

[THE TWO TRUTHS AND THEIR COGNITION]

4.2.3.3.2. *The Explanation of the Two Truths, Which Is the Basis Set Forth by Reasoning*¹⁰⁹⁷

4.2.3.3.2.1. *The Basis for the Division [into Two Truths]*¹⁰⁹⁸

[The set of all] phenomena themselves is taken as the basis for the division. As the *Pitāputrasamāgama Sūtra* says:

In this way, the Tathāgata has an understanding of both the conventional (*kun rdzob*) and the ultimate (*don dam pa*). Phenomena themselves become used up [when fit] into this [framework] of conventional and ultimate truths. Because the Lord has seen emptiness, has understood it, has perfectly actualized it, because of this, he is said to be omniscient.¹⁰⁹⁹

The Great Translator rNgog¹¹⁰⁰ and others explain that it is the intention of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* that the ultimate truth is not something known, a phenomenon (*shes bya*), but this is a mistaken position,¹¹⁰¹ for it contradicts [Śāntideva's] explanation in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, where he quotes that very *sūtra* [just cited] and says that the known, that is, phenomena, are the basis for the division into two truths. [It is also mistaken] because it would follow, absurdly, that the Buddha taught the ultimate truth without understanding it, [as, according to you, it cannot be understood]; and also because it would follow, absurdly, that the very way in which pillars and pots and so on appear is their reality because phenomena could have no thusness (*de bzhin nyid*) qua reality. [Finally, it is mistaken] because it would follow, absurdly, that there would not be the slightest difference between the way things appear to the minds of ordinary beings and to that of *āryans*.

[Opponent:] Well then, how do you interpret this passage from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*:

The conventional and the ultimate
Are what are accepted as the two truths.
The ultimate is not an object of the mind;
The mind is accepted as being conventional.¹¹⁰²

[Reply:] It is an extremely erroneous pervasion¹¹⁰³ to claim, as some do, [431] that the mind's being a conventional [entity] is proof that the ultimate is not an object of the mind. This instead should be explained as follows. The first two lines teach the division into the two truths. Then, for the purpose of clarifying the nature of each of these categories, [it explains in the next two lines] that the nature of the ultimate truth is as follows. It says that the object that is reality and not an object of a mind *deluded by dualistic appearances* is the ultimate. The nature of the conventional is as follows. The mental object of a nominal mind is accepted as being conventional. This is how it must be explained, for the meaning of the following passage from the *Pitāputrasamāgama Sūtra* quoted in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* applies to the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* as well:

That the conventional is the usage (*spyod pa*) of the world is seen by the Tathāgata. That which is the ultimate is inexpressible (*brjod du med pa*), unknowable (*shes par bya ba ma yin pa*), utterly unknowable (*rnam par shes par bya ba ma yin pa*), completely unknowable (*yongs su shes par bya ba ma yin pa*), not demonstrable (*ma bstan pa*).¹¹⁰⁴

The division of phenomena into two truths is a [bipartisan] enumeration meant to exclude any third alternatives. This is because when one affirms somethings as being a false, deceptive object, one must be negating its being the object reality, which is not deceptive; and also because the deceptive and the nondeceptive are mutually exclusive, contradictory things (*phan tshun spangs pa'i dngos 'gal*). Along these lines the *Madhyamakāloka* says: "Two phenomena that possess the characteristic of being mutually exclusive must be related in such a way that the negation of one affirms the other, and hence it is not correct to conceive of something that is neither."¹¹⁰⁵ And also: [432]

Two things related in such a way that the affirmation of one negates the other are said to [possess] the characteristic of being mutually exclusive. Whatever two things possess the characteristic of being mutually exclusive must include everything [within them]. Whatever two things include everything else within them exclude any other alternative. For example, [this is so] in such particular cases as "embodied and disembodied."¹¹⁰⁶

That in the case of things that are directly contradictory (*dngos 'gal*) the affirmation of one negates the other is [a point accepted] without distinction in both the Prāsaṅgika and Svāntarika systems. For this reason the *Pitāputrasamāgama Sūtra* again says:

The "Knower of the Universe" did teach
 These two truths without hearing them from another.
 There is the conventional, and likewise the ultimate.
 There can never be a third truth.¹¹⁰⁷

[Question:] Then how are the four truths collected into the two truths?

[Reply:] The truth of cessation is an ultimate truth, whereas the other three truths are conventional truths. This is because the *Avatārabhāṣya* says: “Then how could there be four noble truths that are different from the two truths?”¹¹⁰⁸ Having asked this question, it says, by way of an answer: “The truths of suffering, cause, and path are included within the conventional truth. The truth of cessation is of the nature of the ultimate truth.”¹¹⁰⁹ What is more, [433] [Candrakīrti’s] *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti* also explains it in this way.

[Opponent:] The truth of cessation is not reality (*chos nyid*) because the refuted objects negated to posit the truth of cessation are the adventitious stains that are a refuted object that in general can exist, whereas that which is negated to posit reality, true existence, is a refuted object that cannot possibly exist.

[Reply:] This is an extremely erroneous pervasion, for it would follow, absurdly, that a nonpot could not be a non-“rabbit’s horn” because the refuted object that is to be negated in positing nonpot, that is, the pot, is a refuted object that in general exists, whereas the refuted object that is to be negated in positing non-“rabbit’s horn,” that is, the rabbit’s horn, is a refuted object that cannot exist.

The belief that the truth of cessation is an ultimate truth is something characteristic not only of Prāsaṅgikas; it is held in common by both the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika systems.¹¹¹⁰ Were that not so, then let us consider the liberative path (*rnam grol lam*), one of the two parts of the equiposed gnosis of the path of seeing that directly understands reality, [the two being] the unobstructed path (*bar chad med lam*) and the liberative path.¹¹¹¹ [If the Svātantrikas did not accept that cessation was an ultimate truth,] then it would contradict the fact that in their system this liberative path is accepted as actualizing (*mngon par byas pa*) a cessation that is the abandonment of the seeds of the obstacles [removed during the path of] seeing (*mtshong spang sa bon*). [They must accept cessation to be an ultimate truth, for otherwise] it would be in utter contradiction to the following position. They accept that the nature body (*ngo bo nyid sku*) and the final truth of cessation of a perfect Buddha are synonyms. Accepting this, they claim that the reality possessing the two purities is the nature body.¹¹¹² [They must also accept this, for otherwise] it would [434] follow that this system should not accept a position which advocates that the nature body is an ultimate body and that composite bodies (*'du byed kyi sku*) are conventional bodies. [Finally, they must accept this, for otherwise] it would follow that the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* commentaries of Ārya [Vimuktasena] and Haribhadra become meaningless when they divide the aspects of the truth of cessation into the sixteen emptinesses.¹¹¹³

Therefore, for the great translator rNog, the father, and his sons, to believe as they do is to advocate that the ultimate truth is not a [knowable] phenomenon and to hold in their hearts what they cannot [out of shame] advocate [openly], namely, that the truth of cessation is not an object of the

mind. When the Lord [Tsong kha pa] himself states in the *Exposition of the Avatāra*, “Whether the truth of cessation is advocated as being a conventional truth is undecided,”¹¹¹⁴ he is not referring to the Mahāyāna Svātantrikas of India nor to the belief that arose in Tibet that in the Prāsaṅgika system the truth of cessation is a conventional truth. He is referring to those scholars, which we have just mentioned, who advocate what they do when they explain the scriptures of the Svātantrikas. What is more, take the syllogism, “the truth of cessation is not reality because the refuted object negated in positing reality is a nonexistent refuted object whereas the refuted object negated in positing the truth of cessation, the stains, is a refuted object that exists.” According to this system, the difference between the Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas is that according to the Prāsaṅgikas [the syllogism] lacks a pervasion, [that is, the predicate does not follow from the reason,] whereas according to the Svātantrikas, it has a pervasion. Apart from this they have no reason whatsoever for claiming that in the Svātantrika system the truth of cessation is a conventional truth.

4.2.3.3.2.2. *The Meaning of the Words [Ultimate and Conventional]*

The meaning of *ultimate truth* [lit. highest object truth, (*don dam bden pa*) is as follows]. Most Svātantrika Mādhyamikas explain that the word *highest* [435] refers to the undefiled equiposed gnosis that understands reality, and that the word *object* refers to its object. Nonetheless, as regards [the etymology] in this [system, that is, in our own, the Prāsaṅgika,] the *Prasannapadā* states: “Because the object is that, and as it is also the highest, it is the highest object; and because it is the truth, it is the highest object truth, [that is, the ultimate truth].”¹¹¹⁵ Hence, because that very object itself is the highest or correct (*yang dag pa*) reality, it is the highest object. In the world something is considered to be deceptive if in reality it is one way while appearing another. The opposite of that is said to be nondeceptive. Because it is this, [the highest object] is said to be the truth. [436]

Therefore, the *true* in the expression *empty of true existence even nominally* and the *truth* in the expression *ultimate truth* are completely different [in what they refer to]. That is why, when the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* says “*nirvāṇa* is the sole truth,”¹¹¹⁶ the *Vṛtti* says:

How so? Because the compounded appears mistakenly, it deceives the childish, but *nirvāṇa* is not like that, for it always abides in a nature, an essence, which is acausal. It never appears to the childish to be causal in nature as the compounded does. Therefore, it is because *nirvāṇa* always abides in *nirvāṇaness* that in strictly worldly terms it is called a *highest truth*.¹¹¹⁷