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**The Art of Interpretation, Geshe Thubten Rinchen, Sera Mey  
Class One, Monday Morning, 10/5/98**

**The Name of the Text**

**TRANGWA DANG NGEBE DUN NAMPAR CHEWE DEN-CHU LESHKAY  
NYINGPO**

figurative and literal meaning thorough distinguish commentary eloquence  
essence

The name of the principle text for this course is *Essence of Eloquence on the Art of Interpretation*, written by **Je Tsongkapa** (1357-1419). Although Je Tsongkapa is Manjushri himself, Je Tsongkapa pretends to bow down to Manjushri at the beginning of the text.

**The Translator's Obeisance**

At the beginning of the text, in keeping with the original texts of India, Je Tsongkapa bows down to Lord Buddha and the great lineage masters.

1. **Shakyamuni Buddha** (p.1, L.1-8). He bows to Buddha, and then to these worldly beings, all of whom are classical Indian Sanskrit poetic names for deities:
  - a. De-Jung, or *Shakra*: Source of Bliss, laying eyes on brings bliss because he is so attractive to you, and also so called because his tantric consort brings him great bliss.
  - b. Gya-Jin: Hundred Gifts; his name is also “riding on a cloud” of a big white elephant.
  - c. Serkyi Ngel: One Born Golden Egg,
  - d. Lu-Me: Bodiless, lord of those with “no” bodies, or Gara Wangchuk, meaning desire realm beings with puny bodies (as opposed to form realm beings who are big and strong).
  - e. Tagyuito, or Kaybjuk: Flower Belt (his wife, Trangden, could only reach up to his belly to hang a flower garland). The Tibetan name for wife is “Little One.”

These deities realize Buddha's glory, and bow down to his omniscient mind. These deities also represent other Hindu religions, and so Je Tsongkapa bows to the speech of the Buddha, which unlike his body and mind, we are able to perceive and benefit from greatly. He teaches us what to do with our lives, and what not to do with our lives, and what you want to achieve and not achieve with your life. A Buddha's body is glorious but can't really help us, and we can't even perceive a Buddha's mind, but a Buddha opens his mouth and speaks to us clearly in a way we can relate to, and this is how he or she really helps us.

2. **Maitreya** and **Manjushri** (p.1, 19-12): They are the "oceans" because the depths of their good qualities (love and knowledge) can't be fully plumbed, and their bodhisattva activities (the six perfections) are ceaseless in the way that the waves of the ocean keep coming day or night whether or not anyone is there to benefit. Then when a disciple's

heart is ready, these waves wash over you when you have enough virtue and purity in your mind. Manjushri's knowledge of the Buddha's speech is like a big bank account.

3. **SHING TE, The Two Innovators** (literally "inventors of the horse cart"). When the Mahayana Dharma went into decline after Lord Buddha passed away the two innovators restored its position, and this was prophesized by Lord Buddha (p. 1, L13-16).
  - a. **Arya Nagarjuna**, the Madhyamika lineage holder.
  - b. **Master Asanga**, the Mind Only lineage holder.
  
4. **Subsequent Holders** of the two lineages (p.2, L1-5)
  - a. **Madhyamika** Lineage: ZAMLING LOSEL, "those who open the clear minds of the world: Masters Aryadeva, Ashvagosa (Pawo), Buddhapalita, Bavaviveka, Chandrakirti.
  - b. **Mind Only** Lineage Holders: Masters Vasubhandu, Sirvati, Dignaga, Dharmakirti

In the world the fame of these deities spreads like a conquering lion, and their grandeur is shown to all the world; but the instant they lay eyes on Lord Buddha their glory and dignity becomes like that of a firefly whose light is put out by the sun of Lord Buddha's omniscient mind and fine spiritual qualities. So they automatically bow to the **mind** of Lord Buddha, the god of gods. So Je Tsongkapa even bows down to the Hindu gods and deities, indicating that the contents of this book are so important that even they must acknowledge Lord Buddha as their master.

### **Pledge to Compose the Book**

Next, Je Tsongkapa promises to complete this great text. "Oh Bhutan Rinchen Drup, and you great Sakya masters, even you Tibetans worked really hard, but you missed some points. I, due to the kindness of my Lama, Manjushri, have been able to clearly see and explain these points. Therefore, out of love for my students I promise to compose and finish this work." Je Tsongkapa next exhorts students of this text, "You who hope to understand and teach emptiness, listen with great respect and with a pure heart" (p.2, L.10). If you are intelligent and persevering, come and ingest the contents of this book.

### **General Outline of Text**

In the root text that Je Tsongkapa's book is based on, *The Sutra Requested by Yil Kyor Kyen*, the Mind Only school view is presented first, followed by the Madhyamika Prasangika view. The book uses the phrase, "the way of emptiness, the way of peace, and the way of something that never started," to refer to **Three Doors of Liberation**:

1. First Door is **emptiness**: the pen has no self-existence from its own side (or, the *nature* of the pen is self-existentless -- using the pen as a basis at a single point in time).
2. Second Door is **the way of peace**: nothing has any characteristics of its own (or, the pen as a *cause* is self-existentless).
3. Third Door is **that which never started**: there's no "wish," which refers to the results of the pen (the pen as a *result* is self-existentless).

We must figure out the meanings of emptiness contained in this book in order to teach others to stop wandering around in the deep forest of suffering. Because of not seeing emptiness of ourselves, we misperceive the cause of our suffering, the cause of our very existence, and the result of our very existence. Therefore, in order to serve and protect a self-existent “me” that doesn’t really exist in the first place, we collect bad karma. We have to understand the emptiness of ourselves, because it's the misunderstanding of ourselves that causes us to collect karma and suffer. It is for this reason that we have to figure out when the Buddha was speaking literally and when he was speaking figuratively.

### **Three Different Meanings of Figurative and Literal**

#### 1. On the Level of *Expression*:

- a. **Literal** means the words themselves and the intended meaning are exactly the same.
- b. **Figurative** means the words and the intended meanings are different.

#### 2. On the Level of *Realities*:

- a. **Literal** refers to **emptiness itself**, or **ultimate reality**; the way it appears and the way it really is are the same.
- b. **Figurative** refers to **deceptive reality**; the way it appears and the way it really is are not the same.

#### 3. On the Level of *Understanding*:

- a. **Literal** means you have an accurate direct or conceptual understanding (TSEMA); the way it is and the way you understand it are the same.
- b. **Figurative** means you have only an approximate understanding, you're still learning; the way it is and the way you understand it are not the same yet.

Even when Lord Buddha said people have to distinguish between his literal and figurative speech, these statements cannot necessarily be taken literally. This is the main point in the study of TRANG-NGE. Even in the Buddha's own speech, he distinguished between literal and figurative, which proves that some of what he said was not intended to be taken literally. Our task is to figure out which is intended to be taken literally and which is intended to be taken figuratively. For example, the Buddha was only speaking figuratively when he said to the Mind Only school that the perfection of wisdom spoken to Prasangikas in the second turning of the wheel was to be taken figuratively.

Actually, during everyday conversation, we are constantly distinguishing whether the person talking to us is speaking literally or figuratively. If you have to make this distinction with just a regular person during normal conversation, then of course you will have to make this distinction with the speech of an enlightened being who can read the mind of all of his audience for all of time and is constantly deciding how to present and adjust the meaning for the benefit of each audience. It's like water poured onto a table which starts to run off in all

different directions, or it's like your brain becoming like scrambled eggs if you didn't start making these distinctions.

In order to make the distinction between the Buddha's intent regarding what was meant to be taken figuratively and what was intended to be taken literally, we have to refer to the two great innovators, Arya Nagarjuna and Master Asanga and see what they said about the two different ways of understanding emptiness. If all of Buddha's speech is intended to be taken literally, then we wouldn't need these two great innovators (p.3, L.9).

### **Three Criteria to Test the Intended Meaning**

The Buddha himself prophesied that the two great innovators would come in the future and that we would need to study their teachings to come to a proper understanding. But it all boils down to being able to match what you hear with your own logic and with what you know to be true (p.3, L.16f.). You must be able to use your own reasoning and establish a valid perception yourself. Otherwise your students won't trust your teachings. You must become a *Tseme Kebu* – a person who cannot lie because you have figured out the truth based on your own logic.

Even the Buddha himself said we should establish truth only by determining the logic of a certain belief. Buddhists don't go around saying, "It's true because Lord Buddha taught it." These three tests can be used to determine the intent of the Buddha's speech (p.4, L.5):

1. **Melt it** - like **direct perceptual experience** of the senses and thought. For example, you directly see that a pen is sitting on the table. Do the scriptures directly contradict any direct experience that you have had? This first test applies to "obvious reality."
2. **Rub it** -- Do the scriptures directly contradict your **logical deductions**. For example, you can logically deduce that a fire must exist where smoke is appearing. This second test applies to "hidden reality," things that are difficult to perceive. Subtle impermanence is another example.
3. **Cut it** -- Do the scriptures contradict the words of a being that you have established otherwise to be one who would **never lie**? This third test applies to "extremely hidden realities" which a being that is not omniscient could only perceive through faith in the words of another being who can reasonably be considered to be incapable of lying. For example, why is it true that you will become wealthy by being generous, or you will become physically attractive by being patient with others? Only a person we can establish as being omniscient could be trustworthy relative to statements about the results of our karmic actions.

## Two Main Sources

If you want to learn to see emptiness, you have to learn how to correctly distinguish when Lord Buddha was speaking literally and when he was speaking figuratively. To decide this you have to go back to the original two innovators and see how they explained emptiness. After establishing the need to distinguish how to determine Buddha's true intent, the remaining sections of the text can be divided into two: the presentation of the Madhyamika school and that of the Mind Only school.

### 1. **DODE GONG DREL** *Commentary on the True Intent of the Sutras.*

sutra

We will use this text for the Mind Only school's position. This work is not technically a commentary. It is Lord Buddha's own words regarding how to interpret his own previous teachings.

### 2. **LODRU MISEPAY DENPAY DO** *Sutra of Never Ending Wisdom.* We will use this

implies

text for the Madhyamika school's position. It

implies that Manjushri is asking questions of the Buddha.

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At this point we begin with the Mind Only school's presentation of how to determine the Buddha's intent, which is called *Commentary on the True Intent of the Sutras* (DO DE GONG DREL).

**Four Parts to the Mind Only Section of the Text**

The first half of Je Tsongkapa's text consists of the Mind Only school's presentation, which is divided into four parts:

1. **A Question regarding apparent inconsistencies** in the sutra. This section consists of the bodhisattva Dundam Yangdak Pak's question, "Lord Buddha, why did you appear to contradict yourself during each subsequent turning of the wheel?"
2. **Buddha explains the inconsistencies.**
3. Je Tsongkapa's explanation of the **Three Essential Attributes**. This section is the guts of the Mind Only school's position.
4. **The result of the exchange** (*drup den*). This is the outcome of the teachings in the third turning of the wheel that come from Lord Buddha's response to question put forth by the bodhisattva Dundam Yangdak Pak.

**The Content of the First Turning of the Wheel**

The *Commentary on the True Intent of the Sutras*, which itself was a sutra spoken by Lord Buddha, mentions seven broad categories of subject matter that Lord Buddha taught during the first turning of the wheel:

1. The five heaps.
2. The twelve gates, or *ayadanas* (your sense organs and their objects).
3. The twelve limbs of dependent origination.
4. The four parts of sustenance.
5. The four arya truths
6. The eighteen categories of existence: the six senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind), six "seats" or sense powers (sensory receptor cells of the eye, etc.), and the six objects that are perceived (shapes and colors, etc. up to thoughts or "dharmadhatus").
7. The thirty seven components of enlightenment, which are presented in seven groups.

**Five Characteristics of Self-Existent Things**

In the first turning of the wheel, Lord Buddha said that all of the things covered in the above seven categories exist in truth, self-existently, from their own side, independently. Furthermore things in the first four categories listed above have the following five characteristics. For example, consider the five heaps:

1. They exist by definition.



2. They have a nature of starting from their own side.
3. They have a nature of stopping from their own side.
4. Their impure nature must be abandoned from its own side.
5. Their cause must be abandoned from its own side.

### **The Self-Existent Nature of the Four Arya Truths**

Likewise, in the first turning of the wheel, Lord Buddha said that each of the four arya truths exists from its own side, independently.

1. The **truth of suffering** exists independently and must be **realized**. The truth of suffering includes the four elements (earth, water, fire, air), plus consciousness and space.
2. The **truth of the cause of suffering** exists independently and must be **abandoned**. The truth of the cause of suffering includes the eighteen categories of existence: six senses, six sense powers, and six types of objects.
3. The **truth of the end of suffering** exists independently and must be **brought about**.
4. The **truth of the means to the end of suffering** exists independently and must be **practiced**. The truth of the means to the end of suffering includes the eighteen categories of existence as things that must be realized and eliminated.

### **The Thirty-Seven Qualities of Enlightenment**

The thirty-seven qualities of enlightenment can be divided into seven categories.

1. The four recollections or awarenesses.
2. The four perfect abandonments.
3. The four miraculous legs.
4. The five powers (these are not the five sense powers).
5. The five forces.
6. The eight components of the arya path
7. The seven of limbs of enlightenment.

In addition, the Buddha said that each of the qualities of enlightenment has the following eight qualities:

1. It exists independently.
2. It has discordance (MI-TUNPA); it contradicts its opposite (e.g., love versus anger).
3. It has an antidote, a counter-agent.
4. It engenders what has not been engendered, what did not exist before (MA KYEPA KYEPA).
5. It is maintained, self-sustaining.
6. It has inseparability (MI KYUPA) from the quality.
7. It is self-perpetuating; it goes ever higher.
8. It is self-widening; it is ever growing more vast

The bodhisattva Dundam Yangdak Pak says in Lord Buddha's *Commentary on the True Intent of the Sutras*, "Lord Buddha, for all of these qualities you said that they were self-existent."

### **Emptiness in the Second Turning of the Wheel**

The bodhisattva Dundam Yangdak Pak then says to Lord Buddha that in the second turning of the wheel (also called the "middle turning," or "in between" turning), Lord Buddha stated that everything is empty, using the following same five characteristics mentioned above:

1. Nothing has its own nature; nothing exists independently.
2. Nothing starts of its own accord, from its own side.
3. Nothing stops of its own accord.
4. Everything is "peace from the beginning," meaning that it is empty of having a self-nature.
5. Everything is "gone beyond grief," meaning that it is "natural nirvana," or lacks independent existence.

The Mind Only school views these statements by Lord Buddha, if taken literally, as being nihilistic, suggesting that nothing exists at all. They also say that on face value these statements contradict Lord Buddha's statements made in the first turning of the wheel when he said that many categories of things do have a nature of existing self-existently.

So the question naturally arises as to why Lord Buddha stated in the first turning of the wheel that some things do have a nature of existing from their own side, and then in the second turning he stated that nothing has a nature of existing from its own side. Having heard Lord Buddha's teachings in the first turning, you would naturally question the statements he made in the second turning, and by implication would also question the statements he made in the first turning -- because the two statements are obviously contradictory if both are taken literally.

The third turning of the wheel, therefore, consists of Lord Buddha's response to the question put forth by the bodhisattva Dundam Yangdak Pak regarding the contradictory statements made in the first and second turnings about the self-existent nature of objects.

At this point, Geshe Thubten Rinchen mentioned that a commentary to Lord Buddha's *Commentary on the True Intent on the Sutras*, written by a Chinaman, claimed that the phrase "to exist by definition" refers very literally to a thing having the nature of existing "through the words of its definition." Je Tsongkapa disputes this point, saying that this view is problematic because "nominal things," or "constructs," which is the first of three attributes of existence presented by the Mind Only school, are said by the Mind Only school to not have a nature of existing by definition; and if "existing by definition" means "through the words of its definition," this would mean that nominal things don't exist at all which is absurd.

Geshe Thubten Rinchen also clarifies several of Je Tsongkapa's references:

- "various categories" refers to the eighteen categories of existence.
- "many categories" refers to the six categories of ???.
- "numerous categories" refers to the six categories of ???.

## Lord Buddha's Answer to the Bodhisattva Dundam Yangdak Pak

Lord Buddha's response to the question regarding his contradictory statements made in the first versus the second turnings of the wheel is given in two sections (p.7, L.5):

1. The first section relates to the first characteristic mentioned above: that nothing has its own nature of existing independently.
2. The second section relates to the second through fifth characteristics: that things don't start or stop, and things are peace from the beginning and are gone beyond grief.

His answer also consists of a brief response, a detailed response, and an example.

## Lord Buddha's Three Summarial Statements

He begins by saying "Oh, Dundam Yangdak Pak, I meant three things:"

1. Things don't have a nature of having **independent characteristics**.
2. Things don't have a nature of **starting**.
3. Things don't have a nature of **being ultimate**.

## The Three Attributes of Existence

In order to grasp the three statements above, you must understand a very important breakdown of existing things into the three following attributes:

1. **SHEN-WANG**     **Dependently originating things**, or things that are caused. This is other power generally the things we see around us in everyday life, things that depend

on the control of something else.

2. **YONG-DRUP**     **"Total existence,"** or **"totality."** This is roughly equivalent to total to exist Madhyamika's understanding of "emptiness."

3. **KUNTAK**     **"Nominal things"** or **"constructs."** Constructs are all the things in the universe other than emptiness. For example, the mental image of a thing not yet seen, like the imagination of the cup of tea that I'm going to drink when I get to the kitchen and make it, which is a thing that doesn't exist at the moment.

As a preview to the Madhyamika Prasangika viewpoint which will come up later, Geshe Thubten Rinchen mentions that when Master Asanga says that nothing has its own nature, he is referring to the above three attributes not having any nature of existing from their own side.

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**The Omniscient Jonangpa's Mistaken View**

Jonangpa, an earlier contemporary of Je Tsongkapa, wrote a text called *The Ocean of the Real Literal Meaning* (NGEY DUN GYATSO). Jonangpa was a great scholar, especially in the tantric teachings, and he probably was responsible for translating some of the Kalachakra into Tibetan. Je Tsongkapa is characteristically respectful when critiquing Jonangpa's incorrect position. He doesn't criticize Jonangpa at all, but just says, "a certain viewpoint wrongly believes..." and then proceeds to tear this false view to shreds. Je Tsongkapa disagrees with Jonangpa on an issue related to interpreting when Lord Buddha was speaking literally. Je Tsongkapa doesn't explicitly name the person who holds these wrong views because a) he has the three spiritual qualities of wisdom, holiness, and purity — especially holiness, which indicates that he wants to keep his ethical vows and avoid putting down someone else and inflating himself; and b) he wants to acknowledge that the spread of Buddhism in Tibet was entirely due to the kindness of these great Lamas that came before him. You can divide a person's spiritual life into their worldview and their activities, and from the point of view of his activities (bodhichitta, renunciation, compassion for others), and these previous teachers had great love and compassion and he doesn't want to express any lack of appreciation for their great kindness. However, from the vantage point of their worldview, Je Tsongkapa's mission is to clarify the correct worldview and correct understanding of emptiness.

In the Perfection of Wisdom, from the point of view of the second turning, they said that the phrase "things don't have a nature of their own" means that things don't exist by definition through any characteristic of their own. The "Omniscient" Jonangpa takes this phrase, "*ultimately* things don't have a nature of their own," to mean that changing things don't have a nature of their own, but emptiness *does* have a nature of its own. He says that Lord Buddha's inclusion of the term "ultimately" indicates that he wasn't referring to emptiness. Je Tsongkapa says that Jonangpa is misunderstanding both the Mind Only and the Madhyamika schools. He says to Jonangpa, "When you say 'nothing has a nature of its own doesn't apply to ultimate reality,' you contradict the *Sutra on the True Intent* as well as the writing of Masters Asanga and Vasubandhu." Je Tsongkapa says that Lord Buddha said in the second turning that none of the three characteristics (constructs, changing things and emptiness) have any nature of their own. For evidence, he quotes Lord Buddha, "Things don't have a nature of being ultimate." The longer explanation on this point (p.13) says, "Total existence doesn't have a nature of its own." Master Asanga says that three different things (the three characteristics) don't have a nature of existing ultimately. Likewise (p.8, L. 3), Master Vasubandhu, in his *Thirty Verses* says, "Total existence doesn't have a nature of its own."

Jonangpa also obviously contradicts the Madhyamika Prasangika school because the three phrases in the second turning – everything from physical matter on up to emptiness lacks a nature of its own, doesn't exist ultimately, and doesn't exist by definition – it's all the same; you are saying that emptiness doesn't exist ultimately, by definition.

Lord Buddha didn't have time to discuss the nature of every individual existing object in the universe, so he *skillfully* divided all of existence into three categories and then discussed the nature of these three categories. So in the second turning Lord Buddha spoke about 108 categories of existence and 18 distinct kinds of emptiness, so he certainly said that emptiness does not have a nature of its own.

### **Lord Buddha Explains His Three Statements**

We now reach a more detailed explanation. In the original sutra, Lord Buddha never gives the actual names of the three characteristics. He merely says, a) "there's no nature to the characteristics of things; b) there's no nature to the beginning of things; and c) there's no nature to the ultimate."

In the second turning of the wheel, Lord Buddha states, somewhat ambiguously, that things don't have a self-nature of having characteristics, of starting, or of being ultimate. He explains these statements one by one in terms of the three attributes of existence, beginning with the first, a lack of a self-nature of characteristics.

### **Lack of a Self-Nature of Characteristics**

The lack of a self-nature of having characteristics of their own (p.9, L.15) is explained in terms of the attribute of *constructs* (nominal stuff, or mental images, KUNTAK).

- **Positively**, constructs only exist through our conceptualization or mental image.
- **Negatively**, constructs lack any self-nature; they don't exist by definition, and they don't have a nature of their own.

Consider nominal constructs;

They lack a nature of their own with regard to their own characteristics,

Because a) they are only creations of our concepts, and b) they don't have a nature of their own by definition.

Je Tsongkapa explains that Lord Buddha says, "When I say nothing has a nature of having any characteristics of its own, I am talking about things that only exist nominally" (p.10, L. 2). Je Tsongkapa now says that you can apply this line of reasoning to the remaining two attributes, dependently originating things and totality.

### **What It Means to Exist By Definition**

Note that the Mind Only and the Madhyamika Prasangika explanations of the phrase "to exist by definition" are totally different:

- To the **Mind Only** school, if a thing is only a mental construct, it does *not* exist by definition, and if a thing is not a mental construct it *does* exist by definition. So to the Mind Only school, constructs don't exist by definition, but dependently originating

things and totality do exist by definition. Notice that there are conceptions of things that do exist, and conceptions of things that don't exist. For example, you can imagine a rabbit's horns, a flower that grows in mid-air, or the glasses made of gold that I'm holding right now. So you can give a name and a concept to a thing that doesn't exist at all. This is no problem.

- Conversely, **Madhyamika Prasangikas** believe that nothing exists by definition; everything exists merely through being given a name (MING, a label) and a term (SHAKTSEL, a mental picture or conceptualization). So Prasangikas agree with the Mind Only school that mental constructs don't exist by definition, but they go a step farther and say that dependently originating things and totalities also don't exist by definition. Prasangikas say that when you go and look for a person that is the thing being labeled "person," you won't find anything, so nothing exists by definition. "Person" does not exist in any one of the parts, or in the collection of the parts all together. If you could find person among the parts, that would be a person that exists by definition, which the Prasangikas deny but the Mind Only school accepts.

The Mind Only proponents believe that when you go and look for a person that is the thing that gets the label "person," analyzing its parts, you *will* find something that exists by definition. They believe that dependently originating things and totality do exist truly by definition, and are not just nominally existent things. They exist from their own side and are not just products of my mind, which carries two meanings to the Mind Only school (this is passed on only through oral tradition):

1. It exists through its own causes and conditions.
2. It exists through some true nature, or unique identity of its own, coming from its own side.

### **A State of Mind that Contradicts Itself**

Consider the state of mind that perceives the absence of the quality of existing by definition with regard to nominal things as described by the Mind Only school, and then consider the state of mind that perceives the absence of the quality of existing by definition with regard to *any* kind of object as described by the Prasangika school; these two states of mind are exactly identical. Therefore, Je Tsongkapa says, "If you have the wrong state of mind that believes nominal things are existing by definition, then you must also be wrongly seeing the thing in the same way that Prasangikas see that *any* thing exists by definition" (p.10, L.16).

According to the Mind Only school, when you go looking for anything that got the name and the term, independent of the name and the term, you *do* find the object; and this holds even for nominal things. Therefore, when a mistaken state of mind that thinks a construct exists by definition goes to look for the thing that got the name and the term, independent of the name and the term, it *does* find something, according to the Mind Only school. It therefore now becomes a correct state of mind because according to the Mind Only school when you go looking for the thing that got the name and the term you do find something. This is an inconsistency in the Mind Only theory, and is a major difference between the Mind Only and the Prasangika schools' meaning of what it means to exist by definition.

The Mind Only school says that constructs don't exist by definition because they don't exist from their own side through their own way of being; they are merely imagined things; however, when you go looking for the thing that got the name, you *do* find it. These two ways of viewing constructs contradict one another.



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**Two Ways of Viewing Things as Existing by Definition**

Reviewing from last class, consider these two points of view, with regard to *nominal* things (which is the group consisting of all unchanging things other than emptiness, such as constructs and empty space):

1. The way the Mind Only school views a nominal thing as existing by definition. This nominal thing would exist from its own side, not just as an imagined thing. We have an innate tendency to see even nominal things as having some existence from their own side, even if we don't believe it to be so intellectually.
2. The way the Prasangika school views any thing as existing by definition. This kind of thing would be such that if you went looking for the thing that got the name and the label you *would* find it.

**Lack of a Self-Nature of Starting**

Up to now, we have been speaking about the phrase, "Things have no nature of having characteristics of their own," which is explained in terms of nominal things. Now we turn to a discussion of the "lack of a self-nature of starting," which is explained in terms of the attribute of dependently originating things.

- **Positively**, a dependently originating thing grows from other causes and conditions and therefore lacks a *self*-nature of starting.
- **Negatively**, a dependently originating thing a) doesn't grow from itself (referring to a view of the Numerist school which believed that things self-manifest or grow spontaneously without other causes), and b) isn't something that doesn't grow from other causes and conditions. There are specific benefits of considering both of these individual negative proofs.

Je Tsongkapa interprets Lord Buddha's statement, "Things don't have a nature of growing," as meaning that things don't have a nature of growing on their own, without their causes and conditions (p.11, L.4). Master Asanga addresses the second negative way, mentioned above, of proving that changing things don't have a nature of growing on their own without their causes and conditions.

Again, as a preview to the Madhyamika Prasangika view, Geshe Thubten Rinchen now mentions the Prasangika position: things don't grow by definition, meaning things don't grow independent of our applying a name and term; therefore, things don't come from other causes and conditions self-existently, and things don't come from their apparent causes. Things come from our naming and labeling them in a certain way.

**The Lack of a Self-Nature of Being Ultimate**

Now we turn to the lack of a self-nature of being ultimate, and this is explained in two different ways, i.e., with regard to the attributes of both dependently originating things and totalities. So there are two kinds of ultimate nature that don't exist:

### **Dependently Originating Things' Lack of a Self-Nature of Being Ultimate**

When you describe ultimate truth as that object that is being perceived by a person who is perceiving emptiness directly, the reason we call it ultimate truth is that it is being perceived by the ultimate state of mind. So the word "ultimate," in the phrase, "ultimate reality," is really referring to the state of mind that is perceiving ultimate reality. And in the Mind Only school, ultimate reality is being denied with regard to changing things. The other kind of ultimate is the ultimate object that is being denied, with regard to totality itself.

Dependently originating things, or changing things, are not ultimate because a) they depend on other causes and conditions, and b) they are not the object of the direct perception of emptiness (and they are more likely to be confused with ultimate reality than are constructs). Constructs also are not the object of the direct perception of emptiness, but they are not mentioned in this category of "not being ultimate" because students are more likely to mistake dependently originating things for emptiness when they are trying to understand and meditate on an object and its emptiness, than when they are considering constructs, which more obviously are not ultimate reality (p.12, L.15).

In the Madhyamika system, first you consider the object, e.g., a water pitcher, then you focus on the emptiness of the pitcher; so as you go back and forth between the object and its emptiness you might tend to confuse the object as being the emptiness of the object. So dependently originating things are emphasized here as not having any nature of being ultimate because they are not the object of the direct perception of emptiness and because they are more likely than a construct (which doesn't even exist by definition, in a unique or ultimate way) to be mistaken for emptiness.

Geshe Thubten Rinchen here describes an analogy: it's like the fact that your perception of sound doesn't force the (incorrect) perception of the unchanging nature of sound (which doesn't exist at all) out of your mind. Sound has the quality of subtle impermanence, and only the correct perception of this fact is the thing that can force out of your mind the perception that sound does not have the quality of subtle impermanence.

### **Totality's Lack of a Self-Nature of Being Ultimate**

Totality is not ultimate because it doesn't have a self-nature; it doesn't have a nature of existing from its own side (p.13, L.9). Totality is the fact that there doesn't exist a construct that is related to a changing object that has a nature of existing by definition, in an ultimate way. Totality here refers to the fact that objects, or the *parts* of a person, lack a nature of having any self-existence. Furthermore, totality is not just something other than self-

existence, it is the total opposite of self-existence. Totality describes the very opposite of a self-existent thing.

Some people might think that constructs are emptiness because like totality they also lack a nature of being self-existent; so in order to distinguish totality from constructs it is said that totality is the opposite of a self-existent nature. So totalities, the fact that constructs that could ever exist by definition doesn't exist, don't exist ultimately.

Note that to the Mind Only school, both dependently originating things and totality don't have a self-nature, don't exist from their own side, but they do exist by definition, in an ultimate way, from their own side. Constructs have a nature of neither existing by definition nor with a self-nature.

Look at the following logical statement: "Consider emptiness itself; it doesn't have a nature of being ultimate, because it's not that thing that emptiness denies." The appropriate response is that it's not necessarily so (KYABBA MAJUNG), because other things like constructs also are not that thing that emptiness denies. Therefore, you have to characterize emptiness as the simple absence of what emptiness denies, rather than saying that it's not the thing that emptiness denies. Constructs are certainly not the opposite of what emptiness denies (p.14, L.4).

Jonangwa then criticizes Je Tsongkapa by saying that when we perceive emptiness, we generally are perceiving it as a positive thing, but that Je Tsongkapa describes emptiness as a negative, as the simple absence of a self-existent thing. This point will be picked up later.

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**Totality is an Absence of Something**

At this point in the text (p.14, L.5-10), Je Tsongkapa responds to Jonangba who has claimed that totality is a positive thing. Je Tsongkapa explains that in the *Commentary on the True Intent of the Sutras*, which Master Jonangba has said himself is a literal work, Lord Buddha Himself stated that totality a) is a simple absence (RAB DU CHEWA) of something (a construct that exists by definition), and b) like empty space (NAMKA) which is the simple absence of an obstruction. Therefore a totality is clearly a negative thing, or an absence of something.

Geshe Thubten Rinchen stated here four times in a row that the Mind Only school misses the thing that emptiness is empty of. The "thing we deny" (GAKJA) is defined very differently in the Mind Only school versus the Madhyamika Prasangika school. Je Tsongkapa says here "in your system..." implying that a better system exists than that of the Mind Only school. The school that is actually most correct is the Madhyamika Prasangika, as expounded by masters Chandrakirti and Buddhapalita (p.287-288).

If you want to know what Je Tsongkapa really believes, go to page 287, line 8. Je Tsongkapa says, "Let's ask a question now..." (DA NI TRI...) We have seen how the idea of what's literal and what's figurative are treated in the two great systems of Madhyamika and Mind Only. We've seen the different ways to look at this subject, even amongst the schools themselves. If you ask, "Among them, which do you choose to follow, Je Tsongkapa?" if you ask, I say:

From the depths of my heart, I have great respect for *all* the Buddhist masters who have ever been. But there is one particular system that uses an especially beautiful explanation for dependent origination to destroy all ideas of self-existence. It is the beautiful cool moonlight of Chandrakirti. It has come and opened the night lotus of my eyes. I've been able to see the path set forth by kind Buddhapalita. Anyone who has seen that – a deep interpretation of dependent origination – where could you ever find anyone who wouldn't follow that system?

**Three Analogies for the Three Attributes**

Three analogies are presented to clarify the meaning of the three attributes that form the core of the Mind Only school's position. We will first interpret the first of the five characteristics Lord Buddha mentioned in the second turning of the wheel, that nothing has a self-nature.

1. That **constructs** have no self-nature of having characteristics is like a **sky flower**. Like a flower that could grow out of the sky without water, soil, etc., the self-nature of constructs is non-existent. However, the point to emphasize here is that constructs are only imagined things, and in this sense lack a self-nature of having characteristics. The sky flower is sometimes used as an example of a non-existent thing, because such a

thing as a sky flower does not exist. That is not the point being stressed here. Here, it is just important to understand that the example shows something which is existing by your imagination when someone says the words “sky flower.”

2. That **dependently originating things** have no self-nature of starting is like a **magic show**, a movie. Dependently originating things are "like an illusion" in the sense that an object, a water pitcher for example, and the perception of the water pitcher seem to be two separate things but they really are coming from the same karmic seed. The pitcher and the visual consciousness perceiving it are the same stuff, of one nature (DZE-CHIK), but appear to be quite distinct things.
3. That **totalities** have no self-nature of existing ultimately is like **empty space**. The Mind Only school believes that those who take the second turning of the wheel literally are falling into the extreme of nihilism. For example, if you say that dependently originating things have no self-nature, you are saying that they don't exist at all. Likewise, if you say that totalities lack a nature of existing by existing, you are saying that they don't exist at, which is silly.

From the Mind Only school's point of view, if you say that all three groups have no self nature (taking the second turning of the wheel literally), then you are falling into nihilism. For example, if you say that dependently originating things have no self-nature, you are saying that they don't exist at all. Likewise, if you say that totalities lack a nature of existing by definition, you are also saying that they don't exist at all, which would then leave everything without any kind of ultimate nature.

Nominal things can represent either an existing thing (e.g., a water pitcher), or a non-existent thing (a sky flower). If we wipe out all dependently originating things that exist, nothing is left to imagine, so even in this indirect way we can't say that nominal things lack a nature of not existing by definition.

### **Dependently Originating Things' Existence by Definition**

The Mind Only school believes that Lord Buddha's words in the second turning of the wheel, if taken literally, will lead one into nihilism (p.18, L.2). He said in the second turning that each of the three groups of attributes lacks a nature of existing by definition. According to Mind Only proponents, this statement is not to be taken literally. If dependently originating things did not exist at all, then the construct and the totality that would apply to them also could not exist. Similarly, if dependently originating things didn't have a nature of existing by definition, then they couldn't be imagined by a constructing mind (which itself is a dependently originating thing); therefore the construct which is the object of the imagining mind also could not exist. Furthermore, if all dependently originating things and all constructs are eliminated, then totality would lose its basis and also could not exist. So if you literally accept that starting and stopping don't have a nature of existing by definition, eventually you will end up eliminating all existing things.

The Mind Only school's belief that the second turning of the wheel was meant to be taken figuratively is analogous to a Lama saying to his student, "could you please drop my tea mug and break it," meaning please be careful with the mug. Likewise, Lord Buddha's statement in the second turning that nothing has a nature of existing from its own side is not necessarily to be taken literally. The Mind Only school believes that this statement was intended by Lord Buddha to be taken literally only with regard to constructs which really don't have a nature of existing by definition; but that the statement was intended to be taken figuratively with regard to dependently originating things and with regard to totalities, both of which really do exist by definition, uniquely, in an ultimate way.

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In this class we will analyze the four latter characteristics that typify Lord Buddha's speech in the second turning of the wheel (p.18). Je Tsongkapa will quote the *Sutra on the True Intent*, Masters Asanga, Master Vasubhandu, and others. We will discuss these latter four characteristics as they relate to two of the three attributes presented by the Mind Only school: constructs and totality:

**The Latter Four Characteristics**

2. Things don't have a nature of **starting** *from their own side*.
3. Things don't have a nature of **stopping** *from their own side*.
4. Things are **peace from the beginning**, meaning that things lack a nature of existing as mentally afflicted things, and have always been so from beginningless time.
5. Things are **natural nirvana**, meaning that things have "**gone beyond grief**" (beyond the state of being mentally afflicted things, beyond the status of being changing things).

Note that each of these four characteristics naturally triggers the one that comes after it.

**How the Latter Four Characteristics Apply to Constructs**

Constructs don't have a nature of existing by definition, and therefore also don't have a nature of **starting or stopping by definition**. If constructs did have a nature of starting or stopping, they would have to have a nature of starting and stopping by definition. Furthermore, constructs have *always* been devoid of having a nature of starting or stopping by definition, so constructs have been "**peace from the beginning**," meaning they have had a lack of self-existence for time without beginning. Finally, constructs are forever "**gone beyond**" the state of a self-existent birth and stopping. A self-existent starting or stopping can be described as grief or suffering.

These four sequential characteristics can be stated in terms of a logical statement:

1. Consider constructs;
2. they neither grow nor stop by definition;
3. because they don't *exist* by definition (p.19, L.12).

If a construct *did* have a nature of growing or stopping, then it must have a nature of growing or stopping by definition. To the Mind Only school, if something didn't have a nature of starting and stopping by definition, then it couldn't have a nature of starting and stopping at all. It's a necessity both ways.

## How the Latter Four Characteristics Apply to Constructs

**KYEWA DANG GAKPA MI-DRELWA**      **Unchanging things (DU MA JE)** are what starting and stopping freedom lacks starting and stopping. Constructs are free of, or gone beyond, suffering, beyond mentally afflicted things, because they are unchanging things. They are free of having a nature of starting or stopping by definition. Therefore, they are peace from the beginning (SHIWA means "peace" or "death" or "stopping" or "rest in peace"). Therefore, they are gone beyond grief.

## How the Latter Four Characteristics Apply to Totality

Totality, or emptiness, *does* exist by definition, according to the Mind Only school. So the jumping off point for totality is that it doesn't have a nature of starting by definition.

**YONG - DRUP**      **Total existence, or "totality."** As soon as the water pitcher comes into all existence existence, every piece of the water pitcher is totally empty. This is the flavor of the word "total existence."

**TAKPA TAKPA DU**      **The time of the unchanging unchanging.** This refers to all the unchanging time time that came before. "From the beginning of beginningless time, and forever after..."

**TESUK TESUK DU**      **The time of the self-standing self-standing.** This refers to all the independent time time that will come after.

In the *Sutra of True Intent*, Lord Buddha used these two unusual expressions to explain why totality doesn't have a nature of starting or stopping by definition. [As an aside, be careful about applying the etymology of words literally to arrive at their meaning; Je Tsongkapa says he got his meaning in this case from the Chinese commentary.] Obviously, emptiness doesn't have a nature of starting or stopping at all because it is a state of emptiness and is an unchanging thing. Likewise, emptiness is peace from the beginning and is gone beyond mentally afflicted things.

## Why the Latter Four Characteristics Don't Apply to Changing Things

Regarding constructs, we said that all five characterizations apply to constructs and each characterization triggers the subsequent one. Regarding totality, we said it *does* have a nature of existing by definition (so the first characterization doesn't apply), but that the other four characterizations do apply.



However, in the *Sutra on the True Intent*, Lord Buddha chose not to mention changing things in relation to the five characteristics because changing things *do* have a nominal or apparent sort of growing and stopping, which must therefore exist by definition (according Mind Only school). Likewise, most of the changing things around us normal people are *not* peace from the beginning and are *not* gone beyond mentally afflicted things. So none of the latter four characterizations really apply to changing things.

Je Tsongkapa says, “Changing things were not what the Buddha was talking about when he mentioned those four characterizations” (p.21, L.12). The reason changing things were not characterized as being something that doesn’t start or stop by definition is that “they are *not* something which is *not* dependently arising.” That is, their starting and stopping is does occur by definition. Then Je Tsongkapa says “the vast majority” (PELCHIR) of things in our normal lives *are* mentally afflicted things and therefore are not in a state of peace, nor have they transcended grief.” The “latter two words” (SIK CHIMA) refers here to the latter two *characterizations*.

### **Master Asanga’s Position**

Master Asanga said in his *Compendium of Higher Knowledge (Abhidharmasamuchaya)*, that these four characterizations apply to *all three* attributes, including changing things. He said, “because Buddha said that constructs don’t have a nature of existing by definition, and because dependent things don’t have a nature of growing by definition, and because totality doesn’t have a nature of being ultimate, things don’t have a nature of existing by definition, of growing or stopping; things are in a state of peace from the beginning and things are gone beyond grief. Is it possible to characterize caused things as not existing by definition? How does the expression “doesn’t have a nature of growing” apply to causes? It means that changing things don’t have a nature of growing *without their causes and conditions*. This is Master Asanga’s point.

So when Lord Buddha said in the second turning of the wheel that nothing has a nature of existing by definition, the Mind Only school applies this statement with regard to changing things as meaning that they don’t have a nature of growing without depending on their causes and conditions. So “not existing by definition” applied to changing things only means not having a nature of growing or stopping without depending on their causes and conditions. So master Asanga just re-interprets what it means to say that changing things don’t exist by definition.

### **Mentally Afflicted Things in a Samsaric World**

Is it true that the vast majority of changing things are mentally afflicted things? It is very helpful to respond “to whom?” But the very fact that we students have to study these things and are not sitting in a Buddha paradise right now and haven’t made great progress along the path, we are in the state called “the initial or original condition” of samsara. The vast majority of changing things *for people like us* who are in the original samsaric condition are

either mental afflictions or are tied up with mental afflictions. The vast majority of things we can even imagine are mentally afflicted things.

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Up until now, we haven't explicitly defined the three attributes of the Mind Only school: constructs, dependently originating things, and totalities. We will do so now, including the presentation of classical examples of each attribute.

**Definition of "Constructs"**

Constructs (KUNTAK) are the hardest of the three attributes to define. Dependently originating things are easier because they are obviously all around us. And after defining what constructs are, it's easier to get your arms around what totalities are.

Three characterizations of changing things that relate to how they are conceptualized by the constructing state of mind are presented (p.22, L.9-16), and the example of SUK, visual objects, or shapes and colors, will be used as an illustration:

**NAMPAR TOKPAY CHU YUL "That object towards which conceptualization functions."** This refers to the *arena* that the construct applies to. When you look at a visual object, your mind is conceptualizing, or laying a construct on it, like "oh, this thing is a visible object."

It could be called, "The characteristics which is the place of imagination." This refers to the state of mind that conceptualizes the *specific features* of the objects using a *word* and a *thought* (versus conceptualizing the very nature, or its primary identity, as above). Changing objects are the basis of the label that a) gets the name using words and b) is thought about in a certain way. For example, to label an object as being created, growing, changing, or existing. The phrase, "The signs of something which is a factor," means the indicators that the object is a produced thing, brought about by the coming together of causes and conditions.

Constructs relate to changing objects through these characterizations of changing objects. The changing things are the arena in which the constructing state of mind is functioning. But there is also a third thing here: the mental image, or the construct, itself, which is in between the constructing state of mind and the object that is the arena toward which the constructing mind functions. This mental image is similar to the DUN CHI presented in the Logic school.

Remember that although constructs are not dependent things, they are directed toward dependent things, toward things that grow from their causes. This idea of constructs is crucial. We will continue to further refine what constructs are.

### **Three Elements in the Illustration of “Tashi the Boy”**

After a child is born, it exists; it is there. Then after a couple days the father names the child Tashi. Not until the father names the child Tashi does anyone think, “Oh, this is Tashi the boy.” No one can have the conceptualization “that is Tashi the boy” until he has been given the name Tashi.

The object that was given the name Tashi existed right at the moment it was born, but the concept “Tashi the boy” couldn’t exist in anyone’s mind until the child is given the name Tashi and people then think of him as being Tashi. So we don’t call the object “Tashi” until the labeling has occurred.

So there are these three elements:

- The object that gets the name Tashi.
- The father’s mind that names the child Tashi.
- The construct or idea “Tashi the boy” that exists in people’s minds after the child is named Tashi.

This third thing, the construct “Tashi the boy,” is neither the object named Tashi nor the mind naming it and thinking of it as “Tashi the boy.” The construct is the thing in between the object and the naming and thinking of it.

This construct, “Tashi the boy,” is something that exists, but before Tashi got the name, “Tashi the boy” didn’t exist. The fact that this construct didn’t pop up at birth is an indication that it isn’t something that exists from its own side through its own unique nature.

Furthermore, the fact that the father’s state of mind is what lends existence to the construct “Tashi the boy” leads us to say that the construct is simply a product of the constructing mind, or as we say in ACI classes, simply a projection of the mind – which is opposed to saying that it exists from its own side with its own unique nature.

Therefore the construct is a very different sort of thing than the object itself, which does have its own unique way of being from its own side. This is what it means when the Mind Only school says that constructs don’t “exist by definition.” Note that this Mind Only school way of defining the phrase “existing by definition” is very different from the way in which the Madhyamika Prasangika school would define it.

### **The Thing We Deny: A Construct that Exists by Definition**

There is no such thing as the construct “Tashi the boy” which could exist from its own side with its own unique nature. But if there were such a thing, that would be the “thing we deny,” the GAKJA, which is the self-nature of objects. It is the thing we are talking about when we speak of emptiness in the Mind Only school. The fact that a construct that exists uniquely from its own side doesn’t exist is the emptiness, or totality, of the object Tashi.

The imagination or mental picture of some construct that supposedly exists by definition (which is impossible) is another kind of construct (KUNTAK) that our mind can hold which does exist. So there are constructs related to things that do exist and constructs related to things that don't exist.

Regarding visual objects or other changing things, we cannot say that our construct of them comes from its own side, exists uniquely or by definition. The fact that we cannot say this is the totality of the object. The fact that the object doesn't have a self-existent construct applied to it, i.e., the impossibility or non-applicability of a self-existent construct, is the totality of the object. This is how dependently originating things act as the arena of the other two attributes.

Now you can apply this same line of thinking about the object Tashi, and the constructs and totality that apply to it, to all other changing objects in the universe.

It is difficult to understand intellectually why “the thing we think we see” – the construct related to the changing object which exists by definition, self-existently – doesn't exist at all; but if you do get it, then you have grasped the whole essence of the Mind Only school.

### **The Value of Changing Things as the Arena**

Is there a difference between the construct related to this *specific* back-scratching stick, and the construct related to all other unchanging things including empty space? Yes. It's more useful and easier to establish what emptiness means when you use a specific example, like the emptiness of the stick -- the fact that the construct related to stick, which exists by definition, doesn't exist. This is why we bring in changing objects to establish as the arena toward which the construct is applied. Otherwise, simply saying that empty space or constructs in general are unchanging things doesn't much help to establish the meaning of totality.

### **Specific Constructs as Necessary Accouterment for Establishing Emptiness**

Previously we divided constructs into those that do exist (the ones that don't exist by definition) and those that don't exist (the ones that do exist by definition). Now we can divide constructs into the specific construct related to the stick, which is a “necessary accouterment” or prerequisite for understanding the emptiness of the stick; and those general unchanging things like other constructs or empty space, which are not necessary accouterments for understanding the emptiness of the stick.

Je Tsongkapa indicates that the text focuses on the first kind of constructs, which relate to a specific object (p.85, L.7). He says, “Generally speaking there are many other kinds of concepts; for example, all archetypes (CHITSENS) and all those things like empty space and other kinds of unchanging things; but the *Sutra of the True Intent* doesn't mention these other general constructs because these general constructs are not necessary accouterment for understanding totality.”

The construct that specifically relates to a changing object is a necessary accouterment in two senses:

- **Positively**, the construct that *does* exist – the “stick” that the conceptualizing mind focuses on – is necessary for establishing the emptiness of the stick.
- **Negatively**, the construct that *doesn't* exist – the “stick” which exists by definition, from its own side – is necessary for establishing the thing we deny, the GAKJA.

So both constructs – those that do exist and those that don't exist – are necessary accouterment for understanding the emptiness of the object.

### **The Emptiness of the Features of the Stick**

So far we have been talking about the object in global terms; for example the stick as a whole. Can you apply all that we've said so far to the state of mind that is focusing on the specific features or characteristics of the stick? For example, “the stick's being impermanent, its being produced, its being a changing thing?” Yes, you can. “The state of mind that is creating a construct with regard to a feature of its object” (e.g., the stick's growing-ness, changing-ness, etc.) can be analyzed in exactly the same way.

The same division of constructs (described immediately above) into those that exist and those that don't exist can be applied to constructs that apply to the *features* of a changing object.

### **Summary of Establishing Emptiness through the Three Attributes**

The fact that the construct “Tashi” (which does exist, and doesn't come from its own side with a unique nature) didn't pop up out of the womb along with the baby at the moment of birth is an indication that the construct doesn't exist by definition, from its own unique way of being, and that it's only a construct of the mind. The fact that there could never be a construct that applies to the boy that exists by definition is the boy's emptiness – i.e., the fact that from the beginning, a construct that existed by definition could never apply to the boy. You could also describe the boy's emptiness as the fact that the construct that *does* exist doesn't come from any nature of its own.

Can the existence of these three attributes be established with regard to *unchanging* things as the arena? This gets a little bit tricky.

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All of the three attributes, and therefore all existing things, can be identified by describing the construct and the emptiness that apply to them.

Consider *the fact* that the stick is the object called “stick” (as opposed to the stick as the object called “stick”). This condition is itself not something that comes from its own side with a unique way of being. It doesn’t exist by definition. It’s a construct created by our imagination.

**How the Three Features Apply to Changing Things**

Je Tsongkapa now (p.22, L.16f.) gives his analysis of the *Sutra on the True Intent*, having previously quoted its passage. He says, “The ‘first three terms’ are referring to the object or basis upon which the constructing state of mind makes its constructions [i.e., the arena, the thing labeled in words and thoughts, and the produced thing], which is changing things. From this point on, Lord Buddha explains how the mind applies labels.” So first he talks about *what* is the basis of constructs, then he talks about *how* the mind does its labeling.

Lord Buddha examines form, or physical matter (SUK), to see how we come up with constructs based on both a) the main object as a whole and b) its characteristics: the particulars (JEDRAK) or features (KEPARS) of the whole (p.23, L.2). First of all, the sutra says that changing things have the three features:

4. They are the arena that gets labeled.
5. They are the thing that receives the name and the term.
6. They have the quality of produced things that grow from their causes and conditions (p. 23, L.6-8).

**How the Three Features Apply to Totality**

Emptiness, or “that very-ness” (DE NYI), is the “very nature” (NGOWO NYI) of constructs that apply to changing things; the very impossibility of their self-nature is the object upon which “total purity” (the direct perception) of emptiness is based (p.23, L.11).

Consider this construct: *the fact that the stick is the stick*. The fact that *this* fact doesn’t exist by definition is the emptiness of the stick. If this fact *did* exist by definition, that would be the thing we deny (GAKJA). When we successfully eliminate the existence of this impossible thing, we arrive at emptiness. This “lack of a self-nature of *objects*” (the *parts* of a person) is the highest form of emptiness in the Mind Only school. You can also consider the “lack of a self-nature of *a person*.” Some people say that the absence of a self-nature of a person is also emptiness, but other people say that this is “only *a kind* of emptiness,” just something that you *can call* emptiness. We will revisit this point when we address the first turning of the wheel.

It's hard to meaningfully name a thing that doesn't exist, but let's consider "the self-nature of objects" (the *parts* of a person). The DRUP in YONG-DRUP can refer to "all of existence," so "upon every existing object (DRUP) emptiness or totality rests."

### **Disputing the Omniscient Jonangba's Definition of Emptiness**

The omniscient Jonangba disagrees with Je Tsongkapa's explanation of how the sutra describes emptiness. Jonangba says emptiness is anything that is devoid of being constructs or changing things. Je Tsongkapa responds that the sutra directly states that emptiness is the fact that changing things don't possess a nature of having a self-existent construct apply to them, not that emptiness is simply the absence of a construct or of a changing thing (p.23, L14).

The sutra says, "emptiness is the fact that changing things *themselves* [DE NYI] do not possess a nature of having constructs that exist *themselves* [DE KONA]" The first "themselves" refers to changing things, and the second "themselves" refers to some construct that could exist by definition.

### **Two Ways to Think About Emptiness**

You can think about emptiness in two different ways. Consider these two examples:

1. The room is empty. There is nothing in it.
2. In a dark room, a rope is devoid of having a nature of being a snake.

Both examples represent an absence or voidness of something being there, but they have a different flavor. When you say a room is empty, it means there doesn't *exist* anything in the room. When you say a rope is not a snake, it means that the rope doesn't have a *quality* or identity of being a snake. If you like to obscure the meaning by using big words, you can say that the first is *adventitious* and the second *ontological*.

When we say changing things are devoid of having a nature of having self-existent constructs, we are using the second kind of example above (the rope is not a snake), saying that changing things do not have the identity or nature of having self-existent constructs that apply to them. So Je Tsongkapa says totality does not refer to a water pitcher not being in the room; it refers to the fact that a person doesn't have any "material existence" (DZE-YU) or doesn't have self-existent constructs that apply to the person.

### **Two Kinds of Constructs Useful for Understanding Emptiness**

Je Tsongkapa mentions (p.25, L.3) "at the two points of the text" (p.9, L.14 and p.22, L.7) that constructing constructs relating to the whole nature of the object, and constructing constructs relating to the features of the object, are the most useful for understanding



emptiness. Other constructs, such as empty space or archetypes, are less useful in understanding emptiness because they are not necessary accouterment for understanding what changing things are empty of.

You can now apply the three attributes to everything described in the first turning of the wheel:

3. The remaining four heaps
4. The twelve gates of the senses
5. The twelve links of dependent origination
6. The four kinds of sustenance
7. The six categories or the eighteen categories

Now you can apply each of the three attributes - changing things, constructs, and emptiness - to each of the subjects taught in the first turning of the wheel. You can also apply the three attributes to the remaining two categories: the four arya truths and the thirty-seven components of enlightenment.

For example when you can conceptualize the first arya truth of suffering as a whole or about its features (such as it is something which I must figure out is happening to me). Changing things relate to the first arya truth by virtue of the fact that it is a changing thing. Finally, the fact that the construct applied to it doesn't exist by definition is the totality of the first arya truth. You can do this with the other three arya truths in the same way. In fact, the same three attributes apply in this way to every existing object in the universe.

This application of the three attributes is how the Mind Only school explains what the Buddha had in mind when he said in the second turning of the wheel that nothing has a nature of existing by definition.

### **Applying the Three Attributes to Unchanging Things**

Constructs, dependent things and totality can be described clearly with reference to a *changing* thing. But then Lord Buddha said that these three attributes can be applied to all existing things, some of which are *unchanging*. So there must be some permutation or process by which you use the three groups to characterize *unchanging* things. Previously we applied the three attributes to one of the heaps: form (SUK). However, the “twelve doors of sense” (*ayadana*, the six consciousnesses and their six objects) described in the first turning include an unchanging thing (i.e., the object that the mental consciousness focuses on). Each changing object has its dependence, construct and totality; all three attributes apply to any changing thing. Geshe Thubten Rinchen asks, “How can you establish the attribute called ‘dependent things’ with regard to an unchanging thing like ‘object of the mind’?” The mind itself, or thought, is triggered by the objects of thought, and inside the category of those objects of thoughts is an unchanging thing. So how do you establish the existence of dependent things with regard to such an unchanging thing. Recall that constructs are related to dependent things which a) are the arena, b) are the object of the labeling process, and c) exhibit the qualities of a produced thing that comes into existence by causes and conditions. This will require some hard thought.

## **The Outcome of the Exchange**

The section coming up tomorrow is the profit of the transaction, or the outcome of the exchange, of the bodhisattva Dundam Yangdak Pak's question and the answer from Lord Buddha. The outcome is Lord Buddha's explanation of what he really had in mind:

8. We understand that the first and second turnings of the wheel were not intended to be taken literally.
9. The third turning of the wheel is the thing we can take literally (according to Mind Only).

**The Art of Interpretation, Geshe Thubten Rinchen, Sera Mey  
Class 9, Friday Morning, 10/9/98**

**The Outcome of the Exchange**

**DRUP DUN** We are now covering the fourth category of the Mind Only section come out meaning of the text, which is the conclusion or **outcome of the transaction of the exchange**. In a nutshell, according to the Mind Only school, the first two turnings of the wheel were intended by the Buddha to be taken figuratively and the third turning of the wheel was intended by the Buddha to be taken literally. Here he described what he really meant in speaking figuratively in the first two turnings when he adjusted his words to fit the capacity of the two respective audiences.

The two sections here are a) “setting forth the actual wording of the sutra,” followed by b) Je Tsongkapa’s explanation of the meaning of the sutra. In the sutra, the Buddha responds to the question put forth by the bodhisattva Dundam Yangdak Pak, regarding the blanket statements that everything in the categories mentioned in the first turning do exist by definition, and when he said in the second turning that nothing exists by definition.

In the third turning the Buddha clarifies to the bodhisattva Dundam Yangdak Pak:

7. Some of the categories mentioned in the first turning actually don’t exist by definition (but he said they did exist by definition during the first turning).
8. Some of the categories mentioned in the second turning actually do exist by definition (but he said they didn’t exist by definition during the second turning).

**Criteria for Literal and Figurative Interpretation of the Sutras**

Both the Madhyamika Prasangika and Mind Only schools believed that some parts of the sutras were intended by the Buddha to be taken literally, and some were intended to be taken figuratively, but the criteria for making the distinction differs greatly between the two schools:

Mind Only school believes that scriptures were intended to be taken literally if the precise wording used matches the Buddha’s intended meaning. Figurative speech is those words that were not intended to be taken on face value.

Madhyamika school believes that scriptures were intended to be taken literally if Lord Buddha was clearly referring to emptiness. Figurative speech is those words that did not clearly refer to emptiness.

For example, Lord Buddha said, “Anything that is produced by causes is changing and will eventually die.” The Mind Only school would take this statement literally, but the Madhyamika school would take it as figurative because it doesn’t clearly refer to emptiness.

In the sutra the bodhisattva has not yet explicitly said he understands which teachings were to be taken figuratively and which literally, but...

**SHU GYI** means **TOB GYI** Like an electric source running an electric fan,  
by  
implicitly by power of implication the bodhisattva's words "I get it"  
suggest that he understands the above  
interpretation of Lord Buddha's intent.

[In a related vein, SHU LA means "concomitant to..." For example, when your mind grasps that sound is impermanent, your mind almost simultaneously grasps that sound is not unchanging.]

### **Four Characterizations of the First and Second Turnings of the Wheel**

In this section of the sutra (p.27, L.3 – L.10) the bodhisattva presents four characterizations to explain why the first turning was spoken figuratively (up to NGE SU KYUPA LA, p.27, L. 10). He then uses these same four phrases to describe the second turning (up to KYUPA LA GYI, p.28, L.1). He then characterizes the third turning by taking the opposite of these four phrases (up to NGE SU KYPA MA LA SOS, p.28, L.9).

**LANA CHIPA** **Surpassable.** That which does have something better.  
High position

**KAB CHIPA** **There does exist a time.**  
Time position

**TRENGWAY DUN** **It is to be taken figuratively.**  
figuratively

**TSUPAY SHI** **It is a point of contention.**

The "Chinese commentator" (Wen Sik or Dzok Tsa) has interpreted parts of these four characterizations differently than Je Tsongkapa.

### **Where the Buddha Taught**

**TRANGSU MAWA RIDAK GYI NGAK** **Deer Park**, a quiet place away from the  
city, place of speech wild animals forest now called Sarnath, in the locale  
of Varanasa  
of great yogis (Benares). "Place of the speech of the  
great yogi [skt., *siddhi*]" is interpreted as  
meaning:

the place where Lord Buddha taught. It is said, “In this planet before Lord Buddha came down from Tushita paradise where he was living and exhibited or pretended to go through the twelve great deeds of a Buddha (e.g., his becoming enlightened was a play that he put on for others’ benefit), there were already living great *siddhis* who because of their practice in former lives had already reached nirvana. Some “self-made Buddhas” (which actually are neither self-made nor Buddhas) cremated their bodies and were able to flow up into the air and then drop down, hence -- place where the *siddhi* fell.” The meaning of this story is that the *siddhis* were telling the Buddha that he would be more needed in other regions because they were already highly realized here, and they hoped that other beings could be better helped, like Lobsang Chunsin going to teach in America where great teachers are really needed.

Geshe Thubten Rinchen says that some students get into Dharma because they understand its beauty and truth and value and benefit. Other kinds of students need something to attract them into Dharma like flying in the air or other amazing thing to lure them into real Dharma. This is one reason for a Lama to show miracles. A second reason to show miracles is to emanate different forms in order to trigger a thought in the mind of a student who is ready to get some important realization.

The *Sutra on the True Intent* says that the first turning was spoken for the benefit of those who have entered the way (TEKPA, or *Yana*) of the Listener. This has been interpreted in two different ways:

1. The lowest path of the three paths: Listener, as opposed to Self-made Buddhas and Mahayanas. The first two paths here are Hinayana (“lower way”), but Theravada may be a more complimentary term to use for these two.
2. The lower two Indian schools: people who had *philosophically* entered the way of the Abhidharma or Sutrists schools. Likewise, these two lower schools are Theravada. The Amdo books favor this interpretation and Geshe Thubten Rinchen tends to agree with them.

It is according to the people’s *philosophical* position, the people for whom the teachings were intended, that we characterize the Dharma taught to them as being hinayana or mahayana.

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Now for the third turning of the wheel we will present:

- The primary student for whom the teachings were intended.
- The primary subject matter, including the same four characteristics introduced in class six.

First, the *Sutra on the True Intent* will be presented by Je Tsongkapa (p.28, L.2-9). The same five elements are used as the basis of the discussion:

3. The nature of things is impossible.
4. The birth of things is impossible.
5. The stopping of things is impossible.
6. Things are total peace from the beginning.
7. Things have a nature of going completely beyond grief.

In the third turning these five elements are similarly discussed in terms of the first element and then the latter four elements being combined, but the *meaning* of these phrases must be adjusted for the third turning. In the second turning the five elements relate mainly to the fact that nothing exists by definition. However, in the third turning these five elements are applied differently, in terms of the three attributes (constructs, dependent things, and totality). For example, it is only constructs that don't have a nature, meaning that they don't exist by definition; and when we say that the birth of changing things doesn't exist by definition, it means "without its own causes and conditions."

So if you say in the third turning that changing things "don't have a nature" it means that they don't have a nature of arising without causes and conditions; you can't say that changing things don't exist by definition.

### **The Students for Whom the Third Turning Was Designed**

The third turning generally is understood to have been designed for students of "all the different ways," Hinayana and Mahayana. However, some scholars say this incorrectly implies that the content of the third turning is meant equally for students of both ways; they say the targeted students are all of the Mind Only students:

- The **more intelligent** Mind Only students can go directly into the second turning and correctly ascertain its meaning (as being figurative in some cases).
- The **less astute** Mind Only students first must study the third turning to learn what is to be taken literally and figuratively and then are able to go and correctly apply it to the first and second turnings.

Je Tsongkapa explains (p.89, L.6f.) that in the second turning, if you consider a dependent thing like the five heaps of a person and the construct applied to them: the fact that Tashi is the thing called "Tashi;" or "the fact that the fact that Tashi is the person to whom the construct 'Tashi' refers could exist by definition" is what is called a non-existent thing

(GAKJA) in the third turning. This GAKJA is described as “the self-nature of *things*,” of the *parts* of a person, as opposed to the “self-nature of persons” (as a whole).

Then in the third turning you look at things described in the first turning and say that the “lack of a self-nature of *persons*” with regard to changing things (called GANGSAK GYI DAK-ME) gets you to the emptiness of changing things described in the first turning.

### **The Turning of the Wheel of Fine Distinctions**

The phrase, “one who has entered all the ways” describes a person who uses the explanations presented in the third turning, also called “the turning of the wheel of fine distinctions.” This phrase refers to Lord Buddha’s making fine distinctions among the three attributes as to whether or not they exist by definition (p.90) – dependent things and totality do exist by definition, and constructs do not exist by definition.

So in the third turning, we reverse the four characterizations of the turnings of the wheel:

8. **LANA MA-CHIPA** **There is no higher** turning in terms of being more literal; the first and second turnings were intended to be taken figuratively.
9. The third turning “**leaves no opening**” in terms of being open to criticism – from the Mind Only point of view, that is (p.31, L.11). Madhyamikas take everything Buddha said in the second turning literally, and therefore believe that nothing exists by definition and in this sense are not masters of proper understanding who could expose the Mind Only interpretations.
10. The third turning is “**to be taken literally**,” meaning that Lord Buddha’s words perfectly match the intended meaning.
11. The third turning carries “**no basis of contention**,” because it can be taken literally in saying that constructs don’t exist by definition and totality and dependent things do exist by definition – so there’s nothing left to debate to about.

### **Chinese Commentary’s Interpretation of the Four Characterizations**

The Chinese commentary (spoken by Wen-sik) on the *Sutra of True Intent* describes the first and second turnings using the same four characterizations above. Je Tsongkapa likes how he describes the first characterization.

Wen-Sik’s description of the second characterization, that “there is an opening,” means there is a more special teaching that could be offered. Je Tsongkapa says that this interpretation is weak because there is then no significant difference between the meanings of the first and second characterizations.

The third characterization is described as meaning a) it does not teach emptiness, and b) it does teach something which exists.” Je Tsongkapa likes this because it resembles the Madhyamika view of emptiness, but in the Mind Only school (where we now are), this is an inappropriate definition of literal vs. figurative.

The fourth characterization is described as GULWA DANG CHEPA, which means “there is some debate about it.” Je Tsongkapa likes this phrasing, because the Tibetan translation of the sutra is something like, “the aspect that is not very apparent.” Emptiness has an aspect that is not apparent.

Je Tsongkapa calls the Chinese commentator, Wen-Sik “DE NE SUM” which means the three baskets or *tripitakas* (sutra, abhidharma and vinaya). So he’s calling Wen-Sik a master of the three baskets (p.30, L6). However, Je Tsongkapa then says that Wen-Sik failed to treat the four characterizations in their reversed form as applied to the third turning.

There is also an Indian commentary on the *Sutra on True Intent* written by YANGDAK DENPA. Je Tsongkapa doesn’t like this guy’s interpretations, and doesn’t address it much here. Je Tsongkapa now says that the subject matter of the third turning is exactly the same as the subject matter of the second turning of the wheel, which he has already addressed.

Then Je Tsongkapa comments on Lord Buddha’s statement about the people for whom the third turning was spoken (“for those who have entered all the ways”), whereas the first and second turnings were directed toward the lower and higher ways, respectively.

### **Revisiting the Four Characterizations of the Turnings of the Wheel**

[Note that the following two sections were presented at the beginning of class 12, but is inserted here.] “Relative to the third one” (SUMBA LA TU-NE), means to be figurative. The Chinese commentary only says that the first and second turnings are figurative, and therefore the other three characterizations also apply to these turnings. He appears to be following the Indian commentator when he says we can derive the other three characterizations by concentrating on the third characterization about these turnings being figurative. This is a genre of literature of which these notes you’re reading right now are an example! The quotation of the Indian pandit is, “Because the content of the second turning of the wheel is separate from the content of the first turning of the wheel, therefore the content of the second turning is not to be taken literally.” So he only mentions the third characterization. Je Tsongkapa only says that the Indian commentator appears unsatisfactory.

Geshe Thubten Rinchen quotes the Indian commentator as it appears in a book by Gungtang Jampayang, an Amdo scholar, on the art of interpretation, which is literally called *To Compose, Continuation* (TSOM-TRO), meaning he passed away before he finished writing it. In Gungtang Jampelyang’s book, the Indian commentary by Yangdak Denpa is called JE-JAN, literally meaning, “to forget - to purify,” meaning “notes I took so I wouldn’t forget.”

Gungtang Jampelyang then says, “there is something higher than this” (LA-CHIPA), because the difference between the first and second turnings can be a bone of contention between the two hinayana schools it is described as “there is a bone of contention.” The text then says “there is an opening because of *the oneness of the way*” (TARDU TEKPA CHIK), a phrase used in the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras to indicate that all of the ways are one way. To get to Buddhahood you have to get up to the third (Mahayana) track eventually anyway. This is especially true in the second turning. But in the third turning it is said that in the end there



are three separate tracks to get to Buddhahood, so “there is an opening” for dispute on this point.

Geshe Thubten Rinchen’s take on why Je Tsongkapa says that the Indian’s comments are unsatisfactory is that if the first two turnings cover the hinayana and mahayana ways, respectively, then saying that “there is a higher way” could only refer to the tantric way. But it’s against Buddhist protocol to mention secret teachings during an open teaching, and this is probably why Je Tsongkapa says the Indian commentator is unsatisfactory.

Geshe La also says that the “basis of contention” is whether or not it all boils down to one *yana* in the end. But the point of the *Sutra on True Intent* focuses on the three attributes rather than on the distinction between the yanayas, so this is probably another reason why Je Tsongkapa finds this characterization to be unsatisfactory.

### **Je Tsongkapa’s View of the Chinaman’s Second Characterizations**

Je Tsongkapa says that “our own system” is as explained before. The four characterizations of the third turning are exactly opposite to those applied to the first and second turnings (p. 31, L4-9).

The Chinese master explains the second characterization – “there will be an opening” – in two ways:

9. “There will be an opening for destruction or blowing away,” meaning if you took the first two turnings literally there would be an opening for someone to wipe your understanding. So he would say that there is no opening to be wiped out if you take the third turning as literal. Je Tsongkapa likes this first explanation.
10. “There will be an opening for something more perfect to come later.” Je Tsongkapa doesn’t like this explanation because when you apply its opposite to the third turning, “a perfect one to come later on,” implies that there is a fourth turning that comes after the third turning, which is not the case.

### **Defining the Third Turning of the Wheel**

Now “this one” (DI-NI, p.30, L.12) refers to the third turning, and Je Tsongkapa refers to it as *the commentary on my true thought of the turning of the wheel* (KORLO GONDREL). There is a big debate about what is the third turning of the wheel:

- Some speak of “the first turning of the wheel which relates to the *first outcome of the exchange*,” “the second turning of the wheel which relates to the *second outcome of the exchange*,” and “the third turning of the wheel which relates to the *third outcome of the exchange*,” meaning **the outcome of the exchange**, or the profit of the transaction between the bodhisattva and Lord Buddha in which we determined that the first and second turnings were figurative and the third turning was literal.
- Other people say that **the sutra itself** (DO DE GONDREL) is the third turning of the wheel. However this sutra has ten chapters and we have been referring thus far only to

the chapter called “the chapter spoken at the request of the bodhisattva Dundam Yangdak Pak.

So some scholars limit the third turning to only the specific chapter in the sutra, and others say the third turning refers to *any* other teaching of the Buddha that has a similar content, which concurs with the conclusions of that sutra chapter. Je Tsongkapa says that any speech of the Buddha qualifies as the third turning if it divides reality into dependent things, constructs and totality and says that two exist by definition and one doesn't.

The third turning (KORLO SUMPÄ) is also sometimes called the “last turning” (KORLA TAMA). The wording “last turning” suggests the last thing taught chronologically, but Je Tsongkapa says that not all of the last teachings of the Buddha qualify as the third or last turning. Only those teachings that similarly explain the three attributes as above qualify as the third turning.

### **Three Names of the Three Turnings**

The Chinese commentary uses these three names:

1. The first turning, *in which the Buddha taught the four arya truths*. This name refers to the subject matter taught in the first turning.
2. The second turning, *in which the Buddha said that nothing has any nature or any characteristics of its own* (meaning nothing exists by definition).
3. The third turning, *in which we ascertain the ultimate*. Ultimate here refers to emptiness itself.

Je Tsongkapa agrees with the name of the third turning, but he would prefer to call it the third turning of the wheel *in which fine distinction are made*. We'll stop here at p.32, L.4.

### **Three Great Convocations**

You *can* accurately say that the three turnings generally refer to three different historical periods of time in the Buddha's life in chronological sequence, but that is not the main point. The emphasis is that when Lord Buddha came to this world he gave *three convocations*, major teaching events to huge collections of people, so it generally refers to these three gatherings and the time periods surrounding them.

The location of the first turning was Sarnath in Varanasi. The locale for the second turning was Vulture's Peak, in Rajugira. The location for third turning is said to have taken place in a town called Yang Ma-Chen, which is believed to be near Nepal, Sravastavath or something like that.

### **The Intended Audience for the Three Turnings**

In both the first and third turnings, the disciples for whom the *wording* was intended and the disciples for whom the *content* or *meaning* was intended are the same group of people (hinayanists and students of all ways, respectively). However, in the second turning the *wording* was intended for the Madhyamika Prasangika disciples, but the *meaning* of the words was intended for Mind Only students. So Mind Only scholars say that the second turning was really designed for their school because they have the inside scoop, the true intended meaning which is figurative. Only the literal wording was designed for Prasangikas.

**The Art of Interpretation, Geshe Thubten Rinchen, Sera Mey  
Class 11, Saturday Morning, 10/10/98**

**How Can the Three Attributes Apply to an Unchanging Thing?**

We are now exploring a tangent that came up yesterday. The category of objects that the mind can hold includes unchanging things, so how can you establish constructs, dependent things, and totality with regard to an unchanging thing, especially if one of the qualities of a dependent thing is that it is a produced thing? This question raises an inherent problem. Consider the clues described below:

1. Dependent things can be described positively, as coming from their causes and conditions.
2. Emptiness is a negative thing – an absence of a self-existent construct that could apply to a changing thing.
3. Dependent things have a nature of being a produced thing.
4. Lord Buddha said you should take changing things as a basis to establish emptiness.
5. The quality of dependence somehow must refer to all existing objects, some of which are unchanging.

**1. Describing Dependent Things Positively**

We said previously (p.11) that when the Buddha said in the second turning, “nothing has a nature of growing,” he was referring to dependent things, or things that grow. Dependent things can be described either positively (they are produced because they depend on their causes and conditions) or negatively (they are not such that they don’t come from their causes and conditions).

**2. Emptiness Is a Negative Thing**

To really understand emptiness you must take as your basis a changing object, and eliminate the self-existent construct that could never apply to it. Recall that the omniscient Jonangwa had said (p.14) that emptiness is a positive thing, because your conceptualization of it is of a positive thing. Je Tsongkapa responded that first you focus on a produced object, then you think about it in terms of a self-existent construct, then you demonstrate that this self-existent construct called the “self-nature of objects” could never apply to this changing thing; so totality is the simple absence of that non-existent quality of self-nature about the changing object. Je Tsongkapa is adamant that you arrive at the emptiness of something by canceling a self-existent thing that never could have existed in the first place with reference to a changing object (p.14), so emptiness must be a negative thing.

**4. Using Changing Things To Establish Emptiness**

To establish emptiness you have to refer to a basis of changing things, which is a quote from the *Sutra on the True Intent* (p.23, L.13). First you take a changing thing, a thing which

comes from its causes and conditions, then you identify and cancel a self-existent construct that could never apply to it in the first place.

### **5. The Quality of Dependence Must Refer To All Existing Objects**

The text says that the three attributes apply to all existing things (p.25, L.5), like the remaining four heaps, the twelve doors of the sense, the twelve links of dependent origination, the four kinds of sustenance, the six categories and the eighteen categories. Some members of these groups are unchanging things: for example, the third arya truth of the cessation of suffering. So how do you apply the three attributes if one of them is dependent things which are changing things which exhibit the nature of a produced thing? It's also a problem with the door of the sense, which is the object of the mind, which includes unchanging things. The dharmadhatu, or the object of the mind, also includes unchanging things.

### **Similar Status of Dependent Things and Their Emptiness**

The Madhyamika Prasangika school (p.120, L.3) says, "If dependent things didn't exist by nature, then their emptiness also couldn't exist by nature." They say that even the Mind Only school would agree with this, and the Mind Only school does indeed believe this. They quote Arya Nagarjuna's root verses on emptiness. He uses the term "produced things" which is equal to saying "changing things." He says, "If produced things didn't exist by nature, then non-produced things [meaning the emptiness that is a quality of the produced thing] could never exist by nature." Then Je Tsongkapa quotes a sutra, "If physical matter itself didn't exist self-existently, then the very nature of physical matter [i.e., its emptiness] also couldn't exist self-existently."

Now consider the door of sense that is the object of the mind, which is an unchanging thing. It doesn't exist by definition because it is a kind of construct. So we are in a checkmate position:

- Either you have to say that this unchanging door of sense does exist by definition, because its emptiness exists by definition, which is a problem because it is a construct, which the Mind Only school says can't exist by definition.
- Or you will have to say that the emptiness that applies to it doesn't exist by definition, because the unchanging door of sense doesn't exist by definition, which is a problem because the Mind Only school says emptiness *does* exist by definition.

So the Mind Only school appears to be facing an irreconcilable inconsistency.

### **Various Attempted Resolutions**

Consider empty space (NAMKA). It is an unchanging construct. Can we describe its totality even though we don't have a changing thing to serve as a basis? Some scholars suggest that the state of mind that is perceiving empty space (which is a changing thing) should be linked

or joined with empty space, and then you have a changing object to serve as the basis of the emptiness of empty space.

A second group of thinkers says there is a state of mind that looks at empty space and focuses on its subtle self-nature (of objects), meaning the subtle form of a self-nature, which doesn't exist at all. This state of mind therefore would be simultaneously grasping to a subtle self-nature of the *state of mind* that is perceiving empty space. They say that this interpretation contradicts the first scholars.

The state of mind that realizes that a water pitcher is changing instant by instant damages the state of mind that holds the pitcher to be unchanging. Now consider the valid perception (TSEMA) of a water pitcher – you see a pitcher standing here. If you now focus on *the perception of* the pitcher and incorrectly see this perception as an unchanging thing, are you thereby thinking of the pitcher as an unchanging thing? No. You can mis-understand the changing nature of the state of mind that holds the pitcher, but this doesn't invalidate your *tsema* of the pitcher itself. Therefore, it is not a valid solution to link the object of empty space with the perception of empty space, so the second group of thinkers has successfully refuted the first group.

When you are trying to understand the emptiness of a water pitcher, you're not really looking for a positive thing. You're actually trying to remove a mistaken idea of a pitcher as being self-existent. When you damage the idea of the water pitcher as self-existent, are you thereby also damaging the idea that *the state of mind* that holds the pitcher as self-existent is itself self-existent? No, at least not directly. So when you're trying stop the state of mind that holds space to be self-existent, you are not also thereby trying to stop the state of mind that holds that the perception of the water pitcher is self-existent (p.25).

A third group of thinkers supports the first group and criticizes the second group's position, saying it is like a Tibetan guy who places a peace offering to a harmful spirit in the western door when the harmful spirit actually is hanging around the eastern door. It's a misapplication. You shouldn't put the peace offering in the wrong door; rather you should go to find what it is that people tend to think is self-existent, which is dependent things (p.92, L. 5). In other words, people naturally tend to take changing things as self-existent, and trying to understand emptiness as it relates to an unchanging thing will not be an effective approach for damaging the tendency to hold things as self-existent. They are saying that it's not very useful to focus on the problem of establishing emptiness with regard to a basis of an unchanging thing.

### **Je Tsongkapa's Resolution**

Je Tsongkapa says it's okay to go ahead and try to establish emptiness with regard to a basis of an unchanging thing, but that in doing so you shouldn't try to link a changing thing to it – after all, the emptiness of space is not the same thing as the emptiness of the perception of space. These are two different emptinesses. Therefore, each existing object in the world, changing or unchanging, has its own unique emptiness.

The text now says that “as you did before” you must establish the object you are focusing on with regard to the three attributes (p.25, L.9). Some say that “as you did before” refers to the three features of dependent things (the arena, thing labeled, and produced thing). Other people say that “as you did before” means that you must establish the three attributes with regard to the new object you are considering such as the first arya truth of suffering.

**The Art of Interpretation, Geshe Thubten Rinchen, Sera Mey  
Class 12, Saturday Afternoon, 10/10/98**

**The Basis for Distinguishing What Is Figurative or Literal**

We will now address a) the basis or foundation of the distinction between what is to be taken to be figurative or literal, and b) the criteria used to make that distinction (p.32, L4).

The **speech of the Buddha** is the thing that is to be taken figuratively or literally. The combined quantity of teachings of Lord Buddha contains the objects that must be distinguished. There are three groups of teachings:

1. Teachings where Lord Buddha said all of these things *do* exist by definition.
2. Teachings where Lord Buddha said all of these things *do not* exist by definition.
3. Teachings where Lord Buddha *made fine distinctions* about whether or not each of the attributes discussed do or do not exist by definition.

**The Method for Distinguishing What Is Figurative or Literal**

The method used by the Mind Only school for distinguishing whether something is to be taken figuratively or literally is whether or not the Buddha made fine distinctions. In the third turning he made the fine distinction that changing things and totality do exist by definition, and constructs don't exist by definition. However, in the first and second turnings he made blanket statements about all three attributes existing or not existing by definition, respectively, and so he was not making these fine distinctions. So these first two turnings are not to be taken literally because he didn't make these fine distinctions.

**The First Outcome of the Exchange**

We have now come to the first outcome of the exchange which resulted from Lord Buddha's answers to the bodhisattva, which has led to a clear understanding of the *basis* (Buddha's speech in each of the three turnings) and the *method* (whether or not fine distinctions were made) for determining whether or not to take Lord Buddha's teachings figuratively or literally.

Therefore, you can describe the three turnings of the wheel as being understood from the point of view of someone who has reached the first outcome of the exchange. However, not everything that was taught during the historical first turning of the wheel qualifies as material for the first turning of the wheel considered from the point of view of someone who has reached the first outcome of the exchange.

During the first period of his teaching, Lord Buddha first taught the "circle of five (disciples)" certain advices of behavior to be followed by an ascetic who has left the home life. For example, you should wear your robes in a neat fashion in order to not cause lay observers to have doubts or aversions toward the Dharma. These advices that were taught



during the first period do *not* qualify as the first turning because they clearly are not content for which we have to decide whether or not they should be taken literally or figuratively. These obviously are meant to be taken literally.

Je Tsongkapa says these advices about how to wear your robes were not something about which the bodhisattva Dundam Yangdak Pak was having a problem and approached the Buddha for clarification (p.33, L.1-2). The material that qualifies as the first turning of the wheel from the point of view of a person who has reached the first outcome of the exchange must be content about which the Buddha said in the first turning that it exists by definition.

Likewise, Lord Buddha taught certain advices in the second period that were not emphasized as not existing by definition. Je Tsongkapa doesn't give a specific example here. However, if you want an example, there is a Sutra called *Journey to Lanka* in which the Buddha taught advices that wouldn't have raised any philosophical problem for the bodhisattva Dundam Yangdak Pak.

In the final period of his life, Lord Buddha likewise taught certain advices which don't qualify as the third turning of the wheel from the viewpoint of one who has reached the first outcome of the exchange. For example, in the *Brief Presentation of Vinaya* (p.33, L.9), as he approached his final nirvana, he spoke about monastic morality "in keeping with what is proper." This phrase refers to the fact that Lord Buddha will no longer be around to consult regarding monastic behavior, but he taught it constantly during his life; so here he summarizes all of his monastic teachings as:

1. **CHOKPA or RUNG-TUNG** Behavior that **you must do**, the things that are advised. advised to do appropriate to do The book is titled "*In Keeping with what Is Appropriate.*"
2. Behavior that **you must not do**, the things that are prohibited.
3. Behavior that you may do or not do, based on your **discretion**.

## **Two Goals of the Third Turning of the Wheel**

Je Tsongkapa asks rhetorically, “Well then, what was *this* trying to accomplish in dividing things into figurative and literal?” (p.33, L.10) The word “this” refers to the chapter in the *Sutra on the True Intent* in which the bodhisattva asks and gets his answer, meaning the third turning of the wheel.

The first goal of the chapter is:

1. It makes a distinction between what is figurative and literal so we can understand that the first turning of the wheel is not intended to be taken literally.
2. It demonstrates that the second turning of the wheel also is not to be taken literally.
3. It demonstrates that this chapter, which is the third turning, itself *should* be taken literally.

The second goal of the chapter is to make the distinction with regard to the way the three attributes exist. So the second function of the third turning of the wheel is **to give disciples a very clever and effective method for seeing emptiness directly** by understanding:

1. Dependent things, which are changing things.
2. Constructs about the changing thing that don't exist: the subtle self-existence “of objects.”
3. The non-existence of this self-existent construct, which is the emptiness of the changing thing.

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We continue with Je Tsongkapa's statement about the purposes of the *Sutra on the True Intent* (p.33, L10):

1. To explain how the first and second turnings were intended to be taken figuratively and the third turning was to be taken figuratively.
2. To give students a means for perceiving emptiness by understanding the relationships between the three attributes: dependent things, constructs and totality.

**Misunderstanding Buddha Nature as Being a Self-Nature of Persons**

Other scholars such as Jonampa and his followers, as well as a Sakya master, Torbowa, agree that the third turning was spoken literally, but they view the third turning as being *all* the things that Lord Buddha taught during the third period of his life, rather than only that speech spoken in the third period that we defined above as being "the first outcome of the exchange" (p.34, L2f.). So these two scholars must say that everything taught in the third period is to be taken literally. The problem is that Lord Buddha at certain times during the final period of his life suggested, when talking to non-Buddhists, or those of lower capacity, that there *is* a self-nature of persons. We believe he spoke in this way merely to attract them to the Dharma, but didn't mean it literally. Je Tsongkapa indicates this strategy of Lord Buddha with the phrase, "certain other [non-Buddhist] schools who believed in a self-nature, in order to guide them..."

Lord Buddha's words are recorded in a sutra called *Essence of the Ones Gone To Bliss [Deshek Ngingpo] Showing the Thing which Is Unchanging or Stable and Exists Truly*. The phrase, "essence of the ones gone to bliss" refers to the *Buddha nature* of all beings, which is mainly the emptiness of your mind, which means that you have the potential to become enlightened. However, these scholars misunderstand this phrase to mean that there is some Buddha that exists already inside of you, which is close to saying that there is a self-nature of a person, some real soul or spirit or permanent inner being or self-nature which is part and parcel (RANG-CHESU) with your being. This is also a common misconception in the West today.

So Jonampa says that in the third turning Lord Buddha made the distinction that the only thing that really exists is emptiness or totality, which exists truly; and all the other things in the universe are not self-existent and don't exist at all (p.34, L.5). In addition, the great Sakya scholar, Torbowa, who like Jonangpa hailed from the Tsang region, north of Lhasa, which is also Geshe Thubten Rinchen's home state, was a great master of the ancient classical commentaries (the TENG YUR). He had intended to refute Jonangpa, but later became convinced by Jonangpa's followers and became one of his strongest proponents.

The *Sutra of the Essence of the Sugatas* does say "that which is stable and unchanging truly exists," and it seems to say that there is a Buddha inside of all of us, but you can't take this

literally. If there really was a self-existent Buddha inside of you it would be much easier to reach enlightenment, and you wouldn't have to make great efforts to study and meditate. We are constantly repeating our dedication prayer, composed by Arya Nagarjuna, "may I be able to one by one collect the merit and wisdom..." these two great energies required to turn yourself into an enlightened being. If there were some pre-fabricated Buddha inside of us we wouldn't need this gradual approach of the two collections.

So obviously we have to take this sutra figuratively. So when the Buddha said you have a Buddha nature inside of you, what he really had in mind (GONG SHI) was that you have the emptiness of a Buddha's mind. This is the Mind Only school's interpretation. It's important for Westerners to be able to correctly debate these points and correctly interpret the apparently contradictory scriptures.

### **Objections by Rinchen Tok**

Another debator, Yang Drokpa, Rinchen Tok, who was probably a Sakya scholar (who were mentioned in class one) in the "Offering of Praise" referred to as "other groups trying to use this reasoning") claimed two problems (p.34, L.9):

1. If you say the distinctions made in the third outcome of the exchange are correct, you must accept Jonangpa's position that everything the Buddha taught in the last period was meant to be taken literally. So it can't be correct to accept the distinctions made in the third turning about what should be taken literally and figuratively.
2. Rinchen Tok therefore suggests that we just switch the middle and the last turnings of the wheel. If you consider each subsequent turning of the wheel to be higher and more sophisticated, which would be natural, then we should consider the second turning of the wheel to be last because it seems to have the highest meaning.

### **The Sutra Requested by the King**

A sutra requested by the king named Lord of All Secret Words said that the turnings of the wheel should be ordered by increasing refinement of the subject matter. Rinchen Tok also says that we should follow the Buddha's statements in this regard.

We say that it's not necessary to follow this ordering because in the *Sutra on the True Intent* Lord Buddha described the three turnings. Rinchen Tok says that "second" refers to the "second belief system," meaning Mahayana belief system. However, Rinchen is correct in pointing out that the second turning is the most supreme expression. The text says that Lord Buddha's teachings on emptiness in the second turning are "most *exceedingly* amazing and wonderful" (p.27, L.14) but the first turning is described as being only "amazing and wonderful."

The order of the three turnings presented in the sutra requested by the king is exactly the same as the order of the three scopes as presented in the Lam Rim: for those of lesser (first turning), medium (second turning) and greater scope (third turning). Geshe Thubten Rinchen

notes that it's not strictly true to say that those people following the lesser ways are not Mahayana because a person in first grade may have big ambitions for the future. So you can say that all three turnings of the wheel are designed for the same person because as their capacity increases in their life they are ready for higher teachings, just as the Lam Rim indicates. This is why the Mind Only school says that it's not necessary to follow the ordering given by the sutra requested by the king.

In summary, Je Tsongkapa refutes Jonangpa and Rinchen Tok by sayings that they haven't carefully understood Lord Buddha's meaning in the *Sutra on the True Intent* and are just focusing on the words "first, second, and third" turnings (p.34, L11).

### **Characteristics of Lord Buddha's Speech**

The speech of the Buddha is "*amazing*" (NGO TSA NGULCHU) because his **motivation** is only love and compassion, for others' benefits. He only speaks at all if he can benefit people who can be helped. Then regarding **content**, Lord Buddha is omniscient and knows of what he speaks perfectly. These characteristics of Buddha's speech are said to be *causal*.

The speech of the Buddha is "*wonderful*" (ME TU CHUNGWA), indicating something "set apart" as being something higher or extraordinary because if a disciple follows his words perfectly they will definitely reach their **goals**. Therefore this characteristic will bring your desired *results*.

It is important to cover all of this detail because we are going back to America and will be questioned on the meanings of all the teachings.

### **Students of Sharpest Powers**

All of the Buddha's teachings are equally cool, but in the second turning of the wheel Lord Buddha used "unlimited" methods for explaining emptiness, using an infinite number of reasonings and angles. This is why we say the second turning was designed for students of sharpest powers.

When the intricate multi-faceted arguments from the second turnings are presented to the sharpest students they suddenly understand emptiness. Students with lower mental powers would get confused by these highest teachings.

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**Arya Asanga Quotes Lord Buddha on the Five Characteristics of Emptiness**

When Arya Asanga presents simple points in his huge works, the *Abbreviation* (DUWA) and *Bodhisattva Bhūmis* (JANGSA), he just refers to the *Sutra on the True Intent*. On difficult points, he refers to these two very books

Je Tsongkapa introduces Arya Asanga's *Abbreviation*, "You can understand the ultimate [emptiness] as having **five characteristics** as described in the *Sutra on the True Intent*." Arya Asanga uses four different chapters from the *Sutra on the True Intent* in order to describe the Mind Only school view of emptiness (the first and second characteristics are from one chapter and the remaining three characteristics are each from separate chapters):

1. **Beyond description.** Emptiness can't be described in words. This refers to the fact that no one who has seen emptiness directly can adequately describe this experience in words to others who haven't seen it.
2. **Non-duality.** Emptiness is described in two ways in the Mind Only school.
  - a. Firstly, the fact that self-existent constructs don't apply to changing things, as above.
  - b. Secondly, when your mind perceives an object – for example, your eye becomes aware of a water pitcher – then your mind and the water pitcher are "devoid of having any separate substance" – meaning that they come from the same karmic seed. Therefore, the mind and the object it perceives are *empty of* having any quality of not coming from separate karmic seeds. The mind and the object are said to be "one substance" (DZE-CHIK) and are non-dual.
3. **Perfectly beyond ordinary thinkers** (TOGEWA). *Togewa* literally means a logician, but here it refers to a person who doesn't clearly understand emptiness, and so is an ordinary thinker.
4. **Beyond being separate or not separate.** A specific object and its emptiness are inseparable, or of one essence (NGOWO CHIK), and so in this sense they are not separate. Conversely, they *are separate* because the *basis* of emptiness and its emptiness *itself* are not the same thing –they can be distinguished conceptually.
5. **One taste** (RO CHIK). Every object around us has its own emptiness and the bases of these emptiness are all different things; but each of the emptinesses are exactly the same in the sense of being the simple absence of the *gakja*, a self-existent object (which doesn't exist). So all emptinesses taste exactly the same.

**Arya Asanga Relies on the Sutra on the True Intent**

The *Abbreviation* also says that you can understand the "three attributes" [CHU KYI TSEN-NYI] by referring to the *Sutra on the True Intent*. "If you were to see [1.] the real nature [of the emptiness] of phenomena, you would be able to remove all [2.] the mentally afflicted side

of your being, and you would reach that place called [3.] liberation.” So Geshe Thubten Rinchen says that Arya Asanga’s three characteristics are emptiness, mentally afflicted things, and liberation.

Arya Asanga then says, “When we discuss the three attributes that things have of not having any nature” (CHU KYI NGOWO NYI MEPA KYI TSEN-NYI), we go back to the *Sutra on the True Intent* and changing things, constructs, and emptiness. Je Tsongkapa’s point is to strongly emphasize that Arya Asanga in three different cases is relying heavily on the *Sutra of True Intent* to write his great works (p.35, L.3-11), discussing the three attributes and the three lacks of a self-nature, with regard to changing things.

### **Eight Consciousnesses and Three Tracks**

Arya Asanga also draws from this sutra when presenting the eight different kinds of consciousnesses and the definite number of different tracks.

There are two different camps in the Mind Only school: “those who follow scripture” and “those who follow logic” (LUNG RIK). Those “who follow scripture” believe that consciousness can be divided into eight categories. In addition to the five consciousness of the physical senses and the sixth of the mind, we add:

1. A **storehouse or foundation consciousness** (KUNSHI NAMPAR SHEPA) where the karmic seeds (BAKJAKS) are stored. In the Middle Way school, when you do some good or bad karma, some kind of energy, seed, or potential (BAKJAK) is planted in your mind stream, or mental consciousness – in the sixth consciousness which is the awareness of your thoughts. But the Mind Only school posits a separate foundation consciousness in which these potentialities are stored and carried around with you.
2. The **mental affliction consciousness**. This is very similar to what in the Middle Way school we call the “tendency to hold *the person* as self-existent.” This consciousness focuses on the foundation consciousness (above) and says “this is a self-existent person.” It’s the state of mind that sees the essence of a person as being the self-existent foundation consciousness which exists from its own side. This is a mistaken understanding (LOK-SHE).

Regarding the three paths, as previously discussed, in the end there is only one track, according to the Middle Way. But this camp of the Mind Only school believes that finally there are still three distinct ways or paths to liberation.

Je Tsongkapa’s style is to focus on the difficult points and not repeat lots of easy details that could be found elsewhere. So he only mentions but doesn’t enumerate and explain the eight consciousnesses, five characteristics of emptiness, etc.

Arya Asanga’s great writings include:

1. **JANG-SA**  
bodhisattvas,

**Bodhisattva Bhumi**. This describes the levels of  
especially the chapter on “thusness.”

2. **DE NAMPAR APA DANG...** **The Exposition** (which literally means, “setting forth that...”).

3. **The Summary of the Ways.**

All of these books focus on emptiness with regard to the Mind Only school’s beliefs, and Arya Asanga in each of these books relies on the *Sutra of True Intent*.

## **The Five Great Books of Maitreya**

The five great books were dictated by Maitreya and recorded by Arya Asanga:

1. *Ornament of Realizations (Abhisamalamkara),*
2. *Higher Line (Uttara Tantra).*
3. *Ornament of the Sutras (DO DE GYEN, Sutralamkara,)*
4. *Distinguishing Between the Middle and the Extremes,* and
5. *Making Distinctions About the Realm of Dharma,* which refers to emptiness itself.

Je Tsongkapa mentions that the first two books have been interpreted as representing beliefs of the Middle Way school. The latter three books present the Mind Only view. Arya Asanga, Master Vasubhandu, and Stirumati (LO DU DENPA) draw from these three books to comment on the Mind Only view, and Je Tsongkapa emphasizes that Arya Asanga and the entire Mind Only commentarial tradition uses as their foundation the *Sutra on the True Intent*. When Je Tsongkapa states, “and so we can conclude when Master Asanga made his presentation of the Mind Only school...” he is implying that Master Asanga is really a Middle Way Consequence proponent. However, the Mind Only school claims that Master Asanga is really a Mind Only proponent.

## **Outline of the Presentation on the Two Extremes**

Je Tsongkapa’s next big subject (p.36, L.4) is the Mind Only school’s presentation of the two extremes or “cliffs” (TA):

1. **KORNDEP** To **discount** or under-rate something, to say that something doesn’t exist discounting when it really does exist.
2. **DRONDOK** To **over-rate** something, to say that something does exist when it really over-rating doesn’t exist.

Je Tsongkapa first describes the outline of the upcoming presentation on the two extremes:

1. A general presentation of how we avoid the two extremes, including Arya Asanga’s approach taken in his *Abbreviation* and in his *Bodhisattva Buhumis*, and in other important texts.



2. “Taking special pains to refute the cliff called over-rating,” which relates to the subtle form of the self-nature of objects.
3. Correctly distinguishing teachings as being meant to be figurative or literal.

### **Bodhisattva Bhumi’s Description of Avoiding the Two Extremes**

Je Tsongkapa now presents the description from Arya Asanga’s *Bodhisattva Bhumis* (p.36, L. 11-14) of what it means to discount something and to over-rate something, and then how to avoid discounting and over-rating. You have to make a clear distinction between the wrong view – the extreme, or edge of the cliff (TA), which you are trying to avoid, and the *state of mind* that is holding that wrong view.

First consider the extreme of over-rating, or seeing something that is not there. This over-rating comes in two flavors:

1. **Existence.** Saying that something that doesn’t exist *is* there, in the sense of *existence*. It either is present or is absent.
2. **Identity.** Saying that something *is* a certain way, or has a certain characteristic or quality that it really doesn’t have. The flavor here is the object’s being somebody or something in terms of its *identity* (versus whether or not it exists at all). It *is* present, but does it exist *in a certain way*, for example, is the rope a snake or is it not a snake?

To understand the extreme of over-rating, you also must distinguish between:

1. The **state of mind** that thinks something is there when it’s really not there.
2. The **object** you thought was there, but really doesn’t exist. This one is the extreme of over-rating. So the extreme, or cliff edge, is the object (which is non-existent) that is held by the over-rating state of mind

The same pattern holds for the extreme of discounting. There are two flavors:

1. **Existence.** Saying that something *isn’t* there when it really is there.
2. **Identity.** Saying that something *is not* something, meaning that it doesn’t have the characteristics or quality that you think it has.

Likewise, you must distinguish between:

1. the **state of mind** that that denies that something is there; and
2. the non-existence of the **object or quality** that you thought wasn’t there, but really is there.

In both discounting and over-rating, the phrase, “edge of the cliff” is a code that indicates the object to which the mistaken state of mind is grasping to as existing, when that object doesn’t even exist; or for the non-existence of that object to which the mistaken mind thinks is not there, when it really is there. So the edge of the cliff is a code word that refers to a thing that never existed in the first place and never could exist.

## The Etymology of Over-Rating and Discounting

**DRON DOK** **Over-rating**, or imputing existence when really there is nothing there.

bird's feather to apply you  
 If you fashion a bamboo shoot into the body of an archer's arrow, then you  
 feather "glue" or "apply" a bird's feather onto the fashioned bamboo so as to guide it in flight. So DRONDOK means to turn bamboo and a feather into an archer's arrow, meaning to creating something that previously didn't exist.

**KORN DEP** **Discounting**, or thinking that something isn't there when it that really is  
 to dispatch there. The verb KORWA means to dispatch a letter or package into someone else's care. If a letter has been dispatched, then there is nothing there any more with you.

Arya Asanga in the *Bodhisattva Bhūmis* asks, "Well, what's *it* like?" (p.36, L.12). Je Tsongkapa says *it* refers to emptiness as presented in the Mind Only school. Master Asanga says you have to learn to eliminate the tendency that over-rates, or imputes existence onto the *gakja*; and discounts, or says something isn't there when it really is there (i.e., emptiness, also known as the "true meaning," YANGDAKPA).

## Two Kinds of People with Mistaken Views

You can characterize people into those who over-rate things that really aren't there, and those who discount things that really are there. According to the Mind Only school:

1. **Detailists** (*Abhidharma* or *Vaibhashika*) and **Sutrists** (schools of logic and perceptual theory), which are the first two great schools of ancient India, are **over-raters**. They say something is there when it really isn't there. For example, they would say that "the fact that Tashi is the thing that gets the name Tashi" (i.e., the construct "Tashi") *does* exist by definition, that it comes from its own side, through its own unique way of existing. The Mind Only school says that this supposed construct that exists by definition really doesn't exist at all.
2. **Middle Way** (*Madhyamika*) followers are **discounters**. They deny the existence of things that really are there. For example, they would say that Tashi and his totality don't exist by definition. The Mind Only school says that Tashi and the emptiness that applies to Tashi *do* exist by definition.

So the two extremes that the Mind Only school denies are the three non-existent objects that are implied in the statement that Tashi and his emptiness don't exist by definition, and in the statement that the construct applied to Tashi does exist by definition.

## **Emptiness: a Quality of Existence or an Absence of a non-Existent Object?**

When we are refuting that something is there when it really isn't there, are we refuting **existence** or refuting **identity**? Up to this point we've been saying that the *absence* of a self-existent construct that doesn't exist is Tashi's emptiness. But is the point that a self-existent construct doesn't exist? Or is the point that the construct that does exist lacks the quality of existing by definition?

The answer is that the emptiness of the boy Tashi is the fact that the thing given the name "Tashi" is not something that exists by definition. Emptiness is the fact that the construct doesn't have a quality of existing by definition. So we are emphasizing *how* something exists, the identity or qualities of the construct applied to an object, rather than *whether or not* something exists. We are focusing more on the identity of the construct than on the existence of a construct. By analogy, we're emphasizing the fact that the rope is not a snake, rather than on an empty room (the absence of anything existing there).

The *absence* of the gakja, and the *way* the construct exists, are both valid ways of describing emptiness, but we are emphasizing the latter at this point.

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**The State of Mind That Over-Rates**

Arya Asanga's *Bodhisattva Bhūmis* says, "It [emptiness] is that thing which is the absence of the two extremes." (p.36, L.11). The extremes don't exist, but the state of mind holding to the two extremes does exist and its emptiness does exist. Consider the fact that the boy Tashi is what we call "Tashi" – this doesn't exist by definition; but there is a wrong state of mind that holds that it does exist by definition. So this extreme view is seeing something there that really doesn't exist (DRON DOK).

This reasoning can be applied to all objects in the world, whether they be changing or unchanging things. The fact that the name given to any object in the universe doesn't exist from its own side is the emptiness of that object; a construct is something that doesn't exist by definition, from its own side, with a unique way of being; but we instinctively believe that the constructs applied to objects do exist by definition, and this is the extreme of over-rating.

**The State of Mind that Discounts**

The discounting state of mind denies the existence of a changing thing that really is there (p. 37, L.4). These three terms are applied to dependent things (SHENWANG).

**TAKPAY TSIKPAY TSEMAY SHI** That object which is labeled with the constructs.

**JU-DU MEPAY YANGDAKPA NGUPO** A pure working thing which is beyond description.

**DUNDAMPA YUPA** That which has some ultimate-ness about it.

**TAMCHE GYI TAMCHE DU** "All to All." This phrase is being used by the Madhyamika

all of all to Prasangika school (p.36, L.7). Some people have interpreted this as meaning *all* Prasangikas are saying that

*all* functioning things don't exist at all. A second interpretation accuses Prasangikas of saying that "*all* the real natures of functioning things are such that they don't exist by definition at *all*," meaning that regardless of place, time, philosophical tenet, etc. no functioning thing exists by definition. The Mind Only school says that changing things do exist by definition, so this latter interpretation would be a critique of the Prasangikas. Geshe Thubten Rinchen believes that the first "all" refers to the real nature of *all* functional things (not to people), because the grammar particle is the genitive rather than the instrumental case.

The text then describes the **consequences** (p.37, L.7) of these over-rating and discounting states of mind: they will waste or ruin someone (CHU SUMPACHA), like wasting an

inheritance. These people are accused of losing their chance to practice “that disciplining way that is used to discipline disciples” (CHU DULWA DULWAY NYAMPA).

### **The Nature of the Three Attributes**

Je Tsongkapa then explains the phrase from Arya Asanga’s Bodhisattva Bhūmies, DOPAY TSIK GYI NGOWO NYI (p.37, L.1) Literally this means “the very nature of the labeling words.” This refers to the *construct* (KUNTAK), and not to the state of mind focusing on the construct. So it refers to the labeling, not the labeler. The *nature* (NGOWO) of the constructing words, of the constructs created by the words, is that they don’t exist by definition. Arya Asanga then describes (p.37, L.5) “that basis of the constructing words,” which refers to the things labeled with the construct (DAKSHI), i.e., the changing things (SHENWANG’s).

Arya Asanga then says “those same things [changing things] exist in an ultimate sense in a way that is beyond description” (p.38, L.3). The phrase “beyond description” indicates that a recalled image of a visual object is a pale version compared to the direct visual perception of the direct visual object. So to describe a water pitcher in words or thoughts is far less vivid than to see it directly. You can also say that “beyond expression” refers to the fact that there is a slight delay from the moment an object first exists until the moment that your mind conceives of and labels the object. This delay is relative to each person’s perceptual speed. Note that “to exist in an ultimate way” (DUNDAMPA YUPA) is not the same as “to be ultimate reality.” Changing things do exist ultimately, in an ultimate way, by definition, but obviously they are not ultimate reality. This refers back to the statement “all to all” and clarifies that all changing things do exist in an ultimate way.

To the Mind Only school, these three expressions that **describe all functioning things** are exactly equivalent:

- To exist **by definition**.
- To exist in an ultimate way, to exist **ultimately**.
- To exist from its own side through its own **unique way** of being.

However, the Mind Only school says that **every existing thing**, including constructs, can be described as:

- To exist **naturally**.
- To exist **from its own side**.

In Madhyamika all five of these expressions are the same in that they don’t apply to *any* existing thing – nothing exists by definition, ultimately, uniquely, naturally, from its own side. But the Mind Only school says of every existing thing that “when you look for the thing that’s given the name, you *do* find it” (TANYE TAKPAY TAKDU TSEWAY TSENNYI NYE).

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Je Tsongkapa summarizes Arya Asanga's description of over-rating and under-rating (p.38, L. 5). Therefore, when we say that any state of mind that says that constructs exist ultimately, that would be over-rating, or attributing existence where there is no existence. Conversely, with regard to changing things and emptiness, which *do* exist by definition, so say that they don't exist by definition is the error of under-rating. To say that something does exist by definition is equivalent in the Mind Only school to saying that it exists ultimately.

**Deceptive Reality versus Ultimate Reality**

When the *Bodhisattva Bhūmis* says, "That which is beyond expression, that which exists in an ultimate way," it doesn't explicitly mention emptiness (p.37, L.5). The Mind Only school believes that changing things and emptiness hand together because they both exist ultimately; so when the Prasangikas say that changing things don't exist ultimately, they must also be claiming that emptiness also doesn't exist ultimately.

Master Asanga says, "The first one [i.e., constructs] is deceptive and the other two [i.e., changing things and emptiness] exist ultimately." Therefore, discounting occurs when you say that changing things and emptiness don't exist ultimately, when in reality they do exist ultimately. As we previously distinguished between ultimate things and ultimate reality, you now must distinguish between deceptive things and deceptive reality.

Is there anything that exists ultimately but is not ultimate reality? Yes, changing things. Again, changing things *are* deceptive reality because only emptiness exists ultimately, but changing things don't *exist deceptively* because Je Tsongkapa says in the text that only constructs exist deceptively. Is there any sense in which changing things do exist deceptively? This will come up later.

When you discount something that really does exist, you are looking at changing things, which really do exist ultimately, and saying that they don't exist ultimately. Now wheel around 180 degrees and shoot your arrow. When you are over-rating, you are saying that constructs do exist ultimately when in fact they really don't exist ultimately (p.38,L.8). In the *Bodhisattva Bhūmis*, when Arya Asanga describes over-rating, or attributing existence to something that really doesn't exist, he is referring to constructs. In the Mind Only school, once you've said that something exists by definition, you must also say that it exists ultimately. Therefore, it is legitimate to define over-rating as thinking that something (i.e., constructs) exists ultimately, when in reality it doesn't exist ultimately. Likewise, when Arya Asanga describes the discounting state of mind as that mind that holds changing things as not existing ultimately, you can also say that discounting is the error of seeing that changing things don't exist by definition.

Now Je Tsongkapa discusses the question of why Arya Asanga uses the phrase, "exist *ultimately*," with reference to the over-rating state of mind, and uses the synonymous phrase,

“not exist *by definition*,” with reference to the discounting state of mind. Je Tsongkapa says that Arya Asanga’s agenda is to point out that the phrase “to exist by definition has the exact same meaning as the phrase, “to exist ultimately.” The phrase under-rating was not explicitly applied to emptiness; it was only applied to changing things. In the *Bodhisattva Bhumis* Arya Asanga says that by discounting functional things, you are automatically also discounting emptiness – if one doesn’t exist by definition, then the other one also cannot exist by definition (p.39,L.5).

Discounting normally consists of saying that something doesn’t exist when it really does exist. So is the Prasangika school being accused of saying that changing things don’t exist at all? They actually are being accused of saying that something doesn’t exist *ultimately* when it really does exist ultimately.

The object that the over-rating state of mind thinks exists is something that doesn’t exist. The fact that *the fact that Tashi is the thing we call “Tashi”* doesn’t exist by definition, is Tashi’s emptiness. Now consider the state of mind that holds a thing to exist truly, when it really doesn’t exist truly. If you want to stop the error being made by this mistaken state of mind, you just have to show that mistaken mind a thing that doesn’t exist truly. This demonstration will eliminate the mistaken state of mind. The constructs that don’t exist are the ones that exist by definition and apply to changing things. To eliminate the belief in these non-existent constructs, you simply have to show emptiness to that state of mind, i.e., the absence of constructs that exist by definition, which don’t exist.

Je Tsongkapa spends more time addressing the over-rating state of mind than he does addressing the under-rating state of mind, because his whole purpose here is to explain existence according to the Mind Only school: and by showing the error made by the over-rating state of mind, by pointing out the non-existence of constructs that exist by definition, he is leading us to emptiness – the lack of a non-existent construct.

However, Je Tsongkapa does describe the discounting state of mind, and he does so by introducing one example. Consider when you think about a particular person: first you think about their parts and then you label those parts. So the heaps of a person provide the thing that gets labeled. If you eliminated the parts of a person would anything be left there, and could you even conceive of the person? No. Similarly, if you removed all changing things, could there exist any constructs applied to those changing things? Of course not. Neither could you have the constructing state of mind that is conceiving of, or labeling, the object. The Mind Only school says, “If you other guys [i.e., Prasangikas] say that changing things didn’t exist by definition, then you are discounting.”

## **Life Advice to Students**

[Because Elizabeth and Rob were leaving for St. Petersburg after this class, Geshe Thubten Rinchen now kindly offered some Dharma life advice to us:

The subject we are studying is very lofty philosophical material, but in your daily practice, for your heart, it is very important to always maintain a solid foundation, including the beginning of Lam Rim practice, such as *how to take refuge* [I wonder if Geshe Michael inserted refuge here, rather than Lama Devotion which is probably what Geshe Thubten Rinchen really said]. If you really want to get to the highest meaning of emptiness, in particular how everything is a projection of the mind, once you get a clear idea of what the Mind Only school says about how constructs don't exist by definition, then we are getting closer to what the Madhyamika Prasangika school means when they say that *everything* is merely a projection, and *nothing* exists by definition. Therefore, the ancient Indian masters approached tantric realizations by virtue of initially carefully studying these truths from the Mind Only perspective.

There are many religious practices throughout the world, especially if you define religion as the attempt to help other people, or to not hurt other people. In order to follow a Buddhist path, you must find and follow a Teacher. I've been teaching you here for eight days or so, but without Geshe Michael you would not be able to receive these teachings at all. There had to be an intermediary and you had to depend on him. How did Geshe Michael reach the point of being able to do this? At the beginning he didn't know a single thing. Then based on the kindness of his teachers, especially Khen Rinpoche, he learned to speak Tibetan to be able to communicate to you. You must realize that you can't learn anything without a Teacher. Geshe Michael studied the Logician's way (TSENNYIPA), properly in the monastic tradition in a way that is like a very deep ocean with a very deep bottom. He did all of this study in addition to his normal work load in his career. He used to come here and take classes at Sera Mey and take them back and study them in the New Jersey Transit bus going to and from his business job. Now because of Geshe Michael's amazing efforts you are able to receive these beautiful teachings in your own language very clearly, so now like the Tibetans, any deficiencies you face are your own responsibility and can't be blamed on inaccessible teachings. Therefore, please keep up your own high level of study and take the full benefit of these teachings.

Geshe Thubten Rinchen also now said that a good Tibetan translator should fully translate this section of class so we can get the full meaning of his advice [which Geshe Michael would not articulate].



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Class 17, Thursday Afternoon, 10/15/98**

**Do Things Grow Or Stop By Definition?**

The Mind Only school is accusing the Prasangikas of discounting. Prasangikas say that everything exists only “nominally;” nothing exists “in a true way” or by definition. Mind Only says that anything that comes from its causes and conditions, such as the main mind and all the mental functions, must exist by definition. They *don't* say that anything that exists by definition must come from causes and conditions, because totality does exist by definition but is an uncreated thing. Mind Only accuses Prasangikas of saying that main mind and mental functions don't exist by definition, and therefore they can't grow from their causes and conditions, and so the state of mind that sees them as growing from their causes and conditions must be a mistaken state of mind ((p41, L.4-8). Je Tsongkapa says “this is what *they* [Mind Only] think.”

Middle way replies that just because something doesn't exist by definition doesn't mean that it can't grow. Nothing exists by definition, but things *do* grow and they *do* stop; and the state of mind that sees things growing or stopping is not a mistaken state of mind.

The Mind Only says, “don't give me that stupid answer.” They say the Middle Way school would say that a speckled rope (representing the growing or stopping of things) may look like a snake, but it's not really a snake – like “things may look like they're growing but you Prasangikas claim that in reality they're not growing. So you Middle Way folks are necessarily saying that things don't grow at all, and the state of mind that thinks they are growing is like the state of mind that thinks a rope is a snake.”

**Does Cause and Effect Exist by Definition?**

The Mind Only school (p.41, L.14) claims that if the Middle Way says that cause and effect don't exist by definition:

- they also must necessarily say that cause and effect don't exist at all; and therefore
- they must say that karma and it's consequences don't work at all; and therefore
- they must say that doing a bad deed doesn't lead to getting a bad result, and doing a good deed doesn't lead to getting a good result.

Mind Only says that if you say that a thing that doesn't exist by definition can still function, you are discounting. Middle Way responds that it's only when something doesn't exist by definition that it can function.

So then Mind Only tries a roundabout attack: “If you Middle Way people say that you're not discounting anything, then you must be saying that you are switching over from something other than not existing by definition, so you agree that cause and effect does work by definition.” You say things don't grow from causes and conditions that exist by definition, but you say things do grow, so they must be growing from something other than the causes

that you say don't exist by definition, so you must be saying that there is some other thing that is making things grow which must exist by definition, so you are admitting that they do exist by definition, and so you must also be saying that things exist ultimately, even though you refuse to say so.

The *Bodhisattva Bhūmis* says (p.42, L.3, referring back to p.39, L.5) that when the Middle Way is discounting changing things they must be saying that changing things don't exist at all:

- so there is no (changing) object to serve as the basis of the labeling;
- therefore there can't be a (changing) state of mind that is labeling things;
- therefore there can't be any constructs that the mind would label as an object;
- therefore there can't be any totalities with regard to the changing objects.

So if you Middle Way people say that cause and effect doesn't exist by definition, then you have to end up saying that nothing exists at all!

### **The Mind Only School Reports the View of the Middle Way**

Je Tsongkapa now quotes the *Bodhisattva Bhūmis* as his source for this Mind Only criticism of the Middle Way (p.42, L.6 to p.43, L.3). "Now some people say about that which possesses difficulty and possesses emptiness..." This quote refers firstly to the very difficult to understand sutra (of the second turning of the wheel, which only the most intelligent Mind Only students can understand); and secondly to the topic of emptiness which it teaches. The Madhyamika Prasangika didn't get it that he "had something else in mind," when he said that nothing exists by definition, i.e., the explanation of the three attributes. The Prasangikas are just making things up, getting things all wrong (TSULSHIN MAYINPA NAMPAR TAKPA), and are not making any sense, being totally illogical (RIKPA MAYINPA). They finally just say that every existing thing in the universe is just a projection, just a construction of your mind. The Middle Way people respond that anyone who possesses these viewpoints *does* have correct view, and that's the way you should explain it to others.

### **The Mind Only School Refutes the Position of the Middle Way**

The Mind Only school says that if the basis that you give the label to, i.e., the changing thing, doesn't exist by definition then it wouldn't exist at all. So then you couldn't have any constructs because their basis doesn't exist either. So you couldn't have any totality either. So there is nothing left that exists, so what is being projected, because nothing exists? So "your version" (NAMDANG) can't be correct because you are refusing both the existence of changing things and the emptiness that pertains to them. So you are discounting things that really do exist, and you are (CHETA), the masters of wrong view, the very worst offenders!

### **Compared to Believing in a Self-Existent Self of a Person...**

“Compared to these [Prasangika] guys,” it would be much preferable to hear from others who have fallen into the opposite extreme of saying that *a person* exists by definition (p.43, L.3; note: SALATALA should be **BALATALA**). “But someone who holds *this* wrong view of changing things and emptiness” as not existing by definition is making the gravest error. The wrong idea that a person has a self-nature is simply an ignorance or lack of awareness about the nature of a person – so it’s not nearly as bad as the active error of discounting or canceling the existence of the entire universe. This lighter misunderstanding of believing people have a self-nature is not heavy enough to:

1. Throw you immediately into the hell realms; If you focus on the self-nature *of yourself*, you at least would focus on protecting your self-existent self, and so would act carefully;
2. Prevent you from practicing Dharma and helping others, so *in the short term* this misperception could actually be beneficial; or
3. Lead you to immediate ruin.

Generally, at our low level of understanding, we do most of our Dharma practices out of an ignorant drive for self-preservation, to keep ourselves out of hell self-existently. But this wrong sense we have of having a self also causes us to react to others with anger, etc. so it eventually also will bring us to ruin.

By saying that *nothing exists by definition*, the Middle Way viewpoint will cause these grave errors:

1. You are discounting the existence of the entire universe, because caused things don’t exist by definition, and therefore constructs, emptiness, cause and effect, and karmic laws can’t exist.
2. You will be thrown immediately into the hell realms because you would have no reason to follow the laws of karma, and you don’t really exist anyway. So there is no motivation to act good and to avoid bad deeds, so you can do whatever you want.
3. You will not practice Dharma and will be brought to the brink of destruction.
4. You will be distracted from (LE YELWAR) following the rules or “foundation for training” (LEBAY SHI). So you will regret the virtues you did before, and reject the Dharma life.

### **“That Thing Which Is Empty of Those Things...”**

The Mind Only now presents their view: “Any thing (GANG LA), [meaning changing things], and that which is not true of any thing (GANG MEPA) [meaning a self-existent construct, which doesn’t exist] – the absence of this is how you arrive at emptiness. This is how things are.” All changing things can exist by definition. It’s the constructs that apply to changing things that don’t exist by definition (p. 43, L.9).

The fact that Tashi is a thing to which a construct “Tashi the boy” which exists by definition does not apply is the emptiness of Tashi. Tashi is not the Tashi to whom the word and thought “Tashi” applies by definition. The thing that is left over when all is said and done (HLAKMA) is the plain old Tashi that does exist by definition. Je Tsongkapa now says (p. 43, L.11), “Functional things from physical matter on up -- the fact that they are empty of any nature of the word which is applied, is the meaning of the words that came before” [“that thing which is empty of those things,” from p.43, L.8]. “After all is said and done, you are left with the things which got the label (NGUPO TSA), and the labeling state of mind (DOPA TSAM).”

“The thing that it is empty of is it’s constructs” which exist by definition, which don’t exist (KANG GYI TONPA-NYI KUNTAK, p.43, L.14), and “the things that are devoid of them,” changing things (SHENWANG); and “the fact that the latter is devoid of the former, is the meaning of totality [emptiness], and it is about this that people are arguing.” If you refer back to p.39, L.8, they are not talking about whether or not things exist at all or exist nominally; they are arguing about whether or not these things exist *ultimately*.

After you eliminate the two extremes – the over-rating extreme of thinking things do exist as they seem, self-existently; and the discounting extreme of thinking things don’t exist at all, you thereby establish two true positions. Remember that the over-rating and discounting states of mind are distinct from the extremes that these wrong states of mind hold onto which don’t exist at all (p.44, L.1-3). Now Je Tsongkapa quotes *Bodhisattva Bhumi’s* again: “That previous thing [the over-rating state of mind], and that lack of the thing [the discounting state of mind]” – that thing which is free of those two [extremes]

Here the term “non-dual” is used to refer to the Middle Way which is free from the two extremes and describes a correct view that neither over-rates a non-existent self-existent thing nor under-rates the existent thing which is not self-existent. The Mind Only school view of emptiness in the very same way can apply to a perfectly existing-by-definition changing thing. So emptiness is the fact that those changing objects that do exist by definition are free of the subtlest forms of self-existence.

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Class 18, Friday Morning, 10/16/98**

**The Middle Way Consequence School Answers a Different Question**

Je Tsongkapa first identifies the two states of mind that hold the two extremes, and secondly shows how those two states of mind are incorrect (p.44, L9). The main opponent here is the Madhyamika Prasangika. Arya Asanga's *Abbreviation* says "some people of the greater way, intent on maintaining their error, make the following claim: in a deceptive way [only as projections or constructs] all objects exist, but nothing exists in an ultimate way [truly, by definition]." The Middle Way is not saying that everything is KUNTAK in the sense of the three attributes. They are saying that everything is a projection of the mind. Je Tsongkapa then explains that Arya Asanga's quote refers to those people of the greater way who say that everything exists deceptively and nothing exists ultimately.

The *Abbreviation* now continues (p.44, L.16), "can you Middle Way people explain exactly what you mean when you use the terms *ultimate* and *deceptive*? When we [Middle Way people] talk about *ultimate reality*, we are talking about the general lack of a self-nature of things, or the fact that nothing exists by definition or truly" (p.45, L.2). Likewise, the Mind Only school asks about the meaning of the phrase "to exist deceptively." The Middle Way answer focuses on the meaning of "deceptive" as being *that state of mind* that sees things as having a nature of their own when they really don't have a nature of their own. Again the Middle Way turns their answer into a focus on the *state of mind* that perceives the object rather than on the way in which the object exists.

**Why the Middle Way Critiques the Mind Only School**

Particularly with regard to changing objects, the Middle Way school gives four reasons to the Mind Only school for why the mind is mistaken when it looks at things and believes them to be existing by definition. This is part of their answer to the Mind Only question about what it means to exist deceptively:

1. **"They make it deceptively"** (KUNDZOP DU JEPÄ). The mind is deceived when it looks at a thing that doesn't exist by definition and thinks it does exist by definition. To hold things as existing truly, through their own essence, (DEN DZIN) is the ultimate mistake.
2. **"They label it"** (DOPA). The mind "over-labels" an object and *imputes* existence by definition onto it.
3. **"They assert it repeatedly"** (NGUNGPA JUPÄ). The mistake of viewing things as existing by definition is self-perpetuating or habit forming.
4. **"They make it a term"** (TANYI DU JEPÄ). By continually thinking that things exist by definition when they really don't exist by definition, you put karmic seeds (BAKJAKS) in your mind to continue to do so in the future.

Je Tsongkapa says that in general the Middle Way is just describing the two truths (even though they address *the state of mind* that sees things as existing deceptively rather than what it means to exist deceptively).

### **The Middle Way Answer Focuses on the State of Mind**

The Mind Only school then wants to know why the Middle Way answers the question about ultimate and deceptive reality by saying “things *do have* the quality of existing deceptively.” This phrasing would suggest the positive quality of how something exists (deceptively), but the Middle Way response focused on how the *state of mind* is deceived when it perceives things as existing deceptively. So the Middle Way response seems to be a little off track.

When the Mind Only school asks what it means for something to not exist ultimately (DUNDAMPA MEPA), the response naturally should address the thing that is *missing*, the kind of ultimate existence that is not there. But the Middle Way school’s answer suggests that the Mind Only question actually *must have meant* that they wanted a classic example as an explanation of what it means to exist as ultimate reality (p.45, L11). Otherwise, the Middle Way would have answered in terms of a thing that doesn’t exist, the subtle version of the thing that lacks a self-nature of objects, which they deny (the GAKJA). Rather, they described the quality of emptiness that things *do have*.

The second half of the answer literally should have “but everything does exist in a nominal or deceptive way.” But instead the Middle Way responded in terms of how *the mind is deceived* when it sees things as existing by definition. If the Middle Way had emphasized that objects do exist (albeit deceptively), they would be describing a concordant that state of mind (DUNTUN), i.e., the way the mind looks at thing, and the way things really are, are in agreement. Rather, they emphasized the word “deceived” in the deceived state of mind, the mind that wrongly holds things as being self-existent (DEN DZIN). So in a roundabout way **the Middle Way is implicitly criticizing the Mind Only belief that objects exist by definition** (p.45, L.14)

The Mind Only school thinks that the state of mind that looks at objects and sees them as existing truly is correct, so the object that the mind thinks it sees (a changing thing that really does exist by definition) is a totally different object than the object which the Middle Way says the mind sees (a so-called object that exists by definition, which doesn’t exist at all). The phrase that keeps coming up in the text for the Middle Way view, “doesn’t have any nature of its own” (NGOWO NYI ME), means that an object doesn’t have a nature of existing truly. By contrast, the Mind Only says that things *do have* a nature of their own, meaning existing truly, by definition.

### **Middle Way View of Existing Deceptively vs. Deceptive Reality**

According to Middle Way school: when you say that something exists, you are talking about “that thing which is *understood* to exist,” and so by implication you are positing a state of

mind that is establishing the existence of the object (p.45, L14). There's a big difference between these two statements:

1. **“This stick exists deceptively”** (it *has* this quality). The word “deceptively” here means that all things exist merely nominally, by virtue of our conceptions.
2. **“This stick is an example of deceptive reality”** (it *is* this). The word “reality” in the second statement refers to the *object* which is “taken by the tendency to see things as self-existent when they’re not, to the mistaken mind that thinks things are real when they aren’t real.” Then the word “deceptive” refers to the *state of mind* that is deceived which tends to see things as self-existent and thinks it sees true reality when there is no true reality there.

Is it true that the stick exists deceptively? Yes, to a certain state of mind that establishes it as an existing thing. This is a “good guy” correct state of mind. Is the stick an example of deceptive reality? Yes, because it is taken by a mistaken mind to exist truly. In these two questions, we are talking about the same stick, but the word “deceptive(ly)” is applied in two very distinct ways. The real clue here lies in the word “reality,” meaning the stuff that is held by the mistaken state of mind that sees things as existing truly.

The Mind Only school also says that the stick is an example of deceptive reality. The Middle Way school would say that the stick exists deceptively, but the Mind Only school would say that the stick does not exist deceptively.

The Mind Only school asks, “what do you Middle Way people mean when you say things exist deceptively?” The Middle Way explains, however, what the word “deceptive” means in the phrase “deceptive reality,” and what the word “ultimate” means in the phrase “ultimate reality.” Both schools accept the idea of ultimate and deceptive reality, so the Middle Way is finding common ground upon which both schools initially can agree – at least until you start to define the words deceptive and ultimate.

Is there a difference between the word deceptive in general and the word deceptive as used in the phrase “deceptive reality”? To say that something exists deceptively, you are confirming something in a positive sense. But in the phrase deceptive reality, the word deceptive negates the existence of something that seems to be real – an unreal thing seems to be real to a deceived state of mind.

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The Middle Way answer serves to re-structure the Mind Only School's question – to make it consistent with the answer given by the Middle Way in terms of what it means for something to be a classic example (TSENCHI) of ultimate reality, and likewise for deceptive reality. Je Tsongkapa says that the Mind Only school is going after the very core of the Middle Way viewpoint (p.45, L8 to p.46, L.4).

The crux of the Middle Way system is to say that a changing thing does not exist by definition, and does not exist ultimately; therefore, any state of mind that is viewing a changing thing as existing by definition, ultimately is a *mistaken* state of mind. So it's not strange that the Middle Way answers a question about what it means for something to exist deceptively or nominally by referring to the mistaken state of mind that misunderstands its object with regard to its ultimate nature. The final test for Middle Way is that when you go looking for the thing given the label, you won't find anything, independent of your projections. **So they define deceptive reality in terms of how it appears to a deceived state of mind.**

Because we haven't grasped the subtle meaning of the Madhyamika Prasangika viewpoint, it feels strange to hear that deceptive reality is perceived through the mistaken perception of a deceived state mind. A natural response would then be, "So, is there anything about a changing object that we can say *does* exist?" The Madhyamika Prasangika school responds, "Yes, we can say that it has ultimate reality." So it's a natural progression for the Mahyamika Prasangika to go from the question of what it means to exist deceptively, to the questions of the existence of ultimate reality.

### **The Mind Only School's Rebuttal**

The Mind Only school uses Arya Asanga's *Abbreviation* (p.46, L.8-15) to refute the Madhyamika Prasangika's position on the meaning of the word "deceptive" in the phrase, "deceptive reality." The Mind Only school states, "With regard to that, we have the following question to ask you: consider the perception of the essence [i.e., seeing things as existing truly, by definition]; are you talking about a constructing state of mind which has come about through its own causes and conditions, or are you saying that it is a state of mind that is itself just a construction of the mind?" In other words, they are asking whether or not the mind itself is just a thing that is imputed, which doesn't exist by definition. If you say the constructing state of mind has come about through its own causes and conditions, then you can't say that it itself is only a construct and that it doesn't exist by definition. Conversely, if you say that the constructing state of mind that sees things as self-existent is itself just a construct, just something made up, and it doesn't come from its own causes and condition, they you must say that *the tendency to see things as self-existent itself does not truly exist*. If it doesn't come from its own causes and conditions then it could never exist. Therefore, if the constructing state of mind doesn't exist, neither can the idea of a self-existent thing exist. Therefore changing things can't exist at all.



The whole crux of the Mind Only school is that changing things do exist by definition. If not, then the constructing state of mind, which is a changing thing, doesn't exist by definition, so it can't conceive of anything, so constructs can't exist either, and the whole system collapses.

Therefore, Je Tsongkapa says, "That state of mind that sees things as existing truly with a nature of their own is coming from *mental seeds* of doing so previously. Therefore, it must come from its own causes and conditions" (p.46, L.16). If so, then it's wrong to say that the constructing state of mind doesn't exist (ultimately). The original phrasing in the *Bodhisattva Bhumis* is "...then don't say it doesn't exist," but what it really means is "then don't say it doesn't exist *ultimately*," because the argument between the Madhyamika Prasangika and the Mind Only schools is whether or not changing things exist ultimately, not whether they exist at all.

Je Tsongkapa continues, "If the state of mind that sees things as self-existent were just a projection (TOKPAY TAKTSAM), then the thing it is projected onto also must be just a projection also" (p.47, L.7). Therefore, all changing things must be merely projections, so there is no solid basis upon which to project your constructs. Then, the whole system collapses because if the tendency to see all things as truly existing is itself just a construct, then all changing things must be merely constructs.

### **The Mind Only School Refutes the Middle Way Response**

The Mind Only school now challenges, "What reason do you want to give for saying that the object that exists by definition to a state of mind that is deceived (according to Middle Way) is not there?" The Middle Way responds, "Because it's a deceived state of mind" (CHINCI LOK GYI NGUPO YINPAY CHIR) that thinks the object exists by definition" (p.47, L.10).

The Mind Only schools responds, "So are you saying that the object exists or that it doesn't exist?" meaning it exists truly, ultimately, by definition. Then they ask, "Do you Middle Way people say it [the tendency to see things as truly-existent] exists or not?" meaning does it *ultimately*. If you say the tendency to hold things as existing ultimately is something which itself exists ultimately, then your whole school collapses because then you can't say of any existing object that the opposite of it's existing ultimately is its emptiness (p.47, L.15). In other words, you can't logically say that every changing thing in the universe doesn't exist ultimately, but the state of mind (which is a changing thing) that perceives these objects is something that *does* exist ultimately. The Mind Only school is demanding consistency in how the emptiness, or ultimate reality, of all changing things is explained.

Conversely, the Mind Only school says in the *Abbreviation*, "If you Middle Way people say that the tendency to hold things as truly existing *doesn't* itself exist ultimately (meaning to them that it doesn't exist at), then you can't describe ultimate reality which you define as the quality of being devoid of existing by definition to a mind that mistakenly holds it to exist truly – which you are now saying doesn't exist (ultimately) (p.48, L.3-11).

### **"Any Fool Can See..."**

Je Tsongpaka now describes the Mind Only view, “These things [changing things or totality] which any fool can see exists by definition...” The Middle Way responds that this Mind Only objection doesn’t phase them, because it’s a *mistaken* state of mind to which things appear to exist by definition. Then the Mind Only School says if this mistaken state of mind does exist by definition, then there does exist a changing thing whose emptiness doesn’t fit your Middle Way definition of emptiness (the quality of being devoid of existing by definition to a deceived state of mind that sees it as existing by definition). And if it doesn’t exist by definition, then there is no state of mind to which deceptive reality can appear and therefore emptiness can no longer be described.

Is the tendency to see things as truly existing something which comes from its causes and conditions, or is it just a figment of the imagination, a projection? Je Tsongkapa here (p.47, L.10) quickly goes through the same point as he made on page 46:

- If the state of mind that thinks things exist truly doesn’t exist by definition,
- then it can’t exist at all;
- so the misperception it has about things existing by definition can’t exist either;
- so the fact that the construct it focuses on doesn’t exist by definition can’t exist either;
- so there is no object, no state of mind, no construct or emptiness, and nothing makes any sense at all.

### **The Dependent State of Mind Is the Lynch Pin of the Argument**

The Middle Way says that *nothing* in the universe exists ultimately. Why does the Mind Only school only challenge this statement with regard to dependent objects in the form of the state of mind that thinks things exist truly? Why not also raise the objection with regard to totality and constructs. The reason is that the battle will be won or lost on dependent things which are the lynch pin of the Mind Only school’s rationale for establishing what is emptiness and what isn’t emptiness. If Middle Way can establish that dependent things don’t exist by definition, they can do so for all other objects. Both schools are seasoned debaters and recognize that dependent things, particularly the state of mind that sees things as existing by definition, are the pivot for the debate.

Firstly, “this very thing (DI NYI) as the object that possesses the characteristic of having an emptiness that pertains to it (YONGDRUP GYI CHUCHEN),” is dependent things. Secondly, dependent things are intimately involved with the process of labeling because words and labels themselves are changing things. Thirdly, changing things are what provide the basis of being labeled. Fourthly, changing things are the stuff about which you can have a mis-perception. So changing things are the crucial thing in a debate about whether or not things exist ultimately (p.48, L.15).

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Recap: The Middle Way has said that nothing exists truly, ultimately, by definition; this includes dependent things, constructs and totality. But the debate only focuses on dependent things because great thinkers (KEPA's) realize that this is the battleground on which the fight will be won or lost. However, to be thorough, the Mind Only school logically should also attack the Middle Way's belief that *totality* also doesn't exist by definition? Je Tsongkapa says the Mind Only school *should have* attacked also on the point of emptiness not existing by definition, but he admits that changing things are the lynch pin of the argument.

**Constructs Don't Exist by Definition**

Both schools generally agree that constructs don't exist by definition, so there's little argument here (except that the Mind Only School might say that empty space *does* exist by definition). But "constructs" here mainly refers to the *gakja* – some supposed construct that could exist by definition – and both schools agree that this thing that we deny doesn't exist.

There's another slight distinction to be made also. The Middle Way's view of constructs not existing by definition is that when you go looking for the thing that is given the name "construct" you will never find anything that exists.

Je Tsongkapa uses the phrase "to have a fanciful belief in the essence of the attribution" to apply to both changing things and to emptiness (p.48, L.2). Consider "the fact that Tashi is what is given the name *Tashi*" – this fact doesn't exist by definition, and that is the emptiness of Tashi, but his emptiness *does* exist by definition. So anyone who says that changing things or emptiness *don't* exist by definition would be discounting. Je Tsongkapa therefore says that the *Abbreviation* and the *Bodhisattva Bhummis* similarly describe the process of discounting and over-rating as well as how to eradicate these errors. Although the *Bodhisattva Bhumis* uses the phrase, "exist *ultimately*," and the *Abbreviation* uses the phrase, "exist *by definition*," these two terms are synonymous.

**An Expert Driver**

An expert driver, especially in India, must be able to back up the car skillfully. Likewise, an excellent scriptural student must be able to go back to earlier lessons and apply them when interpreting material that is currently being learned. So you should frequently review and apply material you learned in the past.

The constructs that arise through verbalizations or through conceptualizations do exist, nominally, but not ultimately – meaning from their own side through a unique way of being. Therefore, when the Mind Only school quotes the *Abbreviation* as saying "constructs don't exist" (p.49, end), they mean that they don't exist by definition. Then (p.50, L.1-4) Je Tsongkapa quotes another section from the *Abbreviation* that says, "the objects (MIKPA)

upon which this state of mind (NAMPAR SHEPA) is focusing [i.e., constructs themselves]” do exist in a constructed way, even though they don’t exist by definition, ultimately.

Je Tsongkapa makes a distinction here between the constructs that really don’t exist at all (self-existent constructs), and the constructs the Mind Only school is saying don’t exist *ultimately* (p.50, L.5). Furthermore, the self-existence of “a person” is the same way – the constructs applied to a person don’t exist by definition. Generally speaking, do constructs exist? Yes. They exist as a construct of your mind, nominally; but they don’t exist from their own side, with a unique way of being.

### **The Division of Labeled Things versus Substantial Things**

1. Consider things that exist as being **labeled** (TAKYU), like a person, or “American Guy.” For American Guy to come into your mind, you must first have a picture in your mind of *pieces* of the American Guy. Anything that exists as labeled works like this.
2. Conversely, things that exist **substantially** don’t first require you to think of their parts in order to conceptualize them. You can think of substantial things as a whole immediately.

**Constructs which *do* exist are things that exist through labels.** When you describe an existing construct you are blocking out the idea that they could exist substantially or that they could exist ultimately; and you thereby affirm that they exist through labels and that they exist only nominally (p.50, L5).

### **Errors in the Great Sanskrit Commentaries**

Je Tsongkapa then attacks “some great [Sanskrit Tengyur] commentaries” who say that the Mind Only school says (p.50, L.8-13):

- **Constructs don’t exist deceptively or nominally, and they don’t exist ultimately.** This is wrong because it suggests that constructs don’t exist at all.
- **Changing things do exist nominally but don’t exist ultimately.** This is wrong on both counts.
- **Totality does exist ultimately.** This *is* correct according to Mind Only school.

### **Do Objects Exist External To Ourselves?**

Furthermore, some of these commentaries say that *Sutra on the True Intent* says that **there do exist objects which exist outside of ourselves.** However, Arya Asanga, in his *Compendium*, used extensive quotes from the *Sutra on the True Intent* to show that the Mind Only school doesn’t believe that objects exist external to ourselves.

1. The **Abhidharmists or Detailists** and **Sutrists or Logic** school *do* believe in external objects. They believe in indivisible particles, like atoms, that have no *parts*, and they

are the building blocks of physical matter. So physical matter is a collection of indivisible particles that have no sides, or are part-less (CHAME). Even theoretically or conceptually they have no parts; mentally they are indivisible. Even in terms of *time*, the particles can't be divisible into instances of time. Note that *part* can even mean a big distinction like the American and the Indian part, so the point is that they believe in **an indivisible whole in terms of space and time**. All of the higher schools disagree with this crazy idea.

2. The **Mind Only** school *doesn't* believe in external objects. They do believe in atomic particles, but they say the particles must have sides, like a top and bottom. They thereby refute the existence of external objects.
3. The **Middle Way Consequence** school *does* believe in external objects. They believe that changing objects can be categorized into internal and external objects, with the former being those objects that are subsumed within your sense powers, mental stream or consciousness. For example, your arm is an internal visual object and a tree is an external visual object; the same holds for all of the senses. This viewpoint is very simple. But not everything that is not subsumed by your consciousness is an external object – for example, unchanging things like emptiness or empty space are not considered external objects.
4. The **Middle Way Independent** school is divided:
  - Those who **act like Sutrists** (DO DE CHUPA) do believe in external objects, which are made up of particles that have *no identifiable* directions. Of course particles have parts, but they are so small that they can't be found, although theoretically they exist (CHOK KYI CHAME).
  - Those who **act like a yogin** (NELNJOR CHUPA, referring to *Yogacharra* or Mind Only School) don't believe in external objects.

The Mind Only and those Middle Way independents who agree with them say that if external objects *did* exist they would have to do so in the way that the two lowest schools assert, which is impossible. The Middle Way consequence group and those of the Middle Way independents who agree with them say that external objects can exist in a different way.

[MINIDISK GETS DISTORTED HERE, THEN ENDS]

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**Master Asanga Didn't Write these Incorrect Commentaries**

**Generally speaking constructs *do* exist.** Some older Indian commentaries incorrectly said that the *Sutra on the True Intent* said that constructs don't exist ultimately *or* nominally (and so they don't exist at all), and that totality does exist nominally but doesn't exist ultimately. They also incorrectly say that the Mind Only school says that external objects do exist. In the *Compendium* (TEKDU), Arya Asanga said that the Mind Only school clearly believes that external objects don't exist. Je Tsongkapa also quotes the *Abbreviation* and the *Bohdisattva Bhumis* to say that constructs do exist in general, even if only nominally, and even if certain constructs don't refer to existing objects.

Je Tsongkapa says that those people who claim that Master Asanga was the author of these mistaken commentaries mentioned above has grossly failed to look into the matter because the books he is known to have written clearly disagree with these incorrect points (p.51, L.1). Furthermore, these commentaries site Master Dharmakirti who lived several hundred years after Master Asanga. So from the point of view of style, content, and historical possibility, Master Asanga cannot have written these incorrect commentaries. Finally, his *Abbreviation* fully comments on nine of the ten chapters of the *Sutra on the True Intent*, so he wouldn't have needed to write another commentary.

**More Erroneous Interpretations of the Mind Only School**

Other erroneous commentaries similarly have said that Masters Asanga and Vasubhandhu believed that constructs exist neither ultimately nor deceptively, and changing things do exist nominally but not ultimately, and totality does exist ultimately. Je Tsongkapa says that anyone who believes this has “dropped out of” the Mind Only system (p.51, L.5). Bhuten Tamche Kyenpa Rinchen Drup, or Bhuten Rinpoche, who was instrumental in putting together the Tangyur and Kengyur and lived a generation and a half before Je Tsongkapa was a renowned and accurate Middle Way scholar, but he mis-reported the Mind Only view. He reported the Mind Only School as saying that when changing things exist nominally, they appear to a mistaken state of mind to be arising and stopping in a way that they are not really arising and stopping – but this is a Middle Way interpretation! Je Tsongkapa accuses these mis-reporters of discounting and therefore canceling the existence of changing things completely.

Jonamba also holds a similar view as Bhuten Rinpoche. Je Tsonkapa responds to Jonamba, “Hey, you said the *Sutra on the True Intent* was intended to be taken literally, but it says that constructs *do* exist and you said neither of the two truths apply to constructs so they can't exist” so you, Jonamba, are contradicting yourself.

**Refuting Attempts to Show That Our Mind Only System is Wrong**

Five different references are used by “some guys” to **refute the Mind Only position that changing things exist ultimately** (p.51, L.15):

1. The *Sutra on the True Intent*.
  2. The *Distinction between the Middle and the Extremes*, dictated by Maitreya to Master Asanga.
  3. A commentary on the *Distinction between the Middle and the Extremes*.
  4. *The Jewel of the Sutras, Sutralamkara, DO DE GYEL*.
  5. A second quotation from the *Sutra on the True Intent*.
1. The *Sutra on the True Intent* examines the nature of the eight components of the arya path, which is one of the thirty-seven components of enlightenment mentioned in class two. It says, “Each component is separate from the other components, and each component grows from its causes and conditions; and the totality of each component likewise is a separate emptiness from the emptinesses of the other seven components; but if you said these eight emptinesses also grow from their causes and conditions then they would have to be produced things and then they can’t be something that exists ultimately because everybody knows that produced things can’t exist ultimately.” So the critics say “you Mind Only guys’ own sutra says that produced things cannot exist ultimately, but you say that changing things do exist ultimately.”
  2. Then Protector Maitreya’s *Dividing the Middle and the Extremes* says, “The ultimate one is only one.” This quotation appears to be saying that only one of the three attributes, totality, exists ultimately, and dependent things and constructs do not exist ultimately. Furthermore, the commentary on this text agrees that this quote means that only totality exists ultimately.
  3. Then the *Jewel of the Sutras* says, “It is not something that exists, it’s not something that doesn’t exist.” This quote refers to things that are ultimate and means that once something comes from its causes and conditions it cannot exist ultimately. If you refer to the five characteristics of totality (see class 14):
    - a. “It’s not something that exists” meaning, for example, that it’s not the case that a water pitcher, and the emptiness of a water pitcher are not the same thing; they are separate or distinct things that don’t exist as a single object.
    - b. “It’s not something that doesn’t exist” (NE MIN) meaning neither are they things that don’t exist in a relationship of identity (if you remove one the other also disappears). If there are no water pitchers there can be no emptinesses of water pitchers.
    - c. Neither do they both exist and not exist.
    - d. Fourthly, neither do they neither exist nor not exist.

So ultimate objects are not things that start or stop, and there is no lessening and no increasing (these words are also in the Heart Sutra). If you study more and more and your knowledge increases, does the emptiness of your knowledge increase also? No. Emptiness is always 100% emptiness. So emptiness is without increasing or lessening.” This is the nature of the ultimate (emptiness), and it obviously excludes produced things.

The *Abbreviation* (p.53, L.2) now says “Consider dependent things (GYU TSEN); do they exist deceptively or ultimately? They are something which exists deceptively.” (*Gyu tsen* normally means reason or justification, but here it means those things that show or have the characteristic of being caused, i.e., a result; so *gyu tsen* is a code word for dependent things.)

### **The Way in which They Avoid the Apparent Inconsistencies**

All of these points challenge the Mind Only school’s position that dependent things exist ultimately (p.53, L.7). However, Je Tsongkapa responds, in defense of the original Mind Only position that dependent things *do* exist ultimately, that there are two different ways to explain the meaning of the phrase “things exist deceptively or things exist ultimately”

1. Firstly “existing deceptively” can mean the object “is only a construction of our imagination,” a creation of our projections, a thing that our mind is constructing (which applies to constructs). Conversely, “existing ultimately” can mean the object is not something that only exists by virtue of our projections or labeling; rather it exists from its own side, through its own unique way of being (which applies to changing things and totality). Recall that in the third turning, constructs were said to exist deceptively, and changing things and totality to exist ultimately.

When you divide all the schools into two – Middle Way school versus all other viewpoints including those of non-Buddhists – the latter group consists of “people who profess functional things” (NGUPO MAWO) who believe that anything that performs a function must exist in truth. They say that changing things do exist ultimately and don’t exist deceptively.

The Middle Way says that nothing exists ultimately and everything exists deceptively. Arya Asanga, in the *Bodhisattva Bhūmis* and in the *Abbreviation*, is using this first set of definitions when he says that constructs exist deceptively and dependent things and totality exist ultimately.

2. The second interpretation (p.55, L.10) of “existing ultimately” simply refers to emptiness itself; defined here as “the ultimate object of the path of purity” – that thing that the direct perception focuses on. Then “existing deceptively” simply refers to all existing objects that are other than emptiness. So according to these definitions, totality exists ultimately and dependent things and constructs exist deceptively.

So when Arya Asanga said that dependent things exist ultimately, he meant it in terms of the *first* definition of what it means to exist ultimately – that they’re not just projections. Now if you go back to the first quote from the *Sutra on the True Intent* which said, “once something has come from its causes and conditions it can no longer be said to be ultimate,” the definition of ultimate here is something that is ultimate reality, or totality. So it’s a little confusing when these Mind Only scholars keep changing the definition of the terms “to exist ultimately or deceptively.”



Likewise, it's okay for a Mind Only person to say "dependent things don't exist ultimately" if they are meaning ultimate in the sense of being emptiness itself. So the Mind Only folks can always change the definition and avoid any criticism. That's why this section of the text is called "The way in which they avoid the apparent inconsistencies."

### **"Intimate Familiarity with the Expression"**

The *Abbreviation* also uses the phrase, "that consciousness that remains in a state where it has accustomed itself to names according to the expressions" (p.54, L.2). What!? This confusing phrase simply refers to *the constructing state of mind*. The object that possesses the name (i.e., which the constructing state of mind is focusing on) neither exists substantially nor exists ultimately. This obscure phrase must be referring to something like a construct, but certainly doesn't refer to changing things. Whatever it refers to, some kind of thing that you think you see, it doesn't exist substantially or ultimately so it must be put into the category of labeled things because it doesn't exist substantially, and into the category of deceptive things because it doesn't exist ultimately. It is, for example, the state of mind that with eyes closed imagines the color blue and focuses on the construct "blue" based on some familiarity with "expressions," as a conceptualization of blue.

Conversely, (p.54, L.9) the text describes a state of mind which is "devoid of, or cleared away of (SELWA) any such total familiarity with the expressions." This phrase refers to a direct perception which is free of conceptualization. The object which *this* state of mind focuses on *does* exist substantially and does exist ultimately. For example, blue itself is a dependent thing.

The point here is that when you are imagining blue, the thing your mind is focusing on is a construct rather than a changing thing, and as such it doesn't exist substantially or ultimately; it exists deceptively, nominally, as a labeled thing. Conversely, when you look at blue itself with a direct perception, the object you are focusing on is a dependent thing and a substantial thing (because it's a functional thing), and it does exist ultimately.

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Class 22, Sunday Morning, 10/18/98**

**A Review of the Five Characteristics of Emptiness**

Recap: Critics of the Mind Only school used five quotations (described in Class 21) to indicate that only unchanging things are ultimate. The third source, *The Jewel of the Sutras*, explains that ultimate reality has five characteristics (p.52, L.15):

1. **“That characteristic which is not existing and not not existing** (YU MIN ME MIN GYI TSEN-NYI). The object and the object’s emptiness are not one inseparable object; neither are they unrelated such that if you remove one you don’t also remove the other (NGOWO CHIK). Other people interpret this line as meaning that totalities are not constructs, but neither are they changing things; additionally it is not something other than the simple absence of what emptiness denies.
2. **The characteristic of being both one thing and separate things.** (CHIK DANG TADE MINPA). “It is also not another kind of not” (DE SHIN MIN SHEN MIN), meaning, “It is not a not of oneness and separateness.” *Oneness* means that the object and its emptiness have an inseparable relationship such that to be one is to be the other; *separateness* means that the object and its emptiness have separate identities.
3. **It’s unchanging; it neither grows nor stops.** (KYE JI MEPAY TSEN-NYI).
4. **It neither increases nor decreases.**
5. **It is neither pure nor going to be pure.** Firstly, the problem with (non-enlightened) sentient beings is that we can’t be in a state of seeing emptiness directly constantly. So we haven’t yet removed those obstacles that are not part of nature itself and are removable and changeable. We are *not pure* of these obstacles yet, and later we will be pure of these obstacles but not self-existently so. This first interpretation focuses on a *future* state of mind. Secondly, we are not pure of the obstacles to Buddhahood right now, and we can’t *achieve* the purity of our Buddha nature because we have *always* had this kind of purity; so totality doesn’t have any purity now (we still have temporary obstacles) and won’t have any purity later. The second interpretation focuses on our *present* condition.

**Two Kinds of Purity of Our Minds**

Buddhas have two kinds of purity: the purity they have achieved through removing the temporary obstacles that are not part of their nature, and their innate purity which is their emptiness itself. So when you remove all of the obstacles to enlightenment, you are not achieving your Buddha nature, because this emptiness of your mind is something that you *always* possessed in exactly the same way at all times. The nature of the purity of your mind and the nature of the purity of the emptiness of your mind are quite different: the purity of your mind is something that must be achieved by removing all of your mental afflictions, but the purity of the emptiness of your mind was always there from beginningless time. Your mental afflictions don’t infect the purity of the emptiness of your mind. For example, the material that makes up a piece of cloth does not inherently possess grease, so when you wash the grease off of the cloth, the cloth is still there. Likewise, if you purify your mind, its

emptiness doesn't somehow disappear. The grease stain was not there from the beginning. Mental impurities are temporary and can be removed (LOBURWA) – the stains weren't in the cloth originally, and when they are removed, the cloth can be clean again; the stains are not “part and parcel” of the cloth and they can be removed through the proper antidotes. The temporary obstacles include ignorance and liking and disliking things ignorantly; they are not a part of emptiness which is somehow physically *covering* emptiness; rather, they are in our minds and are blocking us from seeing emptiness. Our minds are draped or cloaked from seeing emptiness.

### **Four Types of Mental Seeds**

Returning to the end of Class 21, “that consciousness which is intimately familiar with expressions” refers to the mind that imagines or constructs the *idea* of the object, for example, “blue,” or “water pitcher” (p.54, L.3). Being “intimately familiar with expressions” means being intimately intermixed with mental seeds (BAKJAKS). Different things are appearing to this state of consciousness because of the different mental seeds that were put in this mind in the past; these seeds are what makes the mental consciousness believe that it sees what it sees. The *way in which an object appears* can be divided into four categories, and the first two are correct or right and the latter two are incorrect or wrong:

1. The fact that the water pitcher appears to that mind to be a water pitcher.
2. The fact that the water pitcher appears to that mind to be what “water pitcher” refers to.
3. The appearance to the visual conscious that the water pitcher exists as an external object.
4. The appearance to the visual conscious that the fact that the water pitcher is what's called water pitcher is something that exists by definition, naturally, from its own side, through its own unique way of being.

Whichever one of these is occurring in your mind at a given time, all four of these states of mind are triggered by mental seeds, and mental seeds themselves are then divided into four types:

1. **The mental seed of similarity.** You can see a water pitcher now because of the mental seed planted when you saw a water pitcher some time in the past.
2. **The mental seed of expression.** You're taught to call this thing a “water pitcher.” Sometime long ago someone pointed at a shape with a big round belly, a support at the bottom, and a thin top and said “this is called a ‘water pitcher.’” It's the same as when you are learning a foreign language and your teacher keeps saying “bumpa, bumpa, bumpa” which plants the seed in your mind to later think automatically, “Oh, that's a bumpa.”
3. **The mental seed for seeing a self.** Due to your innate tendencies, you are inclined to see things as existing by definition (or as self-existent, according to Middle Way); this ignorance can be focused on yourself and the belief in the self-nature of a person, or focused on objects like the parts of a person. These mental seeds have been planted in your mind from beginningless time, and when they ripen they force you to see the latter two (incorrect) ways of seeing objects:
  - 3a. a water pitcher existing as an external object, and

3b. the fact that the pitcher is what's called "water pitcher" as existing by definition.

The Mind Only school says that *both* of these represent the ignorance that sees a self-nature of objects, and they come from the mental seeds for seeing a self that were planted in the past. It's called "a mental seed for seeing a self" because when you see the pitcher as an external object or you see the construct as existing by definition, these conditions are called "the self of objects" and this wrong state of mind grasps to them as being something that exists.

4. **The mental seed for the component of the cycle of suffering** (SIPA YANGDAK GYI BAKJAK). The Mind Only and lower Middle Way schools describe karma as exclusively mental, so bad deeds themselves can take you to samsaric rebirth because karmic mental seeds leave a trail in your mental continuum. Note that this fourth mental seed doesn't relate to any of the above four ways of seeing an object.

In summary, normal people see blue due to an intimate familiarity with the expression, meaning that our perceptions come from these kinds of mental seeds.

### **Where Do Instincts Come From?**

If you've never seen a water pitcher before nor heard the name "water pitcher" and have no concept in your mind for water pitcher, then you have no "intimate familiarity with the expression." So how can you conceptualize water pitcher? This question, which Westerners often ask, assumes that there were no previous lives nor karmic seeds stored in a baby's mind at birth. From a Buddhist point of view, there is no such thing as a lack of familiarity with things, because so much of what we see is determined by our former mental seeds. This is where innate human instincts come from and is why little kids differ so much from each other in their abilities and interests. So everything you do right now is a result of repeated exposure to a similar kind of thing in the past. A baby calf's instinct to nurse and demanding urge to get milk is another example. This kind of behavior obviously was not learned in this life.

### **What Makes Green Green?**

The concept "green" that comes to your mind when you look at a leaf and at green paper, and the fact that you recognize it as the same color even if you don't know the word "green," is evidence of your previous exposure to the concept green and the mental seeds that must be in your mind that make you recognize the concept green *automatically*.

### **Apperception: Being Aware that You Are Aware**

In the Mind Only school, the *second* consciousness is a state of mind that is free of any such familiarity of expressions, or mental seeds. It can be called apperception, or true awareness of itself – being aware of yourself seeing at the same instant that you are seeing. This apperceptive state of mind does not come about through the force of mental seeds, so it is “devoid of any familiarity with the expression.” Buddha’s minds are also free of the forces of mental seeds, but we’re not talking about these enlightened states of mind here. A normal person’s apperception

Consider two different kinds of objects:

1. “That visual form which is the object that that first state of mind is focusing on” (NAMPAR SHEPAY MIKPAY SUK, p.54, L.4). This object exists through labeling and is not substantial; it does not exist ultimately, but rather exists nominally or deceptively.
2. “That object of the consciousness which is clear of any familiarity of the expressions is focusing on (p.54, L.9). This object exists substantially, not merely as labeled; it exists ultimately, and not just nominally or deceptively.

After the offering and dedication prayers at the end of class, Geshe Thubten Rinchen says, **“I look forward to the day when you do these prayers in English rather than in Tibetan.”**

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Class 23, Sunday Afternoon, 10/18/98**

**The Objects of Two Distinct States of Mind**

Picking up from the end of last class, there are the different kinds of objects, as each one is focused upon by a different state of mind:

1. The mental image of the object. The object of the first state of mind doesn't exist ultimately and does exist nominally, deceptively, or merely as labeled. This object is called "something you can see, that thing which has the name of something you can see." This must refer to *the fact* that visual objects are the things that you call "visual objects" – which is itself a mental construct.
2. The substantial object itself. The object of the second state of mind is substantial, is not just labeled, and does exist ultimately. This object is a thing that "cannot be called" (NGUPO JUDU MEPA) simply something we call "visual object." This refers to the real blue itself, rather than to the mental image of blue.

Consider this thermos bottle. Regarding the kind of object focused on by the second state of mind, this thermos bottle is something that "cannot be spoken of." The thermos bottle you can point to is *not* the thermos bottle that is "beyond description." The thermos bottle that *is* indescribable is that thermos bottle which is inseparable from the eye consciousness which is perceiving it. So *in the Mind Only school*, the thermos bottle you are seeing is not the one sitting on the table. The thermos bottle you are really seeing is the one that has an inseparable relationship with the visual consciousness.

**Where Is the Real Thermos Bottle?**

Where is this thermos bottle located? It *does* exist within the collection of its parts, but it is called "indescribable" because it cannot easily be described accurately by people who have not yet perceived emptiness directly. So to normal people there is a thermos bottle, which we cannot describe, that exist in its parts; but there is a chunk of stuff there which is an appearance in your own mind, and you are focusing on that apparent object and thinking that it is a thermos bottle. This is the object that the first state of mind focuses on. It's something close to a mental image – the appearance in your mind of a thermos bottle (which doesn't exist ultimately and only exists nominally, as a labeled thing). There *is* a real thermos bottle there in the collection of the parts, but this particular thermos bottle is beyond description for us. However, because of our habit of seeing objects as existing external to ourselves, certain mental seeds are planted in our mind that make us see the appearance that the thermos is what is called the thermos. The idea or concept that the thermos is getting the name thermos is actually what we're seeing – we're not seeing the real thermos that is actually out there based on the collection of the parts. So us normal people who haven't yet seen emptiness directly can only see the concept of the thermos. This concept is the object of the first state of mind described earlier (p.54).

Therefore, there are actually two thermoses:

1. The thermos that appears to us normal people, which is the idea or concept of the thermos.
2. The real thermos that *is* out there and truly exists in the collection of the parts, which we normal people can't see at all.

## **Tibetan Medicine and Yellow Yogurt**

Mistaken perceptions can be caused by certain influences or diseases. In Tibetan medicine three basic elements, or humors, and how they are balanced, determine your health: Wind, Bile and Phlegm. For example, in a disease where you have too much of the wind element, you begin to see white things as blue. Let's consider the case, accepted by Western medicine, where if the bile humor is overly predominant you begin to get a condition of jaundice or hepatitis; your eyes turn yellow, and then your perceptions start to change, like you'll start to see white paper as being tinted yellow.

In this example you could distinguish between a person who knew they had jaundice and that it was affecting their perceptions, from a person who didn't know that their jaundice was affecting their perceptions. The second person would be sure that the paper is really yellow. The first person who also sees only yellow would know that there is a second piece of paper that is the real one, which is really white, that is hanging out behind his wrong perception.

Likewise for healthy people, there is a real thermos out there and then there is the appearance of a thermos, and the latter one is what we are always seeing. Like the sick person, we normal people can only see the image that appears to us, but there is also the real object out there, which we can't see.

A white bowl of yogurt would likewise appear yellow to a jaundiced person. Is he eating white yogurt or yellow yogurt? White yogurt, of course, but he thinks he's eating yellow yogurt. In the same way, we think we're seeing the real thermos, but we're only seeing the rough image of a thermos. We can't see the subtle thermos that exists in the collection of its parts. This point comes up far later in the text.

The Middle Way Consequence School, however, says that the rough thermos that appears to you *is* the thermos bottle. That's all that exists. There is no subtle phantom thermos that exists behind our perception of the thermos. Therefore, to their school, the rough thermos that appears to you is an external object.

## **The Rough Image vs. the Subtle Indescribable Object Itself**

It is the subtle indescribable version of the thermos that is indivisibly related to your perception of the thermos, and this thermos itself is a changing object. The *rough image* of the thermos that is appearing to you is not the one that is indivisibly related to your visual perception, and this rough image is in the category of unchanging things or constructs. Again, by contrast, to the Middle Way things are much simpler: there aren't two different thermoses; the appearance of the thermos *is* the thermos.

This rough image of a visual object like a thermos is similar to a general mental image (DUN CHI) of a thing, but not exactly the same. The rough image is an unchanging construct that appears in between our mind and the visual object. In terms of our understanding of it, mental images are relatively easy to grasp. They are not related to sense perceptions; they are images of the mind or the imagination; for example, your mental image of the guy that used to be sitting here in class but now has left to return to America. You would never mistake this mental image for the guy himself.

But the image that relates to the sense perceptions is more subtle, more difficult to catch yourself creating, and more difficult to perceive as the image. This is why the object of the second state of mind is called “indescribable.”

### **Labeled Things vs. Substantially Existing Things**

Je Tsongkapa draws from Arya Asanga’s *Abbreviation* to make the distinction between things that exist as merely labeled versus things that exist substantially (p.54, L.13 to p.55, L.3). An object that exists merely through labels can only be perceived if you first perceive some other object (see class ##). For example, to perceive “a person” you must first perceive their parts before you can see the whole person.

An object that exists substantially can be perceived immediately without having to first perceive other objects. For example, mental things themselves, or states of mind, as an object, can be perceived immediately without having to first perceive their parts. Specifically, **apperception** – the simultaneous awareness of your own perceptions that are perceiving something else – is the awareness that you are seeing blue, and you can perceive the fact that you are seeing blue immediately. The blue which the self-awareness is aware of is something that exists *substantially* because you can perceive it immediately.

### **Labeled Things and Constructs**

A literal description of “existing through labels” (TAGYU) is “that thing which is not such that to perceive it you need not depend on other things, those things which to perceive them you need to depend on other things first” (p.55, L.5). These are things that don’t just exist nominally and which exist through definition, for example a person. **The point here is that the Mind Only school is saying that something can exist by labels and yet still exist by definition.** [The Middle Way school says everything exists merely through labels, and that it would be impossible for an single object to both exist through labels and to exist by definition at the same time; an object can’t be just a projection and yet still exist by definition.] But here the Mind Only school is saying that “a person” exists both through labels and exists by definition. Remember that constructs (KUNTAK) and things that exist by labels (TAKYU) are not synonymous. The requirement for being a thing that exists through labels is that in order to perceive it you must first perceive something else; whereas the requirement for being a construct is that it not exist through its own side through a unique



way of being, and that it be merely a construct of our mind. So to the Mind Only school, constructs and labeled things are not synonymous but neither are they contradictory.

So Je Tsongkapa says that a single object can be both a) an object that exists through labels, and b) an object that exists by definition meaning that it is not simply a projection or construct of the mind. For example, a mental seed which exists *in the* foundation consciousness (KUNSHI BAKJAK) is something which both exists through labels and exists by definition. We say “in the” foundation conscious in order to emphasize that to perceive the mental seed you have to first think about the foundation consciousness as a prerequisite – so the mental seed exists through labels. We could also use as an example “person” which exists only through labels because you have to perceive other things first before you can perceive “person” and it does exist by definition.

The Mind Only school has four distinct meanings for the term existing through labels (TAGYU).

3. Regarding (back on p. 54) the state of mind that holds an object that only exists by labels, TAGYU here means “exists only as a projection or construct of the mind.”
4. In the previous paragraph, TAGYU meant something which in order to perceive it you must first perceive other objects.

Note that when we say that one object can both exist through labels and exist by definition, it’s not contradictory if we are using this second definition; but existing through labels in the sense of being merely a projection of the mind is completely contradictory to existing by definition (p.55, L.8).

A non-existent thing also can be said to exist through labels. For example, the fact that a specific object is called that object. If this fact did exist by definition, it would have to exist through labels because in order to perceive it you first have to perceive other things.

## **What Is There vs. Where It’s Located**

We now return to the topic discussed in class 21, “Avoiding the Apparent Contradiction” (p. 55, L.10). The second way of explaining what it means to exist ultimately and to exist deceptively, is explained in Maitreya’s book, *Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes*. Existing “ultimately” can refer to:

5. The **ultimate object** (DUN DUN DAMPA, “the object of ultimate object”) is emptiness itself, ultimate reality. This is what the second definition of existing ultimately refers to.
6. The **ultimate attainment** is nirvana, reaching the state of a foe destroyer.
7. The **ultimate practice** is the perception of emptiness, the practice of perceiving emptiness.

**DUN DAM** When Je Tsongkapa’s text mentions “the commentary,” it is referring to meaning highest Master Vasubhandhu’s commentary on *Distinguishing the Middle from the*

*Extremes*; and when the text mentions “the explanation” (DREL-SHEY) of this commentary, it is referring to the commentary written by Master Stirumati (LO DI DENPO?), which comes much later in the text. (p.55, L.13). Vasubhandhu says that Maitreya’s book is referring to the second definition of existing ultimately, the “object of highest meaning” which is emptiness itself. The highest state of mind in the world is the direct perception of emptiness. The term “wisdom” (YESHE), here means “path” or state of mind or spiritual realization. So the expression “ultimate object” is a pun: “the object (DUN) of highest (DAM) meaning (DUN).”

When you say something exists ultimately (as ultimate reality), *where* does it exist ultimately? In the ultimate state of mind. You can say that something exists as ultimate in this sense only by speaking of the *state of mind* that is perceiving it. That object that exists to, or is established by, or is located by (NYE DUN), the highest state of mind, is the ultimate object, or emptiness. The subject that holds the ultimate object is “the path of purity,” the direct perception of emptiness. **You must distinguish between the thing that is there (emptiness), and the place where the thing is located.** Je Tsongkapa says, “The highest is that deep state of meditative wisdom which is immaculate [the direct perception of emptiness]” (p.55, L.14). “What could be that ultimate thing? Not dependent things or constructs, but only one thing alone: totality [emptiness].”

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**Review from Last Class**

The idea of the grosser form of the thermos that you see, and a subtler form of the thermos that lies behind it, is similar to the “water analysis” (CHU BAB) in Middle Way – a deity, human and hungry ghost are all seeing a different thing when they look at liquid.

In the second interpretation of what it means to “exist ultimately,”

8. First you must identify the ultimate as being totality or emptiness (YONGDRUP).
9. Secondly, you must identify this emptiness as being ultimate reality or ultimate truth.
10. Thirdly you must identify the person to whom it is true and the state of mind to whom it is established as true – its locale is the state of mind of a person who is seeing emptiness directly.

**The Lack of a Self Nature of Things and of Persons**

Maitreya’s *Distinguishing Between the Middle and the Extremes* says (p.56, L.2), “There are two different objects of the purity and they are spoken to be only one.” Only one of the three groups of attributes can be spoken of as being ultimate reality, and there are two different types of emptiness (YONGDRUP):

11. The subtle lack of a self-nature to “a person.”
12. The subtle lack of a self-nature to “things,” meaning the parts of a person.

Some people say totality only refers to the lack of a subtle self-nature of things, and doesn’t refer to a subtle lack of a self-nature to a person. Je Tsongkapa does quote the *Sutra on the True Intent* as saying, “Totality only refers to the lack of self-nature of things” (p.23, L.16). This contradicts the above quote.

The commentary (by Master Vasubhandhu) says that dependent things and constructs are not ultimate because they don’t qualify as one of the objects of the two knowledges of purity (the emptiness of a person and of things). Je Tsongkapa says (p.56, L.6) these two knowledges of purity are those things which purify your being of the two kinds of knowledge:

13. The direct perception of the lack of self-nature of *a person* allows you to eliminate the mental affliction obstacles, which block you from achieving *nirvana*.
14. The direct perception of the lack of self-nature of *things* (which occurs later) allows you to eliminate the obstacles of knowledge, which block you from becoming *omniscient*.

The Middle Way Independent school agrees, but the Middle Way Consequence group (which alone believes that the tendency to see things as self-existent is itself a mental affliction), would say that it’s the direct perception of the lack of a subtle self-nature of *things* that allows you to eliminate mental affliction obstacles also. The direct perception of emptiness is exactly the same whether you are focusing on the basis of objects or the basis of persons.

## **Apperception and the Direct Perception of Emptiness**

The Incomparable Gentle Voice Manjushri Protector Je Tsongkapa says there are three versions of self-knowledge (RANG RIK, self-awareness, or apperception):

15. The state of mind that watches itself seeing blue.
16. The awareness that is seeing blue is also knowing itself simultaneously.
17. The awareness that knows the very thing itself (emptiness).

The second interpretation – where the awareness of blue is also aware of its perceiving blue – could suggest that the state of mind that perceives itself perceiving emptiness directly must itself be totality because it is the object of the self-awareness of the mind perceiving emptiness.

Apperception involves a second state of mind – the awareness of the awareness of blue – and these two states of mind have an inseparable relationship such that if you lost one you would also lose the other (NGOWO CHIK); apperception is not literally “the mind perceiving itself,” but these two states of mind are so intimately related that you can call it that.

## **Two Interpretations of Rang**

The direct perception of emptiness (subject)	→	the direct perception of emptiness (object)	→	emptiness itself (object)
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There are two ways of interpreting the phrase, “the wisdom which knows itself *individually*” (SOSOR RANG RIK GYI YESHE):

18. “Individually” can mean that each individual direct perception of emptiness also perceives itself perceiving emptiness directly (thus referring to apperception). *Nga-rang* means “myself,” so the first guys say that self (RANG) here refers to myself, meaning apperception. They say that the object of the path of purity need not always be “the ultimate,” i.e., when you are referring to the apperception that occurs during the path of purity.
19. “Individually” can also mean the individual emptinesses of various different objects. *Kor-rang* means “themselves,” so these guys are referring to emptiness, the object of the path of purity. So here the object of the path of purity is always “the ultimate,” or emptiness. They admit that this state of mind does perceive itself, but this fact is unimportant compared to the fact that it is perceiving emptiness. Sera Je scholars believe this point, while Sera Mey scholars and scholars from the Losaling college of Drebung, and the Amdo scholars believe that apperception is not at all referred to when it says “itself.”

Je Tsongkapa agrees with this second interpretation, and he admits that the direct perception does involve some kind of apperception in the Mind Only school (p.56, L.9). So we have to admit that Je Tsongkapa seems to concord with the Sera Je interpretation. However, when we talk about “the object of the *path* of purity,” the object that is the basis of this path, or spiritual realization, is emptiness itself, so the apperception that may also be occurring at this

point is not very important. For example, you can call a certain guy “Mr. President,” and it is because of him being “Mr. President” that you invite him to an international conference, but he is still that same old guy. Similarly, the direct perception of emptiness is involved with other things like apperception, but the main point is that it is focusing on emptiness.

Je Tsongkapa summarizes that even though things may not be ultimate in terms of being ultimate reality, they can still be ultimate in terms of existing from their own side with a unique way of being, not just existing nominally (p.56, L.10). So a thing which is an ultimate but is not an unproduced thing must be a changing thing.

### **The Mind that Is Free of Subject and Object**

Aryadeva, a great Middle Way scholar, in his *Compendium of the Essence of Wisdom* (YESHE NYINGPO KORLAY DUPA), describes a “state of mind which is free of subject and object.” There are two interpretations of this phrase:

20. According to the Mind Only school, an object and the state of mind which perceives it come from the same karmic seed and so are not of a separate substance.
21. Another Mind Only interpretation is that certain states of mind are free of subject and object because their school doesn’t hold to externally existing objects.

Aryadeva then says that these subjects and objects “exist ultimately” (DAMPA DUNDA YU), and “that’s what they say in the Yogacharra (Mind Only) system.” So he is saying that these states of mind do exist ultimately. Je Tsongkapa says this “ultimate” refers to the first meaning of the term ultimate (as existing by definition, not merely nominally). Je Tsongkapa’s personal advice to us regarding the debate about whether or not changing things exist ultimately (which has two meanings) is to focus on the first meaning of “existing ultimately” which is to exist by definition, not merely nominally (p.57, L.1). There is no debate about the second meaning of existing ultimately – whether or not changing things are ultimate reality itself, which is obviously not the case. The debate is whether or not changing things exist by definition, from their own side, not merely as nominally existent objects.

Je Tsongkapa asks, “How is it that the first two natures (constructs and dependent things) exist deceptively?” (p.57, L.5). They exist deceptively in the second sense of not being emptiness itself. Arya Asanga’s *Abbreviation* says, “Dependent things (GYU TSEN) and the constructing state of mind (NAM TOK), here’s how they exist deceptively:”

22. Due to their involvement with mental afflictions.
23. Due to their involvement with motivation.
24. Due to being the object of the labeling process.

The term “ultimate” in the second sense, as being the object of the path of purity, is so-called because if you focus upon it your obstacles will be purified. Emptiness is that object which if perceived directly will allow you to purify yourself of all of your obstacles, which is why it’s called ultimate. So deceptive reality consists of those things which when focused upon trigger mental afflictions. Do *all* changing things trigger mental afflictions? No, but generally they do because for us normal people changing things basically are not peace from the beginning nor are they beyond suffering (see p.22, L.2). Even a heavily afflicted person

who has a mental affliction triggered when they look at a Buddha, would not have increased mental afflictions if they continued to look at a Buddha's body (which is a changing thing), so we only say that *most* changing things are considered to trigger and exacerbate mental afflictions. For example, Devadata, the Buddha's half-brother, could not even maintain his hatred of the Buddha when in his direct presence.

### **The Second Reason Why Things Exist Deceptively**

The second reason why changing things and constructs are said to exist deceptively, and by implication nominally, is described in the phrase, "That very nature which is of the nature of being labeled through thoughts and words [constructs], and that thing which provides the basis of labels [changing things]" – which indicates that changing things are the basis of the label and the basis of the word and the thought.

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Recap: Changing things are said to exist nominally, or deceptively, because:

25. They trigger mentally afflicted things.
26. They provide the basis for labeling or ascription, through the mind, words, or constructs.

Je Tsongkapa says that changing things are called “that which exhibits causation” (GYU TSEN) because they are the place referred to with expression, i.e., labeling through ideas or words, or by constructs, done by a constructing state of mind (p.57, L.14). Master Vasubhandhu says in his *Reasoned Exposition*, “That thing which is the object of the mistaken state of mind of the world is what we call deceptive reality, and that thing which is the object of the state of mind which has gone beyond the world is called ultimate reality.” A “mistaken state of mind of the world” is a deceptive state of mind which is investigating what it is to be a nominal thing (TANYE CHU JE GYI RIKPA). The opposite of this mistaken state of mind is the direct perception of emptiness, which “transcends the world.”

**Three Mind Only Interpretations of Emptiness**

The Mind Only school says that the term “deceptive” in the phrase “deceptive reality” refers to the state of mind that holds its object to be self-existent – meaning, thinking that an object is the thing that’s called the object, by definition (p.58, L.3). We can further posit that there are three kinds of emptiness or totality:

27. The fact that the fact that an object is what it is named doesn’t exist by definition.
28. The fact that objects don’t exist externally.
29. The fact that the consciousness that perceives blue and the blue that that consciousness perceives are not coming from different karmic seeds.

The three states of mind that hold to these three corresponding wrong ideas represent the tendency to hold something as being self-existent. Furthermore, holding one of these wrong ideas will lead to holding to the others. If an object exists externally then it must exist as an object constructed from part-less atoms and it doesn’t exist in an inseparable relationship with my consciousness. The ignorance that holds that the object and the consciousness perceiving it don’t come from the same karmic seed also would believe that the object can’t be indivisibly related to my consciousness.

**Trains, Planes and Buses**

Similarly, “ultimate reality” refers to the object that is perceived by the direct perception of emptiness. So the words “ultimate” and “deceptive” in the phrases “ultimate reality” and “deceptive reality” refer to the *states of mind* that are perceiving emptiness directly or perceiving things as existing truly, respectively; and “reality” simply refers to the thing that is real to these two states of mind. The objects that constitute deceptive reality are those objects

that the deceived state of mind believes to exist truly; and the objects that constitute ultimate reality are those objects that the ultimate state of mind believes to exist truly.

For example, the airports, train stations and bus stations are named on the basis of the vehicles that arrive and depart from them. A train station is a place where trains come in and go out. Similarly, the two kinds of reality are given their names, ultimate and deceptive, on the basis of the two kinds of states of mind, ultimate and deceived, which are perceiving them as existing truly. A train station is so-named because of the trains that come and go, and deceptive reality is so-named because of the deceived state of mind that sees it as existing truly.

## **Two Stages of the Path of Seeing**

A quotation from Arya Asanga's *Abbreviation*, called "incidental explanation" (SHAR CHU) explains the phrases "exist ultimately" and "exist deceptively" in the context of the two stages of the path of seeing (p.58, L.7-15):

30. The direct perception of emptiness is a state of mind that is sometimes described as "existing ultimately" because it doesn't fit either of the reasons listed above for calling something deceptive reality: it's not just a construct of the mind, and it doesn't trigger mental afflictions.
31. The aftermath of the direct perception of emptiness is said to exist *both* deceptively and ultimately: it exists deceptively because you are mostly perceiving deceptive objects, and it exists ultimately because you start thinking about emptiness again. The connotations of these phrases are unique to this explanation, so you shouldn't mix them with earlier interpretations.

## **The Mind Only School Takes Sides against the Middle Way**

Master Vasubhandhu's *Reasoned Exposition* describes an argument between the two lower schools and the Middle Way school (p.58, L.15 - p.59, L.11), and the Mind Only school says that Middle Way can't defend its viewpoint. Mind Only school claims that the Middle Way believes that karma (e.g., the movement of the mind: SEM JUNG SEMPA) and its maturation or ripening *do* exist, but that the "agent" or person who commits the karma *doesn't* exist. Middle way people say, "no object in the universe has any nature of its own" (CHU TAMCHE NGOWO NYI ME), so how can karma and its consequences exist? They can't exist ultimately according to the Middle Way school. If they exist deceptively, then why can't you say the person also exists deceptively?

The two lower schools, Detailists and Sutrists, respond to the Mind Only school (p.59, L.5), saying that "deceptive" means those things which are names, expressions, labels, terms, i.e., constructs (KUNTAKS), and "ultimate" means any objects which could exist by definition. Mind Only says that karma and its consequences can exist ultimately, because the first definition of ultimate is anything which is not simply a projection. You can also call them deceptive, because the second definition of deceptive is anything which is the object of the state of mind that is examining nominal things. The text says "If you want to say 'deceptive'



refers to the state of mind that is exploring nominal things, and if you want to describe ‘ultimate’ as those objects that exist by definition, then karma and their consequences exist nominally and by definition; so whichever definition you want to use is okay with us.” It’s only if you use the problematic Middle Way view from the second turning of the wheel, that you can’t describe an object as being something that exists both ultimately and deceptively. But according to our approach objects can exist both ultimately and deceptively.

The Mind Only school now says that “a person” exists deceptively (according to the second definition) and doesn’t exist substantially (they only exist through labels, as explained above). But karma and its ripenings exist deceptively (according to the second definition) but they do exist substantially and don’t exist as something merely labeled. Furthermore, we can say that all three exist deceptively because they are the object of the worldly state of mind (which analyzes things with a nominal or deceived state of mind). The text then says, “Those two [karma and its ripenings] could never serve as the object of that knowledge which transcends the world [the direct perception of emptiness] because its object is beyond all description [JU DU MEPA] and is an ‘overall characteristic’” (CHI TSEN-NYI) which covers all things, meaning emptiness itself (p.60, L1).

### **The Middle Way Response about Karma, It’s Consequences, and Its Agent**

The Middle Way agrees that Lord Buddha said in the second turning that karma and its consequences do exist and the person who commits the karma doesn’t exist, but he simply meant that karma and its consequences exist nominally and the person who commits the karma exists but not ultimately.

The Middle Way Independent group would agree that karma and its consequences do exist nominally; but they would interpret Lord Buddha’s statement of the second turning, that “the agent doesn’t exist,” as referring to the creator god of the non-Buddhists – the guy who made the world who is eternal and unchanging, which actually doesn’t exist at all.

### **Three Ways of Existing “Deceptively” Relating to the Three Attributes**

In summary, to the Mind Only school there are three different connotations for the term “*deceptive*” (p.60, L.5):

32. **Labeled deceptive stuff** – this refers to a *construct* of the mind.
33. **Mental deceptive stuff** – this refers to *changing things*; and the most important dependent thing to be aware of as being deceptive reality is the mistaken state of mind which tends to hold things as self-existent.
34. **Expression** – this refers to *totality* or *emptiness* which is given so many (inadequate, artificial) expressions. Emptiness is beyond description in the sense that it can’t be described accurately by or to a person who has not yet perceived emptiness; yet we go around trying to talk about it and trying to express it. Emptiness is deceptive in the sense that our words are totally inadequate to describe it. Our descriptions are only rough approximations of emptiness. During the second turning of the wheel, Lord

Buddha does say that *all* existing things exist deceptively, so emptiness must also exist deceptively and not ultimately; and yet emptiness is ultimate reality, not deceptive reality. This is just mincing words. When Lord Buddha said that all things including emptiness exist deceptively, he is referring to the fact that we can only grasp emptiness roughly. More generally, it is correct to say that emptiness exists ultimately and not deceptively

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**Our Images of Emptiness Are Deceptive**

Emptiness is called “expression” because our descriptions of emptiness are futile, only rough approximations of what emptiness really is. In *this* sense *only* emptiness can be said to exist deceptively – because our way of thinking about emptiness involves constructs that are deceptive or inaccurate.

**Precision Thinking**

Je Tsongkapa here explains (p.60, L11 to p.61, L.2) that these terms – ultimate, deceptive, substantial, labeled – mean very different things in the different schools. Therefore, to understand what ultimate truth and deceptive truth really is, you have to be able to describe the views of each school, mainly because the different schools represent ideas about what emptiness is or isn’t that naturally occur to the mind that is working on this question. Otherwise, you’ll be unable to explain the crucial points to others, or you’ll just make something up when you talk to others. You need *precision* particularly between the Mind Only and Middle Way view of what is ultimate and what is deceptive.

<p><b>GAWA</b> became to be happy studying, but to like a thing <i>more</i></p>	<p><b>TSAM</b> nothing more than that</p>	<p><b>Nothing more than what you like.</b> Before you Buddhist, you had some attraction to the way of you couldn’t really describe it clearly; it was <i>nothing</i> <i>more</i> <i>than what you could think of.</i></p>
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**“The Way In Which Other Scriptures Explain These Points”**

Part three now begins (p.61, L.2) by presenting the way that *other* scriptures explain the points about how in the third turning of the wheel Lord Buddha clarified what he meant when he said in the first turning that all these things exist by definition and in the second turning when he said that nothing exists by definition.

Maitreya’s *Jewel of the Sutras (Sutralamkara)* mentions four characteristics of what Lord Buddha really meant when he said in the second turning that “nothing exists by definition.” He was talking about the three characteristics of produced things:

35. The water pitcher, for example, that exists in the **present time**. Is the current water pitcher something that doesn’t come about through its causes and conditions? No. In this sense there is no current water pitcher (which doesn’t come from its causes and conditions). The present water pitcher is constantly in motion; it never stays in its nature; it is constantly on the move toward its destruction.

36. The **past** of the water pitcher. Is the current water pitcher made of the past water pitcher? Of course not, because the past-ness of the water pitcher no longer exists. By the time of the current water pitcher, the past of the water pitcher no longer exists. For example, the meal that you finished at a restaurant, the past meal, doesn't appear now in the present time.
37. The **future** of the water pitcher. Is the future water pitcher such that it doesn't come from its causes and conditions? No, it will come from its causes and conditions. So the future water pitcher that won't have come from its causes and conditions is something that doesn't exist. The water pitcher of the future is *moving toward the present*, but things don't approach the present from the future without their causes and conditions.

The *Jewel of the Sutras* says, "Itself (RANG) and the water pitcher of the future (RANG DANG) (p.61, L.12)

??

says, "That thing which doesn't exist as itself, that thing that doesn't exist as its characteristics, that thing that cannot be found in its essence, that thing which is not as you hold it.

### **The Four Characteristics of How We Exist**

The fourth characteristic, "it does not exist as you hold it to be," consists of the "four backwards thoughts" (CHINCHI LOK SHI):

38. We tend to think of our bodies as beautiful and pure, when in reality they are approaching disintegration and death.
39. We think any good physical sensation is good, when in reality it is suffering because it will end.
40. We think our body is *permanent* and *unchanging*, when in reality it is gradually disintegrating.
41. We tend to think of "ourselves" as existing through its own nature, in truth, from its own side, through some nature of its own; when in reality we don't exist objectively from our own side.

These beliefs are illogical and only are held because we don't correctly analyze the way things really are. Maitreya says that when Lord Buddha said in the second turning of the wheel that nothing exists by

definition, what he meant was that it's incorrect to see yourself as being permanent, not suffering, and having a self-nature. So the opposite of these four characteristics (MITAK DUKNGEL TONGPA DANG ME) are:

42. We are **impermanent** (MITAK). This is the opposite of being permanent (#3 above).
43. We are **suffering** all the time (DUKNGEL). This is the opposite of being happy (#2 above).
44. We are **empty** of any self-nature (TONGPA). This is the opposite being clear or pure (#1 above).

45. We don't have any **self-nature** as "persons." This is the opposite of having a self-nature (#4 above).

If you're about to eat lunch and your hands are dirty, you tend to distinguish between yourself (which seems to be self-existent or self-standing) and your hands which seem to not be a part of you. In reality, you are devoid or empty of having some clean self-existent body that exists separately from your dirty hands. When you think "my hands are dirty," by implication you are thinking "but *I* am clean." You distinguish between you and your body – you feel that you and your body are indivisibly related but are two separate things. In reality, you are empty of having any such separation. It's true that you and your hand are two different things, but they are intimately related. If you remove yourself, your hand also is eliminated. This is why you say "*I* cut my hand," not "this hand was cut."

### **Two Kinds of Relationships**

There are two kinds of relationships in the universe:

46. **Cause and effect.** One thing causes another thing. The cause and the effect cannot both exist at the same time.
47. **Identity.** If you remove one thing, the other thing it is related to also must be eliminated. Both things must exist at the same time. There are two-way relationships of identity; for example, everything that is produced is impermanent and everything that is impermanent is produced; and there are one-way relationships of identity; for example, all water pitchers are changing things but not all changing things are water pitchers.

### **Eight Meanings of the Phrase "Nothing Exists by Definition"**

In the second turning of the wheel, when Lord Buddha said that nothing exists by definition, he was really just denying the four qualities: things are clean, happy, permanent, and have a self-nature. So according to the *Jewel of the Sutras* Lord Buddha meant eight distinct things when he said that nothing exists by definition:

#### **The Three Times:**

48. The present water pitcher doesn't exist which doesn't come from its causes and conditions.
49. The past water pitcher doesn't exist.
50. The future water pitcher doesn't exist.

#### **The Four Characteristics (plus one):**

51. We are impermanent.
52. We are suffering.
53. We are empty of being clean in the sense of existing independent of our characteristics.
54. We don't have a self-nature of persons. This one has a second part:
- 4a. The tendency to hold things as existing as external to ourselves.

## **Eleven Meanings of the Phrase “Nothing Exists by Definition”**

Arya Asanga’s *Compendium of Higher Knowledge (Abhidharma Samuchaya)* says that when Lord Buddha said that nothing exists by definition he was talking about “those two,” meaning the above four (#1-4) and the one (#4a); and “those three lacks of a self-nature:” meaning the three attributes:

55. Constructs really don’t exist by definition.
56. Dependent things don’t grow simultaneously; they only grow from their causes and conditions.
57. Totality is the *absence* of the thing that exists self-existently (the GAKJA); totality is non-existent in the sense of being the simple lack of the subtle thing that emptiness denies. Totality cancels, or doesn’t possess, a self-existent object, and so doesn’t exist by definition.

So now you can say that when Lord Buddha said in the second turning of the wheel that nothing exists by definition, he was talking about eleven things: the eight mentioned in the previous section, plus the three attributes as described immediately above.

## **The Three Times and the Absence of a Self-Nature**

The *Light of the Middle Way*, by Master Kamalashila says (p.61, L.14) that “things that have stopped [e.g., the water pitcher of the past] don’t have a nature either,” meaning they don’t have a nature of sneaking into the present and occurring again. For example, the water pitcher of the present doesn’t “remain in its essence,” meaning it is always on the move toward the past, about to be destroyed. Je Tsongkapa (p.62, L.1) says a future tense sprout can’t just pop out of the ground by itself; a past tense sprout can’t revisit the present because it’s gone forever; and a present tense sprout can’t stay in the present because it’s always on the move. So when Lord Buddha said that nothing had a self-nature, he meant that these three objects of the “three times” don’t have a nature of self-appearing in, revisiting, or remaining in the present time.

“Things don’t exist as you take them to be” means that “infants,” or spiritually immature people or people who haven’t seen emptiness directly yet, take things as being clean, beautiful, permanent, and having a nature of their own (TSANG, DE, TAK, DAK). Also they believe that things are “the very essence of labels,” meaning that they exist as external objects.

## **Some Other Guys Believe in External Objects**

Some other guys “believe the one [the fifth characteristic] to be otherwise” – to be “the definitive characteristic of constructs.” Je Tsongkapa explains (p.62,L.7) that this means that the visual consciousness that holds to blue and the blue that it holds are separate, meaning that they come from separate karmic seeds; therefore, they believe in external objects which don’t come from the same karmic seed as the perception of those objects.

## **The Eleven Explanations also Apply to the Latter Four Characteristics**

The above eleven explanations of Lord Buddha's phrase "nothing has a nature of its own, or nothing exists by definition" only focus on the first of the five characteristics mentioned in the second turning of the wheel. They don't address the remaining four characteristics:

- 58. Things don't grow.
- 59. Things don't stop.
- 60. Things are peace from the beginning.
- 61. Things are gone beyond suffering.

However, these latter four characteristics can be described in the same way as the first characteristic is described above. Lord Buddha's statement in the second turning of the wheel that things don't exist by definition boils down to the fact that they don't exist *as external objects*. Similarly, you can say they don't have a nature of starting or stopping as external objects, and everything transcends the state of existing in a self-nature of being an external object, and everything has been free from the beginning of the state of being a self-existent external object.

For example, the starting and stopping of things doesn't have the quality of having an unchangingness that exists by definition; and things have forever been free of a thing that exists by definition and is unchanging; and things have transcended the state of being an unchanging that exists by definition. If something doesn't exist by definition then it can't be a thing that starts by definition, stops by definition, etc.

Consider your body that is permanent, or unchanging. This is a thing that doesn't exist in the first place. Therefore, it is not something that exists by definition, it is not something that starts or stops by definition, etc. Likewise, consider external things (which also don't exist); when Lord Buddha said that things don't exist by definition, one thing he meant was that things don't exist as external objects that exist by definition. It's also not an external thing that could start or stop by definition; it also transcends the state of going beyond the grief of being an external object; and likewise is so from the beginning.

Are you something that doesn't bear an indivisible relation with your parts? No. You do share an inseparable relation with your hand. Therefore, it's not true that you don't share a relationship to your hand by definition; and it's not true that you don't share a relationship to your hand that could ever start or stop.

Now let's isolate the thing, "existing by definition in the sense of you and your hand having no relationship." Are you free of this quality from the beginning? Yes. And you have transcended, or are free from, this condition of not having a relationship with your hand like this.

To understand these points, you have to focus on a negative thing, on something that doesn't exist, like "does this non-existent thing have such and such a quality?" When we say "clean," we're talking about a hand that's "dirty," and a self that's clean, and the artificial separateness between the hand and the self. There two steps:

1. You think, "I'm clean but my arm is dirty."
2. You therefore think, "My arm is not intimately related to myself."



## SOME QUESTIONS:

How do you reconcile the statement that a dependently originating thing does exist by definition, from its own side, with a unique way of being; with the statement that it has no external existence (because Mind Only says that there don't exist any indivisible parts which would be necessary as building blocks to make it up)? Is a specific reason ever given?

What is the basis of the Mind Only school's claim that if something (particularly, changing things) doesn't exist by definition then it can't exist at all? If constructs exist, but not by definition, then why can't changing things do so also? Do they ever give a specific defensible rationale?

Constructs are "all the unchanging things other than emptiness itself." So how can they be produced by a mental image? Aren't we saying the father's thoughts are the *cause* of the construct "Tashi the boy"? This is a problem because unchanging things can't be produced or caused. I suppose we'd say they "come into existence" coincident to or following the father's thought, but this sounds like merely a semantic distinction. I guess it's the difference between "the fact" (unchanging) and the mental idea (changing).

The Mind Only school's criterion for whether Buddha's words should be taken ("if the words precisely match Buddha's intent") seems to be circular. How do they establish what his intent is for any given statement? What would his reason ever have been to state the second turning as he did? Just to confuse people? Just being lazy using short-hand terminology?

In class 14, we described the Mind Only schools eighth consciousness, mental affliction consciousness, as being a *mistaken* view that the *kunshi* represents a self-existent person that exists from its own side. But doesn't the Mind Only school actually posit that the *kunshi* is self-existent? or would they just say that it exists by definition but is not self-existent?