

The Persistence of Habit:  
Notes on Some Tantric Engagements with Dharmakīrti  
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## Abstract

Dharmakīrti's view of yogic perception (*yogipratyakṣa*) and imaginative cultivation (*bhāvanā*) has generated a good deal of discussion—in Dharmakīrti's text-tradition, in the works of its various critics, and in the contemporary study of Buddhist philosophy. It is discussed not infrequently in Buddhist tantric works, too. However, tantric authors' appeals to yogic perception are at odds with Dharmakīrti's intentions in important ways. In this paper, I show why this appropriation of Dharmakīrti on yogic perception might be surprising, and then I reveal a tantalizing thread of Dharmakīrtian thinking about imaginative cultivation that nevertheless runs through certain Sanskrit Buddhist tantric debates. What is most crucial about Dharmakīrti for these authors, I argue, is his reasoned defense of cultivation's power: its capacity to fundamentally and irreversibly transform the practitioner's cognitive, conative, and experiential habits. I develop this point with reference especially to \*Śāntarakṣita's tantric monograph, the *Tattvasiddhi*.

## Paper

*Dear PR workshop: Many thanks for taking the time to read this! Though I'll read much of it at the workshop, too, if you're busy this coming week. The paper is due soon to a special issue of the Journal of Contemplative Studies on Buddhist tantra and philosophy (hence some of the initial reflections). Some notes are not yet finished, the conclusion might or might not be finished, and my thinking on all this is still very much in progress. I look forward to hearing your thoughts, both about this paper and about any and all related issues! — DKT.*

Tantric Buddhists engage critically and constructively with Buddhist philosophy. The essays collected in this special issue show this in detail. In commentarial literature, practice texts, and independent monographs, many tantric authors seek to show that certain practices are rational and others aren't; that certain conceptions of knowledge, mind, and existence make sense and others don't; and that we can adjudicate all this with reason in addition to appeals to tantric scripture. Their philosophical interlocutors extend beyond just the Madhyamaka to Yogācāra and the epistemological tradition of Dharmakīrti (ca. 550–660) as well, and their interest in philosophy goes beyond philosophical doxography (though there is certainly plenty of that, too). Perhaps most well-known in this regard from the Sanskrit world is Ratnākaraśānti, the remarkable early-11th century polymath whose systematic unification of the methods of the perfection (*pāramitānaya*) and tantra (*mantranaya*) is grounded on a fierce defense of Yogācāra.<sup>1</sup> But there are many others—Indrabhūti, \*Śāntarakṣita, Samantabhadra, Maitrīpa (aka Advayavajra, aka Maitreyaṅgātha) and his disciples, Abhayākara Gupta, and more.<sup>2</sup> And in Tibet, where thinking philosophically about Buddhist tantra was even more prevalent, luminaries from Rongzompa to Tsongkhapa to Ngorchon to Mipam continued this trend.<sup>3</sup> There are of course iconoclastic figures who eschew and critique all such reasoned argument. (Saraha, I take it, means it when he says, “Grasping at sources of knowledge, a fool gets only details.”) And no doubt some figures “masqueraded” as

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<sup>1</sup> [NOTE.]

<sup>2</sup> [NOTE. citations.]

<sup>3</sup> [NOTE. citations.]

philosophers, picking up the mantel of reason for the sake of the authority it was thought to bring.<sup>4</sup> But many others, like those we'll consider here, engaged in philosophical inquiry out of a genuine and sincere commitment to what reason can teach us about reality and the means to realize it. Here, to uncover another instance of this, I'll discuss a revealing thread of engagement with Dharmakīrti's view of yogic perception (*yogipratyakṣa*) that runs through some tantric authors writing in Sanskrit from the late-8th to the early-13th centuries.

In Buddhist tantric monographs and commentaries, ideas about yogic perception are marshaled especially in the context of debates about the practice of deity yoga (*devatāyoga*), the visualization exercise often taken to be constitutive of the generation stage (*utpattikrama*). This is the first stage of *post-initiatory* practice: it comes, that is, after the practitioner has had an initiatory glimpse of the experience of reality a buddha enjoys unendingly.<sup>5</sup> In deity yoga, an imagined identification with a buddha-image in a mandalic palace via carefully visualized, variegated mental imagery is taught to profoundly alter the practitioner's physical, verbal, and cognitive dispositions. Gradually, though still within the period of a single lifetime, the practitioner's very nature is transformed into that of a buddha through the repeated practice of this imaginative exercise.

An objection to this practice developed among tantric circles, however. Why should this kind of exercise lead to a transformation that's real, lasting, and liberative? The imagined identification at deity yoga's core, it might be said, is after all a deceptive fantasy. As Indrabhūti argues in his 8th–9th century *Jñānasiddhi*, it's clear enough that the practitioner is not a buddha when undertaking this exercise: if they were already awakened, the practice would have no purpose. So, just as a pauper imagining himself to be a king won't thereby become one, the unawakened practitioner will not become a buddha just by imagining that it is so.<sup>6</sup> An imaginative exercise that involves deceptive mental imagery doesn't have such power. Later, around the turn of the 13th century, Ratnarakṣita puts the still-current objection like this:

Moreover, buddhahood is the effect of the accumulation of merit and insight. How could that arise just from the imagination? For a poor man does not become a Cakravartin king through the cultivation of the thought, "I am a Cakravartin king!" Nor does someone all of the sudden become a hungry ghost just by imagining a hungry ghost, for there would be the unwanted consequence that good and bad actions would be fruitless.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the imagination can generate vivid imagery that appears as if it is real to a person lost in reverie. Still, like a lover pining for his beloved who might see her appearance as if before him, the meditator's vision will last only a short time, "since it consists of falsehood insofar as it is imagined" (*kalpitatvena mṛṣātmakatvāt*). Its falsehood means that it will be overturned. "Precisely insofar as they have their origin in attachment to the unreal, worldly phenomena are impermanent," Ratnarakṣita's opponent continues. So, being impermanent, all the imagery the practitioner identifies with is quite unlike the unending

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<sup>4</sup> See Ronald Davidson, "Masquerading as Pramāṇa: Esoteric Buddhism and Epistemological Nomenclature," in Katsura Shoryu, ed., *Dharmakīrti's Thought and Its Impact on Indian and Tibetan Philosophy—Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Dharmakīrti and Pramāṇa* (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999), 25–35. The verse from Saraha is *Dohākoṣa* 56b, per Roger Jackson, *Tantric Treasures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 85.

<sup>5</sup> On competing theories of the glimpse in relation to Dharmakīrtian views of yogic perception, see my "Tantric Initiation and the Epistemic Role of the Glimpse," forthcoming in the *Journal of Buddhist Philosophy*.

<sup>6</sup> See JS 2.1–9. [*Can I now cite Torsten and Julian's edition???*]

<sup>7</sup> Ryugen Tanemura, Kazuo Kano, and Kenichi Kuranishi, "Ratnarakṣita's *Padminī* — A Preliminary Edition of the Excursus in Chapter 13, Part 1," *Journal of the Kawasaki Daishi Institute for Buddhist Studies*, no. 2, 5–6: *kiṃ ca buddhatvaṃ puṇyajñānasambhārakāryam. kathaṃ tad bhāvanāmātreṇa syāt. na hi daridrasya rājāhaṃ cakravartīti bhāvanayā cakravartitvalābhaḥ. pretabhāvanayā pretatvalābhaḥ kasyacid akasmāt, śubhāśubhakarma-vaiphalyaprasaṅgāt*. See the summary in Yael Bentor, "Maintaining Identification with a Buddha: Divine Identity or Simply False?," in *Histories of Tibet: Essays in Honor of Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp* eds. Kurtis K. Schaeffer, Jue Liang, and William A. McGrath (New York: Wisdom Publications, 2023), 310.

buddha-qualities it is supposed to represent.<sup>8</sup> However vividly it is made to appear, the identification with the buddha-image the practitioner accomplishes in deity yoga remains incongruous with the goal. It is fleeting, not everlasting. If the practitioner thinks the identification is true, they are just fooling themselves.

It's in response to this that many proponents of deity yoga (Ratnarakṣita included) appeal to Dharmakīrti. In his discussion and defense of yogic perception, Dharmakīrti had claimed that the gradual, repeated contemplation of *anything, whether it is real or unreal*, results in a vivid, transformative experience. Faced with the above objection, proponents of deity yoga cite Dharmakīrti to this effect: the cultivation of the identification with the deity, they claim, will result in a vivid, transformative experience; it doesn't matter that the imagery this identification involves is deceptive and false. Yet in this respect, their use of Dharmakīrti runs counter to Dharmakīrti's own immediate aims in his discussion of yogic perception. For, as we'll see in a moment, Dharmakīrti had not meant to *endorse* imagining false mental imagery as an effective soteriological practice. Far from it. And yet tantric authors seem to take him to be doing just this. Why? Are they appealing to Dharmakīrti just for the authority he brings? Or are they just being sloppy?

I'll show here that the adaptive reuse of Dharmakīrti's discussion of yogic perception in tantric texts is rather on to something of philosophical importance.<sup>9</sup> Tantric authors are not interested in the same epistemological problems that are of principal concern to Dharmakīrti when they cite him on yogic perception. Still, they rightly see in his work more generally a deep commitment to the power of imaginative cultivation—its power not just to change the practitioner's mind temporarily, but to transform its very nature in a manner that cannot be undone. And some are committed, too, to the idea that *knowledge* of this fact should be motivating for rational, prudent people (*prekṣāvāt*). Just as Dharmakīrti had argued that the cultivation of compassion, insight into selflessness, and so on, is rational activity, so too some of the authors we'll consider here argue that we can know that tantric practice will result in the goal of buddhahood and that this fact should motivate prudent people to undertake it. Tantric appeals to Dharmakīrti on yogic perception and cultivation's power, then, are best understood in this light: as constructive and not unreasonable extensions of Dharmakīrtian ideas about the power of cultivation into the realm of tantric practice.

We'll begin by considering the adaptive reuse of two of Dharmakīrti's verses on yogic perception, namely PV 3.282 and 3.285 (= PVin 1.29 and 1.31), in tantric texts. Then, we'll turn to the power of cultivation to fundamentally transform a sentient being's mental stream in a way that is stable and irreversible. This, I'll show, is what's most important about Dharmakīrti's view for tantric authors. We'll see that this is an important theme in the sections of Dharmakīrti's PV 2 that deal with a buddha's cultivation of compassion (*karuṇābhyaśa*) and realization of the truth of cessation (*nirodhasatya*). Finally, we'll turn to the *Tattvasiddhi*, a tantric monograph attributed to \*Śāntarakṣita, which contains a sustained discussion of the problem of irreversibility that is quite clearly indebted to Dharmakīrti's ideas.<sup>10</sup>

### The Adaptive Reuse of Dharmakīrti on Yogic Perception

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<sup>8</sup> See Tanemura, Kano, and Kuranishi, "Ratnarakṣita's *Padmīnī*," 6: *atattvābhīniveśaprabhavatvenaiva hi laukikadharmāṇām anityatvam*. See again the summary in Bentor, "Maintaining Identification," 310.

<sup>9</sup> See especially the introduction to *Adaptive Reuse: Aspects of Creativity in South Asian Intellectual History*, eds. Elisa Freschi and Phillip Maas (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> I will discuss this work and its authorship below. Suffice it to say that I am still doubtful that the author of the *Tattvasiddhi* is the same Śāntarakṣita who wrote the *Tattvasaṃgraha*, the *Madhyamakālamkāra*, etc., and so I write this \*Śāntarakṣita's name with an asterisk. See fn. XXX below.

Dharmakīrti's view of yogic perception (*yogipratyakṣa*), the direct knowledge-event that results from meditative cultivation, has received a good deal of attention.<sup>11</sup> A brief discussion will suffice for our purposes. Famously, Dharmakīrti says at PV 3.285 that repeatedly imagining anything, whether real or unreal (*bhūtam abhūtam vā*), results in an awareness-event that is both vivid (*sphuṭa*, *spaṣṭa*, etc.) and non-conceptual (*akalpa*, *nirvikalpa*, etc.). He writes,

So, whether it is real or unreal,  
whatever is intensely meditated upon  
results in a vivid and non-conceptual awareness-event  
when the cultivation is perfected (*bhāvanāpariṇiṣpattau*). [PV 3.285]<sup>12</sup>

This counts for hallucinations as much as it does for yogic perception—that is, it counts for awareness-events that are *not* sources of knowledge as well as for those that *are*. As he says at PV 3.282,

Those who are deranged due to lust, grief, fear, or madness,  
or are confused by dreams of thieves and the like,  
perceive even false objects  
as if they were present before them. [PV 3.282]<sup>13</sup>

Even something false might be experienced as not conceptually constructed and as having a vivid appearance through the power of the imagination, whether this is cultivated intentionally (as in certain meditation practices) or unintentionally (as in cases of lust, grief, and so on).

Dharmakīrti's primary interest in his definitions of yogic perception is to distinguish between cases of genuine yogic perception and mere episodes of yogic awareness (*yogijñāna*).<sup>14</sup> To do so, Dharmakīrti stipulates that repeatedly turning attention *only to those things previously known by other means* can result in a vivid awareness-event that counts as a source of knowledge, a genuine instance of yogic perception. As he writes at PV 3.286, regarding the different kinds of vivid and non-conceptual awareness-events that arise from repeated imaginative cultivation,

Among those, that which is confirmed by a source of knowledge  
and is connected to a real object that has been ascertained earlier  
is accepted as perception that arises from meditative cultivation;  
the rest are distortions. [PV 3.286]<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> [<See for instance John Dunne “Realizing the Unreal” (2006), Vincent Eltschinger’s *Buddhist Epistemology as Apologetics* (2014), Birgit Kellner’s “Using Concepts to Eliminate Conceptualization” (2020), and Cristina Pecchia’s “Seeing as Cognizing” (2020), as well as my own “Meditative Cultivation and the Force of Truth in Dharmakīrti’s Philosophy” and “A Buddhist’s Guide to Self-Destruction.”>]

<sup>12</sup> PV 3.285 (= PVin 1.31): *tasmād bhūtam abhūtam vā yad yad evābhībhāvyate | bhāvanāpariṇiṣpattau tat sphuṭākālpadhīphalam* ||. See Pecchia 2020, 791; compare Dunne 2006, 514; Eltschinger 2009, 192 fn.99; and Franco 2011, 84. Compare the reading *bhāvanābalaniṣpattau* in *pada c*, which, as Isaacson and Sferra note (2014, 267 fn. 70), occurs in a number of tantric and non-tantric citations of the verse. We’ll come to this below.

<sup>13</sup> PV 3.282 (= PVin 1.29): *kāmaśokabhayonmādacaurasvapnādyupaplutāḥ | abhūtān api paśyanti purato ’vasthitān iva* ||.

<sup>14</sup> That is, this is his primary interest at PV 3.281–287; PVin 1.28–32; NB 1.11. On certain meditation practices that generate forms of yogic *awareness* rather than *perception*, see PV 3.284: *aśubhāpṛthivīkṛtsnādy abhūtam api drśyate | spaṣṭābhaṃ nirvikalpaṃ ca bhāvanābalanirmitam* ||.

<sup>15</sup> PV 3.286: *tatra pramāṇasaṃvādi yat prāṇnirṇītavastuvat | tadbhāvanājam pratyakṣam iṣṭam śeṣā upaplavāḥ* ||. [<NOTE ON READING OF THIS VERSE; significance of *prāṇnirṇītavastuvat*.>] Compare PVin ad 1.28, per the translations in Dunne 2006 and Pecchia 2020.

For Dharmakīrti and his followers, inference—and finally the perfection of this in rational insight (*cintāmayī prajñā*)—is this other source of knowledge.<sup>16</sup> The practitioner who has ascertained the truth of impermanence, selflessness, and so on on the basis of rational inquiry (*yukticintā*) might then begin to meditate on these truths. So, it is reason that grounds yogic perception as a source of knowledge and directs imaginative cultivation that aims toward it. In the context of Dharmakīrtian epistemology, then, PV 3.285 almost serves as a warning, a caveat to the meditator: since even false things might be made real through meditative cultivation, one has to do some rational, inferential work first to settle what should and should not be cultivated.

The reuse of Dharmakīrti’s verses by tantric authors in their defense of deity yoga has a different aim in view. Their interest is not in differentiating between those cultivations that lead to genuine instances of yogic perception and those that don’t. (This is supported in part by the fact that, as far as I know, tantric authors *never* cite PV 3.286 along with their citation of 3.285.<sup>17</sup>) Rather, their aim in citing PV 3.285 is to show that, *even if the identification and imagery involved in deity yoga is all deceptive and unreal*, per the objection we saw above from Indrabhūti, it will have its desired transformative effect: it will result in the vivid *and unending* experience of buddhahood.

Consider Ratnarakṣita’s citation of PV 3.285. He introduces the verse by saying, “It is proven by experience that, with regard to a thing made into the mind’s object, there is the acquisition of stability (*sthairyalābha*) through repeated practice distinguished by careful attention and so on.”<sup>18</sup> That is, the careful, attentive practice of imaginative cultivation results in a transformative experience that will motivate judgment, speech, and behavior in ways that become “stable,” “fixed,” or “everlasting” (*sthira*) once that cultivation reaches its culmination. This is so regardless of whether awareness’s object is false, as PV 3.285 shows. As Ratnarakṣita cites the verse, with a not insignificant difference:

So, whether it is real or unreal,  
whatever is intensively meditated upon  
results in a vivid and non-conceptual awareness-event  
when the cultivation’s *power* is perfected (*bhāvanābalaniṣpattau*). [PV 3.285]<sup>19</sup>

Underlining that the power (*bala*) of cultivation is such that it results in a vivid awareness-event whether or not its object is real, Ratnarakṣita refers back to the opponent’s example of the pauper imagining

<sup>16</sup> For lucid discussions of this point, see Kellner ...; McClintock ...; Eltschinger 2014, 298–328. See too Tomlinson 2023. Dharmakīrti makes this clear both at PV 3.286 and at PVin 1.28 and the following prose.

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps, it might be said, the reason for this is that tantric authors all have PVin 1.31 in mind rather than PV 3.285. This is not impossible, given that both the verses tantric authors cite, viz. PV 3.285 and 3.282, are both also found in PVin (1.31 and 1.29, respectively). Still, the point made by PV 3.286 is made by PVin 1.28 and the following prose, and our authors fail to cite this, too. In any case, this “*never*” is no doubt too strong: many tantric works remain unedited and unstudied, and so it’s possible citations of either PV 3.286 or PVin 1.28 might be discovered. Still, I expect that those would be exceptions that prove the rule.

<sup>18</sup> Tanemura, Kano, and Kuranishi, “Ratnarakṣita’s *Padmīnī*,” 10: *ādarādiviśiṣṭenābhyāsenā cittasyālambyamāne vastuni sthairyālābhasyānubhavasiddhatvāt*. Ratnarakṣita then continues, *tad utkam* — and cites PV 3.285, with the reading *bhāvanābalaniṣpattau* in *pada c*.

<sup>19</sup> Tanemura, Kano, and Kuranishi, “Ratnarakṣita’s *Padmīnī*,” 10: *tasmād bhūtam abhūtam vā yad yad evātibhāvyate | bhāvanābalaniṣpattau tat sphuṭākālpadhīphalam* ||. Emphasis mine. Against the reading of *pada c* that appears to be supported by the commentators on and Tibetan translation of the PV, viz. *bhāvanāpariniṣpattau*, the reading *bhāvanābalaniṣpattau* occurs in a number of tantric and non-tantric citations of the verse, the earliest of which appears to be Haribhadra’s *Abhisamayālamkāra*. See Isaacson and Sferra 2014, 267 fn. 70. All the tantric citations of the verse I am aware of have this reading. Note, with Isaacson and Sferra, that the compound *bhāvanābalaniṣpannam* occurs in the Dharmakīrti’s prose immediately following this verse as it occurs at PVin 1.31. Finally, the (I think insignificant) change in *pada b* from *°abhibhāvyate* to *°atibhāvyate* is found at a number of places, too. This appears not to be consistent across citations of the verse I am aware of and, I think, is likely due to the orthographic similarity of *bhi* and *ti* in many manuscripts.

himself to be a king. “Insofar as all phenomena have a form that is merely mind-made,” he writes, “what’s the problem if, through even the imaginative cultivation of [oneself as] a Cakravartin king and so on, there is the vivid appearance of that?”<sup>20</sup> The opponent had taken the example of the pauper imagining himself to be a king to be clear evidence that a deceptive cultivation will not lead to the ultimate attainment of buddhahood. Ratnarakṣita here asserts the contrary on the basis of Dharmakīrti’s authority: in the case of the pauper imagining himself to be a king, the power of imaginative cultivation is such that, over a long enough period of time, even kingship might be achieved.<sup>21</sup> PV 3.285 is no longer a caveat to the meditator. It’s rather an exhortation to cultivate the image of the deity, however deceptive it might at first appear.

In the early-11th century, Vāgīśvarakīrti cites Dharmakīrti to similar effect. At one point in his *Vivaraṇa* to his own *Tattvaratnāvaloka*, his opponent appeals to a distinction between practices with proliferations (*prapañca*) and those without proliferations (*niṣprapañca*), arguing that deity yoga might be useful provisionally, but its proliferation of mental imagery all has to be abandoned at a higher stage of practice wherein only the real—sheer bliss alone (*sātamātra*)—is cultivated.<sup>22</sup> In response, Vāgīśvarakīrti argues that this distinction is unwarranted. “Surely,” he responds, “whatever object the mind is directed at again and again, without interruption and for a long time, it becomes stable regarding precisely that.”<sup>23</sup> As proof of this point, he cites PV 3.285, with the same difference we find in Ratnarakṣita’s citation.<sup>24</sup> The power of cultivation is able to stably transform the mind regardless of its object. If this were not so, Vāgīśvarakīrti points out, even the advanced cultivations that his opponent claims are without mental imagery would not be able to transform the practitioner’s mind in a way that is lasting. So, rather than concluding that stability can never be achieved, the opponent should concede that, whether or not it involves proliferation (*prapañcam aprapañcam vā*)—indeed, whether or not it is in agreement with a source of knowledge (*pramāṇasamgatam itarad vā*)—the diligent practitioner ought to cultivate the illusion-like form of the deity.<sup>25</sup>

This point about the power of cultivation is, I think, what’s most crucial in these and other tantric reuses of Dharmakīrti’s verses on yogic perception. Regardless of its object, the power of cultivation is such that it can transform the mental stream of the practitioner, fundamentally and irreversibly. In some ways, this is a basic Buddhist point. In his very first discourse in Sarnath, the Buddha makes clear that there is no turning back after his direct realization of awakening: “Indeed, knowledge and seeing arose in me,” the Buddha says to his five disciples: “Unshakeable (*akuppā*) is the liberation of my mind; this is my last

<sup>20</sup> Tanemura, Kano, and Kuranishi, “Ratnarakṣita’s *Padminī*,” 10: *manomayamātramūrtitvena sarvadharmāṇām cakravartyādibhāvanābhyo ’pi tatsphuṭibhāve ko virodhaḥ*.

<sup>21</sup> It’s worth noting that Ratnarakṣita justifies this view further with reference to Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. All the perfections of the exoteric perfection of insight, he notes, are really just perfections of mental attitudes cultivated with sustained concentration over a long period of time. He cites BCA 5.11 and 5.10 as proof texts here, with respect to the perfections of ethical conduct and generosity. As 5.10 has it, “The perfection of generosity is said to result from the mental attitude of relinquishing all that one has to all people, together with the fruit of that act. Therefore the perfection is the mind alone” (Crosby and Skilton trans., modified slightly).

<sup>22</sup> This distinction between *prapañcacaryā* and *niṣprapañcacaryā* is thematized in early tantric works, like Āryadeva’s ca. 9th century *Caryāmelāpakapradīpa* (aka *Sūta*). See Wedemeyer 2007, chapters 9 and 10. There is good reason to think the opponent here is Vāgīśvarakīrti’s colleague, Ratnākaraśānti. [NOTE.]

<sup>23</sup> TRAV 144: *nanu yatraivālbane cittam punaḥ punaḥ preryate nirantaram dīrgakālam ca tatraiva sthīrībhavati*.

<sup>24</sup> See TRAV 144, where we again find the reading *bhāvanābalanīṣpattau* in *pada c*.

<sup>25</sup> [NOTE.] [<This might be the place to cite Rāmapāla’s use of PV 3.285, where we find the verse used to support, in effect, *aprapañca* meditation that skips the *utpattikrama*.>]

birth: now there is no more renewed existence.”<sup>26</sup> Irreversibility is of much concern in the basic literature of the Mahāyāna, too, as Peter Gilks has shown in his very fine study of the topic.<sup>27</sup> The 17th chapter of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, for instance, is devoted to the marks that distinguish the bodhisattva who cannot turn back, the *avinivartanīya* bodhisattva, and the *avinivartanīyabhūmi* would later become systemitized as the eighth of the ten bodhisattva stages.<sup>28</sup> Still, it’s with this point about cultivation’s power to transform the mental stream irreversibly in view that tantric authors appeal to Dharmakīrti in particular. In his 9th–10th century *Advayavivaraṇaprajñopāyaviniścayasiddhi*, Padmavajra cites both PV 3.282 and 3.285 in support of a proof that he appears to borrow from \*Śāntarakṣita’s *Tattvasiddhi*, one we’ll return to in more detail below: “With whatever thing [the mind is joined], through the power of repeated practice regarding it, a nature that is thoroughly distinguished (*viśiṣṭatarasvabhāva*) manifests, which is characterized by the property that it does not turn back.”<sup>29</sup> The mind’s nature is clear; it might take on many different forms. Padmavajra cites a verse from scripture to this effect: “A person’s mind comes to consist of whatever it’s joined with, like a jewel that takes on a variegated form.”<sup>30</sup> Repeated practice, however, is able to transform the mind’s very nature in such a way that the form it takes on is, so to speak, forever lodged there, never to fade. It is to establish this point that Padmavajra refers us to Dharmakīrti. With another pointed reference to Dharmakīrti’s PV, Vāgīśvarakīrti too tells us that there is no turning back when the imagination transforms the mental stream’s nature in a way that is free of misfortune and suffering.<sup>31</sup> His opponent who supposes that the mental imagery cultivated in deity yoga might be abandoned is wrong in the first place, then, because the right kind of habit that is deeply

<sup>26</sup> “Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: The Discourse on the Setting in Motion of the Wheel (of Vision) of the Basic Pattern: the Four True Realities for the Spiritually Ennobled Ones” (SN 56.11), translated from the Pali by Peter Harvey. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 2 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.011.harv.html>. SN V 423: *ñāṇaṃ ca pana me dassanaṃ udapādi — akuppā me cetovimutti, ayam antimā jāti, natthidāni punabbhavo ti.*

<sup>27</sup> See Peter Gilks, “No Turning Back: The Concept of Irreversibility in Indian Mahāyāna Literature,” PhD diss., The Australian National University, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> See Peter Gilks, “No Turning Back,” chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>29</sup> AVPUVS 217: *yena yena hi bhāvena tatra tatrābhyāsabalād viśiṣṭatarasvabhāvam āviṣkaroty apunarāvṛtti-dharmatālakṣaṇam*. Compare the *Tattvasiddhi*, Mishra ed. 13.16–17: *yena yena vāsyate tatra tatra cābhyāsabalād viśiṣṭatarasvabhāvam āviṣkaroty apunarāvṛttidharmatālakṣaṇam*. Note that the line in \*Śāntarakṣita’s text also immediately precedes the citation of *Yoginīsañcāraṇa* 11.2, as it does in AVPUVS. I have emended the edition of the AVPUVS from *apunarāṛṣṭa-* to *apunarāvṛtti-* on the basis of the *Tattvasiddhi* and the available manuscript evidence. My thanks to Torsten Gerloff for sending me an image of the relevant passage and confirming the reading. This work appears not to have been translated into Tibetan, to the best of my knowledge.

<sup>30</sup> *Yoginīsañcāraṇa* 11.2 (= *Samvarodayatantra* 31.31): *yena yena hi bhāvena manaḥ saṃyujyate nṛṇām | tena tanmayatām yāti viśvarūpo maṇir yathā ||*. This verse is cited often in tantric works together with Dharmakīrti’s verses on yogic perception. Padmavajra cites this verse with his citations of Dharmakīrti’s PV 3.282 and 3.285 in the *Advayavivaraṇaprajñopāyaviniścayasiddhi*, ed. p. 217. Ratnarakṣita cites it together with his citation of Dharmakīrti at Tanemura, Kano, and Kuranishi “Ratnarakṣita’s *Padminī*,” 10. In his *Upadeśānusāriṇīyākhyā* on *Yoginīsañcāraṇa* 11.2, Alakakalaśa cites PV 3.282 as support for idea the verse conveys. As Tanemura, Kano, and Kuranishi note (see “Ratnarakṣita’s *Padminī*,” 21, for references), it is also cited in Muniśrībhadrā’s *Yogimanoharā* and in Vīryaśrīmitra’s *Marmakalikā* ad *Tattvajñānaśamsiddhi* 1.1. Finally, as we’ll see in some detail below, it’s also cited in \*Śāntarakṣita’s *Tattvasiddhi* (Mishra ed., p. 13) in the context of the irreversibility of tantric realization.

<sup>31</sup> The position that the image of the deity might be abandoned and there can be the cultivation of just *sātamātra* is not a good one, Vāgīśvarakīrti says, “because it is not possible to abandon what is deeply ingrained (*sātmībhūta*) insofar as its nature is free of misfortune and real.” TRAV 143: *nirupadravabhūtārthasvabhāvatvena sātmībhūtasya tyaktam aśakyatvāt*. (Note that I understand this reason with the following rather than the preceding: read a full stop after the edition’s *dviṭīyasya kalpanā[mā]trateti* and a comma after *aśakyatvāt*.) Vāgīśvarakīrti appears to be referring to Dharmakīrti explicitly here. See PV 2.210: *nirupadravabhūtārthasvabhāvasya viparyayaḥ | na bādha yatnavattve ’pi buddhes tatpakṣapātataḥ ||*. We’ll return to this verse below.

ingrained simply will not be undone.<sup>32</sup> And, as we saw above, it was cultivation’s attainment of stability (*sthairyalābha*), or its coming to a point where it is everlasting, that framed Ratnarakṣita’s citation of PV 3.285. The mental stream is malleable. Our habits, to use William James’s felicitous phrase, have a certain “plasticity”: they are endowed with “a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once.”<sup>33</sup> Yet, these authors claim, in some instances we can attain a strength that will never yield.

### Unbreakable Habits in Dharmakīrti

To understand why imaginative cultivation is capable of transforming the mind irreversibly, we can turn to PV 2. Here, Dharmakīrti argues that, in certain cases, cultivation is capable of transforming the natural, spontaneous flow of the mental stream, its “natural inclination” (*svarasa*). This comes up most explicitly in Dharmakīrti’s discussion of the practice of compassion (*karuṇābhyāsa*).<sup>34</sup> An opponent argues that repeated practice cannot lead to the kind of limitless perfection Buddhists attribute to a buddha’s compassion. Train as much as you like—you’ll never be able to jump one hundred feet in the air; however much you might heat it, water can only be heated to a boil, not beyond. Compassion, the opponent claims, is like that too (PV 2.120). In response, Dharmakīrti specifies that it is only certain properties that cannot be increased to a limitless state of perfection: those properties that are sustained through repeated effort (*punaryatna*) and those that have an unstable basis (*asthirāśraya*) (PV 2.121). As Eli Franco summarizes the point, “If these two conditions do not obtain, then cultivated properties become the own nature of the person, which means that they ‘proceed by their own essence’ (*svarasena pravartante*), that is, they reproduce themselves (or more precisely: moments of their own kind) automatically, without any further effort, in the next moments of the succession of constituents that form the person.”<sup>35</sup> Each jump depends on repeated efforts, and water cools down when it’s removed from the flame, so these examples don’t fit the case at hand. Instead, Dharmakīrti suggests, the cultivation of compassion is more like burning firewood: when the wood becomes charred, the black color it takes on doesn’t require repeated efforts to be sustained, and the wood is such that it stably supports this new property (PV 2.124). Each moment in the causal stream reinforces the next, and so there’s no uncharring the firewood once it is burned. In a similar way, as each repeated act of imagination gives rise to greater intensity, a mental property like compassion becomes the very nature (*svabhāva*) of the mental stream (PV 2.125–126).

The example of firewood is helpful, but we still might doubt that it fits the case of mental properties like compassion. Why should we think that the mental stream’s flow cannot be rerouted again, however long it has been directed toward compassion? All kinds of deeply ingrained habits—desire, aversion, greed, delusion, selfishness, and so on—reinforce themselves and ramify seemingly without end, and yet it’s axiomatic in the Buddhist tradition that these habits can be undone. Why should we think that habits like compassion and selflessness cannot be broken but habits like desire and aversion can be?

This is something Dharmakīrti addresses at a number of places. He claims in the famous conclusion to PVin 1, for instance, that “those who diligently practice precisely the insight that consists in reflection will directly experience the ultimate source of knowledge, which is without error, stainless, and unperishing (*anapāyi*).”<sup>36</sup> Dharmakīrti considers this point in most detail, however, in his account of the Truth of Cessation (*nirodhasatya*) at PV 2.190–216, which has recently been edited, translated, and

<sup>32</sup> Even a more obscure use of PV 3.285 by Rāmapāla in his *Sekanirdeśapañjikā* might be read in this same way. Rāmapāla puts the point in the mouth of an opponent who thinks, contra Vāgīśvarakīrti, that the cultivation of bliss (*sāta*), without the imagery of the deity and so on, can become vivid spontaneously (*svayam*) in virtue of cultivation that is attentive and so on (*sādarādibhāvanā*). See Isaacson and Sferra 2014, 266, fn. 69.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Clare Carlisle, *On Habit* (Routledge: New York, 2014), 21.

<sup>34</sup> [NOTE.] [Eltschinger ? McClintock? Franco 1997, 6–8; Pecchia ??? ...] [PV 2.120–131ab >]

<sup>35</sup> Franco 1997, 6.

<sup>36</sup> PVin 1, 44.4–5: *cintāmayīm eva tu prajñām anuśīlayanto vibhramavivekanirmalam anapāyi pāramārthikapramāṇam abhimukhīkurvanti*. The emphasis is mine.



studied, together with Manorathanandin’s commentary, by Cristina Pecchia. Basically, Dharmakīrti here argues for irreversibility from the absence of causes for backsliding. As he puts it in PV 2.205, once the repeated practice of the path has transformed “the fundamental basis” (*āśraya*) of the mental stream, the arising of faults will not occur again “due to the absence of the power [to do so].”<sup>37</sup> Again, it’s like firewood turned to ash and unlike water heated over a flame: the mind’s nature, once transformed, is stable and unerring.<sup>38</sup> On Dharmakīrti’s understanding of our existential condition, suffering is at root caused by the innate sense of self (*sahajā satkāyadr̥ṣṭih*), his interpretation of our fundamental delusion (*moha*) or ignorance (*avidyā*). When that innate sense of self is replaced by the direct experience of selflessness (*nairātmyadr̥ṣṭi*), the causes for the arising of suffering are brought to an end. These don’t recur, he claims, because the mind’s “natural disposition” (*prakṛti*) is “luminosity” (*prabhāsvara*), whereas occlusions like desire, aversion, and delusion are so many wisps of cloud in the sky (PV 2.208).

In one of the most important statements of his characteristic “epistemic optimism,” Dharmakīrti claims that errors like our innate sense of self are uniquely “unstable” (*adr̥dha*).<sup>39</sup> Once truly corrected, these do not arise again. Dharmakīrti avails himself of the stock example of the mistaken apprehension of a snake where there is really a coiled rope: once the rope is directly apprehended as such, the mistaken belief that there is a snake coiled beside the path at dusk won’t recur (PV 2.207). In the same way, once the innate sense of self is replaced by the direct experience of selflessness, the sense of self and the suffering it causes are forever eliminated.<sup>40</sup> What’s left in that transformed mental stream is compassion, now devoid of any conditions that might counteract its endless proliferation (PV 2.130).<sup>41</sup> Once it’s made the mental stream’s “natural inclination” through repeated practice, compassion is an irreversible disposition, unlike desire and aversion. “Upon their realization of the truth of suffering,” Dharmakīrti says, “for one who is without obstruction, the arising of compassion is a real property, borne by the current of previous inclinations; it does not conform to the sense of self.”<sup>42</sup> Desire and aversion are grounded on the innate sense of self, and so when that goes, desire and aversion cease, too. But compassion is not grounded on the innate sense of self. Instead, compassion arises precisely from its cessation and the uprooting of all

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<sup>37</sup> See Pecchia 2015, 144–147; 170–171. As Pecchia helpfully glosses this verse earlier in her study (p. 21), “This [irreversibility of the cessation of suffering] can be understood as the result of an irreversible state of insufficiency of causes of suffering that comes about because the development of the force of some causes is interrupted, while the force of other causes does continue to develop, to the point where they may bring about a radical transformation of the previous condition. The complex of causes necessary for the arising of any occurrence of suffering becomes definitively insufficient when the cessation of the development applies to the view of a self, whose definitive obstruction is marked by the end of the development of its innate form.” On the notion of the *āśrayaparāvṛtti* in Dharmakīrti, see Eltschinger . . . .

<sup>38</sup> See PV 2.216, which we’ll return to in a moment. Dharmakīrti’s “dissimilar case” (*vipakṣa*) there is the solidity that returns to gold as it cools, but the same point would apply to water heated over a flame. See Pecchia 2015, 21–22, for a discussion of this point, in addition to her translations of Dharmakīrti’s verse and Manorathanandin’s commentary.

<sup>39</sup> NOTE.

<sup>40</sup> We might push back against Dharmakīrti here. True, as I inspect the rope, I’m unlikely to superimpose the idea of a snake upon it. But however well I might know that there is a jacket on the coatrack by my door, when I come downstairs in the dark at night I still start at the mistaken apprehension of a person there. In such a case, though, Dharmakīrti might say that the true causes of the error have not really been uprooted. If they had been, then, because it is the mind’s natural disposition to apprehend what’s real as it is, and because it is the object’s nature to generate an awareness-event that apprehends it as it is, I wouldn’t jump back in alarm. The innate sense of self and the desire and aversion it causes still shape my mental stream, and so I fall prey again to the illusion of a person standing in the dark.

<sup>41</sup> [<NOTE. Franco, Dunne, and Taber on compassion.>]

<sup>42</sup> PV 2.194: *duḥkhajñāne ’viruddhasya pūrvasaṃskāravāhinī | vastudharmo dayotpattir na sāvastvānurodhinī ||*. My translation of the verse here is rather free, incorporating points from Manorathanandin’s commentary, per Pecchia, *Dharmakīrti on the Cessation of Suffering*, 136–139; for a more literal translation, see Pecchia, *ibid.*, 169.

desire and aversion that follows from it. So, unlike desire and aversion, compassion can be made an unbreakable habit.<sup>43</sup>

### Unbreakable Habits in \*Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasiddhi*

The irreversibility of transformations effected by cultivation is defended in great detail—and in clearly Dharmakīrtian terms—by \*Śāntarakṣita in his tantric monograph, the *Tattvasiddhi*.<sup>44</sup> Ernst Steinkellner in particular has drawn attention to this fascinating work in a series of articles.<sup>45</sup> The *Tattvasiddhi* seeks to prove, through appeals to both reason and scripture, that the cultivation of great bliss (*mahāsukha*) in tantric practice is rational, an activity that should be undertaken by any prudent person (*prekṣāvāt*) who seeks liberation from suffering. The work's aim is normative and not only apologetic.<sup>46</sup> As Steinkellner has shown, its first two parts utilize Dharmakīrti's method of inferring the arising of an effect from the presence of its complete set of causal conditions (the so-called *kāryotpādānumāna*) in order to prove that the tantric practitioner who engages in sexual yogic practice attains great bliss and the elimination of suffering.<sup>47</sup> The “complete set of causal conditions” in the case of this practice involves not just the ordinary physical bodies of the practitioner and consort (though \*Śāntarakṣita is clear that it does involve these); involved too are additional properties that distinguish the causal complex and lead necessarily to a

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<sup>43</sup> This point is made most clearly at PV 2.194–196. See Pecchia's translation, with Manorathanandin's commentary, in *Dharmakīrti on the Cessation of Suffering*, 136–139. At issue here, too, is what Prajñākaragupta calls the “great difference” between compassion (*dayā*, etc.) and desire (*rāga*). See PVA ad PV 2.195 (=2.196 in PVA's numbering).

<sup>44</sup> I'll leave the name of the *Tattvasiddhi*'s author with an asterisk throughout. There is good reason to agree with Steinkellner's assessment that it is unlikely this work was written by Śāntarakṣita, the author of the *Madhyamakālamkāra* and *Tattvasaṃgraha*. It is perfectly plausible that Śāntarakṣita might have written tantric works. This particular work, however, includes central claims that seem not to fit with the view defended by the author of the *Madhyamakālamkāra* and *Tattvasaṃgraha*—not just the use of the *kāryotpādānumāna*, which Steinkellner notes is absent from Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla's work (2008, 292–293), but also the unapologetic proof that omniscience (*sarvajña*) is a *conceptual* awareness-event (*savikalpakajñāna*). (Steinkellner 2008 includes a translation of the *Tattvasiddhi*'s final section devoted to this proof.) Any claim that the authors of the *Tattvasiddhi* and *Tattvasaṃgraha* are one and the same Śāntarakṣita would have to account for the apparent discrepancy between the account of omniscience here and that found in the *Tattvasaṃgraha* (on which, see McClintock 2010), or else offer some explanation as to why this discrepancy needn't be accounted for. Settling all this would take us far beyond the scope of this paper; I hope to take these questions up elsewhere. Note, however, that Allison Aitken has recently shown an important precedent for the *Tattvasiddhi*'s view of omniscience in Śrīgupta's *Tattvāvātāra*, a work very influential for Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla: see ...

<sup>45</sup> NOTE. Note finally that two translations of the *Tattvasiddhi* have recently appeared: one, by ..., based on the Tibetan translation, another, by ..., based on Mishra's Sanskrit edition. Still, I have found it necessary to return to the Sanskrit text, made accessible by F.'s inclusion of Mishra's edition as an appendix to her translation. Translations below are my own, then, based on an initial draft translation made in collaboration with Douglas Duckworth.

<sup>46</sup> It's quite true that \*Śāntarakṣita does engage in some lengthy apologetics when he discusses what Steinkellner (2008, 293) calls the “second thesis,” namely, that “just as the Blessed One taught that form and so on and the transformations of bliss that arise from it are the cause of the highest result, so too the transformations of bliss that arise from contact (*sparśa*) [are the cause of the highest result].” See the text per Steinkellner 2008, 293 fn. 14: *yathā bhavagatā rūpādayaḥ tannirjātāḥ [ca] sukhapariṇāmanā anuttaraphalāhetur uktāḥ, tathā sparśanirjāta-sukhapariṇāmanā api*. Cf. Mishra ed., 6.13–14. An opponent objects that the implied physical sexual contact here is prohibited for monastics by the Buddha. \*Śāntarakṣita responds that that prohibition is in fact restricted just to people for whom embodied forms are embraced by ignorance (*avidyāpariḥītāmūrti*); it does not apply to people for whom forms are embraced by insight and means (*prajñopāya*). He then gives an extended scriptural defense of this idea, starting at Mishra ed. 7.2 and ending at 12.2. Still, much of the rest of the work, including the parts that will be our focus here, is not invested in these apologetics as such, but rather with showing what practices a prudent person should undertake and why.

<sup>47</sup> [*See Steinkellner 1999, 2008. While Dharmakīrti says that we cannot infer effects from causes in most cases (...), he makes an exception for special cases where we observe the presence of the entire set of causal conditions. ... >*]

special result.<sup>48</sup> This is what it means to say that, for the practitioner, the forms and so on experienced are “embraced by insight and means” (*prajñopāyaparigraha*): the forms, bodies, and so on involved are all empowered by mantras and mudras,<sup>49</sup> and the practitioner is enjoined to experience himself as the deity. \*Śāntarakṣita cites the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākiṇījālasamvara* to this effect: “I myself am indeed the nature of all buddhas and of all the heroic [bodhisattvas]. Through union with one’s own deity (*svādhidaivatāyogena*), therefore, precisely I myself should reach accomplishment (*ātmāiva sādhayet*).”<sup>50</sup> Not just any pleasure results in the attainment of great bliss, then; only the cultivation of those pleasures distinguished by deity yoga and the empowerments, mantras, and mudras this involves does so.

The portion of the text that interests us here is the lengthy discussion of the structure and force of cultivation and irreversibility.<sup>51</sup> \*Śāntarakṣita states the proof that cultivation leads to permanent, irreversible change with the following:

Thus, given that the mind is like a crystal-stone, naturally luminous, one who is characterized by pleasure and delight attained through a distinguished conditioning by means of forms and so on should experience there, by force of that distinguished practice, the highest perfection (*prakarṣaparyanta*) of [those forms and so on that are] embraced by insight and means. That is, [*vyāpti*:] an awareness-event—like in the case of intuition, crafts, and the practical arts—that partakes of a distinctive conditioning that is produced from the experience of objects like form and so on comes to have an accomplished nature that is supreme and permanent in virtue of the power of the repeated practice of cultivation, in virtue of reaching the highest perfection through cultivation; [*dr̥ṣṭānta*:] like the Sugatas and so on in our system and, in the common world [as Dharmakīrti says], like lust, grief, fear, madness, and so on. And [*pakṣadharmatā*:] the pleasure and delight and so on that are arisen from touch are cultivated. Therefore, they too are endowed with a distinction [whose nature is supreme and permanent when the practice is cultivated to its highest perfection].<sup>52</sup>

The argument has a common form. First, \*Śāntarakṣita states the pervasion (*vyāpti*) between the reason (*hetu*) and the property to be proven (*sādhyadharmā*). In this case, the reason is cultivation (*bhāvanā*) that has reached its highest perfection (*prakarṣaparyanta*) through repeated practice (*abhyāsa*), and what is to be proven is the property of having an accomplished nature (*svabhāva*) that is supreme (*parama*) and permanent (*śāśvata*). \*Śāntarakṣita then appears to give two sets of examples. First, there are cases like trained intuition, crafts, and the practical arts, wherein we also find a distinctive sort of conditioning. This example gives a sense of the sort of practice that’s at stake. But the relevant similar cases where the pervasion is observed (i.e., examples where cultivation that’s reached its highest perfection is seen to be permanent, etc.) are cases like the Buddha’s awakening—and, \*Śāntarakṣita says, other cases that are familiar from Dharmakīrti: cases like lust, grief, fear, madness, and so on. (The reference to PV 3.282 (=PVin 1.29a) is unmistakable.) Finally, \*Śāntarakṣita establishes the so-called *pakṣadharmatā*, or the

<sup>48</sup> As \*Śāntarakṣita says at the opening of the work, “A distinguished causal complex produces only a distinguished result,” as is well-known to all parties of this debate.” Mishra ed., 1.15–2.1: *viśiṣṭā hi sāmagrī viśiṣṭam eva phalaṃ janayatīti sarvavāḍiprasiddhiam*; cf. Steinkellner 2008, 293; ...

<sup>49</sup> See for instance Mishra ed. 2.4–6 and 4.9–15.

<sup>50</sup> SBS 1.24; cf. CMP citation at Wedemeyer p. 366.

<sup>51</sup> This discussion is a long one: see Mishra ed. 12.3–23.4. We’ll be able to consider just some of its complexities here.

<sup>52</sup> See Mishra ed., 12.3–10: *tena prakṛtiprabhāsvarasphaṭikopalasadr̥ṣe manasi rupādibhir āhitasamṣkāraviśeṣa-sukhasaumanasyalakṣaṇaḥ saḥ tatra prajñopāyaparigr̥hītasyābhyāsaviśeṣabalāt prakarṣaparyantarūpatām āśādayed iti. tad yathā — prajñāśilpakalādivadvaiṣayānubhavasāñjātasamṣkāraviśeṣabhāgi jñānam asakṛdbhāvanābhyāsasāmarthyād samāhitaparamaśāśvatasvabhāvam, bhāvanāprakaṣaparyantagamanāt, svasiddhānte sugatādivad loke ca kāmasokabhayonmādādivat. sparśajanitasukhasaumanasyādayas ca bhāvyyante. tasmāt te ’pi paramaviśeṣasāline iti.* The text here is problematic; I’ve made changes to Mishra’s edition following Steinkellner 2008, fn. 22.

fact that the relevant case is in fact characterized by the presence of the reason: the pleasure and delight arisen from sexual practice are also cultivated to their highest perfection. So, he concludes, this pleasure and delight also comes to have a nature that is supreme and permanent.

Much of the following discussion is in defense of the pervasion here. For, it might be objected, some property that has been cultivated *can* be turned back (*āvartana*, *vyāvṛtti*, etc.), and so the mere presence of cultivation doesn't prove the permanence of the cultivated quality. Habits might be plastic, as James said. They might be relatively stable and hard to change, but this is not to say that they will in principle *never* change. They might be lost and forgotten over a long period of time or counteracted by some practice of rehabilitation. The cases \*Śāntarakṣita himself refers to, namely trained intuition (*prajñā*), crafts (*śilpa*), and the practical arts (*kalā*), are good examples of this. I grew up playing piano, but it's been years since I've practiced, and so I've lost much of whatever skill I had. Even the cases \*Śāntarakṣita cites from Dharmakīrti as similar cases wherein the pervasion is observed seem not to be quite right. His Buddhist interlocutor will grant that the Buddha doesn't backslide from the liberation from suffering, but surely habits of lust, grief, fear, and madness can be changed, however deeply ingrained they might seem. The Buddhist path is predicated on this fact.

In response to this worry, \*Śāntarakṣita argues that it is only if a cultivation is brought to its highest perfection that it is really irreversible. This kind of perfection isn't always obtained. Perhaps it rarely is. We can imagine many instances, like my piano playing, where practice falls far short of perfection. (As Dharmakīrti himself emphasized, it's not embodied practices like jumping and so on that can be cultivated "to the highest degree of perfection," but rather mental dispositions.) Still, \*Śāntarakṣita writes, "Whatever has reached its highest perfection does not turn back, just like liberation and so on. Pleasure, delight, and so on have the nature of the reason [insofar as they are brought to their] highest perfection. [So, they do not turn back]. This is a reason based on the nature [of the concepts involved]."<sup>53</sup> That is, it is simply in the nature of the reason in this case, viz. something's *in fact attaining* its highest perfection, for it to be irreversible. When this attainment is reached, it's brought about by the sort of repeated practice that's observed to a limited degree in cases of trained intuition, crafts, and the practical arts. And, when it is reached, we speak of something's being "fully ingrained" (*sātmīkaraṇa*): "[a property's] being fully ingrained follows only from [cultivation] reaching its highest perfection [and not from a less fully developed cultivation]. And so," Śāntarakṣita continues, "because of the power of a distinguished practice, this [property] reaches a state that cannot be turned back again. It does not turn back into something else again; it becomes the very nature of that [causal stream]."<sup>54</sup> Skills might be lost as we fall out of practice. Habits are broken. Still, \*Śāntarakṣita claims, when cultivation reaches a certain level, it leads to an irreversible transformation, just as firewood turned to ash doesn't come back into being.<sup>55</sup>

At this point, we might wonder why some cultivations reach this level of perfection and others don't. Why do we sometimes fall out of practice? And is there any reason to think that tantric practice is the sort of thing we will *inevitably* bring to the highest degree of perfection and thus become irreversible? Here again, \*Śāntarakṣita follows Dharmakīrti's lead—though to rather surprising ends. As we saw above, Dharmakīrti argues that mental properties are the sorts of things that can be cultivated to a limitless degree. This goes for compassion (*kṛpā*) and desirelessness (*vairāgya*), as well as for states he views negatively as causes of continued existence in samsara, like desire (*rāga*) (see PV 2.130cd–131ab). Compassion, however, is not grounded on the false sense of self in the way desire is, and so it might be cultivated and sustained even after the false sense of self is overcome. That false sense of self, meanwhile, is overcome once and for all by the direct experience of selflessness, the vivid result of sustained cultivation brought to its highest perfection: "That which is free of misfortune, true, and the nature of

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<sup>53</sup> Mishra ed., 17.14–16: *ye ye prāptaprakāraṣaparyantāḥ na te vyāvartante, tad yathā mokṣādayaḥ prakāraṣaparyantakāraṇasvarūpāḥ sukhasaumanasyādayaḥ iti svabhāvahetuḥ.*

<sup>54</sup> Mishra ed., 18.1–4: *prakāraṣaparyantagamanamātrānubandhi sātmīkaraṇam. tac cābhyāsaviśeṣabalād apunarāvṛttidharmatām āsav āśādayati.*

<sup>55</sup> See Mishra ed., 18.4–5. Compare PV 2.125–126.

things,” namely, for Dharmakīrti, the direct experience of selflessness, “cannot be obstructed by opposing factors even with effort, for awareness sides with that (*buddhes tatpakṣapātataḥ*).”<sup>56</sup> The mental stream sides with the way things are, and the practitioner knows on the basis of their cultivation of rational insight that the way things are is without self. So, when selflessness is directly experienced, there’s no unseeing it: the mental stream flows forever in that direction. \*Śāntarakṣita refers to this idea in his discussion of irreversibility, too. For him, in a clear reference to PV 2.210, for a mental stream that has reached the state of perfection, there is no turning back “because awareness sides with that” (*buddhes tatpakṣapātāt*).<sup>57</sup> The “that” here, though, is not the direct experience of selflessness. It is the experience of bliss.

Early in his discussion of irreversibility, \*Śāntarakṣita had sought to establish a basic point about the nature of bliss. Using one of Dharmakīrti’s models of our knowledge of absence via non-apprehension (*anupalabdhi*), he argues that, because the nature of bliss is opposed to the nature of suffering, the apprehension of bliss lets us infer the absence of suffering.<sup>58</sup> He writes, “For instance, the present apprehension of heat, which is opposed to cold, proves the absence of cold, since there is no apprehension in a single place of things that are mutually opposed. In the same way, how on earth would it be possible for both pleasure and suffering to occur in what is one and the same continuum? For one is opposed to the other.”<sup>59</sup> Granted, ordinary pleasures are mixed with pain, suffering, and dissatisfaction. But, \*Śāntarakṣita argues, when great bliss that’s qualified by insight and means is cultivated to its highest perfection, “due to the power of repeated practice, when [bliss, delight, and so on] are apprehended to be fully ingrained (*sātmībhāva*) and attained, then the suffering, dejection, and so on, which are opposed to that, cease.”<sup>60</sup>

This helps make sense of \*Śāntarakṣita’s explanation of why the cultivation of bliss is one that will inevitably lead to its highest degree of perfection, and thus its irreversibility. On one hand, \*Śāntarakṣita is clear that the mind’s nature is fundamentally pure (*cittasya ... prakṛtipariśuddhatvāt*), and so “whatever [the mental stream] is perfumed with, and through the power of repeated practice on that, a nature that is thoroughly distinguished manifests which is characterized by the property that it cannot be turned back.”<sup>61</sup> He cites the verse we saw above, *Yoginīsañcāratantra* 11.2, to this effect. But still, because it is by nature opposed to the arising of suffering, the cultivation of great bliss is perhaps unique among mental qualities that might be cultivated, perfected, and fully ingrained. For, unlike intuition, crafts, and practical arts (or unlike the brahmins’ trained aversion to impurity, or *nairghṛṇya*, to use another of \*Śāntarakṣita’s examples), \*Śāntarakṣita claims that no prudent person (*prekṣāvat*) will interrupt their cultivation of great bliss, since no prudent person intentionally cultivates suffering. As he puts it, “For, having understood suffering and so on not to be beneficial, suffering and so on are abandoned by prudent people. And a prudent person will not look somewhere for a cause that will produce it again; otherwise,

<sup>56</sup> PV 2.210: *nirupadravabhūtārthasvabhāvāsya viparyayaḥ | na bādḥā yatnavattve ’pi buddhes tatpakṣapātataḥ ||*. Compare Pecchia, *Dharmakīrti on the Cessation of Suffering*, 173.

<sup>57</sup> Mishra ed., 18.13.

<sup>58</sup> See Mishra ed., 12.10 ff. \*Śāntarakṣita refers here to the *svabhāvaviruddhopalabdhi* sort of *anupalabdhi*, which Dharmakīrti defines at, e.g., *Nyāyabindu* 2.34: *svabhāvaviruddhopalabdhir yathā nātra śītasparśo vahner iti*. “The apprehension of something of an opposed nature [is also evidence of absence], for instance: There is no cold feeling here, because there is fire.” \*Śāntarakṣita refers to this case in his exposition of the point, as we’ll see in a moment.

<sup>59</sup> Mishra ed., 12.14–17: *tad yathā — śītādiviruddham uṣṇādikam upalabhyamānaṃ śītādyabhāvaṃ pratipādayati, yenaikatrassthāne parasparaṃ navirrudham upalabhyate, evam anayor api sukhaduḥkhayor na vaikatras santānātmani katham api sambhavaḥ tadviruddhatvāt tasya*.

<sup>60</sup> See Mishra ed., 12.10–12: *ihāpi duḥkhādiviruddham sukhasaumanasyādīlakṣaṇaṃ kāryam, tac cābhyāsabalāt sātmībhāvaṃ āsādyamānam upalabhyate yadā, tadā tadviruddham duḥkhadaurmanasyādīkaṃ nivartayati*.

<sup>61</sup> Mishra ed., 13.16–17: *yena yena vāsyate tatra tatra cābhyāsabalād viśiṣṭatarasvabhāvaṃ āviṣkaroty apunarāvṛttidharmatālakṣaṇam*. This leads immediately into the citation of *Yoginīsañcāra* 11.2. Cf. Padmavajra’s citation of this at AVPUVS 217, discussed above.

they are not a prudent person—they’re something else, like a madman.”<sup>62</sup> Even in the course of practicing the tantric path, before bringing the cultivation of great bliss to its highest perfection, a prudent person sees that it is of benefit insofar as its presence is by nature opposed to the arising of suffering. So, it is finally only a practice that bears *this* unique result that will be fully ingrained through the power of a distinctive practice of cultivation. Other practices will be interrupted. This one is not only irreversible once it reaches its highest perfection; once a prudent person starts on the path, it becomes more and more evident that the cultivation of great bliss is of the highest value, and so any reasonable person will not turn away from it.

## Conclusion

Even more clearly than the various citations of PV 3.282 and 3.285 we saw above, \*Śāntarakṣita’s *Tattvasiddhi* shows us what is most crucial for tantric authors about Dharmakīrti’s view of cultivation: its power to effect a permanent transformation. This is all the more pointed in the case of the *Tattvasiddhi* given \*Śāntarakṣita’s *disagreement* with Dharmakīrti about how yogic perception really works. Tellingly, \*Śāntarakṣita never cites PV 3.285, and he doesn’t argue that conceptual sorts of cultivation can result in non-conceptual awareness. Indeed, he argues explicitly that this *cannot* happen. Based on the principle that *like causes like*, \*Śāntarakṣita argues that the omniscience of a buddha is an awareness-event that forever involves mental construction. As he begins his argument, “Is this awareness of the Omniscient Ones that occurs at cultivation’s highest perfection strictly conceptual? Or is it non-conceptual? Among these alternatives, in the first place, if it is asserted to be strictly non-conceptual, then how could it be that what is arisen from the power of a conceptual cultivation is non-conceptual? For there cannot be in any way whatsoever the generation of a non-conceptual awareness-event from a conceptual awareness.”<sup>63</sup> The omniscience a buddha obtains must be, he goes on to argue in no uncertain terms, a *conceptual* awareness-event—or an awareness-event that involves mental constructions, a *savikalpakajñāna*. Much could be said about this surprising view.<sup>64</sup> But, for our purposes here, what’s important is that, despite \*Śāntarakṣita’s disagreeing with what we might think is the basic Dharmakīrtian point about yogic perception—viz., that whatever is cultivated, whether real or unreal, will result in a vivid, *non-conceptual* awareness-event at the culmination of that cultivation—\*Śāntarakṣita still considers himself to be working in a Dharmakīrtian milieu. He cites him as support by name, refers to other passages of the PV (as we’ve seen), and structures his whole text around the proof that tantric practice is rational activity via the *kāryotpādānumāna*. This shows that, at least as far as \*Śāntarakṣita was concerned, what is most central about Dharmakīrti’s view is not the idea that a conceptual awareness-event could be made non-conceptual with enough sustained concentration. What is essential is rather Dharmakīrti’s proof of the power of cultivation to transform the mental stream of the practitioner in a way that is irreversible. This is the case too, I think, for other authors like Ratnarakṣita or Vāgīśvarakīrti. Whatever they might have thought about the capacity of sustained reflection to transform conceptual awareness into non-conceptual awareness, what they emphasize in their appropriations of Dharmakīrti’s verses on yogic perception is the stability and irreversibility of the transformation that deity yoga is able to bring about.

Tantric authors’ engagement with Dharmakīrti, then, is not as straightforward as it might seem at first. In work on the Dharmakīrtian view of yogic perception, both traditionally and in contemporary scholarship, a few problems stand out. How can a non-conceptual awareness-event arise from the repeated cultivation

<sup>62</sup> Mishra ed., 19.6–8: *na hi duḥkhādīni hitarūpatayā ’vagamyā kenacit prekṣāvātā tyajyate. na ca punas tadutpattikāraṇam anviṣyate prekṣāvān kvacid, anyathā prakṣāvan na syāt, tad anyo mattakādivat.*

<sup>63</sup> Steinkellner 2001: *kiṃ ca savikalpakam eva tad bhavanāprakarsaparyantavarti sarvajñajñanam ahosvin nirvikalpakam iti. tatra yadi tāvan nirvikalpakam eveṣyate, tadā bhāvanavikalpasāmarthyān nirjātasya katham nirvikalpakatvam. na hi savikalpakād vijñānād nirvikalpakasya jñānasya prasūtiḥ katham api sambhavati.* The translation follows that of Steinkellner 2008, with some modifications.

<sup>64</sup> Steinkellner discusses this surprising view in his translation of the relevant passage (Steinkellner, 2008), and I hope to address it in more detail elsewhere. See too Allison Aitken’s discussion of this point in her forthcoming study of Śrīgupta’s *Tattvāvatāra*. She shows there that, though there might be important differences between Śrīgupta’s and \*Śāntarakṣita’s views of the matter, each argue against Dharmakīrti on this point.

that involves concepts? What distinguishes yogic perception proper from those cultivated awareness-events that are not sources of knowledge? And what does the direct awareness the yogin achieves regarding truths like impermanence or selflessness add to the knowledge about these truths given by rational inquiry? All these are important problems, and they've been recognized as such in the Dharmakīrtian tradition and by its non-Buddhist opponents. But the tantric engagement with Dharmakīrti on yogic perception puts these problems in a different light. Tantric authors seem not especially interested in the first problem (indeed, \*Śāntarakṣita denies outright that this is possible), and the second problem is, for them, beside the point. Their interest instead is in how we might fundamentally and irreversibly change our cognitive and conative dispositions—how we might cultivate new habits that persist forever.