



Madhyamaka Philosophy of No-Mind: Taktsang Lotsāwa's On Prāsaṅgika, Pramāṇa, Buddhahood and a Defense of No-Mind Thesis

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Abstract It is well known in contemporary Madhyamaka studies that the seventh century Indian philosopher Candrakīrti rejects the foundationalist Abhidharma epistemology. The question that is still open to debate is: Does Candrakīrti offer any alternative Madhyamaka epistemology? One possible way of addressing this question is to find out what Candrakīrti says about the nature of buddha's epistemic processes. We know that Candrakīrti has made some puzzling remarks on that score. On the one hand, he claims buddha is the *pramāṇabhūta-puruṣa* (person of epistemic and moral authority), *sarvākārajñatājñānaṃ* (omniscient, wise), *pratyakṣalakṣaṇam* (exclusively perceptual in characteristic) [Candrakīrti (MABh VI.214)], and claims that there are clearly four *pramāṇas*—epistemic warrants—direct perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), testimony (*āgama*) and analogy (*upamāna*) [Candrakīrti (Pp I.3), cf. MacDonald 2015, pp. 287–288]. On the other hand, somewhat paradoxically, Candrakīrti claims that buddhahood is an embodiment of a complete cessation of “mind and mental processes” [Candrakīrti (MABh XI.1, 155a; MAB XI.17d)] Now how are we to make sense of these two seemingly contradictory statements? Do these statements reflect any deeper conflicts within Candrakīrti's system or is there a coherent way to interpret these statements? The Tibetan Prāsaṅgika interpreters of Candrakīrti's Madhyamaka largely agree that there is no internal contradiction in Candrakīrti's system, and agree there is a way to make coherent sense of these statements. Nevertheless, the Tibetans exegetes bring to the table two radically conflicting proposals to approach Candrakīrti's Mādhyamaka; both claiming to successfully address the apparent tension arising from Candrakīrti's statements. One proposal is made by Tsongkhapa Losang Dakpa

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(Tsong kha pa bLo bzang grags pa, 1357–1419), who maintains the tension can be plausibly resolved by demonstrating that Candrakīrti’s unique non-foundationalist epistemological program renders him an epistemological coherentist. In contrast Taktsang Lotsawa Sherap Rinchen (sTag tshang Lo tsā ba Shes rab rin chen, 1405–1477) argues that according to Candrakīrti buddha is a global agnostic, on the ground of the nonexistence of mind and mental processes for those who have attained fully awakening. Taktsang instead proposes the no-mind thesis as a more plausible way to resolve the tension in Candrakīrti’s philosophy, categorically refusing to attribute to buddha any cognitive processes and epistemic warrants. This paper is an analysis of Taktsang’s no-mind thesis—the claim that buddhas utterly lack any knowledge of the world because they do not have epistemic processes and warrants to perceive the world—in what follows a rational reconstruction of his arguments is developed in order to evaluate his thesis. We shall then assess the implications of accepting Taktsang’s no-mind thesis.

Keywords Philosophy of mind · Epistemic coherentism · No-mind thesis · Non-epistemic Buddha · Others’ perspective

Introduction

Taktsang wrote *Freedom from Extremes Accomplished through Knowledge of All Philosophies*, in which his chapter on Madhyamaka (Middle Way School) presents systematic critiques of Tsongkhapa’s Prāsaṅgika account of the two truths (*bden pa gnyis*; Skt. *satya-dvaya*: conventional truths and ultimate truths), and Tsongkhapa’s attempt to develop a systematic Madhyamaka epistemology consistent with the metaphysics of the Indian philosophers Nāgārjuna (c. second century CE) and Candrakīrti (600–c. 650). Taktsang charges Tsongkhapa of committing “eighteen great burdens of contradiction” (*’gal khur chen po bco bryad*) in his interpretation of Madhyamaka, a charge that was vehemently opposed by Tsongkhapa’s later followers in the order he founded, the Geluk (dGe lugs). Taktsang’s critiques were defended by later scholars in the Sakya (Sa skya), his own school, although not explicitly mentioning his name and Kagyü (bKa’ rgyud) tradition.¹ Taktsang’s ideas greatly influenced philosophers of the Kagyü order, particularly the eighth Karmapa, Migyö Dorjé (Mi bskyod rdo rje, 1507–1554) as well as his successor the ninth Karmapa Wangchuk Dorjé (dBang phyug rdo rje, 1556–1603). Both endorsed and expanded on Taktsang’s critique of Tsongkhapa. Taktsang’s attack on Tsongkhapa’s Madhyamaka has also continued to resonate Madhyamaka studies in Tibet through successive generations up to the present day.

The juxtaposition of these two readings of Candrakīrti has a significant philosophical implications: On Tsongkhapa’s reading Candrakīrti’s rejects the epistemological and ontological foundationalism of Dignāga-Dharmakīrti and Abhidharma, but this rejection does not entail a wholesale denial of epistemology,

¹ Geluk is the most recently founded of the four major orders (*chos lugs*) of Tibetan Buddhism. The others are: Nyingma (rNying ma), Sakya (Sa skya), and Kagyü (bKa’ rgyud).

thus Candrakīrti proposes a unique non-foundationalist epistemological program that complements Prāsaṅgika's ontological non-foundationalism. Arguing instead that Candrakīrti offers no systematic and constructive Madhyamaka epistemology or ontology whatsoever, Taktsang insists that Candrakīrti's denial of Dignāga-Dharmakīrti's epistemological foundationalism necessarily entails a wholesale rejection of any possible epistemological program. On Taktsang's reading, Candrakīrti is an error theorist according to whom all concepts are error, utterly false, all entities are false creations, all cognitive subjects nothing but delusions and all cognitive objects we ordinary experience are nothing but products of that deluded mind. Since everything we experience is due to the force of delusion, there is no truth, knowledge of any kind is invariably delusion. Nor is there any sort of reality to be uncovered from any conventional entity.

Tsongkhapa's Epistemological Coherentism: Epistemic Buddha

First we shall briefly consider Tsongkhapa's conception of buddhahood and his justification for the existence of a buddha's knowledge, epistemic processes and epistemic warrants. This will help us clarify Taktsang's contrary position and the critique he levels against Tsongkhapa. Taktsang accuses Tsongkhapa of committing Eighteen Great Contradictions in his exegesis of Candrakīrti. Of those the fifteenth takes issues with what he perceives to be the problems arising from Tsongkhapa's epistemological views concerning omniscience to which we will turn in order to bring a relief to the discussion.

According to Tsongkhapa, Candrakīrti defends a type of epistemological coherentism which Nāgārjuna advocated nearly five hundred years before him. Nāgārjuna argues for what must be, as Garfield puts it, "the first explicit defense of epistemological coherentism in the history of world philosophy."² Modern day Coherentists, such as Lawrence Bonjour, hold the view that whether our beliefs are warranted or justified depends entirely on how well they fit or cohere with our other beliefs. The Coherentist maintains that a belief's justification depends upon its "belonging to a coherent web of mutually supporting beliefs."³ For Tsongkhapa, however, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti are coherentists not simply because their beliefs cohere within a web of mutually supporting beliefs, but additionally they hold their epistemic resources efficaciousness and reliability derives from their *dependence*: that "they are dependent. They are dependent upon their epistemic objects (*prameya*), the objects of knowledge."⁴

The modern coherentist theory of justification, employs what is known as a "doxastic" theory of justification according to which the only items we can use to justify, or that serve as grounds for, our beliefs are other beliefs."⁵ By contrast, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, the ancient Indian coherentists, use what Tsongkhapa calls a "mutual dependence" theory of justification in which the reasons which we use to justify our epistemic truth are in a linguistic and causal dependence relation—

² The Cowherds (2011, p. 28).

³ Lemos (2007, p. 78).

⁴ The Cowherds (2011, p. 28).

⁵ Lemos (2007, p. 78) and Bonjour (1976, p. 290)

that is a form of mutual dependence between epistemic objects and epistemic resources, is necessary to justify epistemic truths.

Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's epistemological coherentism is concerned with how well the four *pramāṇas*—valid epistemic resources—and their respective *prameyārtha*—epistemic objects 'hang together' within the mundane epistemic conventional framework, so that there is well organized, coherent system of knowledge. This is what Candrakīrti endorses in the *Prasannapadā* I.3 after completing his critique of the Sautrāntika's theory of perception. Candrakīrti plainly takes onboard four sources of knowledge—*pramāṇas*: direct cognition, inference, scriptural and analogy—taking them to be conventionally authoritative with respect to their epistemic objects, defined respectively as follows:

Therefore, if things in the world exist—be it characterised (*lakṣya*) or characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*), particulars (essential characteristics) or universals (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*)—they must exist as such in virtue of being directly (*sākṣāt*) apprehended, thus they are not beyond the ken of the sense (*aparokṣa*), for this reason those things, along with their cognitive subjects, are posited as (1) *pratyakṣa*—perceptible. A double moon etc., are not *pratyakṣa* with respect to the cognition without the disorder (*timira*), even though they are *pratyakṣa* with respect to cognition with the disorders.⁶ (2) Inference (*anumāna*) is the cognition whose object is beyond the ken of the senses and which arises from a probative reason that does not deviate (*mi 'khrul ba*) from the thesis.⁷ (3) Authoritative testimony is the statement (*vacana*) of a persons of authority (*āpta*) who know directly things out of the range of the direct faculties (*atīndriya*).⁸ (4) Comparison is the apprehension of an object by virtue of experiencing a similarity (*sādṛśya*) for instance, in the statement, “a cow is like a bull without dewlap.”⁹

Thus we explain that the apprehension of objects occurs by means of the four-fold *pramāṇas*, all of which exist in virtue of being mutually dependent upon each other. Where there is a reliable source of knowledge there also exists knowable objects (*prameyārtha*); where there exists knowable objects there also exists a reliable sources of knowledge. The duo—reliable source of knowledge and knowable object—have absolutely no intrinsic nature

⁶ Candrakīrti (*Pp* I.3, 'a, 25b), see McDonald (2015, pp. 287–288) for a slightly different translation. Here Candrakīrti concludes his discussion on *pratyakṣa* stressing his own account of *pramāṇa* in which even conventionally mistaken perception is recognised as a *pratyakṣa* contrary to Dignāga-Dharmakīrtian approach to dismiss such cognition belong to *pratyakṣa*.—Here is clear evidence where Candrakīrti makes distinction between conventional entities such as a double moon, the imaginary hairs seen visually due to being afflicted by *timira*, visual disorder, he says are not perceptible (*pratyakṣa*) with respect to a cognition of healthy normal vision, even though they are perceptibles (*pratyakṣa* with respect to the cognition the visual disorder. Putting it differently: a vision of a double moon is not even epistemically reliable in the world whereas a healthy visual perception is reliable in the context of the world.

⁷ Candrakīrti (*Pp* I.3, 'a, 25b).

⁸ Candrakīrti (*Pp* I.3, 'a, 25b).

⁹ Candrakīrti (*Pp* I.3, 'a, 25b).

(*svābhāvika*). Therefore, the world is precisely the mode in which things are observed.¹⁰

According to Tsongkhapa, Candrakīrti takes seriously *pramāṇas*—epistemic warrants—that can effectively deliver Mādhyamika's conventional epistemic tasks. So, the epistemological coherentism of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti is about how each component of valid epistemic resources—perception, inference, testimony and comparison—fit together and dovetail, and arise with their respective epistemic objects. Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's critique of the Naiyāyika and Sautrāntika epistemologies, in parallel to the modern day epistemological coherentist critique of Cartesian foundationalism, shares the view that a foundationalist account of knowledge is “untenable”¹¹ as it suffers from what Bonjour calls “the regress problem”.¹²

Unlike Dharmakīrti's epistemology in which epistemically warranted perception should always be veridical and nonconceptual, on Candrakīrti's epistemology, perception and perceptible objects fit together as conceptual entities, mutually causing and supporting each other within linguistic convention. Perception, although conceptual in nature, can nevertheless be an authoritative epistemic resource which can deliver epistemic truth about the perceptible. Perception arises from apprehending the perceptible, but perception in turn conceptually designate or posits the perceptible non-analytically in a manner that meets the standards of linguistic convention. Candrakīrti provides us the example of the cognition of a double moon as a case of perception. He argues that the cognition of a double moon is false (*apramāṇa*)—as it does not cohere with the mundane epistemic convention with respect to a healthy visual cognition: it is clearly false and its percept—the double moon—is nonexistent (unreal). Nevertheless, and this is important to note, Candrakīrti explicitly states that the double moon *does* exist as a reality with respect to the false cognition with the visually disordered. Therefore, even though the double moon percept is nonexistent, the cognition of a double moon is *pramāṇa* with respect to a nonexistent double moon.

Inferential cognition causally arises from our apprehending those objects that are beyond the ken of our direct faculties, by using a probative reason and then positing the inferred objects. Similarly, knowledge derived from authoritative testimony arises due to authoritative individuals having knowledge of things outside the range of the direct faculties (*atīndriya*) and this authoritative cognition posits those obscure objects. And knowledge derived from comparison arises from objects by virtue of their similarity (*sādrśya*) and this knowledge too posits the analogous as they are conventionally without subjecting them to ultimate analysis.

When things are considered conventionally, not upon ultimate analysis, Candrakīrti argues the four epistemic resources are capable of delivering true knowledge of the world according to the (conventional) mode in which things are

¹⁰ Candrakīrti (*Pp* I.3, 'a, 25b). See McDonald (2015, pp. 287–288) for a slightly different translation.

¹¹ Bonjour (1976, p. 284).

¹² Bonjour (1976, p. 282).

epistemically observed—based on how things appear. Therefore, we are able to apprehend objects by means of these four-fold sources of knowledge.¹³

According to Tsongkhapa one of the principal reasons Candrakīrti brings to bear upon the epistemic efficacy of objects is his insistence on *pramāṇas*—epistemic resources knowledge—and the *prameyārthas*—epistemic objects’—emptiness of the intrinsic nature (*svābhāvika*). It is the absolute absence of their intrinsic nature that assures a mutual dependence relation between epistemic sources of knowledge and knowable objects. It is the emptiness of intrinsic nature that frees up both *pramāṇas* and *prameyārthas* from any underlying epistemological and ontological foundations. But at the same time their *niḥsvābhāvika*—the emptiness of intrinsic nature—allows *pramāṇas* and *prameyārthas* to be malleable which enables them to exist in dovetailing manner, entangled with one other ontologically and epistemologically.

Since Candrakīrti applies the same coherentist epistemology at the level of buddhahood, Tsongkhapa argues, no contradiction should arise in Candrakīrti’s system. Tsongkhapa argues that buddhahood is a constitutive of two insights: buddha’s nondual and transcendent insight derived from meditative equipoise and buddha’s dual and immanent insight of the subsequent attainment, both of which, he argues, are equally epistemically warranted, both forms of insights are free from any epistemic misconception, both equally and truly disclose the Mādhyamika’s final ontological insights: emptiness and dependent origination. The only difference between the two epistemic insights is the forms in which they each disclose their insight. The nondual insight derived from meditative equipoise discloses the emptiness of intrinsic nature as the ultimate truth through its critical engagement with the world, cutting through the limits of conceptual linguistic convention. The dual insight derived from the post-meditative activities discloses the emptiness of intrinsic nature conventionally through non-reductive phenomenological engagement with the world, framing the cognitive processes within the domain of linguistic convention. Stating the point differently, insight derived from meditative equipoise, is reductive in the sense of rendering the apparent conventional duality as reducible to a single non-dual space-like-emptiness. In contrast, the dual insight of buddha’s post-meditative activities (such as giving discourses, answering student questions etc.) non-reductively, holistically and relationally sees all entities to be illusion-like-emptiness, directly engaging with all things by way of transcending intrinsic nature, conventionally.¹⁴

To be sure, the epistemic deliberation of buddha’s two insights appear very different, and indeed they differ in the forms they each take. Yet that does not imply that they are two different ‘assessments’ of a truth, which implies substantive

¹³ Candrakīrti’s argument is very closely echoed in David Hume’s psychological account as well when Hume argues in his *Treatise*: “We must therefore, make a distinction betwixt the cause and the object of these passions; betwixt that idea, which excites them, and that to which they direct their view, when excited.” Hume (*Treatise* II:I:II 605). Elaborating this point further Hume says: “Here then is a passion placed betwixt two ideas, of which the one produces it, and the other is produced by it. The first idea, therefore, represents the cause, the second the object of the passion” Hume (*Treatise* II:I:II 606).

¹⁴ Tsongkhapa (1993, p. 742).

difference, or divergent truths, but rather that they are distinct 'means' of arriving at the same truth.

There is nothing that is ultimately real including emptiness itself (since everything is empty of intrinsic nature, the emptiness itself is no exception, it too is empty of intrinsic nature), everything that exists is only conventionally real, thus dependently arisen.

Tsongkhapa draws these arguments from Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's emphasis upon the identity of the emptiness of intrinsic nature and dependent origination, and their cases for the existence of a complementary relation between conventional truth and ultimate truth. These arguments are made explicit in Candrakīrti's *Clear-word (Prasannapadā)* and *Commentary on Introduction to Middle Way (Madhyamakāvātārabhāṣya)*, and in the case of Nāgārjuna *Fundamental Verses of Middle Way (Mūlamadhyamakakārikā)*, *Detailed Commentary on the Verses on of Rice Seedling (Śālistambakavistarākhyāṭīkā)*, *Pratīyasamutpādahṛdayavyākhyāna* and *Precious Garland (Ratnāvalī)*. According to Tsongkhapa, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's arguments in these texts provide the rational ground for the epistemological coherentist thesis that the two insights (the nondual insight derived from meditative equipoise and the dual insight derived from the post-meditative activities) must necessarily be brought together in unison and accorded equal epistemic significance. The two have no epistemic priority over each other and the epistemic role each bring to bear is equally crucial for any knowledge event buddha possesses. In the same way, the two truths are equally ontologically significant; there is no ontological priority of one truth over the other. The two truths are two natures—conventional nature and ultimate nature—of the same entity, the existence of one becomes possible by virtue of the other, and one cannot quarantine the other. Likewise, the two insights reciprocally produce buddhahood by reinforcing and complementing each other, even though they may take two different forms, both insights are an inseparable embodiments of an awakened mind.¹⁵

According to Tsongkhapa if we interpret Candrakīrti as adopting a form of epistemological coherentism, apparent epistemological tension at the level of buddhahood does not arise in the first place. In this sense buddha's conventional insight into the dependently originated nature of phenomena, is consistent with buddha's ultimate insight of the emptiness of those phenomena. And this is to assert that buddha knows the conventional truth without possessing any element of dualistic misconception. Buddha's conventional insight into dependent origination may involve the use of terms and concepts, yet he skillfully uses them still free from dualistic misconception.¹⁶ In this sense buddha's cognitive and epistemic resources

¹⁵ Tsongkhapa (1984, p. 458).

¹⁶ Tsongkhapa, *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, transl. Garfield, L. Jay. (2006, p. 494): "Thus from the perspective of the wisdom by means of which he knows empirical phenomena, all phenomena appear to him as selfless, essenceless, unreal, and illusion like, but not as truly existent. When things appear through that wisdom in virtue of their appearance to the ignorant, it is merely the appearance of their appearance as truly existent to others. As *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* says,

Those who are knowledgeable about things
See things as impermanent and deceptive,
Straw like, empty and selfless.

are completely freed from any defiled mental processes. Therefore, buddha's conventional insight into things as they are does not render redundant or contradict the epistemic role of buddha's ultimate insight into things as they are. The specific function of ultimate insight, on Candrakīrti's definition, is to critically establish emptiness as the ultimate truth, as the final ontological fact.¹⁷ And yet buddha's ultimate insight into things as they are does not render redundant the epistemic role of buddha's conventional insight into things as they are. The specific epistemic function of conventional insight, according to Candrakīrti, is to establish dependent origination as the conventional truth, as the final ontological fact.

For Tsongkhapa buddhahood is the epitome of a mutual reciprocal relationship between the two insights—each of which arise from the cooperative epistemic functions of buddha's sensory cognitions and analytic cognition. It follows from this, that buddhahood is not possible, absent any one of the two cognitions. Here we shall draw upon a useful insight from Immanuel Kant's section on *Transcendental Logic* in which he makes the point that the foundation of all human knowledge is comprised of experience (sensation or intuition) and understanding (or conception). Both of which, Kant says, are necessary epistemic conditions without which knowledge is not possible, as each makes a unique contribution.¹⁸ Similar epistemic issues operate in the case of buddhahood: being a highest form of knowing, buddhahood cannot privilege one of the two cognitions over the other just in the same way neither Kant's intuition and understanding can have priority over the other, nor exchange their functions.¹⁹ As with Kant's intuition, on Tsongkhapa's view no object would be given to consciousness without the epistemic contribution

Footnote 16 continued

They are seen as void.
 Beings, that are baseless, that are not objects,
 Rootless, that do not endure,
 That arise entirely from ignorance,
 That have no beginning, middle, or end—[420]
 —And that are without any core, like a plantain tree,
 And that are like a city of gandharvas,
 Or an endless city of ignorance
 Appear to them just as illusions. [pp. 26–28].

¹⁷ Tsongkhapa, see Garfield, transl. (2006, p. 492): “An ārya, who through wisdom, directly perceives the way things really are, without the slightest appearance of subject–object duality in his perspective, just like water poured into water, is absorbed in meditative equipoise. Thus, he does not directly perceive empirical phenomena, because he would have to perceive them, and they cannot be perceived indirectly. Instead, they would have to be perceived directly. To perceive something without a perceptual aspect is not possible in this system. Therefore, it is not possible for the cognizing mind to which the perceptual aspect of such things as material form or sound appear directly to be without the appearance of subject–object duality. That it does not perceive empirical phenomena does not entail the absurd consequence that the characteristic and characterized are detached.”

¹⁸ In his Introduction to *Transcendental Logic*, Kant writes: “Intuition and conception constitutes, therefore, the elements of all our knowledge, so that neither conceptions without an intuition in some way corresponding to them, nor intuition without conceptions, can afford us a cognition.” Kant, *Critique A50/B74*.

¹⁹ “Further, these two faculties or capacities cannot exchange their functions. The understanding is not capable of intuiting anything, and the senses are not capable of thinking anything.” Kant, *Critique A51/B75*.

of the sensory faculty and sensory cognition. Buddhahood would be impossible, as it would entirely lack phenomenological contents. Buddha's insight into how things are phenomenologically would have no empirical basis, thus undermining the fundamental Buddhist tenet that buddha directly speaks from experience and has a direct and immediate knowledge of all things.

Likewise, like Kant for whom without understanding, no object could be thought, for Tsongkhapa, without contribution from critical, analytic cognition, buddhahood is again impossible, as it would lack the faculty to comprehend the deeper reality of things as they are—conventionally and ultimately. Absent this critical cognitive faculty enabling buddha to undertake a reflective analysis; it is not possible for a buddha either to dually see things as dependently originated (as this ultimate knowledge arises from critically engaging with the world), nor would it be possible for a buddha to nondually see things as empty of intrinsic nature (as this ultimate knowledge can only arise from critically engaging with the world). Both forms of buddha's knowing are premised upon buddha's ability to deflate the blindness of ontological and epistemological presuppositions which arise from the naïve judgement we make upon how things appear to the senses. As for Kant, "Thoughts without content are void; and intuitions without concepts, blind,"²⁰ for Tsongkhapa analytic cognition without the empirical basis of sensory experience would remain utterly void of any meaningful cognitive content. After all, it is sensory cognitive processes that supply analytic cognition its immediately accessible and analysable cognitive contents. Meanwhile sensory experience without analytic cognition would lack the critical faculty to comprehend the deeper reality of things as they are.

Thus, it is buddha's sensory experience which grounds his analytic insight phenomenologically, seeing the five aggregates to be empty of intrinsic nature. Likewise, without bringing to bear analytic cognition's critical role into play upon the sensory experience, the sensory cognition would remain forever blinded by deeply entrenched egocentric beliefs and onto-epistemological suppositions, thus the mind would remain always vulnerable to deceptions and illusions thrust upon it by the senses. When analytical cognition brings its critical reductive analysis to bear upon sensory experience, sensory cognition acquires critical sights, enabling them to understand the deceptive and illusory nature of things for what they are, just as they are without being deceived. Thus it is that these two distinct cognitive resources the buddha brings into play in his daily epistemic and phenomenological engagement with the world enable him to see things as dependently originated, as conventionally real, as merely illusory.

Taktsang's No-Mind Thesis: Non-epistemic Buddha

Taktsang's conceptions of buddhahood is radically different from Tsongkhapa. Taktsang's argument for no-mind thesis is nothing new, as his predecessors Jayānanda, Patsab Lotsāwa and others before him both in India and Tibet have clearly advanced some versions of the no-mind thesis in their interpretations of

²⁰ Kant, *Critique A*₅₁/*B*₇₅.

Candrakīrti. Nonetheless, Taktsang is certainly amongst the first to use the no-mind argument against Tsongkhapa's interpretation of Candrakīrti. Our primary concern from hereon will be to attempt a rational reconstruction of Taktsang's argument for the no-mind thesis, advanced in his reading of Candrakīrti, in order to understand how this proposal constitutes a challenge against Tsongkhapa.

Mark Siderits attempts to capture Candrakīrti's epistemological stance at the level of buddhahood with the notion of "Zombie-Buddha" or "Robo-Buddha."²¹ In Mādhyamika philosophy the notion of Robo-Buddha is associated with the two related no-mind arguments. One is the argument supporting the claim that the perfectly awakened beings can exercise their cognitive skills effortlessly, spontaneously and purely intuitively, without involving any intentional deliberation. The second is the argument supporting the claim that the perfectly enlightened consciousness is pure wisdom (*yang dag pa'i ye shes*), which is, as Taktsang Lotsāwa characterizes it: "undefiled" (*zag med*), "utterly immaterial" (*bem chos min pa*), purity (*gtsang*), blissful (*bde*) and the self (*bdag*)."²² A philosophical zombie is without conscious experience, qualia or sentience, similarly buddhas, according to Taktsang, have no thought process, sensations, or feelings whatsoever. Buddhas, he claims, have no mind and mental processes such as feeling, intention, etc. Absent any experiencing cognitive subject; buddhas are said to comprehend or experience reality immediately, non-dually and non-conceptually. We will call this Taktsang's no-mind thesis. In *Treatise* (*Grub mtha' kun shes*) and the *Commentary* (*Grub mtha' kun shes kyi rnam bshad*)²³ Taktsang articulates his clearest arguments in favor of the thesis. We can sketch the structure of Taktsang's no-mind argument this way:

²¹ Siderits (2006, pp. 308–333). In the philosophy of mind, the philosophical zombie thought experiment was originally conceived as a challenge against various form of reductive physicalism. The zombie argument is advanced in the 1970 s by Nagel (1974, pp. 435–450) and Kirk (2015) and more recently by Chalmers (1996). Physicalist like Daniel Dennett, however, rejects this theory view, arguing that philosophical zombie is impossible to exist and is logically incoherent. Dennett (1991, 1995). To sum the argument in short: a 'philosophical zombie' is a being that resembles us perfectly despite lacking phenomenological states. An influential proponent, David Chalmers, draws an argument from the *conceivability* of a world identical to our own—albeit the humans are replaced with philosophical zombies—to the *possibility* of such a world. Chalmers points thus to a particularly vexing 'hard' problem of consciousness. That is, while we may be able to resolve 'easy' problems such as working out how the eye transmits light photons into visual information, the 'hard' problem—that is, why we have phenomenal states *at all* remains to be solved. This line of argument is often used to defend against the reduction or dismissal of the mental, to defend some form of dualism—the view that the world constitutes two kinds of substances: the mental and the physical, rather than merely a physicalist monist reduction.

²² Sa bcu pa'i bar du je phrar 'gro ba zhig sangs rgyas kyi sar ma lus par spangs pas rtag brtan zhi ba g.yung drung dang gtsang bde rtag bdag gi pha rol tu phyin pa zhes 'khor lo tha ma'i mdo dang bstan bcos las rgya cher gsungs so // Taktsang (2007a, p. 355).

²³ We benefited from two translations of Taktsang's text. The draft translations *Grub mtha' kun shes kyi rnam bshad* which is a joint work with Thomas Doctor, Jay L. Garfield, John Powers, Douglas Duckworth and Sonam Thakchöe. We thank them for permission to use some of the material. We thank Jeffrey Hopkins for his translation of the section on the eighteen great contradictions in Hopkins (2003, pp. 527–575).

- (1) If buddha has mind, he must perceive the world.
- (2) If he perceives the world, the perception must be either (a) from his own perspective (*rang ngor*), or (b) constituted by the perspectives of others (*gzhan-ngor*).
- (3) But (a) buddha's own perspective, being contentless, cannot perceive the world and (b) the perspectives of others, being deluded, cannot be identified with the buddha's perceiving the world.
- (4) Therefore, buddha does not perceive the world. (2,3 *modus tollens*)
- (5) Therefore, buddha does not have mind to engage with the world. (1,4 *modus tollens*)²⁴

Taktsang's defense of the conclusion (5), as we will sketch below, comes primarily from the premises: (3) and (4) which do most of the philosophical heavy lifting. The premises (1) and (2) explicitly deny any third possible alternative by which buddha could experience the world, affirming (3a) that the buddha's knowledge is exhausted in buddha's own-perspective (*rang ngor*) and denying (3b) as possible epistemic authority, as *gzhan ngor*—another person's perspective—is *incompatible* with what we might call the 'buddha's eye-view'.²⁵

There are at least two ways, we can make sense of the distinctions between the perspectives at play here. One way is epistemological: in this sense, Taktsang uses the term *Rang ngor* to describe this 'buddha's eye view'—a phrase referring to buddha's own all-knowing perspective, the unique perspective from which buddha is said to have an exclusive knowledge of the ultimate. *Rang ngor* is a perspective which lacks intentionality, conceptuality and duality. *Rang ngor* is for us ordinary beings strictly inconceivable, *bsam-gyis mi-khyab-pa, acintya*.²⁶ However, deluded beings conceive buddha in virtue of their own karmic dispositions, hence each has her own conception of how buddha perceives the world—this is *gzhan-ngor*. So, by the expression *gzhan ngor*—another person's perspective—Takstang refers to non-enlightened ordinary being's mode of perception, the perspective by which ordinary beings see and experience the world of conventional realities, including their fabricated conception of buddha.

The second way to make sense of the two perspectives—*Rang ngor* and *gzhan ngor* -distinction is suggested in Donald Lopez's text the *Madman's Middle Way*. Here the two perspectives are taken to be *two distinct philosophical standpoints* from which to assert the distinctions between the two theses: an assertion for oneself, literally "assertion from buddha's own perspective" (*rang ngo'i khas len*)

²⁴ We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the structure of this argument to a blind referee, except minor changes in the wording we have appropriated it entirely.

²⁵ Gendun Chöpel also maintains that these two perspectives are quite contradictory. He argues there is not much point in our futile attempts to reconcile the understanding of an enlightened being who has directly understood emptiness with the ignorance of the world who do not have such understand. If there were some possibility of such reconciliation, it would have occurred sometime over the long history of saṃsāra. That it has not suggested that these two perspectives are quite incompatible. Lopez (2006, p. 194).

²⁶ We are grateful for the reviewer's feedback on this point. We are particularly thankful for correcting my problematic idiosyncratic conception of *gzhan gnor*.

and an assertion for others, which is “assertion from the perspective of another” (*gzhan ngo'i khas len*).²⁷

Taktsang employs both these strategies, yet it is the epistemological distinction that he draws between the two perspectives that is most relevant when the nature of buddha's epistemic engagement with the world is the bone of contention.

Buddha's *rang ngor*—Own Perspective: Buddha's Eye-View

So here we first turn to premise (3) of Taktsang's argument that buddha's *rang ngor*—own perspective—is contentless, that the Buddha does not experience the world. We shall have a closer look at this premise by considering two questions: What is buddha's *rang ngor*—own perspective—according to Taktsang? And why does buddha not experience the world? According to Taktsang, the Buddha himself offers the answer to the first question more explicitly and definitively in his turning of the *Third Dharma Wheel* (the specialized teachings of the Yogācāra and Vajrayāna), concerning buddha-nature. Taktsang argues that Nāgārjuna and other great Mādhyamikas have all accepted that the focus of the final and definitive teaching of the Buddha is contained within the Third Dharma Wheel, and that this teaching affirms the primacy of pure wisdom—“undefiled consciousness” (*zag med kyi shes pa*), more commonly known as: “buddha-essence” or buddha-nature (*bde gshegs snying po/tathāgata-garbha*). Taktsang writes in his *Treatise*:

In the final context appears the undefiled mind of the ground.
The *tathāgata* that becomes increasingly clear,
At times referred to as extremely subtle wind and mind.
At others as the natural and innate luminosity.
And at the pinnacle of the vehicles is empty form endowed with supreme features.²⁸

Taktsang's *Commentary* explains that there exists an “undefiled consciousness” which he says is the subject—the ground (*gzhi*), the path (*lam*) and the fruition (*'bras bu*)—of the Third Dharma Wheel Turning. It is called “undefiled consciousness” (*zag med yeshes*) because there exist, according to the Vajrayāna, pure consciousness referred to as “the honey-like undefiled consciousness” (*zag med shes pa sbrang rtsi 'dra*). It is a type of consciousness which is entirely unrelated to any of the six ordinary sensory cognitions. The six ordinary consciousnesses, Taktsang claims, are “the gateways of defilements” (*zag pa'i sgo drug*) for all defilements have the six sensory cognitions as their sources from which to arise. Moreover, the undefiled consciousness is not subject to defilement either through observation (*dmigs pa*) or through association (*mtshung ldan*). That is, not through observation: because undefiled consciousness does not engage with and observe any defiled cognitive object, since all possible objects that could act as its domain of engagement are already, at the stage of buddhahood, entirely eliminated as the objects of negation. Neither is pure consciousness subject to defilement through

²⁷ This second way to understand the distinction is the approach Donald Lopez adopts (2006, p. 145).

²⁸ Taktsang (2007b, pp. 75bd–76ab).

association (*mtshung ldan*): as it does not associate with or accompany any psychological, cognitive or physiological state or entity that could potentially defile it; since all defilements are eradicated at the stage of buddhahood.²⁹

Taktsang identifies the undefiled consciousness with buddha's *rang ngor*—own perspective—and says that this identification often takes shape in the Vajrayāna texts in various forms. In some tantric texts it is called: “the undefiled mind of the ground” (*gzhi'i zag med shes pa*), in many others: “buddha-essence” (*bde gshegs snying po*), in some, it is labelled: “extremely subtle wind-mind” (*shing tu phra ba'i rlung sems*); in the tantras such as *Hevajra* and *Cakrasamvara* it is recognised as: “natural and innate luminosity” (*rang bzhin lhan skyes 'od gsal*) and in the *Kālacakra tantra* it is repeatedly called: “form of empt[iness] that is endowed with all supreme aspects” (*rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong gzugs*).³⁰

Notwithstanding the various names used to describe buddha's own perspective, Taktsang claims, both *sūtra* and *tantra* attribute to this undefiled consciousness certain specific metaphysical qualities: that it is indivisible (*cha med*), omnipresent (*kun 'gro*), peaceful (*zhi zhing*), permanent (*rtag pa*), reality (*chos dbyings*)—ultimate reality (*don dam bden pa*).³¹ Although Taktsang problematizes some of these properties, he appears to endorse most of them. His *Treatise* says there are good reasons why the undefiled consciousness or buddha-nature is described variously. Buddha-nature disintegrates momentarily but its continuum is permanent.³² While stains obscure it, its nature is peaceful. While reasoning demolishes it, the path does not undermine it. While it is not an object of the conceptual mind (*'dzin stangs*)—and therefore beyond the reach of all six sensory consciousnesses—it is an observed object (*dmigs yul*) of the undefiled consciousness itself. Wisdom

²⁹ Taktsang (2007a, p. 349).

³⁰ Bde gshegs snying po sngar las je gsal gyur//la lar shin tu phra ba'i rlung sems dang//gzhan du rang bzhin lhan skyes 'od gsal dang//theg rtser rnam kun mchog ldan stong gzugs zhes//gsungs ...Taktsang (2007b, p. 118).

³¹ 'di cha med kun 'gro zhi zhing rtag/_chos dbyings don dam bden par gsungs...//Taktsang (2007b, p. 118). Taktsang says that these qualities attributed to undefiled consciousness are a major source of confusion amongst the Tibetan interpreters. Some offering a reificationist interpretation such as this one: Undefiled consciousness is “omnipresent”—pervades equally throughout the universe; “stainless”—utterly pure by nature, and peaceful; “permanent”—since momentary disintegration would imply dependent origination and a conditioned entity, ultimate reality is unconditioned and eternal. As the intrinsic nature of reality, ultimate reality is “immutable,” “defies rational analysis,” and “indestructible.” Taktsang (2007a, p. 350). Other interpreters, Taktsang claims, nihilistically denigrate the existence of the undefiled consciousness, therefore denying the existence of *tathāgatāgarbha*, asserting that ultimate reality is the emptiness of true reality” (*bden stong don dom pa'i bden pa*) because reductive analysis can show that the five aggregates are empty and without any core like the plantain tree. Taktsang rejects this interpretation as “nihilistic emptiness” (*chad stong*) and “dead emptiness” (*bem stong*), which he claims are a far cry from the supreme emptiness of (*rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong nyid*). Taktsang (2007a, p. 350).

³² Taktsang seems to disagree with other Mādhyamikas who maintain that continua are not ultimately real. The fact that buddha-nature's continuum is permanent and the fact that it is the only ultimately real entity there is for Taktsang, clearly, indicates that he does not consider it in any inconsistent with it being the ultimate reality.

itself is the ultimate reality.³³ Taktsang claims the Third Dharma Wheel offers the most detailed account of the undefiled consciousness, further adding some more qualifications to describe it. It is “eternal” (*gyung drung*)—“permanent” (*rtag*), “enduring” (*brtan*) and “peaceful” (*zhi ba*)—the transcendent perfection of “purity” (*gtsang*), “bliss” (*bde*), and “self” (*bdag*).³⁴

The *Commentary* explains that the undefiled consciousness is not the ultimate mode of existence which reasoning discovers after having performed its analysis. Nevertheless, it is the way things are merely conventionally because regarding mere convention its natural continuity does not change just as heat may be conventionally held to be the nature of fire, yet this is the case only from the perspective of a mistaken cognition. In reality, even the nature of fire cannot endure without undergoing change. For this reason, there is a universal assumption amongst the Tibetans, Taktsang claims, that buddha’s *epistemic resources are nondeceptive* (*blo ma ’khrul ba*), they thus have special powers to experience even fire as having cooling effects, but this would not be possible should heat be the unchanging nature of fire.³⁵

Taktsang argues that in more explicit teachings of the First and the Intermediate Dharma Wheels this undefiled consciousness or buddha-nature is not treated as a “nondeceptive cognitive subject” (*chos can bslu med*). These teachings do not recognize any nondeceptive cognitive *process*. In the teachings of the final Dharma Wheel and the Tantra, the same cognition is, however, recognised as *nondeceptive epistemic subject* only on the ground that its *continuum* (*rgyun*) *is established to be nondeceptive* (*bslu med*). That is, the continuum of the undefiled consciousness, according to Taktsang, persists uninterruptedly in all the transitional phases of the sentient existence; it exists in the most rudimentary sentient states through to buddhahood—the most evolved mental state of enlightenment. The continuum of the undefiled consciousness continues uninterruptedly throughout all the periods of misleadingly labelled unconscious states, be they states of meditative equipoise, through to comatose states absent any sign of neurological and cognitive activities. It is impossible to stop the continuity of the undefiled consciousness, claims Taktsang; it goes on forever even after the attainment of buddhahood. The continuum of the undefiled consciousness may be *nondeceptive* in so far as it

³³ Kha cig bden stong nyid la der dgongs pas//kun rdzob tu yang de dag med ces smra//de gnyis rtag chad g.yang du lhung bas na// skad cig ’jig kyang rgyun gyi rtag pa dang //dri mas g.yogs kyang ngo bo zhi ba dang // rig pas ’jig kyang lam gyis gzhom med dang //’dzin stangs min kyang dmigs yul yin pa’i phyir// rtag dang zhi bden chos dbyings ming gis bstan//’di ni tha snyad pa yi gnas lugs te// tha snyad tsam du rang bzhin mi ’gyur phyir// Taktsang (2007b, p. 118).

³⁴ De yang sa bcu pa’i bar du je phrar ’gro ba zhig sangs rgyas kyi sar ma lus par spangs pas rtag brtan zhi ba g.yung drung dang gtsang bde rtag bdag gi pha rol tu phyin pa zhes ’khor lo tha ma’i mdo dang bstan bcos las rgya cher gsungs so//Taktsang (2007a, p. 355).

³⁵ gzhan rnam dogs pa chung la rtag pa dang zhi ba dang bden pa dang chos dbyings kyi ming gis bstan pa’i rgyu mtshan yod de/ rim pa ltar skad cig sogs dang / dri sogs dang / rigs sogs dang / yang dag pa’i ye shes kyi ’dzin stangs kyi yul min sogs phyir ro//des na bde gshegs snying po ma yin dgag ’di ni don dam pa’i gnas lugs rig shes kyi mnyed don min yang tha sogs te/_tha snyad tsam du rgyun gyi rang bzhin mi ’gyur ba’i phyir/ khyab ste/ me’i rang bzhin tsha ba zhes sogs grags kyang ’khrul sogs tsam du zad de/ rgyun gyi rang bzhin gzhan du ’gyur ba’i phyir te/_sangs rgyas sogs nus ldan gyi blo ma ’khrul ba la bil bar snang zhes kun la grags pa’i phyir ro// Taktsang (2007a, p. 352).

invariably remains uninterrupted. Yet according to Taktsang, it is also *deceptive* because it consists of instants, a conditioned entity consisting of the conjunction of a series of momentary instants in rapid succession, not enduring even for a second instant.³⁶

Taktsang, of course, does not see any problem in this apparent contradiction. Therefore, he does not provide any attempt to resolve it. He takes for granted that the continuum of the undefiled consciousness possesses the nondeceptive characteristic of the ultimate reality in so far as its continuum is invariably constant, yet this doesn't contradict the fact that it too is deceptive in so far as it is constantly undergoing momentary changes. Since the undefiled consciousness is taken to be the *nondeceptive* epistemic subject (*chos can bslu med*), according to Taktsang, a sustained and thorough meditation upon its nature makes possible the attainment of buddhahood. This meditation takes into account the undefiled consciousness and the emptiness of its reality as, respectively, an appearing object (*snang yul*) and an apprehended object (*'dzin stangs yul*).³⁷ But the realization of buddhahood, Taktsang argues, is not a new attainment of a state which was not already present within, hence the Buddha is said to have repeatedly stated: 'buddha is within.'³⁸ And, Taktsang claims, there is a good reason for this, as Maitreya states, in his famous Yogācāra *Uttaratantra*: "The characteristic amenable to differentiation is adventitious which buddha-nature (*khams*) does not have. The characteristic unamenable to differentiation is an unsurpassable quality which [buddha-nature] does have."³⁹ That is: the ground (*gzhi*) of buddha, qualities from which arises buddhahood, is fully and inherently present within oneself. And therefore, Taktsang claims, the undefiled consciousness, buddha-nature and the adventitious stains that since beginningless time came to accompany each other are utterly irreconcilable: whereas buddha qualities are innate, the stains that do their covering up are extrinsic, must be produced anew through ignorant grasping and objectification.⁴⁰ If buddha-nature and adventitious stains have accompanied one another since beginningless time, we may want to ask, what makes the one innate and the other adventitious and extrinsic? Taktsang again does not elaborate on this point.

In any case, for Taktsang, all buddha qualities are completely compatible, they go hand-in-hand with buddha-nature—undefiled consciousness—the wisdom of the ultimate truth. And because they are inherently present within us as our innate

³⁶ Des khor lo bar pa'i dgos bstan la/ chos can bslu med kyang tha ma dang snags la bltos nas chos can sogs te/ rgyun bslu med tsam du grub pa'i phyir te/ sems med kyi skabs kun dang/ mnyam gzhag yeshes kun dang/ sangs rgyas nas kyang rgyun ched ma myong zhing chad me srid pa'i phyir ro// 'on kyang bslu ste/ 'dus byas yin pas skad cig gnyis par mi sdod pas so// Taktsang (2007a, p. 352).

³⁷ 'di ni tha snyad pa yi gnas lugs te//tha snyad tsam du rang bzhin mi 'gyur phyir//me yi tsha sogs 'khrul ngo'i rang bzhin tsam//nus ldan blo la bsil bar snang phyir ro//des na chos can bslu med 'dir gtogs te//on kyang skad cig la bltos 'di yang slu//di dang 'di yi steng gi bden stong gnyis//snang dang 'dzin stangs yul du byas nas ni//legs par goms na sangs rgyas myur 'grub phyir//Taktsang (2007b, p. 118).

³⁸ Bsgrub gzhi rang la tshang ba la dgongs nas//sangs rgyas rang la yod ces lan mang gsungs//Taktsang (2007b, p. 118).

³⁹ Maitreya (*Sems tsam*, phi 61b; I.155).

⁴⁰ 'di dang thog med nas 'grogs dri ma rnam//shin tu mi mthun gsar du skye dgos kyi//yon tan mtha' dag shin tu mthun pas na// Taktsang (2007a, p. 118).

capacity from the ground up, the Buddha says: ‘The virtues are present in and of themselves’ (*rang chas su gzhi nas yod*).⁴¹ As the *Uttaratantra* states: “The flaws are adventitious but the qualities are innate.”⁴² And for the purification of the stains covering up the undefiled consciousness progressively, we are presented, Taktsang claims, with the scaffolding of the vehicles and the philosophical systems.⁴³ The stains and the flaws from buddha’s *rang ngor* progressively diminish until they are entirely eliminated; consequently, revealing the presence within the pure consciousness, due to sustained meditative equipoise in which the undefiled consciousness is both the cognitive subject and the cognitive object.

At this point, I turn to the second question (addressing the premise 3b): Why do Buddha’s, with their unique perspective, do not perceive the world?⁴⁴ The above discussion partly offers Taktsang’s answer to this second question which we intend to address in this section. In the preceding discussion, we have seen the defense of Taktsang’s claim that buddha’s own perspective, which is the perspective of the undefiled consciousness or buddha-essence, has no cognitive object other than the emptiness of undefiled consciousness itself. We have also briefly considered Taktsang’s claim that buddha’s own perspective operates entirely independently of all six epistemic resources and their sensory objects. Construing them as the gateways of defilements, Taktsang regards all six sensory cognitions as erroneous epistemic resources.

There is the third element which Taktsang introduced in the above discussion, although briefly, that is the notion of the objects of negation. Perhaps the most revealing of all answers to the second question comes from Taktsang’s strict eliminativism which is the view that the objects of negation from buddha’s own perspective entail the elimination entirely of the world of conventional realities and sensory cognitions.⁴⁵ Drawing upon the Tantric and Yogārāca doctrines Taktsang argues, as we shall shortly see, that all cognitive processes that engage with or having any association with conventional truth are necessarily epistemically defective and deceiving, for conventional reality itself exist in virtue of being

⁴¹ Gzhi nas de dag nus pa’i tshul gyis ni//gnas phyir yon tan rang chas zhes kyang gsungs// Taktsang (2007a, p. 118).

⁴² Maitreya (*Sems tsam*, phi 57a; I.51ab).

⁴³ ‘di yi dri ma sbyong ba’i rim pa la//theg dang grub mtha’ gong nas gong du bzhag/ Taktsang (2007a, pp. 118–119).

⁴⁴ Taktsang is aware of the more sophisticated answer to this question which his opponent, Tsongkhapa, proposes to make sense of the claims about buddha’s cognition at issue here. But of course, Taktsang rejects it outright. According to Tsongkhapa, the answer does not require us to invoking such incredible magical powers. But it does require us to differentiate between two kinds of conceptual knowledge: one which superimposes *svabhāva*, therefore, false since doing so invariably ends up positing ultimately real ontological being onto things which in themselves entirely lacked, and one which does not superimpose *svabhāva*, therefore, true since it understands the ways things are. A fully enlightened being who correctly understands things as they are have stopped superimposing *svabhāva* on things, hence understand them merely as relational or illusory entities entirely empty of *svabhāva*.

⁴⁵ Again, Tsongkhapa brings an alternative view on the table according to which object of negation does not involve global elimination, a simple elimination of epistemic errors is enough. Thakchoe and Garfield (2011, pp. 74–87) compares and contrasts Tsongkhapa and Gorampa’s conceptions of the objection of negation. Taktsang’s view is mirrored in Gorampa’s presentation almost identically which differs very significantly from the position Tsongkhapa adopts.

causally conditioned, it is illusory, transient, and deceptive. Gorampa supports this claim when he says that omniscience excludes everything empirical—causality, conventional realities, cognitive processes and obscurational truths—anything that is subject to momentary changes of arising and ceasing cannot exist from a buddha's own perspective.⁴⁶ Here then, we can see that a radically new sense of omniscience is being offered. The perspective of a buddha which is said to have an exclusively nondual experience of the *dharmadhātu*—ultimate reality—is *not* subject to causation and change; however, all conventional realities *ipso facto* bear the marks of impermanence, unreality, deceptivity and are causally subject to arising and cessation, but nonarising is precisely what it means to be ultimately real.⁴⁷

The position which Gorampa defends, we maintain, is consistent with Taktsang's, as both of them reinforce the nondual character of omniscience, according to which ultimate reality—*dharmadhātu*—and buddha's undefiled consciousness—are completely identified, nondifferentiatedly integrated. Gorampa argues that with the attainment of omniscience, buddha's *insight* itself becomes the undefiled *ultimate domain*—*dharmadhātu* (*zag med kyi dbyings*); when ultimate reality is fully actualised, exhaustively familiarized, as a result of which all temporary dualistic concepts drop away. The *ultimate buddha*, then, is an absolute integration of the ultimate perspective of a buddha as the subject and *dharmadhātu* as the object.⁴⁸ Thus omniscience, strictly speaking, as Gorampa explains it, transcends the synthesis between transcendent enlightened insight and ultimate reality.⁴⁹ In other words, as Śākya Chogden puts it: “The actual cognitive sphere of the [nondual] wisdom of meditative equipoise directly realizing emptiness is the wisdom itself.”⁵⁰ For Shākya Chogden, as for Taktsang and Gorampa then, “this wisdom is the ultimate truth, for it is the actual cognitive domain of the wisdom of the meditative equipoise... This holds true because this wisdom is the direct personal wisdom.”⁵¹

For Taktsang this means ultimate reality and enlightened wisdom are identified in every respect, descriptive concepts such as the knower and the knowable, the

⁴⁶ Gorampa (1969a, p. 447a). In fact, Taktsang says, many *sūtras* and *śāstras* describe omniscience to be “permanent, stable, peaceful, and immutable; the transcendent perfection of purity, bliss, self, and eternity” (Taktsang 2007a, p. 355).

⁴⁷ Gorampa (1969a, pp. 447ab).

⁴⁸ Gorampa (1969a, p. 372d). There is an interesting resemblance between Taktsang's identification of omniscience with ultimate reality and Aristotle's divine Intellect being a self-thinker: what it thinks is identical with the divine thinker. (*On the Soul* 3.4, 430a2–4; *Metaphysics* 12.7, 1072b19–12) Similar identity claim for self-thinking, in the case of a disembodied divine intellect, is given by Philoponus of which is endorsed as true of divine Intellect by Plotinus. See Sorabji (2006, pp. 203–204).

⁴⁹ Gorampa (1969a, p. 447d).

⁵⁰ Shākya Chogden (1975b, p. 187).

⁵¹ Shākya Chogden (1975b, pp. 187–188). Śākya Chogden denies emptiness as being the object of the transcendent wisdom. “So-called emptiness—which eliminates other [entities] (*gzhan sel, anyāpoha*) and bears the nonaffirming negative aspect—is not its actual cognitive sphere. Just as Dignāga and his son [Dharmakīrti] deny the direct perception that supposedly directly perceives entitilessness (*dnegos med*), so does Candrakīrti,” he writes. Taktsang's analyses, it has been suggested, heavily influenced Śākya Chogden's metaphysics and his method and here is one such case out of many instances which does very clearly show how much he agrees with Taktsang.

subject and the object, which require invoking dualistic concepts, are all inappropriate.⁵² Central to Taktsang's no-mind thesis is the claim that buddha's own enlightened perspective consists exclusively of contentless, non-dual experience of undefiled consciousness, which he asserts results from having entirely eliminated all objects of negation. This includes all cognitive contents and ordinary sensory cognitions by means of which we commonly experience the world. Taktsang, like Gorampa, adopts the view which could be described as a form of eliminativism (about the object of negation)—which makes an explicit claim that *all* cognitive contents and *all* cognitive activities must be eliminated to attain nondual omniscience. In his *Commentary* Taktsang likens the ontological status of all cognitive entities—conventional realities— and the epistemic process that lead to the perception of these conventional realities—to a nonexistent yellow conch (conches are supposed to be always white according to the Tibetans) and to errors of apprehending the yellow conch, respectively. Cognitive objects do not appear in any way to an omniscient mind, just as the yellow conches do not appear in any way to healthy eyesight. Cognitive objects appear to ordinary beings as though they exist, Taktsang argues, only because we objectify their existence, reifying their reality. Just as the misperception of the white conchs as yellow goes away on the return of healthy eyesight, so the perceptual experience of all objects, on this view, will be gradually eliminated as we progressively move forward along the soteriological paths; eventually there will be a total disappearance of all cognitive objects and corresponding cognitive activities come the culmination of buddha's final insight.⁵³ Analogous to Aristotle's contentless divine Intellect which he postulates in *Metaphysics* 12.7, 12.9 (because it is a self-thinking subject, identical with what it thinks),⁵⁴ Taktsang's omniscience has no epistemic content and no corresponding epistemic subject. Hence no epistemic processes whatsoever could possibly be said to exist in the context of omniscience. This is so, explains Taktsang when commenting on Candrakīrti's *Commentary on Madhyamakāvatāra* (MABh) XI.12a

⁵² This view may be similar to the one held by Plotinus (205–270), widely considered the founder of Neoplatonism. He also proposes in *The Fifth Ennead* 5.3.5 (in order to attain perfect self-knowing), “the seeing subject and seen objects must be present as one thing,” whereby “the object known must be identical with the knowing act [or agent], the Intellectual-Principle, therefore, identical with the Intellectual Realm” (Plotinus 2014, p. 2684). Cf. Sorabji (2006, p. 215). Plotinus' argument is that if in the identity of a cognitive subject with cognitive objects the objects were merely representations of reality, the subject would not possess the realities. Plotinus (2014, p. 2685). Cf. See Sorabji (2006, p. 215). My comparison of Taktsang with Plotinus is not a deliberate attempt to turn Taktsang into some sort of an Advaita Vedāntin, no Mādhyamika would accept this result. But I have to admit the similarities between the two systems are striking to say the least.

⁵³ Gsum pa ni[dag pa'i ye shes la las snang med]-gdul bya gzhan snang la shar ba gzhan don kun rdzob pa'am rdzun pa'i sangs rgyas kyi skus ni gdul bya'i don du sku'i snang tshul bstan pa bzhin du/ thugs kyi mkhyen tshul yang mtha' yas bstan mod/ rig pas dung sogs sha mig dag pa la cung zad mi snang ba dang mtshungs pas ma rig pa'i bden 'dzin lta zhog gnyis snang tsam yang dag pa'i ye shes slob pa 'phags pa'i mnyam bzhag mtha' dag dang/ de'i rtogs pa mthar thug pa'i sangs rgyas rang rgyud kyi ye shes mtha' dag ni gnyis snang gi yul med zhir zhugs nyid yin te/_ (Taktsang 2007a, p. 315).

⁵⁴ Consider, for instance, *Metaphysics* 12.7 where Aristotle writes: “And thinking in itself deals with that which is best in itself, and that which is thinking in the fullest sense with that which is best in the fullest sense. And thought thinks of itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same” (Aristotle 2015, p. 1276; Sorabji 2006, p. 203).

and XI.14a, for the reason that all epistemic objects constitute dualistic appearances, it follows, therefore, that any subject apprehending an object is necessarily dually engaged. Omniscience, by contrast, is invariably nondual.⁵⁵ Here Taktsang turns on its head a commonly held representationalist position which asserts that an object is known when the cognition arises with its representation by claiming that: whereof a representational object does not arise thereof a cognition does not arise either. In the context of omniscience, where an object does not exist there a subject also does not arise. The two are no longer counterparts, they have instead become unified: analogous to water poured into water.⁵⁶

On Taktsang's soteriology, reifying ignorance expresses itself through objective appearances. Following Dharmakīrti and Jayānanda closely who claim that it is ignorance that triggers an objective appearance of forms and so on⁵⁷—on Taktsang's view, *ignorance* literally makes conventional entities appear.⁵⁸ The appearance would continue to express itself dually as representations, as cognitive objects, for those beings in whom are present certain degrees of underlying confusion due to the presence of innate ignorance. Amongst such cognitive agents are those exalted beings whose minds have not yet entirely abolished the residues of ignorance, but who are nevertheless on their way to ascending to such an epistemic summit. When the mind is entirely freed of the residues of ignorance there is then the final epistemic climax in which all objective *appearances* entirely *disappear*.

⁵⁵ Sangs rgyas la ni kun rdzob bden pa lta zhogakun rdzob tsam yang 'jog byed med par gsungs te/_snang ba med pa'i spyod yul mnga' ba rnams la ni ma yin no//sangs rgyas rnams la ni chos thams cad rnam pa thams cad du mngon par rdzogs par byang chub pa'i phyir sems dang sems las byung ba'i rgyu ba gtan log pa yin no//zhes dang / 'og tu yang / sems 'gags pa de sku yis mngon sum mdzad//ces dang / ro mnyam nyid du yang dag thugs su chad par mdzad gyur pas//mkhyen zang khyod kyis skad cig gis ni shes bya thugs su chud / / (Taktsang 2007a, p. 268; Gorampa 1969a, p. 446b).

⁵⁶ Gnyis snang med pa'i ye shes yul med du bshad pa na/ gang tshe zhi ba de nyid yin na de la blo gros 'jug mi 'gyur//zhes sogs kyis yul snang med na yul mkhyen pa'i shes pa mi 'thad do zhes rtsod pa bkod nas/ gang tshe skye med de nyid yin na/zhes sogs kyis/ yul gyi rnam ldan du skyes pas blo des yul de rtogs par grags pa bzhin du/ yul skye med la blo yang skye med chu la chu bzhag bzhin du song nas/ yul gyi gnas tshul dang blo'i snang tshul mthun pa nyid la blos yul rtogs par tha snyad gdags zhes gsungs kyil/ yul snang med pa ma grub ces ma gsungs pa dang / spyod 'jug tu yang / gang tshe dngos dang dngos med dag/ blo yi mdun na mi gnas pa//de tshe rnam pa gzhan med pas//dmigs pa med pas rab tu zhi//zhes ye shes la yul snang med par bshad la/ de lta na chos gsung ba sogs kyil 'phrin las mi 'thad par brtsad pa'i lan du/ ji ltar rdza mkhan stobs chen ldan pas 'dir//zhes sogs dang / yid bzhin nor bu dpag bsam shing //ji ltar re ba yongs skong ba//de bzhin gdul bya smon lam gyi//dbang gis rgyal ba'i skur snang ngo //zhes dang / sems med pa la mchod byas pas//ji ltar 'bras bu 'byung bar 'gyur//zhes brtsad pa'i lan du/ gang phyir bzhugs pa'am mya ngan 'das//mtshungs pa nyid du bstan phyir ro/zhes khyab ma grub kyil lan mdzad kyil sems med pa ma grub bo//zhes ma gsungs so/ Taktsang (2007a, p. 268);

⁵⁷ "There are two kinds of obscurations: the afflicted ignorance and the unafflicted ignorance. Of these, the afflictive ignorance causes the continuation of saṃsāra; the unafflictive ignorance causes the appearance of forms and so on. The buddhas have neither obscuration; hence, since the absence of the cause entails the absence of the effect, they experience neither cyclic existence nor the cognitive appearance of form and so on. That being the case, how could the merely conventional appear to them?" (Jayānanda 1978, p. 73), Jayānanda (MAṬ *dBu ma* Vol. ra: 146b).

⁵⁸ Kun rdzob kyil bden pa ni gti mug gi ming can 'jig rten ngar 'dzin lhan skyes kyis 'jog la/dag pa'i ye shes kyis ma gzigs par yang yang gsungs pa'i phyir ro// Taktsang (2007a, pp. 271–272).

This is the moment of omniscience—the final epistemic ascent which, Taktsang says, must arise from the mantra path.⁵⁹

Buddhahood, from buddha's own perspective, thus cannot accommodate the presence of any appearance which could elicit the subject-object duality.⁶⁰ Buddhahood, according to Taktsang, therefore proscribes all references to the ordinary world of things. There is no other way to escape from naïve realism—the view according to which things exist as they are represented through the medium of ordinary experiences—which is precisely the point Gendun Chöpel's makes when he says: "The extent to which there is unceasing appearance of the conventionalities to that extent there remains a cognitive reference, in spite of having a direct knowledge of emptiness, one is forced to commit to realism."⁶¹

Furthermore, Taktsang contends, the world of phenomena is entirely eliminated from the transcendent perspective of a buddha, not only in *the ultimate* sense but also in *the conventional* sense. His claim is that while the exalted beings in the lower soteriological path have postmeditative experiences of conventional realities—causal processes such as impermanence, conditioned things, unreality, and deceptive phenomena etc., nevertheless these phenomenal worlds of experiences are entirely nonexistent for the omniscient.⁶² Taktsang, like Jayānanda and Dharmakīrti, claims conventional truth is *ipso facto* ignorance, although, "inherent mundane subjectivity posit it, the pure omniscient insight does not perceive it."⁶³

This view of Taktsang in which *obstructions* to omniscience are held to take *physical forms*—objective appearances—and that these appearances must be eliminated if we are to destroy the obstructions to omniscience is one which Gendun Chöpel, according to Lopez, also endorses.⁶⁴ Not surprisingly, therefore, for Taktsang as for Gorampa, there is nothing extraordinary in the ability to establish the ultimate nonexistence of the phenomenal world from the perspective of meditative equipoise; even exalted beings in the lower scale of the noble path can easily do that.⁶⁵ The exceptional quality of omniscience is its ability to establish, even conventionally (empirically), the complete elimination of phenomenal

⁵⁹ 'khor ba 'di'i rtsa ba ni bka' 'khor lo tha mar gsungs pa'i ma rig bag chags kyi sa'o//des na ma rig bag chags kyi sa'i nyon mongs dang / zag pa med pa'i las dang / yid kyi rang bzhin gyi lus dang/bsam gyis mi khyab par bsgyur ba'i 'chi 'pho rnam la dag pa rnam byang gi skye 'chi zhes bya la/ de yang sa bcu pa'i bar du je phrar 'gro ba zhig sangs rgyas kyi sar ma lus par spangs pas rtag brtan zhi ba g.yung drung dang gtsang bde rtag bdag gi pha rol tu phyin pa zhes 'khor lo tha ma'i mdo dang bstan bcos las rgya cher gsungs so//'khor ba shin tu phra ba ni rang lam gyi sgrib gnyis ma lus par spangs kyang rang lam du sbas pa sngags lam du phyung ba'i bem chos phra mo ma spangs pa phar phyin theg pa rkyang pa'i sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das yin te/'di'i thugs rgyud la rdo rje theg par bstan pa'i gnyen po'i mthar thug bde chen gyi ye shes ma 'khrungs pa'i phyir ro/ Taktsang (2007a, p. 355).

⁶⁰ And as Pawo Rinpoche puts it "The direct cognition of the ultimate only engages in the nature of phenomena just as it is, when there are no more remainders of knower, knowable object, true seeing, false seeing, and so on in such a cognition" (Brunnhölzl 2004, p. 608).

⁶¹ Gendun Chöpel (1990, p. 191).

⁶² Gorampa (1969b, p. 730).

⁶³ Kun rdzob kyi bden pa ni gti mug gi ming can 'jig rten ngar 'dzin lhan skyes kyi 'jog la/dag pa'i ye shes kyi ma gzigs par yang yang gsungs pa'i phyir ro// Taktsang (2007a, pp. 271–272).

⁶⁴ Lopez (2006, p. 207).

⁶⁵ Gorampa (1969b, p. 730).

appearances in their postmeditative state. This claim is also mirrored in Gendun Chöphel's assertion, on Lopez's reading of him, that "no appearances are mere appearances. All appearances are appearances of true existence, and all thoughts are conceptions of true existence."⁶⁶ Mipham Rinpoche makes the same claim when he states that as we progressively move higher upwards on the soteriological ladder through meditative equipoise, phenomenal appearances inversely diminish, becoming less and less, eventually completely disappear.⁶⁷ Likewise, Kunkhyen Pema Karpo defends Taktsang's position when he says the appearances exist and are perceived as illusory as long as there exist residues of the soteriological obstructions (*sgrib pa lhag ma*). With the elimination of the residues of the obstructions, the appearances are also completely eliminated from buddha's epistemic domain, never to arise again and *never* to show up in buddha's own perspective.⁶⁸

Gzhan ngor—Others Perspective

Suppose Taktsang is correct that the world of ordinary experience is entirely non-existent from buddha's own perspective, and that a buddha does not have any epistemic resources whatsoever to empirically experience anything of the world, other than being a pure non-dualistic *dharmadhātu*. Now, considering bodhisattvas' ethical pledge, buddhas' absolute commitment to release all sentient beings from being ensnared in samsāra; how is this practice possible for buddhas? How could they even begin to release sentient beings and live up to and practice the noble pledge when the appearances of the sentient beings for whose service they committed themselves becomes non-existent and inconceivable from buddha's own standpoint? This question does appear to pose an insuperable problem for Taktsang's no-mind thesis, given his commitment to the claim that buddhahood is the culmination of the elimination of the objective world of appearances, including therefore the appearances of the sentient beings, and the elimination of all cognitive subjects and all epistemic resources. There does not seem to be any way in which sentient beings could present themselves to the buddhas: after all, they are conventional entities. Nor could buddhas perceive the appearance of the sentient beings, after all, buddhas do not experience anything immanent and dualistic. Consequently, how could buddhas ever know from their own standpoint that there

⁶⁶ Lopez (2006, p. 2006).

⁶⁷ Rinpoche (1993, p. 606).

⁶⁸ Here are some examples of Taktsang's reductio arguments against Tsongkhapa's position which claim that a buddha has direct perception of the world. Sangs rgyas kyi sku 'byung lus bem chos dang bral ba'i ye shes kyi sku nyid du bsgrub pa'i phyir du/sgyu lus la sogs pa'i lam bsgom pa don med par 'gyur te/thugs kyi bem chos mtha' dag 'jal ba yon tan yin pa'i phyir/ lam 'bras bu dang bcas pa rjes su mthun pa ma yin par 'gyur te/ slob pa'i mnyam gzahag ye shes dang / sngags lam gyi dkyil 'khor re re'i sngon du yang snang ba nan gyis 'gog dgos shing / 'bras bu'i dus su mtha' dag snang ba'i phyir ro//mthong lam mnyam gzahag ye shes las gong nas gong du mnyam gzahag tu chos can je gsal tu 'gro dgos par 'gyur te/ 'bras bu'i mnyam gzahag ye shes la chos can mtha' dag snang ba'i phyir ro/des na kun rdzob bden pa dpyod par byed pa'i tshad ma'i gtso bo sangs rgyas kyi ye shes su byas pa 'di ni lugs 'di la brten pa'i skyon gyi gtso bo yin te/ 'jig rten kun rdzob bden pa dang //dam pa'i don gyi bden pa ste//zhes kun rdzob la 'jig rten sbyar ba nus med du thal ba dang / ma brtags grags par gti mug las yin no//zhes dang / Taktsang (2007a, pp. 270–271), Kunkhyen Pema Karpo (n.d., p. 121).

are sentient beings at all who need help? This is the same problem Donald Lopez points out that Gendun Chöpel's Madhyamaka faces. A natural consequence emerging from Gendun Chöpel's statement that: "The Prāsaṅgika would, therefore, be agnostic about the operations of ordinary consciousness; the point is to achieve a state beyond consciousness. The conventional and the ultimate would be two unrelated domains" comments, Lopez.⁶⁹

So how may Taktsang respond to these objections? Taktsang's response to the objection, we will venture to propose here, should come from premise (3b) of his no-mind argument: *gzhan ngor*—another person's perspective. The *gzhan ngor* hypothesis does claim that sentient beings develop their own perspectives of buddhas, although this conception is acquired purely from individual subjective perspectives, exclusively from the standpoint of the ordinary beings who are delusional and confused and has no connection whatsoever with the inconceivable buddha's mode of knowing which is utterly beyond the access of the ordinary. Taktsang proposes the *gzhan ngor* thesis in this way:

There appear in the perception of other trainees the obscurational [truth] that benefit others or the unreal bodies of buddhas similar to the display of the appearance of the buddha bodies for the benefit of the trainees. There are, similarly, also an innumerable display of the modes in which the mind of a buddha comprehends.⁷⁰

Taktsang's *gzhan ngor* thesis has its central claim that the ordinary conception of buddhas simulate the delusional ordinary beings and the worldly appearances exactly in the way in which how we ordinary beings have experience of them. Gendun Chöpel's helpful metaphor nicely illustrate the concept: *other-person perspective* at issue here. He says when a magician conjures up an illusory elephant; the spellbound audience would see a real elephant on the stage where it is completely absent. The magician uses his simple magical tricks so that the audience would perceive a non-elephant entity to create the illusion of a real elephant to appear. And, when the audience asks the magician: "Is this a real elephant?" The magician would reply: "Yes, this is indeed a real elephant." The magician here speaks from another person's perspective, says Gendun Chöpel.

In this context, the magician accepts and takes for granted the existence of the elephant exclusively from another person's perspective—the perspective of his spell-bound audience—even though the magician himself knows all too well that there is no real elephant present.⁷¹ Buddhas too are, for Taktsang, like this magician: they accept what the world of deluded ordinary beings takes reality to be. Just as the elephant the spellbound audience perceives is entirely a product of the magical spell—and consequently nonexistent—the world which we ordinary beings experience, in which inhabit such things as persons, animals, plants etc., is nothing

⁶⁹ Lopez (2006, pp. 196, 200).

⁷⁰ Gdul bya gzhan snang la shar ba gzhan don kun rdzob pa'am rdzun pa'i sangs rgyas kyi skus ni gdul bya'i don du sku'i snang tshul bstan pa bzhin du/_ thugs kyi mkhyen tshul yang mtha' yas bstan mod/ Taktsang (2007a, p. 315).

⁷¹ Chöpel (1990, p. 192).

more than the projections of our deeply held underlying reifying beliefs. And buddhas and Mādhyamikas accept these as the given just to conform to our ordinary deluded perspective, in the same manner in which the magician takes for granted the existence of the magical elephant just to be consistent with the beliefs of the spellbound audience.⁷²

Furthermore, Taktsang claims that buddha's services to benefit sentient beings do not come from any deliberate will, intention or effort. Buddhas make no such attempt whatsoever to embark on or accomplish any specific project dedicated to the service of beings; they undertake no particular activity including all the rest which are beneficial for all beings. Nonetheless, says Taktsang, the wishes and aspirations of the beings spontaneously come to bear fruits, yielding the impressions that buddhas are engaging with the world in various forms and delivering all kinds of activities for the benefit of beings. We are furnished with several metaphors which, Taktsang claims, show the spontaneity and effortlessness with which buddha's moral activities come to bear their fruits:

Buddhas' physical bodies and their inconceivable and inexpressible enlightened deeds are comparable to the wish-granting gems, and the attainment of the anti-poison mantra-monument of garūḍa (which is said to continue to pacify poison even after that person dies). Buddhas not only have no conception of any kind, but there is no need for them even to produce *bodhicitta*—the mind of enlightenment. And yet by the power of the aspirations in their former lives and of the virtuous deeds of the disciples, the displays of their emanations exclusively appear to the others, to each disciple.⁷³

Consider, for instance, a strong potter, (this example Taktsang borrows from Candrakīrti⁷⁴) who turns his wheel so forcefully that it continues to rotate without any further effort, in the like manner, buddhas are said to spin the dharma wheels without requiring any subsequent deliberation. Buddhas are, (Taktsang takes this from Śāntideva⁷⁵) like a wish-granting jewel and wish-granting trees those of which, without any effort entirely, fulfil hopes and aspirations of the parched travelers, the appearances of the buddhas of which require no deliberate effort to be made on the part of buddhas, spontaneously manifest in response to the aspirations

⁷² Rmi lam dang sad pa'i rta glang rnams 'khrul rgyu ma zad kyi bar du yod mtshungs dang / zad nas med mtshungs su lan mang du gsungs pas dbu ma rang lugs la yang log med par smras pa ni don la zhugs pa yin pas/ thad pa de ma 'dor bar dbu ma rang lugs la tshad ma dang tshad min kun rdzob bzhir byas la med par 'dod par bya'o//des na rang rgyud pa mi 'dod pa'i nyan rang la chos kyi bdag med rtogs pa dgos pa dang / thal 'gyur ba mi 'dod pa'i dbu tshad seng ge mjing snol gyi snyan ming yang dwang du blangs pa 'dis ni legs cha bsdu par byas pas 'gal ba mang po 'dus pa yin no/ Taktsang (2007a, p. 273).

⁷³ Sangs rgyas kyi gzugs sku dang 'phrin las bsam yas brjod kyi mi lang ba rnams/_yid bzhin gyi nor bu dang nam mkha' lding gi mchod sdong bsgrubs pa la sogs pa bzhin du rtog pa med par ma zad/_sems bskyed pa tsam yang mi dgos par sngon gyi smon lam dang gdul bya'i las bzang po'i dbang gis gdul bya de dang de'i gzhan snang gi rnam rol kho na yin par bzhed de/Taktsang (2007a, pp. 343–344).

⁷⁴ Candrakīrti (MABh XI.15–16).

⁷⁵ Śāntideva (BCA IX.36).

and hopes of disciples. In the same manner buddhas, without any deliberate intention, accomplish the welfare of the entirety of sentient beings.

The efficacy of the Buddha's activities which these examples are supposed to illustrate, according to Taktsang, offer us the perspective which is required to appreciate buddha's effortless and non-intentionality and therefore of no-mind. Without the need of any deliberate effort on the part of buddhas, they are said to make themselves appear with various forms and appearances to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of the sentient beings. The unintentional blessings which beings are supposed to receive from buddhas are the same both in quality and quantity, whether buddhas to whom the offerings are made or, are directed, are either living or dead.

There is another objection which we could raise against Taktsang's *gzhan ngor* doctrine which Taktsang himself anticipates, and which proceeds as follows⁷⁶: Supposing that we agree with the no-mind interpretation of Candrakīrti's view that buddhas perform no cognitive and epistemic functions, then, how should we understand the implications of the claims we find in Candrakīrti works, where he himself asserts that buddhas have extraordinary cognitive virtues, describing buddhahood as characteristically "perceptual,"⁷⁷ and as the "exclusive epistemic authority."⁷⁸ Similarly, we also find him providing extensive lists of buddha's extraordinary cognitive, psychic and moral prowess, such as the ten powers, four fearlessness and the like.

Taktsang's response is swift but sweeping: he says all such references are only rhetorical devices directed towards buddha's own perspective which, while characterized as "not-seeing" is also recognized as "the supreme way of seeing." Therefore, such textual references are "concerned with the insight of meditative equipoise without an appearance."⁷⁹ There are other Madhyamaka texts in which buddhas are attributed mental processes, for instance, Śāntideva's *Bodhicāryāvātāra* (BCA, *Engaging the Way of Bodhisattvas*) in which the buddhas and bodhisattvas vision is proclaimed to be "completely unimpeded."⁸⁰ The Prāsaṅgika texts make such proclamations, Taktsang claims, for the benefit of other beings by considering "the perspective of trainees" (*gdul bya'i snang ngor*), but not from buddha's own perspective. These texts set out to explain, according to Taktsang, the buddha's life-story according to the perspective of the trainees—assuming they were actual historical events causally embodying the *dharmadhātu*. But none of the supposed events recounted in the life of the historical buddha were real historical events,

⁷⁶ 'o na sangs rgyas kyi ye shes kyis yul gzhan nam pa sna tshogs 'jal bar gsungs pa dang / gdul bya gzhan la de dang de ston pa sogs rgya cher gsungs pa ci zhe na/ de 'dra gdul bya sogs gsungs pa'i phyir te/ rgyas par gong du bstan pa bzhin no// Taktsang (2007a, pp. 315–316).

⁷⁷ Candrakīrti (MABh VI.214ab).

⁷⁸ Candrakīrti (MABh 'a. 312b).

⁷⁹ 'o na 'jug pa nyid las/ tshad ma ni gcig ste thams cad mkhyen pa'i ye shes so//zhes dang / rnam kun mkhyen nyid ye shes ni//mngon sum zhes bya'i mtshan nyid do//zhes dang / gnas dang gnas min mkhyen pa sogs stobs bcu'i rnam gzhas rgyas par bshad pa ci zhe na/_snga ma gnyis ni snang med mnyam gzhas gi ye shes la bshad du rung la/ Taktsang (2007a, p. 270).

⁸⁰ Śāntideva (BCA V.31a–b).

claims Taktsang. The supposed activities of the buddha are, in reality, simply the emanations, or mere *semblances* of, the metaphysically transcendent buddha of *dharmadhātu*.⁸¹ The Ninth Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje helps us clarifying this point when he states that the Mādhyamikas do not speak of the *wisdom of the Buddha as their own position*. “Only when repeating *what others accept in a world*, a nonanalytical context that accords with interdependence do they say that the movements of the arising and ceasing of consciousness exist for sentient beings because sentient beings possess the causes of confusion. Buddhas do not possess those causes, so a buddha’s wisdom, from the buddha’s own perspective, does not arise or cease.”⁸²

Taktsang’s doctrine of another person’s perspective is also defended in the works of many other Mādhyamikas—Gorampa, Mipham Rinpoche,⁸³ and Karmapa Mikyö Dorje,⁸⁴ just to name few. They also have asserted that the exceptional quality of omniscience consist in not experiencing anything empirical from the enlightened perspective. This is the claim that buddhas’ knowledge of the world is not buddha’s own, but knowledge exclusively attributed to a buddha from another person’s perspective. Therefore there is no such thing as buddha’s own knowledge, as the buddha’s omniscience is not predicated upon having dualistic empirical knowledge. Commenting on Madhyamaka in Kagyu tradition Karl Brunnhölzl puts the point this way: “As for those [Mādhyamikas] who are beyond worldly experiences, in order to guide disciples and without analysis, they just repeat what is the common worldly consensus... Again, it is only from the perspective of such people that these Centrists [i.e., Mādhyamikas] say this.”⁸⁵

Apart from some minor differences the commentators—Longchen Rabjam,⁸⁶ Rendawa,⁸⁷ Shakya Chogden,⁸⁸ Mipham Rinpoche,⁸⁹ and Gendün Chöpel,⁹⁰ and their

⁸¹ Taktsang (2007a, p. 270).

⁸² Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje (2008, p. 518).

⁸³ Rinpoche (1993, p. 607). Cf. Duckworth (2008, p. 108).

⁸⁴ Karmapa Mikyod Dorje (n.d., pp. 141–142).

⁸⁵ Brunnhölzl (2004, p. 101).

⁸⁶ Longchen Rabjam (1983, p. 269).

⁸⁷ Rendawa Zhonu Lodo 1995 (1995, pp 127–29).

⁸⁸ See Shakya Chogden (1975a, pp. 477–86), for a detailed analysis of the definitions of the two concealers (*sgrib gnyis*); for his own account see (1975a, pp. 328–33); Shakya Chogden (1975b, pp. 169–71), for his critique of the Gelug view; Shakya Chogden (1975c, pp. 126–143), for further critique of the Gelug view; and pp. 143–150, for more on his own position.

⁸⁹ Rinpoche (1993, p. 518). He argues that there is no difference between the positions of Cittamatrins, Svātantrikas, and Prāsaṅgikas in so far as they all accept that knowledge of the selflessness of person eradicates deluded concealers and that knowledge of the selflessness of phenomena eradicates concealers of true knowledge. In (1993, pp. 487–518), Mipham provides detailed objections on the view held by Lobsang Rabsel (Blo bzang Rab gsal).

⁹⁰ Chöpel (1990, p. 182).

modern counterparts including Singh,⁹¹ Poussin,⁹² Stcherbatsky,⁹³ Lindtner,⁹⁴ Murti⁹⁵ et al.—claim that conventional truth, for Candrakīrti (like Dharmakīrti), is entirely falsehood, constructed out of ignorance. These commentators claim, conceptually, for Candrakīrti, as for Dharmakīrti, is identical to ignorance; hence it is impossible for any conceptual thought to have a valid epistemic status of *pramāṇa* on Candrakīrti's account. And like Dharmakīrti, they claim, Candrakīrti is a reductive eliminativist when it comes to conventional truth, and consequently eliminates the conventional altogether as the objects of negation. The upshot, therefore, is that buddhahood is the outcome of the elimination of all resources of knowledge, and an entire range of epistemic objects, from chairs to everything else in the world as the soteriological objects of negation. That is: ignorance is a soteriological object of negation which can be eradicated through removing conceptuality, duality, and conventional reality which in turn requires the eradication of the entire system of epistemic subjects and objects which may otherwise elicit duality, conceptions, and consequently ignorance. Reading Candrakīrti along the same line, Anne McDonald also observes Candrakīrti “is more often occupied with and thus associated with rigorously arguing an uncompromising denial of the world.”⁹⁶

In conclusion (4, 5), Taktsang categorically asserts that buddhas have no *mind and mental processes*.⁹⁷ He claims that this is the view Candrakīrti confirms when he says buddha has attained true and complete awakening with respect to all phenomena because in him “all motions of mind and mental processes have completely ceased.”⁹⁸ Similarly, Candrakīrti says, the fact that buddha attained embodiment proves that he has arrived at a complete “cessation of mind.”⁹⁹ For

⁹¹ Singh (1989, p. 34) claims: “The Mahāyānist says that Reality is veiled not only by *kleśāvaraṇa* but also by *jñeyāvaraṇa* or the veil that hides true knowledge. The removal, therefore, of *jñeyāvaraṇa* is also necessary. This is possible by the realization of *dharmanairātmya* or *dharmasūnyatā*, the egolessness and emptiness of all elements of existence.”

⁹² Poussin (1985, p. 150) “The Madhyamaka school claims to find the true ‘middle way’ by declaring, not only the unreality of the individuals (*pudgala nairātmya*), but also the unreality of the dharmas themselves; it denies the existence of not only the beings who suffer, but also of pain. Everything is void.” See Poussin (1985, pp. 149, 151).

⁹³ “In the Absolute...all elements of existence have vanished, because all of them, whether they be called defilers, or the creative power of life, or individual existences, or groups of elements, have all totally vanished. This all systems of philosophy admit, i.e., that the Absolute is a negation of the Phenomenal” (Stcherbatsky 1998, p. 198); also see (1998, pp. 10, 195–96).

⁹⁴ In his studies on the *Yuktasāṅgika* in *Master of Wisdom*, Lindtner (1986, p. 259), writes: “Reality is beyond all ontological and epistemological dualities (*dvaya*), while the empirical world of origination, destruction, and so forth is illusory—due merely to ignorance (*avidya*).”

⁹⁵ “Of constructive imagination are born attachment, aversion and infatuation, depending (respectively) on our good, evil and stupid attitudes. Entities which depend on these are not anything by themselves” (see Murti (1985, p. xxvii).

⁹⁶ MacDonald (2009, p. 165).

⁹⁷ Sangs rgyas la ni kun rdzob bden pa lta zhogakun rdzob tsam yang 'jog byed med par gsungs te/_snang ba med pa'i spyod yul mnga' ba rnams la ni ma yin no//sangs rgyas rnams la ni chos thams cad rnam pa thams cad du mngon par rdzogs par byang chub pa'i phyir sems dang sems las byung ba'i rgyu ba gtan log pa yin no//Taktsang (2007a, p. 268).

⁹⁸ Candrakīrti (MAB XI.1; 255a).

⁹⁹ Candrakīrti (MAB XI.17d).

Taktsang, the implications of Candrakīrti's statements are unambiguously clear, and so they must be taken literally, as did some Mādhyamikas amongst whom include Jayānanda, Patsab who were his predecessors, and the later Mādhyamikas: Rendawa,¹⁰⁰ Shakya Chogden,¹⁰¹ Kunkhyen Pema Karpo, Karmapa Mikyö Dorje,¹⁰² Gendun Chöpel¹⁰³ for all of whom buddhahood is wholly devoid of anything empirical. So, on this view, affirming premises 1 and 2, minds and mental processes that are the primary factors which are responsible for producing empirical experience (which stand in the way of attaining buddhahood) must give up their existence for good, because as long as we accept their existence, we cannot escape epistemological foundationalism. Namely, if we accept that (P1) buddha has mind and mental processes, we must claim that he perceives the world. (P2) If he perceives the world, we need to claim that the perception must be either (a) from his own perspective (*rang ngor*), or (b) constituted by the perspectives of others (*gzhan ngor*). Since we cannot, Taktsang argues, accept either of the two, the conclusion that buddha has no-mind is inevitable.¹⁰⁴

To that effect Gorampa Sonam Sengé, who would closely follow Taktsang later and defend the similar position *albeit* not naming him explicitly, warns us this way. Once we admit the existence of mind and mental states as forming a constitutive part of buddhahood, we would inevitably be forced to admit the subject-object duality, as it would imply the existence of differentiated perceptions of the objects and their unique characters.¹⁰⁵ However, buddhahood is nondifferentiated, nondual and free from all conceptual elaborations, the objects of knowledge such as arising, and cessation is attained only when even the slightest dualistic appearance is eschewed. At that point, not even different modes of perception would exist.¹⁰⁶ Gorampa recognizes nonduality as one of the chief characteristics of buddhahood, so the slightest involvement of duality would make impossible the achievement of buddhahood, thus rendering impossible a complete embodiment of the ultimate truth.¹⁰⁷

Since buddha does not have mind to engage with the world, he does not perceive the world, neither from his own perspective nor from the perspective of ordinary beings. Taktsang's defence of the no-mind thesis, as we have sketched above, comes primarily from the premises: (3) and (4) which as we saw do most of the heavy philosophical lifting. The premises (1) and (2) explicitly deny any third possible alternative by which buddha could experience the world, affirming the premise (3a) that the epistemic resources of buddha is exhausted in *rang ngor*—own perspective—and denying the premise (3b) as possible epistemic authority, as such

¹⁰⁰ Rendawa Zhonu Lodo (1995, p. 127).

¹⁰¹ Shakya Chogden (1975a, pp. 335, 328–336, 1975c, pp. 475–476, 1975b, pp. 185–188).

¹⁰² Karmapa Mikyod Dorje (n.d., pp. 318, 320, 324).

¹⁰³ Gendun Chöpel (1990, pp. 144, 147, 182, 191).

¹⁰⁴ Kunkhyen Pema Karpo (n.d., p. 121).

¹⁰⁵ Gorampa (1969a, p. 446d).

¹⁰⁶ Gorampa (1969a, pp. 446d–47a).

¹⁰⁷ Gorampa (1969b, pp. 612–613).

gzhan ngor—another person’s perspective –comes in direct conflict and is *incompatible* with buddha’s eye-view.¹⁰⁸

Therefore, we can sum up Taktsang’s no-mind argument, slightly differently, in this way:

- Buddhas are omniscient—*all-knowing* beings—with a perfect and complete knowledge of all phenomena.
- complete knowledge of all phenomena arises only in those who have the non-dual knowledge in which has entirely dissolved all perceptions of subject-object dualism.
- The non-dual knowledge in which has dissolved all the perceptions of subject-object duality arises only in those who have attained the complete cessation of the movements of minds and mental processes.
- Buddhas are those who have attained a complete cessation of the movements of minds and mental processes,

Buddhas, therefore, have no-mind and mental processes.

Taktsang’s Charge Against Tsongkhapa’s Epistemic Buddha

Let us now have a look at the objections Taktsang’s brings to bear against Tsongkhapa’s conception of buddhahood and epistemic warrants. Taktsang has accused Tsongkhapa of committing what he famously calls the “Eighteen Great Contradictions” (*gal ba’i ‘khur chen bcu brgyad*) in his interpretation of Candrakīrti’s *Prāsaṅgika*. Of those the fifteenth contradiction Taktsang advances against Tsongkhapa is specifically concerned with the epistemological problems of buddhahood. In *The Treatise of Freedom From Extremes (Grub mtha’ kun shes)*¹⁰⁹ Taktsang states the contradiction in this verse:

The claim that omniscient insight engages with all phenomena
Contradicts that it is not an epistemic resource for half. [17a-b]¹¹⁰

In his *Commentary on the Treatise of Freedom From Extremes (Grub mtha’ kun shes nas mtha’ dral sgrub pa zhes bya ba’s bstan bcos rnam par bshad)*¹¹¹ Taktsang elaborates on how Tsongkhapa commits the contradiction in the following paragraphs:

¹⁰⁸ Gendun Chöpel also maintains that these two perspectives are quite contradictory. He argues there is not much point in our futile attempts to reconcile the understanding of an enlightened being who has directly understood emptiness with the ignorance of the world who do not have such understand. “If there were some possibility of such reconciliation, it would have occurred sometime over the long history of saṃsāra. That it has not suggested that these two perspectives are quite incompatible” (see Lopez 2006, p. 194).

¹⁰⁹ Taktsang (2007b, pp. 93–121).

¹¹⁰ Kun mkhyen ye shes chos kun ’jal ba dang //shes bya byed la tshad ma min pa ’gal// Taktsang (2007b, p. 110).

¹¹¹ Taktsang (2007a, pp. 121–362).

Our opponent holds that while a single substance of a buddha's insight knows things both as they are and things as comprehensively,¹¹² those two kinds of knowledge are conceptually distinct. In the same way that as sound's qualities of being a product and being impermanent are constituted by distinct characteristics, they consequently exist in separate, conceptually discernible instances. Hence, a Buddha's insight into things as they are and comprehensive insight must also exist in separate, conceptually distinct instances. We may, therefore, ask: if insight into things as they are is an epistemic resource by means of which one gains comprehensive insight, is it so as an (1) ultimate or (2) conventional, epistemic warrant? If the first is the case, it will follow that things in their multiplicity constitute the ultimate truth [which is problematic]. If we take the second horn of the dilemma, we can argue as follows: consider the insight into things as they are—it turns out to be an epistemic instrument that discerns the conventional because it is an epistemic resource that engages with things comprehensively.

Our opponents may assert that being an epistemic resource that engages with things comprehensively does not entail being an epistemic resource that discerns the conventional. But if they do, since that insight then is an ultimate discernment of things as they are, [286] *it would be contradictory to claim that it engages with things comprehensively.*

If on the other hand, our opponent agrees that this insight is an epistemic resource that discerns the conventional, we can further argue as follows. Consider things as they are: this turns out to be the primary epistemic domain of conventional discernment because it is the primary domain both of insight into the way things are and of an epistemic resource that discerns the conventional. Thus, insight into things as they are ends up being neither an ultimate nor a conventional epistemic resource for comprehensive knowledge. *This epistemic resource would thus fail to engage with half of what is to be known, and our opponent certainly does not say this.*¹¹³

Taktsang's objection springs from two primary concerns he has with the epistemology Tsongkhapa advances. If it is true, as Tsongkhapa claims, that every single

¹¹² The latter type of insight engages with phenomena distributively—that is, it simultaneously apprehends each one in its individuality.

¹¹³ Sangs rgyas kyi ye shes rdzas gcig gis shes bya ji lta ji snyed gnyis ka mkhyen yang ldog chas so sor 'byed par khas blangs pas/ sgra'i steng gi byas mi rtag mtshan nyid so sor bzhag pa'i rgyu mtshan gyis ldog chas phye ba'i mtshan gzhi yang so sor yod pa bzhin du ji lta ji snyed pa'i ye shes kyang mtshan gzhi'i ldog pa so sor yod tsa na/ ji lta ba mkhyen pa'i ye shes de shes bya ji snyed pa la tshad mar song na/ don dam dpyod byed kyi'am tha snyad dpyod byed kyi tshad ma gang du song / dang po lta na ji snyed pa don dam bden par 'gyur la/ gnyis pa lta na/ ji lta ba mkhyen pa'i ye shes chos can/ tha snyad dpyod byed kyi tshad mar thal/ ji snyed pa la de'i phyir/ ma khyab na/ ji lta ba la don dam dpyod byed yin pas der 'jog pa dang 'gal/

'dod na/ ji lta ba chos can/ tha snyad dpyod byed kyi tshad ma'i gzhal bya'i gtso bor thal/ ji lta ba mkhyen pa'i ye shes kyi gzhal bya'i gtso bo gang zhigade tha snyad dpyod byed kyi tshad ma yin pas so// de lta dpyad na ye shes de shes bya ji snyed pa la tshad ma gnyis po gang du'ang ma song bas shes bya phyed la tshad ma min par 'gyur gyi 'di dngos su khas blangs pa ni ma yin no//rdzas sogs ni/ Taktsang (2007a, pp. 285–286).

buddha cognition knows the two truths, it would follow that (1) buddha's own-perspective (*rang ngor*)—buddha's eye-view—which is nondualistic, nonconceptual and transcendent will have to see conventional truth or (2) if not, conventional truth as a supposed object of knowledge will remain unknown, *thus epistemic resource would fail to engage with half of what is to be known*. Both contradictions arise because conventional truths, according to Candrakīrti, are truths for the deluded ordinary beings and confined to the cognitive domain of the other-perspective (*gzhan ngor*) which, Taktsang characterises, as dualistic, conceptual and empirical. But for Taktsang, buddhahood constitutes *rang ngor* exclusively—the only *pramāṇa*—epistemic authority—Candrakīrti is willing to accept. Further, buddha's *rang ngor* is utterly nondualistic, nonconceptual and transcendent and therefore can only embody ultimate truth, since Buddha's perspective does not have a dualistic, conceptual and empirical knowledge, there is no engagement with the conventional world. The other-person perspective, *zhan ngor*—empirical perspective of the world—is not an epistemic authority; it is dualistic, conceptual and empirical and engages with the conventional truth. *Gzhan ngor* necessarily arises from the domains of conventional truth, which is nothing more than the deluded experiences of ordinary beings.

In the paragraphs cited above Taktsang accuses Tsongkhapa of entirely contradicting Candrakīrti's system. According to Taktsang's *Prāsaṅgika*, two truths can never have a complementary ontological structure, and therefore two perspectives—*rang ngor* and *gzhan ngor*—can never have a complimentary epistemic status. Conventional truth, Taktsang claims, only means an obscurational truth, taken to be true by the power of afflictive ignorance which obscures the nature of reality. Tsongkhapa's claim, from Taktsang's standpoints, amounts to claiming that buddha's insight can epistemically affirm the existence of obscurational truth, which in Taktsang's view is nothing more than conjured up by ignorance and this, he says, is absurd. There would be, on Tsongkhapa's view, no epistemic distinction we could draw between ignorance (=conventional truth) of the ordinary beings and wisdom (=ultimate truth) of buddhas. While similarly, the nondual, nonconceptual and transcendent reality which buddha's own-perspective (insight derived from meditative equipoise) establishes could not be differentiated from the dualistic, conceptual and mundane reality.

Implications of Taktsang's No-Mind Thesis

We shall, in this final section, briefly assess the implications of Taktsang's argument for no-mind thesis as a possible solution to the epistemological tensions in Candrakīrti's system raised in the beginning of this paper. The solution Tsongkhapa proposes is the unity of the two truths which argues that the two truths are coherent or correlational. This view allows two important moves: it blocks the reification of the ultimate truth by arguing that it is correlationally grounded in what is conventional true: ultimate compliments with empirical, linguistic, conceptual and cognitive processes. It also blocks the trivialization of the conventional truth by arguing that conventional truth is both ontologically as well as epistemically correlationally embedded in ultimately truth.

But it is extremely controversial, at least for Taktsang. Understandably Taktsang's solution is the radical division of the two truths which argues that the two truths are completely incoherent and non-relational and distinct. This view allows Taktsang two important moves. The first move allows the absolutisation of the ultimate truth and buddha who embodies it by arguing that ultimate truth is metaphysically transcendent, ungrounded in anything conventional, therefore buddhahood which embodies the ultimate is non-empirical, non-linguistic, non-conceptual and non-cognitive. The second move also allows Taktsang the trivialization of the conventional truth and the radical separating of buddhahood from it by arguing that conventional truth is both ontologically as well as epistemically embedded in primal ignorance, the world of ordinary deluded beings. Taktsang denies buddha all possible epistemic processes, hence his proposal: "the no-mind" thesis. The questions remain: how successful are Taktsang's moves? Do they, if at all, address the epistemological concerns arising from Candrakīrti's Madhyamaka? How are buddhas able to liberate beings whom they neither perceive nor can conceive of? To figure out possible resolutions we now turn briefly to assessing the implications of Taktsang's argument and in particular, the degree to which Taktsang succeeds in addressing the key questions raised.

On a closer examination we see, however, that both moves fail to provide any philosophically satisfactory resolution. The problems with Taktsang's second move, we consider this first, is well documented in his book, *How Do Mādhyamikas Think?* Tom Tillemans offers us a host of negative implications arising from Taktsang's reading of Candrakīrti, which he says radically undermines the conventional truth. From such reading Tillemans says Taktsang is no more than a destructive nihilist, a global sceptic according to whom things are just false appearances (*ābhāsa/snang ba*), lacking any genuine existence; therefore, existing only from the point view of "mistaken minds" (*blo 'khrul ba'i ngor yod pa*).¹¹⁴ Taktsang turns Candrakīrti into a global error theorist, a pan-fictionalist representing what he calls "global error theory or fictionalism"¹¹⁵ the view that asserts conventional truth is only fiction or error (*bhrānta/'khrul ba*).¹¹⁶ Taktsang rejects any commitment to truth/reality by assuming a type of "pretence or make-believe" position. On Taktsang's reading, there are no genuine sources of knowledge (*pramāṇas/tshad ma*), no reliable epistemic resource whatsoever. Even the term "right understanding" would have no more purchase than a type of "seeming to be right" that satisfies ordinary acceptance by the deluded world.¹¹⁷

Taktsang's first move is equally self-stultifying and fail. Instead of providing a philosophically satisfying answer to the hard epistemological questions that arise from Candrakīrti's philosophy (the apparent tension between epistemology and deflationary metaphysics), Taktsang's no-mind thesis appears to admit that there is no way out from the contradictions as long as we endorse any conventional entity and epistemic truth. According to Taktsang, as we have seen *zhan gnor* is all we have as

¹¹⁴ Tillemans (2016, p. 4).

¹¹⁵ Tillemans (2016, p. 5).

¹¹⁶ Tillemans (2016, p. 52).

¹¹⁷ Tillemans (2016, p. 4).

our epistemic resources, and since *zhan gnor* is nothing but conceptually and dually reifying the world, conventional reality is nothing more than our own construction.

Obviously Taktsang takes for granted the fact that buddha is an all-knowing being with knowledge of ultimate reality, it is hard to see how a buddha arrives at this conclusion without having employed some epistemic resource. But at the same time we saw he claims that buddha does not have any cognitive process with which to engage with the world, as it is not a part of ultimate reality. So it appears that while as ordinary being we may conceive of buddha as having special access to, and omniscient knowledge of, the world—this is strictly speaking a figment of our imagination—it does not form any integral part of buddhahood—such knowledge is not a part of the cognitive content of enlightened wisdom. With this point in mind, Taktsang treats buddha’s *rang ngor*—enlightened perspective—and *gzhan ngor*—another person’s perspective—to be entirely contradictory and mutually excluding. From buddha’s enlightened perspective, as he explains, a buddha has no perspective, neither ultimately nor conventionally. So, according to Taktsang, there is no such thing as buddha’s engagement in the world from *rang ngor* perspective, but Taktsang claims that there is an image, or conception from the ordinary persons’ perspective (from *zhan gnor*) that buddhas do engage with the world. Mark Siderits nicely captures Taktsang’s problem, when asserting buddha: “invok[es] the notion of ironic engagement.”¹¹⁸ The buddha’s supposed engagement is “ironic” because considered from another person’s perspective, that buddha once again will have to do a “sliding backward,” as it were, to become a naïve realists, *essentialists* or *reificationists*, *confused and deluded*. This must follow because another person’s perspective of a buddha is no different from ordinary beings. In Siderits words Taktsang’s *gzhan ngor* buddha “risk lapsing back into a stance that is allegedly implicated in hypostatization, clinging and suffering;” such as buddha “risk[s] losing all the insights gained.”¹¹⁹

Siderits further problematizes Taktsang’s position when he says that the identification of *gzhan ngor* with the conventional perspective of ordinary beings that “contain[s] the risk of acquiescing in the very habits and preferences that create the conditions for suffering.”¹²⁰ Siderits recognizes this as “one major difficulty” that Taktsang faces, for “this view might be thought of as kind of principled

¹¹⁸ Note, Mark Siderits is not commenting on Taktsang directly. Although his objections do apply to Taktsang’s claims (Siderits 2003, p. 184). The point Siderits makes with respect to Madhyamaka is that if there is no such thing as ultimate truth, then there is the only conventional truth, which is often equated with commonsense realism or that truth which is known ‘even to cowherds.’ But that would mean that it is true that there is *svabhāva* at least on the conventional level. Siderits clearly wants buddhas to be ‘ironically engaged’ with the world-views of the sentient beings they aid. But irony requires that the ironist have an alternative perspective. For an Indian Mādhyamika the ultimate truth is no such perspective: there is no such thing as the ultimate truth—even the claim that all things are empty can only be conventionally true. But Taktsang’s position is different. He believes in at least two levels of truth, the only truth is the ultimate truth. Hence Taktsang turns towards buddha-nature for a substantive, transcendent and inexpressible ultimate truth. Taktsang wants buddhas to be ‘ironically engaged’ with the world-views of the sentient beings they aid, knowing very well that conventional truth is wholly false, having the ironist alternative perspective of the ultimate truth.

¹¹⁹ Siderits (2003, p. 185).

¹²⁰ Siderits (2003, p. 206).

endorsement of common-sense realism with respect to truth.”¹²¹ Taktsang again bites the bullet and defends exactly this type of common-sense realism from another person perspective. He claims that ordinary being's simulation of a buddha's knowledge, based on their ordinary perspective, must either assert or presuppose intrinsic reality of the subjects and the objects. Therefore, such knowledge does not constitute the defining relationship to buddhahood. So, from another person's perspective what stands out as the essential feature of buddha's knowledge is that it is, *in every sense*, precisely equivalent to the confused knowledge of ordinary beings. On this point, Rongtön Shakya Gyaltzen, who is otherwise one of Taktsang's and Gorampa's traditional allies, ridicules the *zhan gnor* doctrine as incoherent and self-stultifying. He says that the claim that buddhahood requires empirical knowledge from the perspective of ordinary beings is tantamount to claiming that either those ordinary beings are buddhas, or that buddhas are ordinary beings. And neither claim makes sense.¹²² This is to claim that a buddha's knowledge of the world is an exact copy of ordinary knowledge. Hence buddha's knowledge from another person's perspective, Taktsang himself admits, is also entirely confused and fallacious with respect to ultimate reality and it is identical to, and therefore importantly *not different from* any epistemic and psychological intuitions we ordinary beings have of the world and ourselves.

So, on this account it turns out that mindless buddhas or Robbo buddhas are no better equipped to serve other beings than are ordinary confused beings. Taktsang's mindless buddhas do not, in fact know anything; they have no cognitive content whatsoever to teach to others. Worse still buddhas would have no epistemic resources even to see other beings, much less help them. Dunne describes the problem this way: “If such is the case, we might feel compelled to conclude that buddhas are entirely outside our reality in some state of complete ‘isolation’ (*kaivalya*), as with many Jain interpretations of the Jinas. It would certainly seem that such a buddha would be completely incapable of doing anything in the world, for s/he would not have any cognitive relation to the world whatsoever. One might even conclude that such a Buddha is simply dead.”¹²³ In a similar vein Dunne's paper criticizes Taktsang's view given it implies that “activity or effort on the part of buddhas [becomes] anathema,”¹²⁴ a buddha would teach only in a “magical and transcendent way,”¹²⁵ rendering the buddha rather “mechanical and lifeless.”¹²⁶

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¹²¹ Siderits (2003, p. 185).

¹²² Rongtön Shakya Gyaltzen (n.d., p. 127).

¹²³ Dunne (1996, p. 548).

¹²⁴ Dunne (1996, pp. 525–556).

¹²⁵ Dunne (1996, p. 549).

¹²⁶ Dunne (1996, p. 550).

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