ALTHOUGH BUDDHISM HAS been viewed as an exquisitely rational religion, Buddhist philosophers have not failed to create conceptual problems for themselves. Perhaps the most persistent of these problems focus on the nature of a buddha: as truly awakened (buddha), a buddha must embody the utter transcendence of nirvāṇa; but as a compassionate guide, a buddha must also remain completely immanent in samsāra, the world of suffering, so as to show others the way to freedom. This tension between a buddha's transcendence and immanence—his location within both nirvāṇa and samsāra—prompted much debate among Buddhist philosophers. In this article, I examine how Dharmakīrti and Candrakīrti, two prominent Buddhist thinkers of India's post-Gupta period (sixth to seventh century C.E.), address the question of a buddha's transcendence and immanence. I begin with a passage from a Buddhist sūtra current in the same period that discusses the career of the "historical buddha," Śākyamuni. The passage I have selected frames the problem in terms of Śākyamuni Buddha's involvement in the world as a teacher and his detachment from the world as an awakened being. From this passage, I glean two crucial issues with which both Dharmakīrti and Candrakīrti struggle: as an immanent teacher, a buddha must speak, but the use of concepts and
language would imply a spiritual ignorance (āvidyā) that a buddha as transcendent must not have. Likewise, as a teacher, a buddha is motivated by compassion (mahākarunā), but the “passion” (rāga) implied by compassion would make transcendence impossible. In examining the ways Candrakirti and Dharmakirti struggle with these issues, I will show how each proposes a different paradigm for buddhahood. My conclusion, however, will suggest that what they share is of greater significance.

INTRODUCTION: THE BUDDHA AS TEACHER

The scriptures of Indian Buddhism abound with accounts of Śākyamuni Buddha’s life, and some of the more compelling tell of the Buddha’s musings shortly after becoming “awakened.” The Lalitavistarasūtra, a famed narrative of the Buddha’s life that dates from perhaps the fourth century C.E., recounts the scene much as it is found in earlier texts. In this curious episode, the Buddha, who has just attained awakening, takes stock of his situation. He marvels at the wondrous qualities of the state that he has attained:

O, how profound is this Dharma that I have realized, that I have awakened to! It is peaceful, calm, tranquil, and pleasing. It is difficult to realize, difficult to understand, for it is neither speculative, nor an object of disputational reasoning. Rather, it is sacred; it is what wise and sagacious people should know. To be specific: it is the abandonment of all the aggregates; it is unsensed, unfelt, and the cessation of all sensation. It is ultimate, foundationless, cool (sītībhāva). Devoid of appropriation, it has no representations, nor can it be represented. It is unconditioned and beyond the six objects of the senses. It is without conceptions, non-conceptual, ineffable, soundless, wordless, without expression or demonstration. It is unobstructed and beyond all perceptual objects. It is the termination of all elements through quiescence (samathadharmapacheda). It is emptiness, without perception. It is the destruction of thirst, and it is free of passion. Cessation, it is nirvāṇa. (Lalita:327)

But Śākyamuni Buddha’s enthusiasm for his transformative realization soon leads him to a rather sobering thought:

If I were to teach others this Dharma, they might not understand it. And if they do not understand it, then my efforts would only have exhausted me, and I would have undertaken an improper task, the untimely teaching of the Dharma. I have no cares; perhaps I should remain silent. (327)

1 Similar scenes are also found in, for example: Mahāvastu iii.134; Dīghānīkāya ii.38; Majjhimanīkāya i.168. Although dating such texts is difficult, they may all be from as early as the second century B.C.E. The Lalitavistara in its present form may be as late as the seventh century C.E., from which time the corresponding Chinese translation by Divākara dates (Nakamura: 131, n. 17).
Indra, the King of the gods, gets wind of the Buddha’s reluctance, so he hurries hither to implore the Buddha to teach others what he has learned. But the Buddha, still irresolute, responds with two famous verses:

My path goes against the grain; it is profound and hard to see; those blinded by passion will not see it—it is pointless to teach it.

Beings have fallen into desires and are carried away in the current; I attained this laboriously—it is pointless to teach it. (Lalita:331–332)

Clearly, the Buddha has a problem. On the one hand, the Dharma or spiritual insight that he has gained is liberative and, were others to realize it, they too would rest in the “cool” knowledge that the fires of desire—or as it is sometimes translated, “passion” (rāga)—have been extinguished. But the Dharma that the Buddha has realized is also “profound”, it is so profound that it seems to be beyond the ken of ordinary beings. The Buddha concludes that it might be better to remain carefree (alpotsaka) and dwell silently in the forest. After all, he has attained a state that is free of concepts and devoid of the fires of passion, so what would prompt him to leave that state by using concepts? Without a passionate urge to act, why would he utter a single word?

This dilemma surfaces in numerous Buddhist sources over the centuries, but much of the trouble stems from assumptions that are not simply Buddhist. Nearly all Indian religious philosophers proclaim some form of “liberation” (mokṣa) as an escape from the endless round of rebirth that our previous actions (karma) compel us to endure. Desire or “passion” (rāga) is usually seen as antithetical to mokṣa, for it is desire for the world and the things of it that induces us to act in ways that tie us to this world of suffering and the endless rebirths that it entails. Buddhist thinkers share many of these assumptions, and they often see desire as one of the primary afflictive mental states (kleśa) that perpetuate suffering. Non-conceptuality, on the other hand, is less a pan-Indian principle for mokṣa than a Buddhist one. For reasons that we will see below, many Buddhist philosophers consider concepts (vikalpa, kalpanā) to be closely linked to ignorance (avidyā), identified by Mahāyāna Buddhists to be the root of all suffering.

Thus, a buddha ought to be passionless and non-conceptual, but how and why would such a being teach? When confronted with this problem, Buddhist philosophers are obliged to make some choices. In terms of a buddha’s passion, one might choose to reject the traditional emphasis on passionlessness (vitarāgata) in Indian religions and admit that a buddha is desirous or “passionate.” The other possibility is to claim

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1Even non-Buddhist philosophers, such as the Mīmāṃsā philosopher Kumārila (sixth century C.E.), recognized this conundrum in Buddhist thought (83, Čodanā v. 137).
that a buddha can still teach even without desire. The same kinds of choices must be made when dealing with conceptuality. Buddhists must either admit that buddhas use concepts and thus accept the problems that arise from such a position; or Buddhists must assert that a buddha can still teach without using any concepts at all.

These sets of choices paint quite different images of buddhahood. If one claims that a buddha can still teach even though s/he has neither passion nor concepts, then one's buddhas become mysterious, inexplicable beings. The nature of a buddha, in short, becomes utterly transcendental, for it is only by transcending ordinary categories of thought that such a being could be possible. On the other hand, one might make some concessions. One might admit that a buddha is indeed desirous or that s/he uses concepts. Any such concessions make one's buddhas somewhat less transcendent and somewhat more worldly. The way a buddha teaches no longer requires such fantastic explanations; s/he teaches somewhat as we would—although, presumably, a buddha would do a better job of it.

Candrakīrti and Dharmakīrti, the two Mahāyāna Buddhists whose works I examine below, appear to hold these two contrasting views of buddhahood. Dharmakīrti's theory of conceptuality and his predilection for passion prompt him to favor a somewhat more worldly paradigm. Candrakīrti's broader interpretation of conceptuality and his views on how a buddha teaches lead him to favor a transcendent model of buddhahood. In order to discuss their opinions, I will examine the most relevant portions of their most seminal works: Dharmakīrti's Pramāṇavārttika with his commentary thereon and Candrakīrti's Madhyamakāvatāra along with his own commentary.

The passages I have chosen deal either directly or indirectly with the problem of a buddha as a teacher, although they all deal with conceptuality or passion in some way. The reader will quickly see that my method relies on a close reading of the texts in order to glean a wider understanding of these philosophers' views on buddhahood. In some cases my interpretations will stem more from what is excluded rather than what is explicitly stated. In other cases my efforts to uncover their notions of buddhahood must rely on extrapolation, for when these thinkers address these complex ideas, they occasionally hedge their arguments, perhaps in order to avoid refutation.

CONCEPTUALITY AND PASSION IN DHARMAKĪRTI'S PRAMĀṆAVĀRTTIKA

Dharmakīrti (sixth to seventh century C.E.) was a philosopher renowned for his subtle discussions of epistemology and reasoning. The
Pramāṇavārttika, his major work, was ostensibly conceived as a commentary on the epistemological treatises of his predecessor, Dignāga; but the Pramāṇavārttika clearly serves as a vehicle for Dharmakīrti's own views. The four chapters of the text deal respectively with inferences, proof of Śākyamuni Buddha's authority, direct or immediate awareness, and disputation. Dharmakīrti apparently considered the chapter on inference to be particularly important, for it is the focus of his detailed commentary, the Svopājñāvṛtti. The Svopājñāvṛtti is Dharmakīrti's lengthiest work, and its extremely terse prose and subtle reasoning make it one of the most difficult texts extant in Sanskrit. For this reason, perhaps, very little has been written on the Svopājñāvṛtti, even though it contains the most in-depth discussion of Dharmakīrti's philosophy. The two passages I have selected in order to discuss non-conceptuality and passion in the context of teaching come from the Svopājñāvṛtti, for they are the most significant to the topic, though they are the least known. The first passage concerns conceptuality; it tells us only indirectly of a buddha's qualities as a teacher, but it will both explain why Buddhists often saw conceptuality as problematic and provide contrast with Candrakīrti's broader, more exigent view, which I will recount later. The second passage deals more directly with the buddhas as teachers; in that passage, Dharmakīrti expresses his view on the "passion" of the buddhas. Through a close reading of both these passages I intend to reveal Dharmakīrti's rather human paradigm of buddhahood.

1. Dharmakīrti on Conceptuality

As with virtually all of his Indian contemporaries, Dharmakīrti maintained that every conceptual thought has an "object" or "referent." He and his contemporaries also maintained that words and concepts have the same kinds of objects; hence, his theories about conceptuality are meant to apply equally to language. But unlike his non-Buddhist peers (and some of his fellow Buddhists), Dharmakīrti sought to account for the objects of thoughts and words without resorting to direct realism. That is, most non-Buddhist philosophers claimed that words and concepts refer to hypostasized universals. Thus, the word or idea "table" has as its object a real and eternal "tableness" that occurs in all instances of tables at all points in time.

For Dharmakīrti the realist doctrine of universals posed many problems. Chief among these is its close alliance to the doctrine of the eternal

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3Hayes and Gillon's article remains the only published work in English that deals directly and competently with the text.
Self or soul (ātman). As with most Buddhists, Dharmakīrti claimed that the notion of Self causes suffering; since the goal of Buddhist practice was for him the elimination of suffering, the doctrine of the Self must be avoided at all costs. If, however, he were to admit that words and ideas refer to real universals, he would be obliged to admit some "Joe-ness," for example, that occurs in the various temporal instantiations of Joe: Joe as a baby, as a young adult, and as an old man. This "Joe-ness" would be nothing other than Joe's real, unchanging Self.

To avoid accepting the existence of real universals such as the Self, Dharmakīrti adopted the "exclusion theory" of Dignāga, his predecessor (Hayes 1988:173ff). According to Dharmakīrti's version of the theory, the word or concept "table," for example, does not refer to some unchanging, real "tableness." Rather, such words and concepts refer to the conceptually constructed exclusion of the individual things (or "particulars") that we call "tables" from other particulars that do not fulfill the functions that we expect of a table. Such exclusions are formed by manipulating mental images (ākāra, pratibimba) that were originally produced in the mind through the sensory perception of the particulars that come to be identified as "tables." Since one cannot point to any single entity or set of qualities that is the same in all those table-images, the only way to see them as the same is to differentiate them from images that do not meet our expectations of what a table should be. In short, what is the same about all table-images is their difference from all other images. This difference is what Dharmakīrti calls an "exclusion" (vyāvṛtti), and, in the strictest sense, words actually refer to these exclusions. Exclusions are always construed as qualities of mental images, and images qualified by exclusions are what Dharmakīrti calls "universals" (sāmānaya), where this term is not used in a realist sense. Since these universals involve images that were initially produced through the perception of particulars, language can still give us information about particulars by virtue of the causal link between images and particulars.

Regardless of the intricacies of this complex theory, the important point is that, on Dharmakīrti's view, words and concepts do not deal with real things because the real is only that which performs a function that is

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1 Although the alleged essence or Self of any person is not a universal in that it is not instantiated in a class of particulars, its instantiation in its parts at multiple points of time makes it a distributed entity akin to a universal. To avoid unnecessary complexity, I will therefore refer to the Self as a "universal" where the latter term is a rubric for all distributed entities.

2 As I am using the term here, particulars are the discrete things that are the objects of our sense perceptions. They are the raw data of experience. I have simplified the discussion here by calling tables "particulars." Dharmakīrti does speak in this fashion, but when being precise, he notes that composite things such as tables are actually groups of particulars (PVS: 66–69; PV 1:137–142).
verifiable through our immediate sense perception. One can cook with a particular fire; one can feel the heat on one's hands. But the conceptual object or universal "fire" offers no warmth. As a conceptual construction, the universal "fire" is unreal because it has none of the real, perceptible or inferable effects of the particulars that it allegedly names.

All this leads Dharmakīrti to have a rather dim view of conceptuality. His clearest condemnation comes when he discusses the tricky issue of how to account for the act of recognition in the absence of real universals; his analysis leads him to some revealing reflections on the nature of conceptual thought. To discuss this point, Dharmakīrti first raises an objection:

"If that were the case (that is, if there were no real universals), then there would be no object which is the same in the various things (that are referred to by a single word or concept). Hence, one would not recognize one thing as the same as another, as in the thought, 'This is that.'” (PVSV: 49)

Dharmakīrti answers his imaginary interlocutor with these lines:

Having seen that things, although different, accomplish this and that meaningful activity, such as (the production of) consciousness, one recognizes that other things are the same as those aforementioned things; one does so having conjoined those things with words that take as their object the difference from that which is other than those things which accomplish the aforementioned effect. (PV 1:98–99ab)

To clarify this terse statement, Dharmakīrti offers a long commentary. It begins with a restatement of the verse:

One sees that among real things (bhāva), some perform a single purposive activity, such as (the production of) an awareness; as such they are (conceptually) distinguished from other (things that do not perform that activity). Those things thus produce by their very nature a false awareness in that person; that awareness is combined with words that have as their object the exclusion of (those things) from those (which do not perform the aforementioned activity). This false awareness is thus (the recognition), "this is that." This recognitional awareness arises because the imprint (placed in the mind by that person's previous) experience has been activated (by what s/he is presently seeing). In this act of recognition the difference (between the things that are classified as the same) is glossed over. (PVSV: 49)

This is a clear application of the doctrine of "exclusion" mentioned above. According to Dharmakīrti, when we recognize that one thing is

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*In indented quotes, an objector's statements will be indicated by quotation marks.*
the same as another, we are only recognizing that both things can be characterized with the same conceptual construct—the exclusion of those things from others that do not perform a similar function. The two things that are both being identified as “tables,” for example, are in fact different: there is no hypostasized quality or universal that occurs in both. Instead, the two things are actually unique in time and space; but by glossing over that real difference, we construct an identity for them. Our conceptual process can only construct a “tableness” that the two things share; in reality, they share no such identity. In this sense, conceptual processes, such as recognition, are “false” (mythya) or “erroneous” (bhrānta) in that they superimpose essences or universals onto particulars that do not in fact have them.

But what is it within the mind that leads us to conflate particulars in this way? To address this issue, Dharmakīrti raises an objection:

“But why does conceptual awareness not apprehend (a particular) just as it is without glossing over its difference (from other particulars)?” (PVSV: 49)

That is, why does conceptual thought necessarily combine things that are in actuality distinct? Can conceptual thought not apprehend a particular, just as it is? Dharmakīrti responds:

Conceptual knowledge is not capable of apprehending (particulars) just as they are because conceptuality is controlled by ignorance. (PVSV: 49)

For Buddhists of Dharmakīrti’s ilk ignorance is the beginningless source of suffering. And on Dharmakīrti’s view ignorance is also the mental mechanism—the internal cause—that compels people to lump things together conceptually and suffer thereby. In saying this Dharmakīrti does not mean that ignorance renders erroneous all forms of consciousness or awareness. Conceptuality is indeed erroneous, but direct awareness, whether sensory or mental, is not. Direct awareness is not erroneous, because it apprehends particulars without the mediation of concepts. This direct, intuitive perception is essential to Dharmakīrti’s philosophy—it is the epistemological bedrock on which all knowledge is based. To clarify that the error caused by ignorance does not apply to direct awareness, he says:

(Sensory awareness is) not (erroneous) because ignorance is defined as conceptuality. That is, ignorance is conceptuality. Ignorance leads one astray by its very nature. Sensory awarenesses are not conceptual in this way. (PVSV: 49)

In this remark Dharmakīrti gives us his strongest condemnation of conceptuality: not only is conceptuality false; but it is false because it
is ignorance. In identifying ignorance with conceptuality Dharmakirti implies that much that is said of ignorance could apply equally well to conceptuality. Just as ignorance is an essential cause of suffering, so too is conceptuality. Just as ignorance is a deeply ingrained tendency in the mind, so too is conceptuality. Just as ignorance must be overcome to become a buddha, so too must conceptuality.

But is conceptuality utterly anathema? Is there no use to it at all? Dharmakirti says:

Although all (conceptual cognitions) are confused, we still define some as instrumental and some as spurious. We do so because we agree on the intended capacity (or lack thereof) for purposive activity. (PVS1: 49)

Concepts still serve a purpose; to the extent that they allow us to reach our desired goal, they are acceptable. A few phrases later Dharmakirti clarifies that the type of goals that he has in mind are the “pacification” or elimination of afflictive mental states; such states include ignorance, which is here identified with conceptuality. Hence, we can conclude that concepts are used to eliminate the compulsion to use concepts.

In the above passage we have seen that Dharmakirti condemns conceptuality, for ignorance expresses itself in concepts. Nevertheless, he qualifies his condemnation by noting that concepts are necessary—we need them to accomplish our goals, especially the ultimate goal of buddhahood. What happens, however, after one has attained buddhahood? Does the linking of concepts to ignorance mean that buddhas can never use concepts?

Such questions are not easily answered, and Dharmakirti himself chooses not to approach this issue directly. As will be evident from the passage on passion below, Dharmakirti admits that Śākyamuni Buddha spoke (at least in some sense), and such a use of language strongly implies a use of concepts. But in the Santānāntarasiddhi (“Proof of the Existence of Other Minds”), where Dharmakirti is obliged to touch upon a buddha’s possible use of concepts, he throws up his hands by equivocally remarking that a buddha’s knowledge is “inconceivable” (Dharmakirti 1991:59a).

Those thinkers who chose to extrapolate from Dharmakirti’s position were faced with a choice: either buddhas use concepts, or they do not. The Indian commentator Vinitadeva (ca. 900 C.E.) chose the former position. When commenting on the Santānāntarasiddhi, he ignored Dharmakirti’s equivocation and blithely asserted that buddhas do indeed have conceptual knowledge (50b). Such affirmations, however, throw one directly into the conundrum of how concepts, which are based on a cognitive error, can occur without ignorance. Some Indian Buddhists went so far as to say that buddhas actually retain some degree of ignorance in
order to interact with the world on a conceptual level. An ignorant buddha, however, does not seem to be an option for Dharmakīrti, for he remarked in the passage above that we use concepts to achieve our goals "until we are foundationally transformed"; whatever else "foundational transformation" might mean, we can be sure that it involves the elimination of ignorance.

Perhaps further research on Dharmakīrti will more clearly resolve this issue, but in the meantime it would seem best to assume that Dharmakīrti’s buddha does not use concepts. Nevertheless, we must admit that Śākyamuni Buddha taught material that his followers understood conceptually, for the above passage makes it clear that Dharmakīrti sees progress along the path as involving the provisional use of concepts in order to reach the goal of liberation. Could the Buddha have conveyed conceptual knowledge without knowing or using concepts himself? By extrapolating from some statements that Dharmakīrti makes about universals, we might answer that a buddha could do so because a buddha knows concepts as particulars.

In the chapter on direct awareness Dharmakīrti says that universals are unreal in that they are not what they are taken to be. As mentioned earlier, what he means by the term “universal” (sāmānya) is actually a cognitive image (ākāra, pratibhāsa or pratibimba) that one imagines to be qualified by an “exclusion” (vyāvṛtti). For example, the concept “chair” is actually a vague mental image of a chair that is associated with the exclusion of all non-chairs. Since this cognitive image is not actually a chair, it is unreal as a chair. Nevertheless, the cognitive image is still a mental event, and, as such, it is real. In other words, when the image is taken as a subsistent something that occurs in a whole class of particulars, it is unreal. But when the image is considered as a mental event, it is a particular, and particulars are real (see, for example, PV 3:7–10 and 281–287). Perceiving concepts in this way, a buddha might be said to know them without incurring the cognitive error that stems from ignorance.

Regardless of what view we might ascribe to Dharmakīrti, it seems clear that he sees concepts as problematic. What is more significant, however, is that he nowhere explicitly denies the buddhas’ involvement

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7 The Kashmiri scholar Jayānanda (eleventh century C.E.) mentions this position (328a-b). Georges Dreyfus pointed out to me that such a position is perhaps identical to the aladhrakāravāda discussed at length by Tibetan doxographers. See, for example, lCang skya (144ff.).

8 Note that Śākyabuddhi (114b-115a) and Karnakagomin (211) clearly state that foundational transformation refers to the elimination of obscurations in the foundation consciousness: āśrayo bhṛatītām dālayavijñānām tasya pārāvṛtti avarānavigamāḥ. It has been generally thought that Dharmakīrti’s philosophy does not employ the notion of the foundation consciousness, but these commentators would clearly beg to differ.
in concepts. The most he will say is that a buddha’s knowledge is “inconceivable.” His equivocation on this issue perhaps indicates an unwillingness to relegate buddhas to a completely transcendental realm, a move that Candrakīrti makes without hesitation. And unlike Candrakīrti, Dharmakīrti’s definition of concepts is not so broad as to include everything that ordinary beings know. Dharmakīrti thus leaves open the possibility that a buddha can know the things of the world non-conceptually. In that sense Dharmakīrti’s buddhas still participate in our world; they still see what we see—we just have the misfortune of superimposing our immediate experience with an unreal web of concepts.

Beyond his position on concepts Dharmakīrti’s more direct and radical affirmation of the immanence of buddhas comes in his position on the buddhas’ passion. It is to an explication of his position that I will turn.

2. Dharmakīrti on Passion

Dharmakīrti’s views on passion appear in his refutation of a certain type of spurious evidence that occurs in some fallacious proof statements. Any proof statement has the form, “S is P because E,” where S is the subject of the proposition to be proven; P is the predicate; and E is the evidence. The stock example is: “That mountain (S) is a locus of fire (P) because it is a locus of smoke (E).”

In the following passage Dharmakīrti is concerned with proof statements in which one adduces an effect as evidence for the presence of a cause, but the relationship between the cause and effect is misconstrued such that the conclusions drawn are invalid. Dharmakīrti begins his discussion by portraying the kind of spurious argument that he wishes to refute. He says:

One observes that a certain effect is absent in opposite cases (i.e., those in which the predicate is absent); one also observes that a general effect is present in a general way in confirming cases (i.e., those in which the predicate is present); from this one infers (that the predicate is present in the subject in question) as the cause (of that effect). But this supposedly instrumental knowledge is spurious. (One has this kind of spurious knowledge when), for example, one thinks that someone is passionate because s/he speaks. (PV 1:12; PVS: 9)

Here Dharmakīrti responds to a position that any number of his opponents might have taken. The vast majority of Indian philosophers saw desire or “passion” (rāga) as incompatible with a high state of spiritual realization and freedom. One’s passion for the things of the world binds one to the world; and since the basic goal of spiritual practice is
freedom (*mokṣa*) from the world, passion is antithetical to spiritual practice. Most Buddhists also recognized passion as an afflictive mental state (*kleśa*) which must be eliminated in order to achieve awakening (*bodhi*), the exalted state of buddhahood. Hence, the argument presented here is rather irksome, for it implies that the historical buddha, Śākyamuni, was not so exalted. Dharmakīrti's objector maintains that desire or "passion" persisted in the Buddha's mind because the Buddha spoke; for, if one is speaking, the cause of speech must be present in one's mind. That cause, according to the objector, is passion.

Dharmakīrti answers this objection by saying that the evidence adduced here—"because he spoke"—does not, in fact, invariably indicate passion in the mind of the speaker. He says that this evidence is remainder-evidence (*śesavat*), meaning that the evidence (the fact of speaking) could be present even when the predicate (passion) is absent. In commenting on the verse, he points out that the actual cause of speech is not desire in the sense that Buddhists intend it:

Speaking and accompanying actions, such as moving the lips, are not the result just of (desirous mental states) such as passion because they are caused by the general intention to speak. (PVSV: 9)

Dharmakīrti is claiming that the mere intention to speak (*vaktukāmatā*) is not a form of passion. He uses the word "general" (*sāmānyā*) to indicate that this intention is not qualified by any other mental states, such as passion (*rāga*) in the sense of an afflictive mental state. Dharmakīrti here refers obliquely to a discussion in the second verse of the chapter. There he made it clear that the specific qualities of a cause cannot be inferred from a general, unqualified effect. One cannot conclude, for example, that the fuel for a particular fire is sandalwood just because smoke is coming from the fire; some additional evidence is needed (PV 1:2 and PVSV: 3–4). So too, speaking does not necessarily indicate the negative mental state, passion; other evidence is required.

The objector, however, is not willing to let Dharmakīrti off the hook so easily. Instead, he insists on his own definition of passion by saying, "But that mere intention to speak is passion (*rāga*)" (PVSV: 9).

Dharmakīrti responds by allowing the definition to stand. He will grant that the intention to speak could be called "passion," but it is clear that this is not his preferred definition. Clarifying what he would prefer to call "passion," he comments:

(Wise people) say that passion is the mental attachment that is brought on by the belief that the Self is permanent and what is Mine is inherently pleasant; it has as its object the seething psychophysical elements. (PVSV: 9)
He gives here a definition of passion familiar to most Buddhist thinkers. It is, first of all, “mental attachment” (cetano bhīṣvaṅga) that takes as its object (viśaya) the constituent elements (dharma) of one’s mind-body complex, which are called “seething” (sāsrava) because they are associated with afflictive mental states. This attachment comes from a misapprehension of some of those elements as a permanent Self and others as the intimate possessions of that self (ātmīya) which are inherently pleasant (sukha) simply because one can say that they are “mine.” Such a misapprehension involves the type of conceptual operation mentioned above; that is, this misapprehension involves the superimposition of allegedly real universals (Self and Mine) onto particulars (in this case, the elements of the mind and body) that actually do not possess any such universals.

Dharmakīrti mentions this definition because he recognizes that speech acts must have some motivation; simply referring to “the intention to speak” is not enough, for one can easily ask what motivates that intention. He thus wishes to point out that there are motivations that are not entangled with the conceptual errors of attachment. Giving us the first glimpse of where he is headed, Dharmakīrti next remarks that some mental states such as compassion can arise without mental attachment. He thereby implies that since speech could be motivated by compassion, the act of speech does not necessarily indicate the presence of passion, when the latter is understood as a form of attachment. Clarifying this, he adds:

One cannot know (that someone is passionate) just from the mere fact that they speak because people who are dispassionate speak just like people who are passionate. Nor is it possible to infer that someone is passionate through some particular kind (of speech that only passionate people have); it is not possible because it is difficult to know what a person’s intention really is. Therefore, any linguistic interaction (that one might proffer as evidence) is misleading since all linguistic interactions are conflated, (in that one cannot be sure of the intentions behind them). (PVSV: 9)

Dharmakīrti rejects any necessary relationship between passion—in the sense of “attachment”—and speech. But when his objector presses the issue, it leads to the following repartée:

“Since (a dispassionate person would not have any desire to achieve some) purpose, such people would not interact linguistically.”

This is not the case because (dispassionate people act) for the sake of others.

“But since (such a person) has no passion (vītarāga), it does not make sense (that they act for any reason, for they have no desires).”
This is not so because (a dispassionate person) might act for the sake of others out of compassion. (PVSV: 9)

The objector is insisting that any motivation, however worthy, is a form of passion or desire; the objector implies that only the complete absence of passion (vātarāga) befits a being who is alleged to be so exalted. Dharmakīrti insists that even a person who might be called "dispassionate" could still act for the sake of others out of compassion. The debate finally comes to a head with the following objection and response:

"Then that compassion itself is passion."

We agree, it is. (PVSV: 9)

Dharmakīrti comes to a stunning conclusion here: it is acceptable to say that compassion (karunā) is passion (rāga). In other words, one can say that a buddha is passionate (rakta). Such a conclusion is remarkable because it contravenes the received wisdom of Dharmakīrti's time: the more exalted a religious figure, the more dispassionate s/he must be. One could scarcely imagine any Jain writer speaking about the Jina as passionate, nor do Brahmanical writers of systematic treatises speak of their founders and luminaries in a way that values a passionate nature.

Dharmakīrti's decision to see the buddhas as passionate does, however, resonate with literary sources such as Indian epic literature and devotional poetry. Indian literary depictions of exalted figures often paint ambivalent and affectively complex pictures, and by Dharmakīrti's time Buddhist sūtras such as the Lalitavistara and Gandavyūha have already placed a more positive valuation on affective (or even passionate) themes and qualities. Dharmakīrti's use of the word "passion" (rāga), however, gains even greater importance because he uses it in a systematic context where such statements cannot be interpreted in a figurative way that allows one to discount their literal meaning. And although he uses it in the context of a "debate," he is, in fact, only debating with himself; he chooses, in short, to raise this point, and he does so in a way that unequivocally stresses a buddha's affective nature. He is certainly one of the first Buddhist systematic writers to do so, and as such he contributes in some sense to the full expansion of this trend in tantric Buddhism, where one can read: "In all the three worlds, there is no sin like passionlessness. Therefore, never be bereft of passion" (Śrīdhara:107b4).

Whatever resonance we might see in Dharmakīrti's attribution of passion to the buddhas, it is important to remember that he does not mean to use the earlier definition of passion as attachment. Rather, the buddhas can be compassionate without adopting erroneous concepts such as "Self." Dharmakīrti says:
Even in the absence of compulsive grasping for the Self, compassion arises through inculcating (it in one's mind) by just understanding a certain kind of suffering. (PVSV: 9)

At first glance, it might seem that the notion of compassion must entail the notion of “living beings” (sattva), for if one does not have the concept “living being,” how can one have compassion? And if one has the concept of “living being,” then one is once again superimposing a universal (“living being”) onto particulars (the psychophysical elements) in which that universal does not in fact exist. In short, one is constructing the notion of a “Self.” Hence, it would seem that compassion actually could be called “attachment” because it involves the same kind of cognitive error as attachment.

To avoid any such conclusions, Dharmakirti adds, “For (in the sūtras) love and so on are said to have different kinds of objects, such as beings, psycho-physical elements and so on” (PVSV: 9). His point is that while one can indeed develop a kind of compassion that takes beings as its object, one can also develop a kind of compassion that takes as its object the particulars that constitute those beings. If we accept the interpretation of the commentator Śākyabuddhi, the phrase “and so on” refers to an even more subtle kind of compassion: one that has no object at all (nirālambana) (24b; Karnakagomin:53). In any case, in mentioning the various objects of compassion Dharmakirti indicates that buddhas can develop compassion without incurring the flaw of conceptuality. Reinforcing this point, he remarks that even though buddhas and bodhisattvas may act out of compassion for the sake of others, “they are faultless because they do not make false superimpositions” (PVSV: 9).

As we have seen above, the action of superimposing unreal universals onto particulars constitutes conceptuality, and it is what Dharmakirti means by ignorance. Buddhas and advanced bodhisattvas are not bound by this kind of cognitive error; they do not compulsively assume that the group of psychophysical aggregates before them is the locus of some real universal, such as “person.” Yet they do live in an affective state: that of compassion. And apparently Dharmakirti considers that affective state of compassion to be so strong that it warrants the use of the term desire or “passion” (rāga), with certain qualifications.

Thus, Dharmakirti is willing to see compassion as passion, a bold move which encourages a less transcendent and more worldly depiction of buddhahood. As mentioned earlier, his view of conceptuality also indirectly contributes to such an opinion of the buddhas, for although conceptuality is ignorance, buddhas still participate in our reality in an immediate way. In addition, the above passage makes it clear that buddhas do indeed speak, so they may have some truck with concepts, even
if they somehow do so non-conceptually. In short, Dharmakīrti’s buddhas seem to be somewhat human, a position with which Dharmakīrti seems comfortable. Other Buddhist philosophers, however, would find such a notion unacceptable. It is the work of one such philosopher that I will now discuss.

NON-CONCEPTUALITY, TEACHING AND COMPASSION IN CANDRAKĪRTI’S MADHYAMAKĀVATĀRA

The Madhyamakāvatāra and its commentary (Madhyamakāvatāra-bhāṣya) were written by Candrakīrti, a Buddhist philosopher who probably lived in the seventh or eight century C.E. (Ruegg:71). Although the extent of his influence in India is unclear, Candrakīrti’s works had an enormous impact in Tibet, where they became the touchstone for the interpretation of Madhyamaka philosophy. Candrakīrti’s works also hold unusual sway in contemporary scholarly circles, perhaps in part due to the emphasis placed on them by the Tibetan traditions. The Madhyamakāvatāra and its commentary are arguably his most significant work, for in them he explores complex and crucial issues that he considers only marginally in his other treatises. One of these issues concerns the nature of the two realities, and through the passage on that topic I will explicate his views on the absence of conceptuality in buddhas and the ways in which they differ from Dharmakīrti’s notions. In another passage Candrakīrti deals with the problems that arise from his theory of non-conceptuality, especially in terms of a buddha as a teacher. By examining that passage we will see more clearly the transcendent image of Candrakīrti’s buddhas, and when we focus on the praises that end his arguments, Candrakīrti’s devotion to compassion will come clear.

1. Conceptuality, the Two Realities, and What a Buddha Sees

Candrakīrti holds strong views on the impossibility of a buddha having conceptual knowledge. He expresses those views when presenting his theory of the two realities: conventional reality and ultimate reality. Most Mahāyāna thinkers discussed the two realities in some fashion, for these categories were considered crucial for a correct understanding of what is truly real. The ubiquity of this concern stems from an emphasis on knowledge of the truly real as essential to the pursuit of liberation, for such knowledge enables one to eliminate ignorance.

In accord with his Mahāyānist peers, Candrakīrti defined the two realities as the conventional (vyavahāra = tha snyad; samvrti = kun rdzob)⁹

⁹Since the Madhyamakāvatāra and its commentaries are available only in Tibetan, in this section I will place the original Tibetan words after their probable Sanskrit equivalents (indicated by a “=”).
and the ultimate \((paramārtha = don dam)\). A thing that exists in terms of conventional reality is only provisionally real; it does not exist in an ultimate sense. A thing that exists in terms of ultimate reality is truly real. Dharmakīrti also used these terms, although he interprets them somewhat differently. According to Dharmakīrti, conventional reality consists of the constructed objects of words and concepts; such objects exist only in a conventional sense because they lack the ability to perform purposive activities or functions. The only truly or ultimately real things are particulars, for only they are capable of purposive function.

Although Dharmakīrti and Candrakīrti both speak of the ultimate and the conventional, Candrakīrti criticizes the type of view that Dharmakīrti proposes. Candrakīrti claims that even particulars cannot be ultimately real. Candrakīrti offers lengthy and sometimes complex arguments to justify this stance, arguments that I cannot begin to treat adequately here. In brief, Candrakīrti attempts to demonstrate that the theory of particulars forces one to posit essences \((svabhāva = rang bzhin, ngo bo)\); his critique rests on the notion that anything that arises from causes and conditions—anything “fabricated” \((kṛtrima = bcos ma)\)—cannot have an essence. If interdependent or “fabricated” things had ultimate essences, one would be compelled to accept numerous absurd consequences \((prasāṅga = thal 'gyur)\). It would be impossible, for example, for such things to be produced. Instead of the ultimate existence of essences, Candrakīrti maintains that the only possible ultimate reality is essencelessness \((nihsvabhāvatā = ngo bo nyid med pa)\), which he also calls “emptiness” \((śūnyatā = stong pa nyid)\). In contrast, anything that arises causally or interdependently can only be said to exist provisionally or conventionally.

In the passage that I will now discuss Candrakīrti spells out his view of conventional reality, which he here calls “the spurious” \((samvṛti = kun rdzob)\). His analysis has several components. He begins with some etymological word-play that connects conventional or “spurious” reality to ignorance; he then draws a distinction between things that are real from the spurious perspective and things that are not. He moves on to the difference between “childish,” ordinary beings and “Āryas” or beings who have had a direct experience of ultimate reality. He points out that for Āryas, nothing that is spurious seems real. Hence, in the context of the Āryas, one cannot speak of “spurious reality”; one can only speak of their experience of the merely spurious or conventional. It is in discussing the cognitions of Āryas that Candrakīrti relates his opinions on the cognitions of a buddha.

The passage begins with a verse:

Since confusion obstructs one’s realization of essence, it is called “the spurious.” The Sage said that a spuriously real (thing) is a fabricated (thing) that appears to be real due to the spurious; a fabricated (thing)
that appears to be fabricated is (just) spurious. (MA 6:28, emphasis added)

Candrakīrti comments:

"Confusion" (moha = gti mug) is that which confuses beings about seeing things as they really are; that confusion is ignorance. It makes one superimpose a non-existent essence onto things, and by nature, it obscures one's experience of (actual) essence; hence, it is "the spurious." (MAB:54b)

Here Candrakīrti offers an etymological explanation of the Sanskrit word samvṛti, which he generally uses with the meaning of "conventionality." In this context, however, he wishes to link the conventional to ignorance in order to demonstrate that conventional reality arises from ignorance. He thus plays on the word samvṛti by emphasizing its meaning of "covering" or "obscuring." For this reason, I translate samvṛti here as "the spurious" in the sense that conventionally real things are only apparently real; their apparent reality is actually a fiction.

Candrakīrti continues:

Whatever appears to be real due to the spurious—that is, whatever appears to have an essence even though it does not have an essence—is spuriously real for the world, which is erroneous. That (thing) is "fabricated" in that it is interdependently arisen. (MAB:54b)

When Candrakīrti speaks of the "world" (loka = 'jig rten) he is referring to ordinary beings. Here he says that certain interdependently arisen things appear to be real to ordinary beings. Such things are the objects of our experience—tables, papers, pens, and such. The fact that such things appear to be real to ordinary beings indicates that those beings are imputing some kind of ultimate, unchanging essence onto those things. But for Candrakīrti interdependently arisen things cannot have such an essence. Hence, ordinary beings are in error. In saying such Candrakīrti takes a position opposed to Dharmakīrti, who maintains that particulars—the objects of immediate sense perception—are ultimately real. In contrast to Dharmakīrti, Candrakīrti extends the definition of conventional or contingent things to cover all objects of perception. The clear implication here is that any experience of any thing in the world (papers, pens, and so on) is necessarily an experience of an ultimately unreal, conventionally constructed thing. In short, Candrakīrti claims that there is no raw sense datum that one could perceive in an unmediated perception. As a result, any knowledge of conventional or "spurious" things is necessarily mediated knowledge. This must lead us to conclude that any such knowledge is in some sense conceptual.10

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10See Tillemans for a discussion of similar issues.
Having defined his notion of spurious or conventional reality, Candrakīrti proceeds to clarify what is and is not spuriously real:

Some interdependently arisen things, such as reflections or echoes, appear false to ignorant persons. But some things appear real to them, such as mind, sensation, and visual forms such as the color blue. The essence of things does not appear in any way to ignorant persons. Therefore, that (essence) and that which appears false even in terms of the spurious are not spuriously real. (MAB:54b-55a)

Some fabricated things seem to be real to ordinary beings; these things—the objects of perceptions, the elements of the mind and body, and so on—are therefore spuriously real. But some interdependently arisen or “fabricated” things do not present themselves as real; they seem fake or unreal. For example, even ordinary beings know that the reflection of one’s face in the mirror is not really one’s face: it is just a reflection. Such things are unreal even in terms of spurious reality.

In drawing the distinction between that which is spuriously real and that which is merely spurious, Candrakīrti is dealing with a problem familiar to students of Madhyamaka philosophy. By placing true reality on the side of the ultimate, Madhyamaka philosophers claim that the conventional world as it appears is necessarily unreal in some way. But, if the world as it appears is unreal, how do we distinguish between a person and a picture or reflection of a person? If they are both equally unreal, why would it be morally wrong to slice up one and not wrong to do so to another? To deal with such problems Madhyamaka philosophers such as Candrakīrti needed to draw some distinction between what is real in conventional terms and what is unreal even in conventional terms. His solution, as explained above, is to claim simply that some things appear real to ordinary persons and some do not. The former things are “spuriously real,” while the latter are “merely spurious.” As for the ultimate nature of things (their essencelessness or emptiness), it does not even appear in any way to ordinary beings; hence, ultimate reality, as with the merely spurious, is also not part of spurious reality. In short, things that are spuriously real are things that appear to be real to a mind that is controlled by ignorance.

Moving on to the understanding that more spiritually advanced beings (Āryas) have of the spurious, Candrakīrti says:

[Advanced beings] who have abandoned the afflicted ignorance see that compounded things have an existence similar to that of reflections and so on. Since they do not presume compounded things to be real, for them compounded things are just of a fabricated nature; they are not real. Childish beings, however, are deceived (by the apparent reality of the spurious). For other (more spiritually advanced beings), compounded
things are just interdependently arisen like illusions and so on; so for
those beings, (all things) are merely spurious. (MAB:55a)

Candrakīrti claims that Āryas, who are at an advanced level of under-
standing, do not experience anything in the world as “real”; everything
seems fabricated to them because they have realized that nothing has a
real essence. They stand in contradistinction to childish beings, who
think the world as they see it is real. The important point here is that, for
advanced beings, even the raw sense data which arise as cognitive images
are simply fabrications; this is tantamount to saying that even raw sense
data are in some sense conceptual. As a result, at the highest state of
understanding where one’s knowledge is completely non-conceptual,
nothing appears at all. Candrakīrti explains:

Because they continue to live with the ignorance which is defined as an
obstruction to knowing the knowable, the Āryas’ sphere of activity
includes appearances; the merely spurious appears to them, but it does
not appear to those whose sphere of activity has no appearances. The
buddhas have fully awakened to (a complete understanding of) all ele-
mental things. Therefore, the fluctuation of mind and mental functions
has completely ceased (for them). (MAB:55a)\textsuperscript{11}

Āryas are advanced beings, but they have not yet eliminated “the
obstruction to knowing the knowable.” What constitutes this obstruction
for Candrakīrti is not entirely clear. In many contexts the “obstruction to
knowing the knowable” is the persistence of some kind of instinctual,
subtle ignorance that induces one to attribute essences to things; this
cognitive instinct prevents one from knowing all knowable things \(\text{jneya}\),
both conventional and ultimate. Here, however, it would seem that the
obstruction is a subtle ignorance that induces one to have any cognitive
appearances at all, an interpretation supported by the Kashmiri commen-
tator Jayānanda of the eleventh century C.E. (146a). Regardless of how
we interpret the “obstruction to knowing the knowable,” it is clear that
Āryas still experience the merely spurious. In other words, they see what
ordinary beings see; they just do not think it is real. But when one has
eliminated the obstruction to knowing the knowable, which only occurs
upon the attainment of buddhahood, one no longer perceives ordinary
things at all.

Such an interpretation of this passage was not popular among many
Buddhist scholars in Tibet, especially Tsong kha pa (1357–1419) and his

\textsuperscript{11}Oddly, Huntington (1989) elided this crucial passage when he translated this portion of the com-
mentary (160, n. 47).
disciples. Their interpretations, however, depart considerably from the text. By contrast, Jayānanda comments on this passage by saying, “buddhas have no cognitive appearances of anything whatsoever because all conceptuality has ceased” (146b). Although Jayānanda naturally brings his own interests to the text, his clarification of the passage employs categories familiar to Candrakīrti and stays close to the text as we have it now. Jayānanda remarks:

In this context, there are two kinds of obscurations: the afflicted ignorance and the unafflicted ignorance. Concerning these, the afflicted ignorance causes the continuation of cyclic existence; the unafflicted ignorance causes the appearance of forms and so on. The blessed buddhas have neither obscuration; hence, since the absence of the cause entails the absence of the effect, they (experience) neither cyclic existence nor cognitive appearance of form, and so on. That being the case, how could the merely spurious appear to them? (146b)

As is clear from Jayānanda's straightforward comment, Candrakīrti does seem to be saying that buddhas are not aware of the things of which we are aware: they do not see tables, chairs, people, places. None of this appears to them. This is perhaps the most extreme statement of non-conceptuality possible, and it contrasts vividly with Dharmakīrti's position; he defines conceptuality far more narrowly, so that for him buddhas still might participate in some way in our perceptual world. For Candrakīrti, however, conceptuality is so broad in scope and buddhas are so non-conceptual that they have no thoughts or cognitive images at all.

The commentator Jayānanda goes on to raise a number of objections that such a position faces. One of the most telling involves the buddhas' role as teachers. Jayānanda asks:

If you claim that the blessed buddhas' minds and mental functions have stopped... then they have no wisdom, which is the cause for teaching the Dharma; therefore, they do not accomplish beings' goals. Thus, how can one claim that the operation of the blessed buddhas' minds and mental functions has ceased? (146b-147a)

In short, buddhas would be incapable of doing anything if they no longer had any thoughts at all. Candrakīrti was aware of such objections, but he defers his response until the final section of the Madhyamakāvatāra, to which I will now turn.

\[12\text{See Tsong kha pa (195–197). Tsong kha pa's view was not shared by some other Tibetan scholars, such as Red mda' ba (126–129) and Shakya mchog ldan (156–157); both of whose interpretations are much closer to Jayānanda's.}\]
2. Knowledge of the Ultimate and Non-conceptual Teaching

i. Ultimate Knowledge as Metaphorical

I have shown above that Candrakīrti offers an extremely broad definition of the conceptuality that ignorance produces. For him a cognition with any content whatsoever is a conceptual cognition arising from ignorance. This position raises two problems, both of which pertain to teaching. First of all, if a buddha’s realization of the ultimate entails a total absence of cognition, then a buddha does not, in fact, know anything; if that is the case, then a buddha would not have anything to teach to others. Second, even if a buddha has something to teach, how can s/he do so if s/he does not have any mental content? Teaching would apparently necessitate at least some minimal cognitive content; thus, even if a buddha somehow had something to say, s/he could not say it because s/he has no cognitive content.

Candrakīrti raises these objections in the final section of the Madhyamakāvatāra, which he devotes primarily to a series of praises to the Buddha Sākyamuni. It is perhaps no accident that these issues arise in the context of poetic praise, for Candrakīrti finds that he can only speak metaphorically of a buddha’s activities in the world. Candrakīrti begins the relevant section by raising the first of the above two objections. He says:

“If suchness (or ultimate reality) is the pacification (of all cognitive structures), then one does not have cognitions of it; and if one does not have cognitions of it, it does not make sense for one to have a determinate cognition whose object is (that) knowable (thing, suchness). How can non-knowledge be knowledge? They contradict each other. And if no one is knowing anything, which one of you will teach others (to realize suchness, saying, ‘I) have realized this?’” (MA 12:3)

In other words, the objector points out that a buddha cannot teach other people what s/he knows because a buddha does not know anything, properly speaking. In his commentary to the verse Candrakīrti indicates why a buddha could not have cognitions of the ultimate:

If cognition were to engage with suchness, which is defined as non-production, of what would a cognitive image arise? Therefore, since there is no cognitive image, cognition does not engage with suchness. (MAB: 330a)

Candrakīrti understands ultimate reality to be the negation of any and all essences or essential processes. Production is perhaps his favorite target, and he demonstrates quite convincingly that there can be no production of any thing in ultimate terms. But his objector points out that knowledge of such a non-object would be epistemologically problematic,
for as with Dharmakīrti, the objector presumes a correspondence theory of knowledge. That is, when one's visual faculty comes into relation with the letters on this page, for example, that conjunction produces in one's mind an image or semblance (ākāra) of the letters, and this initial experience is thought to be non-conceptual. The point here is that for most Buddhist philosophers any instance of knowledge, even non-conceptual knowledge, necessarily involves the production of such a cognitive image; knowledge without a cognitive image would be knowledge without content, and such knowledge is impossible. Candrakīrti, however, must avoid any attribution of positive content to the cognition of ultimate reality, for he has already made it clear that any mental appearance necessarily involves the influence of ignorance. But, if knowledge of the ultimate is completely without any content or cognitive image, how can one know anything?

Candrakīrti responds with a clever verse:

Non-production is the suchness (of all things), and cognition is thus also free of production. That being the case, it is as if: 1) one's awareness takes on the cognitive image of suchness, and 2) in doing so one realizes suchness. (According to most Buddhist epistemologists), awareness knows that of which it has taken on the cognitive image; likewise, metaphorically speaking, the above mentioned awareness is an awareness of suchness. (MA 12:4)

Candrakīrti's response relies on a metaphorical use (nye bar btags pa = upacāra) of the epistemological model described above. That is, most Buddhist epistemologists claim that when consciousness or "awareness" (jñāna, buddhi, dhī, etc.) non-conceptually cognizes an object, it does so by taking on the cognitive image of that object. Thus, when one sees the color blue, the blue object produces a corresponding image or sense-datum in the mind, and one knows the object as that image. Candrakīrti's metaphorical use of this model begins with his claim that the nature of ultimate reality is emptiness, essencelessness, non-production, non-cessation, and so on. This claim is universal in scope: there is no thing (dharma) that is not ultimately essenceless, unproduced, unceased, and the like. In other words, the very fact of being a thing means that the thing must be ultimately unreal.

Candrakīrti uses this claim to his advantage. Since suchness is in part definable as non-production, and since the mind is also unproduced, it is as if the mind has taken on the image of suchness. That is, just as the epistemologists claim that the mind resembles or has the image of "blue" when one knows blue, Candrakīrti can metaphorically say that a buddha knows suchness in that a buddha's mind "resembles" suchness by virtue of being unproduced.
Subsequent interpreters apparently found Candrakīrti's explanation inadequate, for they proposed other, more convoluted explanations. Jayānanda, for example, offers a long and fascinating digression on this point in which he attempts to show that the buddhas do indeed know the world in some sense (325bff.). The Tibetan exegete Tsong kha pa takes another approach to demonstrate a similar conclusion (456ff.). Favoring a position in which knowledge of ultimate reality does have content, Tsong kha pa further objects that the metaphorical sense implied by the particle "as if" (iva = lta bu) cannot be the case. Instead, he refers the reader to a translation in which the particle is absent (457). Even the contemporary interpreter C.W. Huntington seems dissatisfied with the verse: calling it "cryptic," he proceeds to speak of how buddhas know both the conventional and the ultimate (266).

Perhaps these interpreters are disquieted by the type of buddha that Candrakīrti implies. Not only does such a buddha not see the ordinary things of the world, he does not even know ultimate reality because nothing at all occurs in a buddha's mind. Indeed, it would seem that Candrakīrti's buddhas do not know anything at all. If such is the case, we might feel compelled to conclude that buddhas are entirely outside our reality in some state of complete "isolation" (kaivalya), as with many Jain interpretations of the Jinas. It would certainly seem that such a buddha would be completely incapable of doing anything in the world, for s/he would not have any cognitive relation to the world whatsoever. One might even conclude that such a buddha is simply dead.

ii. Candrakīrti on the Buddhas' Teaching

Candrakīrti recognized the problems implied by his discussions of what a buddha knows (or does not know), and in the three verses that follow the discussion of a buddha's knowledge of the ultimate, he addresses the crux of the issue: how does a buddha teach? His approach focuses on the bodies of the buddhas: the reality body (dharma-kāya), the celestial body (sambhogakāya), and the emanation body (nirmanakāya). The latter two are "form" bodies; that is, they are bodies in the physical, corporeal sense. The celestial body is the form that resides in heavenly realms; the emanation body consists of the various ways in which a buddha manifests in our world. The "historical buddha," Śākyamuni, is thus said to be an emanation body. The reality body or dharma-kāya is not corporeal; rather, it is in some sense the source of the other two bodies, for according to Candrakīrti, the dharma-kāya is the power or mental energy that drives those bodies. Using this schema of the three bodies, Candrakīrti explains how buddhas teach:
The celestial body of a buddha is formed through merit; from it, and from its emanations, as well as from space and other things, there comes a sound by the power of the dharmakāya; this sound teaches the Dharma. The world comes to realize reality from that sound. (MA 12:5)

A buddha teaches in a magical, transcendent way. The prerequisite is that s/he have collected prodigious merit in the past, for that merit is associated with the production of a buddha's form-bodies. But it is through a buddha's mind—the dharmakāya—that teaching occurs. The power (anubhāva = mthu) of the dharmakāya causes a didactic sound to emit from a buddha. As Candrākīrti notes in his commentary, a buddha can emanate this sound not only from his body but also from trees, walls, the sky, and so on. Candrākīrti also says, however, that the production of this sound does not at all mean that a buddha is cognitively active: neither his mind (citta = sems) nor any secondary mental activities (sems las byung ba = caitta) are active. Such an improbable state of affairs probably prompted many objections, and Candrākīrti asks himself the most obvious one:

“(The dharmakāya), in which there is by nature neither mind nor secondary mental activities, is without concepts. If that is the case, and if present activity is thereby impossible, how can (the dharmakāya) cause the occurrence of the above mentioned activity?” (MAB: 331a)

Candrākīrti responds to this objection with another metaphorical explanation. He says:

The strong potter's wheel turns very quickly because he has long striven at it. Even though the potter no longer exerts himself, the wheel turns, and we see that it is a cause for ewers and such. Likewise, while (a buddha) makes no conceptual effort, s/he abides in the body whose essence is Dharma, and that (Dharmakāya's) activity is impelled by beings' distinctive virtue and the special prayers (that that buddha made when s/he was a bodhisattva)—how inconceivable! (MA 12:6–7)

Candrākīrti's commentary is clear:

How is it that, even though they have no conceptuality, they accomplish the aims of limitless dimensions of beings by acting in accord with those beings' activities? These kinds of activities (of the buddhas) come about due to the power of the prayers that they previously made as bodhisattvas, such as: “The Blessed Ones have no conceptuality now, but, like wish-granting gems or wish-fulfilling trees, they are intent on accomplishing beings' aims in a suitable fashion without leaving the dharmadhatu (ultimate reality) even for an instant and without missing an opportunity to discipline beings—may I become just like that!” (A buddha's) activities occur due to those prayers and due to the ripening of the disciples' karma for hearing that kind of dharma. One should understand that, even though (buddhas) do not now make any effort, the
above explains the way in which they teach suchness and act so as to accomplish the aims of beings. (MAB:331b)

For Candrakīrti activity or effort on the part of buddhas is anathema, for it would imply the presence of both desire and concepts in the buddhas' minds. Hence, he must seek another source for that activity. He finds it in the past. In other words, a buddha's activity, such as teaching, is the unfolding of events whose actual origin lies in that buddha's previous conceptual aspirations as a bodhisattva, a being who is intent upon attaining buddhahood. By deferring a buddha's efforts to the past, Candrakīrti can thus avoid ascribing any content to a buddha's mind whatsoever. Candrakīrti's choice of metaphor also conveys such an impression, for the comparison of a buddha to a coasting potter's wheel makes a buddha seem rather mechanical and lifeless. The image is one of a completely detached buddha who is so far removed from our life-world that all his volition has long since ceased. So too, a buddha's mode of communication is far from ordinary; rather, a spontaneous sound effortlessly emits from him, and in it we hear what we need to hear. In short, Candrakīrti's buddha appears to be more a volitionless, transcendental force than a speaking, feeling human.

3. Devotion to the Compassionate Buddha

At first glance, Candrakīrti's buddha bears little resemblance to Dharnakīrti's "passionate" teacher, and such a lifeless buddha would seem a rather unappealing object of devotion. But Candrakīrti's philosophical exigencies should not be allowed to obscure his emphasis on compassion, especially when he writes devotionally. In the above discussion, for example, when Candrakīrti needs to explain how a buddha can act without cognitive content, he appeals to the past "prayers" (pranidhāna = smon lam) of the bodhisattva who became that buddha. Such prayers are clearly oriented toward the "accomplishment of beings' aims" in the most efficient way possible. In short, the prayers are motivated by compassion.

Candrakīrti's emphasis on compassion appears at the very outset of the Madhyamakavatāra. As with most Buddhist philosophers, he begins his treatise with verses of praise, but in lieu of the usual panegyric to the historical buddha or some great bodhisattva, Candrakīrti focuses on an unusual object of devotion: great compassion itself. According to his commentary, he does so "in order to demonstrate that great compassion... is worthy of being praised even before the buddhas..." (MAB:220a). For Candrakīrti, then, compassion is the highest object of devotion, since it is

13See also Mārceta (v. 59) for a similar sentiment. Candrakīrti may well be alluding to Mārceta here.
the prior compassion of the bodhisattva that allows the passionless bud-
dha to teach the Dharma to beings in the world. ¹³

Candrakīrti also expresses his devotion to compassion in the verses
that end the Madhyamakāvatāra. Here, however, the praises focus not on
compassion itself but on Śākyamuni Buddha as the locus of compassion:

O victor, you were born of wisdom and, raised by the nursemaid com-
passion, you will practice her ways until all the world reaches supreme
peace—until the shattering of space. What peace, then, is there for you?

A mother suffers for her poisoned child, but not as much as you love
beings, your family, who, flawed by confusion, consume the lethal food
of worldliness. Hence, Lord, you have not passed into peace.

Foolish beings crave the real and unreal; so birth and death afflict them,
and deprived of what they crave and meeting the unwanted, they are
pained. Through that craving too they are born in evil places. They are
the objects of your compassion, Blessed One, so you turn your mind
from peace; for you there is no nirvāṇa. (MA 12:40–42)¹⁴

These devotional words complete a final block of verses that immedi-
ately follow Candrakīrti’s intricate discussion of how a buddha can teach
without having any cognitive content. In this final section Candrakīrti
describes the miraculous and awesome powers of a buddha, and in his
commentary he quotes widely from sūtras that describe a buddha’s spec-
tacular activities in the most fantastic terms. But it is these three last
verses that present the strongest contrast with the unfeeling, mechanical
buddha depicted earlier. Rather than some impersonal force, a buddha is
here depicted as more loving than a mother suffering for her poisoned
child; a buddha is raised on compassion, and a buddha’s compassion is
so strong that it does not allow any escape into some uncaring, quiescent
state.

Candrakīrti’s strong attribution of deep emotion to the Buddha miti-
gates his philosophical tendency to see the Buddha as devoid of any cog-
nitive states (cittacaitta). Indeed, the juxtaposition between a buddha as a
lifeless, spinning potter’s wheel and a buddha as loving mother is so strik-
ing as to seem contradictory. Candrakīrti attempts to avoid contradiction
by placing before these last verses a comparison of the buddhas to wish-
fulfilling trees and wish-granting gems: just as a wish-granting tree or
gem simply grants wishes without any intentionality of its own, so too
the buddhas appear to act, even though they are devoid of any intentions
(MA 12:9, MAB:332a). Such metaphors, however, are already beyond
our ordinary experience. It seems that, if we are to understand how bud-

¹³I use C.W. Huntington’s (1990) translation of the final phrase, “for you there is no nirvāṇa.”
¹⁴Kumārila makes a similar point (87; Codana vv.138–140).
dhas can be such loving teachers, we must rely more on faith than on some systematic reasoning. In short, it ultimately makes no sense for Candrakīrti’s buddhas to act, for they are devoid of cognitive activity; nevertheless, they act out of compassion. Perhaps, then, compassion is not something of which Candrakīrti can “make sense.” After all, compassion is what prompts a buddha’s activities in the world, and if the world does not ultimately make sense, why should compassion?

CONCLUSION

As the above pages have shown, when Buddhist philosophers discuss the nature of a buddha, they often face a pernicious dilemma—a buddha must in some way transcend the world, for the world as we know it is the creation of ignorance; but, especially for Mahāyāna Buddhists, a buddha must also be present in the world as an active teacher and compassionate guide. For many Buddhists the ignorance that drives the world finds its expression in concepts, for conceptual thought is considered to be fundamentally distorted in that it falsely attributes ultimate essences to its objects. So too, the afflictive mental states (kleśa) that arise from ignorance are frequently epitomized by desire or “passion” (rāga), for it is passion that binds one to the world of suffering. But without concepts and passion a buddha’s relation to the world, especially as a teacher, becomes problematic.

To resolve these tensions Dharmakīrti appears to make concessions in both arenas: he defines concepts narrowly so that a buddha might participate in the world non-conceptually; and he boldly admits that a buddha’s compassion might be called “passion,” although such passion is devoid of erroneous notions such as the “Self” (ātman). Candrakīrti, on the other hand, seems less willing to make concessions. He defines concepts so broadly that any knowledge of the conventional world in which we live would necessarily be conceptual; hence, our world does not even appear to a buddha. And his philosophical emphasis on the utter transcendence of buddhahood prompts him to claim that a buddha has no cognitive activity whatsoever; from the perspective of the non-conceptual realization in which Candrakīrti locates buddhahood, a “passionate” buddha is an oxymoron.

Candrakīrti recognizes, however, that one can behold the buddhas from another perspective: the perspective of deluded sentient beings. For them the buddhas are miraculous teachers who work actively in the world out of their fathomless compassion for all beings. This portrait of the compassionate Buddha, the mother grieving for her child, lends itself
easily to an interpretation that is as "passionate" as Dharmakīrti's. What we find, then, is that both Dharmakīrti and Candrakīrti shy away from any straightforward attribution of concepts to buddhas, yet they openly discuss compassion as a crucial aspect of buddhahood, regardless of whatever systematic difficulties such a stance might create.

If we return for a moment to the scene from the *Lalitavistara* with which this article began, we encounter a similar resolution to Śākyamuni Buddha's hesitation. When finally, after much importuning, the Buddha gives serious thought to teaching, he surveys the world with his enlightened vision:

Then, monks, the Tathāgata surveyed the entire world with his buddha-eye, and he saw . . . that beings fall into three categories: those who are intent upon falsity (*mithyatvaniyata*); those who are intent upon truth (*samyaktvaniyata*); and those who are not intent (upon either). For example, monks, a man standing at the bank of a lotus pool sees that some lotuses are under the water; some are even with the water; and some rise above the water. In this way, monks, the Tathāgata surveyed the entire world with his buddha-eye and saw that beings fall into three groups.

Then, monks, the Tathāgata thought, "Whether or not I teach the dharma, those in the group that is intent upon falsity might not understand this dharma. Whether I teach it or not, those in the group that is intent upon truth will understand this dharma. Those, however, in the group that is not intent (upon either) will understand it if I teach the dharma; but they will not understand it if I do not teach it." Then, monks, as the Tathāgata perceived those beings who were in the group that is not intent (upon either falsity or truth), he plunged into great compassion (*mahākārūṇā avakrāmayati*). Alluding to his true knowledge, and aware of the great Brahmā Śikhī's exhortations, he uttered these lines to Śikhī, the great Brahmā:

The door of the deathless is always open, Brahmā, for those beings in Magadha who have ears to listen—

who, without harmfulness, enter with faith and listen to the dharma. (Lalita:334)

In the end, we see that it is not some systematic argument that overcomes Śākyamuni Buddha's hesitation and prompts him to teach his Dharma. Instead, it is simply the Buddha's compassion for beings that prompts his action. As for beings, it is not their intelligence or philosophical acumen that qualifies them for instruction; rather, it is their non-violence and, perhaps especially, their faith.

Thus, the *Lalitavistara* points once again to what Candrakīrti and Dharmakīrti, despite their differences, have in common: that the bud-
dhas are compassionate, and it is compassion that compels them to act. In a sense, compassion is all that remains in a buddha, and a buddha thus falls wholly under compassion’s sway. In the words of Mātrceśā, the great Buddhist poet of the third century:

The whole world is bound without distinction by afflicted mental states; to free the world from afflictions, you have long been bound by compassion. (Mātrceśā: v. 58, translated from the Sanskrit)

ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Derge</td>
<td>Derge edition of the Tibetan Canon, see editor “Barber.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lalita</td>
<td>Lalitavistarasūtra; see attributed author “Buddha Śākyamuni.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Madhyamakāvatāra (Tibetan trans.); see author “Candrakīrti.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAB</td>
<td>Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya (Tibetan trans.); see author “Candrakīrti.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>PV</td>
<td>Pramāṇavārttika; see author “Dharmakīrti.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>PVSV</td>
<td>Pramāṇavārttikasvopajñavṛtti, Gnoli edition; see author “Dharmakīrti.”</td>
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Candrakīrti

MA


MAB

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