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Essential Points for the Investigation of Philosophical Tenets

Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo



KHYENTSE VISION
PROJECT

grub pa'i mtha' rnam par dpyad pa'i snying po

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Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	iv
ESSENTIAL INVESTIGATIONS	1
The Tenets of Other Traditions	1
The Tenets of Our Own Tradition	2
The Śrāvaka Tenets	2
The Cittamātra Tenets	3
NOTES	5
BIBLIOGRAPHY	7

INTRODUCTION

This text by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo belongs to the literary genre of doxography¹ and is based on a teaching by the Indian scholar Ume Senge² preserved in the Tengyur. Works of this kind offer systematic presentations of the philosophical views of various traditions. Despite its brevity, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo's *Essential Points for the Investigation of Philosophical Tenets* covers a vast amount of ground. It begins with a refutation of the principal point of debate between Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools: the existence of the self. This is followed by a systematic deconstruction of the tenets of various Buddhist traditions—namely, those of the śrāvaka path and those of the Cittamātra school. Therefore, the text is principally a concise manual of refutations.

The earliest Buddhist scripture to contain doxographical elements is probably the Buddha's *Discourse on the Net of Brahma* (*Brahmajāla Sutta*) preserved in the Pāli tradition.³ It describes a wide range of practices and views adhered to by contemporary ascetics and brahmins and rejected by the Awakened One. Among the Indian commentarial literature, Bhāvaviveka's *Verses on the Heart of the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakahrdayakārikā*), along with its auto-commentary, *Blaze of Reasoning* (*Tarkajvālā*), was one of the earliest and most essential treatises of this genre.⁴ In it, Bhāvaviveka describes the positions of non-Buddhist and Buddhist schools, only to refute them to establish his own view as supreme.

Since all schools of Tibetan Buddhism regard themselves as holders of the Madhyamaka tradition—with significant differences among Tibetan scholars as to the interpretation of its writings—doxographical works by Tibetan masters generally aim at establishing a hierarchy of views culminating in the doctrine of the Middle Way. Outstanding examples are Longchenpa's *Treasury of Tenets*,⁵ Tagtsang

Lotsāwa's *Ocean of Excellent Explanations*,⁶ and Jamyang Shepa's *Great Exposition of the Tenets*.⁷

Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo authored a few works in this genre, the most important of which is his *Wonderful Ocean of Eloquence: An Account of the Various Vehicles*.⁸ It offers an extensive overview of the paths taken by worldly beings, followers of non-Buddhist traditions, and those adhering to the teachings of the Buddha, including the common and uncommon vehicles taught in the sūtras and tantras.

Sources

Even though Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo does not mention the source of his work, research has revealed that it is based on a slightly longer treatise by Ume Senge.⁹ At times, Khyentse Wangpo paraphrases or summarizes the arguments put forth by Ume Senge, and at other points he excerpts brief passages. Copying the words of previous masters is frequent in Buddhist literature and is regarded as a sign of veneration, even if the original author is not identified.

According to both Tāranātha and Gö Lotsāwa, Ume Senge was one of the five main Indian disciples of Dīpaṅkara Śrījñāna, the renowned master from Bengal commonly referred to as Palden Atiśa in the Tibetan tradition.¹⁰ Ume Senge's only teaching preserved in the Tengyur is his *Concise Analysis of Various Views*,¹¹ the text on which Khyentse Wangpo bases this brief manual.

Unfortunately, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo does not provide a colophon for this text, except for the signature "by Mañjuḥṣa." Therefore, we do not know if Khyentse Wangpo studied Ume Senge's text with one of his many teachers or if he composed the work in the course of his personal research.

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Essential Investigations

Homage to the Omniscient One!

The philosophical tenets can be classified as twofold: those of other traditions and those of our own.

The Tenets of Other Traditions

Generally speaking, there are countless assertions made by those holding distorted views. However, the most significant one was made by followers of the doctrine of supreme Brahman,¹² who assert the existence of a self that is permanent, pervasive, without body, and singular. This view is untenable. Is this self identical with the skandhas or substantially different from them? It would be illogical to assert the former, since the self is seen as permanent, while the skandhas are impermanent. The latter is also unacceptable since there would need to be some substantial entity called “self” other than the skandhas, which could be pointed to after the five skandhas have been removed. [628]

If one argues that such a self exists but is not apparent to anyone, one must also accept the existence of the horn of a rabbit and the child of a barren woman.¹³ Thus, since the self is not seen to be either the skandhas or something substantially different, and since it is not reasonable to maintain a third alternative—stating that the self is neither the skandhas nor something different—it is established that there is no such self.

One might further inquire, are the self and the skandhas the “support” and the “supported”? Such a phenomenon is not observed.

Does the self pervade the skandhas? That would be a contradiction in substance, since the self is one and the skandhas are manifold.

The self also does not possess the skandhas, since no connection between the two has been established.

The self is not singular since the entities it is believed to pervade are separate. If the self is one, it follows that by binding one individual, all others are bound as well.

The self is not autonomous since happiness and suffering are experienced regardless of one's wishes.

It is also not feasible to assert that the self is without body since the idea of the self as something separate from the body has already been refuted. If one asserts that the body is the self, the premise of it being without body is undermined. Lastly, a third alternative¹⁴ is not established. For these reasons, it follows that this designation of a "self" or "I" is similar to identifying a rope as a snake.

The Tenets of Our Own Tradition

The Śrāvaka Tenets

According to the śrāvaka tenets, outer phenomena are composed of subtle particles either separated by space, not separated by space, or without space between them yet not joined.¹⁵ These views [629] are illogical.

According to them, apprehending a rope as a snake is a delusion, but asserting it to be a rope is a mistake as well. Even thinking a rope is in fact not a rope but two twisted strings or a bundle of fibers, one is mistaken. Even fibers do not exist; they are collections of subtle particles.

Now, do these subtle particles exist? They do not, because for a particle to be truly existent implies that it has no directional parts.¹⁶ When the directional parts of a particle are separated, however, no such particle without directional parts can be found. One may then argue that the directional parts are inseparable from the particle. However, when one central particle is surrounded by six other particles, is the part connected to the particle located to its west also connected to the particles located to its east, or not? If it is connected, the particle in the center of the six other particles is indeed a single partless entity. This would imply, however, that all things agglomerated by particles collapse into one subtle particle.¹⁷ If it is not connected to both sides, the premise of the particle being partless is undermined. Thus, since the existence of a single particle has not been established, nor can the existence of many. Without particles, notions of them being with or without space between them, or them touching yet not being conjoined, are nothing but mental superimpositions.

Some maintain that entities exist as wholes possessed of parts,¹⁸ like a rosary and its constituent threads, for instance. This is untenable. Are the parts and the whole

one or separate entities? To maintain that they are one is untenable. If they were, anything that has an outer red layer, for instance, [630] would have to be entirely red, both inside and outside. Also, they cannot be different entities since no whole can be observed separate from its parts. Who has ever seen a whole rosary separate from its twisted strings and strands of fiber?

The Cittamātra Tenets

According to followers of the Cittamātra tenets, the self, particles, and so forth are nonexistent. Mind and awakened awareness, however, are believed to have momentary existence arising in a continuum. This is untenable because momentary existence cannot be established: since the past moment has ceased and the future moment has not yet come to be, both are nonexistent; and without past and future, how could there be a present moment that arises as a result of these?

Regarding the mind, do cause and result arise at separate times or simultaneously? Supposing they arise at separate times, is there a gap between the ending of the cause and the arising of the result? Asserting a gap is untenable because it could only arise from a past moment, which is a nonentity as it has already ceased. Asserting no gap is also illogical because all of time would collapse into a single moment; it would follow that an entire eon would be equal to a single moment, and even one moment would have further subdivisions.

To maintain that cause and result arise simultaneously is also untenable. What effect would the cause have on the result? Things that exist simultaneously, such as the right and left horns of a cow, [631] cannot be differentiated in terms of cause and result.

Furthermore, if the resultant mind arises from an existent cause, a pot would give rise to another pot. If one maintains that it arises from a nonexistent cause, it absurdly follows that rabbits could have horns. If one asserts that it arises without cause, it absurdly follows that mind can arise on the basis of mere matter.¹⁹

Does one cause give rise to one result? No, because it can be observed that single results arise in dependence on many causes and conditions, such as a clay pot.

Does one cause give rise to many results? In that case, cause and result would be at odds. From the perspective of the cause, there would be too many results, and from the perspective of the result, there would be too few causes.

Do many causes give rise to a single result? The fault this would entail is the exact opposite of the previous one.

Do many causes give rise to many results? If a single cause cannot generate a single result, many causes cannot generate many results since “many” is merely a collection of “single” entities.

Therefore, the mind asserted by the followers of the Cittamātra tenets does not arise from any cause whatsoever, and it does not arise in any way.

If there is still conviction in its existence, one may ask, what is the mind's essential nature? Is it singular or multiple? If the former, it would be impossible to perceive multiplicities.²⁰ If the latter, it must either consist of subtle material particles or many moments of mind. Which one is it? The refutation of these points has already been taught.

According to the proponents of false images, mere mind devoid of images is distinguished from material objects due to its knowing quality. It cannot be investigated or expressed. However, this is not tenable. If something has form, it should be visible, and how could something without form [632] be observed?²¹

Likewise, we must investigate the existence of a continuously arising awakened awareness. According to the proponents of real images, awakened awareness endowed with pure focal objects exists. This is untenable since the elimination of all faults and the arising of awakened awareness in terms of a sign that can be apprehended are mutually exclusive.

The proponents of false images argue as follows: "Since a future moment cannot be established when neither past nor present exists, then, if there were no mind essence²²—the basis that is transformed—how can there be awakened awareness, the transformed basis? Moreover, if there is no such awakened awareness, how could the benefit of beings come about?" Just like a butter lamp that has burnt out, the activities of mind and mental factors have ended; but nothing is interrupted, as nothing has ever existed. The benefit of others is accomplished through the power of aspirations alone.

By Mañjughoṣa.

NOTES

1. *siddhānta; grub mtha'*.
2. Ume Senge (*Madhyamakasiṃha; slob dpon dbu ma'i seng ge, eleventh century).
3. The Pāli *Brahmajāla Sutta* is not to be confused with the *Mahāyāna Brahmajāla Sūtra*, which mainly teaches the precepts of bodhisattvas.
4. Bhāvaviveka was an Indian master from the sixth century CE, famous for his writings on Madhyamaka. To date, his *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā* has not been translated in its entirety, though articles have been published by various authors focusing on particular passages of the work.
5. *grub mtha' rin po che'i mdzod*.
6. *legs bshad rgya mtsho*.
7. *grub mtha' chen mo*. For translations and discussions of Longchenpa's (1308–1363) and Jamyang Shepa's (1648–1721) works, refer to Butters, *Illuminating the Goal*; Longchen Rabjam, *Precious Treasury of Philosophical Systems*; Hopkins, *Maps of the Profound*. Tagtsang Lotsāwa's (1405–1477) treatise has not yet been translated.
8. *theg pa'i rnam dbye gsal bar byed pa'i gtam legs bshad ngo mtshar chu gter*.
9. See *Madhyamakasiṃha, *Concise Analysis of Various Views*, 1b1–7b6.
10. Atiśa (982–1054) famously traveled to Tibet in the eleventh century, and his presence and teachings greatly influenced the transmission of Buddhism there. The historians Tāranātha and Gö Lotsāwa disagree as to the identity of his disciple Ume Senge. While Gö Lotsāwa identifies him as Dharmākaramati, Tāranātha lists both individuals separately. See Lama Chimpa and Alaka Chattopadhyaya, *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*, 311; George N. Roerich, *The Blue Annals, Part One*, 262.
11. The colophon of this text states that the instructions were recorded at a great debate and later arranged into their preserved textual form.
12. *bram ze mchog gi rgyud dag*. No equivalent Sanskrit could be identified for this Tibetan term. It is probably a translation of *parabrahman* or *paramabrahman* (literally, “supreme Brahman”), which is found in the doctrines of various Indian schools, including Vedānta. Another related term is *brahmatantra* (**bram ze'i rgyud*), which, according to Monier-Williams's Sanskrit dictionary, means “all that is taught in the Veda.”

13. These are two common examples used in the Madhyamaka literature to indicate unreal entities. If merely asserting the existence of the self would be sufficient to establish its reality, one could equally speak into existence other unreal entities, such as the horn of a rabbit or the son of a barren woman.
14. That is, the self being neither identical to the skandhas nor something different.
15. For a discussion of these various views, see Shantarakshita, *The Adornment of the Middle Way*, 188ff.
16. The implication here is that, according to the śrāvaka tenets, anything that can be disassembled into smaller constituent parts is a conventional reality and is therefore not truly existent.
17. That is, there would be no spacial extension.
18. Literally, “part-possessors.”
19. It is important to remember that Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo is talking about the mind’s arising. Is the cause for the next moment of mind a truly existent entity, is it a nonexistent entity, or does the mind arise without a cause? All three positions are untenable. The refutation of the last point—the mind arising without a cause—implies the Buddhist understanding that the mind’s nature is fundamentally different from that of matter. The defining characteristic of the mind is its cognitive capacity. It is precisely this quality of being “luminous and knowing” (*gsal zhibing rig pa*) that differentiates mind from mere matter. The reasoning here is the following: if the mind does not have its own substantial cause—that is, a cause of the same nature (i.e., something that is luminous and knowing)—it can arise from anything that is not its cause (i.e., matter). It is interesting to note that it is also on the basis of this view that the existence of past and future lives is established.
20. Even though the arising of the mind has been negated, proponents of the Cittamātra tenets would still maintain that the mind truly exists as the real basis for all appearances. The analysis then continues: if it does exist, it must either be a unitary entity or composed of various parts. The argument brought forth to refute the first notion is probably directed against the proponents of real images, according to whom the content of the mind consists of a variety of real images, albeit not separate from the perceiving mind. At any rate, the point is that an undividable, unitary mind cannot have multiple objects of perception.
21. This argument points to the following logical inconsistency. On the one hand, the proponents of false images maintain that mind truly exists, and on the other, that it cannot be investigated and that it is inexpressible. If something is truly existent, it either has form or is devoid of form; there is no third alternative. If something has form, then it should be visible to both oneself and others. If it does not have form, how can anyone perceive it? Therefore, how can one assert the existence of something no one has ever seen?
22. Mind essence, or nature of mind (*sems nyid*), is contrasted with mind (*sems*). These terms are interpreted differently by different authors. According to the Cittamātra tenets, mind essence is the most fundamental aspect of mind and believed to be truly existent. It is the basis for the appearances of saṃsāra and the wisdom of a buddha. Mind, on the other hand, is the ordinary process of dualistic cognition.

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