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Tsong kha pa and the Foundations of Rationality

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Tsong kha pa and the Foundations of Rationality

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## Abstract

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By Edward Ray Falls

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the issue of the foundations of rationality as this arises in connection with Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. Tsong kha pa's distinction between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika methodologies presupposes that some modes of apprehension are infected with a problematic kind of conceptual structuring while other modes of apprehension are not affected by that particularly problematic type of conceptual structuring. Because of this situation, the Prāsaṅgikas' approach to reasoning with realists presents a feasible therapeutic technique. Prāsaṅgikas proceed by drawing the realists' attention to the mere existents which both sides are capable of apprehending and which both sides are willing to concede as indeed being legitimate entities. Both sides are capable of apprehending mere existents because realists and their Mādhyamika interlocutors each rely on the same non-problematic types of conceptual structuring for some of their perceptual experiences. Having established what exists through these reliable modes of apprehension, Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas next demonstrate that there are no intrinsically existent entities lurking among the mere existents which both they and their realist opponents accept. The Svātantrika approach, on the other hand, is problematic because Svātantrikas attempt to reason with realists by conceding at the start that there are indeed intrinsically existent entities. In the course of developing this interpretation, the author resists ontological and epistemological interpretations of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction, critiques several contemporary defenses of the Svātantrika position, and responds to the suggestion that Tsong kha pa's view is hopelessly circular.

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# Introduction

What we would like to get rid of, to exclude, namely the reign of sleep, finds itself annexed by reason, its empire, its function, by the hold of discourse, by the fact that man dwells in language, as someone said. Is it irrationalism to notice that, or to follow reason's line of thought in the text of the dream itself? It's possible for a whole psychoanalysis to go by before what might well happen does happen: we've reached the point where we wake up.

Lacan, *My Teaching*

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the issue of the foundations of rationality as this arises in connection with Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. My thesis is that, for Tsong kha pa, reasoning between two parties presupposes that the two parties share a common mode of perceptual apprehension. This is distinct from the claim that reasoning is founded on a perceptual Given experienced by both parties. Much of my argument is thus concerned with teasing apart a pair of separate concerns which can easily become entangled or conflated. On one hand there is the concern with the foundations of knowledge, to which the notion of the Given pertains, while on the other hand there is the concern with the foundations of rationality. I am interested in offering a picture of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction which explains his position as arising from a concern with the foundations of rationality. My picture thus presents a contrast with important contemporary interpretations of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction which put an emphasis on the notion that epistemological foundationalism is the crux of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. While I offer some critical comments on this epistemological interpretation, my aim here is not to claim that mine is the only or the best interpretation of Tsong kha pa. My intention is simply to present a plausible interpretation which readers might have overlooked and which I think should hold interest for contemporary philosophers, Buddhist and otherwise, who are concerned with the role of rationality in philosophy.

As many scholars have pictured it, Tsong kha pa's claim to originality rests primarily on his unique interpretation of how to draw a doxographical distinction between two sub-schools of Madhyamaka, the distinction between Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas and Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas. It is mainly due to Tsong kha pa's influence that the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction became a major doxographical distinction for subsequent Tibetan thinkers, although as Georges Dreyfus and Sara McClintock note, "Tibetan scholars, far from being unanimous in their understanding of the distinction, have been and continue to be bitterly divided over the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction."<sup>1</sup> On what might be called the standard picture of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction (with which the epistemological interpretation mentioned above agrees), the difference between Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas and Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas is a matter of Svātantrikas' and Prāsaṅgikas' holding completely different views of emptiness (*śūnyatā*; *stong pa nyid*). Hence, the standard picture suggests that the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction, for Tsong kha pa, turns on a substantive ontological disagreement which is of major soteriological significance for Mādhyamikas. This sets Tsong kha pa's view apart from the views of many other Tibetan Buddhist thinkers, earlier and later, who have held that the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction may best be characterized in terms of methodological differences about how Mādhyamikas should reason with non-Mādhyamikas, but who have "refuse[d] to draw any metaphysical implications from these differences."<sup>2</sup> My goal in this study is to present an alternative interpretation of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. I shall argue that Tsong kha pa need not be construed as making the difference between Svātantrikas' and Prāsaṅgikas' views turn on the sort of substantive ontological distinction indicated by the standard picture.

Tsong kha pa's primary concern in considering the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction is, on my reading, to find an explanation for how it is possible to use philosophical rationality *therapeutically* to treat a particular form of agnosia.<sup>3</sup> The condition which Tsong kha pa seeks to address bears

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1 Dreyfus and McClintock 2003: 4.

2 Cabezón 2003: 306.

3 In "Curing Diseases of Belief and Desire: Buddhist Philosophical Therapy," David Burton remarks that "It

comparison with the condition of Oliver Sacks' patient, the man who mistook his wife for a hat. As Sacks describes this patient's response when asked to look at a magazine cover showing a photo of "an unbroken expanse of Sahara dunes":

'I see a river,' he said. 'And a little guest-house with its terrace on the water. People are dining out on the terrace. I see coloured parasols here and there.' He was looking, if it was 'looking', right off the cover, into mid-air and confabulating non-existent features, as if the absence of features in the actual picture had driven him to imagine the river and the terrace and the coloured parasols.

I must have looked aghast, but he seemed to think he had done rather well. There was a hint of a smile on his face. He also appeared to have decided that the examination was over, and started to look round for his hat. He reached out his hand, and took hold of his wife's head, tried to lift it off, to put it on. He had apparently mistaken his wife for a hat! His wife looked as if she was used to such things.<sup>4</sup>

The condition that the Buddhist philosopher must seek to treat, in Tsong kha pa's view, is similar to that of the man who mistook his wife for a hat. All non-enlightened beings, Tsong kha pa and other Mādhyamikas hold, suffer from a particular cognitive deficit which causes them to misapprehend things, including especially themselves and their personal components, as though they were intrinsically existent.<sup>5</sup> As Sacks explains, his patient was able to recognize and correct mistakes by the use of other sense modalities besides sight, and it was only by recognizing the growing frequency of such mistakes that the man was led (encouraged by his wife) to seek a medical solution. But, according to Mādhyamikas, all of the sense modalities of non-enlightened individuals are distorted,

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seems uncontroversial that Buddhism is therapeutic in intent," but "That this Buddhist therapy might appropriately be labelled as 'philosophy' is more controversial, requiring some explanation and defence" (Burton 2010: 183-4). I submit that the distinctively philosophical character of Tsong kha pa's Buddhist therapy is evident in the distinctively philosophical character of the particular cognitive deficit it seeks to address and by the distinctively philosophical fashion in which Tsong kha pa's therapy operates. For Tsong kha pa's therapeutic tool *par excellence* is rational argumentation, or "therapeutic arguments" as Martha Nussbaum might say (cf. Nussbaum 1994). I think Tsong kha pa would concur with Epicurus' famous words (quoted by Clare Carlisle and Jonardon Ganeri in the introduction to the collection of essays they have edited under the title *Philosophy as Therapeia*): "Empty are the words of that philosopher who offers therapy for no human suffering. For just as there is no use in medical expertise if it does not give therapy for bodily diseases, so too there is no use in philosophy if it does not expel the suffering of the soul" (Carlisle and Ganeri 2010: 8).

4 Sacks 1985: 9-10.

5 As Tillemans observes, the reification of a personal self and the components of a personal self as being intrinsically existent is formulated by some Buddhist authors as comprising an explicit theoretical thesis, whereas for other authors, such as Tsong kha pa (see, e.g., Tsong kha pa *GT* 214), it is "deep-seated, i.e., "inborn" (*lhan skyes, sahaja*), and implicit in consciousness even if prelinguistically" (Tillemans 2008: 12). The latter conception of "the view reifying persons and personal components" (*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*) seems the better candidate for being interpreted as a form of agnosia.

leading individuals to not only misdescribe things but to firmly believe their own confabulations. So the situation of the Buddhist philosopher is like that of the king in a parable Candrakīrti relates:

Once, in a country, there was an astrologer who went before the king and said, 'Seven days from now a rain will fall. All those whose mouths the water enters will go insane.' When the king heard that he carefully covered the mouth of his well of drinking water and none of the rain fell into it. His subjects were unable to do the same and so the water went into all of their mouths and they all went insane. The king was the only one whose mind remained normal. In that country the way of thinking and the way of speaking of all the people did not agree with the way of thinking and the way of speaking of the king. Therefore, they all said, "The king is insane." In the end, not knowing what else to do, the king drank the water, whereby he came to agree with everyone else."<sup>6</sup>

Let us call sufferers of the particular form of agnosia which gives rise to a belief in intrinsic existence *realists* (*dnogs por smra ba, vastuvādin*). For Tsong kha pa, the question at the heart of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction, then, is how to use philosophical argumentation to treat realists for their particular form of agnosia.

Tsong kha pa's account of the different proposals by Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas for how to do this leads finally to a picture of truth and rationality which is quite unique in Tibetan Madhyamaka. At stake in Tsong kha pa's endeavor is the face of logical inference in the context of Madhyamaka. On almost every other construal Madhyamaka is a philosophical movement which tends toward some form of radical anti-realist and anti-foundationalist stance. Nevertheless, Tsong kha pa seeks to retain the "*pramāṇa* theoretical"<sup>7</sup> framework of epistemological foundationalism. Tom Tillemans, capturing the sense of astonishment with which scholars have beheld Tsong kha pa's view, writes that Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika undergoes "an overly baroque transformation"<sup>8</sup> in Tsong kha pa's hands. My hope is to explicate Tsong kha pa's view without reducing readers' sense of astonishment. Nevertheless, it is my intent to reduce or cancel the impression, conveyed by the standard picture, that Tsong kha pa's interpretation of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction is completely out of step

6 Gendun Chopel quotes the parable which he finds in Candrakīrti's commentary on Āryadeva's *Catuhśataka*. See Gendun Chopel 2006: 49.

7 John Dunne introduces this cognomen for the style of discourse especially prominent among 7th and 8th century South Asian philosophers which provides the conceptual context for subsequent Buddhist epistemological reflection, particularly for Tibetan Buddhist philosophers. See Dunne 2004: 15ff.

8 Tillemans 2003: 113.

with other Tibetan thinkers' interpretations of the distinction.

### **Reason and Irrationalism**

The problem in Tsong kha pa's texts that I have selected as a point to explore is the question which the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction poses of finding a method of reasoning with the irrational. For the central issue in the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika conversation in Tibet is always the question of whether Mādhyamikas should use constructive inferences in reasoning with realists, and, if so, the nature of the constructive inferences that can be used. One way of understanding Tsong kha pa's concern in the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika conversation has been that he criticizes the Svātantrika approach for, as it were, taking the option of the king in Candrakīrti's parable. Everyone in the king's domain had gone insane from drinking contaminated water, and because of the king's peculiar (sane) demeanor, all had come to believe that it was actually the king who was insane. So, to avoid the consequences of this popular opinion, the king opted to drink the contaminated water in order to achieve a state of mind commensurable to that of his subjects. On the standard picture of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction, the Svātantrikas are like the king because they provisionally accept a theory of conventional reality which says that the perceptual grounds of rational inference are immune to ultimate analysis. This means that, so far as our best account of conventional reality goes, there are intrinsically existent particulars. The reason why this does not conflict with the Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness, it is said, is because these intrinsically existent entities are only conventionally real. By accepting conventional intrinsically existent particulars, Svātantrikas provide themselves with a form of commensurability with their realist opponents. This makes it possible for Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas to use epistemologically well-founded inferences in reasoning with their realist opponents. On the standard picture, Tsong kha pa's critique of this view is ontological. He charges the Svātantrikas with making an unacceptable, albeit subtle, ontological commitment in following this strategy of opening a pathway of rational communication with realists.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> I survey recent interpretations of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction below in chapter one, where I argue that all of these interpretations lean toward something like what I am here calling the "standard picture" of Tsong kha pa's view. In this dissertation I am limiting my attention to contemporary

But as I read Tsong kha pa's critique of the Svātantrikas' position, he understands that they adopt the perceptual perspective of their realist opponents simply as a pragmatic measure to enable reasoned communication to take place. Thus, his concern is not that such a pragmatic measure could actually entail an ontological commitment, since the Svātantrikas' aim is to ultimately reject the perspective which they have thus provisionally adopted. This is not really different, methodologically speaking, from the "horror house" approach to rationality adopted by some mystics and deconstructionists.<sup>10</sup> Tsong kha pa's criticism, as I shall explain, is that this type of methodological approach simply does not work when considered from a therapeutic perspective.

Nevertheless, the problem from a Mādhyamika standpoint is how to articulate an alternative that does not invest too much in rationality. After all, a Mādhyamika stance which regards rationality itself as ultimately empty would seem more compatible with the generally anti-foundationalist and anti-metaphysical tone of many interpretations of Madhyamaka.<sup>11</sup> But what can be said on behalf of a Mādhyamika stance that invests too heavily in the use of philosophical rationality, as Tsong kha pa's seems to do? Is Tsong kha pa finally some sort of a realist about rationality? Or is it possible to read him as finding a middle way between the extremes of realism and nihilism about rationality?

Here it seems possible to make a few brief statements explaining why Tsong kha pa's approach to the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika problem might concern us even if we take a perspective that

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western scholarship. (As I define "western" it means work published in American, European, or Australian academic journals or by publishing houses located in America, Europe, or Australia, and written in European languages.) Nevertheless, the question of the standard picture's sources in the dGe lugs tradition would be a worthwhile topic of investigation in a different kind of project.

<sup>10</sup> See Thurman 1984: 154.

<sup>11</sup> David Loy notes the way in which Western interpretations of Madhyamaka "can be lumped into one of two major categories" (Loy 1984: 441). Loy elaborates: "The more classical readings are those of Th. Stcherbatsky and T. R. V. Murti; although the former is Kantian and the latter somewhat more Vedāntic, both interpret the distinction between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* as the difference between empirical phenomena and noumenal absolute. The more recent interpretations of Frederick Streng and Chris Gudmunsen are influenced by contemporary analytic philosophy, particularly Wittgenstein, and understand *śūnyatā* as a "meta-system" term which does not refer to anything in the world but rather indicates the inability of all language (systems of representation) to refer to anything" (Loy 1984: 441). These two interpretive poles seem also to have their analogues within the Tibetan tradition, where it is possible to trace something like the Stcherbatsky/Murti interpretation in the "empty of other" position developed by *gzhan stong pas*, while something like the Wittgensteinian interpretation seems to line up with the sort of approach of Tibetan thinkers who stress the importance of freedom from *all* conceptual proliferations (*spros pa*).

is not “indexed” to specifically Buddhist “soteriological projects and the axiological assumptions that accompany them.”<sup>12</sup> The “horror house” approach to rationality carries a strong resonance with many contemporary “declarations of irrationalism,” to borrow a turn of phrase from Jacques Lacan.<sup>13</sup> For many contemporary thinkers working in disciplines mostly outside the bounds of analytic philosophy, rationalism has become a problem. Tsong kha pa's critique of the Svātantrika approach to rationality could perhaps be mined in order to develop a parallel critique of contemporary intellectual trends. Such a reading would need to demonstrate that Tsong kha pa's approach to the therapeutic use of reason does not err where proponents of therapeutic philosophy, pragmatism, negative dialectics,<sup>14</sup> and so forth might think philosophy tends to err. On the other hand, for those sympathetic with something like Lacan's notion that “reason encourages us to go on sleeping”<sup>15</sup> the urge might be to construe Tsong kha pa's position as a reactionary stance, a piece of resistance. This dissertation could perhaps be utilized as the preliminary spadework for either sort of project, although I have made no conscious decision (yet) in favor of either subtext.

### **History of Philosophy and Apprenticeship**

It should come as no surprise, by now, that as a reader of Tsong kha pa's texts I have not approached them wearing the hat of a student of traditional scholastic textbooks (*yig cha*). Moreover, I would say that it is only in a limited sense that what I offer here can be classified as “history of philosophy.” Nonetheless, I would hasten to add that I have certainly worked more “seriously according to the norms of the history of philosophy”<sup>16</sup> than, say, Deleuze on Spinoza.<sup>17</sup> But perhaps a few more remarks on methodology are in order to clarify how my project might be located within history of philosophy, specifically history of Buddhist philosophy. Here it will be useful to begin by

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12 See below, p. 10.

13 Lacan 2008: 82.

14 Adorno states the problem of philosophical rationality thus: “Though doubtful as ever, a confidence that philosophy can make it after all—that the concept can transcend the concept, the preparatory and concluding element, and can thus reach the nonconceptual—is one of philosophy's inalienable features and part of the naïveté that ails it” (Adorno 1979: 3).

15 *Ibid.*

16 See Deleuze 1987: 15.

17 See Deleuze 1990.

saying a few words about history of philosophy considered as a genre.

There appears room for debate, at least to the minds of some, over whether history of philosophy really is philosophy. To illustrate this very point, Bernard Williams gives the anecdote of a senior member of a distinguished philosophy department who had this sign on his door: "JUST SAY NO TO THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY."<sup>18</sup> Steven D. Hales and Rex Welshon, in their book on Nietzsche's perspectivism, give a reasoned account of what could perhaps lie behind such a prejudice. Summing up the disadvantages of the genre of history of philosophy, they write:

It should be acknowledged that scholarship about the history of philosophy is a funny business to be in. For one thing, it doesn't seem to be philosophy at all... Intellectual genealogy is a fun pastime, but it solves philosophical problems about as well as the problem of personal identity is solved by investigating one's family lineage... Are the Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, Spinoza, or Nietzsche industries honestly hoping to produce products that measure up to the work of their founders? This seems unduly optimistic. Some works in the secondary literature are written with missionary zeal, as if the author is trying to prove his or her idol right in everything he said. This is a kind of principle of charity gone bankrupt; the methodology of the "philosophical laborers" Nietzsche decries... The other extreme is equally disingenuous—setting out to show that a historically influential, yet long abandoned, view is still false. One is reminded of Nietzsche's comment about philosophers who feel strong enough to once again refute the existence of free will.<sup>19</sup>

Hales and Welshon draw two lessons from Nietzsche about the genre of history of philosophy. Either (1) it is not philosophy because it slavishly adheres to a school or tradition and sets out to prove its idol right in everything; or (2) it is not philosophy because it merely reiterates arguments and positions that, through hollow repetition, have grown trite and irrelevant.

These criticisms do not rate much, however, once the work of rational reconstruction in writing history of philosophy has been taken into account. As Richard Rorty describes it, the historian of philosophy's work involves reconstructing "the real and imagined conversations [philosophers] might have had with their contemporaries"<sup>20</sup> as well as rationally reconstructing "an imagined argument with present-day philosophers."<sup>21</sup> Rorty actually divides these two modes of activity—reconstructing what a philosopher actually said or could have said to his or her contemporaries, and reconstructing what he might say now to present-day philosophers—into separate genres, intellectual history and history of

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18 Williams 2000: 204.

19 Hales and Welshon 2000: 2.

20 Rorty 1984: 50.

21 *Ibid* 53.



philosophy. Intellectual history abides by Quentin Skinner's maxim:

No agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done.<sup>22</sup>

History of philosophy, on the other hand, aims to uncover the doctrines of a philosopher, and "[w]hen we anachronistically say that he 'really' held such doctrines we mean that, in an imagined argument with present-day philosophers about whether he should have held certain other views, he would have been driven back on a premise which he never formulated, dealing with a topic he never considered—a premise which may have to be suggested to him by a friendly rational reconstructor."<sup>23</sup>

As a method, rational reconstruction is, of course, hardly above criticism. But Rorty's brand of rational reconstruction may be particularly vulnerable to critique. For one thing, his approach to rational reconstruction is specifically oriented to the interests of analytic philosophers and accords well with what Kapstein calls the "problems and arguments" approach to contemporary philosophical education.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Rorty has a particular conception of the aim of history of philosophy with which I, for one, am unable to resonate:

The main reason we want historical knowledge of what unre-educated primitives, or dead philosophers and scientists, would have said to each other is that... [w]e would like to be able to see the history of our race as a long conversational interchange. We want to be able to see it that way in order to assure ourselves that there has been rational progress in the course of recorded history....<sup>25</sup>

It is perhaps this type of attitude which prompts the sort of condemnation of rational reconstruction voiced by one critic who writes that it presupposes "a curious hermeneutic" which "supposes that you can respond adequately to what texts mean by recognizing familiar logical shapes in them—logical shapes that have trans-historical identity and that are better understood now than at any previous time."<sup>26</sup> Others have noted the hubris presupposed specifically in Rorty's understanding of rational

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22 Skinner 1969. Cf. Rorty 1984: 50.

23 Rorty 1984: 53.

24 Kapstein 2001: 5. See above.

25 Rorty 1984: 51.

26 Mark Jordan, personal communication.

reconstruction.<sup>27</sup>

However, there are other ways to approach rational reconstruction. One alternative is that articulated by Terry Penner:

*It is my view that it is only possible to give an adequate interpretation of a classical text in philosophy to the extent one has oneself solved the philosophical problems being dealt with in the text. (It is not a matter of first figuring out, from a neutral philosophical standpoint, what the philosopher means, and then assessing the merits of the philosopher's position.)*<sup>28</sup>

Penner's approach requires *solving for oneself the philosophical problems being dealt with in the text.*

Here it seems that the historian, in rationally reconstructing the meaning of the text, may exercise a measure of selectivity. As Michael Hardt, commenting on Deleuze's approach to the history of philosophy, remarks:

Deleuze's journey through the history of philosophy takes a peculiar form. Even though Deleuze's monographs serve as excellent introductions, they never provide a comprehensive summary of a philosopher's work; instead, Deleuze selects the specific aspects of a philosopher's thought that make a positive contribution to his own project at that point. As Nietzschean or as Spinozist, Deleuze does not accept all of Nietzsche or all of Spinoza.<sup>29</sup>

Hardt describes Deleuze's work in the history of philosophy as an apprenticeship. Todd May picks up this theme with the following analogy:

There are those who have gone before us, who have swum in this water before: Spinoza, Bergson, Nietzsche among them. They may help ease us into the water, teach us some strokes, so we don't drown before we get started. We can apprentice ourselves to them. Sooner or later, however, we must push off from the shore and conjugate things for ourselves. That is what Deleuze does in *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*. But we must all do it for ourselves, each of us. We can apprentice ourselves to Deleuze if we like, as he does with those who come before him. But he cannot swim for us.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, the sort of selectivity and originality manifested in Deleuze's "surgical incisions in the corpus of the history of philosophy"<sup>31</sup> might seem to make him an unfaithful reader, even if he does not exactly violate the rules of modern scholarship. Such an approach might strike some as a

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27 See, e.g., Dunne 2004: 5, n. 9.

28 Penner 1987: xv.

29 Hardt 1993: xix.

30 May 2005: 112.

31 Cf. Hardt 1993: xix.

particularly incongruous approach to take to reading a Buddhist philosophical text. However, as Thomas Doctor has recently noted, so-called “traditional” scholars have actually “worked in an environment that cherishes and demands innovation.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, as Doctor observes, Tibetan Buddhist philosophers frequently “push off from the shore” with a vigor that exceeds Deleuze’s.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, such license, for Buddhist philosophers, must be exercised within certain parameters. As Kapstein explains:

That such thinkers as Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti remain firmly within the ambit of the Buddhological project, despite the impressively sceptical dimensions of their path, may be taken by some as proof positive that Buddhist philosophy has never claimed for itself the perfect autonomy of reason that is often supposed to be a hallmark of the Western traditions of rational inquiry derived ultimately from the Greeks.... Even the most radical deconstructions of the world and the self in Buddhist contemplative experience, where the disposition to hanker after the merest grain of reality in body or mind is undone, must be seen to be indexed to specific soteriological projects and the axiological assumptions that accompany them.<sup>34</sup>

Restricted in this way, I think we might share Hales and Welshon’s concern that, for Buddhist philosophers, history of philosophy threatens to become the work of the “philosophical laborers.” However, even if our exercise of selectivity is not “indexed to specific soteriological projects and the axiological assumptions that accompany them,” it is possible that the problems we will find dealt with in a Buddhist philosopher’s texts might actually be problems which concern us.<sup>35</sup> In other words, guided by something like a Deleuzean selectivity, we might as historians of Buddhist philosophy avoid the twin dangers of “slavishly adhering to a school or tradition that sets out to prove its idol right in everything” and “merely reiterating arguments and positions that, through hollow repetition, have grown trite and irrelevant.”

### **Fusion Philosophy and the Problem of Hermeneutic Distance**

My main purpose in writing this dissertation has been to try to come to grips with Tsong kha pa’s problem of explaining how to reason with those who seem beyond the help of reason. Thus, my

32 Doctor 2009: 162.

33 See Doctor 2009: 160.

34 Kapstein 2001: 19.

35 Kapstein comments: “If Buddhism is to emerge as a viable current in Western thought over the long duration, its point of departure will have to be sustained and critical reflection upon its ideals of the good in relation to our contemporary predicaments” (Kapstein 2001: 20).

aim has not been to provide a kind of "cultural translation" which would merely provide a sort of museum diorama of the perspective of another Asian philosopher, and thus provide the Western academy with yet another opportunity to "congratulate itself on having 'broadened its horizons', and having brought more within the scope of its own method," as Jay Garfield puts it.<sup>36</sup> I would rather present a "transformed instance of the original," as Talal Asad calls various attempts by ethnographers to break away from the "representational discourse of ethnography."<sup>37</sup> Asad observes that such presentations may function as invitations to let different practices "become part of our living heritage and not merely of our social science," opportunities to "introduce or enlarge cultural capacities, learnt from other ways of living, into our own."<sup>38</sup> This might suggest that what I have in mind is a project in the mode of doing philosophy that Mark Siderits calls "fusion philosophy."

The idea of fusion philosophy is to borrow elements from one philosophical tradition in order to solve problems arising in another tradition.<sup>39</sup> My own project does seem to fit this mold. I have wrestled with the problems involved in pitting philosophical rationality against the peculiar form of agnosia recognized by Mādhyamikas as the source of all suffering. And I have wrestled with these problems using the conceptual tools of analytic philosophers, chiefly Wilfrid Sellars, Donald Davidson, and John McDowell. Nevertheless, one might raise a number of qualms with respect to fusion philosophy. It is for the sake of such qualms that I feel cagy about my own project's being classified as an instance of fusion philosophy. The most damaging worry, which I shall name and explain at length here, could be that Siderits, in detailing the method of fusion philosophy, does not provide a satisfactory response to the problem of hermeneutic distance.

The problem of hermeneutic distance is directly related to the problems that Tsong kha pa grapples with in interpreting the Svātantrika-Prāsāngika distinction. As noted above, the condition of the non-enlightened is like that of neurology patients with certain right-hemisphere syndromes. As

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36 Garfield 2002: 247.

37 Asad 1993: 193.

38 *Ibid.*

39 See Siderits 2003: xi.

Sacks explains, it "is not only difficult, it is impossible, for patients with certain right-hemisphere syndromes to know their own problems—a peculiar and specific 'anosagnosia', as Babinski called it."<sup>40</sup> Not only is it impossible for sufferers of disorders of recognition and perception to know their own problems, but it is also extremely difficult for the non-afflicted to place themselves in the situation of the afflicted. Sacks says that "it is singularly difficult, for even the most sensitive observer, to picture the inner state, the 'situation', of such patients, for this is almost unimaginably remote from anything he himself has ever known."<sup>41</sup> In other words, the inner phenomenal state of the afflicted is beyond anything that the non-afflicted is able to imagine because the phenomenal states of the afflicted and the non-afflicted are related in something like the way that we might say incommensurable conceptual schemes must be related.<sup>42</sup> So the problem at the heart of Tsong kha pa's investigation of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction is the problem of how to understand and overcome incommensurability.

Nevertheless, it is this problem as it arises in inter-cultural hermeneutics which leads Matthew Kapstein to hold that "Buddhist philosophy, despite its great and ancient history, remains for us a project as yet unborn."<sup>43</sup> As Kapstein explains:

It is by now a commonplace to remark that our attempts to interpret Buddhist thought in Western terms have generally reflected the intellectual perspectives of the interpreters as much as those of the Buddhist thinkers we wish to interpret. Nāgārjuna has seen Hegelian, Heideggerian, and Wittgensteinian readings come and go; Vasubandhu has been incarnated as both transcendental idealist and phenomenologist; the arguments of Dharmakīrti and his successors might have stepped out of the pages of Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* or the *Principia Mathematica* of Russell and Whitehead. To take an ungenerous view of our encounter with Buddhism, a great Asian religion turns out to be whatever we happened to have had in our heads to begin with. Like Frank Baum's Dorothy, we visit Oz only to discover that we never had to, and indeed never did, leave Kansas.<sup>44</sup>

Siderits' approach to fusion philosophy could be seen as an attempt to evade the problem of hermeneutic distance. For Siderits, fusion philosophy is something like borrowing tools from the house

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40 Sacks 1985: 3.

41 *Ibid.*

42 That is, if we accept the idea of conceptual schemes contra Davidson's position in his essay "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." See Davidson 2006.

43 Kapstein 2001: 20.

44 Kapstein 2001: 3.

next door to fix a problem in our own philosophical house.<sup>45</sup> But how does one approach one's neighbor to borrow a tool without presupposing that the neighbor's set of tools will be somehow analogous to one's own? In other words, Siderits' characterization of fusion philosophy seems to beg the question with respect to the problem of hermeneutic distance, rather than addressing the problem.

To more fully explain how Siderits' account of fusion philosophy seems to beg the question with respect to the problem of hermeneutic distance, let us consider how Siderits approaches his test case. Siderits' test case is the problem of personal identity as it is known in contemporary analytic philosophy circles, e.g., in the work of Derek Parfit. As Siderits explains:

The Reductionist view of persons espoused by Derek Parfit in *Reasons and Persons* (1984) has provoked a great deal of controversy. While it is difficult to count heads on such matters, it seems unlikely that most Anglophone philosophers working on the issue of personal identity today accept that view. Still, Parfit has not recanted. Now Parfit himself was well aware that the Buddha once held a view similar to his own. What neither Parfit nor his many critics seem to have realized, however, is that in the classical Indian controversy over the Buddha's view of persons, philosophical tools were forged that might help us adjudicate the dispute between Parfit and his many critics.<sup>46</sup>

Here it may seem that Siderits' conception of fusion philosophy has all the merit of borrowing a wrench to ice a cake. Siderits anticipates that worries will arise over the hermeneutic distance between the different "houses":

Someone might complain that what I am using as a pipe wrench was never intended as such. Two questions might be raised in response. First, will such use warp the tool? That is, will using the tool in this way seriously distort our understanding of the role it plays in its home context? Second, must those who borrow their neighbors' tools first master and then recite the complete ethnography of the house next door before they may use their tools? That is, is the Buddhist philosophical tradition to be a museum diorama, or may selected pieces of that tradition sometimes be put to novel uses?<sup>47</sup>

Siderits' questions point to the nature of the obstacle that the problem of hermeneutic distance poses for fusion philosophy. First, there is the basic issue of adequately understanding the nature of our neighbor's tools. The question whether such use will warp the tool is a cousin of the worry raised by

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45 See Siderits 2003: xiii.

46 Siderits 2003: xi.

47 Siderits 2003: xiii.

Kapstein. Siderits' first question ("Will such use warp the tool?") seems intended as a rhetorical response to the kind of worry Kapstein articulates. Siderits' point is that the concern of fusion philosophy is not with interpreting the meaning of foreign concepts or cultures. Fusion philosophy, as Siderits conceives it, is primarily about problem-solving.<sup>48</sup> So, it would seem, understanding the nature of a tool in its home context is not particularly important. All that matters is how well it performs in the "novel use" to which we would put it. The rebuttal to this is that if we are going to borrow a tool from next door to do the work of a pipe wrench, then surely it is because we think our neighbor has a *better* pipe wrench than we do. As Plato observes about the use of tools for cutting, it is necessary to find the tool that is best suited to the nature of the task at hand.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the danger of "warping the tool" cannot be casually dismissed by the fusion philosopher. If the tool we borrow from our neighbor's house turns out to just be the old pipe wrench we, as Kapstein says, "had in our heads to begin with," then the project of fusion philosophy is truly a pipe dream.

However, it may be that a tool's full potential has not been realized by the use that has been made of it in the other house. Perhaps our neighbor has been using the better pipe wrench as a door stop. Siderits seems to intend to address this kind of worry by the second question he asks ("Must those who borrow their neighbors' tools first master and then recite the complete ethnography of the house next door before they may use their tools?"). Again, Siderits' strategy is rhetorical. To explain the difficulty this question seems meant to address, it will be useful to note that Siderits proposes fusion philosophy as "a successor to the practice of what has been called comparative philosophy."<sup>50</sup> Thus, fusion philosophy is descended, in some sense, from the literature of anthropological comparison. But the problem that plagues such literature, and which is particularly acute in the case

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48 See Siderits 2003: xi. In this respect, Siderits conception of fusion philosophy reflects what Kapstein calls the "problems and arguments" approach to philosophy "that defines much of contemporary philosophical education" (Kapstein 2001: 5). Kapstein finds this approach to philosophy problematic as a point of entry into Buddhist philosophy (more on this below).

49 Plato writes in the *Cratylus* (at 387a): "Suppose, for example, that we undertake to cut something. If we make the cut in whatever way *we* choose, we will not succeed in cutting. But if in each case we choose to cut in accord with the nature of cutting and being cut and with the natural tool for cutting, we'll succeed and cut correctly" (Plato 1997: 104).

50 Siderits 2003: xi.

of comparative philosophy, is the question of why similarities and differences between two traditions should matter to anyone. Jonathan Z. Smith states the problem forcefully: "There is nothing easier than the making of patterns; from planaria to babies, it is done with little apparent difficulty. But the 'how' and the 'why' and, above all, the 'so what' remain most refractory."<sup>51</sup> Fusion philosophy has a ready answer to the "so what" question. Recognizing the similarities and differences between traditions can facilitate problem solving through borrowing. As Siderits *should* have said: "we can sometimes make progress toward solving philosophical problems by looking at what traditions distinct from our own have had to say about [issues *like*] the issues with which we are concerned."<sup>52</sup> But here the worry mentioned above has already been assumed away. The worry was that perhaps our neighbor has a radically different use for the tool we want to use, perhaps so radically different that we cannot even comprehend its intended use in its home context, and might therefore overlook its potential usefulness in our own context. In other words, incommensurabilities could prevent comparativists from even recognizing similarities which the fusion philosopher might find useful. Siderits' response to this potential problem is to shrug aside the ethnographer's labor of producing a cultural translation. But to do so, we must be ready to presuppose a kind of commensurability that presumably makes the requisite recognition of similarities and differences an easy matter. It is not necessary to master and recite the ethnography of the house next door in order to use their tools because the uses of their tools are perfectly self-evident to anyone, so Siderits seems to suggest.

The presupposition that the uses of philosophical tools are trans-culturally recognizable to *philosophers* is connected with an assumption about philosophy generally. Instances of this sort of presupposition are easy to find in contemporary literature on Buddhist philosophy. For example, consider the following remark by Dreyfus and McClintock, speaking of the general philosophical relevance of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction: "These topics concern not only Buddhist philosophy but have broader implications in philosophy more generally..."<sup>53</sup> The assumption here is

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51 Smith 2000: 41.

52 Siderits 2003: xi (brackets mine).

53 See p. 3.



that philosophy involves concerns which are not only trans-cultural (to the extent that we must still recognize Buddhism as a foreign import) but also perennial. This sort of assumption will be met with discomfort, however, by some. For instance, Kapstein urges that “the relationship between Buddhism and philosophy must continue in some respects to perplex us, even after we have grown to accept the locution “Buddhist philosophy.””<sup>54</sup> Kapstein reminds us that “one of the hallmarks of philosophy is that it must forever renew itself in response to the specificities of place and time” so that “the very notion of a ‘perennial philosophy’ risks finishing as an annulment of the philosophical spirit.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, Kapstein continues: “The elaboration of doctrine and argument in traditional Buddhist settings necessarily responded to the intellectual cultures of the times and places concerned. We cannot rightly expect to find there ready-made answers to the problems that confront our contemporary philosophical culture,”<sup>56</sup> contra Siderits’ conception of fusion philosophy.

Approaching the presupposition of philosophy’s trans-cultural status from another angle, a different kind of qualm emerges. It may be that the assumption of philosophical commonalities veils a more sinister set of relations between practices and discourses found in “other cultures” and, as Kapstein puts it, “that sphere of thought whose horizons and practices have unfolded within those discourses that have been known to the West as “philosophy.””<sup>57</sup> Perhaps an appearance of commonalities is actually the product of what Asad calls the “inequality of languages.”<sup>58</sup> Asad points out that the “dilemmas of relativism appear differently depending on whether we think of abstracted understanding or of historically situated practices.”<sup>59</sup> As he explains, the ethnographer’s task is to

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54 Kapstein 2001: 20.

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Ibid.*

57 Kapstein 2001: 4. In thinking about the nature of philosophy, Kapstein tends to give more weight to Heideggerian assumptions than some might be inclined to concede. For example, Kapstein holds an evidently high estimation of Heidegger’s view that philosophy is “definitionally inalienable from the contingencies of its Greek beginnings” (Kapstein 2001: 6). Nevertheless, for a contrary perspective, consider Jay Garfield’s remarks: “So to treat *philosophy* as denoting something the Greeks and their German descendants did, and therefore as comprising nothing Asian, commits one to two grave errors: either one presumes falsely that no Asian ever did what the Greeks and Germans did (think reflectively about the nature of things) or one presumes that there is something terribly special about such reflection when done in Athens or Freiburg. Just what could that be?” (Garfield 2002: 231-2).

58 See Asad 1993: 171-99.

59 Asad 1993: 179.

produce a cultural translation, and, as he says, "All good translation seeks to reproduce the structure of an alien discourse within the translator's own language."<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, this "breaking down and reshaping of one's own language through the process of translation," as Asad puts it, "depends on the willingness of the translator's language to subject itself to this transforming power."<sup>61</sup> Here the inequality of languages, which "is a feature of the global patterns of power created by modern imperialism and capitalism,"<sup>62</sup> is a major factor in determining the pliability of the translator's language. Thus, Asad observes:

To put it crudely, because the languages of third world societies—including, of course, the societies that social anthropologists have traditionally studied—are seen as weaker in relation to Western languages (and today, especially to English), they are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process than the other way around. The reason for this is, first, that in their political-economic relations with third world countries, Western nations have the greater ability to manipulate the latter. And, second, Western languages produce and deploy desired knowledge more readily than third world languages do. (The knowledge that third world languages deploy more easily is not sought by Western societies in quite the same way, or for the same reason.)<sup>63</sup>

So a concern is that the fusion philosopher's project of using "elements from one tradition in order to try to solve problems arising in another"<sup>64</sup> presupposes a translation process which is actually only an extension of unfair power relations existing between Euro-American academics and scholars from traditional Buddhist settings.<sup>65</sup> Thus, we have Siderits' peculiar note of caution to Buddhologists not

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60 *Ibid* 189.

61 *Ibid* 190.

62 *Ibid* 199.

63 *Ibid* 190-91. Garfield corroborates Asad's general point. Garfield says: "There is also an important political dimension to translation. Translation programs are typically asymmetric: We translate the texts of a tradition we are studying and typically, in studying that tradition we transfer expertise regarding it to the dominant tradition in which the study is being pursued. But rarely do we find the dominant, subject tradition translating its own texts into the language of the subordinate object tradition. This privileges the subject's language and hence reinforces the privileged status of the tradition of the subject, to the disparagement of the object tradition. The work of the subordinate tradition is hence assimilated as an object of study, while the superordinate tradition can congratulate itself on having "broadened its horizons," and having brought more within the scope of its own method" (Garfield 2002: 247).

64 Siderits 2003: xi.

65 Jay Garfield voices this sort of concern, observing that "Euro-American academics meet Tibetan or Indian academics on terms of unequal power. The power differential is manifested concretely in economic and academic terms: in terms of access to university posts; to grants; to libraries, journals, and presses; and even the ability to obtain that indispensable tool of the academic trade, the laptop computer—in short, the issue is access to the seals of authenticity and to positions from which those seals can be conferred or withheld" (Garfield 2002: 231). For an interesting complement to Garfield's remarks, see Lopez 1998: 174-5. Lopez's chapter provides a useful background against which to begin considering Garfield's claim. More

familiar with “current work on personal identity, and the methods of analytic metaphysics in general,”<sup>66</sup> where he practically admits to subjecting elements of the Buddhist tradition to a transformation for the purposes of his fusion project. He says: “What I present here as elements of Buddhist philosophy may not be immediately recognizable as such to those who are accustomed to reading the tradition in other ways and for other purposes.”<sup>67</sup>

Siderits' response to such qualms about the trans-cultural, trans-temporal status of philosophical problems and tools is suggested by his interpretation of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. As I shall explain in detail in chapter three, Siderits suggests a conventionalist account of objectivity which posits a worldly canon of rationality which transcends the bounds of particular places and times.<sup>68</sup> For Siderits,<sup>69</sup> people everywhere have a “common core of shared beliefs” to be explained as a matter of their also sharing “a common set of conventionally accepted principles of rational belief formation.” He defends this idea by saying that “we would not be inclined to say that they [i.e., the members of a different language community] believe the same things we do unless we supposed that they form beliefs from evidence in the same way that we do.”<sup>70</sup> On this view, how to do philosophy also seems to be a part of the worldly canon of rationality. That is, the nature of philosophical problems and conceptual tools does not seem to vary in his view, except in superficial details, across times and places. This makes it possible for philosophers' views to be measured against one another and normatively appraised. Thus, Siderits concludes that it is possible to “distinguish between better and worse theories,” i.e., philosophical theories, of conventional reality.<sup>71</sup>

Even if we accept something like the idea of a worldly canon of rationality, it is problematic to suppose that the worldly canon of rationality is such as to guarantee the commensurability of

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objective substantiation of Garfield's claim is, to my knowledge, unavailable.

66 Siderits 2003: xiii.

67 *Ibid.*

68 See Siderits 1989; also see chapter three below.

69 Here I assume that Siderits accepts as his own the view which he ascribes to the Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas, which he calls non-relativistic pluralism (see Siderits 1989). See chapter three below, where I offer corroboration for this assumption.

70 Siderits 1989: 245-6.

71 Siderits 1989: 242.

philosophical views, or, at any rate, the commensurability of different ways of understanding what it is to do philosophy. As Kapstein says, "If we assume that we already certainly know what philosophy is, so that the question is closed even before we have had the occasion to ask it, then evidently we are not thinking philosophically at all..."<sup>72</sup> The assumption that a worldly canon of rationality includes enough meta-philosophical prescriptive content to ground the enterprise of fusion philosophy is implausible. While we might accept that the worldly canon of rationality brings certain constraints to bear on any instance of philosophizing, it is unlikely that the assumption of a worldly canon of rationality is sufficient to ensure common, or even recognizable, problems and tools. If asked to characterize the nature of a worldly canon of rationality, we would do well, I suggest, to take the sort of "bottom up" approach which Wendy Doniger advises in the case of comparative mythology. Doniger writes:

The universalism of most systems of comparison can, I think, be avoided. The great universalist theories were constructed from the top down; that is, they assumed certain continuities about broad concepts such as sacrifice, or a High God, or an Oedipal complex; but these continuities necessarily involved cognitive and cultural factors that, it seems to me, are the least likely places in which to look for cross-cultural continuities. The method that I am advocating is, by contrast, constructed from the bottom up. It assumes certain continuities not about overarching human universals but about particular narrative details concerning the body, sexual desire, procreation, parenting, pain, and death, details which, though unable to avoid mediation by culture entirely, are at least *less* culturally mediated than the broader conceptual categories of the universalists.<sup>73</sup>

Nevertheless, I think we should not expect to discover a worldly canon of philosophizing in the worldly canon of rationality, even if our picture of the worldly canon of rationality is constructed with the sort of care which Doniger recommends.

The problem with fusion philosophy, thus, is that it grasps onto identities while, paradoxically, not holding tightly enough to the uniqueness of distinct cultural identities. In supposing that universally applicable canons for the identification of philosophical activity are included in the worldly canon of rationality, fusion philosophy reifies a particular conception of what philosophy is. At the

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<sup>72</sup> Kapstein 2001: 4. Of course this is a paradoxical statement. To judge that claiming to know *what philosophy is* comprises an instance of non-philosophy requires a knowledge of what is not an instance of philosophy, which presumably also implies a knowledge of what philosophy is.

<sup>73</sup> Doniger 1998: 59.

same time, it does not take the question of identity quite seriously enough. That is, as we saw above, the fusion philosopher is not worried about whether a tool gets warped in the novel use to which it is put. Hence, fusion philosophy cuts itself loose from the constraint of understanding a concept's meaning relative to its home cultural context.

Hermeneutic distance, it should be noted, is a problem that is more easily overcome in practice than in theory. It is the problem which every child overcomes to acquire her mother-tongue, and which good ethnographers overcome in the field. As Asad writes:

In the field, as Lienhardt rightly suggests, the process of translation takes place at the very moment the ethnographer engages with a specific mode of life—just as a child does in learning to grow up within a specific culture. He learns to find his way in a new environment and a new language. And, like a child (or a convert), he needs to verbalize explicitly what the proper way of doing things is, because that is how learning proceeds (cf. A. R. Luria on “synpraxic speech,” in Luria and Yudovich 1971, 50). When the child (or the anthropologist) becomes adept at adult ways, what he has learnt becomes implicit, as assumptions informing a shared mode of life that aspires to coherence but always contains areas of unclarity.<sup>74</sup>

To suppose that cultural differences interpose an impermeable barrier to understanding is of course absurd. Garfield observes that “Western philosophers” (I imagine he means academics working in main-stream college and university philosophy departments where the culture is primarily inspired by the analytic tradition), when asked why their academic coverage is limited to the Western philosophical tradition, frequently “plead their lack of familiarity with the Asian texts, and inability to approach them, let alone to teach them or to use them in research.”<sup>75</sup> As Garfield notes: “Better for the shoemaker to stick to his last, they say, than to lapse into charlatanism.”<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, as Garfield points out, this response rests on one of three implausible assumptions: “(1) Asian philosophy is unreadable by anyone with European ancestry; (2) One should never read anything one has not already read or teach anything one has not been taught in graduate school; (3) One must never rely on a translation in teaching and research, and Asian languages are impossible to learn.”<sup>77</sup>

So the problem that hermeneutic distance presents for fusion philosophy is primarily a

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<sup>74</sup> Asad 1993: 192.

<sup>75</sup> Garfield 2002: 252.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid* 253.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*.

theoretical problem. In practice, there is no insurmountable obstacle to the feasibility of a Siderits-style fusion project, provided the proper "causes and conditions." Of course, without such determinate factors in place, problematic theory could well turn into problematic practice, which is why fusion philosophy, like other sorts of fusion things, needs to be handled with extreme caution. For example, when Hegel wrote about "Lamaism" in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* of the mid-eighteen-twenties,<sup>78</sup> presumably conditions were not yet ripe for a viable exercise in fusion thinking. Conditions are now better. Strong graduate programs in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist studies exist in major American and European universities. Primary texts and commentaries are available in excellent European language translations.<sup>79</sup>

A number of valuable scholarly investigations focusing on Tsong kha pa's thought, in particular, as well as translations of Tsong kha pa's main philosophical texts, have appeared during just the last fifteen years or so. Readers will find that I lean heavily on this body of work. It is good work, so I make no apologies to the "rigorist" who expects a work purporting to be about thinking originally performed in another language to contain significant portions of the original texts, left untranslated, even if nowhere else than in the footnotes.<sup>80</sup> I have made no modifications to the translations cited except to smooth out inconsistencies in nomenclature and choices about how to translate key technical terms. For example, I have retained the Sanskrit names for the doxographic categories which are the focal point of this study.<sup>81</sup> The terms 'Svātantrika' and 'Prāsaṅgika', it seems to me,

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78 See Lopez 1998: 23 for the reference and a brief but insightful consideration of Hegel's remarks.

79 See Lopez's remarks on the success of the "dharma presses," Lopez 1998: 178.

80 This type of scholarship parodies Vladimir Nabokov's expectations of a good translation (which I vigorously espouse when it comes to *translations*): "I want translations with copious footnotes, footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the top of this or that page so as to leave only the gleam of one textual line between commentary and eternity" (Nabokov 1992: 143). I do have some misgivings, nevertheless, about the remainder of this passage expressing Nabokov's view that the literal sense is to be preferred in the production of translations: "I want such footnotes and the absolutely literal sense, with no emasculation and no padding—I want such sense and such notes for all the poetry in other tongues that still languishes in "poetical" versions, begrimed and beslimed by rhyme" (*ibid*). Nabokov envisions footnotes capable of bridging the gap between the literal sense and fluent comprehension for readers encountering the text for the first time with no access to its mother tongue. But why couldn't the direction of the bridge be reversed for the benefit of readers to whom the text is available in its original form, or to satisfy readers with an exceptional penchant for scholarly scrupulosity?

81 Translations of these terms are fairly consistent in the literature, although some diversity exists. Most translators use 'Autonomists' for 'Svātantrikas' and 'Consequentialists' for 'Prāsaṅgikas'. Thurman, more

qualify as instances of Thomas Kuhn's point about the usefulness of Ramsey sentences for the purposes of defining technical terms.<sup>82</sup> The Ramsey sentence is a representation in formal logic which expresses the claim that there are entities which satisfy a particular predicate or set of predicates. Theories can thus be stated in the format of a Ramsey sentence.<sup>83</sup> As Kuhn notes, "The existentially quantified variables with which such sentences begin can be seen as what I previously called "placeholders" for terms requiring interpretation, e.g., 'phlogiston', 'principle', and 'element.'"<sup>84</sup> So 'Svātantrika' and 'Prāsaṅgika', like 'phlogiston' and so forth, are the sort of terms which Kuhn regards as untranslatable. He says that such terms are "new and must be learned or relearned."<sup>85</sup> Given the fraught status of Tsong kha pa's way of making the distinction between Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas, it would seem ill-advised to treat these terms in any other way.

#### **An Important Caveat on My Use of the Terms 'Svātantrika' and 'Prāsaṅgika' and Other Grouping Expressions**

There is the danger of a misunderstanding arising whenever grouping expressions such as 'Svātantrika', 'Prāsaṅgika', and 'Madhyamaka' are used as I shall be using them. Obviously, such expressions can mean different things for different people, not to mention the danger of reification. Here let me state that my use of such grouping expressions is not intended to stake any metaphysical or historical claims. I do not, therefore, mean to suppose or imply that there are such monolithic entities as a "Svātantrika System of Philosophy," or hordes of homegenous-minded philosophers who would wholeheartedly and unanimously subscribe to a list of essential doctrines defining a particular institutional identity. I mean my use of these terms to be as innocent, in every way, as any use of language can be. This having been said, I must confess to feeling somewhat like the trespasser who claims not to have seen the "No Trespassing" sign. In any event, it should be possible to clarify most of the uses I make of such problematic expressions simply by imagining a tacit "Tsong kha pa's" or "Tillemans'" or "Siderits'," and so on, in front of any questionable expression. I avoid such qualifiers in

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idiosyncratically, uses 'Dogmaticists' for 'Svātantrikas' and 'Dialecticists' for 'Prāsaṅgikas'. See Thurman 1984.

82 See Kuhn 1983: 46.

83 The typical format of such a Ramsey sentence for a given theory T is ' $\exists x_1 \dots x_n T[x_1 \dots x_n]$ '.

84 Kuhn *ibid.*

85 *Ibid* 45.

my writing for stylistic purposes, but I strive to make it so that the relevant angle of vision in each case can easily be determined by context.

### **Chapter Overview**

In this Introduction my aim has been to provide an orientation to the issue explored in this dissertation and to address, at least in a preliminary manner, some pressing methodological concerns. Looking ahead now to the rest of the dissertation, let me conclude by offering a brief sketch of the thesis and argument of each chapter ahead and try to give a summary indication as to how to connect the theses of the individual chapters so as to be able to gain sight of the overarching line of thought running through the entire dissertation.

**Chapter One** provides a limited survey of contemporary scholars' interpretations of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. I argue that the consensus among contemporary scholars, despite slight variations in how they articulate or construe the matter, is that Tsong kha pa's manner of drawing the distinction between Svātantrikas' and Prāsaṅgikas' respective positions presupposes an ontological difference between the two schools' views of emptiness. In particular, I examine interpretations of Tsong kha pa's distinction presented in the collection of essays on the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction edited by Georges Dreyfus and Sara McClintock. For the final part of the chapter, I home in on Tom Tillemans' interpretation of Tsong kha pa's distinction. By discussing how Tillemans' criterion for realism connects with Mark Siderits' reconstruction of Madhyamaka as a form of global anti-realism, I am able to make my use of the terms 'realist' and 'realism' more precise. In doing so, I offer some reasons why one might choose to step away from ontological interpretations of Tsong kha pa toward an alternative picture of his view. My concept of an alternative picture of tsong kha pa's view is guided by the belief that Tsong kha pa's philosophy can be very usefully understood as a form of cognitive therapy.

**Chapter Two** continues with a more focused look at Tillemans' interpretation of Tsong kha pa's



Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction.<sup>86</sup> Chapter two consists of three sections. In section one I present Tillemans' claim that for Tsong kha pa the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction hinges on acceptance or rejection of epistemological foundationalism and the notion of an epistemological Given. In section two, however, through an analysis of John McDowell's reading of Wilfrid Sellars' conception of what is really at stake in endorsing or rejecting the Myth of the Given, I attempt to show that Tillemans' assumptions about the relationship between foundationalism and the notion of the Given are misleading. In particular, I join McDowell in maintaining that Sellars' own considered position is not a form of anti-foundationalism. McDowell explains that the question of the Given is about the issue of entitlement, not the issue of epistemological foundations. The issue of entitlement, to put it roughly, is concerned with the question of how to be sure that the concepts or words that one uses are really applicable to things in the world and that thought is not somehow cut off from an external world, like a set of wheels spinning in a frictionless void. Finally, applying this to the question of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction, I suggest that Tsong kha pa pictures both Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas as opponents of the notion of any kind of Given, yet he also thinks that they each position involves the endorsement of a kind of empiricist foundationalism. I propose that we can understand this in the light of the conception of reformed empiricism sketched by McDowell. This implies that the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction does not hinge on the epistemological issue of foundationalism or on the issue of the Given. I conclude the chapter by analyzing a few key passages from Tsong kha pa's works which seem to support my approach to Tsong kha pa's distinction, which is to take it as purely a matter of therapeutic procedure.

In **Chapter Three** I consider Mark Siderits' case for the Svātantrika position's superiority over the Prāsaṅgika position. My aim is to explain why Tsong kha pa's account of the difference between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika methodologies undermines Siderits' appraisal of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the two positions. Siderits argues that the Svātantrika position is superior to the Prāsaṅgika perspective because Svātantrikas develop a more sophisticated conventionalist account of objectivity than Prāsaṅgikas do. His rational reconstruction of the Svātantrika position draws on Donald Davidson's theory of radical interpretation as revised by Ian Hacking. In the first three sections of the chapter I offer a detailed explanation of Siderits' view. I conclude the chapter with a section

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86 Since McClintock's interpretation of how the distinction is understood by Tsong kha pa's followers, mainly mKhas grub, relies heavily on Tillemans' interpretation, I also include McClintock's treatment of the issue in my discussion here, even though I give a more focused analysis of McClintock's interpretation of Śāntarakṣita's and Kamalaśīla's Svātantrika-Madhyamaka in chapter four below.

explaining why Tsong kha pa's argument against the Svātantrikas' use of autonomous inferences undermines Siderits' defense of the Svātantrika position.

According to Tsong kha pa, Svātantrikas think Mādhyamikas can use autonomous inferences in reasoning with realists, whereas Prāsaṅgikas do not think autonomous inferences can be used in these situations. The reason why Tsong kha pa thinks autonomous inferences cannot be used in these situations is that realists and Mādhyamikas ground their inferences in different ways of perceptually apprehending things. Realists' inferences are ultimately based on an apprehension of things as intrinsically existent, so in the context of debate with realists on the question of intrinsic existence, Tsong kha pa thinks that the Mādhyamika must oppose the realist's distorted mode of perceptual apprehension (*'dzin stang*) by adopting a position that is ultimately founded in a different mode of apprehension. I argue that even granted Siderits' proposal as to how Svātantrikas are able to bypass incommensurabilities arising in instances of different styles of reasoning, Tsong kha pa's argument that Mādhyamikas cannot use autonomous inferences in reasoning with realists holds.

**Chapter Four** looks at how the work of two other contemporary scholars who defend versions of the Svātantrika position might suggest ways in which to resist Tsong kha pa's critique of the Svātantrikas' use of autonomous inferences. One way to resist Tsong kha pa's critique of autonomous inferences might be to adopt the stance that Mādhyamikas are able to ironically enter into their opponents' point of view and are thereby enabled to agree on a logical subject in common with realists. I find something like this strategy in Malcolm David Eckel's reading of Bhāvaviveka's Svātantrika position. Another approach to resisting Tsong kha pa's critique seems to be evident in Sara McClintock's interpretation of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's account of autonomous. According to McClintock, for Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla a Mādhyamikas' inferences can be grounded in perceptual appearances because those appearances are distorted in the same ways for Mādhyamikas as they are for realists.

With respect to Eckel's reconstruction and defense of the Svātantrika position, I argue that the problem with grounding autonomous inferences in an exercise of irony is that it requires Mādhyamikas to construct inferences grounded in experiences which they themselves could only pretend to be

having. This is problematic because it implies that the ironist's inferences cannot satisfy the requirement for autonomous inferences, which stipulates that every part of the inference must appear the same to both parties. With respect to McClintock's reconstruction and defense of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's position, I argue that their strategy is self-defeating considered from a therapeutic standpoint. They suppose that the foundational appearances for their own and their opponents' inferences are all corrupted by ignorance. But how could an effective therapy be carried out on the basis of what is pathological? How would one base a proof, for example, *that there is no mind-independent fact of the matter about the origins of stars* on its seeming that there *is perceptual evidence that there are mind-independent facts of the matter about the origins of stars*?

In **Chapter Five** I do my best to curtail a common error that many interpreters of Tsong kha pa's view seem to make. Many interpretations of Tsong kha pa's view, by both contemporary and traditional commentators, rest on a fallacious importation of the Svātantrikas' assumption that *all* appearances are corrupted by the conceptual distortion that superimposes intrinsic existence onto anything that one apprehends. This opens the dangerous possibility that Tsong kha pa's view is hopelessly circular. Commentators have been led to suppose that Tsong kha pa holds that one must achieve a non-conceptual experience of emptiness in order to be able to distinguish between intrinsic existence and mere existence. Nevertheless, they correctly attribute to Tsong kha pa the claim that a realization of emptiness cannot be achieved unless one has first formed an ability to adequately tell the difference between how things appear with intrinsic existence superimposed and how they appear without such distortion. In other words, Tsong kha pa insists that a successful program of therapy requires a correct identification of the problem, which is the distorted perception of things according to which they appear to be intrinsically existent. Thus, Tsong kha pa's view seems to be hopelessly circular. A correct identification of the object of negation presupposes a direct realization of emptiness, while nevertheless it is impossible to achieve a direct realization of emptiness without first correctly identifying the object of negation.

I criticize the assumption that Tsong kha pa thinks that ordinary beings who have not yet had a direct realization of emptiness cannot adequately distinguish between an experience of intrinsic existence and an experience of mere existence. Through a close reading of the key passages in Tsong

kha pa's writings which commentators rely on in attributing this claim to Tsong kha pa, I argue that in these passages Tsong kha pa is actually arguing *against* the claim which these commentators take him to be advancing. That is, these passages present a *reductio ad absurdum* against the claim that ordinary beings, before achieving a direct realization of emptiness, are unable to tell intrinsic existence and mere existence apart. Tsong kha pa is arguing, or so I claim, that in order for it to be possible for a Mādhyamika to reason with a realist, it must be possible for the realist to have an experience of mere existents and recognize that those mere existents *are not* intrinsic existents. And that means that ordinary beings must be able to tell the difference between mere existence and intrinsic existence *in order to* realize emptiness.

**Chapter Six** extends the argument begun in chapter five. I consider passages in which Tsong kha pa argues that there are three modes of apprehension (*'dzin stang*). In addition to the modes of apprehending things as though they were intrinsically existent and apprehending things as though they were empty of intrinsic existence, Tsong kha pa postulates a mode of apprehending things as merely existent. This mode of apprehension, he believes, is shared by Mādhyamikas and non-Mādhyamikas. The third mode of apprehension is pivotal for Tsong kha pa's understanding of how opponent acknowledged inferences are to be used in reasoning with realists. In particular, I offer a close reading of Tsong kha pa's explanation of an example of an opponent acknowledged inference taken from Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārika*. My aim is to elucidate the importance, in Tsong kha pa's account of opponent acknowledged inferences, of the idea that non-Mādhyamikas are able to apprehend mere existence.

In the **Conclusion** I make two final moves. First, I offer an explication of Tsong kha pa's use of parameterization in his account of the two truths. My explanation of Tsong kha pa's approach to the two truths mobilizes my claim that Tsong kha pa postulates three modes of apprehension, and I critique approaches to Tsong kha pa's conception of the two truths which might unintentionally or otherwise give rise to the idea that Tsong kha pa thinks the distinction between the ultimate and the conventional is some kind of an ontological distinction. Finally, I offer a response to a potentially damaging critique of Tsong kha pa's distinction between intrinsic existence and mere existence. The critique, which I initially present in the course of the discussion in chapter six, is by Gendun Chopel

(1903-1951), the “renegade dGe lugs monk” whose intellectual legacy is so intriguing in part because of his unique confrontation with modernity, and in part because of his tendency to issue scathing criticisms of dGe lugs positions.<sup>87</sup> Gendun Chopel challenges Tsong kha pa's distinction between intrinsic existence and mere existence on the grounds that there is no phenomenological difference between an apprehension of intrinsic existence and an apprehension of mere existence. Admittedly, there is a striking paucity of phenomenological description on Tsong kha pa's part where the difference between intrinsic existence and mere existence is concerned. Nevertheless, I believe that situations like this make rational reconstruction interesting and worthwhile. It is not only a challenge but perhaps also an opportunity to exercise a greater measure of creativity when one sets out to provide a response on behalf of a historical thinker to a criticism which that thinker seems not to have noticed, or at least not to have addressed explicitly. In this case, I use the method of fusion philosophy to develop a response to Gendun Chopel's criticism. Drawing on Jean-Paul Sartre's phenomenological analysis of self-deception, and focusing particularly on his literary study of the phenomenon in the novel *Nausea*, I develop a phenomenological account of the difference between intrinsic existence and mere existence. I argue that experiences of intrinsic existence are marked by a kind of internal instability due to the tension between how things appear in such experiences, on the one hand, and how rational analysis suggests things must be.<sup>88</sup> Experiences of mere existence, on the other hand, are characterized by an inherent stability, as I attempt to explain.

The line of thought which runs through the dissertation is that Tsong kha pa's distinction between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika methodologies presupposes that some modes of apprehension are infected with a problematic kind of conceptual structuring while other modes of apprehension are not affected by that particularly problematic type of conceptual structuring (although this is not to say that other modes of apprehension are not dependent on other types of conceptual structuring). Because of this situation, the Prāsaṅgikas' approach to reasoning with realists presents a feasible therapeutic technique. Prāsaṅgikas proceed by drawing the realists' attention to the mere existents

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87 It is unclear the extent to which the positions Gendun Chopel criticizes are attributable to Tsong kha pa himself (cf. Lopez 2006), although I claim that in the case at hand, at any rate, the critique would seem to stick to “the Foremost Lama,” as Gendun Chopel perhaps ironically refers to Tsong kha pa. It is interesting to note that Gendun Chopel was nicknamed “the madman” (*smyon pa*) in part because of his proclivity for defending non-Buddhist positions on the monastic debate grounds while he was still living in the monasteries.

88 For advanced practitioners, there is also a tension between how things appear when they are apprehended as intrinsically existent and how they appear when apprehended to be empty of intrinsic existence.

which both sides are capable of apprehending and which both sides are willing to concede as indeed being legitimate entities. Both sides are capable of apprehending mere existents because realists and their Mādhyamika interlocutors each rely on the same non-problematic types of conceptual structuring for some of their perceptual experiences. Having established what exists through these reliable modes of apprehension, Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas next demonstrate that there are no intrinsically existent entities lurking among the mere existents which both they and their realist “patients” accept. The Svātantrika approach, on the other hand, is problematic because Svātantrikas attempt to reason with realists by conceding at the start that there are indeed intrinsically existent entities. Tsong kha pa thinks this is a hopeless therapeutic strategy. But, in any event, nothing about the story I tell about Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction presupposes that the two methodologies require different ontological commitments or epistemological presuppositions of any kind, contrary to what has become the widely accepted view among contemporary scholars. To this “standard picture” of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction we shall now turn.

# Chapter One

## Svātantrika Ontological Commitments

The aim of this first chapter is to present what I am calling the 'standard picture' of Tsong kha pa's interpretation of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. Most contemporary scholars seem to accept the standard picture which portrays Tsong kha pa as the creator of an altogether "new" ontological interpretation of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. It shall be my aim, over the course of the dissertation, to step away from this picture. Here I shall focus on how Tsong kha pa's view has been presented in recent scholarship on the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. As this will show, the standard picture finds support from a notable cadre of contemporary scholars. However, while these scholars basically agree that Tsong kha pa criticizes Svātantrikas for making some form of ontological commitment, the unity of their conceptions of Tsong kha pa's view breaks into a panoply of accounts when it comes to explaining the exact nature of this alleged ontological commitment.<sup>1</sup> We shall consider several strategies which have been used to try to articulate the nature of the ontological commitment Tsong kha pa is said to ascribe to the Svātantrikas. Afterward, I shall offer some critical reflection on the relation of ontological commitments to realism in the Mādhyamika context. This will point the way to developing a different picture of Tsong kha pa's approach to the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction.

Admittedly, many of the presentations of Tsong kha pa's view to be considered here are simply thumbnail sketches which scholars have provided for the purposes of contextualizing other Tibetan thinkers' views. For instance, Tauscher's discussion of Tsong kha pa is given merely for the purposes of presenting some background for Tauscher's reading of Phya pa. Similarly, Cabezón presents a sketch of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction for the purposes of comparison with the

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the following, let us presuppose, for the sake of convenience, that the notion of ontological commitment could be rendered more explicit relying on Quine's account of ontological commitment: "To show that some given object is required in a theory, what we have to show is no more nor less than that that object is required, for the truth of the theory, to be among the values over which the bound variables range" (Quine 1969: 94).

view of Tsong kha pa's near contemporary, Rong ston shākya rgyal mtshan (1367-1449). And Dreyfus's treatment of Tsong kha pa's view is also succinctly drawn within the context of an essay on the thinking about the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction of another major Tibetan philosopher, 'Ju Mi pham rgya mtsho (1846-1912). So the central aim here is not to provide a final assessment of every author's interpretation of Tsong kha pa. This does not mean that I will not hesitate to make a few critical observations wherever I happen to get caught up in the spirit of these scholars' project of getting Tsong kha pa's and his predecessors' or contemporaries' views right. Nevertheless, as I explained before,<sup>2</sup> my intention is not to participate in that sort of project. My intention is simply to present another picture of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction which contemporary philosophers might find useful. And to do that, it will be useful to show how the picture I am presenting differs from a conception of Tsong kha pa's view which many contemporary scholars already seem to have found useful.

### **Tom Tillemans and Chizuko Yoshimizu on Tsong kha pa's Distinction**

One approach to articulating the way in which Tsong kha pa supposedly thinks Svātantrikas make an ontological commitment, *or something like an ontological commitment*, is to treat the occurrence of such a commitment as a corollary of the epistemological position which Svātantrikas adopt. This way of articulating the Svātantrikas' alleged ontological commitment thus involves a combination punch. Not only is the Svātantrika position to be criticized for adopting a faulty ontology, but it is also criticized for defending a flawed epistemological doctrine. This way of articulating Tsong kha pa's critique of the Svātantrika position is found in key essays by Tom Tillemans and Sara McClintock which we shall consider at length in chapter two and chapter four.<sup>3</sup> On this conception of Tsong kha pa's critique of the Svātantrika approach, the Svātantrika's ontological commitment is seen as a corollary of the acceptance of a form of epistemological foundationalism. As Tillemans explains,

The given is thus often viewed as the necessary ontological correlate to foundationalism. It is seen as the

<sup>2</sup> See above in the Introduction.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Tillemans 2003 and McClintock 2003.



metaphysics integral to the epistemological view that there are self-authenticating, or intrinsically credible, cognitions—perceptions—which constitute the final court of appeal upon which inferential understanding depends for its justification and without which there would be an infinite regress, one understanding supporting another without end.<sup>4</sup>

Tillemans connects the notion of the Given with the notion of *svalakṣaṇa*, or particulars, which Svātantrikas accept conventionally. Tillemans thus establishes a link between epistemology and ontology which he uses to argue that the Svātantrika position at least has “affinities with realism,” even if we cannot call the Svātantrika position full-fledged realism.<sup>5</sup> Tillemans adapts a criterion from Crispin Wright and John Haldane’s characterization of realism to determine whether a view is a form of realism, or at least “like” realism. Tillemans’ criterion appeals to the idea that “the fundamental core of realism is a fusion of two ideas, deference to the independent and objective facts that make true beliefs true and the self-assurance that we can know these facts.”<sup>6</sup> The link Tillemans thus forges between epistemology and ontology in his account of Tsong kha pa’s critique of the Svātantrika position misleads Tillemans to infer that Tsong kha pa rejects the project of epistemological foundationalism when he supposedly rejects Svātantrika quasi-realism. In the next chapter I argue against this particular turn in Tillemans’ interpretation. For now, let it suffice to note that Tillemans’ articulation of Tsong kha pa’s alleged ontological interpretation of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction makes a weaker claim than the other views to be considered here, since Tillemans only argues for a kind of “rapprochement” between realists’ and Svātantrikas’ views.<sup>7</sup>

Chizuko Yoshimizu advances a stronger form of the claim that Tsong kha pa thinks Svātantrikas are realists. Yoshimizu describes Tsong kha pa’s critique of the Svātantrika position as being grounded

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4 Tillemans 2003: 98.

5 Cf. Tillemans 2003: 110.

6 Tillemans 2003: 109. See below, pp. 46-67, for further discussion.

7 Cf. Tillemans 2003: circa 108. It is difficult to grasp what exactly Tsong kha pa could find to criticize in the Svātantrika position’s merely being “like” realism, unless we countenance an altogether different conception of Tsong kha pa’s critique of the Svātantrika position. That is, Tsong kha pa’s criticism could be conceived as being motivated by psychology, not ontology. For there could be undesirable psychological ramifications involved in maintaining an attitude of deference to something like objective facts, even though such an attitude might not strictly speaking be said to involve an ontological commitment (depending on how the notion of “deference to something like objective facts” is cashed out). For more on Tillemans’ criterion for realism, see below, pp. 36 ff.

in the “respective ontologies” of Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas.<sup>8</sup> Yoshimizu's aim is to uncover the way in which Tsong kha pa modifies Candrakīrti's critique of Bhāvaviveka. Tsong kha pa's discussion of Candrakīrti's critique of Bhāvaviveka's use of autonomous inferences to formulate the Mādhyamika view is of course the point of entry for Tsong kha pa into the Tibetan Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika conversation. Yoshimizu suggests that Tsong kha pa re-conceptualizes Candrakīrti's argument. Rather than taking it as an argument to show why Bhāvaviveka should not use autonomous inferences, Yoshimizu suggests that Tsong kha pa construes the focus of the argument to be to show why Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas are unable to use autonomous inferences. On Yoshimizu's reading, “Tsong kha pa seems to find Bhāviveka's fault in his ontological *assumptions* rather than in his use of autonomous inference per se.”<sup>9</sup> That is, autonomous inferences can be used by Svātantrikas but not by Prāsaṅgikas because the two schools adopt different ontologies. Yoshimizu's basis for ascribing an ontological commitment to Svātantrikas here comes close to Tillemans', for on Yoshimizu's reading Svātantrikas accept the idea of grounding an autonomous inference on a *svalakṣaṇa*.<sup>10</sup> Yoshimizu's claim does not involve any convoluted hedging, however. The contrast between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika ontologies is clear-cut, in Yoshimizu's view. She says:

Consequently, there are two kinds of direct perception: For those who accept the existence of real self-characteristic as it appears, it is nonerroneous (*ma 'khrul ba, abhrānta*), whereas for those who do not accept such a real self-characteristic, it is erroneous (*khrul ba, bhrānta*). In other words, their respective ontological positions determine the nonerroneous or erroneous character of direct perception.<sup>11</sup>

Yoshimizu thus indirectly ties the Svātantrikas' ontological commitment to the issue of epistemological foundations, although she does not explore the connection or explicitly discuss the Given and foundationalism in the way that Tillemans does. For Yoshimizu, no explanation seems to be required as to why the acceptance of “a real self-characteristic” constitutes an ontological commitment. A “real self-characteristic” is simply a type of entity which Svātantrikas accept but Prāsaṅgikas reject.

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8 Yoshimizu 2003: 258.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Cf. *ibid.*

11 Yoshimizu 2003: 265.

Yoshimizu's interpretation of Tsong kha pa's view makes a strong form of the claim that the Svātantrika position involves an ontological commitment. But it is generally true that the strongest forms of a claim are the easiest to counter, and this proves to be the case here. If Yoshimizu were correct and Tsong kha pa's rejection of the Svātantrika approach were straightforwardly based on Svātantrikas' acceptance of *svalakṣaṇa*, then Tsong kha pa's critique would be relatively simple to rebut. Defenders of the Svātantrika approach would need only to point out the provisional nature of the Svātantrikas' acceptance of *svalakṣaṇa*, for Svātantrikas only accept "real self-characteristics" conventionally.<sup>12</sup> Since their acceptance of *svalakṣaṇa* is only provisional, it could hardly be an effective criticism to charge Svātantrikas with a full-fledged ontological commitment. The more effective approach for making an ontological interpretation of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction would thus be to proceed indirectly, as Tillemans does, and attempt to establish that Svātantrikas' acceptance of *svalakṣaṇa*, while not immediately constituting an ontological commitment, leads by a subtle route to some attenuated form of ontological commitment. Or, as Tillemans might say, the Svātantrikas' *provisional* acceptance of *svalakṣaṇa* makes them "end up in a very subtle way being *like* realists."<sup>13</sup> The relative strengths of the interpretations proposed by Tillemans and Yoshimizu is particularly evident if we consider what they say about Tsong kha pa's uses of the label "realist" (*dngos smra ba*). Tillemans says, "Of course, Tsong kha pa is not saying that Svātantrikas *are* themselves *dngos smra ba*."<sup>14</sup> As Tillemans explains, "Now, straight off, what should be clear is that no Mādhyamika, be he Svātantrika or Prāsaṅgika, will countenance there being a genuinely real external world completely independent of mind—in that sense, both schools clearly are

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12 Tsong kha pa is of course well aware of the provisional nature of the Svātantrikas' acceptance of a form of intrinsic existence. For example, Tsong kha pa writes: "On this point, the master Bhāvaviveka asserts that it is the nature of forms and such to exist conventionally by way of their intrinsic character. The Cittamātrins argue that imaginary constructs lack characteristic nature because it is not their nature to exist by way of intrinsic character. To refute them, Bhāvaviveka investigates the agents and objects involved in the process of imaginary construction. He says that if they assert that the terms and minds that construct entities and features lack intrinsic character conventionally, then they are inappropriately denying the existence of contingent entities. Therefore, it is clear that Bhāvaviveka asserts that contingent entities have intrinsic character conventionally" (*GT* 168).

13 Tillemans 2003: 107.

14 *Ibid.*

*not* realist, when the term is used in the full sense following Haldane's and Wright's criteria."<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, Yoshimizu makes a point of the fact that Tsong kha pa finds it convenient to classify Svātantrikas together with realists under the heading of "those who assert that the self-nature exists."<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that Tsong kha pa carefully qualifies this terminological convention, reiterating that Svātantrikas are definitely *not* realists.<sup>17</sup>

### **Georges Dreyfus and Helmut Tauscher on Tsong kha pa's Distinction**

Dreyfus' presentation of the ontological interpretation of Tsong kha pa's critique is more nuanced than Yoshimizu's, but Dreyfus nevertheless advances a somewhat stronger version of the interpretation than Tillemans. Whereas Tillemans suggests an indirect route from the Svātantrikas' acceptance of *svalakṣaṇa* to their holding a position that is "like" realism, Dreyfus says that the Svātantrikas' attempt to ground autonomous inferences on *svalakṣaṇas* "has ontological implications."<sup>18</sup> This suggests an ontological difference between Svātantrikas' and Prāsaṅgikas' positions more on the order of that envisioned by Yoshimizu. Dreyfus' way of stating how Tsong kha pa thinks the Svātantrika position involves an ontological commitment skirts the objection that since Svātantrikas accept *svalakṣaṇas* only conventionally, their ontological commitment is at the most only pragmatic. Thus, Dreyfus says,

For Tsong kha pa, the Svātantrika view still holds to a certain idea of objectivity and is thus unable to eliminate fully the object of negation as understood by the Prāsaṅgika. In particular, the Svātantrika holds that phenomena exist objectively ( *rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pa* , lit., are established by their own characteristics) on the conventional level and that this objective existence should not be negated; otherwise, if one *were* to negate this conventional objective existence, the Svātantrika argues, the conventional validity of phenomena would be jeopardized.<sup>19</sup>

The force of the claim that the Svātantrika position involves an ontological commitment is here mitigated when Dreyfus says that Svātantrikas merely "hold to a certain idea of objectivity." This is

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15 Tillemans 2003: 109-110.

16 Yoshimizu 2003: 262.

17 Cf. *GT* 255.

18 Cf. Dreyfus 2003: 326.

19 Dreyfus 2003: 318.

analogous to Tillemans' cautious classification of the Svātantrika position as being "like" realism on the grounds of Svātantrikas' maintaining a deference to objective facts. Nevertheless, elsewhere Dreyfus more boldly describes Tsong kha pa's conception of the Svātantrika position as involving the idea that Svātantrikas accept that "phenomena exist objectively."<sup>20</sup> Thus, Dreyfus' treatment of Tsong kha pa's view is more or less on a par with Yoshimizu's. One has the impression, however, that Dreyfus, in the interests of more expediently presenting the distinctive qualities of Tsong kha pa's critics' approach to the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction, creates something of a straw-man in his portrayal of Tsong kha pa's view. Tsong kha pa's claim, as Dreyfus formulates it, wears its absurdity on its sleeve, for there is nothing easier than to find absurdity in the claim that the Svātantrikas' conventional acceptance of objective existence constitutes a serious ontological commitment. The alternative approach to the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction proposed by Tsong kha pa's critics, thinkers such as Rong ston shākya rgyal mtshan (1367-1449), sTag tshang lo tsa ba (b. 1405), Go rams pa bsod nams seng ge (1429-1489), gSer mdog paṅ chen shākya mchog ldan (1428-1509), and the Eighth Kar ma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1504-1557), makes the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction, as Dreyfus says, "not ontological but purely pragmatic, and hence much less dramatic than Tsong kha pa would have it."<sup>21</sup>

The upshot of the purported ontological difference between Svātantrikas' and Prāsaṅgikas' ontologies in Tsong kha pa's account, according to Dreyfus, is that the two schools are divided in their views of the nature of emptiness.<sup>22</sup> Dreyfus states that "Tsong kha pa's dominant place in the intellectual history of post-fifteenth century Tibet and his aggressive promotion of Prāsaṅgika as the supreme Madhyamaka view were key elements in reinforcing the preeminence of Prāsaṅgika in Tibetan Buddhism."<sup>23</sup> Dreyfus' view is thus equivalent with Yoshimizu's when she writes that "by connecting autonomous inference with conventionally established self-nature or self-characteristic, Tsong kha pa demonstrates the difference between the ontological positions of the Prāsaṅgika and the

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20 Dreyfus 2003: 326.

21 Dreyfus 2003: 327. Also cf. pp. 319-20.

22 Cf. *ibid* 318.

23 *Ibid* 319.

Svātantrika as well as the former's superiority over the latter."<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the extremity of the position which Dreyfus and Yoshimizu ascribe to Tsong kha pa seems to be what Tillemans means to caution against when he notes that "Even the Tibetan dGe lugs pa scholastic, as we saw, would never countenance calling Mādhyamikas "realists" (*ngos smra ba*)."<sup>25</sup> The disbelief evinced by Tillemans' response to the prospect of an interpretation of the Svātantrika position like that which Dreyfus and Yoshimizu ascribe to Tsong kha pa is echoed by Dreyfus' summary of Tsong kha pa's critics' reaction to Tsong kha pa's view. As Dreyfus says, voicing Tsong kha pa's critics' point of view:

The first and most important issue on which Tsong kha pa's critics agree is the rejection of his assertion that there is a substantive difference between the Svātantrika and the Prāsaṅgika understanding of emptiness. The critics argue that in as much as the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction is laid out in Indian texts, it is not couched in terms of a difference in the view of emptiness. Candrakīrti, for instance, does not accuse his opponent Bhāvaviveka of having a different view of emptiness or of not understanding emptiness but, rather, of not understanding the methods appropriate to its realization. Moreover, these critics argue, it is highly counterintuitive to imagine that such venerable figures as Bhāvaviveka and Śāntarakṣita, who have been counted in India and in Tibet among the great masters of the Madhyamaka tradition, had an inferior understanding of emptiness to that of Candrakīrti, who stood almost alone as a Prāsaṅgika. Is it feasible to posit that there is a correct view of emptiness, that of the Prāsaṅgika, that had not been comprehended by almost the totality of the important Indian Madhyamaka thinkers?<sup>26</sup>

Tsong kha pa's claim that the Prāsaṅgika approach is superior to the Svātantrika approach is, I must agree with Dreyfus, based on the notion that the Svātantrika approach fails to negate the subtle object of negation.<sup>27</sup> For Tsong kha pa does describe the Svātantrika conception of the object of negation as being "very coarse relative to the Prāsaṅgikas' apprehension of the object of negation."<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish these two claims: (1) the Prāsaṅgika view is superior to the Svātantrika view because only the Prāsaṅgika view can rid one of the subtle object of negation, and (2) the subtle object of negation is a purported entity, and negation of the subtle object of negation consists in the denial that that purported entity actually exists. It is not obvious from what Tsong kha pa says that just because he asserts (1) he must also accept (2). Indeed, Dreyfus' discussion of how

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24 Yoshimizu 2003: 258.

25 Tillemans 2003: 110.

26 Dreyfus 2003: 321.

27 Cf. *ibid* 318-319.

28 *EI* 197.

the critics react to Tsong kha pa's presentation of his view in the minor text, *dKa' gnad brgyad*,<sup>29</sup> brings out a point which suggests an alternative to supposing that the negation of the subtle object of negation must be an ontological concern. The *dKa' gnad brgyad* presents a distillation of the eight "significant philosophical differences that establish the Prāsaṅgika as a separate school," as Dreyfus observes.<sup>30</sup> One of the eight difficult points is, as Dreyfus puts it, "(6) the assertion that the grasping to the self of phenomena is a negative emotion (*nyon mongs; kleśa*)."<sup>31</sup> In other words, the subtle object of negation is the "grasping to the self of phenomena," and according to Tsong kha pa this is an "innate apprehension of true existence which has operated beginninglessly."<sup>32</sup> So, putting together the notion of an apprehension of intrinsic existence's being innate with the notion of its being a negative emotion, we may surmise that, according to Tsong kha pa, the Prāsaṅgika view is that the object of negation is something on the order of a neurosis. Thus, there is no need to construe the negation of the object of negation in the strictly logical sense by which proponents of an ontological interpretation reach something like (2) above. It may be that the Svātantrika approach's failure to eliminate the subtle object of negation would be best described rather as a failure in psychotherapeutic praxis, i.e., a failure to bring the particular course of "Madhyamaka analysis" to an end.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, scholars such as Dreyfus and Tauscher adopt an ontological interpretation of Tsong kha pa's claim that the Svātantrika approach fails to negate the subtle object of negation. We have seen how Dreyfus adopts this stance. Tauscher likewise asserts that the Svātantrikas' different

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29 Cf. Dreyfus 2003: 324-28.

30 *Ibid* 324.

31 *Ibid*.

32 *EI* 197.

33 Perhaps in characterizing the notion of bringing a Mad-analysis to an end we might provisionally follow Freud, who offers the following definition of what is meant in psychoanalytic theory by the phrase "the end of an analysis": "An analysis is ended when analyst and patient cease to meet for the analytic session. This happens when two conditions have been approximately fulfilled. First, the patient must no longer be suffering from his former symptoms and must have overcome his various anxieties and inhibitions and, secondly, the analyst must have formed the opinion that so much repressed material has been brought into consciousness, so much that was inexplicable elucidated, and so much inner resistance overcome that no repetition of the patient's specific pathological processes is to be feared" (Freud 1963: 237). Though there is no time to argue the point here, I would suggest that something like Freud's conditions determining the end of analysis (suitably modified) could be satisfied by the bodhisattva, on Tsong kha pa's account, somewhere in the supermundane stage of the path of cultivation; see Apple 2008: 78-9.

identification of the object of negation “constitutes a basis for ontology.”<sup>34</sup> As Tauscher mentions, the object of negation is specified by Tsong kha pa using six terms which, as Tauscher says, “are more or less synonyms”: “established as real” (*bden par grub pa, satyasiddha*), “established in an absolute sense” (*don dam par grub pa, paramāthasiddha*), “truly established” (*yang dag par grub pa, samyaksiddha*), “established in itself” (*rang gi ngo bos* or *rang ngos nas grub pa, svarūpasiddha/svabhāvasiddha*), “established through its own characteristic” (*rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pa, svalakṣaṇasiddha*), and “established through its intrinsic nature” (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa, svabhāvasiddha*).<sup>35</sup> Tauscher claims that these six terms form two groups of three, with the first three covering uses which both Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas could together accept. The latter group of three terms, however, is used exclusively to designate the negation of the subtle object of negation which Tsong kha pa thinks only the Prāsaṅgikas successfully negate, according to Tauscher. The latter three terms apparently connote, for Tauscher at any rate, the idea of phenomenal contents' having objective existence.

Nonetheless, I can find nothing in Tsong kha pa's writings to substantiate the division Tauscher proposes between the two groups of terms.<sup>36</sup> It is true, however, that Tsong kha pa distinguishes the

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34 Tauscher 2003: 229.

35 Cf. *ibid* 230.

36 Tauscher does cite a passage from the *Lam rim chen mo* in order to substantiate the claim that the division between Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas is based on “whether or not they conventionally accept external objects [established through their own characteristic]” (Tauscher 2003: 230). The complete passage, as Tauscher has it, reads: “The learned ones from the time of the later propagation of the doctrine in the Land of Snow applied the two designations “Prāsaṅgika” (*thal 'gyur ba*) and “Svātantrika” (*rang rgyud pa*) to Mādhyamikas. As this is in accordance with the *Prasannapadā* it is not to be considered their invention. Thereby the distinction of whether or not they conventionally accept external objects [established through their own characteristic] is ascertained, and when they are named according to [their respective] manners of generating the theory of ascertaining the ultimate (*paramārtha*), i.e., emptiness (*sūnyatā*), in a mental continuum (*saṃtāna*), too, the distinction of Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika is ascertained” (*ibid*; cf. *GT* 116). But there is a problem with the bracketed comment interpolated by Tauscher. This comment distorts Tsong kha pa's remark about ascertaining a doxographic distinction between two schools based on whether or not they conventionally accept external objects. By inserting the qualification, “established through their own characteristic,” Tauscher forces a statement about the distinction between Sautrāntika-Mādhyamikas and Yogācāra-Mādhyamikas to sound as though it were referring to the distinction between Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas and Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas. The broader context of the passage which Tauscher excerpts shows that Tsong kha pa is summarizing both pairs of doxographic distinctions. Just before the remarks quoted by Tauscher, Tsong kha pa explains how “the history of commentary on Nāgārjuna's thought” separates according to “a system in which external objects exist conventionally” and one in which “external objects do not exist conventionally” (*GT* 116). Tsong kha pa concludes: “Thus, two forms of Madhyamaka arose; the former is called Sautrāntika-Madhyamaka and the latter Yogācāra-Madhyamaka” (*ibid*). Then, after



way in which Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas posit conventional entities, and his distinction could mirror the sort of distinction Tauscher applies to the two groups of terms. For Tsong kha pa, Svātantrikas posit conventional entities by “the force of appearing to an awareness” whereas Prāsaṅgikas posit conventional things by “the force of conceptuality.”<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Tsong kha pa's distinction here does reflect the difference in subtlety of the objects of negation which he ascribes to the different schools (more on this later).<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, as we shall see when we consider this point in detail in the next chapter, it is unclear that the distinction between positing things by the force of appearing to an awareness and positing them by the force of conceptuality demands to be ascribed ontological significance.

### **José Ignacio Cabezón on Tsong kha pa and Rong ston pa**

The final version of the ontological interpretation of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction which I shall consider is the version proposed in Cabezón's comparison of Tsong kha pa's view with Rong ston pa's conception of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction.<sup>39</sup> It will be useful to examine not only Cabezón's treatment of Tsong kha pa's view, but also to briefly consider his presentation of Rong ston pa's view, for Cabezón's interpretation of Rong ston pa already begins to unravel the standard picture we have been surveying. Cabezón suggests that in Tsong kha pa's account we find a distinction in the Svātantrikas' and Prāsaṅgikas' views of emptiness “extending to all facets of the Madhyamaka as a philosophical system.”<sup>40</sup> On Cabezón's view, the Svātantrikas' realism is evident not only in the question of “whether or not Svātantrikas explicitly accept “existence by virtue of own characteristic” (*rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pa*) at the conventional level,” but also in “many

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briefly going over the distinction between Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas, Tsong kha pa, summarizing both sets of distinctions, explains that considered in one way, i.e., whether or not they conventionally accept external objects, “all Mādhyamikas are included within two types,” while considered another way, i.e., in terms of the method by which they instill the view of emptiness into the mind-streams of realists, all Mādhyamikas are again “included within two types—Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas” (*ibid*). The point is that the pair of distinctions cuts across one another. Thus, it is possible to have Svātantrika-Yogācāra-Mādhyamikas and Svātantrika-Sautrāntika-Mādhyamikas, and so forth.

37 Cf. *EI* 200-201.

38 See chapter two.

39 Cf. Cabezón 2003.

40 Cabezón 2003: 297.

of their other tenets—their use of the qualifier “conventionally” in their repudiation of inherent existence, their distinction between true and false conventionalities (*yang log kun rdzob*), their positing of a form of personal identity that is not the “mere I,” and so forth....<sup>41</sup> Thus, his characterization of Tsong kha pa's appraisal of the Svātantrika view argues for a systematic approach to the question of ontological commitment. With this more diffuse way of articulating Tsong kha pa's negative assessment of the Svātantrika view, Cabezón manages to stand apart from the messy task of explaining in detail how “accepting any form of independent existence, subtle or otherwise”<sup>42</sup> could result in a “rigid metaphysical distinction”<sup>43</sup> between the two schools.

However, Cabezón's comparison of Tsong kha pa and Rong ston pa on the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction undermines as much as it bolsters the standard picture. Cabezón's interpretation of Rong ston pa's position problematizes one aspect of the standard picture, namely, the image of Tsong kha pa as creator of an altogether new conception of the relevance of autonomous inferences. Cabezón shows that in Rong ston pa's thinking Tauscher's “old” style Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika concern with whether Mādhyamikas should defend a thesis is mixed together with the “new” style concern about whether the parts of a constructive inference—subject, predicate, and example—must appear the same to both parties (in Cabezón's parlance, this is the issue of “relying upon a reason that has its trimodal criteria established by a valid cognition”). On Cabezón's reading, Rong ston pa maintains that Mādhyamikas cannot use autonomous inferences, i.e., inferences whose parts appear the same to both parties, precisely because Mādhyamikas do not have a thesis to defend. Not having a thesis, the subject, predicate, and so forth do not appear any particular way to the Mādhyamika. As Rong ston pa says, “for the Mādhyamika at that time [i.e., in the context of ultimate analysis debating a realist] there is not even the appearance of a subject.”<sup>44</sup>

Rong ston pa's pragmatic approach leads him to make a 'soft' doxographic distinction between

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41 *Ibid.*

42 Cf. *ibid* 301.

43 Cf. *ibid* 298.

44 *Ibid* 300. My brackets.

Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika, one that, as Cabezón says, “does not imply such a radical split in the Madhyamaka, and that does not require a choice between Candrakīrti and the rest of the Indian Madhyamaka tradition.”<sup>45</sup> Crucial to Rong ston pa's soft doxographic distinction, Cabezón argues, is his rejection of the ontological interpretation which, according to the standard picture we have been surveying, Tsong kha pa contributes to the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika conversation. The ontological interpretation pivots on the question whether autonomous inferences are necessarily problematic from a Mādhyamika perspective. Rong ston pa rejects the ontological interpretation's suggestion that autonomous inferences are thoroughly problematic by advancing a purely procedural interpretation of Prāsaṅgikas' rejection of autonomous inferences. As Cabezón explains, on Rong ston pa's view the Svātantrikas' mistake is in requiring commensurability between realists and Mādhyamikas in order for Mādhyamikas to be able to use constructive inferences in reasoning with realists. Thus, as Cabezón says, quoting Rong ston pa:

[W]hat makes someone a Svātantrika is the insistence that emptiness can be understood “only by relying upon a reason that has its trimodal criteria (*tshul gsum*) established by means of a valid cognition, so that there is [for Svātantrikas] no question of the need for a *svatantra* reason.” Prāsaṅgikas, on the other hand, believe that “when one analyzes the ultimate there is nothing *to* be established by means of a *svatantra* reason, [a reason] that takes as its object the quality accepted by [Mādhyamikas themselves] (*rang gis mngon par 'dod pa'i chos*), and that is sought to be inferred in regard to a subject (*chos can*) that is established by the valid cognitions of both parties [the Mādhyamikas and their opponents].” In short, for Prāsaṅgikas, there *is* no trimodal criteria that *can be* established by both Mādhyamikas and their opponents, making the Svātantrika insistence on such a formal reason inappropriate.<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, Rong ston pa thinks Mādhyamikas are able to use a form of constructive inferences in reasoning with realists about the ultimate. Thus, Rong ston pa maintains that “the Prāsaṅgika analogue of the *svatantra* [i.e., autonomous inference],” as Cabezón puts it, is the “inference based on what is established for others” (*gzhan la grags pa'i rjes dpag*),<sup>47</sup> or opponent acknowledged inference. The question this raises, of course, is, what is the difference between opponent acknowledged inferences and autonomous inferences?<sup>48</sup> Rong ston pa explains:

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45 *Ibid* 296.

46 *Ibid* 300.

47 *Ibid* 299.

48 Another question this raises is, how is Rong ston pa's conception of opponent acknowledged inferences

In a syllogism that establishes a *svatantra* thesis, the trimodal criteria are ascertained. [In an inference] based on what is established for others, for the sake of eliminating the misconceptions of the opponent, one states as the reason what the others accept, without establishing any thesis independently (*rang dbang du*).<sup>49</sup>

In other words, the Prāsaṅgika accepts the opponent's point of view with an *as if* attitude, effectively adopting the opponent's perspective with an ironic stance, for the sake of opening a pathway of rational communication. Nevertheless, this does not put to rest the question of the difference between opponent acknowledged inferences as used by Prāsaṅgikas and autonomous inferences as used by Svāntarikas. On this sort of approach to opponent acknowledged inference, it could seem that the two strategies are virtually identical. We shall encounter this issue again in chapter four when we discuss McClintock's defense of Śāntarakṣita's and Kamalaśīla's Svāntarika methodology against Tsong kha pa's critique.<sup>50</sup> McClintock points out that Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla use what look like autonomous inferences even "where they do not accept the subject (infinitesimal particles), the quality to be proved (that they are perceptible), or the reason (because they are the objects of the sense faculties) *even conventionally* at another, higher level of analysis."<sup>51</sup> This leads McClintock to query: "What, then, is to prevent us from concluding that *all* apparently autonomous inferences advanced by these thinkers are in fact understood as provisional when regarded from the higher Madhyamaka level of analysis? Why cannot *all* their inferences actually be opponent-acknowledged, autonomous in name alone?"<sup>52</sup>

The answer, as we shall consider at length later, is that for Svāntarikas the parts of an inference are established for both parties as appearing the same way because of the innate distortion which affects all perception.<sup>53</sup> In this way Svāntarika thinkers like Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla ensure that all parts of an inference appear the same to both Mādhyamikas and realists. But the point that

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different from Tsong kha pa's conception of opponent acknowledged inferences? I discuss this below.

49 Cabezón 2003: 299.

50 Or Tillemans' version of Tsong kha pa's critique, at any rate. See McClintock 2003, and see below, chapter four.

51 McClintock 2003: 146.

52 *Ibid* 146-7.

53 See McClintock 2003: 146-150.

Rong ston pa might insist upon is that in the context of ultimate analysis, i.e., the context of analyzing to determine whether or not a thing is intrinsically existent, the mode of perception affected by an innate distortion would not correspond to any perceptual content found in the Mādhyamika's mind for, as we have seen, Rong ston pa thinks that "for the Mādhyamika at that time there is not even the appearance of a subject."<sup>54</sup> For Rong ston pa, then, the crux of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction is that the modes of perceptual apprehension available to Mādhyamikas and realists are incommensurable. This leads Rong ston pa to a purely methodological conception of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. As Cabezón observes, "For Rong ston pa, then, Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas differ from each other only with respect to the epistemological requirements necessary to make syllogisms that prove emptiness valid."<sup>55</sup>

In the chapters that follow, I shall argue for a picture of Tsong kha pa's approach to the use of rationality which does not differ, in certain respects, from Rong ston pa's on Cabezón's reading. The only difference, in fact, between Rong ston pa's view and Tsong kha pa's, on my reading, is that Tsong kha pa anticipates something like McClintock's defense of the Svātantrika view. McClintock's defense, as we shall see,<sup>56</sup> effectively addresses something like Rong ston pa's critique of autonomous inferences. That is, Tsong kha pa agrees with Rong ston pa that autonomous inferences are impossible between Mādhyamikas and realists due to incommensurability. However, Tsong kha pa's critique of the Svātantrika approach goes a step further. Tsong kha pa allows that the Svātantrikas also agree that incommensurability is an obstacle to autonomous inferences. However, as McClintock

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54 *Ibid* 300. As I shall argue later, Tsong kha pa has a similar reaction to the Svātantrika methodology. Of course, Rong ston pa insists that things do not appear to the Mādhyamika in the context of ultimate analysis because Rong ston pa believes that the Mādhyamika should defend no thesis. On the other hand, Tsong kha pa believes that the Mādhyamika should defend a thesis. As I shall explain in later chapters, for Tsong kha pa the incommensurability between the Mādhyamika's and the realist's perspectives in the context of ultimate analysis arises from the fact that, *in that context*, the Mādhyamika must oppose the realist's distorted mode of perceptual apprehension (*'dzin stang*) by adopting a position that is ultimately founded in an opposite mode of apprehension. The point is not that the awareness of a Mādhyamika, at the moment of presenting the realist with an inference, must be submerged in meditative concentration on emptiness. The point is simply that an inference cannot successfully uproot the realist's mistaken mode of apprehension if the Mādhyamika adopts that mistaken mode of apprehension for the sake of grounding an inference.

55 Cabezón 2003: 301.

56 See chapter four for detailed discussion.

explains, Svātantrikas recognize that by *provisionally* accepting the perceptual perspective of their opponents, *grounded as it is in an innately distorted mode of perceptual apprehension*, the problem of incommensurability can be overcome and the possibility of autonomous inferences secured.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, Tsong kha pa rejects the sort of ironic acceptance of the opponent's perspective practiced by Svātantrikas. Thus, his critique goes one step further than Rong ston pa's, and in doing so also effectively critiques Rong ston pa's account of opponent acknowledged inferences. For the sort of account of opponent acknowledged inferences proposed by Rong ston pa, on Cabezón's reading, is of course virtually the same as the Svātantrika account of autonomous inferences.<sup>58</sup>

In the next section we shall turn aside from surveying contemporary scholars' interpretations of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. What emerges from the survey we have taken is a picture of Tsong kha pa's critique of the Svātantrika approach to the use of philosophical reason which is different from the picture I shall be developing in the coming chapters. On the standard picture, as we have seen, Tsong kha pa's critique is primarily ontological. He rejects the Svātantrika approach because it involves some kind of subtle ontological commitment, or at least something *like* such an ontological commitment. The remainder of this chapter offers some critical reflection on the sense in which realism, as we are using the term here, involves ontological commitments. We are using the term "realism" to denote the perspective of those afflicted with the form of agnosia to which Mādhyamaka analysis is supposed to provide an effective therapy. I shall explore the relevance of this use of the term to uses of the term in the contemporary realism/anti-realism debate. This will give us a clear idea how to decide the extent to which ontological commitments are pertinent to criticizing how Svātantrikas use philosophical rationality.

### **A Criterion for Realism**

As we have already considered, Tom Tillemans offers a criterion for determining whether a view comprises a form of realism. Tillemans' criterion says that "the fundamental core of realism is a

<sup>57</sup> Cf. McClintock 2003: 146-150.

<sup>58</sup> This is what McClintock recognizes, although she has dGe lugs commentators' conceptions of opponent acknowledged inferences in her sights, and not Rong ston pa's.

fusion of two ideas, deference to the independent and objective facts that make true beliefs true and the self-assurance that we can know these facts.”<sup>59</sup> Tillemans' criterion provides a useful place to begin considering, from a critical perspective, the relevance of ontological commitments to the appellation as 'realists' of those who believe in intrinsic existence. As we have seen, Tillemans says that in Tsong kha pa's view Svātantrikas “end up in a very subtle way being *like* realists, i.e., “advocates of real entities” (*dingos smra ba*)....”<sup>60</sup> Tillemans does *not* say, however, that Tsong kha pa thinks Svātantrikas *are* realists.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, I shall eventually argue that Tsong kha pa himself is *like* a realist, in Tillemans' sense, and that the Svātantrikas' being *like* realists, in this sense, is thus no grounds at all for criticism from Tsong kha pa's point of view. Therefore, Tillemans' interpretation, as we shall see, offers us a picture of Tsong kha pa as a philosopher unable to satisfactorily resolve the tensions within his own thinking.

My thesis in the next chapter shall be that it is possible to separate the commitment to a notion of the Given from a commitment to foundationalism, so that one can be a foundationalist without accepting the Given. For Tillemans, as we shall see, the Given is the ontological correlate of epistemological foundationalism. Thus, when Tillemans says that realists are committed to a deference to independent, objective facts, he means that realists are foundationalists and that, by virtue of being foundationalists, they sustain an ontological commitment to the Given. But precisely what sort of ontological commitment could be involved in an acceptance of the Given? Isn't the Given an epistemological issue, after all? Isn't it a curious conflation of ontology and epistemology to speak of the Given as an “ontological correlate”? Here I shall attempt to unpack Tillemans' conception of the ontological significance of accepting the Given. As we shall see, Tillemans' conception of how accepting the Given involves an ontological commitment presupposes a *realist* manner of understanding the realism/anti-realism debate. I shall propose an alternative manner of understanding that debate which I hope will clarify how my use of the term 'realism' differs from

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59 Tillemans 2003: 109.

60 *Ibid* 107.

61 See above, p. 32-33.

Tillemans'. I wish to reserve the term 'realism' to refer precisely to those who suffer from a particular form of agnosia. It is because of this cognitive distortion, I shall argue, that philosophers are predisposed to think that there is something like a "realism/anti-realism" problem in the first place. If the illusion that such a problem deserves consideration can be dispelled, or exorcised,<sup>62</sup> then the illusion that Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction is an ontological matter might also be dispelled. But first it will be useful to explain how, starting with the idea that accepting the Given commits one to a form of realism, it might be concluded that being a foundationalist (which for Tillemans implies accepting the Given) must carry some form of ontological commitment.

Tillemans alludes to the ultimate connection between his conception of realism and the sort of realism involved in the realism/anti-realism debate when he says that "We can also understand how contemporary writers, like Mark Siderits, would see the Mādhyamikas as all being *anti-realists* in their denial of a mind-independent reality to which beliefs, when true, must correspond."<sup>63</sup> Here anti-realists are pictured as denying the existence of something which, it can be inferred, realists would embrace. But it will be useful to make a more detailed examination of Siderits' treatment of how Madhyamaka relates to the realism/anti-realism debate. This will help us to better understand what sense, if any, might be made of the idea that realism involves some sort of an ontological commitment. And from there it will be possible to reconstruct how Tillemans might think that accepting the Given is imbricated in a similar sort of ontological commitment.

### **Siderits on Madhyamaka and the Realism/Anti-realism Debate**

In the contemporary realism/anti-realism debate, the term 'realist' applies to philosophers who presuppose a kind of inside-outside picture of knowing.<sup>64</sup> On these philosophers' view, it is as though there were an invisible fence separating mind and world, and knowledge is something that occurs on

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62 This is a favorite expression of McDowell's for speaking of the aim of therapeutic philosophy in connection with the picture that seems to give rise to a "realism/anti-realism" problem.

63 Tillemans 2003: 110.

64 I explain this concept in greater detail in chapter two.



the inside, when internal objects adequately represent external objects. Anti-realists reject this picture of knowing. Nevertheless, Siderits thinks there are dissatisfying implications with “attributing this sort of anti-realism to the champions of the doctrine of emptiness (and hence for calling them 'anti-realists').”<sup>65</sup> Thus, Siderits does not believe that anti-realism is the final position adopted by Mādhyamikas. It is simply a station along the path of a dialectical progression which ends in what he calls ironically engaged semantic non-dualism.<sup>66</sup> It will be useful here to consider how Siderits unpacks part of this dialectic, for doing so will lead to a clear understanding of the type of ontological commitments which realists, in Tillemans' sense of 'realist', might be expected to form.

The dialectic begins with what can be characterized as common-sense realism. This view is easily grasped by anyone who understands the expression “ordinary medium-sized dry goods” and assigns the referents of that expression to the set of ultimately real things. The next stage in the progression is what Siderits calls Buddhist Reductionism. The relationship between common-sense realism and Buddhist Reductionism can be likened to the relationship between our everyday conceptions of things and the conception of the world which scientific theory makes available. As Wilfrid Sellars observes<sup>67</sup> about the relationship between theory and the everyday conception of things, which Sellars refers to as the “manifest image of man-in-the-world,” theory is supported by the manifest image, but theory also conflicts with the manifest image. Whereas the manifest image postulates a world populated by persons, other “medium sized dry goods,” and so forth, theory presents a different conception of what there is. For Siderits' Buddhist Reductionist, the “theory” in question is the Abhidharma mereological analysis of reality, which denies that any part-possessing entity could be an ultimate entity. Siderits shows that this mereological reductionism leads the Buddhist Reductionist to the doctrine of intrinsic natures which says that all of an ultimately real entity's intrinsic properties are essential to that entity. In order to move to the next stage of the dialectic, Siderits thinks, it is necessary for the Mādhyamika aspirant to refute the Buddhist

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65 Siderits 2003: 159.

66 Cf. Siderits: 2003: 160.

67 Cf. Sellars 1963: 1-40.

Reductionists' essentialism. I shall briefly review Siderits' reconstruction of the refutation of essential intrinsic properties. Then I shall explain how, in Siderits' view, this refutation doubles as a refutation of the picture of knowing which is the central issue in the contemporary realism/anti-realism debate.

First, it shall be useful to clarify the details of Buddhist Reductionists' essentialism as Siderits conceives it. Siderits construes intrinsic natures, or essences, in terms of essential *intrinsic* properties. An intrinsic property would be any property a thing has that is not dependent on its relations to other things. As Siderits explains:

I can say of my cat not only that she is black but also that she is presently under the table, that she is disliked by the dog downstairs, and even that she is such that  $7 + 5 = 12$ . But only certain monadic predicates denote intrinsic properties.... Being black would thus count as an instance of an intrinsic property of my cat, while the other three properties mentioned above would not.<sup>68</sup>

For the argument that realism involves a commitment to the existence of *essential* intrinsic properties, Siderits assumes, first, that the realist is prepared to distinguish between ultimate and other "non-ultimate" entities. The motive for such a distinction comes for the realist from her commitment to the idea that there is one true theory that correctly describes reality, as shall be explained later. Siderits' argument that mereological reductionism entails the doctrine of intrinsic natures is as follows. Mereological analysis establishes something like Sellars' principle of reducibility, which says that if an object is an assembly of component objects, then the assembly cannot possess any properties not reducible to either (i) properties of the individual component objects, or (ii) products of relations between the individual component objects.<sup>69</sup> Although Siderits does not explicitly invoke the principle

<sup>68</sup> Siderits 2003: 117. If further elucidation of the notion of intrinsic properties is necessary, consider the following illustration given by David Lewis: "Hubert Humphrey has a certain size and shape, and is composed of parts arranged in a certain way. His size and shape and composition are intrinsic to him. They are simply a matter of the way he is. They are not a matter of his relations to other things that surround him in this world. Thereby they differ from his extrinsic properties such as being popular, being Vice-President of the United States, wearing a fur hat, inhabiting a planet with a moon, or inhabiting a world where nothing goes faster than light. Also, his size and shape and composition are accidental, not essential, to him. He could have been taller, he could have been slimmer, he could have had more or fewer fingers on his hands" (Lewis 1986: 199).

<sup>69</sup> Sellars 1963: 35. Sellars asks rhetorically, "Cannot systems have properties which their parts do not have?" to which he responds, "Now the answer to this question is 'yes', if it is taken in a sense of which a paradigm example would be the fact that a system of pieces of wood can be a ladder, although none of its parts is a ladder.... [T]here is no trouble about systems having properties which its parts do not have *if these*

of reducibility, his explanation of Buddhist Reductionist essentialism shows that this principle is behind the Buddhist Reductionists' conclusion that all of the properties of an ultimate entity must be intrinsic properties. If a tree, for instance, is reducible to an aggregate of cellulose molecules, then all properties of the tree are extrinsic properties, by the principle of reducibility. But if the properties of the individual cellulose molecules are in turn extrinsic properties, e.g., the cellulose molecules are reducible to aggregates of atoms, then we are off on an explanatory regress. The tree's properties cannot be intelligibly explained until some ultimate entities are postulated which have nothing but intrinsic properties.

Nevertheless, the thesis that there are ultimate entities bearing nothing but intrinsic properties is not yet the thesis that an ultimate entity's intrinsic properties are essential properties. An intrinsic property is any property that is not dependent on its bearer's relations to other things. But an essential property determines its bearer's identity. If an ultimate entity could possess more than one intrinsic property, then the question, "Which of those properties is essential?" would inevitably arise. Alan Sidelle makes this point:

For however one may try to specify the individuating criteria for quarks, or whatever one's fundamental elements may be, there would seem to be 'alternative' criteria such that under one, some change counts as accidental, and under the others, it counts as substantial.... Wherever you have a fundamental particle that can change with respect to location but not to charge, you also have one that can change with respect to charge but not to location.... Any property is a possible basis for individuation; if some objects don't have parts, that just reduces the list of candidates. While fundamental particles may be physically less complex, they are not conceptually so.<sup>70</sup>

This explains why the Buddhist Reductionists opt to limit the number of an ultimate entity's intrinsic properties to one. Siderits unpacks the Buddhist Reductionists' reasons for deciding that every intrinsic property is an essential property and that there is one intrinsic property per ultimate entity with the following line of reasoning.<sup>71</sup> Suppose a pot of water is on the table, the water in the pot is hot, and the water in the pot is composed of "water atoms." Then there are two possibilities: either the water

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*properties are a matter of the parts having such and such qualities and being related in such and such ways"* (Sellars 1963: 26).

<sup>70</sup> Sidelle 1998: 441.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Siderits 2003: 119.

atoms alone must explain the pot of water's being hot (or cold), or else in addition to being composed by the water atoms, which are intrinsically 'wet', the water in the pot must also be composed of hot atoms, which possess intrinsic heat and which thus explain the pot of water's being hot (or cold, if the hot atoms are absent). Mereological reductionism favors the second alternative, for on the first alternative, the water atoms could explain the pot of water's being hot only if, in addition to wetness, the water atoms also possessed intrinsic heat. But, Siderits suggests, "this bundling together of intrinsic properties looks to the mereological reductionist like the same sort of aggregative process that led to the conceptual construction of the chariot,"<sup>72</sup> which would imply that water atoms, which we were taking as ultimate entities, are not ultimate after all.

Thus, realists are committed to the existence of ultimate entities possessing nothing but essential intrinsic properties. Siderits explains that Mādhyamika analyses show that it is incoherent to suppose that there exist either ultimate property-bearers or intrinsic natures (essential intrinsic properties). He summarizes this conclusion with the slogan: "The ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth." This is, of course, a flat-out contradiction. But that is no cause to be dismayed, in Siderits' view, since a contradiction is only a challenge, as he says, "to work out the Gricean conversational implicature." What message is the Mādhyamika trying to communicate by this "open flouting" of the conversation rule which requires truthfulness, i.e., requires that one utter only statements one takes as true?<sup>73</sup> Siderits says that we should resist the temptation to "suppose that the intention here is... to convey that the object of Buddhist wisdom is something inexpressible, perhaps something that can only be apprehended through a kind of non-rational intuition."<sup>74</sup> For the point is merely to communicate that the question, "What is the ultimate truth?" rests on a false presupposition that there are some ultimate entities with intrinsic natures for an "ultimate truth" to be about.<sup>75</sup>

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72 Siderits 2003: 119.

73 Siderits 2008: 125.

74 *Ibid*: 126.

75 This should be understood in the light of the Buddha's response to the question whether an enlightened person is reborn after death, Siderits explains. To the proposal that the enlightened person is reborn after

However, Siderits does not think that the statement, "The ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth," is false. It is, rather, truth-valueless. This is based on the principle of semantic fitness, which, as he explains, is "an approach to contradictory statements that was widely shared among classical Indian philosophers" according to which no proposition is expressed by a contradictory statement.<sup>76</sup> The assumption here is that a word string is capable of performing its function (i.e., denoting a possible state of affairs) if and only if the arrangement of the words in the string fits a possible arrangement of real things. For example, "Devadatta waters the plants with fire" does not express a proposition, "[s]ince fire cannot perform the function of giving plants the fluid they need."<sup>77</sup> However, as Siderits goes on to explain, the principle of semantic fitness appears to raise a problem for Mādhyamikas. Their favored form of argument is *reductio*, but if contradictions are truth-valueless, "then there can be no *modus tollens* argument from the falsity of the contradiction to the falsity of the opponent's thesis."<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, Siderits says,

[T]he Mādhyamika has a way around the difficulty. They do not assert that the contradiction derived through the *reductio* is false. They say instead that the derived contradiction should not be asserted by the opponent. And realizing that this statement should not be asserted, the opponent will realize that the thesis from which this contradiction was derived should likewise not be asserted. This strategy allows the Mādhyamika to set about disabusing us of the notion that there is such a thing as the ultimate truth without themselves saying anything that could be construed as a characterization of how things ultimately are (or are not).<sup>79</sup>

As Jay Garfield suggests, this type of reading of Madhyamaka emphasizes a literal interpretation of such statements of Nāgārjuna's as the following: "I prostrate to Gautama/ Who through compassion/

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death, the Buddha said this could not be said; but then to the proposal that the enlightened person is not reborn after death, he also said this could not be said. So when he was "asked how it could be that someone is neither reborn nor not reborn after death, the Buddha replied with the analogy of the fire that has gone out: if it were asked where this no longer visible fire had gone, it could not be answered that it had gone to the north, to the south, to the east or to the west" (Siderits 2008: 126).

76 Siderits 2008: 132.

77 *Ibid.*

78 *Ibid.*: 133.

79 *Ibid.* Siderits' criticism of Garfield and Priest's interpretation turns on the same issue (see Siderits 2008). As Siderits points out, Garfield and Priest have no principled reason for permitting the exception that Mādhyamikas' contradictions are true whereas everyone else's are false. Here, however, the situation is different: there is a principled reason for saying that nobody's contradictions are semantically efficacious. And when the Mādhyamika's opponent is brought to realize the semantic inefficacy of his or her thesis-statement, this will entail a realization that such a statement simply should not be made. If the opponent then searches for the reason why, he or she will find the false presupposition behind the meaningless statement.

Taught the true doctrine,/ Which leads to the relinquishing of all views" and "The victorious ones have said/ That emptiness is the relinquishing of all views."<sup>80</sup> Moreover, as Garfield also points out, if the "central teaching of Madhyamaka is that one should relinquish all views," then there are powerful affinities between Madhyamaka and Western skepticism.<sup>81</sup> However, Siderits contends that Madhyamaka anti-realism is not a form of skepticism. While it is true that Madhyamaka refutes the notion that anything is intrinsically a means of knowledge, or intrinsically an object of knowledge, Mādhyamikas are not left in the lurch with having to deny all knowledge claims.<sup>82</sup> They simply trade intrinsic for extrinsic means of knowledge. Siderits calls this epistemological contextualism. The epistemological contextualist asserts "that what counts as justification is always determined contextually, through such factors as the type of inquiry, its environmental setting, and the aims of the inquirer."<sup>83</sup>

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80 Garfield's translations. Garfield 2002: 46.

81 Garfield gathers a sample of excerpts from sources ranging from Pyrrho to Wittgenstein to substantiate this claim. For instance, the following clearly resonate with Siderits' statement (cited above): ""We must not say about any one thing that it is or that it is not or that it is and is not or that it neither is nor is not" (Pyrrho) (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks, 1991: 474-6; cited by Garfield 2002: 49). The resemblance between this statement and the Buddhist *catuṣkoṭi* is especially striking. Garfield also cites Wittgenstein: "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb beyond them" (Wittgenstein 1961; cited by Garfield 2002: 49).

82 So Mādhyamikas are not global skeptics: cf. Burton 1999: 21-23.

83 Siderits 2003: 146. The problem with Siderits' rejection of the comparison with skepticism, however, is in the way he understands skepticism. He treats skepticism as a stance toward general knowledge claims. This is evident in his concern to distance Madhyamaka anti-realism from the sort of radical skepticism which makes "bizarre error-possibilities" its "stock in trade," such as that we are brains in a vat or being systematically deceived by an evil demon (*ibid*: 151). But there is an important difference between this kind of radical skepticism and the type of skepticism which seems to bear such affinities with a "relinquish all views" interpretation of Madhyamaka. The former originates in Descartes' method of doubt and serves an important role in the Cartesian foundationalist project; so let us call it Cartesian skepticism. The latter, however, is rooted in the classical skeptical tradition, and may be called Pyrrhonic skepticism. Whereas the purpose of Cartesian skepticism is, ultimately, to secure the foundations of scientific knowledge, the central aim of Pyrrhonic skepticism is therapeutic. The method of Pyrrhonic skepticism is to set conflicting philosophical theses in equipollence with one another, with the aim being to cause a suspension of judgment with respect to such theoretical knowledge claims. Having achieved such a cognitive state, the emotional and volitional byproduct is tranquility (*ataraxia*) experienced as release from the anxiety and frustration which inevitably attend philosophical investigations. With such release comes a renewed ability to attend to the things of everyday life. (It is worth noting that the Pyrrhonian must endure philosophical labor in order to attain *ataraxia*. As Wittgenstein observes in a Pyrrhonian humour: "Philosophy unties knots in our thinking; hence its result must be simple, but philosophizing has to be as complicated as the knots it unties" (*Zettel*, §452; cited by Stern 2004: 50). Thus, Pyrrhonians would win by dint of philosophical labor that which Hume ascribes to the powers of his "spleen and indolence": "Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively

Talking about adopting epistemological contextualism is just another way of talking about holding an epistemic theory of truth. This is where Siderits' conception of Madhyamaka meets up with the contemporary debate about realism. As Siderits says, realism "has three key theses: (1) truth is correspondence between proposition and reality; (2) reality is mind-independent; (3) there is one true theory that correctly describes reality."<sup>84</sup> These theses all add up to a particular picture of what it is to know a thing. Charles Taylor aptly describes this as the "Inside-Outside" picture of knowing.<sup>85</sup> Or as Richard Rorty says, realism leads to the idea that "Philosophy's central concern is to be a general theory of representation...."<sup>86</sup> On this picture of knowing, as Rorty explains, "To know is to represent

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impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hour's amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther" (Hume 1978: 269.)

Siderits is interested in Madhyamaka's potential therapeutic benefits for philosophy addicts. (Wittgenstein, by the way, is the poster-child for the conception of philosophy as an addiction. The following anecdote from Rush Rhees (Rhees 1984: 219, n. 7; cited in Stern 2004: 53) is but a sample: "As he [Wittgenstein] was leaving, this time, he said to me roughly this: 'In my book I say that I am able to leave off with a problem in philosophy when I want to. But that's a lie; I can't.'") The similarity between Siderits' program and Pyrrhonic skepticism is underscored when he says things like the following: "what the enlightened perceive might be just the same world we perceive, only without the illusion of hidden depths."

In general, there is a fine line, with respect to philosophers who practice therapeutic philosophy, between their being perceived as propounding a form of skepticism or as doing deconstruction (perhaps in the service of a constructive program). For example, as Joshua Kates observes with respect to the work of Derrida: "[T]wo different strands of Derrida interpretation have largely been pursued from the onset of deconstruction's reception, without ever finding a way to combine in a single, comprehensive outcome. One version takes its focus to be language, and sees it as arriving at what is essentially a new, more radical form of skepticism. The editors of the 2001 *Norton Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, to take one recent significant example, hold this view of deconstruction.... Another school of thought has long insisted that Derrida's work would be ill defined by any sort of skepticism; it deems language at best an ancillary concern of Derrida's, and it views deconstruction overall in much greater proximity to traditional philosophy. For Rudolphe Gasché (the first major proponent of this view) and those who follow his lead, deconstruction sets out conditions of possibility and impossibility of philosophy" (Kates 2005: xv-xvi). A similar polarity of interpretations has arisen in Wittgenstein studies, as David Stern comments: "The principal fault line separating Wittgensteinians is over a question of philosophical method.... Robert Fogelin draws a helpful distinction between 'Pyrrhonian' readings of the *Investigations*, which see the book as informed by a quite general scepticism about philosophy and so as aiming at bringing philosophy to an end, and 'non-Pyrrhonian' readings, which construe the book as a critique of certain traditional theories in order to do philosophy better.... According to leading non-Pyrrhonian interpreters (e.g. Hacker, early Baker, Pears, Hintikka and Hintikka, von Savigny), Wittgenstein replaces mistaken views with a quite specific positive philosophical position of his own.... Pyrrhonian Wittgensteinians (e.g. Diamond, Conant, later Baker) see Wittgenstein's contribution as therapeutic, a critique of all philosophy, including his own" (Stern 2004: 34-5). It is no less common, perhaps, for a philosopher to misjudge the consequences of his own work. In Siderits' case, it seems that though he would distance his Madhyamaka from skepticism in order to highlight its constructive dimension, he fails to appreciate the resonance between his Madhyamaka and classical skepticism.

84 Siderits 1988: 311.

85 Cf. Taylor 2002: 106-107. Also see chapter two below, pp. 60-70.

86 Rorty 1979: 3.

accurately what is outside the mind; so to understand the possibility and nature of knowledge is to understand the way in which the mind is able to construct such representations."<sup>87</sup> Siderits further explains the connection between realism and the inside-outside, or representationalist, picture of knowing. Siderits says that "To obtain truth we must let the world determine the nature of our representations."<sup>88</sup> The realist's idea is that if the nature of our representations is determined by other factors besides mind-independent reality, e.g., by contextual factors such as the particular concepts we employ in articulating our thoughts, then, as Siderits explains, "any such reflection of our interests and cognitive limitations may detract from the ability of representations employing such concepts to capture the nature of the world."<sup>89</sup>

The realists' concern with a sort of hyper-objectivity is rooted in their commitment to being able to apply the principle of bivalence to *all* truth claims. This includes truth claims which an epistemic theory of truth must, by definition, rule out as possible legitimate truth claims. As a matter of definition, an epistemic theory of truth does not admit as legitimate truth claims any claims whose truth-values would be unknowable if truth were a non-epistemic notion. Andrew Joseph Cortens offers the following explanation of this point:

Take an arbitrary statement whose truth-value, on [the epistemic theorist's] view, would be forever unknowable if truth were a non-epistemic notion: say, the statement that gold is malleable (henceforth, 'G'). We who conceive of truth non-epistemically can only suppose that the epistemic theorist is unwilling to commit himself to the proposition that *we* take to be expressed by saying 'G is true'. After all, the epistemic theorist admits, in effect, that neither he nor anyone else can know *that* proposition. So the epistemic theorist no more believes in the truth of G than the skeptic does.<sup>90</sup>

I want to restate Cortens' point. To more clearly distinguish the epistemic-theorist's conception of a knowable truth-claim about the malleability of gold from the realist's conception of the mind-independent fact of the matter regarding whether gold is malleable, let us call the epistemic-theorist's truth-claim 'G<sub>ET</sub>' and let us call the realist's mind-independent fact of the matter 'G<sub>FOM</sub>'. Cortens supposes that the epistemic-theorist wants to say that G<sub>FOM</sub> is unknowable, whereas G<sub>ET</sub> is knowable.

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87 *Ibid.*

88 Siderits 2003: 114.

89 *Ibid.*

90 Cortens 2000: 158.



But I do not think this exactly captures what the anti-realist, on Siderits and Tillemans' conception of anti-realism, wishes to say about the status of  $G_{FOM}$ . To say that  $G_{FOM}$  is simply unknowable admits that the existence of  $G_{FOM}$  is at any rate intelligible. It admits that  $G_{FOM}$  is the sort of thing that could be articulated in the form of a comprehensible claim, and that it makes sense, moreover, to think that  $G_{FOM}$  is such that it is  $G_{FOM}$  itself which could make a  $\bullet G_{FOM} \bullet$  claim either true or false. Finally, it is to grant that a  $\bullet G_{FOM} \bullet$  claim has the status of true-or-false independent of whatever style of reasoning or conceptual structuring might be used to articulate the  $\bullet G_{FOM} \bullet$  claim.<sup>91</sup> Nonetheless, the anti-realist, at least as I understand Siderits and as Tillemans also seems to understand Siderits, intends to deny that  $G_{FOM}$  has any of these features. The anti-realist wants to deny that  $G_{FOM}$  could even exist. That is, the anti-realist's claim should be that  $G_{FOM}$ , a mind-independent fact of the matter about whether gold is malleable, cannot possibly exist. And, in general, the anti-realist's claim would thus be that there could be no mind-independent facts of the matter about anything whatsoever.<sup>92</sup>

#### **A Critique of Siderits' and Tillemans' Use of 'Realism' and 'Anti-Realism'**

In this section I shall do two things. First, I shall attempt to explain how the conception of anti-realism as a particular sort of *ontological* position, with which we concluded the previous section, might contribute to Tillemans' thesis that accepting the Given must involve one in a subtle ontological commitment. Second, I shall explain why we might wish to step away from an ontological conception of the position that follows a critique of realism. Indeed, it is not clear that Mādhyamikas, because of their therapeutic intentions toward realists, should at all be referred to as "anti-realists." It would be better, it seems, if we construe Tsong kha pa's Madhyamaka in something like the way in which Rorty

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91 For more on the notion of a claim's true-or-false status, as opposed to its mere truth-value, being dependent on styles of reasoning or conceptual structuring, cf. Hacking 1982. For more discussion, see chapter three below.

92 From the impossibility of any mind-independent fact of the matter, especially any mind-independent fact of the matter about essences, Siderits infers that "no statement can be ultimately true" (Siderits 2003: 157). That is, no  $\bullet \Phi_{FOM} \bullet$  claim could be true because bivalence fails for  $\bullet \Phi_{FOM} \bullet$  claims in general. Such claims do not even have true-or-false status. The Mādhyamika way of putting the point, Siderits thinks, is through the four denials of the tetralemma. As Siderits explains: "For the Buddhist anti-realist, bivalence failure is global: for any statement  $s$  purporting to describe how things ultimately are, neither  $s$  nor its negation not- $s$ , the conjunction of  $s$  and not- $s$ , nor the negation of the conjunction of  $s$  and not- $s$  may be asserted" (Siderits 2003: 157-8).

construes Heidegger and Davidson as adopting an “above the battle position” with respect to the realism/anti-realism debate.<sup>93</sup>

First let me explain how it might be possible to proceed from an ontological conception of anti-realism to the view that accepting the Given involves a subtle ontological commitment. According to the conception of anti-realism teased out of Siderits' interpretation of Madhyamaka in the previous section, anti-realists assume particular types of ontological stances in contrast with realists. To understand this better, it will be useful to adopt a familiar distinction between local realisms and anti-realisms, on the one hand, and global anti-realism on the other. In his book on global anti-realism, Cortens questions whether the local forms of anti-realism usually suspected of inflating into global anti-realism, e.g., anti-realism about truth, anti-realism about objects, or anti-realism about semantic content, actually do lead to global anti-realism.<sup>94</sup> To set the stage for his investigation, Cortens proposes a criterion for the use of 'realist' and 'anti-realist' which, it seems to me, is firmly compatible with the ontological construal of anti-realism articulated above. He proposes that a realist about  $x$  is someone who holds beliefs that line up with the standard view about  $x$ .<sup>95</sup> The second step for Cortens is to note the perspectival nature of uses of the terms 'realist' and 'anti-realist', which his criterion for realism in no way conceals.<sup>96</sup> As Cortens observes, these are “loaded” expressions,<sup>97</sup> which he illustrates by the case of Berkeleyan idealism. Berkeley accepts something like the following thesis: “*The propositions expressed by standard utterances of physical object sentences are compatible with the thesis that everything is either a mind, an idea in a mind, or a collection of ideas.*”<sup>98</sup> As Cortens remarks, assuming an audience that shares his own rejection of idealism, “Given our own views about what is normally expressed by such physical object-sentences as 'There is a table in front of me', it immediately follows that Berkeley did not believe that there is a table in front of him, or, more

93 See Frede 1987: 734.

94 To be exact, Cortens sets it as his task to determine the nature of the more general phenomenon involved in anti-realism. He observes that “anti-realism is a hydra-like creature, manifesting itself in a bewildering variety of forms” (Cortens 2000: ix).

95 Cf. Cortens 2000: 14-15.

96 After all, who decides what is the standard view about, say, God?

97 *Ibid* 18.

98 *Ibid* 17.

generally, that there are tables or any other physical objects.”<sup>99</sup> Consequently, we (or Cortens and his audience, at any rate) might regard Berkeley as an anti-realist about physical objects. Nonetheless, Berkeley considers himself a realist about physical objects. As Cortens says, “Berkeley rejects what I have been calling the “standard” view of physical object-talk,” and therefore “he will not hesitate to describe himself as believing that there are tables.”<sup>100</sup>

With Cortens' discussion as background, we can see now that Siderits' Mādhyamika anti-realists would be opposed to a type of realism about *facts of the matter*, that is, Mādhyamikas themselves would *not* hold beliefs that line up with the standard view about facts of the matter. With this way of picturing the realism/anti-realism debate we get a correlative ontological distinction between realists and anti-realists. Realists are ontologically committed to facts of the matter as facts of the matter are standardly conceived (that is, mind-independent, non-relative, and so forth). On the other hand, this picture gives us anti-realists who also assume an ontological stance, for they are committed to the denial of what realists believe in, which means they are committed to the non-existence of facts of the matter as standardly conceived.<sup>101</sup>

But how might this characterization of Mādhyamika anti-realism help us to understand Tillemans' conjecture that Tsong kha pa thinks that Svāntarikas, by accepting the Given, are involved in a subtle form of ontological commitment? As we have seen, on Tillemans' interpretation Tsong kha pa does not think Svāntarikas are realists, only that they are *like* realists in some important sense. If

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99 *Ibid.*

100 *Ibid* 18.

101 Here Gendun Chopel might resist Siderits' construal of Madhyamaka as a form of anti-realism on the grounds that it remains within the ambit of “involuntary assertions” associated with conceptual structuring (*prapañca, spros pa*). Thus Gendun Chopel writes: “Therefore, the assertion of the presentation of conventions is, in brief, an involuntary assertion. The reason it must be an involuntary assertion is that when this appearance produced from the innate ignorance arises involuntarily, one must involuntarily also make presentations of things such as good and bad, existence and nonexistence, which are based fundamentally on the artificial ignorance; and based on that, there arises this need to remain involuntarily in this triple-realmed saṃsāra. Thus, one must understand that *involuntarily* really means “involuntarily” (Lopez 2006: 82). In trying to find an interpretation of Tsong kha pa's understanding of Madhyamaka which does not follow Siderits' construal of Madhyamaka as a form of anti-realism, but which steps beyond the realism/anti-realism dichotomy, we might thus open a way to reading Tsong kha pa's position as being finally closer to Gendun Chopel's position, at least in some respects, than most traditional scholars would be willing to acknowledge.

we understand realism as involving an ontological commitment to facts of the matter, as Tillemans leads us to suppose by connecting his discussion with Siderits', it follows that he must not think that Svāntarikas err in assuming the existence of the sorts of facts of the matter believed in by realists. Yet, as it turns out, this is precisely the sort of error that accepting the Given could lead to. In accepting the Given, foundationalists are not logically committed to *global* realism, but it seems that they *are* committed to a kind of realism about perceptual contents. For example, if Adolphe's suspenders appear to me to be purple,<sup>102</sup> then there is at least a fact of the matter about how they appear to me, a fact of the matter which proponents of the Given, i.e., realists about the Given, if you will, typically maintain that I am able to know irrefragably simply by virtue of its being an internal sense content.<sup>103</sup> Thus, in *conventionally* accepting the Given, Svāntarikas are *like* realists because they (at least provisionally) accept facts of the matter about internal sense contents. Their acceptance of the Given thus involves an ontological commitment which could be construed as "subtle" in at least two senses. It is a subtle ontological commitment first because it is not a commitment to the existence of all sorts of things, since it is only a local form of realism. Second, the ontological commitment is subtle because Svāntarikas only *provisionally* accept the Given.

I have hereby explained how taking anti-realism as an ontological position could lead to the idea that accepting the Given involves some sort of ontological commitment, which was my first goal in this section. Now I shall suggest a couple of reasons why we might wish not to construe Tsong kha pa's Madhyamaka as a kind of anti-realism, at least not in this ontological sense, even if we retain the appellation 'realist' for those whose cognitive deficit is the target of Mādhyamikas' therapeutic interventions. One of my reasons for not wanting to speak of Mādhyamikas as anti-realists tracks Arthur Fine's criticism of certain forms of anti-realism in his essay (now a classic) "And Not Anti-Realism Either." My other reason stems from the idea which I am trying to promote of taking Tsong kha pa's philosophy as primarily a *therapeia* rather than a *theoria*. Let me state each of these reasons

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102 Cf. Sartre 1964 (1938): 19.

103 See the discussion of the Given in the next chapter for elaboration on this point.

in sequence, starting with the one which draws on Fine's work.

Fine distinguishes broadly between two kinds of anti-realism. On the one hand there are anti-realisms which, in retreating from realism's correspondence theory of truth, seek to replace the realist's conception of truth with a different understanding of truth which finally boils down to some version of the idea that truth is a matter of consensus. Fine calls these forms of anti-realisms, with their acceptance theories of truth, "truth-mongers." He places the views of Putnam, Wittgenstein, and Kuhn together in this camp.<sup>104</sup> On the other hand there is a kind of anti-realism which seeks to step away from realism by imposing limits on one's epistemic attitude. Fine explains this form of anti-realism in terms of what Bas van Fraassen calls "constructive empiricism."<sup>105</sup> As Fine explains:

The distinctively anti-realist thesis of constructive empiricism is two-fold: (1) that science aims only to provide theories that are empirically adequate and (2) that acceptance of a theory involves as belief only that it *is* empirically adequate. The intended contrast is with a realism that posits true theories as the goal of science and that takes acceptance of a theory to be belief in the truth of the theory.<sup>106</sup>

Our attention here shall be confined to Fine's criticism of instances of the former kind of anti-realism, those issuing in some form of acceptance theory of truth. For it seems evident that Siderits' conception of Mādhyamika anti-realism is an instance of this kind of anti-realism, not a form of constructive empiricism.<sup>107</sup>

Fine offers a "canonical representation" of the features which particular anti-realisms of the "truth-mongering" variety all have in common. In general, what these anti-realisms have in common is that they reject realism's correspondence theory of truth, and in its place they substitute accounts of truth which portray "the truth of a statement *P* as amounting to the fact that a certain class of subjects would accept *P* under a certain set of circumstances."<sup>108</sup> I think Siderits' epistemic

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104 Fine 1984: 53.

105 *Ibid* 57.

106 *Ibid* 57.

107 For an interpretation of Madhyamaka as an instance of constructive empiricist anti-realism, see Thomas Doctor's research on the position of rMa bya byang chub brtson 'grus (twelfth century), for instance, Doctor 2009.

108 Fine 1984: 53.

contextualism obviously conforms to this schema. Siderits' conception of epistemic contextualism most closely resembles the paradigm-relative conception of truth which, as Fine notes, is characteristic of Kuhn's brand of anti-realism.<sup>109</sup>

I turn now to Fine's criticism of this kind of anti-realism. First, he suggests that instances of this kind of anti-realism exhibit "a common turning towards behaviorism."<sup>110</sup> He argues that "in one way or another, these anti-realists seem sympathetic to the behaviorist idea that the working practices of conceptual exchange exhaust the meaning of that exchange, giving it its significance and providing it with its content."<sup>111</sup> In other words, whereas realism seeks to ground "the working practices of conceptual exchange" in something *more* than those practices themselves, by orienting us "to face 'out on the world,'" as Fine puts it, the behaviorist strand in this kind of anti-realism "turns us right around to look back at our own collective selves, and at the interpersonal features that constitute the practice of the truth-game."<sup>112</sup> Having argued that acceptance theories of truth must make something like this sort of behaviorist move, Fine then proceeds to critique that move. He argues thus:

[W]hatever might possibly warrant the behaviorist conception of truth-as-acceptance should at least make that a conception we can take in and understand. Even if, as some maintain, truth is merely a regulative ideal, it must still be an ideal we can understand, strive for, believe in, glimpse—and so forth. But if, as the behaviorism [*sic*] holds, judgments of truth are judgments of what certain people would accept under certain circumstances, what are the ground rules for arriving at those judgments, and working with them as required? Naively, it looks like what we are called upon to do is to extrapolate from what *is* the case with regard to actual acceptance behavior to what *would be* the case under the right conditions. But how are we ever to establish what *is* the case, in order to get this extrapolation going, when that determination itself calls for a prior, successful round of extrapolation? It appears that acceptance locks us into a repeating pattern that involves an endless regress.<sup>113</sup>

Fine suggests that we might suppose that if we could examine S's behavior when S accepted a proposition P *under the right circumstances*, then we might expect to be able to extrapolate and so understand S's conception of acceptance conditions in actual instances of S's accepting some

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109 See *ibid.* Cf. above pp. 55-56, and see my extensive discussion of Siderits' interpretation of Mādhyamika approaches to rationality below in chapter three.

110 Fine 1984: 54.

111 *Ibid.*

112 *Ibid.*

113 *Ibid.* 55.

proposition  $P^*$ . But in order to be able to specify the circumstances that would need to obtain in the counter-factual situation where  $S$  correctly accepts  $P$ , we must already be able to state and understand  $S$ 's conception of acceptance conditions in actual instances of  $S$ 's accepting some proposition  $P^*$ . This argument seems particularly designed to foil conceptions of truth-as-acceptance which rely on some such notion as the goal of enquiry obtained by "perfectly rational agents" (e.g., Putnam) to explain what they mean by acceptance. Nevertheless, Fine's argument might not seem to apply so straightforwardly to cases where the notion of "the right conditions" is not construed in the light of a counter-factual regulative ideal. What about a hard-line behaviorism which marks no separation between the "right conditions" for acceptance and the actual conditions in which a proposition is accepted? Fine's claim is that the acceptance-theorist's conception of acceptance must be such that "we can take [it] in and understand [it]." But what is so difficult to take in and understand about the actual conditions under which people accept propositions? Fine's objection to acceptance theories of truth might thus not seem completely well-motivated.

To fill in the gap in Fine's argument, we need look no farther than the work of one of the philosophers whose view Fine (mistakenly, I submit) thinks is readily identifiable as a version of truth-as-acceptance anti-realism. Wittgenstein's skepticism about rule-following seems to provide a suitable block to the anti-realist's hard-line behaviorist maneuver to dodge Fine's criticism.<sup>114</sup> Wittgenstein's skeptic wants to know whether  $S$ , in adding a pair of numbers where each number is less than or equal to 56, is following the rule for 'plus', which takes two numbers (arguments) on either side of the '+' sign and yields the sum of those numbers, or the rule for 'quus', which acts like 'plus' unless either of the two numbers on either side of the '+' sign is greater than 56, in which case the number that

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114 While this is not the place to get into the exegetical questions involved in interpreting Wittgenstein's work, I trust that Kripke's presentation of *his* interpretation of Wittgenstein on skepticism about rule-following (and it is Kripke's presentation, from Kripke 1982, that I shall be following, though I shall not attempt to document this in detail) is clear enough to let us extrapolate the argument we need. In any event, the same caveat about the exegetical complexities involved in interpreting Wittgenstein prohibit me from making much of this point, but I believe Fine is mistaken in interpreting Wittgenstein as advancing a truth-as-acceptance anti-realism. I would rather take Wittgenstein as promoting a Pyrrhonian form of skeptical therapy which would place his approach to realism closer to Tsong kha pa's (as I read Tsong kha pa) in terms of his work's therapeutic intentions. Cf. Stern 2004.

follows the '=' sign is always '5'.<sup>115</sup> The skeptic's point, is that it is impossible to determine whether S intended to follow the rule for 'plus' or the rule for 'quus' in adding a pair of numbers where each number is equal to or less than 56, *even if* we turn to the counter-factual situation where we could observe what S would do if asked to add a pair of numbers where at least one of the numbers in question was greater than 56. Suppose that in such a counter-factual situation S were to perform according to our expectations for 'plus' and not 'quus'. How would this help us with the original case? It does not seem to be of any help. For it could be that although S intended to follow the rule for 'plus' under the circumstances in which we could *tell* whether it was the rule for 'plus' or 'quus' that was being followed, i.e., the counter-factual situation where at least one of the numbers added was greater than 56, nevertheless in the original case where we are unable to tell the difference S could be intending to follow the rule for 'plus' or S could be intending to follow the rule for 'quus'. Now to derive from this a suitable argument for Fine's thesis all we need is to recognize that the question of which rule S is following infects the idea of S's accepting a proposition P under certain conditions. To explain this, let me briefly recapitulate where we were in the argument. Fine's thesis is that we are unable to make sense of acceptance theories of truth because it is impossible to make sense of the notion of accepting a proposition P under certain conditions. Fine presents a forceful argument for this thesis where the case of accepting a proposition under *the right* conditions is concerned. But if our anti-realist takes a hard-line behaviorist stance, then Fine's argument is irrelevant, for all we have to understand are the actual conditions under which S accepts a proposition P in order to be able to understand the idea of S's accepting a proposition P under some conditions. Now, however, in the light of Wittgenstein's skepticism about rule-following, we can reasonably withhold our assent to the behaviorist's proposal that in order to understand acceptance-theories of truth we only have to observe the actual conditions under which actual people accept actual propositions. What Wittgenstein's paradox of rule-following shows is that we can never be sure that we have adequately understood the actual conditions under which a person accepts some proposition. For a person might

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115 Cf. Kripke 1982.



*intend* to accept a proposition under some conditions other than the conditions which we would surmise by simply observing the conditions under which he or she accepts the proposition in question.

That completes my discussion of Fine's criticism of anti-realism. But it is useful to note that Fine's arguments against the different kinds of anti-realism serve Fine's purposes as a philosopher of science. Fine sees realists and anti-realists alike as adopting a mistaken attitude toward science, and he sees his own job as correcting that attitude. He thinks realists and anti-realists see science as needing a context, an aim, and an interpretation.<sup>116</sup> As Fine puts it, the battle between these "isms" "usually takes the form of arguing that the favorite one is better than its rivals because it makes better sense of science than do its rivals."<sup>117</sup> Fine's response to this situation is to resist the temptation of inventing yet another *position*, another "ism," to throw into the fray. Thus, Fine remarks:

But when we are asked what is the aim of science itself, I think we find ourselves in a quandry, just as we do when asked "What is the purpose of life?," or indeed the corresponding sort of question for any sufficiently rich and varied practice or institution. As we grow up I think we learn that such questions really do not require an answer, but rather they call for an empathetic analysis to get at the cognitive (and temperamental) sources of the question, and then a program of therapy to help change all that.<sup>118</sup>

My proposal is to interpret Tsong kha pa's approach to Madhyamaka as paralleling Fine's approach to science, which is why I would feel uncomfortable with casting Tsong kha pa's Madhyamaka as a form of anti-realism.

But does my impulse to interpret Tsong kha pa's Madhyamaka as a form of therapy mean that I don't think Tsong kha pa can be understood as offering a Madhyamaka *position* which opposes realism? After all, the option of construing Madhyamaka as consisting in the adoption of an attitude of positionlessness has been attractive to many contemporary commentators, including Garfield and Priest<sup>119</sup> as well as Siderits, as we have seen above. Moreover, the positionlessness interpretation of Madhyamaka would seem complementary to my intention to understand Tsong kha pa's Madhyamaka

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116 Fine 1984: 61.

117 *Ibid.*

118 *Ibid.*

119 For instance, cf. Garfield and Priest in Garfield 2002.

as a form of therapy. For Garfield has suggested parallels between a positionlessness Madhyamaka and classic Greek Skepticism, which shares the therapeutic orientation of the other Hellenistic schools of philosophy.<sup>120</sup> Nevertheless, we ought to resist any temptation to interpret Tsong kha pa's Madhyamaka as an instance of positionlessness Madhyamaka. Of course Tsong kha pa himself very emphatically rejects positionlessness interpretations of Madhyamaka,<sup>121</sup> but that by itself might not constitute a reason to abjure any attempt to interpret Tsong kha pa's approach along those lines. Nevertheless, we might reject positionlessness on philosophical grounds.<sup>122</sup> In particular, we may suppose that the problem Tsong kha pa finds with positionlessness is finally analogous to the problem he finds with Svātantrika methodology which is, as I shall argue in later chapters, that it is insufficiently efficacious as a therapy for the agnosia with which realists are afflicted. However, the precise details of Tsong kha pa's critique of positionlessness are a subject for another time and place.<sup>123</sup>

To conclude this section and this chapter, let me emphasize the fact that although I refer to those who believe in intrinsic existence as *realists*, it is not my intention to set up Tsong kha pa's view as a simple counter-position to realism, even though it may be that there is some therapeutic value in

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120 Cf. Garfield's essay "*Epoche and Śūnyatā*" in Garfield 2002.

121 See, for instance, Jinpa 2002: 23-25.

122 One argument against positionlessness would be that it readily falls into a pragmatic paradox. The criticism here would be similar to a criticism of classical Skepticism sketched by Martha Nussbaum. Nussbaum suggests that Skeptics land in a pragmatic paradox because of their rather dogmatic commitment to the value of *ataraxia* (cf. Nussbaum 1994: 300-306). Analogously, it might be suggested that proponents of positionlessness contradictorily assume a position on the value of achieving a state of holding no position. Nussbaum explains, however, that for the Skeptics there is response which they might take to the charge of pragmatic paradox, which is to argue that their orientation to *ataraxia* is not a belief or a value commitment, but a natural inclination. As Nussbaum puts it on the Skeptics' behalf, "Naturally, without belief or teaching, we move to free ourselves from burdens and disturbances" (Nussbaum 1994: 305). Nevertheless, a similar response is not available to the proponent of positionlessness. How could it be suggested that realists possess a natural inclination to rid themselves of the *agnosia* with which they are afflicted? Their *agnosia* is not only a kind of cognitive default for them (see Westerhoff 2009: 47), but it seems that, at least in Tsong kha pa's view, realists are dually afflicted. Not only do they suffer from a form of *agnosia*, but they also suffer from something *like* an accompanying *anosognosia*. Later, in chapter five, I resist efforts by contemporary commentators to read Tsong kha pa as imputing realists with actual *anosognosia*.

123 Nonetheless, I cannot resist the opportunity to note that, according to his biography, it appears that Tsong kha pa *did* hold something like a positionlessness interpretation of Madhyamaka until Mañjuśri, through the mediation of Lama Uma pa, remonstrated against such an approach to Madhyamaka. It seems that Mañjuśri's intervention in taking a definite position on the matter made a deep impression on Tsong kha pa and was of great therapeutic benefit in his recovery from realism, since the episode is recounted as catalyzing a breakthrough for Tsong kha pa in his understanding of emptiness. Cf. Thurman 1984.

staking one's view of emptiness as a philosophical position over against realism, as Tsong kha pa might be taken to think. Whatever we make of Tsong kha pa's view of emptiness qua philosophical position, I urge that we shall do well not to make it a form of anti-realism. The consequences of such an interpretive strategy are evident in Tillemans' picture of Tsong kha pa's Madhyamaka. Tillemans is forced to describe Tsong kha pa's approach to Madhyamaka as "baroque" because of Tsong kha pa's attempt to fuse the *pramāṇa* theoretical framework with what Tillemans' interpretation of Madhyamaka as anti-realism leads him to call "Madhyamaka ontology." The *pramāṇa* theoretical framework is a form of epistemological foundationalism, which requires the notion of some form of the Given, according to Tillemans. And the Given, on Tillemans' view, is the "ontological correlate to foundationalism," which I have suggested can be construed as implying that the epistemological role of perceptual contents can only be understood in terms of mind-independent facts of the matter about those perceptual contents themselves. Thus, Tsong kha pa's project appears uniquely incoherent and hypocritical, on Tillemans' interpretation. On Tillemans' reading, Tsong kha pa would thus have to accept an ontology of no facts of the matter, while at the same time attempting to enjoy the privileges of an epistemology that requires facts of the matter. And, at the same time, he would be hypocritically denigrating Svātantrikas for attempting to do the very thing he himself is doing.

Despite the unsatisfactory qualities of Tillemans' reading, his particular version of the standard picture of Tsong kha pa's view is especially intriguing precisely because it presents our protagonist's position with such vividly drawn flaws. Hence, Tillemans' interpretation deserves further investigation, which is why I continue, in the next chapter, by considering in further detail Tillemans' thesis that the key issue in Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction is the question of accepting or rejecting the Given.

## Chapter Two

### Mādhyamikas and the Myth of the Given

Why does Tsong kha pa reject the Svātantrika method of using autonomous inferences to establish emptiness? On one important contemporary interpretation of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction, it has been suggested that the Svātantrika method involves provisionally accepting a form of the Given, and so the suggestion is that it is something about the notion of the Given that Tsong kha pa finds problematic in the Svātantrika methodological approach. I shall argue that there is, however, interpretive room to let the question of the Given drop out of the picture. That is, I shall suggest that there is nothing in the way that Tsong kha pa draws the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction to demand that we construe it as raising the question whether or not Svātantrikas accept a form of the Given. Tsong kha pa is quite clear that the crux of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction is a matter of how Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas apprehend the object of negation (*dgag bya*). By analyzing Tsong kha pa's discussion of this in the *dGongs pa rab gsal* and *Lam rim chen mo*, I shall attempt to show that Tsong kha pa's distinction can be explicated without presupposing a difference in Svātantrikas' and Prāsaṅgikas' attitudes toward the Given. But apart from whether we read Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction as turning on the question of the Given, another aim of this chapter is to show that Tsong kha pa's epistemological project is consistent with the therapeutic aims of Madhyamaka philosophy. As we saw at the close of the previous chapter, there is some question about the coherence of Tsong kha pa's attempt to merge the epistemological foundationalism of the *pramāṇa* theoretical<sup>1</sup> framework with Madhyamaka, since Madhyamaka seems to entail repudiating epistemological foundationalism. By carefully considering the work of modern analytic philosophers, particularly Wilfrid Sellars and John McDowell, to determine what they think is really at issue in the question of the Given, I hope to explain why the fusion of Madhyamaka and epistemological foundationalism is not only coherent, but could provide Tsong kha pa with a very

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<sup>1</sup> See above, Introduction, p. 4, n. 6.

attractive position.

I begin, in the first part of the chapter, with a review of Tillemans' and McClintock's readings of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction.<sup>2</sup> Their reading tends to fuse foundationalism and the Given in such a way as to make it seem that in order to reject the notion of the Given one must also reject the project of epistemological foundationalism. This leads Tillemans, at least, to present Tsong kha pa as a conflicted foundationalist, a kind of logic addict who knows that in light of Candrakīrti's anti-foundationalism he really ought to give it up. Thus, Tillemans says that "in making Prāsaṅgikas adopt a *logician's* positions on things being established by *pramāṇas*, Tsong kha pa introduces into Candrakīrti's philosophy a kind of lingering deference to objective facts...."<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, it shall be my aim, in considering McDowell's interpretation of Sellars in the second part of the chapter, to demonstrate that there is interpretive room to construe Sellars' rejection of the myth of the Given as not at odds with an unflinching commitment to the basic epistemological program of empiricist foundationalism. By giving up the idea of the Given, Sellars does not mean to step away from the notion that knowledge claims may finally be grounded in perceptual beliefs that make no further *inferential* presuppositions. As McDowell argues, Sellars' is a reformed empiricism which carefully distinguishes between the question of inferential justification and the question of entitlement. The notion of the Given, on McDowell's interpretation, is primarily a response to the question of entitlement. Sellars' choice of a different response than proponents of the Given to the question of entitlement, a response which pictures perceptual knowledge as dependent on non-inferential conceptual structuring, does not preclude the possibility of providing a classical empiricist foundationalist answer to the question of inferential justification.

After arguing for the coherence of Tsong kha pa's project, I shall turn to the interpretive question of whether Tsong kha pa's critique of Svātantrika methodology must be read as turning on

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2 I shall focus on only one part of McClintock's discussion in this chapter. In a later chapter, I consider her defense of the Svātantrikas Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla against the sort of critique of Svātantrika methodology which she and Tillemans attribute to Tsong kha pa.

3 Tillemans 2003: 113.

the question of the Given. I do not deny that Mādhyamikas would reject the notion of the Given. My concern is simply whether Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction might be understood on the supposition that Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas alike reject the idea that perceptual contents could be independent of conceptual structuring. Thus, both Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas would reject the notion of the Given. I focus, for my interpretation, on passages from the *dGongs pa rab gsal*, or *Elucidating the Intention*, where Tsong kha pa distinguishes the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika views on the basis of how they apprehend what he calls the "fundamental object of negation." He says that the Svātantrikas have a coarse apprehension of the foundational object of negation relative to the Prāsaṅgika view.<sup>4</sup> The question is how to interpret the adjective "coarse" in this context. Proponents of the standard picture, as we have seen, tend to construe this as having to do with holding "heavier" ontological commitments. Nevertheless, I shall argue that Tsong kha pa's distinction rests on an attitude toward concepts and conceptual structuring (*prapañca*, *spros pa*) which is somewhat unusual in the Buddhist tradition. There is, generally speaking, a tendency in the Buddhist philosophical tradition to set concepts and perceptions in a fundamental binary opposition to each other.<sup>5</sup> Concepts are generally seen as the source of all error and falsehood, whereas perception is the ultimate source of genuine knowledge.<sup>6</sup> While Tsong kha pa does not step away from this basic picture, he certainly blurs the lines between concepts and perception.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, he strictly avoids the position toward which this bifurcation between concepts and perception tends to lead in other Tibetan interpretations of Madhyamaka. On these interpretations, the target of the Mādhyamika negative dialectic is *all* conceptual structuring. In Tsong kha pa's view, this kind of interpretation of Madhyamaka is a mistake

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4 See *EI* 197-8.

5 Indeed, this is precisely the sort of binary opposition which, as deconstructionists typically seek to demonstrate, inevitably possesses an inner logic which, when unpacked, leads to reversals and inconsistencies.

6 For example, as McClintock notes, "Although it is true that Dharmakīrti maintains inference ( *anumāna* ) to be as reliable as perception in terms of its status as a means of trustworthy awareness ( *pramāṇa* ), inference  *is*  dependent upon perception to function" (McClintock 2003: 129).

7 Any consistent Mādhyamika would have to reject the notion of the Given, I am supposing. In this sense, Tillemans' remarks about Candrakīrti's "deliberately fudging" the distinction between conceptual thought and perception (cf. Tillemans 2003: 100) would perhaps indicate Tsong kha pa to be a more faithful reader of Candrakīrti than he is frequently made out to be (see, e.g., Huntington 2003).

which leads to nihilism. Moreover, it is the very mistake which, I shall argue, Tsong kha pa finds at work in the Svātantrikas' coarse apprehension of the fundamental object of negation.

### **The Given as the “Necessary Ontological Correlate to Foundationalism”**

Tillemans and McClintock suggest that the notion of the Given can provide a useful interpretive tool for explicating how the Buddhist *pramāṇa* theoretical tradition thinks about autonomous inferences, although McClintock's appraisal of this application is more qualified than Tillemans'. McClintock points out a number of parallels between the *pramāṇa* theoretical conception of perception and the western notion of the Given,<sup>8</sup> but she also notes that it may be problematic to fully assimilate the *pramāṇa* theoretical tradition's understanding of perception with how western empiricists have thought about the Given. She seems to attempt to tread a middle ground in the controversy between Tillemans and Georges Dreyfus on this question. Dreyfus argues against the usefulness of the notion of the Given in interpreting the Buddhist *pramāṇa* theoretical tradition,<sup>9</sup> offering reasons similar to those McClintock suggests for why we ought to exercise caution in applying this particular interpretive lens. As McClintock observes, critics of the Given, most notably Wilfrid Sellars, argue that perception is somehow conceptually dependent. There is an analogue to this point of view in the *pramāṇa* theoretical tradition, as she explains: “In the Buddhist epistemological tradition,.... only those perceptual judgments will arise for which the conditions exist in the mindstream wherein the perceptual awareness occurs. In this sense, we only see (or know) what we are already conditioned to see (or know).”<sup>10</sup> So the notion of the Given would seem to be an interpretive tool toward which we should indeed be chary. Nevertheless, McClintock uses the notion of the Given to articulate the following question, which is basically the same question Tillemans seeks to address: “[D]oes postulating the [G]iven on the model of the Buddhist epistemologists necessarily imply an ontological commitment on the part of a Mādhyamika that, from a Madhyamaka perspective, should be deemed

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8 See McClintock 2003: 128-9.

9 See Dreyfus 1996.

10 McClintock 2003: 129.

in Tsong kha pa's terms 'unsuitable'?"<sup>11</sup>

Tillemans connects the program of empiricist foundationalism with acceptance of some form of the Myth of the Given, and he suggests that accepting the Given involves some form of ontological commitment. He says that "The [G]iven is thus often viewed as the necessary ontological correlate to foundationalism."<sup>12</sup> And, as he notes, acceptance of the Given involves, at least for Buddhist logicians, a commitment to particulars of one kind or another. For Sautrāntikas, particulars are external objects; for Yogācāra idealists, they are mental entities—"appearances, or images (*ākāra*) to perceptual consciousness"; and for Sautrāntika-Svātantrikas and Yogācāra-Svātantrikas, they are external objects or mental entities, respectively, which "are relegated to the level of merely customary existent entities."<sup>13</sup> Tsong kha pa often characterizes the Svātantrikas as accepting that a thing exists by way of its own intrinsic character (*rang gi mtshan nyid kyis yod pa*).<sup>14</sup> This expression involves a gloss on the Sanskrit *svalakṣaṇa* which, as Tillemans says, denotes for the Buddhist logicians some kind of particular. But it is evident that Tsong kha pa changes the sense of this key technical term. Tsong kha pa writes:

Here the term "intrinsic character" is not used, as the logicians use it, simply to mean something that performs a function. Instead..., it refers to something's own intrinsic [existence], which any functioning thing or non-functioning thing is believed to have. That is why the advocates of intrinsic [existence] claim that even an inference that comprehends a non-thing is not mistaken regarding a conceived object that has such an intrinsic [existence].<sup>15</sup>

Tillemans elucidates Tsong kha pa's shift in meaning, remarking that

when philosophers speak seriously of "intrinsic natures/properties," "things in themselves," "particulars," "objectivity," they are convinced they are providing an ontology, viz., a description of the most general and fundamental features of the universe that must exist to somehow legitimate, or ground, our ordinary ways of talking and acting, and even our scientific methods.<sup>16</sup>

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11 *Ibid* 130.

12 Tillemans 2003: 97.

13 Tillemans 2003: 98.

14 Alternatively, Tsong kha pa uses "established by way of intrinsic character" (*rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pa*) and similar locutions (e.g., "established from its own side," *rang ngos nas grub pa*) to say the same thing.

15 *GT* 259, my brackets.

16 Tillemans 2003: 95.



And he adds that it would be difficult to imagine that the Svātantrika, when invoking the Given for the purposes of grounding autonomous inferences, could be any less complicit in this type of realist ontological enterprise. So it is this form of realism, a kind of *taking ontology seriously*, which Tillemans suggests is the necessary ontological correlate of foundationalism. He characterizes this sort of realism as consisting in a “deference to the independent and objective facts that make true beliefs true” together with “the self-assurance that we can know these facts.”<sup>17</sup> This sort of deference to objective facts and self-assurance that we can know these facts, Tillemans proposes, are thus incorporated in the new sense of “intrinsic character” with which Tsong kha pa uses the term.

Similarly, McClintock also draws explicit connections between the Given, foundationalism, and realism in her explanation of Tsong kha pa's critique of the Svātantrika method. She is not quite as emphatic as Tillemans about the connection between the Given and foundationalism, only noting that the Given is “almost invariably” “understood as part of a foundationalist theory of justification.”<sup>18</sup> But in drawing a connection between the Given and a form of realism which a Mādhyamika would find problematic, her interpretation parallels Tillemans' account. Where a notion of the Given takes a part in foundationalist theories of knowledge, she says, it does so by virtue of its ability to “provid[e] evidence for some degree of unassailable reality.”<sup>19</sup> So, McClintock argues, the “key ontological difference between Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas on this view, then, is entirely a matter of how they understand conventional reality, and especially how they understand the nature of that which appears to conventional perceptual awareness.”<sup>20</sup> As in Tillemans' interpretation, the Svātantrikas go wrong in their endorsement of a kind of realism about the mind-independent status, or more specifically concept-independent status, of the objects of perceptual consciousness. McClintock puts it thus:

Significantly, Svātantrikas are said to commit the error of allowing the *subtle* object of refutation to stand on the conventional level. That is, conventionally they make the mistake of accepting that perceptual objects

17 Tillemans 2003: 109.

18 McClintock 2003: 128.

19 *Ibid* 130.

20 *Ibid* 131.

possess real natures (*svabhāva*) which have a mode of existence (*sdod lugs*) independent of the mind's constructive and interpretive functions.<sup>21</sup>

McClintock concludes by saying that “anyone who accepts what could be described as the [G]iven cannot be a Mādhyamika, or at least cannot be a Mādhyamika in the truest and best sense of the term,”<sup>22</sup> since the kind of realism involved in the notion of the Given is incompatible with the Mādhyamika critique of realism.

So Tillemans and McClintock agree on the basic point that accepting the Given is incompatible with the Mādhyamika critique of realism. In chapter one I offered a detailed reconstruction of the reasoning behind the idea that accepting the Given might involve an ontological commitment to mind-independent facts of the matter. Moreover, I explained why we should be interested in an interpretation of Tsong kha pa which steps away from picturing the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction as turning on ontological considerations. In the next section I shall argue that the chain of reasoning by which a subtle ontological commitment gets ascribed to the Svātantrikas is misguided from step one. To summarize that chain of reasoning: foundationalism involves accepting the Given, and accepting the Given leads to a commitment to the existence of mind-independent facts of the matter. Nevertheless, I shall argue below that it is possible to be a foundationalist without accepting the Given. This opens the door for me to suggest that Tsong kha pa's Prāsaṅgikas can coherently endorse foundationalism, *pace* Tillemans. And it invites us to consider the possibility that the issue of the Given is not the crux of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. Indeed, on the picture I shall suggest, Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas alike would reject the Given and yet embrace foundationalism. In the final section of this chapter I shall propose an alternative interpretation of the crux of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction.

### **Inferential Justification, Entitlement, and Reformed Empiricism**

I shall attempt in this section to say what is at stake in the question of the Given, which, despite appearances, is *not primarily* an issue about epistemological foundations. The crux of the

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid* 132.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid* 131.

matter in the question of the Given, as John McDowell explains, is the objective purport (or intentionality) of experience. This does not pertain to the epistemic status of any particular knowledge claim, but to the question of entitlement, that is, the question of an epistemic agent's authority to make any particular knowledge claim.<sup>23</sup> I begin by considering the relationship between the question of the Given and empiricist foundationalism. This tack makes it seem as though the central concern of Givenists *is indeed* to provide a satisfactory view of inferential justification. But McDowell thinks that there is another way to conceive of the Givenists' project which becomes apparent if we consider the historical roots of the notion of the Given. On his view, Sellars correctly identifies an incoherence in the notion of the Given which becomes evident when the notion of the Given is taken to provide an answer to another sort of question than that of epistemological justification. On Sellars' view, McDowell avers, the Given can be construed as a bad answer to the question of entitlement, which comes up because of problems with the picture of valid knowing presupposed by early modern Western philosophy. Thus, Sellars' critique of the Given is a repudiation of that basic picture of the connections between knowers and the known. However, before saying more about this, I shall briefly explain the role which the notion of the Given happens to be able to play in connection with epistemological concerns about inferential justification, even though allaying those concerns is not what the notion of the Given is primarily fitted to do. The contingent association of the notion of the Given with foundationalism has occluded the Given's connection with the question of entitlement and created the illusion that a commitment to foundationalism and acceptance of the Given are logically equivalent stances.

Empiricist foundationalism can be understood as elaborating a key metaepistemological presupposition, the notion of inferential justification.<sup>24</sup> Foundationalism can be construed as the

<sup>23</sup> As McDowell writes: "Sellars's point in introducing the second dimension is that there is another way of responding to the question "*Quid iuris?*" in which what one says in response relates quite differently to the claim whose candidacy to be recognized as knowledgeable is under discussion. In a response of this second kind, one does not offer grounds for endorsing a claim that purports to express knowledge. What one addresses, in the first instance, is not the truth of the particular thing the subject says but her authority, in the circumstances, to say something—anything—of the relevant sort: for example her authority, in the prevailing illumination, to make a claim about something's colour" (McDowell 2009: 234).

<sup>24</sup> See Fumerton 1995: 36.

response to a worry that the notion of inferential justification leads to a vicious infinite regress.<sup>25</sup> Foundationalists suggest that somewhere we must come to beliefs capable of inferentially supporting other beliefs which are not themselves so supported—some kind of noninferential justification. A common suggestion is to suppose that something like sensations are ultimately responsible for delivering the sorts of noninferential justifications necessary to stop the regress. The reason for this sort of move is that, typically, these kinds of mental states can be known directly, i.e., without justificational intermediaries.<sup>26</sup>

Some contemporary philosophers, especially Sellars, have criticized any type of approach to foundationalism *which involves a particular conception of the sort of mental states qualified to provide noninferential justification*. Sellars says that “the classical concept of a sense datum”—a typical instance of the sort of mental state in question, the paradigmatic Given—is “a mongrel resulting from a crossbreeding of two ideas”<sup>27</sup>:

(1) The idea that there are certain inner episodes... which can occur to human beings (and brutes) without any prior process of learning or concept formation.... [and] (2) The idea that there are certain inner episodes which are non-inferential knowings... providing the evidence for all other empirical propositions.<sup>28</sup>

It is the first idea which Sellars and others repudiate in the notion of the Given. As deVries comments, this is the idea that the mental states in question are in some important way independently arisen:

Two features seem crucial to a robust conception of the given:

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25 If E1 is one's justification for believing P, then if E1 is inferentially justified, then that must be by appeal to E2 which supports E1; but then the question of E2's justification prompts an appeal for support by E3, which will, in turn, have to be supported by E4, and so on.

26 “How are we to interpret this notion of direct knowledge?” deVries and Triplett ask, to which they reply: “Very roughly, the idea is that direct knowledge does not have to be achieved or arrived at by inferring, pondering, sorting of evidence, calling forth memories, comparing data, or using other constructive cognitive processes. All it has to do is simply *be there*. It requires only the person's attention, if even that, in order to be knowledge for that person” (deVries and Triplett 2000: xix). As they explain, the conception of knowledge in which this sort of notion of direct knowledge figures is representative “of a type of view common in early modern Western philosophy” (xvi, n. 5); according to this view, the “differences in the degree of certainty or the quality of knowledge are explained on the basis of the *directness* of the knowledge in question: Things known directly are supposed to be highly certain or known very well; things known indirectly are less certain and presumably less well known” (xvii).

27 deVries and Triplett 2000: 210 (“Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” or EPM, §6).

28 deVries and Triplett 2000: 210-211 (EPM §7).

•The given is *epistemically independent*, that is, whatever positive epistemic status our cognitive encounter with the object has, it does not depend on the epistemic status of any other cognitive state. Notice that epistemic independence does *not* follow from immediacy (not being inferred from other knowledge) unless the *only* form of epistemic dependence is actual inference.

•It is *epistemically efficacious*, that is, it can transmit positive epistemic status to other cognitive states of ours.<sup>29</sup>

I say more to elucidate the notion of epistemic independence below. For now, it is important to note that Sellars, at any rate, does not reject the second feature of a noninferential cognition—its epistemic effectiveness. But he challenges the coherence of putting this idea together with the idea that the Given is independently arisen—that is, that it is unacquired,<sup>30</sup> or in no wise dependent on the subject's conceptual capacities.<sup>31</sup>

The tension inherent to the notion of the Given will be more evident, McDowell thinks, if we consider its place in a particular picture of how epistemic agents are connected with the world they know. The origin of the impulse to conceive of the Given as independently arisen can be explained by reference to the historical context of early modern Western philosophy, particularly the dualistic picture of knowing which dominates early modern Western philosophy.<sup>32</sup> Charles Taylor, referring to this “Inside/Outside” conception of knowing,<sup>33</sup> remarks:

“*Ein Bild hielt uns gefangen*”<sup>34</sup> indeed, and it was and is a powerful one.... A crucial feature of this view is that

29 deVries 2005: 98-99.

30 See EPM §6.

31 As McDowell states: “Having something Given to one would be being given something for knowledge without needing to have capacities that would be necessary for one to be able to get to know it” (McDowell 2009: 256).

32 As deVries and Triplett suggest, it can be traced to the basic dualistic picture presupposed by all thinkers in that period: “The rationalist and empiricist traditions in early modern philosophy (roughly the 17th and 18th centuries) shared the most fundamental elements of [a common epistemological] picture, despite their differences. In its metaphysical component, this shared picture is fundamentally dualistic, in that it acknowledges that we have the concepts of two very distinct kinds of things in the world: the mental and the nonmental or material.... At its root, the nonmental was taken to be whatever is governed solely by the causal laws of physics. It can therefore be completely described by reference solely to those properties referred to in those laws: mass, extension or shape, location, motion, etc.... Whereas the material world was thought to be governed by those causal principles that physics was beginning to discover, the mental realm was thought to be governed by *rational* principles. These were regarded as *laws of thought*, whether laws of deductive consequence, inductive discovery, or the mere association of ideas” (deVries and Triplett 2000: xvi-xvii).

33 Taylor 2002: 106.

34 The quote is taken from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* §115: “A picture held us captive” (Wittgenstein 1958: 48).

it portrays our understanding of the world as taking place in a zone, surrounded by and (hopefully) in interaction with a world, which is thus seen as playing the role of Outside to its Inside.<sup>35</sup>

As Taylor further observes, "This deep and powerful image raises the issue of the boundary. Inside and outside have to interact; this is indeed implicit in the very idea of knowledge: what goes on in the inner zone is meant to be in some way at least partly modeled on what exists outside."<sup>36</sup> Modern Western philosophy's captivity to this picture results in a kind of epistemological anxiety,<sup>37</sup> and it is in the crucible of such anxiety that the notion of the Given was forged.<sup>38</sup> Advocates of the Given conceive that a select sub-set of one's mental states are specially suited to satisfy this need for a metaphysical and epistemological linchpin. But it is the drive to design such a dual-purpose entity which leads to the incoherence noted by Sellars and others. In order for an inner episode to qualify as the right sort to serve as a point of contact or interface with an extramental object, the episode in question must not be dependent on any other mental entities—beliefs, awarenesses, conceptual capacities, and so forth. This means that whatever cognitive content, or information, the episode carries must be solely derived from the episode's causal connection with an extramental entity. But it is by its cognitive content that it would qualify to enter into justificatory relations with other mental entities. In other words, its cognitive content is essentially a mental property, not the sort of property that could be transferred via causal connections, as deVries and Triplett say: "the mind is thought of as a self-contained space capable of utilizing for its knowledge only what is entirely within its realm."<sup>39</sup> Justifications hold between mental entities and are governed by the laws of thought, whereas causal connections hold between extramental entities and are governed by the laws of physics, and *nothing*,

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35 Taylor *ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*

37 This anxiety is described poignantly, as Maximilian de Gaynesford points out, by Virginia Woolf: "I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop; which I now join—so—and seal up, and make entire. The world is entire, and I am outside of it, crying, "Oh save me, from being blown for ever outside the loop of time!" (Woolf 1931: 21-2; quoted by de Gaynesford 2006: 128).

38 As deVries and Triplett observe: "The doctrine of the given arose in the context of the problem of the mind's knowledge of the external physical world. If a mind is to gain knowledge about extramental reality, there must be some point of contact or interface between the mental and the extramental. This will be the point at which the metaphysical connection between the mind and the external object (presumably some causal connection) is transformed into an epistemological connection" (deVries and Triplett 2000: xx).

39 *Ibid.*

the inside/outside picture decrees, can reside in both realms.

The myth of the Given as accepted by most of traditional empiricist foundationalism is one approach to the anxiety caused by the inside/outside picture of knowing. It takes the inside/outside picture for granted and attempts to solve the epistemological problem of justification created thereby. But another approach to the anxiety caused by the inside/outside picture is to perceive the picture itself as the problem. Philosophers like Kant and Sellars, McDowell suggests, take what appears *prima facie* to be a skeptical challenge to our knowledge of the external world, and find instead a question about authority—about the subject's authorization to make the sort of judgments he or she makes. On this way of viewing it, the question of the Given turns out to be how to account for "the intentionality of empirical thought in general."<sup>40</sup> Proponents of the Given have been ineptly attempting to provide an answer to the question *quid juris*, the question of entitlement, which Kant raises only with respect to some particular concepts such as "fortune and fate, which circulate with almost universal indulgence."<sup>41</sup> But this is a legitimate question to ask about empirical concepts in general. The question of entitlement is, however, an epistemological question only in the broadest sense, McDowell suggests.<sup>42</sup>

So in McDowell's view, Sellars' critique of the Given does not find the question of foundations to be the central issue. Rather than construe Sellars as attempting to replace a bad foundationalist response with some kind of coherentist response to the epistemological problematic created by the inside/outside picture (as other interpreters of Sellars have done),<sup>43</sup> McDowell's Sellars challenges the

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40 McDowell 2009: 7.

41 *Critique of Pure Reason* A84/B117 (Kant 1997: 220).

42 Discussing Sellars' use of the term 'epistemic', he says: "[Sellars] uses "epistemic" as a term of art, covering far more than what the word's etymology would suggest.... [T]he epistemic, for Sellars, covers states or episodes that involve the actualization of conceptual capacities and as such have intentionality or objective purport, whether or not they amount to cases of knowledge.... There is a precedent for Sellars's using "epistemic" in this at first sight strange way.... The precedent I mean is Kant's first *Critique*. From the language of that work, one might think knowledge is its primary concern. But in fact Kant's concern is not knowledge so much as the directedness of thought at objects, the intentionality or objective purport, that is a prerequisite for anything to be even a candidate to be a case of knowledge. Heidegger says: "*The Critique of Pure Reason* has nothing to do with a 'theory of knowledge'." That is surely excessive, but in its over-the-top way it points towards a claim that would be correct, and one that could also be correctly made about Sellars's "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind"" (McDowell 2009: 209-210).

43 Certain aspects of the coherentist interpretation of Sellars are evident in the following instances: Donald

very presupposition of the entire problematic—the inside/outside picture. McDowell thinks Sellars does this by holding the Givenist accountable for answering the question of entitlement. Givenists provide a bad answer to this question because they accept the inside/outside picture, for it is built into their incoherent response to the question. Sellars, on the other hand, understands that the proper way to respond to the question is by jettisoning the inside/outside picture, although due to other commitments, McDowell thinks, Sellars is not completely successful in doing so.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, supposing that McDowell's interpretation of Sellars is correct (and I am inclined to side with something like his interpretation), Sellars' critique of the Given does not connect with the problems which primarily concern foundationalists, e.g., infinite inferential regresses and such. The primary concern is with the question of entitlement. At any rate, it was clearly no part of Sellars' vision to completely abandon the metaphor of foundations.<sup>45</sup> McDowell understands Sellars as "aiming to

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Davidson's tacit Sellarsian themes rendered explicit in McDowell's reading of Davidson (see McDowell 1994); Richard Rorty's interpretation of Sellars as also explicated by McDowell; Robert Brandom's interpretation of Sellars (see Brandom 1994); and, to some extent, deVries and Triplett's commentary on "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (deVries and Triplett 2000).

44 McDowell does not think Sellars is entirely successful at exorcising the inside/outside picture. As McDowell explains, Sellars' "master thought" is to draw a line: "above the line are placings in the logical space of reasons, and below it are characterizations that do not do that" (McDowell 2009: 5). Perceptual experiences "make" or "contain" claims, so in that sense they belong above the line as "actualizations of conceptual capacities" (cf. 2009: 9-13), but the question is whether Sellars retains some "below the line" element to serve some explanatory purpose. McDowell's opinion about this has changed over time. In earlier readings of Sellars, he argues that Sellars retains a conception of sensations as being below the line, but that the "sensations look like idle wheels" (2009: 16). This reading goes along with his remarks in *Mind and World* where he attributes to Sellars a picture in common with Donald Davidson in which impressions "are opaque" (cf. McDowell 1994: 137-46). Later, McDowell revises his interpretation of Sellars, but he continues to think that Sellars fails to relinquish a vestigial form of the inside/outside picture. McDowell writes: "Sellars puts forward a conception of experiences on which they contain propositional claims. I used to take that to be a version of the thought I have attributed to Kant—that experience is sensory consciousness informed by the higher faculty... [But although] Sellars comes close to Kant in saying experiences contain claims.... [,] all he can make of that idea is that experiences are composites, with claim-containing items accounting for their intentionality and sensations accounting for their sensory character. And this reflects his not arriving at what I take to be the authentically Kantian view. Sellars does not envisage claim-containing occurrences that are themselves shapings of sensory consciousness" (2009: 122).

45 The most convincing piece of evidence for this is the following statement by Sellars, cited time and again by numerous commentators sensitive to this point: "If I reject the framework of traditional empiricism, it is not because I want to say that empirical knowledge has *no* foundation. For to put it this way is to suggest that it is really "empirical knowledge so-called," and to put it in a box with rumors and hoaxes. There is clearly *some* point to the picture of human knowledge as resting on a level of propositions—observation reports—which do not rest on other propositions in the same way as other propositions rest on them. On the other hand, I do wish to insist that the metaphor of "foundation" is misleading in that it keeps us from seeing that if there is a logical dimension in which other empirical propositions rest on observation reports, there is another logical dimension in which the latter rest on the former" (EPM §38; cited by deVries 2005: 128; also cited by McDowell 2009: 222).



rescue a *non-traditional* empiricism from the wreckage of traditional empiricism."<sup>46</sup> McDowell suggests that what Sellars needs to do in order to "fill out this specification of a reformed empiricism" is to explain the contrast between (a) knowledge which *noninferentially* "presupposes other knowledge of matters of fact" and (b) "the presupposition-free knowledge-yielding powers that experience is credited with by traditional empiricism."<sup>47</sup> And, as might be expected, the challenge in explaining such a contrast lies in making sense of (a), the notion of knowledge which noninferentially presupposes other knowledge. This notion is quite puzzling, after all, for how else could one item of knowledge *presuppose* another item of knowledge than by means of some sort of inferential relation? Yet Sellars quite explicitly affirms the possibility of some form of *noninferential epistemic presupposition*:

It is important to note that I characterized the knowledge of fact belonging to this stratum as not only noninferential, but as presupposing no knowledge of other matters of fact, whether particular or general. It might be thought that this is a redundancy, that knowledge (not belief or conviction, but knowledge) which logically presupposes knowledge of other facts *must* be inferential. This, however, as I hope to show, is itself an episode in the Myth.<sup>48</sup>

Sellars develops his conception of noninferential epistemic presupposition in what he calls the "other logical dimension" of observation reports.<sup>49</sup> McDowell explains that "Sellars's thesis is that *observational authority* depends on the subject's own reliability in the second dimension...."<sup>50</sup> In other words, whereas the *first logical dimension* of observation reports pertains to inferential justification, the *second dimension* deals with a subject's entitlement.<sup>51</sup>

With this suggestion, however, it might seem that we are still dealing with a form of inferential

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46 McDowell 2009: 221.

47 *Ibid* 223.

48 deVries and Triplett 2000: 243-4 (EPM §32).

49 As Sellars says: "[I]f there is a logical dimension in which other empirical propositions rest on observation reports, there is another logical dimension in which the latter rest on the former" (deVries and Triplett 2000: 250; EPM §38).

50 McDowell 2009: 233.

51 As McDowell elucidates: "One way of placing an episode or state in the space of reasons... is to give grounds for accepting that its content is true, premises from which there is a sufficiently good inference to the truth of what the putative knower claims or would claim. Sellars's point in introducing the second dimension is that there is another way of responding.... In a response of this second kind, one does not offer grounds for endorsing a claim that purports to express knowledge. What one addresses, in the first instance, is not the truth of the particular thing the subject says but her authority, in the circumstances, to say something—anything—of the relevant sort: for example her authority, in the prevailing illumination, to make a claim about something's colour" (McDowell 2009: 234).

justification. To establish the authority of my observation reports I might have to establish my own reliability. And to do that, as McDowell notes, I might say something “of the relevant sort,” for example, “This is a good light for telling what colour something is” or “I can tell when something is *green*.” But surely this amounts to an acknowledgement that observational authority does, after all, rest on the first logical dimension of inferential justification. The sorts of things one might say to establish one's entitlement might seem, thus, to be no more than truncated reliability inferences. For as McDowell observes, Sellars does say that “the idea of reliability can be explicated in terms of there being a good inference... from the person's making a claim (in the circumstances in which she makes it) to things being as she says they are.”<sup>52</sup> Yet McDowell insists:

I might support my entitlement to the claim that something is green by saying “This is a good light for telling what colour something is.” [But t]he relevance of this to my observational authority about the thing's colour belongs in the second dimension, which is not to be spelled out in terms of inference. I do not cast what I say about the light as a premise in an inferential grounding for what I claim to know about the colour of the thing.<sup>53</sup>

To construe McDowell's point, I think that a fruitful way to think about McDowell's interpretation of Sellars' idea that one can have a concept “only by having a whole battery of concepts of which it is one element”<sup>54</sup> is to take the notion of “having a whole battery of concepts” in something like the sense in which Ian Hacking speaks of coming to know a “style of reasoning.”<sup>55</sup> Here one's

52 McDowell 2009: 231.

53 McDowell 2009: 232.

54 The full quote reads: “Now, it just won't do to reply that to have the concept of green, to know what it is for something to be green, it is sufficient to respond when one is *in point of fact* in standard conditions, to green objects with the vocable “This is green.” Not only must the conditions be of a sort that is appropriate for determining the color of an object by looking, the subject must *know* that conditions of this sort *are* appropriate. And while this does not imply that one must have concepts before one has them, it does imply that one can have the concept of green only by having a whole battery of concepts of which it is one element. It implies that while the process of acquiring the concept of green may—indeed does—involve a long history of acquiring *piecemeal* habits of response to various objects in various circumstances, there is an important sense in which one has *no* concept pertaining to the observable properties of physical objects in Space and Time unless one has them all—and, indeed, as we shall see, a great deal more besides” (deVries and Triplett 2000: 226-7; EPM §19).

55 Hacking elucidates his conception of styles of reasoning by emphasizing the sense in which it can be set apart from a crude form of subjectivism, and yet could be seen as raising the worry of a more cunning form of subjectivism: “An inane subjectivism may say that whether p is a reason for q depends on whether people have got around to reasoning that way or not, I have the subtler worry that whether or not a proposition is as it were up for grabs, as a candidate for being true-or-false, depends on whether we have ways to reason about it. The style of thinking that befits the sentence helps fix its sense and determines the way in which it has a positive direction pointing to truth or to falsehood” (Hacking 1982: 48).

observational authority, or entitlement, might be construed as hinging on one's knowing how to reason about observation reports. As Hacking states, "Understanding is learning how to reason,"<sup>56</sup> as illustrated by the following example:

The renaissance medical, alchemical and astrological doctrines of resemblance and similitude are well-nigh incomprehensible. One does not find our modern notions of evidence deployed in those arcane pursuits.... [In learning to interpret texts in this tradition, w]hat you learn is not systems of translation but chains of reasoning.... What we have to learn is not what they took for true, but what they took for true-or-false. (For example, that mercury salve might be good for syphilis because mercury is signed by the planet Mercury which signs the marketplace, where syphilis is contracted.)<sup>57</sup>

The crucial distinction here is between being *either true or false*, and being *true-or-false*, which might be better expressed by the contrast, to which McDowell alludes, between *claimables* and *claimings*.<sup>58</sup> Inferential justification, the first logical dimension of observation reports, deals with various beliefs, including perceptual beliefs (expressed by observation reports) which are either true or false. Perceptual beliefs can be foundational because they do not inferentially presuppose any other knowledge claims. On the other hand, from the second-dimensional point of view, perceptual beliefs noninferentially presuppose a style of reasoning. In the second-dimension, knowing a style of reasoning in no wise contributes to the inferential justification of either  $p$  or  $\text{not-}p$ , but such knowledge is required in order to comprehend that such a thing as  $p$  is a candidate for being true-or-false, in Hacking's terms. That is, knowing the relevant style of reasoning, i.e., "a whole battery of concepts," need not be specifically invoked in the context of inferentially justifying that  $p$  is true or false, but it is necessary in order to understand anyone's claiming that  $p$  is even up for consideration as true-or-false.

Hacking's notion of 'styles of reasoning' might thus afford us the following gloss on what it means to accept the Given. Someone who accepts the Given believes that there could be observation reports that presuppose no style of reasoning about observation reports. In effect, the Given would be

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56 Hacking 1982: 60.

57 *Ibid.*

58 McDowell writes: "The point does not concern an inferential dependence between *claimables*, constituted as such only by there being inferential relations between them.... It concerns a non-inferential dependence thanks to which certain *claimings* can have the authority of observational knowledge" (McDowell 2009: 235).

a presuppositionless candidate for being true-or-false. It would be available for consideration as true-or-false separate from anything like the sort of normative structure required for inferential justifications of particular claims to even take place. But according to McDowell's reformed empiricism, *p*'s candidacy for being true-or-false noninferentially presupposes other knowledge, i.e., knowledge of a style of reasoning about observation reports. But *p*'s status as a specific claim, its being claimed as true or as false, need not, within the framework of inferential justification, presuppose any other knowledge. In other words, reformed empiricism would allow for a foundationalist approach to knowledge, a form of empirical given, *a mode of deference to objective facts*, without requiring subscription to the myth of the Given.

As we saw in the previous chapter, according to Tillemans it is Svātantrikas' deference to objective facts which supposedly inspires Tsong kha pa's criticism, and it is Tsong kha pa's own lingering deference to objective facts which leads Tsong kha pa to "an overly baroque transformation of Prāsaṅgika thought."<sup>59</sup> I argued above that Svātantrikas' deference to objective facts does not actually commit them to realism about mind-independent facts of the matter.<sup>60</sup> So if there is anything wrong with Svātantrikas' deference to objective facts, it must consist in the part of that deferential attitude which, as Tillemans suggests, Tsong kha pa's Prāsaṅgikas would have in common with Svātantrikas. Tillemans' assessment of Candrakīrti's attitude, on the other hand, indicates that the way to understand what is problematic about Tsong kha pa's and the Svātantrikas' approach to the use of rationality, from a *vintage* Prāsaṅgika perspective, is their use of a foundationalist approach to knowledge. On Tillemans' reading, "Candrakīrti seems to lack the deference to grounding facts of his Svātantrika adversary,"<sup>61</sup> and "Candrakīrti ends up having no use at all for foundationalist holdovers like appearances-cum-particulars."<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, in light of McDowell's and Sellars' views, it is unclear precisely what could possibly be the objection to foundationalism *sans* the Given.

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59 See Tillemans 2003: 113.

60 See chapter one above.

61 Tillemans 2003: 112.

62 *Ibid* 100.

Supposing that we accept the general position for which I have been arguing, we are left with a serious interpretive question. To recap, on the position argued for here, the question of the Given is logically independent of the question of anti-realism about mind-independent facts. So there are philosophical grounds to think that we might well remove the issue of acceptance or rejection of the Given from the list of suspected determining factors in attempting to explain Tsong kha pa's account of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. Similarly, the question of foundationalism appears to be out, for it is possible for someone to be a foundationalist without endorsing an idea of the Given. For, as we have just seen, the notion of the Given is a (bad) answer to the question of entitlement, not primarily an answer to the question of inferential justification which concerns foundationalists (although some foundationalists, it is true, can pick up the idea of the Given and run with it—nevertheless, rejecting the Given and rejecting foundationalism are hardly the same thing). Thus, the question which faces us is the question of how exactly does Tsong kha pa make a distinction between Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas? I shall begin answering this question in the next section.

### **The Subtle Object of Negation**

In the tradition of Nāgārjuna and his followers, the “darkness of ignorance” (*avidyāndhakāra*)<sup>63</sup> is particularly explained by reference to conceptual elaborations, proliferations, fabrications, or *structuring* (*prapañca*, *spros pa*).<sup>64</sup> I shall argue that it is in Tsong kha pa's thinking about the nature and extent of the distortion which conceptual structuring imposes onto perception, and about the character of the sort of therapy required to address the problem, that we find the resources for interpreting his conception of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. In this section, I shall be concerned with the interpretation of Tsong kha pa's claim that the Svātantrikas have only a coarse

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63 See Tillemans 2008 for an interesting discussion of different Buddhist theorizations of this notion.

64 For example, Nāgārjuna writes: “Through the elimination of karma and affliction there is nirvana./ Karma and affliction come from conceptual thought./ These come from mental fabrication./ Fabrication ceases through emptiness” (MMK XVIII.5; see *OR* 377). Cf. Westerhoff 2009: 46-52. Hereafter, the terms '*prapañca*' and '*spros pa*' shall be used in a manner that reflects my interpretation of Tsong kha pa's view. So these terms shall be used specifically for types of conceptual structuring that give rise to the delusion that things are intrinsically existent. For, as I shall argue, Tsong kha pa does not hold that every type of conceptual structuring contributes to the production of that specific delusion.

apprehension of the fundamental object of negation (i.e., the distortion imposed by conceptual structuring, as we shall see below), whereas Prāsaṅgikas' apprehension of the fundamental object of negation is more subtle.

As we have seen in Tauscher's and others' presentations, Tsong kha pa explains the superiority of Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka over Svātantrika-Madhyamaka as a matter of the Svātantrikas' having managed only to identify a "coarse" (*rags pa*) object of negation.<sup>65</sup> In the contemporary interpretations we have considered, this is taken as marking an ontological distinction between Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka and Svātantrika-Madhyamaka. Tsong kha pa has been construed as making the claim that Svātantrikas make ontological commitments that Prāsaṅgikas avoid, and this, in turn, has been cashed in in terms of saying that Tsong kha pa thinks Svātantrikas hold an inferior view of emptiness.<sup>66</sup> Here the coarseness of Svātantrikas' apprehension of the object of negation has been interpreted in terms of having "heavier" ontological commitments. However, I read Tsong kha pa's metaphor differently. The metaphor readily evokes an image of cutting meat, the contrast between coarser and finer cuts being related to the different degrees of precision required for different stages in the process. Trimming the meat from a bone, the butcher leaves the fat for a later stage when he uses a sharper, specialized knife to trim away the fat. This is something like the image which, I argue, Tsong kha pa means to evoke in the contrast between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika methodologies. On the interpretation I suggest, Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas alike identify the fundamental object of negation as the innate perceptual distortion which superimposes on appearances the erroneous apprehension of intrinsic existence. This superimposition is a product of conceptual structuring. The

65 See *EI* 197. Also, cf. Tauscher 2003: 229.

66 It is worth noting that Tsong kha pa's claim for Prāsaṅgikas' superiority is not nearly as "dramatic" as some scholars have suggested. In the *Lam rim chen mo*, Tsong kha pa states, rather mildly: "The great Mādhyamikas who follow the noble father Nāgārjuna and his spiritual son Āryadeva split into two different systems: Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika. Which do we follow? Here, we are followers of the Prāsaṅgika system" (*GT* 274). Nevertheless, Dreyfus, for example, speaks of Tsong kha pa's "aggressive promotion of Prāsaṅgika as the supreme Madhyamaka view" (Dreyfus 2003: 319). It would be more adequate, from a historical point of view, to speak of Tsong kha pa's followers as aggressively promoting their interpretation of Prāsaṅgika against views they deemed heretical, such as the *gzhan stong* view. But it is not apparent, from Tsong kha pa's writings, that he was involved in a vigorous campaign to snuff the Svātantrika approach out of existence. Indeed, judging from Tsong kha pa's discussion of the Svātantrika position in *dGongs pa rab gsal*, he seems to have held the Svātantrika method in some esteem.

Svātantrikas' approach to eliminating this distortion presupposes that *all* conceptual structuring imposes an apprehension of intrinsic existence. However, as we shall see, Tsong kha pa argues against the idea that all conceptual structuring gives rise to an apprehension of intrinsic existence. So Tsong kha pa's approach to cutting away the conceptual structuring which *does* give rise to the distortion of intrinsic existence requires more precision than the Svātantrika approach calls for. Thus, in his view, the Svātantrika approach is analogous to an unskilled butcher's attempts to trim the fat using a coarse instrument that is better for cutting meat from the bone.

In *dGongs pa rab gsal*, Tsong kha pa contrasts the Svātantrikas' coarse apprehension of the object of negation with "the innate subtle apprehension of true existence [according to the Prāsaṅgikas]."<sup>67</sup> It would be tempting to correlate what Tsong kha pa says here about the subtle object of negation with a train of remarks in the *Lam rim chen mo*, where he distinguishes, while on the theme of correctly identifying the object of negation, between "the fundamental object of negation"<sup>68</sup> and "philosophical determinations."<sup>69</sup> Philosophical determinations are only suitable, he suggests, for negating "things that are imputed by the advocates of philosophical tenets—such as objects that are partless particles, partless moments of experience, or a natural substrate (*pradhāna*) with three *guṇas* ("strands") asserted by the Sāṃkhyas."<sup>70</sup> Here it could seem as if Tsong kha pa clearly has the Svātantrika dialectic in his sights. He says that it is on the basis of the fundamental object of negation that realists reify so many different things.<sup>71</sup> Philosophical determinations identify these reified entities as objects of negation, but they are insufficient to stop the tendency to reify further entities. Only by eliminating the fundamental object of negation can this tendency be brought to a halt. He says: "When you negate the referent of ignorance's cognitive process, you completely stop all of these tenet-driven reifications, as though you cut a tree at its root."<sup>72</sup> To the same effect, he

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67 *EI* 197-8.

68 See *GT* 195-6.

69 See *ibid* 196-7.

70 *Ibid.*

71 See *ibid* 211.

72 *Ibid.*

says: "There is limitless diversity among objects of negation, but they come together at the root; when you refute this, you refute all objects of negation."<sup>73</sup> Tsong kha pa explains, further, that when Nāgārjuna refutes a diverse range of hypostatized entities in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, the purpose of this display is "only for the sake of eradicating the way that ignorance apprehends things."<sup>74</sup> Ignorance, he explains moreover, "is an awareness that mistakenly superimposes intrinsic nature; it apprehends internal and external phenomena as existing by way of their own intrinsic character."<sup>75</sup> In other words, ignorance is a mode of apprehension that superimposes a distorted appearance onto the apprehension of any object whatsoever. In this distorted appearance, things seem as though there were a mind-independent fact of the matter about their existence and nature.

So, if we were to correlate Tsong kha pa's distinction between the fundamental object of negation and acquired misconceptions, on the one hand, and the distinction between the subtle object of negation and the coarse object of negation, then we might seem to have a tight explanation of the distinction between Prāsaṅgikas' and Svātantrikas' views, all pivoting around different conceptions of the object of negation. The multifarious reifications refuted by the Svātantrika dialectic could thus be understood as mistakenly targeting only coarse manifestations of the fundamental object of negation. Whereas the Svātantrika dialectic might thus be construed as concerned primarily with ontology, the aim of Prāsaṅgika analysis would be more readily understood as a psycho-therapeutic method designed to curb the mental habit which gives rise to all of those reifications.

Nevertheless, that is not the picture of Tsong kha pa's Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction which I am proposing. I do not suppose that Tsong kha pa thinks the Svātantrika approach fails to appreciate the Mādhyamika stance on the fundamentally distorted character of primary perceptual processes. McClintock's defense of the Svātantrika approach, which we shall consider in more detail in chapter four, shows that Svātantrikas approach the use of rationality as a form of cognitive therapy aiming to correct the sort of basic perceptual distortion which Tsong kha pa identifies as the

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid* 126.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid* 209.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid* 207.



fundamental object of negation. Thus, McClintock explains the primarily psycho-therapeutic orientation of the Svātantrika approach:

Only an advanced practitioner, a buddha or a high-level bodhisattva, has the kind of purified vision in which appearances are not brought about by error, if they even have appearances at all. Thus, even when his realist opponents have a different *intellectual* understanding of the elements involved in an inference—including, most significantly, the manner in which these elements are established to appear—a Mādhyamika can still, due to a primordial ignorance shared with others, find some common ground from which to begin the dialectical process of demonstrating that unassailably real natures do not exist.... The important thing is not what appears to one; the important thing is that one applies analysis to that appearance. Through the application of analysis, one provides one's opponent and oneself with the opportunity and the means to throw off the shackles of all types of realism and to begin in earnest the path of meditation on the naturelessness (*niḥsvabhāvatā*) of all things.<sup>76</sup>

There is interpretive room to allow that Tsong kha pa holds something like McClintock's view of the Svātantrika approach. The place in the *Lam rim chen mo* where he distinguishes between the fundamental object of negation and acquired misconceptions comes before the place where he begins to discuss the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction. There is no indication in the text that Tsong kha pa intends to base the distinction between Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika methodologies on the distinction between the fundamental object of negation and philosophical determinations. So we need not accept the picture which suggests a correlation of the fundamental object of negation with the subtle object of negation apprehended and eliminated only through the Prāsaṅgika method.

But this puts us back to square one with respect to interpreting Tsong kha pa's distinction between the apprehensions of a subtle and a coarse object of negation. To explicate this distinction, I suggest that we focus our attention on the section from *dGongs pa rab gsal* where Tsong kha pa comments that Svātantrikas apprehend only a coarse object of negation. Here we also find Tsong kha pa's distinction, which I mentioned above, between the ways in which Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas posit conventional things. According to Tsong kha pa, Svātantrikas posit conventional entities by "the force of appearing to an awareness" whereas Prāsaṅgikas posit conventional things by "the force of conceptuality."<sup>77</sup> The distinction here seems to rest on a contrast between perception and conceptual

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76 McClintock 2003: 150.

77 See *EI* 200-201.

awareness, something like, e.g., the contrast between raw feels and linguistically formed thoughts. This might seem to suggest, contrary to everything that I have been arguing, that we would well draw the distinction between Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas on the basis of the idea that Svātantrikas accept some form of the Given whereas Prāsaṅgikas reject any form of the Given.

Nevertheless, if only for the sake of argument (supposing some readers might still feel unconvinced by my previous arguments), let us suppose that Svātantrikas accept the idea that all perceptual contents are conceptually structured, thereby rejecting any form of the Given. Granted this supposition, we might then ask ourselves, is it still possible to draw a distinction between positing things by the force of appearing to an awareness and positing things by the force of conceptuality? The answer, it seems to me, is affirmative. The way to see the distinction is to notice that there are different kinds of conceptual structuring. Even if every perceptual consciousness is conceptually structured, does this mean that every perceptual consciousness is conceptually structured in precisely the same way? Supposing that every perceptual consciousness were conceptually structured in precisely the same way, it would suffice, in order to express the conventional dependence of things, to say what the Svātantrikas say, which is that conventional things are posited by the force of appearing to an awareness. That formula would cover all of the possibilities because there would only be one possible way for things to appear to an awareness. Of course we should not suppose that Svātantrikas hold the absurd view that there is only one way to conceptually structure perceptual contents, since that would be incompatible with the diversity of appearances which clearly does exist. But what comes to the same thing would be to say that all perceptual contents, in addition to being conceptually structured in whatever ways they happen to be conceptually structured, are additionally all alike conceptually structured in one particular way. We would want to say, as Svātantrikas, that the one way in which all perceptual contents are conceptually structured alike is in being conceptually structured to have an appearance of intrinsic existence. In other words, the innate perceptual distortion which constitutes the fundamental object of negation for Svātantrikas, on this reading,

would be due to a single form of conceptual structuring which happens to all perceptual contents across the board.<sup>78</sup> Here the formula which says that things are posited by the force of appearing to an awareness would serve as a way of expressing the Svātantrikas' conception of the fundamental object of negation. The goal of Madhyamaka analysis, toward which the formula points, would thus be, on the Svātantrika view, the elimination of all appearances (or all appearances familiar to ordinary beings, at any rate).

Supposing, on the other hand, that not every appearance is the result of conceptual structuring which posits intrinsic existence, the goal of Madhyamaka analysis looks different, and a different formula to serve as a way of articulating what the fundamental object of negation will be needed. For the fundamental object of negation, from this perspective, would not be all appearances, or at least all appearances familiar to ordinary beings. On this view, we would not expect the conceptual structuring which posits intrinsic existence to be active in shaping every perceptual awareness. Consequently, we need to be more precise in specifying the mode of positing conventional things, allowing for the distinctions between different ways of positing things. We have to be sensitive to these distinctions, for not every way of positing things is responsible for the appearance of intrinsic existence, so not every way of positing things has to be eliminated. By indicating that things are posited by the force of conceptuality, the Prāsaṅgika formula allows for this kind of precision in specifying distinctions between different ways of positing things, i.e., different modes of apprehension arisen from different forms of conceptual structuring. And this is exactly the picture for which Tsong kha pa argues. The following passages support this claim. In the *Lam rim chen mo* (*Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, hereafter '*Great Treatise*'), Tsong kha pa writes:

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78 This is equivalent to the claim that, except for high level bodhisattvas and buddhas, all beings possess only one mode of apprehension whereby every perception yields a distorted appearance of intrinsic existence. There could be no alternative mode of apprehension for beings until they achieve a very high level of realization. This, too, is a part of the standard picture from which I shall be stepping away. Later I shall consider a problem which Tsong kha pa's approach to the use of rationality would get into if we accepted this part of the standard picture (and, as I shall explain, there are scholars who have argued that Tsong kha pa's view does get into this problem, and these scholars build their argument on precisely the assumption that I am suggesting the Svātantrikas make). See below, chapter five.

Āryadeva's *Four Hundred Stanzas* says, "Conceptuality sees and you are bound; it should be stopped here." Even the conceptuality mentioned in that statement does not refer to all conceptual consciousnesses whatsoever, but rather to conceptual consciousnesses that superimpose essential existence on phenomena.<sup>79</sup>

And a little below that, Tsong kha pa continues:

Hence, the ultimate wrong conceptual consciousness that conceives the object of negation is the innate ignorance which is the first of the twelve factors of dependent-arising. Acquired objects of negation are merely superimpositions based on this. Thus, it is not at all the case that reason negates all of the cognitive processes through which non-conceptual consciousnesses—e.g., sensory consciousnesses—apprehend things. Therefore, only conceptual mental consciousnesses have cognitive processes that are negated by reason; more specifically, reason refutes the cognitive processes of the two conceptions of self and the cognitive processes of those conceptual consciousnesses that superimpose further attributes on objects that have been imputed by those two conceptions of self. It is not that reason refutes the cognitive processes of all conceptual consciousnesses of any kind.<sup>80</sup>

In the same vein, Tsong kha pa writes, for example, in the *Lam rim chung gnu*:

With respect to sustaining [meditation] within analysis in this way, it is not correct to stop analytical meditation upon holding that all conceptuality whatsoever is apprehension of signs—that is, apprehension of intrinsic existence. For earlier [I] have proven in many ways that conceptuality apprehending intrinsic existence is just one class of conceptuality. It is established that to regard that whatever conceptuality apprehends incurs the damage of reasoning is a deprecation in which the object of reasoned negation is excessive and also is not the meaning of the scriptures.<sup>81</sup>

Tsong kha pa's defense of the distinction between conceptual structuring which has to be repudiated and conceptual structuring which yields perceptual cognitions that are accurate or true *in conventional terms* occupies a considerable segment of the discussion in the *Lhag mthong* or "Special Insight" section of the *Great Treatise*.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, this distinction provides the basis for Tsong kha pa's use of parameterization to explain the Madhyamaka doctrine of the two truths.<sup>83</sup>

Thus, I conclude that Tsong kha pa's understanding of the distinction between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika methodologies rests on the contrast between a coarse and a more subtle way of thinking

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79 *GT* 210-211.

80 *Ibid* 212.

81 *MLE* 160.

82 See especially *GT* 155-75.

83 I return to the topic of Tsong kha pa's use of parameterization in the Conclusion.

of the conceptual structuring which gives rise to apprehensions of intrinsic existence. Svātantrika methodology presumes that all appearances are affected by the problematic form of conceptual structuring which causes apprehensions of intrinsic existence to occur. Prāsaṅgika methodology, on the other hand, as Tsong kha pa construes it, presupposes that not every aspect of the conceptual structuring which gives rise to appearances is influenced by the problematic form of conceptual structuring. This means that, for Prāsaṅgikas the goal is not to wholly discount the epistemic value of appearances.

The ramifications of the differences between these two basic approaches shall be unpacked over the course of the chapters to come. Let us busy ourselves first with the next obvious question, which strikes me as being the question as to what the grounds are for taking the Prāsaṅgika approach to be methodologically superior to the Svātantrika approach, given the conclusion that we have reached so far. Rather than enter into a direct exposition of Tsong kha pa's view of the matter, I propose to begin by considering a dissenting point of view (that is, a point of view in dissent with Tsong kha pa's claim that Prāsaṅgika methodology is superior). So in the next chapter, I shall assess Mark Siderits' defense of the claim that it is actually the Svātantrikas who have the superior methodology.

## Chapter Three

### A Case for Svātantrika Superiority

In this chapter I consider Mark Siderits' interpretation of the distinction between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika methodologies. Siderits' essay, "Thinking on Empty: Madhyamaka Anti-Realism and Canons of Rationality,"<sup>1</sup> makes a case for the Svātantrika position's superiority over the Prāsaṅgika position. My aim is to explain why Tsong kha pa's account of the difference between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika methodologies undermines Siderits' appraisal of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the two positions. Siderits argues that the Svātantrika position is superior to the Prāsaṅgika perspective because Svātantrikas develop a more sophisticated conventionalist account of objectivity than Prāsaṅgikas do. His rational reconstruction of the Svātantrika position draws on Donald Davidson's theory of radical interpretation as revised by Ian Hacking. Siderits bases his claim for the superiority of the Svātantrika position on the fact that the Svātantrika version of a conventionalist account of objectivity encourages theoretical inquiry into the nature of conventional reality. That is, Svātantrikas allow that the conventional is something about which it is possible to form better or worse theories. Thus, Siderits suggests, for Svātantrikas it makes sense to ask whether our conventions are more adequate than some other group of people's conventions. The Prāsaṅgika approach, on the other hand, involves a subtle "reification" of conventions because Prāsaṅgikas (paradigmatically Candrakīrti, for Siderits) do not devise an account of objectivity that allows for treating the conventional as the sort of thing about which there could be better or worse theories, and so they must adopt an attitude of "smug tolerance" when confronted with different styles of reasoning or linguistic conventions. In other words, Prāsaṅgikas would have no option, if confronted with different styles of reasoning or different conventional practices, but to embrace a form of relativism, whereas Svātantrikas could still defend a form of universalist objectivity for their own claims about the nature of conventional reality.

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1 See Siderits 1989.

On Tsong kha pa's account, however, Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas enjoy equal leeway to explore conventional reality as a *topos* of theoretical inquiry.<sup>2</sup> However, the crux of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction is, for Tsong kha pa, the issue of autonomous inferences. Svātantrikas think Mādhyamikas can use autonomous inferences in reasoning with realists, whereas Prāsaṅgikas do not think autonomous inferences can be used in these situations. The reason why Tsong kha pa thinks autonomous inferences cannot be used in these situations is that realists and Mādhyamikas ground their inferences in different ways of perceptually apprehending things. Realists' inferences are ultimately based on an apprehension of things as intrinsically existent, so in the context of debate with realists on the question of intrinsic existence, the Mādhyamika must oppose the realist's distorted mode of perceptual apprehension (*'dzin stang*) by adopting a position that is ultimately founded in a different mode of apprehension. For it would not be possible to uproot the realists' mistaken mode of apprehension if Mādhyamikas sought to ground their own inferences in the same mistaken mode of apprehension as realists. So it is impossible for Mādhyamikas and realists to accept a wholly commensurable logical subject when debating specifically about the issue of intrinsic existence. But a commensurable logical subject, i.e., a subject which appears the same way for every interested party, is a necessary condition for the use of autonomous inferences. I shall argue that even granted Siderits' proposal as to how Svātantrikas are able to bypass incommensurabilities arising in instances of different styles of reasoning, Tsong kha pa's argument that Mādhyamikas cannot use autonomous inferences in reasoning with realists holds.

Siderits' approach to the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction, like the approach which I have

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2 To take an example of the kind of speculation about the nature of conventional things Tsong kha pa and his followers are prepared to indulge, consider Tsong kha pa's thoughts on the distinction between impermanence and momentariness (Cf. Dreyfus 1997: 114). He does not follow the precedent of Indian Buddhist thinkers in collapsing these notions into the single idea that things have no temporal distribution, i.e., real things exist for only a single instant. For Tsong kha pa, if something is impermanent, then it has a definite limit to its duration, its "time of establishment" (*grub dus*). He uses the example of a year to explain this concept. A year needs to endure for twelve months, and it cannot endure for one instant beyond the twelve month limit (Cf. *OR* 205). To say that a thing is momentary, on the other hand, means that it is always moving toward the end of its time of establishment. As Dreyfus explains, "The meaning of momentariness is not in the short duration of the moment but in the reality of constant change. For things to be momentary means that their existence in time constitutes them, instead of being something merely external to them" (Dreyfus 1997: 113).

been arguing we could ascribe to Tsong kha pa, presumes that the pivotal question is not whether Svātantrikas accept a form of the myth of the Given, or whether they are foundationalists. As shall be seen, Siderits' Svātantrikas are adamantly opposed to the myth of the Given, i.e., scheme-content dualism. And we saw in the previous chapter that foundationalism is a non-issue, that is, it is possible to reject the Given while nonetheless holding empiricist foundationalism to be a fruitful field of endeavor. The central issue, as we shall see, is whether it is possible for Tsong kha pa to concede Siderits' proposal, in general, while consistently abstaining from positing a commensurable subject in the exceptional instance of debate over intrinsic existence. In other words, Tsong kha pa would agree with Siderits' Svātantrika that it is possible for a Mādhyamika and a realist to commonly agree on a subject, e.g., that tree outside the window, for the purposes of debating about some qualities it possesses, perhaps even some metaphysical qualities. For example, a Mādhyamika can debate with a Yogācārin about the tree's status as an external object. Yet when conversation turns to the question of a thing's intrinsic existence, Tsong kha pa thinks it is suddenly impossible for the proponent and opponent to have the kind of agreement necessary for an autonomous inference. Tsong kha pa's attitude here may appear rather *ad hoc*. For he is prepared to admit that the tree is 'real' for the purposes of inquiring whether, say, it needs to be removed in order to prevent it falling on the house, or even for the purposes of debating whether it is an external object. But if the question is whether the tree is intrinsically existent, suddenly the Mādhyamika and the realist cannot even agree that they are talking about the same thing!

To elucidate Tsong kha pa's position on this point, and reconstruct the sort of response to Siderits that his position seems to imply, let us divide the discussion into four parts. The first three parts shall present Siderits' position, and the fourth shall take up Tsong kha pa's view. First I shall present the broad contours of Siderits' account of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction and explain how the distinction is related, in his view, to the issue of relativism. Siderits believes that Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas are, as Mādhyamikas, agreed in their philosophical rejection of an inside-outside



picture of knowing. As shall be seen, Siderits thinks Mādhyamikas are able to reject this picture of knowing by adopting conventionalism. That is, without countenancing anything like an intrinsically existent reality, an “outside,” as the source of the objectivity of our knowledge-claims, anti-realists have to account for the true-or-false status of particular claims against the background of a community's adoption of a specific set of conventional practices (including, most importantly, linguistic practices). However, this type of conventionalist objectivity gives rise to the danger of second-order relativism. In second-order relativism, it is not the adequacy of individual truth-claims that is in question, but the adequacy of one community's set of conventional practices against another community's practices. As we shall see, Siderits thinks Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas have available to them different responses to the problem of second-order relativism, and it is on the basis of the different types of response which they have available that Siderits argues for the superiority of the Svātantrika position.

Part two looks at the theoretical background of Siderits' strategy to provide Svātantrikas with a way to avoid letting conventionalism lead to second-order relativism. Here I consider Hacking's adaptation of Davidson's theory of radical interpretation,<sup>3</sup> since this informs Siderits' reconstruction of the Svātantrika position. What Hacking finds in Davidson's theory is a way for anti-realists to block second-order relativism. A crucial piece of Davidson's theory is the use he makes of the principle of charity. He counsels assuming that not-yet-interpreted statements are true even before one knows what is being claimed by the statements in question. The principle of charity requires us to assume that the conditions for a not-yet-interpreted statement to be true are satisfied, but the catch is that we can only regard the statement's truth-conditions as being satisfied by our own criteria as to what it would take for such a statement to be true. In other words, uninterpreted statements are constrained to comply with our own linguistic conventions. This perhaps makes Davidson's approach too effective, for it seems to plunge conventionalism into the first danger mentioned above, the kind of “smug

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3 Davidson's theory is articulated in his 1973 essay, “Radical Interpretation.” See Davidson 2006. Hacking's response to Davidson's theory is in Hacking's essay “Language, Truth, and Reason.” See Hacking 1982.

tolerance" which would discourage any rational inquiry into the correctness of our knowledge. Hacking's aim is to allow for there to be the possibility of incommensurability which an exaggerated application of Davidson's theory might foreclose when it eliminates the danger of second-order relativism. That is, Hacking wishes to preserve Davidson's conventionalism and his defense against second-order relativism, but yet make room for a picture of scientific progress which involves shifting from an old scientific paradigm to a new paradigm which might not be fully commensurate with the old paradigm. So to preserve the possibility of such incommensurabilities, Hacking adapts Davidson's approach to distinguish between conventional truths that are open to inquiry and ones that are not (e.g., sense-datum reports). As we shall see, Hacking's revision of Davidson's theory is the basis for Siderits' reconstruction of a possible Svātantrika solution to the problem of second-order relativism.

Part three unpacks Siderits' use of Hacking to explain the difference between Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika versions of a conventionalist account of objectivity. Siderits argues that Svātantrikas develop something like Hacking's approach in connection with their investigation into the nature of conventional reality, that is, they develop a conventionalist account of objectivity which reserves a place for the idea that there could be a "best theory" of conventional reality. Prāsaṅgikas, on the other hand, are committed to a "no-theory" approach to conventional truth, which would leave Prāsaṅgikas with no option, Siderits thinks, but to embrace relativism if confronted with a different style of reasoning or conceptual scheme.

Finally, in part four I explain Tsong kha pa's critique of the Svātantrikas' endorsement of autonomous inferences in reasoning with realists about intrinsic existence, and I argue that the critique holds even if Siderits' reconstruction of the Svātantrika position is accepted. That is, Siderits' suggestion is that the Svātantrika approach to reasoning assumes that the worldly canon of rationality is universally binding, but this does not suffice, I argue, to ensure that the requirement for using autonomous inferences can be satisfied in every case. An autonomous inference requires all the parts of the inference (subject, predicate, evidence) to be established and appear the same way for all

parties concerned. But Tsong kha pa insists that in the case where Mādhyamikas are attempting to reason with realists the sort of commensurability required for autonomous inferences cannot be accepted by Mādhyamikas. This is because realists' inferences are grounded in a perceptual apprehension of things as being intrinsically existent, whereas Mādhyamikas have to argue from a position which presupposes that things can be apprehended as being empty of intrinsic existence. So it is impossible for Mādhyamikas to accept the sort of commensurability required for autonomous inferences.

### **Canons of Rationality and Anti-Essentialism**

Siderits reverses the traditional appraisal of the relative strengths of the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika positions. Tibetan Buddhist philosophers typically put Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka on top of the doxographic heap.<sup>4</sup> But in Siderits' view, it is the Prāsaṅgikas who emerge with a grasping attitude toward conventional truth. Siderits argues that because Svātantrikas adopt a non-relativistic pluralism about canons of rationality, they are better able than Prāsaṅgikas to avoid subtly reifying conventional reality. In his analysis of Candrakīrti's and Bhāvaviveka's respective arguments against Yogācāra idealism,<sup>5</sup> Siderits detects different resources at hand in their views for dealing with the possibility of other canons of rationality yielding other versions of conventional reality. Candrakīrti rejects "the possibility that our linguistic practices might allow of alteration and improvement."<sup>6</sup> Because conventional practices are "thought of as brutally given and to be taken at face value,"<sup>7</sup> there is the danger for the Prāsaṅgika of slipping into "a smug tolerance: they have their ways of reasoning, we have ours, and that's the end of the matter."<sup>8</sup> The problem with this perspective is that it cannot "see that there may yet be better and worse versions of conventional truth... [which is] to see that there, too, there is always room for improvement."<sup>9</sup> The Svātantrikas, on the other hand, avoid this danger

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4 See Dreyfus 2003: 318.

5 Discussed below, see pp. 113 ff.

6 Siderits 1989: 243.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Siderits 1989: 247.

9 Siderits 1989: 248.

because they think it makes a certain amount of sense to build theories about conventional reality. Conventional truth is not a brute given, but it is the sort of thing about which it is possible to have better or worse theories. By reconstructing the Svātantrika position in this way, Siderits also manages to “tease out” “an anti-realist response to the charge of relativism... from the Madhyamaka response to the objection that they are nihilists about rationality.”<sup>10</sup>

To better understand how the notion of canons of rationality figures in Siderits' account of the Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction, a good place to begin is by considering how he draws the line separating Mādhyamikas from non-Mādhyamika Buddhist philosophers. He describes the approaches to ontology of both Abhidharma and Yogācāra philosophers in terms of a distinction between “a conventional or worldly canon of rationality on the one hand, and philosophical rationality on the other.”<sup>11</sup> This distinction is of course derived from the traditional Buddhist distinction between conventional and ultimate truth. As is well known, the doctrine of two truths originated as a hermeneutic exigency. The Buddha explicitly denies the existence of a Self of persons in some of his recorded discourses, yet in others he explicitly refers to persons as if such a Self did in fact exist. But in contexts where the Buddha seems to admit the existence of a Self, such admissions appear to be an expedient means of imparting important ethical doctrines, whereas contexts where the Self is denied appear to convey the Buddha's definitive position on the ontological question of the Self's existence. So the ultimate truth is that the Self does not exist, but the existence of the Self is a conventional truth. Or, to use Siderits' interpretation, the non-existence of the Self is the truth discovered by philosophical rationality, whereas the existence of the Self is observed in contexts of discourse governed by a worldly canon of rationality.<sup>12</sup>

Relating this point to Siderits' interpretation of Madhyamaka, then, what we can say about the views of non-Mādhyamika Buddhist philosophers is that they hold essentialist views. For they demonstrate the ultimate truth of the Self's non-existence through discovering that the essence of

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10 Siderits 1989: 231.

11 Siderits 1989: 233.

12 See Siderits 1989: 232-3.

personhood is something other than the sort of substantial entity which the Self is typically conceived to be. For example, according to the Abhidharma school, “the person may be reductively analyzed into a space-time chain of causally related physical and psychological states.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, the essence of personhood is discovered to be a space-time chain of causally related physical and psychological states, and this essence is discovered in the context of discourse governed by philosophical rationality. But, as Siderits points out, where Madhyamaka departs from the “lower schools” is in its anti-essentialism: “emptiness is defined as lack of essential nature.”<sup>14</sup>

This helps us to understand how Madhyamaka, on Siderits' interpretation, faces, as Siderits calls it, the problem of nihilism about rationality. The Mādhyamika rejection of essentialism is tantamount to a complete refusal of the canon of philosophical rationality. There are no essences; therefore, the exercise of philosophical rationality, which seeks the essence of things, is a barren form of activity. As Siderits conceives it, the exercise of philosophical rationality is imbricated with the notion that there is something *behind* or *deeper than* thought and language, some essential nature which thought and language are about. The illusion of depth created by this notion is what Mādhyamika anti-essentialism, in Siderits' view, pits itself against.

But Siderits explains that when Nāgārjuna gives reasons “to show us the implausibility of” the project of philosophical rationality to describe “reality in a way that is not contaminated by human interests,”<sup>15</sup> he does not do so within the framework of philosophical rationality. His reasons are given in the discourse governed by the worldly canon of rationality, and that is why it is not inconsistent for him to critique philosophical rationality. Siderits concludes: “he is not a nihilist about rationality: the worldly canon of rationality, grounded as it is in human practice, is perfectly acceptable.”<sup>16</sup> So Nāgārjuna *does* have a thesis, just not a thesis framed in the context of philosophical rationality. His thesis is condensed by Siderits into the slogan: “the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth.”

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13 Siderits 1989: 232.

14 Siderits 1989: 234. This is a point which Siderits makes more impressively in more recent work than in the early paper I am focusing on in this chapter. Cf. Siderits 2003, esp. 132-134.

15 Siderits 1989: 236.

16 *Ibid.*

What this means, according to Siderits, is "that an acceptable canon of rationality will have to reflect human needs, interests and institutions."<sup>17</sup>

So, on Siderits' interpretation, the "Mādhyamika thus escapes the charge of nihilism about rationality by embracing a kind of conventionalism."<sup>18</sup> But this raises the potential threat of relativism. That is, the Mādhyamika uses the worldly canon of rationality to motivate worldly opponents to accept the thesis of emptiness, and the truth of the Mādhyamika's thesis is thus dependent on the standards of objectivity put in place by conventional practices. But such practices are contingent, that is, different communities may adopt different conventions and thus have different standards of objectivity. In that case, a Mādhyamika analysis refuting an intrinsically existent self might not be recognized as objectively true according to a different community's standards of objectivity. For example, a community of quantum physicists employing a non-classical logic might not feel compelled by Buddhist mereological arguments. As Siderits observes, "This 'community standards' approach to truth and rationality would seem to entail that a proposition might be either true or false depending on the cultural milieu in which one finds oneself."<sup>19</sup> But this outcome is as problematic as nihilism about rationality, since it seems to result just as quickly in refutation, as Siderits continues to say: "And this is absurd, for what makes a proposition true or false is the facts, which do not vary across cultures. Likewise the fact that we have more true beliefs and fewer false beliefs than did our ancestors can only be explained by supposing that we employ superior standards of rational acceptance, a notion that is incomprehensible on the present approach to rationality."<sup>20</sup>

To restate the problem, claiming that the only acceptable canon of rationality is a worldly canon of rationality results in ascribing to Mādhyamikas a conventionalist account of objectivity. A conventionalist account of objectivity alleviates the pain of relativism at the level of particular knowledge claims by providing an explanation in terms of standards conventionally accepted by a

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17 *Ibid.*

18 Siderits 1989: 239.

19 *Ibid.*

20 Siderits 1989: 239-40.

community as to how individual claims could satisfy the conditions of refutability and responsibility which seem to be constitutive of objectivity. However, this simply raises the threat of second-order relativism. While the conventionalist can account for objectivity with respect to individual claims by subjecting those claims to the standards conventionally accepted by a particular community, this does not rule out the possibility of someone's challenging the whole set of conventions adopted by a particular community. That is, the community of quantum physicists might reject not only the Mādhyamikas' individual claims, but the Mādhyamikas' version of the worldly canon of rationality (because its logic conforms with principles of classical logic). Thus, second-order relativism is the problem of justifying not the adequacy of individual claims, but the adequacy of different conceptions of how to justify the adequacy of individual claims. The next section examines a couple of ways in which conventionalists have addressed the problem of second-order relativism.

### **Radical Interpretation and the Quest for the Best Theory**

Siderits bases his Svātantrikas' response to the problem of second-order relativism on Ian Hacking's adaptation of Donald Davidson's theory of radical interpretation. Hacking's concern is to preserve Davidson's rejection of scheme-content dualism without thereby jeopardizing the sort of incommensurabilities presupposed by a Kuhnian model of scientific advance. So Hacking's strategy is to restrict the scope of Davidson's principle of charity to the basic sentences of empirical observation, while allowing for the possibility of different styles of reasoning. By admitting different styles of reasoning, i.e., withholding unrestricted applications of the principle of charity, Hacking makes it possible to make sense of the idea that some sentences (certain theoretical claims, at any rate) could be uninterpretable. Nevertheless, by adhering to Davidson's theory of interpretation with respect to a wide class of claims (e.g., sense-datum reports), Hacking manages to develop a form of non-relativistic pluralism. Before considering Hacking's position, it will be useful to provide a brief, but sufficiently detailed, exposition of Davidson's theory of interpretation.

The basis for Davidson's position is a form of denial of the inside-outside picture of knowing

we considered in chapter two. As discussed above, the inside-outside picture of knowing, or “dualism of scheme and content” as Davidson puts it, is an epistemological paradigm which has built into it the presupposition of intrinsic existence. An intrinsically existent entity would exist in such a way that no relation to its being conceptualized in any way by anyone could be relevant to its existing with the nature it actually has. I have been calling philosophers who reject intrinsic existence anti-realists (for they are, after all, anti-realists about intrinsic existence), and anti-realism in this sense would clearly be a motive for rejecting the inside-outside picture. However, it is not necessary to insist that Davidson's rejection of scheme-content dualism is particularly motivated by an endorsement of anti-realism in this sense or any other sense.<sup>21</sup>

Davidson avers that the root of scheme-content dualism lies in the idea of relating a conceptual scheme to something that is *not* the conceptual scheme—*experience* or *reality* in some sense. He says, “conceptual schemes (languages) [we are told] either organize something, or they fit it...”<sup>22</sup> Because the scheme has to be related to something that it is not, there is room on this picture for the idea that there could be different schemes which 'organize or fit' (experience or nature/reality) in different, incompatible ways. And if one accepts that having a language is somehow inextricably bound together with having a conceptual scheme,<sup>23</sup> then it would be a short step to the conclusion

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21 Davidson might be taken as declaring himself a realist when he says that beliefs are made true by “an objective public world which is not of our own making” (Davidson 2006: 228). He also says: “In giving up the dualism of scheme and world, we do not give up the world, but re-establish unmediated touch with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false” (Davidson 2006: 208). McDowell thinks Davidson fails to put us in touch with the world because Davidson does not think sense perceptions can enter the “logical space of reasons,” since sensation in Davidson's view is a brute causal process. McDowell argues that this conception of sensibility makes sense impressions “opaque.” On the view McDowell ascribes to Davidson, “if one knows enough about one's causal connections with the world, one can argue from them to conclusions about the world, but they do not themselves disclose the world to one. They have an epistemological significance like that of bodily feelings in diagnosing organic ailments” (McDowell 1994: 145). The general trend of McDowell's interpretation is that Davidson recognizes the problems with realism and makes moves in the right direction to dissolve those problems, but ultimately “saying what [Davidson] will let us say does not entitle us to find no philosophical mystery in thought's bearing on the world” (McDowell 1994: 142). Rorty goes the farthest to interpret Davidson's view as a form of what I am calling “anti-realism” (although Rorty might have qualms with this terminology, cf. Rorty 1991: 354-5). Yet Rorty notes Davidson's “pledge of allegiance” to realism as “an embarrassment” for his own interpretation of Davidson (Rorty 1991: 354).

22 Davidson 2006: 203.

23 *Ibid* 197.



that human languages could be incommensurable, in part or *in toto*.

Davidson's argument against scheme-content duality rests on his theory of radical interpretation. The central claim of his theory is that "the objective features of the world... alter in conjunction with changes in attitude towards the truth of sentences."<sup>24</sup> The attitude of holding a sentence true "is an attitude an interpreter may plausibly be taken to be able to identify before he can interpret, since he may know that a person intends to express a truth in uttering a sentence without having any idea *what* truth."<sup>25</sup> For example, consider the case of a field linguist attempting to interpret "the language of a hitherto untouched people,"<sup>26</sup> as in Quine's thought-experiment of the linguist constructing a translation manual. With such in mind, Quine invokes his famous example where a native informant cries "Gavagai!" and points to what the linguist takes to be a rabbit scurrying by.<sup>27</sup> Davidson's point about interpretation, then, is that it is possible for the linguist to hold the native's utterance, 'Gavagai', to be true even if no interpretation of the statement has yet suggested itself. This is the key to Davidson's theory of radical interpretation. A theory of 'radical interpretation'<sup>28</sup> would explain how utterances are understood, and it would do so solely on the basis of taking the sentences expressed as being true (assuming that informants are not deluded or actively deceiving us), without presupposing "essential use of such linguistic concepts as meaning, interpretation, synonymy, and the like."<sup>29</sup> Davidson hereby marks his allegiance to Quine's general metaphysical outlook, which is distinguished by Quine's relentless attack against excessive ontological posits in, e.g., the philosophy of language, such as that there are meanings and so forth. But Davidson distances his own program from Quine's idea that "a translation manual is the best form for a theory of interpretation to take."<sup>30</sup>

A theory of translation will not work as a general theory of interpretation, Davidson thinks, because it does not presuppose that the translator knows the meanings of any of the object language

24 *Ibid*: 193, n. 16.

25 *Ibid* 192.

26 Quine 1960: 28.

27 See *ibid* p. 29.

28 Davidson notes that "[t]he term 'radical interpretation' is meant to suggest strong kinship with Quine's 'radical translation'" (Davidson 2006: 184, n. 1).

29 *Ibid* 187.

30 *Ibid*.

sentences even after they have been correctly translated. That is, a theory of translation requires the translator to know three languages: the subject language (the language into which sentences are being translated), the object language (the language from which sentences are being translated), and the metalanguage which states which subject language sentences translate which object language sentences. So, for example, suppose the object-language statement is "Schnee ist weiss" and suppose the subject-language and metalanguage are the same, say, English. So the theory of translation should provide instructions, stated in the metalanguage, as to which subject language sentences to substitute for which object language sentences in order to produce a translation. Thus, the theory in our example should contain something like the following statement: "Substitute •Snow is white•s for •Schnee ist weiss•s."<sup>31</sup> But a theory of translation leaves opaque the manner in which the translator understands sentences in his or her own language, Davidson argues. Hence, he says, "The problem of interpretation is domestic as well as foreign.... All understanding of the speech of another involves radical interpretation."<sup>32</sup>

Davidson argues that all that is necessary to explain interpretation is a theory of truth and a grasp of the principle of charity. The particular theory of truth which Davidson believes will do the trick for the purposes of a theory of interpretation is Tarski's account of the concept of truth in formalized languages. Tarski stipulates that for every sentence *s* of the object language, there is a sentence of the form

*s* is true (in the object language) if and only if *p*.

To take an instance where the object language and subject language happen to be the same,

•Snow is white•s are true if and only if snow is white.

Or, to take an instance where the object language and subject language differ,

•Schnee ist weiss•s are true if and only if snow is white.

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31 Here I borrow Sellars' dot-quote convention to set apart subject and object languages from occurrences of metalinguistic elements.

32 Davidson 2006: 184.

Davidson calls such instances of the form T-sentences. T-sentences state the truth conditions for sentences in the object language; that is,  $s$  is true just in case  $p$  obtains. This theory of truth works in conjunction with the principle of charity in Davidson's theory of interpretation. The principle of charity counsels counting speakers "right in most matters."<sup>33</sup> This involves "assigning to sentences of a speaker conditions of truth that actually obtain (in our own opinion) just when the speaker holds those sentences true."<sup>34</sup> Davidson continues: "What justifies [this] procedure is the fact that disagreement and agreement alike are intelligible only against a background of massive agreement."<sup>35</sup> For example, returning to the example of the field linguist and the native's utterance 'Gavagai!', if the field linguist presupposes that the native's perceptual faculties function analogous to her own, and that the native is not trying to deceive, and so forth, then even without knowing what 'Gavagai' means, the safest bet is to assume that the native believes "Gavagai! is true." The benefit of putting together charity with Tarski's theory of truth is that we then have a way to come at the question of meaning through the interdependence of meaning and belief. Knowing that a speaker holds a sentence true is insufficient to know "neither what he means by the sentence nor what belief his holding it true represents."<sup>36</sup> However, if as interpreters we assign to a speaker's sentences truth conditions that actually obtain, then it is possible, by triangulating, to understand what the speaker's

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33 Davidson 2006: 207. Davidson cautions that the "methodological advice to interpret in a way that optimizes agreement should not be conceived as resting on a charitable assumption about human intelligence that might turn out to be false. If we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances and other behaviour of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standards, we have no reason to count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or as saying anything" (Davidson 2006: 193). What this suggests is a criterion, or "critterion," whereby entities exhibiting what could be construed as intentional behavior might be classified as rational beings or not. For example, do the dances of honey bees qualify them as "rational animals"? John McDowell thinks that "mere animals" do not "weigh reasons and decide what to do" because their lives are "led not in the world, but only in an environment" (McDowell 1994: 115). Though this issue is tangential to our main discussion, its salience for anyone interested in Buddhist philosophy will be immediately obvious. As Tom Tillemans remarks: "[A] Buddhist has his reasons for wanting to say that there are mental factors, ways of thinking, etc. in common to humans and all other forms of animal life: this is in effect for him a necessary condition for there to be reincarnations across different forms of life and for there to be liberation from all possible reincarnations.... [But] it has to be granted that such commonality of mental features between humans and lower animals makes no sense for people who do not see it as meaningful to talk about reincarnation across such radically different forms of life" (Tillemans 2008: 12-13, n. 18).

34 Davidson 2006: 207.

35 Davidson 2006: 193.

36 Davidson 2006: 206.

sentences mean. Thus, if a small, furry brown animal scurries across the path, and the native utters "Gavagai!", then the linguist might derive from these circumstances the following T-sentence<sup>37</sup>:

- Gavagai•s are true if and only if there is a rabbit scurrying across the path ahead.

Through subsequent surveillance of other contexts in which 'Gavagai' is used, the linguist might determine on the basis of this T-sentence that 'Gavagai' means "rabbit".<sup>38</sup>

Davidson's reliance on Tarski's theory of truth is the key to his repudiation of scheme-content dualism. Davidson's argument is that the picture of a conceptual scheme organizing something—nature or experience—makes no sense at all, and that the idea of a conceptual scheme fitting reality, or the totality of experience, is dispensable for purposes of explanation.<sup>39</sup> He says that "the notion of fitting the totality of experience, like the notion of fitting the facts, or of being true to the facts, adds nothing intelligible to the simple concept of being true."<sup>40</sup> That is, suppose we accept the idea of a conceptual scheme. Then, according to this idea, particular utterances must stand as instances of attempting to make applications of the alleged concept scheme to reality, and when an utterance is true this would be said to mark a successful application of the scheme, i.e., the scheme would be said to fit reality. But to say that a sentence *s* is true, as we have seen on Tarski's analysis, is merely to assert that *the conditions which would have to obtain for that sentence to be true* do obtain, e.g., "The sentence 'My skin is warm' is true if and only if my skin is warm."<sup>41</sup> Davidson's point is that *with* the notion of holding a sentence true we have everything necessary to make sense of operating in a particular conceptual scheme, and the additional idea of fitting the scheme to something outside the scheme contributes nothing. As he says, "what sounded at first like a thrilling discovery—that truth is relative to a conceptual scheme—has not so far been shown to be anything more than the pedestrian

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37 Notice that here we are leaving out the complication of interpreting body-language, for surely a complete description of the circumstances in question would need to mention that the native gesticulates in a certain way when making his utterance.

38 Here let us leave out of the discussion the issue of indeterminacy of reference for which Quine's famous example was originally designed to be an intuition pump.

39 See Davidson 2006: 203-205.

40 *Ibid* 204.

41 *Ibid* 205.

and familiar fact that the truth of a sentence is relative to (among other things) the language to which it belongs."<sup>42</sup>

Against the backdrop of Davidson's rather deflationary picture of conceptual relativity, Hacking's project is to preserve something like the picture "of how new (perhaps better) [conceptual] schemes result from new and better science," which "is very much the picture philosophers of science, like Putnam and Feyerabend, and historians of science, like Kuhn, have painted for us."<sup>43</sup> The term 'incommensurability' was first used by Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend to denote the form of second-order relativism they think is involved when the meanings of scientific terms and concepts change along with the theories relative to which they are used.<sup>44</sup> On Kuhn's sense of "incommensurable," a pair of languages would be incommensurable if they contain terms that are not inter-translatable. Kuhn explains, using the example of 'Gavagai', that if the field linguist's language (English, say) and the native's language are incommensurable, then there may "be no English description coreferential with the native term 'gavagai'."<sup>45</sup> He continues:

Perhaps, that is, the natives structure the animal world differently from the way English speakers do, using different discriminations in doing so. Under those circumstances, 'gavagai' remains an irreducibly native term, not translatable into English. Though English speakers may learn to use the term, they speak the native language when they do so. Those are the circumstances for which I would reserve the term 'incommensurability'.<sup>46</sup>

Kuhn conjectures that theoretical terms such as 'phlogiston' are instances of this sort of incommensurability. The important point, from Hacking's point of view, is that such terms acquire their meaning within the contexts of older scientific paradigms. In other words, the incommensurabilities (or partial incommensurabilities) notable between old and new scientific theories are due to different styles of reasoning. It will be recalled from our discussion of Hacking's view in chapter two that a style of reasoning has to be presupposed in order for a claim to even be considered meaningful, that is, in order to even think of the claim as possibly being true or false.

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42 *Ibid* 200-201.

43 *Ibid* 200.

44 Cf. Kuhn 1983: 33-4.

45 Kuhn 1983: 39.

46 *Ibid* p. 40.

Thus, it is Hacking's aim to show that Davidson "has left a space for a relativist fear."<sup>47</sup> The wedge Hacking uses to pry things apart and reveal such a space is a distinction Hacking draws between two classes of sentences:

I urge a distinction between statements that may be made in any language, and which require no style of reasoning, and statements whose sense depends upon a style of reasoning. Davidson writes as if all sentences were of the former class. I agree that 'my skin is warm' is of that class. When I once looked for the best example of a sense-datum sentence to be actually published in the annals of real science, I hit upon precisely this sentence, or rather, 'my skin is warmed'. It begins Sir William Herschel's investigations of 1800 which are said to commence the theory of radiant heat.<sup>48</sup>

That is, on Hacking's view, while some sentences, such as the sentences expressing a scientific theory, are dependent on the style of reasoning within which they are framed for their entitlement, i.e., their true-or-false status, there are other sentences, such as observation reports, which presuppose no style of reasoning. Hacking says, "There is perfect commensurability, and no indeterminacy of translation, in those boring domains of 'observations' that we share with all people as people. Where we as people have branched off from others as a people, we find new interests, and a looseness of fit between their and our commonplaces."<sup>49</sup> Thus, on the one hand, Hacking secures a segment of language, the segment consisting of sense-data sentences, against the worry of second-order relativism by ensuring that the principle of charity is fully applicable in such instances. Nevertheless, he clearly restricts the principle of charity's applicability with the conception of styles of reasoning, thereby ensuring that it is possible to tell the sorts of stories about theoretical advance that historians of science need to be able to tell.

But in thus opening a space for incommensurabilities, it could seem that Hacking reintroduces a form of second-order relativism which undermines the notion of theoretical advance. That is, in order to tell a story in which scientific investigation arrives at better theories, it must in the first place be possible to compare theories. But incommensurability seems to negate the possibility of making such comparisons. In other words, it would seem that there could not be a meta-reason, as Hacking

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47 Hacking 1982: 64.

48 Hacking 1982: 62-3.

49 *Ibid* 61.

calls it, to which final appeal might be made to justify one style of reasoning against another. Thus, second-order relativism, in the context of Hacking's position, consists in the problem of our inability to justify the particular style of reasoning in which individual knowledge claims come to be intelligible. After all, there are alternative styles of reasoning, and these are not all commensurable. Witness the difference between two cultures where "one culture includes the practice of homeopathic medicine, the other the practice of modern science-based medicine,"<sup>50</sup> or the differences between pre-Galilean and post-Galilean physical science.<sup>51</sup>

Hacking proposes a pragmatist solution to the problem of second-order relativism.<sup>52</sup> The problem is that it would seem that there cannot be a meta-reason to which final appeal could be made to justify one style of reasoning against another. But Hacking proposes that something like objectivity, at the second-order level, can be secured through appeal to *success*. He writes:

Other styles of reasoning may occur; some are current. Other people may have other interests.... Our overall interests in truth and reason may well be served by letting other styles of reason evolve in their own ways, unfettered by a more imperial kind of rationalism. But that does not mean that I, as anarcho-rationalist, will take up something so recently killed off in our own tradition as homeopathic medicine and its appeal to similitudes. That is for others (though if they look healthier than me, I might join up).<sup>53</sup>

Here Hacking does not explicitly thematize what would be required in order for success to function as an external constraint—a "meta-reason"—controlling against second-order subjectivity. Nonetheless, there is an implicit picture of what it would require, which is briefly glimpsed when Hacking considers Noam Chomsky's proposal of such a meta-reason:

I have quoted Chomsky giving a... meta-reason. On his analysis of the Galilean style, it has not only worked remarkably well, but also, in the natural sciences, at least, we have no alternative but to go on using that style, although, of course, in the future it may not work. Although Chomsky does not make the distinction, his meta-reason is less that Galileo's style continues to find out the truth about the universe than that it poses new kinds of probing and answering. It has produced an open-ended dialogue. That might terminate in the face of a nature that ceased to participate in ways that the Galilean can make sense of. We know it might

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50 Siderits 1989: 246.

51 Cf. Hacking 1982.

52 This will be borne out in the detailed discussion below. Siderits cites Hacking approvingly; cf. Siderits 1989: 249, n. 13.

53 Hacking 1982: 66.

cease to cater to our interests, but at present (says Chomsky) we have no alternative.<sup>54</sup>

But what could it mean to speak of a style of reasoning's continuing success being terminated "in the face of a nature that ceased to participate in ways that the Galilean can make sense of"? The remark is obscure,<sup>55</sup> although it would seem that one might interpret Hacking as suggesting that "the face of nature" is independent of styles of reasoning. But wouldn't that be tantamount to reinstating an inside-outside picture of knowing? That is, how can we make sense of the idea of "the face of nature" not participating in a style of reasoning without oscillating again to a conception of knowing that relies on some sort of hybrid conceptual-nonconceptual entity? If the face of nature does not participate in our style of reasoning, does that not mean that it is in some sense "outside" of the style of reasoning? And does it not seem that any form of access we could have to something outside the style of reasoning would have to depend on something capable of permeating both inner and outer domains, i.e., some form of Given?

We need not press this point any further here. Hacking's metaphor of the "face of nature" perhaps hearkens to a residual, albeit subdued, commitment to realism integral to Davidson's own project. Davidson reserves a place for irradiations and skin irritations to impose causal constraints on the conventional practices of belief formation that ground linguistic usage, although he does not go so far as to allow that such constraints justify particular beliefs.<sup>56</sup> To go that extra step would be to reintroduce a form of the Given. Hacking seems to want to follow in Davidson's footsteps in this matter. At any rate, as observed above, it is not necessary to connect Davidson's conventionalism (i.e., his rejection of scheme-content dualism) with anti-realism about the Given in order to understand why proponents of anti-realism might be motivated to endorse Davidson's form of resistance to scheme-content dualism. In the next section, we shall consider how Siderits follows through with such an

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54 Hacking 1982: 65-6.

55 This is probably unintentional, but Hacking's metaphor presents itself as a play on a key metaphor in Christian mystical theology, the metaphor of the "face of God." For example, this is a favorite motif of the twelfth century Cistercian William of St. Thierry. Cf. Déchanet 1971: 11, n. 21.

56 As McDowell observes: "According to Davidson, experience is causally relevant to a subject's beliefs and judgments, but it has no bearing on their status as justified or warranted" (McDowell 1994: 14).



agenda by using Hacking's revision of Davidson to articulate how Svātantrika differs from Prāsaṅika on the issue of second-order relativism.

### **Non-Relativistic Pluralism**

Hacking's position fits Siderits' description of "a kind of non-relativistic pluralism—a view that affirms the existence of distinct canons of rationality but denies the relativistic claim that all such canons are equally acceptable."<sup>57</sup> Siderits argues that something like this is also the view taken by Svātantrikas as opposed to that adopted by Prāsaṅikas. As for the latter, Siderits suggests that they embrace relativism. He identifies "three strategies that anti-realists have taken in responding to the charge that they are relativists about rationality."<sup>58</sup> The first, which he calls "the bullet-biting strategy," seems to correlate with the view he ascribes to Prāsaṅikas. Proponents of this view admit "that indeed anything goes,"<sup>59</sup> because there are no meta-reasons. Thus, Siderits says: "As anti-realists, the Mādhyamikas would of course be barred from appealing to any ultimate standards in judging the relative merits of [different] styles of reasoning. And the Prāsaṅikas, with their no-theory approach to conventional truth, would be forced to accept the relativism about rationality that such evidence seems to suggest."<sup>60</sup>

Siderits develops the contrast between the Prāsaṅika and Svātantrika approaches to second-order relativism by examining the ways in which Candrakīrti (the paradigmatic Prāsaṅika) and Bhāvaviveka (the paradigmatic Svātantrika) argue against two Yogācārin theses. First, he considers Candrakīrti's critique of the Yogācārin doctrine of reflexive awareness. Against the idea that cognition cognizes itself, Candrakīrti insists that conventional linguistic practice does not permit the instrument of an action and the object of an action to be one and the same entity (e.g., "we cut the tree with an axe, point to the tree with a finger," and so on<sup>61</sup>). If the Yogācārin suggests that the syntactic requirements of ordinary language do not disclose the nature of ultimate reality, "Candrakīrti's

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57 Siderits 1989: 240.

58 *Ibid.*

59 *Ibid.*

60 Siderits 1989: 245.

61 Siderits 1989: 243.

response is that there is no investigation of reality apart from our conventional linguistic practices."<sup>62</sup>

For Candrakīrti, Siderits says,

[c]onventional truth is not to be seen as a theory, or as giving us the materials with which to construct a theory. It's just that we don't talk that way.<sup>63</sup>

For Bhāvaviveka, on the other hand, it is possible to develop a sort of theory out of conventional practices. That is how Siderits describes Bhāvaviveka's proof that the causes of sensory consciousnesses could indeed be external objects, contra the Yogācārins' position. As Siderits explains, Yogācārins argue that collections of atoms are unable to cause sensory consciousnesses because individual atoms are imperceptible, and collections do not actually exist. Bhāvaviveka responds by distinguishing between two types of collections: aggregates and composites. While the Yogācārins' reasoning applies to aggregates, it does not work for composites whose components "are related through more than mere proximity."<sup>64</sup> Now, while Bhāvaviveka's distinction between aggregates and composites seems to fly in the face of Buddhist reductionism, this is not really the case because Bhāvaviveka means the distinction to apply only within the domain of our worldly canon of rationality. He does not deny the reasoning behind reductionism as it would be implemented in the context of analyzing ultimate reality. But in the dispute with Yogācārins about the best account of conventional reality, Bhāvaviveka thinks that the distinction between aggregates and composites "is implicit in our conventional practice, and can be drawn out in a way that is consistent with the worldly canon of rationality."<sup>65</sup> So, Siderits explains, whereas the Prāsaṅgikas regard conventional truth as "a set of brutally given practices which must be taken at face value," Svātantrikas think it is possible to "distinguish between better and worse theories" of conventional reality.<sup>66</sup>

The backbone of Siderits' interpretation of the Svātantrika approach is his assimilation of

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62 *Ibid.*

63 Siderits 1989: 244.

64 Siderits 1989: 243-4.

65 Siderits 1989: 244.

66 Siderits 1989: 242.

Hacking's and Davidson's positions. Siderits explicitly names Davidson's view as an instance of the second strategy with which anti-realists have responded to the charge of relativism. Following this strategy, the anti-realist argues that no sense can be made of the sorts of incommensurabilities required to give relativism any purchase.<sup>67</sup> We have already considered the way in which Davidson makes this argument, and we have seen how Hacking's modification to Davidson's position makes room for the possibility of the sort of non-relativistic pluralism Siderits ascribes to Svātantrikas. Siderits adopts roughly the same strategy as Hacking. For Siderits' Svātantrikas, people everywhere have a common core of shared beliefs to be explained as a matter of their also sharing a common set of conventionally accepted principles of rational belief formation. He defends this idea by saying that "we would not be inclined to say that they [i.e., the members of a different language community] believe the same things we do unless we supposed that they form beliefs from evidence in the same way that we do."<sup>68</sup> Siderits' reasoning here can be unpacked by considering how he treats the case of homeopathic medicine versus science-based medicine. Siderits argues that what this case shows is that "one style of reasoning might prove better than the other at serving a generally accepted need (generating ways to cure our physical maladies) without undermining the worldly canon of rationality on which the whole enterprise rests."<sup>69</sup> What seems here to be suggested is that generally accepted needs are shared in common by different groups of people (i.e., groups of people demarcated by distinct styles of reasoning or canons of rationality). These generally accepted needs seem to have arisen from within the domain of that common core of shared beliefs which Siderits suggests results from a common set of conventionally accepted principles of rational belief formation. It is instructive to consider how Siderits' approach to this case compares with Hacking's treatment of the same example. Hacking differs from Siderits in that he does not assume that the two styles of reasoning, homeopathic and science-based medicine, are used by groups of people who necessarily share a generally accepted need. For Hacking, different styles of reasoning arise "[w]here we as people have

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67 Cf. Siderits 1989: 240.

68 Siderits 1989: 245-6.

69 *Ibid.*

branched off from others as a people" because we have found "new interests"; moreover, beyond "those boring domains of 'observations'," where we can presume "perfect commensurability" and "no indeterminacy of translation," we cannot expect more than "a looseness of fit between their and our commonplaces."<sup>70</sup> So, when Hacking takes up our reaction to homeopathic medicine, he suggests only that if some of our interests seem to happen to look like they might be accomplished better within the framework of homeopathic medicine, then we might start to experiment with that style of reasoning.<sup>71</sup> But this does not seem to go so far as to posit a "substantial overlap in the canons of rationality current in the two cultures."<sup>72</sup>

Siderits' account of Svātantrika methodology thus rests on the assumption that Mādhyamikas and their opponents share a common core of shared beliefs as well as a common set of principles of rational belief formation.<sup>73</sup> Mādhyamikas and their opponents have such a common background, Siderits thinks, because the Mādhyamika conventionally accepts the worldly canons of rationality held by their opponents. It is only against this common background that it is possible for their differences to even be intelligible.<sup>74</sup>

But does sharing the same canon of rationality with respect to the formation of empirical beliefs ensure that Mādhyamikas and realists will be able to agree on a commensurable subject? For Mādhyamikas can use autonomous inferences in reasoning with realists only if a commensurable

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70 Hacking 1982: 61.

71 Thus, Hacking writes: "Our overall interests in truth and reason may well be served by letting other styles of reason evolve in their own ways, unfettered by a more imperial kind of rationalism. But that does not mean to say that I, as an anarcho-rationalist, will take up something so recently killed off in our own tradition as homeopathic medicine and its appeal to similitudes. That is for others (though if they look healthier than me, I might join up)" (Hacking 1982: 66).

72 Siderits 1989: 245-6.

73 McClintock adds that "Some Mādhyamikas, e.g., Śāntaraksita and Kamalāsīla, appear to feel also that the main thing we all have in common is a similar embodiment/karmic situation. We thus share not only beliefs and principles, but more importantly physical organs and consciousnesses that operate in approximately similar ways" (McClintock, personal communication).

74 Here Siderits adheres to Davidson's thought, as Davidson writes of the use of charity in his theory of interpretation: "The method is not designed to eliminate disagreement, nor can it; its purpose is to make meaningful disagreement possible, and this depends entirely on a foundation—*some* foundation—in agreement. The agreement may take the form of widespread sharing of sentences held true by speakers of 'the same language', or agreement in the large mediated by a theory of truth contrived by an interpreter for speakers of another language" (Davidson 2006: 207).

subject can be agreed upon. In other words, before we can accept Siderits' claim that Svātantrika methodology is superior, what we want to know is whether the worldly canon of rationality indeed suffices as a basis for autonomous inferences in cases where Mādhyamikas are reasoning with realists about the question of intrinsic existence. I shall argue below that Tsong kha pa's critique of autonomous inferences holds despite Siderits' attempt to use the notion of a worldly canon of rationality to solve the problem of incommensurability.

### **Tsong kha pa's Argument Against Autonomous Inferences**

In this section I shall explain why, even granting Siderits' picture of Svātantrika methodology, Tsong kha pa would not accept that a Mādhyamika and a realist could agree on a commensurable subject<sup>75</sup> when debating about intrinsic existence. Tsong kha pa's objection to Mādhyamikas' using autonomous inferences in debate with realists about intrinsic existence is based on his exegesis of Candrakīrti's critique of Bhāvaviveka.<sup>76</sup> Candrakīrti's argument turns on the idea that the Mādhyamikas' position is based on the buddhas' and advanced bodhisattvas' direct perception of emptiness. This perceptual perspective is normative for Mādhyamikas, and it is logically incompatible with realists' perceptual perspective. As Tsong kha pa explains, on the question of intrinsic existence, a realist is just like someone suffering from eye disease. The realist perceptually apprehends things as intrinsically existent, but such a perceptual apprehension has to be regarded as inaccurate. Thus Tsong kha pa quotes Candrakīrti:

Inaccurate and accurate consciousnesses are different. Therefore, when an inaccurate consciousness takes what is non-existent as existent, as in the case of someone with eye disease seeing falling hair, it does not perceive even to the slightest degree an object that exists. When an accurate consciousness does not reify what is unreal, as is the case of someone without eye disease looking for the imaginary falling hair, it does not perceive even to the slightest degree objects that are nonexistent....<sup>77</sup>

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75 Of course, autonomous inferences require commensurability with respect to all parts of an inference, not just the logical subject. I pray that readers will allow me hereafter, for convenience' sake, to synecdochically refer to the parts of an inference by simply mentioning the subject. At any rate, as I explain below, it is just on a commensurable logical subject, in particular, that Tsong kha pa insists Mādhyamikas cannot agree with realists.

76 I offer an analysis of Tsong kha pa's reading of Candrakīrti's argument below in chapter five.

77 *Prasannapadā* 29.7-30, cited by Tsong kha pa, *GT* 254.

Tsong kha pa renders the opposition between these two types of consciousnesses more explicit:

objects found by non-mistaken consciousnesses do not appear to mistaken consciousnesses, and objects that appear to mistaken consciousnesses are not found by non-mistaken consciousnesses.... each engages its object by excluding the object of the other.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, any reasoning which accepted a commensurable subject with the realist could only lead, eventually, to conclusions which contradicted the buddhas' and advanced bodhisattvas' insight into the true nature of reality.

But a possible objection to this line is that such a stance seems to leave the Mādhyamika with no grounds for the use of reasoning to establish emptiness. The stance I am attributing to Tsong kha pa could even seem to land in a pragmatic paradox when we stop to consider that a Mādhyamika practitioner's realist opponent is frequently a part of his or her own divided consciousness.<sup>79</sup> How could a Mādhyamika ever use negative dialectic to critique his or her own mistaken perceptions in order to achieve the cognitive standpoint attained by buddhas and advanced bodhisattvas, if it were not possible to find some common ground with the realist part of his or her own mind from which to begin the dialectical process?<sup>80</sup>

I shall suggest that Tsong kha pa *does* find some common ground in perceptions that appear

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78 *GT* 256. This is reminiscent of how Tsong kha pa in other places, e.g. the section on the two truths in the *sGongs pa rab gsal*, refers to ordinary beings' perception of things as obscurational or deceptive truths (see *EI* 217-220).

79 As Kapstein remarks concerning Śāntarakṣita's and Kamalaśīla's advocacy of the course of Madhyamaka dialectic: "As Kamalaśīla insists, the doctrines Śāntarakṣita is concerned to refute all involve 'mistaken views of the self' (*vitathātmadrṣṭi*). As such, the importance of critical reflection upon them lies precisely in the fact that they are not just *others'* views of *themselves*, but that, potentially at least, they are views that any of us may harbor, whether explicitly or not, with respect to *ourselves*. Śāntarakṣita's critical journey through the byways of Indian philosophy is therefore no mere exercise in doxography; rather, it is a therapy whereby one must challenge one's own self-understandings so as to disclose and finally uproot the misunderstandings that are concealed therein" (Kapstein 2001: 15).

80 This qualm echoes McClintock's articulation of Śāntarakṣita's and Kamalaśīla's grounds for insisting on the practical necessity for Mādhyamikas to be able to use autonomous inferences in reasoning with realists. McClintock says: "Only an advanced practitioner, a buddha or a high-level bodhisattva, has the kind of purified vision in which appearances are not brought about by error, if they even have appearances at all. Thus, even when his realist opponents have a different *intellectual* understanding of the elements involved in an inference—including, most significantly, the manner in which these elements are established to appear—a Mādhyamika can still, due to primordial ignorance shared with others, find some common ground from which to begin the dialectical process of demonstrating that unassailably real natures do not exist" (McClintock 2003: 150). For further discussion of McClintock's defense of Śāntarakṣita's and Kamalaśīla's position, see next chapter.

the same for realists and Mādhyamikas, but that this common ground is inadequate for the purposes of autonomous inferences precisely because it is incommensurable with the perceptual perspective from which realists posit their logical subject. This shall require a lengthy explanation, and the explanation anticipates a thesis to be elaborated and defended in the coming chapters. This thesis is that Tsong kha pa does not completely divest Mādhyamikas of all recourse to grounding their inferences in a perceptual perspective commensurate with the realist's own perceptual perspective because Tsong kha pa holds that, in addition to the mistaken mode of apprehension (*'dzin stang*) whereby things are apprehended as intrinsically existent, and the unmistaken mode of apprehension whereby things are apprehended as empty of intrinsic existence, all beings have available to them a third mode of apprehension which is indeterminate with respect to the question of intrinsic existence, in which things can appear just as mere existents.<sup>81</sup> Tsong kha pa's account of opponent acknowledged inferences depends on the possibility that Mādhyamikas and realists can agree on commensurable predicates and evidence (i.e., reasons), even when debating about intrinsic existence.<sup>82</sup> However, it is not possible for Mādhyamikas and realists to find a commensurable subject. When it comes to the subject of the debate, the Mādhyamika and the realist are operating with incommensurable modes of apprehension. The realist's mode of apprehension shows him a subject that is intrinsically existent, whereas the Mādhyamika, when presenting reasons that both the Mādhyamika and the realist could accept, must inhabit a mode of apprehension which is indeterminate with respect to intrinsic existence.

My aim in this section is to explain in detail why the incommensurability between a mode of apprehension which reveals intrinsically existent entities and a mode of apprehension which presents things without any determination with respect to intrinsic existence<sup>83</sup> precludes the possibility of a Mādhyamika's using autonomous inferences in debate with a realist. Moreover, in light of Siderits'

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81 I argue for this interpretation in chapters five and six below.

82 For more on this, see chapter six.

83 It is worth noting that the incommensurability between the mistaken mode of apprehension and the "mere" mode of apprehension is precisely the basis for Tsong kha pa's use of parameterization in his exposition of the Madhyamaka doctrine of two truths. See below p. 193.

claim that the worldly canon of rationality suffices as a basis for autonomous inferences, it also needs to be explained why the worldly canon of rationality could not suffice to overcome the incommensurability between a mode of apprehension that apprehends things as intrinsically existent and the mode of apprehension that apprehends things as merely existent. To this end, I shall develop a counter-example to the claim that a commensurable subject could be found where a pair of interlocutors inhabit incommensurable modes of apprehension, even taking into account that they are equal participants in the worldly canon of rationality.

The counterexample I use is the case of a brain in a vat. This is a thought-experiment invented by Hilary Putnam for a controversial argument to prove that realism is incoherent.<sup>84</sup> The brain in a vat scenario, as used here, provides a useful intuition pump to explain why a discrepancy in how a thing appears to two people could prevent them from reasoning effectively with each other about that thing. By considering a point Richard Rorty makes in response to Putnam's argument, and John McDowell's rebuttal to Rorty's point, I shall attempt to show why having a common canon of rationality makes no difference to finding a commensurable subject for the purposes of autonomous inference. The reason why autonomous inferences strictly require all parts of the inference to be established and appear the same to all parties is that if this requirement is not satisfied then the natural relation (*svabhāvapratibandha*, for Buddhist epistemologists) between the evidence and the predicate is severed or interrupted. But this relation is the basis of an inference's effectiveness. In cases like that of trying to reason with a brain in a vat to bring about a realization of the discrepancy between how things seem to the envatted brain and how things really are, the conditions for an autonomous inference cannot be satisfied, even supposing the person reasoning with the brain in a vat and the brain have canons of rationality in common. And, on the reconstruction of Tsong kha pa's view which I am proposing, Tsong kha pa would hold that the case of Mādhyamikas reasoning with realists is similar in the relevant ways to the case of reasoning with a brain in a vat.

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<sup>84</sup> That is, realism about mind-independent facts of the matter, as discussed above in chapter one. Cf. Khlentzos 2004: 196-206 for an interesting discussion of Putnam's argument.



*The Brain in a Vat Argument, Incommensurability, and Autonomous Inferences*

The brain in a vat scenario asks us to imagine a human brain kept in a vat of nutrients and whatever other chemicals might be required to sustain the brain's life outside a human body. Moreover, we are to suppose there is a scientist (or perhaps evil machines will do) possessing the knowledge and the means to stimulate the brain's neurons in such a way that, from within the phenomenal perspective of the brain in a vat ("Biav"), it is impossible to discriminate an embodied existence from an envatted one. Putnam first introduced this example as a hypothesis to show that if an externalist account of semantic content is true, then realism is incoherent. According to the externalist account, the semantic contents of mental or linguistic representations (including intentional objects and referents) are determined by factors outside the head. That is, nomological relations between external objects and thoughts (or sentences expressing thoughts) are taken as providing a kind of necessary connection between mind and world. Thus, semantic content is determined by "facts about the world and about how we are situated within it, about the contexts in which we utter our words and the linguistic community to which we belong, and so on."<sup>85</sup> Supposing this account is true, Putnam's argument (or one interpretation of the argument, anyway) says that if realism is assumed, then an absurdity follows. The absurdity, as shown by the case of Biav, is that we are unable to think, "I might be a brain in a vat." On the externalist account of semantic content, the thought "I might be a brain in a vat" would have to express a different semantic content for Biav than it would for an unenvatted person. This is because when the unenvatted person thinks, "I might be a brain in a vat," there is a different nomological path to trace from content to external objects than when Biav thinks "I might be a brain in a vat." Biav's thought connects back to a computer-rigged vat filled with nutrient solution, whereas the unenvatted person's thought connects back to an embodied existence. Consequently, Biav's thought cannot be the same as the unenvatted person's, for the identities of the thoughts' contents are determined differently. We might say, therefore, that Biav speaks a different language than the unenvatted person, i.e., she speaks Vattish instead of English (or

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85 Khlentzos 2004: 200.

Tibetan, or whatever). This results, Putnam thinks, in the consequence that an unenvatted person cannot coherently think, "I might be a brain in a vat." If the unenvatted person's thought, "I might be a brain in a vat," were true, then his thought might be in Vattish rather than in English. But on the externalist account semantic content is necessarily determined by contingent facts. Given that the person was not a brain in a vat when thinking, "I might be a brain in a vat," his thought must have been in English and could not have been in Vattish. So the thought could not be true. It is self-refuting.<sup>86</sup> With this lemma, the conclusion that realism is self-contradictory follows at once, for according to realism (i.e., the inside-outside picture of knowing) it should be possible for someone to coherently think, "I might be a brain in a vat." But, provided the externalist account is correct, it is impossible for someone to coherently think such a thing. Thus, Putnam argues, realism must be false because externalism is true.

With this argument evidently in view, Rorty suggests that "the best way to translate the discourse of a brain which has always lived in a vat will be as referring to the vat-cum-computer environment the brain is actually in."<sup>87</sup> That is, Rorty invites us to consider Biav's utterances (or manipulations of neural symbols) as an occasion for radical interpretation. By the principle of charity, therefore, we should hold Biav's sentences true. But we must remember that the truth conditions for Biav's utterances are precisely what *we* take them to be, viz., the vat-cum-computer environment in which Biav lives. So it makes no difference whether an unenvatted person thinks "I might be a brain in a vat" in Vattish or English. It could be true that I am a brain in a vat, even if I am not.

McDowell's critique of Rorty's argument elucidates the principle of autonomous inferences which requires that things have to appear and be established in the same way for all parties in order for there to be commensurability, as I shall explain below.<sup>88</sup> McDowell urges that Rorty's

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86 Here I am summarizing the results of various attempts to give a clear articulation to Putnam's reasoning. It is not important, for purposes here, to be concerned with the details of Putnam exegesis. Cf. Khlentzos 2004: 199-206.

87 Rorty 1991: 340.

88 Cf. chapter one above. Also cf. McClintock 2003: 134 ff. and Cabezón 1992: 273 ff.

response to the brain-in-a-vat worry works the wrong way round. The response does not calm the fear that our picture leaves our thinking possibly out of touch with the world outside us. It just gives us a dizzying sense that our grip on what it is that we believe is not as firm as we thought.<sup>89</sup>

That is, McDowell takes it that Rorty and Davidson share the aim to address the sort of skeptical anxieties which, as we have seen in chapter two, attend the notion of intentionality where an inside-outside picture of knowing is involved. That is, where distinctions between subjective and objective factors are allowed to generate possible discrepancies between inner contents and external things, there ensues the general malaise and obsession about a mind-world gap which is characteristic of the modern European philosophical heritage. So McDowell reads Rorty's invocation of Davidson's theory of interpretation as an attempt to exorcise such anxiety by dispelling the "felt distance between mind and world."<sup>90</sup> But McDowell thinks Rorty succeeds only in exacerbating the anxiety, even though Rorty does drop the inside-outside picture of knowing. McDowell continues:

The problem is that in the argument Rorty attributes to Davidson, we ring changes on the actual environment (as seen by the interpreter and brought into the interpretation) without changing how things strike the believer, even while the interpretation is supposed to capture how the believer is in touch with her world.... If I protest that some belief of mine is not about electronic impulses or whatever but about, say, a book, the reply can be: "Certainly your belief is about a book—given how 'a book' as you use the phrase is correctly interpreted."...This strikes me as making it impossible to claim that the argument traffics in any genuine idea of being in touch with something in particular.<sup>91</sup>

McDowell's comments here derive most of their force from rhetorical panache, viz., a vexed tone which says that to follow Rorty's suggestion would be a shocking betrayal of common sense. Nevertheless there is not a fully formulated argument in McDowell's reply. The argument that can be found is encapsulated in the following statement: "we ring changes on the actual environment (as seen by the interpreter and brought into the interpretation) without changing how things strike the believer, even while the interpretation is supposed to capture how the believer is in touch with her

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89 McDowell 1994: 17.

90 John McDowell comments on the different strategies of different kinds of anti-realists, and of realists and anti-realists, for dealing with the problem of intentionality: "I... assume that philosophical concerns about the possibility of knowledge express at root the same anxiety as philosophical concerns about how content is possible, an anxiety about a felt distance between mind and world. Davidson and Rorty usually focus on concerns of the former sort, whereas I focus on concerns of the latter sort; I take it that the underlying thought is the same, that we ought to exorcize the feeling of distance rather than trying to bridge the felt gap" (McDowell 1994: 147).

91 McDowell 1994: 17, n. 14.

world." Our "ringing changes on the actual environment" speaks of the exercise of imagination we make in order to gain an empathetic apprehension of the vat-cum-computer environment through Biav's "eyes." The conclusion, however, is ambiguous. He says that the interpreter's charitable exercise of imagination does not really "capture how [Biav] is in touch with her world." But by "her world" does he mean the world the way it appears to Biav in an inner phenomenal manner? Or does he mean the vat-cum-computer environment Biav inhabits, that is, Biav's world the way it appears to *us*? If it is the world the way it appears to Biav that our interpretation fails to deliver, Rorty might reply that that is not the job of our interpretation. Surely "how things strike" Biav manages just fine at putting her in touch with the world the way it appears to *her*. On the other hand, McDowell could mean that it is how Biav is in touch with her world the way it appears to *us* that the interpretation fails to capture. But then, why should it be *our* interpretation's responsibility to capture how Biav is in touch with <her world as it appears to us>? Why presume that she has any inkling or concern at all with how *we* take her world to be? Our interpretation should aim to tell us how she is in touch with <her world as it appears to her>, right?

If we agree that, at least with respect to the particular formulation above, McDowell's response to Rorty is incomplete, or perhaps just loosely stated, I think nevertheless that there is an argument to be given which is sympathetic with the point McDowell is driving at. It will be useful, in order to unpack the argument I think McDowell is pointing to, to make some distinctions. First, a distinction can be made between the phenomenal contents of perceptual experiences and the conceptual contents of beliefs formed on the basis of perceptions. On a typically Buddhist causal account of empirical knowledge, phenomenal contents are part of the causal nexus that produces conceptual contents. It will also be useful, with a causal account in view, to distinguish between the proximal and distal causes of an epistemic agent's phenomenal contents. For example, if I look and see a pink flower, the pink flower is the distal cause of its appearing to me as if there is a pink flower out there, while a combination of factors (more than we can perhaps identify with certainty) may function as

proximal causes of its appearing that way to me. Among the proximal causes of my phenomenal contents we might include cognitive factors such as low-level conceptualizations, as well as psychological factors such as the mood I was in during the moment when my sense organs were affected by the distal cause, and perhaps unconscious determinants as well. And of course relevant physiological factors should be included, not least of which would be my neural state.<sup>92</sup> At any rate, it needs to be possible to make something like the distinction between proximal and distal causes of phenomenal contents, it would seem, in order to be able to explain abnormal cases of perception such as hallucinations, illusions, dreams, and so forth. In such instances, given the distinction, what we can say is that some sort of interference has arisen between the distal cause and the phenomenal content such that the phenomenal content fails to exhibit the normal nomological relation between the kind of distal cause and phenomenal content in question.<sup>93</sup> For example, in the case of a person suffering jaundice, the nomological relations which would normally obtain between the appearance of a flower and the actual flower do not obtain. The person's vision is physiologically impaired in such a way that the flower appears yellow although it is actually pink (say).

Now it is possible to formulate the sort of objection which I think McDowell means to make to Rorty's argument. There should be a nomological relation between Biav's thoughts and the things those thoughts are about. That is, if Biav has a belief about a book, but the distal cause of her belief (i.e., the distal cause of the phenomenal content on which she bases her belief) is not a book but a computer-simulation of a book, then we have to say that she has a false belief. The principle of charity cannot override a lapse of connection between her belief and its causes. In other words, if we think

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92 Cf. Coates 2007 for further discussion. As Coates observes, "[the] external perspective on perception suggests the idea that perception involves a number of separate stages, linking what is situated outside the subject, by a causal chain that includes neurophysiological events, to the culminating inner phenomenal experience, which supervenes upon the subject's brain state. We can combine this thought with the idea that an experience with the same phenomenal content could have been caused in an abnormal manner, without the external object being present—the subject could, for example, have had a hallucinatory experience of the same kind, triggered by quite different distal causes (such as the ingestion of a drug), but resulting in the same proximal brain state" (Coates 2007: 2).

93 I have in mind the sort of homomorphism involved in Wilfrid Sellars' conception of picturing (see O'Shea 2007: 147-158), or the sort of necessary connection which Dharmakīrti ascribes to the predicate-evidence relation (*svabhāvapratibandha*) (see Dunne 2004: 145-222). See below for further discussion.

there should be a nomological relation between Biav's belief and her evidence for that belief, then we will find Rorty's move unsatisfactory.<sup>94</sup>

This sheds light on the requirement that for an autonomous inference to be feasible, all parts of the inference (subject, predicate, and evidence) have to be established and appear the same for all parties. There are two parts to this requirement. First, it means that there must be a nomological relation between a proposition and the evidence for belief in that proposition. For Dharmakīrti, this nomological relation is the *svabhāvapratibandha* ("natural relation") which ensures that the evidence cannot occur without the predicate.<sup>95</sup> As Siderits points out, there are no inductive arguments, "just the deductively valid arguments, and then all the rest."<sup>96</sup> The inductive process that constitutes Buddhist inference just amounts to "obtaining the relevant projection rule—the nomological generalisation that is needed to guarantee the conclusion," along with enough evidence to establish that "the proportion of the epistemically relevant possible worlds in which this nomological generalisation holds is at least high."<sup>97</sup> When an inference is really tight, however, it may suffice to bring about a form of certainty (*niścaya, nges shes*) regarding objects of knowledge. The other part of the requirement specifies that it has to be the same nomological relation between a proposition and the evidence for all parties concerned. The reason for this requirement seems to be to ensure that both parties can allow themselves, in Siderits' words, "to be persuaded that the pattern behind the

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94 Of course, this point could be stated somewhat differently. McDowell's resistance to Rorty's argument is not actually premised on a concern to honor a nomological connection between beliefs and evidence. Nevertheless, the special connection McDowell postulates between a perceptual experience and the perceived object does more or less the same work as nomological relations in my formulation of the objection. Paul Coates' comments on direct realist accounts of perceptual experience are elucidating with respect to how we might better understand McDowell's position: "Many Direct Realists try to explain the nature of perceptual experience by appealing, either covertly or explicitly, to the idea of a unique non-causal relation of a special kind. The simplest version of such a relation would be that of partial identity: the perceived object is taken to be, literally, a part of the subject's experience. Not all those who reject the causal theory in favour of a relation of intrinsic connectedness would express the point in this manner; all, however, accept the idea that the experience is necessarily bound up with the object perceived, and is not a logically separable inner entity.... McDowell, in defending his version of the disjunctive view, speaks of the 'unmediated openness of the experiencing subject to external reality', and in a number of places makes claims reminiscent of Heidegger's view that, standing in some sense 'outside science', we find ourselves in perception 'face to face' with objects" (Coates 2007: 85).

95 See Dunne 2004: 150-53 and ff.

96 Siderits 2003: 315.

97 *Ibid.*

projection rule in question is robust.<sup>98</sup> This part of the requirement is clearly present in a formulation provided by Tsong kha pa's disciple mKhas grub. mKhas grub says that it is not sufficient for there to be *some* nomological relation between the proposition and the evidence so far as the proponent is concerned, and *some other* nomological relation between the proposition and the evidence from the opponent's point of view.<sup>99</sup> This would be analogous to Putnam's claim that Biav and the unenvatted person must speak different languages, e.g., Vattish and English. That is, if we were to ignore the distal causes of a jaundiced person's belief that the conch he sees is yellow, but attend only to the nomological relations between the proximal causes of his phenomenal content and his perceptual judgment that the conch is yellow, then we might conclude that his belief is warranted by the evidence that *he* has available. Such an approach would of course take us down the fast lane to a kind of Protagorean relativism.<sup>100</sup>

But the argument above, teased out of McDowell's response to Rorty shows that the appropriate nomological relation between Biav's beliefs and the distal causes of her beliefs fails to obtain, hence she is *mistaken* about the nature of her environment. That is, we can agree with Rorty that the ultimate intentional object of Biav's thoughts is the vat in which she lives, but she has the wrong relation to that object for the purposes of forming correct beliefs about it. And the source of the distortion lies in the nature of the proximal causes of the phenomenal contents on which she bases her beliefs about her own existence, i.e., her neurons are being tampered with by a computer. Viewed in this way, we can understand why reasoning might break down even in cases where two parties share a canon of rationality (as we may suppose Biav and an unenvatted person do). Reasoning could be useless where the other person is under the influence of a cognitive deficit, at least with respect to the aspect of the person's experience affected by the deficit.

To explain more clearly how the case of Biav illustrates why Mādhyamikas cannot use autonomous inferences in reasoning with realists, we may imagine what it would be like if there were

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98 *Ibid* 316.

99 Cf. McClintock 2003: 134 and Cabezón 1992: 273.

100 Cf. Plato's *Theaetetus* (e.g., in McDowell 1973).

a process of rational analysis and meditation, analogous to the Buddhist path, by which Biav's nomological relations to her envatted environment could be altered. Thus, we might suppose that rational analysis is capable of locating flaws in the simulation of an embodied existence which Biav is being fed by the computer, and that by undertaking a rigorous regimen of analysis and contemplative exercises, Biav could eventually enter into normal nomological relations<sup>101</sup> with her envatted existence and thus apprehend reality. Now, in order to carry the parallel a bit further, it will be useful to imagine that Biav undertakes to "liberate" another brain in a vat with whom she is networked via the computer; we will call him "Bertie." Our question is whether Biav can use autonomous inferences in reasoning with Bertie to persuade him of his disembodied existence. We are supposing that there are flaws in the computer simulation that the brains are being fed, and that these flaws are detectable when analysis brings them into focus. Let us say that whenever an envatted brain does not focus its attention on the immediate sensations of embodiment caused by the computer simulation, but instead pays attention to, say, the temporal relations between moments of phenomenal awareness, that anomalies become evident.<sup>102</sup> However, Bertie is "obstinate," let us say, because whenever doubts are raised about his own embodied existence he defensively turns his attention away from the temporal dimension of his phenomenal awareness and focuses on momentary states of awareness, which we may presume present the computer's simulation of embodiment at its best.<sup>103</sup> In other words, questions about his embodiment seem to trigger a reflexive flight into something that is perhaps like a "solipsism of the present moment."<sup>104</sup>

In order to reason with Bertie, Biav will not be able to offer an inference with an instantaneous moment of sensory awareness for the logical subject, since it is precisely this sort of solipsistic mode of awareness which comprises Bertie's best evidence of his own embodiment. Of course, neither

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101 We might qualify this to say "normal" by the standards of an unenvatted, embodied person.

102 It is impossible to establish a perfect correspondence since the apprehension of intrinsic existence and the apprehension of embodiment are not the same phenomena.

103 I must insert the disclaimer that I do not have in mind here any actual philosophical response to the sort of Cartesian skepticism with which Bertie would surely conflate Biav's arguments.

104 Cf. Santayana 1955.



would it be possible for Biav to get very far reasoning with Bertie by assuming the sort of perceptual standpoint which would be achieved when an envatted brain enters into normal nomological relations with its envatted existence and realizes its own disembodied condition.<sup>105</sup> For Bertie does not occupy such a standpoint, and such a standpoint is contradicted by his own phenomenal awareness. So the answer to our question whether Biav can use autonomous inferences in reasoning with Bertie is that Biav *cannot* use autonomous inferences. Solipsistic present moments of awareness would be unacceptable logical subjects from the point of view of the final standpoint which contradicts Bertie's experience, and reasoning based on such moments of awareness would be incommensurable with the temporally structured evidence which Biav needs to invoke in order to draw Bertie's attention to the flaws in the computer simulation.

Analogously, on the view which I shall argue Tsong kha pa holds, evidence against things' being intrinsically existent has to be drawn using inferences grounded in the mode of apprehension which apprehends things as mere existents. Tsong kha pa can trace this constraint on the nature of rational evidence directly to Nāgārjuna. In *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* xxiv.10a-b Nāgārjuna says,

Without depending on the conventional truth,  
The meaning of the ultimate cannot be taught.<sup>106</sup>

and Tsong kha pa comments: "Therefore, since it is a means for achieving liberation, just as a person who desires water looks for a vessel, one who aspires for liberation must undoubtedly at the beginning accept the conventional just as it is."<sup>107</sup> Autonomous inferences will not work with the realist because the realist attempts to address the question of intrinsic existence as a question about ultimate reality, which leads him, as might be expected, to want to argue from a stance that is grounded in how he apprehends it to be. In other words, the realist will try to use inferences

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105 This would be true regardless of whether Biav had yet achieved such a cognitive standpoint in her own experience. Here we might assume that Biav, like a bodhisattva who has not yet realized emptiness, has become intellectually convinced of her condition just through rational analysis of the spatial and temporal discrepancies evident in the computer simulated reality.

106 See *OR*: 498.

107 *Ibid.*

grounded in the mode of apprehension which apprehends things as intrinsically existent. The Mādhyamika can get nowhere trying to use counter-inferences that are grounded in the mode of apprehension which apprehends things as empty,<sup>108</sup> since the authority of such a mode of apprehension is precisely what is in question. It might be hoped, then, that the third mode of apprehension, whose authority should be recognized equally by the realist and the Mādhyamika, can provide a logical subject to satisfy the requirement for an autonomous inference. Nevertheless, the third mode of apprehension, whereby things are apprehended as merely existent without any determination as to the question of intrinsic existence, cannot supply the necessary common logical subject. The realist is arguing from a cognitive perspective that is grounded in the mistaken mode of apprehension, and this mode of apprehension is incommensurable with the “mere” mode of apprehension. To grasp why the two modes of apprehension are incommensurable, it is useful to notice that from the perspective of the mistaken mode of apprehension, a claim of the form “x is intrinsically existent” is evaluable, that is, it possesses the quality which, as we have seen, Hacking calls *being true-or-false*. This is not so from the perspective of the “mere” mode of apprehension. What it *means* for x to be apprehended as a mere existent is precisely that x is apprehended without any sort of determination with respect to the predicate' — *is intrinsically existent*!. From the perspective of the “mere” mode of apprehension, it is as if the concept of *intrinsic existence* had never existed.

Supposing, then, that the Mādhyamika is constrained, as explained above, to adduce evidence grounded in the “mere” mode of apprehension, we can conclude that she cannot use autonomous inferences in reasoning with realists. The “mere” mode of apprehension and the mistaken mode of apprehension are as incommensurable as eighteenth century and present day chemistry. Of course, this last comparison might give readers of Kuhn some hope regarding the chances of the Mādhyamika's still being able to open a path of rational communication with the realist. Kuhn proffers

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108 Again, it matters not whether the Mādhyamika practitioner herself has realized emptiness. The point is that she cannot use an autonomous inference in which the logical subject is conceived to be empty, for this would simply be contradicted by the realist.

the processes of interpretation and language acquisition as the model to help us understand how incommensurabilities can be overcome,<sup>109</sup> and later we shall have an opportunity to explore whether or not Tsong kha pa's approach to how Mādhyamikas reason with realists fits Kuhn's model.

But before considering Tsong kha pa's account of opponent acknowledged inferences, it shall be useful first to consider a couple of objections to Tsong kha pa's critique of autonomous inferences, which we shall do in the next chapter. One objection holds that Mādhyamikas *can* use autonomous inferences in debate with realists because to agree on a common subject with the realist is simply an application of *skill in means* (*upāya-kauśalya*). The Mādhyamika does not *sincerely* accept the opponent's point of view. The autonomous inference, on this way of looking at it, should be construed as simply an exercise in *maieutic* irony.<sup>110</sup> The other objection argues that Mādhyamikas can use autonomous inferences in debate with realists because it is simply a matter of fact, due to their own embodied existence, that Mādhyamikas have the same mistaken mode of apprehension in common with realists.

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109 Cf. Kuhn 2000, esp. 53.

110 See below p. 114, n.12.

## Chapter Four

### Further Svātantrika Defenses

As I said at the end of the previous chapter, there are two possible lines of resistance to take against Tsong kha pa's critique of autonomous inferences as I am interpreting it here. One way to resist the critique would be to adopt the stance that Mādhyamikas are able to ironically enter into their opponents' point of view and are thereby enabled to agree on a logical subject in common with realists. I find something like this strategy proposed by Malcolm David Eckel in his exposition of Bhāvaviveka's position, which I discuss below. Finding this strategy problematic, I move on to discuss Sara McClintock's interpretation of the Indian Mādhyamikas Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's approach to the use of autonomous inferences. I shall argue that both methods, the method which Eckel finds in Bhāvaviveka's work and the method which McClintock finds in Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's work, are inadequate from the point of view of therapeutic technique.

I shall begin, in the first part of the chapter, with an appraisal of Eckel's analysis of Bhāvaviveka's approach to the use of autonomous inferences. Eckel suggests that Bhāvaviveka's Svātantrika strategy of argumentation can best be construed as an exercise in irony. Noting how this resonates with Siderits' conception of the end result of the Madhyamaka dialectical process, I shall argue that there is nevertheless a problem with Svātantrika methodology if we take it as indeed recommending nothing more than the strategy of the ironist. The problem with grounding autonomous inferences in an exercise of irony is that it requires Mādhyamikas to construct inferences grounded in experiences which they themselves could only pretend to be having. This is problematic because it implies that the ironist's inferences cannot satisfy the requirement for autonomous inferences, which stipulates that every part of the inference must appear the same to both parties. But in order to completely articulate a critique of the method of ironic engagement, it shall be useful to compare this method with the foundationalist method proposed by Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla.

On McClintock's interpretation of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's account of autonomous

inferences we find a foundationalist account of autonomous inferences. For Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, the idea is that Mādhyamikas' inferences can be grounded in perceptual appearances because those appearances are distorted in the same ways for the Mādhyamikas as they are for realists. As McClintock notes, Śāntarakṣita "says that two ordinary people can communicate effectively in the same way that a person who sees two moons due to an eye disease can obtain agreement from another person afflicted with a similar disease to the statement that there are two moons."<sup>1</sup> I argue that Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's foundationalism can be usefully understood as involving a form of mental partitioning. By quarantining non-conceptual contents from the conceptual articulations that could possibly be grounded in those contents, it becomes possible to treat appearances (i.e., non-conceptual contents) as neutral in the struggle between different conceptual articulations or interpretations of them. Moreover, by taking the strategy of mental partitioning another step, competing conceptual views can be treated as occurring within the context of a single epistemic agent's consciousness. In reconstructing this strategy, I follow Donald Davidson's use of the notion of mental partitioning in his theory of irrational actions (*akrasia*, or weakness of will). On Davidson's model, the different departments of the mind can be regarded as semi-autonomous epistemic agents. I argue that this model is useful for understanding Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's account of autonomous inferences because, on their account, it has to be possible for the proponent of an inference to, in effect, hold contradictory views within a single consciousness. That is, in order to satisfy the requirement that every part of the inference must appear the same to both parties, the proponent must be able to conceptually apprehend an appearance in the way that his opponent does, while at the same time being able to apprehend it according to the Madhyamaka view. I suggest that the partitioning model, as applied to Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's method, provides in this way a useful conception of rationality. And this account of rationality thus justifies adopting a foundationalist paradigm as opposed to the sort of anti-realism about rationality to which, I suggest, the pragmatist method of ironic engagement opens the door. This point completes the critique of ironic engagement

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1 McClintock 2003: 150.

mentioned above.

I finally argue that, from Tsong kha pa's point of view, Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's approach to foundationalism is nevertheless unsatisfactory. Once again on grounds of therapeutic technique, rather than on ontological or epistemological grounds, I argue that their conception of autonomous inferences, considered as a therapeutic method to bring realists to an acceptance of emptiness, is inadequate. The basis for my critique is Tsong kha pa's definition of the Svātantrika method as involving a coarse apprehension of the fundamental object of negation, as discussed earlier in chapter two. I argue that Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's approach does not leave them with any basis to find a basis of commensurability in appearances that their own arguments are not meant to ultimately take away. Their method involves a critique of *all* appearances, because the basis of commensurability that they identify in appearances is the distortion generated by conceptual structuring which they think corrupts every appearance. They do not make any room for genuinely neutral appearances which could serve as an evidential basis for their view. Without such a basis that could lie outside the scope of the Madhyamaka critique, Svātantrikas seem to be in the unenviable position of trying to lift themselves up by their own bootstraps (or would it be to throw themselves down, in this case?).

### **Irony and Pragmatism in Bhāvaviveka's Approach**

I shall begin by focusing on the suggestion that Svātantrika methodology can be understood as an exercise in irony. One place where this type of suggestion can be found is in Eckel's treatment of Bhāvaviveka's thought. Eckel's presentation of Bhāvaviveka's view provides an illustrative case study of how one might apply the concept of irony in an explication of the Svātantrika-Madhyamaka position. Eckel has suggested on behalf of Bhāvaviveka's view that what could be involved in adopting the point of view of mistaken consciousnesses is a form of irony. According to Eckel, Bhāvaviveka's strategy walks a tightrope between two kinds of irony.<sup>2</sup> Stable irony involves "a surface level of meaning that yields to another level in a solid and predictable way," whereas in unstable irony "the

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<sup>2</sup> Eckel notes that attention was first drawn to the distinction between stable and unstable irony by Wayne Booth. Cf. Eckel 1992: 47.

new interpretation seems to undermine itself so that a reader is never sure of having reached the final meaning.<sup>3</sup> Bhāvaviveka's point of view, on Eckel's account, attempts to balance these two kinds of irony by moving back and forth between three stages of thought. In the first stage, conventional reality is naively accepted, but the movement to the second stage is an instance of stable irony, for in the second stage all of the "distinctions drawn from ordinary life" are denied.<sup>4</sup> However, the movement from the second to the third stage becomes possible only when Bhāvaviveka's thought enacts unstable irony. In the third stage, the distinctions of conventional reality are reappropriated, "but in a transformed way."<sup>5</sup> This reappropriation is motivated by a bodhisattva's altruism, and it marks the bodhisattva's passage into unlocated nirvana (*apraṭiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa*). As Eckel says, "A bodhisattva does not leave samsara,... but a bodhisattva is free from the harm of samsara; a bodhisattva does not attain nirvana, but it is as if a bodhisattva were standing in nirvana."<sup>6</sup> The reappropriation of conventional reality in the third stage is instigated or enabled by the transition from a perspective of stable irony to that of unstable irony. This occurs when the negations occurring in the movement from the first to the second stage are themselves negated (one finds that "they are just as empty as anything else," as Eckel remarks).<sup>7</sup> But, as Eckel notes, there is not really a third stage, but only a delicate balancing act which "requires the soft tread of a bodhisattva."<sup>8</sup>

Eckel is not the only contemporary western commentator to suggest that the Buddhist stance with respect to conventional reality should be understood in terms of a kind of irony. For instance, Siderits proposes that Buddhists think we can adopt an attitude of ironic engagement such that "we are able to enter into certain sorts of engaged attitudes despite a knowledge that would seem distancing (in the way irony is usually thought to be), and thus alienating."<sup>9</sup> In any case, the connection between Svātantrika methodology and the Buddhist notion of skill in means (*upāya-*

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3 Eckel 1992: 47.

4 Cf. Eckel 1992: 29.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid* 48.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

9 Siderits 2003: 107.

*kauśalya*) is clearly evident. Tsong kha pa observes that, for Svāntrikas, the method of provisionally assuming the realist perspective “is seen to be a very skillful means for leading those who are temporarily unable to easily realize the very subtle suchness toward [realizing] it.”<sup>10</sup> It is understandable, at any rate, why it might be attractive to construe the Buddhist notion of skill in means in light of something like the *maieutic* irony practiced by Socrates.<sup>11</sup>

But something Siderits says about ironic engagement points to why the concept of irony also might *not* aid the cause of Svāntrika methodology. He says that the Buddhist

holds that, like the sophisticated urbanist, we can induce and maintain belief in a useful fiction while knowing it for what it is. We can be genuinely engaged persons while still preserving the sense of irony necessary to escape the suffering that is the usual fate of persons. We are smart enough to do two things at once.<sup>12</sup>

But finding a commensurable subject is not a matter of doing two things at once. It is a matter of doing one thing: perceptually apprehending an object. Inducing and maintaining belief in a useful fiction, i.e., ironically accepting the opponent's point of view, involves a conceptual process, but apprehending an object is something deeper.

To explain this better, it might be useful to reflect on how adopting an attitude of irony differs from applying Davidson's principle of charity. Davidson says that a change “in attitude towards the truth of sentences” is sufficient to alter “the objective features of the world.” I suggest that a good

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10 Hopkins 2008: 207.

11 As Joseph Westfall explains: “The depiction of Socrates as a midwife – initiated and propagated by Socrates in Plato’s *Theaetetus* – captures something essential in the imagination of the reader of Plato’s dialogues, something so central to our image and understanding of Socrates that, when referring to his distinctive dialectics, we use the word ‘*maieutics*’, from the Greek ‘*maieusthai*, meaning midwifery” (Westfall 2009: 627). Westfall is however mistaken when he writes that the difference between Socratic maieutics and the irony practiced by the sophists is that “the sophist does not assist his students in their labor, but instead gives birth himself to truths he then hands over to those willing to pay for them: a black market dealer in newborn nuggets of wisdom” (627). In the *Sophist*, the Visitor tracks down the sophist's nature by the method of divisions, and in doing so he notes two types of “insincere imitators” of mere beliefs (as opposed to the wise who produce copies of knowledge rather than mere beliefs). The two types are: those who “maintain [their] insincerity in long speeches to a crowd” and those who use “short speeches in private conversation to force the person talking with him to contradict himself” (*Sophist* 268b; trans. White, in Cooper 1997: 292). Politicians belong to the former type, and the sophist is the latter sort. So the sophist employs irony in a manner which would be, in externals, virtually indistinguishable from Socrates' own use of irony. Perhaps we should postulate a higher order irony in order to suggest the ironic way in which Socrates assumes something of the role of a sophist, or rather, parodies the sophist.

12 Siderits 2003: 109.



way to understand how this is supposed to work is to think of the change in attitude toward the truth of not-yet-interpreted statements as effecting something like a perceptual gestalt shift enabling the interpreter to “see” the world differently. This would be analogous, I suggest, to the perceptual gestalt shift occurring when, for example, someone first has pointed out to them the other figure which they have not yet seen in the duck-rabbit drawing. Suppose, thus, that someone viewing the drawing has not noticed the duck before. On first being told that there is a rabbit there too (in addition to a duck), he might not immediately apprehend the duck's bill as a pair of rabbit ears, but *taking his informant's word for it*, he looks for a rabbit and becomes able to see rabbit ears where he had before seen only a duck's bill. The difference between this and adopting an attitude of irony, I submit, is that the ironist *does not apprehend the object apprehended by her interlocutor* even though the ironist superficially adopts the conceptual apparatus of someone who believes her interlocutor's sentences are true. That is, staying with the duckrabbit example, the perceptual gestalt shift does not actually happen for the ironist, but she acts as if it has for as long as to do so will serve her purpose of reasoning with the person who sees a rabbit in the drawing.

This means that ironic engagement leaves the Mādhyamika with no *actual* engagement with the opponent at the level of what he experientially apprehends. Why does this matter? Might we not simply join Sara McClintock in asking, “What, then, is to prevent us from concluding that *all* apparently autonomous inferences advanced by these thinkers are in fact understood as provisional when regarded from the higher Madhyamaka level of analysis?”<sup>13</sup> Of course McClintock's question is applied by her to Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's account of autonomous inferences. We shall consider how apt the question is with respect to their view later on. But, for now, it should be evident that the question is quite apt with respect to the method of ironic engagement. This method, applied to autonomous inferences, would seem to prove McClintock's thesis that autonomous inferences, at least the way some Svātantrikas use them, are actually very different from opponent acknowledged inferences after all (at least on the conception of opponent acknowledged inferences which McClintock finds in mKhas

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13 McClintock 2003: 146-7.

grub's writings<sup>14</sup>). On the conception of opponent acknowledged inference which McClintock takes from her reading of mKhas grub, an opponent acknowledged inference is used when only the opponent accepts the parts of the inference as being established as they appear to him or her.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the inference need be based only on how things appear to the opponent. So, as it would appear, opponent acknowledged inferences (thus conceived) are tailor-made for ironists. However, in the next section I shall begin to explain why for other defenders of autonomous inferences commensurability is prized more highly than it is by pragmatists.

### **Toward a Critique of Ironic Engagement**

Here I shall voice two criticisms of the method of ironic engagement. The first criticism is actually something like a lemma for the second criticism, since the first criticism is readily dismissed by the pragmatist but, by evoking the pragmatist's rebuttal, nonetheless sets up the conditions for the second criticism. The first criticism takes the ironist's inferences to task on ontological and epistemological grounds because they do not actually engage with the objects apprehended by the opponent. This leaves the ironist's inferences vulnerable to a charge of subject failure (*āśrayāsiddha*).<sup>16</sup> As we shall see, the ironist has a ready response to this criticism. The ironist's response involves dismissing the epistemological and ontological concerns involved in the charge of subject failure, turning the debate from a question of metaphysics to a pragmatic question of therapeutic technique. Nevertheless, the second criticism we shall explore meets the method of ironic engagement precisely on the level of therapeutic technique. Here the ironist is taken to task for not establishing sufficient commensurability with the "patient" to ensure a successful therapeutic process. I present this second criticism of ironic engagement as a piece of rational reconstruction. Later in the chapter it will be evident how this criticism is tied directly to Tsong kha pa's view, showing that it is a criticism that he could and would likely make of the pragmatist approach.

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14 As shall eventually be seen, I do not find the kind of opponent acknowledged inferences in Tsong kha pa's account that McClintock finds in mKhas grub's work. See chapter six below.

15 Cf. McClintock 2003: 136-8.

16 For discussion of this fallacy, see Tillemans' "What is the *Svadharmīn* in Buddhist logic?" and (with Donald Lopez, Jr.) "What Can One Reasonably Say about Nonexistence?" in Tillemans 1999.

One implication of the Mādhyamika's actually not apprehending the opponent's logical subject, it could be said, is that the Mādhyamika's inferences commit the fallacy of subject failure, or *āśrayāsiddha*. This is the fallacy which arises when the logical subject, or property-possessor (*dharmīn*), does not exist. As Tillemans observes, the problem of subject failure is well known in Western philosophical literature.<sup>17</sup> The fallacy involves attempting to prove a proposition the subject of which does not exist, and the reason why this might appear fallacious is if the truth of the proposition is thought to depend on the existence of the subject. Since the ironist's Mādhyamika does not accept the existence of the subject, he must believe that the proposition his inference purportedly proves is actually false, and so he cannot offer the inference as a reliable instrument of knowledge.

As might be guessed, this is not an objection which we should expect the pragmatist to be especially ruffled by. The pragmatist might maintain that she does not have to believe in her inferences in order to use them, for pragmatic purposes, to bring about a change in her opponent's perspective. Here the critic must recognize that the pragmatist will not acknowledge any metaphysical or epistemological concern as a legitimate grounds for criticism. So it is necessary to consider an angle of criticism which arises rather from a pragmatic point of view. To evaluate the pragmatist's interpretation of the Madhyamaka approach to rationality on an "equal playing field," so to speak, the critic must come to see the question of Madhyamaka methodology primarily as a question of therapeutic method.<sup>18</sup> From such a point of view, the superior method would be whatever method is most effective as a means by which to guide beings afflicted with a severe cognitive deficit through the therapeutic process to a "cure." Judging by this standard, the method of ironic engagement proves to be inadequate, I suggest. Its inadequacy becomes palpable if we explore the question of what constitutes an effective therapeutic method.

Of course this question cannot be exhaustively investigated here, but I suggest, for the

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<sup>17</sup> See Tillemans 1999: 171.

<sup>18</sup> To this extent I wholeheartedly endorse Joseph Loizzo's identification of Madhyamaka as a therapeutic philosophy. As Loizzo articulates the notion of therapeutic philosophy, "A therapeutic philosophy is a philosophy meant to define and treat ignorance as an illness, rather than to advance one worldview against opposing views" (Loizzo 2007: 46).

purposes of bringing up the technical inadequacy of ironic engagement in a short space, that it shall be expedient to take Freudian psychoanalysis as a basic comparative framework in which to consider the question of therapeutic technique, notwithstanding the qualms of some that for the purposes of “cross-cultural comparison with the therapeutic philosophy of Nāgārjuna and Chandrakīrti, [Freudian theory does] not provide a complete comparative framework.”<sup>19</sup> Since it is with respect to technique that we are searching for a suitable analogue, Freud's shortcomings as a philosopher, whatever they may be, are not pertinent.

To the end of evaluating ironic engagement as a therapeutic technique, then, I suggest that we concentrate our attention for a moment on some recommendations which Freud makes to physicians on the psychoanalytic method of treatment.<sup>20</sup> These recommendations are, as Freud remarks, intended as a set of directions such as to complement the “fundamental rule of psychoanalysis” for the patient.<sup>21</sup> The fundamental rule of psychoanalysis tells the patient what is expected of him or her in the context of the analytic clinic. The patient “must relate all that self-observation can detect, and must restrain all the logical and affective objections which would urge him to select,”<sup>22</sup> that is, the patient must avoid interrupting the flow of free association providing access to the unconscious by interposing a process of conceptual structuring. In his recommendations to physicians, Freud delineates a set of technical “rules” designed to ensure that the physician approaches the analysis in the same way as the patient does. As Freud says:

[T]he physician must put himself in a position to use all that is told him for the purposes of interpretation and recognition of what is hidden in the unconscious, without substituting a censorship of his own for the selection which the patient forgoes. Expressed in a formula, he must bend his own unconscious like a receptive organ towards the emerging unconscious of the patient, be as the receiver of the telephone to the disc. As the receiver transmutes the electric vibrations induced by the sound-waves back again into sound-waves, so is the physician's unconscious mind able to reconstruct the patient's unconscious, which has directed his associations, from the communications derived from it.<sup>23</sup>

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19 Cf. Loizzo 2007: 49.

20 See Freud 1963.

21 Cf. *ibid* 121.

22 *Ibid*.

23 *Ibid* 121-2.

Here the aim of the rules for both patient and physician, it becomes clear, is to enable them to find a sort of commensurability in the medium of the unconscious process. Censorship and resistances have to be rescinded which could impede the sort of "contact" between the patient's unconscious and the physician's unconscious which Freud expects to be imminently beneficial to the patient.

It could be said that the commensurability required between the patient's unconscious and the physician's unconscious is vitally necessary to ensure a successful therapy because it is the precondition for there to be a requisite form of compassion on the part of the therapist. This comment might raise an automatic objection, however. The objection is encapsulated in what Freud himself states, in one of his directions to physicians:

I cannot recommend my colleagues emphatically enough to take as a model in psychoanalytic treatment the surgeon who puts aside all his own feelings, including that of human sympathy, and concentrates his mind on one single purpose, that of performing the operation as skillfully as possible.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, Freud's conception of the analyst's "capacity for analytic perception"<sup>25</sup> seems to require the sort of commensurability which his rules of method are designed to foster. It is not clear that the form of commensurability in question has much to do with conscious conceptions of sympathy, anyway. The main concern seems to be not to impede a certain kind of transference from the patient to the physician, and vice versa. (On the other hand, it is not clear, for that matter, that Freud's counsel that the physician should maintain a surgeon's detachment has quite exactly as much to do with forestalling sympathy as his remarks might lead one to think.<sup>26</sup>) At any rate, the issue of "human

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24 Freud 1963: 121.

25 Cf. *ibid* 122.

26 In the very next breath after cautioning against "human sympathy," Freud provides a specific example of the sort of emotional attachment which could prove unfavorable for the analytic process. He says, "Under present conditions [i.e., during the historical period when Freud and his followers were attempting to establish psychoanalysis as a reputable mode of psycho-therapeutic treatment] the affective impulse of greatest danger to the psychoanalyst will be the therapeutic ambition to achieve by this novel and disputed method something which will impress and convince others" (*ibid* 121). The concern here is that the physician's interest in seeing the analysis prove successful should not become a factor in the analysis, regardless of the source of the impulse to become attached to the expectation of a successful therapeutic process. No matter whether such an impulse arises from sympathy for the patient, or from an egocentric fascination with the success of the psychoanalytic movement, the impulse to see a satisfactory denouement of the analytic process is precisely the target of Freud's admonition. Such an impulse could presumably tempt the physician to try shortcut techniques such as "combining a certain amount of analysis with some suggestive treatment

sympathy" seems irrelevant to the basic point that, for Freud, a successful therapeutic process depends on there being in place a solid foundation of commensurability between the patient's unconscious and the physician's unconscious.

Now, if we trace out the analogy, it seems that the role of the unconscious for Freud is functionally isomorphic with the role of perceptual apprehension in the context of the debate between Mādhyamikas and realists. Furthermore, the role of the censorship or resistances in the context of psychoanalytic therapy is analogous to the role of different theoretical stances which might be based on fundamental perceptual apprehensions. The analogy here requires us to structurally differentiate the levels of perceptual apprehension and conceptual interpretation. Such a move might presumably be resisted from a pragmatist angle of vision because of the basic antipathy of pragmatism to any form of foundationalist structure. However, this kind of resistance should have already been forestalled by our discussion of reformed empiricism in chapter two.

It remains to ask, why do Freud and defenders of autonomous inferences think that commensurability is a precondition for a successful therapeutic process? This question is more difficult to answer than it might at first seem to be. The simple answer would be that in order for two parties to be able to reason with one another, they have to be able to agree with one another about at least *some* aspects of what they are reasoning about. However, the sort of agreement envisioned in this answer is a form of conceptual agreement. This is not the form of agreement posited by Freud and defenders of autonomous inferences—at least those who would resist the method of ironic engagement on the grounds being advanced here. As noted above, both Freud's view and the view of defenders of autonomous inferences involves a structural differentiation between different levels or "departments" of mental operation, and commensurability is required for just one of those levels or departments. In the case of the defenders of autonomous inferences' view, commensurability is sought at the level of non-conceptual, intuitive awareness. It will take some time to unpack the reasons for this complexity and for why commensurability at this level of mental operation is crucial to

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in order to achieve a perceptible result in a shorter time" (*ibid* 124).

defenders of autonomous inferences' view (leaving aside Freud's position now that the comparison has done its work<sup>27</sup>). At this point, it will be useful to turn to McClintock's account of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's approach to the use of autonomous inferences, because considering their foundationalist approach to Mādhyamika rationality will help to clarify matters.

### **Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's Foundationalism**

The first point I want to make is that it is important not to conflate the approach McClintock finds in Śāntarakṣita's and Kamalaśīla's writings with the pragmatist approach considered above.<sup>28</sup> This is a mistake that it is particularly difficult to resist, because a natural way to misunderstand the technique McClintock describes is by construing it as involving something like the pragmatist approach. We can see how this happens by considering the following train of thought. The sliding scale of analysis, as McClintock explains, is put into motion when Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla offer inferences to establish, e.g., at the Sautrāntika level of analysis, the reduction of everything to externally existing partless atoms. This is, however, only one stage of the dialectical process. Following this, at the Yogācāra level of analysis, these authors offer a proof that there are no external objects. This dialectical progression through different levels of analysis, i.e., different possible positions on the "doxographic tree," is comparable to Siderits' description of the Madhyamaka dialectical process which we considered in chapter one. McClintock's account of how Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla base autonomous inferences in appearances is meant to explain what "permits these authors to move among apparently contradictory ontological and epistemological schemes, even within the purview of a single philosophical treatise."<sup>29</sup> However, when she tells us that "all apparently autonomous inferences advanced by these thinkers are in fact understood as provisional when regarded from the higher Madhyamaka level of analysis,"<sup>30</sup> it is too tempting not to think of the Mādhyamikas as like children playing with chalk on a blackboard and then wiping the board with an

27 We will consider another point in Freud a bit later. See below p.130 ff.

28 I begin with this admonition because I must confess that for some time I labored under precisely this misunderstanding of the view McClintock finds in Śāntarakṣita's and Kamalaśīla's work.

29 *Ibid* 139.

30 McClintock 2003: 146-7.

eraser. Since they only *provisionally* accepted the inferences they advanced from the perspectives of the lower schools, their attitude toward these ephemeral inferences is apparently all too similar to the pragmatist's ironic stance.

Nevertheless, the crucial difference between the way McClintock thinks of the Svātantrikas' reasoning from the basis of the conventional as opposed to the way the pragmatists think of it is that, on McClintock's account, the conventional consists in a baseline of perceptual appearances. The fact that all the different inferences cast at all of the different levels of analysis appeal back, ultimately, to the baseline of appearances<sup>31</sup> is what distinguishes these inferences from the pragmatist's distinctively *uninvested* inferences. McClintock points out that Śāntarakṣita's and Kamalaśīla's "arguments always proceed, sometimes explicitly, by *ignoring* or *suppressing* certain tenets that the authors elsewhere uphold as "true" on [a different] level of analysis."<sup>32</sup> But by suppressing tenets upheld elsewhere, these authors do not mean to detract from the suppressed tenets' claim to be solidly grounded in perceptual experience when considered from the perspectives of those other levels of analysis. In their view it is possible to anchor an inference in appearances from any level of analysis, as indicated when Śāntarakṣita says: "I do not refute the entity which appears."<sup>33</sup>

The situation that Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla are speaking to is a familiar one. In reasoning with opponents from a lower philosophical school, it is not possible to construct an autonomous inference from the point of view of a higher school because the subject and so forth will not be acceptable to one's opponent. McClintock takes Kamalaśīla's recommendation to be that in such a situation the way to proceed is to follow the strategy pioneered by Bhāvaviveka.<sup>34</sup> As McClintock explains, in his *Prajñāpradīpa* Bhāvaviveka suggests that in a debate between a Mādhyamika and a Sāṃkhya philosopher it would be possible to find a common logical subject, acceptable to both

31 As McClintock explains: "Appearances thus have different values on the different levels of analysis. On the Sautrantika level, appearances testify to real, external particulars. On the Yogācāra level, they testify to the reality of the mind" (144-5).

32 McClintock 2003: 145-6.

33 *Ibid* 147.

34 McClintock explicitly traces Kamalaśīla's method back to Bhāvaviveka (see McClintock 2003: 148). Cf. Tsong kha pa's exposition of Bhāvaviveka's approach at *GT* 252-3; I gloss this passage in detail in chapter six, see pp. 177-181 below.



parties, by considering a “general” subject such as sound without making any philosophical determinations about that subject which might lead the interlocutors to disagree, such as that it is a quality of space or whatever.<sup>35</sup>

The key notion for understanding Bhāvaviveka's technique is the idea of abstracting, as it were, from any imaginative determination (*adhyayavasāya*) unique to either philosophical perspective. Imaginative determinations are false conceptual constructs imposed on the images, or appearances, available in non-conceptual awareness. So the strategy for constructing an autonomous inference, here, would be to systematically exclude the uniquely determining theses of both the opponent's and the proponent's own positions. The technique is, thus, to effectively neutralize any conceptualization affecting how one takes appearances in order to get back to a common basis in appearances.

So the view which Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla take, as McClintock's interpretation suggests, is that appearances are generally present in all minds, and that these appearances are commonly distorted by error in the minds not only of realists but also of Mādhyamikas. McClintock observes:

Only an advanced practitioner, a buddha or a high-level bodhisattva, has the kind of purified vision in which appearances are not brought about by error, if they even have appearances at all. Thus, even when his realist opponents have a different *intellectual* understanding of the elements involved in an inference—including, most

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35 Cf. McClintock 2003: 148. It should be mentioned that McClintock's overt thesis that autonomous inferences are very similar to opponent acknowledged inferences (see McClintock 2003: 146-7) gains little support from her account insofar as she tracks the continuity between Bhāvaviveka's approach to autonomous inferences and the approach taken by Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla. The thesis starts to seem plausible only when her description of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's approach veers away from Bhāvaviveka's strategy toward a presentation of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's approach ignoring the feature which sets it apart from the pragmatist's strategy of ironic engagement. McClintock seems to step away from Bhāvaviveka's strategy when, citing Kamalaśīla's remark about not relying on a subject and so forth from the perspective of one's own philosophical system, she suggests: “One interesting way to read this statement is to consider that the implication is that while one may not construct an inference from the perspective of one's own philosophical system, one *may* do so from the perspective of *another's* philosophical system. On this reading, Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla appear to come rather close to mKhas grub's idea that opponent-acknowledged inferences alone are appropriate for Mādhyamikas” (148-9). This would definitely be a move away from Bhāvaviveka's approach, where one rescinds both from one's own position and one's opponent's position to find a “general” subject which is neutral between the two perspectives. Here I think we should pause to consider the precise nature of the overall strategy which McClintock attributes to Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla. Is the suggestion that the Mādhyamika should adopt the *opponent's* perspective, or is it to try to find a common subject that is free of the prejudices that either the proponent or the opponent might bring to the debate? I argue, taking everything she says into consideration, that the latter is the more plausible way to construe their approach, though it gives no comfort to the idea that these thinkers' conception of autonomous inferences does not significantly differ from dGe lugs conceptions of opponent acknowledged inferences.

significantly, the manner in which these elements are established to appear—a Mādhyamika can still, due to a primordial ignorance shared with others, find some common ground from which to begin the dialectical process of demonstrating that unassailably real natures do not exist<sup>36</sup>.

The level of appearances is, on Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's view, a kind of reservoir of karmic imprints and ignorance which has to be accepted just as a matter of course with being "still ensconced in conventional reality."<sup>37</sup> McClintock elaborates:

Some Madhyamakas, e.g., Santarakṣita and Kamalasīla, appear to feel also that the main thing we all have in common is a similar embodiment/karmic situation. We thus share not only beliefs and principles, but more importantly physical organs and consciousnesses that operate in approximately similar ways.<sup>38</sup>

The distorted images which Mādhyamikas and realists alike thus experience at the level of appearances ensures that their perspectives are commensurable in the way that is required for the use of autonomous inferences. As McClintock explains:

Even Mādhyamikas experience dualistic images, and thus Mādhyamikas, too, can find conventional agreement concerning appearances with others whose minds are afflicted by a similar form of ignorance. The common appearances that they use as the subjects of the debate are understood, even *known*, not to be unfailing indicators of reality. But they are still the locus of conventional consensus, and for that reason they are also the natural starting point for investigation and debate.<sup>39</sup>

I submit that it is in their acknowledgment of a common basis of experience that Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's view diverges from the pragmatist conception of Svātantrika methodology.

The reason why appearances in experience can function foundationally<sup>40</sup> as they do in

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36 McClintock 2003: 150.

37 *Ibid* 149.

38 Personal communication: comments on a draft of chapter three of this dissertation.

39 *Ibid* 149.

40 Here it is worth noting that, as we saw in chapter two, McClintock joins Tillemans in problematically fusing an endorsement of foundationalism with acceptance of the myth of the Given. This means that when she says that Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla abandon the notion that appearances are Given at the Madhyamaka level of analysis, she probably also means that they must then abandon foundationalism. This hardly seems plausible as a way to understand McClintock's own interpretation of the foundational role of appearances for Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla in justifying autonomous inferences between Mādhyamikas and realists even at the level of Madhyamaka analysis. Of course, if we keep in view our discussion of reformed empiricism from chapter two above, we should have no difficulty understanding the separation of an endorsement of foundationalism from an acceptance of the Given. And then, moreover, if readers are persuaded by the other argument I gave in chapter two distinguishing acceptance of the Given from the sort of realism that Madhyamaka is concerned to refute, then there is even more room to feel comfortable with construing Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla as foundationalists *all the way down*, as it were.

Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's view is that they are, to a certain extent, irrepressible. As noted above, according to McClintock appearances distorted by primordial ignorance arise for all ordinary beings, whether they are Mādhyamika practitioners or not; only buddhas and high-level bodhisattvas are exempt from this general rule. McClintock comments that whereas appearances are taken to testify to the existence of external objects at the Sautrāntika level of analysis, and they are taken to testify to the reality of the mind at the Yogācāra level, at "the Madhyamaka level, they testify to nothing other than the continued presence of ignorance in the mind."<sup>41</sup> The key point, which shows the kind of irrepressible quality or incorrigibility that I am talking about, is that distorted appearances can be "understood, even *known*, not to be unfailing indicators of reality," as McClintock says, and yet they arise with a certain force of necessity whereby the Mādhyamika is constrained to take appearances as the starting point of analysis.<sup>42</sup> McClintock continues: "The important thing is not what appears to one; the important thing is that one applies analysis to that appearance."<sup>43</sup>

The assumption that appearances are somehow incorrigible or irrepressible<sup>44</sup> leads to a structural differentiation, in Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's view, between conceptualization and non-conceptual, phenomenal awareness, similar to the sort of compartmentalization of mental operations

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41 McClintock 2003: 144-5.

42 *Ibid* 149. Here I shall just mention how this resonates with the view one finds in Gendun Chopel's work (and similar resonances could probably be identified in the views of countless other Tibetan philosophers—Gendun Chopel's remarks just happen to be lying ready at hand. For him, the resilience of appearances before the force of analysis is like the durability of stones and so forth before the heat of a flame (cf. Gendun Chopel 2006: 59). He articulates the paradoxical nature of the incorrigibility of appearances thus: "In brief, when one thinks that a pot is utterly nonexistent and sees it directly with the eyes, the illusionlike awareness is produced automatically. Thus, what danger is there of falling into nihilism?" (*ibid*). In other words, a contradictory cognitive state unavoidably results because one *thinks* that x is utterly nonexistent at the same time as one *sees* x directly with one's eyes (that is, if one is a Mādhyamika). It is also worth noting, to clarify Gendun Chopel's remark that one thinks the pot is utterly nonexistent, that Gendun Chopel construes the significance of Madhyamaka anti-realism in a different way from how I am suggesting Tsong kha pa understands it. For Gendun Chopel, the final aim is to eliminate *all* conceptual structuring, including the conceptual structuring involved in the opposition *x exists* and *x is nonexistent*. So one response Tsong kha pa might have to Gendun Chopel's position is that he is only working with the Svātantrikas' coarse way of apprehending the fundamental object of negation.

43 *Ibid* 150.

44 I do not mean, of course, to be misunderstood as saying that McClintock thinks that appearances *withstand rational analysis* for Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla. Clearly, they think that the problem with appearances, with ignorance, is that they, it, just keeps coming back again and again for a long, long time. But, with patience and endurance, the Mādhyamika will, as McClintock eloquently puts it, "throw off the shackles of all types of realism and... begin in earnest the path of meditation on the naturelessness (*niḥsvabhāvatā*) of all things" (McClintock 2003: 150).

discussed above in the previous section. McClintock puts her finger on this structural differentiation when she writes,

Thus, even when his realist opponents have a different *intellectual* understanding of the elements involved in an inference—including, most significantly, the manner in which these elements are established to appear—a Mādhyamika can still, due to a primordial ignorance shared with others, find some common ground from which to begin the dialectical process of demonstrating that unassailably real natures do not exist.<sup>45</sup>

Here, it is as though the minds of Mādhyamikas and their realist opponents were divided within by a kind of imperceptible partition separating the *phenomenal contents* of the mind from whatever intellectual understanding of those contents happens to occur on the *conceptual* side of the divide. It is useful to hypothesize something like this sort of partitioning, at any rate, in order to understand how *two* intellectual understandings could vie for a location within the space of a single epistemic agent's consciousness, as we have to do in understanding how the Mādhyamika can both *sincerely* accept and reject his opponent's perspective all in the width and breadth of proposing a single inference.

What I am suggesting here is that the notion of a partitioning of the mind can help us to better understand Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's account. The strategy employed by these authors is analogous, for example, to the strategy which Donald Davidson employs in his response to the problem of *akrasia*, or weakness of will.<sup>46</sup> Instances of weakness of will occur when someone knows that it would be in their own best interest not to perform a certain action, but they perform that action anyway (for example, weight watchers who cannot resist the temptation of a piece of cake). The

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45 McClintock 2003: 150.

46 Christopher Shields comments that the term '*akrasia*' "is a blurry term, modulating in its meaning from treatment to treatment" (Shields 2007). The theme of *akrasia* is explored by Davidson in a series of essays: "How is Weakness of the Will Possible," "Paradoxes of Irrationality," and "Deception and Division." See Davidson 2006 and Elster 1986. Davidson defines *akrasia*, following Aristotle's classic definition, as a phenomenon occurring in any action "where the agent acts counter to what he believes, everything considered, is better" (Davidson 2006: 142). Socrates famously championed a view which rules out anything like clear-eyed *akrasia*. As Aristotle puts it, formulating Socrates' position: "It would be awful, Socrates thought, when knowledge is present in someone for something else to master it and drag it about as if it were a slave. Socrates campaigned against this account altogether, on the grounds that there is no *akrasia*: No-one acts against what he supposes to be best, but does so rather because of ignorance" (*EN* VII 3, 1145b23-27, translated by Shields, see Shields 2007: 64). Tillemans has argued that the interpretation of what ignorance is, for Buddhist epistemologists, is usefully approached via the idea of epistemic *akrasia*, or epistemic weakness of will (see Tillemans 2008).

phenomenon of *akrasia* is especially puzzling for the sort of rationalist theory of action championed by Davidson, in which reasons are effectively the causes of events (actions), since cases of *akrasia* exhibit a breakdown in the pattern, i.e., they are instances of irrational behavior which seem to defy description on a rationalist theory of action. Davidson's solution is to suggest that the minds of agents are partitioned, and that different parts of the mind "run the shop," so to speak, at different times. This lets us understand how parts of the mind which either have their own reasons, or which perhaps simply do not obey reason, might sometimes coopt the part of the mind which knows what is best, overall, for an agent.

As Tillemans observes, partitioning the mind generally fits well into the framework of Buddhist theories of personal identity:

The natural picture for [the Buddhist] is not that of one and the same mind or subject oddly holding two opposing ideas or networks of ideas—a puzzling phenomenon indeed—but of many semi-autonomous cognitive structures each having their own beliefs, with no substantial person linking them together.<sup>47</sup>

Tillemans' conception of partitioning follows Davidson's account. Davidson's sketch of what partitioning could be like is as follows, in Davidson's words:

[T]he way could be cleared for explanation if we were to suppose two semi-autonomous departments of the mind, one that finds a certain course of action to be, all things considered, best, and another that prompts another course of action to be, all things considered, best, and another that prompts another course of action. On each side,... there is a supporting structure of reasons, of interlocking beliefs, expectations, assumptions, attitudes, and desires....<sup>48</sup>

This sort of picture helps us to understand how one could accept an opponent's intellectual understanding of  $x$  while nevertheless simultaneously rejecting that understanding of  $x$ , where both understandings of  $x$  are based on  $x$ 's appearing a single way to one. The latter is of course the sort of situation posed by Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's account of autonomous inferences.

Earlier I said that it would take considering Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's view to clarify why

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47 Tillemans 2008: 16.

48 Davidson 2006: 148.

defenders of autonomous inferences should want to establish a form of commensurability at the level of non-conceptual, intuitive awareness. Now the answer will be apparent. The project of foundationalism is to make it possible to take a deferential attitude toward objective facts. The foundationalist's main impulse is to resist nihilism about rationality. Commensurability of some form or another is the key element in foundationalism's defense against nihilism. Foundationalists typically obtain commensurability by means of something like the sort of compartmentalization of mental operations we find embodied, in Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's view (and in countless other foundationalists' views), by the distinction between non-conceptual foundations and conceptual articulations. The additional move of acknowledging the possibility that different conceptual articulations might comprise distinct partitions within a single epistemic agent's mind only completes the picture for a quite plausible theory of rationality.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, to finally complete the critique of ironic engagement begun in the previous section, we can say that the problem with the pragmatist's approach to reasoning is, in short, that it does not permit us to take the foundationalist's measures to block nihilism about rationality. It is important to be precise about the criticism that is here being leveled against pragmatism. The complaint is not that pragmatism leads inescapably to nihilism. Nor is the complaint meant to surreptitiously lodge a plea

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49 To briefly fill in some of the details of the sort of theory of rationality I am talking about, we can begin by considering how partitioning the mind would work to explain how two distinct individuals can reason with one another in connection with a disagreement about a single thing (and such disagreement is precisely the precondition for any sort of reasoning to occur between *two* people). It has to be possible, first and most importantly, for the two people to hold conceptually articulated views or assertions with regard to just one thing, not two *different* things. Obviously, if their views were about different things, then they would simply just be two separate views about a couple of different things. But if they disagree, then not only are the views about a single thing, but the views themselves have to be distinct. Yet in order for one of the individuals to know that he disagrees with the other individual, and thus proceed to the stage of argument, it must be possible for the person, in coming to realize that he disagrees with the other person, to entertain both views and recognize that they are distinct. *This* ability requires a facility for conceptual blending, which, as indicated by the work of Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (cf. Fauconnier and Turner 2002), involves the construction of a complex integration network consisting of distinct yet connectible mental spaces. It seems plausible, then, to assimilate the notion of mental spaces and integration networks to the picture of semi-autonomous departments of the mind in order to reach the conclusion that the essence of reasoning (i.e., thinking rationally) consists in the process whereby integration networks try to achieve equilibrium, as Fauconnier and Turner put it. This lets us offer a univocal description of reasoning no matter whether it involves deliberation occurring between two or more individuals, or deliberation occurring within a single epistemic agent's mind.

on behalf of realism about mind-independent objective facts. As argued above in chapter one, at least some anti-realists (Tsong kha pa and Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas among them) hold that it is possible to stay committed to anti-realism about mind-independent facts while nonetheless cultivating a deferential attitude toward such facts, or toward something like such facts. So, I suggest, the view of nihilism about rationality, to the extent that it may be construed as a form of anti-realism (anti-realism about *thinking*?<sup>50</sup>), is distinct from anti-realism about mind-independent facts of the matter. Drawing this distinction lets us see that Tsong kha pa's argument with pragmatism would be of one piece with his argument with interpretations of Madhyamaka current in his day. As Thupten Jinpa and José Cabezón each observe, the fundamental impetus for Tsong kha pa's thinking and writing included an array of interpretations of Madhyamaka which he regarded as nihilistic.<sup>51</sup> I suggest, thus, that the general category of "nihilism" has, in Tsong kha pa's work, a more specific sense intended particularly to pick out views tending to encourage the sort of anti-realism about rationality we are here talking about. In any event, Tsong kha pa's solid commitment to the foundationalist enterprise stands unquestioned, and I would merely add to our picture of Tsong kha pa's foundationalism the consideration that a motive for foundationalism can be understood as arising primarily from the sort of concern with therapeutic technique broached earlier. Below I shall elaborate on the extent to which I construe Tsong kha pa's foundationalism to be motivated by a concern with therapeutic technique, as I close the chapter with an explanation of how I think Tsong kha pa's critique of Svātantrika methodology may be applied to the picture of rationality with which we are provided in Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's view.

### **A Critique of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's Method**

Tsong kha pa's criticism of the Svātantrika method, as will be recalled from our discussion in chapter two, is that the method rests on a relatively coarse apprehension of the fundamental object of negation. As explained before, what it seems this could mean for Tsong kha pa is that Svātantrikas

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<sup>50</sup> See John Dunne's discussion of "thoughtless Buddhas" in Dunne 1996 for a possible characterization of how to conceive of such a position without falling into outrageous absurdity.

<sup>51</sup> See Cabezón 1992: 7-8 and Jinpa 2002: 22-25.

over-extend their critique of conceptual structuring, decrying *all* forms of conceptual structuring as involving innate ignorance. Tsong kha pa maintains that the Prāsaṅgikas' more subtle apprehension of the fundamental object of negation involves the recognition that it is only the conceptual structuring that gives rise to apprehensions of intrinsic existence that leads to problematic forms of attachment (finally causing suffering). We can add one assumption to clarify this picture of Tsong kha pa's critique. The assumption is that he thinks Svātantrikas reject, as he himself does, the notion of perceptual contents that are independent of conceptual structuring (i.e., the Given<sup>52</sup>). Put this assumption together with the coarse identification of *all* forms of conceptual structuring as involving primordial ignorance, and the implication is precisely the sort of view which McClintock finds in Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's work. That is, their view seems to be that all of the appearances experienced by ordinary beings (non-bodhisattvas and bodhisattvas below a certain stage of progress on the Buddhist path) are corrupted by the distortions that dispose individuals to believe in realism. As I shall try to show in the next two chapters, Tsong kha pa takes a different view of the extent to which ordinary appearances are corrupted by innate ignorance. However, for now, the question is what precisely Tsong kha pa could find wrong with the Svātantrika approach. As I have argued, Tsong kha pa shares the Svātantrikas' foundationalist approach to epistemology and the issue of the Given is not relevant to the object of negation. Moreover, Svātantrikas *are Mādhyamikas* for they correctly identify the fundamental object of negation as a tendency to form beliefs about mind-independent facts. Thus, epistemologically and ontologically, there is no difference between Tsong kha pa's view and the Svātantrika view. It seems, then, that in order to locate a difference between their approaches, it will be necessary to compare them from the perspective of their relative therapeutic efficacy.

The problem with the Svātantrikas' approach, thus, is that the foundational appearances for their inferences are all corrupted by ignorance. How could an effective therapy be based on the basis

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<sup>52</sup> But we should not forget that Tsong kha pa's and the Svātantrikas' rejection of the Given need not be construed as an implication of their anti-realism about mind-independent facts.



of what is pathological? Could any inference based on *accepting* the opponent's logical subject (as proponents of autonomous inferences are required to do) be honestly expected to establish the *opposite* of what has already been accepted as a precondition of the inference? That is, suppose I acknowledge my opponent's evidence for his belief in a mind-independent fact of the matter about, say, the origins of stars. And suppose that I acknowledge this evidence in the way that Svāntarikas recommend I should, that is, I acknowledge that the evidence strikes *me* as proper evidence for such a belief. How, then, am I supposed to base a proof *that there is no mind-independent fact of the matter about the origins of stars* on its seeming to me that there *is perceptual evidence that there are mind-independent facts of the matter about the origins of stars*? The use of such autonomous inferences, thus, seems like a hopeless waste of time.

To expand on the therapeutic inadequacy of the Svāntarika method of using autonomous inferences (in case what has just been said does not already suffice to make the point), I think we can once again turn to Freudian psychoanalysis as a basic comparative framework. I suggest that we may measure the effectiveness of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's conception of autonomous inferences by thinking in "fusion mode" about Freud's recommendations on how psychoanalysts might best proceed, in a clinical setting, to handle instances of transference-love. The patient's transference to the person of the analyst consists in the superimposition onto the analyst of a stereotype-construct which focuses the patient's repressed aggressive or erotic impulses.<sup>53</sup> In the case of transference-love, the patient may be led to make sexual advances toward the analyst. Freud counsels that if the analyst were to return these advances, "it would be a great triumph for the patient, but a complete overthrow for the cure."<sup>54</sup> Freud indicates that the transference is the greatest weapon of the resistance. Resistances are pictured by Freud as tendencies to persist in "the repression of the unconscious impulses and their derivatives."<sup>55</sup> As we have seen, there is at least a structural analogy between resistances, which give

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53 Cf. Freud 1963: 105-115.

54 Freud 1963: 174.

55 *Ibid* 109.

rise to pathogenic neuroses in the context of psychoanalysis, and the “karmic imprints and ignorance”<sup>56</sup> which on Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's account generate appearances. Both resistances and ignorance consist in unconscious mental processes, and each produces effects which can be regarded as in need of being “lifted.” With these parallels in view, it seems apparent that Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's approach to autonomous inferences is likely to give rise to instances analogous, from the standpoint of therapeutic technique, to the sort of situation an analyst would be in were he or she to return the sexual advances of a patient. As Freud explains, such a love relationship would end only in “a strengthening of [the patient's] tendency to repression.”<sup>57</sup> And there seems to be no reason to expect anything better, by analogy, from the sort of common logical subject, rooted as it is in primordial ignorance, which Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla have to offer.

Nevertheless, when it comes to proposing the sort of critique I have been outlining as a rational reconstruction of Tsong kha pa's objection to Svātantrika method, the matter is complicated by the fact that one also finds presentations of Tsong kha pa's Prāsaṅgika therapeutic technique which seem to indicate that his Prāsaṅgika method and Svātantrika method are identical with respect to technical application. Examples could be multiplied. Jeffrey Hopkins offers an extensive quote from the Mongolian dGe lugs scholar, bsTan dar lha ram pa, to illustrate a suggestion that the sorts of criticism leveled by Gendun Chopel against the dGe lugs pedagogical paradigm do not fall on fallow ground but are echoed by the voices of internal critics in the dGe lugs tradition.<sup>58</sup> The particular criticism which Hopkins finds echoed in bsTan dar lha ram pa's work is Gendun Chopel's critique of the worry that nihilism will result from subjecting appearances to the full force of reason's onslaught.<sup>59</sup> Hopkins prefaces his discussion of this criticism by observing:

Because ordinary beings cannot distinguish between inherent existence and conventional existence, as soon as it is said that objects are validly established, they tend to believe that objects as they perceive them are affirmed. Therefore, some non-Ge-luk-ba masters have taught that nothing except emptiness validly exists;

<sup>56</sup> McClintock writes that, on Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's account, “The arising of images in perception is thus not an arbitrary affair...; rather, it is rooted in karmic imprints and ignorance” (McClintock 2003: 144).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid* 174.

<sup>58</sup> See Hopkins 1996: 544ff.

<sup>59</sup> See p. 125, n. 42 above.

they feel that since a student is unable to distinguish between inherent existence and conventional existence, he can destroy his conception of inherent existence through destroying his sense of existence and then afterwards determine what remains.<sup>60</sup>

In other words, ordinary beings cannot make the distinction Tsong kha pa's view draws between intrinsic existence and mere existence, and the reason why beings are unable to make this distinction is that *all* of their appearances are distorted with the conceptual structuring that generates a perceptual apprehension of intrinsic existence. To make another comparison with Western philosophy, the view Hopkins here ascribes to some non-dGe lugs thinkers is analogous to Kant's view that space and time are the *a priori* forms of intuition. For Kant, appearances cannot occur that are not spatio-temporally structured. Similarly, for these Tibetan philosophers, no appearances can occur that are not structured *a priori* by a conception of intrinsic existence. To complete the analogy, we need only imagine what Kant's position would be like if he also assumed that space and time do not pertain to the real organization of *things in themselves* (i.e., *noumenal* reality). In any event, it should be apparent that the view Hopkins here assigns to some unnamed non-dGe lugs thinkers results from adopting the Svātantrika view that *all* appearances are distorted by problematic conceptual structuring. Where things become potentially quite confusing, however, is when we find authors such as bsTan dar lha ram pa who, in the context of an exposition of *Tsong kha pa's* view, adopt the notion that *all* appearances are distorted by ignorance. Thus, bsTan dar lha ram pa writes:

Except for refuting just these mountains, fences, houses, and so forth which so forcefully appear to exist concretely, we are wrong if we search for some other horn-like thing to refute.... Still, some say [in answer] to this, 'This is wrong because the mountains, fences, houses, and so forth as they appear to common beings are the objects of direct apprehension by sense consciousnesses. Therefore, it is unsuitable to refute them in any way because {Tsong kha pa's *Great Treatise*} says, "None of the objects of non-conceptual sense consciousnesses are ever refuted through reasoning."

That indeed is true; however, an object which appears to a non-conceptual [sense] consciousness is the object which is conceived to exist inherently by a conceptual consciousness [in the sense that a conceptual consciousness assents to the object's appearance of inherent existence]. Therefore, related with this object are the appearance of objective existence which is to be refuted and the mere appearance [of the object] which is not to be refuted. [However] before attaining the view [of non-inherent existence but conventional, valid, effective existence] these two appear confused as one. When the view is found, these two [the appearance of objective existence and the mere appearance] are discriminated, and it is well renowned in the words of the wise that there is this essential {sic} that the mere appearance is not refuted. When mountains, fences,

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60 Hopkins 1996: 543-4.

houses, and so forth appear to ordinary beings, they appear in all respects to exist objectively. Therefore, one should meditate until, destroying this mode of appearance, it is cancelled in all respects for one's mind, and the fear, 'Now there is nothing left over,' is generated....

Therefore, greatly superior to the present-day philosophers to whom not even an image of the mode of objective existence has appeared are those in former times who overextended what is refuted [in the view of selflessness and held that the objects themselves are refuted].<sup>61</sup>

Here the strategy that bsTan dar lha ram pa recommends is indistinguishable from the Svātantrika method, at least with respect to the compass of what is to be negated. But this should not be surprising since his understanding of ordinary beings' mode of apprehension seems to rest on the Svātantrikas' assumption that *all* appearances are corrupted by the conceptual distortion that superimposes intrinsic existence onto anything that one apprehends.

As we shall see, the tendency to import a Svātantrika appraisal of the fundamental object of negation into a reading of Tsong kha pa's methodological recommendations is a common occurrence. And it leads to serious interpretive puzzles like the following. Tsong kha pa's number one piece of technical advice is the admonishment that it is not possible to achieve a realization of emptiness without first having developed a clear conceptual grasp of the object of negation (dgag bya), i.e., intrinsic existence.<sup>62</sup> Yet Tsong kha pa also believes that conventional things do exist, though they do not exist intrinsically. But if ordinary beings, when experiencing the mere existence of conventional things, are unable to distinguish mere existence from intrinsic existence, then how could they ever form a clear concept of intrinsic existence? A distinct perceptual apprehension of a thing would seem to be the prerequisite for forming a clear concept of that thing. By pressing this line of thought, some interpreters suggest that on Tsong kha pa's view it is possible to distinguish within one's own experience between mere existence and intrinsic existence only after a direct realization of emptiness. But this seems to leave Tsong kha pa's Mādhyamika aspirant in a double bind. In order to realize emptiness she must form a clear conceptual understanding of intrinsic existence. Nevertheless, in order to form a clear concept of intrinsic existence, she must first be able to distinguish intrinsic

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61 *Ibid* 545-6, curly brackets mine.

62 This technical recommendation of Tsong kha pa's is alluded to, for instance, in bsTan dar lha ram pa's derogatory remark that some modern philosophers have never even apprehended an "image of the mode of objective existence" (see the quote above).

existence from mere existence within her own experience, which she cannot do until after she has had a direct realization of emptiness. I shall pursue this line of thought at length in the next chapter to show that it rests on presuppositions, like the characteristically Svātantrika presupposition that ordinary beings' only mode of apprehension is thoroughly corrupted by primordial ignorance.

# Chapter Five

## The Circularity Problem

As noted at the end of the previous chapter, Tsong kha pa's view seems to give rise to a picture that is hopelessly circular. On this picture, one must achieve a non-conceptual experience of emptiness in order to be able to distinguish between the way things appear to exist when intrinsic existence is falsely superimposed onto one's perceptual content, on the one hand, and on the other hand the way things appear just as they are. However, the circularity enters with another part of the picture. It seems that Tsong kha pa also thinks that a realization of emptiness cannot be achieved unless one has first formed an ability to adequately tell the difference between how things appear with intrinsic existence superimposed and how they appear without such distortion. This problematic picture of Tsong kha pa's view is rooted in a presupposition which I do not think Tsong kha pa would accept, which is that ordinary beings are so hopelessly deluded, before being introduced to the Madhyamaka view, that they entirely lack the capacity to accurately discriminate between intrinsic existence and mere existence.

My aim in this chapter is to critically examine some authors' attributions of this presupposition to Tsong kha pa. I shall argue that the presupposition is inconsistent with Tsong kha pa's position, and that attributions of the presupposition to Tsong kha pa are not supported by solid textual evidence. First, I consider a particularly clear formulation of the circularity problem by Thupten Jinpa, along with a way out of the problem which Jinpa proposes could be available to Tsong kha pa. Then I examine the textual grounds which Jinpa and other authors cite to support their claim that the circularity problem, or at least a commitment to the problem's main presupposition, is a feature of Tsong kha pa's thought. The problem's main presupposition is that individuals without Madhyamaka training can only perceptually apprehend things as though things were intrinsically existent. Non-Mādhyamikas would have, on this view, no ability to apprehend mere existence. After considering the texts cited as

evidence for Tsong kha pa's accepting the circularity problem's presupposition, I conclude that these texts do not lend support to such an interpretation of Tsong kha pa's view. Indeed, I shall argue that one of the passages in question, when properly contextualized, actually contains an argument against the circularity problem's presupposition.

My focus in the first part of the chapter will be the circularity problem. In section one, I offer a brief survey of how the circularity problem has been handled in recent literature. As shall be seen, almost no one has attempted to address the puzzle as a serious issue, and hardly anyone has proposed a potential solution. Thupten Jinpa's discussion of the matter is exceptional in this respect, although in the end, as I shall explain, the solution he suggests is unsatisfactory.

Section two takes up the textual evidence with which Jinpa and others have backed up their attributions of the circularity problem to Tsong kha pa. I offer alternative interpretations of the passages in question. With respect to one passage from the *Lhag mthong chen mo*, cited by Gendun Chopel, I argue that it is a particularly gross misreading to take the passage as evidence that Tsong kha pa accepts the circularity problem's main presupposition. The passage is actually part of an argument *against* the presupposition that non-Mādhyamikas can only apprehend intrinsic existence.

### **Jinpa's Solution**

This section considers Jinpa's treatment of the problem of circularity, including his proposed solution to the problem. Jinpa's exploration of this issue is useful to consider because his speculation as to how the problem might be addressed illuminates an important assumption behind the idea that the problem is Tsong kha pa's. This assumption, as I shall explain below, is that Tsong kha pa holds a realization of emptiness to consist in a kind of non-conceptual experience which is not conceptually structured in any way. In other words, Jinpa's solution involves ascribing a form of the myth of the Given to Tsong kha pa. His solution consists in suggesting that the circularity might be dissolved if we could use parameterization to remove the apparent inconsistency in holding the following pair of claims: (1) that an adequate concept of intrinsic existence cannot be formed without having had an

experience of the difference between intrinsic existence and mere existence, and (2) that an experience of the difference between intrinsic existence and mere existence can occur only if it is conditioned by an adequately formed concept of intrinsic existence. On Jinpa's proposal, this inconsistent pair of claims is the result of considering a single process from two points of view. That is, from the perspective of having completed the process of realizing emptiness, the process itself appears differently than it does at the beginning. Nonetheless, I shall suggest that Jinpa's proposal rests on questionable translations of some technical Tibetan epistemological terms.

The circularity problem has been noted by numerous expositors of Tsong kha pa's thought.<sup>1</sup> Some have been reluctant to suggest that it is a problem arising directly from Tsong kha pa's view, attributing it rather to Ge-luk pedagogy. Thupten Jinpa, however, suggests that it is a problem arising directly from Tsong kha pa's position,<sup>2</sup> although he somewhat cagily suggests that though Tsong kha pa was aware of the circularity, it may perhaps be that "he did not think of it as a real problem."<sup>3</sup> As Jeffrey Hopkins points out, some teachers within the Ge-luk tradition have seemed to feel that there could be a problem but have recommended that students need not be concerned with the distinction between mere and intrinsic existence until they have begun to make some progress at realizing emptiness.<sup>4</sup> This ambiguity in how to address the problem is especially evident in Gendun Chopel's formulations of the difficulty in his *Adornment for Nāgārjuna's Thought*.<sup>5</sup> He treats the problem as an objection, but not as an objection directly to Tsong kha pa's position. Rather, he treats it as an objection to the caricature (as he sees it) of Tsong kha pa's position presented in Ge-luk monastic

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1 Pettit cites Elizabeth Napper's and Guy Newland's comments in this regard (see Pettit 1999: 145-6; Napper 1989: 147; and Newland 1992: 18). The paper trail goes back to Jeffrey Hopkins, who finds the problem of identifying the object of negation discussed in Geshe bsTan dar lha ram pa's *Presentation of the Lack of Being One or Many* (*gCig du bral gyi rnam gzhas legs bshad rgya mtsho las btus pa'i 'khrul spong bdud rtsi'i gzegs ma*). Hopkins traces articulations of the problem back to Gendun Chopel (see Hopkins 1983: 543-47).

2 For Jinpa's formulation of the problem, see below. Cf. Jinpa 2002: 52-3.

3 Jinpa 2002: 53.

4 Hopkins quotes Geshe bsTan dar lha ram pa, who compares such a student to a person learning to ride a wild horse. Unlike either a person with no firsthand experience with wild horses, or an expert in controlling wild horses, fear is suitable for the person "who has understood a little but not completely how to mount a wild horse" (Hopkins 1983: 547).

5 See Gendun Chopel 2006: 47-120. Gendun Chopel's presentation of the problem of recognizing the object of negation can be found in the following numbered paragraph's in Lopez's translation: ¶37, ¶39, ¶41, ¶136, ¶167, ¶191, and ¶234.



textbooks.<sup>6</sup>

Jinpa offers perhaps the clearest presentation of the puzzle, and he formulates the problem as follows: “What does it mean to say that someone must have a prior understanding of what is to be negated?” Tsong kha pa's answer, as Jinpa explains, comes in his elaboration of the following text by Śāntideva:

Without contacting the entity that is imputed  
You will not apprehend the absence of that entity.<sup>7</sup>

Tsong kha pa explains that for someone trying to ascertain the absence of a particular person, a necessary prerequisite for doing so is knowing the person in question.<sup>8</sup> But in this picture of

- 6 Something along the lines of Pettit's observation about Mipham's relationship to Tsong kha pa and Tsong kha pa's interpreters in the dGe lugs tradition seems apropos as well to describe Gendun Chopel's stance. Pettit writes: “Because he names his opponents as *dGe ldan pa* (*Beacon* § 1.1), Mipham's critiques in the *Beacon* are implicitly directed toward Tsongkhapa. However, the fact that Mipham quotes Tsongkhapa to support his own position in the *MAZL* [i.e., Mipham's commentary on Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*] and praises him elsewhere... suggests that Mipham was more concerned with the way his Gelug contemporaries understood Tsongkhapa. This is perhaps corroborated by the fact that Mipham and his Gelug opponents exchanged many refutations and counter-refutations...” (Pettit 1999: 146). Donald Lopez, Jr., also remarks on the ambiguity in Gendun Chopel's attitude toward Tsong kha pa. Lopez says: “Indeed, the opposition to Tsong kha pa often attributed to the *Adornment*, although certainly present on several major issues, is by no means thoroughgoing; [Gendun Chopel's] most vituperative contempt is reserved not for Tsong kha pa but for the complacent scholastics who claim to preserve his legacy” (Lopez 2006: 159). Jinpa makes the observation that Gendun Chopel frequently reacts to “a certain caricature of Tsongkhapa's views” (Jinpa 2002: 201), but he seems to imply that the caricature is a product of Gendun Chopel's own reading of Tsong kha pa, rather than an artifact of dGe lugs pedagogy.
- 7 *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.140ab, translated by Lam Rim Chen Mo Translation Committee, *GT* 126. Tsong kha pa's elucidation of these lines is one of those instances, according to Tom Tillemans, in which we can see that Tsong kha pa “seems to have elaborated many of his most fertile and sweeping philosophical ideas and interpretive schemes on the basis of the slimmest, and sometimes even misconstrued, Indian textual evidence” (Tillemans 2003: 96). Tillemans praises Williams 1995 for demonstrating the tenuous nature of “Tsong kha pa's use of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.140 as an Indian textual source for the doctrine of recognizing the object to be refuted” (Tillemans 2003: 116, n. 8).
- 8 See *GT* 126. Tsong kha pa's point is reminiscent of Sartre's illustration of an intuition of nothingness in the example of Pierre's missed appointment. Sartre writes: “I have an appointment with Pierre at four o'clock. I arrive at the café a quarter of an hour late. Pierre is always punctual. Will he have waited for me?... It is certain that the café by itself with its patrons, its tables, its booths, its mirrors, its light, its smoky atmosphere, and the sounds of voices, rattling saucers, and footsteps which fill it—the café is a fullness of being. And all the intuitions of detail which I can have are filled by these odors, these sounds, these colors, all phenomena which have a transphenomenal being. Similarly Pierre's actual presence in a place which I do not know is also a plenitude of being. We seem to have found fullness everywhere. But we must observe that in perception there is always the construction of a figure on a ground. No one object, no group of objects is especially designed to be organized as specifically either ground or figure; all depends on the direction of my attention. When I enter this café to search for Pierre, there is formed a synthetic organization of all the objects in the café, on the ground of which Pierre is given as about to appear. This organization of the café as the ground is an original nihilation. Each element of the setting, a person, a table, a chair, attempts to isolate itself, to lift itself upon the ground constituted by the totality of the other objects, only to fall back

*experiencing an absence* there are already the seeds of a problem. As Jinpa explains:

[T]his implies that the Mādhyamika aspirant is able to coherently distinguish between 'existence only' [mere existence] (*yod tsam*) on the one hand, and 'intrinsic existence' (*rang bzhin gyis yod pa*) on the other. Not only that, he or she must be able to distinguish this within his or her own personal experience, i.e., how things and events appear to the naïve worldview. The problem with this, however, is that such distinctions can be made, if at all, only in the aftermath of having cognized the absence of intrinsic existence (*niḥsvabhāva*) by true knowledge [direct experience]. Until then, existence and intrinsic existence remain completely indistinguishable so far as the perception of the average individual is concerned.<sup>9</sup>

Jinpa says that mere existence and intrinsic existence “are, to use Tsongkhapa's own imagery, like a face and its reflection in a mirror”:

As far as visual perception is concerned, the face that you see in the mirror and its reflection are one and the same image. There is no separate image of the face apart from the reflection that appears in the mirror.<sup>10</sup>

For someone who mistakes the reflection of a face in the mirror for a person's actual face, there is no discriminable detail in his or her phenomenal awareness of the reflection that could form the basis of a realization that it is indeed only a reflection being apprehended and not the real face.

Let us examine the presuppositions of this puzzle more carefully. If ordinary beings could have access to an experience of mere existence, free of the superimposed conception of intrinsic existence, then they might possibly have the contrasting experiences of *mere existence with intrinsic existence*

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once more into the undifferentiation of this ground; it melts into the ground. For the ground is that which is seen only in addition, that which is the object of a purely marginal attention. Thus the original nihilation of all the figures which appear and are swallowed up in the total neutrality of a *ground* is the necessary condition for the appearance of the principle figure, which is here the person of Pierre. This nihilation is given to my intuition; I am witness to the successive disappearances of all the objects which I look at—in particular of the faces, which detain me for an instant (Could this be Pierre?) and which as quickly decompose precisely because they “are not” the face of Pierre.... [Thus the *whole* café] makes itself ground for a determined figure; it carries the figure everywhere in front of it, presents the figure everywhere to me. This figure which slips constantly between my look and the solid, real objects of the café is precisely a perpetual disappearance; it is Pierre raising himself as nothingness on the ground of the nihilation of the café.... [T]here is an infinity of people who are without any relation with this café for want of a real expectation which establishes their absence....[Thus,] judgments which I can make subsequently to amuse myself, such as “Wellington is not in this café, Paul Valéry is no longer here, *etc.*”—these have a purely abstract meaning; they are pure applications of the principle of negation without real or efficacious foundation, and they never succeed in establishing a *real* relation between the café and Wellington or Valéry. Here the relation “is not” is merely *thought.*” (Sartre 1956: 40-42). There seems to be a striking convergence of Tsong kha pa's and Sartre's views at this juncture: only by having a real expectation based on an actual familiarity with the object in question could there arise an intuitive awareness of the object's absence, such as the Mādhyamika seeks to cultivate with respect to the object of negation.

9 Jinpa 2002: 52-3.

10 *Ibid.*

*superimposed*, on the one hand, and *mere existence without intrinsic existence superimposed*, on the other, and thereby derive an experiential knowledge of the difference between intrinsic existence and mere existence. But the puzzle presupposes that ordinary beings are incapable of having an experience of mere existence free of the superimposition of intrinsic existence. I shall consider this presupposition in detail in the next section. First, however, I shall briefly consider the solution to the circularity problem proposed by Jinpa.

Jinpa suggests a tentative solution invoking the category of correct assumption (*yid dpyod*) from a traditional Tibetan typology of mental states. As Jinpa acknowledges, this category is controversial, and Tsong kha pa himself gives no indication that he would make this move. The categories of correct assumption (*yid dpyod*) and inference (*rjes dpag*) are branches of the division of types of mental states which apprehend a new object of knowledge without directly or intuitively contacting the object in question.<sup>11</sup> The difference between the pair is that inference involves a true belief which is supported by a reason, whereas correct assumption advances no reason. As Georges Dreyfus observes, correct assumption "is the Tibetan equivalent of Plato's *doxa*, the mere opinion opposed to certain knowledge."<sup>12</sup> Jinpa prefers to gloss '*yid dpyod*' as "intellectual understanding," and he places the term in opposition with what he calls "true cognition" or "true knowledge." He intends the contrast between 'intellectual understanding' and 'true cognition' to mirror the opposition which causes the trouble in the puzzle: the opposition between *possessing a concept of intrinsic existence* and *having a direct, intuitive experience capable of disclosing the difference between intrinsic and mere existence*, respectively. Jinpa's suggestion is that if possessing a concept of intrinsic existence can be comfortably taken as a case of simply having an intellectual understanding of intrinsic existence, and if transitioning from a mere intellectual comprehension (a hypothesis or hunch, as it were) to an empirically confirmed cognition is the sort of process which might be readily understood, then perhaps the inconsistency which creates the puzzle could be reconciled.<sup>13</sup>

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11 Cf. Dreyfus 1997: 373.

12 Dreyfus 1997: 390.

13 Thus, he writes: "[W]e might expect that [Tsong kha pa] would reconcile this seeming paradox [the puzzle]

Recalling that the puzzle is built around a pair of inconsistent claims, what we might say, to elaborate on Jinpa's proposal, is that the pair of claims are merely two descriptions of a single process, that involved in transitioning from an intellectual understanding to a true cognition. The first claim, which states that possession of the concept *intrinsic existence* presupposes having had an experience (independent of concepts) adequate to provide knowledge of the difference between mere and intrinsic existence, describes the process from a particular "direction." It delineates what is required in order to make the successful transition *from* an intellectual understanding *to* a true cognition. On the other hand, the second claim, which states that an experience adequate to provide knowledge of the difference between mere and intrinsic existence presupposes possession of the concept *intrinsic existence*, describes the process as considered from the other direction. It looks back, as it were, from the perspective of an accomplished true cognition and specifies what it would take to reach that end, namely, a hypothesis or hunch that pans out when subjected to rigorous investigation. In this way, the puzzle would seem to vanish. A hypothetical, purely intellectual understanding that *intrinsic existence might be the object of negation* turns out to be confirmed in the practitioner's "laboratory" once meditation leads to the sort of experience suited to empirically ground a comprehension of the distinction between mere and intrinsic existence. Thus, the apparent incoherence or circularity can be dismissed as a matter of perspective in how the process is considered.

However, this solution runs into some problems of terminological imprecision. First, "intellectual understanding" is a rather misleading gloss on "correct assumption," which more accurately translates the Tibetan "'*gid dpyod*.'" "Intellectual understanding" carries the expectation of a contrast with direct, non-conceptual or non-intellectual cognition, whereas "correct assumption" is indeterminate. The assumption designated by "'*gid dpyod*'" might be the sort of thing that could be

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by invoking a popular Tibetan epistemological distinction between cognition by true knowledge and intellectual understanding. In this view, prior to a cognition of emptiness, a Mādhyamika aspirant first develops an intellectual or conceptual understanding of the distinction between existence only and intrinsic existence. However, a *true cognition* of such a distinction arises only subsequent to the actual deconstruction of intrinsic existence" (Jinpa 2002: 53).

confirmed by an immediate sensory awareness, or it might be something that a more indirect chain of inference would eventually establish. For example, if I say that I have merely an intellectual understanding of how to operate a bulldozer, this suggests that perhaps I have read an operator's manual or viewed a training video, but have no practical, firsthand experience behind the controls of an actual bulldozer. On the other hand, one might correctly assume that the green switch powers up the bulldozer. This assumption does not rest on a formal reason (where one knows there is pervasion between the logical subject and predicate), nor is it based on anything like a direct intuition. To use Dreyfus' example, if I am told that my neighbor has been in an accident, and I have not myself witnessed the accident, nor do I have a demonstrative proof of the fact, I may yet assume that it is true, and it may happen that my assumption is correct.<sup>14</sup> As this example suggests, correct assumption captures something like what goes on in probabilistic inference. A difference between a probabilistic inference and the sort of inferences recognized by Buddhist logicians as instances of authoritative knowledge or valid cognitions (*tshad ma, pramāṇa*) is that a probabilistic inference does not involve the natural connection between predicate and evidence (*svabhāvapratibandha*) discussed in the previous chapter. Moreover, the reasoning involved in forming a particular correct assumption could be based on firsthand experience. My correct assumption that the green switch will turn on the bulldozer could be based on a fund of practical knowledge of machines, even though I might never have operated a bulldozer and possess no demonstrative reason for believing that green means "on" in this instance. Furthermore, a correct assumption about which switch turns on the bulldozer could be made in the heat of the moment, in the practical context of being there trying to turn on the bulldozer. So the connotation of Jinpa's "intellectual understanding," which conveys the sense of a contrast with firsthand experience and immediate perception, is misleading.

The second point of imprecision is Jinpa's somewhat vague English expression "true cognition" (variably "true knowledge"). Presumably this term is related to the term *tshad ma* (Sanskrit: *pramāṇa*), often translated as "valid cognition." In the typological scheme from which the category

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Dreyfus 1997: 389.

“correct assumption” is borrowed, the contrast which is set up between valid cognition and correct assumption is something like the contrast between “demonstrative evidence,” on the one side, and on the other an assorted array of cognitions encompassing everything from probabilistic-based inferences, to customary or habitual beliefs, to the phenomena studied in modern epistemological literature under the term “epistemic luck.” The point is that demonstrative evidence, in Buddhist epistemology, can consist in either a direct perception of the object of knowledge, or an inference. Yet only a perceptual cognition could fulfill the semantic expectations built into Jinpa's contrast between “intellectual understanding” and “true cognition.” For, as it will be recalled, in order to generate a solution to the puzzle, the opposition between intellectual understanding and true cognition needs to mirror the opposition between possessing a concept of intrinsic existence and having a direct experience of the kind that could provide knowledge of the difference between intrinsic and mere existence. Nonetheless, an inference can yield demonstrative evidence. But an inference does not provide the right contrast with Jinpa's notion of mere “intellectual understanding.” Nevertheless, if Jinpa's term “true cognition” is supposed to capture the typological contrast between correct assumption and belief based on demonstrative evidence (as it seems intended to do), then a true cognition consisting in an inference ought not be excluded as a semantic possibility.

So Jinpa's solution to the circularity problem is unsatisfactory. There does not seem to be a good reason, from Tsong kha pa's point of view, to make the sort of distinction between “intellectual understanding” and “true cognition” required for Jinpa's solution to work. Of course, Jinpa acknowledges that it might be that Tsong kha pa did not even think of the circularity problem as a “real problem.”<sup>15</sup> I want to pursue this thought through the next section, where I shall consider the textual grounds for thinking that Tsong kha pa would accept the puzzle's presuppositions.

### **The Circularity Problem's Textual Support**

Jinpa suggests that there are textual grounds for assigning to Tsong kha pa the thesis that leads to the circularity problem. As we have seen, that thesis says that ordinary beings are so

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Jinpa 2002: 53.

hopelessly deluded that they never experience things without the distortion from superimposing intrinsic existence on whatever they perceive. Apart from the reference Jinpa gives, it is difficult to find other authors who connect the circularity problem with textual sources. A number of authors who mention the problem all refer back, finally, to a formulation of the problem by Gendun Chopel, while seemingly taking for granted the fact that Tsong kha pa actually accepts the puzzle's presuppositions. In Gendun Chopel's formulation of the puzzle, there are exactly two references to places in Tsong kha pa's writings which allegedly support the claim that the puzzle is a consequence of assumptions Tsong kha pa would accept.<sup>16</sup> One of these references is actually the same one cited by Jinpa. My aim in this section is to appraise whether the texts cited by Jinpa and Gendun Chopel actually show what they are purported to show. My argument is that the texts do not support the idea that Tsong kha pa accepts the presuppositions leading to the circularity problem. Furthermore, one of the texts in question actually points in the opposite direction, i.e., it is part of an argument Tsong kha pa gives to show that ordinary beings do sometimes experience things without the superimposition of intrinsic existence. That is, Tsong kha pa actually thinks ordinary beings sometimes have experiences of mere existence whether or not they have any Madhyamaka training.

Before examining the particular passages cited by Jinpa and Gendun Chopel, it will be worthwhile to note the extent to which an attribution of the circularity problem's main presupposition to Tsong kha pa has seemed compelling for many of Tsong kha pa's readers even without an explicit endorsement of the claim on his part. It may be that the general Madhyamaka tendency to derogate ordinary things and impugn ordinary sensory consciousnesses, as we discussed in a previous chapter,<sup>17</sup> has had an influence on Tsong kha pa's audience's exegetical expectations. For example, Candrakīrti's use of the analogy of a person with eye-disease might suggest that ordinary beings' perceptions are always overlaid with the illusion of intrinsic existence. Ordinary beings must always

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16 Gendun Chopel seems to paraphrase Tsong kha pa, and he does not clearly identify his sources; however, Donald S. Lopez, Jr. has tracked down the source for one of his "quotations," and I shall suggest that the source for Gendun Chopel's other quote is the same passage cited by Jinpa.

17 Cf. chapter two.

apprehend things through a veil of obscuration. Such a reading of Candrakīrti's analogy gains added support if we consider instances from Tsong kha pa's own writings which do not explicitly affirm the claim that ordinary beings never experience things without the superimposition of intrinsic existence, but which nevertheless seem consistent with the general Madhyamaka impugnation of ordinary cognitions. For example, in Tsong kha pa's exposition, in the *dGongs pa rab gsal*, of the basis of the Madhyamaka division of the two truths,<sup>18</sup> he insists on defining conventional things (i.e., "conventional truths") as obscurational truths (*kun rdzob bden pa, saṃvṛti-satya*).<sup>19</sup> And in the *Lhag mthong* section, Tsong kha pa says:

Conventionally, we assert that all phenomena are like a magician's illusion and are, therefore, false in conventional terms. Still, it is not contradictory to posit them as conventional truths (*kun rdzob bden pa, saṃvṛti-satya*). [Candrakīrti's *Commentary on the "Middle Way"*] says, "Because ignorance obscures the nature of phenomena, we call it the concealer (*kun rdzob, saṃvṛti*)." Hence there is no contradiction in something being true for the concealer (*kun rdzob, saṃvṛti*), that is, ignorance, and false for the conventional consciousness (*kun rdzob, saṃvṛti*) with which we refute the essential existence in phenomena.<sup>20</sup>

That is, from the point of view of the conventions employed in Madhyamaka analysis, all things are shown to be illusory to the extent that they appear to be intrinsically existent. Thus, Tsong kha pa seems to endorse the implication of Candrakīrti's analogy. If such an interpretation is correct, then he must think that ordinary beings always apprehend things through a haze of ignorance which "obscures the nature of phenomena."

A number of authors follow this tack in reading Tsong kha pa's account of the way in which ordinary beings' perceptions are affected by ignorance. For example, Guy Newland says:

One of the cornerstones of Tsong Khapa's interpretation of the Consequence system is the notion that ordinary, healthy conventional consciousnesses can be valid, i.e., authoritative (*tshad ma, pramāṇa*), despite being tainted by the effects of ignorance. Consider, for example, an eye consciousness directly apprehending a patch of blue. Autonomists and Consequentialists agree that for such a consciousness the blue appears as something that is inherently existent. Unlike the Autonomists, the Consequentialists consider that it is, on this account, mistaken. Nevertheless, Tsong Khapa claims that such an eye consciousness—despite the mistaken appearance of its object as inherently existent—is completely authoritative and incontrovertible regarding the mere existence of blue. While our ordinary sense of existence is mixed up with the meaning of inherent

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18 Cf. Hopkins 2008: 217 ff.

19 Cf. chapter six below.

20 *GT* 175.



existence, the two can be differentiated via training in logic and meditation.<sup>21</sup>

On Newland's reading, the only hope an ordinary being can have of ever being able to differentiate "our ordinary sense of existence" from the "meaning of inherent existence," i.e., to be able to tell the difference between mere existence and intrinsic existence, is through a long, arduous course of training in logic and meditation. Thus, Newland's reading closely tracks the picture of how ordinary beings must cultivate a realization of emptiness which, as we have seen, can be found in Jinpa's exposition of the circularity problem. Similarly, Sonam Thakchoe asserts: "Although ordinary beings experience false and deceptive conventional truth all the time, they remain oblivious to the inconsistent, and in this sense false and deceptive, nature of conventional truth."<sup>22</sup> Thakchoe thus concludes that, without the intervention of Madhyamaka training, ordinary beings must always apprehend things as intrinsically existent.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, we shall eventually examine some passages in which Tsong kha pa clearly denies the claim that ordinary beings must always apprehend things as intrinsically existent. First, however, let us examine some passages which purportedly provide support for the claim that Tsong kha pa accepts such a thesis. Jinpa says that in the *Legs bshad snying po* "Tsongkhapa states that until and unless the individual himself has [experientially] deconstructed intrinsic existence, no amount of verbal explanation given by a third person can help him clearly distinguish between existence only and intrinsic existence of things and events."<sup>24</sup> This is a paraphrase of the following remarks by Tsong kha pa:

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21 Newland 1999: 81.

22 Thakchoe 2007: 35. For further discussion of Thakchoe's exposition of Tsong kha pa's view of the two truths, see below in chapter six.

23 For further support on this point, Thakchoe quotes Jay Garfield as saying: "Yet one must bear in mind that, according to Nāgārjuna [and also for Tsongkhapa], perception untutored by Mādhyamika philosophy and rigorous practice delivers objects to consciousness as inherently existent. In this sense, the things that we see are wholly false. For most of us, the best that we can do is reason our way into knowing, but not seeing, their true nature. The goal of meditation on emptiness is to bring this knowledge into perceptual experience and, hence, to see things as they are" (Garfield 1995: 208; cf. Thakchoe 2007: 35). Nevertheless, I can find nothing in Garfield's published work to indicate that he would ascribe to Tsong kha pa the view that ordinary beings require training in logic and meditation in order to become able to apprehend things in any way other than as intrinsically existent.

24 Jinpa 2002: 53.

Although the sprout and its relativity are established by natural, conventional, validating cognitions in the mental processes of both protagonist and antagonist, that (type of validating cognition) is confused for the antagonist with (a presumed) validating cognition encountering intrinsic objective existence, and the two are not distinct for him until his (authentic) view is generated. Hence the protagonist is unable to show him (anything established by merely conventional validating cognition) until such time (as his confusion is gone), even though the protagonist himself distinguishes (the two types of validating cognition).<sup>25</sup>

Jinpa takes this passage to be driving at the idea of a kind of incommensurability between Mādhyamika proponents and non-Mādhyamika opponents which would result in a break down in communication. "No amount of verbal explanation," as Jinpa says, will successfully convey to the opponent a comprehension of the difference between mere existence and intrinsic existence, because the opponent is confused by innate ignorance. Everything appears intrinsically existent all of the time to the opponent's "naked eye." So arguing with such opponents is useless until they have "generated" the "(authentic) view." Until then, the opponent is unable to discriminate the demonstrative evidence supporting the proponent's arguments from the false counter-evidence backing up the opponent's own view, since the opponent has not "[experientially] deconstructed intrinsic existence" and thereby gained the ability to distinguish the two forms of evidence (one genuine, the other deceptive). Communication fails, Jinpa seems to suggest, because the opponent and the proponent attempt to rest their respective arguments on incommensurable intuitive experiences. The proponent calls on a direct, intuitive awareness of emptiness (the absence of intrinsic existence) as evidence, whereas the opponent appeals to a direct, intuitive awareness (distorted by innate ignorance) of intrinsic existence. The entity whose ontological status is in question (e.g., a sprout) is consequently apprehended differently by the different individuals. It appears merely existent to Mādhyamikas because they are able to distinguish intrinsic and mere existence on the basis of their experience, Jinpa suggests, whereas it appears intrinsically existent to non-Mādhyamikas since they are unable to experience it in any other way.

But Tsong kha pa's point in this passage is not that Mādhyamikas and their opponents are unable to communicate. The issue here is the metalogical principle which states that a demonstrative

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<sup>25</sup> Thurman's translation. Thurman 1984: 342.

proof (valid cognition) must be such that every part of the inference—logical subject, predicate, and example—must appear and be established in exactly the same way for both the proponent and the opponent. According to this principle, a Mādhyamika would be unable to reason by direct proof with a realist opponent using an autonomous inference. This is a point we have already considered in chapter three. Tsong kha pa's concern in the passage from the *Legs bshad snying po* cited by Jinpa is to underscore the difference between Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas and Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas. Svātantrikas do not allow for the possibility of any form of constructive inferences other than autonomous inferences, whereas Prāsaṅgikas realize that there are other forms of constructive inferences. Tsong kha pa continues:

Although Dialecticists [i.e., Prāsaṅgikas] among themselves may demonstrate methods of establishment (of subjects, etc.) by validating cognitions without deriving them from each other's assertions, (they employ) validating cognitions presented in verbal, conventional terms, and not presented in terms of the intrinsic objectivity of the phenomena (involved). Hence, (the employment of) private dogmatism is inappropriate (for them also).<sup>26</sup>

That is, Prāsaṅgikas, when reasoning amongst themselves about conventional things, might use autonomous inferences without violating the principle restricting autonomous inferences to opponents and proponents for whom things appear and are established in the same way. Nonetheless,

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26 Thurman 1984: 342. If I understand Thurman correctly, *private dogmaticists* hold that the referents of an inference's components must be inter-subjectively identifiable on the basis, ultimately, of privately accessible inner states of intuitive awareness because reference ultimately depends on how things phenomenally appear to one. Thus, according to private dogmaticists, in order for mutual acts of reference to occur it would have to be the case that each epistemic agent has access to an inner state of intuitive awareness with phenomenal content which appears the same for that agent as it does for all other parties involved. But in order for that to be the case, Thurman's argument suggests, inner states of intuitive awareness would have to possess "definite characteristics" (*svalakṣaṇas*) independent of conceptual articulation. However, Thurman explains that Tsong kha pa does not think that any inner state of intuitive awareness possesses a "definite characteristic" (*svalakṣaṇa*) of its own independent of how it is conceptualized. For to accept inner states of intuitive awareness with definite characteristics, Thurman implies, would be tantamount to accepting mind-independent facts of the matter about inner states of intuitive awareness. Thus, if we were to accept Thurman's interpretation of the issue, then we would have a reason for subscribing to something like the standard picture of Tsong kha pa's critique of Svātantrika methodology. As discussed in chapter one, it is realists' commitment to the existence of mind-independent facts of the matter that Mādhyamikas reject. But if Svātantrikas, in clinging to the possibility of using autonomous inferences, were thereby committed to the existence of mind-independent facts of the matter about inner states of intuitive awareness, then Svātantrikas would, after all, be realists. Nevertheless, for reasons similar to those I have already offered to explain why I think realism about the Given and realism about mind-independent facts are logically independent issues, I would resist Thurman's interpretation of Svātantrikas as "private dogmaticists."

Prāsaṅgikas know that it is possible to reason constructively with realists without necessarily using autonomous inferences. We shall consider Tsong kha pa's account of how Mādhyamikas are able to reason constructively with realists, without using autonomous inferences, in chapter six.

In any event, the passage cited by Jinpa as evidence that Tsong kha pa accepts the puzzle's first presupposition seems, rather, to offer better support for my reading which finds Tsong kha pa denying that autonomous inferences can be used in reasoning with realists. A similar conclusion presents itself when we turn to Gendun Chopel's textual support for the idea that Tsong kha pa accepts the puzzle's first presupposition. Gendun Chopel writes:

"In order to understand the view, it is very important to identify the object of negation" is as well known in the mouths of everyone as breath. If this is true, how is it possible to identify true establishment separately before understanding the view? For the Foremost Lama [Tsong kha pa] himself said, "Until one has understood emptiness, it is impossible to ever distinguish mere existence from true existence and, similarly, one cannot distinguish non-true existence from mere nonexistence" and "That is the final reason why there is no commonly appearing subject for Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika." Thus, how can one rely on that pretense of the identification of the object of negation?<sup>27</sup>

The second place where he paraphrases Tsong kha pa ("That is the final reason why there is no commonly appearing subject for Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika.") is probably alluding to the passage cited by Jinpa, which we have just considered. The first paraphrase—"Until one has understood emptiness, it is impossible to ever distinguish mere existence from true existence and, similarly, one cannot distinguish non-true existence from mere nonexistence"—is thought by Lopez to be an allusion to the following passage from the *Lam rim chen mo*:

Before they [ordinary beings?] find the view that things lack intrinsic nature, it is impossible for them to distinguish between mere existence and existence by way of intrinsic character. This is because—as indicated in the passage from Candrakīrti's *Commentary on the "Four Hundred Stanzas"* cited above—they think that anything that exists must exist essentially. As result of this, they take everything that lacks intrinsic nature to be nonexistent, making it impossible for them to posit cause and effect for that which is empty of intrinsic nature.<sup>28</sup>

Here again, context is crucial to how we should understand these remarks. The passage, raised out of context, does seem to support assigning to Tsong kha pa the presupposition that individuals without

<sup>27</sup> Gendun Chopel 2006: 57.

<sup>28</sup> *GT* 260, my brackets. Cf. Lopez 2006: 57, n. 7.

Madhyamaka training are unable to discriminate mere existence and intrinsic existence because they are incapable of having an experience of mere existence free of the superimposition of intrinsic existence. However, what Tsong kha pa actually says is that if we “suppose that those who have not yet understood the view that there is no intrinsic nature *did* apprehend everything as truly existent whenever they thought of any conventional thing,” then there “would be a great impediment to understanding the meaning of the Madhyamaka.”<sup>29</sup> So the remark Gendun Chopel paraphrases is actually the hypothesis to an argument intended to refute the presupposition that individuals with no Madhyamaka training always apprehend everything as though it were intrinsically existent. I will conclude this chapter with an examination of the argument Tsong kha pa gives in this passage.

It will be useful to consider the entire passage alluded to by Gendun Chopel's paraphrase. The passage reads:

[S]uppose that those who have not yet understood the view that there is no intrinsic nature *did* apprehend everything as truly existent whenever they thought of any conventional thing. There would ensue a complete logical breakdown of the need for Mādhyamikas to accept, conventionally, the objects that are posited by the world's ordinary conventional consciousnesses, insofar as those consciousnesses are not affected by the previously explained circumstances that cause error. Therefore, since there would be no way to distinguish the ontological status of conventional objects from the ontological status of a putative divine creator, this erroneous view would be a great impediment to understanding the meaning of the Madhyamaka.<sup>30</sup>

That is, if individuals with no Madhyamaka training could not think of or perceive things in any other way than by thinking of or perceiving things as intrinsically existent, then a conventionalist account of objectivity would collapse. But it is important to specify here that not every form of conventionalist account of objectivity would collapse under such circumstances. To be precise, a conventionalist account of objectivity like the Svātantrika approach to foundationalism, examined in chapter four above, is the form of conventionalist account of objectivity which Tsong kha pa thinks would collapse. It will be recalled that according to the Svātantrika approach, all foundational appearances are corrupted by the superimposition of intrinsic existence.<sup>31</sup> The precise argument against this view that Tsong kha pa makes in the passage we read above takes the following form. If individuals were

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29 *GT* 260.

30 *GT* 260.

31 See above, pp. 69-76.

unable to think of or perceive ordinary things in any other way than by thinking of or perceiving them as intrinsically existent, then individuals would lose the ability to differentiate between ordinary things which do exist and other things which do not exist.

Tsong kha pa illustrates this by the example of some people's believing in a divine creator, or God. If individuals were unable to distinguish intrinsic existence from existence, then those who believed in God would have to think God is intrinsically existent any time they think of God. On the other hand, those who did not believe God exists would have to think of God as an entity which is not intrinsically existent. This would make the believers' and the non-believers' perspectives incommensurable. As we saw in chapter four, it is impossible for individuals taking opposite positions on the question of something's intrinsic existence to find the kind of commensurability necessary to reason with one another. This suggests that if individuals were unable to distinguish intrinsic existence from mere existence within their own experience, then a form of relativism would ensue. People who believed in God, leprechauns, and so forth could not be reasoned with by those who did not believe in such entities.

But the Prāsaṅgika approach, Tsong kha pa thinks, does not leave Mādhyamikas with no way to reason with individuals who believe in things that do not exist, particularly those who believe in intrinsic existence. In the next chapter, we shall consider Tsong kha pa's explanation of how Mādhyamikas are able to reason with realists on the basis of a mode of apprehension whereby things are apprehended without a superimposition of intrinsic existence. Unlike Siderits, Tsong kha pa does not attempt to ground autonomous inferences in the worldly canon of rationality. As argued in chapter three, commensurability cannot be established for Mādhyamikas and realists on the question of intrinsic existence, not even on the basis of a commonly accepted canon of rationality. But Tsong kha pa does think, nevertheless, that realists can be reasoned with on the basis of conventional things. His conception of opponent acknowledged inferences depends on his view that individuals with no Madhyamaka training are sometimes able to apprehend things without the superimposition of intrinsic

existence. That is, such individuals are able to apprehend mere existents as well as apprehending things as intrinsically existent. It is on the basis of a shared mode of apprehension, whereby conventional things are apprehended as mere existents, that Tsong kha pa suggests Mādhyamikas are able to construct inferences in reasoning with non-Mādhyamikas.

## Chapter Six

### Opponent Acknowledged Inferences

The goal of this chapter is to explain Tsong kha pa's conception of how Prāsaṅka-Mādhyamikas are able to use constructive inferences in reasoning with non-Mādhyamikas. According to Tsong kha pa, the Prāsaṅika approach differs from the Svātantrika approach because Prāsaṅikas believe it is possible to establish genuine commensurability with non-Mādhyamikas only to a limited degree. However, this commensurability can be established, Tsong kha pa thinks, on the basis of conventions which both Mādhyamikas and non-Mādhyamikas sincerely accept. While the limitations of this kind of commensurability preclude the use of autonomous inferences, Tsong kha pa holds that Prāsaṅikas are nevertheless able to use a certain type of inferences in reasoning with realists. He thinks that the Prāsaṅika might be able to disabuse realists of their misconception that things are intrinsically existent by pointing out the actual capacities which realists agree are possessed by things. Such a line of argument comprises an opponent acknowledged inference because the opponent acknowledges the reason. That is, realists can be shown, based on what they themselves *and* Mādhyamikas accept about things, that the things which realists believe are intrinsically existent actually are not intrinsically existent.

My argument hinges on Tsong kha pa's presentation of how the Prāsaṅika approach differs from the Svātantrika view in its conception of conventional truth. I shall consider passages in which Tsong kha pa argues that there are three modes of apprehension (*'dzin stang*). In addition to the modes of apprehending things as though they were intrinsically existent and apprehending things as though they were empty of intrinsic existence, Tsong kha pa postulates a mode of apprehending things as merely existent. This mode of apprehension, he believes, is shared by Mādhyamikas and non-Mādhyamikas. The third mode of apprehension is pivotal for Tsong kha pa's understanding of how opponent acknowledged inferences are to be used in reasoning with realists. I shall present Tsong kha



pa's explanation of an example of an opponent acknowledged inference taken from Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārika*. My aim throughout shall be to elucidate the importance, in Tsong kha pa's account of opponent acknowledged inferences, of the idea that non-Mādhyamikas are able to apprehend mere existence.

### **Apprehending Mere Existence**

In the *Lhag mthong chen mo*, Tsong kha pa's discussion of the three modes of apprehension occurs in the context of his exposition of Candrakīrti's repudiation of Bhāvaviveka's use of autonomous inferences. Specifically, Tsong kha pa thinks that Candrakīrti is critiquing Bhāvaviveka's strategy for explaining how Mādhyamikas can use autonomous inferences in reasoning with realists. The argument Tsong kha pa finds in Candrakīrti will be familiar to us from our discussion of incommensurability and autonomous inference in chapter three, and our discussion, in chapter four, of Bhāvaviveka's strategy of grounding inferences in a "general," neutral subject. On Tsong kha pa's reconstruction, whereas Bhāvaviveka thinks it is possible for Mādhyamikas and realists to find a commensurable subject by the method of abstraction, Candrakīrti argues that a commensurable subject is impossible because of the opposition between mistaken consciousnesses and unmistaken consciousnesses.

According to Tsong kha pa, Bhāvaviveka thinks it should be possible for Mādhyamikas to use autonomous inferences in debate with realists because they share common modes of perception. Bhāvaviveka's proposal is premised on the fact that autonomous inferences are possible in instances of disagreements involving diametrically opposed philosophical points-of-view. For example, the Vaiśeṣika says that sound is a product of atomic interactions, whereas the Sāṃkhya regards sound as the manifestation of a seed inherent in primordial matter (*pradhāna*). But both are able to agree that sound exists, unspecified with respect to either of these theories, because it is established by perception. Thus, it is possible to find a commensurable subject established in the same way for both parties in such cases. Bhāvaviveka's suggestion, then, is that by analogy it should be possible to rescind the unique cognitive determinations giving rise to philosophical disagreement between the

Mādhyamika and the realist, thereby allowing them to arrive at a commensurable subject. Bhāvaviveka's proposal thus resembles that advanced by the Yogācāra-Svātantrikas of finding a commensurable subject in a final layer of error which distorts the image and makes the object of perception appear intrinsically existent.<sup>1</sup> This final layer of error is reached by eliminating every imaginative determination (*adhayavasāya*) distinctive of the proponent's and opponent's points-of-view. For Bhāvaviveka, however, as opposed to the Yogācāra-Svātantrikas who think the commensurable subject is an image in sensory consciousness, the commensurable subject is just the mere existent accepted by both Mādhyamika and realist alike.<sup>2</sup> Or that is how Tsong kha pa interprets Candrakīrti's reconstruction of Bhāvaviveka's position, at any rate. For Tsong kha pa explains Bhāvaviveka's strategy thus:

If we were to use "a real eye," for instance, as the subject, it would not be established for us, but if we used "an unreal eye" as the subject, it would not be established for the other party. Hence, giving up such specificity, we must use the *mere* eye or *mere* form as the subject. Why? Because it must be established as commonly appearing to both parties, inasmuch as it is the basis that both Mādhyamikas and essentialists analyze in order to see whether there is a specific quality, such as "being produced from itself." This is what Bhāvaviveka thinks.<sup>3</sup>

But, as Tsong kha pa explains, Candrakīrti argues that the analogy with, e.g., a Vaiśeṣika arguing with a Sāṃkhya does not carry through to the case of a Mādhyamika proponent arguing with a realist. Tsong kha pa says:

[I]n the systems of the advocates of emptiness of intrinsic existence and the opponents of emptiness of intrinsic existence, there is no such thing as an eye or a form as a generality that is established by a valid cognition that is neither a non-mistaken consciousness nor a mistaken consciousness. Its being established by a mistaken consciousness is not established for the opponent, and the Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika proponent's valid cognition does not establish its being found by a non-mistaken consciousness. Hence, the analogy fails.<sup>4</sup>

That is, although in the case of Vaiśeṣikas debating Sāṃkhyas it is possible to retreat to an

1 Cf. above pp. 122-125.

2 Siderits writes: "On the Prāsaṅgika view, conventional truth is a set of brutally given practices which must be taken at face value.... Candrakīrti... reject[s] the possibility that our linguistic practices might allow of alteration and improvement. Once again, conventional practices are thought of as brutally given and to be taken at face value" (Siderits 1989: 242-3). So what I am suggesting is that Siderits' interpretation gets it all backwards, on Tsong kha pa's view. Siderits' Candrakīrti is Tsong kha pa's Bhāvaviveka.

3 GT 253.

4 GT 258.

uninterpreted baseline of perceptual data not affected by the conceptual structuring involved in the respective philosophical positions of the two opponents, such a move is impossible in the case of Mādhyamikas versus realists. This is just the point I argued against Siderits in chapter three.

The key premise in Tsong kha pa's reconstruction of Candrakīrti's argument against Bhāvaviveka's strategy is the opposition between a mistaken consciousness and an unmistaken consciousness where the question of intrinsic existence is concerned. Tsong kha pa alludes to the familiar trope of those suffering from eye disease who see hairs floating in the air before their eyes. Such an eye-consciousness "takes what is nonexistent as existent," and is not a reliable source of knowledge with respect to whether there are actually hairs floating in the air before one's face. On the other hand, someone with healthy eyes can possess an eye-consciousness that is a reliable source of knowledge with respect to the existence or nonexistence of floating hairs. Similarly, the distorted images invoked by Svātantrikas as a commensurable logical subject are erroneous, and, therefore, such sensory consciousnesses "are... not suited to attest that an object exists by virtue of its intrinsic character."<sup>5</sup> However, noble beings "who perceive reality possess [an accurate, non-mistaken] consciousness [with respect to intrinsic existence,] and no one else."<sup>6</sup> But for a noble being, none of the objects of ordinary consciousness appear. He says: "non-mistaken consciousness does not at all apprehend form, sound, and such."<sup>7</sup> So for an unmistaken consciousness there certainly could not appear any object "that does not exist by way of its intrinsic character, yet appears as though it did," such as the Svātantrika proposes to provisionally take for a commensurable subject with the realist. Tsong kha pa concludes: "Therefore, since there is no valid cognition attesting to a subject that is proven to appear in common for both systems, there will inevitably be a fault in any position that you try to prove to an opponent using an autonomous reason."<sup>8</sup> That is, any attempt by a Mādhyamika at using autonomous inferences to reason with realists will involve the fallacy of subject failure

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5 *GT* 256.

6 *Ibid* 257; my brackets.

7 *Ibid* 256.

8 *GT* 257.

(*āśrayāsiddha*).

But if the modes of apprehension of mistaken consciousnesses and unmistaken consciousnesses are thus totally incommensurable, then this threatens to undermine the idea of Mādhyamikas' being able to reason with realists. Since Tsong kha pa wishes to reserve a place for some constructive form of logical argumentation "as part of the process of initially instilling in others the view that knows that things lack intrinsic nature,"<sup>9</sup> he must find a way to explain how the incommensurability of mistaken and unmistaken modes of apprehension does not lead to subject failure *every time* a Mādhyamika puts together an inference with a realist. His response is to argue for a third mode of apprehension possessed by realists and Mādhyamikas alike. He says: "It is completely wrong to claim that before living beings find the view that phenomena are like illusions, any conception they have of something as existing is a conception of true existence."<sup>10</sup> He continues, insisting that there are three ways of apprehending an entity's existence: "(1) apprehending [it] as truly existing, which means apprehending it as having an essential or intrinsic nature; (2) apprehending it as existing in a false way, which is the apprehension that the seedling lacks essential existence, but exists like an illusion; and (3) apprehending it as merely existing in general, without specifying whether it is true or false."<sup>11</sup> In *dGongs pa rab gsal* Tsong kha pa also says:

When the mind operates on an object, there are three [modes of apprehension]:

1. apprehending that the object of observation is intrinsically existent
2. apprehending that it is not intrinsically existent
3. apprehending it without qualifying it as either of these two.

Therefore, although [the object] is not apprehended to be without intrinsic existence, it is not necessarily apprehended to be intrinsically existent.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, he asserts that individuals without Madhyamaka training are capable of perceiving things by means of either the first or the third modes of apprehension:

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9 *GT* 255.

10 *Ibid* 259.

11 *Ibid*.

12 Hopkins 2008: 212-13. Translation slightly modified.

Living beings who have not developed within their mindstreams the view that knows the absence of intrinsic existence possess the third and first modes of apprehension, that is, the apprehension of mere existence and the apprehension of intrinsic existence, but they lack the apprehension of things as like essenceless illusions [i.e., they lack the apprehension of the absence of intrinsic existence]. It is completely wrong to claim that before living beings find the view that phenomena are like illusions, any conception they have of something as existing is a conception of intrinsic existence.<sup>13</sup>

Mādhyamikas, on the other hand, are able to apprehend things by means of all three modes of apprehension, as Tsong kha pa says: "Those who have developed in their mind-streams the view that knows the absence of intrinsic nature may apprehend things as existing in all three ways."<sup>14</sup>

It may help us to understand Tsong kha pa's conception of how these mode of apprehension are related to one another by considering a line of argument developed by Gendun Chopel to refute Tsong kha pa's use of the notion of a third mode of apprehension. Gendun Chopel's argument targets, in particular, the relation Tsong kha pa postulates between the mode of apprehending mere existence and the mode of apprehending intrinsic existence. On Tsong kha pa's account, the mode of apprehending mere existence is the default mode of apprehension for ordinary beings. The mode of apprehending intrinsic existence, on the other hand, is a superimposition which is logically posterior to the default. The default object of apprehension is required, in Tsong kha pa's view, as the basis of designation (*gdags gzhi*) for the apprehension of intrinsic existence. This picture is crucial to Tsong kha pa's account of opponent acknowledged inferences because the default provides a foundation that is commensurable for Mādhyamikas and non-Mādhyamikas. We shall see how the default figures in Tsong kha pa's account of opponent acknowledged inferences in the next part of this section. But in order to gain a better comprehension of Tsong kha pa's view that the mode of apprehending mere existence is the default, it will be worthwhile to examine Gendun Chopel's objection in some detail.

Gendun Chopel argues that the order of the relation Tsong kha pa postulates between apprehending mere existence and apprehending intrinsic existence must be reversed. He urges that ordinary beings' default mode of apprehension is the mode of apprehending intrinsic existence, which

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13 *GT* 259, translation slightly modified.

14 *Ibid* 260.

means that in order to refute intrinsic existence it is necessary to refute ordinary things as they immediately appear. Since the default appearances of things would have to be refuted on Gendun Chopel's line of thought, Tsong kha pa's use of the distinction between mere existence and intrinsic existence to secure commensurability between Mādhyamikas and non-Mādhyamikas would not work.

Gendun Chopel's argument occurs in a series of remarks<sup>15</sup> arranged sequentially in his *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan*. The argument is found in remarks 36-42.<sup>16</sup> There are three stages to the argument. The first stage presents the picture of how Tsong kha pa thinks apprehending mere existence and apprehending intrinsic existence are related. On this picture, as suggested above, the mode of apprehending mere existence is a sort of "default" state for non-Mādhyamikas, and the mode of apprehending intrinsic existence is a special state that a person slips into whenever strong emotions are stimulated by events occurring in his or her surroundings. In this stage of the argument, Gendun Chopel raises a skeptical problem which undermines this picture. Let us consider this stage of the argument briefly before turning to the other stages.

Gendun Chopel's interrogation of Tsong kha pa's picture begins with the examination of a pedagogical technique used by teachers in Tsong kha pa's tradition to help students distinguish between the merely existent conventional "I" and the intrinsically existent "I" posited by innate ignorance. The technique is illustrated by Gen Lamrimpa in the following excerpt from a teaching:

What comes to mind when you think of yourself? Does anything appear at all? Bring to mind the thought "I" and see what arises to the mind in terms of the mode of appearance of yourself. What would happen if someone said "You scoundrel"? Do you have a sense of "I" that arises in response to that? And what happens

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15 I think it is fair to compare the literary form of Gendun Chopel's *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan* to that of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. That is, the text consists of a series of numbered "remarks." As David Stern explains, with respect to the remarks that comprise the *Philosophical Investigations*: "In reading Wittgenstein, it is essential to keep in mind that his characteristic unit of writing was not the essay or the book, but the 'remark' (*Bemerkung*). A remark is a unit of text that can be as short as a single sentence or as long as a sequence of paragraphs spanning several pages" (Stern 2004: xiii). Nevertheless, it is also important to bear in mind that we have Gendun Chopel's text only in the form of notes compiled by his student, Zla ba bzang po. Cf. Lopez 2006: 220-229.

16 Given the similarity in the literary form of Gendun Chopel's book and Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, noted above, it should be no surprise that they parallel one another in another way. Just as it is difficult to pinpoint exactly where an argument begins or ends in the *Philosophical Investigations*, it is likewise difficult to do so in the case of the *Klu sgrub dgongs rgyan*. So my specification of the argument's parameters is admittedly and unavoidably going to appear arbitrary to some.

if someone comes and says, "You are a marvelous person"? Do you experience a sense of "I" in response to that? Doesn't there arise a very tangible, firm sense of "I am"? Try to observe very carefully the manner in which your "I" appears on such occasions. If it appears as something quite tangible, it seems truly existent.<sup>17</sup>

The idea here seems to be that the transition from apprehending things as merely existent to apprehending them as intrinsically existent is triggered by situations which alter one's perspective on the things in question. In the example of one's sense of "I," one's perspective seems to shift in relation to whether the "I" is being praised or condemned. This indicates a close connection between shifts in one's mode of apprehension of the "I" and the strong emotional attachments one has to a particular perspective on one's sense of "I." Another type of example of the transition between modes of apprehension which Gendun Chopel discusses is the example of questioning one's perception of a thing under conditions where one experiences a sense of certainty that one's perception is accurate. If someone sees an object and believes it is a pot, but someone else says, "That is not a pot," this might trigger an emotional response in the person who believes it is a pot. His conviction that he is right could be described as surging up, and there seems to be a connection between his sense of "I" and his conviction that he is right. What examples like these seem to suggest is a criterion for distinguishing times when modes of apprehending mere existence are active from times when modes of apprehending intrinsic existence are active. The criterion would be that transitions from apprehending mere existence to apprehending intrinsic existence are marked by alterations in one's affective state. Buddhist psychology recognizes three types of feeling (*vedanā, tshor ba*), pleasure (*sukha*), pain (*duḥkha*), and neutral feeling (*aduḥkhāsukha*).<sup>18</sup> Transitions between the modes of apprehension, as the examples seem to indicate, correspond to changes in the associated feelings. Pleasure and pain are associated with apprehending intrinsic existence, whereas neutral feeling is associated with apprehending mere existence.

While this criterion may be reliable, the first stage of Gendun Chopel's argument challenges

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17 Gen Lamrimpa, trans. B. Alan Wallace 1999: 78-9. Gendun Chopel bases what could seem to be a stinging criticism of the distinction between mere existence and intrinsic existence on this type of pedagogical device. See chapter five for further discussion.

18 Cf. Hopkins 1983: 239-241.

the very premise that there is even a coherent distinction to be drawn between apprehending mere existence and apprehending intrinsic existence. According to Tsong kha pa, as we have seen, the crucial difference between the two modes of apprehending is that one of them is essentially erroneous. Any apprehension of intrinsic existence is an apprehension which involves the imputation of something that does not really exist. So no apprehension of intrinsic existence could be a valid cognition. Thus, the transition from apprehending mere existence to apprehending intrinsic existence is marked by an alteration in the epistemic status of one's cognition. A valid cognition becomes an invalid cognition. Nevertheless, Gendun Chopel suggests that because transitions between modes of apprehension are marked by changes in the intensity and vivacity of one's emotional state, it should seem unlikely that such changes in emotional state should correspond to changes in one's epistemic reliability. If anything, he thinks, the reliability of one's cognition should be confirmed by the raised intensity of one's emotions. He says: "If this ordinary mind that thinks "I" is valid, then the mind thinking "I" that is produced when someone says "You are a thief" would simply be more valid."<sup>19</sup> And he concludes: "Therefore, according to their system, it seems that weak thoughts are valid, and when that very mind becomes stronger, like a shift in the wind, it turns into a conception of true existence. How strange!"<sup>20</sup>

The second stage of Gendun Chopel's argument aims to refute a different position than that critiqued in the first stage. In the second stage, the target of criticism seems to be a position to which Gendun Chopel's opponent retreats after the attack in the first stage. The position to which the opponent retreats will be familiar to us. It is the view that individuals with no Madhyamaka training completely lack the capacity to discriminate phenomenologically between apprehending mere existence and apprehending intrinsic existence. Gendun Chopel writes: "Moreover, some say that when a valid form of awareness is produced that thinks, "A pot exists," a conception of true existence is simultaneously produced, which thinks, "The pot exists as truly established," but that it is difficult to

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19 Lopez 2006: 57.

20 *Ibid.*



identify them separately."<sup>21</sup> The response Gendun Chopel offers to this defense provides a clear indication of his own view. He rejects the idea that there is any distinction to be made between intrinsic existence and mere existence, and he thinks that when Mādhyamikas refute intrinsic existence this must consist in the repudiation of ordinary things. Nonetheless, his argument here concedes the opponent's thesis that mere existence and intrinsic existence are indistinguishable for ordinary beings. As Gendun Chopel playfully responds: "If one is certain to arrive whenever the other arrives, then when they are refuted, they should be refuted equally."<sup>22</sup> That is, the opponent's thesis leads to the same conclusion that Gendun Chopel himself advocates, which is that the refutation of intrinsic existence must consist in the refutation of ordinary things.

In the third stage of Gendun Chopel's argument, he resists the notion that the mode of apprehending mere existence is the default condition for ordinary beings. Here his criticism turns against the criterion articulated above for recognizing transitions between modes of apprehension. Citing a number of phenomena which seem to primarily engage one's neutral affective states rather than one's positive or negative emotions, and which at any rate do not ordinarily evoke particularly intense emotions, he argues that the frequency of such occurrences is greater than the frequency with which phenomena evoking intense positive or negative emotions occur. He says:

The mind that thinks, "It is dawn" is valid. The mind that thinks, "I am tying my belt" is valid. In the same way, if all the thoughts like "I am drinking tea" and "I am eating tsampa" are simply valid, then among all the thoughts that fill a day, there is not even one thing to refute.<sup>23</sup>

However, the mode of apprehending intrinsic existence is a condition to which beings have "grown accustomed... from time immemorial," so it seems that the frequency of occurrences of times when this mode is active should be higher than the frequency of occurrences of apprehending mere existence.<sup>24</sup> He argues thus:

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21 *Ibid.*

22 Lopez 2006: 58.

23 Lopez 2006: 58.

24 Gendun Chopel writes: "If [apprehending intrinsic existence]... does not occur more than a couple of times a day, then it is most amazing" (Gendun Chopel 2006: 58).

Thoughts of whatever you are most accustomed to are produced first. For example, as is stated in the treatises on valid knowledge, when you see your father coming, who is also a brahmin and a teacher, the first thought produced is, "My father is coming." Such thoughts as "The teacher is coming" or "A brahmin is coming" do not appear to the mind. Because we have become accustomed from time immemorial to this mind which is the conception of true existence, we must decide that when we see a pot, the mind that is produced first is the conception of the true existence of the pot.<sup>25</sup>

So although the default is whatever mode of apprehension occurs with the greatest regularity, nevertheless the mode of apprehension that occurs with the greatest regularity must be that to which beings are most readily disposed through habits and conditioning. Moreover, the mode of apprehending intrinsic existence operates through the force of the predispositions acquired "from time immemorial." Thus, Gendun Chopel concludes, the default mode of apprehension must be the mode of apprehending things as intrinsically existent, regardless of whatever emotional states are associated with it.

The argument does not pretend to refute the claim that there is a mode of apprehension whereby the mere existence of things is apprehended. But it contradicts the role of such a mode of apprehension in Tsong kha pa's account. Gendun Chopel's argument suggests that apprehensions of intrinsic existence are the default rather than apprehensions of mere existence. If this were correct, then as shall become clear below when we consider opponent acknowledged inferences, Tsong kha pa's strategy of using the notion of mere existence to address the problem of incommensurability between Mādhyamikas and non-Mādhyamikas would be thwarted. This is because it can hardly be imagined that a mode of apprehension which becomes active no more than "a couple of times a day" could suffice for the purposes of establishing commensurability between Mādhyamikas and non-Mādhyamikas. Later I shall suggest a way for Tsong kha pa to respond to Gendun Chopel's argument. But, for now, let us complete this chapter by taking a detailed look at Tsong kha pa's account of opponent acknowledged inferences.

### **Reasoning with People Who "See" Things That Aren't There**

The aim of this final part of the chapter is to provide a detailed explication of Tsong kha pa's

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25 Lopez 2006: 58.

account of opponent acknowledged inferences. My focus shall be on the section in the *Lhag mthong chen mo* where Tsong kha pa explains how opponent acknowledged inferences work despite the incommensurability which prevents Mādhyamikas from using autonomous inferences with non-Mādhyamikas. Tsong kha pa here analyzes a constructive inference proposed by Nāgārjuna. Tsong kha pa's aim in giving this analysis is to show that the argument does not have to meet the strict commensurability requirements for autonomous inferences in order to succeed. My goal in commenting on Tsong kha pa's analysis of the argument is to clarify how important it is for his account that all parties to an inference share the mode of apprehending mere existence as their default mode of apprehension.

Tsong kha pa uses the following argument from Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* as an example of an opponent acknowledged inference:

Sight does not see  
Its own self.  
How can what does not see itself  
See something else?<sup>26</sup>

Tsong kha pa explains how to construe this as a standard inference of the form 'S is P because E'. The subject is *seeing*, the predicate in question is *is intrinsically existent*, and the reason why the predicate does not apply is *because the eye does not see itself*. That is, the thesis which the Mādhyamika seeks to establish is "Seeing is not intrinsically existent because the eye does not see itself." The claim, "Seeing is not intrinsically existent," is here a gloss on Nāgārjuna's conclusion that sight cannot "see something else" (line 4). The reason why *not being able to see something other than itself* can be glossed with *seeing is not intrinsically existent* is that if the eye's ability to see were intrinsically existent, then it would be an immutable power which operates under any circumstances regardless of whatever object it is supposed to have to operate on. Thus, if *seeing* were intrinsically existent, then it would have to operate on the eye itself, as well as operating on all other objects.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 3.2, trans. Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee, cf. *GT* 268.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. chapter one for further discussion.

But our primary concern here is not with the cogency of this particular argument. Our aim here is to explain exactly how Tsong kha pa takes this as a clear example of an opponent acknowledged inference. He states that it is an opponent acknowledged inference because “the reason is accepted by the other party while Mādhyamikas also accept the thesis.”<sup>28</sup> That is, the Mādhyamika accepts the subject, the predicate, *and* the reason. So the reason is accepted by both parties, which means that it must be apprehended as merely existent by both parties. The reason, to reiterate, is *because the eye does not see itself*. This reason does not involve an intrinsically existent eye or intrinsically existent seeing. It is an everyday fact accepted on the basis of worldly conventions that an eye cannot see itself. The best that an eye can do is to see images of itself in mirrors, water, and so forth.

Tsong kha pa stresses that Mādhyamikas accept the thesis because he wants to emphasize the difference between opponent acknowledged inferences and *prāsaṅgas*. The proponent of a *prāsaṅga* does not commit to any thesis.<sup>29</sup> But the proponent of an opponent acknowledged inference seeks to establish the thesis contained in the inference, e.g., that seeing is not intrinsically existent. The opponent, on the other hand, will acknowledge only the reason, at least initially. Of course, if the inference is adequate and the opponent rational, then this state of affairs should be temporary. The aim of advancing an inference is, after all, to persuade someone of the truth of one's thesis.

Nevertheless, Tsong kha pa takes the utmost care to be clear that the inference advanced by the Mādhyamika is not an autonomous inference. That is, the Mādhyamika is not constrained by the requirement for autonomous inferences which demands that every part of the inference appear and be established in exactly the same way for all parties. If Mādhyamikas *were* constrained by this requirement, as Svātantrikas suppose they are, then the inference's cogency would be dissolved. The subject, *seeing*, which is apprehended by realists as intrinsically existent, would also have to be apprehended as intrinsically existent by the Mādhyamika. But how could the Mādhyamika then argue cogently, or even intelligibly, that *intrinsically existent seeing is not intrinsically existent*? This is why

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28 *GT* 268.

29 For further discussion of *prāsaṅgas*, see chapter one.

he insists that an opponent acknowledged inference does not require perfect commensurability.<sup>30</sup> The only part of the inference that must be commensurate is the reason, and commensurability is obtained by the fact that the reason consists in a conventional truth about a merely existent entity. For, as we have seen, Tsong kha pa believes individuals without Madhyamaka training as well as Mādhyamikas can apprehend mere existents. An analogy might help us gain a clearer understanding of the method Tsong kha pa is proposing. Let us consider the example of a father attempting to persuade his daughter that there is not a monster under the bed. Even though father and daughter disagree about whether there is a monster under the bed, it should nonetheless be the case that, when the father shines a flashlight under the bed, both he and his daughter will have the same experience of whatever is under the bed.

By relinquishing the requirement for autonomous inferences, however, do not Mādhyamikas run the risk of subject failure (*āśrayāsiddha*)<sup>31</sup>? That is, even if the opponent accepts the reason in the same way as the Mādhyamika, this does not mean that the opponent will accept that the predicate *is not intrinsically existent* applies to a merely existent subject. To use Tsong kha pa's example, the opponent apprehends *seeing* as though it were an intrinsically existent activity of the eye. So it would seem that the opponent does not perceive the same subject as the Mādhyamika. For the Mādhyamika, the *seeing* in question is not intrinsically existent but merely existent. So the Mādhyamika's subject does not exist for the opponent, and vice versa.

This is like the puzzle that arises if we ask, with regard to the monster under the bed example, "Is the father's non-existent monster the same as the daughter's existent monster?" For the father advances a thesis: "The monster under your bed is not real." His thesis has a logical subject, and the question we have to ask is whether the father's logical subject is the same as the logical subject of the daughter's thesis: "The monster under my bed is real." But how could they be the same if the father is correct and there *is* no monster? Of course, the standard approach of modern logicians to

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30 Cf. *GT* 269, toward the bottom of the page.

31 Cf. chapter one for further discussion of the fallacy of subject failure, or unestablished basis.

puzzles about non-denoting expressions is to replace apparently singular referring expressions with definite descriptions in order to render the exact logical forms of the statements in question more perspicuous. Thus: "The monster under your bed is not real," rendered more precisely, says "There is something such that it is under your bed and it is a monster and it is not real." And this can be further clarified by construing the apparent predicate "is real" as a covert existential quantifier. So, in simpler form, what the father's statement actually says is "There is something such that it is under your bed and it is a monster." This will be false just in case, as the father avers, whatever is under the girl's bed fails to satisfy the predicate "is a monster." What this strategy reveals is that the same set of circumstances will make either the father's or the daughter's thesis true, even though they are contradictory existence claims. For the daughter's thesis, rendered more perspicuously, states "There is something such that it is under my bed and it is a monster." The father's and daughter's propositions are the same except for accepting and denying, respectively, that the predicate *is a monster* applies to whatever is under the bed. The same set of objects in the world has to be checked to determine whether the father or the daughter is correct. That is, an inspection under the girl's bed with a flashlight is what is called for. If the daughter is correct, then the set of objects thus inspected will include something that is a monster, and if the father is correct then it will not. (And let us hope that the father is correct, so that everyone can get some sleep!)

Similarly, with respect to the Mādhyamika's and the realist's disagreement about the logical subject's intrinsic existence, the same set of entities has to be inspected. If the realist is correct, then the set of objects under investigation will include something that is intrinsically existent, and if the Mādhyamika is correct then the set of objects under investigation will consist only of merely existent entities, i.e., conventional things. Either way, the problem of reference failure cannot arise, since both sides accept that there is definitely a set of objects to be put under investigation. As Tsong kha pa says:

The opponents themselves accept the existence of those subjects, such as the eye, as well as the reasons and

examples. Therefore, why should the Mādhyamika have to prove them?<sup>32</sup>

That is, to again use the analogy of the father reasoning with his daughter, why should the father have to prove that what the flashlight makes visible underneath the bed is really what is there (or not there)? If the little girl insists that a monster is visible when the flashlight is shone under the bed, then there is no hope of reasoning with her. As Tsong kha pa says of a realist who refuses to accept the results of a thorough investigation, "it would be pointless to argue with them. Who could ever help them?"<sup>33</sup>

So Tsong kha pa's view that apprehensions of mere existence are the default for ordinary beings is the key to Tsong kha pa's understanding of opponent acknowledged inferences. Without being able to make an appeal to something that all parties to an inference can sincerely accept, it would not be possible to reason with people who see things that do not really exist.

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32 *GT 270*.

33 *GT 270*.

# Conclusion

The power of the status quo puts up the façades into which our consciousness crashes. It must seek to crash through them.

Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*

In this dissertation, I have attempted to pull away from one line of criticism of the Svātantrika approach which ties a failure to deliver reason from its own coercive character to the idea that Svātantrika methodology involves a commitment to the Given, and thereby to a subtle form of intrinsic existence. Another line of criticism to which I have attempted to direct our attention, instead, comes to grips with Svātantrika methodology as a therapeutic technique. Here the criticism is not that Svātantrikas' use of rationality is uncritical in the sense that they themselves are led thereby to reify objective facts. The criticism is, however, that as a therapeutic technique the Svātantrika approach to the use of rationality proves ineffective against realism's defenses and might even inadvertently bolster the realist's resistances. In addition to critiquing a standard criticism of Svātantrika methodology and redirecting that critical energy, I have also attempted to explain why Tsong kha pa's own approach to the use of rationality might be deemed more successful than the Svātantrika approach. This effort culminates in the interpretation of Tsong kha pa's account of opponent acknowledged inference I presented above in chapter six. My attempt has been to show the way in which Tsong kha pa *fully endorses* the basic apparatus of foundationalist epistemology while avoiding the Svātantrikas' procedural errors, resting as they do on the problematic presupposition that every mode of apprehension available to ordinary beings is ultimately imbricated in realism's defense.

I shall not seek in this conclusion to speak the final word in response to the question whether Tsong kha pa's own account of rationality succeeds or fails to attain, as Theodor Adorno might put it, a critical knowledge of its own coercive character.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it may prove useful, as a means to clarifying some issues which readers might yet feel the dissertation leaves vague or undefined, if I

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<sup>1</sup> As Adorno says, "the coercion of thought is the medium of its deliverance" (Cf. Adorno 1973: 48).



include here a few words about Tsong kha pa's use of parameterization and his conception of the Madhyamaka doctrine of the two truths. And, finally, I shall close with a brief prospectus for some further research which some readers might yet wish to explore.

### **Tsong kha pa's Use of Parameterization and the Two Truths**

The aim here is to further elucidate the connection between Tsong kha pa's account of opponent acknowledged inference and his use of parameterization. We shall consider an example which I think usefully illustrates Tsong kha pa's use of parameterization. Then we shall briefly consider an objection to Tsong kha pa's approach, to which I respond by elaborating on how Tsong kha pa's use of parameterization is illuminated by the interpretation of his view presented in the chapters above. Nevertheless, the impetus that exists in current trends among scholars to import Svātantrika presuppositions into the interpretation of Tsong kha pa cannot be ignored. I shall close the section with a case study analyzing the sort of confusion this can generate as an obstacle to understanding Tsong kha pa's account of the two truths.

I shall begin by considering an example which Thupten Jinpa uses to illustrate Tsong kha pa's use of parameterization:

If there is a flowerpot in front of the speaker, it should be observable; when it cannot be seen, we can safely conclude that there is no such object in front of the speaker. In this context, there is a coincidence between not finding or not observing an object on the one hand, and finding its absence on the other. This is, however, not the case with, for instance, the presence of a ghost (supposing such things exist!) in front of the speaker. In the latter case, the non-observance of it simply cannot be taken as adequate grounds for its non-existence.<sup>2</sup>

That is, a flowerpot sitting before one is the right sort of thing to be detected by an ordinary person using an authoritative means of obtaining knowledge of the flowerpot's existence, e.g., vision or touch, in most cases. If an ordinary person employs some such cognitive instrument then one may justifiably expect to find the flowerpot, supposing there is one. And if there is no flowerpot sitting before one, the same cognitive instrument's failure to detect a flowerpot is entitled to stand as evidence of the flowerpot's non-existence, assuming that one's eyes, say, are not defective or

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<sup>2</sup> Jinpa 2002: 54.

deceived. On the other hand, a ghost is the wrong sort of thing to be detected by an ordinary person using, say, his or her eyes, so not seeing a ghost does not constitute evidence that there is no ghost in the room. Similarly, intrinsic existence is the right sort of thing to be detected by someone using Madhyamaka analysis<sup>3</sup> or by a noble one's non-conceptual awareness. Thus, intrinsic existence's failure to appear in either of these contexts is evidence for the non-existence of intrinsic existence. Nevertheless, a flowerpot, say, is the wrong sort of thing to be detected by Madhyamaka analysis or by a noble one's non-conceptual awareness, so not finding a flowerpot, or other ordinary things, in these contexts does not constitute evidence for the non-existence of such ordinary things.

Gendun Chopel suggests that the distinction Tsong kha pa wishes to make is problematic. He writes:

The nonobservation of the suitable to appear is the final proof of nonexistence. However, no one seems to know the dividing line between how much is suitable to appear and how much is not suitable to appear. Thus, someone endowed with superknowledge does not see a flesh-eating ghost in that house; and therefore, because the suitable to appear is not observed, it is established that there is no flesh-eating ghost. Furthermore, according to a sūtra, a noble being who has attained a bodhisattva level and has great superknowledge sees in the width of the earth [touched] by just the wheel of a chariot sentient beings equal to the particles of the earth. If that is the case, one must differentiate the degrees of this thing being suitable to appear and this thing being unsuitable to appear in accordance with the difference in levels of superknowledge or realization. The nonobservation of the suitable to appear that is agreed upon with one voice by many millions of vulgar common beings is just a portion of the nonobservation of the suitable to appear. Therefore, one must understand that the nonexistence which they prove is just one side of nonexistence.<sup>4</sup>

While Gendun Chopel's remarks are somewhat elliptical, the point seems to be that a comparison of the cognitive powers of ordinary beings with noble ones is not such as to bring comfort to Tsong kha pa's distinction between mere existence and intrinsic existence. The first part of Gendun Chopel's argument consists in observing that ascent through the various levels of superknowledge and realization should involve an expansion of one's awareness. More and more things ought to become "suitable to appear," which are not suitable to appear to ordinary beings, such as flesh-eating ghosts and microcosmic populations. One does not expect that such an expansion of awareness should also

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3 By "Madhyamaka analysis" I mean the sort of identity-difference analysis inspired by Buddhist philosophers' earlier use of mereological analysis. Cf. *GT* 277-87. Also cf. Tillemans 1982.

4 Gendun Chopel 2006: 84.

involve a contraction, as Tsong kha pa's distinction would require. That is, ordinary things like flowerpots should not cease to be suitable to appear as one's consciousness expands. The second part of Gendun Chopel's argument consists in noting that, as one's consciousness expands, more and more of the things which are suitable to appear are simply not observed, i.e., Gendun Chopel concurs with the phenomenological account Tsong kha pa accepts of what it is like to perceive the absence of intrinsic existence. That is, things do not appear in the context of a noble one's perceptual apprehension. The implication of both parts of Gendun Chopel's argument is that a noble one's not observing ordinary things does constitute evidence that such things do not exist.

Nevertheless, Tsong kha pa's use of parameterization rests on the distinction he draws between the three modes of apprehension. 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. 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." Moreover, the other two modes of apprehension contain no rules for propositions about mere x's which are indeterminate with respect to the question of intrinsic existence. So propositions positing mere x's unqualified as to whether or not they are intrinsically existent are not true-or-false from the point of view of mistaken and unmistaken consciousnesses. This explains why the non-appearance of merely existent x's from the point of view of the unmistaken mode does not refute the existence of merely existent x's. Moreover, because the subject term "x" in propositions of the form "there are intrinsically existent x's" and "there are x's" is structurally equivalent in the contexts of the different styles of reasoning,<sup>5</sup> it is thus possible from the point of view of the mistaken mode of apprehension

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5 The structural equivalence of merely existent entities and intrinsically existent entities is alluded to by Tsong

to superimpose “intrinsically existent x” onto “x”.

Nonetheless, missing the connection between Tsong kha pa's use of parameterization and the incommensurability of the *three* modes of apprehension, some authors have construed Tsong kha pa's parameterization through the lens of a literal interpretation of the Madhyamaka impugning of ordinary things.<sup>6</sup> That is, on the picture some authors read into Tsong kha pa, the fact that ordinary things do not exist in the same way as they appear comes to mean that things possess an insubstantial mode of existence. Once they are perceived by a mind free of cognitive distortion, things appear illusory, like façades. I suggest that this sort of interpretation of Tsong kha pa's view is misleading. It results in a picture of Tsong kha pa's view which he could not accept. By treating intrinsic existence and mere existence as modes of existence, rather than as objects of modes of apprehension, such an interpretation ineluctably converts the kind of existence which Tsong kha pa attributes to ordinary things into a kind of quasi-existence, as we shall see in the following case study of an exposition of Tsong kha pa's view which goes awry in its depiction of Tsong kha pa's use of parameterization.

#### The Radio Channel Analogy

Guy Newland, in his exposition of Tsong kha pa's view, uses the example of two radio stations<sup>7</sup> to explain Tsong kha pa's approach to the issue that noble ones do not apprehend ordinary things when realizing emptiness, although the existence of ordinary things would seem to imply that they ought to appear whenever any valid cognition comes to be trained on them. Newland says:

Channel A is “all things considered radio.” This is our regular, *conventional* channel and on it we get all kinds of information about the diversity and complexity of the world.

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Normally we *only* listen to this station, so we take it all at face value and without deeper scrutiny. We are

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kha pa: “For example, it is like the worldly convention, “Some are here; some are not here.” The term “some” is the same, but no one supposes that the some who are here and the some who are not here are the same. So also, the “non-mistaken” quality of the sensory consciousnesses is posited in terms of an ordinary worldly consciousness; Mādhyamikas do not assert them to be non-mistaken. It is like the statement by Candrakīrti, “Those... are true for the world.”” (*GT* 174).

6 As Jinpa observes, “Madhyamaka writings abound with metaphors such as mirages, echoes, mirror images, bubbles, reflections of the moon in water, hallucinatory ghost towns, etc. to underline th[e] illusion-like nature of all things” (Jinpa 2002: 163).

7 Cf. Newland 2008.

unaware that there is or could be any other channel. But in fact there is a second station, broadcast on channel B, the *ultimate* perspective. Channel B's programming is "all emptiness, all the time radio."

...

Channel B, emptiness radio, adds new information and a deeper perspective on what is being discussed on the conventional channel. It shows that the things discussed on channel A definitely do not exist in the way that they are ordinarily presented.<sup>8</sup>

To represent the picture Newland's example gives us, we can begin by considering how channel A is analogous to ordinary beings' distorted perceptions of ordinary things like sprouts and flowerpots in which those things appear to be intrinsically existent. Channel B, on the other hand, represents noble ones' apprehension of the absence of intrinsic existence. Things like intrinsically existent sprouts and flowerpots do not ever appear for a noble one, and the absence of intrinsic existence never appears for ordinary beings, just as channel A's programming is not heard on channel B and vice versa.

But what precisely is the relationship between the "two channels' programming"? Newland's radio analogy is consistent with Tsong kha pa's aim to avoid having the perceptions of ordinary beings and noble ones contradict one another.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the example seems to indicate that Tsong kha pa's parameterization is primarily ontological in nature. Thus, the difference between "channel A" and "channel B" is that B, "emptiness radio," reveals "a deeper perspective" on conventional things by showing that they "definitely do not exist in the way that they are ordinarily presented." In other words, while conventional things appear to exist intrinsically, noble ones perceive that things do not exist in that way but have another mode of existence. This would indicate that the Madhyamaka derogation of ordinary things has to be understood literally. Or we might avoid construing the radio analogy's picture as implying the full-blown nihilistic version of a literal interpretation of Madhyamaka. Thus, we might wish to say only that conventional things can possess nothing but a kind of *quasi-existence* compared with the sort of existence we ordinarily attribute to them. In Newland's words:

A pervasive sense that things are real and solid and exist just as they appear is woven right into the fabric of the world as we experience it. While tables do exist, we have yet to see them just as they are. Our very perception of them—while a valid source of information—is at the same time contaminated with a layer of distortion. That distortion is the appearance of the table as something that is able to be there on its own

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8 Newland 2008: 45.

9 Cf. Thakchoe 2007: 11-12.

power, something that exists in and of itself.<sup>10</sup>

So, on this sort of reading, we might conclude that Tsong kha pa does not think that things like tables are real and solid. Based on the contrast we have here between “ordinary” (i.e., intrinsic) existence and mere existence, if we were to press in favor of such a reading of Tsong kha pa, with all of its implications, then we might consider the following phenomenological description as offering an apt portrayal of how Tsong kha pa could think of the comparison between how things appear before and after a realization of emptiness. The following is taken from Sean Kelly's discussion of seeing things in Merleau-Ponty:

Imagine visiting an old western movie set. When you first arrive, you might be amazed at how realistic everything looks. As you walk down the street, it really seems as though buildings rise up on either side. The bank really looks like it is a bank; the saloon really looks like it is a saloon; it really seems as though you've stepped into the Old West. Movie sets are constructed to fool you this way.

But they are movie sets after all, and a little bit of exploration reveals this fact. Walking through the saloon doors is nothing like walking into a saloon. The anticipation of a cool sarsaparilla, and even the anticipation of a room with chairs in it and a bar, is immediately frustrated in the movie set saloon. When you walk through the doors you see nothing but the supporting apparatus for the saloon façade and perhaps some stage materials hidden away. The same for what earlier looked to be a bank. It is revealed instead as a very convincing face supported by some two-by-fours and bags of sand. And so on for every structure on the street.

If you explore the set enough in this way, then an amazing thing can happen. Now as you walk down the street, it doesn't look realistic at all. Instead of buildings on either side, it looks as if there are mere façades. Instead of feeling as if you're in the Old West, it feels as if you're on an Old West movie set. This is not because you can see through the doors to their empty backsides, or, indeed, because you “see” anything different at all (at least in one very limited sense of “to see”). Let us stipulate, in fact, that every light ray cast onto your retina is exactly the same as it was when you first arrived on the set. Still, your experience of the set can change, a gestalt shift can occur, so that the whole thing looks like a set full of façades instead of an Old West town.<sup>11</sup>

Kelly's description of what it is like to realize that an Old West town is really a façade, and particularly of how the props come to look as the realization truly sinks in, seems to resonate well with the possible picture of Tsong kha pa's view we have been entertaining in this section.

Nonetheless, Tsong kha pa's account of illusion-like appearance leads to a conception of illusion which poses problems for this picture of Tsong kha pa's position. What is Tsong kha pa concerned with when he explains illusion-like appearance? He is concerned with the way ordinary

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10 Newland 2008: 47.

11 Kelly 2005: 77-8.

things appear following a realization of emptiness. While ordinary things do not appear to a mind realizing emptiness, following meditation on emptiness, when the mind returns to everyday concerns, things are said to have an illusion-like appearance. Late in the "Special Insight" section of the *Great Treatise*, Tsong kha pa takes some time to correct some erroneous phenomenological descriptions of what this illusion-like appearance is like. For example, he denies that experiences of a lack of tangibility, as in, e.g., reflections, echoes, or rainbows, are like the experience of illusion-like appearance which follows a realization of emptiness. He argues:

Otherwise, if you did claim that the Madhyamaka sense of illusion and falsity is something of this sort, then when a rainbow and wispy smoke {or reflections and echoes} are taken as the substrata, the idea that they intrinsically exist would never occur, because according to your approach the very ascertainment of the substrata would be an ascertainment that they appear but lack intrinsic existence. Also, when the tangible is itself taken as the substratum, this approach would not lead to the ascertainment that the tangible lacks intrinsic existence, because according to your approach the ascertainment of the substratum is a conception of intrinsic existence. Therefore, when form and such appear in that way, this is not what it means to appear like an illusion, because there is not even the slightest refutation of the object of the misconception which thinks that this sheer and diaphanous appearance is the mode of being, or ontological status, of those objects.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, if experiences of entities possessing a certain intangibility, e.g., echoes and such, amounted to experiences free of the superimposition of intrinsic existence, then it would not be possible to dispel a belief in the intrinsic existence of such intangible entities. Moreover, it would not be possible to preserve the mere existence of tangible entities from harm by rational analysis, since tangibility and intrinsic existence would be synonymous. To take a concrete instance, suppose the experience of an echo were after all an experience free of the superimposition of intrinsic existence. Because it is an experience of an intangible voice, experiencing the tangible voice which produced the echo would be tantamount to an experience of the echo as an intrinsically existent entity because of being an experience, as it were, of the echo with tangibility added to it. In that case, it could never occur to one to refute the intrinsic existence of the echo itself. Moreover, there would be no way to refute the voice's intrinsic existence without also refuting its tangibility, which would be tantamount to denying its very existence.

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12 *GT* 356. Brackets mine.

Reflections, echoes, and façades are all equivalent in that they are phenomena suggesting functional capacities that do not really exist. For example, an echo suggests a speaker located in a certain direction, but searching in that direction with the expectation of finding an actual person leads to disappointment. A façade, similarly, is incapable of performing the functions of, say, an actual Old West town, as Kelly explains. Such phenomena are illusory precisely because they arouse more expectations than they can really satisfy. In this sense, we might say that phenomena which are thus illusory are incomplete, at least from the point of view of someone taken in by their illusory quality. Reflections, echoes, and so forth are incomplete, that is, by comparison with the actual entities such a person would expect to find in their place. But now, the claim we first set out to appraise was not whether the illusion-like appearance which follows meditative equipoise is like such phenomena as reflections, echoes, and so forth. Our question was about the deeper perspective which, as the radio analogy seems to suggest, emptiness brings to bear on the existence of conventional things. The question is whether such a deeper perspective has anything to do with the phenomena associated with such illusory perceptual experiences as are involved in seeing reflections, hearing echoes, or encountering façades. That is, what do such phenomena tell us about the way things ordinarily appear to exist? Does emptiness mean that conventional things are incomplete in something like the way in which it has been suggested echoes, reflections, and façades are incomplete? But incomplete by comparison with what? Not ordinary things, since those are what we are now saying are incomplete.

Now we come to how Tsong kha pa's account of illusion-like phenomena contradicts the picture we have here extrapolated from the radio analogy exposition. If ordinary things are illusory because they are incomplete, then they are so because they are unable to perform certain expected functions. Nevertheless, if the functions ordinary beings expect things to perform are just the functions of everyday things like tables, flowerpots, and persons, then the question becomes, which of their functions are conventional things incapable of performing? They have to lack some expected



functional capacities if we are to make sense of the incompleteness entailed by their illusory or inferior-grade existence. Yet if ordinary things are not fully functional, then dependent arising, karma, or other conventional truths necessary for the purposes of grounding ethical and religious practices might be compromised. In other words, the picture suggested by the radio analogy is unsatisfactory because it ends up with something like the same consequences as the nihilistic interpretations of Madhyamaka so vehemently criticized by Tsong kha pa. If the ultimate truth brings a deeper perspective to bear on conventional truths whereby conventional truths appear false or incomplete, then Newland is wrong when he says that the news from "channel B" ("emptiness radio") doesn't affect the news from "channel A" ("all things considered radio"). He says: "We still have to make distinctions and make choices about what, if anything, to drive."<sup>13</sup> But what could be the point of such choices and distinctions if cars are really illusory-cars? Why would it matter whether you enter the saloon or the bank, if everything is, after all, only a façade?<sup>14</sup>

These considerations call attention to the final item that I wish to consider. Tsong kha pa's distinction between intrinsic existence and mere existence, for all that has been said about it here thus far, might remain for some readers an impalpable, mysterious idea. In the next section, I wish to indicate a possible avenue by which that idea might be made more concrete.

### **The Phenomenology of Mere Existence and Intrinsic Existence**

In chapter six, I discussed an objection Gendun Chopel raises to Tsong kha pa's view.<sup>15</sup> Gendun Chopel's argument targets the way Tsong kha pa makes the distinction between intrinsic existence and mere existence. It seems to me that the argument capitalizes on the absence of any positive characterization by Tsong kha pa of the phenomenological differences between apprehending intrinsic existence and apprehending mere existence. Moreover, the trend among interpreters of Tsong

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13 Newland 2008: 45.

14 I submit that fictionalist interpretations of the Madhyamaka doctrine of the two truths might encounter difficulties similar to the kind of difficulty raised in this section. For further discussion of fictionalism as a strategy for understanding Mādhyamikas on the two truths, see Jinpa 2002: 162-171; also cf. Siderits 2009: 58-62 for an interesting discussion of fictionalism as an interpretive lens through which to consider Buddhist accounts of the two truths.

15 See pp. 155-160 above.

kha pa to import the Svātantrika picture of perceptual apprehension, which as we have seen leads to serious interpretive puzzles, seems also to be rooted in Tsong kha pa's apparent omission of a complete phenomenological investigation of the different modes of apprehension. I do not mean to suggest that there are not hints and traces of a phenomenological investigation of the modes of apprehension in Tsong kha pa's writings. But Tsong kha pa's basic treatment in his main texts of the difference between the "mere" mode and the mistaken mode, particularly, seems oriented primarily toward logical considerations and could use extensive amplification. If any scholar knows about a place in Tsong kha pa's writings where a satisfactory phenomenological description is given of the difference between apprehending mere existence and apprehending intrinsic existence, either which I have neglected or which lies beyond the bounds of the texts I have had occasion to examine, I would be most receptive and eager to learn more. However, in lieu of a more expansive treatment by Tsong kha pa himself, an investigation of the phenomenology of mere existence and intrinsic existence could provide rational reconstructionists with plenty of rich, fallow soil.

In the remainder of the space available to me here, let me offer a brief exploratory foray into what we may thus regard as uncharted territory. Here the fusion philosopher's eye might be expectantly turned toward seminal texts in the field of phenomenology, and to no more vital resources could we turn, I suggest, than to the works of the French phenomenologists Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. For my purposes here, I shall focus primarily on Sartre's account of the phenomenology of self-deception, particularly as it figures in his novel *Nausea*.<sup>16</sup> Sartre describes self-deception as exhibiting a metastable structure involving vacillation on the part of an agent between at least two kinds of cognitive states. For Sartre, the metastable quality observed in instances of self-deception is also observed in instances of role-playing or play-acting, and, indeed, Sartre avers that at least one of the elementary kinds of cognitive states involved in self-deception is comprised of forms of play-acting. My thesis is that Sartre's account of the structure of self-deception can be used as a

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<sup>16</sup> Of course there is also an extensive treatment of bad faith in Sartre's philosophical treatise, *Being and Nothingness*. Nevertheless, the phenomenological descriptions in *Nausea* will suffice for our purposes, and by concentrating on the novel it is possible to avoid entanglement in the complexities of the longer work.

model or template for exploring Tsong kha pa's account of the alternation cognitive agents undergo between the different modes of apprehending things, the mode of apprehension of mere existence and the mode of apprehension of intrinsic existence. In what follows below, I shall do two things. First, I shall explain Sartre's account of the structure of self-deception in greater detail, and then I shall attempt to apply his account to the task of reconstructing Tsong kha pa's thinking about the phenomenological difference(s) between an apprehension of mere existence and an apprehension of intrinsic existence.

Sartre offers several vivid descriptions of experiences in which everyday objects or situations deconstruct at the level of perceptual detail for the main character of *Nausea*, the diarist Antoine Roquentin. Our interest is not primarily in Sartre's descriptions of these fantastic experiences, but in his portrayal of Roquentin's reaction to them.<sup>17</sup> Often Roquentin's responses to these experiences, and particularly his responses to *anticipations* of such experiences, involve exercises of self-deception. However, it will be useful to also examine passages which seem to describe Roquentin's state at times when he is not involved in either forestalling or undergoing episodes of existential nausea. These passages, I shall eventually argue, provide us with the necessary contrast to comprehend the metastable structure of self-deception. It is important to note that the latter sort of passages, while they do not exhibit the presence of bad faith, should not be misconstrued as providing instances of what Sartre later and elsewhere calls "authenticity." As David Detmer explains,

[Sartre] tells us that we can 'radically escape bad faith', but that this requires 'a self-recovery of being which was previously corrupted' [Sartre 1956: 116, n. 9]. This self-recovery, which Sartre calls 'authenticity', requires a radical conversion from the project of being-God to a project based on freedom.<sup>18</sup>

Detmer argues that in Sartre's early work, particularly *Nausea* and *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre

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17 I shall not attempt to sift through the interpretive question as to whether or not Roquentin undergoes a *transformation* over the course of the novel so that, by the end of it, his reactions to the nausea can be construed as operating above the level of bad faith. My aim is simply to highlight the instances in which Roquentin's awareness operates *in bad faith*, of which there are plenty in the early part of the novel.

18 Detmer 2008: 138.

focuses primarily on describing the condition of *inauthenticity*. But Detmer's thesis does not preclude the possibility that, in all, there are three cognitive states that are of interest to Sartre, the state of authenticity, the state of bad faith (or self-deception), and a third state which is neither of these. Thus, I do not propose that the passages to be examined in which Roquentin's bad faith seems to be inoperative comprise instances in which he has "escaped bad faith." My suggestion is simply that Roquentin enjoys moments in which "the project of being-God" subsides and he is able to get involved in things without any exercise of self-deception. This does not, however, imply that he has achieved "authenticity."

To begin with, it may be useful to provide a brief analysis of passages describing instances of the sort of semi-hallucinatory episodes Roquentin associates with his bouts of nausea.<sup>19</sup> In the following passage, which perhaps provides the most illustrative instance of the grotesque, phantasmagoric quality of these experiences, Roquentin imagines what it might be like if everyone were to suddenly wake up one day and participate in something like his own awareness of the absurdity of existence:

For example, the father of a family might go out for a walk, and, across the street, he'll see something like a red rag, blown towards him by the wind. And when the rag has gotten close to him he'll see that it is a side of rotten meat, grimy with dust, dragging itself along by crawling, skipping, a piece of writhing flesh rolling in the gutter, spasmodically shooting out spurts of blood. Or a mother might look at her child's cheek and ask him: "What's that—a pimple?" and see the flesh puff out a little, split, open, and at the bottom of the split an eye, a laughing eye might appear. Or they might feel things gently brushing against their bodies, like the caresses of reeds to swimmers in a river. And they will realize that their clothing has become living things. And someone else might feel something scratching in his mouth. He goes to the mirror, opens his mouth: and his tongue is an enormous, live centipede, rubbing its legs together and scraping his palate. He'd like to spit it out, but the centipede is a part of him and he will have to tear it out with his own hands. And a crowd of things will appear for which people will have to find new names—stone-eye, great three-cornered arm, toe-crutch, spider-jaw. And someone might be sleeping in his comfortable bed, in his quiet, warm room, and wake up naked on a bluish earth, in a forest of rustling birch trees, rising red and white towards the sky like the smokestacks of Jouxtebouville, with big bumps half-way out of the ground, hairy and bulbous like onions. And birds will fly around these birch trees and pick at them with their beaks and make them bleed. Sperm will flow slowly, gently, from these wounds, sperm mixed with blood, warm and glassy with little bubbles.<sup>20</sup>

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19 Katherine Morris suggests that Sartre's descriptions of these experiences may have been "enhanced" by his experimentation with mescaline in 1935 (Morris 2008: 3 and 20, n. 6).

20 Sartre 1964: 159.

Some commentators suggest that in passages such as this we have evidence of Sartre's commitment to something like Hume's denial of necessary laws in nature.<sup>21</sup> I think that a denial of real necessity is only one part of what Sartre is up to in passages of this kind. I suggest that what nauseates Roquentin in such episodes is a realization of the arbitrariness with which language and concepts divide reality. His apprehension of things is altered, during these episodes, and the way in which it is altered is that the usual "rational constraints," as Eli Hirsch puts it, "on how the words of a language ought to divide up reality"<sup>22</sup> become threatened. But what do they become threatened by, we might ask? For Roquentin (or for Sartre), the usual rational constraints of language and concepts lose their purchase on things precisely because of the protean nature of existence. As Roquentin puts it, "*Anything* can happen."<sup>23</sup> While this does correspond with Hume's notion,<sup>24</sup> the important point for Sartre is that the protean nature of existence consists in its *transphenomenality*. Sartre's understanding of the transphenomenal nature of things seems to have begun with his appropriation of Husserl's theory of *Abschattungen*, or "adumbrations." To use an example of Husserl's, suppose I set out to give a phenomenological description of a study, and I begin by noting that "the lamp rests on the table, amid books, papers, and other things."<sup>25</sup> But I am unable to apprehend every part of the lamp itself in a single moment of awareness, from a single vantage point. It is impossible, for instance, to apprehend the underside of the base of the lamp while the lamp is standing up, or to apprehend the color of the lamp as it appears from a different point in the room than the point from which I am currently regarding the lamp. All of the different possible perspectives that one might take on the lamp, but which cannot be achieved in a single act of apprehension, comprise the adumbrations of the lamp. The adumbrations of a thing are, by definition, transphenomenal because they always transcend the actual phenomenal content of a single act of apprehension. Sartre converts

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21 See Morris 2008: 3.

22 Hirsch 1993: 7.

23 Sartre 1964: 78.

24 Hume expresses the idea with a famous though rather pedestrian thought experiment. He imagines that tomorrow the sun might not rise. (Morris finds this example *tepid*, by comparison with Sartre's more titillating examples; see Morris 2008: 3).

25 Husserl 1997: 80-81. Cf. Kelly 2005: 88-9.

Husserl's concept of adumbrations into a notion of vertiginous excess, and he further deviates from Husserl's notion by observing that this excess can be present in a single act of apprehension. In *Nausea*, Roquentin's discovery, indeed, is that every act of apprehension, every moment of awareness, is infused or infested with this troubling excess. Roquentin, examining the blackness of a chestnut tree root, describes it thus:

The simplest, most indefinable quality had too much content, in relation to itself, in its heart. That black against my foot, it didn't look like black, but rather the confused effort to imagine black by someone who had never seen black and who wouldn't know how to stop, who would have imagined an ambiguous being beyond colours. It *looked* like a colour, but also... like a bruise or a secretion, like an oozing—and something else, an odour, for example, it melted into the odour of wet earth, warm, moist wood, into a black odour that spread like varnish over this sensitive wood, in a flavour of chewed, sweet fibre. I did not simply see this black: sight is an abstract invention, a simplified idea, one of man's ideas. That black, amorphous, weakly presence, far surpassed sight, smell and taste. But this richness was lost in confusion and finally was no more because it was too much.<sup>26</sup>

Another way to describe Roquentin's experience here might be to say that he is undergoing a temporary lapse of *entitlement*.<sup>27</sup> Roquentin seems to be experiencing a breakdown in the style of reasoning on which he ordinarily relies to give structure to his sensory cognitions. We might say that Sartre's conception of existence implies an understanding that there could be other ways of conceptually structuring our perceptual experiences.

It is Roquentin's recognition of the arbitrariness of his style of reasoning about perception that he finds threatening. Experiences like the experience of the chestnut tree typically leave him feeling ill and afraid. Roquentin recoils from these experiences, and to designate his recoil action we might fittingly borrow Gendun Chopel's expression and call it "the fear of external objects."<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless,

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26 Sartre 1964: 130-131.

27 See chapter two above.

28 Gendun Chopel writes: "As long as one is deferential to the perceptions of the world [cf. Tillemans' criterion for realism, discussed in chapter one], even though one has already attained the path of vision [*darśanamārga*], there is no choice but to remain in the system of the vulgar. To the extent that the power of the object or the obstructions to omniscience decrease, to that extent there is the consciousness of being freed from the confines of the object, and the fear of external objects subsides" (Lopez 2006: 107). Here I take it that a sort of deference to objects presupposes the intention to reside comfortably within the framework provided by the "confines of the object." Such an intention is symptomatic of the self-deception Roquentin requires in order to avoid plunging into nausea.

Roquentin's fear of external objects, in any of its incarnations, never amounts to more than a kind of play-acting. For Sartre, role-playing or impersonation is never perfect but always involves a hybridity which betrays it for what it is:

It often happens that the synthesis is not entirely achieved: the face and body of the impersonator do not lose all their individuality, and yet, on this face, on this female body, the expressive nature "Maurice Chevalier" is about to appear. A hybrid state develops, which is neither altogether perceptual nor altogether imaginative and which deserves being described for its own sake. These unstable and transitory states are obviously what is most entertaining for the spectator about an impersonation.<sup>29</sup>

For Sartre, the sort of play-acting involved in impersonations pervades other social roles, for instance the roles of waiting tables or being seduced.<sup>30</sup> But it also pervades every one of Roquentin's efforts in *Nausea* to avoid or forestall experiences that disclose "Existence everywhere, infinitely, in excess, for ever and everywhere; existence—which is limited only by existence."<sup>31</sup> One type of play-acting that Roquentin tries to use in order not to be overwhelmed by the "universal burgeoning," the "profusion of beings without origin,"<sup>32</sup> is his role as author of a biography of the Marquis de Rollebon, an eighteenth century political figure and adventurer.<sup>33</sup> The stage setting for this role is in the library of Bouville where Roquentin "works" at his writing and research. Here the books, "powerful and squat, along with the stove, the green lamps, the wide windows, the ladders," and so forth usually "serve at least to fix the limits of probability."<sup>34</sup> As Roquentin explains:

As long as you stay between these walls, whatever happens must happen on the right or the left of the stove. Saint Denis himself could come in carrying his head in his hands and he would still have to enter on the right, walk between the shelves devoted to French Literature and the table reserved for women readers. And if he doesn't touch the ground, if he floats ten inches above the floor, his bleeding neck will be just at the level of the third shelf of books.<sup>35</sup>

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29 Sartre 1986: 63; Robert D. Cumming's trans., Cumming 1992: 46.

30 See Cumming 1992: 50-51.

31 Sartre 1964: 133.

32 *Ibid.*

33 Cf. *ibid* 70 and 97-99.

34 *Ibid* 76.

35 *Ibid.*

Like a stage director, Roquentin understands the importance of situating an action stage left or stage right. And he understands the importance of the props. The familiar objects of the library determine the sorts of action that can occur. The props play their parts just as the actors do theirs. Nevertheless, the hybridity that is integral to all play-acting also pervades the play-acting of these familiar objects. At one point, Roquentin recognizes the library for what it is—a library-façade. He says:

Today they fixed nothing at all: it seemed that their very existence was subject to doubt, that they had the greatest difficulty in passing from one instant to the next. I held the book I was reading tightly in my hands: but the most violent sensations went dead. Nothing seemed true; I felt surrounded by cardboard scenery which could quickly be removed. The world was waiting, holding its breath, making itself small—it was waiting for its convulsion, its Nausea....<sup>36</sup>

Another time the hybridity of library and library-façade becomes evident in an event the occurrence of which might be nearly as shocking and unusual as would be an apparition of Saint Denis. The Autodidact molests a young boy at one of the reading tables and is remonstrated and assaulted by the Corsican. Roquentin describes the library in the moments building up to the explosive confrontation:

Never had a library offered such a reassuring spectacle: I heard no sound, except the short breathing of the fat woman, I only saw heads bent over books. Yet, at that moment, I had the feeling that something unpleasant was going to happen. All these people who lowered their eyes with such a studious look seemed to be playing a comedy: a few instants before I felt something like a breath of cruelty pass over us.<sup>37</sup>

The library/library-façade's very hybridity allows the scene to shift, to change from being the scene of Roquentin's lazy, sentimental last visit to the library in Bouville to being the scene of the Autodidact's horrific, yet comedic, expulsion from the library. Roquentin encounters this kind of hybridity or ambiguity throughout the novel. Sitting in the "Railwaymen's Rendezvous," staring at the patronne's cousin Adolphe's suspenders, Roquentin becomes annoyed by the stubborn unwillingness of the color of the suspenders to disambiguate between blue and purple.<sup>38</sup> And in the project of writing the

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* 76-77.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid* 164.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid* 19.



biography of Rollebon, there is a similar ambiguity inherent in the genre itself. Like the waiter who is aiming at himself as an imaginary café waiter,<sup>39</sup> Roquentin aims at himself as an imaginary historian, yet he must, like the waiter, perpetually negotiate a broken equilibrium between different possibilities: between being a historian and not being a historian, but something else, a writer of fiction.<sup>40</sup>

The kind of ambiguity which hounds most of Roquentin's experiences in the novel is symptomatic of Sartre's "eidetic analysis of self-deception." As Robert Cumming notes, for Sartre self-deception is metastable, "the kind of mental structure," as Sartre himself says, that is "precarious and liable to disintegrate."<sup>41</sup> Self-deception involves a vacillation between what Sartre at one point calls "good faith and cynicism."<sup>42</sup> We see this type of vacillation time and again with Roquentin in *Nausea*. For instance, returning from Paris, from a failed attempt at renewing an affair with a former lover, Roquentin has been purged of every hope of finding shelter somewhere from the Nausea. He has sought sanctuary in his writing, in adventures, and in love, and every form of self-deception, of play-acting, has failed to hold back the Nausea: "I am free: there is absolutely no more reason for living, all the ones I have tried have given way and I can't imagine any more of them."<sup>43</sup> And yet he does imagine a time, someday, when he might be able to accept himself.<sup>44</sup> It would be after he had written a book, a different book, "not a history book.... Another type of book. I don't quite know which kind.... A story, for example, something that could never happen, an adventure."<sup>45</sup> Could this be the inception of yet another bout of bad faith?<sup>46</sup>

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39 Cf. Cumming 1992: 50.

40 Roquentin says: "I have the feeling of doing a work of pure imagination. And I am certain that the characters in a novel would have a more genuine appearance, or, in any case, would be more agreeable" (Sartre 1964: 13-14), and "...I'd be better off writing a novel on the Marquis de Rollebon" (58). Moreover, when he finally admits to himself that he has been playing at writing a biography, and finally gives it up, Roquentin acknowledges that the Marquis de Rollebon "was nothing more than an image in me, a fiction" (97).

41 See Cumming 1992: 48.

42 Cf. *ibid.*

43 Sartre 1964: 156.

44 *Ibid* 178.

45 *Ibid.*

46 It might be argued that here, at last, Sartre offers the reader a glimpse of an alternative mode of being to which Roquentin may aspire. Here, so the argument could go, the reader gets some relief by being permitted to imagine Roquentin being transformed and finally arriving at some sort of authentic mode of existing. And this picture of the significance of the final scene of the novel might also suggest that here *for the first time* we have sight of the possibility of any mode of existing *other* than the inauthentic modes of existing that

Roquentin is in a state of existential crisis throughout most of the novel, and most of the time he is in either one of two states. Either he is fleeing the Nausea in bad faith, i.e., exercising his fear of external objects in one form or another, or he is making a stand and facing, even playing with, "the absurdity of the world."<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, these two conditions do not exhaust Roquentin's repertoire. He sometimes enters a third state in which the Nausea and its anticipation vanish, where the struggle with absurdity has no relevance. Such occasions are extremely rare; perhaps there are only two such occasions in the entire novel. One is when Roquentin is wrestling with an episode of Nausea in the "Railwaymen's Rendezvous." This is when the color of Adolphe's suspenders gives him so much trouble. It is also the famous scene where Roquentin loses himself in a gramophone recording of a jazz piece, and in the black woman's song the Nausea vanishes.<sup>48</sup> But note that so also does the struggle to retreat from the Nausea. It is as if Roquentin's attitude simply shifts to a completely different register. The change is impermanent, of course. The Nausea and the play-acting that Roquentin usually depends on to avoid noticing the Nausea disappear only while the jazz is playing. For "the narrow duration of the music which traverses our time through and through, rejecting it, tearing at it with its dry little points,"<sup>49</sup> he is granted a brief rescue. The other time when Roquentin notices that the Nausea is gone is when he stands atop a hill overlooking Bouville after his trip to Paris. In this passage, Roquentin emphasizes the way in which his actions for this day have been

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Roquentin has tried thus far. But my suggestion is not that Roquentin never does escape bad faith and arrive at "authenticity." My thesis does not depend one way or the other on the question whether Roquentin ever achieves "Sartrean redemption." The point on which I wish to insist is simply that the ambiguous, hybrid character of Roquentin's experiences, the ambiguity which Sartre suggests is integral to instances of self-deception, is also evident to some degree in this final scene. The proposed writing project *could* lapse into yet another instance of Roquentin's trying to fool himself and avoid taking responsibility for his own existence. The point is that ambiguity is integral to both inauthentic and authentic modes of existence. In this way Sartre's description of the structure of the opposition between bad faith and authenticity mirrors the dual structure of Tsong kha pa's characterization of the modes of apprehending intrinsic existence and the absence of intrinsic existence, i.e., emptiness. But the third mode of apprehension, the mode of apprehending mere existence, stands apart from the particular interdependence of the former two modes of apprehension, just as the moments when Roquentin is genuinely granted a respite from vacillating between play-acting and resignation, when the Nausea is temporarily lifted, do not possess the ambiguous structure of Roquentin's typical *modus operandi*. See below.

47 *Ibid* 130.

48 *Ibid* 22.

49 *Ibid* 21.

carried forward primarily by habit and routine. He remarks:

I do not neglect myself, quite the contrary: this morning I took a bath and shaved. Only when I think back over those careful little actions, I cannot understand how I was able to make them: they are so vain. Habit, no doubt, made them for me. They aren't dead, they keep on busying themselves, gently, insidiously weaving their webs, they wash me, dry me, dress me, like nurses. Did they also lead me to this hill?<sup>50</sup>

In both of these scenes, Roquentin's experience is marked by a shift from reflective to pre-reflective drives or activities. Following a piece of music or washing and dressing oneself are skills acquired through habit or routine. Borrowing an expression from Michael Polanyi, we might say that such skills operate "transparently" because they have been honed through repetitive practice so that their motor execution no longer demands conscious attention.<sup>51</sup> Another thing to notice about these pre-reflective "modes of doing," as we may call them, is that they are free of conflict. The vacillation that characterizes Roquentin's default condition, moving back and forth between fleeing and accepting his awareness of existence, does not characterize his experience while he is engrossed in pre-reflective, habit-driven modes of doing.<sup>52</sup> These are not instances of having achieved "authenticity." Authenticity, for Sartre, stands locked in conflict with inauthenticity, or self-deception. Both poles of the dichotomy are necessary ingredients in the meta-stable structure of self-deception. But skillful, pre-reflective modes of doing stand outside the field of tension between authenticity and inauthenticity, offering a

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50 *Ibid* 157.

51 Cf. Eno 1996: 136. Some might argue that while attending to one's toilet might readily lend itself to such a construal, it is less convincing to try to apply the point to the example of listening to a piece of music. I would disagree with such a contention. Nevertheless, this is not the time or place to get into that discussion, and, at any rate, my case does not depend crucially on the point.

52 One way to understand Roquentin's experience in these scenes is by comparison with Zhuangzi's illustrations of skillful expertise, or *wu wei*. In the story of Ding the Butcher, for example, Ding explains his mastery of meat-cutting: "[N]ow I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are. So I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint" (cf. Graham 1981: 47). As Mark Berkson elaborates: "It is in such states that, in a sense, the sage no longer acts; rather, the Dao acts through the sage. These are states often reached by great musicians or athletes who are so absorbed in the moment that they simply perform effortlessly and spontaneously" (Berkson 1996: 118-119). Of course, there is no reason to look only to great musicians and athletes for examples of such expertise. As indicated by Sartre, and I submit also by Tsong kha pa, effortless and spontaneous modes of doing are evident in the humblest and most universal of activities.

third mode of existing which is in some sense neutral with respect to the other two modes of existence.<sup>53</sup>

Enough has now been said about Sartre's eidetic analysis of self-deception to let me suggest some parallels between Sartre's account and Tsong kha pa's account of the different modes of apprehension. I believe this should grant us with a glimpse, at least, of how Tsong kha pa might describe the phenomenological difference between apprehending intrinsic existence and apprehending mere existence. The parallels are easy to see. For Sartre, self-deception involves a meta-stable structure in which a person's orientation to existence alternates between aversion and a kind of resignation. There is analogously, for Tsong kha pa, a meta-stable structure detailed in the way in which he pictures an almost perpetual alternation for advanced practitioners between the two modes of apprehension, the mode of apprehending intrinsic existence and the mode of apprehending emptiness. Only fully realized buddhas are completely free of this alternation between the two modes of apprehension, as Tsong kha pa explains:

Since Superiors who have not been Buddhafied have not abandoned the ignorance that is an obstruction to omniscience, they have an alternation between conceptuality involving the appearance [of intrinsic existence and/or conventional phenomena] in states subsequent to meditative equipoise and the absence of [such] appearance in meditative equipoise. Buddhas, on the other hand, have completely, that is, entirely, become enlightened, that is, have realized actualization of the ultimate and conventional aspects of all phenomena; hence, all movements of conceptual minds and mental factors have utterly vanished, due to which they have no alternation between having or not having the conceptuality involving appearance [of inherent existence and/or conventional phenomena] in meditative equipoise and in states subsequent to meditative equipoise.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to a conflict between two states which stand opposed to each other, both thinkers postulate a third type of state which stands removed from the conflict and which involves some form of pre-reflective engagement with the world. This third state, I have suggested, is exemplified for Sartre by such quotidian activities as listening to music or washing and dressing oneself. And for Tsong kha pa likewise, I have argued, there is a mode of apprehension of things as mere existents

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53 Nonetheless, Sartre portrays Roquentin as *more capable* of accepting existence for what it is in the aftermath of these experiences of pre-reflective doing than he usually is otherwise. So the pre-reflective mode of existing may have some therapeutic value on Sartre's view.

54 *EI* 252.

which is different from either of the contradictory modes of apprehending things as either intrinsically existent or empty of intrinsic existence. The mode of apprehension of mere existence does not characterize Buddhahood for Tsong kha pa any more than do pre-reflective modes of doing necessarily characterize authenticity for Sartre. Nevertheless, just as Sartre hints that pre-reflective modes of doing may enable one to more readily come to terms with existence, Tsong kha pa's account of the role of mere existence in the process of reasoning with realists suggests that he would think that learning to cultivate this mode of apprehension is an important part of Madhyamaka therapeutic technique.

The analogy between Sartre's analysis of self-deception and Tsong kha pa's analysis of the different modes of perceptual apprehension thus gives us a lead on how it might be possible to characterize the phenomenological difference between the modes of apprehending intrinsic existence and mere existence. The suggestion is not that the mode of apprehending intrinsic existence involves any explicit form of self-deception.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, the mode of apprehending intrinsic existence does at least seem to be involved in a meta-stable structure analogous to that which Sartre finds in self-deception. On Tsong kha pa's account, the apprehension of intrinsic existence encounters resistance, initially, at the level of rational thought. Reasoning and perception contradict one another because the notion of intrinsic existence gives rise to logical absurdities, and yet in the reflective context of being concerned with the question of intrinsic existence things appear intrinsically existent. Tsong kha pa thinks that eventually, through training in meditation, an ordinary person will start to apprehend things in accordance with reason. Then there may begin an alternation at the perceptual level between apprehending intrinsic existence and apprehending emptiness. Nevertheless, the state of apprehending mere existence will differ from the state of apprehending intrinsic existence inasmuch as apprehending mere existence will not involve any conflict or tension, either between perception and reasoning or between perceptions. There is no alternative mode of apprehension which is

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<sup>55</sup> I leave it as a matter for further exploration, however, whether there might be some tacit mode of self-deception involved in realism.

diametrically opposed to the way things appear for someone apprehending mere existence. Thus, the phenomenological characterization of the mode of apprehending intrinsic existence differs from that of the mode of apprehending mere existence. The apprehension of mere existence seems internally stable, whereas the apprehension of intrinsic existence is internally volatile due to its meta-stable structure. This perhaps helps us to explain the pedagogic device criticized by Gendun Chopel. If one were accused of being a thief, it might not be surprising for one to instantly feel combative. Such a feeling would probably accompany the realization that it may be necessary to engage in conflict, at some level, to defend one's reputation or personal safety. And this feeling of combativeness would be similar to the feelings associated with a disposition to resist alternative ways of apprehending things, i.e., alternative modes of conceptually structuring one's perceptual contents. For the apprehension of intrinsic existence integrally rejects other ways of conceptually structuring perceptions, in something like the way in which Roquentin's recoil from Nausea seems to be inspired by a wish to cling to the belief that whatever happens next will be familiar, comfortable, and predictable. The apprehension of mere existence, on the other hand, possesses the limpid ease of motor execution. It seems that what Roquentin says about "the necessity of this music" could apply to any pre-reflective mode of doing: "nothing can interrupt it, nothing which comes from this time in which the world has fallen; it will stop of itself, as if by order,"<sup>56</sup> like a ritual or routine that is performed with compulsive regularity.

The contrast between apprehending intrinsic existence and apprehending mere existence corresponds roughly to the difference between the unstable attention patterns of beginners in meditation practice and the stable attentiveness of more advanced practitioners. For beginners, attention fluctuates between the two poles of lethargy and hyperactivity, even for normal individuals not afflicted with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders or obsessive/compulsive disorders.<sup>57</sup> Could it be that the reason why beginning meditators' powers of attention are so erratic is because the objects on which they frequently try to focus their attention are themselves inherently unstable? Beginning

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56 Sartre 1964: 22.

57 Cf. Wallace 2006: 14.

practitioners and other realists not only lack the capacity to apprehend emptiness, but they are afflicted with an innate agnosia which becomes activated any time their familiar styles of reasoning seem threatened or impinged in some way. Thus, the objects which they apprehend are meta-stable. What they perceive may not agree with what they know it is reasonable to believe about things. The conflicts that are integral to this kind of experience are the birthplace of metaphysical and ethical problems, for example, the puzzles of material constitution.<sup>58</sup> Metaphysicians are like Roquentin when he is in bad faith and trying to give stage directions to the books and stove and other objects in the library, trying to tell them what to be. In contrast, Buddhist meditators are trained to practice focusing their attention not on the sort of unstable entities that interest metaphysicians, but on the kind of mere existence that a pre-reflective mode of doing is best equipped to find. So meditators breathe, and they pay attention to their breath. It seems no accident that a stabilization of attention presupposes a stable mode of apprehension which can find a stable phenomenon to be the focus of attention. As Śāntideva remarks in the eighth chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*:

Therefore, in order to tear down the obscuring veil, I shall concentrate my mind in meditation, constantly on the proper object, dragging it from false paths.<sup>59</sup>

So, contrary to Gendun Chopel's charge that no *phenomenological* sense can be made of Tsong kha pa's distinction between apprehending intrinsic existence and apprehending mere existence, I suggest that the phenomenological difference between these modes of apprehension is describable in the following terms: an apprehension of intrinsic existence involves a state of awareness that arises on reflection, is unstable, and whose object is unstable, whereas an apprehension of mere existence involves a pre-reflective state of awareness which is stable and which finds a stable object of attention.

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58 Cf. Rea 1997.

59 Śāntideva 1995: 104.



Tsong kha pa's approach to meditation practice is imbricated with his understanding of rational analysis. I have been able here to only hint at the ramifications of his account of modes of apprehension for his understanding of meditation theory. Yet a careful study of the connections between Tsong kha pa's theoretical view and his practical instructions remains a desideratum. Nonetheless, as I have here attempted to suggest, Tsong kha pa's conception of the difference between the modes of apprehension of intrinsic existence and mere existence, and of the therapeutic significance of the latter mode of apprehension, may hold the key to a more comprehensive investigation of his thought.



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