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Tibetan Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna

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Introduction

The culminating philosophy and practice for Buddhist traditions in Tibet is what is found in tantra, or Vajrayāna. Yet Tibet is unique in the Buddhist world in that it is a place where not only the traditions of tantra (for which it is widely known) are practiced, but where the epistemological traditions of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) and what came to be known as Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka also took root. It is hard to underestimate the significance of this fact, and the enormous influence this convergence had upon the distinctive forms of philosophical and contemplative practices that flourished in this culture.

In particular, the intersection of valid cognition (inspired by Dharmakīrti) and Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka (inspired by Candrakīrti) led to a vibrant philosophical tradition in Tibet. The deconstructive critiques of Madhyamaka and the systematic phenomenology of Yogācāra had already come to a synthesis in India, in the works of Śāntarakṣita in the eighth century. As one of the first Buddhist scholars to visit Tibet, Śāntarakṣita was particularly influential in the early transmission of Buddhism in “the Land of Snow.” His tradition of Yogācāra-Madhyamaka – which presents the conventional truth in accord with Yogācāra and the ultimate truth in accord with the Madhyamaka – was a powerful synthesis that he brought to Tibet in the formative era of the assimilation of Buddhism there.

The systematic philosophy of Yogācāra-Madhyamaka contrasts sharply with Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka. Candrakīrti, who was renowned in Tibet as a proponent of Prāsaṅgika, had argued against central positions of Yogācāra, namely, that there could be minds without objects and that awareness was reflexive (self-aware) by nature. Since Candrakīrti came to be widely accepted in Tibet as the definitive interpreter of Nāgārjuna after the twelfth century, Yogācāra, despite its importance, tended to take a back seat

to Prāsaṅgika in most Tibetan representations of philosophical systems. However, the philosophical view of Yogācāra by and large can be seen in Tibet to be transposed into Vajrāyāna, and it is Vajrayāna that is held as supreme among all Buddhist paths in the traditions there.

Vajrayāna takes bodily presence as fundamental to the path of awakening, since the body is seen to contain wisdom. Also, bodily processes become central loci of meaning – processes such as birth, sex, and death are inscribed with resonances and significance as they structure worlds and correlate with a grand cosmological narrative. As opposed to the reductive conceptual analyses of abstract, propositional thought, tantra is a philosophy rooted in the body. It is (embodied) “philosophy in the flesh” in the way that Lakoff and Johnson (1999) use the term; or, better yet, a philosophy of “flesh” in a Merleau-Pontian sense – that is, (enminded) bodily flesh interpenetrating with the sensing flesh of the world (see Merleau-Ponty 1968). It is thus perhaps futile to *make sense* out of the Vajrayāna out of context, for it is first and foremost an embodied philosophy, a topic that does not lend itself easily to armchair theorizing, for it calls for a participatory orientation – part and parcel with lived (yet dying), unspoken (yet speaking), and unacknowledged (yet knowing) *performative* dimensions. But with this in mind (and body), we can perhaps here get a *feel* for some of the features that come to define Buddhist philosophy in Tibet.

Philosophical Vajrayāna (that is, Vajrayāna as philosophically articulated) shares a strong continuity with the Mahāyāna and also represents a clear break from it. The constructive role of mind (Yogācāra) and the universality of emptiness (Madhyamaka) both play predominant roles in Vajrayāna. Yet with Madhyamaka there can be a tendency to reify emptiness (at the expense of appearance), and there is a tendency in Yogācāra to reify the mind (and disregard body, which is also a denigration of appearance). Philosophical Vajrayāna professes a system that serves as a corrective to both of these tendencies: by applying the unity of appearance and emptiness (appearing–emptiness) and body–mind in an integrated theory–practice.

Philosophical Vajrayāna

The “resultant vehicle” of Vajrayāna is called such due to taking the effect as the path (Tsongkhapa 1995, 15–16). In the “causal vehicle” of *sūtra* one relates to the Buddha as the goal of a causal process of transformation. However, in the resultant vehicle of tantra the approach is different; one does not see a separate Buddha “out there” to be attained in a distant future, but the Buddha is approached as an immanently present reality accessible *right now*.

One of the most important themes that extends into Vajrayāna from Mahāyāna is buddha-nature (*bde gshegs snying po*, *tathāgatagarbha*). While many of the practices of the Vajrayāna are also shared with Mahāyāna, and are not different from simply ritual Mahāyāna,¹ the practical application of the theory of buddha-nature in Vajrayāna takes on a distinctive form. According to Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), the renowned forefather of the Geluk (*dge lugs*) tradition, what distinguishes Vajrayāna is the practice of deity yoga (Tsongkhapa 1995, 21) – that is, identifying with the Buddha, or the appearing aspects of the divine (or buddha-) nature.

According to Longchenpa (1308–1364), an important figure in the Nyingma (*nying ma*) tradition (the “old school” of translations in Tibet), in the causal vehicle one sees buddha-nature as a future event of a causal process, while in the resultant vehicle one sees buddha-nature as the immanently present reality, qualitatively indivisible from its effect, the Buddha (Longchenpa 1996, 1169–70). Not all Buddhist sects in Tibet follow Longchenpa’s formulation *vis-à-vis* buddha-nature, but perceiving the qualities of the Buddha here and now is an essential part of the practice of tantra, not only in his tradition but across all major Buddhist sects in Tibet. Arguably, the underlying philosophy behind the practice of deity yoga is the presence of buddha-nature within being(s). That is, buddha-nature can be seen as the philosophical underpinning for the practices of tantra.²

In any case, the descriptions of the world in certain (Highest Yoga) tantras radically differ from the negative appraisals of the aggregates, causality, and consciousness that we see in early Buddhists *sūtras*. In particular, these tantras invert the categories that are commonly expressed as negative in *sūtras* and form the basis of a distinctive Vajrayāna philosophy and practice. For instance, in Vajrayāna the truth of suffering arises as the essence of the truth of cessation, and the truth of origin (that is, afflictions and karma) likewise becomes the truth of the path (Mipam 2000, 443). Also, the five afflictions are described as the nature of the five wisdoms in tantra; they are the unceasing display of awareness. And in certain traditions, such as *Kālacakra* and the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*), the world is seen at its core not as a product of karma but as, more fundamentally, an expression of wisdom (Kongtrül 2002, 120–35). In this way, the dominant categories of early Abhidharma, such as the five aggregates, are completely overturned and creatively inscribed with positive meanings. This directly parallels how the permanence and purity of buddha-nature in *sūtras* that are classified in Tibet as the last “wheel of doctrine” (*dharmacakra*) overturns the descriptions of impermanence, suffering, and so on, in the first wheel of doctrine. Yet while Vajrayāna is commonly mistaken for the content of the Buddha’s third turning of the wheel of doctrine, the content of the three turnings is *sūtra*, not tantra.

Before saying more about Vajrayāna and the nature of the relationship between *sūtra* and tantra, we will first briefly survey a range of ways in which Madhyamaka is represented in Tibet. Madhyamaka takes the place of the highest philosophical view (in the causal vehicle) among Tibetan Buddhist sects, and seeing how different traditions formulate the view of Madhyamaka is an important part of understanding how these traditions relate to tantra and negotiate the relationship between Madhyamaka and Vajrayāna.

Variations of Madhyamaka

An influential representation of Madhyamaka is found in the claim of “other-emptiness” (*gzhan stong*) made famous by the Jonang (*jo nang*) school. In the Jonang tradition, to affirm that the ordinary objects of relative truth exist in reality – such as tables and chairs that exist merely in ignorant, dualistic perspectives – is to fall into the extreme of essentialism. On the other hand, to say that the ultimate truth does not exist and is devoid of its own essence is to stray to the other extreme, the extreme of nihilism.

Avoiding these two extremes is the Middle Way in the Jonang tradition. Followers of this school claim to avoid the extreme of essentialism by maintaining that relative phenomena do not exist in reality, and to avoid the extreme of nihilism by affirming that the ultimate truth really exists.

Dölpopa (1292–1361) is known as the forefather of the Jonang tradition. He famously claimed that the ultimate truth is not empty of itself, but is “other-empty.” For Dölpopa, what is other-empty exists within reality; it is real and empty of what is other – the unreal. In this way, the ultimate truth is not empty because it is the true ground of reality; it is “empty” only in the sense that it lacks all relative phenomena. He went on to claim that all phenomena of the relative truth are “self-empty” – that is, they are utterly absent in reality (Dölpopa 1976, 300–3). Relative phenomena are self-empty because they are empty of their own respective essences and not because they are lacking with reference to something extrinsic to themselves.

Tsongkhapa, who came to be known as the forefather of the Geluk tradition, criticized Dölpopa’s interpretation as realist by arguing that it misrepresented the genuine meaning of the ultimate truth of emptiness. He said that the ultimate truth is not to be understood as one thing being empty of another, but must be known as a mere absence of true existence. Significantly, Tsongkhapa laid out a distinctive interpretation of Prāsaṅgika and distanced himself from Yogācāra.³ He said that Prāsaṅgika alone has the correct interpretation of Madhyamaka, and argued that other Buddhist philosophies fall short of the authentic view. Tsongkhapa marks an important line between the old and new schools of interpretation of Madhyamaka in Tibet.

In the Geluk tradition, the genuine ultimate truth is always emptiness and appearance is always the relative truth; emptiness and only emptiness is the ultimate truth. In this tradition, to undermine the reality of ordinary appearances, such as tables and chairs, is to stray to the extreme of nihilism. Yet to say that the genuine ultimate truth is anything other than emptiness (that is, that the ultimate truth is anything other than a *lack* of true existence) is to stray to the extreme of essentialism. Madhyamaka according to this tradition is in between these two extremes.

The Geluk tradition’s formulation of Madhyamaka emphasizes how the two truths are experienced from the perspective of an ordinary sentient being. The Jonang tradition, on the other hand, describes the two truths by emphasizing how they are experienced from the perspective of a buddha. In contrast to these two influential traditions, the Nyingma tradition represented by Mipam (1846–1912) asserts the Middle Way as *unity* (*zung ’jug*). In unity, there is no duality, so the duality of sentient beings and buddhas has also dissolved. In the Nyingma presentation of the Middle Way as unity, to claim that anything stands up to ultimate analysis is to fall to the extreme of essentialism. Wisdom or even a divine maṇḍala cannot be found when its true nature is sought by analysis. Thus, for Mipam, there is no true essence in anything, and the position that nothing ultimately exists is the claim of “self-emptiness” (Mipam 1987, 450). With this, his Nyingma tradition claims to avoid the extreme of essentialism. On the other hand, to deny the reality of what does indeed exist conventionally – for example, saying that tables and chairs do not exist in ordinary perspectives, or that wisdom and divine maṇḍalas do not exist in the perspectives of sublime beings (*’phags pa, ārya*) – is to fall to the extreme of nihilism. By asserting the conventional existence of these phenomena, his tradition claims to avoid this extreme (Mipam 1990, 420).

A late Nyingma commentator, Bōtrül (1898–1959), regards the Nyingma position above as “self-emptiness” (*rang stong*) in contrast to the (Geluk) claim of “emptiness of true existence” (*bden stong*) and the (Jonang) claim of “other-emptiness” (*gzhan stong*). He makes this distinction based on three different ways of identifying the object of negation among three different representations of Madhyamaka in Tibet: (1) other-emptiness (Jonang/Yogācāra), (2) emptiness of true existence (Geluk/Svātantrika), and (3) self-emptiness (Nyingma/Prāsaṅgika) (Bōtrül 2011, 37). He states that the primary object of negation in (Jonang) “other-emptiness” is inauthentic experience, the primary object of negation for the (Geluk) “Svātantrika” is true existence, and the primary object of negation in (Nyingma) “self-emptiness” is any conceptual reference. Accordingly, he says that the two truths can be said to be (1) different in the sense of “negating that they are one” (*gcig pa bkag pa*) in the context of other-emptiness, (2) “the same with different contradistinctions” (*ngo bo gcig la ldog pa tha dad*) in the contexts of (Geluk) Svātantrika discourse, and (3) “neither one nor many” (*gcig du bral*) in (Nyingma) Prāsaṅgika discourse (ibid., 149–50). In this way, he outlines three different approaches to Madhyamaka.

Despite the differences on the surface between these three traditional representations of Madhyamaka, we find a lot in common within their interpretations. Aside from a varied degree of emphasis upon certain aspects of a Buddhist worldview, we do not necessarily find a substantial difference between the Jonang, Geluk, and Nyingma interpretations. We can see this when we look beyond the language of self-emptiness and other-emptiness to see that all three traditions accept a fundamental appearance/reality distinction – the Buddhist doctrine of two truths – whereby it is held that (1) phenomena do not exist in the way they appear to an ordinary being (in which case appearances do not accord with reality), and (2) appearance and reality accord without conflict in the undistorted perception of a buddha.

Also, all these traditions accept that: (1) the undistorted perception of ultimate truth is not the distorted appearance of relative truth (other-emptiness), (2) relative phenomena are not found when their ultimate nature is analyzed (emptiness of true existence), and (3) emptiness in essence is inexpressible (the ultimate of Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka). Furthermore, in none of these traditions is emptiness the utter negation of everything – it is not utter nihilism because some type of *presence* remains. It is presence that becomes the primary subject matter of tantra, a topic to which we now turn.

Tantric Distinction

Madhyamaka holds the top place in a hierarchy of four philosophical systems (*grub mtha', siddhānta*) – Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Mind-Only, Madhyamaka – and each school can be seen in an ascending scale as transcending the limitations of the previous one. The hierarchy of views can also be seen to extend through to tantra, whereby Vajrayāna offers the next philosophical paradigm that resolves the shortcomings of the preceding level of the system (Madhyamaka), while incorporating its insight. In this light, tantra marks a distinct philosophical horizon.

The hierarchy of views in the four philosophical systems of *sūtra* appears to be based upon an internal principle of emptiness – the higher the view, the more

increasingly ineffable, indeterminate, or essenceless ultimate reality is acknowledged to be. That is, the philosophical systems of *sūtra* can be seen to depict a hierarchy based upon the empty quality of reality – the higher the view, the more comprehensive is the explanation of emptiness. The increasingly immanent *presence* of the divine (Buddha), however, better represents the internal logic guiding the hierarchy of views within Vajrayāna, the vehicle of tantra. In the context of the four or six classes of tantras,⁴ we see how the hierarchy shifts from the principle of increasing *transcendence* (emptiness) – as it is in *sūtra* – to the principle of *immanence*. That is, the higher the view, the more the wisdom and body of the Buddha become accessible as an *immanent presence* in reality.

We can see how the discourses of Madhyamaka deal explicitly with ontology and its deconstruction, *what is and what is not*, whereas a unique subject matter of tantra is a particular type of experience or *subjectivity*. In the philosophical systems represented within the “causal vehicle” of non-tantric Mahāyāna, the *empty* aspect of luminous clarity (*’od gsal*), the fundamental nature of mind, is emphasized, and, in the “resultant vehicle” of Vajrayāna (i.e., tantric Mahāyāna), the emphasis is on the aspect of *clarity* (*gsal cha*). Although luminous clarity is addressed in *sūtra*, the aspect of clarity is not as fully developed as it is in tantra (Bötrül 2011, 96–9).

Emptiness is a quality of objects, as well as a quality of subjective minds, whereas the aspect of clarity concerns the aspect of appearance, and specifically subjectivity, or awareness. By *subjectivity*, I do not mean a mode of consciousness that necessarily relates to a world as a subject encapsulated in a world partitioned into a metaphysical subject–object dualism. Rather, I use subjectivity simply to refer to phenomenological awareness, “being aware.” In Vajrayāna, this interior space of subjectivity exhibits modes of awareness (ways of relating to experience) that are coarse and modes that are subtle. Rather than representing the habitual patterns of the coarse (dim and dull) registers of consciousness, the emphasis of Vajrayāna is to elicit a direct encounter with the most subtle nature of awareness. This nature of mind, the fundamental intelligence that is “bright” and “clear,” is disclosed in tantra more directly and extensively than in *sūtra*. Thus, the primary distinction between *sūtra* and tantra is made in terms of the subject – or, in other words, the shift from *sūtra* to tantra can be seen as a move from ontology to subjectivity, from substance to spirit.

We see a parallel shift in Hegel’s critique of Spinoza’s pantheistic ontology, in what he calls “Spinozism.” In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* he says: “God is the absolute substance. If we cling to this declaration in its abstract form, then it is certainly Spinozism or pantheism. But the fact that God is *substance* does not exclude *subjectivity*” (Hegel 1984 [1827], 370). Likewise, the nature of deity in Vajrayāna is not a substance; rather, it is a dynamic subjectivity, the awareness of emptiness and appearance in unity. Deity (Buddha) is not an abstract intellectual category that is a simple metaphysical absence or negation, for it is an experiential presence that is known – actualized and embodied. The mind of the deity is wisdom’s subjectivity and appearance is the divine body (and sound is divine speech – mantra). That is, the universe – inside and out – is the (speaking) mind–body of the Buddha, the *dharmakāya*. The subject in tantra is empty (while aware), beyond words (while expressive), and transcendent (while embodied).

The philosophy of Vajrayāna maintains that the subject is wisdom (*yl can ye shes*) and that appearances are divine (*snang ba lha*) (Mipam 2000, 443–57). In *sūtra*, appearances are seen to be illusory; in tantra, however, appearances are also seen as divine. Thus, a “correct relative” (*yang dag pa'i kun rdzob, samyaksamvṛti*) of *sūtra* is the “incorrect relative” (*log pa'i kun rdzob, mithyāsamvṛti*) in tantra. As for the ultimate truth, while there is some disagreement in Tibet about a distinction in view between *sūtra* and tantra concerning the realized object (emptiness free from constructs), there seems to be no disagreement about the realizing subject being a more subtle awareness in tantra.⁵

For the Geluk school, Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka is the highest view, and thus, for this school, there is no difference between the view of *sūtra* (i.e., Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka) and that of tantra (Tsongkhapa 1995, 18). While the dominant Geluk tradition makes the tantric distinction based solely on method, this is not the case for Tibetan traditions that assert what we may call “philosophical Vajrayāna” and make an explicit distinction between *sūtra* and tantra based on a *philosophical* view as well. In such cases, we see more of a role for Yogācāra analyses, such as the phenomenological reduction (*snang ba sems su bsgrub*), both in coming to terms with emptiness in Madhyamaka and in the philosophical formulation of Vajrayāna.

In the case of the Nyingma school, “unity” is the key. For Mipam, for example, unity functions both to integrate the discourses of *sūtra* and tantra and to bring together the discourses on emptiness and appearance in the second and third turnings of the *dharma-cakra* as representative of the “definitive meaning” (*ngeḥ don, nithārtha*). For this tradition, the world of tantra is also reflected within the presentation of Madhyamaka, as opposed to the Geluk and Sakya traditions, which maintain a more strict separation between these two discourses.⁶

In the Jonang tradition, Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka is not the highest view even within the philosophical systems of the causal vehicle. We can see with “other-emptiness” how a view of emptiness in *sūtra* (and emptiness articulated as an implicative negation) yields to a view of tantra, one that is not bounded by the constraints that delimit ultimate truth to a negative referent. An implicative negation (*ma yin dgag, paryudāsa-pratiṣedha*) plays an important role in Vajrayāna, where emptiness, or openness, becomes “emptiness endowed with all supreme aspects” (*rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong pa nyid*). With the Jonang tradition, other-emptiness in Madhyamaka reflects directly the pregnant (fullness of) emptiness in the *Kālacakratantra*. This suggests how, in [Highest Yoga] Tantra, terms come to be charged with exalted values (*sgra mthun don spags*), values that tend to overturn their meanings within the *sūtra* system, as in the case with the afflictions.

Vajrayāna as Pantheism

Vajrayāna in Tibet is *pantheist* to the core, for, in its most profound expressions (e.g., Highest Yoga tantra), all dualities between the divine and the world are radically undone. Although there may be a variety of pantheisms, in *Concepts of Deity*, H. P. Owen characterizes “pantheists” in general as follows: “‘Pantheism’ (which is derived from the Greek words for ‘all’ and ‘God’) signifies the belief that every existing entity

is, in some sense, divine” (Owen 1971, 65). A definition of pantheism from the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* states: “Pantheism essentially involves two assertions: that everything that exists constitutes a unity and that this all-inclusive unity is divine” (MacIntyre 1971, 34). Both of these definitions reflect the view of philosophical Vajrayāna.

In his depiction of the “goal” of pantheism, Michael Levine, in *Pantheism: A Non-Theistic Concept of Deity*, echoes a characteristic of the “resultant vehicle” of Vajrayāna (and Mahāyāna more generally): “The pantheist eschews any notion of their [*sic*] being further goals; for example, the theist’s beatific vision; personal immortality; *nirvāṇa*; and even Spinoza’s ‘blessedness,’ interpreted as something other-worldly” (Levine 1997, 347). Levine apparently has in mind a *nirvāṇa* that is conceived as separate in space (i.e., non-Mahāyāna *nirvāṇa*) and time (i.e., non-tantric *nirvāṇa*), not the integral vision of the Buddha in Vajrayāna as an immanent, perfected reality that can be accessed in this body right now.⁷

Rather than being conceived as a separate transcendent world, in Vajrayāna the divine is seen within the world, and the infinite within the finite, as is characteristic of pantheism. As Hegel states: “The real infinite, far from being a mere transcendence of the finite, always involves the absorption of the finite into its own fuller nature” (Hegel 1873, 78). Compare this sense of the infinite with the (“bad”) infinite of classical theism in Owen’s statement: “The ‘in’ in ‘infinite’ is to be taken as a negative prefix. It means that God is non-finite. In order to arrive at a true notion of him we must deny to him all those limitations that affect created being” (Owen 1971, 13). Such a notion of the infinity of God negates the world and makes God an imagined “other” that is separate from the finite world. Such a dualism has the consequence that God becomes valorized at the expense of a devalued world. With Vajrayāna, by contrast, (ultimate) value is not forged at the expense of the (relative) world. Rather, the realm of the Buddha is discovered no place other than in this world and in this body.

A devaluation of finite being is not limited to the modern world, or even to classical theism. We can see similar instances of devaluation of body and world in other forms of South Asian monastic traditions, including medieval Mahāyāna and modern Theravāda. Śāṅkara’s (c. eighth century) brand of Advaita Vedānta also shares this feature of world denial, where the world is an illusion that does not exist in reality. In the case of Śāṅkara, union with Brahman entails the dissolution of appearances – an end to the realm of *māyā* along with the world of plurality and difference. In contrast to the acosmism exemplified by Śāṅkara, we see a close parallel with the pantheism of Tibetan Vajrayāna in the non-dual tantric synthesis of Abhinavagupta’s (975–1025) Kashmiri Śaivism, where appearance (*ābhāsa*) is a modality of the divine. A principal difference seems to lie in the fundamental role played by compassion in Buddhist Vajrayāna, which is the staple of all Mahāyāna practices.

Notes

- 1 Indeed, if we had access to living communities of Buddhist Mahāyāna practice in India, as we have in Tibet, we can reasonably speculate that we would find many rituals (e.g., *buddhānusmṛti*) that resemble Vajrayāna practices.

- 2 The importance of buddha-nature in tantra is reflected in the words of Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama:

The substance of all these paths [*Guhyasamāja*, *Kālacakra*, Great Perfection] comes down to the fundamental innate mind of clear light. Even the sūtras which serve as the basis for Maitreya's commentary in his *Sublime Continuum of the Great Vehicle* [*Uttaratantra*] have this same fundamental mind as the basis of their thought in their discussion of the Buddha nature, or essence of a One Gone Thus (*Tathāgatagarbha*, *De bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po*), although the full mode of its practice is not described as it is in the systems of Highest Yoga Tantra.

(Dalai Lama 1984, 224; emphasis added)

- In the context of explaining a Geluk view, Jeffrey Hopkins affirms: "The fact that emptiness (and the mind fused with it in realization) is called a deity is similar to calling the emptiness of the mind Buddha nature" (Hopkins 2009, 51).
- 3 At least two of Tsongkhapa's eight unique assertions of Prāsaṅgika are rejections of central tenets of Yogācāra: (1) the unique manner of refuting reflexive awareness and (2) the necessity of asserting external objects as one asserts cognitions (Tsongkhapa 1998, 226).
- 4 The four classes of tantra are Action Tantra (*bya rgyud*, *kriyātantra*), Performance Tantra (*spyod rgyud*, *caryātantra*), Yoga Tantra (*rnal 'byor rgyud*, *yogatantra*), and Highest Yoga Tantra (*bla na med pa'i rgyud*, *anuttaratantra*). In the Nyingma tradition, there are six: the first three are the same as above, but in place of Highest Yoga Tantra there are the three "inner-tantras" (*nang rgyud*): Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga (the Great Perfection).
- 5 Kongtrül stated that proponents of "self-emptiness" claim that the only difference in tantra is the subject (*yl can*), and not the object that is free from conceptual constructs; on the other hand, proponents of "other-emptiness" claim that there is a difference in the object (*yl*) as well (Kongtrül 2002, 716). Sakya Paṇḍita (1182–1251) stated that there is no view higher than the freedom of constructs taught in the "perfection vehicle" of *sūtra*: "If there were a view superior to the freedom from constructs of the perfection [vehicle], then that view would possess constructs; if free from constructs, then there is no difference [in view between tantra and the perfection vehicle]" (translation mine) (Sakya Paṇḍita 2002, 308).
- 6 In the Geluk tradition, the strict *sūtra*-tantra distinction is textually enshrined in Tsongkhapa's two great works: *The Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* and *The Great Exposition of the Stages of Mantra*, which deal respectively with topics of *sūtra* and tantra.
- 7 Pantheism in North-West European traditions has historically been rejected and seen as horrible, not because it is irrational, but because it is pagan. Pantheism does not buy into the metaphysical assumptions of classical theism; there is no separation into a God/world duality. Hegel and Spinoza were labeled "pantheists" and even atheists, although they themselves did not describe their own views with those terms. Hegel even denied that Spinoza was an atheist; rather, he said that Spinoza had "too much God." We see an interesting point of departure in the works of Hegel for considering the relationship between the divine and the world in Buddhist thought. In particular, we can see this within Hegel's insight into the nature of the infinite. Hegel distinguishes between a "bad infinite," which is a series of finite things, and a true infinite that encompasses the finite. Charles Taylor describes Hegel's infinite as follows:

The true infinite for Hegel thus unites finite and infinite . . . he refuses to see the finite and the infinite as separate and over and against each other . . . The infinite must englobe the finite. At its most basic level this reflects Hegel's option for an absolute which is not separate from or beyond the world but includes it as its embodiment.

(Taylor 1975, 240)

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