

# [THE LOGIC OF THE SVĀTANTRIKA CRITIQUE]

## 4.2.3.1.3.2. *The Explanation of the Measure of the Svātantrikas' Object of Refutation*<sup>469</sup>

If one does not understand the differences between the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika Madhyamikas as regards the extent of the refutation, one will not be able to understand in the least the differences between the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika views. Therefore, I will first of all explain in brief the measure or extent of the objects of refutation of the Prāsaṅgikas and the Svātantrikas.

### *[The Analysis of the Svātantrikas' Object of Refutation Based on the Example of the Illusion]*

In the exposition of the Madhyamaka view it is well known that all phenomena are to be ascertained as lacking truth by depending on the example of the illusion (*sgyu ma*), so let me here explain this point by using the example of the illusion.

When a magician conjures up a horse or an elephant out of stones and [141] sticks, which are the things that act as the basis of his conjuring (*sprul gzhi*), [different people are affected in different ways]. Three [types of individuals are to be considered]: (1) the magician, (2) the spectators whose eyes are affected by the spells (*sngags*) and substances (*rdzas*) of the illusion, and (3) the person who arrives there after [the incantations have been performed]. Although the horse and the elephant appear to the first individual, [the magician,] he does not *conceive* of them as a horse and an elephant. The second individual has both the appearance and the conception [of a horse or elephant]; whereas the third individual has neither the appearance nor the conception.

In this regard, it is not correct to maintain that the basis of the conjuring of the illusion appears to be a horse or an elephant to an erroneous consciousness but does not appear to be a horse or an elephant in general. This is be-

cause were it otherwise, it would follow, absurdly, that there could be no error in regard to the appearing object (*snang yul la 'khrul pa*).<sup>470</sup>

Thus, although the basis of the conjuring of the illusion appears to be a horse or an elephant from the magician's perspective, the basis of the conjuring of the illusion does not appear [to him] as a horse or an elephant *under the sole influence of the object's own reality* (*sdod lugs*), depending also on a mind that has been affected by spells and substances, [namely, his own]. From the perspective of the spectator whose eyes have been affected by spells and substances, the object exists as a horse or an elephant in its own right without being something that is posited by the mind internally.

Now let us draw the analogy between the example and its meaning. Just like the spectator of the illusion whose eyes have been affected, when phenomena appear to common ordinary beings as existing, they are apprehended as existing in their own right (*sdod lugs su yod pa*), without being posited by virtue of the fact that they appear to the mind. This is called the *innate apprehension of true [existence]* and it has been present since beginningless time. Yet, in comparison to what it is that the Prāsaṅgikas consider the object to be refuted, what the Svātantrika here posit is much more crude (*shin tu rag pa*). It is not the subtle innate apprehension of true [existence].

When one finds the correct philosophical viewpoint (*lta ba*), which is the [142] logical refutation of the true existence that is grasped by the innate apprehension of true [existence], then, like the magician, one no longer apprehends either outer or inner phenomena, [that is, external things or the mind,] to exist in their own right without being posited<sup>471</sup> by the power of the mind internally; one comes to understand that in reality they are posited by the power of the mind.

Those things posited by the power of a mind that is not opposed by a valid cognition are accepted as nominally existent [entities]. Not everything posited by the power of *any* mind is accepted as being nominally existent. Even though the fact that the sprout arises from the seed is established by the power of the mind, this does not vitiate against the fact that the sprout, from its own side (*rang gi ngos nas*),<sup>472</sup> arises from the seed. This is similar to the fact that [within the example] the basis of the illusion appears from its own nature to be a horse or an elephant.<sup>473</sup>

Reality is also posited as existing by the power of the mind to which it appears, but although reality is posited as existing because it appears to the gnosis that perceives [things] the way they are, the gnosis that perceives [things] as they are does not [itself] posit reality as existing.<sup>474</sup> It is instead posited as existing by a different, nominal mind that [thinks] "reality exists by virtue of the fact that it appears to the gnosis of an *āryan*."

Just as other people, whose eyes have not been affected, have neither the appearance nor the conception of a horse or an elephant, likewise, the gnosis of an *āryan*, which is unaffected by ignorance and perceives [things] as they

are, does not contain even the appearance of those conventional objects in regard to which it understands reality. How could it possibly be said to apprehend that things really exist without their being posited by the mind?<sup>475</sup>

Such is the method for interpreting the analogy between the fact that all phenomena are illusions and the example.

[Opponent:] Though the illusion appears as a horse or an elephant, it is empty of being a horse or an elephant. Likewise, though the pot appears to be a pot, it is empty of being a pot. This is what it means for things to be like illusions. That example is to be taken as meaning that things are empty of [being] themselves (*rang stong*).

[Reply:] [Though this is their basic view], some [of the opponents] claim that *all* phenomena are empty of being themselves, whereas others claim that [only] conventional, produced things ('*du byed*) are empty of being themselves. Both of these [positions] are highly nihilistic views. Were it so, it would follow, absurdly, that no phenomenon could be itself, and if you accept that, no phenomenon would be possible. The same would be true in regard to produced things [if it were the case that only *they* were claimed to be empty of being themselves]. Also, it would follow, absurdly, that the "emptiness of being itself" could not be itself because it is empty of being itself. You have accepted the three cycles! [143]

Therefore, in the Svātantrika system sprouts and so on are both really existent in their own right (*yul rang gi sdod lugs su grub pa*) and dependent upon being mentally posited. [That something] really exists in its own right, without it being posited by the power of the mind, is the final object their reasoning refutes.

### **[The Analysis of the Svātantrikas' Object of Refutation Based on Scriptural Sources]<sup>476</sup>**

In this regard the *Madhyamakāloka* clearly and explicitly explains how it is that [things] are to be posited as conventionally existing. If we reverse this, we implicitly determine what [it means for something] to truly exist. Hence, [as true existence is what is to be refuted], we can [in this way] determine the size of the object of refutation [according to the Svātantrika system]. The *Āloka* says:

Things are really (*yang dag par*) natureless (*ngo bo nyid med par*); and the erroneous ('*khrol pa*) mind that reifies [things by thinking] the opposite of that, [that is, that things *do* have real natures,] is called the *conventional* (*kun rdzob*) [lit. the concealer] because it is as if it obscured (*bsgrib pa*) reality (*de kho na nyid*), as if it covered it over ('*gebs pa*). As the [*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*] says:

Conventionally things arise  
 But ultimately they are essenceless.  
 That which is mistaken as to this essencelessness  
 Is accepted as being a concealer of the truth (*yang dag kun rdzob*).<sup>477</sup>

Because it arises from this conventional [mind], what this reveals are perceived things, being all false, and belonging only to the conventional [sphere]. What is more, these arise by virtue of the ripening of the latent potentialities (*bag chags*) of error that [have been deposited on one's mental continuum] since beginningless time. That [mind] reveals things to all living beings as if they were real in nature. Therefore, things that are false in their nature, that [are posited] by virtue of these [mistaken] thoughts, are said to exist only conventionally (*kun rdzob tu yod pa kho na*).<sup>478</sup>

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This is saying that things exist by virtue of thought, and that the fact that things appear to all beings to exist as if they were real in nature, and *not* as if they existed by virtue of thought, is due to the ignorance which is the ripening of the latent potentialities of error that [have been deposited in the mind] since beginningless time.

[Opponent:] But the *Madhyamakāloka* also says: "To say that ultimately there is no arising is to be explained [as meaning] that things are not [perceived] to arise by a correct (*yang dag pa'i*) consciousness."<sup>479</sup> So should you not be explaining the measure of, [that is, what it means for something to have,] true existence [in terms of whether the thing] is established as existing by means of the knowledge (*rig shes*)<sup>480</sup> that perceives reality?

[Reply:] It is extremely important to realize that in the context of both the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika [systems] there are two interpretations of [the word] *ultimate* in the expression *ultimately nonexistent* (*don dam par med pa*). In one interpretation, [conventional things] are said to be "ultimately nonexistent" [or "nonexistent within the ultimate"] because [here] *ultimate* refers to the threefold study-contemplative-meditative knowledge<sup>481</sup> that analyzes reality; and conventional things do not exist within the purview (*ngor*), [that is, as the objects,] of that [knowledge]. In the second interpretation truth is called *ultimate*. Hence, what does not truly exist is called *ultimately nonexistent*.

According to the first interpretation it is possible for something to be ultimate; that is, something, [namely, emptiness,] can exist within the purview of that knowledge.<sup>482</sup> According to the second interpretation it is impossible for anything to be "ultimate" or to "exist in that ultimate [way]" according to either [the Prāsaṅgika or the Svātantrika systems].

If something truly exists, it must exist within the purview of the knowledge that analyzes reality because if something truly exists it must *be* reality

(*gnas lugs su grub*) [lit. it must exist as or in reality]. Though something be reality, however, it need not be truly existent. Hence, even though something exists within the purview of the knowledge that analyzes reality, it need not truly exist. Therefore, taking that knowledge as “the ultimate,” because the sprout does not exist within the purview of that knowledge, the sprout can be posited as not ultimately existing, but although reality *does* exist within the purview of that knowledge, one cannot posit reality as ultimately existing, for a sprout’s not being the object of that knowledge implies that it is not<sup>483</sup> reality, and if it is not reality, it cannot truly exist; but as reality (*chos nyid*) is the object of that knowledge, it ends up being reality (*gnas lugs su grub par song*.) although simply because it is reality does not imply that it must truly exist. [145]

Without making these kinds of distinctions, some have fallen into such errors as believing that the measure of that which is to be refuted (*dgag bya’i tshad*) [is determined by whether something] “can withstand analysis by reasoning” (*rigs pas dpyad bzod*). They do not distinguish between something “withstanding the analysis by reasoning that examines reality” and something “being established by reasoning.” Hence, the sages of old, like the translator rNgog (1059–1109 C.E.),<sup>484</sup> believe that the ultimate truth is not a knowable phenomenon (*shes bya*), whereas others, like Cha pa (1109–1169 C.E.),<sup>485</sup> assert that the “absence of true existence” truly exists. Yes, errors as huge as these *have* arisen.<sup>486</sup>

### [The Correct Identification of the Svātantrikas’ Object of Refutation]

Now I will explain what kind of “existence by virtue of own characteristic” the Svātantrikas accept on the nominal level.<sup>487</sup> It is quite clear that the Acārya Bhāvaviveka accepts that nominally things exist by virtue of their own characteristic, for he refutes the Vijñāna [vādins’] claim that the fact that imputed entities (*kun brtags*) do not exist by virtue of their own characteristic is the meaning of the *Samdhinirmocana* [passage that states that] imputed entities are characteristically natureless (*mtshan nyid ngo bo nyid med pa*), that dependent entities (*gzhan dbang*) are causally natureless (*skye ba no bo nyid med pa*), and that reality (*yongs grub*) is ultimately natureless (*don dam pa ngo bo nyid med pa*).<sup>488</sup> In [refuting this claim] he analyzes [the situation and determines] that imputed entities are of two types, those that do the labeling (*’dogs byed*) and those that are labeled by them, [that is, by those that label] (*des btags pa*). He explains that to accept that the word or conceptual thought, which is what predicates, does not exist by virtue of its own characteristic is [146]

Reason: because it is a product.

466. *LRCM*, folio 415b; in *CMDR*, p. 254, the passage is mistranslated.

467. Most likely a reference to the Jo nang pa doctrine. See Broido, "The Jonang-pas on Madhyamaka," p. 87; Go ram pa, *Ita ba'i shan 'byed*, pp. 3–8; kLong rdol bla ma, *dBu ma'i ming gi rnam grangs*, pp. 432–433; my "The Canonization of Philosophy"; and *TTG*, pp. 139 passim.

468. See *LSN*, folios 49a–63a. Other expositions of the Svātantrika system include Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *A Study of Svātantrika (SOS)* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion, 1987); S. Iida, *Reason and Emptiness: A Study of Logic and Mysticism* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1980); M. D. Eckel, "Bhāvaviveka and the Early Mādhyamika Theory of Language," *PEW* 28 (1978): 323–337; his "A Question of Nihilism: Bhāvaviveka's Response to the Fundamental Problems of Mādhyamika Philosophy" (Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University, 1980), and also his *Jñānagarbha on the Two Truths* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987). K. Mimaki discusses the Svātantrika in the context of the question of classifying the Madhyamaka into two schools in "The bLo gsal brub mtha' and the Madhyamaka Classification in Tibetan Grub mtha' Literature," in Steinkellner and H. Tauscher, *CTBRP*, pp. 161–167. For varying perspectives on this subject see various articles in *Tibet Journal* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1989). See also *LMS*, pp. 58 passim; and section 4.2.2.

469. See mKhas grub rje's remarks in *Lam ngan mun sel sgron ma*, folios 174a passim; also Go ram pa, *Ita ba'i shan 'byed*, pp. 11–12, 70–76, 111.

470. According to rJe btsun Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, *BPD*, folios 94a–95a, the stones and sticks do not always have to appear as the horse or the elephant but the "basis of the conjuring," by definition, must; which is to say that the latter refers to the collection that, having had the spell cast on it, is ready to appear as a horse or elephant as soon as it is seen by a spectator. The basis of the illusion has within it the potential to immediately appear in this way, as opposed to the striped rope in the corner, for example, which in general cannot be said to always appear as a snake, depending not on some spell for attaining its deceptive power, but simply appearing as a snake in given situations and to certain people with certain predispositions. See also section 3.1.3.5.1.1.3.

471. The word *posited* (*'jog pa*) has the connotation of verification here. The mind that posits an entity is the valid cognition that acts as the source of verification for it. In almost every case this is simply the valid cognition that perceives the object itself, though, as we shall see later, this is not invariably the case.

472. Keep in mind that the Svātantrikas and the Prāsaṅgikas differ in several respects, this being one. In the latter, the fact that all things are imputations or labels of the mind is sufficient to determine them as truthless, as not existing from their own side. This is not the case in the Svātantrika system, where things are seen to be both posited by the power of the mind and inherently existent.

473. As opposed to the Prāsaṅgikas' example of the rope, which, from its own side, has no power to appear as a snake and does so simply due to external conditions.

474. As mentioned earlier, though reality itself is the ultimate truth, the *existence* of reality is strictly a conventional truth. Hence, the gnosis of an *āryan*, which perceives *only* the ultimate truth, cannot perceive the former and cannot be the source of verification of the existence of reality.

475. In other words, if this gnosis has no conventional entities within its purview as far as appearances are concerned, there can be no question of it having any conceptions of the kind mentioned, appearances being much more difficult to abandon, as well as being the source of their corresponding conceptions.

476. See J. Hopkins, "A Tibetan Delineation of Different Views of Emptiness in the Indian Middle Way School," *Tibet Journal* 14, no. 1 (1989): 10–43.

477. For a more extensive discussion of this passage, see Se ra rJe btsun pa, *dBu ma'i spyi don*, folios 92b–93a.

478. Toh. no. 3887, *dBu ma sa*, folio 228b. See also *EE*, p. 283.

479. Toh. no. 3887, *dBu ma sa*, folio 229b. See *EE*, p. 284.

480. On the meaning of this term see the following note; see also Rong ston pa, *dBu ma la 'jug pa rnam bshad*, p. 112.

481. According to oral commentary on this point, in the discussion that follows the "knowledge" (*rig shes*) being spoken of, which almost exclusively refers to the inferential knowledge of emptiness, here refers instead to the equipoised wisdom of an *āryan*; for otherwise, it would make no sense to say that conventional objects do not exist within the purview of that knowledge. To use the word *rig shes* in this way, however, is an anomaly. What is more, mKhas grub rje's associating it with the knowledge gained from study and contemplation might make this interpretation suspect. Nonetheless, it is even more absurd to suppose that no conventional phenomena appear to a conceptual understanding of emptiness, the alternative.

482. Which is to say that emptiness fits the first definition of *ultimate* because it exists within the purview of that knowledge.

483. Here we have emended the text to read *gnas lugs su ma grub pa* as opposed to the existing reading of *gnas lugs su grub pa*, as the only possible reading that makes sense.

484. Legs ldan shes rab, one of the greatest Tibetan translators. See van der Kuip, *CTBE*, pp. 29–53, and especially pp. 35–48, where he discusses the relationship of Madhyamaka views to those concerning logic (epistemology). See also *LMS*, pp. 59n, 85n; *MOE*, pp. 406–411, 535.

485. See S. Onada, "Phya Pa Chos Kyi Seng Ge's Classification of *Thal 'Gyur*," pp. 65–66; also van der Kuip, *CTBE*, pp. 59 *passim*.

486. The basic error, says mKhas grub rje, is in confusing the two connotations of the word *ultimate* in the expression *ultimately existing* as explained. rNgog, he claims, confuses the analytical reasoning that examined reality with reasoning in general.

mKhas grub rje visualizes him reasoning as follows: even reality cannot withstand an ultimate analysis . . . hence, it cannot withstand reasoning in general . . . hence, it cannot be established by a valid cognition and hence reality, that is, the ultimate truth, does not exist. Phya pa, on the other hand, he perceives to reason as follows: reality, the absence of true existence, exists within the purview of the gnosis that understands reality . . . hence, it truly exists, and hence, the absence of true existence truly exists. Only further scrutiny of the views of these authors, to the extent that they are available, will bear out mKhas grub rje's claims, however.

487. See *CMDR*, pp. 227 passim; also *MOE*, pp. 574, 632. Go ram pa, *Ita ba shan 'byed*, pp. 20–22, discusses this view of the dGe lugs pas and then (pp. 109–116) goes on to refute much of what we shall find later. Go ram pa believes, for example, that “on the conventional level there is no difference between the Svātantrikas and the Prāsaṅgikas” (p. 109), a view that is anathema to mKhas grub rje who maintains that the Svātantrikas accept “existence by virtue of own characteristic” on the conventional level, whereas the Prāsaṅgikas do not.

488. For a similar interpretation see Kamalaśīla's remarks in *Madhyamakāloka*, Toh. no. 3882, dBu ma sa, folios 134a–b.

489. Toh. no. 3853, dBu ma tsha, folio 242a; C dBu ma tsha, folio 243b. See also *SOS*, pp. 69–70, for a more detailed discussion of this passage and the following one from the commentary.

490. Toh. no. 3859, dBu ma za, folio 274a; P no. 5259, dBu ma za, folios 325a–b. *TTC* has *ngos po* for *ngo bo*, see previous note. The passage is not cited in Tsong kha pa's *Legs bshad snying po* but is cited in his *Lhag mthong chen mo*, in the collection *rJe'i Tsong kha pa'i gsung dbu ma'i lta ba'i skor* (Sarnath: Pleasure of Elegant Sayings Press, 1975), p. 64.

491. In other words, if composite things did not exist by virtue of their own characteristic, they would have to be labeled phenomena, but we know from certain scriptural passages (cited later) that Bhāvaviveka accepts that such things are substantially existent phenomena, hence the two categories would have shared members and not be mutually exclusive, which is absurd.

492. P no. 5256, dBu ma sa, folio 231b.

493. *MA* (VI, 36), p. 122; *EOE*, p. 161.

494. This could be a direct quote but is more likely a paraphrase, as mKhas grub rje is for the most part quite strict about identifying the text from which he quotes. Bhāvaviveka's theory of sense perception is in many ways similar to Dignāga's. See M. Hattori, *Dignāga on Perception* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968); and R. P. Hayes, “Dignāga's Views on Reasoning (Svārthānumāna),” *JIP* 8 (1984): 219–227.

495. See ICang skya's comments on this point, as translated by Lopez in *SOS*, pp. 285–286.