

Gorampa argues that this line of reasoning is not correct. He states,

> This position is illogical. Since the diamond-like meditative stabilization at the end of the mental continuum has burnt the kindling of conceptual proliferations which are objects of knowledge such as arising, ceasing, permanence, nihilism, and so on, it is the *dharmadhātu* which pacifies all conceptual proliferations. And when the previous mental continuum has pacified all conceptual proliferations such as arising and ceasing, these two become inseparable, and they are posited as enlightened awareness.[439]

Awareness, Gorampa argues, is the union of a mind which is free from conceptual proliferations and the *dharmadhātu*. When the "diamond-like meditative stabilization" – that is, the mind of an advanced *ārya* that is completely free from conceptual proliferations[440] – and the *dharmadhātu* are no longer perceived as separate things, Gorampa reasons that this is a buddha's awareness.

This passage marks a distinct change in Gorampa's writing; in attempting to describe the nature of a buddha's awareness (which he has already argued cannot be

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[439] *de'ang mi 'thad de/ rgyun mtha'i rdo rje lta bu'i ting nge 'dzin gyis shes bya skye 'gag/ rtag chad la sogs pa'i spros pa'i bud shing bsregs nas spros pa mtha' dag zhi ba'i chos dbyings dang/ sngar gyi rig pa'i rgyun de'ang skye 'gag la sogs pa'i spros pa mtha' dag zhi nas de gnyis dbyer med du gyur pa la ye shes su 'jog pa'i phyir ro/* BPD 437-438

[440] The term "diamond-like meditative stabilization" (*rdo rje'i lta bu ting nge 'dzin, vajropamasamādhi*) has slightly different connotations in different Buddhist traditions. Here, Gorampa uses the term to indicate the final stage of the tenth bodhisattva *bhūmi*, and the end of the Path of Meditation; this is the stage that immediately precedes complete buddhahood.

described), his prose begins to take a more poetic turn. Referring to evocative descriptions and metaphors such as "burning the kindling of conceptual proliferations,"[441] Gorampa is attempting to convey the nature of an experience to his readers. What he means in the above passage is that the *dharmadhātu* is the space in which all phenomenal content is capable of existing, but when a buddha has attained awakening and his mind is in a state of *spros bral*, there is no conceptual content that remains to fill that space.

In short, Gorampa argues that fully enlightened buddhas must be understood as having awareness, but that this awareness should not be considered as anything separate from the *dharmadhātu* itself. Again, from a buddha's perspective, there are no dualistic distinctions between self and other, or between mind and the *dharmadhātu*.

Inquiry into whether mind and mental factors exist or do not exist

In order for ordinary cognition to occur, Buddhists posit the existence of mind and mental factors (*sems dang sems las 'byung ba*).[442] Gorampa argues that these are not present for a buddha:

> Mind and mental factors are described as being associated with dualistic appearances of aspects in the three realms; as having the quality of seeing the natures and qualities of objects, and as posited in terms of seeing many different distinct objects. But here [on the buddha-ground], when one has realized objects of knowledge are not differentiated from consciousness which is free from conceptual proliferations such as arising, ceasing, and so on, there is not even the slightest quality of difference among dualistic appearances and their modes of apprehension.[443]

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[441] This is a reference to Candrakīrti in *Madhyamakāvatāra* III:1 and its commentary.

[442] According to the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, there are 51 mental factors that are associated with the mind. These include the five omnipresent mental factors (contact, feeling, perception, volition, and attention), as well as 46 additional mental factors that may or may not be present at any given moment in the mind. These include states such as desire, faith, attachment, resentment, and worry. For more on these, see Asaṅga 2001.

[443] *sems sems byung ni khams gsum pa'i rnam pa can gyi gnyis snang dang bcas pa dang/ don gyi ngo bo dang khyad par mthong ba'i khyad par yod pa dang/ don gyi khyad par la'ang mi 'dra ba du ma mthong ba'i sgo nas bzhag par gsungs la/ 'dir shes bya skye 'gag la sogs pa'i spros pa mtha' dag dang*

Here, Gorampa argues that the schema of mind and mental factors only pertains to dualistic appearances. Again, because buddhas have eliminated all dualistic appearances in their entirety, and experience freedom from conceptual proliferations, it makes no sense to say that a mind and fifty-one separate mental factors exist at the buddha-ground. Like Gorampa's explanation of the two truths and appearances, mental factors are indistinguishable from the mind at this stage.

<u>Inquiry into whether arising and ceasing exist or do not exist</u>

The fifth and final question that Gorampa addresses in this section pertains to whether the conventional truth – in terms of the arising and ceasing of phenomena – appears to a buddha. This question is of particular importance for Gorampa because buddhas are understood to be omniscient, but as we have already seen, there are no conceptual proliferations at the level of buddhahood. How, then, can Gorampa maintain his position while allowing for buddhas to be all-knowing? After all, if one is all-knowing, then one should know all *things*.

Gorampa's main point in this section is that, "In a buddha's awareness and internal appearances (*rang snang*),[444] there is no arising or ceasing,"[445] meaning that the conventional truth as ordinary persons understand it does not appear to buddhas. He does not give his own reasonings here, but simply cites Nāgārjuna[446] and Candrakīrti[447] to

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bral ba'i shes pa dang dbyer med pa mngon du gyur pa'i tshe gnyis snang dang 'dzin stangs mi 'dra ba'i khyad par cung zad kyang med BPD 438-439

[444] When describing appearances (*snang ba*) in this section, Gorampa uses the terms *rang snang* and *gzhan snang* in opposition to each other. While the term *gzhan snang* (literally, "other-appearance") is used to refer to ordinary persons' perceptions of external objects, *rang snang* (literally, "self-appearance") refers to appearances in a buddha's mind. Buddhas appearances must be internal because they do not engage in dualistic distinctions, and therefore they do not perceive external objects as being "out there" in the world, separate from their own minds.

[445] *sangs rgyas kyi ye shes dang/ de'i rang snang la skye 'gag med* BPD 440

[446] *klu sgrub kyis/ gang gis skye dang 'jig pa dag/ tshul 'di yis ni spangs gyur pa/ rten cing 'byung ba gsungs pa yis/ thub dbang de la phyag 'tshal lo/* BPD 440

support this claim. Gorampa then states, "From the perspective of the practitioners, appearances such as arising and ceasing are external appearances, but they are not internal appearances."[448] This means that ordinary conventions involve appearances of external things, and they are only perceived by unenlightened beings whose minds still engage in dualistic distinctions. In other words, the perception of conventional reality – which involves arising, ceasing, persons, desks, and so on – only occurs when the mind engages in dualistic distinctions. Once one eliminates dualistic distinctions and has internal appearances, such conventions do not arise.

This appears to present a significant problem. If buddhas do not engage in dualistic distinctions, and external phenomena do not appear to them at all, then it seems as though it would be impossible for a buddha to work in the world for the sake of sentient beings. After all, buddhas teach, express compassion, and engage in myriad activities that involve engagement with the conventional. Gorampa responds to this issue as follows:

> The reflection of Indra appearing on a ground of beryl seems to arise and dissolve because of having and lacking qualities of the ground. However, Indra does not arise or dissolve in that way.[449] This example demonstrates that although the physical body of the buddha – which appears to the minds of practitioners depending on whether or not virtuous qualities exist in their minds – appears as arising and dissolving, there is no arising and dissolving of the buddha himself.[450]

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[447] *'jug par/ de tshe skye ba med cing 'gag pa med/ ces pa'i 'grel par/ ye shes kyi rang bzhin can gyi sku shes bya'i bud shing skam po ma lus pa bsregs pa las shes bya skye ba med pas skye ba med pa dang ldan par gyur pa gang yin pa 'di ni sangs rgyas rnams kyi chos kyi sku'o/* BPD 440

[448] *gdul bya'i ngor skye 'gag tu snang ba ni gzhan snang yin gyi rang snang ma yin* BPD 440

[449] This refers to an example in the *Uttaratāntra*: "The image of Indra [RG 4.4-20] and his court is reflected in the earth, which has been made into shining lapis lazuli as a result of the meritorious deeds of beings. Even though that image is not real, seeing it inspires beings to gather merit so that they too can be reborn like Indra. The images appear, but Indra remains without the intention to do anything. He is unmoving yet effects this great deed for the benefit of others. The images appear and disappear according to the purity or otherwise of the minds of beings." (Hookham 1991, 254.)

[450] *baiDUrya'i sa gzhi la shar ba'i brgya byin gyi gzugs brnyan sa'i yon tan dang bral ma bral gyis skye 'jig tu snang yang de lta bu'i skye 'jig brgya byin la med pa dper byas nas/ gdul bya'i rgyud kyi dge ba yod*

Here, Gorampa argues that although a buddha does not engage in the conventional realm himself, he appears to do so from the perspective of ordinary persons in a manner that depends upon their own virtue. It is only a buddha's physical form (*gzugs sku, rūpakāya*) which appears to exist in the conventional realm, subject to conventional experiences such as sickness, old age, and death. This is a significant point for Gorampa. By arguing in this way, Gorampa manages to interpret the relationship between buddhas and the conventional truth in such a way that buddhas can be said to *engage* with the conventional without actually *experiencing* it.[451]

Concluding this section, Gorampa reminds us that everything that is explained in words or conceived by thoughts is necessarily conventional, and that although a buddha doesn't experience these conventional things himself, he can still interact with ordinary beings:

> In brief, the following are all conceptual proliferations: the eight phenomena such as arising and ceasing which are mentioned in the salutatory verse of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*; the twenty-seven topics, from conditions to views, which are the objects of analysis in the twenty-seven chapters; and, since they are illustrated by those, all worldly conventional establishments. As such, when on the buddha-ground a single instant of primordial awareness directly knows them as one taste with the *dharmadhātu,* those conceptual proliferations do not appear. Nevertheless, there is no contradiction in employing conventional terminology to say that "They are realized (*rtogs*)." This is because the conventional term "realized" refers to the mere capacity to show disciples those proliferations such as arising and ceasing as they truly are, through having eliminated imputations that are predicated of arising, ceasing and so on. One eliminates those imputations through actualizing the *dharmadhātu* that is devoid of arising, ceasing and so on.[452]

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med kyi dbang gis blo snang gi gzugs sku la skye 'jig tu snang yang sangs rgyas rang la skye 'jig med par gsungs pa'i phyir ro/ BPD 440-441

[451] Gorampa's Indian predecessors held similar views of buddhahood. For example, Candrakīrti explains a buddha's teaching in terms of the three bodies (Dunne 1996, 548–550.) And Kamalaśīla refers to a buddha's omniscience as "unseeing" (*adarśana*) (McClintock 2010, 354.)

[452] *mdor na rtsa ba shes rab kyi mchod brjod kyi skabs kyi skye 'gag la sogs pa brgyad dang/ rab byed nyi shu rtsa bdun gyis dpyad par bya ba'i rkyen nas lta ba'i bar nyi shu rtsa bdun dang/ des mtshon nas*

In this important passage, Gorampa explains that not just arising and ceasing, but *all topics* mentioned in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (which, moreover, are related to all conventional entities) are necessarily conventional and conceptual, and are therefore not objects of a Buddha's awareness. It is still acceptable to say, however, that a buddha knows all phenomena, because from the perspective of a buddha's nondual awareness, conventional appearances are indistinguishable from the ultimate truth. In this way, Gorampa argues that there is no problem with asserting that buddhas no longer engage in conceptual thought, yet continue to operate in the world for the sake of sentient beings.

Gorampa appears to be walking a very fine line, here. Each of the above five inquiries regarding a buddha's awareness results in an answer that is qualified in some way, so as to avoid any sort of absolute or essential position. In other words, from a buddha's own perspective, the two truths, dualistic appearances, awareness, mind and mental functions, and concepts such as arising and ceasing cannot be said to exist *as such* (i.e., in the sense that they are identified as entities that exist in relation to other things), but they *can* be said to exist from the perspective of ordinary beings. Again, just as we saw in the previous chapters concerning the two truths, that which is understood to be real or true depends on one's perspective. The same can be said for a buddha's mind. While we can explain a buddha's awareness in terms of the ultimate truth, omniscience, or the *dharmadhātu*, the fact is that from a buddha's perspective, his own awareness cannot be described in any of these ways, because from the perspective of an enlightened mind that is free from conceptual proliferations, nothing at all can be described.

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kun rdzob tha snyad kyi rnam gzhag thams cad spros pa yin pas de dag sangs rgyas kyi sar chos kyi dbyings su ro gcig par ye shes skad gcig ma gcig gis mngon du gyur pa'i tshe spros pa de dag mi snang yang de dag rtogs zhes pa'i tha snyad ni mi 'gal te skye 'gag med pa la sogs pa'i chos dbyings mngon du gyur pas skye 'gag la sogs pa'i chos can la sgro 'dogs chod nas gdul bya la ji lta ba bzhin ston nus pa tsam la rtogs pa'i tha snyad mdzad pa'i phyir ro/ BPD 441-442

Gorampa's responses to these five inquiries can be seen as a sort of linguistic analogue of *spros bral*. By arguing that the conventional truth, for example, neither appears nor does not appear (i.e., it does not appear as a separate truth in the way that ordinary persons understand it, but it also cannot be said to be nonexistent, because it is inseparable from the ultimate), Gorampa avoids falling into any view that might be characterized as "extreme." At the same time, however, it is clear that he does hold *some* view about a buddha's awareness; Gorampa wants to show that there is something that it is like to be a buddha. By framing his discussion in terms of differing perspectives, Gorampa manages to argue that there is something specific that it is like to be a buddha, while maintaining that this specific what-it-is-likeness cannot be conceptualized or explained.[453]

Competing views: Candrakīrti on Buddhahood

The *Synopsis*, like the majority of Tibetan Madhyamaka writings, is heavily informed by the work of Candrakīrti.[454] Gorampa relies on Candrakīrti (specifically his *Madhyamakāvatāra*) to justify many of his arguments, and for the most part, the two philosophers are in agreement with respect to Madhyamaka's ontological commitments and styles of rational analysis. When we consider the nature of a buddha's awareness, Gorampa follows Candrakīrti more literally than do Tsongkhapa and his Gelugpa

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[453] This bears a certain resemblance to Michael Sells' concept of "unsaying" (which is how he translates the Greek *apophasis*): "Every act of unsaying demands or presupposes a previous saying. Apophasis can reach a point of intensity such that no single proposition concerning the transcendent can stand on its own. Any saying (even a negative saying) demands a correcting proposition, an unsaying. But that correcting proposition which unsays the previous proposition is in itself a 'saying' that must be 'unsaid' in turn." (Sells 1994, 3.)

[454] Following the translation of his texts into Tibetan in the eleventh century, Candrakīrti becomes a semi-canonical figure in Tibetan Madhyamaka traditions, on par with Nāgārjuna. For more on Candrakīrti's influence in Tibetan Buddhist literature, see Vose 2009.

successors,[455] but there are nevertheless some subtle differences that set Gorampa's views apart. By highlighting some of the points of divergence between Gorampa and Candrakīrti, we will be able to appreciate some of the more subtle aspects of the ways in which Gorampa's arguments about the two truths and the tetralemma in the Basis chapter of the *Synopsis* inform his views of buddhahood in the Path and Result chapters.

In his presentation of the two truths in the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, Candrakīrti argues that one of the main differences between the mind of an *ārya* and that of a buddha is that while the merely conventional (*kun rdzob tsam*) appears to the former, it does not appear to the latter at all:

> Because they live with the ignorance characterized by the obscuration to omniscience (*shes bya'i sgrib pa*),[456] [the merely conventional] appears to *ārya*s whose sphere of activity has appearances, but it does not appear to those whose sphere of activity is devoid of appearances. Because the buddhas have completely awakened to all phenomena, it is asserted that the fluctuation of mind and mental factors is eradicated (*gtan log pa*).[457]

That is, while an *ārya* in the post-meditative state perceives and engages with conventional phenomena (although, of course, she does not perceive such phenomena as conventionally *true*), a buddha does not perceive such phenomena at all. Candrakīrti states here, in no uncertain terms, that a buddha does not perceive the conventional. The

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[455] See, for example, Tsongkhapa's commentary on the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*. For other accounts of the differences between Tsongkhapa and Sakyapa commentators, see Cabezón and Dargyay 2007; Komarovski 2011.

[456] Madhyamaka espouses two types of ignorance: obscurations to liberation (*nyon sgrib, kleśāvaraṇa*), and obscurations to omniscience (*shes sgrib, jñeyavaraṇa*). These are sometimes translated as emotional obscurations and cognitive obscurations, respectively.

[457] *de yang shes bya'i sgrib pa'i mtshan nyid can ma rig pa tsam kun tu spyod pa'i phyir snang ba dang bcas pa'i spyod yul can gyi 'phags pa rnams la snang gi snang ba med pa'i spyod yul mnga' ba rnams la ni ma yin no/ sangs rgyas rnams la ni chos thams cad rnam pa thams cad du mngon par rdzogs par byang chub pa'i phyir/ sems dang sems las byung ba'i rgyu ba gtan log par 'dod pa yin no/* (*Madhyamakāvatāra* 110; commentary on VI:28)

fluctuation of mind and mental factors has ceased completely for a buddha, and therefore, the conventional no longer appears in any way whatsoever.[458]

Before considering the implications of Candrakīrti's position, let us recall Gorampa's understanding of this issue, presented above:

> Conventional truth which is the inseparability of the two truths *does exist*, because it is necessarily a part of the two truths. Since these are *two truths which appear specifically to a buddha*, they are not synonymous with the two truths that are taught to practitioners.[459] (Emphasis added.)

While Candrakīrti is explicit in stating that the merely conventional does not appear to buddhas at all, Gorampa does not wish to push the issue quite so far. Gorampa is explicit in asserting that *both* truths appear to a buddha, although he qualifies this assertion in a very specific way. He argues that the conventional truth which appears to buddhas is *not* the conventional truth that appears to ordinary beings. From the perspective of a buddha who has eliminated all dualistic distinctions, the conventional truth appears, but it appears as that which is inseparable from the ultimate truth. In other words, conventional *phenomena* – such as tables, persons, thoughts, and so on – do not appear to a buddha, but the conventional truth does nevertheless appear. It appears, Gorampa argues, nonconceptually and nondually, as that which is inseparable from the ultimate. It is necessary for buddhas to have an appearance of the conventional – even if it does not appear in the same ways as it appears to non-buddhas – if buddhas are to continue to function in the world for the sake of sentient beings.

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[458] For a detailed explanation of Candrakīrti's views of buddhahood (along with a helpful comparison to Dharmakīrti), see Dunne 1996.

[459] *bden gnyis zung du 'jug pa'i kun rdzob bden pa ni yod de/ zung 'jug la ya gyal dgos pa'i phyir ro/ 'di ni sangs rgyas rang snang gi bden pa gnyis yin pas/ gdul bya la bstan pa'i bden pa gnyis dang don mi gcig go/* BPD 436

This is one of the few instances in the *Synopsis* in which we find Gorampa struggling to maintain a literal reading of Candrakīrti. Gorampa follows Candrakīrti quite closely in the earlier sections of his text which deal primarily with ontology and rational analysis, but he appears reluctant to embrace Candrakīrti's conception of buddhahood, in which the conventional does not appear at all. This reluctance likely comes at least partially from the influence of the *pramāṇa* (*tshad ma*) tradition on Tibetan Madhyamaka, as well as influences from tantra. Throughout the *Synopsis* and many of his other writings, Gorampa references the work of Sakya Paṇḍita (*sa skya pan di ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan*, 1182-1251), a highly influential scholar whose views were largely informed by the seventh-century Indian logician and epistemologist Dharmakīrti. It is beyond the scope of this project to analyze the extent of Dharmakīrti's influence on Gorampa's views in any detail, but suffice it to say that the *pramāṇa* tradition greatly influenced Gorampa – along with many other Tibetan Mādhyamikas – in ways that it did not influence Candrakīrti (who, in fact, is thought to have been highly skeptical of the *pramāṇa* tradition as it was developed by Dignāga at least).[460]

At the level of analysis that assumes the existence of extra-mental objects, Dharmakīrti's account of buddhahood involves a mind that engages with ultimately real particulars, but not with conceptually constructed universals.[461] This account relies on a slightly different ontology than that of Candrakīrti and Gorampa, but the important point to note is that according to Dharmakīrti, buddhas perceive entities. If we consider Candrakīrti (for whom buddhahood involves no appearances of conventional phenomena at all) and Dharmakīrti (for whom buddhahood involves the direct perception of

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[460] For a thorough presentation of Tibetan interpretations of Dharmakīrti, see Dreyfus 1997.
[461] For an account of Dharmakīrti's description of buddhahood, see Dunne 1996. For more on Dharmakīrti, see Dunne 2004; Dreyfus 1997.

particular entities), we can see that Gorampa's view of buddhahood occupies a space that is in between these two thinkers, although it does not align squarely with either. Gorampa asserts that the conventional appears to buddhas, but that distinct *things*, per se, do not appear.

Bringing Tsongkhapa into consideration provides us with a bit more nuance on this issue. Recall from chapter two that according to Tsongkhapa, the two truths are divided on the basis of objects as opposed to perspectives, and that as such, enlightened beings are capable of perceiving the ultimate natures of objects as well as their conventional natures. This means, in short, that according to Tsongkhapa, buddhas perceive *things*. Thus, we can see that both Gorampa and Tsongkhapa occupy some space in between Candrakīrti and Dharmakīrti with respect to a buddha's awareness, but Gorampa aligns more closely with the former, while Tsongkhapa aligns more closely with the latter.

The implications of this divergence between Candrakīrti and Gorampa are significant; for both thinkers, conventional phenomena do not appear to buddhas. However, while Candrakīrti asserts that nothing *at all* appears to a buddha's awareness, Gorampa contends that there is *something* that appears. This "something" is, however, nondual, nonconceptual, and inexpressible, and appears to a buddha's awareness as something that is not separate from that awareness itself. As we have already seen, Gorampa repeatedly reminds us that a buddha's awareness cannot be accurately characterized through words or thoughts, but he goes on to describe a buddha's awareness in the following five ways:

- The two truths appear to the perspective of a buddha, but they are not differentiated.

- There are appearances (*snang ba*) for a buddha, but they are not ordinary, dualistic appearances. Instead, they are a buddha's "own appearances" (*rang snang*).

- A buddha's awareness is the inseparability of the *dharmadhātu* and the mind.

- Mind and mental factors do not exist as separate things.

- Conventional *objects* do not appear to a buddha, but it is still acceptable to say that a buddha knows all phenomena, because the conventional and ultimate truths are undifferentiated in a buddha's mind.

All five of these points highlight an important aspect of a buddha's awareness: it is free from all conceptual, dualistic structuring. The two truths, appearances, mind and mental factors, and so on are all understood to exist differently for buddhas than they do for ordinary persons. The conventional and ultimate truths are not differentiated into two. Appearances do not exist in the sense of an object appearing to a subject. A buddha has awareness, but this awareness is the inseparability of the buddha's mind with reality itself. Mind and mental factors do not exist as separate things. Conventional objects do not appear (because the appearance of any objects necessarily implies duality), but a buddha is still understood as being omniscient.

Through this description of buddhahood, Gorampa presents a buddha's mind as something that is free from ignorance and conceptual proliferations, while still remaining capable of being aware of reality. Gorampa's buddha is not, in other words, a robo-buddha, devoid of a mind entirely.

Implications and further questions

In short, Gorampa outlines a system of Madhyamaka in which one begins by understanding that the two truths are divided on the basis of mind. Based on this understanding of things, one utilizes analysis to refute the four extremes of existence,

nonexistence, both, and neither at the ultimate level. One first applies analytic reasoning to refute each of these four possibilities individually and in succession, and then, one meditates on these analyses in order to realize the refutation of all four extremes simultaneously. The resulting instantaneous moment of realization is the initial experience of *spros bral*, which marks an initial direct experience of the actual ultimate truth that is realized. After this initial experience, one continues to meditate, alternating between meditative equipoise and the post-meditative state, practicing virtuous activity in the post-meditative state until eventually, the distinction between the two states becomes indistinguishable. When this occurs, and one can constantly and effortlessly remain in a state of freedom from conceptual proliferations, one is said to have reached buddhahood.

On this model, from a buddha's own perspective, there is only awareness, free from conceptual proliferations. There is no differentiation between awareness and objects of awareness, and it is in this sense that we can say that a buddha is omniscient. A buddha's mind is all-knowing, precisely because when a mind is in a state of *spros bral* there is nothing to be known, and there is nothing that is unknown. This type of omniscience is what McClintock has labeled "spontaneous omniscience," understood as "a kind of *unknowing* or *nonknowing* that nevertheless appears to unawakened sentient beings to be total omniscience."[462] From the perspective of a buddha's nondual, nonconceptual enlightened awareness, there is only non-propositional knowing itself, devoid of dualistic object-subject structures, but from the perspective of ordinary beings

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[462] For a detailed treatment of omniscience, see McClintock 2010. See especially pp. 347-359 for an explanation of "spontaneous omniscience." This is distinguished from other understandings of omniscience, based on the Mahāyāna notion that external objects do not exist, and that therefore there are no *things* to be known by buddhas.

who carve up the world in terms of objects and subjects, it is acceptable to describe a buddha as knowing every*thing*.

A buddha lacks conceptual thought, but this does not mean that a buddha is some kind of insentient robot or zombie, whose mind is completely blank.[463] A buddha's mind is, on the contrary, completely full; it is pure awareness that does not discriminate or distinguish between different objects, or between awareness and objects of awareness. It is simply awareness itself. Gorampa argues that a buddha "manifests numerous enlightened activities without having conceptual consciousness,"[464] meaning that his actions are spontaneous, unmediated by thoughts.

This understanding of a buddha's awareness contrasts with that of Candrakīrti, who argues that the conventional does not appear to a buddha. For him, compassion plays an important role in explaining a buddha's ability to teach in the world. In order to account for a buddha's activities in the ordinary world, Candrakīrti compares a buddha's awareness to a spinning potter's wheel, in the sense that a great amount of effort is required to set it in motion at the outset, but eventually, it continues to operate on its own, without any intention or intervention. He explains,

> The strong potter's wheel turns very quickly because he has long striven at it. Even though the potter no longer exerts himself, the wheel turns, and we see that it is a cause for ewers and such. Likewise, while (a buddha) makes no conceptual effort, s/he abides in the body whose essence is Dharma, and that (*dharmakāya's*) activity is impelled by beings' distinctive virtue and the special prayers (that the buddha made when s/he was a bodhisattva) – how inconceivable![465]

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[463] Gorampa follows Candrakīrti quite closely in his descriptions of an enlightened mind. For a thorough explanation of Candrakīrti's stance on enlightened awareness, see Dunne 1996.

[464] *rnam par rtog pami mnga' bat phrin las sna rshogs 'byung ba/* BPD 449

[465] *Madhyamakāvatāra* XXII:6-7, translated by Dunne 1996, 549.

Here, a buddha is described as being capable of functioning in the conventional, conceptual world, even though he himself does not employ concepts or actually perceive the conventional realm.

Gorampa, on the other hand, attempts to avoid Candrakīrti's problem by arguing that buddhas *do* have appearances, and that the conventional *does* appear for them (albeit in a radically different way than it appears to ordinary persons). There seems to be a contradiction, here: on the one hand, Gorampa argues that one must strive to eradicate all conceptual proliferations, and that a buddha's mind is completely free of dualistic, conventional, conceptual thought. On the other hand, Gorampa wants to avoid Candrakīrti's "robo-buddha" problem,[466] so he argues that once conceptual proliferations are eliminated completely, we cannot say that *nothing* at all appears to a buddha's awareness. Gorampa's final description of a buddha's mind does, in fact, seem to point toward *something* appearing. This "something" is described in many ways, as the union of the two truths, as the *dharmadhātu*, as the inseparability of the *dharmadhātu* and the mind, and so on. While none of these terms refer to conventional phenomena, they still indicate the presence of some sort of mental content. After all, if the distinguishing feature of a buddha's mind were the complete absence of all mental activity whatsoever, then anyone could become a buddha by slipping into a deep sleep, or becoming brain-dead.[467]

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[466] Candrakīrti, or course, did not see this view of buddhahood as a problem. Later interpreters, influenced by the *pramāṇa* tradition, were troubled by an account of buddhahood that was completely devoid of all mental content in its entirety.

[467] This, as we have seen in previous chapters, is one of Tsongkhapa's main criticisms against the Sakyapas. This is why Gorampa is attempting to walk a fine line in his description of buddhahood, to suggest that something remains (even if that "something" cannot be conceptualized).

In a purely abstract sense, it is perhaps difficult to reconcile Gorampa's freedom from conceptual proliferations on the one hand, with the presence of nondual appearances on the other. However, if we revisit Ryle's distinction between knowing that and knowing how outlined at the beginning of this chapter, we might be able to better understand Gorampa's overall position. Knowledge of conventional things is necessarily propositional; it relies on object-subject duality. We can understand knowledge of conventional things in terms of knowledge-that. Knowledge of the ultimate, however, is nonconceptual, nondual, and non-propositional (as long as we are referring to the ultimate that is realized, and not to the ultimate that is taught). This is knowledge-how. So, we can say that according to Gorampa, the goal of Madhyamaka is to abandon knowledge-that in favor of knowledge-how. While enlightened knowledge-how is based on the previous cultivation of knowledge-that, the former cannot be reduced to the latter. In fact, in order to truly cultivate knowledge-how, Gorampa argues that all forms of knowledge-that must be abandoned completely.

We can say, therefore, that Gorampa is a weak intellectualist with respect to a buddha's knowledge. The spontaneous, nonconceptual compassion of a buddha is a manifestation of his non-propositional knowledge-how, but ordinary persons, perceiving the buddha as though he were engaging with the conventional truth in rational ways, describe his enlightened activity propositionally, as knowledge-that.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the opening verses of the sixth chapter of the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, Candrakīrti writes:

> Even though one is an ordinary person, when he hears about emptiness, internal joy arises again and again; his eyes damp with tears from that joy, the hairs on his body standing on end – that person has the seed of the mind of a perfect buddha.[468]

This description of an ordinary person's reaction to hearing about emptiness is how we might imagine Gorampa must have felt when contemplating the mind of a fully awakened buddha. Someone like Gorampa must have been filled with a similar sense of awe when contemplating the nondual, nonconceptual, enlightened awareness of a buddha. Buddhahood is a state that is, presumably, attainable by any sentient being who develops the resolve to embark on this path, and for someone like Gorampa to realize that he has the ability to educate others about this process would be quite remarkable.

Although Gorampa's writings are capable of educating his followers about the nature of buddhahood, Gorampa is careful to remind his readers that the ultimate truth is something that must be experienced in order to be fully known. Intellectual knowledge of the concept "ultimate truth" is not the same as directly seeing things as they really are, no matter how diligently one studies Gorampa's texts, or however intimately acquainted one might be with concepts pertaining to the ultimate. If Gorampa is right about this

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[468] *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI:4-5a: *pṛthagjanvatve 'pi niśamya śūnyatām pramodam antar labhate muhur muhuḥ/ prasādajāsrāvanipāta-(pramodajāsrāvinayata-) locanaḥ tanūruhotphullatanuś ca jāyate // yat tasya sambuddhadhiyo 'sti bījaṁ* Huntington 1995, 226n6–7. Tib.: *so so skye bp'i dus na'ang stong pa nyid thos nas/ nang du rab tu dga' ba yang dang yang du 'byung/ rab tu dga' ba las byung mchi mas mig brlan zhing/ lus kyi ba spu ldang bar gyur pa gang yin pa// de la rjogs pa'i sangs rgyas blo yi sa bon yod/*

understanding of the ultimate truth, then it follows that a buddha must be more than a skilled philosopher; he must possess a special type of mind that is capable of engaging with appearances in a nondual, nonconceptual way. At the same time, an experience of reality must be based on the prior cultivation of certain kinds of concepts, which means that a buddha must also be more than an advanced meditator. A buddha must have arrived at her nondual, nonconceptual apprehension of appearances through prior rational analysis. For Gorampa, this prior analysis is the hallmark of *spros bral*, and it is what sets this mental state apart from simply "non-thinking." Perhaps *spros bral* is better understood as a sort of "unthinking;" it is something that comes about after one deconstructs appearances through analysis, and then turns that same deconstructive analysis in on itself.

The View of No-View

The process of creating and then undoing conceptual structures results in a final view that is not actually a view at all. Gorampa describes this throughout the *Synopsis* in terms of the "not finding" (*ma rnyed pa*) of things. One first conceives of things as truly existing, but when one analyzes that concept, one cannot find true existence anywhere. One is similarly unable to find true non-existence, both, or neither through subsequent investigations. Gorampa's process involves carrying out such thorough analyses of all types of conceptual thought that one is forced, through the not finding of anything, to conclude that there is no possible thought that can be grasped and upheld as "The Madhyamaka View."

Through emphasizing this non-view, Gorampa likely sees himself as upholding in the strictest sense Nāgārjuna's statement in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*:

> If I had any thesis, then I would be at fault.
>
> Since I have no thesis, I am completely without fault.[469]

Gorampa attempts to align himself strictly with this passage by articulating *spros bral* in terms of the "not finding" of any view. In order to emphasize this non-view in the *Synopsis*, Gorampa introduces other characters into his philosophical story. He categorizes his interlocutors according to the views that they purportedly hold: Tsongkhapa has a view of "the absence of true existence;" Hashang has a view of "not thinking;" Dolpopa has a view of "other-emptiness." In contrasting himself with these and other characters, Gorampa manages to highlight his point that *spros bral* must be understood in terms of the complete freedom from *all* views.

If Gorampa were alive today, he might similarly juxtapose his own (non-)view with the views of the analytic philosophers discussed in the preceding chapters. In doing so, he might show us where contemporary analytic philosophy falls short in explaining Nāgārjuna's writings. Philosophy is, for Gorampa, more than mere analysis. It is something that is performed, practiced, and experienced. Gorampa frames philosophy in the *Synopsis* in terms of something that is intimately connected to the world that we inhabit. As such, the practice of philosophy is the practice of figuring out how to live ethically and purposefully in the world.

Gorampa's treatment of the tetralemma, for example, can help us to embrace contradictions without resorting to dialetheism. While there is nothing necessarily *wrong* with dialetheism, it strikes me as an unnecessary and inaccurate approach to understanding the Madhyamaka tetralemma (and likely would have seemed odd to

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[469] Skt. *yadi kā cana pratijñā syān me tata eṣa me bhaved doṣaḥ/ nāsti ca mama pratijñā tasmān naivāsti me doṣaḥ//* Tib. *gal te ngas dam bca' 'ga' yod/ des na nga la skyon de yod/ nga la dam bca' med pa na/ nga la skyon med kho na yin/* (*Vigrahavyāvartanī* 29). Lindtner 2002, 80.

Gorampa as well). Early Mādhyamikas such as Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva were clearly advocates of rational, logical thought, and their formulations of tetralemmic analysis in terms of statements such as, "not existent, not nonexistent, not both, not neither" ought to be read as straightforwardly as possible, without adding unnecessary qualifications. At the same time, however, their aim in invoking tetralemmic analysis was not to arrive at some clearly defined conceptual understanding of reality; their aim was to show practitioners the ways in which a conceptual understanding of reality is inadequate and can be transcended.

This is where Gorampa's approach to the tetralemma diverges from that of analytic philosophers such as Garfield and Priest. Garfield and Priest are thoroughly entrenched in a project which rests on the assumption that knowledge about "the way things really are" can be achieved through a thorough understanding of logic. As such, they contend that the Madhyamaka tetralemma is a tool that must be understood in terms of logical propositions. Gorampa, on the other hand, comes from a perspective in which knowledge of "the way things really are" must be experienced rather than conceptualized. For him, the Madhyamaka tetralemma is a soteriological tool. One can utilize logic in order to make conceptual sense of each of the four negations individually, but one must then internalize that knowledge and implement it in the world. For Gorampa, fully comprehending the absence of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither results in a state in which one realizes emptiness. And in realizing emptiness, one realizes the impermanence and interconnectedness of all conventional things. We might plausibly extend this reasoning to argue that such a realization has an important ethical dimension:

once one has come to a complete realization of the interconnectedness of all things in the world, one cannot help but act compassionately in the world.[470]

Similarly, if we consider Gorampa's understanding of the way in which the ultimate truth is realized, we can see that it is a type of knowledge-how. As argued in chapter 5, this state of knowing-how is brought about through the cultivation of certain types of knowing-that, but it cannot be *reduced* to knowing-that. This is yet another point of distinction between Gorampa's brand of Madhyamaka and analytic philosophy. According to Gorampa, the act of doing philosophy is something that is radically transformative.[471] It induces more than just a clear conception of reality; it paves the way for a complete, direct realization of the way things really are. This is a state that cannot be achieved through rational analysis alone. If we consider the enlightened mind of a buddha, which Gorampa describes as unceasingly working for the benefit of all sentient beings, we can see that he intends for his philosophical project to be something that profoundly affects the mind.

A note on the conventional

As Gorampa has shown, "correct seeing" can be understood in multiple ways. This is the case with different levels of analysis pertaining to the minds of different types of beings (see chapter 3), but it is also the case with respect to an ordinary person's understanding of the conventional truth. As Gorampa makes clear, there are multiple ways to get the conventional "right." Appearances can be correctly understood, for example, in terms of mind, or in terms of external objects. The important issue for

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[470] Gorampa does not make this claim explicitly in the *Synopsis*, but I do believe that this position can be inferred based on his emphasis on emptiness in the Basis section, followed by his emphasis on cultivating compassion through practice in the Path section.

[471] In this sense, we might place Gorampa's views of philosophy alongside those of Pierre Hadot, in terms of being "a way of life." (Hadot 1995, 264–275.)

Gorampa is that a correct understanding of appearances leads to the eventual realization of the ultimate. The criteria for "correct seeing," in other words, is that which allows one to eventually deconstruct the scaffolding of the conventional.

Because a realization of the ultimate involves the complete elimination of all conceptual proliferations in their entirety, the specific concepts that one employs in order to eventually arrive at such a state are ultimately not important. Through making sense of the conventional (however it might be understood), one begins to make sense of the ultimate truth that is taught. The conceptual structures of the conventional, in other words, allow one to construct an idea of "the Madhyamaka view" (even though ultimately, there is no view). Like the temporary scaffolding on a construction site, however, these conceptual structures are eventually no longer needed, and are subsequently removed. Conceptual structures, in other words, are necessary in order to bring about a realization of the ultimate, but once the ultimate is realized, these conceptual structures disappear. They are extraneous to the realization that is the goal.

This contrasts with someone like Tsongkhapa, who contends that one must work to develop one very specific concept of emptiness in order to realize the ultimate truth. Emptiness, for Tsongkhapa, is an object (*yul*). As such, a practitioner must work to understand the conventional in very specific ways, in order to eventually realize that very specific object directly. There is no room for flexibility about the conventional for someone like Tsongkhapa, because it is used to orient a practitioner toward a specific object. For Tsongkhapa, the conventional is not part of the temporary scaffolding that allows one to eventually realize the nature of reality nonconceptually; rather, the conventional is part of the structure of reality itself.

Gorampa the Mādhyamika(?)

In short, Gorampa outlines a process-oriented approach that embraces rational analysis, deemphasizes ontology, and results in a nonconceptual realization of reality. This view places him at odds with Tsongkhapa, Hashang, and a host of other Mādhyamikas, but nevertheless manages to align with the writings of Candrakīrti in significant ways. This is because Gorampa, like all Tibetan Mādhyamikas in the fifteenth century, is not only engaged in a philosophical project, but also in a doxographical one.

Madhyamaka might be seen as largely a commentarial process. All Mādhyamikas are, in one way or another, engaged in the project of interpreting Nāgārjuna. Nāgārjuna's Indian successors were concerned with interpreting his foundational Madhyamaka texts, and later Tibetan Mādhyamikas continued this process. By focusing extensively on the writings of Candrakīrti[472] and his contemporaries,[473] as well as on Dharmakīrti and the *pramāṇa* tradition,[474] Tibetans crafted their own flavor of Madhyamaka, which was more or less fully formed by the time Gorampa lived in the fifteenth century.

As a result of this particularly Tibetan brand of Madhyamaka thought, Tibetan Mādhyamikas such as Gorampa have relied on certain shared assumptions. Gorampa and his primary interlocutors agree, for example, on the two truths doctrine, on the notion that emptiness is the final view of Madhyamaka, and that Nāgārjuna's tetralemmic analysis is a useful tool for realizing that emptiness. However, different scholars and sects tend to disagree over the specific divisions between the two truths, the nature of emptiness, and the employment of the tetralemma. Over time, as the lines between religious authority and temporal power blurred in Tibet, philosophical debates became increasingly heated,

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[472] See Vose, *Resurrecting Candrakīrti*.
[473] See Dreyfus and McClintock 2003.
[474] See Dreyfus 1997.

and sectarian divisions became increasingly rigid. By Gorampa's lifetime, the divisions between Nyingma, Sakya, and Kagyu were deeply entrenched, and the newly-formed Ganden/Gelug sect was quickly asserting itself as a separate tradition.

These sectarian divides provided the impetus for Gorampa's polemical moves in the *Synopsis*. But it is worth pointing out that in spite of Gorampa's repeated criticisms of Tsongkhapa and others, these thinkers tend to agree on many more points than they disagree. It seems that in the course of the development of Tibetan thought, as the points of disagreement between two rivals grew more minute and detailed, the polemical rhetoric became grander and more aggressive. Regardless, it is this polemical setting that must be taken into account if we are to understand Gorampa's motivations and assumptions about his audience for the *Synopsis*.

Because of these polemical and doxographical divides, Gorampa must construct his own view in relation to the views of others. This is precisely why we see such overt attempts by Gorampa to distance himself from those with whom he disagrees in the *Synopsis*; he wants to be sure that his readers understand who he is *not*. But the same goes for the construction of Gorampa's own identity as well; he must utilize doxographical distinctions in order to present *himself* as someone who is to be taken seriously in the context of Tibetan Madhyamaka discourse. Because of his monastic affiliations and teaching lineages, Gorampa must identify as a Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika. That is, he must be seen as agreeing with his contemporaries that Candrakīrti's interpretation of Nāgārjuna is supreme, and his Madhyamaka commentaries must be seen as wholeheartedly supporting Candrakīrti's view. In the context of Madhyamaka writings in Gorampa's Sakya tradition, disagreeing with Candrakīrti would be tantamount to

disagreeing with Nāgārjuna, which would be the rough equivalent of disagreeing with the Buddha himself.[475] Thus, we see a number of explicit appeals to Candrakīrti throughout the *Synopsis*.

However, upon reading the *Synopsis* more carefully, we can find instances in which Gorampa diverges from a strict adherence to Candrakīrti's Madhyamaka, although he does this implicitly. Recall from Chapter 2 that Gorampa allows for different descriptions of the conventional; he states that while many people can understand appearances in terms of that which conforms to the world (i.e., according to Candrakīrti's Prāsaṅgika view), it is also acceptable to understand appearances as mind (i.e., according to Śāntarakṣita's Yogācāra-Svātantrika view). In this way, Gorampa manages to highlight some Yogācāra influences, while still maintaining his identity as a Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika.[476]

Chapter 5 noted a similar attempt by Gorampa to distance himself from Candrakīrti, this time with respect to his understanding of buddhahood. While Candrakīrti is explicit in arguing that buddhas do not have appearances of the conventional *at all*, Gorampa is reluctant to embrace this view wholeheartedly.[477] Instead, Gorampa appeals to and endorses Candrakīrti's view that buddhas do not have

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[475] Indeed, a Mādhyamika's disagreement with any scholar who is generally held in high esteem within one's community can result in exclusion. Gorampa's contemporary Śākya mchog ldan, for example, famously criticized Sakya Paṇḍita's *dom gsum rab dbye* by raising a series of questions on points that he believed required further clarification. Despite the fact that he was a more prolific author than Gorampa and his works were better preserved, Śākya mchog ldan remains a pheripheral figure in the Sakya tradition, whose writings are overshadowed by those of Gorampa. It is Gorampa's overt agreement with his Sakyapa predecessors that resulted in his status as the main proponent of the mainstream Sakyapa view.

[476] It is important to note that in addition to Yogācāra influences (due to Kamalaśīla and Śāntarakṣita), Gorampa – along with most Tibetan Mādhyamikas – is also heavily influenced by tantric views. In Gorampa's case, his primary tantric influences come from the Lamdre tradition.

[477] Gorampa is not the only Tibetan Mādhyamika to have a difficult time following Candrakīrti on this view. Tsongkhapa's *dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal*, for example, goes to great lengths to argue that buddhas have appearances, without explicitly contradicting Candrakīrti's writings.

appearances, but adds the qualification that buddhas just do not have appearances *in the same ways that ordinary persons have appearances*. That is, according to Gorampa, there are still appearances of the conventional for buddhas – they are just different kinds of appearances, in which the ultimate and conventional are inseparable. By adding this kind of qualification, Gorampa is able to present a view that differs from that of Candrakīrti, while still retaining his identity as a Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika.

Another point worth noting is Gorampa's stance on the divisions between the categories of Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika. While I have not addressed this issue in any detail in this dissertation, Gorampa discusses a number of points of distinction between the two schools at length in the *Synopsis*. While this is an issue that warrants further study, Gorampa's main argument is that the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika schools differ in terms of their methods of rational analysis, but they do not differ with respect to their final view of the ultimate. According to Gorampa, both schools assert that a realization of the ultimate truth is *spros bral*. This view contrasts with that of Tsongkhapa, who famously lists "eight difficult points" (*dka' gnad brgyad*) that separate the two schools with respect to their views of the ultimate. Tsongkhapa's approach results in a stance which ranks the view of Candrakīrti's Prāsaṅgika school higher than that of the Svātantrika. By arguing that the two schools differ in terms of method, but not final view, Gorampa once again manages to diverge from Candrakīrti (or, in this instance, the *character* that Candrakīrti plays in Tibetan doxographical discourse) implicitly, while avoiding explicitly contradicting anything that he says.[478]

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[478] The character of Candrakīrti as the proponent of Prāsaṅgika – and the categories of Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika as a whole – are understood by western-trained scholars as having been invented by Tibetan doxographers. See Dreyfus and McClintock 2003; Vose 2009.

When understood in a greater doxographical context, Gorampa's seeming openness toward other views in the *Synopsis* begins to look like a deliberate rhetorical strategy. By *explicitly* agreeing with Candrakīrti and the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka position, Gorampa manages to also *implicitly* put forth his own views that do not necessarily align with those of Candrakīrti. These views, if stated explicitly or independently, would likely lead to Gorampa being ostracized by his Madhyamaka community. If we take this strategy seriously, Gorampa begins to look less like an ecumenical scholar who is tolerant of a diversity of views, and more like a shrewd philosopher who utilizes rhetorical strategies and doxographical categories to his advantage. This is, in fact, part of what makes other scholars consider his views seriously. Because Gorampa manages to argue against his Mādhyamika opponents while simultaneously maintaining his identity as a Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika, Gorampa forces his interlocutors and their followers to pay attention to what he has to say.

This serious consideration of Gorampa's philosophy is what initially led to his texts being banned in Central Tibet in the seventeenth century, and what later led to the republication of his texts in the twentieth century. The re-publication of Gorampa's texts led to a resurgence of his views, not only among fellow Sakyapas, but also among some scholars belonging to the Kagyu and Nyingma schools. Gorampa's use of rational analysis while maintaining an emphasis on *spros bral* appealed to non-Sakyapa scholars belonging to traditions that historically placed greater emphasis on meditative practices than on logical reasoning but who also saw the value of and need for engaging in rational debate. Gorampa's style of philosophy enabled these scholars to develop their own rational arguments against Gelugpa-style reasoning, without compromising their

respective emphases on nonconceptual realization. Today, Kagyu and Nyingma scholars study Gorampa's philosophical texts at Sakya monastic institutions, and Sakyapa scholars teach philosophy in some Kagyu and Nyingma monasteries.

While I believe that Gorampa is, on the whole, persuasive in his arguments in the *Synopsis*, there are some instances in which he appears to be walking a very fine line between Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, especially when we consider his views concerning the ultimate truth.[479] His inquiries into the nature of a buddha's mind in the Result chapter, for example, betray his affinity for the Yogācāra view. While Candrakīrti (and, therefore, it would seem, all good Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas) explicitly denies the existence of appearances for buddhas, Gorampa suggests that buddhas actually *do* have appearances. A strict follower of Candrakīrti (and therefore, of the so-called Prāsaṅgika "tradition" that Tibetan doxographers claim that he began) would deny the existence of any appearances at the level of buddhahood, because to affirm *anything* at the ultimate level – even emptiness itself – would be anathema to the Prāsaṅgika view. Gorampa, however, is clearly arguing for the presence of *something* at the level of buddhahood, even if that "something" cannot be labeled as such. The same can be said for all of the other inquiries about the nature of buddhahood that Gorampa addresses: with respect to the presence of the two truths, enlightened awareness (*ye shes*), and so on.

At times, it appears as though Gorampa is attempting to walk so fine a line between Yogācāra and Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka that he occasionally steps onto one side or the other. This might be an inevitable and unavoidable outcome of his rhetorical strategy; when one attempts to traverse too narrow a path, one is likely to overstep one's

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[479] Here, I mean "Madhyamaka" and "Yogācāra" in terms of essentialized, doxographical categories as they tend to be articulated in Tibetan Buddhist texts.

bounds from time to time. However, perhaps this is actually a deliberate strategy on Gorampa's part; by overtly agreeing with Candrakīrti and at the same time covertly endorsing Yogācāra-influenced views, perhaps Gorampa is being deliberate in his trespasses over to the Yogācāra side. Perhaps he is able to couch his affinity for Yogācāra in terms of his endorsement for Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka in much the same way that a parent might sneak vegetables into his child's macaroni and cheese. I believe that this is the case for Gorampa; for such a skilled philosopher, his forays into Yogācāra are no mistake. At the same time, he understands that he must adhere to certain conventions and constraints if he wishes to be taken seriously by other Mādhyamikas.

Appendix: Topical Outline of the *Synopsis*

Note: This is only a partial topical outline of the text. Some parts of the Basis section of the *Synopsis* (§3.1.1.) are further divided into over twenty different levels of subsections. Here, subsections beyond nine levels have been omitted, for the sake of relative clarity. Page numbers in the Chinese edition (corresponding to the edition quoted in this dissertation) are listed in brackets.

Prologue [1]
1. Introduction to the explanation [8]
   1.1. Explanation of the importance of the tradition-founding master [8]
      1.1.1. The attainment of good qualities [9]
         1.1.1.1. The distinct abandonment [9]
         1.1.1.2. The distinct realization [9]
      1.1.2. The performing of enlightened activities [9]
         1.1.2.1. The way of obtaining the distinct perfection of generosity [10]
         1.1.2.2. Creating a foundation for the basis of the three jewels [10]
      1.1.3. The subsequent praise [10]
         1.1.3.1. Praise in terms of his birth-name [11]
         1.1.3.2. Praise in terms of his being renowned in the world [12]
         1.1.3.3. Praise in terms of what was shown in many sutras and tantras [12]
   1.2. The methods of division according to the tradition [13]
      1.2.1. The method of division according to the teacher [14]
         1.2.1.1. By means of scripture [14]
         1.2.1.2. By means of reasonings [14]
            1.2.1.2.1. The collection of reasonings [14]
               1.2.1.2.1.1. Refutations of the extremes which are imputed by opponents [15]
               1.2.1.2.1.2. Establishing our own system of Madhyamaka [16]
               1.2.1.2.1.3. Rejecting the arguments of the ways in which they derive from those other texts [16]
            1.2.1.2.2. The collection of praises [19]
               1.2.1.2.2.1. The praise for the basis [19]
               1.2.1.2.2.2. The praise for the path [20]
               1.2.1.2.2.3. The praise for the result [20]
            1.2.1.2.3. The collection of discourses [21]
      1.2.2. The explanation according to the perspectives of his successors [21]
   1.3. The method of engaging in the telling and listening of this system [25]
      1.3.1. The characteristics of the teacher who explains [25]
      1.3.2. The method of their instructions [26]
      1.3.3. The characteristics of the student who hears [30]
      1.3.4. The method of their hearing [31]
      1.3.5. Demonstration of the conditions for explaining and hearing [32]

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