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Compassion, Knowledge, and Power: A Tibetan Approach to Politics and Religion

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In the introduction to his *Modern Buddhist Bible*, Donald Lopez suggests that the form of Buddhism recently promulgated and practiced in developed countries, especially the United States, should best be considered a "new sect" of Buddhism.¹ The subtext of Lopez's brief discussion is that "modern Buddhism" is far more modern than Buddhist. In other words, Buddhism is simply an easily appropriated slate on which the angst-ridden elite of the developing world may write their own modern concerns. Along these lines, the cultural critic Slavoj Žižek deplores "Western Buddhism" as an untraditional pabulum that saps its adherents of the will to realize any agency within the upheavals of modernity.² Both Lopez and Žižek are right, I think, to decry an all-too-easy appropriation of Buddhism as a kind of religious opiate, but it would be wrong to think that the "modern" in "modern Buddhism" is supplied only by its Western adherents. Instead, in asking why Buddhism seems so easily appropriated into modernity, we should heed those, such as Gustavo Benavides, who note that traditional Buddhist thought anticipates modernity:

In some respects, indeed, systems such as Buddhism went much further than philosophies developed in the Christian world in their approach to philosophical problems. Thus one can regard Buddhist conceptions of language as having recognized the arbitrary and relational character of the linguistic sign. Similarly, the attempt to move beyond the infatuation with the illusory ego can be considered as the most consistent rejection of reification before Marx. Finally the concept of *dharma* and the concern with causality allow one to analyze all of reality in its constitutive aspects as well as to determine the mechanisms through which these principles relate to each other.³

In terms of what he calls Buddhism's "modern" conceptual world, Benavides is only scratching the surface here. Even Donald Wiebe, whose approach to modernity amounts to a triumphalist paean to European rationality, highlights features in European intellectual developments that, while central to his version of modernity, are also central to Buddhist thought.⁴

Nevertheless, while Buddhist intellectuals inhabit a conceptual world with certain modern features, we could scarcely call Tibet "modern," whether it be before or after the invasion by the People's Republic of China in 1950. If a kind of "conceptual modernity" elaborated largely by the intelligentsia were sufficient for the constitution of a modern society, then

early Buddhist skepticism and its concern with causality would have led us to expect a flourishing technology in the Buddhist world; similarly, the fact that membership in the community of monks is regulated in a contractual rather than in a sacramental manner would have led us to anticipate generalized democratic social arrangements resembling our own through Buddhist Asia.⁵

Benavides rightly underlines an important lesson here: from the seeming "modernity" of Buddhism we should learn that modernity itself is less monolithic than the singularity of the term may suggest.⁶ At the same time, this lesson opens up an inquiry into the ways in which Buddhism is in fact not modern, most especially in terms of the political and social institutions in traditional Buddhist countries. We may usefully ask, in other words, why Buddhism's conceptual modernity did not lead to parallel developments in social and political theory. For now, we will leave this large, perhaps intractable, question aside in favor of a more modest inquiry: given that Buddhist intellectuals did not develop social and political theories and institutions that we would identify as modern, how do those intellectuals react when they are now confronted with the opportunity or need to do so? How, in short, can a Buddhist intellectual turn the "conceptual modernity" of Buddhist thought to the task of creating the theoretical structures that justify or enable the social and political institutions of our times?

We could answer this question in many ways, since many Buddhist intellectuals throughout Asia have commented on the social and political issues that confront them through some ineluctable modernity, whether it be brought by an invader (as in Tibet, invaded by China), a more gradual colonizer (as in Sri Lanka, colonized by the British), or a neighbor under modern duress (as in Thailand, confronted by the violent conflict of modern ideologies first in Vietnam and then in Cambodia). Perhaps, however, it is especially Tibet where a Buddhist version of conceptual modernity reached its most rarefied heights, while at the same time social and political modernity seemed especially absent. Indeed, it is only in the last two decades that Tibetan Buddhist intellectuals, despite the clearly "modern" features of Tibetan philosophy, have attempted to formulate any political

or social theory in relation to modernity. That is, in terms of conceptual modernity, it is almost banal for Tibetan intellectuals to acknowledge, for example, that one's notion of truth is contingent on a particular context because one's epistemic practices are relative to teleologically contingent linguistic and cultural assumptions, and even to one's biology as a human.⁷ This type of well-elaborated and coherent relativism has been *de rigueur* for a millennium in Tibet, and it is only one of the ways in which Tibetan Buddhist thought resembles many of the intellectual trends in late modernity. Yet, at the same time, any clearly (or even vaguely) articulated political and social philosophy has been almost entirely absent prior to the last two decades. Thus, in terms of both theory and practice, Tibet is a particularly striking instance of a discontinuity between some well-elaborated forms of conceptual modernity and an almost wholly absent social or political modernity. Hence, given the contrast of Buddhist conceptual modernity with its premodern social and political theories, it may be particularly useful to examine a Tibetan intellectual's attempt at formulating a political argument in these late-modern times. With this in mind, let us turn to an especially revealing example of such an argument: a political pamphlet called *Passkey of the Fortunate: An Analysis of the Full Integration of Religion and Politics*, by the renowned scholar Gen ("Teacher") Lobsang Gyatso.

Gen Gyatso's pamphlet is one of a handful of such works written by Tibetans, but even if *Passkey* were merely one of hundreds, the intellectual stature of its author would still draw our attention. Widely recognized as one of the finest Tibetan philosophers of his generation, Gen Gyatso was educated entirely through the traditional monastic system, and he had comparatively little knowledge of Euro-American philosophy or theory. One might suppose, then, that he was not particularly qualified to discuss the "integration of Religion and politics" (*chos srid zung 'brel*), especially if we compare him to the handful of Tibetans who have studied Euro-American intellectual traditions through graduate programs in Euro-American institutions. In short, if detailed knowledge of what we would call "Tibetan political history" is necessary to this discussion, then Gen Gyatso is a poor candidate. And if the topic requires in-depth knowledge of political theory, which on the international stage must de facto mean European and North American political theory, then he is also poorly qualified. But if the construction of a Tibetan notion of government as the "integration of religion and politics" should spring from Tibetan Buddhist thought, then Gen Gyatso is certainly one of the most qualified authors to have addressed this question.

As recounted in his memoirs, Gen Lobsang Gyatso was born the child of very ordinary parents in a very ordinary village in Kham, the eastern province of Tibet. Initially educated at a small, local monastery, he could barely read and write when he set off for the long journey to Lhasa in order to study at Drepung monastery, an immense monastic university with

some eight thousand monks in residence at the time. Drepung was and (as reestablished among Tibetan exiles in India) still remains one of the main institutions of the politically powerful Gelug sect, the largest branch of Tibetan Buddhism and the one in which the Dalai Lamas are always educated. Despite tremendous competition and hardship, the young Gen Gyatso evinced an astounding flair for philosophical debate and careful thought, and his career soon seemed destined to realize the Tibetan version of the American dream, as evoked by the old Tibetan adage, "The throne of the Gelug has no owner, if mother's dear boy has the wits to reach it."⁸ Unfortunately, that dream was rudely interrupted by Chinese imperialism, and, after the abortive uprising of 1959, Gen Gyatso and thousands of other Tibetans followed the Dalai Lama in his headlong escape from the People's Liberation Army to seek refuge in India, the "holy land of the Buddha" for Tibetans. Even in exile, Gen Gyatso's fame as a sharp and original thinker continued to grow, and eventually the Dalai Lama asked him to join with him in establishing an innovative institution, the "School of Dialectics," where young Tibetan scholars might study Buddhist thought outside of the context formed by the large Gelug monasteries.⁹

In addition to his philosophical acumen, Gen Gyatso was also among the relatively few Tibetan authors who wrote prolifically even in exile. He composed some two dozen major works—quite an accomplishment for a man who was barely literate when he arrived in central Tibet at the age of 17. His eloquent and fluent style should serve as a paragon for contemporary Tibetan literati. And this makes it all the greater shame that his career was cut brutally short in 1997 at the age of 69. In February of that year, he and two of his students were savagely murdered, knifed to death barely ten minutes' walk from the Dalai Lama's quarters. By all but the most biased accounts, his assassins were members of a fanatical and reactionary offshoot of the Gelug sect representing those unable to cope with the strains of modernity. A few months before, he had penned some derisive and insightful criticisms of that sect, and these writings (along with earlier critiques) were likely the immediate cause of his assassination. The text that we will now examine, Gen Gyatso's *Passkey of the Fortunate*, may also be implicated in that assassination in a less direct but more profound way.

BACKGROUND

Based on a speech presented much earlier, *Passkey* was written and published in 1991, an important year for the Tibetan government-in-exile. Just two years earlier, the Dalai Lama became a Nobel laureate for peace, and that momentous event helped to spur the rapid completion in 1991 of the

Charter of Tibetans in Exile. The Charter serves as the constitution of the exile community, and it lays the groundwork for the exile government's vision of a future constitution in what, it is hoped, will one day be a post-colonial and democratic Tibet. Although Gen Gyatso presents *Passkey* as a largely descriptive and partially historical work, I understand it as a prescriptive work aimed especially at those in the Tibetan government-in-exile who were engaged in the drafting of the Charter. Gen Gyatso was likewise responding to a comparable work on religion and politics by Dungkar Lobsang Trinley, a Tibetan scholar residing in China who wrote his political text under the auspices of the People's Republic of China.¹⁰ Gen Gyatso's main task is to respond to those in the exile community who, in a manner similar to Dungkar Lobsang Trinley, wish to lessen or even eliminate the influence of Buddhism in Tibetan politics. In a larger sense, Gen Gyatso was also seeking to make Buddhism relevant to the political modernity embodied by the democratic model of government reflected in the Charter.

Gen Gyatso focuses his work on a phrase that, for hundreds of years, was the moniker of the overall governmental system of Tibet: namely, the "integration of religion and politics" (*chos srid zung 'brel*). What I have translated as "religion" is actually the Tibetan term *chos*, the Tibetan rendering of the Sanskrit term "Dharma." In this context, *chos*, when used without qualification, refers to the beliefs, texts, and (less precisely) the practices—but not the institutions—that constitute the "the Buddha's Dharma," or "the Buddha's religion." When speaking of specific historical traditions of Buddhism with monastic or other institutional establishments, Tibetan intellectuals add the word *lugs* ("system") to form the compound term *chos lugs*, a "Religious System" or "Religious Tradition." When speaking of other religions, Tibetan intellectuals will use the same terms, *chos* or *chos lugs*, to speak of these other traditions. In this usage, *chos* is almost always modified in some fashion, as in *ye shu'i chos*, "the religion of Jesus," or even *rdzam bu gling gyi chos lugs rnams*, "the religions of the world." When unadorned, however, *chos* almost immediately conjures only one "religion," namely, Buddhism. In other words, as J. Z. Smith noted in his genealogy of the term in its Euro-American academic use, "religion" means first and foremost "our religion," in part because it is against "our religion" that other candidates will be compared.¹¹ It is this sense that best approximates *chos* when Gen Gyatso employs the term in a generic fashion. Hence, I will translate *chos* with a capitalized "Religion" to render explicit the notion that our author has a paradigm in mind, just as we may have.

For Gen Gyatso, Religion paradigmatically refers to the Buddhist Religion, but the term *srid* ("politics") points to no clear paradigm. We have already mentioned that traditional Tibetan learning did not include any clearly articulated political philosophy; hence, on a theoretical level no paradigm is available to Gen Gyatso. Likewise, the old (i.e., preinvasion) Tibetan

government itself was certainly set in its ways, but those ways were often quite obscure and fluid. Certainly, one would be hard put to summarize the workings and structure of the old Tibetan political system in any coherent description. The point, then, is that the formulation of the Charter—as a paradigm for an eventual constitution of postcolonial Tibet—required intellectuals such as Gen Gyatso to envision what “politics” should mean.¹² Gen Gyatso himself never quite comes to a clear definition, but his argument assumes that the defining domain of politics are the “worldly” (*jig rten pa*) concerns of power and profit (*khe dbang*), and that the activity of a political person is to be involved in that domain in either positive or negative ways. That is, in a positive sense, we may say that someone is “political” in that he is involved in regulating power and profit in a manner that benefits the most number of individuals, or a person may be “political” in that he seeks to maximize the power and profit of some segment of society—his family, his monastery, or just himself—at the expense of others.

THE ARGUMENT FOR THE INTEGRATION OF RELIGION AND POLITICS

The distinction we have just drawn—between the good and bad politician—is one that lies at the heart of Gen Gyatso’s argument against those who wish to remove Religion (i.e., Buddhism) from Tibetan politics. He begins his line of reasoning with a basic Buddhist theory that has become an axiom for Tibetan political thinking in recent times: namely, that all persons are equal inasmuch as they wish to be happy and eliminate their suffering. The problem, however, is that persons are deeply confused about the means to become happy and eliminate their suffering. Gyatso cites a well known verse:

Hoping to relieve their pain, they run directly toward suffering because they are confused.

And because they are confused, though they wish to be happy, they kill their happiness as if it were their enemy.¹³

The point, then, is that if one wishes to be happy and not suffer, one must eliminate one’s confusion about the means to reach those goals. For Gyatso, as for all Tibetan Buddhist intellectuals, that confusion rests on a failure to understand the causal process that produces suffering and thus prevents happiness. In brief, the proximate causes of suffering are mental, vocal, and physical activities that create suffering by causing harm, whether it be harm to oneself or to another. Hence, the first step in eliminating the suffering that obstructs happiness is to find a means to “tame” body,

speech, and mind such that one no longer engages in harmful activities. As Gen Gyatso explains,

Concerning body, speech and mind, one may for a while be able to tame body and speech through worldly guidelines and laws, but like a leopard caged in a leopard trap, body and speech will only be tamed for a while. When the conditions become available, body and speech will revert to the way they were before. As for the mind, it can be tamed for a while by means of instructions that are taken from a religious system, but it cannot be tamed through only worldly instructions. In addition, in order to properly or effectively tame the mind, one must rely on a Religion that has effective instructions and effective advice. It is for this very reason that, for the purposes of human society, one definitely needs a system that integrates the religious and the political (*Passkey*, 20).

Gen Gyatso here argues that the “worldly” (*jig rten pa*) guidelines or laws will not be effective in preventing harmful activities of body, speech, and mind because the domain of the worldly, power and profit, is not the domain in which one can make an effective intervention of this kind. Instead, it is only in the domain affected by Religion that such restraint or “taming” becomes effective, and on his view, such taming is crucial in the political arena. He clarifies:

To be specific, if the members of one’s human society in general, and more especially those persons in high positions of authority, are not tamed in body, speech and mind, then that society will face many problems, such as numerous crises and infrequent peace. This is something that one may know from one’s own experience. So as to lessen such problems, a society may draft much legislation and emphasize the enforcement of its laws, but if the problems that are not thereby subdued become even more prominent, then this is an indication that those laws and legal actions are not taming the minds of that society’s members. For this reason, the Buddha said, “Things are of the nature of mind; the mind is primary, it comes before all. If one acts with a clear mind, then whatever one may say or do will lead to happiness.” Hence, whatever may be the extent or greatness of one’s political system, one must have an equally correct (*yang dag pa*), extensive and great Religion to supplement it (*Passkey* 20–21).

For Gen Gyatso, the domain of Religion is the mind itself, and the purpose of Religion is mental transformation; hence, Religion becomes our principal means for obtaining happiness and eliminating suffering. This is so because the main causes of unhappiness and suffering are harmful actions of body, speech, and mind; hence, achieving happiness and eliminating suffering rests on eliminating those actions. The key is that those actions themselves are motivated by deeply ingrained “negative mental states” (*nyon mongs*) such as anger, greed, lust, and especially ignorance; and the only way to guarantee the elimination of those harmful actions is to transform the mind in such a

way that those negative mental states no longer occur. Mental transformation, moreover, is beyond the political sphere: it is not a matter of power or profit. Instead, it has to do with the mind, which is the domain of Religion.

If we recall Gen Gyatso's special concern with "persons in high positions of authority," we can readily see the point he is making: When persons act in the political sphere, there is nothing about politics itself that ensures that they will act so as to benefit, rather than harm, others. The only way to lessen the likelihood that they will act in a deliberately harmful fashion is to lessen (or, if possible, eliminate) the negative mental states motivating those harmful actions, and only Religion is effective in lessening or eliminating those states. Moreover, since political functionaries and others with authority are obliged to manipulate power and profit, it is especially important for them to be engaged in religious practices that lessen negative mental states. Thus, on Gen Gyatso's view, Religion is clearly crucial to a peaceful society led by a beneficent government.

THE PROBLEM OF CORRUPTION AND SOME SAFEGUARDS

Gen Gyatso presents an appealing vision of governmental officials seriously engaged in lessening their anger, greed, lust, and so on through the sincere practice of Buddhism. It does not, however, take much imagination to conjure all sorts of ways in which this idyllic picture might quickly become corrupt. Thinking of the catastrophic loss of Tibetan sovereignty after the invasion by Maoist China in 1950, he responds to a belief held by some Tibetans:

There are many who have not carefully examined the essential issues concerning Religion and the essential issues concerning politics in Tibet; they claim that Tibet was lost to the communists because there was too much practice of Religion in Tibet, but this is just the frightened chattering of rabbits. What then is the case? Religion became weak; religious officials too often sought profits and power in contradiction to Religion, and political officials were too eager to seek profits and power that contradicted the government. Due to these and other such conditions, both Religion and politics were weakened, and so Tibet was lost. How, then, does it make sense to say that Tibet was lost due to Religion (*Passkey*, 40–41)?

This is really the crux of the issue for Gen Gyatso. For Tibetans, the problems of a wholly irreligious government require no extensive demonstration: their experiences under the heavy and brutal hand of Maoist China provide ample and indisputable evidence.¹⁴ Nevertheless, while it may therefore seem important to encourage the salubrious influence of Religion on government, some Tibetans publicly (and many more privately) express

great concern about the obstructionist role played by religious conservatives throughout Tibetan political history. For his own part, Gen Gyatso does not seek to excuse the behavior of influential Buddhists in the past; rather, he aims to justify the continuing status of Buddhism as an official part of the Tibetan government in the future. Indeed, far from excusing the past, part of his strategy is to condemn the corruption of old Tibet's religious institutions. Drawing a provocative parallel with Russian Christianity, he recounts an illustrative experience:

In Russia in particular, the leaders of the Christian church sought to support the politicians, and those church leaders became very enamored of cathedrals, robes, wealth, power and so on. They paid little attention to the people, and most of the people became impoverished. As a result, it was easy for Lenin and others to promulgate socialism. When I myself was traveling in Russia, I saw many old Christian churches, and while they had fallen on hard times, they were still astounding in their basic form. Also, in a museum near Moscow, I saw some splendid ceremonial headgear that formerly belonged to a great Christian priest; this particular item is rather well known in the world. As the guide was explaining all this to me, I recalled the situation in Tibet, and I became exceedingly sad. Later, I also went to the capital of outer Mongolia, and in their largest museum I saw the robes of the Jetsun Dampa's [i.e., the head Mongolian cleric's] retinue, especially those items that had been put there in remembrance of his wife. When I saw those robes and ornaments, I spontaneously thought, "The teachings of the Buddha have been destroyed," and I became very depressed.

Afterward, as we were having tea, I was asked, "How was the exhibit?"

I responded, "The spread of Buddhism to Tibet and Mongolia was incredibly beneficial, but it also seems very unfortunate that the practitioners in high levels of responsibility became so corrupt."

"How so?"

"Those who made the teaching flourish worked endlessly and managed to do so, but it is obvious that those who enjoyed their labors did so in an exceedingly heedless and gluttonous manner."

Indeed, I have already noted that, in our own land of Tibet, those who wrongly practiced the Buddha's teachings and the practitioners in high levels of responsibility became enamored of luxury, interested in power, distracted by wealth, and so on. As a result, they became the main welcoming party and tools of the Chinese communists (*Passkey*, 61–63).

Gen Gyatso does not mince words here. He clearly acknowledges and deplores the unwholesome (and well-documented) influence that corrupt religious authorities had in old Tibet.¹⁵ He is well aware, however that mere condemnation will not prevent the problem from reoccurring, and he therefore devotes the balance of his text to considering ways to justify and implement the official presence of Buddhism in the Tibetan government while providing safeguards that are intended to prevent the corruption that destroyed old Tibet.

Some of the safeguards proposed by Gen Gyatso are essentially procedural or structural. He considers, for example, a series of safeguards that rest simply on the acknowledgment that the integration of Religion and politics must sometimes be avoided or abandoned. Such circumstances include any case in which the majority of the population no longer believes in Religion, or the corruption of religious institutions becomes unmanageable, or the political philosophy of the governmental system is incompatible with Religion (*Passkey* 98–100).

Gen Gyatso also proposes proactive policies to prevent Religion from becoming corrupted by politics. The premise of such policies is that Religion and politics come into conflict only when one has failed to correctly understand their domains. As noted above, the domain of politics is power and profit, and when properly executed, the political function of government is to preserve the rights and freedom of all citizens within that domain.¹⁶ Understood in this fashion, politics and governance are *public* affairs. Religion, on the other hand, is a *private*, multi-lifetime affair whose domain is the achievement of happiness and the elimination of suffering. He remarks:

The affairs of government or society are not private issues; rather, they have to do with providing for the needs of the general populace and preserving their rights, profit, and power. The purpose of Religion, on the other hand, is to give a private person the means to achieve happiness—or to practice a good spiritual path that leads to happiness—over the course of many lifetimes, whether it be for one's own sake or others'. Therefore, the goals and purpose of Religion and politics are distinct, and one must engage in them in a manner that keeps them distinct. Let us not mix the fish with the turnips [or, to use an equivalent American expression, "a place for everything, and everything in its place"] (*Passkey*, 64–65).

It is crucial to recall that Gen Gyatso does not at all mean that Religion has no official place in government; instead, government needs to encourage the practice of Religion so that governmental officials engage in beneficial, rather than harmful, politics. In other words, the role of Religion in government is to instill and sustain a sense of altruism in governmental officials while also lessening their anger, greed, lust, and so on. Religion, however, can fulfill this function only if religious institutions do not become corrupted by politics, and it is for this reason that safeguards are essential. With this in mind, Gen Gyatso also suggests policies for the active governmental restraint of religious persons or institutions when they become overly politicized. For example:

If, in the name of Religion, a movement begins that proposes political strategies to gain political power or that in some way interferes with the rights and profit of the general populace, then that movement must be suppressed and halted by the government or the law. This too is within the jurisdiction of a

government that integrates Religion and politics. Likewise, religious practitioners who are learned and experienced and who are also expert in the religious moral codes should be sent as professional administrators to investigate and correct individual, private clerics and also religious institutions so as to determine whether they are being run in accord with their religious moral code and whether they are living up to the requirements of their religious practices. And, these administrators having conducted their investigations, firm directives should be issued to prevent any decline in the quality of Religion. These policies, along with governmental support of them, are another responsibility of a government that integrates Religion and politics (*Passkey* 102–103).

With these and other policies, some of which surely infuriated conservatives in his own sect, Gen Gyatso hoped to create safeguards that would stave off the disastrous corruption and politicization of religious institutions that characterized old Tibet. His proposals are numerous, and some are perhaps promising. Nevertheless, for him the most important safeguard is one that is largely implicit: an uncompromising commitment to reason.

REASON AND THE HIERARCHY OF KNOWLEDGE

Gen Gyatso is firmly located in a highly rationalist tradition that generally admits only two forms of trustworthy knowledge: perceptual experience and empirical reasoning (that is, inference based on the evidence of the senses). In extraordinary cases, one may also appeal to a third kind of knowledge, namely, inference based on scriptural passages, but one may do so only when two conditions are met: the issue at hand is crucial to one's spiritual advancement, and it is an issue that cannot be decided by either perception or empirical reasoning. Based not only on *Passkey*, but also on Gen Gyatso's other works and my conversations with him, I am confident, that on Gen Gyatso's view, cases that require an appeal to scriptural proof are so exceedingly rare as to be irrelevant. In other words, a good Buddhist might allude to scripture for illustrative reasons, but he will base his knowledge claims entirely on his own sensory experiences or on empirical reasoning based on evidence derived from the senses.¹⁷ In *Passkey*, Gen Gyatso does not belabor this point, but it appears at crucial moments throughout the text. For example, when first discussing the need to obtain happiness and eliminate suffering, he introduces the traditional notion of *blang dor*, "what must be adopted" (*blang*) in order to become happy and "what must be eliminated" (*dor*) in order to end suffering. Elaborating on the place of sensory experience, he remarks:

The are many different versions of "what is to be adopted and what is to be eliminated," and even within one version, one must discern the degrees of

subtlety [of the presentations within that one version]. Likewise, negative mental states such as ignorance are also numerous in their degrees of subtlety; therefore, resorting only to a rational path, one must examine the negative mental states through sensory experience as a trustworthy source of knowledge. If one attempts to examine them through textual analysis, reverential meditation, and so on, one will be unable to do so (*Passkey*, 17).

And in response to the notion that Religion should be rooted in faith, he responds by highlighting Buddhism's compatibility with democracy because of its emphasis on reason:

Some people say, "Religion is something that should conform to faith only. Politics should conform to a legal system only. Therefore, the combination of the two is contradictory." In fact, there is no contradiction. Most other religions are followed through faith only, and it is therefore difficult to combine them with politics. Nevertheless, the Buddhist Religion is said to include methods for accomplishing the aims of others in an extensive fashion. And since the Buddhist Religion teaches right and wrong in accord with reality, it is a crucial necessity for proving what constitutes a correct political system. A purely political system such as a communist government conforms to a legal system only; hence, it is difficult to coordinate it with Buddhism. However, it is easy to combine a political system with Religion in a governmental system that has a strong connection with the sciences (*rig pa'i gzhung lugs*). For example, the democratic governmental system does need the authoritative support of a legal system, but its foundation is to increase the rights and autonomy of its citizens in conformity with empirical reason. Hence, the Buddhist Religion is very much compatible with it, as I have explained and will explain (*Passkey*, 47–48).

This emphasis on reason is not just a product of a particular style of argumentation; rather, it is crucial to Gen Gyatso's conception of Religion itself. Just above we saw that a "rational path" is the basis on which one is going to examine one's sensory experience and come to understand the negative mental states that motivate harmful actions and thus produce suffering. Indeed, for Gen Gyatso's sect, the Gelug, reason is the *principal means* of eliminating the negative mental states. To this end, Gelug monks are trained from a young age in a highly refined form of debate that rests on a sophisticated and well-developed theory of empirical inference. As a young monk, Gen Gyatso would often debate for as much as eight hours a day—a practice that still continues in the large Gelug monasteries reestablished in exile.¹⁸

A successful debater such as Gen Gyatso is able to run logical circles around his opponents, and one can readily imagine that after years of practicing debate several hours a day, the best debaters gain an astounding acuity in this style of inferential reasoning. The explicit aim of such intensive training is to enable Gelug practitioners to apply their skill in reasoning to

the analysis of the causes of suffering. To put it succinctly, the conclusion of that analysis is that suffering is caused by a persistent and deeply ingrained mental habit called "ignorance"—an essentialism that causes one to continually err in one's understanding of the world, especially in relation to one's personal identity. Dharmakirti, a Buddhist thinker of central importance to the Gelug tradition, puts it this way:

All types of flaws [i.e., the negative mental states] are born from the belief that the evanescent components of body and mind are the locus of an essential self. That belief is called "ignorance." When that belief occurs, one experiences clinging to that alleged self, and from that clinging comes anger and so on.¹⁹

Moving beyond Dharmakirti, the Gelupga tradition maintains that ignorance is understood to be essentialism not only about one's personal identity, but indeed about all things. Thus, at its subtlest, the rational analysis central to Gelug practice is meant to demonstrate that it is *impossible* for any person or thing to have an essential, unchanging, or absolute identity. In other words, all things are "empty" of essence. By using meditative practices to focus on this "emptiness," one is able to counteract one's instinctive essentialism, the deep spiritual ignorance that causes suffering.²⁰ As an intellectual firmly located within the Gelug, Gen Gyatso accepts all of this, and thus, when he says that Religion is the way to obtain happiness, Gen Gyatso more specifically means that Religion is principally a form of rational analysis that, by radically correcting one's erroneous perspective on self and world, liberates one from suffering.

How, then, does reason act as a safeguard against the corrupting influence of politics in Religion? Gen Gyatso's implicit position seems to be this: Religion is incorruptible because, when properly applied, reason is incorruptible. To put it another way, the corrupting influence of politics is based on engaging with power and profit in a way motivated by negative mental states, such as the lust for wealth. Negative mental states, however, are incompatible with reason, inasmuch as they are rooted in beliefs and habits that do not conform with the nature of reality as discovered by reason. And since Religion itself is rooted in reason, Religion too cannot be corrupted, if reason is allowed to have its proper place. Thus, one way to read Gen Gyatso's other safeguards is that they are all intended to guarantee that in religious institutions, reason retains its proper place.

In traditional terms, this primacy and incorruptibility of reason is expressed in an important verse cited and discussed by Gen Gyatso:

In this regard, it is observed that there are two kinds of persons, the spiritual adept and the ordinary person. Among these, the ordinary person is refuted by the adept. And adepts are refuted by successively more advanced adepts through a distinctive quality of their understanding.²¹

The main point of this verse is simply that, as one moves up the ladder of spiritual development, one understands the world in a manner that supersedes the understanding of those on lower rungs. Gen Gyatso makes it clear that such progress comes through reason: the higher adept's knowledge supersedes the knowledge of ordinary persons and lower adepts because the higher adept's analysis of the world's ultimate nature conforms more closely to reason. In the Gelug educational system, this rational form of spiritual progress is institutionalized through a gradual progression in the curriculum from a simpler to a more complex metaphysics. Younger monks begin with studies based on a realist Buddhist school, and when their formal education ends many years later, they are expected to be learned in the highest, antirealist school that espouses the critique of essentialism mentioned above.²²

I have noted that, according to Gelug thinkers, progress up the ladder depends primarily on the degree to which one's analysis of the *essence* of persons and things conforms to reason. This is so because the main impediment to spiritual progress is one's erroneous beliefs (and hence, cognitive habits or dispositions) in relation to essences. One begins in the first school with a version of essence that is more refined than the naïve beliefs of ordinary persons, and one ends, as noted above, with the most rational analysis, which demonstrates that the belief in any form of essence is erroneous. But at this point, one may wonder why the Gelug bother teaching essence at all: would it not be best to begin with the most rational analysis, the one that critiques essence altogether? The answer is that, without preceding through the study of the lower schools, an ordinary person cannot leap to the study of radical antiessentialism because he simply will be incapable of understanding it. Even if he is able to follow the intricate reasoning, his habits and dispositions will stage a cognitive revolt: the dissonance with what he has believed all along is simply too great, and he will reject out of hand this highest form of Buddhist thought. Hence, not only must beginners be taught the lower schools first, they must even be shielded from the radical views of the higher schools, lest their philosophical careers be spoiled before they can begin.²³

Although not clearly acknowledged by Gen Gyatso, this principle—that the uninitiated cannot understand and must even be shielded from higher knowledge—has two critical implications in a political context. The first is that the higher is one's progress, the more privileged and protected one's knowledge becomes. That is, the farther one is from the naïve beliefs of ordinary persons, the greater the inability for those persons to understand what one knows, and the greater the imperative to shield ordinary persons from its devastating impact. The second implication is that, while the explicit focus of this knowledge is the question of essence, it also makes one more clearly understand the world from the perspective of those below one.

That is, by removing one's confusion about essences, one more clearly sees the ways in which others, who still have that confusion, are constructing and imagining their world. This means, in effect, that one gains a great facility to manipulate that world; it is for this reason that a buddha, who has eliminated all trace of the dispositions rooted in the false belief in essence, is the best of teachers. This much the Gelug tradition accepts. What is not explicitly acknowledged (although Gen Gyatso does hint in this direction) is that it means that a buddha should also be the best of politicians.

These two implications—that higher knowledge is privileged and protected, and that it is politically powerful—come along with a third implication that is explicitly acknowledged by Gen Gyatso. That is, by cutting through the ignorant essentialism that fuels our anger, greed, lust, and so on, reason also cuts through the petty and short-term perspectives that drive political affairs about rights, power, and profits. In short, the higher one's understanding, the greater the danger of becoming disconnected from the world. Even in religious terms, this disconnect is thought to be disastrous, since the highest goal—buddhahood—is not an escape from the world, but rather a transformation of it. And obviously, on a political level it would not at all be useful to inculcate in one's government officials a philosophy that makes them progressively more alienated from the duties of governance. It is thus crucial for Gen Gyatso to discuss another important facet of Tibetan Buddhism: compassion. It is in this context, however, that we will find the most problematic aspect of his approach to the integration of politics and Religion.

COMPASSION, VIOLENCE, AND PRIVILEGED KNOWLEDGE

By all accounts, compassion is crucial to one's spiritual progress in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the form of Buddhism practiced in Tibet. Without compassion, one's rational analyses of essence will tempt one into a quietistic escape from the world in a manner that will greatly hinder one's progress to full enlightenment. This doctrine is well known by Gen Gyatso, but in the political context, he raises an objection that is a kind of corollary:

Someone might object, "In the course of governance (*chab srid*), there are many political actions that do not accord with [the moral law of] karmic cause and effect, such as military strategy or the eradication of evil-doers in accord with the law. Religion, however, should be practiced only on the basis of a path of peace and non-harm, in accordance with [the moral law of] karmic cause and effect. Hence, it is wrong to connect Religion with politics" (*Passkey*, 51).

Gen Gyatso responds in a manner that reflects the typical doctrinal response to the religious equivalent of this problem: to be fully enlightened,

one must not allow one's critique of essences to draw one away from the world into a quietistic escape, and to prevent that escape, one intensely cultivates compassion. This puts one on the path of the "bodhisattva," one who, having cultivated an extreme degree of compassion, is fully committed to ending the suffering of all beings. Enlightenment or buddhahood thus becomes a means to the goal of eliminating all being's suffering, rather than an end in itself. It is only by having this degree of compassion that one can avoid an escape into quietism. As a bodhisattva, one is distinguished from those following the so-called "Hīnayāna," a quietistic Buddhist path in which one seeks escape from suffering for oneself alone.

Gen Gyatso employs these well-known doctrines about the practice of the bodhisattva in order to respond to the objection that a religious governmental official might need to act in a manner that leads even to violence. He says:

This is an extremely difficult issue, and someone such as me cannot come to any definitive conclusion. Nevertheless, in simple terms, I would say the following. In the context of the Hīnayāna, one must practice in a way that especially prevents oneself from accruing flaws. Hence, one is not able to combine the aforementioned political activities with one's practice. Nevertheless, such is not the case for a practitioner of the Mahāyāna. Instead, in as much as he is engaged in others' aims, a Mahāyāna practitioner [i.e., a bodhisattva] must compare the degree of benefit or harm that will accrue to others from the practitioner's actions, and if the benefit outweighs the harm, he must engage in that task, even if it involves some harm. Likewise, when he compares the degree to which virtue or flaws will accrue to him as a result of his action, if the virtue is greater than the flaws, then he must engage in that virtuous act, without shrinking from the flaws that will accrue. This way of acting is required by the ethical code of the bodhisattva vow. There are two reasons for this. First, except for bodhisattvas on a high stage of the path, other bodhisattvas cannot accomplish great benefit for others in a way that does not involve some flaws or harm. And second, if a bodhisattva does not accomplish others' aims because he shrinks from the harm involved, his work for the aims of others will cease. Hence, in practicing the Mahāyāna Dharma, one must accomplish those acts that, in accord with the best possible empirical reasoning and the degree of actual benefit for others, will result in accomplishing others' aims, which are one's primary goal. One does so in a manner that does not focus on one's own aims (*Passkey* 51–52).

In short, as a bodhisattva—a practitioner of the Mahāyāna—one's great compassion compels one to focus on the needs of others, rather than one's own needs. Hence, if after careful and rational examination, one determines that a particular action (here, a political one) is in the best interest of most citizens, one must engage in that action, even if it means that one will personally be obliged to bear a some moral, karmic punishment as a result of that action.

Thus far, Gen Gyatso's response does not seem overly problematic. Certainly, he has opened the door to all kinds of activities in the name of aiding beings, but he has also noted that, before one reaches a quite high level of understanding, even one's most rationally supported actions will involve some problems. He thus acknowledges that even bodhisattva politicians might miscalculate, and that the check on those miscalculations is, on the one hand, the primacy of empirical reasoning, and on the other, the emphasis on altruistic motivation. The upshot of this advice is that, using the best empirical reasoning available, the bodhisattva politician should take her best shot, and she should do so without any concern for the repercussions to herself; instead, she should only be concerned with the maximal benefit for the populace at large.

To illustrate his point further, Gen Gyatso turns to a former life story of the Buddha—that is, a story of the Buddha when he was still just a bodhisattva. In many Buddhist cultures, these tales of the Buddha-to-be are often used to work out ethical problems. The tale concerns a figure named "Power of Compassion":

Previously, the Teacher, the Buddha, took rebirth as "Power of Compassion," a seafaring captain. He and his companions had filled his boat with the inconceivable jewels that they had gathered, and they were now returning to port. A passenger named Evil Splinter, however, was determined to follow a certain bad intention, and he committed himself to killing Power of Compassion along with his companions. Through his clairvoyance, Power of Compassion learned of Evil Splinter's intention, and he thought, "I would have no regrets if he were to kill me, but if he were to kill all of my fellow shipmates and then arrive at my our country, he would cause unbearable problems for the citizens, and in the end, he himself would be born in Avīci, the lowest hell, where he would have to experience limitless suffering. If, however, I were to kill him, it seems that I would save the lives of my shipmates, and the citizens would also be able to live happily ever after. Therefore, for the sake of those citizens, even though I myself may be born in the lowest hell if I kill him, I will be able to bear it." Thinking in this way, he became greatly moved, and he killed Evil Splinter. When he did so, due to his compassion and altruism he accumulated a limitless amount of merit (*Passkey*, 55).

As an illustration of Gen Gyatso's point, this tale is especially useful because it so clearly indicates the way in which the various elements of that theory become, in combination, extremely problematic. First, we find the centrality of great compassion, whereby any act is permitted, as long as it is the most beneficial to the most beings. Second, we find the notion of privileged knowledge, here depicted metaphorically as "clairvoyance." The point of this metaphor is that Power of Compassion alone had access to this knowledge, a point made more clearly in the canonical version of the story.²⁴ Finally, this privileged knowledge is also powerful in practical terms, since

it enables Power of Compassion to preemptively restrain Evil Splinter even before he is able to act on his evil intention.

When I say that this story points to the problems in Gen Gyatso's theory, I am thinking especially of the manner in which it would justify not an individual's actions, but rather the actions of several persons of authority who see themselves in this fashion, for example, as compassionate persons possessed of privileged knowledge connected to power. I do not mean to object to the separate elements of the theory. It seems readily demonstrable, for example, that some persons may gain a level of mental clarity that makes their understanding of a situation particularly insightful, and while violence is difficult to control, I am willing to accept that lethal violence might be compatible with compassion in some exceptional cases. So too, it is not in itself problematic to say that clarity of understanding gives one the ability to manipulate one's world in a powerful fashion. Instead, the problem is that, in combination, these elements lead to an authority structure that concentrates privileged knowledge in the hands of a few influential persons who feel fully justified in exerting their ability to implement or authorize lethal force.

The point I am making might best be illustrated with an example. On March 20, 1995, two years before the assassination of Gen Gyatso, another murderous act was carried out in the name of what was allegedly a form of Buddhism. Shoko Asahara, the highest guru of Aum Shinrikyo, ordered some acolytes to release sarin nerve gas into the subway system of metropolitan Tokyo. Twelve people perished, and over 5,500 were affected, some sustaining permanent injuries.²⁵ The motivation and justification for this attack rested on two principles: first, that Asahara possessed an ability to know what others could not know; and second, that "the guru and spiritually advanced practitioners" have a right to kill others when the irreligious actions of those others pose an extreme danger to both themselves and the spiritual community.²⁶ Asahara claimed to have found especially the latter doctrine in Tibetan Buddhist texts, but Mark Juergensmeyer rejects this claim, saying instead that he doubts that "such a teaching is written in any Tibetan authentic Tibetan Buddhist text." According to him, "It appears to be Asahara's own concoction." In fact, Juergensmeyer is wrong. The principles employed by Asahara are fully authentic to Tibetan Buddhism; it is precisely the doctrine illustrated by the story of the tale of the boatman, "Power of Compassion."²⁷ This is sad and ironic, for it is likely that those who ordered Gen Gyatso's assassination used the same doctrine to justify their crime. They, too, claimed access to privileged knowledge that verified Gen Gyatso's status as an enemy of Religion intent on catastrophic harm; for them, he thus became worthy of a compassionate killing at the hands of pliable young men wielding long knives.

Hence, if we follow Gen Gyatso's attempt to reconcile Buddhist principles with the political modernity of a democratic government, we find ourselves in a difficult and dangerous bind. On the one hand, it is clearly best for one's government to be populated with persons who are constantly seeking to move rationally beyond the limited and erroneous perspectives that fuel their anger, greed, and uncontrolled desires. It is useful, in other words, to admit that most people are confused, and that we would prefer to be governed by persons who are less confused than we are. In acknowledging the possibility that some of our officials see the world far more clearly than we do, however, on Gen Gyatso's model we are also admitting that their knowledge is privileged: We cannot verify their knowledge claims because their way of seeing the world is at this point beyond us. Indeed, if we could understand what they know, we could not cope with it emotionally, so they must compassionately protect us from that knowledge. Thus, in admitting the superiority of these officials' knowledge and understanding, we would have to accept that we cannot distinguish between the wise bodhisattvas and the confused Asaharas of the world, since both make claims to privileged knowledge that we cannot verify. And if our governmental system gives a bodhisattva—or an Asahara—the authority to command lethal force, what shall we do when, as we are ordered to release the gas, he says, "Just trust me"? Perhaps, then, without denying the possibility that others have unique access to some crucial knowledge, we should wait until most of us can share in that knowledge before we decide to open the valve—or wield the knife.

NOTES

1. This is a rather obvious subtext of the introduction, Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *A Modern Buddhist Bible: Essential Readings from East and West* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), vii–xl.

2. Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief, Thinking in Action* (London: Routledge, 2001), 13, notes that "the 'Western Buddhist' meditative stance is arguably the most efficient way, for us, to fully participate in the capitalistic dynamic while retaining the appearance of mental sanity." It enables the sane participation in that insane dynamic because it lets one "renounce the very endeavor to retain control over what goes on . . . [since for the Western Buddhist] all this social and technological upheaval is ultimately just a non-substantial proliferation of semblances which do not really concern the innermost kernel of our being."

3. Gustavo Benavides, "Modernity," in Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 195.

4. In his essay, "Modernism," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds. (London: Cassell, 2000), Wiebe focuses on "the modernity of the intellectual developments leading to the eventual ascendancy of science" because these developments "constitute a fundamental change of mentality from all

previous traditional cultures—archaic, ancient or medieval” (354). To defend this sweeping claim, he draws especially on Timothy Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), and Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983). Although Wiebe shows no awareness of Buddhism, all but one of the features that he highlights are typical of Buddhist thought as well. For example, in his account of Reiss he states that, “the [premodern] conjunctive mode of thought involves a form of ‘cognitive’ union with the divine while the modern, disjunctive mode of thought accentuates human responsibility for one’s being” (356). Reading Blumenberg, he comments that “moderns adopt a rational approach to the resolution of human problems rather than a passive acceptance of the promise of salvation; in so doing, they relate to a natural, rather than a supernatural, world open to scientific understanding. . . . [Thus,] modernity constitutes a break with the dominant theme of divine omnipotence in the Middle Ages, affirming by contrast the contingency of the world—a critical commitment to rationality both in knowing the world and in living in it” (356–57). We will see below that these features are clearly central to Buddhist thought. We will also see that the one feature of Wiebe and Blumenberg’s modern rationality that is explicitly rejected by Buddhist thought is “the separation between cognitive achievement and production of happiness” (358).

5. Benavides, “Modernity,” 195.

6. Citing Reinhard Bendix, John F. Wilson, Toby Huff, Ernest Gellner, and others, Benavides, “Modernity,” 195, notes: “if we ask ourselves why types of social arrangements that characterize Western modernity did not emerge in the Buddhist world, we must remember [their] warnings about modernity referring not to a clearly delimited formation but rather to a bundle of elements, not all of which can be expected to be present at the same time; above all, we must keep in mind that the emergence of Western modernity required the confluence of constellation of technical, institutional and ideological developments.”

7. What I mean by “epistemic practices” are those procedures used to obtain reliable or justifiable knowledge of one’s world. To say that such practices are “teleologically contingent” is to assert that the knowledge derived thereby is justifiable only in relation to some set of goals. Hence, what counts as knowledge in terms of one set of goals may be considered erroneous in relation to some other set of goals. I attempt to unpack some of these issues in John D. Dunne, *Foundations of Dharmakīrti’s Philosophy*, Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004).

8. *A ma’i bu la yon tan yod na / dga’ ldan khri la bdag po med /*. All translations from the Tibetan are my own.

9. For a more detailed account of Gen Gyatso’s life up until exile, see idem., *Memoirs of a Tibetan Lama*, trans. Gareth Sparham (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1998). In an appendix Sparham includes his own account of Gyatso’s murder and the circumstances surrounding it.

10. Lobsang Trinley Dzungkar [Dung dkar], *Blo bzang ‘phrin las [The Merging of Religious and Secular Rule in Tibet]* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1991).

11. Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms*, 269–84.

12. Gen Gyatso often seems to struggle with the notion of “politics” as understood from a Buddhist intellectual’s perspective, and the subtext of that struggle

must be noted. When I first met him in 1994, he struck me as a man who could run circles around nearly any opponent in a debate—this is an appropriate skill for a man who founded and guided a “School of Dialectics.” Nevertheless, in the present work on politics, his arguments strike me as far less convincing than his work in other contexts. Without going into detail, the lesson I draw is not that Gen Gyatso simply lacked expertise in this area, but rather that he, along with the vast majority of Tibetan Buddhist intellectuals, occasionally does not seem to know what counts as a good argument when writing on what we call “politics.” This brings me to the point of this aside: Gen Gyatso is on an uneven playing ground. He is attempting to play “our” game, that is, a game wherein Euro-American conceptions of politics, sovereignty, rights, and authority hold sway. He clearly knows that he must play by our rules, and he tries his best (but he sometimes fails). For us, this raises an important question: what does it mean for us to set the terms of the debate? Why is it that our Euro-American concepts of politics, statehood, human rights, and the like get to determine the context of discussions about the fate of Tibet and its people? Is this something with which we should be satisfied? Minimally, I think, it is an asymmetry that we cannot ignore, even if no remedy is readily apparent.

13. *Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva with the Commentary Pañjikā*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, 12 (Darbhanga, India: The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research, 1960), 1.28.

14. See Warren Smith, *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), a minutely detailed, scholarly and even-handed account of relations between China and Tibet.

15. Melvyn Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913–1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), offers a thoroughly documented account of the ultimately disastrous religious politics in the Tibetan institutions of the early twentieth century.

16. Gen Gyatso repeatedly states the prime function of government (and hence, politics) is to protect its citizens’ rights (*thob thang*) and freedom (*rang dbang*). His discussion of just war (*Passkey*, 64) is a particularly interesting example of this position.

17. This is, I think, a very plausible reading of the approach to scripture found in the works of Dharmakīrti, a main inspiration for Gen Gyatso. See my *Foundations of Dharmakīrti’s Philosophy* for a more elaborate discussion of these issues.

18. For an engaging account of the Gelugpa educational system and its implications, see Georges Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Monk* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

19. *Dharmakīrti’s Pramānāvārttika with a Commentary by Manorathanandin*, ed. Rāhula Sāmkṛtyāyana, *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, 24/3–26/3 (1938–1940), 1:222.

20. For an academic account based on traditional sources, see Tupten Jinpa, *Self, Reality and Reason in Tibetan Philosophy: Tsongkhapa’s Quest for the Middle View*, Curzon Critical Studies in Buddhism, 18 (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2002), 176–83.

21. Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva*, 9.3–4a, b.

22. Dreyfus, *Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, alludes occasionally to the role played by a hierarchy of views in this educational system. For Dreyfus, a major outcome

is that the principal of a hierarchy of views tends to limit hermeneutical freedom (192–93). A similar function, I think, is to provide an authority structure rooted in one's philosophical acumen: the greater the understanding, the greater the authority. Of course, other factors contribute to the strength of one's authority, but philosophical understanding appears always to carry significant weight.

23. The injunction against teaching the philosophy of the highest school to those unprepared to hear it is a common theme. For a typical expression of this notion, see, for example, the *Rtsa shes tik chen* by Je Tsongkhapa, founder of the Gelug tradition to which Gen Gyatso belongs: Rje Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa, *Dbu ma rtsa ba tshig le'ur byas pa shes rab ces bya ba'i rnam bshad rigs pa'i rgya mtsho* (Varanasi, India: Vāna mtho slob dge ldgan spyi las khang [Gelug Student Welfare Committee of the Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies], 1992), 12–13.

24. For an English version of the canonical story, see Garma C. C. Chang, gen. ed., *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Selection from the Mahāratnakūṭa*, trans. by the Buddhist Association of the United States (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991 reprint of 1983 ed.), 455–57. In the canonical version, which occurs in the “Sātra on Skill in Means” (*Upāyakauśalyasātra*), “Power of Compassion” receives the information about Evil Splinter from a certain sea spirit who comes to him in a dream. This knowledge is thus obviously unique to him—one hopes that it was not what we might call “faulty intelligence.”

25. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: the Global Rise of Religious Violence*, *Comparative Studies in Religion and Society*, 13 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 103.

26. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 114.

27. The doctrine is systematically elaborated in a number of places, including the commentary on the bodhisattva ethic, the *Byang chub gzhung lam* by Je Tsongkhapa. See Rje Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa, *Byang chub sems dpa'i tshul khriims kyi rnam bshad byang chub gzhung lam*. Vol. ka in *Gsung 'bum* [‘Collected Works], (New Delhi: Mongolian Lama Gurudeva [sponsor], 1978–1979; photo-offset of old Zhol edition [Lhasa: sponsored by Byams pa dngos grub and Skal bzang don grub, 1897]), for example, see 76a–78a. The doctrine amounts to the claim that, in order to prevent the particularly catastrophic outcome of some harmful act, a bodhisattva is permitted—or on some accounts, even obliged—to kill the person(s) who would otherwise commit that harmful act. It is important to note that, while privileged knowledge is always assumed by this doctrine, it is often stated only obliquely as a necessary part of the doctrine's context. In Je Tsongkhapa's version, however, the privileged nature of the knowledge in question is actually quite clear. Indeed, on his view, the requisite knowledge is so high as to make the doctrine inapplicable in the vast majority of cases. In this regard, Je Tsongkhapa appears to take a far more cautious approach than Gen Gyatso.