

## VI. Mādhyamikas Playing Bad Hands: The Case of Customary Truth<sup>1</sup>

Skilled thinkers—like good card players—sometimes have to make the most of the lacklustre hands they get. The hands they are dealt are not cards, of course, but unlikely readings or other odd textual phenomena. Some well-known cases are strikingly clear. The later Dharmakīrtian tradition, for example, took up the philosophically rich question of the autonomy of human reason, in part influenced by the seemingly random, and trivial, fact that two Indic manuscript traditions happened to have differing orders of the chapters in *Pramāṇavārttika*.<sup>2</sup> Other cases seem to me less clear than they have been made out to be, like the so-called misunderstanding of the compound *dharmakāya* as meaning a kind of metaphysical absolute, a “phantom body” of buddhas.<sup>3</sup> Madhyamaka, too, has some of its more important philosophy influenced by quite problematic textual phenomena. Let’s take up two examples. They are by no means the

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<sup>1</sup> The present article is an elaboration of some themes initially mentioned in Tillemans 2011, reprinted in Tillemans 2016. Much of the discussion on the term *saṃvṛti* figures in Newland and Tillemans 2011. The direct inspiration for the present discussion of *lokaprasiddha* was a conversation with Stephen Batchelor, who insightfully said to me that the discrepancy between a Pāli *sutta* text and the Mahāyānist version could be a lot more important than I had initially thought.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, one transmission began *Pramāṇavārttika* with the chapter on “inference-for-oneself” (*svārthānumāna*), the chapter elaborating the canons of human reasoning. This textual phenomenon was understood, by commentators like Devendrabuddhi and Śākyabuddhi, as in accord with their philosophical stance that logical reasoning is more fundamental than the pronouncements of the Buddha and that people can and should know Buddhist truths independently of appeals to religious authority. The other transmission had *Pramāṇavārttika* beginning with “The proof of authority” (*pramāṇasiddhi*), or the proof of the Buddha’s being *the* uniquely reliable spiritual guide; such an order of the chapters was defended by the commentator Jayanta, because, according to him, it rightly assigned primacy to the Buddha’s omniscience in assuring truth. See Ono 1997.

<sup>3</sup> See n. 9 below.

only cases,<sup>4</sup> but they are important because they concern quite radically different understandings of the idea of customary truth.

The first is the Madhyamaka construal of Skt. *saṃvṛtisatya*, Tib. *kun rdzob bden pa* (customary truth/reality) as “that which is recognized by the world” (*lokaprasiddha*)—this is no doubt influenced by a textually very problematic *sūtra* passage. The second is the fact that the major Madhyamaka explanations unpacking customary truth are, in part at least, dependent on orthographic problems and resultant confusions about Sanskrit roots. In what follows, we’ll look at the details of these two cases and look at what impact they may well have had philosophically.

We begin with *lokaprasiddha*. Candrakīrti quotes a famous passage as *his* textual source for the idea. It figures in Mahāyānist scriptures, too, notably the *Trisaṃvaranirdeśaparivarta* (chapter I) of the *Ratnakūṭasūtra* (D. f. 9b *ngas ‘di skad du ‘jig rten ni nga la rgol gyi / nga ni ‘jig rten dang mi rtsod do zhes gsungs so*. Taishō 310, 5a7-8: 我言世與我諍我不與世諍), although both the Chinese and Tibetan versions cite only the first half—“I have said that the world argues with me but that I don’t argue with the world.”

The passage is clearly very important for Candrakīrti. It is prominently cited in two of his works, the *Prasannapadā* ad *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XVIII.8 and his *Madhyamakāvātārabhāṣya* ad VI.81 (p. 179 ed. L. de La Vallée Poussin). Here is the whole passage in Sanskrit as given in the *Prasannapadā* (ed. L. de La Vallée Poussin, 370.6-8):

*loko mayā sārđhaṃ vivadati nāhaṃ lokena sārđhaṃ vivadāmi / yal loke ‘sti saṃmataṃ tan mamāpy asti saṃmataṃ / yal loke nāsti saṃmataṃ mamāpi tan nāsti saṃmataṃ /* “The world (*loka*) argues with me. I don’t argue with the world. What is agreed upon (*saṃmata*) in the world to exist, I too agree that it exists. What is agreed upon in the world to be nonexistent, I too agree that it does not exist.”

Now, which canonical text is being cited here? The *Ratnakūṭa* clearly indicates that the speaker is referring to a passage he supposedly stated elsewhere, but alas does not say anything more; Candrakīrti does not identify the source by name either, only as “a scripture” (*āgama*).

<sup>4</sup> See n. 14 below for two more of them.

Significantly, however, we do get help from the Pāli canon. We find the following passage in *Samyutta Nikāya* III, p. 138 (ed. Léon Feer):

*nāham bhikkhave lokena vivadāmi loko ca mayā vivadati // na bhikkhave dhammavādī kenaci lokasmiṃ vivadati // yam bhikkhave natthi sammataṃ loke paṇḍitānam aham pi tam natthīti vadāmi // yam bhikkhave atthi sammataṃ loke paṇḍitānam aham pi tam atthīti vadāmi //*. “Bhikkhus, I do not dispute with the world; rather, it is the world that disputes with me. A proponent of the Dhamma does not dispute with anyone in the world. Of that which *the wise* [my italics] in the world agree upon as not existing, I too say that it does not exist. And of that which *the wise* [my italics] in the world agree upon as existing, I too say that it exists” (transl. Bhikkhu Bodhi 2000, 949).

Candrakīrti’s source thus seems to be a Mahāyānist recension of a *sūtra* that we also find in the Pāli canon. Now, the Pāli, in contrast to the *āgama*’s Sanskrit quoted in *Prasannapadā* (and in contrast to the Tibetan translation of the passage as found in Candrakīrti’s works) has the term *paṇḍitānam* in this passage and the discussion that follows. Thus the *Samyutta* speaks about that which “the wise (*paṇḍitānam*) in the world (*loke*)” agree upon as existing/not existing, rather than just that which is agreed upon as existing/not existing in the world. The difference is significant because it means—as the subsequent discussion explicitly shows in the *Khandavagga* of the *Samyutta Nikāya* (see Bhikkhu Bodhi 2000, 949-950)—that the Buddha accepts “impermanent, suffering, changing matter” etc., as existent and holds that “permanent, stable, eternal, unchanging matter,” etc. is nonexistent. He thus would accept an ontology proposed by the wise, i.e., qualified experts in the world. The Sanskrit, however, simply says that the Buddha accepts what is accepted in the world; experts are not mentioned.

The Sanskrit scriptural passage of unspecified provenance, then, gives the textual hand that Candrakīrti was actually dealt, and it has a marked potential to ground a type of populist view of *lokaprasiddha* and *saṃvṛtisatya*: customary existence and truth are somehow copies, or reflections, of what the average worldlings in fact think across time and culture, or perhaps just what the sixth century Indian *hoi polloi*, or at least most of them, did think. This populist bent seems to be no accident and is in the Mahāyānist sources. Indeed, the *Ratnakūṭa*, itself, explicitly glossed

the term “the world” in the cited passage as “infantile, ordinary beings,” in short, *bāla* and *prthagjana*. The Pāli *Samyutta* reading, emphasizing what experts or ideal individuals think, rather than the opinions of the infantile, does not have that same populist potential at all.

The Mahāyānist Sanskrit recension, and hence also the Tibetan version, probably lost a key word in the transmission process. (It seems to me more plausible that the word *pañḍitānām* (= Pāli *pañḍitānam*) dropped out in the Mahāyānist *sūtra* than that it was added in the *Samyutta*). That Mahāyānist version, with the omission, then constituted part of the scriptural basis for a school of Madhyamaka that the Tibetans eventually termed *’jig rten grags sde spyod pa’i dbu ma pa* (“Mādhyamikas who practice in accordance with what is recognized by the world”) by which they meant Candrakīrti and his followers, the so-called Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas (*dbu ma thal ’gyur ba*).<sup>5</sup> We’ll come back to the philosophical aspects of Candrakīrti’s version of *saṃvṛtisatya* as “what is recognized by the world.”

Let us now move to a second aspect of the problem of how to take *saṃvṛtisatya*. We frequently find *saṃvṛtisatya* translated as “conventional truth” or (as we have done) “customary truth,” but in fact the aspect of societal agreements and consensuality that such translations convey is far from obvious from traditional analyses of the Sanskrit term. (Leave aside, for our purposes, the ambiguity between truth and reality inherent in the terms *satya* and *bden pa*. There are linguistic-philosophical problems in putting *those* two together, too, but they need not concern us here.) Part of the reason for this lack of clarity seems to be a vacillation between two etymological derivations. The evidence is somewhat complex. As Franklin Edgerton had long ago suggested, what the Pāli renders as “consensus” or

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<sup>5</sup> The Sanskrit terms for the two Madhyamaka schools are widely used reconstructions from the Tibetan. On Candrakīrti’s own manner of taking causal processes as they are accepted by the common man, see his *Madhyamakāvatāra* VI.32-33. A common man’s explanation of how lutes make sound is found in his *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* ad VI.35 (ed. L. de La Vallée Poussin p. 121): *dper na shing dang rgyud la brten byas la / lag pa rtsol ba byas pa gsum tshogs na / sgrog byed pi wang gling bu la sogs pas / de dag las skeyes sgra yang ’byung bar ’gyur /*. The passage is quoted from the *Lalitavistara* XIII, verse 114 (ed. P.L. Vaidya): *yathā tantri pratītya dāru ca hastavyāyāma trayebhi saṃgati / tuṇavīṇasughoṣakādibhiḥ śabdo niścarate tadudbhavaḥ //*. “E.g., in reliance upon strings, wood and manual effort, then by the conjunction of these three [factors], musical instruments such as *tuṇa* and *vīṇā* (“lutes”) issue a sound that arises due to these [factors].”

“agreement” (*saṃmuti*) is rendered in Sanskrit as *saṃvṛti*. It is plausible then to think, with Edgerton, that in discussions of the two truths where we should have expected a Sanskrit term like *saṃmati/saṃmata* (consensus, agreement, agreed upon) we in fact regularly ended up with *saṃvṛti* instead. We would be dealing with a potentially confusing and weighty spelling mistake, or perhaps a case of hyper-Sanskritism, where a form like *saṃmuti/saṃmati*, based on  $\sqrt{MAN}$  “to think” and *saṃ* “all together,” would become *saṃvṛti*, from  $\sqrt{VR}$ .<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, *saṃmati/saṃmata* would have clearly indicated that conventional, or consensual, agreements were involved—and such terms, whether in Pāli or in Sanskrit, are in fact very clearly and regularly used in contexts concerning customary truths, as we see in the quoted *sūtra* passage’s use of *saṃmata*, but also in numerous other Indic sources. But that is not the current that actually prevailed in the Sanskrit discussions of the two truths (and hence in Tibetan, too, with their use of *kun rdzob*). Indian and Tibetan commentators instead were forced to deal with *saṃvṛti*, which they thought to be etymologically derived from the root  $\sqrt{VR}$  *vṛṇoti*, “to cover, conceal,” instead of *saṃmati* coming from  $\sqrt{MAN}$ . Complicating things further is that we also seem to have explanations (as we shall see in a *Prasannapadā* passage discussed below) that suggest the term was derived from  $\sqrt{VRT}$  *varṭate*, as if one might have read *saṃvṛtti* “existence, occurrence,” rather than *saṃvṛti*, due to the common phenomenon of consonant doubling in Indic manuscripts.

Candrakīrti’s three usages of the questionable term *saṃvṛti* suggest strongly that a triple ambiguity arose due to uncertainties about which of those Sanskrit roots was the right one. He seems to have been unable or unwilling to decide, and thus gave us three choices in *Prasannapadā* 492.10 (ed. La Vallée Poussin):

*samantād varaṇaṃ saṃvṛtiḥ / ajñānaṃ hi samantāt sarvapa-  
dārthatattvāvachhādanāt saṃvṛtir ity ucyate / parasparasambhavanaṃ  
vā saṃvṛtir anyonyasamāśrayenety arthaḥ / atha vā saṃvṛtiḥ saṃketo*

<sup>6</sup> Edgerton 1977, 541, s.v. *saṃvṛti*: “Both Prāt[imokṣasūtra] 52.3 and Bhīk[ṣuṇīkarmavā-  
canā] 28b.4 associate *saṃvṛti* (Pāli *saṃmuti*) with *saṃmata*, suggesting that  $\sqrt{vṛti}$  is  
hyper-Skt. for Pali  $\sqrt{muti}$ .” See also Karunadasa 1996, 25, which makes the same point,  
as well as the links with the two different roots.

*lokavyavahāra ity arthaḥ / sa cābhidhānābhidheyajñānajñeyādila-kṣaṇam //*. “It is *saṃvṛti* in being completely an obstruction. Indeed, ignorance, because it masks completely the nature of all entities, is said to be *saṃvṛti*. Alternatively, the meaning is that what arises in mutual dependence is *saṃvṛti* because of one thing being dependent on another. Or again *saṃvṛti* means agreed upon usage or worldly transactions. This is characterized as expressions, what is expressed, cognitions, and what is cognized and so on and so forth.”

In short, one usage of *saṃvṛti* is to refer to *ignorance* whereby one takes as true what is not, thus concealing the actual way things are. Another usage is as dependent arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*), more exactly as “mutual dependence” (*parasparasambhavana*), and hence means things that lack intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). The third usage is to mean agreements governing the use of signs, i.e., *saṃketa*, as well as the various worldly practices, or more accurately, worldly *transactions* (*lokavyavahāra*). Included here are both agreed-upon linguistic expressions (*abhidhāna*) and objects of expressions (*abhidheya*), as well as cognitions (*jñāna*) and their objects (*jñeya*).

The first usage of *saṃvṛti* clearly does rely on an etymological understanding in terms of the Sanskrit  $\sqrt{VR}$  *vṛnoti*, “to cover, conceal,” giving the sense of *saṃvṛtisatya* as true-for-the-completely-covered, true-for-the-ignorant, true-for-the-benighted—in short, truth that might be needed for people to get along in the world and spiritually progress, but that is actually nothing more than a type of fool’s gold. This *saṃvṛti* has little connection, if any at all, with what we understand as “convention” in the sense of agreements, consensus, conventions, and rule-guided activities. As for *saṃvṛti/saṃvṛtti* meaning mutual dependence, this includes all that exists—everything lacks intrinsic natures and exists through causal dependence, mereological dependence, and/or dependence upon a cognizing mind. It appears then that the term here may indeed be understood as derived from  $\sqrt{VRT}$  *vartate*, “turn,” “go on,” “take place,” “exist,” with *saṃvṛtti* (with two “t”s) meaning “being,” “becoming,” “happening.” The third use of *saṃvṛti*, however, does recognizably involve consensus and convention. Candrakīrti’s gloss of *saṃvṛti* as *saṃketa* (“convention-governed symbols;” “usage that is agreed upon”) suggests that people may well have initially read the term as *saṃmuti* or *saṃmati/saṃmata* “consensus” coming from  $\sqrt{MAN}$  “to think” and then

moved to a problematic Sanskritism and a mistaken derivation from  $\sqrt{VR}$ , or perhaps even  $\sqrt{VRT}$ .

Modern interpreters often seem to privilege one or another of these three uses of *saṃvṛti* in their interpretation of Madhyamaka philosophy, and their choice determines, in an important fashion, what *saṃvṛti* is for them. Thus some opt for the first sense of *saṃvṛtisatya* and render the term as, for example, “*vérité d’enveloppement*,” (J. May, K. Mimaki), “*vérité de surface*” (D. Seyfort Rugg), or “truth-for-a-concealer,” “concealer-truth” (J. Hopkins). On the other hand, those modern writers who translate *saṃvṛtisatya* as “relative truth” (T. Stcherbatsky), or “conventional truth” (the Cowherds and numerous others) are, in effect, choosing to downplay or even disregard the first sense in favor of the second or third.

Modern interpreters aside, what were the philosophical consequences of these two textual phenomena in actual historical Buddhist schools of thought? Candrakīrtians, especially in Tibet, where Candrakīrti’s philosophy took on an importance that it never remotely had in India, were often tempted by a kind of global error theory and a dismissal of sophistication in the discovery of truth. To be sure, this was not a pure invention of Tibetans. There are several passages in Candrakīrti’s own writings that are naturally read as going in that direction. Elsewhere (see Tillemans 2011) I have dubbed this interpretation of Candrakīrti’s philosophy “typical Prāsaṅgika.”

It seems likely that the first etymology of *saṃvṛti* played *some* role in shaping that recurring Indo-Tibetan philosophical interpretation. Thus, for example, for Tibetan Jo nang pa interpreters of Madhyamaka *saṃvṛti* (= *kun rdzob*) means what is only “existent for mistaken understandings” (*blo ‘khrul ba’i ngor yod pa*), which is a marked leaning towards the first etymological interpretation. Many Tibetan Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas, and some Indians, like Jayānanda, too, argued that for Mādhyamikas there simply could be no *pramāṇas* (means of knowledge), i.e., that no-one could actually get customary truth right—there were only widespread errors that seemed right to the world. I would venture that if key spellings—i.e.,  $^{\circ}vṛti$  and  $^{\circ}rdzob$ —hadn’t been what they were, at least some of the push for that global error theory would have disappeared.

Perhaps, too, Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka might have been a somewhat different, possibly a more sophisticated philosophy, if the Mahāyānist *sūtra* text Candrakīrti cited had spoken of “wise people in the world,” as did the *Samyutta*, instead of just “the world.” Candrakīrtians might

have promoted, in some areas at least, more of a qualitative hierarchy of opinions and thus criticism by optimally qualified, insightful individuals, the opinions of a kind of ideal audience, rather than those of a purely actual one. In effect, they might have even been closer to the other Mādhyamikas, the so-called Svāntarikas, who stressed that the world was, in fact, badly wrong on a variety of things, and who thus placed weight on the rationally founded opinions of the judicious (*prekṣāvāt*)<sup>7</sup> instead of acquiescing, across the board, in the actually attested opinions of the lowest common denominator. A Svāntarika like Kamalaśīla, for example, in his *Sarvadharmāṇiḥsvabhāvasiddhi*, takes what looks to be a typical Prāsaṅgika-like position to task—viz., that all customary things are “established just because people believe them to be” (*dam bcas pa tsam gyis grub pa = pratijñāmātreṇa siddha*)—giving examples of where the world makes significant errors that *should* not be accepted.<sup>8</sup>

Let me conclude with a question that philologists might well pose at this point. Do such dissections of the Sanskrit and Tibetan compounds and the key *āgama* passage imply then that typical Prāsaṅgika philosophy is *just* confusion and little more? I certainly would not want to go that far. I don’t want to dismiss the influence of linguistic and textual phenomena, but I don’t want to exaggerate the importance of that influence either, as occasionally happens when philology is used to somehow *explain away* serious philosophical or religious ideas.<sup>9</sup> Spelling problems, hyper-

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<sup>7</sup> On the Svāntarika-Mādhyamika’s recourse to the idea of “judicious people,” see McClintock 2010.

<sup>8</sup> The passage from the *Sarvadharmāṇiḥsvabhāvasiddhi* is discussed extensively in Tillemans 2011 and 2016, chapter II.

<sup>9</sup> Let me give an example of what I think we had better not do. Harrison 1992 argues that some current ideas about the buddha, notably that buddhas *are* “Dharma-bodies,” are to quite a degree due to our mistaken readings of some occurrences of *dharmakāyāḥ* as a plural substantive—rather than as an adjective qualifying “buddhas” (“... have the Dharma as their bodies”)—or reading the substantive uses that there are in texts exotically, rather than just as meaning “buddhas are collections of qualities/dharma teachings.” Our bad reading of texts supposedly led us to the following conceptual error: “the temptation is to impute some kind of unitary ontological status to it [the *dharmakāya*] and to engage in theological flights of fancy which are unsupported by the texts. Thus metaphor gives way to metaphysics. (Harrison 1992, 74).” Paul Harrison, Jean Dantinne 1983, and others are no doubt right in taking many substantive occurrences

Sanskritisms, and missing words in *sūtras* gave *some* impetus to a version of customary truth as a rather dumbed-down truth, with no demand for expertise, and accessible easily to all. (I don't know how anyone could quantify that influence precisely). Be that as it may, there *were* serious philosophical issues that went far beyond those textual matters.

The bigger issue here in Mādhyamika versions of customary truth can be framed as a recognizable philosophical problem: whether a normative dimension is needed, or is indispensable, in a viable concept of truth. In other words, is truth what *should* be believed, and not merely what *is* in fact believed, very possibly by people who don't know any better and are always, in some sense, wrong? This issue remains a real one independently of what canonical texts did or did not say, or how Sanskrit terms were construed. Typical Prāsaṅgikas, including I think Candrakīrti himself on a natural reading of his texts, in effect, advocated a populist *lokaprasiddha* and global error theory largely because of their basic philosophical stance: they were very reluctant to accept that Mādhyamikas *should* make truth claims and thus have theses (*pakṣa*) of their own. Thus they acquiesced in the truth claims that others—the common man—in *fact* make. Svātantrikas,

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as meaning simply “the collection of qualities” or *l'ensemble des qualités*. It is clear, however, *pace* Harrison's prescriptive stance against reading *dharmakāya* absolutely/theologically (or ontologically), that there were important ways *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* commentators took *dharmakāya* as a substantive and accorded it an absolute sense. This is not a theological flight of fancy; *it is a major philosophical idea in Buddhist scholasticism*. Following Haribhadra, for example, the *dharmakāya* is the Buddha's omniscient mind or the buddhas' omniscient minds (= *jñānātmakadharmakāya*; *ye shes chos sku*) or the absolute and unitary nature of those minds (= *svābhāvīkākāya*; *ngo bo nyid sku*). See Makransky 1997, chapter X. Mainstream Yogācāra and Madhyamaka in India and Tibet uses the term in the absolute/theological fashion; it is not, as Harrison suggests, due essentially to the modern imagination and our wrong readings. What might be more reasonably claimed is that the *sūtras* had “non-absolute” uses of a term that the scholastic tradition widely read in an absolute/theological fashion and—whether we like it or not—then figured in later Indian and Tibetan religious accounts of the Buddha's bodies. Philology is indeed important; prescriptive stances and debunking usually do not help much. See also Tillemans 2007a and 2016, chapter I for arguments against some other well-known attempts at debunking, i.e., the critiques of Nāgārjuna in Robinson 1972 and Hayes 1994.

like Kamalaśīla, recognized the needed normativity in the concept of truth and saw the populist alternative as rationally disastrous.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly enough, some philosophically inclined Candrakīrtians, too, deliberately rejected the populist, non-normative stance on questions of *saṃvṛtisatya*. Such is the case of the Tibetan dGa' ldan pa/dGe lugs pa school. Its founder, Tsong kha pa, differentiates *saṃvṛtisatya* and “customary existence” (*saṃvṛtisat*). In this latter case he opted for the second and third senses and thus maintained that when Mādhyamikas say that all things exist customarily, they do *not* mean that things exist only from the mistaken point of view of ordinary people’s obscured minds, but rather intend that they exist as dependent-arising and because of customs.<sup>11</sup> Famously, too, Tsong kha pa insisted that Prāsaṅgikas, like their Svātantrika counterparts, are able to make and defend truth claims, that there had to be *pramāṇas*, and that customary truth was not just a widespread error, a fool’s gold that only seemed to be gold to mistaken minds. He seems essentially to have read Candrakīrti to say that a common man’s position was the best a Mādhyamika could do on metaphysical matters—like causality, universals, the existence of the external world, the status of absences, and other ontologically problematic facts—but that opinions on many other types of matters would admit of considerable reform and sophisticated upgrades.<sup>12</sup>

Most of Tsong kha pa’s positions were first and foremost argued for in terms of their philosophical promise.<sup>13</sup> They are often problematic textually, and some of the most obscure parts in his oeuvre concern *his* citing of Indian sources as backing for his ideas. I and others have gone into more details elsewhere as to how well, or badly, the philosophy fits the Indic texts of the school—Prāsaṅgika rather than Svātantrika-

<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere (i.e., Tillemans 2011 and 2016, chapter II) I have characterized the problem as one of avoiding the “dismal slough of relativism.”

<sup>11</sup> See Newland 1992, 83.

<sup>12</sup> This “atypical Prāsaṅgika” is taken up in Tillemans 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Curiously enough, though, his all-important choice of Candrakīrti and Prāsaṅgika as representing the *best* Madhyamaka thought, rather than Bhāviveka and the Svātantrika, is traditionally said to have been made *not* primarily for philosophical arguments but on the basis of his own, or his guru’s, visions of a tutelary deity, Mañjuśrī. On the extraordinary importance of these visions and their place in the development of the dGe lugs pa school, see Ary 2015.

Madhyamaka—to which Tsong kha pa decided to pledge allegiance. Suffice it to say here that Tsong kha pa did well what good philosophers East and West have regularly done and will no doubt continue to do: deftly philosophize as they want to with the textual transmissions they receive. Philosophy has its own imperatives: not infrequently, its sophistication and depth proceeds with, and even demands, misreading.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Two cases: (1) Tsong kha pa's strained reading (in *Lam rim chen mo's* last chapter) of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* IX.140ab in order to ground his own formulation of the idea of "recognition of the object of negation" (*dgag bya ngos 'dzin*). As Williams 1998, chapter 4, shows amply, this does not work as a likely account of the text of IX.139-141, nor is it the reading of the Indian commentators like Prajñākaramati and Vibhūticandra; yet it plays such a key and philosophically subtle role in Tsong kha pa's interpretation of Madhyamaka. (2) Tsong kha pa's pseudo-Indian textual justification (in *Drang nges legs bshad snying po*) for the idea that Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas, like Bhāviveka, accept intrinsic natures on the level of customary truth. See Eckel 2003 for, *inter alia*, the convoluted textual data and their (mis)use; see Tillemans 2003 on the important philosophical implications.

